

# **Truth for Today**

*The Bible teaching radio programme*

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**Broadcast Date:** 18 February 2001

**No.** T0150

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## **Paul's First Letter to Timothy: Introduction and 1 Timothy 1:1-20**

Browsing through a gift shop recently, I came across a display of fridge magnets. The motto on one of them caught my eye. It read: "Parents can give their children two things - roots and wings." How important those two things are! As Christian parents particularly, we need to surround our children with love, the love of Christ. The same applies to those other children with whom we have contact, whether in our neighbourhood, in Sunday School or children's clubs. They need to see the love and power of Christ working in us so that they, in their turn, will turn to Him as their Saviour.

But there comes a time, too, as our children grow up when it's time to let them go, to do their own thing, to give them wings. We cannot forever bind them to ourselves. In letting go, we find that they will, of their own accord, want to return.

In a spiritual sense, roots and wings were what Paul gave to young Timothy. In the next few weeks, God willing, we are going to look at 1 Timothy, the first of the two letters which Paul wrote to Timothy. It will be helpful if we spend some time looking at the background to this letter as we trace it in the book of Acts.

### **Timothy - background**

On their first missionary journey (Acts 13:3-14:28), Paul and Barnabas came to Lystra, Timothy's home town (Acts 14:5-19). This would have been around AD 46 and Timothy might have been about 15 years old; Paul was possibly about 45 years old. We know that Timothy's father was a Greek and his mother a Jewess (Acts 16:1). Through the influence of his godly mother, Lois, and his godly grandmother, Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5), Timothy had been brought up from childhood to be well acquainted with the Holy Scriptures (2 Timothy 3:15). At that time, those Scriptures would, of course, have been our Old Testament.

### **Paul in Lystra - First missionary journey**

Until the visit of Paul and Barnabas to Lystra (Acts 14:5-19), it is likely that none of that family knew anything of the Lord Jesus, apart from the promises of His coming given in the Old Testament. Of that visit, Luke tells us, "They were preaching the gospel there" (Acts 14:7). It was probably as a result of Paul's preaching that Timothy came to saving faith in our Lord Jesus Christ. Certainly, Paul addresses this first letter "To Timothy, my true son in the faith" (1 Timothy 1:2). So Timothy's roots in Christ, his Saviour, began.

DL Moody, the American evangelist, once returned from an evangelistic service. He told his hosts that there had been 2½ conversions that night. "Two adults and a child?" queried his hosts. "No. Two children and an adult", he replied. You see, DL Moody reckoned that when a child was converted to Christ, that child might expect to have a whole lifetime of service to dedicate to Christ. An older person could only offer a much shorter time. Christian parent, grandparent, Sunday School teacher, youth club worker, whatever may be the contact you have with children, be assured of this that you can make no better investment in them than, from as early an age as possible, you teach them the Scriptures. So God in His mercy may use His word to their salvation.

Timothy was doubtless aware of subsequent events in Lystra. After a man, crippled from birth, was healed by Paul (Acts 14:8-10), the people worshipped Paul and Barnabas as gods (Acts 14:11-18). But when trouble-making Jews, antagonistic to the Gospel, arrived from Antioch, the people were persuaded to stone Paul. He was dragged out of the city and left for dead (Acts 14:19). Shortly after, Paul revived (whether naturally or miraculously we are not told) and the next day left for Derbe (Acts 14:20).

In this way, young Timothy was made aware of the cost of Christian discipleship. Indeed, when Paul and Barnabas passed through Lystra a few weeks later on their return journey home, they spent their time "strengthening the souls of the disciples, exhorting them to continue in the faith, and saying, 'We must through many tribulations enter the kingdom of God'" (Acts 14:22).

## Paul in Lystra - Second missionary journey

Some four or five years later, Paul, now on his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22), this time with Silas, returned to Lystra (Acts 16:1). So well had Timothy continued in the faith that we read of him that "he was well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). Incidentally, the name Timothy means 'honouring God', so young Timothy certainly lived up to his name! As a result, Paul chose Timothy to accompany them in their missionary efforts. It was on that journey that Paul and Silas were flogged at Philippi (Acts 16:16-24) and thrown into jail (Acts 16:25-34). Again Timothy was reminded of the cost of discipleship.

