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A True Child in the Faith

1

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1:1–2)

The supreme joy for any parent is to see their child grow into a mature, well-developed adult. For that they pray, labor, and hope. The same is true in the spiritual realm. There is no greater joy for a spiritual parent than to beget a true child in the faith and lead him to maturity.

Paul desired, as every Christian should, to reproduce in his spiritual children his virtues of Christlikeness. He sought to lead others to Christ, then nurture them to maturity, so they would then be able to repeat the same process. He describes that process through four generations in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.” To so reproduce himself was a central goal in the apostle’s life.

The degree to which he was used by God in producing genuine spiritual children is astonishing. While many of his companions, such as Barnabas, Silas, John Mark, Apollos, and Luke were not his spiritual

offspring, many others were. Dionysius, Damaris, Gaius, Sopater, Tychicus, Trophimus, Stephanas, Clement, Epaphras, the Corinthians (1 Cor. 4:15), and many others, including probably most of those mentioned in Romans 16, were in all likelihood the fruit of the apostle's evangelistic efforts. Some he reached personally, others were saved through his public preaching. Still others were reached indirectly through those Paul himself had reached.

Of all those who were saved before Paul met them, and those who were the fruit of his labors, only two does he call "true child in the faith." One is Titus (Titus 1:4), and the other is Timothy. That unique description was reserved for these key men in the apostle's life. Of the two, Timothy most reflected Paul. Paul wrote of him,

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be concerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. But you know of his proven worth that he served with me in the furtherance of the gospel like a child serving his father. (Phil. 2:19–22)

For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. (1 Cor. 4:17)

Timothy was Paul's protégé, his spiritual son, the most genuine reflection of the apostle.

This letter to Timothy (as well as the second one) is first and foremost a letter from one man in the ministry to another, from the beloved mentor to his most cherished pupil. We must therefore first understand it in terms of what was happening in the lives of Paul and Timothy, and the situation at Ephesus. Only then can we apply its truths to our own day.

THE AUTHOR

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope; (1:1)

Paul is certainly a name familiar to any student of the New Testament. Paul (Paulus in Latin) was a common name in Cilicia, in which his home city of Tarsus was located. It means "little," or "small," and may be an indication that he was small from birth. He was not a man of striking stature or marked appearance. A second-century writer described

him as “a man small of stature, with a bald head and crooked legs, in a good state of body, with eyebrows meeting and nose somewhat hooked, full of friendliness; for now he appeared like a man, and now he had the face of an angel” (cited by R. N. Longenecker, “Paul, The Apostle,” in Merrill C. Tenney, ed., *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977], 4:625). His demeaning opponents at Corinth said of him, “His letters are weighty and strong, but his personal presence is unimpressive, and his speech contemptible” (2 Cor. 10:10).

Whatever his physical stature may have been, his spiritual stature is unsurpassed. He was one of a kind in the history of redemption, responsible for the initial spread of the gospel message through the Gentile world.

This unique man was born into a Jewish family (Phil. 3:5), and held Roman citizenship (Acts 22:25–28). His Hebrew name was Saul, after the most prominent member of his tribe of Benjamin, King Saul. The New Testament refers to him as “Saul” until his first missionary journey (Acts 13:9), after which he is called “Paul.”

He had a traditional, orthodox upbringing. He described himself as “circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee” (Phil. 3:5). He was a fanatically committed, zealous devotee of Judaism. In Galatians 1:14, he described himself as “advancing in Judaism beyond many of my contemporaries among my countrymen, being more extremely zealous for my ancestral traditions.” His fiery zeal was seen in his willing participation in Stephen’s murder (Acts 8:1), and his subsequent persecution of the church (Acts 8:3; 9:1–2; 26:9–11).

