

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL TO TIMOTHY
**THEME: GODLINESS THE OUTWORKING
OF THE SPIRITUAL MIND**

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THEMES AND KEY PHRASES OF THE EPISTLE

Throughout the Epistle are found a number of recurring themes and key phrases. These are set out below to assist the reader to grasp the main ideas which permeate the Epistle.

THE CHARGE

Throughout the epistle constant reference is made to a “charge” and to a “commandment” which Paul delivered to Timothy. Both words are the translation of the Greek word “paraggelia.” As in the Revised Version, the word should be more correctly and consistently translated as “charge”. It is a proclamation or command and is strictly used of commands received from a superior (officer) and transmitted to others, as in an army. The purpose of these instructions was that Timothy may know how he should conduct himself in the Ecclesia of God, which is the house of God (ch. 3:15-16), and that he may thus be an example to all of the believers (ch. 4:12) therefore assisting others to manifest in their life the character of God.

The various aspects of the “charge” are that the Truth may be taught in purity of doctrine (ch. 1:3), the final outcome of which would be love out of a pure heart and a good conscience (ch. 1:5), and that one may be encouraged to war the good warfare of faith (ch. 1:18). In chapter 4 the apostle focuses on the main purpose of the charge, namely, that Timothy and his associates should manifest Godliness in their lives. He thus expounds the benefits of Godliness in verses 7-11. The relief of the widows is seen as a manifestation of Godliness and is a continuation of the charge (ch. 5:3-7). Impartiality in judgment is essential in ecclesial life and thus the charge also encompasses this (ch. 5:21). Timothy is finally encouraged to see the great value of the Truth and thus to faithfully manifest the Truth in his life (ch. 6:1-13). The rich who trusted in riches were to be taught the uncertainty of their foundation. The only sure foundation is a trust in Yahweh the living God who will provide richly for all those who put their trust in Him (ch. 6:17-19).

GODLINESS

The term “godliness” frequently occurs throughout the epistle and has reference to God manifestation. This is the overriding theme of the epistle, i.e. that the moral characteristics of the Deity may be manifested in the lives of believers today as the result of a transformed disposition (Rom. 12:2; 2:14-15). The term is to be found in chapters 2:2; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 5:4 (piety); 6:3, 5, 6, 11. A very similar Greek word also translated “godliness” appears in chapter 2:10.

The believer is one who so conducts himself in the house of God (i.e. the ecclesia), that he reveals in his life the character and attributes of the Deity. These characteristics are reflected by him when, and only when, he perceives those characteristics, which God has revealed to him. He shows mercy to others as God has given unbounded mercy to him: the peace and unity which he finds with the Father is reflected in his relationship with his brethren; and the unmerited favour of grace which God has revealed to mankind is seen in his own associations in the household of God. These characteristics of the man of God flow from the renewal of the mind (Rom. 8:1-12) and not just by conformity with external regulations.

“THIS IS A FAITHFUL SAYING”

This statement occurs in chapter 1:15, 3:1 and 4:9. The sayings that follow are like proverbs; pithy condensations of the Truth and thus summarise the apostle’s message. Some have thought them to be extracts from a first century statement of faith of the believers. The sayings are designated “faithful” as they were clearly from collected known sayings which were trustworthy and reliable.

“THESE THINGS COMMAND AND TEACH”

This expression occurs in chapter 4:11 and a similar one in ch. 6:2 outlining a specific instruction which

Paul would have Timothy pass on to the ecclesia at Ephesus.

THE YOUNG MAN TIMOTHY

Timothy was a constant companion of the great apostle Paul (Rom. 16:21). Although his natural characteristics included timidity and physical ailments, he is an excellent example of the strengthening and impelling nature of the Word of God. His early training by his mother and grandmother helped him to absorb God's word, and this reveals the value of early training of children in the Truth (2 Tim. 3:15).

Timothy's mother and grandmother, both spiritually-minded Jewish women, assisted him in his early years to develop that fruit of the Spirit which Paul refers to in Galatians 5. His father was a Greek (Acts 16:1) and the only source of spirituality in the family was his mother and grandmother (2 Tim. 1:5).

It is possible that Timothy was converted by Paul on his first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:6) and on his second visit, hearing of the development in the truth of this young man, he caused him to be circumcised and then took him as his assistant on his journey (Acts 16:2-3). After travelling with Paul and Silas through Asia Minor and Macedonia he was left at Berea (Acts 17:14) when Paul went to Athens. When Timothy and Silas later joined Paul in Athens (Acts 18:5) "Paul was pressed in the spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ". Those today who would emulate the spiritual characteristics of Timothy will likewise stimulate their associates to continue in the work of the Truth (cp. Prov. 27:17). Timothy was then dispatched to Thessalonica (1 Thess. 1:1; 3:2; 3:6).

