

Armagh Baptist Church – 7th March 2010
The Life and Times of Timothy 1
‘Why Ephesus of all places?’
1Timothy 1:1-11

Introduction

Last Sunday morning I gave you an overview of the life of Timothy. We saw that he was saved out of a mixed background in Lystra at the age of 16. He entered full-time missionary work with the Apostle Paul just 2 years later at 18. By the age of about 21 he had already seen 4 churches planted on the Continent of Europe as he worked as part of Paul’s missionary team.

We saw that even though he usually worked as part of a team, from time to time (about every 7 years in fact) Paul gave him a job to do on his own. He was sent to help persecuted Christians in Thessalonica; he was sent to sort out major church problems in Corinth; he was sent to deal with false teaching and a personality clash in Philippi; and now just a year after that, Paul leaves him in Ephesus – this was to be his greatest challenge yet!

I’m sure in those early days Timothy asked himself many a time:

‘Why Ephesus of all places?’

You get the impression from v.3 that Paul had to do some coaxing to get Timothy to go, never mind stay in Ephesus:

*‘As I **urged** you... **stay there** in Ephesus.’ (v.3)*

Why did Paul send Timothy to Ephesus, and why was Timothy so reluctant to stay there?

Well what do we know about Ephesus?

1. It was a major city - the main city in Asia Minor – a strategic foothold for the Gospel.
2. It was the centre of the pagan Diana worship – See Acts 19 – with all its occult and immoral practices. So it was a tough city in which to try to plant a church. In fact Paul had stayed there for 3 years to get this church planted – that’s the longest time Paul ever spent anywhere! That’s how tough it was!
3. Paul had said his final farewell to the Elders of the Church in Ephesus in Acts ch.20. It was a tearful good-bye, thinking they would never see each other again. But on that occasion Paul had warned them how the devil would try to get in among them to divide and destroy the church after he had gone (See Acts 20:25-32). Sadly the warning of v.30 seems to have come true. Just 5 years later the churches in Ephesus have been led astray into false doctrine by people from within the church, not from outside it – possibly even by some

of the very elders that Paul himself had appointed, who had now gone off the rails doctrinally!

4. Even though this was the church that received the 'Letter to the Ephesians' that we have in our Bibles, yet still they were led astray by false teachers. That letter was so full of clear doctrinal teaching on the Gospel and on the Church, and it has that closing chapter 6 with its warning about the Spiritual Battle we are in as Christians and its teaching on the Whole Armour of God – and yet that wasn't enough to keep them on track! (We need to be warned!)

This was the church that Timothy was now sent to at the age of about 36 to try to sort it out, and to try to get it back on track again.

Paul's message to Timothy in this first letter is basically 3-fold:

1. Stop the False Teachers (ch.1)
2. Appoint Good Elders in their places (ch.3), and
3. Set a Good Example to all of them, yourself, as to what it means to live a truly godly life. (This theme crops up regularly throughout the letter).

So Timothy was in for a difficult time ahead, as he tried to turn this church around. Can you begin to understand then why he had reservations about going there and facing all that lay ahead? It wasn't going to be easy!

Paul gets straight down to business in Chapter 1 – no niceties, none of his usual thanksgiving - just commands to Timothy, '*his true son in the faith*' (v.2) to get on with the job in hand:

1. Paul's Command to Timothy (v.1,3,5)

(v.1) Before Paul commands Timothy to do anything, he points out that he himself was a man under authority. '*Paul*' himself was '*an apostle of Christ Jesus by the **command** of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope.*' Paul was a man under orders himself!

Paul hadn't taken it upon himself to go into the Lord's work. He had been called by God to this ministry. It was in Acts ch.9 that he was given the very important task of being an **Apostle**.

The original Apostles of Jesus Christ, and Paul the Apostle to the Gentiles had the task of laying the foundation of the Gospel for the New Testament Church.

- Their task was to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ wherever they went.
- To plant churches made up of those who had responded to their message and believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and Lord.

- To appoint elders or leaders in these churches to carry on the work after they had left.
- And from time to time they came back and visited these churches, as they were able, to see how they were getting on – to see whether they were remaining true to the faith or not.

After all, much of the New Testament wasn't written down at this stage, and the devil was very active, so it was quite easy for the Gospel to be distorted and for churches and whole groups of Christians to go off the rails spiritually.

This is what had happened in Ephesus. On this occasion Paul couldn't go himself (he had to go to Macedonia to see the churches there) so he sends Timothy instead.

(v.3) Here Paul uses the same command word again. Timothy was under authority – Christ's authority, and the Apostle Paul's Authority to

'command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer!'

Paul was giving Timothy an order. He was passing down the line, the command of God, for Timothy to get on with his work in Ephesus.

He was under orders to get this false teaching stopped immediately!

But in case Paul sounded very harsh in passing this order on, or in case Timothy might be tempted to use harsh measures to root out these false teachers, Paul reminds him what his goal was in v.5:

(v.5) 'The goal of this command is love.' – Timothy had falsehood to root out, and he had false teachers to deal with, but he had to remember he wasn't out just to win a few arguments; he was out to win these people back to the Lord - so *'speak the truth in love'* (cf Ephesians 4:15).

