

NEW TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 31

Paul's Life after Acts and 1 Timothy

In the fall of 1984, just a few months after I had graduated from law school and become employed, I had a wonderful opportunity to see the Texas Tech Red Raiders play football in Jones stadium, Lubbock. While there, I bumped into Ken Dye, my minister at my childhood church in Lubbock. We had a few moments to catch up, and I told Ken of my move to Houston detailing my freshly launched career as a lawyer. With his gracious manner and his warm smile, Ken looked me in the eye and gave me his pastoral advice. “Mark, don’t get so caught up in your job that you forget who you are and who called you into his kingdom. It’s too easy to start thinking you’re something on a stick! Remember you belong to God, and it is his job you are to be about. You only practice law because he put you on this road!”

I’ve thought of that often, both because I’d never heard the expression of one “thinking they’re something on a stick” and because it settled in my soul as “good advice from a godly man.”

I still keep up with Ken over 30 years later. Rarely does a month go by that he doesn’t send me an email checking on me, encouraging me, or simply letting me know what is going on in Middle Tennessee where he now resides.

There is an advice that comes with the age and experience of walking with God and walking in the world. That is something we experience through the blessings of godly men and women who come into our lives. It was no different 1,950 years ago when Paul was taking time in his later years to write what scholars have come to call the “pastoral epistles.” They carry this name because they were written to individuals (Timothy and Titus) out of Paul’s pastoral care for them and the churches where they ministered.

There are four letters of Paul that we believe he wrote while under house arrest in Rome. Those we have considered either last week (Ephesians) or earlier (Philippians, Colossians and Philemon).¹ Paul was in Rome appealing his case that arose from his time in Jerusalem. Paul’s arrest and subsequent confinement was almost as much for his own protection as it was for any possible offense he

¹ This series is a continuation of a series from 2014, so the classes on Philippians and Colossians can be found at the class website www.Biblical-Literacy.org. The class on Philemon was not yet done, but was covered fairly well recently in the Life Group Greek class also available on the class website. We will likely cover Philemon again as we finish this series, but will wait to do so since I taught it just weeks ago.

might have committed. In fact, even Paul's appeal to Rome was one Paul made to stop from having to go through the dangers of another trial in Jerusalem, where a number of Jews had conspired multiple times to kill him.

We know that none of the Roman authorities that had already heard the case against Paul could find any reason to convict him. As Paul told the Jews in Rome, "When they examined me, they wished to set me at liberty, because there was no reason for the death penalty in my case" (Acts 28:18). King Agrippa and the governor Festus, the last to hear Paul's case had even discussed that Paul "could have been set free if he had not appealed to Caesar" (Acts 26:32). Most scholars suspect, then, that Paul was ultimately released from his Roman time in chains, as Paul himself had anticipated.² We can remember that in writing from prison, Paul told multiple audiences that he expected to be released and come to visit them.³

Acts closes, however, without telling us what happened. The final verses record that, "He lived there [Rome] two whole years at his own expense, and welcomed all who came to him, proclaiming the kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ with all boldness and without hindrance" (Acts 28:30-31). Why doesn't Luke give us any more information? Scholars differ in answering this. The early church historian Eusebius (c. 260 – 341) writing about 250 years later reported,

"Luke probably wrote the Acts of the Apostles at that time, carrying down his narrative until the time he was with Paul. We have said this to show that Paul's martyrdom was not accomplished during the sojourn in Rome which Luke describes."⁴

We can cobble together a bit of Paul's life by reading his three pastoral epistles.⁵ While they show some of his life's direction after his first Roman time in chains,

² It is also worth noting, and not without mentioning God's providence, that the Caesar at this time was Nero. Nero's court advisor, who would likely oversee Paul's appeal, was Seneca, brother of Gallio, proconsul of Achaia. This is the same Gallio that had already examined Paul after Jews had brought basically the same charges against him in Corinth, proclaiming, "If it were a matter of wrongdoing or vicious crime, O Jews, I would have reason to accept your complaint. But since it is a matter of questions about words and names and your own law, see to it yourselves. I refuse to be a judge of these things" (Acts 18:14-15). No doubt Paul would have informed Seneca of his brother's prior ruling!

³ See Phil. 1:19, 25; Phile. 1:22.

⁴ Eusebius, *Church History* 2.22.6

⁵ I treat 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus as writings of Paul the Apostle. Some critical scholars believe these are writings of someone else who wrote after the "school of Paul" at some later time after Paul's death. Those scholars raise notable issues to support their view. I will address them in a later lesson.

their greatest value comes in the discharge of advice, instruction and encouragement he gives to the young men he has mentored in the faith.

