



## 1 Timothy - Chapter One

### Summary of Chapter One

Paul opens the letter by identifying himself as an apostle of Christ, naming his faithful co-worker Timothy as its recipient; a man who Paul clearly held in high regard and affection.

It is apparent that Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with the false teachers whose doctrine was causing problems in the local church, while Paul attended some other business in Macedonia and elsewhere, no doubt. Paul then felt it necessary to write further instruction to Timothy to exhort him in his charge to deal with such men.

Paul concluded the chapter with a heartfelt statement of his personal gratitude toward God for the grace and mercy he had been shown despite his own personal sin, thus giving encouragement to all in the church who could identify themselves as such sinners, knowing that grace and mercy is there for all in such great abundance.

### I. 1 Timothy 1:1-2 - Salutation

This letter clearly claims to be written by Paul. A denial of its Pauline authorship, which many have done over the past 200 years, raises significant issues regarding the reliability of all NT Scripture. However, there is significant internal and external evidence to support and accept this letter as being authentically written by the apostle Paul.

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope,

#### 1 Timothy 1:1

Paul reinforced his apostolic authority by stating that his apostleship came by the command of God. On the basis of this command, he charged Timothy with his task (v.3) and provided a general charge to all other disciples (v.5). Paul's reference to his apostolic office signifies the authority from God by which he preached, taught

and wrote. Its inclusion here was not for the benefit of Timothy, for he knew Paul too well for that. It was for those in the church to whom Timothy would no doubt have read it out aloud. It has also served to command the same level of authority and respect throughout the church age.

As the recipient of the letter, Timothy would have been afforded the same level of respect and carried the same authority as if it were Paul speaking in person. Church leaders in the modern age can speak just as authoritatively provided they acknowledge it is the apostle and not they who are speaking.

There are some great teachers and writers around who enable us to understand the Scriptures more deeply. One danger for the church though is when other church leaders teach from these books and not from the Scriptures themselves, for it has the danger of passing on the ideas of man rather than the Words of God. One is fallible, the other is not!

God our Saviour. In the Pastoral Epistles, Paul often described both God the Father and God the Son as Saviours of their people: *<<Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel>>* (2 Timothy 1:8-10), and: *<<in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour, To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour>>* (Titus 1:3-4).

Christ Jesus our hope. He is not only our hope, for: *<<To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory>>* (Colossians 1:27). Having already stated God our Saviour, which set the theme of the letter to be focused on eternal salvation, Paul then alluded to one of the misconceptions of the false teachers; that is, the end had already come, for there were those: *<<who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some>>* (2 Timothy 2:18). Paul's teaching showed that this is the age of salvation but that it will not be completed until the *Parousia* of Christ; that is the hope of the church and a hope for all mankind.

<sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my loyal child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

### 1 Timothy 1:2

My loyal child in the faith. Timothy had become Paul's assistant shortly after the commencement of the Second Missionary journey: *<<Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of*

by the believers in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted Timothy to accompany him; and he took him and had him circumcised because of the Jews who were in those places, for they all knew that his father was a Greek>> (Acts 16:1-3). Paul soon came to trust Timothy to work on his behalf: <<and we sent Timothy, our brother and co-worker for God in proclaiming the gospel of Christ, to strengthen and encourage you for the sake of your faith>> (1 Thessalonians 3:2).

Paul saw him as his true child in the faith: <<But Timothy's worth you know, how like a son with a father he has served with me in the work of the gospel>> (Philippians 2:22). The title Paul gave him in this letter must have given him significant encouragement to tackle the difficult work that lay ahead for him. The church was to recognise this as the apostle's stamp of approval on Timothy's doctrine, particularly in the light of the current doctrinal controversy.

Paul's normal greeting in his letters was simply grace and peace. Some commentators and scholars wonder at the addition of mercy here and in: <<To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord>> (2 Timothy 1:2), but Paul often introduced things in the opening of his letters that he would deal with later in the letter. Refer to v.13 and v.16. It also denotes God's special care of an individual in need.

It is so often a danger when reading Paul's letters to overlook some of the key phrases in salutation or final greeting, which are actually of fundamental importance to the life of service to Christ. Grace, mercy, and peace are more than just gifts from God; they are key qualities in the Godhead and should be evident in the hearts, minds and lives of all disciples of Christ. If faithful ministers such as Paul and Timothy were in need of grace and mercy, then the rest of the world are in need of a renewed and continual outpouring.

## II. 1 Timothy 1:3-20 - Confronting the False Teaching

Paul charged Timothy to deal with the false teachers (vv.3-7), briefly corrected their misunderstanding of the law and its purpose (vv.8-11), presented himself as an example of the intended effect of the Gospel (vv.12-17), and restated his basic charge with some specific examples of false teachers (vv.18-20).

