

1 Timothy - Commentaries by Stanley Bruce Anstey

First Epistle of Paul to Timothy: The Order of God's House, 1 Timothy 1:1-5: The Apostle's Charge to Timothy (1:1-5)

(Chapter 1)

Chapter 1 is introductory. This can be seen by Paul's words in chapter 2:1—"I exhort, therefore, that first of all ... " This shows that the exhortations concerning the order of the house of God begin at that point; all that precedes it, therefore, is introductory. The first chapter is Paul's apostolic charge to Timothy.

The Salutation

Vss. 1-2—Paul writes to Timothy as an "apostle." He mentions his apostleship because he was about to enjoin Timothy with an apostolic charge. He refers to himself as an apostle of "Christ Jesus" (W. Kelly Trans.). In each of his epistles (except Titus), when mentioning his apostleship, Paul speaks of having received it from "Christ Jesus." (The KJV does not make this distinction, but the more critical translations and interlinears do.) When the Lord's title ("Christ") is put before His Manhood name ("Jesus"), it denotes Christ as having completed redemption and gone back into heaven as a glorified Man. Thus, He has taken His Manhood into glory. It was from Christ on high, as a glorified Man, that Paul received his apostleship (1 Cor. 9:1-2). Peter, on the other hand, calls himself an apostle of "Jesus Christ." When the Lord's Manhood name of "Jesus" is put before His title as "Christ," it denotes the One who came from heaven to accomplish the will of God by dying on the cross. It is significant that Peter would call himself such because it was here on earth where Peter received his apostleship (Luke 6:13-16).

Paul's apostleship was by the commandment of "God our Saviour." Paul mentions this because it is the particular character of God in grace towards all men that he will emphasize throughout the epistle. "Christ Jesus" is presented as "our hope." It is not exactly the event of His coming that is our hope here, but He Himself who is the center of the purpose and counsel of God. Hence, the gospel is not merely something that extricates us from the just penalty of our sins; it is also that which brings us into line with the whole system of glory where Christ is the Object and our Hope.

Timothy is spoken of as Paul's "own son in the faith," which means that he evidently was saved through Paul's labours, though it is not mentioned in the account given in the book of the Acts. Three things are mentioned in the greeting as being from "God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord"—"grace, mercy, and peace." These three things were the supply that Timothy could draw upon in carrying out his special charge from the Apostle. There would be "grace" to meet every situation, "mercy" with regard to failure in the path, and "peace" for the various trying situations he would encounter.

It has often been noted that when the Apostle addresses assemblies, he mentions grace and peace, but not mercy. As mentioned, there is mercy available for failing individuals who are repentant. Whereas the Church stands as a responsible corporate witness in this world, and if it fails, as the Christian testimony has done, there is no mercy granted in the sense of it being restored—only judgment. Hence, there will be no restoration of the public testimony of Christianity. It will end its course in this world by being rejected by the Lord and spewed out of His mouth (Rom. 11:13-27; Rev. 3:15).

The Charge and Its End

Vss. 3-5—Paul goes straight to the issue that gave rise to the writing of the epistle. There were "some" at Ephesus who were teaching extraneous and profitless things that would not build up the saints in the most holy faith (Jude 20), and it needed to be put to a stop. Paul had warned the elders at Ephesus at an earlier time of the defection that was coming in that region (Acts 20:29-31). It had now begun, and was gathering momentum with certain teachers among them. By the time of the writing of his second epistle to Timothy, Paul had to report that "all" in Asia (of which Ephesus was the capital) had "turned away" from him and his teaching (2 Tim. 1:15).

In view of the impending apostasy, Paul told Timothy to "enjoin" those who taught in the assembly to "teach no other doctrines" but that which was to "godly edifying." Paul traced the strange doctrines that were coming in to two different sources:

He labels the first as being "fables." These were vain imaginations that were being brought in by converted Gentiles from their former heathen beliefs. They were especially of Greek origin.

He calls the second, "interminable genealogies." These were meaningless details of a historical bearing that were being brought in by converted Jews. ("Interminable" is something that is long, tedious, and tiring; it is a better word than the KJV's "endless," because genealogies do have an end, back to Adam.)

Timothy was not to "give heed" to these things because they would not help him or the saints at Ephesus spiritually; such things only "minister questions" rather than "godly edifying." "Fables" are false ideas borne out of the human imagination running wild in spiritual things. Such are the product of an undisciplined mind at work in the things of God. "Interminable genealogies," in essence, are just meaningless historical facts and trivia that only tire the saints, rather than feed them with spiritual food.

