*More than a Greeting*

1 Timothy 1:1-2

8/27/23

For two weeks, we laid a foundation for our study of 1 Timothy. Today we begin our verse-by-verse odyssey through the letter. It is always tempting, especially after spending two weeks on introductory material, to brush over the introductory verses. We know Paul and Timothy are and what their relationship to one another was; and if you have read or studied Paul’s letters before, you are familiar with his standard greeting of grace and peace. But there are riches in these verses to be enjoyed if we will slow down long enough to see them.

Paul’s follows the normal pattern for letter writing in his day. First, he identified himself as the author. Given the close relationship between Paul and Timothy, it would seem that stating his name should be enough. But Paul’s intention is for the church to listen in on his instructions to Timothy. So, his further comments are for the congregation, not Timothy.

Paul defines himself as an apostle of Jesus Christ. This title points to his authority in the church. There were three basic qualifications for being an apostle: 1) You had to be an eye-witness to Jesus’ resurrection. 2) You had to be personally called and 3) discipled by Christ. There have only been 12 men to hold this office in the history of the church. These men were granted unique authority for preaching the gospel and communicating God’s truth. When an apostle spoke from God, it came with the authority of God.

By stating his apostleship, Paul was reminding the Ephesian believers of his authority. His instructions are not food for thought, suggestions, or one way of doing things among various options. He wrote by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He was God’s mouthpiece in this moment for the church. The opponents that Timothy was dealing with did not have this authority. So Paul is setting himself apart as a unique authority in the debates happening in the church.

Yet Paul is not a power-hungry man who had elevated himself to a position of influence. He holds his apostleship because of the command of God. If you know the story of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9, you know that he was actively persecuting the church when Christ arrested him with His grace on the road to Damascus. His conversion was accompanied by Christ’s call to be the apostle to the gentiles. Becoming an apostle was not his idea. It was God’s plan. More than that, it was God’s command. Paul fulfilled his ministry in obedience to God’s will. This produced both humility and confidence in Paul. He was humble because, as we will see in vs. 12ff., he was fully aware of his unworthiness. He was what he was by the grace of God, not personal merit. Yet God’s command also gave him the confidence to fulfill his ministry. He served by the will and command of God. He could work for His pleasure, using the gifts God had given him to fulfill the ministry God had assigned them.

I pray regularly that God would raise up pastors and missionaries from the youth in our church. Yet, I do not believe that one should enter such work lightly. Because of the unique challenges and opposition experienced in ministry, one should only enter this work if they are confident of God’s call on their lives. A strong sense of God’s calling keeps you humble when ministry is going well, for you know it is His work and not yours; and it keeps you confident in challenging times because you know God has placed you there for such a time as this. May God raise up faithful leaders from our midst to serve His church.

Notice how Paul defines the God who commanded him to serve as an apostle. He defines the Father as *our Savior.* Usually, that term is reserved for Jesus, because He did the work that accomplished our salvation. But there are a few times in the NT, and many times in the OT, where the Father is defined as Savior. Each member of the Godhead is active in accomplishing salvation. The Father planned it in eternity past and is active in drawing sinners to Christ (Jn. 6:44). The Son accomplished it through His sinless life, sacrificial death, and victorious resurrection. The Spirit then applies it to individuals through the miracle of the new birth (Jn. 3). In this we see the saving nature of God and can rightly call any member of the Trinity *Savior* for the role they play in accomplishing our salvation.

But it was not just the Father who commanded Paul to be an apostle. Christ Jesus also issued the command. That was one of the qualifications of being an apostle: you must be personally called to it by Christ. Christ is defined as *our hope.* Paul has not lost his Christ-centeredness. He would heartily sing with us *what is our hope in life and death? Christ alone, Christ alone! And what is our only confidence? That our souls to Him belong.*

So, Paul is the author. Next, the recipient of the letter is identified. It is Timothy, who we got to know last week. So we are familiar with his close relational and ministerial ties with Paul. What we need to note here is how Paul defines Timothy for the benefit of the church. He calls him *my true child in faith.* Again, this is significant because of the crossroads the church at Ephesus was at. Rival doctrines with their rival lifestyles were clamoring for attention. How do people know which leaders are orthodox and which are not? They did not have a completed NT to turn to. When Paul calls Timothy his true child in the faith, he meant that Timothy aligned with the orthodox message of the apostles; therefore, the congregation should follow him. Surely there were others in the church who remained faithful to Christ who would stand with Timothy in the truth. So, Paul is helping the congregation know which voices to listen to, and which voices needed silenced. As we touched on last week, this remains an important need for us today, for not every talking head on the radio, TV, podcast, or in pulpits is faithful to the gospel. We need discernment to know who is a true child of the faith, and who is an imposter.

