

INTRODUCTION AND 1 TIM. 1:1-20

By Ashby L. Camp

Copyright © 2006 by Ashby L. Camp. All rights reserved.

Introduction

I. Timothy and his relationship with Paul

A. Timothy lived in Lystra (Acts 16:1), a town in south central Asia Minor, in an area known today as Turkey. His mother, Eunice (2 Tim. 1:5), was a Jew, but his father was a Greek (Acts 16:2). Timothy was not circumcised as a child as required by Jewish law (Acts 16:3), perhaps because his father forbid it, but he had been taught the Scriptures from the time he was a child (2 Tim. 3:15).

B. Paul and Barnabas went to Lystra on Paul's first missionary journey (Acts 14:8-20), around A.D. 47-48. Timothy's mother and his grandmother Lois (Acts 16:2; 2 Tim. 1:5) probably became Christians at that time. They became Christians before Timothy (2 Tim. 1:5), which, along with the way Timothy is introduced in Acts 16:1, makes it unlikely that Timothy was converted during the same visit. And yet, just two or three years later, on Paul's second missionary journey, Timothy was a Christian and had a good reputation among the brothers in Lystra and Iconium (Acts 16:1-2).

C. Timothy most likely became a Christian through the influence of his mother and the church elders in Lystra. Paul thus had a clear, albeit indirect, hand in Timothy's conversion, which along with the close working relationship they developed, led him to refer to him as his "true child in the faith."

D. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary journey, around A.D. 50, he wanted to take Timothy with him (Acts 16:3). It was probably at that time that Timothy received a spiritual gift (a gracious endowment) for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by prophetic recognition of the gift (1 Tim. 1:18, 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5).

E. Paul had Timothy circumcised simply as a matter of evangelistic expediency.

1. Timothy was considered a Jew by the Jews, and Paul did not want to hinder the gospel's progress among the Jews by having an uncircumcised Jewish-Christian as his associate. Paul knew that circumcision was insignificant in God's eyes (Gal. 5:6, 6:15), but he knew the Jews might be put off by it, and he was willing to become all things to all people so as to win some (1 Cor. 9:19-23).

2. On the other hand, he refused to have Titus, a Gentile, circumcised (Gal. 2:3-5) because the Judaizers were insisting that this was necessary for salvation (e.g., Acts 15:5). Giving in to that demand would not be a matter of expediency but a matter of compromising the truth of the gospel.

F. Timothy accompanied Paul and Silas through Macedonia. Paul left Berea under duress and headed for Athens, but he left Silas and Timothy behind (Acts 17:14-15), presumably to instruct the new converts in their faith. Paul sent word back for Silas and Timothy to join him as soon as possible.

G. It seems that Silas and Timothy (or maybe just Timothy) joined Paul in Athens and then Timothy was dispatched to Thessalonica to strengthen and encourage the saints in the midst of their persecution (1 Thess. 3:1-3). Silas presumably was sent somewhere else in Macedonia (or remained in Berea), and then Paul left Athens for Corinth (Acts 18:1), where Silas and Timothy later joined him (Acts 18:5). The three of them are said to have preached Christ among the Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:9).

1. Paul stayed in Corinth over one and a half years (Acts 18:18:11, 18). It is from Corinth that 1 & 2 Thessalonians were written, both of which include Silas and Timothy in the salutation. The impetus for 1 Thessalonians was the good news that Timothy brought back about the church there (1 Thess. 3:6-8).

2. Paul refers to Timothy in 1 Thess. 3:2 as "our brother and God's fellow worker in spreading the gospel of Christ."

H. Paul met Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth, a Jewish-Christian couple that had been expelled from Rome under the edict of Emperor Claudius. They accompanied him to Ephesus, where Paul made only a brief stop, promising to return if it is God's will. Paul left Priscilla and Aquila in Ephesus and returned to Antioch, ending his second missionary journey. Timothy's whereabouts at this time are not stated, but presumably he was still traveling with Paul.