We mustn't think that these things were problems that troubled the early Church, but would have no relevance in our day. These two things are still a danger in Christian ministry. Have we not heard some, whose minds have not been subject to sound principles of Biblical exegesis,

bring forth fanciful interpretations of Scripture that are mere imaginations? And, have we not been pained to listen to that which passes as ministry, but is merely natural, earthly, and historical in content, rather than that which is spiritual? These things may catch the fancy of some, but they do not lay a foundation of truth in souls whereby they are established in the faith (Rom. 16:25; Col. 2:7).

It is quite possible to occupy time in ministry with things that do not build up the saints in the truth. Timothy was to rebuke this kind of profitless ministry and “enjoin” those who would minister in the assembly to “teach no other doctrines” than that which would “further God’s dispensation” (vs. 4 – J. N. Darby Trans.).

Furthering “God’s dispensation” has to do with setting forth the Christian revelation of truth in a way that the saints understand their calling in Christ and their respective responsibilities in the house of God, both individually and collectively. The special revelation of truth in Christianity that has been delivered to the saints in connection with the present calling of the Church is heavenly in character rather than earthly (Jude 3). It is a new thing distinct from the legal system in the Mosaic economy, and it should be the focus of the ministry in God’s house in Christianity. Furthering the present dispensation is not accomplished by teaching doctrinal truth concerning the Church merely, but also includes that which regulates practical matters pertaining to the moral order of life in God’s house. (Teaching things that pertain to the place of men and women in the house of God, as Paul does in chapter 2, is an example of furthering God’s dispensation in this practical sense.) While the object of Christian ministry is to present Christ in His glory and beauty, the purpose of Christian ministry is to “further God’s dispensation” in the souls of believers.

Vs. 5—The “end” (the goal) in view of the Apostle’s “commandment” (charge) to Timothy was that a right spiritual state would be found in the saints so that they would walk according to the due order of God’s house, and thus, a proper testimony would be rendered by them to the world of God’s true character.

This right spiritual state that Paul desired in the saints, is summed up in three things—“love out of a pure heart,” “a good conscience,” and “faith unfeigned.” A person in this desirable state of soul will have:

Love out of a pure heart—which is a heart of love toward all with right motives. Impure and ulterior motives only hinder true Christian love.

A good conscience—is not obtained by making sure that we never fail in our Christian walk; no one would have a good conscience if that were the case, for “we all often offend” (James 3:2). Rather, it is to have an honest heart that judges self regularly.

Unfeigned faith—is unwavering confidence in the goodness of God.

We see from this that the aim of the charge was not merely to produce orthodoxy of doctrine among the saints, but to also produce moral suitability to God’s character in the saints. Paul’s point is clear; teaching sound doctrine that furthers God’s dispensation produces practical results in the saints. This supports the old adage that “our doctrine forms our walk.” Good doctrine leads to a good walk; false and profitless teaching will not accomplish this. In fact, such erroneous teaching leads to ungodliness (2 Tim. 2:16). For this very reason, “sound doctrine” is insisted on 7 times in this epistle (chap. 1:10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1).

Hence, in summary, the charge to Timothy was to “further God’s dispensation” by teaching the doctrines of grace, to the “end” that the saints would be found in a suited state to be led in a line of conduct that was befitting to the order of God’s house.

First Epistle of Paul to Timothy: The Order of God's House, 1 Timothy 1:6-17: A Parenthesis (1:6-17)

The Right and Wrong Ways to Achieve the Moral Conduct Suited to the House of God

Vss. 6-17—Paul breaks off speaking of his charge to Timothy to show, in a parenthesis, that there is a right way and there is a wrong way of producing the right moral conduct in the saints. In these verses, he contrasts the Law and grace, and shows that grace is the only way to produce the desired moral conditions mentioned in verse 5.

This digression was necessary because there were many who had the mistaken idea that adhering to legal principles in one’s life would accomplish the desired end of practical holiness and higher spirituality. Paul shows that such a notion is a misuse of the Law, and such legality will not make any real and lasting effect in the saints. Then, he points to his own life to show what grace can do; it transformed the most impossible case in history. Grace turned the chief of sinners into a model Christian whose life became a pattern for all who would believe thereafter.