Today we begin with Paul's letter of First Timothy.

FIRST TIMOTHY

As we look at this letter, we refresh our memories on Timothy and his life with Paul. We first read of Timothy in Acts 16, although it was likely he was converted earlier, perhaps in Paul's first missionary journey discussed in Acts 14. Paul took Timothy with him on a number of different trips including Troas, Philippi, Berea and Athens. From Paul's writings we know that Timothy assisted with letters Paul wrote from Rome and Corinth and other places as well. In Paul's third missionary journey, Timothy was sent with Erastus into Macedonia from Ephesus where he was serving with Paul (Acts 19:22).

A number of scholars think it likely Timothy was serving in Ephesus when he received the first of Paul's two letters. The early church historian Eusebius recorded the strong historical traditions associating Timothy with the Ephesian church.⁶ This would have likely placed Timothy there in a time range consistent with Paul's closing prophetic concerns given to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:28-30:

“Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

Remembering these prophetic words of Paul helps make sense of not only what Paul was writing to Timothy as immediate concerns, but also Paul's writings about elders and church structure seeking to safeguard the Ephesians against coming problems. We shall see this in the very beginning of Paul's letter.

Chpt. 1

Paul begins his letter writing as an apostle by the “command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope.” He writes it to Timothy calling him, “my true child in the faith.” Paul begins with a blessing of grace, mercy and peace. Immediately from there, Paul launches headlong into his concerns over false teachers. Paul had urged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to charge certain persons not to teach different doctrines, not to spend their time and energies on myths, genealogies and other

⁶ Eusebius, *Church History* 3.4.5.

matters that promote speculation over against the responsibility to teach the bedrock, never-changing Christian faith.

Some leaders had lost their way in the Christian life. These folks were supposed to focus on living and teaching love that issues from a pure heart and good conscience as well as the sincere faith of the church. Instead, however, they had swerved from these truths and were spending their time and energy in vain discussions that were out of line. These teachers spoke with confident assertion, even though they were dead wrong and had no real understanding of what they were talking about, especially on matters of the law!

Paul and Timothy both knew the law itself was good, but only when used properly! Properly used, the law assists with the lawless, disobedient, ungodly sinners. It shows unholiness, ungodliness and profanity. God gave the law not only to point sinners to a need for Jesus and redemption, but also to help control the lawless person, stopping the vile acts of violence against parents, murder, sexual immorality, homosexual behavior, capturing people and selling them into slavery, lying, or anything else “contrary to sound doctrine.”

So Paul points out two ways God has used the law in human affairs, one to control behavior, another to show the way to the Messiah. It is this second way that moved Paul to an outpouring of thanksgiving to God. Paul knew that in his ignorance and unbelief he had blasphemed, persecuted and insolently opposed God. Still in his own ignorance, Paul received mercy from God as the gift of Jesus’ atoning sacrifice overflowed for Paul with the faith and love found in Jesus.

There was certainly no doubt in Paul’s mind that the church’s saying was dead-on true, “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners!” Paul placed himself at the top of the “Vilest Sinners” list!

The mercy Paul received was not simply for Paul’s eternal security. It was also to show others the mercy of God. Paul understood that God worked through him as an example to display God’s perfect patience to those who would come to believe in Jesus for eternal life. This brings one of scripture’s most profound praises to Paul’s mouth (and pen!):

To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”⁷

Paul gives Timothy the serious charge to wage the good warfare over these issues. From early on the prophecies about Timothy covered his role in this regard. Timothy was to hold onto the faith and conscience that rightly follows God. Others had failed in this regard and shipwrecked their faith. That does not mean

⁷ To Paul we quickly add our own, “AMEN!”

that these were lost beyond hope. As we know from 2 Cor. 11:25, Paul was shipwrecked multiple times, losing everything but his life! But Paul's concern is over two particular people, Hymenaeus and Alexander. These men were in so deep that Paul handed them over to Satan so they might learn not to blaspheme!⁸

Chpt. 2

So in practical terms, what is it Paul would have Timothy do? First, he urges Timothy to pray with supplication, intercession and thanksgiving for all people. Paul wants these prayers even for the rulers (who are not necessarily godly!) This is to the end that the church can lead a godly life in peace and quiet service. This is a pleasing thing to God for God is at work to bring more into his kingdom! God does not wish anyone to perish, but would have all people be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth. The truth is simple; just as there is one God, there is one mediator between God and man. That one mediator is Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom to redeem the people on whose behalf he intercedes. This is the very reason God appointed Paul to do his mission work!

