

Homiletics Analysis: 2 Timothy 1

Content & Intent

This Text — Content

Second Timothy 1 opens Paul's final letter — his last recorded words before martyrdom — with a greeting that anchors both writer and recipient in the covenant purposes of God (vv. 1–2). Paul immediately moves to thanksgiving and prayer, recalling Timothy's sincere faith traced through three generations of believing women, and expressing confidence that the Spirit's gift in Timothy is genuine and sufficient (vv. 3–7). The chapter's governing imperative arrives in verse 7: God has not given a spirit of timidity but of power, love, and self-discipline — and this drives the twin commands that follow: do not be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord or of Paul the prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God (vv. 8–12). Paul grounds this call in a compressed but theologically dense statement of the gospel itself — grace given in Christ before time began, now manifested through Christ's appearing, abolishing death and bringing life and immortality to light (vv. 9–10). Paul sets himself as the exemplar of unashamed suffering: appointed herald, apostle, and teacher; suffering without shame because he knows *whom* he has believed and is convinced of God's power to guard what has been entrusted (vv. 11–12). The chapter closes with two contrasting portraits: Phygelus and Hermogenes who deserted Paul in Asia (v. 15), and Onesiphorus who was not ashamed of Paul's chains, searched him out in Rome, and refreshed him repeatedly (vv. 16–18). The chapter thus moves from divine provision (the gift of the Spirit) through gospel grounding (the eternal purpose behind the gospel) to human exemplars — one of faithful shame-free loyalty, one of cowardly desertion.

This Text — Intent

God's intent through this passage is to stiffen the spine of a discouraged, perhaps faltering, younger minister by demonstrating that the only sufficient ground for courage under pressure is the gospel itself — not personal resolve, not circumstances, not the presence of allies, but the eternal, Christ-secured, Spirit-empowered purpose of God that no imprisonment or desertion can touch. The passage is not merely instructing Timothy about courage; it is performing courage for him, showing him what it looks like in Paul, modeling it in Onesiphorus, and exposing by contrast what its absence looks like in those who deserted. God is calling every reader — not just ordained ministers — to a gospel-grounded, Spirit-enabled refusal of shame, rooted not in what they can muster but in what God has already secured in Christ before the ages began.

Subject Sentence: The Spirit-given power of the gospel frees God’s servant from the paralysis of shame.

Primary Claim: God is calling Timothy — and every believer — to abandon shame-driven silence and embrace gospel-grounded suffering, not by generating courage from within, but by resting the full weight of that courage on the eternal, Christ-secured purpose of God already accomplished and already indwelling them by the Holy Spirit.

Interpretive Evaluation

The nature of the “gift” in verse 6 — *charisma* and the laying on of hands

The Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition frequently reads verse 6 (“fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands”) as a reference to a specific spiritual gift, potentially tongues or prophecy, imparted by apostolic laying on of hands and subject to attenuation if not actively cultivated. This reading draws support from the general New Testament use of *charisma* for specific Spirit-bestowed gifts. The laying on of hands as an impartation mechanism also has genuine New Testament precedent (Acts 8, 1 Tim. 4:14).

The Reformed reading acknowledges that *charisma* is a real spiritual endowment and that the laying on of hands was a genuine ordination act — but resists reducing the gift to a specific spiritual ability. The context of verse 7 controls: the gift in question is defined immediately as the spirit of power, love, and self-discipline — not a specific miraculous ability but the Spirit-wrought capacity for gospel ministry under pressure. First Timothy 4:14 confirms the connection to Timothy’s ministerial calling and ordination. The gift, then, is the endowment of the Spirit for the specific work of gospel ministry — and the call to “fan it into flame” is a call to active, courageous exercise of what has already been given, not an appeal to generate something not yet present. This reading is to be *preferred* because verse 7 functions as the exegetical gloss on verse 6 — the Spirit-gift is immediately defined, and the definition is functional and ministerial, not miraculous in the narrow charismatic sense.

Verses 9–10 and the nature of grace — Arminian/Wesleyan readings

Wesleyan and Arminian interpreters frequently read “grace given us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” (v. 9) as referring to prevenient grace extended to all humanity, not to the unconditional election of specific persons. This reading allows the text to serve as evidence for general grace rather than particular predestination.

