

The Thessalonian & Pastoral Epistles

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Preface

This booklet was produced to accompany the talks given by Roger Prime as he surveyed the Thessalonian and Pastors' epistles in the '*Serving Today*' radio programme for pastors and Church leaders. Roger has given us an excellent summary of these important books and we trust that reading this volume will encourage you to preach from these parts of the New Testament.

I am grateful again to Roger for his willingness to prepare this material, and we pray that God will graciously make it a blessing to you.

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Chapter 1 - The Thessalonian Epistles

Introduction

The letters we know as 1 & 2 Thessalonians, which were both written fairly closely together, are two of the earliest letters written by Paul. When Paul was on his second missionary journey, we read in Acts 17 that after he was released from prison in Philippi he travelled further into Europe, passing through the cities of Amphipolis and Apollonia before arriving at Thessalonica. There he preached the Gospel in the Jewish synagogue and there were both Jews and God fearing Greeks who were converted to faith in Jesus. However, Paul was not able to stay in the city for a long period because unbelieving Jews started a riot against Paul and his missionary partners, Silas and Timothy. The believers at Thessalonica helped Paul and his companions to leave the city that night and they travelled on to Berea. However, when these Jews at Thessalonica heard that Paul was preaching at Berea they went there and again stirred up a crowd against him. Paul had to leave the city and travelled on alone to Athens. Silas and Timothy were left behind in Berea with instructions to rejoin Paul, but before doing that from 1 Thessalonians 3:1-3 we discover that Timothy was instructed to return to Thessalonica to encourage the young believers there. He was also to bring news of their progress in the faith back to Paul. From Acts 18:5 we learn that it was when Paul had left Athens and arrived at Corinth, that Silas and Timothy met up with him again. Timothy brought news of the believers at Thessalonica and

Paul immediately wrote his first letter to them from Corinth.

The Thessalonian Church was formed through the preaching of Paul on his second missionary journey. Looking at Acts 17 Paul does not appear to have stopped in the cities of Amphipolis or Apollonia to preach. Instead, he pressed on to Thessalonica. This was a very strategic city, being the Roman capital of Macedonia and was the second largest city in that area, second only to Philippi. It was also a seaport which made it an important city for trade. In addition, it was also on the main highway linking Rome with those parts of the empire further east. Indeed, we see just how influential the city was from 1 Thessalonians 1:8 where Paul rejoiced that the faith of these believers and the message of the Gospel had become known throughout the whole of Macedonia and Achaia, which we know as modern day Greece.

While Acts 17:2 tells us Paul spent three Sabbath days preaching in the synagogue, his stay was probably a bit longer than that because 1 Thessalonians 2:9 says that Paul worked to support himself financially while he was there and from Philippians 4:16 we know that the believers in Philippi sent gifts to support Paul while he was in Thessalonica.

1) 1 Thessalonians

We have seen that Paul wrote this letter after Timothy met him in Corinth and brought news of his visit to

Thessalonica. Paul was naturally concerned for the young believers at Thessalonica, particularly as they probably faced persecution after Paul had left. The report of Timothy reassured Paul that they were standing firm in their faith and so he wrote to thank God for their faith and steadfastness despite severe suffering, and to rejoice in the way their faith had been spreading. Paul also had to defend himself in the way he conducted his ministry among the Thessalonians as there were those who were criticising the Apostle. He also explains why he had sent Timothy back to them. In 1 Thessalonians 3:10 Paul refers to his longing to visit them again and supply what is lacking in their faith. This suggests there were some areas of concern reported back by Timothy and it may well be that Paul covers some of these from this point on in his letter. We see that he encouraged them to increase in their love for one another (3:12) and urged them to live lives worthy of the Lord (3:13), warning particularly against sexual immorality (4:3ff) and idleness at work (4:11). There was also some confusion over whether believers who died before Christ returned would miss out on the resurrection, Paul deals with this at the end of chapter 4. He also writes to clarify their understanding of the return of Christ (4:13-5:11). It is interesting to see how the return of Christ must have been an important part of the teaching Paul gave to these believers during the short time he was with them, and he returned to that in his second letter.

We need to take note that Paul ended the first letter with instructions to the believers about their attitude towards

their spiritual leaders as well as encouraging them in their own spiritual lives (5:12-28).