Sadly by the end of the Century and probably by the time of Timothy's death, they had sorted out the false doctrine, but they had forsaken their first love – their love for the Lord was not what it used to be (see Revelation 2:1-7).

So we need to learn this well here – the goal of right doctrine is to have a greater love for the Lord and His Word. If our increased head knowledge of doctrine only leaves us colder in heart towards the Lord and His Word, then there's something wrong. If our doctrine only fills our heads but doesn't warm or change our hearts, then there's something very wrong!

Doctrine is important – but so is our love for the Lord – the two should go hand in hand. As v.5 says, if you can have a pure heart, a clear conscience, and a sincere faith before the Lord, then you will have right doctrine and a right relationship with the Lord – one that is based on Love.

So Timothy's orders were to stop false teachers, appoint good elders, and set a good example of godly living himself. But the warning he needed to hear was that he must never let his love for the Lord grow cold, no matter what difficulties he had to face. The same applies to us all. Let's look now at...

2. Paul's Description of the False Teachers (vs.3-7)

In v.3 he just calls them '*certain men*' who were teaching false doctrines, but down in v.20 he seems to mention 2 of their names: Hymenaeus & Alexander. Paul says they had ship-wrecked their faith and had been guilty of blasphemy against God.

Throughout the letter we are able to pick up the sort of things they were teaching that were wrong. For example:

(v.4) They were teaching myths based on the endless genealogies of the O.T. This only led to controversy, and didn't progress God's work at all – useless!

(vs.8-11) They were forever teaching the O.T. Law to Christians – telling them they should try to keep all the O.T. Laws if they were to be good Christians. This was wrong as Paul points out in vs.8-11.

The Law is supposed to point out to the ungodly and the sinner where they have gone wrong – to show them their sin. It then becomes like a school-master to lead us to Christ for salvation, as Paul taught in Galatians 3:24. So the Law can be used in pre-evangelism to show someone their sin and their need to be saved, but the Law cannot change that person, or even save that person, and we certainly shouldn't be asking them to re-double their efforts to try to keep it, we should be telling them to simply trust in Christ, and put their faith in Him as Lord and Saviour - to be saved by Grace – not works! We certainly shouldn't be telling Christians to try to keep the Law! We can't! So among other things, these false teachers in Ephesus were legalists.

(Ch.4:3) Later on in chapter 4 we find that they had made up some more rules and regulations:

- They told people they shouldn't get married – they'd be more holy if they didn't – if they stayed celibate!
- They told people if they abstained from certain foods they'd be more holy too – Does this sound familiar? (e.g. Lent / Fish on Friday, etc?)

(Chs.5&6) By the end of the Letter it seems that these false teachers had a love for money too. They may even have been charging people a fee for performing certain tasks - such as baptisms etc. Paul is careful to point out in Ch.5:17-18 that a Christian worker is worthy of his hire, and deserves to be properly supported by his church, but it is a different matter to put a charge on

every act of ministry he performs – it very quickly then becomes a money making exercise (See 6:5,6,9,10,17-19). Instead a church should pay their pastors and evangelists in such a way that ministry is free to the end-user.

That is only a very quick survey of some of the things these people were teaching and doing, but do you see that many of these same abuses are still with us in some churches today!? Some things never change – the devil is still using the same tactics today as he ever has!

3. Why are these false teachings so serious? (vs.10-11)

Well, Paul gives us a very simple straightforward answer in vs.10 & 11. All these things are contrary to the sound doctrine of the glorious Gospel of our God. And there is no other Gospel!

The true Gospel is the one that God entrusted to Paul and the other Apostles. They were under a solemn charge to preserve that Gospel from error and to hand it on unchanged to each successive generation coming after them. (See 2 Timothy 1:11-14, 2:1-2).

All these other false teachings either add to, or take away from, the true Gospel which is the only way of Salvation.

The Gospel is so important because it is the only way that men and women can be saved and get right with a Holy God. And because personal faith and trust in Jesus and his death for us on the cross is the only way our sins can be forgiven by God's grace, apart from anything we can do, we must make sure that we preserve this Gospel, preach it to as many people as we can, and then when our day is done, pass it on intact to the next generation coming after us.

Conclusion

It is not some endless genealogy of Bishops who claim to be able to trace their apostolic succession back to the original apostles who have the right to dispense the Gospel to men and women of our generation – that in itself is no safeguard for the Gospel – as Church history has proven to us!

Rather, it is those of us who are faithfully seeking to preach and teach the Word of God, and who are reaching out with the Biblical Gospel, who are the ones who hold the message of life for men and women today.

So let's not be blinded by any church or its traditions, instead open your eyes and your ears and think about what you are hearing, and then search the Scriptures to see if what you're being told is true, and when you find the truth – Jesus, trust in Him for yourself, and be sure to share him with others!

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