

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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1 Timothy: The Image of a Godly Leader

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope; Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do. (1 Timothy 1:1-4)

Having spent several months in our study of 2 Peter 2 with its focus on false teachers, it seems logical and balanced to take a look at the opposite side of the same coin. Rather than look emphatically at the character of the false teacher, let's take a look at the character and conduct of the godly church leader and teacher. Second Peter indeed has its role in a healthy balanced Christian perspective. Invariably we occasionally encounter the insidious false teacher who imitates the people whom Peter so directly opposes. A significant percent of the Christian community lives with a somewhat "Pollyanna" attitude regarding error and those who teach it. Ignore them, pretend that they simply don't exist, and they will eventually go away. Peter's letter jolts us back into reality on this point. However, a full study of 2 Peter reveals a common tie with Paul's first letter to Timothy. The most effective antidote to error, especially devious error, is a strong foundation in the faith as it comes to us in the New Testament. That is the point of 2 Peter 1.

Probably most contemporary Christians have abandoned any sense of expectation that their leaders simply can, or even should, live up to the qualifications of leadership as set forth in the pastoral epistles (Paul's letters to the two young preachers, Timothy and Titus). Often this attitude finds its strongest support from deficient leaders themselves. Therefore they advocate full abandonment of these qualifications as required criteria for ordination or as the basis for continuing in active ministry in a church office. Many of these same people would react with horror to someone advocating such a cavalier abandonment of an essential theological concept. They simply refuse to live up to the Biblical requirements for office in the church. Sadly, I occasionally encounter this "Why bother,

attitude among our own fellowship of Primitive Baptists. More than once I have heard this response, "If we wait to ordain someone till they meet these qualifications, we'd never ordain anyone at all. Therefore, we should just ignore the qualifications." In any institution of human beings the organization will never rise above its leadership. Any appearance of this reckless abandonment of Biblical requirements among church leaders is frightening indeed. I will maintain in this writing that we cannot abandon the required qualifications of church officers any more than we can abandon a cardinal theological concept. In fact abandonment of one position often leads to abandonment of the other. I will also urge that continuing adherence to the qualifications should be required for a man who holds a church office to continue in that office. What is a church office? In the sense of qualifications as set forth by Paul to Timothy the two offices requiring ordination and thus subject to these qualifications are the offices of elder (pastor, preacher) and deacon.

Paul's letters in the New Testament are "occasional" letters. Some event, problem, or "occasion" prompted him to write each letter. Typically Paul identifies the occasion for his letters near the beginning of each letter and near its end, something of idea bookends around the detailed instructions addressing the primary issue that motivated the writing of the letter.

We should not think of either Timothy or Titus as resident pastors of a specific church. Rather they appear in each of these letters as special helpers to Paul, sent by him to deal with specific problems in a local area or church. Through the window of these letters we can see much regarding the culture of New Testament Christianity, as well as the local culture of each church involved in these special apostolic

assignments. In addition, and to our benefit, we can discover some of the significant problems encountered by first century Christianity and how an inspired apostle directed his aides to deal with those problems. Particularly in this point we can learn about potential problems that we shall encounter and discover Biblical instruction to deal with them.

Some commentators suggest that the pastoral epistles form a comprehensive handbook of pastoral ministry and church conduct. Given the fact that both men served directly under Paul's apostolic authority and direction with churches that he had visited or founded, I suggest that we should view these letters in a somewhat less comprehensive manner. However, Paul's emphasis on sound (literally, healthy) teaching makes these letters an invaluable source of instruction for every church that truly aspires to New Testament faith in its belief and practice.

The New Testament contains an incredible breadth of instructive information regarding any question of belief or practice that a conscientious church will need. We should view the whole New Testament, not just the Pastoral Epistles, as our handbook for Christian faith and practice. For example, the two letters that Paul wrote to the Corinthian church confront cosmopolitan, suburban Christianity, likely the most relevant—and frightening—New Testament letter to confront twenty-first century Western Christianity. In this letter to Timothy we learn through the occasion that Paul assigns to the letter, that he sent Timothy to the church at Ephesus to confront and to correct a growing problem within that church. Three rather informative New Testament references tell us much about the short history of this church. In Paul's letter to the Ephesian church we gather that they were strong in their faith and faithful in their practical living out of the faith. We sense less of rebuke and correction of specific error and more of encouragement and reinforcement of good faith and practice than in most of Paul's church letters. First Timothy informs us that the Ephesian church fell under the influence of false teachers from within the church and needed Timothy's reinforcement of Paul's foundational teaching to rediscover their true spiritual roots. Interestingly, Paul's final personal words to the elders at this church become prophetic of this specific problem (Acts 20:30 and context). Finally when we read John's (actually Jesus' personal message) letter to the Ephesian church near the end of the first century (Revelation 2:1-7) we encounter a sad affirmation of the

lingering problem of internal weakness at Ephesus. Jesus warns them that they have left their first love (not necessarily first in chronological order, but distinctly first in order of importance). They appear in danger of losing their "candlestick," their identity and blessing as one of the Lord's churches.

"...[T]hat thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith..." Here we discover Paul's opening "bookend" idea, the "occasion" for his letter to Timothy. It appears that some of the elders within the church were now teaching "other doctrine," that they were paying more attention to "fables and endless genealogies" than to "godly edifying which is in faith." This last reference to genealogies may suggest that the false teachers had embraced a false view of Old Testament writings and were elevating their errant interpretations above Paul's New Testament instruction to them.

While I question that 1 Timothy, or the three Pastoral Epistles combined, establish a comprehensive manual of church administration, I hold that these letters are invaluable to a healthy church culture. Paul affirms this point to Timothy (1 Timothy 3:14-15).

My objective in this writing will be to reinforce a thoroughly New Testament model for both doctrine and for church activity. This vision of the church is sorely needed in our time. Modern churches in large numbers rationalize one doctrinal abandonment after another from the New Testament pattern. For example, many church leaders exhibit more loyalty to the feminist movement than to the New Testament text and its prohibition of women as teaching leaders in the church. While they justify their rejection of the New Testament model on the basis that Paul's objection to women leader-teachers was based on local cultural problems, Paul himself based his objection on Adam and Eve; this example establishes a principle that transcends local culture. Among our own Primitive Baptist people, often the ideas of an older respected preacher are viewed with more knowledge and respect than the teachings of Paul and other New Testament writers as the basis for what we believe and what we do. If we say that we believe in Scripture alone as our foundation for faith and practice, we are ethically bound to demonstrate intense familiarity with and faithfulness to the New Testament model in all matters. May we live up to our profession.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday 10:30 A. M.
Joseph R. Holder Pastor