Paul later intended to send Timothy to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17; 16:10; cp. Acts 19:22). It is not certain whether he actually arrived in Corinth although it is most likely that he did. The reference in 1 Cor. 16:10-11 is very revealing of Timothy's characteristics -- "Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do." The Twentieth Century New Testament renders this "... take care that ye have no cause for feeling anxious while he is with you." Knox continues, "... he is not to be treated with disrespect" and Phillips translates, "there is no reason to look down on him". These statements suggest that Timothy was of such a physical nature as not to automatically command the respect of those whom he met for the first time. He is portrayed as one of a retiring, timid disposition. His spiritual qualities, however, over-shadowed his natural disabilities so that Paul could say of him that he had taught the Truth to those in Corinth (2 Cor. 1:19) and that he had such a spiritual outlook that he could say in Phil. 2:19-23, "I have no man like-minded."

During the apostles' imprisonment in Rome, Timothy was with him and is mentioned in the epistles written from Rome at that period in his life (Philemon 1; Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1). It is difficult to place the context of the final reference to Timothy, in Heb. 13:2,3.

"Timothy" is short for Timotheus and means, "honoured of God" (Young's Concordance), or "dear to God" (Strong's Concordance). His life and example well illustrate these principles. In him we have a young brother of mature spiritual qualities, hampered by physical infirmities, but a man whose faith and courage lifted him above his natural disabilities, which became incidental to him, so that he rendered outstanding service to the cause of Truth and to Paul personally.

REASON FOR THE EPISTLE

Paul wrote to Timothy, while away from Ephesus on a visit to Macedonia to advise him of how he should conduct himself as the spiritual leader in Ephesus -- the "pioneer" ecclesia of Asia (1 Tim. 1:3). It appears that Paul was delayed for some time in Macedonia and so wrote to him concerning many matters of ecclesial life, hoping that he would soon return to help him.

The essence of his reason for writing is contained in these words, "that thou mayest know how thou

oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God (3:14-16). These verses should be considered carefully within their context in the centre of the epistle. It is sufficient to point out at this stage that Timothy was to behave himself in such a manner as to give witness to his teaching and to remind the ecclesia that it was the “house of God”, a community of people who reflect the characteristics of the Deity in their life. The ecclesia is, therefore, the foundation and support of that Truth which must be revealed in the lives of the individuals in the ecclesia. (It is a great secret accepted by common consent that God was revealed in human flesh when His Son lived on the earth; “we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the father” (John 1:14). Jesus revealed a way of life and conduct, which is a pattern for all to follow and, Paul therefore, urges the ecclesia to implement his example as the correct basis of behaviour in their walk to the Kingdom.)

TIME OF WRITING

It is difficult to precisely place the time at which the epistle was written. It appears, however, that it was probably during Paul’s three-year stay at Ephesus (Acts 19), during which he took a journey to Macedonia (1 Tim. 1:3; 3:14) which is not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. It must have been written at a time when the ecclesia was large enough to require a formal organization of elders, bishops and deacons (ch. 3). It also must have been written prior to his last meeting with the elders of the Ephesian ecclesia when he said that he would see their faces no more (Acts 20:25). He infers in the epistle (3:14) that he would return to Ephesus. As he makes no reference to his difficulties or his suffering and imprisonment (as in his second epistle [2:9], which was written in prison) it must have been written during his period of stay at Ephesus. Some have suggested the date of writing to be A.D. 56

VERSES 1-2

PAUL’S SALUTATION

Paul was in no need of formal introduction to Timothy. It appears that the purpose of his salutation was to support Timothy with Apostolic authority so that he might implement in the Ecclesia the instructions received in this epistle.

VERSE 1

“PAUL AN APOSTLE OF JESUS CHRIST”

The man who was once called “Saul” (appointed) and had received honour from men, had now been separated to the work of God. In recognition that he was really “little” in God’s sight, he was known as “Paul” (cp. 1 Cor. 15:9; Eph. 3:8). An apostle is “one sent”, an agent accredited by another, or an ambassador (Eph. 6:20). Paul was sent to take the Truth to others. An apostle must have seen Jesus during his ministry, been an eye witness of his resurrection (Luke 24:48; Acts 1:8, 21; Heb. 10:39-41; John 15:27; 1 Cor. 9:1-2; 15:5,8) and have been called and sent by Jesus Christ. From 2 Cor. 5:16 it seems that Paul had known the ministry of Christ by personal observation.