The text, however, does not say grace was given to all humanity before time — it says grace was given *to us* in Christ Jesus. The grammatical force of the aorist participle *dotheisan* (“having been given”) locates the act of grace in a specific divine decision prior to creation,

directed toward a specific “us.” The parallel in Ephesians 1:4 — “chosen in him before the foundation of the world” — confirms the Reformed reading. The Wesleyan appeal requires importing a universalist scope the text does not supply. The Reformed verdict is that this passage is one of the clearest pre-temporal election texts in the Pauline corpus, and its context — grounding Timothy’s courage not in present circumstances but in an eternal, unassailable divine purpose — makes the particularity essential to the text’s rhetorical and theological function. If grace were merely general prevenient grace, it would provide no more ground for Timothy’s personal courage than a vague benevolence toward humanity at large. The *particularity* of the grace is precisely what makes the ground firm.

Verse 12 — “what I have entrusted to him” (or “what he has entrusted to me”)

A significant textual and interpretive question exists at verse 12: does “what has been entrusted” (*tēn parathēkēn mou*) refer to (a) what Paul has entrusted to God — Paul’s own life, ministry, and suffering — or (b) what God has entrusted to Paul — the gospel deposit itself? Both translations are grammatically possible. The same Greek phrase (*parathēkē*) appears in 1:14 and 2:2 clearly referring to the gospel deposit entrusted to Timothy.

The Reformed reading prefers option (b) — Paul is convinced that God is able to guard the gospel deposit entrusted *to Paul* — for several reasons: it coheres with 1:14 and 2:2 where the *parathēkē* is clearly the gospel entrusted to the minister; it grounds Paul’s courage in God’s faithfulness to the gospel mission rather than merely God’s care for Paul personally; and it fits the chapter’s sustained concern with the preservation and transmission of sound teaching. However, the alternative reading (Paul entrusting himself to God) is not heterodox — it expresses genuine Christian confidence in divine keeping. Both readings are worth noting in exposition; the preferred reading simply has stronger canonical and contextual warrant.

Onesiphorus — Roman Catholic and liturgical readings

The Roman Catholic tradition has sometimes used the prayers for Onesiphorus in verses 16–18 (including the phrase “may the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day”) as evidence for the legitimacy of prayers for the dead, inferring that Onesiphorus had already died when Paul wrote. This reading has been used in debates about purgatory and intercessory prayer for the deceased.

The text does not state that Onesiphorus was dead. The inference is entirely circumstantial — Paul prays for his household separately, which some read as suggesting Onesiphorus himself is absent from it. But the text offers no burial notice, no past-tense reference to his death, and no unambiguous indicator that he has died. The natural reading is that Onesiphorus is alive, possibly still in Ephesus or traveling, and that Paul prays for his future final-day vindication as he prays for Timothy’s future reward throughout the letter. The Roman Catholic use of this text for prayers for the dead should be *refuted* as a reading that imports a theological framework the text cannot independently bear. It remains a legitimate observation that the text does express a kind of eschatological prayer for

Onesiphorus's final-day mercy — this is worth noting in exposition as a window into Paul's affection and hope.

Key Canonical Support

- **Romans 8:28–30** — The same pre-temporal divine purpose that grounds Timothy's courage in 2 Timothy 1:9 is stated in its fullest form here: foreknew, predestined, called, justified, glorified — an unbreakable chain from eternity past to eternity future. Both passages ground present suffering in an eternal divine purpose that cannot be disrupted.
- **Ephesians 1:3–14** — Paul's extended doxology of election, predestination, and redemption in Christ before the foundation of the world provides the canonical backdrop for 2 Timothy 1:9–10. "Blessed in Christ with every spiritual blessing" is the positive side of what 2 Timothy 1 applies to courage under pressure.
- **John 10:27–29** — Christ's declaration that no one can snatch His sheep from His hand or from the Father's hand directly illuminates 2 Timothy 1:12: "I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that day what has been entrusted." The security is identical; the grounding is the same keeping power of God.
- **Isaiah 50:4–9** — The Suffering Servant passage in which the Servant declares "I have not been rebellious; I have not turned back... the Lord God helps me; therefore I have not been disgraced... I know I will not be put to shame" is the Old Testament template for shame-free suffering in the service of God. Paul's confidence in 2 Timothy 1:11–12 echoes this Servant pattern, and Christ's fulfillment of it is the ground of Paul's — and Timothy's — courage.
- **Acts 4:18–20 / Acts 5:27–29** — The apostles before the Sanhedrin, declaring "we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard," exemplify the Spirit-wrought refusal of shame that 2 Timothy 1:7–8 calls Timothy to. The continuity between the early apostolic community's courage and Paul's charge to Timothy is canonical confirmation that this is the Spirit's normal work in gospel ministry.

Aim: To demonstrate that gospel-grounded courage is not a personality trait to be generated but a Spirit-given reality to be exercised — and to call every reader to plant their courage in the eternal, unassailable purpose of God revealed in Christ rather than in present circumstances or the presence of allies.

