

**Armagh Baptist Church – 28<sup>th</sup> March 2010**  
**The Life and Times of Timothy 3**  
**'Don't Shipwreck Your Faith!' 1 Timothy 1:18-20**

**Introduction**

Paul has already told Timothy to stay in Ephesus and get on with an important but very difficult task in v.3. We have got the impression that Timothy didn't really want to stay there, probably because of the difficulties he knew lay ahead of him as he would try to tackle the problems in Ephesus.

In order to try to encourage Timothy to stay and get on with his work, Paul has already reminded Timothy of the power of the Gospel. He first of all told him of his own conversion experience in vs.12-17. If the Gospel had the power to transform Saul of Tarsus - the Arch-Persecutor of the Christian Gospel, into Paul the Apostle - the Greatest Preacher of the Christian Gospel, then it would have the power to tackle any situation - and even the toughest of individuals.

But just in case Timothy still felt that he wanted to get out of Ephesus and run away from his task, Paul reminds him of a few other things in vs.18-20:-

**1. He Reminds Timothy of his own Conversion and Calling (v.18)**

**His Conversion:** Simply by using the phrase "*Timothy, my son*" Paul reminds Timothy of how he had been converted to Christ. It wasn't in the dramatic way that Paul had been converted by the blinding light of the Risen Lord on the Damascus Road, but it was no less real for that.

Timothy had been led to trust in Christ by Paul himself, during his first visit as a missionary to Timothy's home town of Lystra in Acts ch.14. Timothy was about 16 then, and because Paul had been there at the moment of his new birth he often thought of Timothy as his true son in the faith (cf. 1 Tim 1:2). Paul hadn't saved Timothy - Jesus Christ had - but Paul had been the human instrument. Timothy had been saved by Jesus Christ for a purpose, and what he had been asked to do in Ephesus was now part of that purpose.

**His Calling:** Timothy had been called into the Lord's Service, into Christian ministry at the young age of about 18, just 2 years after his conversion (Acts ch.16). Here in v.18 we get another clue as to how that had happened. It was by a number of prophecies made about him, either by the elders of his home church (who all spoke well of him in Acts 16:2) or by Paul himself.

Many commentators believe that the words which follow in v.18 and 19a are the words of prophecy that were made about Timothy on that occasion.

If so, then 3 things were said to him:-

- \* **He was to fight the good fight**
- \* **He was to hold on to his faith**
- \* **He was to keep a clear conscience**

If this was what was said about him, then what he was being asked to do now in Ephesus was certainly very much in keeping with these statements. Because in Ephesus...

- \* He was going to have to go on **fighting** for the truth of the Gospel.
- \* He was going to have to hold on to salvation by **faith**, and not given in to the false doctrine of salvation by works, or keeping of the law.
- \* And he had to **keep a clear conscience** before the Lord in all of his dealing; with everyone there in Ephesus. He must not show favouritism; he must deal with each individual honestly, with a clear conscience, before the Lord.

So Paul was simply pointing out to Timothy that the things that were said to him at his calling or commissioning for Christian Service had been said with places like Ephesus in mind. He maybe didn't fully see that then, but surely he should see that now.

It's interesting in 2 Timothy 4:6-8 to see that Paul uses the same phrases as he writes again to Timothy at the end of his own life. It was as if Paul had proven by example that such a life could be lived.

**I remember how I was saved**, as a child of 7, simply opening my heart to what I knew about Jesus then, thanking him for dying on the cross for my sin, and asking him to come into my life to be my Saviour. I knew Jesus did come in, and he has never left me since. As I said last time, my conversion was more like Timothy's, not so much like Paul's.