Paul’s appointment as an apostle was direct from heaven (Acts 9:3-6, 15-16; Gal. 1:11-12). His own estimate of himself was that he had been the chiefest of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15). He saw himself as unworthy to be called an apostle due to his blasphemous persecution of the brotherhood (1 Cor. 15:8-10). It had been God’s grace, however, which had appointed him to preach God’s riches to the Gentiles (Gal. 1:15-16). In His wisdom Yahweh saw that Paul had both the natural and spiritual qualities needed for the work of the Apostle to the Gentiles.

“BY THE COMMANDMENT OF GOD OUR SAVIOUR, AND LORD JESUS CHRIST, OUR HOPE”

In other epistles he is referred to as an apostle “according to the will of God”. Here it is by God’s

“commandment” or proclamation (cp. Acts 13:2). This would give authority to Timothy as he led and guided the Ecclesia by implementing Paul’s instructions (for Paul needed no personal introduction to Timothy.)

God is our Saviour (Luke 1:47; Isa. 45:21; Jude 25; 2 Tim. 1:9). The name “Jesus” is the Greek form of “Yah shua”, meaning “He will be salvation” (Matt. 1:21). Although Jesus Christ is often called “Saviour,” it is only because God has appointed him to be such. The Father is the source of salvation and Christ is the mediator whom that salvation is channelled to mankind (Acts 5:31). If then Paul has received his apostleship from God our Saviour, he has his authority from the Supreme Power in this work of salvation.

The commandment is also, however, from “the Lord Jesus Christ our hope”, because the salvation God offers is illustrated in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Father’s salvation being channelled through Christ is a point which consistently features throughout this epistle (1:16; 6:14-16, 19). The Lord Jesus Christ is the means of our salvation and is therefore “our hope”. A life motivated by that hope will manifest “... Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col. 1:27).

VERSE 2

“UNTO TIMOTHY, MY OWN SON IN THE FAITH”

Timothy’s name means, “honoured of God”, and provides us with an excellent index to his character. He was a true, or genuine, son who faithfully represented the characteristics of his father in the Truth. The translator, Panin, renders the phrase, “genuine child in faith.” There were, therefore, other sons who were not genuine in the sense that they were not true representations of their spiritual father, though begotten by Paul in the Gospel. Timothy owed his spiritual life to Paul (1 Cor. 4:14-16; 2 Tim. 1:2; 2:1; Gal. 4:19) and the apostle’s estimate of his character is given for us in Phil. 2:20-22; “For I have no man like-minded who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s. But ye know the proof of him that as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.” This father-son relationship between Paul and Timothy was so close that it was an illustration of the supreme example outlined in verses 6-9 of the same chapter. Timothy was a true son and thus the authority and love of the father was answered by the love and respect of his son.

“GRACE, MERCY, AND PEACE”

These three attributes must be carefully considered so that the nucleus of God manifestation throughout this epistle may be seen. “Grace” is that undeserved kindness or favour which God has bestowed upon mankind in providing, in Christ, a means of salvation. (Luke 1:28-30; 2:52; 3:22; Eph. 1:6-7; 2:5, 7, 8; 3:2, 7, 8; 4:7, 29; 6:24). This personal need has been fulfilled by God in a people who do not truly deserve such grace (Rom. 5:8). Therefore, His true sons today will reflect this grace to others.

Only in the epistles to Timothy and Titus is the term “mercy” used in his salutation, all other epistles commencing with the expression, “grace and peace”. Vine describes mercy as “a feeling of sympathy with misery, active compassion, the desire of relieving the miserable, succour. It assumes (1) a need by him who receives it, (2) resources adequate to meet the need on the part of him who shows it”. God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) and has provided salvation for all men (Titus 3:4; Luke 1:72; Rom. 15:9). He is merciful to those who fear Him (Luke 1:50) and as He is the only One who gives true succor, we must pray for it (Heb. 4:16) and for others who need it (Gal. 6:16; 1 Tim. 1:2). His mercy will be fully revealed at the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ (2 Tim. 1:16; Jude 21). As we have received mercy from the Father, those who manifest His character will, therefore, reflect this to others (Matt. 9:13; 12:7; 23:23; James 2:13). Paul here reveals compassion and love in extending help in a time of need,

knowing the difficult task confronting Timothy (cp. Luke 10:37; Isa. 54:7). Mercy is characteristic of a good shepherd. Both Timothy and Titus were in the position of shepherds of the flock of God (cp. Acts 20:28). Shepherds must be perceptive of the needs of the flock in which they minister, and use their abilities to provide those needs.

