

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

GOD'S GRACE AND CALLING!

Read 1 Timothy 1:1-20

Introduction.

1 and 2 Timothy along with Titus are known as the Pastoral Epistles, because they consist largely of pastoral advice on how to deal with problems in churches both in Ephesus and in Crete. These letters were written to Timothy while he served as Paul's appointed leader of the church of Ephesus, probably in the mid-60s AD.

Ephesus was a wealthy city located on west coast of Asia Minor (modern day Turkey), on the banks of the Cayster River as it enters the Mediterranean, forming an ample harbour. It was an important city, serving as the capital of proconsular Asia, a Roman province. It probably had a population of about half a million. The Ephesians worshipped the goddess Artemis (Diana), whose temple in Ephesus at the time was one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. It was also home to Hellenistic mystery religions, as well as the residence of many Jews. Each of these exerted its influence on the religious climate in the city.

Acts 19 tells the story of Paul's two-year ministry founding the church in Ephesus, probably about 53-54 AD. The city was so important to Paul and early Christianity that it was the recipient of four letters that exist today:

- Paul's Letter to Ephesians
- Paul's Letter to 1 Timothy. (2 Timothy was addressed primarily to Timothy himself while he served as the leader of the church in Ephesus.)
- 1 John was probably written by the Apostle John as a circular letter to the churches in the area, with Ephesus as the most important. John apparently lived there for a number of years, and it is his traditional burial place.
- Letters to the Seven Churches of Revelation (Revelation 2-3) has Ephesus as the first church addressed, encouraged, and admonished (Revelation 2:1-7).

This important church was subject to the winds of heresy from both Judaism on the one hand and the Hellenistic mystery religions on the other. Correction of the false teachers was necessary for the church to survive intact.

The Author

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope...” (v1)

Paul, in his self-description, emphasized his credentials (apostle) and his authority (by the commandment of God). He did this both as a personal encouragement to Timothy and so the letter could be used as a letter of reference before the Ephesian Christians. Paul used the word “Saviour” which at that very time, the title Saviour was used to honour the Roman Emperor. People called, and were forced to call, Caesar Nero “saviour.” Paul made the identity of the real Savior clear: God, in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Recipient & Greetings

“To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.” (v2)

- **Timothy:** The Book of Acts tells us that Timothy came from Lystra, a city in the province of Galatia (Acts 16:1-3). He was the son of a Greek father (Acts 16:2) and a Jewish mother named Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5). His mother and grandmother taught him the Scriptures from the time of Timothy's youth (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15).
- **A true son in the faith:** Paul could consider Timothy a true son in the faith because he probably led him and his mother to faith in Jesus on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-20 and 16:1). This also expressed Paul's confidence in Timothy's integrity and faithfulness to the truth.
- **Grace, mercy, and peace:** This is a familiar greeting Paul used in his letters to congregations. Here, he also applied it to an individual. God grants His grace, mercy, and peace not only to churches, but also to the individuals who make up the churches.

Yet there is a difference. When Paul wrote to churches, he commonly only greeted them with grace and peace. To both Timothy (also in 2 Timothy 1:2) and Titus (Titus 1:4) he added mercy to the greeting.

The Effect of False Doctrine

“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.” (vv3-4)

Paul told Timothy to remain in Ephesus because it seemed that Timothy wanted to give up and run away. Most everyone in ministry deals with this at some time; for a few it is a constant affliction. There was probably both external pressure and internal pressure for him to leave. We can think of many reasons why Timothy might not want to remain in Ephesus:

- He might have missed Paul and wanted to be with his mentor.
- He might have been discouraged by the normal difficulties of ministry.
- He might have questioned his own calling.
- He might have been frustrated by the distracting and competing doctrines swirling around the Christians in Ephesus.

Despite all these reasons, there is no doubt that God — and the Apostle Paul — wanted Timothy to remain in Ephesus, and in the rest of 1 Timothy 1, Paul gave Timothy many reasons why he should stay there and finish the ministry God gave him to do. God will allow us to be in difficult situations. We must set our minds to meet the challenge, or we will surely give up.

