

2 Timothy 1:15-18

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Paul presents two examples to Timothy of faithless and faithful men. Phygelus and Hermogenes, who have betrayed Paul and are following untrue doctrines. These men are not to be imitated. But Onesiphorus is a man worth imitating: he visited Paul in prison and encouraged him, and was not embarrassed to be associated with him. Paul prays that God will show great mercy to Onesiphorus on the Day of Judgment for his service to God.

Paul has offered his own testimony as a positive witness to faithfulness, that will lay up treasure in heaven. Now Paul offers a negative witness, one not to follow: an example of unfaithfulness. And he also adds an additional faithful witness. In doing this, Paul makes clear that faithfulness is a choice made by each believer. Believers are made righteous in the sight of God through the death of Jesus, received by faith. That justification salvation is a gift that cannot be earned or lost. But after we are born again, there is still a life to live. And that life is made up of our choices. God leaves it to us to choose whether to follow Him, and believe His promised rewards, or follow our own way, and seek the rewards promised by the world. The consequence of our choices is immense.

Paul raises the negative example first, saying *You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes.* There are those who turned away from Paul. In fact, *all who are in Asia turned away from Paul.*

Asia was a Roman province at that time. It covers what is modern Turkey. Paul's missionary journeys went through Asia. When Paul mentions *Asia*, he might be including the region of Galatia, to whom Paul wrote the letter to the Galatians. Apparently the Galatians, and others of Paul's disciples in Asia, decided to follow a way other than that taught by Paul. In his letter to the Galatians, they had turned from following Paul's gospel of grace, and had begun to follow a gospel of religious rules. They were "seeking to be justified" rather than trusting Christ to do all the justifying (Galatians 2:17). Perhaps they had turned back to Paul after receiving his letter. But if so, they had now *turned away from him.*

Paul notes two specific men who are bad examples: *Phygelus and Hermogenes.* These men would have been known to Timothy, but this is their only mention in scripture. Paul does not want Timothy to follow this way, which might involve compromising truth to avoid risk of rejection. Again, the fact that Paul is concerned for Timothy, his top disciple, tells us that all of us are susceptible, and need to keep constant watch. To constantly rekindle our fervor and zeal for the gospel.

Now Paul adds *The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me.* It seems that *Onesiphorus* was unafraid to minister to and identify with Paul *in Rome.* In fact, when *Onesiphorus* was *in Rome*, he eagerly searched for Paul and found him in prison, in

chains. Onesiphorus was fearless, thinking of Paul, and ministering to him. Not just once, but many times, as Paul says *he often refreshed me*.

Paul elevates *Onesiphorus* because he *was not ashamed of Paul's chains*, his being in prison. This likely connects with the admonition from 1:8, where Paul said:

“Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God.”

(2 Timothy 1:8)

It seems clear that Paul is concerned about Timothy, hoping that he will be like Onesiphorus, and not like those in Asia, who turned away from him. This is the third occurrence of the word *ashamed* in this chapter. The progression is instructive:

- Paul tells Timothy “Do not be ashamed” of Paul’s imprisonment (2 Timothy 1:8).
- Paul says “I am not ashamed” of his suffering in prison for the gospel (2 Timothy 1:12).
- Paul tells Timothy the good example of Onesiphorus, who was “not ashamed” to identify with Paul in his chains (2 Timothy 1:16).

The point seems to be “Follow the example of Onesiphorus and me, and do not be ashamed of a testimony that is persecuted, but rather follow the example.”

In verse 16 Paul prayed a great wish upon Onesiphorus, and not only upon him but on *the house of Onesiphorus*. That wish was for the *Lord to grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus*. What Paul has in mind by the phrase *grant mercy* is made clear in verse 18, where Paul says:

the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day. Again here the *that day* being referred to is the day of the judgement, when all will stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ, to receive rewards for deeds done while living this life (2 Corinthians 5:10). Jesus will judge our deeds, and give out rewards based on a number of factors. Some of those include:

- The talents and opportunities we were given. To whom much is given, much will be expected (Matthew 25:14-30; Luke 12:48).
- The measure we used to judge others (Matthew 7:2).
- The things we did for those who could not pay us back in this life (Matthew 25:40; Mark 9:36-37).
- Our boldness in witnessing for Christ (Luke 9:26).
- Our faithfulness in walking in obedience to the commands of Jesus, and overcoming temptation from the world to follow its ways (Revelation 1:3).

Paul will make clear that we should live for *that day* by making our first priority to please Jesus with our thoughts and deeds.

However, even if we do all these things, we will not be able to demand anything from God. God owes no one anything. To the extent God grants us a reward, it is a matter of His *mercy*. *Mercy* is the granting to someone something they were not owed. God does not owe anyone. Yet, God is a

merciful God. He is eager to reward His servants. He wants to see His children succeed. That is what Paul stated in verse 12, that he knows whom he has “believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day” (the Judgement Day). Paul knows Onesiphorus cannot show up and demand anything. No one can. So Paul prays for God’s *mercy*, to heap great rewards upon him for his service to Paul, and to the gospel.

In wishing this, Paul refers to a biblical principle voiced by Jesus. Jesus told His disciples:

“He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet’s reward; and he who receives a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man’s reward.”

(Matthew 10:41)

We might consider that Paul is praying upon Onesiphorus to grant him the same reward due Paul, for ministering to him in his chains.

Paul then adds a tag about Onesiphorus, stating—*and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus*. Timothy would know all about Onesiphorus’ *services* that he *rendered at Ephesus*, because at the time Timothy received this, he was ministering to the church at Ephesus (1 Timothy 1:3). At the end of the letter, Paul will ask Timothy to greet the household of Onesiphorus.

Biblical Text

¹⁵ You are aware of the fact that all who are in ^[k]Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. ¹⁶ The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; ¹⁷ but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me— ¹⁸ the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day—and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.