

II TIMOTHY 1:15-18
A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES!

Please turn in your Bibles this morning to II Timothy chapter 1 as we continue our in-depth study of Paul's second letter to Timothy and his last letter before he was martyred for his faith by Ceaser Nero.

As we will see, what Paul is dealing with in these verses is born out of what he just said to Timothy. In fact, you can't live or walk apart from this.

What is it that we need to walk faithfully?

Let me read through these verses and then I will expound on them. We concluded our study last week in II Timothy 1:13-14 as Paul wrote, "**Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.**"

Paul is admonishing Timothy to stand strong in the faith. All that Paul had given to him regarding the Lord, all that he knew regarding how to live out his faith he needed to keep so that he could stand tall in the faith.

Remember, Paul is passing off the scene and he is passing the torch, you might say, to Timothy to carry on the work of the Lord!

That is a huge task and there is no way that Timothy could do that on his own. And thus, we are able to stand tall and be faithful because the Holy Spirit gives us the power to walk accordingly. Or, as Paul put it, all that was given to us we "**. . . keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.**"

The Holy Spirit is the key to faithfulness, and we *CAN'T* walk or be faithful in our walk without the Holy Spirit in our lives. Yes, we can try, and we will do okay when things are going well, but when things are not going well, when things get tough, we *WILL* fail, not might!

And make no mistake about it, the battle is real, the battle is intense, and friends will walk away from you! And that is hard. That is hurtful. And in saying that, we have to be careful how we walk in spite of this.

We need to be friends!

We need God to enable us to walk accordingly, to be faithful!

And the focus this morning in our study is – *A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES!*

Now you may not think too much about this, but we need to. I am amazed at the number of friends I have had over the years, Christian brothers and sisters, that just walked away from me because, I really don't know. They made some excuses, and, in the end, that is all they were.

I thought we were friends, but something happened, and they just left. I don't get it, but Paul had the same problem, friends, Christian friends who just walked away. And not just walked away but did so in the time of his greatest need!

So I think this is an important subject or the Holy Spirit would not have added this in the Word of God.

And I do realize that this is a tough topic but again, it is important as we are to shine for Jesus. We must live as He desires us to live, and we will see that in our study this morning as we look at these verses.

One report, from 2022 said this regarding friendship in America. We are told, “*Aristotle reminds us that friendship is an important political good, and a central part of a well-lived life. Despite being more interconnected than at any time in our history, America is experiencing a friendship crisis. Americans, especially men, have far fewer friends than in decades past.*”

Another report tells us,

Would you lay down your life for your friends? Would they do so for you?

If the answer to either of these questions is no, perhaps a better understanding of real friendship would make such meaningful relationships possible.

Sadly, many Americans have been deformed by a Hollywood idea of friendship as portrayed in movies. In addition, the Internet and social media also depict friendship as a casual acquaintance with others. The expression Facebook friend denotes a superficial friendship activated by a click.

However, real friendships are based on virtue and only acquired through hard work and sacrifice. They cannot be based solely on a chance encounter, joint activities and personal interests. Two people do not just meet and instantly become best friends for the rest of their lives.

This is romantic notion of friendship. Likewise, friendship cannot be reduced to the shared interests of business relationships because they are *quid pro quo* [a favor or advantage granted or expected in return for something]. There is no disinterested charity involved.

Thus, sociologists point out that Americans have few friends.

True friendship needs a higher ideal that hovers above the two parties involved. The Christian idea of friendship is based on supernatural faith in God, who provides the motive for sacrifice and love. . . .

A friendship based on virtue and the love of God places a high ideal at the center of the relationship and displaces the ego that destroys Christian Charity. Sacrificial relationships, for example, are commonly forged in war. They are enduring friendships that come about through mutual sacrifice motivated by ideals.

Today there are ever fewer friends and ever greater hatred among people that should be friends, even within families. The lack of friendship is pushing society into advanced stages of disintegration. The root cause is selfishness and the lack of charity. . . .

