

Timothy – A Man Dear to God

There are three New Testament passages that when taken together, provide us with both a background into the early history of Timothy, and also an insight into the Epistles that are considering as part of our Daily Readings. 2 Timothy chapter 1 speaks of the faith exhibited by him, his mother, and grandmother:

“... the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also” (2 Tim. 1:5).

From these words, we find that so far as his maternal side was concerned, Timothy would have been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord (cp Eph. 6:4). That this was so is confirmed by 2 Timothy 3:

“... from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15).

Both testimonies show that Paul had an intimate knowledge of both Timothy, and his family life. “From a child”, Lois and Eunice instilled in him a faith which reflected that of their own – so making him “wise unto salvation”.

However, the third passage shatters any thoughts we may have had, that Timothy’s family background was a harmonious one. Acts chapter 16 describes Paul:

“then came he to Derby and Lystra: and behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess and believed; but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1).

Moreover, we read further that:

“him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters; for they knew all that his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1, 3).

The truth of the matter therefore, is that Timothy came from a divided household. He had not been circumcised according to the Mosaic Law – and since his Mother and Grandmother were faithful believers, this is most probably due to the influence of his Greek father. So it was, that in order that he might go with Paul, and have acceptance amongst the Jews, the Apostle circumcised him.

Acts chapter 16, cited above shows that Paul found Timothy at Lystra. Verse 2 speaks of how he was “well reported of by the brethren that were of Lystra and Iconium”, so that his faith was well-known. But what is of particular interest, is that this occasion was not the first time Paul had been to Lystra. Acts chapter 14 recounts the healing of a lame man in that place, and of how movers of sedition sought to destroy the Apostle by stoning him:

“there came hither certain Jews from Antioch and Iconium, who persuade the people, and having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead” (Acts 14:19).

Timothy would have been a witness to all this (see 2 Tim 3:11). He would have seen the miraculous healing of the cripple. He would have seen the stoning of the Apostle Paul, which took place as a direct consequence of the preaching of the Word. Yet he did not keep his faith to himself for reasons of safety, but became well-known for what he believed and taught – which doubtless put him at considerable risk.

What is particularly significant concerning the stoning of Paul at Lystra, is how they supposed Paul to have died from his injuries – yet we read in the next verse:

“howbeit as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derby” (Acts 14:20).

It was quite possible that Paul had actually died, and was risen from the dead (i.e. “he rose up...”), but be that as it may, there would certainly have had to have been a miraculous healing of his wounds. And we are told that as soon as he rose up, Paul “came into the city” – i.e., he went back to Lystra, where he had just been stoned! What a remarkable illustration of faith!

When we put all these things together, we can make certain deductions. When Paul healed the lame man, the consequence was that many of them believed. From the way in which Paul went back into the city, we could surmise that there was a friendly place there, for him to go to. Was that place, perhaps, the house of Eunice, Lois, and Timothy? Did they provide lodgings for the Apostle? If so, that would certainly explain Paul’s intimate knowledge of the faith of both Lois and Eunice. They, accepting the things concerning the Name of Jesus Christ, and the Kingdom of God, would have taught those things to Timothy – who we may suppose, was also a witness to the things that took place there. Believing in these things, Timothy preached them also, for his faith was known of throughout the vicinity. Indeed, his faith was such, that Paul would have him “to go forth with him” to assist him in his work. So it is in these things, we have the background of Timothy, and also a readiness of his part to be identified with those who suffered with the Lord’s Sake, placing himself in personal danger for the preaching of the Word.

From the Epistles of Paul to Timothy, we learn that the young man was given one of the Holy Spirit Gifts by the Apostle. So we read:

“Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the eldership” (1 Tim. 4:14).

And again:

“wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands” (2 Tim. 1:6).

We aren’t told which gifts Timothy was given, but there appears to have been prophecies associated with them. Hence Paul exhorted him:

“This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightiest war a good warfare ...” (1 Tim. 1:18).

So it was, that part of his role was to be a warrior – waging the warfare of faith against the principles of Sin – something that we shall come to consider presently.

A PRIMARY ROLE

It would appear that the primary role of Timothy was to visit the brethren and sisters who had come to the Truth through the preaching of the Apostle Paul. By reminding them of Paul’s preaching and example, he would consolidate the Ecclesias, and strengthen them in the Lord. So, Paul wrote to the Corinthians:

“For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every ecclesia” (1 Cor. 4:17).

