

# 2 Timothy - Part 7

by John Hunter

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*In this sermon, John Hunter explores the themes of loyalty and abandonment through Paul's relationship with Onesiphorus during his imprisonment.*

**Duration:** 28:11

**Scripture:** 2 Timothy 1:16

**Topics:** "Christian Friendship", "Persecution Faith"

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## Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the events surrounding Paul's arrival in Rome during a time of chaos and destruction caused by a fire. A man named Onesiphorus diligently seeks out Paul, facing difficulties and suspicion from the Christians in Rome. Despite Paul being treated as a criminal and being chained, Onesiphorus provides him with comfort, fellowship, and support. The preacher emphasizes the importance of true friendship and support during times of crisis and difficulty, drawing parallels to the treatment of Jesus and the need for genuine believers to stand firm in their faith. Additionally, the preacher mentions that this passage is used by Roman Catholics to support their doctrine of praying for the dead.

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## Transcript

Verse 15. This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me, of whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus, for he oft refreshed me, was not ashamed of my chain.

But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me. Verse 16. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day.

And in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well. Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. Verse 17.

The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also. And in this section we have Paul and his associates. Verse 15.

Paul and the Asiatics, all that be in Asia. Verses 16 to 18, you have Paul and Onesiphorus. And in verses 1 and 2, you have Paul and Timothy with others.

You'll notice in verse 15 that all in Asia have deserted Paul. Two men are prominent, Phygelus and Hermogenes. Verses 16 to 18, in contrast to them, there's one man and he's loyal.

And then in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 2, you have many men, Timothy and faithful men. So that in verse 15, you can think of the disappointment to Paul when men who usually stood with him are no longer there. You can think in verses 16 to 18 of the delight when Onesiphorus appear possibly unexpectedly.

And then you can think of Paul's confidence and pleasure when he thought of Timothy and other faithful men. Now the days are dark for Paul. He's in a dungeon.

He's awaiting martyrdom. He's possibly there on a political charge. I would take it that at least the charge would be twofold.

He would be charged with taking part in burning Rome. Nero had burned Rome for his own purpose, but he was blaming the Christians. And Paul, being the leading Christian, was getting a lot of the blame.

So he would be charged with burning Rome. Secondly, I would take it he would be charged for weakening imperial authority and for practicing things that were hostile to the government. Now when I say that he would be charged with weakening imperial authority, I mean this, that the Romans, when they referred to Caesar, they referred to him as my Lord Caesar.

That is, he was taking divine titles to himself. Now no Christian would call Caesar Lord. As far as they were concerned, Jesus Christ is Lord.

So they would bring the charge that he was weakening imperial authority. Again, they would bring the charge that he was undermining established customs in the country. You see, paganism was the order of the day.

Now it doesn't convey a great deal to you, but you see, one day through the door would come an invitation. It was an invitation to the idol temple, coming from a so-called friend. And the invitation would say, you are invited to dine at the table of my Lord Serapis.

Now, Lord Serapis was one of the gods that they worshipped. And of course, if they went, everything was devoted to the worship of the God. The meat would be dedicated to him.

Again, when they went to these pagan temples, there were the temple virgins, the prostitutes. And actions there that were immoral were looked upon as done in a sacred way, a religious way to the gods. So you can appreciate that the Christians objecting to all these things had brought themselves under government persecution.

So the days were dark. And Paul is in the dungeon, dismal and dark. They tell us that it was underground.

Light and air could only come through a hole in the ceiling. There he was waiting. Look only is with me.

Like the Lord, others were deserting. He was passing through his Gethsemane and his Calvary. It wasn't easy.

I'm inclined to the opinion that when he was due to appear before Nero, that he sent for leading Christians to come to testify for him. He couldn't call Timothy and Luke and Titus. They were looked as close associates with very grave suspicion too.

So I reckon that Paul sent out for other Christians to come to bear testimony to him. I wouldn't be at all surprised if he expected Phagellus and Hermogenes to come. And in chapter 4 at verse 16 is it? He tells

us that my first defense, no man stood with me, nobody turned up.

