

1-2 Timothy – 1 Timothy 1:12-20

Review

Last time, we began our study of Paul's pastoral letters to his beloved spiritual child Timothy. Before starting our study of the text of the letters, we looked at what the book of Acts has to say about Timothy and his ministry with Paul. We then briefly looked at the greeting of 1 Timothy and talked about the meaning of the Greek word **ἀπόστολος** *apostolos* – one sent forth under orders – which Paul frequently used to describe himself. Then we began looking at Paul's first warning to Timothy about false teachers in Ephesus – those who were straying from straightforward Gospel-centered teaching into distracting speculations about genealogies and other minutia. Finally, we spent the greatest part of our time looking at several Greek words in 1 Timothy 1:10 regarding the assertion by some professing Christians who promote the homosexual and transgender ideologies that these Greek words have been mistranslated in the “mainstream” English language translations of God's Word. That led us into a brief discussion about the fluid nature of human language and the imperfection of the language translation process itself using 1 Corinthians 13 as our example.

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Let's continue now in our study of the text of 1 Timothy.

12I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 1 Timothy 1:12 (ESV)

Recall that Paul was writing this first epistle to Timothy either near the end of his 2-year house arrest in Rome or just afterward. Paul was writing from Rome after Timothy had returned to Ephesus. Paul had suffered greatly in his Gospel ministry, just as Jesus said to Ananias of Damascus...

For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.” Acts 9:16 (ESV)

Thus, Paul speaks here of the strength he had received from the LORD throughout these tribulations. As he wrote this letter, Paul had been under arrest for his Gospel preaching for about five years. Paul's ministry was fraught with persecution and danger from the beginning. Two years before he met Timothy, Paul had been stoned and left for dead in Lystra – Timothy's own hometown (Acts 14:19-20). During our last meeting we mentioned the fact that Paul frequently found himself defending his status as an apostle of Jesus Christ even to the congregations that he himself had established. In his second letter to the church in Corinth (written sometime during Paul's third missionary journey on which Timothy accompanied him), Paul listed some of the suffering he had endured during his ministry.

24From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. 25Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; 26in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; 27in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and

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nakedness— ²⁸besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches. 2 Corinthians 11:24-28 (ESV)

Of course, Timothy was aware of these sufferings, and had endured some of them himself alongside Paul as they journeyed and ministered together. Paul doesn't reiterate these things in his letter to Timothy, but simply remarks that through all of them he drew his strength from Jesus by the power of His indwelling Spirit.

ASIDE – In the USA and much of the affluent world today, we see church fellowships splintering for petty causes. In Europe and North America, people are turning away from church fellowships and from God Himself at an ever-increasing pace. In this, we are like the seed that fell by the way in Jesus' Parable of the Sower – allowing the cares and pleasures of this world to choke out the seed of the Gospel which God's Spirit has sown in our hearts. Some churches splinter over doctrinal or procedural differences. Many small local church fellowships simply fade away like old soldiers as their aging congregants die off one-by-one without being replaced. Other churches disappear simply because their members are no longer interested in fellowship with each other or due to the ever-present "church hurt" caused by unloving behavior among Christian brothers and sisters. People are also leaving large churches due to misbehavior on the part of church leaders. The Southern Baptist Convention – the world's largest Protestant denomination – lost over 400,000 members in 2022, and over 3 million since 2006, and that decline is accelerating.

Strange as it may sound, I believe this implosion of God's Church in affluent societies is due to a lack of suffering for the sake of the Gospel. When the Church first came into being after Jesus ascended back to His Father, intense persecution of the Church began immediately – with Saul of Tarsus himself being one of its strongest opponents. Yet, despite that suffering and the intense persecution that followed over the next few centuries, the Church thrived. Christian believers had to depend upon one another for their very survival. Even today, in places around the world where Christians are intensely persecuted, local fellowships continue to thrive and grow as their members nurture and reassure one another.

