

PAUL'S SWAN SONG

Grace to the Very End

2 Timothy 4:16–22



LET'S BEGIN HERE

Death focuses our minds. In light of eternity, the lights of this world lose their luster. Few think about possessions owned or monies earned. Instead, our thoughts turn to people loved—and who loved in return; to joys and sorrows, victories and defeats. Sadly, some die with resentments for harms done and regrets for dreams unfulfilled. These die without dignity, for they die without grace. A grace-filled death only comes about after a grace-filled life. Like few others, Paul lived with grace and died with grace—grace to the very end.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. A Testimony Marked by Grace (2 Timothy 4:16–18)

Demas' desertion hurt Paul, but it left no bitterness in his mouth. Alexander's opposition harmed Paul, but it left no pangs of revenge in his mind. And though loneliness lingered, it lingered only for a moment—dispersing in the presence of the Lord of grace.



Quotable

We demonstrate

*God's grace
when we refuse
to hold grudges
against those
who hurt us.*

*After all, God
did that for us.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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DOORWAY TO HISTORY

The Injustice of Roman Justice

Law should be the protector of justice. But when madmen make law, justice becomes perverted.

When Paul was arrested, he was brought before a tribunal to determine whether sufficient evidence existed for a formal trial. This “first defense” (2 Timothy 4:16) or *prima actio* included a presentation of the case against Paul, as well as his opportunity to present his case for innocence.¹ Afterward, the court would have rendered one of two decisions: a *non liquet*, meaning there was insufficient evidence to proceed, followed by an order to release Paul; or an *amplius*, meaning there was sufficient evidence to proceed, followed by an order to schedule a *secunda actio*—the trial itself.²

Paul had the right to an attorney and to call witnesses, but at his *prima actio*, he defended himself without witness testimony. We're not sure whether Paul's *prima actio* was conducted in private or public, but there's little doubt that his *secunda actio*—the trial which condemned him to death—was a public affair.

Nero presided over the trials of other Christians, and because Paul was a leader of the sect, we can assume Nero served as Paul's judge too. Trial before the imperial court took place either in the forum or the emperor's private Vatican gardens. In judging Paul's case—and those of all Roman Christians condemned to die—Nero was no legal expert. Legal historian Detlef Liebs noted, “Judges, advocates, interested parties, and authorities were often guided in their legal decisions by public opinion, their own experiences, and their personal attitudes about justice.”³ And as Tacitus made clear, Nero's sense of justice was a thinning thread.

The mad ruler sentenced Christians to the most ghastly forms of death. “Covered with the skins of beasts, they were torn by dogs and perished, or were nailed to crosses, or were doomed to the flames and burnt, to serve as a nightly illumination, when daylight had expired.”⁴ Did they suffer such horror to satisfy justice? No! To satisfy the gluttony of “one man's cruelty.”⁵

2. A Farewell Filled with Grace (2 Timothy 4:19–22)

The God of grace stood alongside and strengthened Paul. And Paul gave Him glory. Then, at his final hour, the apostle of grace stood with and strengthened the people of God.



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LET'S LIVE IT

“You must pay for everything in this world one way and another,” novelist Charles Portis wrote. “There is nothing free except the grace of God. You cannot earn that or deserve it.”⁶ Praise God that His grace doesn't come with a fee! God's grace is needed as we live and as we die, and God freely provides it.

We can't live graceless lives and expect to exit this world gracefully. We die as we lived. Paul's life and his pen overflowed with grace from the moment of his conversion to his death. And just before the axman's ax fell, Paul demonstrated six habits of grace we would do well to emulate.

Living and dying with grace means . . .

1. *Asking the Lord not to hold offenses against those who offend us*
2. *Expressing enormous gratitude for God's work in our lives*
3. *Anticipating God's rescue from this evil world*
4. *Claiming our secure heavenly home*
5. *Finding delight in the fact that God still has a plan for others*
6. *Releasing others from our expectations of perfection*

How gracious are you in these six areas? Place an X where appropriate.

Grace #	Graceless		Gracious		Grace-full
1					
2					
3					
4					
5					
6					



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Based on how you're living today, do you think you will die with grace?

What can you do to become more "Grace-full"? Be specific.

ENDNOTES

1. We don't know specifically what Paul was accused of or what evidence the prosecutor brought against him. Historians of the period, like Tacitus—who said Christians were condemned for their "hatred of mankind," meaning their refusal to involve themselves in the social and civic life of Rome, which involved pagan worship, including fornicating with temple prostitutes—recorded that Christians were accused of atheism because they refused to worship the Roman gods and participate in emperor-worship. Christians were also accused of cannibalism because of their practice of eating Christ's "flesh" and drinking His "blood" at the Eucharist. See Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44, in *Annals, Histories, Agricola, Germania*, trans. Alfred John Church and William Jackson Brodribb (New York: Everyman's Library, 2009), 354; and John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 2 Timothy: Guard the Gospel*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973), 123.
2. See Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 637.
3. Detlef Liebs, *Summoned to the Roman Courts: Famous Trials from Antiquity* (Berkeley, Cal.: University of California Press, 2012), 2.
4. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44, 354.
5. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44, 354.
6. Charles Portis, *True Grit* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), 37.



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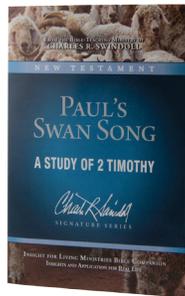
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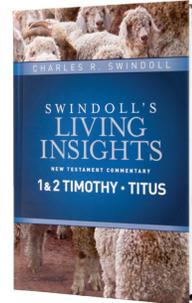
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