“PEACE” is a term signifying “to bind, join or unite”. It is not just the absence of strife, but the presence of wholeness and unity (Phil. 4:6-7, 9).

These three terms show a development of ideas, so that peace would naturally follow the manifestation of Divine grace and mercy. Those who reflect God in their lives, will, therefore, grant unmerited favour to others, extend to them help in time of need, and provide that unity which must be characteristic of the ecclesia of God.

“FROM GOD OUR FATHER AND JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD”

Timothy is reminded that though he was Paul’s child in the faith, God was the Father of them both and that it was through the Lord Jesus Christ that the blessings of the Father will come upon the ecclesia.

VERSES 3-5

THE NEED FOR TIMOTHY TO REMAIN AT EPHESUS

VERSE 3

“AS I BESOUGHT THEE TO ABIDE STILL AT EPHESUS, WHEN I WENT INTO MACEDONIA”

Paul had intreated Timothy to remain at Ephesus to fulfil a need in that ecclesia when the apostle was required in other parts of God’s vineyard. Timothy may have desired to accompany Paul into Macedonia, but he accepted the apostle’s advice to remain for the benefit of the brethren and sisters.

“THAT THOU MIGHTEST CHARGE SOME THAT THEY TEACH NO OTHER DOCTRINE”

The term “some” is more specific in the original and signifies “certain”. There was, therefore, a group within the ecclesia who were undermining Paul’s influence and trying to establish their own false doctrines (verse 6, 19; 4:1; 5:15; 6:10, 21). In verse 20 he specifies the names of two of the leaders of this group. They were teaching doctrines which were divergent from the Truth or literally, “heterodox doctrine.” The term, “no other doctrine,” comes from a root word, “a teacher of other than right doctrine” and suggests the irrelevant and incongruous doctrines of Judaism such as circumcision (cp. Gal. 1:7-8), washing of hands, etc. The need for correct doctrine forms an important part of this epistle, being mentioned nine times (ch. 1:3, 10; 4:1, 6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:1, 3).

VERSE 4

“NEITHER GIVE HEED TO FABLES AND ENDLESS GENEALOGIES, WHICH MINISTER QUESTIONS”

These fables according to verse 7 relate to the practices of Judaism. The rabbis taught certain myths which they used as the basis for guiding men’s minds. Many oral traditions were therefore preserved in the Jewish Targums. Upon fictitious genealogies they built types and shadows beyond that which is legitimate. Historic characters were also submerged in a fog of legend and myth upon which detailed expositions were based. The false premise upon which they were based resulted in a dangerous blend of truth and error (cp. Matt. 15:6). The purpose was purely to satisfy the curiosity of men’s minds (Acts 13:6, 8:9, 19:13; cp. also Titus 1:14) and disputings about such things of no profit did nothing to increase

their faith. They were doubtful disputes and not God's revealed truth. The usual result of such things is argument and strife. The Diaglott renders the phrase, "minister questions", as "occasion disputes."

The worthwhile teaching is that which edifies the ecclesia and Paul, therefore, directs Timothy's attention to the necessity to concentrate on the Word of God itself and avoid unprofitable speculation. The very same warning is also repeated in the second epistle, ch. 2:23, and also to Titus (3:9).

"RATHER THAN GODLY EDIFYING WHICH IS IN FAITH"

"God's stewardship," which is the more correct meaning of the term "godly edifying," is more profitable than being involved in disputes and questions based upon the fables of the rabbis. This stewardship involves organising, training and discipline in the teaching of the Gospel to ensure the edification of the ecclesia. If Timothy wasted his time by taking heed to absorbing doubtful doctrines he would fail utterly in the true work of stewardship. The term "in" has the sense here of "in the sphere of". The administration to which both Timothy and ourselves have been called (2 Tim. 2:2), is concerned with the things of faith which have been designed by God. We are, therefore, answerable to Him in this work if our labours are in accordance with faith. The words, "so do," are not in the inspired record and may be eliminated.

VERSE 5

"NOW THE END OF THE COMMANDMENT IS CHARITY"

Having outlined his original intention in leaving Timothy at Ephesus (namely, to control doctrinal matters -- v. 3), Paul now outlines what the end of that charge was to be.

