

THE MINISTRY OF THE WORD
Arlington Presbyterian Church (PCA)

The Beauty of a Spiritual Bond

2 Timothy 1:1-5 (576)

August 26, 2001

Not including Hebrews, the authorship of thirteen of the books in the New Testament is attributed to the Apostle Paul (Romans, I and II Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, I and II Thessalonians, I and II Timothy, Titus). Three of the letters, First and Second Timothy and Titus, form a subset of this body of Scripture. These three are normally referred to collectively as the **Pastoral** Epistles. While ten of Paul's letters are written to churches, these three are addressed to individuals, fellow-workers in the gospel, giving instructions concerning their **pastoral** duties.

The uniqueness of II Timothy lies in the fact that it is the last of Paul's letters. I want to put this letter into some historical context for you. "The Book of Acts [28:16, 30-31] closes with Paul in prison in Rome about the year A.D. 63" (Halley's, p.635). This was not as harsh a situation as it could have been. He was under house-arrest. He lived for two whole years in his own rented quarters. He was granted a certain measure of freedom. He was at liberty to preach and teach the gospel and to receive and entertain guests. It was during this period that he wrote the four letters we call the Prison Epistles – Ephesians, Colossians, Philippians, and Philemon. "The common belief is that he was acquitted, returned to Greece and Asia Minor, was later re-arrested, taken back to Rome, and executed about A.D. 66 or 67" (Halley's, p.635). **II Timothy** was written during this second Roman imprisonment prior to his martyrdom.

Paul was probably about 66 years old when he wrote this letter to Timothy. He must have been feeling his age. Paul's letter to Philemon was written six years earlier and even then he described himself as an old man. **Philemon 9**, *I rather appeal to you – since I am such a person as Paul, **the aged**, and now also a*

prisoner of Christ Jesus. Since Paul's conversion on the Damascus Road his had been the hard life of an itinerant missionary. Traveling from place to place when travel was slow and attended with difficulty and dangers. Surely his body showed the strain of having endured hunger, thirst, exposure, beatings, stonings. Not only this but for years he had borne the *daily pressure of concern for all the churches (II Cor. 11:28)*. Not one of us would have been able to criticize him if, after so many years, he had decided to retire; to hang up his cleats and enjoy a few years of comfort, rest, and ease. But he doesn't go out that way. He won't die on the golf course or in the den watching TV. He will die on the field pursuing the upward call of God which he had received all those years ago. Before us, as far as we know, is his final written communication to his most beloved companion in the work. As such, every phrase is laced with poignancy. Every admonition and exhortation is intensified by the fact that Paul is facing death and by the depth of his love for Timothy.

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, 2 to Timothy, my beloved son : Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, 4 longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. 5 For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well.

Two years ago I put together a Prospectus to aid in recruiting the discipleship class with whom I am working at the present time. The Prospectus includes seven observations I have made over the years that point out the need for such a mentoring emphasis. I want to share one of those observations with you. There is an obvious lack of mutual accountability which exists in the church, particularly among Christian men. Such autonomous Christianity is fraught with all sorts of dangers – susceptibility to fall into sin, a critical spirit, marginal ministry

involvement, and stunted spiritual growth among them. This observation was subtly reinforced this past week. Julia and Cheryl Cain spent several hours perusing all of the church scrapbooks, selecting photographs to be used for a presentation at one of the *Arise and Build* events. I love to look at photographs of the church family and so I also made my way through books and bags and boxes of pictures. I could not help but notice that there are literally hundreds of pictures recording retreats, conferences, and fellowships involving the women of APC. I even remarked to Julia and Cheryl that the women always seem to be planning something or going somewhere. Photos documenting the same things involving the men of APC are as rare as a Dallas Cowboys pre-season victory.

What I really want to focus on today is the beauty of the spiritual relationship between Paul and Timothy. These five verses “bleed” mutual affection. As I considered these two men my mind naturally turned to some of the brothers to whom I am attached by a rich, spiritual bond. A few days ago I received a call from Mike Whitehead – one of those brothers. By the way, in my illustrations and examples this morning I think it best not to refer to anyone in the present company. Mike was struggling a bit. He and his wife, Kathy, had recently been stung by the defection of a family to whom they had gotten pretty close. He was discouraged at what is an obvious and pervasive lack of intimacy in relationships within the church. We talked at length about **Galatians 6:2**, *Bear one another's burdens*. I reminded him that such intimate relationships do exist but they are so costly as to be rare. I have known only a handful in my nearly 30 years as a Christian, but that's a handful more than many believers. It is sad but true that not a few believing men and women go through life never having known the mutual joy and spiritual encouragement which flow out of a deeply affectionate, spiritual relationship. Because of this scarcity, we will be well-served to examine this one between Paul and Timothy closely with the prayer that God would grant to each of us such a satisfying and beautiful gift as a true brother or sister in the faith. And this morning I want to help you see what such a relationship looks like. We'll take a look at seven features which rise out of these verses.

