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**Day 351 – December 17**

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## **Christ's Church and the Apostles (30-100 CE)**

### ***First Letter to Timothy***

**Readings: 1 Timothy 1:1-6:21**

#### ***Reflections:***

- **First Letter to Timothy:** Many conservative scholars believe that Paul wrote this after he was released from Rome and returned to Macedonia. Paul is writing to Timothy who is serving in leadership at Ephesus. Most liberal scholars believe that 1, 2 Timothy and Titus called the Pastoral Epistles are all later works from the second century dedicated to Paul. This is based on the Greek vocabulary of all three letters which is more common with second century Christian writers and themes. These arguments are more technical in nature as it has to do with the analysis of what words are most commonly used in the text. Yet as early as 180 CE these letters were viewed as authentic to Paul and this is maybe the most compelling argument to consider them as authentic from Paul, possibly with the help of a secretary. If Paul did not write these, the content within was obviously viewed as so consistent with Paul that the early church leaders included it within the accepted authentic writings of the Jesus movement.
- **Salutation:** Paul's opening greeting is slightly varied from his other letters. He includes mercy in his traditional opening of "grace" and "peace". Timothy was one of his closest companions and a young leader in whom he invested a great deal. It makes sense that at the end of Paul's life he would write such a letter to provide Timothy with this kind of direction.
- **Instructions for the church – unsound doctrine:** Paul warns against a spirituality rooted in philosophical debate and controversy. One of the key indicators of a spirituality that is off base is endless amounts of talking with very little action to show for it. Paul reminds Timothy that the work of the kingdom flows out of our trust relationship with God that has changed us inside out (pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith) and moves us towards loving others. A religious approach to God produces a kind of pride in head knowledge rather than a humility born out of true heart knowledge of God's grace.
- **Law to be used properly:** Throughout the formation of the church, the role of the Jewish Law (or Torah) was actively debated and discussed. Again Paul consistently views the Law as leading sinners toward Christ, a diagnostic tool that reveals sin and prepares their hearts to hear the message of Jesus and his power to transform their hearts and lives through grace and the work of the Spirit.

- Paul an example: Paul again shares his own complete transformation from an angry religious bigot to someone changed by grace, faith and love. Throughout these three pastoral letters Paul gives trustworthy sayings. He is attempting to give Timothy and Titus sound bite leadership statements that they can pass along within their spheres of influence. Paul's first statement is the summary of Jesus' mission and his strategic decision to make Paul an example of divine enemy love and God's ability to save the worst of the worst. Paul is moved by his own experience of grace to declare praise to God. As we come to grips with the depth of our own salvation we can't help but praise God.
- Timothy to keep faith: We see here the natural role of prophecy or hearing God speak within the early Christ community and its role in speaking into leaders' lives and enabling them to remain strong in their leadership. Paul is probably here using military language in his phrase "fight the good fight" referring to the spiritual battle of advancing the kingdom. Paul now highlights two leaders who have apparently rejected their faith and maintaining a clear conscience before God and as a result have crash and burned their relationship with God. Paul does with them what he counseled 1 Corinthians 5:5. This process of handing someone over to Satan was viewed as redemptive. In this case, it was for the purpose of teaching about treating God lightly or blaspheming. Although it sounds harsh the goal is to allow a person to reap the consequences of rejecting God and embracing ways that are completely contrary to the truth.
- Call for men and women to pray: Paul now encourages Timothy to make prayer a top priority. As we say in Ephesians 6:10-20, prayer is a key aspect of spiritual battle. During times of persecution it is particularly important to pray for those in government to seek God's help in creating a climate of peace and security. Paul now rehearses again the key truths of the Jesus movement. God loves everyone equally. There are no racial or religious favorites. There is one mediator between God and humanity – Jesus. Religions day has come and gone. All of this took place on schedule according to God's plans and purposes. Paul was called by God as an apostle, herald, and teacher to the Gentiles. The basics. Paul now affirms the importance of unity to this ongoing practice of prayer.
- Women to be modest: Paul here encourages modesty and not focusing undue attention on self-adornment. This is not a rule that is outlawing all forms of jewelry but rather a principle about not obsessing about your appearance.
- The role of women: This passage has caused a great deal of grief over the years for women as it has been applied strictly without attention to context. Paul as in 1 Corinthians 11:2-16 maintains a culturally sensitive position on women where the freedom they have in Christ is not used in an offensive way. Paul argues not from culture but from the Biblical story and again this is consistent with his approach on these matters. With this said, we should highlight the positive sides. First, women are viewed as fundamentally equal with men (see Galatians 3:28). Women are to be taught as full disciples. Women play an important role in restoration and salvation. Paul is most likely making a connection that the seed of Eve was Christ and that through women, just as through Eve, God is completing his salvation.