An old saying goes: *To have a friend, you need to be a friend. Friendship is work and requires sacrifice. However, it is richly rewarding when based on virtue and love of God.*

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Please understand that friendship is important, especially in the days we are living in. And for Paul, friendship was important as well, but, as we are going to see, some walked away from Paul in his time of need and others stood by him, they were true friends.

I have broken down the verses we will be looking at this morning into two main points. They are,

UNFAITHFUL FRIENDS – II TIMOTHY 1:15

FAITHFUL FRIENDS – II TIMOTHY 1:16-18

So with that as our introduction, let's begin reading in II Timothy chapter 1, beginning in verse 15 and let's see what the Lord has for us as we study His Word and look at this topic – ***A FRIEND LOVES AT ALL TIMES!***

II TIMOTHY 1

VERSE 15

Please understand that when Paul speaks of Asia, he is not speaking of the far eastern continent but the Roman Province of Asia or mostly modern-day Turkey.

Also, Ephesus was located in the Roman Province of Asia and thus, Timothy was aware of the situation.

Not only that but think about this for a minute. Paul spent a good part of his life ministering to people the love of Christ, the Good News and now, when things got tough for him, they turned from him, those who were supposed to be his friends.

They abandoned Paul, in a sense.

This is a hard one to swallow because the great apostle Paul, at the end of his days and a fantastic missionary career, was almost all alone. He was not praised by the world, or even regarded much among other Christians.

And I can understand the world coming against Paul, but when other Christians did that, when they turned from him, when they did not support him, that was devastating to Paul and I am sure it is when friends do that to us!

Now, if Paul was around today and this happened, the book deals would be off, the interviews would be over, the magazine stories would be silent, no movie deals for sure, and his friends and probably his own family would avoid him like he had the plague!

But, as unpopular as Paul was with people, supposedly Christians, because of his faith and the persecution he was suffering, Heaven was rejoicing over this man.

But for people living in Paul's day, Christians, make no mistake about it, Paul had become **RADIOACTIVE** politically speaking. And the result of that was we see that the churches of Asia Minor were afraid to be seen with Paul or to have any contact with him for fear Nero would come after them as well.

Now here's the thing. Nero was on a rampage. He burned parts of Rome, and he blamed the Christians for doing that. He had Paul arrested and now Paul is sitting on death row. And I am sure that Nero would come after those who had associated themselves with Paul and the Christian faith.

One writer, regarding Nero, wrote this, *"Nero watched from the Tower of Maecenas on the Esquiline Hill while singing. Nero sent out men to set fire to the city. There were unconfirmed rumors that Nero sang from a private stage during the fire. Nero was motivated to destroy the city so he would be able to bypass the senate and rebuild Rome in his image."*

I truly believe that after Paul was released from his first Roman imprisonment, after he spoke with Nero and shared the Gospel with him, that Nero rejected the truth, and he became demon possessed. When you look at what he did to Christians, that is the only conclusion that I can come to!

Of this persecution, one writer put it like this,

Nero preferred to publicly execute those who refused to renounce their faith, either in events he'd personally organized, or at regular state-sponsored times.

At times, Christians were pitted against savage animals, such as dogs, in a gruesome display of violence and bloodshed. At others, victims were crucified.

Another particularly gruesome form of execution was to burn Christians alive as human torches.

Nero was known for his extravagant gardens, which he would light up at night with burning torches.

According to some accounts, Nero would have Christians tied to stakes and covered in tar or pitch before setting them alight.

The burning bodies would then be used to light up the gardens, creating a macabre spectacle for Nero's guests.

- <https://bit.ly/42kSILX>

It was not that persecution might come, it was there, and many were scared, and many were trying to distance themselves from a relationship with Paul, like Phygellus and Hermogenes.

Folks, again, perspective is everything.

Do you want to be a man pleaser or a God pleaser?

I want to hear ***“Well done good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of your King!”***

I would rather serve the Lord and have fellow Christians against me than to have people exalt me and hear groans from Heaven!

And like we have seen here, Paul even names the names of two men who were unfaithful, Phygellus and Hermogenes.

