

Route Sixty-Six

Part Fifty-Four

1 Timothy

*Conduct in the House of God
(Acts 3:18; 1 Timothy 3:15, 16)*

With Study Questions

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But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled (Acts 3:18).

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory (1 Timothy 3:15, 16).

Introduction

It is a common occurrence for me to entertain discussions with people who find a lack of contentment with the church. People visiting, or seeking membership in, our church will often explain (generally nicely) some reason they have left their former church. Others will express concern with matters within our own church family. Then there is a general disposition of distrust in the institutional church wafting in the ether of our culture.

What I have found in these discussions of ecclesiastical discontent or distrust is the frequent and repeated theme of frustration regarding how matters have been handled. Whether the problems are moral or theological, whether there has been financial scandal or minor power moves within a small congregation, people have difficulty suffering a lack of process in confronting whatever the issue might be.

Deciding to have purple carpets in the sanctuary or painting the church green may be of little consequence to most. But if you find these, even somewhat minor, decisions are made incompetently or without any oversight or accountability, a red flag might go up. If we have no process, for example, with how we're going to arrange the chairs in church or what

time we're going to begin the service, what about accountability when it comes to the budget or heresy or immorality among church leaders? Such a clumsy approach to the functioning of the church can, and should, raise eyebrows.

In our Route Sixty-Six series we take a brief detour for a few books. Romans through 2 Thessalonians have been letters to churches regarding their doctrine and the general related issues. Now, for three books, the Apostle Paul turns his pen toward individual pastors (Timothy and Titus). Perhaps Paul is anticipating his own absence or (these letters written later in Paul's ministry) he has become increasingly aware of the challenges facing local ministers.

That these letters are written to individual pastors should not tempt the layperson to be inattentive regarding their content. Letters were often read publicly (Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27) for the benefit of all. It is not only on the shoulders of the pastor to know the details and nature of his call, but for the congregation to know and encourage that pursuit as well.

Many years ago, when we were a much smaller church, it seemed that I had to be involved in every duty required for us to function. From bulletins to budget, from Sunday School to helping organize the church picnic. In time I became routinely encouraged by members in our church who assume responsibilities that I might more dedicate myself to prayer and ministry of the word (Acts 6:4).

How a church, pastors, deacons, members function is critical to the well-being of the body. Much of what we will read in these letters to Timothy and Titus are ignored altogether by today's church or bent beyond recognition.

Survey of 1 Timothy

Early and late in this epistle we are given what may be understood as the theme, an entrusted stewardship. Paul says it early of himself then later, by way of charge, to Timothy. In chapter one Paul writes of...

...the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust (1 Timothy 1:11).

In chapter six comes the charge.

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust (1 Timothy 6:20).

As taught by Jesus in many of His parables where the King goes to a faraway country, God has entrusted His ministry to fallible humans who are required to behave faithfully in their care of something that doesn't actually belong to them. The light shining upon every decision is that this church/the church, has one true King. He is to be ever served in every encounter.

One early impediment to fruitful ministry is revolves around self-inflated, quasi teachers who are robbing Timothy of his time through **"endless genealogies"** and **"idle talk"** (1 Timothy 1:4, 6). This can be a tricky problem. At least fourteen times in 1 and 2 Timothy Paul will use the word **"doctrine"** or **"teaching"**. It is a priority.

Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine (1 Timothy 5:17).

But for some, theology can be a hobby or a cudgel used to dominate and intimidate. We must ever adhere to the counsel of the Spirit when it comes to the word of God.

Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith (1 Timothy 1:5).

It is not always easy to know when time, which might be better used elsewhere, is a wasting. Nonetheless, doctrinal discussions are not something from which Paul ever shied away. If we wish to speak of the law, it is good **"if one uses it lawfully"** (1 Timothy 1:8). In this context, lawfully is the restraining power the law of God has to retrain the wickedness of the ungodly.

Paul lists sins and sins that are also crimes. The extent to which the law of God should be brought to bear upon secular cultures in order to retrain sin is a matter of some debate. It will, nonetheless, be either the law

of God or the law of man. Laws will either be derived from the Holy Word or unholy hearts.

It is in this discourse that Paul offers the self-evaluation of being the chief of sinners. It was the recognition and contemplation of God's mercy toward him that Paul breaks forth in doxology.

Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen (1 Timothy 1:17).