There were difficult days. Paul was on a political charge. The state was against him.

His days were numbered. To appear as a witness for Paul would possibly mean that you might finish up in the same dungeon and the same death. And so he says, all that be in Asia turned away from me.

That's amazing. Whenever you go home you read Acts 19 verse 10. And you're told there that all that in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jew and Gentile.

The great work of God had been done in Asia. But now they're turned away from him, including these leaders. Now it says they be turned away from me is in what we would call the aorist or point tense.

That is it refers to a certain time. And I would take it that word got around quickly that Paul had been arrested and taken to Rome. And panic struck.

All the leaders would be saying, will we be next? If he begins to widen the persecution the same as they do in Eastern Europe, the knock at three o'clock in the morning and the elders are taken away. The idea is get the elders and you'll scatter the flock. And so panic struck them and nobody knows Paul and nobody's a friend of Paul.

And these men go down in the sacred texts as men who abandoned and forsook Paul in the hour of his need. And there's a day of account coming for such men. For to abandon and forsake and turn away from Paul was turning away from the Lord and the gospel when testimony was needed.

And so he looked around that day and found nobody there. That's why he hadn't even a council for the defense. He had to conduct his own defense, which he did brilliantly.

But he knows that his days are numbered. All they that are in Asia be turned away from me of whom are, and he names the men. He does that in the pastoral epistles.

You'll have noticed that he's naming men, naming men that turned away, naming men that opposed, naming men that taught false doctrine. And he's telling Timothy all this, for he knows that Timothy will feel it as he feels it. And he's telling Timothy for this reason, Timothy, the day's coming when you'll likely be in the same position.

And I want you to understand, Timothy, that the road that I'm going, you'll probably need to tread too. It's not very easy, is it? You see, the devil was busy. To get Paul in the dungeon with the sentence of death upon him was his greatest victory since he put Christ on the cross, so to speak, when he got Stephen stoned and James martyred.

And now he's got Paul in the dungeon, and the days are numbered. And Paul recognizes this. And so he's laying all this out before Timothy.

You see, brethren, you'll need to understand this. Now listen to me. If you're going to be a leader amongst God's people, you'll need to remember this.

There will be people that will let you down at the time when you need them most. Suddenly you look around for men that you expect to be there, and they're not there. Have you ever been betrayed like that? Have you ever been let down by the people you thought would stand with you? But on the other hand,

you'll always find oneself as those who unexpectedly will stand with you.

And you'll always find men who are constantly loyal and faithful to the Lord and to the gospel and to the servant, as was Timothy and others. Now, that brings me to verses 16 to 18. Note one or two things, will you please, here.

Will you notice that Paul tells us the story from how it came to him? That is, in verse 16, he tells us about Onesiphorus, what he did for him in the dungeon. Then in verse 17, Onesiphorus just suddenly appeared, so Paul starts the story there and works backward. Verse 17, he tells you how he sought him out in Rome.

And verse 18, he tells you about what he did in his hometown. Verse 18, how he ministered unto me at Ephesus. Got it? Now, a number again.

You may or may not know, this might surprise you if you don't know, do you know that this is the passage that the Roman Catholics base on their doctrine of praying for the dead? Now, you read it with me and you never noticed that. For you know all you need is a doctrine and then you can soon get something to build it on. Do you know what they build the doctrine on? Verse 16, the Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus.

He's praying for the house, so they say that Onesiphorus must have died. Verse 18, the Lord grant unto Onesiphorus that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day. So Paul's praying, he's dead, that he may find mercy.

And then they go to 2 Timothy chapter 4 at verse 19, salute Prisca and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. And so they are building up the idea because he's praying for the household. And in verse 18, he prays for him, assuming that he's dead, they build the doctrine of prayers for the dead.

Quite a flimsy foundation, isn't it? Because I'll tell you in a moment why he was praying for the household. Now, let me now try please and build up the story for you. We'll go back now to Ephesus.

Paul's in Rome in the dungeon and up yonder in Ephesus, Onesiphorus and others, they're no doubt praying for Paul. They've heard he's been arrested and taken to Rome, that's all. And if you'll allow just a little imagination, maybe Onesiphorus is there with his wife and they're praying about Paul.

