

Although addressed to one individual, Paul writes as an Apostle by direct authority of God and the Lord Himself. This epistle is binding on every believer, then and now. God is not titled "Father" here, but the Lord Jesus Christ is titled in full. And He is our hope! The future, not the present, is our objective. Timothy is addressed intimately and affectionately as Paul's own son in the faith. But it is not only fatherly care for his son in the faith that Paul exercises here, but a father's assignment of duties to his son in the faith who is to represent him in the faith.

When writing individuals Paul adds "mercy" to "grace and peace" by which he customarily greets congregations of local assemblies. We personally each need mercy for our walk here, as well as the grace and peace. There are responsibilities and privileges an individual believer has that a congregation of believers cannot fulfill. The assembly does not teach, shepherd or evangelize. Individual believers do. The assembly benefits from their service for the Lord and supports and accommodates them. On the other hand, scripturally, an individual cannot rule an assembly, direct assembly meetings or its decisions. Christ is its Head.

Paul has gone on to Macedonia, where are the faithful, generous assemblies we have read about before, Philippi, Berea, and Thessalonica. Timothy was with him on the first visits to those places and had later been sent as Paul's messenger and representative to Philippi and Thessalonica when Paul was too endangered to return himself. Now he and Timothy are separated again for the Lord's work. There is much to do and too few that could be relied upon to do it. A few years earlier Paul had written the Philippians from the Roman prison:

Philippians 2:19 But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20 For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. 21 For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. 22 But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel. 23 Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me. 24 But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.

So young Timothy, as a stand-in for the apostle, is entrusted with a challenging responsibility to minister to the many and various needs of a spiritually mature, local assembly, Ephesus. This was work that perhaps seemed overwhelming for his apparently timid personality, yet in the wisdom of the Lord he often chooses meek men for delicate jobs for which naturally assertive people might not be as suited. Paul encourages Timothy so he won't let his timidity move him to opt out of work the Lord has given him to do through the Holy Spirit.

First off, Paul beseeches him to charge some, without naming names, that they teach no other doctrine. Other than what? Teaching or preaching other than the gospel Paul

had been given as an apostle. Timothy is able to recognize other doctrine, whether taught ignorantly or intentionally. We are to be alert to recognize other doctrine too, if it should arise among us or becomes popular in Christendom. Some saints may be gifted, as Timothy was, to specifically detect "other doctrine" and expose and refute it from scripture without offensive arguments. Sound doctrine is essential to survival of an assembly.

In the place of sound doctrine some were apparently prone to introduce "fables" or become occupied with "endless genealogies." These are not only unprofitable (or worse) in themselves, they distract the saint's hearts from the truth and ultimately from Christ. These have no eternal value but draw our thoughts, time and energy away from Christ and the faith.

Fables The literature and religious folklore of both the Jews and the pagans are rife with intriguing stories and legends well calculated to excite curiosity and imaginations of both simple and sophisticated minds. In addition to pagan Greek and Roman mythology the Gnostic's of that day were introducing their own brand of religious superstition and challenging Christian faith. The Mormons and Jehovah Witnesses do so today. The Apocrypha, non-inspired books added to the Bible, are an example of Jewish fables, although they are sometimes useful as historical accounts of the times. Down through the years vast numbers of Christian fables have appeared, e.g. stories of miraculous visions and sightings of the Virgin Mary, exaggerated or fanciful accounts of "saints" beatified by the Roman Church and stories of modern day "miracles" and "spiritual manifestations" that stir excitement among the Charismatic Christians. There are many, many cute fables surrounding the "Christmas story" like "Amahl and the Night Visitors," "The Little Drummer Boy" (song) etc., etc. The "Missing Day" fable citing (falsely) a NASA engineer could be called a Christian Legend. There are a number of these going around, the Christian equivalent of Urban Legends, the exciting, but false, stories that spread like wildfire in the secular world. There is a web site on the Internet that is helpful in exposing and debunking such stories, <www.truthminers.com>. Christians sometimes seem to be a rather gullible lot. Stories that are often spread by word of mouth upset many of the Lord's own. Such stories, when they become public, discredit the gospel message. They are both linked together in the mind of the unbeliever as foolishness. (The gospel is ranked as foolishness anyway to sophisticated people, 1Corinthians 1:18-24.) Fictional accounts (novels, films, etc.) of Bible times and characters, though often interesting, may impart an image of Jesus, or some other person or event, which is not really according to scripture. These can have the effect of distorting the believer's perception of the Lord or some Bible story. Be careful, and check what you see and read against the Bible. Children are especially vulnerable. Be

cautious about what they are exposed to.

