

1 AND 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS *for* EVERYONE

20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION WITH STUDY GUIDE

N. T.
WRIGHT

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NEW TESTAMENT FOR EVERYONE
20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION WITH STUDY GUIDE

N. T. Wright

Matthew for Everyone, Part 1

Matthew for Everyone, Part 2

Mark for Everyone

Luke for Everyone

John for Everyone, Part 1

John for Everyone, Part 2

Acts for Everyone, Part 1

Acts for Everyone, Part 2

Romans for Everyone, Part 1

Romans for Everyone, Part 2

1 Corinthians for Everyone

2 Corinthians for Everyone

Galatians and Thessalonians for Everyone

Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians and Philemon for Everyone

1 and 2 Timothy and Titus for Everyone

Hebrews for Everyone

James, Peter, John and Judah for Everyone

Revelation for Everyone

*For
the Diocese of Durham
a small gift from its chief pastor*

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INTRODUCTION TO THE ANNIVERSARY EDITION

It took me ten years, but I'm glad I did it. Writing a guide to the books of the New Testament felt at times like trying to climb all the Scottish mountains in quick succession. But the views from the tops were amazing, and discovering new pathways up and down was very rewarding as well. The real reward, though, has come in the messages I've received from around the world, telling me that the books have been helpful and encouraging, opening up new and unexpected vistas.

Perhaps I should say that this series wasn't designed to help with sermon preparation, though many preachers have confessed to me that they've used it that way. The books were meant, as their title suggests, for everyone, particularly for people who would never dream of picking up an academic commentary but who nevertheless want to dig a little deeper.

The New Testament seems intended to provoke all readers, at whatever stage, to fresh thought, understanding and practice. For that, we all need explanation, advice and encouragement. I'm glad these books seem to have had that effect, and I'm delighted that they are now available with study guides in these new editions.

N. T. Wright
2022

INTRODUCTION

On the very first occasion when someone stood up in public to tell people about Jesus, he made it very clear: this message is for *everyone*.

It was a great day – sometimes called the birthday of the church. The great wind of God’s spirit had swept through Jesus’ followers and filled them with a new joy and a sense of God’s presence and power. Their leader, Peter, who only a few weeks before had been crying like a baby because he’d lied and cursed and denied even knowing Jesus, found himself on his feet explaining to a huge crowd that something had happened which had changed the world for ever. What God had done for him, Peter, he was beginning to do for the whole world: new life, forgiveness, new hope and power were opening up like spring flowers after a long winter. A new age had begun in which the living God was going to do new things in the world – beginning then and there with the individuals who were listening to him. ‘This promise is for *you*,’ he said, ‘and for your children, and for everyone who is far away’ (Acts 2.39). It wasn’t just for the person standing next to you. It was for everyone.

Within a remarkably short time this came true to such an extent that the young movement spread throughout much of the known world. And one way in which the *everyone* promise worked out was through the writings of the early Christian leaders. These short works – mostly letters and stories about Jesus – were widely circulated and eagerly read. They were never intended for either a religious or intellectual elite. From the very beginning they were meant for everyone.

That is as true today as it was then. Of course, it matters that some people give time and care to the historical evidence, the meaning of the original words (the early Christians wrote in Greek), and the exact and particular force of what different writers were saying about God, Jesus, the world and themselves. This series is based quite closely on that sort of work. But the point of it all is that the message can get out to everyone, especially to people who wouldn’t normally read a book with footnotes and Greek words in it. That’s the sort of person for whom these books are written. And that’s why there’s a glossary, in the back, of the key words that you can’t really get along without, with a simple description of what they mean. Whenever you see a word in **bold type** in the text, you can go to the back and remind yourself what’s going on.

INTRODUCTION

There are of course many translations of the New Testament available today. The one I offer here is designed for the same kind of reader: one who mightn't necessarily understand the more formal, sometimes even ponderous, tones of some of the standard ones. I have tried, naturally, to keep as close to the original as I can. But my main aim has been to be sure that the words can speak not just to some people, but to everyone.