And by the time we get to the end of this letter, listen to what Paul says about those who abandoned him. In II Timothy chapter 4 Paul wrote, **“Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica - Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. . . . Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words. At my first defense no one stood with me, but all forsook me. May it not be charged against them.”** II Timothy 4:9-11, 14-16.

Keep in mind that the Mamertine prison, where Paul was being held, was just a hole in the ground with an opening at the top. No bathrooms. They did not provide clothing for you. The food was minimal to say the least. It was a horrible situation.

And then your friends flee from you out of fear, of not wanting to be associated with you. And you are basically left alone.

There was no one who stood with Paul as he was on trial for his faith. No one to be a friend to him. He was all alone.

Well, that is not exactly true. Listen to what Paul goes on to say in II Timothy 4:17, **“But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that the message might be preached fully through me, and that all the Gentiles might hear. Also I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.”**

This lack of Christian love, these friends who walked away from Paul were wrong, but in the end, Paul knew that no matter what, no matter how many of his friends walked away, the Lord was with him, and it was the Lord who strengthened him!

That is important for us to understand because, like it or not, and I don't, friends will walk away and I think this is why the Holy Spirit put this in here, so we can learn from it and be encouraged through those times.

That is something that we need to remember, that the Lord is always with us. Friends may come and go, as I have said, but the Lord will never do that. (Hebrews 13:5)

Now it would be great to have your name in the Bible, like Phygellus and Hermogenes, but not like this. Not as examples of unfaithfulness!

But now they were ashamed of the Gospel, fearful. And they were ashamed of Paul. Because of that they tried to distance themselves, probably because of the persecution that Nero had brought upon Christians!

And, as I have said, once Paul was in prison, those who had been with him, those who were in Asia, were afraid of being found guilty by association, not just these two men! But since they were probably leaders and many knew them, Paul mentions them by name to drive home his point about being left alone.

And yes, the persecution was real, but they had their eyes on self-preservation instead of the Lord and in doing so it caused them to distance themselves from their friend Paul, the one who taught them so much about the Lord, loved them so much!

And we can understand this kind of rejection from the world, even though it still hurts. But when it comes from fellow Christians, those you have been caring for and yet, now they are turning away from you and they are fighting against you, that is heartbreaking!

In the area of Asia were the Galatian believers. And Paul says of them in Galatians 4:19-20, **“My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you, I would like to be present with you now and to change my tone; for I have doubts about you.”**

In other words, they were Paul’s spiritual children and now they are fighting against him, they turned away from him. Can you imagine the pain that brought to Paul.

I think that is one of the reasons that Paul greatly desired to see Timothy because he was one of the few who had not deserted him in his time of need! (II Timothy 1:4)

It is interesting that we don’t know anything more about these two men except what we are told here and how sad to have their lives known by these words because they were not willing to count the cost and go the distance.

Now, in our own lives, if someone had to describe our faith as Paul did with these two men, would they speak of us as a coward, traitor, deserter, or faithful even in the face of danger?

Now I think we can have many reasons why we turned from someone who was our friend, and we can justify it. But can we really?

I don’t think we can.

Now before you get mad at me and tell me the reasons I am wrong, let me share this with you.

Remember what Jesus prayed before He went to the cross to pay for our sins and then you can decide if what you are doing or not doing is right or wrong. Again, I realize that this may not be an easy subject for you but listen to what Jesus is praying for and if you are dealing with broken friendships, pray for the Lord to help restore them.

In John 17:20-21 we are told, **“I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.”**

Jesus has been praying for His men, but now He is praying for all those who will come to saving faith, and that includes you and me!

And what is this prayer about?

That we would be one as God the Father and Jesus are One.

Why is this so important?

Because, as the world looks at our lives, as they look at the love that we have for one another they may come to saving faith!

Now let me also say this. The love, that oneness that God the Father and Jesus have is perfect. They are never in opposition to one another. They never fight. They never disagree.

I think we are all in agreement with that.

And Jesus is saying that we are to love one another as they love each other!

How is that going?

It is a battle, isn't it?