But in the places where persecution is rare and mild, Christian fellowships are moribund and many simply evaporate for lack of interest. I am concerned that when intense persecution of Christians arrives in our communities – as it eventually must in fulfillment of Biblical prophecy – there will be no fellowship of believers left to care for one another.

[Keb' Mo' - Victims of Comfort](#)

¹³though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, ¹⁴and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:13-14 (ESV)

Just in case someone isn't familiar with Paul's history prior to being saved, here is a brief summary. The only biographical information we have available about Saul of Tarsus (known better by his Roman name – Paul) comes from Luke in the book of Acts, and from Paul himself in his letters. Although he was a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, he was also a Roman citizen – born in the port city of

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Tarsus in the Roman province of Cilicia in what is now southeast Turkey. The date of Saul's birth is unknown, but it was likely just a few years after Jesus was born. As a young man, Saul joined the sect of the Pharisees and studied under the famous teacher Gamaliel (Acts 22:3). After Jesus' ascension, persecution of His new Church in Jerusalem and in the surrounding regions began immediately. About one year after Jesus' ascension, Stephen – one of the men chosen by the eleven remaining apostles to serve as deacons in the church at Jerusalem – was falsely accused of blasphemy and stoned to death outside the city. Saul witnessed this execution and approved of it (Acts 7:58 & 8:1). In the subsequent months, Saul was a leader in the persecution of the church in Jerusalem and the surrounding region (Acts 8:3). Finally, Saul obtained authorization from the chief priest in Jerusalem to arrest and imprison members of the Church in Damascus. On the journey to Damascus, Jesus appeared as a blinding light to Saul, and called Paul as His apostle (Acts 9:1-9).

Paul refers here in this passage to his persecution of the church and his denial of the Gospel before his encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus. To me this begs a question. Timothy no doubt knew about these things in Paul's past. Why did Paul bother to repeat them here in this letter? Perhaps Paul **did** intend for Timothy to share his letter with the church in Ephesus and the surrounding region.

Paul goes on to say that he received God's mercy because he persecuted the Church before he knew the truth of the Gospel. This immediately begs another question. Does God consider our unknowing sins differently than our purposeful ones? Even as He was being nailed to the cross, Jesus appealed to His Father to forgive those who were crucifying Him because they didn't realize what they were doing (Luke 23:34). The Law of Moses called for special sacrifices to be made by those who sinned unknowingly (Leviticus 4:2). Nevertheless, the Law also reminds us that unknowing sin is still sin before our perfectly righteous God.

17“If anyone sins, doing any of the things that by the LORD’s commandments ought not to be done, though he did not know it, then realizes his guilt, he shall bear his iniquity. 18He shall bring to the priest a ram without blemish out of the flock, or its equivalent, for a guilt offering, and the priest shall make atonement for him for the mistake that he made unintentionally, and he shall be forgiven. 19It is a guilt offering; he has indeed incurred guilt before the LORD.” Leviticus 5:17-19 (ESV)

Jesus also apparently taught a differentiation between unknowing and intentional sin in His Parable of the Faithful and Wicked Servants.

47And that servant who knew his master’s will but did not get ready or act according to his will, will receive a severe beating. 48But the one who did not know, and did what deserved a beating, will receive a light beating. Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more. Luke 12:47-48 (ESV)

Since Jesus offered up His own life in our behalf, we are no longer under the Law of Moses with its animal sacrificial system for the atonement of sin. Nevertheless, we must repent of our sins – both our purposeful sins and those we do in ignorance – seeking the same mercy and forgiveness God granted to Paul that Jesus purchased for us all with His blood. God generously offers His mercy and grace if we will only ask Him. In Acts 3, Peter spoke of this to some of those very Jews who had called for Jesus to be crucified, whom Jesus Himself had asked His Father to forgive.