Let me add a note about the translation the reader will find here of the Greek word *Christos*. Most translations simply say 'Christ', but most modern English speakers assume that that word is simply a proper name (as though 'Jesus' were Jesus 'Christian' name and 'Christ' were his 'surname'). For all sorts of reasons, I disagree; so I have experimented not only with 'Messiah' (which is what the word literally means) but sometimes, too, with 'King'.

Unlike the rest of Paul's letters, which (except for Philemon) are addressed to whole churches, the 'Pastoral Letters' are addressed to individuals: two to Timothy, whom we know from Acts and from several other references in Paul, and one to Titus, about whom Paul speaks warmly elsewhere in his writings. These letters are very practical, offering encouragement and advice on the day-to-day life of a local church and the role of the chief pastor within it. At the same time, they constantly give us glimpses of a rich theological picture of Jesus, and of the power of the gospel. Many have wondered whether Paul himself could have written these letters, which are very different in some respects from the others. This book isn't the place to discuss such matters; what concerns us here is what the letters say and how they relate to us today. So here it is: 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus for everyone!

Tom Wright

1 TIMOTHY

1 TIMOTHY 1.1-7

True Teaching about the Truth

¹Paul, an apostle of Messiah Jesus according to the command of God our saviour and Messiah Jesus our hope, ²to Timothy, my true child in faith: grace, mercy and peace from God the father and Messiah Jesus our Lord.

³This is my charge to you, just as it was when I went to Macedonia: stay in Ephesus, so that you can tell the relevant people not to teach anything different, ⁴or to cling on to myths and endless genealogies. That sort of thing breeds disputes rather than the instruction in faith that comes from God. ⁵The goal of such instruction is love – the love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience and sincere faith. ⁶Some people have wandered off from these things and turned aside to foolish talk. ⁷They want to be teachers of the law; but they don't understand either what they're talking about or the things about which they pronounce so confidently.

I remember with considerable embarrassment one of the very first sermons I ever preached.

In my mind's eye I could see it so well. I knew – or thought I knew – what I wanted to say. But when I sat down to put it together, to write it out and see how it would go, it all somehow ran away from me. I remember going to one of the biblical passages that was to be read in the service and discovering to my horror that, on closer inspection, it was a lot more complicated than I had thought when I had first glanced at it. I remember trying to work in all sorts of points that I'd only just come across, and had not really thought through. And I remember my mind and imagination jumping to and fro between the mental image I had of what a great preacher ought to sound like, the texts in front of me on the desk, and the ideas, jottings and illustrations in my notebook.

Fortunately, I don't have a clear memory of how the sermon went on the day. I suspect there is a good reason for that. By the time I stood up in the pulpit, I no longer knew what the sermon was aiming at. I knew plenty of things I wanted to say, and plenty that I thought the congregation needed to hear, but I couldn't have told you then, and I can't tell you now, what I wanted the sermon to *achieve*. I was in the state described in the classic story of the seminarian submitting a draft sermon to the college principal. He sat anxiously while the great man read it through.

'Will it do?' asked the student.

'Do what?' replied the principal.

So when I read what Paul is saying to Timothy about different types of teaching, I know from the inside, as it were, at least part of what he's guarding against. He has in mind two basic types of teaching. One goes round and round in circles, picking up interesting ideas and theories and playing with them endlessly – though not necessarily having a very detailed understanding of what such things might really be all about. The other has a clear aim, cuts out anything that gets in the way of it, and goes straight to the point.

A good deal in this letter, and in 2 Timothy and Titus as well, is concerned with these two types of teaching, and we shall see Paul come back to the point from several different angles. The three letters, taken together, are usually called 'the Pastoral Letters', partly because Paul is acting as a pastor to Timothy and Titus, and partly because he is writing to instruct them in their own pastoral ministries and in the ministries that they are to establish in their various congregations. But they might equally well be called 'the Teacher's Manual', because so much of what they contain is about the kind of teaching that Christian leaders should be giving – and, just as much, the kind they shouldn't.