2) 2 Thessalonians

The first letter was probably taken to Thessalonica by one of Paul's missionary companions and shortly afterwards they returned to Paul while he was still at Corinth with further news of the church. There were again matters of concern for these young believers in the way they were being influenced in their faith, once again Paul writes to warn and encourage them. The main issue Paul had to write about in the second letter was again the second coming of Jesus. We see in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-3 that the believers had become unsettled by a prophecy, report or letter, supposedly coming from Paul which stated that the Day of the Lord – that is Jesus' return – had already taken place. Paul wrote to warn them not to be deceived by this report and then to give important teaching concerning the Lord's return.

In addition, it seems there were some in the church who did not take notice of Paul's warnings about idleness and Paul had to write to tell the church how to deal with such believers if they would not obey his instructions.

3) Paul's Teaching In 1 & 2 Thessalonians

In the opening chapter of 1 Thessalonians, after his initial greeting, Paul gives thanks to God for the faith, love and hope of these young believers. These are three words Paul

uses at other times to characterise the Christian life, particularly at the end of 1 Corinthians 13. It is interesting to notice that he uses them again at the beginning of 2 Thessalonians to these same believers.

In 1 Thessalonians 1 Paul expresses his assurance that God had chosen these believers to be saved because of the way the Gospel had transformed their lives. They did not just hear the Gospel preached, the Holy Spirit was at work to bring a deep conviction about what they heard and to change their lives. Despite the suffering they experienced from the opposition of the Jews, they received Paul's message with joy and lived Christ-like lives as they followed the teaching and example of Paul and of his missionary companions. Such was the change in their lives that they became an example to all the other believers in that area. The key to this change was that they had turned from their former idols to serve the living God and they lived their lives in the light of Jesus' return (1 Thessalonians 1:10-11). Theirs was a wonderful testimony to the power of the Gospel to save sinners and transform the lives of those who believe in Christ.

In 1 Thessalonians 2 we see, however, that Paul had to defend his honesty and integrity when he had come to preach the Gospel to them. It would seem that those who opposed his message were attacking the character of Paul by suggesting that his motives in preaching to them were wrong and that he was only out for financial gain. In response Paul stressed the love and care he had shown to them as young believers in Christ and that he had not been

a financial burden to them. He then encouraged them to stand firm in their faith in the face of their ongoing sufferings, reminding them of similar sufferings being experienced by believers in Judea.

We have to say that there was a possibility that Paul's enemies were suggesting he might have abandoned these new believers in Thessalonica. At the end of chapter 2 and the beginning of chapter 3 Paul explains how he had tried to make a return visit to them, but when Satan had hindered this he had sent Timothy and was encouraged by the good news Timothy brought back of their faith and steadfastness through their trials. Paul then deals with some issues that Timothy had reported back to him following his visit to the church. Paul twice mentions the importance of growing in their love for one another, and as we have already seen he gave important teaching on the matter of sexual purity and encouraged them to have a right attitude to work so that their lives would win the respect of outsiders.

Most of the remainder of this first letter is taken up with teaching about the second coming of Jesus, for which there was a particular reason. We can see from the end of chapter 1 that the return of Jesus was an important part of Paul's preaching of the Gospel. Following on from that, there appears to have been some confusion among the Thessalonian believers about some of the details. In particular there was a concern that believers who died before Jesus returned might miss out on the resurrection. Paul refers to them as those who fall asleep – this refers to their bodies – their souls are not asleep but with the Lord.

We see in 1 Thessalonians 4:14 that Jesus will bring these souls back with him when he returns, then their bodies will be raised again to life and made anew as they are reunited with their souls. Believers who are still living when Christ returns will also be transformed and taken up to meet with the Lord. This is known as the rapture of believers, and there are two things that are quite clear. Firstly, that it will happen when Christ returns and secondly, that there will be nothing secret about it because Jesus' return will be a very public event accompanied by the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God. Paul then goes on in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-10 to remind them of truths he had already taught them about the return of Jesus. The time of this event is unknown to us and so Paul describes it like the coming of a thief in the night because it will be sudden and unexpected. Yet, while it will catch unbelievers unprepared as they live in the darkness and sin of this world, this will not be the case with believers. Therefore, we are to be those who know that the Lord is coming and who live godly and self-controlled lives so that we will be ready to meet him when he returns.