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¹⁴*But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer [Barabbas – e.g. Matthew 27:15-23] to be granted to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man [a lame beggar whom Peter had just healed by the Name of Jesus] strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.*

¹⁷*“And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer (e.g. Isaiah 53), he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:14-21 (ESV)*

¹⁵*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. ¹⁶But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:15-17 (ESV)*

When Paul says here in 1 Timothy 1:15 that Jesus came to save sinners, what he really means is that Jesus came to save anyone and everyone who believes in His resurrection and calls upon His Name for salvation. After all we are **all** sinners both by nature and by choice!

Recall Jesus' response to the Pharisees who had complained that Jesus was eating and drinking with tax collectors and sinners at Matthew's house.

³¹*And Jesus answered them, “Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. ³²I have not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.” Luke 5:31-32 (ESV)*

Yet Paul makes an interesting point here that Jesus frequently uses His mercy and grace upon those whom we ourselves might consider most unworthy as examples to everyone who might think of himself as somehow more worthy. Probably almost every Christian believer in Israel and surrounding lands had heard of Paul's persecution of the church by the time he encountered Jesus on the Damascus Road. Very likely no one who had heard of him ever thought that Saul of Tarsus could possibly receive salvation in Christ and the indwelling of His Spirit. Remember Ananias' reaction when Jesus appeared to him and directed him to seek out Saul and minister to him (Acts 9:10-16).

What is our reaction when we hear a known blasphemer and perpetrator of horrendous sins like Jeffrey Dahmer confess belief in the Gospel of Jesus Christ? In our heart of hearts, don't most of us

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mistrust the confession? Don't we secretly assume that Jesus will deny His mercy and grace to those we consider irredeemable monsters? Yet Jesus uses people like Paul and others who are known to have committed heinous crimes as examples that He has come to save **all** sinners – even and especially those that “right thinking” people might consider lost causes.

18This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, 19holding faith and a good conscience... 1 Timothy 1:18-19a (ESV)

Church tradition holds that Paul was released temporarily from his first house arrest in Rome (ca. 62-63 AD), and was later arrested, imprisoned, and eventually martyred during the general roundup of Christians in Rome following the Great Fire of Rome in July 64. However, there is no direct contemporary evidence of Paul's release or indeed of his final imprisonment and execution. Everything we know about Paul's life and ministry is found in the book of Acts, and in Paul's own letters. The book of Acts ends with Paul freely ministering the Gospel in Rome from his headquarters in a rented house there. In fact, it isn't entirely clear from the text of Acts itself whether Paul was ever actually tried before Caesar (Nero). When Paul first arrived in Rome, he was free to come and go as he pleased with the single Roman soldier assigned to guard him (Acts 28:16). Later, in his second letter to Timothy, Paul mentions his chains. We have already mentioned that Timothy was also apparently under arrest during his time together in Rome with Paul (Hebrews 13:23). Apart from these few Biblical facts, most of what we surmise about the final years of Paul's ministry is based on speculation and tradition – not hard contemporary documentation.

Recall Paul's statement to the elders of the church at Ephesus when he met with them at Miletus on his way to Jerusalem at the end of his third missionary journey...

22And now, behold, I am going to Jerusalem, constrained by the Spirit, not knowing what will happen to me there, 23except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and afflictions await me. 24But I do not account my life of any value nor as precious to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of the grace of God. 25And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again. Acts 20:22-25 (ESV)

But if we read between the lines of 1 Timothy 1:18, we can infer that Paul himself realized his evangelistic mission was coming to an end. Therefore, Paul says that he is passing the mission – in which he and Timothy had labored together for many years – on to Timothy alone to carry forward. I could find no explicit reference in Acts or any of the Pauline epistles to the prophecies about Timothy that Paul speaks of here, but we can safely assume they pertained to this same charge of ministry that Paul was now passing on to Timothy. Paul repeated this charge to Timothy once more in 1 Timothy 6:13, and then one final time in 2 Timothy 4:1. Before we move on, note that in all three of these passages, Paul simply assumes the authority as Timothy's spiritual father to direct Timothy's ongoing ministerial efforts.

