

1 Timothy 1:12-17

Timothy, to whom this letter is addressed, worked very closely with Paul. His name is linked with Paul in many of the apostle's letters to churches and his activities are referred to in many of those letters as well. Paul lauded Timothy in the Letter to the Philippians as "like-minded" with him and trustworthy, and reported proudly that "as a son with a father" Timothy had served with him in ministry. At the time this first letter was sent to Timothy, he was on a mission in Ephesus, handling an assignment entrusted to him by the apostle, who had mentored him for ministry.

In Acts, we find a brief biographical sketch of Timothy. He was a native of Lystra, in Galatia, and the son of a mixed marriage; his mother, Eunice, was Jewish and his father was Greek. During Paul's first ministry in Lystra, mother and son and probably grandmother Lois, were converted; when Paul returned there about two years later, he was so impressed by reports about their development in faith and their standing within the Christian fellowship, that he invited Timothy to accompany him in ministry. Having been reared by his mother as a Jew, Timothy had been taught the Scriptures.

Paul recognized Timothy's spiritual growth and giftedness and helped the young man learn and appreciate the duties and disciplines of ministry as worked in tandem: Paul leading, Timothy assisting. Timothy served with Paul in Thessalonika, Corinth, Philippi, as well as during Paul's

lengthy and dramatic preaching and teaching stay in Ephesus. Working with Paul, and learning from him, Timothy developed leadership skills and faithfully managed assignments whenever and wherever the apostle deemed it fitting.

Paul instructed Timothy to be intentional and decisive in teaching believers under his charge. First of all, Timothy is to combat wrong teaching and false teachers, teachings and teachers that deal more with ethnic lore and ambiguous subjects - which stir controversy - rather than with truths that promote godliness. Paul ordered Timothy to fight the good fight against false teachers with faith and a good conscience.

Some people had also been distracted from the truths of the gospel through inept teachings regarding “the Law.” From the very first decade of the church’s life, questions were raised regarding the role of the Mosaic Law in Christian life. Both those of Hebrew background and those from the Gentile world had an interest in the answer, but few leaders were sufficiently informed to settle the debate.

Paul knew that some would-be teachers in the church were teaching the law without understanding either what they are saying or what they are talking about with such confidence. Unlike Paul, they did not have a right view regarding the law; they could not properly distinguish between its ceremonial strictures and its moral principles, they did not know what had been abolished through the sacrificial death of Jesus and what

remains as moral demand, what was preparatory and what continues as permanent. Paul does not dwell on the matter; he simply states that law, divine or otherwise, “is good if used appropriately.”

Paul’s critique of inept teachers of the law, and the vice-list of sins committed by those who live contrary to divine law, perhaps triggered memories about his earlier zeal for the law and how that zeal had caused him to misjudge Jesus and persecute him and his followers in the name of the law.

If Paul’s rather long testimonial thanksgiving in 1st Timothy to Christ Jesus for saving and entrusting him to preach the gospel is understood in this light, then it will not seem out of place here where he has treated “wrong teachings.” The fact that he had earlier been dead wrong in his zealous war against Christians must have been on his mind as he thought about how the law has been mishandled. He realized that his testimony could hearten Timothy; because it would help the young leader better appreciate being trusted with the gospel.

In Paul’s testimonial thanksgiving about what issued from Christ to grant Paul his new life and calling, four words stand out boldly: **mercy, favour, faithfulness, and love.** Remembering how, with blasphemy, he had spoken slanderously against Jesus, how, with unbridled zeal, he had arrested followers of Jesus, and how he was “in full agreement” with the murder and stoning of Stephen, Paul knew his past was not only sordid,

but sinful. Although his past made him consider himself as “the biggest sinner of all,” Paul knew that the mercy, grace, faith, and love he had experienced in submitting himself to Christ left all that past behind. Paul was a changed person with a new life, a new status, a new record, and a new role.