Before we go any further, though, are we really sure these letters were written by Paul himself? Everybody in the early church seems to have taken it for granted that they were. But in the last two hundred years many writers have pointed out several ways in which the letters sound and feel significantly different to the main letters (Romans, Galatians and so on) which we know to have come from Paul himself. Some now regard the question as settled: Paul, they say, couldn't possibly have written them. Others see it as still open. Some still insist that they must have been written by Paul. There are, after all, some very personal details which it would be strange for anyone else to have made up.

It's a complicated matter, and this kind of book isn't the place to go into it in any detail. But we do need to remind ourselves that when these letters were written – that is, some time between about 50 and 100 AD – it was quite common for someone to write in someone else's name. This didn't necessarily mean they were (as we would say now) committing forgery. They might be genuinely following through the thought of the person whose name they were using, and applying it to a new situation. I don't think this is a full explanation of the facts in this case, but it's worth bearing in mind.

Equally, we should remember that Paul himself is an example, even in the letters everybody agrees really do come from him, of how the same person can write in very different styles from one situation to another. A good example is his two letters to Corinth. They are so different in style and tone that if they were the only pieces of his work we

possessed we might well imagine that he could only have written one of them, and that someone else must have written the other. But it's certain that he wrote both. The difference between the Paul of Romans and the Paul of the Pastorals is not much greater than the difference between the Paul of 1 Corinthians and the Paul of 2 Corinthians. For the purposes of this book I'm going to leave the question open, but will continue referring to the author as 'Paul' for the sake of ease.

One of the things we can be quite sure of is that the 'Paul' of these letters is every bit as keen on teaching the truth as the 'Paul' of Romans and the rest. And we have here a crisp, clear statement of what that teaching aims at: not just the conveying of information, but a whole way of life, summed up in verse 5 under three headings: genuine love, good conscience and sincere **faith**.

Underneath these we can detect two concerns which run through these letters. First, Paul is anxious that everyone who professes Christian faith should allow the **gospel** to transform the whole of their lives, so that the outward signs of the faith express a living reality that comes from the deepest parts of the personality. Second, he is also anxious that each Christian, and especially every teacher of the faith, should know how to build up the community in mutual love and support, rather than by the wrong sort of teaching or behaviour, tearing it apart. We know even today, with two thousand years of history, how easily things can seem to fall apart. How much more fragile must the little churches have seemed in those early days, with tiny communities facing huge problems.

But, as the opening greeting insists, they do not face those problems alone. Paul's **apostleship** is rooted in God's command to him, and he assures Timothy of God's grace, mercy and peace. The God he invokes is the 'saviour' – a title often used in the first century for the Roman emperor, the Caesar of the day; and the Jesus he follows as his hope is the King, the **Messiah**, the world's true Lord. Once we get that straight, there should be no need for teachers to go round and round in circles, fussing about strange old stories or 'endless genealogies', as some of the Jewish teachers of the day seem to have done. There is no point, either (verses 6 and 7), in people trying to teach the Jewish **law** to Christian congregations without really understanding, as Paul certainly did, what it actually is and how it would need to be applied. No: the teaching of the gospel itself, and of the way of life which flows from it, must not be a muddled, rambling thing, going this way and that over all kinds of complex issues. It must go straight to the point and make it clearly, so that the young Christians who so badly need building up in their faith may learn the deep, rich, basic elements because of which genuine Christianity stands out from the

world around it, rather than hiding its life inside a thick outer casing of complex and impenetrable ideas.

1 TIMOTHY 1.8–11

The Purpose of the Law

⁸We know, after all, that the law is good – if someone uses it lawfully!