He was on his way to Damascus to carry out further persecutions when his life was suddenly, dramatically changed forever. The risen, ascended, glorified Christ appeared to him and his terrified companions. All in a brief time, he was struck blind, saved, called to the ministry, and shortly afterward baptized (Acts 9:1–18). Following a period of solitary preparation in the Nabatean (Arabian) wilderness near Damascus, he returned to that city and began proclaiming the gospel. After his fearless preaching aroused the hostility of both the Jewish and Gentile leaders (Acts 9:22–25; 2 Cor. 11:32–33), he escaped and went to Jerusalem. The church in that city was naturally hesitant to accept the one who had persecuted them so violently. Eventually, through the efforts of Barnabas, Paul was accepted. He later became one of the pastors of the church at Antioch (Acts 13:1ff.). It was from that ministry that the Holy Spirit sent him to his life’s work as the apostle to the Gentiles (Acts 22:14–15; 26:16–18).

The verb *apostellō*, from which the noun *apostolos* (**apostle**) derives, means “to send off on a commission to do something as one’s

personal representative, with credentials furnished” (Kenneth S. Wuest, *The Pastoral Epistles in the Greek New Testament*, vol. 2 of *Word Studies in the Greek New Testament* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978], 22). We could translate *apostolos* as “envoy,” or “ambassador,” someone who goes on a mission bearing the credentials of the one who sent him.

An apostle in the New Testament was one sent to carry the gospel to sinners. In the broadest sense, many individuals were called apostles. Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), Andronicus and Junius (Rom. 16:7), and James the Lord’s brother (Gal. 1:19) all bore the title, though they were not among the twelve chosen by our Lord. They are what 2 Corinthians 8:23 calls “messengers [apostles] of the churches.”

In its more restricted and common New Testament usage, “apostle” refers to an apostle **of Christ Jesus**. Those apostles included the original twelve (with the deletion of Judas and the addition of Matthias after Judas’s defection) and Paul. In contrast to the apostles of the churches, these men were commissioned by Christ Himself. They were personally chosen by Him (cf. Luke 6:13; Acts 9:15), and learned the gospel from Him, not other men (cf. Gal. 1:11–12). The apostles of Christ were witnesses of His words, deeds, and especially His resurrection (Acts 1:21–22). Paul qualified on that count since he met the risen Christ on the way to Damascus, and on three other occasions (Acts 18:9–10; 22:17–18; 23:11).

Apostles of Christ were also gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive and impart divine truth. It was to them that Jesus said, “But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you” (John 14:26). They also had the power to cast out demons and heal the sick, performing those signs, wonders, and miracles that constituted the “signs of a true apostle” (2 Cor. 12:12; cf. Heb. 2:3–4). According to Ephesians 2:20, they are the foundation upon which the rest of the church is built. The church from its birth studied “the apostles’ doctrine” (Acts 2:42).

The word order **Christ Jesus**, instead of the more usual “Jesus Christ,” is unique to Paul. “Christ Jesus” appears in only one place in the New Testament outside of Paul’s writings. That reference, Acts 24:24, occurs in Luke’s description of the apostle’s testimony to Felix and Drusilla. While Paul also uses the word order “Jesus Christ,” the other apostolic writers (Peter, James, and John) do so exclusively. A possible explanation is that the other apostles knew first the man Jesus, and only later understood that He was the divine Christ. On the other hand, Paul’s first exposure to Him was as the risen, glorified Christ.

It may seem unnecessary for Paul to emphasize his apostolic authority to Timothy, who certainly didn’t question it. Timothy, however,

faced a difficult situation in Ephesus, and needed the full weight of Paul's apostolic authority backing him. This letter, as it was read and enforced in the church, would strengthen Timothy's hand.

The use of *epitagē* (**commandment**) instead of the more usual *thelēma* ("will") further stresses Paul's apostolic authority. Paul had a direct charge from God the Father and Jesus Christ to carry out his ministry. That mandate included the writing of this letter, which put on Timothy and the church a heavy burden to obey its injunctions. *Epitagē* refers to a royal command that is not negotiable, but mandatory. Paul, Timothy, and the congregation at Ephesus were all under orders from the Sovereign of the universe. Paul also may have chosen this stronger term because of the false teachers at Ephesus, who likely questioned his authority.

