

REFLECTIONS AND STUDIES IN THE PASTORAL LETTERS TO TIMOTHY

By Bob Young

Paul writes to two younger itinerant evangelists, Timothy and Titus, and encourages them in their ministry. Paul's admonition concerning ministry touches several broad topics: **the gospel message, the church, the church leaders, and the minister**. Concerning the church, Paul gives instructions concerning prayer, public gatherings and worship, and the responsibilities and behaviors of various groups in the church. Concerning the church leaders, Paul gives instructions concerning their characteristics and responsibilities. Paul encourages Timothy to faithful ministry in the first letter to by reminding him about several things.¹ In this essay, we will first consider in some detail the content of the first letter to Timothy with these four general topics in mind, and then conclude with a brief overview of the second letter to Timothy including some admonitions drawn from that second letter.

First Timothy

First, Paul issues a charge, reminding Timothy of the **nature and priority of the gospel** and urging on him a **passion for the truth**. Based on the purpose statement at the beginning of the letter, it is likely that Paul's instruction to Timothy (as well as the guidance for the church and church leaders) is given in view of the threat of false teachers. Timothy is to confront the false teachers and to guard the correct teaching. It may well be that some of the instructions of chapter 2 are related to the need to maintain healthy teaching. Likewise, the instructions concerning church leaders in chapter 3 may reflect the presence of false teachers. When false teaching is a threat, an authorized, authoritative group of teachers must be identified. Such teachers must know what to say, must have first applied the truth in their own lives to give the message credibility, and must continue to set a good example. These ideas are reflected in Paul's instructions to the leaders and also to Timothy concerning his own ministry (chap. 4).

Second, Paul reminds Timothy and the church at Ephesus that the church must **depend on God** to realize the calling of the church to holy, dependent living. Holy living depends on having correct understandings of God, God's purpose, and God's will. The assemblies must reflect the church's commitment to quiet living and prayer dependence on God. The assemblies must reflect the church's interest in those around it. The assemblies are no place for advancing oneself, and it is especially important that the teaching done in the assemblies be accurate. Those who are easily led away must be warned and their influence combated.

Third, Paul urges the young minister to **work with and support the church leaders**. The groups of church leaders named include the bishops (elders), the deacons, and at least two groups of women who are at work in the activities of the church. The first of the two groups of women is simply called "the women". These are mentioned in the context of the instructions concerning elders and deacons. That these are the deacons' wives is unlikely since there is no corresponding list of characteristics for the elders' wives. More likely, these women are a

¹ The list that follows is drawn from the first letter to Timothy, but the themes mentioned are also reflected in the letter to Titus, and in the second letter to Timothy.

group of qualified women (deaconesses?) who work in various aspects of the church. This group is especially important in view of that some women were especially susceptible to being led away by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6-7) and that other women were apparently parading themselves ostentatiously in the assembly and seeking to assume inappropriate roles (2:9-12). This section is concluded by (or immediately followed by) Paul's stated desire that all know how to behave in the church (either in the church generically as members of the church, or in the assembly). This requires that Christians understand the nature of the church, appreciate the church in God's plan, know the mystery and foundation of the church, and recognize the threats that surround the church—threats which require that the leaders and minister protect the church.

Following this purpose statement at the end of chapter 3 and at the beginning of chapter 4, Paul urges Timothy to **personal integrity in ministry** and to work with and encourage the various groups in the church. The conclusion of the letter includes a final charge to Timothy. Paul's instructions to Timothy regarding ministry are detailed below.

Based on this brief overview, First Timothy can be outlined as follows.