Paul left Timothy with an important job to do, making it all the more important that he remain in Ephesus. The job was to make sure that correct doctrine was taught in Ephesus. Paul did this because doctrine is important to God and should be important to His people. Today, what one believes — that is, their doctrine — is remarkably unimportant to most people. This spirit of the modern age has also heavily influenced modern Christians. We live in a day where Pilate's question What is truth? (John 18:38) is answered, “Whatever it means to you.” Yet truth is important to God and should be to His people.

The Purpose of Good Doctrine

“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” (vv5-7)

The purpose of the law is found in its inward work upon the heart, not in mere outward observance. Without this understanding, it is easy to become shallow legalists who are only concerned with outward performance and appearance.

- **Love from a pure heart:** This suggests the idea that the problem in Ephesus was along Jewish-type legalistic lines. They misunderstood the commandment and the law.

If spending time in God's word does not produce love from a pure heart, a good conscience, or sincere faith in us, something is wrong. Legalism may make us twist God's word, so that instead of showing love we are harsh and judgmental; instead of having a good conscience we always feel condemned knowing we don't measure up; and instead of sincere faith we practically trust in our own ability to please God.

- **Idle talk:** This probably has in mind vain speculations about the Scriptures, which may have had analytical and entertainment value but were never meant to be our spiritual diet.

In the King James Version, idle talk is translated vain jangling — the idea is of meaningless babble.

- **Understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm:** The problem, people in Ephesus did not even understand the implications of their own teaching.

Teachers Who Have Wandered Away

“But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully, knowing this: that the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.” (vv8-11)

The purpose of the law is to show us our sin, not to lead us to righteousness (as in Galatians 3:24-25). It wasn't made for the righteous person (who walks by faith according to Galatians 3:11) but for the lawless and insubordinate, to show them their sin.

The idea isn't that the law has nothing to say to the righteous person, but that it especially speaks to the ungodly. On the phrase, the law is not made for a righteous person, it is observed that the word for “made” refers “to the custom of writing laws on boards and hanging them up in public places within reach of every man, that they might be read by all; thus, all would see against whom the law lay.”

In Paul's mind sound doctrine and right conduct are vitally connected. The sinful actions described in verses 9 and 10 are contrary to sound doctrine. Many people will condemn anyone with standards — especially higher standards — as being a legalist. Having standards and keeping them does not make us legalists and obedience doesn't make us legalists. We are legalists when we think what we do is what makes us right before God.

If there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine:

The implication is that in Ephesus, the church existed in a culture marked by these sins listed in verses 9 and 10 and those teaching false doctrine in some way allowed or promoted this sinful lifestyle.

The apparently sinful environment of Ephesus shows us another reason why it was important for Timothy to remain in Ephesus. He should remain there because it was a difficult place to serve God and further the kingdom. He had to break up the fallow ground there, instead of running to an easier place to plow.

Though the law cannot bring righteousness, the glorious gospel of the blessed God can — a gospel that, in the words of Paul, was committed to his trust. He sensed his responsibility to preserve and guard the gospel, and to pass it on to Timothy and others.

Why was Paul entrusted with the gospel?

“And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” (vv12-14)

Paul was entrusted with the gospel because Jesus enabled Paul, and Paul thanked Jesus for that enabling. Paul was enabled for this ministry because he was counted... faithful for the ministry. Faithfulness made Paul ready to be used by God.

We often see our Christian service as a matter of volunteering. Yet as Christians, in regard to Jesus and His church, we are not volunteers. We are slaves. We are duty bound servants of Jesus, and faithfulness is expected of such servants.

You don't have to be smart to be faithful; you don't have to be talented or gifted. Faithfulness is something very down-to-earth, and each of us can be faithful in the place God has placed us. Many people wait to be faithful. We tell ourselves, “I'll be faithful when I'm in such and such a position.” That is foolish. We should be faithful right where we are at — our faithfulness is shown in the small things.