19...By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, 20among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:19b-20 (ESV)

The only Biblical mentions of Hymenaeus are in Paul's pastoral letters to Timothy. We know nothing else about Hymenaeus apart from Paul's warnings to Timothy about him. From his name, we can infer that Hymenaeus was not a Jew, and from the context of Paul's warnings, we can infer that Timothy knew him either from Ephesus or from Rome. Hymenaeus may have been one of those "certain people" who had wandered away from the true Gospel into speculations about myths and genealogies that Paul mentioned earlier in this chapter.

The name Alexander was very common among the Gentiles – particularly the Greeks – since the time of Alexander the Great. In fact, thousands of years later, it remains a popular boy's name throughout the world. Therefore, it is impossible to determine exactly which Alexander Paul speaks of here in 1 Timothy 1:20. Indeed, this may be the same Jewish Alexander who attempted to speak in defense of Paul and his disciples during the riot at Ephesus (Acts 19:33). We can safely infer that Timothy was familiar with the Alexander whom Paul mentions here. We can also assume that even if Alexander had been a professing Christian at one time, he had later fallen away from the faith and worked against Paul during his first trial at Rome (2 Timothy 4:14-18).

ASIDE – Pastors and church leaders have a sacred charge to protect our flocks from false teachers who Jesus in His Sermon on the Mount said, ***"...come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves."*** (Matthew 7:15) Yet many Bible teachers shy away from "naming names" in calling out heresy from the pulpit. In the dim reaches of ages past when I myself was a child, parents taught that if we don't have anything nice to say about someone, we should keep our peace. But if our intent is to warn our brothers and sisters about wolves among the flock, how can we possibly accomplish that purpose without identifying the wolves as Paul did here in his letter to Timothy.

With that much understood, we also need to ensure that when we speak about people who aren't present to defend themselves, we are willing to attach our own names and reputations to whatever we are saying. In my humble opinion, journalists should be forbidden to quote or paraphrase "anonymous sources." Nor should anonymous "whistle blowers" be "a thing." Anyone who is willing to say anything at all should also have the courage to stake their names and reputations on what they say. If they are not willing to stand behind what they say, they should simply sit down and shut up. Furthermore, any accusations we utter – especially from the pulpit in the Name of God – must always be based on our own direct knowledge, not repeated gossip heard from someone else. Otherwise, our parents were correct. We should simply remain silent.

James speaks at length about the power of the tongue – for good or for evil (James 3:1-12). Once we voice our thoughts, they can no longer be contained. They can never be retrieved and can often return to cause great harm. Unfortunately, God did not provide our tongues with a seven-second delay or a recall function. Therefore, we must continually guard what we say ourselves by the power of God's Spirit within us.

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A useful mnemonic tool for doing this is the acronym – THINK.

- T** - Is it true?
- H** - Is it helpful?
- I** - Is it inspiring?
- N** - Is it necessary?
- K** - Is it kind?

Since we're speaking about calling out false teaching and false teachers from the pulpit, we're already assuming that what we wish to say is *true* (by our own first-hand knowledge). Obviously, any truthful warnings we offer will be *helpful* to our hearers. They should also *inspire* our hearers to research the allegations for themselves under the guidance of God's Spirit and the illumination of His Word.

Obviously, such warnings are *necessary* since Christian flocks are continually under spiritual attack from our great enemy who seeks to kill, steal, and devour all that is holy. But we must also ensure that our warnings are *kind*. They must never be personal attacks. The intent must always be restoration of an erring brother or sister into loving fellowship with God and His Church.

But I'll step down now from my soap box.

Looking Ahead

Next time, God willing we will continue our study of Paul's first pastoral letter to Timothy starting with Paul's admonition to pray for everyone, and then launching into one of the most controversial passages in all of God's Word.