Heresy is to the church what treason or sedition is to the state, and yet it can so often go unchallenged. Not so with Paul, for he recognised the dangers that so-called enlightened versions of the truth and spiritual elitism can do to those who accept it as a version of the truth, rather than accepting the Gospel truth. Heresy is not harmless for it has the capability to destroy much of the work of Christ by disrupting the unity of the church.

### II.a 1 Timothy 1:3-11 - Warning against False Teachers

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus with instruction to deal with the false teachers who had infiltrated the church there. In this section, Paul gives further instruction to ensure this false doctrine is eradicated because of the damage it caused to other believers.

Paul referred to such men as wanting to be teachers of the law, indicating they may have been Jews, although this is by no means certain. Paul went on to express that the law is good if used correctly but that its main focus was against the lawbreakers themselves.

For Paul, heresy endangered the church and individuals who would be drawn into error, perhaps beyond the reach of salvation. It threatened the church's evangelistic mission in the world, by contaminating the Gospel.

### II.a.i 1 Timothy 1:3-7 - The charge to deal with false teachers

At least one of Timothy's purposes in Ephesus was to deal with false teaching that was troubling the church. Not enough information is given to determine exactly what the false teaching was. The concern here was not so much the identity of the false teachers but their effect, which was in direct contrast to the goal of apostolic instruction. The results of false teaching were speculations (v.4) and vain discussion (v.6), while the result of true teaching is love coming from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith (v.5). The focus of false teaching led to deviations and wandering (v.6), while the focus of true teaching was a steadfast aim (v.5). And regarding the law, the advocates of false teaching were without understanding (v.7), while the advocates of true teaching had correct knowledge (vv.8-11).

<sup>3</sup> I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine,

#### 1 Timothy 1:3

I urge you is not so much a request or suggestion but an apostolic command, although it was given in the type of language that indicated trust in, as well as respect and affection for the person being instructed, i.e. Timothy.

The province of Macedonia included several churches Paul had personally established during his previous missionary journeys, including Thessalonica, Berea and Philippi. It had not been Paul's original intention to serve in Macedonia, but was undertaken through the direction of the Spirit: <<*During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, 'Come over to Macedonia and help us.'* When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them>> (Acts 16:9-10).

Remain in Ephesus indicates that this was Paul's own city of departure. It was a city and church he knew very well, having spent a considerable amount of time based in the city, which Paul confirmed in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders at a meeting in Miletus: <<*Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to warn everyone with tears*>> (Acts 20:31).

Different doctrine is that which diverged from the accepted teaching of the Old Testament, Christ and the apostles. Paul had strong views on anyone who taught anything other than the true Gospel: <<*But even if we or an angel from heaven*

*should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to what we proclaimed to you, let that one be accursed!>>* (Galatians 1:8). The little that is known of the specific content of these teachers' doctrine suggests that its central feature was a misunderstanding about the resurrection of believers. This was perhaps due to some confusion over the Pauline teaching that believers even now participate in the death and resurrection of Christ: *<<Therefore we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly be united with him in a resurrection like his>>* (Romans 6:4-5). Therefore, they believed and taught that the resurrection of believers had already occurred in a spiritual sense. This may seem strange unless thought is given to the fervency of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century belief that Jesus was about to return immediately. A modern equivalent is perhaps the 'wealth and health' gospel that is taught in Christian triumphalism, selling Jesus as a cure for all of life's ills and problems; failing to mention that tribulation is a guarantee for anyone who truly accepts the Christian way of life.

<sup>4</sup> and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the divine training that is known by faith.

#### 1 Timothy 1:4

Myths, Greek *mythos*, in the NT is a negative term characterising beliefs as fanciful, untrue and even deceptive: *<<For the time is coming when people will not put up with sound doctrine, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own desires, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander away to myths>>* (2 Timothy 4:3-4), and: *<<That testimony is true. For this reason rebuke them sharply, so that they may become sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths or to commandments of those who reject the truth>>* (Titus 1:13-14).

Such myths were often used to excuse immoral behaviour on the basis of a divine or traditional pattern. It was soundly rejected in apostolic teaching: *<<For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we had been eyewitnesses of his majesty>>* (2 Peter 1:16).

With the later reference to the misuse of the law (vv.7-10), genealogies here, seems to refer to speculative use of OT accounts of biblical characters or family trees. The false teachers would thus call erroneously on some historical character in support of an argument, seeming to give authenticity to their spurious claims, by linking their 'knowledge' to such characters. Some of the rabbis were well known for intricate and fanciful interpretations of such OT texts.