Content Table

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
1	Greeting: Paul, apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus	Opens with the source of Paul's identity and authority — not earned but given; "promise of life" frames the letter from its first sentence in gospel terms
2	Recipient: Timothy, "my dear son"; grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord	"Beloved child" (<i>agapētō teknō</i>) — warmer than the standard greeting; establishes the pastoral-affective relationship that makes the exhortations credible
3–4	Thanksgiving: Paul thanks God for Timothy, serves God with a clear conscience as his ancestors did, remembers Timothy constantly in prayer, and longs to see him, remembering his tears	"Clear conscience" — Paul does not approach God as one who has abandoned the faith of his fathers; Timothy's tears (at their parting, Acts 20?) signal genuine relational depth
5	Confidence in Timothy's sincere faith, which first lived in Lois and Eunice — and Paul is persuaded it lives in Timothy	The faith is <i>sincere</i> (<i>anypokritos</i>) — unhypocritical, unperformed; its presence in three generations argues for its authenticity and continuity
6	On the basis of this, Paul urges Timothy to "fan into flame" the gift of God given through the laying on of Paul's hands	The gift is real; the command implies it can be suppressed or allowed to diminish through fear and inaction; "fan into flame" (<i>anazōpyrein</i>) — to stir back to full blaze
7	God has not given us a spirit of timidity (<i>deilia</i>) but of power (<i>dynamis</i>), love (<i>agapē</i>), and self-discipline	The definitive interpretive key to v. 6: the gift is the Spirit's endowment for ministry; <i>deilia</i> = cowardice, timidity — the only NT use of

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
	(<i>sōphronismos</i>)	this word; power, love, self-discipline are not abstract virtues but ministerial capacities
8	Therefore: do not be ashamed of the testimony of the Lord or of Paul His prisoner; join in suffering for the gospel by the power of God	The imperative flows from v. 7 — the Spirit has already provided what courage requires; shame is not just personal cowardice but a theological failure, a functional denial of the gospel's power
9	God has saved us and called us to a holy calling, not according to our works but according to His own purpose and grace given in Christ Jesus before the ages began	The gospel's foundation is pre-temporal, purpose-driven, grace-secured — not contingent on Timothy's performance or Paul's survival; "before the ages began" — the courage-ground is eternal
10	This grace has now been manifested through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel	The eternal purpose has broken into history; "abolished death" (<i>katargeō</i>) — rendered inoperative, defanged; if death itself has been abolished, what precisely does Timothy have to fear?
11	For this gospel Paul was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher	Three-fold office: <i>kēryx</i> (herald — public announcement), <i>apostolos</i> (sent one — authoritative commission), <i>didaskalos</i> (teacher — systematic instruction); Paul's suffering is not random but vocationally located
12	This is why Paul suffers; but he is not ashamed, because he knows whom he has believed and is convinced	"I know whom I have believed" — not <i>what</i> but <i>whom</i> ; personal knowledge of Christ, not merely

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	God is able to guard “what has been entrusted” until that day	propositional confidence; the ground of courage is not Paul’s grip on God but God’s grip on the entrusted deposit
13	Hold to the pattern of sound words that Timothy heard from Paul, in faith and love in Christ Jesus	<i>Hypotypōsis</i> — pattern, outline, template; the sound teaching is not optional content but the defining shape of faithful ministry; held “in faith and love” — not merely formally but relationally and affectively
14	Guard the good deposit entrusted to you by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us	The guarding is Timothy’s responsibility; the enabling is the Spirit’s provision — both are true simultaneously; this is the final word before the contrasting portraits
15	All in Asia have turned away from Paul, including Phygelus and Hermogenes	“All in Asia” is likely hyperbolic but reflects the near-total collapse of Paul’s support network in the Ephesian region; Phygelus and Hermogenes are named — unashamed of naming the ashamed
16–17	Onesiphorus refreshed Paul often, was not ashamed of Paul’s chains, sought Paul out eagerly in Rome, and found him	“Not ashamed of my chains” — direct echo of vv. 8, 12, 16: shame/not-shame is the chapter’s thread; seeking Paul out in Rome required effort, risk, and determination
18	Paul prays that Onesiphorus will find mercy from the Lord on that day; his service at Ephesus is also acknowledged	Eschatological orientation: the loyalty demonstrated now will be vindicated on <i>that day</i> — the day of Christ’s appearing (v. 10); Onesiphorus’s service is remembered precisely and

Verse(s)	Content	Notes
		personally

Divisions Table

Division	Verses	Label
1	1–2	Greeting: Apostle, Son, and the Promise of Life
2	3–7	Foundation: Sincere Faith, Genuine Gift, Sufficient Spirit
3	8–10	Imperative: Share in Suffering — The Gospel Provides the Ground
4	11–14	Exemplar: Paul’s Shame-Free Suffering and the Pattern to Guard
5	15–18	Portraits: Desertion Exposed, Loyalty Honored

Subject Sentence & Primary Claim (*restated*)

Subject Sentence: The Spirit-given power of the gospel frees God’s servant from the paralysis of shame.