Vss. 6-7—Paul says that there were “some” who were lacking (“missed”) the moral qualities stated in verse 5 and had “turned aside” from the doctrines of grace that furthered God’s dispensation. These men were pushing another line of things which Paul calls “vain jangling.” This element was of a Jewish origin (Judaizing teachers) and was the bane of the Christian testimony in the early Church; many epistles warn against this error of mixing Law with grace. Sad to say, Judaic principles still run strong in many Christian circles today.

These judaizing teachers imagined themselves to be “teachers of the law,” but they didn’t “understand” what they were teaching. They were “strenuously” affirming that Christians needed to keep the Law. These men were teaching from the Old Testament Law of Moses, but they were misapplying it altogether. This shows that it is possible to use Scriptural words and phrases in Bible teaching, and yet not know the true meaning and application of them. Let us be careful, therefore, to be “rightly dividing the Word of Truth” when expounding the Scriptures (2 Tim. 2:15).

Vs. 8—Paul goes on to show that “the law is good” if it is used properly. He rightly labelled the produce of human imagination as mere fables (vs. 4), but he couldn’t say that about the Law. It was God’s Law and it was “holy, and just, and good” (Rom. 7:12). It could be used by the Christian to condemn evil and show that the judgment of God was against such who did evil. Thus, it is a useful tool in showing a person that

he is a sinner. But, Paul says, “the law has not its application to a righteous man”—that is, a person whom God has declared righteous through his belief of the gospel (Rom. 3:22; 4:5). In Scripture, a Christian is viewed as having died to the law (Rom. 7:4-6). Since the law has nothing to say to a dead man, it has no claim on a believer whatsoever (Rom. 6:14). The legal teachers in Ephesus, evidently, didn’t know this and were attempting to bind the obligations of the law upon Christians, and thus, were making the Mosaic law the rule or standard for Christian living. But the law is not the Christian’s standard—it is Christ. The rule for Christian living is the life of Christ, which is much higher in moral character than the legal commandments of Moses. In fulfilling “the law of Christ,” which is to emulate Him in our walk and ways (Gal. 5:2), we go far beyond “the righteous requirement of the law” (Rom. 8:4; Rom. 14:8-10).

While “the law is good, if a man use it lawfully [properly],” it can also be misused; and if used wrongly, it works mischief among the saints—as Paul’s epistle to the Galatians shows. The law was not designed to give a person holiness; it demanded it of him, but it did not have the power to produce it in him. To insist on the principle of law-keeping for the Christian life is to misunderstand the true meaning and proper use of the law.

The Law Condemns Sinners

Vss. 9-11—The correct use of the law is explained in this next series of verses. Its great purpose is not (and never was) to make men walk rightly, but to show that the judgment of God is against every evil principle in man. It is a sword for the conscience, giving men the knowledge that they have sinned (Rom. 3:20), but it has no power to produce good in man (Rom. 3:19; Gal. 3:19).

Paul illustrates this point by listing a number of offenders whose lives the Mosaic Law condemns. Nine of the Ten Commandments are covered in these things. “Lawless and disobedient,” “ungodly and for sinners,” “unholy and profane,” refers to those who violate the first table of commandments in a general way. The first table (the first four commandments) has its bearing on man’s responsibility toward God. “Ungodly,” refers to living without reference to God. “Unholy and profane,” has to do with corruption in holy things pertaining to God.

The rest of the list pertains to the second table of the law; it has to do with man’s responsibility toward his fellow man.

“Murderers of fathers and murders of mothers.” This violates the 5th commandment: “Honour thy father and thy mother” (Ex. 20:12).

“Manslayers.” This violates the 6th commandment: “Thou shalt not kill” (Ex. 20:13).

“Whoremongers” and “them that defile themselves with mankind.” This violates the 7th commandment: “Thou shalt not commit adultery” (Ex. 20:14).

“Menstealers.” This violates the 8th commandment: “Thou shalt not steal” (Ex. 20:15).

“Liars” and “perjured persons.” This violates the 9th commandment: “Thou shalt not bear false witness” (Ex. 20:16).

The phrase, “And if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine,” summarizes all the commandments, and in a sense, includes the tenth commandment—“Thou shalt not covet.” The other commandments pertain to acts, but this has to do with an inclination of the heart. Paul seemed to come to an understanding of his breaking of the tenth commandment sometime after his conversion (Rom. 7:7-9). Many expositors believe that he learned this when he went to Arabia and passed through the exercises of Romans 7:7-25, and thus, found practical deliverance from the indwelling sin-nature.