I. On his third missionary journey, which began around A.D. 52, Paul returned to Ephesus and stayed there for roughly three years (Acts 19:8, 10, 20:31). This is noteworthy because 1 & 2 Timothy were written to Timothy in Ephesus. During this stay, Paul sent Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17-18, 16:10-11), to another difficult church situation. He refers to him in 1 Cor. 4:17 as "my beloved and faithful child in the Lord," and he says in 1 Cor. 16:10-11 that Timothy is doing the work of the Lord and that no one is to despise him (probably because of his close association with Paul).

J. Paul decided to go to Jerusalem from Ephesus, passing through Macedonia and Achaia (Acts 19:21). He sent Timothy and Erastus ahead of him to Macedonia (Acts 19:22). Not long after doing so, a riot erupted in Ephesus, having been instigated by a silversmith named Demetrius who made silver shrines of Artemis. Paul promptly left for Macedonia (Acts 19:23 - 20:1). He encouraged the people throughout Macedonia, and during this time wrote 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 7:5-7), which includes Timothy in the salutation.

K. Paul worked his way down to Greece (Acts 20:2), where he stayed three months (Acts 20:3), almost certainly in Corinth. It was here that he wrote Romans. Rom. 16:21 says, "Timothy, my fellow worker, sends his greetings to you."

L. Accompanied by Timothy and some others, Paul headed back through Macedonia because the Jews had made a plot against him as he was about to sail to Syria (Acts 20:3-4). Timothy and the others went ahead to Troas, where Paul (and Luke) joined them, sailing there from Philippi (Acts 20:5-6). They left immediately after the Lord's Day, being in a hurry to get to Jerusalem (Acts 20:11, 16). Those who sailed from Troas picked Paul up at Assos (he had gone there on foot) and then continued on for Jerusalem (Acts 20:13-14).

1. The ship stopped at Miletus where Paul sent for the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:17). Again, 1 & 2 Timothy were written to Timothy while he was in Ephesus.

2. Paul prophesied that savage wolves would come in among the Ephesian Christians and would not spare the flock. He said, "Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears" (Acts 20:29-30). Paul also said that the elders would not see him again (Acts 20:25, 38).

M. With a few more stops, Paul made it to Jerusalem. There was a riot in the temple because some Jews thought that Paul had brought the Gentile Trophimus into the temple and defiled it. Following that was the two-year imprisonment in Caesarea and two-year house arrest in Rome. Timothy is with him in Rome. His name appears in the salutation of Philippians, Colossians, and Philemon, all of which were written during Paul's first Roman imprisonment. Paul says the following about Timothy in Phil. 2:19-24:

¹⁹ I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, that I also may be cheered when I receive news about you. ²⁰ I have no one else like him, who takes a genuine interest in your welfare. ²¹ For everyone looks out for his own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. ²² But you know that Timothy has proved himself, because as a son with his father he has served with me in the work of the gospel. ²³ I hope, therefore, to send him as soon as I see how things go with me. ²⁴ And I am confident in the Lord that I myself will come soon.

N. From prison Paul also wrote Ephesians, which was probably a circular letter to churches in Asia Minor that, because of some contact with Ephesus (e.g., the initial point from which it circulated), came at an early date to be associated exclusively with that city.

O. Acts ends with Paul in prison, but in keeping with Paul's expectation expressed in Phil. 1:25-26 and 2:23-24, it seems he was released from prison around A.D. 62.

There is a strong church tradition regarding this release. It is reflected in 1 Clement (late 1st century), the Muratorian Canon (around A.D. 180), and in Eusebius (early 4th century).

P. At some point, perhaps before his release, Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus. Upon his release, Paul may have gone west to Spain, as he intended to do when he wrote Romans (Rom. 15:23-28) and as church tradition indicates that he did. If so, he probably stayed in Spain only a short time and then made a missionary journey to Crete with Titus (Tit. 1:5). Whether before or after going to Crete, Paul went to Macedonia, and Timothy left Ephesus to meet him on his way there.

1. This may be the tearful visit mentioned in 2 Tim. 1:4. If this was the first time for Timothy to see Paul, his spiritual father, since his release from prison, it would have been very emotional, and parting would have been even more so.