Paul's orders came from **God our Savior** and **Christ Jesus, who is our hope**. Someone has well said that Christianity is a religion of personal pronouns. We do not worship a distant, impersonal deity, but God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope. By linking God the Father and Jesus Christ as the source of his divine commission, Paul alludes to the deity of Christ. Jesus frequently linked Himself with God the Father in the Gospels (cf. Matt. 11:27; John 5:17–18; 10:30; 17:1–5, 11, 21–22). Christ's deity may well have been under attack at Ephesus (cf. 1 Tim. 3:16).

God our Savior is a title that appears only in the Pastoral Epistles, though it has roots in the Old Testament (cf. Pss. 18:46; 25:5; 27:9; Mic. 7:7; Hab. 3:18). God is the deliverer from sin and its consequences; He is the source of salvation, and planned it from eternity (cf. 2 Thess. 2:13). The liberal notion that the God of the Old Testament is a wrathful, vengeful God whom the gentle, loving Christ placated is both false and blasphemous.

God the Father's plan for salvation was carried out by **Christ Jesus, who is our hope**. We have hope for the future because of what Christ has done in the past and is doing in the present. In Colossians 1:27 Paul says, "Christ in you, [is] the hope of glory." The apostle John wrote,

Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (1 John 3:2–3)

There were no doubt some errorists in the Ephesian assembly trying to rob believers of salvation's hope. Paul responds by stressing both as-

pects of Christ's work (cf. 1:11, 14–17; 2:3; 4:10) as he writes to Timothy, so Timothy can confront such attacks.

THE RECIPIENT

to Timothy, my true child in the faith (1:2a)

The name **Timothy** means “one who honors God.” He was named by his mother and grandmother, Eunice and Lois, who were no doubt devout Jews before they became believers in the Lord Jesus. They taught Timothy the Scriptures from the time he was a child (2 Tim. 3:15). His father was a pagan Greek (Acts 16:1), and may well have been dead by this time. As the son of a Jewish mother and a Greek father, Timothy had credentials that gave him access to both cultures.

Timothy was Paul's disciple, friend, co-worker, and dear son spiritually. By the time 1 Timothy was written, he had been with Paul for about fifteen years as the apostle's constant companion. He remained behind in Berea with Silas after persecution forced Paul to leave for Athens (Acts 17:13–15), but later joined Paul there (cf. Acts 17:15). He was with Paul in Corinth (Acts 18:5), was sent by Paul into Macedonia (Acts 19:22), and accompanied him on his return trip to Jerusalem (Acts 20:4). He was with Paul when he wrote Romans (Rom. 16:21), 2 Corinthians (2 Cor. 1:1), Philippians (Phil. 1:1), Colossians (Col. 1:1), the Thessalonian epistles (1 Thess. 1:1; 2 Thess. 1:1), and Philemon (Philem. 1). He frequently served as Paul's troubleshooter, being sent by him to the churches at Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2), and Philippi (Phil. 2:19), and now Ephesus.

Gnēsios (**true**) refers to a legitimate child, one born in wedlock. It is the opposite of *nothos*, which means “bastard,” or “illegitimate child.” Timothy was a *gnēsios* child of Paul, while Demas was a *nothos*. Timothy's faith was genuine. The use of *teknon* (**child**) instead of *huios* (“son”) speaks of Paul's giving birth to Timothy spiritually. Since **in the faith** is anarthrous (lacking the definite article) in the Greek, it could be translated “in faith.” In that sense, Paul would be saying Timothy is his son in the sphere of faith. The NASB translation **in the faith** refers to the objective body of the Christian faith. Both senses are possible, and consistent with Paul's usage elsewhere.

The phrase **true child in the faith** gives insight into Timothy's character. Paul sets Timothy up as an example of what a true child in the faith is like. His authenticity is thus verified, and the Ephesian church called to follow his example. Five characteristics implied in this opening section marked Timothy as a true child in the faith. Examining them provides a brief overview of the epistle.

SAVING FAITH

It is obviously impossible to be a true child in the faith without experiencing divine salvation in Jesus Christ. Paul testifies throughout the epistle to the genuineness of Timothy's conversion. In 1:1–2, he suggests through the use of the plural pronouns that Timothy has the same God and the same Christ as he does (cf. 4:10). In 6:11, Paul calls him "you man of God," then exhorts him to "fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (6:12). Timothy was not only called to eternal life by God, but also publicly professed his faith in Christ. Unmistakable affirmation of Timothy's salvation comes in 2 Timothy 1:5, where Paul speaks of his "sincere faith."