The opening chapters ends with Paul charging Timothy to “**wage the good warfare**” (1 Timothy 1:18). We are to be ever mindful that a spiritual battle rages! Moments of rest are vital, but a disposition of spiritual coasting will ultimate bring us to the bottom of the hill. With that charge to Timothy comes another much neglected aspect of a sound church, church discipline. Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered to Satan (the world or out of the church) for their own spiritual well-being. This great act of love is ever interpreted by the world and the church, as intolerant and viciously judgmental. A bigger lie can hardly be told.

In chapter two we are called to pray for all people. Paul highlights prayers for kings and people in authority that those under their care might lead “**quiet and peaceable lives in all godliness and reverence**” (1 Timothy 2:2). Naturally attached to this admonition is something obvious to us but perhaps not as obvious to the early church with its Jewish roots. It is God's desire to reach all people without distinction.

Many, and naturally so, struggle reconciling 1 Timothy 2:4 (God's desire that all people be saved) with predestination and the power of God in general. How is it the Almighty God has a desire that He is incapable of meeting!!!??? Suffice it to say for now that “all” in Scripture seldom means every last single. And in this context, it is quite apparent that talking about all classes or categories of people-every nation, kindred and tongue (Revelation 5:9; 7:9).

He continues his instruction with the spectacularly unpopular counsel that the authoritative teaching office in the church is to be assumed by men rather than women. The influence of the feminist movement along with a very loose and liberal method of Bible interpretation has all but redacted this passage (1 Timothy 2:12).

It would be overly ambitious to engage all the reasons offered for ignoring this. Briefly, some argue that women were uneducated at this time in history. But those are the exact words to describe Peter and John (Acts 4:13). Another argument is that Paul and Jesus were accommodating their culture (why Jesus picked twelve men to be apostles).

But one thing which should be readily apparent to any Bible student is that neither Jesus nor Paul (or any biblical writer) wrote to accommodate culture at the expense of truth. Jesus' interaction with the Samaritan woman in the fourth chapter of John overwhelming proves that point. Add to this that in Paul's argument for his position he appeals all the way back to creation and Eve being deceived. Again, this can go much deeper, but we must move on for now.

We now move to the qualifications for elders and deacons. One is hard-pressed to find a topic more critical to the well-being of the church than this chapter. In the over fifty times the word "elder" is used in the New Testament it is almost always in the plural and always in the plural when it comes to ruling in the church. Simply put, Christ has determined to exercise His kingly rule over His church by a plurality of elders.

If your church is not run by a plurality of elders, they should be working toward that. If your elders fail to meet the standards put forth by 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 it will be the beginning of troubles for your local congregation. The same can be said of the character and role of the diaconate. The chapter climaxes with a reminder of why Paul was writing the letter along with what all those in leadership must ever keep in their hearts.

I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth. ¹⁶ And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory (1 Timothy 3:15, 16).

Moving into chapter four, Paul instructs Timothy that he is living in times where apostasy has been prophesied. Timothy should not be overly discouraged to see false teachings and hypocrisy. Good pastors are to

continue in biblical instruction though surrounded, within and without, by error.

If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed (1 Timothy 4:6).

Paul completes the epistle with instructions on how to best minister and interact with the elderly, the young, the widows, the rich. As a pastor (and as a church) we should honor and encourage the elders. It is with big picture thinking that Paul seeks to help Timothy (and all of us) avoid being overwhelmed with whatever dreams or visions or goals he might have had which have not materialized.

Now godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into *this* world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out (1 Timothy 6:6, 7).

Those in the church and in the ministry are not immune to the desire for riches, recognition and various snares that have caused some to have “**strayed from the faith**” (1 Timothy 6:10). In this environment, Paul again offers the battle cry.

But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession in the presence of many witnesses (1 Timothy 6:11, 12).

May we, as a church, ever be committed to obey that charge given to him and, by extension, to faithful churches throughout history.

O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust (1 Timothy 6:20a).

Questions for Study

1. Why is the process by which the church functions so very critical (pages 2, 3)?
2. 1 and 2 Timothy was written to Timothy. Does that mean it has no relevance to others? Explain (page 3).
3. What is committed to the trust of the church? How should this color our behavior (pages 3, 4)?
4. Theology is necessary but can become something unhealthy. Explain how and give some examples (page 4).
5. What is the lawful use of the law (pages 4, 5)?
6. How is church discipline difficult but also loving (page 5)?
7. If God wants all to be saved, why aren't they (page 5)?
8. Carefully discuss men and women in roles of leadership in the church (pages 5, 6).
9. Is eldership important to a healthy church? Why? Same question on the deacons (page 6).
10. What are Paul's closing words to Timothy (page 7)?