2. Paul tells Timothy to stay in Ephesus to combat the false teaching that was threatening the church (1 Tim. 1:3). From what Timothy told him, the situation was dire. Sometime after that meeting, Paul wrote 1 Timothy, probably around A.D. 63.

II. Background on Ephesus

A. Ephesus was the most important city in Asia Minor. Its harbor and location at the convergence of three great trade routes made it an important commercial center.

B. Ephesus had a major stadium and marketplace and a theater cut into the hillside that seated 24,000 people. It also had a great marble main street, flanked on both sides by an elaborate colonnade, that ran from the harbor to the theater. The population in N.T. times is estimated to have exceeded 250,000.

C. Ephesus had temples devoted to emperors, but its major religious attraction was the Temple of Artemis (Latin = Diana), one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. According to one reconstruction, it was about 420 ft. long, 240 ft. wide, 60 ft. high, and supported by 117 columns. Since the temple was regarded as sacrosanct throughout the Mediterranean world, it became the primary banking institution of Asia Minor. It also attracted pilgrims to Ephesus during the festivals of Artemis in March-April. The statue of Artemis quite possibly was in part constructed from a fallen meteorite (see, Acts 19:35). Goths destroyed the temple in A.D. 262.

D. Magic arts, the attempt to master spirits, were popular in Ephesus. Charms or books believed to possess magical powers were called "Ephesian Letters." The scope of this phenomenon is evident in Acts 19:19 where, after the episode involving the seven sons of Sceva, people repented of their involvement in magic and burned their magic books. The value of these books, in current American dollars, would be about 2.2 million (5.50/hr x 8hrs x 50,000)!

III. The False Teaching

A. Who were the false teachers? There is no hint that they came from the outside. Rather, they appear to be insiders, just as Paul had prophesied in Acts 20:30. In other words, the church is being led astray by some of its own elders.

1. The heretics were clearly "teachers" (1:3, 7, 6:3), and teaching was the task of elders (3:2, 5:17).

2. A significant part of 1 Timothy is devoted to the character, qualifications, and discipline of church leaders (3:1-13; 5:17-25), much of which stands in contrast to what is said about the false teachers.

B. What was the nature of their teaching? They are characterized by:

1. an interest in myths (1 Tim. 1:4, 4:7; Tit. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:4) and genealogies (1 Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9)

2. a concern with the law or a Jewish orientation (1 Tim. 1:7; Tit. 1:10, 14, 3:9)

3. a tendency toward controversy, argumentation, and speculation (1 Tim. 1:4, 6, 6:4, 20; Tit. 1:10, 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23)

4. falsely calling their opposing arguments "knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20)

5. deceptiveness (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Tit. 1:10-13; 2 Tim. 3:6ff. esp. v. 13)

6. immorality (1 Tim. 1:19-20; Tit. 1:15-16; 2 Tim. 2:16, 19; ch. 3)

7. a desire to get material gain by means of their teaching (1 Tim. 6:5; Tit. 1:11; 2 Tim. 3:2, 4)

8. a harsh asceticism, apparently forbidding marriage and the eating of meat (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

9. a teaching that the resurrection had already taken place (2 Tim. 2:18; cf. 1 Tim. 1:19-20)

IV. The Purpose of the Letter

A. The letter was intended for the church, not just for Timothy. But because of defections in the leadership, Paul does not write directly to the church but to the church through Timothy.

B. He does this to encourage Timothy to carry out the difficult task of stopping the erring elders, who had become thoroughly argumentative, to authorize Timothy before the church to carry out the task, and to expose to the congregation the false teachers and their teaching and what Timothy is to do about it.

1 Tim. 1:1-20

I. Salutation (1:1-2)

1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, ²to Timothy, [my] genuine child in faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

A. There was trouble in the Ephesian church. People were turning away from Paul's gospel and were following other leaders and their heretical teaching. Paul opens with a statement of his authority. He became an apostle by direct command of both God and Christ. He is God's messenger.

B. Timothy is Paul's genuine child in faith. He is Paul's delegate and carries with him Paul's apostolic authority. The implication is that the Ephesians must heed Timothy's teaching.