The circumstances of Timothy's conversion are not recorded in Scripture. It is likely connected, however, with the ministry of Paul and Barnabas in Lystra (Timothy's hometown) on the first missionary journey (Acts 14:6–23). After seeing Paul heal a lame man, the people decided he and Barnabas were gods, and attempted to sacrifice to them. Shortly afterward, however, some of Paul's Jewish opponents from nearby cities came and turned the crowds against him. They stoned Paul, dragged him out of the city, and left him for dead. Timothy, Eunice, and Lois must have been aware of those events, and may have been converted then. Timothy thus had a very dramatic introduction to Paul. When Paul revisited Lystra on his second missionary journey, he chose Timothy to minister with him.

Unfortunately, not all those associated with the church at Ephesus may have had genuine faith. Some may have questioned the deity of Christ, prompting Paul to write, "By common confession great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, was vindicated in the Spirit, beheld by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory" (3:16). No one who rejects Christ's deity can be saved. Our Lord said in John 8:24 that "unless you believe that I am He, you shall die in your sins." Salvation, according to Paul, comes from confessing Jesus as Lord and believing that God raised Him from the dead (Rom. 10:9). Evidently there were those in Ephesus not committed to those essential truths. Some, likely even among the leadership, were openly teaching false doctrine (1:3), the very thing Paul warned the Ephesian elders against (Acts 20:29–30). Such men had strayed from the truth, and had "turned aside to fruitless discussion" (1:6).

In chapter 4 Paul warns,

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. (4:1–3)

Since the “later times” began with the coming of Christ (cf. 1 Peter 1:20), some in Ephesus fell short of true saving faith, believing instead demonic lies. They listened to hypocrites, with seared and deadened consciences, teaching a false asceticism.

According to 6:20–21, some at Ephesus had fallen prey to “worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge.’” As a result, they had “gone astray from the faith.” They had missed the mark regarding saving faith, and were lost.

Timothy’s genuine faith stood out in sharp contrast with the false faith of many at Ephesus.

CONTINUING OBEDIENCE

The New Testament teaches repeatedly that the hallmark of a true believer is a life-pattern of obedience. Our Lord said in John 14:15, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (cf. vv. 21, 23). In John 8:31 He told those who had professed faith in Him, “If you abide in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine.” Paul wrote in Ephesians 2:10, “We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” Good works are not the grounds of salvation, but the evidence of it. As Martin Luther put it, “Good works do not make a good man, but a good man does good works” (“The Freedom of a Christian,” in John Dillenberger, ed., *Martin Luther: Selections from His Writings* [Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1961], 69).

The pattern of Timothy’s life was obedience. When Paul returned to Lystra on his second missionary voyage, he found that Timothy was “well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium” (Acts 16:2). Paul testified of Timothy’s loyal devotion in 4:6: “In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

Others at Ephesus did not have that pattern of continual obedience. In 1:19 Paul writes of those who, having rejected “faith and a good conscience,” had “suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” They had started on the right course, but had been lost before they reached safe harbor.

In chapter 5, Paul advises younger widows to remarry, because “some have already turned aside to follow Satan” (5:15). Such women exemplified the truth of 1 John 2:19, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us.”

In chapter 6, Timothy was told to warn those who pursued riches that

those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. (6:9–10)

Timothy’s unwavering obedience was truly “an example of those who believe” (4:12). He had been a persevering believer in a church riddled with defectors.

HUMBLE SERVICE

A true child in the faith is a servant. Paul described the conversion of the Thessalonians in these words, “you turned to God from idols to serve a living and true God” (1 Thess. 1:9). The Christian life is to be lived as a stewardship of service to the sovereign lordship of Jesus Christ. The disciples left everything to follow and serve Jesus. True salvation is marked by a servant’s heart.

