**Paul’s true son in the faith** 5/5/24 dkm

Read: Acts 16:1-10, 1Timothy 1

Text: 1Timothy 1:1-3

Psalms: 147:12-20, 78:1-8, 92:7-15, 72old

The church today, at least in the West, is at a low ebb. The doors of the church I attended in my youth are closed. Many churches have closed or face declining numbers. Why, we might ask. Let me suggest two reasons: doctrine and life. In the last two hundred years the Bible has been subjected to literary and historical criticism from within the church, and scientific criticism from the theory of evolution. The authenticity of these letters written by the apostle Paul to Timothy and Titus was questioned in the heat of this criticism. All criticism, both literary and historical, has come up empty handed. Not one error has been proven in the Bible, but all this criticism has taken its toll in the minds of many- not you I hope!

A second reason for the decline in the church is the life of some of its members. In recent years some church leaders have been found guilty of child sexual abuse. Others have been guilty of adultery, of extortion, or of bullying behaviour. When the Bible is no longer regarded as the word of God, and when teachers depart from ‘sound doctrine’, the conduct of people in the church will depart from the standards demanded by God and our Lord Jesus Christ. Paul told the young Timothy, ‘Watch your life and doctrine closely’ (4:16 NIV). We might have put doctrine or teaching first, but these two are related, and equally important.

These three letters, 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, are referred to as the pastoral epistles. The apostle Paul wrote them to these individuals, although they were not confidential letters. Timothy and Titus were men who had been with Paul in his missionary endeavours. They had heard the gospel from Paul, and he had taken them ‘under his wing’ to train up as future leaders in the church. What would happen to the church when Paul was gone? What would happen to the church if the gospel Paul preached was corrupted by the ideas of men- or women?

We do not know how old Paul was when he wrote his second letter to Timothy. He was however, back in prison and not expecting to be released: ‘My departure is at hand’ (Tim 4:6). It seems he was again in prison in Rome, but by this time Nero was emperor, and was unleashing a vicious attack upon Christians after the great fire of Rome in AD64. The book of Acts ends with Paul under house arrest in Rome. Most scholars believe Paul was released from house arrest after two years, in AD62, and then, after travelling to Spain, came across the Mediterranean to Crete, to Ephesus, to Macedonia (Philippi) and to Nicopolis (Tit 3:12). He ends up back in Rome and in prison in AD67 and was probably martyred soon afterwards.

One more word of introduction before diving into the text of 1Timothy. This letter was written to an individual not a church, as already mentioned. It was written some five years after Paul’s other letters, so the church had grown and developed. While the church remains a ‘body’ or ‘organism’, there was a need for some organisation. Paul was already appointing elders in the churches, and deacons were appointed back in the Jerusalem church (Acts 14:23, 6:3). But here in 1Timothy and Titus he outlines the qualifications of men, and men only, appointed as leaders or, as we call them, office-bearers in the church. Timothy was personally ‘charged’ by the apostle to deal with false teachers, to uphold sound doctrine, and ensure good conduct in the church at Ephesus.

1Timothy opens with the usual form of salutation or greeting. We will highlight, ‘Apostolic authority’, ‘Son Timothy’, and ‘Place and purpose’.

**1.Apostolic authority**

Paul did not always introduce himself as an apostle, but he does so here in 1Timothy, and in other letters like Corinthians and Colossians. The word ‘apostle’ simply means ‘sent one’, but Paul was personally sent by Jesus Christ, the risen Jesus Christ. He was recognised along with the other apostles who were personally called by Jesus to follow him. All were witnesses of his resurrection (Acts 1:22). Paul began his relationship with Jesus on the other side of the fence as it were; he was a persecutor of Christ’s followers. He admits this in Philippians 3:4 and tells Timothy he is the chief of sinners (1:15). But his divine calling meant he, like the other apostles, was chosen to receive, transmit, and explain the message of God’s saving plan which centres on Christ. The apostles became authoritative in the church through their teaching and writings in the NT.

Paul preached the grace of Jesus Christ because he personally experienced the grace of Jesus Christ. There were men preaching the grace of Jesus who had not experienced his grace. Such men were in the church at Ephesus and are in the church today. Paul told Timothy to identify and expose such men, and we must do the same. Examination of their teaching and their life is the way to do this.

‘An apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour’ (1:1). Normally Paul does not refer to God as ‘our Saviour’ but does so five times in these pastoral letters. He would have read of ‘God the Saviour’ in the OT; Mary refers to ‘God my Saviour’ in her song Luke 1:47. It may be that he was hearing Nero claiming to be the saviour of the world and was countering this claim. Jesus of course, is our Saviour but ultimately, so is God our Father, because he sent his only begotten and beloved Son to die on the cross, thereby becoming our Saviour. Referring to God in this personal way is uniquely and boldly Christian. Beware of referring to God as the God of my father or my uncle, or to Jesus as the ‘Jesus whom Paul preaches’ (Acts 19:13). Can you say he is ‘God **my** Saviour’?

Paul was an apostle by the command of Jesus, ‘The Lord Jesus Christ our hope’ (1:1). It was Jesus who spoke to Saul on the Damascus Road and sent him to ‘bear my name to the Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel’ (Acts 9:15). Paul never forgot that life-changing moment; he never forgot his divine calling. While men are not called under such dramatic circumstances today, some do have a calling from God to preach and teach the gospel. Such men must not neglect this calling; Paul writes to Timothy, ‘Do not neglect the gift that is in you… with the laying on of the hands of the eldership’ (4:14, 2Tim 1:6). Paul himself said, ‘Woe is me if I do not preach the gospel’ (1Cor 9:16). In this letter itself we are told of two men, possibly elders, who rejected the faith (1:20).