### Timothy with Paul

In this may a special bond of affection developed between Paul and Timothy, a father - son relationship, as it were. Indeed, some years later, Paul would write to the Philippians, "But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly ... for I have no one like minded, who will sincerely care for your estate. For all seek their own, not the things which are of Jesus Christ. But you know his proven character, that as a son with his father, he served with me in the gospel" (Philippians 2:19-22). In this close working relationship, Paul associates Timothy with himself in the writing of no fewer than seven of his letters - 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon, as the opening verse of each of these letters indicates.

### Timothy at Ephesus

But the time came when Timothy had to be given his wings, as it were. He had already been marked out for special service by Paul, both by prophetic word (1 Timothy 1:18) and by the laying on of hands (1 Timothy 4:14; 2 Timothy 1:6). As a part of that special service, Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to oversee the church there (1 Timothy 1:3). The church at Ephesus occupied no small place in Paul's heart. Paul first visited Ephesus on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:19-21) and then again on his third missionary journey when he spent some three years there (Acts 19:1-41). Then on his journey to Jerusalem and, ultimately, imprisonment in Rome, Paul sent for the elders of the church in Ephesus to meet him in Miletus (Acts 20:17-38) where he bade them a sorrowful farewell (Acts 20:17). It is a measure of Paul's confidence in Timothy that Paul was prepared to entrust to him the care of the church at Ephesus.

But this was no light task. The church there was being besieged by enemies of the cross of Christ who would destroy the Gospel. Timothy was probably not a well man and somewhat lacking in confidence (1 Timothy 4:12; 5:23). This first letter, then, was written by Paul to his son in the faith to give him guidance and help for his difficult mission.

### Paul's letters to Timothy

It is difficult to place the writing of this letter in the context of events described in the book of the Acts. It seems likely that, after the imprisonment described in Acts 28, Paul enjoyed a brief period of liberty during which this letter was written, probably around AD 63. Subsequently, Paul was rearrested, tried and condemned to a martyr's death. Paul's second letter to Timothy was written shortly before this martyrdom, probably around AD 64-65.

### 1 Timothy 1:1-20

The chapter can be divided as follows:

1. Paul's greeting: 1 Timothy 1:1-2;
2. Paul's charge to Timothy: 1 Timothy 1:3-11;
3. Paul's testimony: 1 Timothy 1:12-16;
4. Paul's doxology: 1 Timothy 1:17;
5. Paul's warning. 1 Timothy 1:18-20.

#### 1. Paul's greeting: 1 Timothy 1:1-2

Let's read 1 Timothy 1:1-2: "Paul, an Apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Saviour and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, to Timothy, my true son in the faith: grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord."

Paul's words breathe both firmness and deep affection. Paul's work for God was the result of direct commandment from God, and that as from God our Saviour - a favourite expression of Paul (see 1 Timothy 1:1, 2:3; Titus 1:3, 1:4, 2:10, 2:13, 3:4). It was also by commandment from the Lord Jesus Christ. So after Saul's conversion (Acts 9:1-9), when the Lord would send Ananias to him (Acts 9:10-19), the Lord says to Ananias, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine ..." (Acts 9:15).

It was important for Timothy to realise then, and for us to realise now, that Paul's message was derived from God and came with God's authority. What Paul writes in subsequent chapters about the role of men and women in the church (see 1 Timothy 2:1-15) and the qualifications for office (see 1 Timothy 3:1-13) in the church cannot be set aside as simply Paul's views. But Paul's greeting also reveals the deep fatherly affection he felt for Timothy. In that same affection, just before his martyrdom, Paul would write to Timothy, "Be diligent to come to me quickly" (2 Timothy 4:9). Timothy had seen at first hand some of the suffering and the difficulties experienced by Paul. Now Timothy was confronted by those same difficulties.

Paul wishes for Timothy those special blessings from God which had seen Paul through life and would do the same for Timothy:

- **Grace** - in a time of special affliction, the Lord had promised Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9).
- **Mercy** - "I obtained mercy" Paul will twice tell Timothy later in this chapter (1 Timothy 1:13, 16).
- **Peace** - "the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus", as Paul writes to the Philippians (Philippians 4:7).

