

## New Testament Survey for Beginners: Part 15 – 1 Timothy

Timothy was from Lystra. The son of a Greek father and Jewish mother, he was still very young when he first heard Paul preach. It was on the apostle's second missionary journey, however, that he revisited Lystra and chose Timothy as a travelling companion. To avoid unnecessary resentment among the Jews, Timothy agreed to be circumcised, and, without doubt, the early training he received from his mother in the Old Testament Scriptures was a great help to him as well.

Timothy was timid and retiring, which was probably due in part to his youth and lack of physical strength. He was not lacking, though, in moral courage or in depth of spiritual commitment, as we learn from the pastoral epistles, and these strengths were probably the reason why Paul chose Timothy to help him in the first place. He was appointed, after all, to rebuke false teachers, to direct public worship, to assist in the choice of office-bearers, to show wisdom in the church and to offer his own life an example and inspiration to others.

Paul wrote chapter 1 to remind Timothy why he left him in Ephesus, that he might warn others against false teaching and seek to prevent those poorly equipped from teaching what they do not understand (1:3-7). The law of God is a good thing and profitable, for instance, but it is meant to show men what sinners they are; it is not meant to be relied upon as a means of saving anyone (1:8-11).

The apostle then gives himself as an example of how he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and insolent, yet he was shown mercy because he did those things in ignorance. At the same time, Paul gives himself as an example of the Lord's mercy, how great it is in that even he, the chief of sinners, might be saved. He then calls on Timothy, if he is to serve the Lord effectively, to maintain a sincere faith and a good conscience, unlike some who have carelessly fallen into error (1:12-20).

Chapter 2 is a call to prayer (2:1-8). We are to pray for all kinds of people, including kings and others in authority, that we may live in peace with men and in reverence toward God. It is good so to pray, for God desires the salvation of all classes and conditions of Adam's fallen race, of Gentiles as well as Jews.

Let women dress modestly, not teaching men or exercising authority over them, for Adam was created first and it was Eve who was deceived (2:9-15). Note this clear teaching on complementarianism, that men and women are equal, yes, but they serve different roles and exercise different functions. What an important lesson this is for our own age, too, how it is that we are to recognize and honour our God-appointed biological differences, not to give way to gender dysphoria but help those who are confused to accept what God has made them to be and to do what He has ordained for them to do. Do we seriously think that we can be happy, or that the Lord Himself will be pleased, if we try to reverse that order?

Chapter 3 lists the qualifications for men to be elected as office-bearers, both elders and deacons, in the local church. (The terms 'bishop', or 'overseer', and 'elder' are used interchangeably as we see from Acts 20.) In each case the focus is on a demonstration of character and proven service (3:1-13). Once again, what an important lesson this is for us as Christians to follow still today. On the one hand, there are many men in our day who do not want to be office-bearers in the church because they think they are too busy and have more useful things to do. Oh, but what better work can one do for the Lord, or more vital to the spiritual wellbeing of others, than to serve as an elder or deacon in the house of God? On the other hand, there are too many men as well who, if they do seek church office, desire the status they think it gives them rather than the opportunity of offering humble service to the Lord. Such men are clearly unsuitable for office.

If the office-bearers are important, it is because the church itself plays a vital role in what God is doing in the world (3:14-16). We all belong to a family, a family in which we first learn the fundamental lessons of discipline and instruction. Well, the Church is the family of God where we learn what it means to fear the Lord, and each local church is appointed to serve as the pillar and ground of the truth to the people of that community. No other institution is established or equipped to proclaim the whole counsel of God, to persuade people of its teachings and to defend its moral standards for holy living before the eyes of a watching world, as is the church. Whenever we see the kingdom of God enlarged and enhanced, what is it that makes the church effective in this task? It is the finished work of Christ. Here is the mystery of godliness: It is not sinners deciding on their own to turn over a new leaf, but God working in them to will and to do His good pleasure solely on the grounds of the death and resurrection of the Man Jesus.

The second half of this letter, beginning chapter 4, is not only practical instruction for Timothy particularly, but for all ministers of the gospel generally, regardless of when and where they are called to serve. Paul gives warning of a coming apostasy within the churches, an apostasy which may be spurred on by outside influences, but is essentially the result of carelessness on the part of those who profess faith within the church (4:1-11). This is not necessarily a falling away at the end of the world, but what can happen, and will happen, in any period of spiritual lethargy in these latter times. Let Timothy and every pastor give faithful instruction in these matters, therefore, focusing on spiritual exercises, not allowing himself or others to be distracted and pulled off course.

Timothy is a young man, but he is not to let anyone undermine his ministry on account of it (4:12-16). To prevent that from happening, he is to set an example to others, to give attention to teaching, to stir up the gift of his calling, to meditate on what he has been set apart by God to do and to give himself in total commitment to it. Because of his youth, he should not rebuke others in a way that may prove offensive, but simply exhort them with familial respect and propriety (5:1,2).

The apostle addresses the matter of widows who are in need of special care (5:3-16). The principle is that, if they have family, they are to be supported by them; if they are without family, they are to be supported by the church. No family should ever abandon their God-given role of looking after and caring for their own; that begins with the parents providing for their children, of course, but often ends with the children providing for their parents in old age, and so it should be if that is needed. This reduces the burden on the church to look after them. There will always be widows and others in special need who have no family to take on these duties, however, in which cases, if no other means of provision is available, it is essential that the church family be there to help.

A distinction is to be made between widows over sixty years of age and those under sixty. A widow under sixty, by virtue of her being cared for too early and might have too little to do, may be inclined to become distracted, to become a gossip and a busybody. Because of that, these younger widows should be encouraged instead to marry again, bear children if they are able to do so, and continue managing their house as they have done in the past.

Elders who serve faithfully are to be respected and their counsel heeded (5:17-25). Here a distinction is made between ruling elders and teaching elders, and the teaching elder, or minister, like anyone in special need, is to be financially supported. Paul worked as a tent-maker to earn his own wages, but that arrangement was temporary at best, and there were times when he regretted doing so (see 2 Corinthians 12). The biblical principle is clear, that the labourer is worthy of his wages and should therefore be paid.

Any accusation against an elder should be upheld by supporting witnesses, and he, if found guilty, should be openly rebuked before the assembly as a warning to others. This is a formal charge against an elder, after all, not informal pastoral counsel to an erring brother or sister. Such charges are to be handled without prejudice or partiality, without hasty judgment or sharing in other people's sins.

Bondservants are to honour their masters so that God Himself should not be blasphemed, and let them not resent doing so even if those masters are brothers in Christ, because those who are so benefited are beloved of the Lord (6:1-10). Some men pursue outward godliness as a means of gain, and we are not to associate with them in doing that, for the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil which bring many sorrows. Pursuing inward godliness for Christ's sake, on the other hand, and being content with that as an end in itself without material or social advancement, results in a far better and everlasting gain.

Timothy is called to flee such worldly ways, to pursue a genuine godliness instead, to fight the good fight of faith, and to continue in that until Christ, who witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate, comes again, and to do so knowing that Christ Himself will reveal such commitment to duty in due time (6:11-16). Finally, Timothy is instructed to command the rich to trust in the living God who gives His people everything they need, to be rich in good works – ready to give and willing to share – storing up for themselves a good foundation for all that is yet to come (6:17-19).

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