

1 & 2 Timothy Overview

Sermon Excerpts from John MacArthur

I want to talk about what it is to be a true child in the faith. Just as the supreme joy for a parent is to give birth to a physical child who is all that the parent's heart could ever hope for and to see that child mature and grow and develop and become fully the person, the person that you prayed he or she would become, reflecting all the perfection of human physical characteristic and all the possibility of character, just as that is the supreme joy for a parent, so the supreme joy for a spiritual parent is to be able to say about someone that they are a genuine child in the faith. Just as you would hope as a Christian, as a Christ-exalting, God-honoring Spirit-filled Christian parent that your child would be all that a physical child could be in the fullness of physical and mental and emotional and social stature, so it is that spiritually all of us would desire to raise one who would be truly a genuine child in the faith. That is a real reflection of our spiritual life and values. And for Paul to so designate Timothy sets Timothy aside in a very special way. He was Paul's very genuine reflection. He was a true child of the Apostle in terms of his spiritual life. He was all that any discipler could ever hope for, could ever pray for. He was what Paul would have wished him to be in every sense. He is the child of Paul's ministry. He is the protégé, he is the offspring, he is the spiritual son which Paul has raised and he is reflective of all that Paul would desire that he should be.

And it is to this marvelous man that this and the second epistle is written. For us it is the beginning of a new adventure, an adventure with the Word of God, an in depth study of rich and profound truth that are going to come to us, first of all, in 1 Timothy. The epistle itself deals with many great subjects, subjects which were needful for Timothy to know in his ministry to the church. It deals with, for example, error in the church and how that error is to be confronted, the proper pattern for church leadership, the importance of sound theology and the centrality of teaching is a major theme, the call for godliness and holiness in living and ministry, the proper attitudes and roles of men and women in the church, how to deal with discipline in the church, how to confront issues in the church, how to deal with a sinning leader in the church, the correction of problems that threaten the church. These are themes

dealt with in 1 Timothy, also in 2 Timothy and also in Titus.

I might suggest to you that the key verse in 1 Timothy is chapter 3 verse 15, you might want to look at it. We're just going to get a good overview today. First Timothy 3:15, Paul says, "If I tarry long that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth." And in verse 14 he says that's why I'm writing in order that you may know how to behave in the church. The first epistle to Timothy then is all about behavior in the church. It is all about the church and how the church is to conduct itself and how its leaders are to focus on the church. It's an essential epistle.

Now let's look at a little bit of the introduction itself. It is a standard format. Suppose I need only to remind you that when the New Testament writers wrote their epistles they did not invent some new format, they used the existing Greco-Roman format for letters and that format you see here. It begins with the author and his identification and then the recipient and his identification. In this case, Paul an Apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope, that's the author and his identification and then it's always followed by the recipient, Timothy and his identification, true child in the faith. And then comes a greeting or salutation, grace, mercy and peace from God our Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. You'll notice in both cases where you have Christ Jesus in the Authorized it says Jesus Christ, the better manuscripts reverse those and that's the way I read them. So it is a standard format. It is a very simple format. It never really varies in Paul's letters.

So, in a normal way Paul writes a letter to Timothy. It is first and foremost, and you need to keep this in mind when you study the Scripture, it is first and foremost a letter from one man to another man. While we look at it as a book of the Bible and its reaching far beyond its original destination in the life of Timothy, we must go back to the realization that it began as a single man's passionate call to another man in ministry that needed to be applied to the situation in existence. And so we go back to that and that's how we understand what a book in the Bible means. If we try to interpret it only in a contemporary setting, we are at a loss as to its

significance. So we go back and we ask what was happening in the life of Paul, what was happening in the life of Timothy, what was going on in the church in Ephesus where Timothy was then working and what was it that caused this letter to be written the way it was written? And out of that we draw those things which are applicable to our own understanding.

Now why does Paul take such pains to establish his Apostleship like this to Timothy? We could understand if he was writing to the church at Ephesus where Timothy is now busy, or other churches in Asia-Minor to which Timothy no doubt also was ministering. We could understand if he was trying to lay some kind of weight on his authority with a church but why does he make this statement with Timothy? Does Timothy need to be convinced? Obviously he did not. Timothy knew of Paul's authority but it is because Timothy is going to need to enforce these things in the church that Paul has the weight placed upon his own Apostleship. Timothy is an ambassador. Timothy, in a sense, is a representative of Paul. And in order for Timothy to have all the leverage that he needs to get his message across, it is important for Paul to lay down some heavy reminders about his own authority. The letter comes to strengthen Timothy's hand in what is a difficult situation.