It is, and the reason that this is a battle is that the flesh wars against the Spirit and the Spirit against the flesh! (Galatians 5:17)

Let's face it, we are not all going to be in agreement on everything in life, that is just the way it is. Now I am not saying we should be in disagreement with foundational truths of doctrine. In fact, it is Jesus that unites us together and if we have a different Jesus than what the Bible speaks of then there is no unity.

But let us not use those life differences as an excuse. Remember the commandment that Jesus has given to us, not a suggestion, but a commandment.

In John 13:34-35 Jesus tells us, **“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”**

Now some of you may be thinking, *“Hey, wait a minute. This is not a new commandment! We find that spoken of in the Old Testament, in Leviticus 19:18. It says in that verse, ‘You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord.’ So how is what Jesus said any different than what Moses wrote about?”*

How did Moses tell us to love people?

As we love ourselves!

So what is the difference then?

There is a big difference here because Jesus tells us that we are to love others **“As I have loved you.”**

They loved with a brotherly type of love and Jesus is commanding us to love with an unconditional type of love. And this love, this Agape love only comes from God. You can’t manufacture it, it is supernatural.

“But you don’t understand. My friend betrayed me! My parents are ignoring me! My children have turned away from me! My spouse let me down! My friend was not there when I needed them the most!”

And that list can go on and on. You can put all kinds of reasons why we don’t love people. We can have all kinds of reasons why we have stopped loving them!

But again, what did Jesus say, what did He command us to do?

He said that we are to love people, "**As I have loved you.**"

In spite of what we have done, does God still love us?

Absolutely, His love towards us is unconditional!

Now, what someone has done to you, do you still love them?

I know, not an easy subject but if we are not challenged as we read through the Word of God, then what is the point!

We need to grow and to grow in the faith is to surrender our lives to the Lord and allow that love that Jesus has for us to flow through us and touch the lives of others!

And please understand that the identifying mark of a Christian is not how big his Bible is, or how worn his Bible is, or the Christian bumper sticker he has on his car or the Christian tee-shirt or whatever. The identifying mark of a Christian is his **LOVE!**

There are people that can quote Scripture, they know it inside and out and yet, what they know they are not practicing and that is wrong. That is not what God's Word is all about, just knowing it! It is practicing it!

We can do all kinds of service for the Lord but if we lack love, we are not representing Him correctly!

Do I, do you love the way that Jesus loves?

In 200 A. D. the early church leader, Tertullian, noted how the pagans viewed Christians with astonishment.

They would say, "***See how they love one another?***"

And yet, there is that battle between the flesh and the Spirit, to love like Jesus or to love like the world! And the world's love is fickle!

It all boils down to this, they'll know we're Christians if we have love for one another.

In fact, this is the only distinguishing mark that the disciples were given in the Scripture, that they were to love one another, their ability to love, Agape love, a love that can only come from God!

As a young Christian we use to sing this song, *They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love*, and it is a wonderful song to bring to mind how we are to walk. It goes like this,

*We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;
We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord;
And we pray that all unity will one day be restored.*

*Chorus: And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love,
yes, they'll know we are Christians by our love.*

*We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand;
We will walk with each other, we will walk hand in hand;
And together we'll spread the news that God is in our land.*

*We Will work with each other, we will work side by side;
We will work with each other, we will work side by side;
And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride.*

*All praise to the Father, from whom all things come;
And all praise to Christ Jesus, His only Son.
And all praise to the Spirit who makes us one.*

- They Will Know We Are Christians by Our Love

Many in Asia, like Phygellus and Hermogenes turned away from Paul, they distanced themselves from him, they did not want to be associated with him.

Again, that is so hard when you are going through a tuff time.

And here in II Timothy we see – **UNFAITHFUL FRIENDS!**

But we do see a good friend as we read on, one man who dared to leave Ephesus and come to Rome to assist Paul and we will be looking at – **FAITHFUL FRIENDS!**

VERSES 16-18

In stark contrast to the unfaithfulness of Phygellus and Hermogenes is Onesiphorus.

We don't know a lot about this man except that he lived in Ephesus, (II Timothy 4:19), and he traveled to Rome, some say on business, but he could have gone to Rome just to see Paul.