⁹We recognize that the law is not laid down for people who are in the right, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinners, the unholy and worldly, for people who kill their father or mother, for murderers, ¹⁰fornicators, practising homosexuals, slave traders, liars, perjurers, and those who practise any other behaviour contrary to healthy teaching, ¹¹in accordance with the gospel of the glory of God the blessed one that was entrusted to me.

We stood by the stream, looking across to the other side of the valley. It was a perfect spring day: gentle breeze, high cloud, bright sunshine, the hills around us at their best. Somewhere in the distance we could hear a sheep calling to its lamb.

‘We’ve never been across there,’ said my companion. ‘All the times we’ve walked up here, not once have we taken the southern route and seen the view from those hills.’

He knew as well as I did why we hadn’t been that way. We got the map out once more and looked at it. A mile or so to the south of us there were small block capitals in red ink. DANGER AREA, it said. The message was repeated every half mile or so. Some way to the south there was an army camp. The whole area was used as a practice ground for military manoeuvres. The frustrating thing that day was that we’d been up in the hills for hours and hadn’t heard any gunfire. The chances were that the soldiers had other things to do just then. We could probably have walked across the whole terrain and been completely safe. But when the map says DANGER there is really no sense in even thinking about it. We looked wistfully at the unexplored hills, and set off north for one of our old familiar walks.

Now imagine for a moment that you had a map which *only* marked danger. Supposing the only words on the whole area covered by the map were signs, not only of army firing ranges, but of sheer cliffs you might fall off, dangerous intersections where road accidents might occur, bridges that looked safe but might collapse if you tried to cross them, and so on. Suppose there were no other words or symbols – nothing to tell you the name of the towns and villages, no signs of where there were good views, picnic spots, pretty paths beside the

rivers, places where you could get a meal or a drink or a bed for the night. It would be a depressing sort of map, wouldn't it? It might make you want to stay at home and never venture out of doors. It reminds me of that teasing line in Proverbs (26.13): when someone says 'There is a lion in the streets!', they may be telling the truth, but they may simply be looking for an excuse not to go to work that day.

The main point of the present passage is that the Jewish **law** is like a map which only marks danger. Paul, having left Timothy in charge of the church in Ephesus, was aware that there were some teachers there who were very keen on the Jewish law. It was regarded, after all, as the basis not only of personal morality but of the whole Jewish way of life. Perhaps, as he suggests in the previous passage, some of the Jewish Christians in Ephesus were making the law central to their development of Christian teaching. And that, he says, is like sending people off for a walk in the country when all that the map tells them is where they should *not* go.

For such a purpose, he says, the law is very useful. That, in fact, is what it's there for; using it like that is the appropriate thing to do, the 'lawful' way of handling it (verse 8). If you want to know what not to do, the Jewish law will give you an outline, marking several types of attitude and behaviour with the word DANGER, or perhaps 'No Road This Way'. It won't tell you what you *should* do; by itself, it won't encourage you to think through and live out the attractive, outgoing life of love and service which was, for Paul, what being a Christian was all about. So, somewhat contemptuously we may feel, he lists the people for whom the teaching of the law ought to be useful: people who are always wandering off into danger areas, who seem bent on going too near the edge of moral cliffs or trying to cross bridges that will crumble underneath them and send them crashing into the river below. The implication throughout is: well, if they want to teach the law, that's fine, but it presumes that their hearers are people of this sort – whereas, if they are working in a Christian community, their hearers ought *not* to be people of that sort!

