

*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, <sup>2</sup> To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. <sup>3</sup> As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer <sup>4</sup> or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work – which is by faith. <sup>5</sup> The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup> Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. <sup>7</sup> They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. <sup>8</sup> We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup> We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> for the sexually immoral, for those practising homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine <sup>11</sup> that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*

First of all, Paul sends greetings his friend, disciple, and true son in the faith, Timothy. Timothy was a native of Lystra in Galatia. In the New Testament, he is mentioned many times. One church tradition suggests he was born around 17 A.D. The mother of Timothy was a Jewess named Eunice. She later, however, became a Jewish Christian (Acts 16:1, 2 Timothy 1:5). His father was a Greek (Gentile). The grandmother of Timothy, on his mother's side, was named Lois and she, too, became a Christian. Both women were likely converted during Paul's first evangelistic journey to the city in 46 A.D., when he healed a cripple man but soon after Paul was stoned and left for dead. (Acts 14). That's the background.

Paul presents his own credentials, which to us may seem a little strange as surely Timothy already knows who Paul is and doesn't need to be told he is an apostle appointed by the command of God the saviour and Jesus the hope. At this time the Roman emperor was called the saviour of his people, but Paul says God is the saviour. Paul also declares grace, mercy and peace are from God and Jesus. Paul often declared grace and peace in his letters, but this time adds mercy. Mercy is added in 2 Timothy and the letter to Titus. Some believe that as these are the two named leaders in the church to which a letter is addressed, ministers need additional mercy from God!

The letter was probably written while Paul was in Macedonia and on his way back to Ephesus because of the false teachers he had heard about in that city. Timothy was in Ephesus and left in charge of its church by Paul.

Paul's letters contain a lot of detail and this one is no different. He gets straight to the point. While he has been in Macedonia. It seems that Timothy is having trouble with the Ephesians. He was sent by Paul to put them back on track, and sadly for Timothy that isn't happening. It is remarkable how quickly the same problems we see in our churches occurred in the early church so soon after accepting Jesus as Lord and Saviour. Timothy was to command false teachers to stop doing so. They probably were beginning to go astray soon after Paul left Ephesus so that he had to send Timothy along to deal with the problem, and now having heard back from Timothy, he wrote this letter. Doctrine was important to Paul and should be to us. If we don't know what we believe, how can we share the Gospel? We live in an age where truth is whatever people want to believe, and people ask, as did Pontius Pilate "what is truth?" when it comes to what the Word of God says when it says something they don't agree with. How do we cope with people who refuse to accept the Word of God is inerrant? The temptation is to maintain the peace, don't argue, and let them believe what they want to believe instead of challenging them and seeking to show them the error of their ways. But what if they share their false doctrine with others and mislead them? The church today is full of people who ignore bits of the Bible they disagree with, and they will tell the people that what they believe is truth, rather than what the Bible reveals as truth. A lot of 1 Timothy makes uncomfortable reading for church leaders as well ordinary Christians who choose not to agree with what Paul writes. They shrug this off by claiming Paul isn't Jesus, and so much of what he writes – half the New Testament – can be ignored when it doesn't fit in with their ideas. These will be those who will say "Lord, Lord we did all these things in your name" and Jesus replies "I never knew you". Paul is telling Timothy that these people need to stop teaching false doctrines. Timothy is young, he's not an Ephesian, and he's having trouble convincing new Christians deviating from the Gospel with false teaching that they are on the wrong track. In addition, people were being distracted with useless myths or fables and genealogies. False teaching in a church full of Jewish converts would always revert back to Jewish beliefs by making obedience to all the Old Testament laws compulsory – with diet, dress, festivals, and even sacrifices.

Fanciful tales embellished by the gullible is why so many early church writings of the first and second centuries are dismissed as wishful thinking by people wanting to make holy men look holier, saints enduring greater hardships and suffering and miracles look more miraculous. As for genealogies, ancestry was important to many Jews as well as Gentiles, as if having “righteous” ancestors and relatives would rub off on a believer. We’ve heard it often enough ourselves from people who do not go to church or know what the Bible says but think they are Christians – my grandfather was a great Christian or my mother went to church every week – as if that would make us believe that the person making this claim was a Christian too. Ancestral credentials are irrelevant as God has no grandchildren. Every Christian has to have his or her own faith in Jesus to be a child of God and none of us can bestow a ticket to heaven on our unbelieving children, spouses, siblings, parents or other relatives.

In Ephesus the talk about fanciful tales, genealogies and reversion to the old Jewish ways resulted in “*controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work – which is by faith.*” Paul is direct and knows that Timothy is having trouble convincing people to stop chattering about things that are unimportant, as the reason for correcting people is because he loves them. God disciplines those he loves. Following the law, the rules, isn’t enough... there has to be sincere faith.

*<sup>5</sup>The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup>Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk.*

Thousands of rules, regulations and resolutions have been created to “guide” the church; volumes of “Canon Law” exist to create a Church that bears little in common with the early church. Some of the contents of these documents plainly contradict God’s Word and are obviously false doctrine. Much of the time spent deliberating yet more regulation, more paperwork, more argument, and more disunity is wasted time and hasn’t brought a single soul into the kingdom of God. As disciples we can be distracted by having to deal with this especially when it is claimed to be well meaning and meant to deal with issues that the Bible has simple answers which people seek to find a way around to avoid. Paul in writing to Titus (1:14-16) says *pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth.* <sup>15</sup>*To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted.* <sup>16</sup>*They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good.* Sadly, we are in this state today as so much of what is discussed in church synods and councils is nothing to do with the Gospel and all about worldly matters with solutions to problems that mirror what the world is doing rather than what Jesus would do.