**But I also clearly remember my call to preach.** It came at the age of 19. It was while I was reading Jeremiah ch.1, just before I preached my first Sunday sermon in Sion Mills Baptist Church. It was the night before. See Jeremiah 1:4-10, 17-19. The significance of those words have come back to me again and again in various situations in my ministry since. As well as building and planting churches, there have at times been things that needed up-rooting or tearing down, things to destroy and overthrow, as well as things to build and plant. There is a weeding out to do, as well as a building up, and sometimes the weeding out is harder than the building up. But the God who called is the God who is faithful to His Word. Incidentally it was that very same passage, Jeremiah chapter one, that God used to call me back into pastoral ministry, after 4 years with SIM. In January 2008, Alistair Quigley came to preach in Portadown. He read this passage in the middle of his message, and then said, "*I'm glad I don't have a call like that!*" Well I knew that I did, and I knew from then on that God was calling me back to a consecutive preaching ministry. Before that year was out, you had called me to become your pastor here in Armagh.

Can I just say to anyone who would be thinking of going into any kind of Christian work, make sure first of all that you are truly converted to Christ.

And make sure secondly that you have been clearly called by God. Because when the going gets tough, it's those two things you must be able to come back to, and hold onto, to keep you going. Make sure God has clearly guided you, and that it's not just something you're taking on yourself.

So Paul reminded Timothy of his conversion and his calling.

## **2. He reminds him of the importance of faith and a clear conscience: v.19**

Again Paul is referring back to the things that were said to Timothy at his commissioning to the Lord's Work. Here Paul points out the importance of holding on to his faith and of keeping a clear conscience before the Lord. He tells us why this is so important in v.19: Because if you reject these things, you have actually ship-wrecked your faith! You're all washed up as a Christian! No good to anybody, and certainly no use to the Lord.

### **(i) Faith:**

Hebrews 11:1,6

*"Without **faith** it is impossible to please God."*

*"**Faith** is being sure of what you hope for, and certain of what you do not yet see."*

Faith is at the very heart of true Christianity.

Ephesians 2:8,9

**By Faith** is the only way that anybody can be saved or get right with God. It is certainly not by your own good works. Otherwise you could boast about how you got to heaven by your own ability; rather than by the finished work of Christ on the cross.

Romans 5:1

**By faith** is the only way we can be justified in the sight of a holy God. It's the only way we can find peace with God – It's by Faith. It's not by works at all.

This was what Timothy was going to have to fight for in Ephesus.

And we still have to fight for this doctrine in our day too.

The idea of salvation by works is sadly still so prevalent in this country.

### **(ii) A good conscience:**

(See 1:19, 1:5, 3:9, 4:2, 2 Tim 1:3, Titus 1:15,16)

Why does Paul emphasise so much the need for keeping your conscience clear in all of these verses?

Well sometimes people think that because they have got saved simply by putting their faith in Jesus, that they can then live their lives whatever way they want thereafter:

*"I'm saved: I've got my ticket for heaven, so I'll just live whatever way I like!"*

But nothing could be further from the truth. Somebody who claims to be saved, and yet lives a sinful, immoral, wicked life is kidding themselves that they're saved at all, but they will certainly not be able to kid God!

Our Conscience is a little voice within us, that doesn't often say anything, but when it does it should be listened to, because it's trying to tell us the difference between right and wrong.

In fact a Christian who claims to know God's Word the Bible, has a distinct advantage, because his or her conscience has been sensitized by the standard of God's Word, therefore such people are without excuse - they of all people should know the difference between right and wrong!

That's why Paul tells Timothy to hold onto a good conscience.

Don't reject it, or try to silence it, or refuse to listen to it, or go against it, because God could be using it to keep you on the right track.

The problem is that when you go against your conscience often enough, it can become de-sensitized, as Paul puts it in 1 Timothy 4:2 it's as if it has *"been seared with a hot iron."*

If that is the case with you, then you're on very dangerous ground.

Because a seared conscience will actually let you do all sorts of things that you would normally be horrified about.

That's why Paul warns Timothy - (and us) - to hold on to a good conscience!

This actually explains why some fine, respectable, Christian leaders, can sometimes fall into serious and open sin. It's because they fail to keep their conscience clear before the Lord. They stop keeping close accounts with God. Maybe they become too big for their boots. They think they're beyond falling into sin. They feel they have arrived spiritually. After all they've been teaching and counselling so many Christians for so long, they know this stuff inside out and they become complacent. If that happens, and it could happen to any of us, then we are on shaky ground, and we're heading for a fall. So this morning, all of us have been warned, keep hold of the faith (the true Gospel) and a clear conscience before the Lord. Finally, Paul's third point to Timothy:

## **3. He reminds him of two examples of ship-wrecked Christians (v.20)**

Hymenaeus and Alexander. Who were they? What had these men done?