He clearly has in mind not just the Jewish law in the sense of the first five books of the Bible (that's one meaning 'the law' could have at the time), but more specifically the Ten Commandments which we find in Exodus 20.1–17. We mightn't have noticed this with the first words in the list in verses 9 and 10 – lawless, disobedient, godless, sinners, unholy, worldly – but it becomes clear in what follows. The fifth commandment deals with the respect due to parents, the sixth with murder, the seventh with adultery, the eighth with stealing, the ninth with giving false evidence, and the tenth – often regarded as a kind of catch-all at the end of the list – with covetousness. From near the

end of verse 9 and through verse 10 Paul seems to have these six commandments in mind, and is expanding their range a bit: the extreme opposite of honouring parents is killing them, the commandment against adultery should be taken to include all kinds of non-married sexual activity, the most dramatic example of stealing is when you steal an actual human being to sell as a slave. Paul, too, adds a catch-all at the end of his list: 'any other behaviour which is against healthy teaching'. The fact that he's following the commandments quite closely here implies that we should see those earlier terms, beginning with 'lawless', as a way of describing people who break the first three commandments at least – putting God first, not making idols, not taking God's name in vain. (The fourth commandment, about keeping the **sabbath**, was controversial in early Christianity, as Romans 14 makes clear; but that's a topic for another occasion.)

The point of it all seems to be, not so much to list various types of bad behaviour for their own sake, but to say: the law is fine, if you want a map of where all the dangers lie. There are indeed dangerous types of behaviour out there, and the **gospel** message of Jesus, through which God's glory is truly revealed (verse 11), is just as much opposed to them as the Jewish law is. But don't imagine that by teaching the Jewish law you will do more than put up some more signposts warning people about these dangers. What's far more important is to explore the gospel itself, the message which was entrusted to Paul and the other **apostles**. When the law was given in the first place, God also revealed his glory to Moses (Exodus 32–34), despite the fact that the people had already broken the law. Here, as in 2 Corinthians 3 and 4, Paul declares that, however good the law is, it is the gospel, not the law, which reveals God's glory.

1 TIMOTHY 1.12–17

Paul as an Example of God's Saving Grace

¹²I thank Messiah Jesus our Lord, who gave me strength. He regarded me as trustworthy by appointing me to his service – ¹³even though I used to say blasphemous things against him, and persecuted his people violently! But I received mercy, because in my unbelief I didn't know what I was doing. ¹⁴And the grace of our Lord was more than enough for me, with the faith and love that are in Messiah Jesus. ¹⁵Here is a word you can trust, which deserves total approval: 'Messiah Jesus came into the world to save sinners' – and I'm the worst of them! ¹⁶But this was why I received mercy: so that in me, precisely as the worst, Messiah Jesus could demonstrate the full scale of his patience, and make me a pattern for those who were going to believe

in him and so attain the life of the age to come. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, the one and only God, immortal and invisible, be honour and glory to the ages of ages, Amen!

When I was a boy, television was in its infancy. There was only one channel, and there wasn't very much to watch on it. But, when I graduated off the programmes for little children (*Andy Pandy* and *Bill and Ben, the Flowerpot Men*), there was one regular serial that stands out in my mind: *The Lone Ranger*. I didn't know then what I know now, that the story of the one Texas Ranger left alive after the death of colleagues and family fitted into a pattern of American stories which were shaped by, and then shaped in turn, the way many Americans saw the world. Like a lot of young boys, I was excited by the exploits of this quiet, understated hero.

The Lone Ranger's horse, Silver, became almost as famous as the man himself. Silver shared his master's exploits, and seemed to understand exactly what he was doing and where he needed help. But when we first meet Silver, at the start of the long and almost epic cycle of Lone Ranger stories, the horse is not only unbroken, untamed, but is assumed to be unbreakable, untameable. Tonto, the Native American who becomes the Lone Ranger's close friend and ally, declares that it's impossible to tame a horse like that. There is an utter wildness and wilfulness about him which would make normal horse-tamers give up and try their skills on easier animals. But the Lone Ranger is not to be put off. This is the horse for him. By some secret means he calls the animal to be his, and the horse responds and gives him a lifetime of service.