You say, "Was it a difficult situation in which Timothy ministered?" Extremely difficult, extremely difficult. Originally when Paul and Timothy went to Ephesus, the first thing Paul had to do is in chapter 1 verse 20, he had to take Hymenaeus and Alexander and deliver them to Satan that they might learn not to blaspheme. He had to remove two very key leaders in the church. For all we know they may have been pastor/teachers in that church, they may have been overseers in that church. But they were teaching heresy and they had made shipwreck, verse 19 says, of the faith. And when Paul went in there what he did was eliminate those two guys and then he set Timothy in the leadership and left. And now he's writing back to Timothy because he knows there be great difficulty in setting in order what's going on in that church because of the influence of false teachers, false doctrine. And so to strengthen Timothy's hand he affirms that this comes authoritatively from one who was commissioned not by a church but by Christ Jesus Himself...Christ Jesus Himself.

Now he's not through with this affirmation. "Paul an Apostle of Christ Jesus," now he gives us another strong statement about why he's writing, "by the commandment of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope unto Timothy." Now he is not only an Apostle by the commandment of God our Savior and Christ our hope, but he is writing by the commandment of God our Savior and Christ our hope. What he is really saying here is not only is my commission based upon God's purpose, but my letter is also, so you better listen to what it said. It's a strong word. It's as if he said I have a direct command from God and Christ to write this letter, Timothy. Now carry this out. It puts a great burden on Timothy, it puts a great burden on the church who no doubt would have heard that letter read to them.

So apparently there were some errorists, some false teachers, some heretics in this church that Timothy was laboring with and they were wanting to rob the church of salvation. They were defining a God who was not a Savior. Maybe it was an incipient Gnosticism where God was a distant being who started everything and was far off and didn't care and there were a series of emanating sub-gods off of Him through which we would try to go and get some appeasement and Jesus was one who would go to this angry indifferent God and sort of appease Him and make things better for us. Whatever it was we really can't label it, there must have been some who were attacking the very...the very essence of God's redeeming love and some who also were attacking the character and deity and work of Jesus Christ.

So the letter then has great import because there are some very basic things at issue here like the fact that God is a loving God who wants to save and like Christ is the Son of God, God in human flesh who has died for us and so forth. I mean, the very issues of salvation are at stake in this letter. So the letter comes then with a heavy emphasis on authority because there has to be an understanding among those people that this letter is coming from one who was commissioned by God and Christ and one who is writing by the direct will of God and Christ to speak to issues which are at stake in that church.

And isn't it sad to think about the fact that here we are about the middle of the sixties, about 64 A.D. we're about 30 years away from the death of Jesus Christ and already inside the church there are those who would deny the loving, redeeming, saving plan of God and the deity of Jesus Christ? This is 30

years after His death and already that's not outside the church, that's in the church. And who do you think brought it in? Take a wild guess. That's the work of the adversary. And so we learn what Paul learned very early and especially working with the Ephesian church which he had warned already earlier before this was ever written that when I leave you're going to have problems. Remember that in Acts 20? Perverse men are going to rise from within you. Wolves are going to come in and try to mess you up. I know it will happen as soon as I leave, he said. And I commend you to the Word of His grace which is able to build you up. I know what will happen. And sure enough, he left and it happened. And it happened so extensively that by the nineties when John wrote the Revelation, the letter to Ephesus was that you for all intents and purposes have left your first...what?...love. The Ephesian church became the victim of error initially and then apparently it got its act together under Timothy, corrected the error and then became a victim of apathy and indifference. And it's an old story, beloved, the enemy will work on the church in whatever way the church will allow it. If the enemy cannot corrupt the theology, the enemy will bring apathy. And here we have a chronolog of this Ephesian church, first this a glowing and exciting and thrilling church in its beginnings. It becomes THE church to which Paul gives three years of his life to lay the foundations. The church to which he gives Timothy for oversight and leadership among its already established leaders at this particular time. But in the process of moving from the ministry of Paul till the time that Timothy has come there, in those very few years, maybe ten or twelve years at the most, the church has already reached a place where heresy is filling the place. Timothy apparently was able to set that right. And in a few years after that, the church has become totally apathetic and lost its first love.