While Paul did not elaborate, his reason for rejecting the false teachers' system is clear: instead of serving God's salvation plan, as proper interpretation of Scripture always should, their esoteric approach only promote speculations. Evidently their conclusions were not readily accepted, and the debates and arguments that followed did more to divide than to edify the church. This can be compared and contrasted with Paul's own teaching: *<<Although I am the very least of all the*

*saints, this grace was given to me to bring to the Gentiles the news of the boundless riches of Christ, and to make everyone see what is the plan of the mystery hidden for ages in God who created all things>>* (Ephesians 3:8-9). Even if such speculations were on relatively minor points of Scriptural interpretation, the key point is that any debates and disputes that may arise from such teaching would distract disciples away from the main focus of their faith, and that is to serve Christ in all sincerity, with a good conscience.

Divine training or stewardship from God, translates the phrase *oikonomian theou* that is difficult to capture in translation, for Greek *oikonomia* can mean orderly plan or household management, i.e. stewardship. In this context it either refers to God's orderly outworking of his plan of salvation in all human history, or to the human responsibility of stewardship in advancing that plan. In either case, the false teachers produced speculation rather than the advancing of the Kingdom by faith in Christ.

<sup>5</sup> But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

### 1 Timothy 1:5

The aim of such instruction, that is, the goal of apostolic charge, is love – a clear indication of the intended result of Paul's teaching in 1 Timothy, and indeed in the rest of his and most other NT letters: *<<And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love>>* (1 Corinthians 13:13), *<<By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things>>* (Galatians 5:22-23), *<<And let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds>>* (Hebrews 10:24), *<<You do well if you really fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, 'You shall love your neighbour as yourself'>>* (James 2:8), *<<Honour everyone. Love the family of believers. Fear God. Honour the emperor>>* (1 Peter 2:17), *<<But now, dear lady, I ask you, not as though I were writing you a new commandment, but one we have had from the beginning, let us love one another>>* (2 John 5), *<<The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth>>* (3 John 1), and: *<<But you, beloved, build yourselves up on your most holy faith; pray in the Holy Spirit; keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life>>* (Jude 20-21). It is, of course, a command of Jesus to do so: *<<I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another'>>* (John 13:34-35).

Whereas false teaching results in meaningless speculation, proper apostolic teaching results in practical good behaviour rooted in love. And that love must come from internal, Spirit-worked changes that have produced a pure heart - the inner part of a person cleansed from sin, rather than one filled with sinful desires; a good conscience - the rational, thinking part of a person bringing awareness to one's thoughts and actions, rather than one laden with guilt and shame; and a sincere faith, rather than pretence and hypocrisy. This verse is central to the whole letter, for: *<<And without faith it is impossible to please God, for*

*whoever would approach him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him*>> (Hebrews 11:6).

In Paul's day, people did not tend to think individualistically as they do in modern western culture. Whereas today, a poor conscience might result in feelings of guilt, in Paul's day the focus would have been more on what impact one's thoughts and actions had on others and therefore would be more likely to invoke feelings of shame and dishonour in the eyes of others. In this example, it refers to the standards of conduct that were deemed to be acceptable to the wider church.

Although Paul's first thought would have been to correct the thinking of believers tainted by the false teachers, he would also have had in mind the redemption of the false teachers themselves, who could have repented and returned to Christ: <<*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will*>> (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

Some translations have the verse as the 'aim of *our* charge', where the plural is used to denote the instructions that were given to all apostles and then to others gifted for teaching the Gospel truth.

<sup>6</sup> Some people have deviated from these and turned to meaningless talk, <sup>7</sup> desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make assertions.

### 1 Timothy 1:6-7

Meaningless talk. Paul believed in preaching the Gospel truth of Christ crucified and resurrected to life, with faith in his promises as being the route to salvation. It seems that others were getting hung-up on religious practices instead of faith, which is something that has been evident throughout the church age.

Desiring to be teachers of the law refers to the Law of Moses, indicating that these false teachers may have been Jews or proselytes of the Jewish faith, or Gentiles who knew the reputation and respect that the Jewish teachers of the law held in their own communities, so that these men craved that same respect from the church.

That they were without understanding indicates that they were not of a priestly line nor had they received Pharisaic training. Although it is well documented that some Jews were trying to bring the religious legalism into the faith, there were also many Gentiles who were intent on bringing in paganism as well, for it suited their lifestyle choices, and continues to do so today! It also appears to have been the case since antiquity: <<*Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?*>> (Job 38:2).

Doctrinal subtleties, special interpretations, secret knowledge, spurious claims to authority, controversy and dogmatism ought to make God's people suspicious. However, it is possible for those in the faith to recognise elements

of these in themselves or to become dogmatic in their own understanding, to the point where they go beyond discussing Scriptural interpretation into argument and even anger toward a different interpretation. This is not a quality of faith in Christ and such people need to be aware of this, then discuss and test what they think with mature believers in order that their own understanding or the doctrine they follow is soundly shaped by the truth.