It is significant that the theme of Jesus' return is something Paul again deals with in 2 Thessalonians. In the opening chapter, Paul wanted to encourage the believers at Thessalonica in the trials they were passing through. Their steadfast faith was evidence that God counted them worthy to suffer for his sake, so Paul assures them that God is just and that the day is coming when the Lord Jesus will return to judge and punish the ungodly and, to be glorified among his people.

In 2 Thessalonians 2:1-2 we learn that these believers were being led astray by a message supposedly having come from Paul claiming that “the day of the Lord” had already come. Now this does not necessarily mean they thought Jesus had already returned because “the day of the Lord” is an expression that can also refer to the events that immediately precede Jesus’ return and prepare the way for his coming. Just as the sun rising announces the beginning of a new day so there were those saying that events had begun which would lead to the immediate return of Christ. In response Paul reminded them of what he had already taught them, namely, that before Jesus’ return there will be a great rebellion against God and the appearance of a figure he describes as ‘the man of lawlessness’. Paul says that the spirit of lawlessness is already at work in the world, but in the purposes of God, it is being restrained. The day will come immediately before Christ’s return when this restraint will be removed and the “man of lawlessness” will appear to oppose the Lord and deceive unbelievers by false signs, miracles and wonders. The believers are reassured, however, with the certainty that this figure will be overthrown by the Lord Jesus at his return. So we begin to see how this teaching on the second coming of Jesus is clearly important teaching for us still today.

The closing part of 2 Thessalonians (2:13-3:15) is taken up with Paul once more expressing thankfulness for the faith of these believers, praying that God would continue to strengthen them as well as asking prayer for himself. He also gives a warning against idleness and instructs the

church on how they are to act in discipline when a brother will not obey the teaching given by the Apostle.

4) Hints For Sermons

From 1 Thessalonians 1 you could preach a series on the effect that the Gospel had on these believers. In chapters 2 and 3 you might look at Paul’s example in his relationship with the Thessalonian church. In chapters 4 and 5 there is important teaching on the conduct of believers as well as in 2 Thessalonians 3. The teaching on the Second Coming of Jesus seems an obvious choice for material to preach on. There are four main passages: in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 we have the rapture of believers, in 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 we have the time of Christ’s return, and the importance of being ready. Then in 2 Thessalonians 1:5-10 there is teaching on the final judgement and in 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12 teaching on “the man of lawlessness”.

5) A Sermon Outline

A sermon based on 1 Thessalonians 5:1-11 could be given the title ‘The Day of the Lord’. This is clearly referring to the day of Jesus’ return. The first point could be called ‘The Coming Day’ and we could speak of the certainty of Christ’s return, even though we do not know the time or date. We would also speak of the unexpectedness of Christ’s return, like a thief in the night. The second point to make would be ‘The Children of the Day’ where we would want to draw a contrast between believers living as sons of light and unbelievers living in the darkness. We would

also want to speak on the believer's conduct as we await in faith for the return of Christ.

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Chapter 2 - The Pastoral Epistles

Introduction

'Pastoral Epistles' is the name given to Paul's two letters to Timothy and the one he wrote to Titus. Whilst they were written to individuals they are not really personal letters. Instead we see them as being pastoral because they deal with issues that are very important to the pastoral oversight of the local church.

On a visit to Ephesus, it would appear that Paul left Timothy in that city to have spiritual oversight of the church, and he had left Titus behind in Crete, following a visit to the island, with a similar responsibility. They were probably not technically pastors of these churches, but more as representatives of the apostle to have oversight of the churches and, in particular, to supervise the proper organisation and function of the churches with locally appointed elders and deacons.

As far as we know the three letters appear to have been written fairly closely together with the first letter being written to Timothy, followed by the letter to Titus and then the second letter to Timothy. It is clear from this last letter that Paul believes his life will shortly end in martyrdom

and, from what is known he was put to death for his faith on the orders of the Roman Emperor Nero. Because they were written at the end of his life, Paul recognised that his own ministry as an apostle was coming to an end and his concern was for the ongoing life of the church in the years that were to follow. The era when the church had apostles to guide would not continue indefinitely, so in these pastoral letters Paul is concerned to lay down principles for the establishment of spiritual leadership in the churches, to deal with issues concerning the organisation of church life and to warn of the dangers the church will face, so that it is preserved from error and kept pure in both doctrine and practice. These letters are therefore recognised as containing important teaching for us still today if our churches are to be protected against false teaching and ungodly living.