Those same blessings from God are still available to us today, whatever our difficulties. Let's lay hold on them as Timothy no doubt did!

## 2. Paul's charge to Timothy: 1 Timothy 1:3-11

Paul was anxious that Timothy stand firm in Ephesus against attacks on the simplicity of "the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to [Paul's] trust" (1 Timothy 1:11). In that gospel there was no room for the pretensions of men's minds - "fables"; nor the supposed claims of the flesh - "endless genealogies" (1 Timothy 1:4). Nor was there room for those who would make the keeping of the law the basis for salvation. The law was, and is, good but it only demonstrates man's departure from God. The catalogue of the sins of mankind detailed in 1 Timothy 1:9-10 make for sorry reading. But what a terrible indictment, too, of mankind in this 21st century when so many of these sins are publicly flaunted. No, the law can only turn man in all his need to God for salvation. That salvation rests solely on the finished work of Christ at Calvary.

## 3. Paul's testimony: 1 Timothy 1:12-16

What a marvellous testimony this is! Whatever man's need, as the preceding verses have so clearly demonstrated, there is hope for even the chief of sinners! (1 Timothy 1:15) We must read Paul's words: "And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has enabled me, because He counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry, although I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent man; but I obtained mercy because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant, with faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. However, for this reason I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show all longsuffering, as a pattern to those who are going to believe on Him for everlasting life" (1 Timothy 1:12-16). What God could do for Paul, He could do for Timothy, and He can do for me and for you!

"Me first." As children, we were taught that we could never say those selfish words. Indeed, the adage is still true, **J**esus first, **O**thers next, **Y**ourself last spells J-O-Y. But this is no selfish claim on Paul's part. "Me first ... a pattern." That's it! Paul's desire was that he might so live Christ that others would realise that if God could do that for Paul, God could do that for them too! Christian friend, let your life, let my life, be patterns for others to see the grace of God at work!

## 4. Paul's doxology: 1 Timothy 1:17

So often in his epistles as Paul is reminded of the greatness of who God is and what He has done, he cannot but burst forth in a song of praise. So here, confronted with the mercy and grace of God, he exclaims, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17). Think of the mercy and grace of God shown to yourself; then lift your heart right now in a song of thanksgiving to Him. The words of the hymn are appropriate:

*Thank You, O my Father,  
For giving us Your Son.*

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## 5. Paul's warning verses 18-20

As we have already seen, Timothy had been marked out by a prophetic message for this special service ahead of him. Paul now reminds him of this so that he "may wage the good warfare" (1 Timothy 1:18). That was a warfare in which Paul had been engaged for many years now. Just before his martyrdom, Paul could say to Timothy, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8). Yes, there was a fight to be fought, there were battles to be won, but here in this letter, Paul reminds his son in the faith, Timothy, of all the resources in God which Paul had experienced and were there now for Timothy to draw on. Perhaps Timothy would recall the words Paul had penned with him to the Corinthians, "For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal [that is, fleshly] but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds" (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Yes, there were strongholds of the enemy, Satan, in Ephesus. But Timothy would be encouraged by these words of Paul to take up the battle against them. There would be those who, rejecting Paul's teaching and the dictates of a good conscience, would make shipwreck of whatever profession of Christianity had been theirs. The chapter ends on a very solemn note: "... of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme" (1 Timothy 1:20).

To maintain the purity of the early church, God gave special power to the Apostles and those connected with them. So Paul writes to the Corinthians concerning the man guilty of serious sexual immorality, "In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:4-5). The eternal security of the believer in the Lord Jesus is not called in question here. The promise of the Lord Jesus is absolutely sure and certain: "My sheep hear My voice and I know them, and they follow Me. And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand" (John 10:27-28). But in certain serious cases of sin, the life of a believer on earth may be terminated rather than he carry on dishonouring God (see Acts 5:1-11).

So Timothy is encouraged to carry on in his work for the Lord at Ephesus, knowing that all the resources of a Saviour God are at his disposal.

We close on Paul's note of praise: "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1 Timothy 1:17).

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