So Paul wants people praying everywhere. The prayers are not the place of fighting or fussing. Rather the prayers are to take bodies and minds into reverence of God. That meant for men to lift their hands and women to dress modestly, preferring good works over costly clothes! While we do not know the specific problems Timothy was facing in Ephesus, Paul reinforces that the women are to learn quietly, not teaching in an authoritative way over men. This is a lesson Paul underscored by reminding Timothy that God made man first, then woman; and it was the woman who first stepped out to sin. That is not to say that women are without salvation! Jesus died for all, and before he could die, he had to be born to a woman! So Eve (and all women) actually have their salvation, in a sense, through giving birth, assuming they live lives of faith with its fruit of love, holiness and self-control.⁹

⁸ Most scholars understand Paul to have excommunicated these men as a means of correction in hopes they might return to the faithful.

⁹ I have opted for one of several possible meanings for what Paul has written here. Paul's actual words, in the English Standard Version are, "Yet she [woman] will be saved through childbearing." A number of different ideas are set forward for Paul's meaning. Three that seem most likely are (1) that given above (through childbearing came the Messiah); (2) that women bear children as part of the Genesis curse (Gen. 3:16) and so Paul is not teaching salvation by works but is merely referencing the life of women after the fall in a similar vein to his statement in Philippians 2:12 that we are to work out our salvation as God is at work in us; and (3) Paul means that women are "saved" (or "preserved") in the sense that they are protected through the dangerous process of childbirth as they persist in their faith.

Chpt. 3

On issues of church leadership, Paul wants to clarify some issues with Timothy. First, anyone who wishes to be an overseer¹⁰ is seeking a noble task! So any overseer needs to meet certain qualifications:

- Be above reproach
- Have only one wife
- Be sober-minded and self-controlled
- Be respectable and hospitable
- Be able to teach
- Not a drunkard
- Gentle, not violent or quarrelsome
- Not a lover of money
- A good manager of his own household and children (if he cannot manage his own house and children, how shall he manage God's?)
- Not a new convert (humility should mark God's overseers and new converts might be tempted to be proud for such an assignment) and
- Not poorly thought of outside the church.

Not only does Paul address the office of overseer, but also that of deacon, a responsibility of great importance before God and the church. A deacon should be:

- Dignified, not devious or deceptive in speech
- Not addicted to wine nor greedy for money
- Clear men of faith that have been tested and shown true
- Married to dignified women who speak carefully and faithfully

¹⁰ Paul here uses the Greek word *episkopē* (ἐπισκοπή) from which we derive "Episcopal." The word references an official pastoral role in the church which some reckon as an "elder" in modern parlance. Hence some use the word "pastor" with reference to this office while others use the term "elder." The Greek term referenced someone "involved in oversight or supervision." ("ἐπισκοπή," Bauer, Danker, Arndt, and Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, 2d Edition (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979). In Titus Paul writes of the role of "elders" (ESV) using the Greek word from which we get "presbyter" (*presbuteros* – πρεσβυτέρους).

- Married to one wife, and, like overseers, managing their children and households well.

Paul wanted to come help Timothy in these matters, but felt he needed to write because of uncertainty over when or if Paul might join up with him.

These matters were important because the church is not simply a social club. It is the household of God, the group that is called out of the world into fellowship with each other and the living God himself, in all his truth, grandeur, and mystery. God was manifested in the flesh in Jesus, vindicated as God by the power and work of the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed in the world, and taken up in glory!

Chpt. 4

Paul knew, and the Spirit had prophesied, that some would depart from the faith and devote themselves to teachings that distort the truth and proceed from deceitful spirits and demons. People with seared consciences who have no real awareness of God's holiness would be teaching a self-deprivation that claimed itself holy when in fact it denied the true nature of humanity and the Christian walk. The idea that marriage was wrong, that certain foods were evil, etc., was typical of this outrageous doctrine that misunderstood God, his creation and his holiness.

Paul wanted Timothy to teach this properly before the church. Rather than engaging in irreverent silliness, Timothy was to train for real godliness. This should be the real area of Christian focus, working before God on God's issues as we hope on our Savior Jesus.

Paul encouraged Timothy to teach this, in spite of his youth, in spite of the pressure from others. Paul reminded and encouraged him that this was the point of the gift that God had given him, affirmed through the elders laying on their hands, to teach in his words, his actions. Timothy was to exemplify love, faith and purity. Until Paul came, Timothy was to devote himself to reading scripture in public with teaching and exhortation to the church. This was important for the hearers, but also for Timothy himself!