Paul's past did not disqualify him from serving God. God's mercy and grace were enough to cover his past and enable him to serve God. We should never feel that our past makes us unable to be used by God. With these words, Paul gave Timothy another reason to remain in Ephesus. It is likely that one reason Timothy wanted to leave Ephesus and his ministry there because he felt unworthy or incapable of the work. These words from Paul assured Timothy, “If there is anyone unworthy of disqualified, it should be me. Yet God found a way to use me, and He will use you also as you remain in Ephesus.”

Christ's Grace to Paul

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life.” (vv15-16)

Jesus came to save sinners, not those living under the illusion of their own righteousness. As Jesus taught, it is the sick who need a physician (Mark 2:17). Since Jesus came into the world to save sinners, this is the first necessary qualification for being a child of God — being a sinner. Sinners are not disqualified from coming to God, because Jesus came to save them.

Paul's claim to be the chief of sinners was not an expression of a strange false humility. He genuinely felt his sins made him more accountable before God than others. Paul felt — rightly so — that his sins were worse because he was responsible for the death, imprisonment, and suffering of Christians, whom he persecuted before his life was changed by Jesus (Acts 8:3; 9:1-2, 1 Corinthians 15:9, Galatians 1:13, Philippians 3:6).

In Acts 26:11, Paul explained to Agrippa what might have been his worst sin: *And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities. He compelled others to blaspheme Jesus.* “This, indeed, was a very horrible part of Saul's sinfulness. To destroy their bodies was bad enough, but to destroy their souls too—to compel them to blaspheme, to speak evil of that name which they confessed to be their joy and their hope, surely that was the worst form that even persecution could assume. He forced them under torture to abjure the Christ whom their hearts loved. As it were, he was not content to kill them, but he must damn them too.”

Amazing Grace

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen. This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck, of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” (vv17-20)

Paul could not think of how bad he was, and how great the salvation of God was, and how great the love of God was, without simply breaking into spontaneous praise. This outburst of praise shows that Paul both knew God and that he loved God.

- He knew God to be the King eternal, ruling and reigning in complete power and glory.
- He knew God to be immortal, existing before anything else existed, and being the Creator of all things.
- He knew God to be invisible, not completely knowable by us; we can't completely figure out God or know all His secrets.
- He knew God alone is wise, that He is God — and we are not. We think our plans and insights are so important, but only God really knows and understands all things.

The charge to fight the good fight.

Again, the Greek word for charge (*parangelia*) is the same as in 1 Timothy 1:3; it is a military word, referring to an order from a commanding officer. Paul wanted Timothy to consider what the Holy Spirit had said to him through others in the past and receive the courage to remain in Ephesus from those.

The focus is not the prophetic word Timothy heard in the past. The focus is on battle right in front of him now, where he must wage the good warfare — that is, “fight the good fight” (KJV). Timothy had a job in front of him, and it was going to be a battle. It wasn't going to be easy, or comfortable, or carefree. He had to approach the job Paul left him to do in Ephesus as a soldier approaches battle. This gave Timothy still another reason to remain in Ephesus. He should sense a responsibility to stay when he felt like leaving because he was like a soldier in a battle, who could not desert his post.

Hymenaeus and Alexander:

We know nothing of Hymenaeus and Alexander other than what Paul said of them here. Paul apparently disciplined them for their disobedience to God in heresy, in conduct, or in both. From other New Testament passages we can surmise that he did this by putting them outside the church, into the world, which is the devil's domain. The punishment was a removal of protection, not an infliction of evil.

The Lord protects us from many attacks from Satan (Job 1:10; Luke 22:31-32), and much of this protection comes to us in what we receive as we gather together as Christians. In this, Paul gave Timothy one more reason to remain in Ephesus. He should do it because not everyone else does. We can't simply act as if every Christian does what God wants them to and stays faithful to the gospel. The fact that some do not remain faithful to the end should give us more incentive to not give up.