

## What is the “deposit” of 2 Timothy 1:12?

By Bob Young

I was recently asked to explain the use of the word “deposit” in the context of 2 Tim. 1:8-14. The word appears only three times in the New Testament (1 Tim. 6:20, 2 Tim. 1:12, 1:14).

In 1 Tim. 6:20, something was entrusted to Timothy’s care. Various possibilities are suggested as one reads the book. I do not believe 1 Tim. 6:20 will be helpful for understanding the context and meaning of 2 Timothy 1.

The text of 2 Timothy 1 must be read in context.

**1:8-14.** These verses are one extended sentence in Greek. Based on the grammatical construction, the paragraph is 1:3-14.

“Ashamed” appears three times in the extended passage (vv. 8, 12, 16). Timothy is to testify without being ashamed of the gospel or of Paul. The “testimony of our Lord” is either the witness of Jesus or the witness about Jesus. Through the gospel God calls us to holiness. In the gospel is revealed God’s power; in the gospel God’s grace and purpose are seen, revealed in Christ’s coming to destroy death by bringing light and immortality. Timothy is called upon to suffer (*sugkakopatheo*, suffer evil together) for the gospel. The mention of suffering (1:8) surfaces several times throughout the book of 2 Timothy.

God’s salvation and holy calling are not according to (*kata*) human works of merit, but according to God’s purpose and grace which God planned and gave in Christ Jesus before time eternal. This salvation has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ. In the Pastoral Letters, God is described as Savior and Jesus is described as Savior. Both were instrumental in our salvation. The sentence continues with two dependent participles: “having destroyed death” and “having made visible life and immortality.” Both of these Jesus did through the gospel!

**1:11-14.** Paul describes himself as herald, apostle, and teacher for the gospel. “Appointed” (*tithemi*) reflects God’s action in selecting Paul. A herald (*kerux*) is one who announces or proclaims (*kerusso*) the message (*kerygma*) of another. *Kerygma* is used in the New Testament to describe apostolic preaching. Since herald is today a little used word and has a special meaning, perhaps a better translation is “preacher.” Paul was confident of his calling and confident of God’s ability to protect him. He wanted to transfer this attitude to Timothy.

**1:12.** How should the words “my deposit” be understood? Two possibilities: (1) Is the deposit something God has given to Paul (as in v. 14 with reference to Timothy) or (2) something Paul has given to God? A deposit is simply something entrusted to another. The Greek uses the genitive/ablative form (of me, from me, my deposit) presenting the possibility of meanings other than the possessive. There are three possible meanings. Each one presents an important truth about the Christian life.

- 1- Paul has entrusted something to God and is confident that God will guard it.
- 2- Paul is convinced that God will protect the purity of the gospel described in vv. 8-10, the deposit of the gospel which God has entrusted to Paul.
- 3- Paul has entrusted his life and destiny to God.

Choosing between these options hinges on how one translates the Greek words. The use of “deposit” in v. 14 is less difficult because it is not modified with the personal pronoun; the literal reading is “the good deposit.”

**1:13-14.** “Sound words” means healthy teaching. The Greek word that is translated “sound” (*hugiaino*) has the same root as our word hygiene. Timothy is to be guided by what he has heard from Paul. “To keep” or “to have” the healthy teaching means holding fast rather than observing or obeying. Timothy is to hold fast to the pattern (*hupotuposis*) Paul has given him. Timothy is to guard (same verb as v. 12) the good deposit (same word as v. 12). In the context, the reference in v. 14 is most certainly to the gospel.

If one reads the same meaning for the same word in v. 12, the reading of v. 12 is: “I am convinced that he is able to guard my gospel until that day.” However, the use of the same words (guard, deposit) with two different meanings within the same context could be a literary device. Despite the repetition of both the noun and the verb, I conclude that v. 14 does not necessarily help with understanding the meaning of v. 12.

The preacher or teacher who wants to be honest with the text will present all three possibilities in v. 12; all are true. God guards what we entrust to him. God protects what he entrusts to us. We as Christians entrust our very lives to God.

Healthy teaching comes from God. The false teachers could not claim that their teaching was from God. The teaching Paul brought and passed on to Timothy was from God, and was therefore authoritative. The Holy Spirit dwelt in Timothy. Timothy would be helped in his work by God’s presence.