C. Paul wishes Timothy the blessing of laboring in the power and protection of God.

II. The Ephesian Problem Stated (1:3-7)

³Just as I urged you when I was going to Macedonia to remain in Ephesus, [do so] in order that you may command certain men not to teach a different doctrine ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote useless speculations rather than the stewardship of God, which is by faith. ⁵But the goal of the command is love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. ⁶Some, having deviated from these things, turned to worthless talk, ⁷wanting to be teachers of the law yet understanding neither what they say nor the things about which they make confident assertions.

A. Some leaders in Ephesus were teaching a false gospel, a doctrine that differed from the apostolic norm. This heresy was apparently rooted in legendary tales that were somehow tied to O.T. genealogies.

B. The devotion to legends and genealogies (see, 1 Tim. 4:7; this was their hobbyhorse) promoted useless speculations -- in the leaders and their hearers -- rather than the faithful administration of the stewardship the leaders had received from God. The leaders were spinning theological yarns that were pulling the saints from correct beliefs and correct living and were causing quarrels and divisions in the church (1 Tim. 6:4-5).

C. Timothy is told to stop the heretical teaching and the related fixation with myths and genealogies. In contrast to useless speculations and the strife that emanates from them, the goal of the command to stop the false teachers is love. That is, the goal is to develop love within the church by removing this impediment to it. Love, of course, leads to peace and harmony.

D. The love that is the goal of this command, Christian love, stems from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. It stems from a heart that is pure in its devotion to God, from a conscience that is tuned to good moral choices, and from a Christian faith that is free from pretense and hypocrisy.

E. The false teachers departed from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith and turned to worthless talk. They were pushing drivel. They wanted to be teachers of the law, but they had no real understanding of it. In their hands, the law was a dangerous weapon.

III. Proper Use of the Law (1:8-11)

⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if anyone uses it lawfully,
⁹ knowing that the law is not laid down for a righteous man but for the lawless and rebellious, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their father and those who kill their mother, for murderers, ¹⁰ fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I was entrusted.

A. The law, having come from God, is good, but it can be misused, which is what the false teachers were doing.

B. Proper use of the law involves recognition of the fact it was laid down (in relevant part) to restrain evil. The Mosaic law was not given as grist for theological speculation or to be bound on Christians, who in their Spirit-powered drive to be loving, fulfill (ideally) the law's ethical requirements. Paul's point is that these teachers have no business imposing on the church their speculations derived from the Mosaic law, but his comment raises (for us) the whole question of the Christian's relationship to the Mosaic law.

C. In short, the "law," as the complete set of commands under the Mosaic covenant, is no longer in force, but the moral norms included among those commands have continuing validity and find full expression under the new covenant.

1. The fundamental ethical requirement for the Christian is love (Mat. 7:12 22:37-40; Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), but some specific conduct is loving and some is not. Love is the center, but there are definite requirements on how it expresses itself. As Paul notes, such things as patricide, matricide, murder, fornication (having sexual relations with one to whom one is not married, though the Greek word can encompass other forms of unlawful sexual activity), homosexual conduct (BDAG defines *arsenokoites* as "a male who

engages in sexual activity with a person of his own sex"), kidnapping, lying, and perjury are contrary to sound teaching that accords with the gospel of Christ. They are not part of faithful Christian living.

2. So the Christian, though not being under the Mosaic law, upholds the transcendent moral requirements that are included in that law (Rom. 3:31; see, Rom. 7:7, 13:9; 1 Cor. 10:14; Eph. 6:2). It is this ongoing moral law, centered in love, that is the "law of Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2 with 5:14).

3. Christians in the N.T. were not required to obey (other than as an accommodation) commandments of the Mosaic law relating to circumcision, sacrifices, the priesthood, feasts, holy days, ritual purity laws, and food laws (see, Mat. 15:16-20; Mk. 7:18-19 -- the rules of ritual contamination are removed). These things point to deeper realities that have found their fulfillment in Christ. His one sacrifice has made those in him perpetually holy and clean; we are the true temple.

D. The gospel of Christ, the gospel to which this sinful living is contrary, reveals the glory of the blessed God. And this gospel was *entrusted* to Paul. The Lord gave it to him to proclaim.