1) The Recipients Of These Letters

The first reference to Timothy is found in Acts 16:1, when Paul met him on his second missionary journey. His mother was a Jewess, who was also a believer, and his father was a Greek. Timothy was himself a believer at this stage, since Paul wanted him to go with him on this second missionary journey, and as Timothy was converted through Paul's ministry, the probability is that he was converted when Paul visited Lystra on his first missionary journey. Timothy became an important part of Paul's missionary team at that time, particularly through his involvement with the church at Thessalonica, which we noted above. We do not know whether he travelled with Paul to Antioch at the

end of that journey, but we know that when Paul returned to Ephesus on his third journey, Acts 19 and 20 record that Timothy was with Paul again in his missionary endeavours. While we cannot be certain that Timothy went to Jerusalem with Paul at the end of that journey when Paul was arrested and eventually taken as a prisoner to Rome, what is certain is that Timothy visited Paul during his captivity in Rome and is referred to in the letter Paul wrote to the Philippians, where he reveals his plan to send Timothy from Rome to visit Philippi. Clearly Timothy was a key figure in Paul's missionary team.

Titus is not referred to directly in Acts, although his name is mentioned on a number of occasions in Paul's letters. In Titus 1:4 Paul refers to him as '*my true son in our common faith*' which indicates that he was converted through the ministry of Paul at some point. We also know from Galatians 2:3 that Titus was a Greek and that he went with Paul on a visit to Jerusalem. Titus was with Paul in Ephesus during his third missionary journey when he wrote his letters to the church at Corinth, and was key in visiting the Corinthians on Paul's behalf and also in helping to organise the collection Paul was making for the poor believers in Jerusalem. Therefore Titus was also a vital part of in Paul's missionary team.

2) Background To The Letters

You may recall that when Paul wrote from his imprisonment under house arrest in Rome to the church at Philippi and also to Philemon, he was expecting to be

released from prison and hoped to visit the Philippian church as well as Philemon and the church at Colossae. It is possible that this release from prison took place and that Paul was then able to make these planned visits to these two places and minister in other areas. After he was released from house arrest, Paul probably left Rome and may have travelled to Crete where he preached the Gospel. We do not know whether Paul had made an earlier visit to the island, but when he left on this occasion Titus remained behind with instructions from Paul to deal with some unfinished work among the believers and to appoint elders in the churches. We see that in Titus 1:5. Paul's letter to Titus was written later, perhaps from Macedonia, but the apostle planned to spend the winter at Nicopolis, a city on the west coast of Greece, where he hoped Titus would be able to join him. Paul refers to this in Titus 3:12.

Paul travelled on to modern day Turkey where he visited Ephesus and possibly Colossae. At some point he left Timothy behind in Ephesus with responsibility for the spiritual oversight of that church, while he travelled on to Macedonia, perhaps fulfilling his promise to visit Philippi. In 1 Timothy 1:3 we see that Paul was delayed in returning to Ephesus and so he wrote to Timothy with further instructions for him. This is referred to in 1 Timothy 3:14-15 and was probably written from Macedonia, before Paul travelled to Nicopolis. We see in 2 Timothy 4:12-13 that Paul requests Timothy to bring a cloak and parchment scrolls that he had left behind on a visit to Troas and also refers in v20 to leaving Erastus at Corinth and Trophimus at Miletus because he was unwell. Paul appears to have

travelled quite widely, but by the time he wrote his second letter to Timothy he had been arrested again and was in Rome anticipating his death by martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel.

3) 1 Timothy

a. Content

Having left Timothy in Ephesus with responsibility for the spiritual oversight of the church there, Paul now writes to him. While he intended to return to Ephesus himself, Paul records in 1 Timothy 3:14-15 that he wrote this letter with further instructions, in case he was delayed. The letter indicates three main areas of concern that Paul had. First, that Timothy should stand firm against false teachers and hold firmly to the truth of God's Word. Second, that he should give Timothy instruction concerning certain areas of church life. Third, that he should encourage Timothy as a younger man in growing in spiritual maturity.