I tend to think he went there for the business of finding Paul and when he got there, he hunted Paul down and once he found him, he was a comfort to Paul, he ministered to Paul's needs!

Keep in mind that he had to track Paul down in prison, it was not an easy thing to do, and yet, he didn't let difficulty stop him and he found Paul.

Think about this for a minute. When Onesiphorus got to Rome there were many prisons in Rome. He had no idea which one Paul was in.

And it was not like he could pick up the phone and start calling the different prisons to see where Paul was at.

Onesiphorus had to track Paul down, he had some work ahead of him when he got there but he was determined to find Paul and he did despite the difficulty in finding him.

Think about this for a minute. If we are only faithful when things come easy to us, then the reality is, we are not very faithful!

And here's the thing. If you really care for someone, if they are important to you, if you truly love them, then nothing will stop you from finding them or getting to them.

I don't know if you remember this story, it happened right here in Wisconsin.

This happened several years ago. There was a man by the name of Alvin. He was seventy-three years old, and he lived down in Iowa.

Because of his poor eyesight he could not get a driver's license.

Not only that, but he did not trust buses or airplanes. Which makes it difficult to get around.

Alvin's brother had a stroke and of course, he wanted to be there for him. But how was he going to get there without a driver's license and not wanting to take any other transportation, like buses or airplanes as I have said.

What was he going to do?

Well, nothing was going to stop Alvin from seeing his sick brother, so he cranked up his 1966 John Deere lawn mower and he drove it some 200 miles to Blue River Wisconsin.

Wow, that is determination. He wanted to be with his brother, and nothing was going to stop him, and he did make it!

That is the kind of dedication, of love that we see here with Onesiphorus.

In fact, for Onesiphorus, his journey from Ephesus to Rome was more difficult than Alvin's and yet, he not only made it to Rome, but he found Paul there in the Mamertine prison!

An example in the scriptures of this kind of love is seen in the four friends that lowered a paralyzed buddy through the roof so Jesus could heal him.

We are told of this story in Luke 5:17-19 we are told, **“Now it happened on a certain day, as He was teaching, that there were Pharisees and teachers of the law sitting by, who had come out of every town of Galilee, Judea, and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was present to heal them. Then behold, men brought on a bed a man who was paralyzed, whom they sought to bring in and lay before Him. And when they could not find how they might bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the housetop and let him down with his bed through the tiling into the midst before Jesus.”**

Now Mark tells us that this incident with the paralytic who is healed by Jesus took place in Capernaum, probably in Peter's house. And the place is packed as Jesus was teaching. It was standing room only!

And here come these four men, and they are carrying their paralyzed friend because he couldn't walk. And as Jesus is teaching, they arrive at Peter's house.

Now here is the problem. Since they got there a little late, they couldn't get in because of the crowds of people, there was no more room.

Now for most, they would leave and come back another day. But their desire to bring their friend to Jesus so that he may be healed, made whole, able to walk again was more important than a room filled with people.

And thus, when one door closes another opens or should I say, a hole in the roof opens up!

Again, there was no room, and they are so determined they carry him to the top of the flat roof, and they open up a portion of the roof and let their friend down right in front of Jesus.

I like the fact that they let nothing get in their way of doing this.

Does our behavior, our actions, reflect what we believe to be true about the Lord? It should! For these men, nothing was going to get in their way of bringing their friend to Jesus.

That is love, that is true friendship!

And, let me add this. Nothing should get in our way of loving people, reaching out in the love of Christ to them, being a friend to them. These men loved their friend so much that nothing was going to get in their way.

Now for the Jews, illness was a result of sin or so they believed. But please understand that not all illness is a result of sin in a person's life, as some try to tell you.

But this man's illness was most likely a result of his sin for most paralysis in those days was due to syphilis, a sexually transmitted disease.

Thus, he is now at the end of his life, no hope, and he is brought to Jesus, the one who can give us hope.