1_A Charge to Preach and Protect the Gospel [includes a brief purpose statement]

[After a brief purpose statement, this section is addressed to Timothy regarding his tasks in ministry, especially as they relate to the gospel]

2_A Charge regarding Prayer and Behavior in Worship

[This charge guides Timothy's work with and instruction to the church]

3_A Charge to Work with the Church Leaders

[This charge contains semi-public instruction about church leaders]

Purpose Statement: how to act in the church [3:14-4:5]

[This section treats the nature of the church, the purpose of the church, the mystery and foundation of the church, and the threats that surround the church]

4_A Charge to Integrity in Ministerial Leadership

[This charge to Timothy concerns his personal life in ministry]

5_A Charge regarding Behavior in the church [5:1-6:2]

[This section gives instructions concerning various groups in the church, their responsibilities and Timothy's interaction with those groups]

6_A Final Charge to Timothy

[This section includes some instruction for the church, but Timothy's charge is to practice the principles, and then to teach them]

The task of ministry requires that the man of God be faithful in three areas. **The minister must be faithful to the Word, to the task of ministry, and to the people with whom he ministers.** This is no easy job. Being faithful to the people includes both those in the church and those outside the church. Being faithful to people includes teaching the lost, edifying the church, and combating false teachers. Some contemporary ministers attempt to do ministry with only one or two of these three primary areas in view. Some spend all of their time with Christians and

seldom touch the lives of the lost. Some spend time with people but do not spend enough time in the Word of God to be faithful to the gospel and passionate about the Word.

A Charge to Preach the Gospel—1 Timothy 1

Paul urges Timothy to preach. Preaching involves both confronting those who teach false doctrines and correcting those who engage in useless, improvable, meaningless speculations. Controversy is not an appropriate subject of preaching. Preachers are to preach their faith, not their doubts.

Preaching focuses in the gospel of God's grace, demonstrated by the faith and love that are in Christ. Preaching requires a passion for truth, and believing that the truth of Jesus Christ has one goal—to save sinners.

This charge to preach is primary. The preacher so preaches as to touch and convict both the lost and the saved. The preacher knows how to confront false teachers. The preacher is committed to the priority of the Gospel, the purity of the Gospel, and a passion for truth.

A Charge concerning Prayer and Christian Behavior in Assemblies—1 Timothy 2

It is difficult to claim a single focus for this chapter. Some have said the subject is worship, but it seems the focus may be larger than the public worship. Paul urges Timothy to set certain matters in order. It is of interest that the matters addressed here are not mentioned in the Ephesian letter which likely comes from about the same time period. Perhaps Paul recognizes that some things are best handled in a practical, private way. Paul entrusts to Timothy the task of helping the church learn proper prayer (by subject and method). Such prayer depends on understanding our access to God through Christ. Our dependence on God keeps us from asserting ourselves and stepping out of the God-given order. Christian assemblies should be characterized by decorum and correct teaching by those entrusted with the task. The church lives and is instructed in quietness.

A Charge to Work with Church Leaders—1 Timothy 3

This chapter is well-known in church circles for its instructions concerning the characteristics of church leaders—both elders and deacons. Apparently Timothy, as Titus, can serve the church by helping it select spiritual leaders. In today's world with many leadership theories derived from the secular world, some would say that the church followers should select the leaders. First Timothy chapter 3 may suggest that the church cannot do that effectively or well without guidance. The chapter also shows that while the letter is addressed to Timothy, there are sections that contain semi-public instruction so that the reading of the letter would instruct and admonish the church as well as Timothy.

The Purpose of the Instructions—1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

Paul includes a reference to the importance of these instructions near the center of the letter. This section either follows what precedes it, or perhaps concludes it. In the passage, we see another reason for Paul's writing. (Remember that we identified a brief purpose statement near the beginning of the letter.) These instructions (a charge to Timothy, instructions to the church, and instructions concerning to church leaders) are necessary because it is not certain that Paul will be able to come as soon as he hopes. In the meantime, people need to know how

to act in the church. This is important because of the nature of the church, the purpose of the church, the mystery and foundation of the church, and the threats that surround the church. Paul wants Timothy and the church at Ephesus to appreciate God's plan for the church (consider also Ephesians 1-3 in this area). He urges Timothy to be prepared to protect the church, especially from false teachers.

A Charge to Ministerial Integrity in Leadership—1 Timothy 4:6-16

In this section, Paul urges Timothy to personal integrity evidenced by orderly living. This chapter is worthy of an entire sermon concerning how ministry is to be done. The brothers are to be instructed in the truth of faith. The example of the minister is to avoid temptations and to be an example of how life is lived when one is trained in godliness. The minister lives in hope, and demonstrates that hope by a level of labor and striving that leaves no doubt concerning his priorities and passion. His example is above approach. His devotion to Scripture, preaching and teaching is obvious to all. His life is visible and worthy of emulation. His doctrine is likewise above reproach. His perseverance is known to all. This kind of ministerial integrity saves people—the lost are saved, the church is sustained in salvation, and the minister is saved.