Women are vital to the ongoing restoration and salvation as their relationship with Christ sets the stage for how God will use them as mothers within community.

- **Qualification of elders:** Paul affirms those that have a heart desire to be in leadership. Yet the standard is high for those in leadership because their lives are in focus within community. At some level, they must be able to model the truth of God changing us from the inside out. In a culture where a man could have many wives and even concubines, the early church was encouraging their community to move towards a single covenanted partner. They are to model the fruit of the Spirit in their lives and relationships. They are to have a healthy home life. Now these verses have caused some pastors to lose their jobs during the season of life when youth are prone to rebel. This is probably again taking this text out of context in that we keep children at home much longer than they did in this period. Parents are called to manage their children well, not necessarily their teens or young adults. Each situation must be worked through case by case within a grace based community. There is also a strong caution about giving new believers too much authority too quickly and the impact that pride can have on their spiritual development. Consistently in Scripture the major failure of Satan was his pride. Overseers or Elders are the basic leadership term of the New Testament. They are used interchangeably and most likely represented those who led the house churches.
- **Qualifications of deacons:** Deacons were those who provided practical services to the house churches and those in needs. They were the recognized workers who practically kept everything organized and allowed the Elders to focus more on the spiritual welfare of the house church community. Although they do not have the same role, the qualifications are virtually the same. They can be a more recent convert it appears but they must still hold to the deep truths of the faith. It is important that the Deacons who may have more opportunity to handle money should not be interested in dishonest gain (dipping into the house church pot). We should also note that Paul mentions their wives. These words probably apply equally to both Elders and Deacons. We should also note that although only men are suggested as Deacons, women were Deacons in the early church (see Romans 16:1-2 as well as Philippians 4:1-3 that seems to suggest these two women were recognized workers).
- **Reason for instructions:** Paul clarifies again that he is writing to ensure they all stay on track. He hopes to come but in case he is delayed, he wants them to be grounded in solid teaching. Paul now inserts another song as he sometimes does. These songs are the early confessions of the church. Again we see how completely Jesus focused these songs are. “He appeared in a body (suggests a pre-incarnation state of being before he was born), was vindicated by the Spirit (referring to the resurrection), was seen by messengers (often translated as “angels” but the context clearly points to messengers – the Greek word can be translated either way depending on context), was preached among the nations, was believed in the world, was taken up to glory (the chronological ordering would have placed

the ascension earlier in the song but that is the nature of songwriting).” We see the entire life and mission of Jesus summarized in this simple song.