The word "commandment", is the same as the word, "charge," in verse 3, while the word, "end", is "telos" in the Greek, carrying the idea of the "point aimed at," "conclusion" or "finishing point." Thus Paul now relates to Timothy the importance of carrying his original charge to a conclusion, in order to produce a sacrificial love in the brethren springing spontaneously from pure hearts.

The end or maturity of Paul's charge is the fully developed, mature virtue of love (cp. Eph. 4:12-16; 1 Cor. 13:13; Matt. 22:40). Paul's aim was to develop this active love for God and His people which was so superior to the speculative learning of those he was opposing. Love also provides the energizing principle for our faith, for Paul states that "faith works by love" (Gal. 5:6) and being such a mature virtue, love can only be cultivated under the right conditions, manifesting itself fully at the end of the process (cp. 2 Pet. 1:5-7). True love should abound the more we deepen our understanding of the Word and involve ourselves in service to God.

"OUT OF A PURE HEART AND OF A GOOD CONSCIENCE AND OF FAITH UNFEIGNED"

The heart is the source of our actions, words and feelings (Rom. 10:10; Matt. 12:34; 15:19; 22:37). The issues of life come from it. "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life" (Prov. 4:23). The Psalmist also said, "He that walketh uprightly and worketh righteousness and speaketh the Truth in his heart" is he who would abide in the tabernacle of God in the Age to Come (Psa. 15:1-2). Our actions, therefore, will be dictated by a desire to serve others for their eternal good (see Psa. 24:4; Matt. 5:8).

The word "conscience" in the Greek, literally means, "with knowledge," and stems from a verb meaning "to become aware." Conscience is that faculty developed within a person which distinguishes between what it considers morally good or bad. One can develop either a good or an evil conscience (See "Good

Conscience”). A conscience which springs from “a faith unfeigned” is of great value in God’s sight. “Faith unfeigned” is more correctly “unhypocritical faith.” It is a faith which is pure and sincere, because it comes from divine wisdom (cp. James 3:17). Timothy, himself, had such a faith (2 Tim. 1:5).

The terms “love,” (see *“Love” in the New Testament*) “pure heart,” “good conscience” and “unfeigned faith,” are all internal characteristics without the showy externals characteristic of the Judaisers. God, who tries the hearts (Psa. 7:9) is well aware, however, of the inner motives and thoughts which He desires to see in all who seek Him in sincerity and in truth.

“GOOD CONSCIENCE”

“The reader, by contemplating Adam and Eve in innocence and afterwards in guilt, will perceive in the facts of their case the nature of a good conscience and of an evil one. When they rejoiced in ‘the answer of a good conscience’ (1 Peter 3:21) they were destitute of shame and fear. They could stand naked in God’s presence unabashed; and instead of trembling at His voice they rejoiced to hear it as a harbinger of good things. They were then pure and undefiled, being devoid of all conscience of sin. They were then of the truth, living in obedience to it as expressed in the law; and therefore their hearts were assured before Him ...

“Sin, then, takes away ‘the answer of a good conscience towards God’ and converts it into an evil conscience, which may be certainly known to exist when the subject of it is ashamed of the truth and harassed by ‘doubts and fears.’” (Elpis Israel, pages 85-86)

“LOVE” IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In 1 Tim. 1:5 the word, “charity” is the Greek word “agape”. It is one of several words in the New Testament translated “love” and expresses ideas previously unknown in profane Greek literature. Its meaning, therefore, must be determined from the context of the Oracles of God themselves. “Agape” is a love that is self-denying and sacrificial. It is love in its fullest conceivable form and was first fully exhibited by Christ (John 15:12-13). It is used to express God’s relationship with us (1 John 4:9) and the relationship between the Father and the Son (John 15:10; 17:26; Col. 1:13). Its use in this epistle (which highlights the doctrine of God Manifestation) is thus very appropriate. Those who would reveal the character of the Deity, must develop that sacrificial outlook that denies self interest and acts for the benefit of others. (Another word “phileo” is used in the New Testament and was the highest word among the Greeks for love. It relates more to a tender affection such as brotherly love which must also be revealed by believers). The only way in which agape love in its various aspects can be shown is to allow the power of the absorbed Spirit-Word to transform the mind and heart (Rom. 5:5; Gal. 5:22). Note that throughout the epistle there is an emphasis on love (1 Tim. 1:14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11).



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