After his opening greeting we notice how Paul addresses the issue of the false teachers who were troubling the church at Ephesus. They claimed to be teachers of the law (1:7) and were teaching that through keeping the Old Testament law a person could be accepted by God. Paul shows in these verses that the law was given to expose our sin, not as a means of being justified with God. Referring to his own experience in v12-16, Paul shows that a sinner is justified before God as a result of God's grace and mercy towards those who have done nothing to deserve it. We are

made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ, not by what we do. As a Pharisee Paul had great zeal to keep the law of God yet it did not make him right with God, rather he confesses he became a blasphemer, a persecutor and a violent man. He was opposed to Christ, yet God showed great mercy to him and brought him to see that Jesus came into the world to save sinners so that by faith we can be justified in God's sight.

In 1 Timothy 2 Paul gives instructions to Timothy concerning certain areas of church life. We see in verses 1 to 8 the priority that prayer is to have among the Lord's people. We are to pray for those in authority in our nations, particularly that they will create an atmosphere of peaceful living in which the Gospel can spread and the Lord's people can live godly lives. Then in 1 Timothy 2:5-6 Paul brings us back again to the heart of the gospel as he points to Jesus alone as the one mediator between God and man, by offering his life as a ransom for sinners. Having given instructions about prayer, Paul then teaches about the role of women in the church. Their lives are to be marked by modesty in the way they dress and by good deeds (v9-10). They are not to teach the men nor have authority over them. This principle goes back to the creation and the time of the fall recorded in Genesis 3. Rather, their faith is to be expressed in the godly influence that a mother can have in teaching and training her children in the ways of God.

Paul then gives some more important instructions concerning the organisation of the church in 1 Timothy 3.

In verses 1 to 7 he sets out the high calling and solemn responsibility given to elders who are to have spiritual leadership in the church. They are to be men who are above blame in their personal lives, in family life, in their spiritual maturity and in their reputation in the world. He also gives the necessary qualifications for a deacon. The word deacon literally means “servant”. Whilst the elders were to give spiritual leadership, the deacons were to serve the church in more practical matters. However see that even for deacons there are important qualities that have to be displayed. Like elders, they must be above blame in their personal lives, in their understanding and commitment to the truth of God’s Word, and in managing their own families. Verse 11 may refer to deacons’ wives or to women who worked alongside the deacons in serving the needs in the church.

Paul begins I Timothy 4 by referring to those who will abandon the faith in the latter times. The expression ‘the latter times’ is a similar expression to ‘the last days’ found in 2 Timothy 3. Both of these expressions mean the whole of the period of time between the first and second comings of Christ. An examination of Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2 shows that the last days began then (see Acts 2:17) which is the entire period of the church age, so Christian believers are always living in the last days before Christ returns. These days are marked by those who abandon the truth of the Gospel. In the remainder of chapter 4 Paul gave Timothy some personal advice about guarding his own life against apostasy and exercising himself in godliness. Timothy’s personal life was to be an

example to the believers and in his public ministry he was to use his God given gifts in preaching the truth of the Gospel.

In 1 Timothy 5 Paul has a lot to say about the care of widows. He is concerned that where a widow has a family who are believers, she should be cared for by her family so that the church can devote itself to caring for those who are really in need. The reference in v9-10 is to older widows who possessed the spiritual qualities that would enable them to become involved in the pastoral care of the church. Paul then returns to the subject of elders. These men are to be respected and those whose work is preaching and teaching the Word of God, in particular, are to be properly supported. Paul also gives instruction as to how an accusation against an elder should be dealt with.