- Human doctrines: Paul now refers to prophetic words through the Spirit that are giving those in leadership understanding that there are going to be false teachers that will cause them problems. There is not only the work of the Spirit but we also see the active reality of a spiritual warfare as some false leaders are empowered by unclean spirits to cause serious difficulty for the church. We see that the hallmarks of these false teachers are a form of super spirituality that focuses on a harsh treatment of the body and the rejection of marriage (sexuality even within marriage was viewed as sinful) and certain foods. Within the Roman context there were some religious cults that viewed the body and everything that was physical as evil and fallen. This worldview in time influences some groups of Christians and by the second century they form a sect of Christianity called Gnosticism. They rewrite their own gospels and become an alternate form of Christianity that becomes religious in its own super spiritual way. Some Christians today fall into a similar trap with hyper emphasis on fasting, punishing their bodies and viewing sexuality as fundamentally a compromise or fallen rather than something to be celebrated before God. Paul again has a very open view believing that everything God created is good and should be received with thanksgiving and offered back as worship to God.
- Instructions to Timothy – Strive for godliness: Paul encourages Timothy to train for effectiveness. Timothy obviously liked to work out and so Paul encourages him to take that same mental attitude to his relationship with God and spiritual leadership. Again Paul keeps highlighting specific sayings he hopes Timothy will put to memory and use in his teaching.
- Teaching and example: Paul affirms Timothy even though he is young. Young leaders should be treated with respect as they are challenged to set an example of a truly sold out life for Christ. Again the qualities mentioned are rooted in an internal heart change rather than strict religious observance: speech, life, love, faith, and purity. Paul encourages Timothy to teach Scripture. Apparently this was his gift from the Spirit and it was prophetically spoken over him when they laid hands on Timothy to commission him into ministry. Again Paul is modeling how normative it was for the Spirit to be actively engaged in leadership decision and speaking to give guidance. The practice of laying hands on someone was not something magical but rather a physical expression of solidarity and unity. Timothy is encouraged to pay careful attention to his own spiritual and leadership development with the hope that he will have a huge spiritual impact on those who follow him.
- How to treat others: Paul now counsels this young leader on the appropriate way to relate within community. Men and women can be close within community but these relationships must remain in proper perspective. Older men and women should be treated with respect as spiritual mothers and fathers. Younger men and women must be treated as brothers and sisters. This family paradigm is the most basic way we as Christians should view each other in community.

- Concerning widows – obligations toward widows: This longer section on widows reminds us how important ministry to the poor was within the early church. Widows and orphans represented the most vulnerable within their society. Paul's basic teaching is that families should take care of their own family members and single parents need to do all they can to care for their own families. The church should focus primarily on those who have no one to take care of them. Paul warns widows against just living for pleasure (seeking intimacy with men probably implied) rather than focusing on prayer and growing in intimacy with Christ. The challenge is for families to really own and take care of those within their extended family.
- Church's support of widows: Paul makes it clear that widows can receive support but they are to be of an age where they can do nothing else to earn an appropriate living and have a reputation of doing all they can to serve Christ. This list meant that these widows would be consistently supported by the church. In other words, they were providing a kind of retirement or welfare support for these women. This list wasn't for crisis support for going weekly support.
- Regarding younger widows: Paul doesn't mince his words. In 1 Corinthians 7 he encourages everyone to remain single because of the crisis they were facing. Now he encourages all the single women to marry and to focus on raising healthy families. Apparently one of the challenges of the early church is that younger women would lose their husbands and then simply want the church to pay for them so that they could hang out all day and not have to do anything. Paul won't sit still for this. He points out that some have already spiritually fallen away. Now we should also mention that these younger women were pledging that they were now going to be just married to Christ (again one of the images of our relationship with Christ) but then would abdicate that commitment as soon as they found a good man to marry. Paul as someone dedicated to lifelong singleness doesn't like this hypocrisy and simply encourages them to not make these kinds of commitments.
- Responsibility of women: Paul finally challenges women within families to care for women. The goal is to ensure that money raised for the poor actually goes to those who really need it.
- Concerning elders – honor and support of elders: Paul affirms paying those elders who do teaching and preaching and also holding them publically accountable if they mess up. Paul applies the Biblical principle that all important matters must be established by two or three witnesses. This is a good reminder that we should not listen to gossip but also should not ignore concerns that are consistently raised in community.
- Caution regarding elders: Paul throws in a few final encouragements. Don't show favoritism or be hasty about lay hands (commission publically). There is a kind of pure leadership that comes from doing things properly and using good due process. Timothy as a young leader may be tempted to put his own friends into leadership roles even if they don't have the same integrity or maturity as he does. Paul seems worried about this and so warns his young

apprentice to be careful about how he appoints house church leaders. Now we should also note that Paul refers to the elect angels. These would most likely be those angels who did not rebel with Satan but chose to remain true to God.

