

No.21, First Timothy

This the first of four epistles addressed to individuals – two letters to Timothy, one to Titus, and one to Philemon. The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus go together being what are known as the *Pastoral Epistles* – that is, they are addressed to men who were actively pastoring churches and were in need of valuable counsel due to certain difficulties that had arisen in those churches. Consequently, in the Pastoral Epistles the Church has always had and still has what may be regarded as an inspired manual of teaching and instruction on the issue of the pastoral care of Christ's Church.

Timothy was native of Lystra in the region of Galatia. His father was a Gentile and his mother, Eunice, a Jewess, who along with Timothy's grandmother, Lois, exercised a godly influence on Timothy as a child, 2 Tim 3: 15 & 2 Tim 1: 5. But though he had such a godly upbringing, Timothy was not converted until Paul's visit to Lystra during his first missionary journey. 1 Tim 1: 2, "*Timothy, my own son in the faith...*" & Acts 16: 1 – Timothy described as "a certain disciple" here at the beginning of the 2nd missionary journey; but since he was Paul's convert then he must have been converted during the 1st journey.

Timothy had proved himself within his own church, Acts 16: 2; and was recognised by Paul as being gifted for Christian ministry and thus was taken by Paul on the 2nd journey as a fellow-missionary, v.3. In a number of Paul's epistles it will be seen that Timothy exercised a valuable ministry and was highly regarded and loved by the Apostle Paul. He regarded the younger man as one whom he could trust above all others to attend to the spiritual business to which he was sent, Philippians 2: 20 – 22.

For some time, Timothy laboured in Ephesus, having been commissioned by Paul to stay there and attend to the spiritual needs of the Church, 1 Tim 1: 3 & 4. Obviously the Ephesian church was an important church with much to contribute to the witness of the entire NT church of those times. Thus, it became the target of Satan's attack, as Paul had predicted & warned, Acts 20: 28 & 29. As this first epistle to Timothy reveals that prediction came to pass, thus Timothy was needed to stay at Ephesus and labour for the well-being of the Church there. Note ch 3: 15 – this verse is central to any understanding of this epistle in that it outlines one of the great responsibilities of the Church; namely, that of being *the pillar and ground of the truth*. Here is why Timothy was needed in Ephesus: to exercise a ministry that would result in the Church being enabled to be what the Lord intended – be the pillar and ground of the truth. In a real sense this epistle is built around this issue of the Church being what is described here. Thus, study of the epistle will show Paul doing a number of things to enable the Church to fulfil her role of being the pillar and ground of the truth.

1. FIRST, HE GIVES A DESCRIPTION OF THE TRUTH

In this key verse Paul refers to *the truth*. The reference is to the Gospel itself, spoken of under various terms that Paul uses frequently throughout 1 Timothy – *the doctrine*, 6 times; *the faith*, 9 times; *the godliness*, 4 times; then, *the truth*, 5 times. The use of the definite article – "the" – with these words indicates that they are to be understood in a technical or theological way to define the Gospel. Note some of the striking statements of the Gospel that Paul gives – ch 1: 11, ch 1: 15 & ch 2: 5 & 6. But in ch 3: 16 Paul proceeds to give what is essentially one of the greatest descriptions & definitions of *the truth* to be found in the entire NT. There are six foundational facts about Christ in this verse.

As to His person He is God incarnate – "*God was manifested in the flesh.*" This is the foundation of the Gospel; and is the focus of such clear revelation in much of Scripture, John 1: 1 & 14. The Gospel rests on this great fact & miracle of history that God took to Himself our humanity in the miracle of the incarnation; and in that humanity accomplished redemption.

As to His being proved to be the Saviour He was "justified in the Spirit." The word "justified" contains the thought of *vindication*. The clause means that the Holy Spirit vindicated or proved that authenticity of Christ as the Messiah by setting His seal on all that He did – especially by the resurrection, 1 Pet 3: 18. The point is that sinners need a Saviour who provides them with a perfect righteousness; and the Holy Spirit by vindicating Christ declares that His righteousness is the ground of our acceptance with God.

In the third place He was "seen of angels." For one thing these words signify that it was only in Christ that the angels ever saw eternal deity. Then, the words also speak of the wonder & adoration of the angels with regard to the whole scheme of redemption. Those of their own company that sinned were passed by but the second Person of the Trinity undertook to redeem men. This is a matter of amazement to the angels of God, 1 Pet 1: 12.

Fourthly, He was "preached unto the Gentiles." The point here is that Christ is a Saviour for all kinds of men. While He was born, lived, died and rose again among the Jews, His Gospel is equally fitted for the world.

Thus, in the fifth place He is "believed on in the world." These words point to the remarkable success of the Gospel in that from across the world the Lord is drawing out a people from all nations.

In the sixth place, Christ was "received up into glory." This refers to His exalted and pre-eminent position. The words signify that Christ reigns & rules and is able to save to the very uttermost for all power belongs to Him as the glorified Mediator of His people. He occupies a place that belongs to no other.

2. SECOND, HE URGES THE DEFENCE OF THE TRUTH

The Church is to be the “pillar and ground of the truth” which means that she is to be the support and stay of the truth in the sense of defending it against error. See 1 Tim 6: 20 – “keep” means *guard*; and the phrase “that which is committed to thy trust” is the translation of one word signifying *a deposit committed*; see also 2 Tim 1: 14. Thus, throughout 1 Timothy there are various exhortations given to Timothy to defend the truth for the simple but solemn reason that the enemy never relinquishes his attempts to destroy it; see ch 1: 18-20; ch 3; ch 6: 3-5 & 20-21. One of the great dangers facing the Ephesian church was an unlawful use of God’s law, ch 1: 5-11. The law is good in the sense that convicts of sin and leads men to Christ, therefore, Gal 3: 24. And it also shows the unchanging standards for behaviour among believers. In that sense it is in keeping with the Gospel, ch 1: 11. But it is never to be presented as the way of salvation. Against such a notion we must always defend the truth.

3. THIRD, HE ENCOURAGES THE DISSEMINATION OF THE TRUTH

Again & again Paul points out the Church’s responsibility to teach the truth. Elders must be “apt to teach...” ch 3: 2. Timothy is exhorted to teach, ch 4: 11 & 6: 2. But there must be more than orthodoxy – the truth will only be disseminated by the Church successfully when she conducts herself in the proper way. In this chapter where our text lies the Apostle gives charge concerning church government, the inference being that when there is such then the Church will be strong to send forth the truth. There must also be separation from that which is injurious to truth. In these two epistles to Timothy there are 14 calls to separation from heretics, six of them in this first epistle. God demands that stand from His people for in that way the Church will be able to send forth the truth without any hindrance.

Rev. John Greer