And when their eyes to their feet, suddenly Onesiphorus says to his wife, I'm going to go to Rome to find out about Paul. I'm not happy at all. And she says, oh yes, that'll be fine.

And then she stops and a shadow flips across her face and he knows what it means. And so does she. In the first blush of enthusiasm, prayerful enthusiasm, she agrees.

And then she sees the danger. If he goes to Rome and is found to be a friend of Paul, she might never see him again. They've heard about others.

They're not touching Paul at all. And they agree in the house that day that he'll go. They'll take their tender farewell for she might never see him again.

Can you understand why Paul says, the Lord, give mercy unto the household of Onesiphorus? Because they were all taking part in the sacrifice, in the cost. They were all prepared to take the risk that husband and father might lose his life and they'll never see him again. It was a big thing, wasn't it? Would you do that for your brother? I don't know about this man much.

He's one of these men that appear on the page and disappear. Phagellus and Hermodunus, they'll appear as deserters and pass off. Onesiphorus will appear, shine as a bright star and pass off.

You'll never hear of him again. But what is recorded of him here has enshrined his name for loyalty and devotion to Paul in his darkest hour. I don't know.

He couldn't have been a slave. He couldn't have got away. He may have been a free man, a worker.

If that's so, he's going to make great sacrifices to go there. On the other hand, he may have been quite well off. Possibly he may have been.

I'll indicate to that to you later. But whatever it was, no matter how it was, he's prepared to take the journey and face up to the grim possibilities of dying for Christ along with Paul. Let me say this too.

If he hadn't been in the best of fellowship with Paul, he would never have been prepared to sacrifice his life for him. Maybe you don't get on too well with some of the brethren. Do you think that would cancel out your ability to help them in a difficult day? Obviously, there's fellowship here.

At the close of verse 18, as Paul walks back, most translations would leave out unto me. Thou dost know how many things he ministered at Ephesus. There was this brother taking part in the activities of the local church, quite an invaluable brother.

So that means if anything happens, not only will the family lose him, the assembly will lose him. It just all depends, brethren and sisters, on whether you hold to life grimly or lightly. Just all depends as to whether you love heaven better than earth.

Just all depends on whether you love Christ better than anybody else on earth. Oh yes, there's a deep love and devotion behind this man's action. What do you think? Come again.

Verse 17, he reaches Rome. Now remember, the city's in chaos. The fire burned for nearly a week, six days and seven nights.

The whole thing's in a desperate situation. Half the city's destroyed. And Onesiphorus arrived in Rome looking for the wee man, Paul.

Now watch what it says. When he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently. That means he had a bit of trouble.

It wasn't easy. He would go to the Christians, but they are not talking. If they know, they're not saying.

Why, you say? Just like today in Eastern Europe. They don't know this man. He could be an informer.

He could be planted by the government to find out who are the friends of Paul. You know, this is all strange to us, but we know what's happening, don't we? And they might look at this man suspiciously and say, oh well, he's maybe just ferreting out who the friends of Paul are, so they're not saying anything. He would go along to some officials and they, some would quite brusquely attempt to get off hope.

Others officials might kindly say, listen friend, I'll leave you back. I don't, I'm not allowed to say too much. I'll leave you the hope.

But he kept at it. Until ultimately, by picking up something here and there. Now you read it again.

Verse 17. But when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently and found me. You can nearly hear the exclamation of surprise, can't you? As in, on Onesiphorus appeared and found me.

My, my, what a day that was, eh? When Onesiphorus appeared. He had expected others, but he never expected him. Now listen to me, will you? Now listen to me.

Don't you think that all your friends that profess to be your friends are really your friends? You never prove your friends when things are going well. You only prove them when the tide's running against you and you're in desperate trouble. Isn't that right? That's when you'll prove the people that are royal and real.

Not when everything's going well. They can take of your hospitality. We've all got friends on that level.