It's a frightening thing to think about. But the reason the New Testament gives us these letters is so that we can continually be correcting the same things that will always exist in the life of the church. Well, it's from Paul an Apostle of Christ Jesus by the commandment of God our Savior and Christ our hope. And then verse 2 says, "Unto Timothy." The name is made up of two Greek words. One means to honor and the other is the word for God. Timothy means one who honors God. It's a beautiful name...one who honors God, or he who honors God. No doubt it was given to him by his mother and grandmother who must have been devout Jews because according to 2 Timothy they taught him the

Scriptures from a child. I believe that it's most likely his father who was a pagan, who was a Greek, not a Jew, was not a Christian, not a believer and may well have been dead at this particular time. But it's certainly not a factor in Timothy's spiritual progress, the factors were his mother and grandmother and perhaps they had named him "he who honors God" wishing with all their hearts that he would indeed live up to his name which in fact he did. His grandmother's name was Lois, according to 2 Timothy 1:5 and his mother's name was Eunice and they had carefully and faithfully taught him the Word of God. In fact in 2 Timothy 3:15, "From a child you have known the holy Scripture."

So they gave him a name of great great significance. Timothy, this young man, was a beloved and trusted companion of the Apostle Paul. In fact, probably more than any other was the protege the number one product of Paul's ministry, his disciple, his replacement. The reason I say that is 1 Corinthians chapter 4 in verse 16 as he writes to the Corinthians, he says, "I beseech you, be ye followers of me." Pattern your life after me. "And because I want this...this is marvelous...because I want you to be just like me I sent you Timothy." Isn't that great? I want you to be like me so I sent you Timothy. You say, "Well why does he do that?" "Who is my beloved son and faithful in the Lord who will bring you into remembrance of my ways." In other words, I want you to be like me so I'm sending you Timothy who is exactly like me. He'll bring you in to remembrance of my ways. He does things the way I do. He is my child in the faith.

This marvelous man, Timothy, who was with Paul for up to 20 years from the time of his conversion as a man in his late teens to the time of about 35 years of age when he's receiving this letter, all of that time he's been with Paul in some kind of ministry with the exception of the time that he sort of seems to disappear during Paul's imprisonment. He was left behind at Berea with Silas when Paul escaped to Athens and later joined Paul there. In due time he came to Athens, in Acts 18 he was sent as Paul's emissary to Macedonia in Acts 19, he was there when the collection from the churches was being taken to Jerusalem with Paul in Acts 20. He was with Paul in Corinth when he wrote his letter to Rome. He was Paul's emissary to Corinth when there was trouble in the church, as I read you in the fourth chapter of 1 Corinthians. He was with Paul when he

wrote 2 Corinthians. It was Timothy who went to see how things were going in Thessalonica and he was with Paul when he wrote the letter to that Thessalonian church. He was with Paul in prison when he wrote the letter to the Philippians. He was with Paul when he wrote the Colossians. He was with Paul when he wrote Philemon. He was constantly with him...a beloved disciple. The son of a Jewish mother, a son of a Greek father, he was a perfect companion. He had the Jewish heritage to have access into the synagogue where Paul always began his ministry. He had the Gentile background to understand the culture and be accepted by the Gentiles as well. He was a unique and marvelous tool of God.

But the most important thing that Paul can say about him, and this is what I want to focus on this morning just to introduce it and then next week we'll develop it, he calls him "true child, or genuine child in the faith." That is a marvelous and rich statement. This opens up tremendous insight into the character of Timothy. In other words, the emphasis is not on the fact that Timothy is his child, but the emphasis is on the fact that Paul gave birth to Timothy. It is a birth word. You are my product. You are a genuine child in the sense of the parent/child relationship. You owe me your spiritual life. You are my offspring in the faith.

So the whole thing is really introduced to us in those two verses from Paul who has tremendous passion for this Ephesian congregation because of his own three years invested there. He wants them to listen so he lays down his credentials as strongly as he can and makes allusion to their heresies regarding Christ and God and the Saviorhood of God and the hope of Christ. He gives Timothy all the weight he can by saying he's a true reproduction of me and then asks God to pour out on Timothy continuing grace, continuing mercy and continuing peace that he may carry out the work that he is commissioned to do.