I like what Spurgeon wrote regarding the quality of these men who brought their friend to Jesus. He wrote, *"They need be strong, for the burden is heavy; they need be resolute, for the work will try their faith; they need be prayerful, for otherwise they labor in vain; they must be believing, or they will be utterly useless."*

We go on to read regarding this story, the response of Jesus in Mark 5:20-26, **"When He saw their faith, He said to him, 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.' And the scribes and the Pharisees began to reason, saying, 'Who is this who speaks blasphemies? Who can forgive sins but God alone?' But when Jesus perceived their thoughts, He answered and said to them, 'Why are you reasoning in your hearts? Which is easier, to say, 'Your sins are forgiven you,' or to say, 'Rise up and walk'? But that you may know that the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins' - He said to the man who was paralyzed, 'I say to you, arise, take up your bed, and go to your house.' Immediately he rose up before them, took up what he had been lying on, and departed to his own house, glorifying God. And they were all amazed, and they glorified God and were filled with fear, saying, 'We have seen strange things today!'"**

Why did these men bring their friend to Jesus?

To be healed, he could not walk, he was paralyzed.

And what does Jesus tell them? **"... 'Man, your sins are forgiven you.'"**

I don't think that is what they wanted to hear but Jesus gets to the heart of the matter, He sees the repentance of this man and He forgives his sins. You see, his friends could only bring him so far, to Jesus, that is as far as they could go. Now it was his own faith that brought the forgiveness of sins as he repented and came to Jesus.

Also, keep in mind who were sitting in the front row to hear Jesus! The religious leaders were in the front row, they were the ones who had front row seats because of their position. And as soon as they hear those words from Jesus, they jump all over Him for saying He has the power to forgive this man's sins.

Why were they so upset? Simply, it was the fact that only God can do that.

In Isaiah 43:25 we are told, "**I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions for My own sake; and I will not remember your sins.**"

Don't miss the point. Jesus was telling these religious leaders and all those who were there that He is God and He thus, has the power to forgive a person of their sins!

Remember what we read in verse 17 of Luke chapter 5, "**. . . And the power of the Lord was present to heal them.**"

Yes, the power was there to heal those religious leaders as well as this man, but the religious leaders just refused to receive it! Jesus could have extended that forgiveness to them, but they rejected Jesus being God.

And the Lord healed this man showing them that He does have the power to forgive sins. This man stood up and walked away!

How does this relate to our love for people?

If you are struggling in this area, you need to come before God and ask for forgiveness. He has the power to heal you and empower you to love those that you are struggling with, if you are willing to give Him your life, all of it!

I have talked with people who have left the church, and they would say the reason they left is because they could not get along with so and so! Wow!

These men sacrificed so much, and this kind of love is seen in our sacrifice, how we care for people.

The last day of my trip to Russia, Zehenya and I visited some homes of people from the church who were sick, had various issues in their life that prevented them from coming to church from time to time, even those in a rehab center.

Again, I had a 20-hour plane ride back home and I could have just vegetated and done nothing. But I told Zehenya that I wanted to go and share God's Word and thus, we spent all day driving to various homes sharing the Word of God. And when I say travel, some took us a few hours to get to!

Was I tired?

Absolutely but I was so blessed to be able to meet these families and share God's Word with them to comfort them, encourage them, help them. In fact, they blessed me just talking with them and some of them are going through, well, all of them were going through some very, very difficult times and yet, what God gave me to share with each of them, was just what they needed to hear.

And to see the joy on their faces when I greeted them! We became friends because we were family in Christ. Yes, most of the time they only spoke Russian and I spoke only English, but the unity was in Christ and it was wonderful!

Listen again to what Paul says of this man, Onesiphorus. He said in II Timothy 1:16, **“The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain.”**

In other words, Onesiphorus was a servant to Paul. He is an example to us of what a servant is like because, what Onesiphorus did for Paul we should do unto others.

What did he do for Paul?

First of all, *he refreshed Paul*. He not only came to Paul once, but he visited him frequently there in that Roman prison, the Mamertine Prison.

When was the last time, by your presence, you refreshed someone?