Humble service characterized Timothy’s life. At Paul’s urging, he willingly remained in the difficult post at Ephesus (1:3). Although in his late teens or early twenties at the time, he endured circumcision to better serve with Paul (Acts 16:3). As already noted, he served Paul for many years, through difficult circumstances. No wonder, then, that Paul called him “my fellow worker” (Rom. 16:21). There is no higher praise.

There were others at Ephesus who were not interested in humble service. Paul warned in 3:6 against making a recent convert an elder because of the danger of pride. Apparently some in the Ephesian assembly sought leadership roles only to exalt themselves (1:6–7). Those elders marked by humble, diligent service were to be rewarded (5:17). Those who proudly continued in sin were to be publicly confronted (5:19–20). The false teachers at Ephesus were characterized by conceit, not humility (6:4).

Timothy's humble service made him a fitting heir to the unselfish, sacrificial apostle himself.

SOUND DOCTRINE

A true child in the faith will adhere to sound doctrine. Jesus said to the Pharisees, "He who is of God hears the words of God; for this reason you do not hear them, because you are not of God" (John 8:47). The early church devoted itself to the apostles' teaching (Acts 2:42).

Timothy was a student and a teacher of sound doctrine. He was "constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine" which he had been following (4:6). Paul exhorted Timothy to teach the truths he had learned (4:11; 6:2), confident that Timothy was doctrinally sound.

Ephesus was plagued by false teachers. Some had turned aside from the truth to fruitless discussion (1:6). They presumed to be teachers of the law, though they did not understand it (1:7). Paul disciplined two of them, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20). Paul describes the false teaching at Ephesus as "worldly fables fit only for old women" (4:7), "disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions" (6:4). Its perpetrators were conceited and understood nothing (6:4).

In contrast to the false teachers, Paul was confident of Timothy's orthodoxy. He trusted Timothy to "give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching" until he arrived in Ephesus (4:13).

COURAGEOUS CONVICTION

Those who make an impact for the cause of Christ must have the courage of their convictions. Any dead fish can float downstream; it takes a live one to fight the current. Strong conviction comes from spiritual maturity and knowledge of the Word, and is an essential element in any effective ministry.

Timothy was to be a fighter. Paul put him in Ephesus to "instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines" (1:3). He was to "fight the good fight" (1:18), and guard what had been entrusted to him (6:20).

Many in the Ephesian congregation lacked the convictions of their pastor. They were compromisers. Such men were not qualified to be elders (3:2), or deacons (3:10), since they were not above reproach. Some of the younger widows were in danger of renegeing on their commitment to Christ (5:11–12). Still others in the congregation had com-

promised with money and “pierced themselves with many a pang” (6:10).

In contrast, Timothy maintained his convictions, even when that cost him his life. According to tradition, he was martyred in Ephesus some thirty years later for opposing the worship of the goddess Diana. He “[held] fast the beginning of [his] assurance firm until the end” (Heb. 3:14).

THE SALUTATION

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. (1:2b)

Grace and **peace** is the familiar Pauline greeting, appearing in all of his epistles. Only here and in 2 Tim. 1:2 does he add **mercy**. Timothy would need all three in dealing with the situation at Ephesus. **Grace** refers to God’s undeserved favor, love, and forgiveness that frees sinners from the consequences of sin. **Mercy** frees us not from the consequences of sin, but from the misery that accompanies it. **Peace** is the result of grace and mercy. It refers not only to harmony with God but also to tranquillity of soul. Grace, mercy, and peace are needed throughout the Christian life, not merely at salvation.

Once again Paul links **God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord**, thus stressing Christ’s deity and equality with the Father. As already noted, part of the heresy at Ephesus involved a rejection of Christ’s deity.

In these two short, seemingly perfunctory verses, Paul reveals his passion for the Ephesian church, a passion kindled during his three years of ministry there. To help Timothy combat the heresy threatening the church, he throws the full weight of his apostolic authority behind him. He also asks God to pour out on Timothy, his true child in the faith, the grace, mercy, and peace he needs to handle the situation. These verses thus serve as a fitting introduction to this important letter.