Now there are other interesting themes here as well, notably the biblical one of the truly human being who is put in charge of the animals (see Genesis 2.19–20). But the point I want to make is this: from the moment when the Lone Ranger shows that he can tame the untameable horse and make it into his servant, and even in a measure his friend, the viewer knows that he will be able to conquer all other obstacles in his path as well. He has already taken the hardest case, and the easy ones will now be – well, easy. And that is precisely the point Paul is making when he talks of what God had done in his life. God has taken the wildest, most violent of blaspheming persecutors, and has transformed him into not only a believer but also a trusted **apostle** and evangelist. If God can do that, there is nobody out there, no heart so hard, no anger so bitter, that it remains outside the reach of God's patient mercy.

This is the point of verses 15 and 16, which form the centre of this passage. Paul had been the worst sinner; the word for 'worst' literally means 'first' or 'chief'. 'Chief Sinner' – that, looking back, is how Paul

sees his former life! Not that it had seemed like that at the time, of course; he had thought he was doing God's will. Sincerity is clearly not enough. Now he realizes that his angry words against the early Christians had been blasphemous, slandering the people who were following King Jesus, and that the angry deeds that had gone with them were just like the persecutions that God's people had always had to endure. He was doing to God's true people what the wicked pagans had done to Israel in times past. The fact that he thought he was defending Israel against heresy only made it worse. This is the sort of man he had been. The Christians, doing their best to hide from his violent attacks, would surely have regarded him as way beyond the scope of God's mercy.

But nobody is beyond that loving reach. Paul adds an interesting note, similar to what he says about his fellow Jews in Romans 10.2–3: he was acting 'ignorantly, in unbelief'. Just as Jesus had prayed that God would forgive the Roman soldiers who were nailing him to the cross, because they didn't know what they were doing (Luke 23.34), so Paul looks back and sees that he had had no idea what he was really doing. No doubt he would say the same about others in his condition. And God loves to show to just such people how patient and forbearing he really is (verse 16). Paul thus becomes a pattern, a model, for the way in which God reveals his love to the most unlikely people and brings them to **faith**. And, as always in Paul, faith in turn becomes the key to membership in 'the **age to come**', the new age for which the Jews had longed. Paul had originally supposed that the blasphemous nonsense of the Christian message might hold back the day when God's new age would dawn for Israel and the world. Now he sees that the message is actually about this new age, dawning in Jesus and now spreading its light to all the nations.

Paul has become one of the central agents of this spreading light. He finds new strength bubbling up inside him for the tasks to which God has called him, and he knows this comes from King Jesus himself (verse 12). What's more, he knows that this is a sign that God is considering him trustworthy. In a world of suspicion, of lies and counter-lies, God's project to save the world is built on trust. This seems intolerably risky: surely God isn't going to trust frail, fallible mortals? But that, too, is part of God's strange way, the way of love. And it's because of that initial trust that Paul can in turn trust others to help him in his work. That's one part of what the Pastoral Letters are all about.

As so often, the passage which seemed to be all about Paul is in reality all about God and his grace and love. So it's quite appropriate that Paul ends it with an outburst of praise to the one true God (verse 17). This is the line made famous in the great hymn of Walter Chalmers Smith (1824–1908), 'Immortal, invisible, God only wise'. When your

train of thought brings you back to praise this one and only God, you know he is trusting you and equipping you for his service. That is one of the reasons why worship is central to all genuine Christian living.

1 TIMOTHY 1.18–20

The Battle of Faith

¹⁸I am giving you this command, Timothy my child, in accordance with the prophecies which were made about you before, so that, as they said, you may fight the glorious battle, ¹⁹holding on to faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected conscience, and their faith has been shipwrecked. ²⁰I include Hymenaeus and Alexander in that category. Indeed, I have handed them over to the satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

In the days before ships could navigate by satellite, the compass was the most crucial item on board. Whether it was sunny or snowing, whether it was day or night, whether the ship was on course or off course, the compass was the vital sign that told the sailors which direction they were going. There were other problems, of course – a cloudy night would mean no stars, and no stars meant that they wouldn't know how far north or south they were – but the compass remained at the heart of the ship's operation.

