

Paul's Epistles to Individuals

Lesson 16 – 2 Timothy 1:15 – 2:6

I. Paul's Cohorts (vs. 15-18)

In these verses Paul gives a brief reference to some of his associates who had failed him. In **v. 15**, Paul says, *“all who are in Asia turned away from me”*. Some take this as either an inaccurate statement, primarily an attempt to discredit Paul, or as hyperbole, also tending to ascribe to Paul inaccuracies or inconsistencies in his writings. Neither is the case. This is a factual statement made by a man inspired by the Holy Spirit. However, context shows that Paul is speaking of a class of individuals and not every Christian in Asia.

A. Who is “All”?

In **Acts 2:1**, the *“all”* that gathered in one place is limited by context to the Apostles and not the larger group of 120 mentioned in **Acts 1:15**. Likewise, the *“all”* here more than likely describes a group of Asian Christians that were expected to visit Paul or even defend him during his imprisonment and not the whole of Christians in Asia. The fact that this group is said to have included Phygelus and Hermogenes (**v. 15**) shows it to have been a limited class with at least two influential members. We can also know this because they are contrasted with Onesiphorus, who *“was not ashamed of my chains”* (**v. 16**). See also **4:16**.

B. Onesiphorus was Different

Onesiphorus put himself at personal risk to find Paul in prison at a time when Roman persecution was intense (**v. 17**). Nero had already burned Rome and accused Christians of the arson in 64 A.D. Rome had always had strained relationships even with the Jews, ultimately resulting in them being banned from Rome by Claudius on at least one occasion (**Acts 18:1-2**). It is reasonable to assume that Christians from Asia who were expected to visit or defend Paul failed under these conditions, leaving them contrasted with Onesiphorus who bravely persevered in his encouragement of Paul.

C. Onesiphorus; Dead or Alive?

Interestingly, Onesiphorus is mentioned twice and only in this letter (**1:16; 4:19**). In both cases, the reference is to the *“household”* of Onesiphorus. Secular history holds that he was one of the earliest evangelists to be sent out by the Apostles and that he was martyred near Ephesus, likely before this letter. Some say this is why he refers to the *“household”* of Onesiphorus here and uses the past tense in referring to him. Because Paul wishes *“mercy”* for him (**v. 18**) and because a reference in the apocryphal, and certainly uninspired writing 2 Maccabees 12:40-45 addresses the practice, the Catholic church cites this as an early example of praying for the dead to affect their eternal destiny after the fact. Clearly there is no support for that concept in these verses. Onesiphorus may have still been alive and his family may have been worthy of mention by Paul. In any case, based on what is known about him, it seems unlikely Paul would have felt the necessity to pray for him in death so as to improve his eternal destiny as the Catholics use the concept.

II. Another Admonition to Be Faithful in Preaching and Teaching (2:1-2)

The word *“therefore”* indicates that these words continue to build on the things said in the closing verses of Chapter 1. Keeping in mind that some had *“turned away”* from Paul, the admonition here is to be *“strong”* against the temptation to abandon the Truth. Paul had several who had failed in the

expectation to stand fast. Phygelus and Hermogenes (**1:15**), Demus (**4:10**), Alexander (**4:14**), and others (**4:16**) had weakened and turned away. Timothy knew of this (**1:15**) and is admonished to avoid the same fate, and instruct others likewise.

A. *Strong in the Grace (v.1)*

The word translated “strong” here is the Greek “endunamoo” meaning to empower. This word or a variation is found in several other uses familiar to us. John the Baptist grew and “waxed strong in spirit” (**Luke 1:80**). Jesus likewise grew and “waxed strong in spirit” (**Luke 2:40**). Abraham was “strong in faith” (**Rom. 4:20**). Paul instructed those in Ephesus to be “strong in the Lord” (**Eph. 6:10**). We are told to “stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong” (**1 Cor. 16:13**) and weakness is overcome when we are strong (**2 Cor. 12:10; 2 Cor. 13:9**). To be strong in the spirit, faith, and the Lord is to be empowered by them. There can be no greater source of strength and resolve than the understanding that by God’s grace (unmerited favor) we have salvation in Christ.

B. *Teach Others Also (v. 2)*

The Hebrew writer makes the point like this; “For this reason we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. 2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompense, 3 how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard, 4 God also bearing witness with them, both by signs and wonders and by various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit according to His own will” (**Heb. 2:1-4**). This admonition causes the responsibility for adhering to and teaching the Truth to pass from generation to generation. Only “faithful men” (**v. 2**) can be trusted to pass on the teachings without deviation.

III. **Suffer Hardship as a Good Soldier of Jesus Christ (vs. 3-6)**

A military metaphor is used more than once to illustrate the life of a Christian. In **1 Cor. 9:7**, Paul uses a soldier as one of the examples of a person who earns his living from his work. In **Phili. 2:35**, Epaphroditus is called a “fellow soldier” as is Archippus in **Phile 2**. The physical work of a soldier is characterized by conflict. Fighting for a cause. In that sense, teaching and preaching the gospel creates conflict and the spiritual fight is real. A soldier’s life is also sometimes a life of suffering. Living in a foreign land, at odds with the indigenous population, confronting the adversary with a risk of death.

A. *Soldiers Focus on the Difficult Job (v. 4)*

If a soldier focuses on things not directly relevant to the critical task, they will be distracted and not suitable to their commanders. They also expose themselves to harm. This is not intended to prohibit secular work as Paul at times worked to support himself (**Acts 18:3; 2 Thess. 3:7-9**). It is intended to warn against becoming entangled in external concerns. Everything a Christian does should be for the purpose of pleasing Christ (**Eph. 6:5-6; Col. 3:17-23**).

B. *The Athlete Only Wins if He Competes Lawfully (v. 5)*

A succinct notice that God’s Word is to be followed without deviation. There are no shortcuts to discipline and training (**1 Cor. 9:27**).

C. *The Farmer and the First Fruits (v. 6)*

The diligent laborer is the first to be rewarded. See also **James 1:25**.