A problem that can arise in many so called 'free churches', is that enthusiastic individuals may be allowed to bring the message to the church. They often do so to fulfil personal pride in being seen at the front of the church and enjoy the respect and authority it gives them. Such people are themselves in danger of becoming false teachers if they have not been given the divine gifts necessary to teach Scripture.

#### II.a.ii 1 Timothy 1:8-11 - Proper use of the law

The false teachers did not know what they are talking about (v.7), but Paul and his co-workers, we in v.8, knew the truth about the law (v.9).

<sup>8</sup> Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it legitimately.

#### 1 Timothy 1:8

The law is good. Many Christians today think of the Mosaic Law negatively, but Paul clearly stated that it is good. Some have certainly misused the law, e.g. the false teachers in this letter, but the law itself was a gracious gift of God to Israel, as David records in Psalm 119. The law is a reflection of the law giver and the law maker, who is perfect.

If the law is seen as good, then fulfilling the law must also be good, for: <<Love does no wrong to a neighbour; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law>> (Romans 13:10). The main point here is that all disciples are to live in and reflect the love of God, for: <<Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love>> (1 John 4:8).

<sup>9</sup> This means understanding that the law is laid down not for the innocent but for the lawless and disobedient, for the godless and sinful, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their father or mother, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> fornicators, sodomites, slave-traders, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching <sup>11</sup> that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

#### 1 Timothy 1:9-11

The law is laid down not for the innocent. People who are innocent, just or righteous do not need the law to restrain them, but those who are lawless and disobedient need such restraint: <<What then should we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet, if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, 'You shall not covet.' But sin, seizing an opportunity in the commandment,

*produced in me all kinds of covetousness. Apart from the law sin lies dead>>* (Romans 7:7-8). Paul is not denying that the law has a use in teaching Christians how to live, for he said it is good in v.8, and in vv.9-10 he echoed several of the Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17), in their OT order.

Exactly how the law applies to the NT believer is a matter of some debate. Some argue that the Mosaic Law has been entirely superseded, and what remains is the Law of Christ, as indicated in: *<<To those outside the law I became as one outside the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law) so that I might win those outside the law>>* (1 Corinthians 9:21), where Paul seems to distinguish between the Jewish law and something he calls alternately God's law and 'the Law of Christ', which is of continuing validity for Christians, whatever their ethnicity. This second law appears to include the ethical teaching of Jesus as well as absorbing both the theological structure and many of the moral precepts of the Mosaic Law. This 'Law of Christ' today would also include the moral commands of the NT epistles, since in them the apostles interpreted and applied Christ's life and teachings to the NT churches.

Others argue for an abiding authority of certain aspects of the Mosaic code. Paul elsewhere affirmed that Christians are no longer under the Mosaic Law: *<<But now we are discharged from the law, dead to that which held us captive, so that we are slaves not under the old written code but in the new life of the Spirit>>* (Romans 7:6), *<<yet we know that a person is justified not by the works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ. And we have come to believe in Christ Jesus, so that we might be justified by faith in Christ, and not by doing the works of the law, because no one will be justified by the works of the law>>* (Galatians 2:16), and: *<<Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring would come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained through angels by a mediator. Now a mediator involves more than one party; but God is one. Is the law then opposed to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could make alive, then righteousness would indeed come through the law. But the scripture has imprisoned all things under the power of sin, so that what was promised through faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed. Therefore the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer subject to a disciplinarian, for in Christ Jesus you are all children of God through faith>>* (Galatians 3:19-26), and that fits well with what he wrote here. As in those other passages, these verses indicate that one purpose of the law is to expose sin. In addition, although believers are no longer under the Law of Moses, they are, as noted, under the Law of Christ and are governed by the Spirit. All interpreters agree that the Mosaic Laws, rightly understood, still gives Christians wisdom about the kind of conduct that pleases or displeases God.

Those who strike or kill their fathers and mothers violate the law: *<<Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the*

**Lord your God is giving you>>** (Exodus 20:12), as do all murderers, who violate the command: **<<You shall not murder>>** (Exodus 20:13).

The sexually immoral, i.e. fornicators, sodomites and any other sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage, violate: **<<You shall not commit adultery>>** (Exodus 20:14), for the term includes more than just adultery; Greek  *pornos* refers to one who practices any sexual conduct contrary to God's moral law.

Sodomites refers to men who practice homosexuality. The Greek noun *arsenokoitēs* refers to males who engage in homosexual acts and echoes the Septuagint wording of: **<<You shall not lie with a male as with a woman; it is an abomination>>** (Leviticus 18:22), and: **<<If a man lies with a male as with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall be put to death; their blood is upon them>>** (Leviticus 20:13). Although some have argued that only certain kinds of homosexual conduct are in view, such as homosexual prostitution, pædophilia, unfaithful relationships or conduct by people who do not naturally have homosexual desires, there is no evidence in the words of the text, the context, or in evidence from the ancient world to prove that Paul was referring to anything other than all kinds of homosexual conduct. This is not limited just to men but includes women as well.