A Charge regarding Behaviors and Relationships with various groups—1 Timothy 5:1-6:2

There is some question about whether this section should conclude at 6:2 or continue through 6:10. We have chosen this division of the text because the final charge to Timothy includes an admonition to help people think correctly about the contrast between the riches of this world and the riches of God. The inclusion of the subject of worldly riches in 6:17-19 seems a good reason to include 6:3-10 in the final section as well.

Effective ministry establishes healthy and helpful relationships with members of the church. This section includes instructions about how to treat older men, older women, younger men, younger women, and other groups including widows and elders, slaves and masters.

A Final Charge—1 Timothy 6:3-21

The final charge to Timothy is to combat false teaching, false doctrine, and instruction that is not healthy. Friction is easier than harmony. Truth is easily lost, and even more easily lost when money enters the picture. In fact, truth and money are virtual opposites. Money misused and misevaluated surely leads to evil. Wrong understandings of money lead people away from faith and into troubles.

The first line of defense is the righteous life of the man of God. Hope in God is displayed in lives built on the firm foundation of life that is genuinely life.

Second Timothy

It is on the basis of the teachings and instructions outlined in the first letter that Paul writes the second letter a few years later. In this letter, one can identify four principles for effective ministry. These principles are especially important because of the changing nature of our world. In a world of change, the church is continually challenged to address the current situation without letting go of our firm grasp of the truth. An easy way to explain the progression of the second letter is this: (1) what you have received, (2) the importance of doing

something with what you have received, (3) the power for action in such a time as this is from God, (4) the result of faithful action.

Effective ministry is generation to generation

We can also call this “what you have received.” Paul had a great heritage in the Lord. He has received a legacy. No generation can sit down and be satisfied with the success of the previous generation. It does not matter what the past looked like, whether success or failure. The torch is passed to us.

We are called (1:6-8) according to our gifts and opportunities. The previous generations provide for us examples. We must protect what has been entrusted to us, moving forward in the power of the Holy Spirit.

Effective ministry is urgent

We call this “the importance of doing something with what you have received.” Christianity is no leisure-time activity. Christianity is not something we pursue in our spare time. Such a low priority is no priority at all.

Effective ministry recognizes the most urgent task is passing on the message of truth. The message must be told again and again and again. It is entrusted to many, in the hopes that some will pass on the message.

Paul illustrates this truth with several images—images which reflect the nature of ministry, images which communicate the priority of Christianity. Among these word pictures are witnesses, soldiers, athletes, farmers, prisoners or criminals, workers (tentmakers?), and useful household tools.

The minister is a good workman. He is not sloppy, negligent, nor slothful. He is capable and knowledgeable in handling the Bible, the word of truth. He is competent, expert, and of good reputation. His life is above criticism in that even if such comes, it is not deserved and he is not ashamed.

Effective ministry depends on God’s power

In a time of change, God provides. The first century church faced terrible times. Those times were at least as bad as ours—probably worse. Paul in his own personal ministry had faced and endured persecutions and trouble. Such is the nature of life, and is beyond us if we are depending solely on our own power.

The power for God’s work comes from God. The Scriptures provide all wisdom. The Scriptures provide salvation through faith. The scriptures are God-given and useful in every circumstance of life. The Scriptures perfectly equip for every work at hand.

Effective ministry which incorporates these basic characteristics has the desired result

When ministry recognizes that the task is urgent, when the word is preached, when the life and death nature of the work is seen, the minister never lets up. He is always prepared in every time. He is never off duty, just as the Christian is never off duty. He is always patiently, carefully instructing, giving correction, rebuke, encouragement, or whatever the situation requires.

Effective ministry is stable, purposeful, always working in evangelism, never missing an opportunity so that every ministry duty is fulfilled. The result is demonstrated in Paul's own life and confidence. Faithful ministry leads to confidence in the crown.