Now you may be feeling, ***“But what about me? I need some refreshing as well!”***

Here’s the amazing thing. As we serve the Lord, He will refresh us. I don’t always understand it, but I have seen it in my own life. That, as tired as I am at times, as I am obedient to the Lord, He does refresh me.

The reality is, it is never about me, it is about the Lord and others. And it is the Lord who will take care of us.

That is what Paul said in Philippians 2:3-4, **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others.”**

That was Onesiphorus, he put Paul first and refreshed Paul. What an example to us of how we are to live out our Christian faith.

Not only that, but *he was not ashamed of Paul’s situation*, the chains that he was in.

True friends will stick by you no matter what while ***“fair-weather friends”*** are only around when things are going well, when they get what they want.

In Proverbs 17:17, one of my favorite verses, and I have to admit, I have tons of favorite verses because they speak to me in the various situations I am in and thus, they become my favorite until the next situation and the next verse.

But listen to what we are told in Proverbs 17:17, “**A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.**”

This was not the time to associate yourself with someone like Paul, and yet, Onesiphorus did not let that stop him. The love of God was more important to him than the danger that was out there by associating himself with Paul!

D. L. Moody put it this way regarding this verse. He said, “*A true friend is like ivy - the greater the ruin, the closer he clings.*”

You see, a true friend will always be there for you, in the good times and in the hard times. A true friend will love you in spite of what they know of you.

And when you are struggling, when you are going through those tough times, you will be able to tell your friends because when times get tough, they will be by your side through the thick and thin times. A true friend is priceless!

What kind of a friend are you to others?

We also see that this man, *he also sought Paul out very zealously.*

There were many prisons in Rome, and he could not just pick up the phone and call to find out where Paul was, as I have said. He had to search them out one at a time until he found Paul.

If you are only faithful when it is easy, then you are not a friend, you are not faithful!

The love that this man had for Paul did not end when tough times came but only grew stronger.

Here is a man who lived up to his name; it means *“help-bringer.”*

As Christians, may we, as *“Christ-followers”* manifest the nature of Jesus in all we do!
That we bring the love, the help of Christ to our friends as they are down, as they are hurting.

What a great example for us to follow!

One author and pastor had this to say about this man. *“Onesiphorus stands as a tremendous example; when all others had forsaken Paul, he loved Paul and ministered to him. Whom would God have you be an Onesiphorus to? Whom would God have you diligently seek out, not be ashamed of, and refresh? Is there not one ‘fringe’ person you know that others have forgotten about, who has no status or reward to give you back, that you can reach out and love in the name of Jesus? Is there not one person on the outside whom you can draw into your circle of friends, and refresh them in the name of the Lord?”*

Something to think about.

Now I need to add this because there is some controversy and some unbiblical teaching that comes from the misinterpretation of this verse.

Some believe that Onesiphorus was dead. Of those that do many are Catholic and Protestant scholars who believe that, by this time, Onesiphorus was dead.

What is the big deal about that?

Well, listen again to II Timothy 1:18. We are told, **“The Lord grant to him that he may find mercy from the Lord in that Day - and you know very well how many ways he ministered to me at Ephesus.”**

If he was dead, then what Paul is saying here in II Timothy 1:18 that he was praying for the dead. And thus, by this misinterpretation of Onesiphorus being dead they come up with the unbiblical justification for the practice of praying for the dead!

One writer put it like this against that kind of thinking. He wrote, *“There is not the vaguest hint that Onesiphorus was dead. Proponents of this view are idle babblers clutching at a straw to shore up an unbiblical practice.”* (William MacDonald)

In other words, there is absolutely no proof that Onesiphorus was dead when Paul wrote this letter.

Now some would argue that in II Timothy 1:16, when Paul said, **“The Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus . . .”** doesn’t that prove he was dead? Paul did not pray for him but for his family!

Not at all. It simply means that at that time Onesiphorus was not with his household because he had been in Rome with Paul, and he was probably traveling back to Ephesus.

Remember what Paul said in II Timothy 1:17, **“When he arrived in Rome.”** It is likely that he was not in Rome any longer, as I have said.