The **first** feature is that a rich, spiritual relationship is always **Christocentric**. Look at **verses 1 and 2**. ***An apostle of Christ Jesus ... life in Christ Jesus ... grace, mercy and peace from Christ Jesus***. Paul pointed out to the Philippians that Timothy was seeking after the *interests of Christ Jesus (2:21)*. Siamese twins often share vital organs. It is as if Paul and Timothy share the same heart. Remember what else Paul told the Philippians about Timothy? *For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare (2:20)*. Just because Ike and Mike are believers doesn't mean they will automatically be kindred spirits. Timothy and Paul were *kindred spirits*. What does that mean? Timothy's heart was filled with the same religious *affections for* Christ. His mind was occupied with the same spiritual *thoughts of* Christ. His will was intent on the same spiritual *service to* Christ. His chief pursuit, like that of Paul, was Christ and the advance of the gospel. Let me share a few personal examples to flesh this out for you.

In relationships like the one we have in view here, brothers or sisters **talk** a lot about spiritual things. Last Tuesday morning several guys gathered at the hospital to annoy Scott Smith before his heart procedure. After they wheeled Scott out of his room the rest of us walked over to Denney's for a little breakfast. Later, as I reflected on our time in Scott's room and the time in the restaurant, it hit me that over the course of three hours, those guys probably didn't go five minutes without the conversation turning to theology, the meaning of some verse, the state of the church in America, worship. They just weren't particularly interested in Tennessee football. Imagine that!

Men and women of kindred spirit engage in the same gospel **pursuits**. I share a kindred spirit with Mike Whitehead. Mike was my companion in door-to-door evangelism in the mid-70s. We picked out a neighborhood and every Saturday morning for an entire summer we went door-to-door seeking to gain a hearing for the gospel. We talked to guys as they washed their cars. We shared Christ with one guy while he was roofing his house.

Men and women of kindred spirit are **moved** by thoughts of Christ and the gospel. I share a kindred spirit with Ray Carter. Donnie Frensley was Ray's mentor as well as my own. A dear brother from Nashville, Ray followed us to DTS. He is now the pastor of a large church in downtown Chicago. Ray and I shared a love for good preaching. I remember on several Fall evenings we would sit on our back porch listening to E.V. Hill preaching tapes. E.V. Hill is a black preacher, the pastor of Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles. Some of you simply cannot connect those dots. You cannot imagine anything more boring. But those times together thrilled our souls and Dr. Hill preaching Christ moved us to tears on more than one occasion.

Tuesday morning as the five of us were leaving Denney's, Jack Smith, Scott's brother, and I walked up the cashier to pay our bills. I can't remember exactly what elicited my remark but I said, almost offhandedly, "I'm a free man. My sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more." As the last few words of Spafford's hymn left my mouth, I looked at Jack, he glanced up at me and we both went silent at the same time. Our eyes glassed up. In that brief moment we shared a common, unspoken wonder at what Christ had done for us personally. Beloved, the common denominator between men and women who know a rich, spiritual bond is the wonder of Christ and His atoning sacrifice for sinners. Now, verse 2.

The **second** feature of a rich, spiritual relationship is **affectionate loyalty**. Relations within the household of faith, the church, are described by Paul in family terms. God is our heavenly Father. By His gracious work of adoption we are His children. We enjoy the benefits and assume the responsibilities which go with being a member of God's household. We become to one another spiritual fathers and mothers, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters. Paul addresses Timothy as **my beloved son (2:2)**. Timothy was Paul's spiritual son by virtue of the fact that he probably came to faith under Paul's ministry. He was also Paul's son by virtue of his filial loyalty. Paul said of Timothy, *He served with me in the*

furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father (Phil. 2:22). I recognize that in real life siblings are sometimes estranged from one another. All the same, the Biblical design is that the brother / sister relationship is one of life's closest. **Proverbs 18:24**, *There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.* The implication, of course, is that brothers are unfailingly loyal to one another. One of the beauties of a deep spiritual bond is that of enduring loyalty; the sense that you have a brother or sister who will always be there.