Paul begins 1 Timothy 6 by giving instructions to slaves in the way they are to behave towards their masters, particularly, if the master is a believer. We then find two passages dealing with the believer’s attitude towards money, the first warning against the love of money and the second giving instruction to the rich in the way they are to use their wealth. Between these two passages is further encouragement to Timothy to persevere in godliness.

b. Hints For Sermons

We could pick up on the passages in chapters 1 and 4 that warn against false teaching and those that depart from the faith, and also Paul’s instruction to Timothy to stay true to

the faith he has received and be faithful in preaching and teaching the truth. We could also deal with the instructions Paul gives for church life in chapters 2 and 5 as well as the important teaching in chapter 3 concerning the qualities required in those who serve as elders and deacons. There is also material to preach on concerning the example to be set by those called to leadership in the church in chapter 4 and the believers' attitude to money in chapter 6.

c. A Sermon Outline

In 1 Timothy 2:1-4 Paul gives instructions about prayer. We can look at this passage by asking three simple questions.

- a) **How are we to pray?** In verse 1 Paul uses four words to describe different aspects of prayer – making specific requests, more general prayer, interceding on behalf of someone else and the importance of thanksgiving in prayer.
- b) **Who are we to pray for?** Whilst Paul mentions prayer on behalf of everyone, he specifically mentions prayer for those who rule over us – kings and all those in authority. Paul believed that all earthly rulers are ultimately there by the will of God, which is surprising since he suffered at the hands of the Roman Emperors – yet he urges believers to pray for earthly rulers.

- c) **What are we to pray for?** Paul answers this question in verses 3 and 4 – we are to pray that those in authority may so govern that we can live peaceful and quiet lives and that as believers we live lives of godliness and holiness. We are also to pray for the success of the Gospel since God desires people of all nations to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

4) 2 Timothy

a. Background

2 Timothy is probably the last letter Paul wrote that is included in our Scriptures. It is clear from the letter that Paul was once more imprisoned in Rome. He had probably had a period of freedom since the imprisonment recorded at the end of Acts. Paul had visited a number of places, including Ephesus and Crete during that time, but he has now been arrested again and taken as a prisoner to Rome. This arrest possibly took place at Troas where we know from 2 Timothy 4:13, he had left behind a cloak and parchment scrolls, and which he asked Timothy to take to him. He may have been unable to collect these at the time of his arrest.

We see from 2 Timothy 4:16 that Paul had already made one defence of his position before the Roman court. By that time Paul was alone. His companions had either been sent on missions for him or had deserted him. This is recorded in 2 Timothy 4:10-12. No verdict was reached at

that first trial, but Paul knows that his martyrdom for the sake of the Gospel is imminent. He refers to that in 2 Timothy 4:6-8. By the time he wrote this second letter to Timothy, Paul refers to Luke being with him (2 Timothy 4:11). The purpose in writing this letter was to encourage Timothy to join him in Rome before winter and bring with him the cloak and parchments left behind in Troas. We do not know whether Timothy reached Paul before his martyrdom, but we have recorded in 2 Timothy Paul's final instructions to Timothy in case he did not arrive in time to see him. In summary, Paul encourages Timothy to be faithful to God in his personal life and ministry, in the face of opposition and persecution, and also in standing firm for the truth against false teachers.

b. Content

In the opening chapter, after his initial greeting and prayer of thanksgiving for Timothy, Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful to God in using the gifts the Lord has given to him. He also urged Timothy not to be ashamed of the Lord, nor of Paul. Timothy is to be prepared to face suffering for the sake of the Gospel, and the incentive for being faithful in facing suffering is found in the certain hope Christ has given to those who believe in him. Paul also encouraged Timothy to be faithful to the truths of the Gospel the apostle has passed on to him. He is to guard the truth of the Gospel he has received.

In 2 Timothy 2:1-2 Paul tells Timothy to look out for reliable men whom he can teach the truth he has received

from Paul, and who will also be qualified to faithfully teach others. As Timothy passes on the truth in this way, the gospel is safeguarded for future generations. This is something that all pastors must be looking out for today. We need faithful men, equipped by God whom we can instruct in the truths of God's word and who will then be able to pass on that truth to others. This is certainly a valuable and necessary principle for us to work out in our ministries and church life still today. Timothy is also encouraged to be faithful in his personal devotion to the Lord. Paul helpfully uses a series of three pictures. Timothy needs the discipline of a soldier, the dedication of an athlete and the determination of a farmer in seeking to be faithful to the Lord. Paul also used the example of his own personal life to encourage Timothy in his faithfulness. From 2 Timothy 2:14 to the end of the chapter Paul encouraged Timothy to be faithful in his public ministry as well. For all of us who are called to preach and teach God's Word verse 15 is a good text to have as our goal,

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

In 2 Timothy 3:1-9 Paul warned Timothy about the godlessness that will characterise the last days. We have noted earlier that in the New Testament the expression 'the last days' refers to the whole period between the first and second coming of Christ. So while Timothy would see these things happening in his day, we still see today those who show the same ungodliness referred to in these verses.