Slave traders. The Greek *andrapodistēs* shows that Paul considered all kinds of forcible enslavement to be sinful and a violation of: **<<You shall not steal>>** (Exodus 20:15), i.e. the theft of a person's liberty. There were many people who worked as servants, bond servants or slaves in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century. Some found themselves in such a position in order to pay off a debt and others were born into such a position. Paul was indicating those who were free being forcibly taken into slavery, which was often the result of war, but was also a prolific and profitable trade for those who would simply take people and sell them, something that continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

While in prison in Rome, Paul had encountered a runaway slave called Onesimus, whose owner Philemon was a Christian and known to Paul. As Onesimus had come to faith, Paul sent him back to Philemon, stating: **<<Perhaps this is the reason he was separated from you for a while, so that you might have him back for ever, no longer as a slave but as more than a slave, a beloved brother – especially to me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord>>** (Philemon 15-16), for: **<<There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus>>** (Galatians 3:28).

Liars and perjurers violate: **<<You shall not bear false witness against your neighbour>>** (Exodus 20:16).

Paul was not claiming that the false teachers were committing the sins listed but, through their doctrine, they were leading others into such lifestyle choices.

Sound teaching or doctrine. The participle of the Greek verb *hygiainō*, found in all three Pastoral Epistles, here translated sound, includes the idea of health, in the sense of healthy or health giving doctrine, and in 2 Timothy it contributes to an extended metaphor in which false teaching spreads poison insidiously

throughout the body like gangrene: <<*Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenæus and Philetus*>> (2 Timothy 2:16-17), while true doctrine makes the body healthy, sound teaching (v.10), by definition, is that which flows out of the Gospel.

## II.b 1 Timothy 1:12-20 Gratitude for Mercy

Paul openly stated that he was among the worst of sinners, for he had been trained as a Pharisee, had studied the oracles of God since childhood and yet had remained ignorant of what they truly taught, for they pointed to the coming Christ of God, who had been so recently among them in the form of Jesus and yet Paul, like so many others, had opposed the work of God through the Gospel of Jesus.

Yet despite his sin and wicked persecution of the church, God had shown him mercy and poured out his grace upon Paul, bringing him to undeserved redemption and salvation, holding him up as an excellent example of the Gospel of grace.

Paul concluded the section by revisiting his command for Timothy to deal firmly with the false teachers and the harmful effects of their doctrine.

### II.b.i 1 Timothy 1:12-17 - The Lord's Grace to Paul

The reference to being entrusted with the Gospel (v.11) led Paul to give thanks to God for this manifestation of grace to him. This is not, however, merely a personal aside for Paul. The discussion of Paul's conversion and commission also illustrates the transforming effect of the Gospel (v.5), in contrast to the uselessness of the false teaching. Here he is portrayed as the antithesis of the false teacher and a model for Timothy and indeed all other disciples to emulate.

<sup>12</sup> I am grateful to Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because he judged me faithful and appointed me to his service,

#### 1 Timothy 1:12

**I am grateful.** All disciples have so much to be grateful for, although the receipt of the Gospel is something to be treasured above so many other things, especially when a person like Paul is subsequently called to go out and proclaim that very Gospel with apostolic authority. To be an apostle or indeed any other minister of God is an office of trust as well as of power, and the former more than the latter; for this reason ministers are called to be stewards: <<*Think of us in this way, as servants of Christ and stewards of God's mysteries*>> (1 Corinthians 4:1).

**Matthew Henry wrote:** 'It is a glorious trust, because the gospel committed to them is a glorious gospel; it is a trust of very great importance. God's glory is very much concerned in it. Lord, what a trust is committed to us! How much grace do we want, to be found faithful in this great trust!'

Paul gave thanks because Christ was willing to **appoint** him **to service** in spite of his past sins. Paul marvels that God graciously considered him worthy of trust, Greek *pistos*, translated here as **faithful**, in spite of the fact that he had been unbelieving (v.13). Paul was effective in his work, not on the basis of his

theological education, his personal charisma or up-to-date methods of teaching. Paul clearly identifies his work as being achieved through the power of Christ, which led Paul into faithful service, for it was Christ who commissioned him as he lay in the dust on the Damascus Road: <<***But get up and stand on your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose, to appoint you to serve and testify to the things in which you have seen me and to those in which I will appear to you***>> (Acts 26:16). This was in clear contrast to the false teachers: <<***I did not send the prophets, yet they ran; I did not speak to them, yet they prophesied***>> (Jeremiah 23:21).