The testimonial thanksgiving that appears in this letter is from a grace-claimed man whose heart knew at deep levels that God’s grace is efficient, sufficient and abundant. And he was determined to be responsible in spreading the word about that grace. “This saying is reliable and deserves full acceptance: ‘Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.’” That was, and remains, the central message of the Christian faith, and every believer’s change of life validates its truthfulness. Small wonder then, that Paul, grace-influenced, broke into praise as he closed out his testimony, exulting: “Now to the king of ages, to the immortal, invisible, and only God may honour and glory be given to him forever and always! Amen.”

Paul wrote a personal letter to Timothy to encourage, warn, and instruct him. He opened this letter from Macedonia, written between 62 and 64 AD after being released from his first Roman imprisonment. Timothy was Paul’s protege, spiritual son, and pastor of the Ephesian church.

This is one of the three pastoral epistles: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. Ephesus was a Roman port city in Asia Minor (modern-day

Turkey) and was home to the temple of Diana or Artemis. False teachers who prohibited marriage and eating of certain foods had infiltrated the Ephesian church.

Some of the themes being explored in these letters are false doctrines, holiness, godliness, prayer, world evangelism, Christian conduct in worship, qualifications of church leaders and Christian relationships. Paul's letter to Timothy offers advice and guidance on church leadership, doctrine and godly behaviour. Paul gave advice on how to maintain church order while living according to Christian beliefs in everyday life.

Paul emphasized the importance of sound doctrine and qualifications for church leaders, including overseers and deacons. Additionally, Paul encouraged us to persevere in this faith despite challenges and to confront false teachings. We should cultivate a spirit of love and faithfulness within the church community and to treat others with kindness and respect, showing the example of Christ's unconditional love. We should be strong in evangelism to spread the gospel.

Greek for "insolent" is *hybrizo*, which means violent. Paul thanks the Lord for his superabundant love, mercy, and grace to appoint him as an apostle, even though he was once a blasphemer, a persecutor of Christians, and a violent man.

Christ came to earth to save sinners by grace and through faith. Paul

called himself the chief of sinners. Greek for “long-suffering” is *makrothymia*, which means patience. Christ is a God of love, grace, mercy and patience. But, what does it mean to be saved? Christ saves sinners. This is an ongoing daily process. It is not a one-time happening. It continues every day of your life. It is a daily experience and acknowledgement.

Our preaching series on First and Second Timothy is a window into how the church works — or doesn’t work — as the Holy Spirit leads successive generations to behave as the body of Christ in new ways.

“Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.” But what does that mean? What does that even look like? How was a small Christ-believing community living in the midst of a thriving imperial city with a flourishing economy — where elevated status was a recognized sign of success — to make sense of this?

In this strikingly autobiographical passage, the author describes himself as having once been “a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence.” But now he stands as a prime example of the “utmost patience” of Christ. Not only has he experienced the mercy, love, and grace of Christ, but he has also, remarkably, been judged as faithful and appointed as a servant of Christ.

This is all a way of saying, if Christ can save and transform me, “the

foremost of sinners,” then he can surely save anyone. And even with the passage of time, still no one is beyond the reaches of the mercy of God. Have confidence in the gospel to save and transform.

Leading a church as part of a wise and diverse team, which perhaps includes the founders and those who have benefited directly from their mentorship, is a wonderful experience. We might describe such a situation as safe. However, as life and people move on, particular challenges arise:

How do we live as a church after the founders?

How to lead the church forward, deeper in the life of God, while developing second- or third-generational leadership structures?

How do we maintain a teaching ministry that is consistent with and faithful to that which has been passed on?

How do we develop new leaders?

How to maintain order in worship, without stifling the Spirit, within a growing and increasingly diverse congregation?

How do we model loving, compassionate, and empathetic relationships across generations and social boundaries?

How do we live a good life together?

How do we live the life of Christ?

These are some of the issues and questions faced by the believing community led by Timothy in Ephesus.

How do these issues and questions affect our lives as Christ's living communities? How will we respond?

Amen.

PRAYER OF THE DAY

God of wisdom, open our eyes and ears as we study the Epistle of 1st Timothy. Open our understanding to explore the riches of your Word. Thank you for the truth of your word that transcends time, culture, geography, race, and history. We pray for your word to be deeply imprinted into our hearts. In Jesus' name. **Amen**