Primary Claim: God is calling Timothy — and every believer — to abandon shame-driven silence and embrace gospel-grounded suffering, not by generating courage from within, but by resting the full weight of that courage on the eternal, Christ-secured purpose of God already accomplished and already indwelling them by the Holy Spirit.

Applications (Five)

1. Diagnose where shame is operating as your functional lord. (*Affections/Worship*) The chapter’s repeated shame-language (vv. 8, 12, 16) suggests that shame — not outright unbelief — is the most common mechanism by which the gospel is suppressed in ordinary Christian life. Before addressing behavior, identify where shame is actually functioning as a governing force: the conversation you redirected away from Christ because the room would have gone quiet, the social media post you never made, the friendship where faith has never surfaced because the relational cost feels too high. Shame operates below the level of conscious decision, which is why Paul does not simply tell Timothy to “be braver”

— he dismantles the theological ground for shame by showing it has nowhere to stand when the gospel is truly believed. Name the specific territory where shame governs before applying the remedy.

2. Believe — with the full weight of your understanding — that the courage you need has already been given, not merely offered. (*Mind/Belief*) Verse 7 does not say God *offers* a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline to those who ask correctly. It says God *has given* it — aorist, accomplished, done. The failure to exercise courage is not a failure of supply; it is a failure to act on what has already been provided. This is a recalibration of the mind before it is a movement of the will: the Spirit's endowment for gospel ministry and witness is not waiting to be unlocked by sufficient effort or spiritual maturity. It is present. The call to "fan into flame" is the call to exercise what is already there, not to generate what is absent. Adjust your understanding of the Spirit's work accordingly — not as a distant resource to be accessed but as a present endowment to be exercised.

3. Plant your courage not in circumstances or allies but in the pre-temporal, Christ-secured purpose of God. (*Mind/Belief*) Paul's confidence in verse 12 does not rest on his prison conditions improving, his legal case strengthening, or his supporters returning. It rests on something that cannot be touched by any of those variables: the eternal purpose of God established in Christ before time began. Verses 9–10 are not a theological parenthesis — they are the load-bearing wall of the entire chapter. When circumstances deteriorate (and they will), when allies desert (and they do), what remains? Only what was established before all of it: grace given before the ages began, death abolished, life and immortality brought to light. Timothy's courage — and yours — must be rooted at exactly that depth, or it will not hold.

4. Let Onesiphorus's specific actions name what unashamed loyalty looks like in your own context. (*Will/Behavior*) Onesiphorus did not simply feel sympathetic toward Paul — he searched him out, found him, and refreshed him repeatedly (vv. 16–17). The language is active, effortful, and costly: finding a Roman prisoner required navigating official hostility and social stigma. The application is not "be a good friend" but something more specific: identify the believer in your own life who is isolated, under pressure, or suffering for gospel faithfulness, and make the specific, costly, inconvenient effort to find them, reach them, and refresh them. The chapter holds up Onesiphorus not as an inspiring idea but as a concrete behavioral template. Copy the template.

5. Handle the sound teaching you have received as a deposit worth guarding, not as information available for revision. (*Will/Behavior*) Verse 13 calls Timothy to hold the pattern of sound words "as a template" — *hypotypōsis* — meaning the teaching has a definite shape that defines faithful ministry, not a flexible suggestion open to cultural negotiation. Verse 14 calls him to guard it as a deposit — *parathēkē* — meaning something entrusted for safekeeping, not something owned and therefore available for modification. The practical demand: in every teaching, pastoral conversation, and discipleship relationship, ask not "what does my audience find compelling?" but "what does the

deposit require?” Guarding is an active, deliberate posture — it assumes the deposit is under pressure and requires intentional protection.