Chpt. 5

While Paul warns Timothy not to let others despise his youth, he also warns Timothy to show proper respect to the older men as he teaches them. Timothy should encourage these, not lord his teaching role over them. Paul then gives Timothy a model for each group he teaches in the church. Older women, Timothy should treat as mothers, younger women as sisters and younger men as brothers. Timothy was to help take care of widows, but never to supplant the care their own families should provide. That is important for the family members! They need to learn the role of caretakers for those in need in their immediate families.

Timothy had a specific program in place to provide for certain widows in need. Even in this program, Timothy was to be careful and Paul had specific practical guidelines for which women belonged in the care program and which ones did not. Those women likely to remarry were to do so rather than rely simply on the church's gratuity while their days were spent in unproductive and counterproductive ways.

Timothy was also given guidance over taking charge of the elders.¹¹ It was right to let them earn their daily bread from the job they performed for the church. They were also to be held in honor for their service, especially if they were also taking the role of teaching.

Timothy was to take seriously any concerns of elders persisting in sin. In his judgments on this, Timothy had to take care and be impartial.

This responsibility was hard on Timothy. Timothy's body was sickly and he had frequent stomach problems. Paul wanted Timothy to use some medicinal wine for his sickness. This would help Timothy as he tried to follow the path God had for him.

Chapter 6

Paul adds some comments about the need for slaves to live honestly in service to their masters, especially if they were believers working under believing masters. This was important because they were a reflection of God.

As Paul moves his letter towards a close, he again reminds Timothy of the importance of teaching these truths. False doctrine is not only of no use in building up the church, but it actually produces evil and dissension. The Christian walk is rooted in contentment and the church should reflect that also. That is why food and clothing should be our real physical needs, with anything else seen for what it is, something temporary that can be used for God in this world, but not taken out of the world with us. Any who believe in goods as a source of happiness fall into a trap that is destructive for them personally. The love of money, Paul explained, is the root of all kinds of evil.

So as a man of God, Timothy should flee such things. Instead of chasing riches, Timothy should pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness, fighting the good fight of faith. Paul charges Timothy to hold onto the good faith of Christ and the confession of his Lordship until he appears. Jesus, the "blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen!"

¹¹ Paul here uses the Greek for "presbyter," a position he details in Titus. See footnote 8 above.

As if Paul thinks of one last subject he failed to cover he adds what we might consider a “p.s.” Paul closes urging Timothy to teach the wealthy neither to believe themselves special because of their money, nor to believe their money is an answer to their life’s issues. They need to see that God is the answer to all of life and any riches they have are God’s that are given for them to use to his purposes and ends. The riches are for God’s good works, not man’s vainglory.

Paul then finally closes with a personal word of encouragement and grace for Timothy.

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a clear faith”* (1 Tim. 1:5)

Paul was upset! Paul saw that some had taken the gospel message and instead of using it to purify men’s lives in holy obedience, it was relegated to some backwater place in the believer’s life as the believer was taken on a false ride of some enhanced super doctrine belief system that ran counter to what God was really about in the church and the believer. Paul would have none of it! Our goal as believers is not to find some new fangled belief system that might seem really cool or new. Our goal is to grow deep roots in our faith that manifest in actions of love and other Christian fruits. We should always carefully ask ourselves, “Are we more enamored with discussing the intricacies of new beliefs and cutting edge doctrines than we are in living lives of love and service?” If so, then we need to heed Paul’s careful warnings here.

2. *“I desire then that in every place the men should pray”* (1 Tim. 2:8)

Prayer... not just for meals, nor simply for children’s bedtime... not for times of life threatening illness, nor for great needs in our own life; Paul wants us to take our bodies and dedicate them to serious out loud prayer. Paul speaks of intercession for others, of thanksgiving, of supplications. Let us decide now to take Paul’s admonition to heart. Go home. Go into a closet or room by yourself. Take time and posture yourself before God in ways that convey your respect and need. Then verbally pray for someone(s). Set out requests, request God’s rescue or help for him/her, and thank God for hearing and acting! Then let this become a practice, not a onetime occurrence.

3. *“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”* (1 Tim. 1:15)

This is the core message for all mankind. This is the center point of human history. This is the truth that drives eternity. And, yes, it calls to the unsaved to move into a relationship with the King of kings. But for Paul writing to Timothy we see something else as well. This truth moves Paul at several times in this letter

to break out into praise for God. With anthems never excelled in human thought, the Spirit moves in Paul in responsive praise: To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” Again later Paul proclaims, “he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen.” Here we who are saved must stop and marvel at what God has done in us and for us. We join our voices with Paul and the angels proclaiming the praises of a King above all kings – our God and Father!