Friendship amongst the brethren is important. I am not saying that every person you meet will be your closest friend, but remember, as Christians we are all part of the family of God, and we will be spending eternity together. Don’t wait until heaven to reconcile differences and learn to love with the love of God!

One person put it like this. He wrote,

What is a friend?

Friends are people with whom you dare to be yourself. Your soul can be naked with them. They ask you to put on nothing, only to be what you are. They do not want you to be better or worse. When you are with them, you feel as a prisoner feels who has been declared innocent. You do not have to be on your guard. You can say what you think, as long as it is genuinely you.

Friends understand those contradictions in your nature that lead others to misjudge you.

With them you breathe freely. You can avow your little vanities and envies and hates and vicious sparks . . . and absurdities, and in opening them up to friends, they are lost, dissolved on the white ocean of their loyalty.

They understand.

You do not have to be careful. . . .

It makes no matter. They like you. They are like fire that purges to the bone. They understand. You can weep with them, sing with them, laugh with them, pray with them. Through it all - and underneath - they see, know, and love you.

A friend? What is a friend?

Just one, I repeat, with whom you dare to be yourself.

- C. Raymond Beran, in Bits & Pieces, September 19, 1991, p. 3-4

I like that. You don't have to live up to some standard to be a friend, you can be yourself. Can you imagine if we had to do that with God! We would be in trouble. He knows us better than we know ourselves and He loves us, and He wants us to love the brethren!

As one pastor said about Onesiphorus,

Onesiphorus stands as a tremendous example; when all others had forsaken Paul, he loved Paul and ministered to him.

Whom would God have you be an Onesiphorus to?

Whom would God have you diligently seek out, not be ashamed of, and refresh?

Is there not one “fringe” person you know that others have forgotten about, who has no status or reward to give you back, that you can reach out and love in the name of Jesus?

Is there not one person on the outside whom you can draw into your circle of friends, and refresh them in the name of the Lord?

- Source Unknown

I think that is something that the Lord wants us to think about. Where are we at with the brethren? Can we love them as Christ loves us? Are we willing to forgive what others might have done to us?

That is something you are going to have to deal with within your own heart and see what God wants you to do.

And I understand that this is not an easy subject and maybe that is why many don't want to deal with it. But we have to deal with it. The Lord wants us to deal with these issues of the heart and surrender to His will in these things!

I also like what Warren Wiersbe had to say regarding this man. He wrote,

Onesiphorus was not ashamed of Paul's chain. The apostle was manacled [chained] to a Roman soldier twenty-four hours a day.

Onesiphorus could have invented many excuses for staying in Ephesus.

But instead he made the dangerous journey to Rome and ministered to Paul. “He often refreshed me” was Paul's description of this man's ministry.

The Greek word means “to cool again.” “Bracing me Like fresh air” is the way the Amplified Bible translated it. How we thank God for Christians who are “a breath of fresh air” in our hours of trial!

Were it not for Paul's letter, we would never know that Onesiphorus had served Paul and the church. But the Lord knew and will reward him "on that day."

The essentials for a successful ministry have not changed: courageous enthusiasm, shameless suffering, and spiritual loyalty.

- Warren Wiersbe, The Wiersbe Bible Commentary – NT, p. 775

Make no mistake about it, the battle with friendship is tough because it is a battle of the wills, God's will and our will. It is a battle of the flesh, our flesh, our ways and the Spirit or God's way.

And we have a choice to make, to be a friend and obey the Lord or to be at war with each other!

As I close this morning, let me leave you with this to think about.

To whom would God have you be an Onesiphorus to?

Then step forward and do it – refresh them, don't be ashamed of them, and seek them out diligently!

We have seen some great lessons this morning to apply to our lives in regard to friendship!

And I will close with this. A Bible verse we have heard this morning, but I think the Lord wants to impress this upon our hearts. And remember, apart from the Holy Spirit empowering us, as well as our surrender to Him, we can't live this kind of life, we can't love as Jesus loves.

The verse is this, "**A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.**"
Proverbs 17:17.

Lord, help us to have that kind of love, the love that you have for the Father!