Again Paul uses his example to encourage Timothy in remaining faithful in 2 Timothy 3:10-13.

At the end of 2 Timothy 3 we have some verses that remind us of important truths about the Word of God. Paul is encouraging Timothy (v14) to remain faithful to the Word of God. He reminds him that the Scriptures are able to bring sinners to salvation through faith in Christ. They have been breathed out or inspired by God and therefore have the authority as the Word of God. As such, they are profitable for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness so that the believers may be matured in their Christian lives. Paul follows these words in the opening part of 2 Timothy to encourage Timothy to remain faithful in preaching and teaching the Word of God (see 2 Timothy 4:1-8).

The closing part of this letter is taken up with references by Paul to his personal circumstances. In 2 Timothy 4:6-8 Paul anticipated his martyrdom for the faith and gave testimony to his faithfulness to the Lord and his anticipation of the glory that awaited him. This was followed by references to individuals and circumstances mentioned. But in verses 17-18 Paul testifies to the faithfulness of God and expresses his confidence in the grace of God to bring him safely to glory which is a lovely climax to this letter based around the theme of faithfulness.

c. Hints for Sermons

We need to emphasise this theme of faithfulness as there is so much we could teach on the importance of being faithful in using our God given gifts from 1 Timothy chapter 1, being faithful in personal devotion and public ministry from chapter 2, and being faithful to the Word in chapters 3 and 4. We can also teach on the example of Paul's faithfulness in 2 Timothy 4 and the faithfulness of God again from Paul's testimony in 2 Timothy 4:17-18. We could also pick up on the importance of teaching and training others to be faithful ministers of the Word in 2 Timothy 2:1-2 and the ambition all who are called to preach and teach the Word should have from 2 Timothy 2:15. We could also preach from 2 Timothy 3:15-17 on the authority and sufficiency of the scriptures.

d. A Sermon Outline

Using 2 Timothy 1:3-12 as our text, we could give it the title **Faith in difficult times**, remembering the background, including Paul's own expected death as a martyr and the difficulties he warns Timothy to expect, particularly in the opening verses of chapter 3. There are four things that we can see from the faith of Timothy and Paul.

- a. **Sincere faith.** Paul recognises this in Timothy (v3-5).
- b. **Serving faith.** Timothy was not to be timid but to use his God given gifts in the power of God's Spirit. This is referred to in v6-7.

c. Courageous faith. Paul encourages Timothy to exercise such a faith in v8-10. He does so using the encouragement, not only of his own faith, but the experience of the grace of God and the assurance of the victory of Christ over death.

d. Confident faith. Paul expresses his own faith in v11-12 as he reflects on the faithfulness of God to keep him and bring him safely home to glory.

5) Titus

Although this follows 2 Timothy, it was written around the same time as 1 Timothy and we have already seen 2 Timothy was probably the last letter that Paul. Titus is in Crete, but we know very little about how the gospel reached that island. We know from Acts 2 that there were people from Crete present in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. It is possible there were converts among them who then took the gospel back with them to Crete. We also know from Acts 27 that the ship carrying Paul as a prisoner to Rome called at Crete, but whether Paul had any contact with the islanders is unknown. What we do know from Titus 1:5 is that Paul and Titus had visited Crete and Titus was left behind by the Apostle to finish some work Paul had started among the believers and to appoint elders in the churches in each town. Paul's purpose in writing is to encourage Titus in these tasks he had left him to do.

a. Teaching

The theme that we find running through the letter is introduced by Paul in the opening verse of the letter where he writes about the knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness. Paul's main theme can be summed up as the grace of God, which saves us through faith in Christ and brings us to a knowledge of the truth, will produce godliness in the believer's life. We will see that Paul quickly picks up on this theme in the opening chapter, but before he does so he gives specific instructions to Titus about the appointment of elders. A lot of the material about the qualifications of elders is very similar to what we find in 1 Timothy. We see again here that an elder is to be above blame in his personal life, in his family life, in their spiritual maturity and in his reputation in the world. Here Paul adds the importance of an elder holding firmly to the truth of the Gospel so that he can encourage other believers with sound teaching and answer those who deny the truth.