**Hymenaeus:** This man is also mentioned in 2 Tim.2:17-19.

His problem seems to have been one of false doctrine.

He was teaching false doctrine concerning the Resurrection i.e. that it had already taken place! He was probably referring to the resurrection of all men at the end of the Age, when Christ returns – but he was claiming that it had already happened. If so they had all been left behind, and as you can imagine

it was rocking the faith of some weaker Christians. For example, they were wondering if they would ever see loved ones again, who had already died? His problem was one of teaching false doctrine.

**Alexander:** This man is harder to figure out. He is mentioned in 2 Tim 4:14-15. Paul mentions by way of warning to Timothy that Alexander *“had done them a great deal of harm.”* And *“The Lord would repay him for what he had done.”* Timothy was told to be on his guard because of him, and that he had strongly opposed the Gospel. Could it be that this man’s problem was one of immoral behaviour?

False doctrine does a certain amount of harm to a local church, but by and large the watching world doesn’t really pick up on the finer points of doctrine so much. But if a professing Christian falls morally, or lives a blatantly immoral lifestyle, then that’s a scandal, and the watching world certainly does pick up on that! And as Paul says, a great deal of harm can be done to a local church, and to the Gospel, by such behaviour in a so-called Christian’s life.

#### **What had Paul done to these men?**

Paul says in v.20:

*‘Whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.’*

What does that mean?

Well the same phrase is used in 1 Cor. 5:5.

This time it was to the Church in Corinth, and Paul again was the writer.

Here the problem was also a professing Christian living an immoral lifestyle.

A man was actually having a sexual relationship with his father’s wife (v.1).

This does probably not refer to his own mother, but to his step-mother.

The problem was that the Church was tolerating this, instead of dealing with it! The man was doing wrong, but the church was wrong as well to turn a blind eye, and not to deal with it!

Paul makes it clear in this passage what he means by **“handing someone over to Satan”** - They were to be put out of the fellowship (v.2) at least for a while, until there were signs of repentance (vs.4-5). N.B. (v.5b) You still want them to be saved in the end!

(vs.6-8) The important thing is to nip such behaviour in the bud before it spreads and comes to be seen as ‘acceptable’ by the rest of the church.

(vs.9-11) The rest of the church must ‘not associate with’ or eat with, a person who has been suspended from membership in this way. They must feel the draft of the lack of Christian fellowship. That, in itself, should make them want to repent, to come back to the Lord, and then back into the fellowship.

(vs.12-13) These verses make it clear that we do have the right to judge those who are in membership of the local church. We are not to be judgemental to those outside, but we do have the right to seek to correct the behaviour of those who are in membership, and who have submitted themselves to the discipline of the church. We are called to exercise discipline in a loving manner within the church. At all times the desire should be for the repentance and restoration to fellowship of the member who has fallen into open sin. In Corinth this seems to have happened in the end (See 2 Corinthians 2:5-11)

#### **Conclusion**

So this was the sort of thing that Timothy was going to have to do in Ephesus. Carrying out such discipline is never easy, and it is always heart-breaking. Though it is something the Lord calls us to do in his Word, as a local church, it is always a time when the Devil tries to get in and cause division, hurt and pain. But it still has to be done.

So we can understand why Timothy was tempted to leave, and run away from Ephesus when he knew that this was the sort of thing he was going to have to do there. In fact some of the people he was going to have to discipline, were probably some of the elders who Paul himself had appointed 5 years earlier! Now they had gone off the rails spiritually and were teaching false doctrine. It wasn’t going to be easy to remove them. But for the sake of the Gospel it had to be done. And it had to be done for the sake of the testimony of the Church in Ephesus.

So for the sake of the testimony of this church here in Armagh, and for the sake of our witness to the Gospel, each of us as members needs to hold on to our faith and keep a clear conscience before the Lord in both our doctrine and our behaviour!

May God help us to do so. Amen.

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