Paul also recorded it as his service, identifying that it is Christ who calls people to service and those who are called will see the fruits of that calling. Paul's ministry was sustained by and originated in Christ. Those who would share Paul's goals and vision for life, and in his ministry, must also share his complete dependence on Christ.

<sup>13</sup> even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and a man of violence. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

### 1 Timothy 1:13

Paul received mercy because he acted ignorantly. Sins committed in ignorance are still sins nonetheless. However, the punishment is less severe: <<***But one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded***>> (Luke 12:48). God's grace knows no bounds and therefore the magnitude of sin is not an issue for him as it is for many people. Those who have a truly penitent heart will be forgiven much: <<***Therefore, I tell you, her sins, which were many, have been forgiven; hence she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little***>> (Luke 7:47).

The point is that his salvation was undeserved; his ignorance did not excuse his sin or warrant God's mercy. Most likely Paul was contrasting himself with the false teachers. At the time when Paul was so opposed to Christ, he had not yet professed faith. These men professed to follow Christ and still lived in an evil manner. In so doing, they were coming dangerously close to being cut off from the possibility of God's mercy: <<***Therefore I tell you, people will be forgiven for every sin and blasphemy, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. Whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but whoever speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come***>> (Matthew 12:31-32), <<'Truly I tell you, people will be forgiven for their sins and whatever blasphemies they utter; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit can never have forgiveness, but is guilty of an eternal sin' – for they had said, 'He has an unclean spirit'>> (Mark 3:28-30), <<***And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven***>> (Luke 12:10), and: <<***If you see your brother or sister committing what is not a mortal sin, you will ask, and God will give life to such a one – to***>>

*those whose sin is not mortal. There is sin that is mortal; I do not say that you should pray about that>> (1 John 5:16).*

<sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

### 1 Timothy 1:14

Overflowed describes just what an abundance of love and grace God has for those who are faithful in their service to him.

Paul's references to faith and love, and to his prior condition of ignorance and unbelief, were again directed at the false teachers. On the one hand, he seriously questioned any Christian spirituality that was not marked by faith and love, belief and godly response. On the other hand, the false teachers' Christian background; they know the Gospel, had been members and probably even leaders in the church, which made the game they played an extremely dangerous one: *<<For it is impossible to restore again to repentance those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit>> (Hebrews 6:4).* Their history was marked by movement away from the faith, while Paul's life reflects growth in the faith. The false teacher and the Christian teacher are diametrically opposed.

### 1 Timothy 1:15-16

Earlier statements in this section (vv.12-17) may seem to suggest that Paul viewed his salvation as resulting from his own faithfulness or even his ignorance, although comments made on v.13 show this was not the case. These two verses make it clear that Paul was marvelling at his conversion specifically because he knew himself to be so bad, for in his religious endeavours he had persecuted God's people, as seen in his days as Saul: *<<But Saul was ravaging the church by entering house after house; dragging off both men and women, he committed them to prison>> (Acts 8:3), and: <<Meanwhile Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem>> (Acts 9:1-2).*

<sup>15</sup> The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the foremost.

### 1 Timothy 1:15

Calling attention to certain sayings as sure and worthy of full acceptance is a particular distinctive of the Pastoral Epistles: *<<The saying is sure: whoever aspires to the office of bishop desires a noble task>> (1 Timothy 3:1), <<The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance>> (1 Timothy 4:9), <<The saying is sure: If we have died with him, we will also live with him>> (2 Timothy 2:11), and: <<The saying is sure. I desire that you insist on these things, so that those who have come to believe in God may be careful to devote themselves*

*to good works; these things are excellent and profitable to everyone>> (Titus 3:8).*

Christ Jesus came, to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost: <<*For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost*>> (Luke 19:10). Paul surely did not mean that he now sinned more than anyone in the world, for he elsewhere says that he had lived before God with a clear conscience: <<*While Paul was looking intently at the council he said, 'Brothers, up to this day I have lived my life with a clear conscience before God'*>> (Acts 23:1), and: <<*Therefore I do my best always to have a clear conscience towards God and all people*>> (Acts 24:16), and he asked other believers to follow his example, while recognising he was still a long way from being fully righteous: <<*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us*>> (Philippians 3:17).

As Paul clearly stated here, the basis of salvation is the historical ministry of Christ. This ministry, executed in the past, for Christ Jesus came, continues in the present day to be effective in the teaching and spread of the Gospel. This is God's plan: salvation is linked solely to Christ and the message about him. Commitment to anything but the apostolic Gospel is heresy.