So, the author of this letter is Paul, and the recipient is Timothy; yet Paul intended for the church to listen in on their conversation. Finally, Paul pronounces a blessing. There are several things to note about it. First, these are attributes he desires for Timothy to experience. Second, they come from God. Finally, they are customized expressions of common 1st century greetings.

The custom greeting in 1st century Greco-Roman culture was to wish grace on someone. By that, they expressed the desire for the person to experience the favor of the gods. The common Jewish greeting of the day was Shalom, or peace. That expressed the desire for a person to experience the peace of God. Paul couples these common greetings together while also Christianizing them. Grace points to God’s ongoing forgiveness and enablement of His people to live for His purposes. Peace points to the tranquility of His relationship with His people and the stability that comes to them because of their relationship with God.

Sandwiched between these two standard greetings is another word that Paul rarely uses as a greeting. It is mercy. Mercy speaks to God’s compassion towards and concern about His people. Given the challenging work Timothy was engaged in at Ephesus, Paul desired for God to show Timothy His mercy. Timothy needed divinely supplied grace, mercy, and peace if he was to see this challenging work through to the end.

On the surface, that is the greeting. Paul is the author; Timothy is the recipient, and the desire is for the experience of God’s grace, mercy, and peace. But there is one more feature worth noticing in the text. In the original Greek, these two verses contain 32 words; 11 of them are used to identify God five separate times. Paul was an apostle *of Jesus Christ.* He served at the command of *God our Savior* and of *Christ Jesus* our hope. Grace, mercy, and peace come from *God the Father* and *Christ Jesus our Lord.* This left me asking why Paul spent a full third of the words in the introduction repeatedly naming God. I want to be careful not to read more into the text than is here, but I think there is a purposefulness to this.

At its core, the problem of liberalism is not its distortion of or departure from God’s word. That is a real problem, but it is a symptom of the disease, not the disease itself. Liberalism is rooted in the age-old desire of man to replace God with themselves. Dr. Micheal Easley has a great line he uses: *God created man in His own image, and man has been trying to create God in their image ever since.* That ultimately is what liberalism does. It does not seek to eliminate God. What it does do is push Him out of the center of things in order that man might be the primary emphasis. God is often relegated to a Santa Clause role…a nice guy who exists to give us what we want. Liberalism’s redefining of Scripture and emphasis on myths, genealogies, speculations, and fruitless discussions is all about squeezing God into a box we have fashioned, rather than letting God define Himself, us, and how we are to live through His word.

The repeated use of God’s name drives home the truth that God is in charge of the church. Christ is our hope, not our actions. God is the one who saves, not us. Ultimately Christ is Lord, the sovereign ruler of all things, and especially His people. Colossians 1:18 tells us that Christ *is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.* As head of the church, Titus 2:14 tells us that He *gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed and to purify for Himself a people* ***for His own possession,*** *zealous for good deeds.* This is His church, and we are His possession purchased with His blood for the purpose of doing good works for His glory.

Keeping Christ as the center of our focus and our lives in submission to Him safeguards us from making ourselves the center of the universe. Our passion as a church should be to know God, to discover His designs for our lives individually and corporately, and then to seek to walk in His ways together. By repeatedly pointing us to God, Paul is reminding us of whose church it is and who gets to determine what we do and how we do it. May our lives be lived in submission to Him, and may we have the humility to change when God’s word exposes ways in which our lives are not in conformity with His standard. We don’t get to change the standards because they are culturally uncomfortable or aren’t where we would draw the lines. Instead, we are to *humble [ourselves] under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt [us] at the proper time* (1 Pet. 5:6).