Very quickly though, Paul comes to one of the problems facing the Church in Crete. In Titus 1:12 we learn that the inhabitants of Crete had a reputation for ungodly living and it would seem that churches on the island were being troubled by false teachers who were themselves living ungodly lives. In Titus 1:10 Paul calls them rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers and in v16 he says that whilst they claim to know God, they deny him by their ungodly actions. It is likely that in their teaching they were justifying ungodly living. Titus is instructed by Paul to rebuke them so that they might be sound in the faith. Paul's

theme that true faith and knowledge of God will lead to godly living is vital to what he says in these verses.

In chapter 2 the theme of the importance of godly living continues when Paul addresses different groups within the church. Titus was to teach the older men what godly living means for them, similarly older women are not only to be taught how they are to live, they were also to teach the younger women how to live out their faith in their lives. Young men are to be characterised by self-control and Titus himself was to be an example to the believers in his own life, in his teaching and speech. Paul also gives instructions to slaves concerning their behaviour in relation to their masters. This is all very practical teaching that is so important still today. In Titus 2:11-14 Paul helps us see why godly living is so important in the believer's life. In these verses we see that a proper understanding of God's grace in saving us through faith in Jesus when we have done nothing to deserve his forgiveness, should lead us to turn away from lives of sin and lead godly lives. Paul explains that the purpose of Christ's sacrifice was to redeem the believer from all wickedness and cause them to be eager to please God in the way they live their lives.

The third chapter of Titus again has some very practical teaching. Titus was to remind the people of their responsibilities towards the civil authorities over them and also in their relationships with all people, particularly the unsaved. They are to remember that they too were once like the ungodly, living as they do, until God in his mercy saved them through the new birth, making them just in his

sight by his grace. As a result the believers are to devote themselves to doing what is good so that their lives will be a witness to the ungodly. It is good to be able to see how Paul's theme recorded in the opening verse runs through most of the letter. In Titus 3:9-11 we see how Paul tells Titus to avoid getting caught up in fruitless arguments with the false teachers. If such people would not heed his warnings, Titus was to have nothing more to do with them. In the final greetings Paul says that he is sending Artemas to relieve Titus from his responsibilities in Crete in the hope he will be able to join Paul in Nicopolis where he plans to spend the winter.

b. Hints for Sermons

We have already identified the main theme from this letter: the importance of faith in Jesus leading to godly living. The book is not too long to follow this theme through by preaching a series on all three chapters. For a shorter series you could pick up on the practical teaching to different groups in chapter 2 and also in relation to the civil authorities and society in chapter 3. Also in Titus: 11-14 and 3:4-8 Paul focuses on the grace of God shown in the Gospel. These are two wonderful passages to preach on.

c. Sermon Outline

Taking as a text Titus 2:11-14, where Paul writes about the grace of God we could use as a title for our message '**The Gospel of the Grace of God.**' In the introduction mention the importance of belief and behaviour, that the reality of

faith is expressed in the way we live. There are three main points:

- a. **The Power of the Gospel.** Paul introduces the grace of God that brings salvation in v11, then in v14 he focuses on the power of this Gospel in that Christ's death on the cross was to redeem the believer from all wickedness. Salvation is not just redemption from the penalty of sin, but also from the power that sin holds over our lives.
- b. **The Purpose of the Gospel.** We see in v12 that the purpose of God's grace in the believer's life is to teach us to say no to sinful behaviour and to live upright and godly lives in this present age. This is emphasised by the end of v14 where the purpose of Christ's death is to purify for himself a people eager to do what is good.
- c. **The Promise of the Gospel.** This is expressed in v13 where we are reminded that as we live in this present age we are waiting for our glorious hope of eternal life to be fulfilled at the return of Jesus Christ. He will come as he has promised. This hope has a great impact on the way we are to live as believers now.

These three thoughts – the power, purpose and promise of the Gospel show how important it is that our faith as believers is expressed in the way we behave.

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