Apparently Paul meant that his previous persecution of the church: <<*For I am the least of the apostles, unfit to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me*>> (1 Corinthians 15:9-10), as well as v.13, made him the foremost sinner, for it did the most to hinder others from coming to faith: <<*For you, brothers and sisters, became imitators of the churches of God in Christ Jesus that are in Judæa, for you suffered the same things from your own compatriots as they did from the Jews, who killed both the Lord Jesus and the prophets, and drove us out; they displease God and oppose everyone by hindering us from speaking to the Gentiles so that they may be saved. Thus they have constantly been filling up the measure of their sins; but God's wrath has overtaken them at last*>> (1 Thessalonians 2:14-16). Yet it also allowed God to save Paul as an example of grace (v.16).

Another interpretation is that, in light of the Holy Spirit's powerful conviction in his heart, and his nearness to God, Paul could not imagine anyone being a worse sinner than he. Godly people with some self-knowledge are prone to think of themselves in this way.

Came into the world. A great miracle and a profound mystery is that God chose to come to his people as a human being: <<*And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth*>> (John 1:14). He requires that truth to be told everywhere through the faithful teaching of his Gospel and remains full of grace despite the continued outpouring, and will do so until there are no vessels left to fill: <<*So she left him and shut the door behind her and her children; they kept bringing vessels to her, and she kept pouring. When the vessels were full, she said to her son, 'Bring me another vessel.' But he said to her, 'There are no more.' Then the oil stopped flowing*>> (2 Kings 2:5-6).

To save sinners. It is the sick who need the doctor: <<Go and learn what this means, “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have come to call not the righteous but sinners>> (Matthew 9:13), and: <<For the Son of Man came to seek out and to save the lost>> (Luke 19:10).

<sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I received mercy, so that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display the utmost patience, making me an example to those who would come to believe in him for eternal life.

### 1 Timothy 1:16

Paul saw himself as an example of the effect of true Christian instruction. He was the sort of person for whom the law was intended, refer to the comments made on vv.9-11, and the result of the Gospel in his life was not mere idle speculation but profound and complete transformation.

Paul’s testimony of his personal encounter with Christ demonstrated the power of the approved Gospel. Paul knew in his heart and was fully convinced that this message was true. And it is essential that every Christian share this conviction borne out of experience. This faith is not based on a mystical encounter with an invisible God but is evidenced through a changed life. This was demonstrated so clearly in Paul, something the false teachers could not demonstrate through their own teaching or life style choices. God’s salvation plan is linked solely to the Christian Gospel. It requires faith and produces a new manner of life; and for those who accept this way of life there is the promise of eternal life in the very presence of God the Father.

<sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

### 1 Timothy 1:17

In giving his testimony again, Paul was clearly moved to worship and gave glory to God as the transcendent King who is eternal, immortal, and invisible, and yet who intervenes personally in this world to save his people.

The King of the ages is also known as the Ancient of Days: <<As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze>> (Daniel 7:9 NIV-UK).

Immortal, invisible. As God, he knows only immortality for God cannot die; despite Jesus the man dying, Christ the God cannot: <<It is he alone who has immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see; to him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen>> (1 Timothy 6:16). He cannot be seen with the human eye in his divine nature, not because: <<Truly, you are a God who hides himself, O God of Israel, the Saviour>> (Isaiah 45:15), but because those who see God will die: <<And Manoah said to his wife, ‘We shall surely die, for we have seen God’>> (Judges 13:22).

The only God has echoes of: <<Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one>> (Deuteronomy 6:4 NIV-UK), which is known as the *Shema* and is a

declaration of faith, a pledge of allegiance to the one true God. It is said upon arising in the morning and upon going to sleep at night. It is said when praising God and when beseeching him. It is the first prayer that a Jewish child is taught to say. It is said to be the last words a Jew says prior to death.

**Paul was giving his personal rendition of something that will continue for all eternity:** <<*Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels surrounding the throne and the living creatures and the elders; they numbered myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, singing with full voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honour and glory and blessing!' Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, singing, 'To the one seated on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honour and glory and might for ever and ever!'*>> (Revelation 5:11-13).

## II.b.ii 1 Timothy 1:18-20 - The Charge to Timothy Renewed

These verses, together with vv.3-7, form bookends around the section (vv.3-20). Paul restated his charge in v.18 as he did in v.3 and v.5, calling for specific action against the false teachers.

<sup>18</sup> I am giving you these instructions, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made earlier about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight,

### 1 Timothy 1:18

**I am giving you these instructions.** All positions of authority, whether it be in politics, industry or in service to the church, carry obligations with them. Timothy had a God-given responsibility to serve, and his charge was to deal with the false teachers in Ephesus.

**Prophecies.** God had spoken clearly through others to set Timothy aside for his ministry. This assurance of a specific divine calling was to strengthen Timothy for the work. Paul would again allude to this: <<*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders*>> (1 Timothy 4:14), where the gift probably referred to something related to Timothy's calling to and gifting for ministry, as indicated by God through prophecy and recognised by the church when the council of elders laid their hands on him, although the precise gift that Timothy received is not specified.