Theological Importance

Theological Importance: This passage contains one of the most compressed and theologically dense gospel statements in all of Paul’s letters (vv. 9–10), anchoring the call to courage in the deepest possible theological ground: the eternal, pre-temporal purpose and grace of God, secured in Christ, now manifested through His appearing. The passage teaches with clarity that divine grace precedes human action (“not according to our works”), that it was settled before time began (“before the ages began”), and that its chief achievement is the abolition of death itself — making fear of suffering, loss, or social shame appear in its true light as a theological failure to believe what the gospel actually says about what Christ has done. The text also teaches that the Holy Spirit’s role in the believer is not merely regenerative but sustaining and empowering — the Spirit is the source of the power, love, and self-discipline that make shame-free gospel ministry possible. These are not abstract doctrines but the structural supports of courageous Christian living.

Reformed Theological Significance

Reformed Theological Significance: Second Timothy 1 is a defining passage for the Reformed understanding of the relationship between divine sovereignty and human courage. The passage does not call Timothy to manufacture courage through willpower or ascetic discipline — it grounds courage in what God has *already* done in Christ, *already* given through the Spirit, and *already* established before time began. This is the Reformed pattern: the indicative of divine accomplishment is the foundation of every imperative of human response. The pre-temporal election language of verse 9 stands as one of the clearest Pauline articulations of unconditional grace — grace not contingent on foreseen faith but constitutive of the divine purpose that produces it. Furthermore, the passage models the Reformed understanding of Scripture as deposit (*parathēkē*): not a living document that develops with the community but a fixed, guarded deposit of apostolic teaching to be transmitted whole and undiminished from generation to generation (vv. 13–14; cf. 2:2). This deposit-theology is the epistemological foundation of Reformed confessionalism.

Main Takeaway

The gospel that saved you was settled before you were born, is guarded by a God who has already abolished death, and is powered in you by a Spirit who does not traffic in

cowardice. You have been given everything courage requires — which means the shame that keeps your mouth closed and your witness muted is not a resource problem. It is a belief problem. Believe the gospel all the way down to its pre-temporal roots, and the ground for shame collapses.

Preaching/Teaching Pitfalls

- **Preaching verse 7 as a motivational call to self-improvement.** “God hasn’t given you a spirit of fear — so be bolder!” strips the verse of its pneumatological content and turns a statement about Spirit-provision into a pep talk about human potential. The verse is not telling Timothy to access a courage he has failed to develop; it is telling him that the Spirit’s endowment is already sufficient and that his timidity is a failure to act on what has already been given. The preacher must keep the Spirit as the subject, not the hearer’s willpower.
- **Reducing “fan into flame the gift” to a generic call to spiritual disciplines.** While spiritual disciplines are legitimate, the gift in view is not general spiritual vitality but the Spirit’s specific endowment for gospel ministry and witness. The application must stay tethered to gospel courage and faithful ministry, not become a broad platform for “stay in the Word and prayer.” The context defines the gift; let it do so.
- **Ignoring the pre-temporal election theology of verses 9–10 because it feels controversial.** Verses 9–10 are not an incidental doctrinal aside — they are the theological load-bearing structure of the chapter’s call to courage. A preacher who skips past “grace given us in Christ Jesus before the ages began” because the congregation includes mixed views on election has removed the very foundation Paul uses to ground Timothy’s courage. The passage requires these verses to work; preach them.
- **Moralizing the Onesiphorus portrait.** “Be like Onesiphorus — be a good friend to those who are suffering” is not false, but it is insufficient if it stops there. The Onesiphorus portrait functions within a chapter-long argument about shame and courage. His loyalty is not generic kindness; it is the specific refusal of shame — he was “not ashamed of my chains” — in a social context where association with a Roman prisoner was costly. The application must carry the specific weight of shame-refusal, not just general encouragement toward pastoral care.
- **Treating Paul’s personal confidence in verse 12 as merely inspirational autobiography.** “I know whom I have believed” is frequently quoted as a stirring expression of personal faith and sung as a hymn — which it is. But its function in the passage is argumentative: Paul is modeling what it looks like to rest courage in the person and power of Christ rather than in circumstances. The verse is not self-contained inspiration; it is the lived demonstration of the theology Paul has just

stated in verses 9–10. Exposition must hold the verse within its argument, not extract it as a free-floating confidence statement.

- **Underweighting the Phygelus/Hermogenes reference as merely historical background.** Paul names the deserters specifically, which is unusual — and intentional. Their abandonment is the negative contrast to Onesiphorus’s loyalty and, implicitly, the trajectory Timothy is being warned away from. The preacher who passes over verse 15 as “just historical context” misses Paul’s rhetorical point: desertion is named, exposed, and implicitly condemned, not because Paul is bitter but because Timothy needs to understand what the shame-driven path looks like when it is fully lived out. The naming is itself a theological act.