This seems to be a consistent feature in other Epistles:

“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” (Phil. 2:19).

“[we] sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the Gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith” (1 Thess. 3:2).

The passage from Philippians cited above, demonstrates that the communication of Timothy was two-way: he would establish and comfort them by reminding the ecclesias of the ways of Paul, and he would report to Paul the general state of the ecclesias.

TIMOTHY AT EPHESUS

Although there was a need generally to consolidate the ecclesias, there appears to have been a greater need in the ecclesia at Ephesus. Timothy’s ministrations here were not to be administered as he was passing through to another place: he was to stay there for some time:

“As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus ... that thou mightiest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, nether give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith, so do” (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

For some reason, this ecclesia seems to have been more prone to the inroads of apostasy than the others. Hence Acts 20 records how Paul admonished the elders there:

“... I know this that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears” (Acts 20:29-31).

There would appear to have been a measure of success in Timothy’s diligence to obey this command, for when we read later of the Ephesian Ecclesia, they were commended for their watchfulness and the way in which they tried those who claimed to be apostles, yet were not:

“I know thy works and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars: and hast borne, and hast patience, and for my Name’s sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted ...” (Rev. 2:2-3).

However, despite their diligence in this regard, there was still a problem at the ecclesia – perhaps due to an over-zealous crusade against apostasy:

“... Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast lost thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou hast fallen, and repent, and do the first works” (Rev. 2:4-5).

Here is a warning to us: it is vital for us to oppose error when it manifests itself, but the motivation ought to be out of love for the things of the Truth, and not just a hatred for the error. Resisting the apostasy is only part of our work: we must also “be watchful and strengthen the things that remain” (Rev. 3:2), and it is that aspect which the ecclesia at Ephesus was lacking.

A GOOD SOLDIER

We saw earlier how that following the laying on of hands, part of Timothy’s role was to “war a good warfare” (1 Tim. 1:18). This seems to be a theme of the Epistles, as we read also in the second Epistle: “**Be strong** in the grace that is in Christ Jesus ... Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ” (2 Tim. 2:3). This Epistle was the last penned by the Apostle Paul before his death, and spoke of the work that Timothy had to engage himself with in his absence.

There is a parallel here with the words of Moses to Joshua, when Moses was to die, and Joshua was to lead the people in a victorious warfare against the powers of sin that occupied the land:

“Be strong and of a good courage, fear not and be not afraid of them: for Yahweh thy God he it is that will go with thee; he will not fail thee nor forsake thee” (Deut. 31:6).

“And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, **Be strong** and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee” (Deut. 31:23).

And continuing the parallel, we read in Deut. 34:9 that just as Paul had “laid hands” upon Timothy, even so Moses did for Joshua.

BE NOT ENTANGLED

The Apostle continued his exhortation to Timothy, by way of demonstrating the logical outcome of warring a warfare:

“No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier” (2 Tim. 2:4).

King David provides an example of one who did become entangled with the affairs of this life, in his sin with Bathsheba. Rather than being on the front line, warring the warfare against the heathen nations, the record informs us that he instead resided at home. He then became tempted by the display of Bathsheba washing herself, and lost his focus as a warrior of Yahweh. The whole sorry tale demonstrates the depths to which any one of us could descend to, given the right circumstance. We ought to instead focus on the warfare, and not become distracted by the pleasures of sin, even for a season. So it is written:

“... we wrestle not with flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand” (Eph. 6:12-13).

This is the warfare that we are all engaged in – and there is no discharge until the day of our death (see Eccl. 8:8). The Apostle Paul continued his warfare until the very end. Hence he was able to say: “I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of Righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge shall give me at that day ...” (2 Tim. 4:7-8). We must do likewise in order to receive the same reward.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is our leader in the warfare of faith. He is described as being our Captain:

“... it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings ...” (Heb. 2:10).

We then, must follow his lead, to be partakers of his victory. He was never distracted by the deceitfulness of sin: his focus was always on enacting the principles of his Father. And we must do likewise: warring the warfare, that we, with the Apostle Paul might exclaim: “But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ ...” (1 Cor. 15:57).

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