**Paul had a similar experience in his sending:** <<*Now in the church at Antioch there were prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manæa a member of the court of Herod the ruler, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, 'Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.' Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off*>> (Acts 13:1-3).

The word prophecy, the Greek *prophēteia*, refers generally to speech that reports something that God spontaneously brings to mind or reveals to the

speaker, but which is spoken in merely human words, not words of God. Therefore it can have mistakes and must be tested or evaluated. An alternative view of this gift, held by some, is that it involves speaking the very words of God, with authority equal to the OT prophets and equal to the word of Scripture. A third view is that it is very similar to the gifts of preaching or teaching. This gift is widely indicated throughout the NT churches. Prophecy is used to build up, encourage, and comfort the gathered community. Prophecy is also used evangelistically to disclose the secrets of the hearts of unbelievers and lead them to worship God.

**Fight the good fight.** The military style language would have been quite deliberate and not used just as a glib quote. Timothy was about to go into battle with these dangerous heretics, but the tone of Paul's letter must have been a great source of strength to Timothy, encouraging him to tackle this rather difficult task. Appointment to ministry involves commitment to service even when it is under less than ideal circumstances.

<sup>19</sup> having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith;

### **1 Timothy 1:19**

The false teachers, **rejecting** their **consciences**, ploughed ahead in their sin, perhaps oblivious to the harm they were causing themselves and others in the church through their ignorance and self-righteousness.

**Shipwreck in the faith.** This most likely referred to the false teachers who claimed to be believers but had fallen away from the faith they initially professed, thereby showing they were never truly converted in the first place: ***<<They went out from us, but they did not belong to us; for if they had belonged to us, they would have remained with us. But by going out they made it plain that none of them belongs to us>>*** (1 John 2:19). The language indicates that Paul saw this as the destruction of their faith and not just a personal setback.

<sup>20</sup> among them are Hymenæus and Alexander, whom I have turned over to Satan, so that they may learn not to blaspheme.

### **1 Timothy 1:20**

**Hymenæus.** A false teacher who will be mentioned again, as already indicated: ***<<Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenæus and Philetus>>*** (2 Timothy 2:17).

**Whom I have turned over to Satan.** This most likely refers to being put out of the church, i.e. excommunication, since those outside of the church are in **Satan's** realm. This language highlights the importance and protection of church membership, since being put out of the church leaves one more exposed to **Satan**.

Paul would not have come to these conclusions lightly and neither should the church in any age. However, church leaders especially are called to stand in the gap to defend the Gospel and sometimes harsh measures are needed. This

can be seen by taking the following Scriptures as a whole, which shows that the church should be a place that is non-judgemental and loving, but must not tolerate anything that undermines the Gospel message: <<'If another member of the church sins against you, go and point out the fault when the two of you are alone. If the member listens to you, you have regained that one. But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If the member refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if the offender refuses to listen even to the church, let such a one be to you as a Gentile and a tax-collector>> (Matthew 18:15-17), <<For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present I have already pronounced judgement in the name of the Lord Jesus on the man who has done such a thing. When you are assembled, and my spirit is present with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to hand this man over to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved on the day of the Lord>> (1 Corinthians 5:3-5), <<But if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but to some extent – not to exaggerate it – to all of you. This punishment by the majority is enough for such a person; so now instead you should forgive and console him, so that he may not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I urge you to reaffirm your love for him. I wrote for this reason: to test you and to know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. What I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ. And we do this so that we may not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs>> (2 Corinthians 2:5-11), and: <<Take note of those who do not obey what we say in this letter; have nothing to do with them, so that they may be ashamed. Do not regard them as enemies, but warn them as believers>> (2 Thessalonians 3:14-15).

May learn not to blaspheme. If the false teachers had repented, they would have been saved; church discipline is motivated by love, with the hope that the one disciplined will turn back to the Lord. There is no explicit indication that the false teachers directly uttered evil statements about God, i.e. blasphemed. However, to misrepresent God's truth is to speak ill of him just the same.

Many hold this to be the same Alexander recorded by Luke: <<Some of the crowd gave instructions to Alexander, whom the Jews had pushed forward. And Alexander motioned for silence and tried to make a defence before the people>> (Acts 19:33), who was involved in the Ephesian riots marshalled against Paul's work in the city some years earlier and whom many people believe was ultimately responsible for having Paul rearrested and eventually martyred. He was spoken of by Paul from his prison cell as he awaited execution: <<Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will pay him back for his deeds>> (2 Timothy 4:14). However, that is only speculation. He is not the man identified as the son of Simon of Cyrene, who carried the Lord's Cross to Golgotha: <<They compelled a passer-by, who was coming in from the country, to carry his cross; it was Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus>> (Mark 15:21), nor was he the member of the priestly family in the Sanhedrin: <<The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family>> (Acts 4:5-6).