Your real friends will be when the tide's running against you and you're needing a bit help and support and everybody's deserting you. Then you'll find your true friends. He says, verse 16, he was not ashamed of my chain.

Well, Paul was literally chained. He was a criminal. He was being treated as a criminal.

The same as Christ. 700 years before Christ came, Isaiah lifted his pen to write and he says of Christ, he was numbered with the transgressors. That means he was treated like a criminal.

He was treated as if he was a criminal. Now Paul's being treated like a criminal. He's chained and that chain spoke its message, the hallmark of what it means to stand true for Christ in a dark day.

That chain spoke out of shame and ignominy and there were people who were shunning it and didn't want to have anything to do with him. But not so on the surface. He was not ashamed of my chain and he stands out in the scriptures as a man of gallant staunchness.

That's a good old English word that, isn't it? Gallant staunchness. A man that will stand firm beside another and he'll take the reproach of the chain. He says, look again, he oft refreshed me.

Is that how it's put? He often refreshed me. That means that he came time and again. It was all right coming once but he came often.

That means he was able to stay there for a while. It means he was prepared to risk his life. He'll now be known by everybody on duty at different times.

He's a friend of Paul. Well now, the word refresh means to be cool. He just means that his visits, they encouraged and cheered and helped and brought hope and a bit of life to Paul.

How would they refresh him? Well, he would refresh him first of all by his presence. My, what it meant that grim day when suddenly Onesiphorus appeared. Do you know what your Bible says? A brother is born for adversity.

That's when you prove your brethren in days of adversity. A brother is born for adversity. There are some men like that.

They'll come to light and into the fullness in difficult days. It was one thing to minister at Ephesus and serve the Lord when there's no price to be paid. Another thing to take your life in your hand and say, I'll stand by the wee man.

He would refresh him, not only by his presence, but he would refresh him by the information that he brought. Oh, how eagerly would Paul would ask him about the churches and the Christians. Here was his link with an outside world.

Here was his link with an area that he'd evangelized for three years. He tells us in Acts 20, around three years he was there. How eagerly he would listen as Onesiphorus told him at all.

He would refresh him possibly by bringing him food and drink. You know, Rome didn't care very much about its prisoners. They wouldn't worry whether they lived or died.

So he possibly would bring along a little bit of sustenance for him. That's why I'm inclined to think maybe he was quite well to do. You know, money's done a lot of good for the cause of Christ.

Nothing wrong in having money as long as you use it the right way. And this man was using what he had and he would bring along food and drink and all that was necessary for Paul's comfort. He oft refreshed me.

He would refresh him by his fellowship. My, what it meant just to sit down with somebody that loved the Lord. Somebody that loved the truth.

Somebody that was prepared to sacrifice his life. Somebody that was prepared to stand in a dark hour and defy all the authorities. Says Paul, he oft refreshed me.

You know, brethren and sisters, there are some of you old enough to know that there have been days of crisis and difficulty and you've proved who your friends are. A lot of you are too young to appreciate this, but maybe there'll come a day when you'll be in a difficulty and I tell you it's then you'll prove your friends and you'll prove that possibly the most unlikely people will come to your aid. And the folks that you thought, some of the brethren that lead and some even of the brethren that minister, won't know you.

Won't know you. You see brethren, it's when we're down that we need the lifting up. It's not right.

Things are going well with you, now you're getting on all right. It's not right. You're not too dependent to quite an extent on the fellowship, but if the wind was against you and the tide was running hard and the fire was burning fierce and you were very conscious that you were pretty much on your own, and this man's not suffering for his sin and he's not suffering for his failure, he's suffering for the truth.

He's suffering because he was a big man among the Christians. And he became the target of the devil. The devil came right in on him.

That means a lot then. It means a lot then to talk about being Christ's prisoner. You see, you'll need to adjust your mind.

Listen, men are only men at the best. Got that? Don't you fear any man whose breath is in his nostrils. You'll learn to have a fear of God in your soul and you'll find this, that God will never let you down.

There'll always be one man. There'll always be one man that will stand by your side to give you comfort and help and refreshment. Now I need to stop.

My time's up. May the Lord bless his work.

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