1-28-24

1 Timothy 1:1-20

Timothy was a young man who became an associate of the apostle Paul. More importantly, he became a disciple of Jesus Christ. While he often traveled with Paul on missionary journeys, Paul also gave him other assignments. Paul had left Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus. Keep in mind that Ephesus was heavily populated and although the church certainly interacted with each other, there would have been multiple house churches where different congregations would meet. So Timothy wasn’t just trying to keep one church congregation straight.

As the Gospel spread and new church congregations were established, problems would immediately arise with false teaching. Satan wasted no time in attacking the growing body of Christ. Incidentally, this is one strong indication that Christianity is the true way to God; it undergoes such fierce resistance; even right from the beginning. Most of the epistles that are in the New Testament deal at least partly with some form of false teaching and false teachers.

While most of the New Testament letters are written to the churches, the two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are actually Paul writing to the ones acting as pastors. He is trying to give them encouragement, advice, and remind them of their primary task which is the Gospel. As Jude wrote to the Christian churches, “*I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints.*” You see, this isn’t a job that is only for pastors; it is for every Christian.

And each of us is called to stand strong in contending for the faith handed down through the apostles. That doesn’t mean standing in the streets screaming about Jesus; but it does mean being unwavering in confessing Him as the one and only Saviour of the world. It does mean not negotiating on what is proclaimed in the Bible to be right and wrong. Jesus warned the church in Laodicea that because they were lukewarm, “*I will spit you out of My mouth.*” That warning goes for all of us. Take a firm stand for Jesus, no matter what it costs you.

Along those same lines, Jesus Himself asks in Luke 6:46, “*Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?*” There is a huge difference between confessing and acting. Confessing Christ is necessary, but if it doesn’t lead to action it is worthless. As James tells us, “*Faith without works is dead*.” Put another way, the difference between confessing Christ and acting on that confession could be the difference between eternal life and eternal death.

Each of us must ask ourselves that question and search deeply for the answer: Do we simply confess Christ or do we have the works to show the confession is from our heart? Do we simply say “Lord, Lord” or do we do what Jesus says? Don’t misunderstand me; our salvation is through faith alone in Christ, but our works are the evidence of that faith.

Even though 1 Timothy was written specifically to a pastor, it is for all Christians; again, all of us are to contend for the faith. All of us need to be on guard for heresies and false teachings. And some of them can be very difficult to detect. That is why all of us need to read and study our Bibles and be in fellowship with other Christians. Martin Luther once wrote: “It’s a great thing to know that one has the very sure and infallible Word of God.” That’s what the Bible is and that’s why we can trust it. And because it is the Word of God, we know we mustn’t mess with it. If it says something is wrong, it is wrong.

Attending church is important because that is one of the main places for fellowship with other Christians. In Ecclesiastes 4:12 we are told: *And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart.* Yes, we can and should study on our own; but it is then easier for us to misinterpret a passage, or to come under the influence of a false teacher. We are safer and stronger as a church body.

Paul has already left for Macedonia leaving Timothy as head elder or pastor of the churches in Ephesus. We can see from the letter that Paul is writing about problems that were already there in the churches; both he and Timothy know what they are. The frustrating thing for us is that we don’t. We have a general idea but Paul doesn’t spell out the specifics of what is going on. Apparently, we don’t need to know.

For one thing, there seem to be some people who are teaching things that are outside of the Gospel. Paul mentions “*strange doctrines*”. This would include any spiritual doctrine taught as fact that is not substantiated in the Bible; or is somehow twisting or overemphasizing something that is in the Bible. For example, in 1 Corinthians 15:29, Paul makes the statement: *Otherwise, what will those do who are baptized for the dead?* This is the only place in the Bible that something like this is mentioned. It is not explained at all and appears to be an example Paul is using to make a point about something else. He does not say it is an acceptable practice. Yet some religious groups will make a point of being baptized for someone who is dead. This is a strange doctrine.

Paul says to not pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. The myths could be coming from Judaizers, who taught that even Christians had to follow all the Mosaic laws. There were plenty of Jewish stories that came along with them. Additionally it could have been from those who tried to incorporate Pagan practices and beliefs into Christianity. Neither of these could be accepted because they would be adding to the apostolic faith.

While genealogies are important in the Bible because they establish the lineage of Jesus and thus that God’s promises are fulfilled, they can also cause problems when someone uses them to establish some connection that may not be there. Regardless, all three of these things cause speculation and there is no room for speculation in the Gospel. Speculation is an easy trap to fall into because it can be very interesting. The problem is that it takes away from the furthering of Christ’s Kingdom, which is to be our main focus.

Paul goes on to speak of some who try to teach matters of the law, but as he says, they don’t know what they are talking about. This is almost comical if it wasn’t so tragic. These people are teaching in order to be glorified themselves; to make themselves important. They are not teaching to further the Kingdom of God.

Paul makes an interesting statement in verse 9 where he says that the law is not for a righteous person but for those who are lawless and rebellious. How do we consider this? Let’s start by considering who is righteous; according to the Bible, no one is. But we must also keep in mind that those who are followers of Jesus are covered in His righteousness. We are now under a covenant of grace; not the Mosaic covenant of the law. We can still use the law to understand what is pleasing to God, but our salvation is through Christ not works.