The endless genealogies Paul refers to are not the official Jewish ancestral records needed to verify one's place in the priesthood or one's tribal lot. These are not endless, however useless they were now that Messiah was come and rejected and gone. Soon their temple would be destroyed, the Jewish people scattered world wide and all of it rendered meaningless. But occupation of ancestry among a **heavenly** people called out from the world by an ascended Christ is also of no good use. Social distinctions of ancestry would only divide the assembly in which there is no such distinctions.

Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

Colossians 3:11 Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all.

The Mormons' preoccupation with genealogies only mirrors that of the Gnostics' who apparently devised mystic genealogies derived from fanciful beings. On another front, the Roman Catholics claim Papal authority by tracing it back to "St. Peter." More recently, similar claims for having the only "Lord's Table" have been heard, validated by tracing a pedigree back to J. N. Darby and the small group that originally came out from the Anglican Church to meet on the ground of the One Body. The resulting questioning, and divisiveness do not glorify God.

Love is the end result Paul is seeking in the commandment Timothy is given to administer, love out of a pure heart. A pure heart and a good conscience that results from pure conduct that is consistent with the intents of a pure (undivided) heart. But instead of this some were first turning aside [swerving, straying] and turning to that which Paul calls vain discourse, fruitless discussion, meaningless talk, idle talk, vain jangling, not the sweet music of sound doctrine which rings clear like a bell and edified the hearers. The Gospels document many examples of the Pharisees' vain discourse which Jesus had to counter..

Paul is referring specifically to some who desire to be teachers of the law. The Law, that old obstacle to grace, just keeps coming up among professing believers. Paul has to contend for the faith in almost all of his writings. Little or no mention of the Law was made in his epistle to the Ephesians, but it is now becoming an issue there as well. There were two possible explanations why. Either they don't even understand what they are saying, or they don't realize the consequences of what they (strenuously) claim to affirm and hold.

Paul first points out that the law is good. It is holy just and good, Romans 7:12. The problem is not with the Law. It is with those who cannot, or will not, keep it. The natural man, the flesh, instinctively rebels against regulation or restraint. Paul very aptly shows the law is not made for the righteous person but for the lawless and

disobedient—those who practice all manner of horrendous, unholy acts, including everything and anything that is not according to sound teaching. **The standard is the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to Paul's trust.** That which he was to faithfully bring to all, the Jew first and also the Gentile. That which he was to define and defend at the cost of his very life. Paul thanks the Lord Jesus Christ for God's calling and enabling him to bring the gospel.

The law is useful if used lawfully, that is, according to the purpose it was given. It was given to show mankind we are totally incapable of pleasing God by any human effort. Cain tried to, even though he was not under any law, and because he failed he murdered his own brother. So the Law can and should be used to convict sinners of their sinfulness and lost condition. It can be used even if the hearer doesn't "believe in God." The word of God is sharper than any two edged sword. It first convicts a lost soul then presents the way of salvation. While the law is useful for convicting souls it isn't lawful to use as the way to obtain salvation. Keeping the law is not the way to eternal life. The cross of Jesus is. Preach that!

The Jesus never once broke the law, yet He died for every sin I committed that violated the law. Therefore God can righteously forgive my sins and count me righteous, or just in His sight. What grace! Don't ever let God's grace be diluted or tarnished by introducing the law as a way of salvation or as a way of life after a person is justified. The law is useful! Useful to expose and condemn sin. Then grace takes over. The Old Testament saints having been given the law learned they couldn't keep it. Condemned by it they obtained salvation by faith casting themselves upon the mercy of the God who gave the Law. David did, Psalm 51.

The law gives insights into God's own heart. The glory of His holiness is revealed in it. Paul uses three pairs of terms to describe who it is for:

- * the lawless (those who do not acknowledge the right of law) and *disobedient, (Those who accept the law but disobey it.)
- * the ungodly (impious, those who will not accept God's existence or rights as Creator God and *for sinners, (those who acknowledge there is a God but ignore His rights.)
- * unholy (those who are unclean) and *profane, (those who give top priority to occupation with earthly things).

Then Paul names specific sins as examples. While this list is not all-inclusive the things that are named are significant and prevalent among the lost. They are key points to use to bring a sinner to Christ. Yet this very list shows the grace of God for He saves all such that come to Him. Come! Once having come to Christ these things should not be seen among us.

By Ron Canner, February 15, 2006.