Paul adds that this correct use of the Law is “according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God” which he preached. This shows that the Law is in complete accord with the gospel, in the sense that both uphold the holiness of God. However, the standard of holiness proclaimed in the gospel is far higher than that stated in the Law, for the gospel of the glory of God centers around a glorified Christ. Hence, in announcing the gospel, Paul says, “All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23). He does not say, “All have sinned and have come short of the Law.”

In speaking of “the gospel of the glory of God,” Paul is referring to the highest and fullest character of the gospel preached in the Christian era. Elsewhere, he said that he preached “the gospel of the grace of God” (Acts 20:24). These are not two different gospels, but two aspects of the same gospel. The gospel of God’s grace announces that God has come down in the Person of Christ, who has accomplished redemption for all mankind. The gospel of God’s glory announces that God has raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His own right hand in the glory. This second aspect of the message tells the fact that there is a glorified Man at God’s right hand and that the believer has a position of acceptance there in Him. The other apostles preached the Gospel of the Grace of God; Paul preached it too, but he had a special commission to preach the Gospel of the Glory of God, and therefore, he calls it “my gospel” (Rom. 2:16, etc.)

Stating that God is “the blessed God” coincides with the burden of the Apostle in this epistle. Blessed, means “happy.” The disposition of God as a happy God who desires the blessing of His creatures is in keeping with “the testimony” that is to be “rendered” in this “due time”—the Day of Grace (chap. 2:6). The concept of a “blessed God” is quite the opposite of the ideas that the heathen have of God. They design their idols and images according to their ideas of God, and invariably they depict Him as being sad or angry. The gospel, on the other hand, presents God as He truly is—a happy God who desires the blessing of His creatures.

Grace Converts and Transforms Sinners

Vss. 12-17—In contrast to the Law which condemns sinners, grace converts sinners! Paul points to his own conversion as an outstanding example of the power of grace. It converted him; this is something that the Law couldn’t do. The terms of the Law are inflexible and can only condemn a person to death when its terms are not met. But the greatness of “the gospel of the glory” caused Paul (then Saul of Tarsus) to see himself in a light that he had never seen before—as a sinner who had come short of that great glory (Acts 9:3-6). Until that day, he actually thought that he had kept the Law (Acts 23:1), but when the glory of God shone into his soul, he made two great discoveries:

First—that he was a “blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious [an insolent overbearing man].” (Being a “blasphemer” means that he had broken the first table of the Law; being “a persecutor and injurious” means that he had also broken the second table—James 2:10.)

Second—the other great discovery he made was that Christ is the Saviour of sinners.

The gospel enlightened him; it gave him to see himself as a sinner and to see Christ as the Saviour. The gospel caused Paul to see himself as God saw him, and it turned him to the One whom he had rejected, confessing Him as “Lord” (Acts 9:5). There were now two divine things that operated in his soul: “mercy” (vs. 13) and “grace” (vs. 14); these are two things that the Law cannot offer people who realize that they have sinned against God. See Hebrews 10:28.

Vs. 15—The conclusion of the matter is that the “faithful saying” that magnifies the mercy and grace of God in the gospel is “worthy of all acceptance.” That is, it is worthy to be accepted by all men. If God can save “the chief of sinners” through His mercy and grace, He can save anybody who accepts the message of the gospel in faith!

Vs. 16—Paul mentions another reason why he “obtained mercy”—his conversion was to be a model (“pattern”) for “them which should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting.” The mercy and grace of God not only saved Saul of Tarsus from hell, but it transformed him into a model Christian! Through the power of God, the ultimate sinner became the ultimate saint. This was accomplished by grace—not by the Law. The good news is that that same grace can transform all who believe the glorious gospel. Since Paul’s Christian life is a pattern for us, it is not wrong to seek, by grace, to emulate his life of faith and devotion, self-sacrifice, etc. (Eph. 5:1; Phil. 3:17).

Vs. 17—Recalling the incredible mercy and grace of God toward him, Paul breaks into a doxology of praise to “the King of the ages, the incorruptible, invisible, only God.” God is the King of the ages: He is “incorruptible” as to His divine nature and “invisible” as to His inscrutable ways. If Timothy had this great Person before his soul, he would not lack in devotion or energy in carrying out Paul’s apostolic charge.

Hence, this parenthetical digression teaches us that the necessary state needed in the saints for them to walk according to the due order of the house of God cannot be reached by law-keeping, but by a sense of grace working in the heart.

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