Now, the law itself won’t save those rebellious ones Paul mentions here, but it does serve a purpose. The law should convict them of sin. The law should show them that they are in deep trouble and that they need help. In turn this should lead them to Christ who is the only One who can help. It certainly doesn’t always do this, but that is the hope.

And here we begin to see an overarching theme of this chapter: that God wants people to come to Him for salvation and all we do ought to be focused on advancing Christ’s Kingdom. That is the purpose of the Gospel; that is the faith once for all handed down to the saints: salvation through Jesus Christ. And it is open to any who will accept it. God is not a harsh judge, just waiting to punish for the smallest infraction; as it says in 2 Peter 3:9, “*The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance*.” God wants you to turn to Him; but He won’t force you.

Paul goes on to list some particularly repulsive sins including murder, even of parents; all forms of sexual immorality such as fornication, adultery, and homosexuality; kidnapping which covers human trafficking; all forms of lying. In Galatians 5, Paul gives a similar list and says, “*those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*” However, in 1 Corinthians 6, Paul again gives this list and finishes with, “*Such were some of you*.” The point being that no matter what someone has done in the past, if they become convicted of sin and recognize their need for Jesus and turn to Him, they will be saved. That’s what God wants. And that’s what the Christian wants.

After this list of heinous sins, Paul talks about himself. He says that he was a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Even though he was a pharisee and zealous for the Law and for God, he completely missed the point of the Law showing that we need Christ. He violently persecuted the Christians, having them jailed and sometimes killed. But he was shown the true extent of his sinfulness on the Damascus road when Jesus asked him the question, “*Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?*” As he was persecuting Christians, he was actually persecuting Jesus, who is God: He was committing blasphemy.

Thus, even after listing all the sins that we consider so bad, Paul said that what he did was worse than those things: He referred to himself as the foremost of sinners. Yet he was forgiven. And this is the wonderous hope for all of us. As he says in verse 15, “*It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners*.” Paul himself became an example to all sinners that there is hope of salvation in Jesus Christ; in Jesus Christ alone.

In verse 18, Paul comes back to reminding Timothy of what he has to do. He brings up prophecies that Timothy received to remind him to fight the good fight, to keep the faith, and to maintain a good conscience. I’m sure the prophecies contained some specifics regarding Timothy’s future and his calling; we don’t know exactly what they were. But keep this in mind, none of us need a prophecy to tell us that we are all held to the same standards. We are to fight the good fight of confessing Christ as Lord and standing on the Bible. We are to keep the faith that we learn from God’s word given by the Holy Spirit. We are to maintain a good conscience because we are call to be a holy people. None of these things are trifles; they come from God.

Now Paul names two people who have not kept the faith and would be known to Timothy. In these verses we don’t find out what they’ve done. These names are brought up again in 2 Timothy and they are probably the same people. They have both somehow rejected the faith and the necessity of a good conscience.

It appears that Hymenaeus has taught some of the people that the final resurrection had already taken place and they had missed it. Paul says that Alexander the coppersmith has caused him much harm. Although there is not much detail, we can see that these two characters have caused a lot of problems. So Paul deals with them: he hands them over to satan. It’s hard to tell exactly what this means. While there is certainly a place for church discipline, I don’t think any of us need to try to turn someone over to satan. Remember that Paul is an apostle; we are not.

I think the main point for us is to see the reason that Paul turned them over: so they would be taught not to blaspheme. The hope here is that they were truly Christians who had gotten off track and by whatever means possible they would be brought back into a good relationship with Christ. There is a similar occurrence in 1 Corinthians 5:5, Paul says: *I have decided to deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*

Being handed over to satan and the destruction of one’s flesh are harsh, but if that’s what it takes to save one’s soul from hell, it is worth it. It all comes back to the Gospel, that any one who turns to Jesus will be saved; and that is to be the hope and prayer of every Christian: that even the foulest of sinners would be saved.

We each have the same job as Timothy; to be watchful that false teaching does not make its way into the church. While the early church had to worry about traveling false teachers and those within the church turning from the Gospel, we now have the television, the internet, social media, and all manner of printed material. All of these will give teaching that deviate from the Gospel; the precious gift of God that means our salvation.

Cling tightly to Jesus; don’t allow yourself to be led astray by all the voices in the world that are against Him, that try to deny His commands, that try to deny Him. He is our Saviour and we owe Him our eternal life. There is no price we can pay for Him that is too great.

Prayer

Almighty God, so many in this world that You created will not recognize You. As Your word tells us, satan is currently the prince of this world, and many follow him, many are led astray by him. He leads so many into damnation who are of the world; and although he cannot have the souls of the Christians, he can shipwreck their lives, making them unprofitable servants.

So Lord, we pray for this Your church. Give us discernment by Your Holy Spirit, that we may recognize false teaching and heresy, and not succumb to its alluring call. Give us a heart that desires Your word and write it on our hearts, that it may always be there to guard us. Give us Christian brothers and sisters to help us stay on the straight and narrow path to salvation.

Then Lord, we ask for a desire for lost souls. Pull our hearts so that we will take time to pray for those we know are lost; no matter how repulsive to us they may be. Keep in our minds Lord that we were at one time equally repulsive to You.

Thank You for the Gospel; it is the means of eternal life and it comes only from You.

We pray these things in Jesus’ name

Amen