So if the compass got dirty, or stuck, or pulled out of its true line by some strong magnetic force, the ship was in real trouble. Imagine being blown about in a small boat in the middle of the ocean, without the slightest idea which way you were facing. It's enough to make you panic just to think about it.

For many serious-minded writers in the ancient world, the human equivalent to the compass was the conscience. The strange, mysterious little voice that tells you what's right and what's wrong, sometimes whispering, sometimes shouting, seldom totally silent – many thinkers, both Jewish and pagan, saw it as a kind of divine presence, to guide and warn the human race. Of course, not all societies agree on the exact detail of their various moral codes. But almost all have the same basic ethical beliefs (the wrongness of murder, theft and so on). The conscience can, as it were, be educated this way or that. But it's still there, the voice that says 'Yes, this is right,' or 'No, you shouldn't do that.'

What we find in Paul is the beginning of a Christian view of conscience. Paul would have agreed with the moral teachers of his day on the importance of conscience, and would have said that the reason it was there was that the one God, the creator, had implanted it in the

human heart as a small but significant witness to the way he wanted humans to live. But, since Paul was quite clear that nobody could in fact live the way God wanted by their own unaided efforts, he would also have stressed that to be properly obedient to the true promptings of conscience, one would have to come to **faith**, accepting the gift of new **life** from God in the power of the **spirit**. That way, one would become a truly human being at last, able to reflect the image of the creator God. The pagan moral teachers could point the way, but they couldn't actually help people to do what they knew they should. Seneca, one of the greatest moral teachers of Paul's day, was himself criticized for failing to live up to the standards he taught to others. He admitted it.

But what if you stopped listening to your conscience altogether? That is what Paul says some people have begun to do. He doesn't explain why they would think this appropriate; but of the two names he mentions, Hymenaeus and Alexander, one of them, Hymenaeus, crops up again in 2 Timothy 2.17. There Paul says that he and another man are teaching that 'the **resurrection** has already happened', in other words, that Christians are already fully 'raised from the dead' in all the senses that matter, and have therefore presumably passed beyond the need to make the effort to obey the normal moral codes. This has, in fact, been a familiar feature of some types of would-be Christian piety: when people discover what a dramatic difference God's power can make in their lives, they sometimes imagine that they have been set free from all ordinary constraints, and have therefore put their consciences into a back room and locked the door. Not surprisingly, this has often led to moral and spiritual disaster, as people then give free rein to all kinds of impulses over which conscience would normally provide a control.

Paul's reaction in such cases is swift and strict: he has 'handed them over to **the satan**', to teach them not to say and do wicked things. As in 1 Corinthians 5, this seems to mean that such people are to be put out of the Christian assembly, forbidden to meet with, and eat with, the rest of the church. Paul saw the fellowship of the church as the place above all where the power of God was active to heal, guide, lead and direct individual Christians. To forbid people access to it was therefore tantamount to sending them away into outer darkness, to a place where the only spiritual influence they might come under would be that of 'the **accuser**', the satan. The aim, of course, is that after a very short time in such a condition they would realize their mistake and come back with sorrow and penitence, ready to learn wisdom. That is what probably happened in the other case, as 2 Corinthians 2 seems to indicate.

Paul's charge to Timothy is, of course, that he shouldn't go the same route as Hymenaeus and Alexander, but that he should hold on tight to two things: faith and a good conscience. Faith reaches out and grasps

the God who made you and is remaking you through Jesus and the spirit. Conscience, educated now by the same spirit according to the pattern and teaching of Jesus, steers you through the choppy and dangerous waters of life. In pastoral work what you often need is a rule of thumb, a quick and easily memorable summary of certain basic points which could in principle be developed at more length but which a busy person needs to recall without difficulty. ‘Fight the glorious battle, holding on to faith and a good conscience.’ Simple, clear and challenging.

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