*Choosing Faithfulness*

Introduction to 1 Timothy

8/20/23

Last week we started a series on 1 Timothy, which I have titled *Choosing Faithfulness*. We got to know the church at Ephesus by tracing its history through the pages of the NT. Today, we want to continue laying the foundation for this study by doing three things. First, we want to get to know Timothy, the pastor to whom this letter is address. Second, we want to look at four key verses that capture 1 Timothy’s core message. Finally, we will survey the book to see how its message unfolds.

So first, we want to get to know Timothy. Timothy is introduced into the narrative of the NT in Acts 16, where we learn that he was from a multiethnic family. His father was a Greek, while his mother was a Jew. 2 Timothy 1:5 tells us that his grandmother Lois was the first person in his family to believe. Then his mother Eunice. After that Timothy. It is likely that all three came to faith in Christ during Paul’s ministry at Derbe during his first missionary journey. It appears that Timothy’s father is out of the picture by we meet him.

Acts 16 takes place at the beginning of Paul’s second missionary journey. Paul began this trip by first visiting the churches he had previously planted. While in Derbe, the saints spoke highly of Timothy, who was probably still a teenager at the time. Paul was so impressed with him that he made him a part of his church planting team. Timothy is mentioned throughout the narrative of Paul’s second and third missionary journeys. He was involved in planting churches in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Corinth, and Ephesus. In addition to helping start these churches, Paul sent Timothy on various occasions to do pastoral work in Philippi, Corinth, and as we learned last week, Ephesus. The assignments in Corinth and Ephesus were difficult ones, as both churches were struggling when Paul sent Timothy to them. We also learn in Hebrews 13:23 that he spent time in prison for his faith. Aside from maybe Silas, there was no other member of Paul’s ministry team whom he trusted more than Timothy. In Philippians 2, Paul says of Timothy: *I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare… you know his proven worth, that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father* (Phil. 2:20, 22). Indeed, when Paul was awaiting execution, it was to Timothy that he turned for strength, and comfort as expressed at the end of 2 Timothy.

In addition to being Paul’s main man for the hardest pastoral assignments, Timothy was active in Paul’s writing ministry. His name appears with Paul’s at the beginning of 2 Corinthians, Philippians, Colossians, 1&2 Thessalonians, and Philemon, which is nearly half of Paul’s letters. What his role was in the formation of these letters, we do not know, but Timothy’s name appears alongside Paul’s as an authorial participant.

Now we know that Timothy was young when he joined Paul’s team. People guess he was anywhere between 16-20 at the time. You may be familiar with Paul’s encouragement in 1 Tim. 4:12 *let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity, show yourself an example to those who believe.* From this verse, many conclude that Timothy was timid, so Paul must encourage him to be bold. I take it in a little different way. Older people tend to brush off young leaders when these younger leaders reveal weaknesses in their lives. Timothy is in Ephesus to deal with elders who have gone off the rails theologically. I can tell you from personal experience when, as a young pastor I had to address a man who was old enough to be my grandfather about his unbiblical approach to his church leadership, his first response was to point out my age and suggest that I keep to my proper place until I grew up some. Now, this was just a deflection attempt to avoid dealing with his sin; but I can just imagine how Timothy, who lived in a culture that valued age far more than ours does, faced this challenge. Paul knew this letter would be read publicly. So, I think this statement was less for Timothy and more for the church. Paul is telling the church that age is not what qualifies a man for ministry. Rather it is rather spiritual maturity. That is why Paul tells Timothy not to worry about his age but to focus on his conduct.

Now there is more we could say about Timothy, but what I want us to see for now is how Timothy is a man of character to whom Paul entrusted the most difficult ministry responsibilities. You don’t send clueless youth to deal with entrenched leaders who are corrupting the church with doctrinal error. Timothy was the man for the hour, for we learned last week that God used him to turn things around in Ephesus.

Next, we want to consider four key statements that reveal Paul’s purpose for writing this letter. First, we see the problem Paul is addressing in 1:3-4: *As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith.* We need not spend long on this point, for we have already identified this problem. But Paul is making three things clear: 1) there are some individuals teaching strange doctrines in the church; 2) this teaching is negatively affecting the church’s health; 3) Timothy was to deal with the teachers and their strange doctrines.

Second, we see the purpose for Paul’s writing. 3:14-15 says *I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.* We will wait until we get to Ch. 3 to really pull these verses apart; but in a nutshell, Paul is saying that the church possesses a defined body of truth that determines how we conduct ourselves within the life of the church. 1 Timothy reads as a church manual. Men, you are to do this; women you are to serve in the church in these ways; here are the standards by which you identify leaders in the church and how you remove them if they disqualify themselves; this is how you manage your benevolent funds; and so on.

There are two ways in which the church preserves sound doctrine. First and foremost, it must be taught. This is why, in 2 Timothy 2:2 Paul will tell Timothy *the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also*. Teach people the truth, and they will be able to identify error when it comes.