The last time I was in Tennessee I drove my parents down to Tullahoma for a visit with my mom's two sisters and her brother. All of them now in their mid to late 70's. We went out to lunch and then I drove them down to Lynchburg where they were born and raised. I drove them out into the country to see their old home place. We stopped by a small country church so they could walk through the cemetery to see the headstones marking the graves of kinfolk from generations past. At one point I distanced myself and observed these three sisters and their brother. With the exception of my own mother three of them had lost their spouses – cancer, suicide, divorce. With all they had experienced over the years, there they were, brother and sisters, in the twilight of their lives, together. There for one another until the end. *Timothy, my beloved son.*

Now the **third** feature of the kind of relationship in view here. Your aspirations (*strong desires*) for one another are primarily **spiritual**. **Grace, mercy and peace to you.** Sometimes as I pray for my children there wells up in my soul an almost indescribable yearning for their well-being. Know what I'm talking about? I pray for physical and mental health, success in school, and stuff like that. But the deepest longing of my heart is that my children know the reality of spiritual consolations in Christ - peace of soul, ease of conscience, contentment with divine providence, the joy of guilt removed and of a substitutionary atonement, the hope of glory. Paul and Timothy had their senses trained to discern what is really valuable. In a truly spiritual bond to the degree that one brother possesses

and cherishes these spiritual consolations, the other brother will be satisfied and at rest.

Now, **verse 3**. The **fourth** feature is that a rich, spiritual relationship is a grace **gift** from God. That dear brother or sister is an expression of God's unmerited favor to you. ***I thank God ... as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day.*** Paul most likely maintained a regular, consistent prayer life. Morning and evening prayers were a way of life for him. Timothy was such a part of Paul's life that the apostle interceded for him every time he prayed. And when he did he was grateful for all that God had done and was doing in Timothy's life and for all the ways that Timothy enhanced Paul's own life.

Verse 4. The **fifth** feature is that brothers or sisters bound together in the gospel desire each other's **company**. You just enjoy being together. ***Longing to see you, even as I recall your tears.*** It seems that Paul has some particular episode in view here. Timothy, you remember, served our Lord as the pastor of the church in Ephesus. Paul is probably referring to his emotional farewell to the elders of the church there. ***Acts 20:36-38, And when he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they should see his face no more. And they were accompanying him to the ship.*** Paul just flat-out missed Timothy. He missed praying with Timothy. Worshiping with Timothy. Talking about the ministry. Talking about the advance of the gospel.

The **sixth** feature is that a rich, spiritual bond is always a source of mutual **joy**. ***So that I may be filled with joy.*** Let's admit it. Even as saints we can be pretty difficult at times. We are sometimes the source of disappointment, frustration, and aggravation to one another aren't we. But to be a source of joy for others. Timothy wasn't perfect. He had his share of weaknesses. But there was

something in his personality, character, constitution which commended itself to Paul.

The **seventh** feature is this. A rich, spiritual relationship is one in which brothers feed off the reality and strength of one another's faith. ***For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you.*** The genuineness of Timothy's faith was a source of great joy to Paul. "In the midst of persecution and suffering, where fidelity is so very important (cf. 1:8ff), Paul is thankful to God that he can remember Timothy as one in whom there was a faith that neither wavered nor was double-minded, a genuine trust in God (cf. by analogy Jas. 1:6-8)" (Knight, p.369). I share a kindred spirit with Donnie Frensley. What I wouldn't give to sit in another Friday night couples Bible study with Donnie. What I wouldn't give to sit in someone's living room and listen to Donnie share the gospel with them. Maybe the most attractive feature of Donnie's life was the genuineness of his faith. I always had the confidence that he would pursue Christ, share his faith, memorize Scripture, teach the Word whether anyone else did or not. Such a life, beloved, is an incredible source of encouragement.

Why do so few Christians know the joy of a deep, spiritual bond? **First**, you may be **preoccupied** with the things and affairs of this life. Look at **4:10**, *For Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me.* Your own thirst for God is a weak thing. You are not growing spiritually. You are worldly-minded. You will attach yourself to others who are like-minded. **Second**, autonomy and distance may be your **preference**. You do not want to be accountable to anyone for your own faith and practice nor do you want to assume a measure of responsibility for anyone else. Yours is a dangerously shallow understanding of the doctrine of the church, the body of Christ. You just don't get it. **Third**, your **pursuits** are dictated by self-interest. Listen to one of the things that set Timothy apart from his contemporaries. **Philippians 2:21**, *For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus.*

But let's assume you desire such a bond. What do you do? My own simplemindedness really comes out here. **First**, pray for a genuine hunger for the things of Christ. **Second**, pray and ask God to give you this great gift of a loyal brother or sister in faith. **Third**, take the initiative to spend time with brothers whose lives are spiritually attractive; brothers who are growing in grace and knowledge. I believe some strong spiritual bonds will be forged as you do these three simple things.