Paul says - *the law is good if one uses it properly* – but if one is to be a teacher of the law, one must first know it and not add to it things that are not in it, nor delete bits that the teacher of the law disagrees with. There were men in Ephesus who sought to strive for moral perfection through obedience of the law of Moses and thought that their obedience or righteousness would enable them to be saved. But who among them or us, however hard they or we try, is sinless? There is an uncomfortable passage in Ezekiel 18 about the righteous man who turns away from being just and right to commit sins. None of his righteous deeds will be remembered. The unrighteous man who commits many sins and then does what is just and right is saved and none of his wicked deeds are remembered. Jesus came to forgive sinners so that we stand before God clothed in his righteousness. The false teachers were going back to being Jewish and teaching that works would earn you a place in heaven. Paul tells Timothy that <sup>7</sup>*They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.* <sup>8</sup>*We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.* The law is intended to reveal sin to the ungodly and is not a means for a righteous man to become perfect.

Paul continues <sup>9</sup>*We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers,* <sup>10</sup>*for the sexually immoral, for those practising homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.* Yet again, as in other letters, Paul lists the sins that the unrighteous commit. The law will convict all of us of some sin or other, because we are sinners who break God’s laws. None of us is righteous. Simply not breaking the law – which is pretty impossible when thinking bad thoughts about others is as bad as actually doing what we imagine we would like to do - won’t make us righteous either. Without faith in God, the righteousness of Christ cannot clothe us to hide our sins from a holy God who will be the judge at the final day. The false teachers who claim to know the Gospel and mislead people needed to be rooted out from the church of Ephesus. In Revelation 2, the church of Ephesus has managed to

root out the false teachers, but in doing so lost her first love. Being correct on doctrine without love makes us like the Pharisees who obeyed the law but had little love of God or men.

Timothy was instructed by Paul to teach *the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he (Jesus) entrusted to me (Paul)*. So what is this gospel? This is the good news that God's glory is revealed in making the believer "righteous" through the righteousness of Jesus Christ.

So what can we take from this passage?

Paul is an apostle sent by God to reveal the truth. Today in the wider church there are many who find Paul's letters do not fit in with their own beliefs and so will delete the bits they don't like claiming it was for the first century church when times were different and not relevant for the church today. They will claim Paul was living in a different world or that what he wrote was just for the first century Ephesians and not for us. That argument would apply to all the New Testament apart from the Gospels, if it were valid. There are people who only accept the words of Jesus in the Gospel as truth – red letter "Christians" - and the rest is mere optional guidance rather than Holy Spirit inspired truth. In so doing they deny the Bible is the inerrant Truth and that the Word of God is eternal and applicable for all time. Theologians love to pull apart the Bible for inconsistencies and contradictions, but do they do so under the guidance of the Holy Spirit? What other passages some find objectionable can be deleted on this basis? If Scripture is truth, however unpalatable it may be to some, then none of the words written can be ignored. None of those who claim Paul is writing his own opinions will have the temerity to claim that the Holy Spirit told them that Paul is wrong. I will be blunt: disagreeing with Paul is not an option for a disciple of Jesus.

Do any of us know better the mind of God than what is revealed in Scripture? The Ephesians thought they knew better than Paul and he tells Timothy that they are false teachers. Do we have false teachers in the wider church who claim they know better than Paul what Christ had in mind for his church? There were many heresies in the first few centuries of the church, all refuted so that what is in the creed is what we believe. There are modern day heretics with "new perspectives" on Paul who deny that we are saved by faith alone (*Sola fide*) but need to perform works as well to gain entry into heaven. All agree that James says we need works as well as faith, but we are saved by faith in Christ and that forgiveness is a gift (grace and mercy) from Christ, who alone forgives our sins and took the punishment we deserve on himself. As we go through this letter there will be other things that are done in the church today which are not in agreement with Scripture. Theologians and those who draw up doctrines have used arguments to support things that do not align with Scripture, and many will find their arguments disingenuous because they seek to support change already seen as necessary and then find means to justify the unjustifiable. As Protestants there are five "solas" which we looked at in St Andrew's a year or two ago. They are "*sola scriptura*", "*sola Christus*", "*sola fide*", "*sola gratia*" and "*soli deo gloria*". We base our belief on Scripture alone, Christ alone, faith alone, grace alone and do all to the glory of God. This letter really challenges us, as we go through it, on the state of the church today and how the people who decide on doctrine and church management have sought to ignore what Paul says in precisely the same way the Ephesians were ignoring what he was telling them is the Gospel and also God's plan for the church. Whenever man rebels against God and substitutes his own ideas, why would God bless such men? In the days of Moses God called the Israelites a stiff-necked people precisely because they continually thought they knew better than God and went ahead to do what they wanted. The result was always disastrous. The same applies to the church today. The church is in decline in the West where doubt, compromise and people pleasing is everywhere. She is on the rise in the rest of the world where the doubts, heresies and people pleasing is rare because the Word remains the bedrock on which the churches stand.

So let us stand firm and hold fast to Jesus. One day we will be held to account for everything we have said and done. Praise the Lord that Jesus can remember no more those things that were sinful when we ask for forgiveness.