The second safeguard is biblically informed, well-thought-through practices. I once read a quote that went along these lines: *no one likes to think about or work on church polity. It oftentimes can feel like a distraction from the true work of the church. But when you need your polity to work for you, you will be really glad you have it in order.* In other words, no one likes church polity, until you need clearly defined processes to deal with a problem. Paul taught that church life should be done decently and in order (1 Cor. 14:40). Following biblically informed processes safeguards the church from those who would like to introduce theological innovations. It is not fool proof, but it really helps when a church has their doctrines clearly defined as well as how those beliefs determine how they function.

The problem in Ephesus was the presence of false teachers whose corrupt doctrine was hurting the church. Paul’s purpose in writing Timothy was to lay out proper beliefs and their accompanying actions. Paul teaches that godly behavior begins with sound doctrine. Therefore, he expresses this goal in 1:5: *the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* A maturing Christian is one whose growing knowledge of God continually transforms the daily expression of their faith.

We will pull this verse apart in a couple of weeks. What we need to see here is how proper belief leads to proper behavior. The goal of all Christian doctrine is love…love of God and love of neighbors as ourselves. This summarizes every command in the bible. Biblical love is the result of tangible things. It is the product of a pure heart. A heart controlled by sin will not love God or man like they should. It is also the product of a good conscience. If it is possible to have a good conscience, it is also possible to have a corrupt one. Thus, we need a sincere faith in the revealed body of truth contained in God’s word. Sincere belief in this revealed body of truth informs our consciences and purifies our hearts. These things work together to cultivate God’s love in our hearts.

So we see the problem of false teaching. The purpose of the letter is to outline proper conduct in the church. The goal is to produce loving Christians who are spiritual providers rather than spiritual consumers. Yet dealing with entrenched leadership who are corrupting the church is hard, unpleasant work. Timothy does not have an easy job on his hands. So why should he bother? Well, our last key verse speaks to what motivates faithful service. 4:10 says *it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.* Why would any of us sacrifice for the purposes of Christ? Why do hard things, be criticized, give up your Sundays to be at worship, serve in Sunday school or Wednesday night, give your time and resources for others, or do anything else mature Christians do? Because our hope is fixed on the living God who saved us from the slavery of sin! Our passion in life should be to glorify Him in all that we do. Paul and Timothy did not do what they did because they were man pleasers (see Gal. 1:10). Instead, their hope was fixed on God, and that is what drove them to sacrificially serve the church at great personal cost.

Finally, we want to end this morning with a quick survey of 1 Timothy, so we understand the flow of the letter. After a typical greeting, Paul wastes no time diving into the issues, as chapter 1 focuses on the false teachers’ presence in the church. Vs. 3-11 focus on the nature of the false teaching and the faulty lifestyles it produced. Vs. 10-11 make it clear that their teaching had departed from the gospel.

Yet Paul has not lost sight of grace, for in vs. 12ff, he rehearses his own checkered past. Yet God’s grace was sufficient for him. But there was a big difference between Paul and the false teachers Timothy was confronting. Paul had started in ignorance but came to an understanding of the truth. By God’s grace, he was now a minister. Yet the opponents in Ephesus had started with truth, been made ministers, then moved into error. Paul had turned from sin to salvation. These men had turned from salvation to sin and error.

Having identified the primary problem, Paul begins to methodologically address core elements of church life. Chapter 2 tackles three subjects: 1) the importance of prayer; 2) the general role and conduct of men in church life; and 3) the general role and conduct of women in church life. 2:11-15 are some of the most misunderstood and misapplied verses in the NT.

Chapter 3 focuses on the qualifications of spiritual leadership within the church. It identifies the two biblically sanctioned offices of elder and deacon and defines the character required of those whom we appoint to them. Given the leadership challenges facing the church at Ephesus, this is an important chapter for them to work through.

Chapter 4 carries the subject of church leadership forward by focusing on what elders do. It opens with a brief mention of the false teachers and some of their faulty doctrines. But for most of the chapter, Paul instructs Timothy on the true nature of pastoral ministry. This serves two purposes. 1) it instructs Timothy on what his ministry priorities should be; 2) it teaches the congregation what to look for in a faithful minister. This was important because some recognized leaders were on the wrong side of the issues. How do the sheep know who to follow?

Chapter 5 takes on two more important topics. First, in vs. 3-16 Paul gives some guidelines for the church’s charitable efforts. The focus is on widows, but the principles laid down inform wise stewardship of the Lord’s funds to ensure that the money given helps people towards godliness rather than enabling idleness. While the subject of money is being dealt with, Paul turns his attention towards the compensation of elders before addressing how to remove an elder who is caught in sin.

Chapter 6 closes the letter with a general call to godliness. Paul addresses for a third time how bad doctrine produces bad behavior. Those who wish to be godly are to have nothing to do with these teachers’ corrupt doctrine. But more important than this is our intentional pursuit of godliness. This involves fleeing what is wrong and pursuing what is right. Both take work, intentionality, and perseverance. Or to put it another way, faithfulness to Christ does not happen by chance. It is a willful choice each of us makes as we daily deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Jesus just as He commanded us to. My prayer is that our study of this letter will help us choose faithfulness.