In referring to Jesus Christ ‘our hope’ (1:1), Paul points to the future we have in Christ, a sure and certain future. Nero was not the last man to offer hope and salvation to people, but he is dead, and all great men will die. Putting you hope in politicians or man-made gods is futile; it is to have no hope at all (Eph 2:12). Our hope is in the resurrection, which is in no doubt because Jesus is already risen from the dead. Belief in the resurrection is fundamental to our faith and our hope. If you have no hope in seeing Jesus as he is and being transformed into his likeness (1John 3:2f), how can you call yourself a Christian? ‘Now abide, faith, hope, and love’.

**2. Son Timothy**

This is a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. There is no other name associated with the sender, or with the receiver of this letter. Who was Timothy? His pedigree is given as: mother Eunice, and grandmother Lois (2Tim 1:5). Both these women must have believed in Jesus when Paul visited Lystra in Asia Minor (Turkey) on his first missionary journey (Acts 14:22). Timothy probably also believed at this time or shortly afterwards because when Paul returned to Lystra after a year or so he found a disciple called Timothy. Timothy was well spoken of in the local church, so Paul asked him to join his missionary team; he circumcised Timothy because his father was a Greek.

Timothy was quiet and timid and did not enjoy good health; he might not have passed the test for a church worker today! But he was faithful, very faithful to the Lord, and to Paul. He quickly learned the truths of the gospel from Paul, and ably represented the apostle in Thessalonica, Philippi, and other churches, including here in Ephesus. Paul looked upon Timothy as a son in the faith, as being like-minded and utterly dependable (1Cor 16:10, Phil 2:19f). If Timothy was still in Philippi when Paul was released, he later joined Paul in Ephesus, after Paul left Titus on Crete. Paul had moved to Macedonia, probably Philippi, and it was from here that he sent this letter to Timothy in Ephesus (1:3, Phil 2:24).

After declaring himself to be the writer of this letter, and Timothy as the recipient, Paul adds a word of blessing; ‘Grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord’ (1:2). As in verse 1, God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord are joined together as being the source of this blessing of the apostle. His usual blessing was ‘grace and peace’ (1Thess 1:1, 2Thess 1:2, Col 1;2) but here we see the addition of ‘mercy’. ‘Peace or Shalom’ was a common Jewish blessing, and a beautiful blessing at that- ‘Peace be unto you’. ‘Peace be with you’ is what Jesus said to his fearful disciples when he appeared to them after his resurrection (John 20:19,21). For Paul, as for us, this word points to the peace we have with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1), as well as the peace we have with one another in Christ. It is more than a beautiful blessing; it is a deep and meaningful blessing.

The blessing of ‘grace’ is specifically Christian because we alone know the grace of God in the Jesus Christ, in the cross and the resurrection. You will not hear a non-Christian saying, ‘Grace to you from God our Father’. The word ‘grace’ refers to the unmerited favour of God, God’s love for us while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). Mercy is similar to grace, but with a focus on pity; mercy is help for the helpless. ‘These three gifts together point to the favourable, privileged and perfectly secure position that Christians have in the Lord Jesus Christ in relation to God’ (Milne).

**3.Place and purpose**

The church in Ephesius was very strategic; this was the capital city of the Roman province. It was a commercial city with a seaport. It was home to the famous temple of the Greek fertility goddess, Artemis. Paul had discovered the importance of this temple when he spent almost three years in Ephesus. He was forced to leave, but only after appointing elders in a growing church (Acts 20:1,17). Saying farewell to these elders as he hurried back to Jerusalem for Pentecost was a time of reflection and encouragement, and unpleasant expectations, for both Paul and the elders of this church. The church would have grown since that time, but like other churches had also become the target of false teachers.

Paul heard about the false teachers, maybe from Timothy himself. Paul had dealt with false teachers before, and he was not that far away from Ephesus, but he was confident Timothy could deal with them, after giving him advice, and no doubt praying for this young leader. He hoped to come soon (3:14). The best way to counter false teaching is to give sound teaching, and that is what Paul emphasizes. He urged Timothy to ‘guard what was committed to your trust’, to ‘give attention to reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine’, sound doctrine (4:13, 6:20).

The false teachers in Ephesus wanted to go back to Jewish fables and genealogies, and to the commandments of men (1:4, Tit 1:14). Paul faced opposition from Judaizers demanding converts be circumcised and made to obey the law; they did not understand the grace of God in salvation but looked to law keeping and rituals. The false teachers in Ephesus were not Judaizers but they we still Jews. With great imagination, they were making up stories or myths from the OT, from genealogies in particular. Still today we see Christians taking pride in their genealogy; it is interesting to know about our ancestors and we can be thankful for them, but when we stand before God our only hope is in the Lord Jesus Christ. We also think of Christians who spend lots of time, and place great confidence, in working out the number system in apocalyptic writings.

We will see later that elements of Gnosticism, which became fully blown in the second century, are seen in the false teaching at Ephesus. Knowledge rather than faith became the focus of the false teachers. They prided themselves in their knowledge, especially new knowledge. Still today people, including some church leaders, run after things that are new in the realm of spiritual teaching and practices in the church of God. Truth is found in Jesus Christ as he is revealed in the Bible, and this truth does not change. Truth remains truth today, tomorrow, and for ever.