- Advice to Timothy – Regarding health: Timothy didn't drink wine (maybe as an example of self-control) but Paul encourages him not to be so disciplined as to lose his own health. Timothy was frequently ill and so Paul encourages him to use wine for medicinal purposes. Here is great evidence against those that teach that if you have enough faith you will never be sick. If this what the early church believed, Paul would have simply told Timothy to have more faith rather than to use something medicinal.
- Regarding appearances: Paul throws in a bit more leadership wisdom. Basically some sins are obvious and come with immediate consequences. Other sins are not obvious and the consequences sneak up on them. In the same way, living righteously will pay dividends whether sooner or later. In both cases, you can expect that both your sins and your righteousness will find you out. We all reap what we sow!
- Instructions to slaves – To respect masters: Paul's words here closely echo what he wrote in Ephesians regarding the mutual submission and respect within the master and bondservant relationship. Again it is fascinating that equality in Christ did not immediately result in the first Christians taking a stand against the social structure of slavery. Rather than rejecting the structure they worked to establish a fundamental equality of all people within community and then teach respect and mutual care within those social structures. Paul refers to slavery as a yoke that no doubt was repressive in many regards. Yet he teaches that masters should actually serve their slaves within their care.
- Concerning mercenary teachers – False motivations: Paul again tackles the topic of false teachers. He points out again hallmarks of false teachers. They want to use the message of Jesus as means to get rich. They love to stir up controversy and quarrelling over words. They promote suspicion and friction within community. They see the truth as a reason to divide rather than a force that unites.
- Attitude toward money: Paul teaches what he explained in his letter to the Philippians – the secret to contentment is to find all your needs met in Christ. We are not to reject worldly wealth but we are to live free of its influence. We are not to see wealth as our source of security or happiness. Christ is all we have in this life and all we will carry into the next life. Greed and the pursuit of becoming wealthy can easily lead us off the path of seeking Christ alone and rather than deliver the good life will ultimately bring us pain.
- Timothy's motivation: Paul calls Timothy to pursue character qualities, not financial success. It is the fruit of the Spirit at work in and through our lives that will bring us joy and peace. The battle we are to fight is a spiritual battle. Paul ends this encouragement to Timothy with an extended praise to God for his ultimate rule of the world. We do not fight a spiritual battle afraid of losing it. Rather we fight it as those who are already triumphant in Christ. Paul lists all of the qualities of God that should give us complete security in our service to

him – the only Ruler, King of kings, Lord of lords, immortal, lives in unapproachable light, no one has seen or can see in all his perfection and power. “If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31.

- Proper use of wealth: Again Paul is reminding Timothy of his consistent teaching on wealth. God blesses us with earthly riches for our enjoyment but more importantly so we can share in the joy of radical generosity. Wealth can make us proud and self-sufficient. If we embrace radical generosity, wealth has the power to help us identify with God as we sacrifice so that others are cared for as we give away our money. As we give away our earthly wealth, we store up eternal wealth in heaven. Paul no doubt is putting in his own words the teachings of Jesus from Matthew 6:19-20. Paul again refers to the life that is truly life. There is a kind of good life that is promoted within every culture that is actually a false dream. The life that is truly life is the life of serving God and others. Other-centeredness is counter-intuitive but it is truly the pathway to the truly good life.
- Concluding remarks – Benediction: Paul’s final words are simple reminders of the key points Paul has been making. Timothy was obviously struggling with listening to the wrong voices in his life and losing his focus. How many young leaders have struggled with the same thing and need the steadying and reassuring wise words of a spiritual father or mother like Paul? This was God’s grace to Timothy and to the generation of young leaders who would follow Timothy and would need the same encouragements.