IV. The Glorious Gospel Exemplified in Paul (1:12-17)

¹²I am grateful to the one who has strengthened me, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a violent man. But I was shown mercy because, being ignorant, I acted in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

¹⁵The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But on account of this I was shown mercy, so that in me, the foremost, Christ Jesus might display the utmost patience as an example for those who come to believe on him for eternal life. ¹⁷Now to the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory, forever and ever, amen.

A. Having mentioned the glorious gospel that was entrusted to him, Paul bursts into thanksgiving. In the process, he testifies about the gospel, which was being threatened by the false teachers.

B. The gospel in a nutshell is that even one as blind and sinful as Paul can receive God's abundant mercy in Christ. Paul marvels and rejoices in the mercy of God, which is so great that he not only received Paul, the foremost sinner, but also entrusted him with the task of sharing the gospel with the world. Paul is saying, in essence, "To think that he would consider me, of all people, worthy of his trust."

C. Paul says he was shown mercy because he acted in unbelief born of ignorance. He is not saying that he received mercy because he had it coming, because his sins were somehow excusable. Not at all. The whole point is just how bad a sinner he was. He is saying that, though his sins were horrible, they were not the result of a conscious, clear-eyed rejection of God. His sin was not "willful" or "high handed" (in the sense of Num. 15:22-31) in that he was willing to repent (see Longman, *Immanuel in Our Place*, 95-96).

D. Paul also says that he, the foremost sinner, was shown mercy to serve as "Exhibit A" for all other sinners who would believe on Christ for salvation. In saving Paul, Christ demonstrated utmost forbearance in dealing with sinners. Paul's point is simple: "If God did it for me, given who I was and what I did, then there is hope for all."

E. Paul concludes with a doxology. God rules in and over all ages, he is immortal (incorruptible), invisible, and the only God. Therefore, all honor and glory are due him forever and ever.

V. The Charge Renewed (1:18-20)

¹⁸ I entrust this command to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by them you might wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. Some, having rejected the latter, have suffered shipwreck concerning the faith; ²⁰ among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I handed over to Satan so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

A. Paul tells Timothy that his entrusting to him the command to silence the false teachers is in keeping with the prophecies that had earlier been made about him. He is referring to that time, probably very early in their relationship, when Timothy received a spiritual gift for ministry, the giving of which was accompanied by the laying on of hands (by the elders and Paul) and by a prophetic recognition of the gift (see, 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:5). By recalling these prophecies, what God had said about the gift and about Timothy's use of it in ministry, Timothy may be encouraged to wage this noble war against the false teachers.

B. Waging the good warfare involves his holding onto his own faith and good conscience. In 1:5 and 1:19b Paul says that the false teachers had abandoned these things. Timothy must take care not to be swayed from them in the course of the battle (see, 1 Tim. 4:16).

C. The false teachers, having rejected a good conscience (meaning they were consciously disobedient), suffered shipwreck regarding their faith. Faith and morality, belief and ethics are inextricably linked, so rejection of one influences the other.

D. Hymenaeus and Alexander were among the heretics at Ephesus. Paul says that he handed them over to Satan, meaning that on the basis of his apostolic authority he put

them back into Satan's sphere, i.e., put them outside the church and the fellowship of God's people. It's the same thing that was done in 1 Cor. 5:5.

1. We're not told when this was done, but 1 Cor. 5:5 makes clear that it need not have been done in person. Perhaps Paul passed judgment on them when he met with Timothy en route to Macedonia.

2. The purpose of disfellowshipping is redemptive, to bring them to repentance. In Paul's words, it was to teach them "not to blaspheme," meaning not to slander or misrepresent the true faith given by God through their false teaching.

3. Hymenaeus is probably the same person referred to later in 2 Tim. 2:17. He is there mentioned, along with Philetus, as one who was teaching that the resurrection had already occurred and upsetting some people's faith.

4. Alexander may be the same person referred to later in 2 Tim. 4:14-15, but I am skeptical. It was a common name, and it seems to me that if this was the Alexander who had been disfellowshipped in Ephesus, Paul would not have identified him by his occupation ("the metalworker"), but it's possible.