The Epistle of First Timothy

Chapter 3

We are into the first letter of what are called, the Pastoral Epistles, letters written by the Apostle Paul to both Timothy, a student and colleague of Paul and to Titus another student and follower and eventual pastor; and this first letter was directed at Timothy. Now Timothy as we know was the son of a Greek father and a devout Jewish mother, and apparently was never circumcised as a Jew, but was raised Gentile, however, his mother Eunice did raise him in the Jewish scriptures, and as far as we can tell came to Christ whether through his mother or under Paul’s teachings is unknown. But we know he became an almost special student under Paul, and has risen in Paul’s ranks as a messenger, minister and in uses Paul needed.

Paul had been in Ephesus and had to leave, but he asks Timothy to stay at Ephesus and rectify many situations there, and in doing so, wants Paul wants Timothy to review the condition of this Ephesian Church as to doctrine, to obedience and how these folks are able to adhere to the Pauline ministry established there especially during the difficulties they endure from the heathen population around them and the Jewish interlopers they are faced with who constantly strive to change the message from salvation to the law..

We can look at, study, and absorb day, deal with the adversity of the world around us? I hear of the underground Churches in China, for example, and note their steadfastness despite the Communist purges of Christian Churches, and also note how these same Churches survived, over the last couple of centuries, and see our churches here in America succumb to the world and its attractions. Look at the Church in Turkey or Iraq, and even faced with prison time or death, yet these Churches somehow survive. How are we doing?

We next looked into the prayer life of the Church, and the attitude of prayer, and Paul’s admonishment to pray even for the leaders who are striving to put them in prison, feed them to the lions, or make garden lanterns out of them. Paul goes on to give reasons why we should be in constant prayer, and this chapter, today, reminds us that we should never take the privilege, of prayer lightly. This is a great responsibility we have, to communicate with our Father in heaven, just as we long for our children to communicate with us, God longs for His children to communicate with Him.

Jesus, in Matthew Chapter 6, relates to His audience, the right attitude of prayer, and Paul points out that our prayer is private, and he does use the Pharisaic example of lifting Holy Hands, but that prayer is private time prayer, and our outward attitude should express our inward humbleness. He used the example of women who gussied up, hair primped, and finery worn, meaning who were they showing off for or too? God is not at all impressed with what we are dressed as, although, frankly, growing up, I was always taught to come to Church in the best I have and as I would dress for others, or for special occasions.

So, to re-summarize 1st Timothy: Chapter 1 has been dealing with the general health of the Church and its doctrine, Chapter 2 has been dealing with the health of the prayer life of the Church, and here in Chapter 3, we will be dealing with the health of the Church leadership. And although this letter does not necessarily deal with what kind of leadership the Church should have, it will deal with what qualifications that leadership should have. Too often in today’s Church, leadership depends more on popularity of a person with his peers, and less on actual qualifications and understanding of responsibilities of the position.

A] 1 Timothy 3: 1 through 7; (read)

1] “*This is a faithful saying, If the man desires the position of a Bishop, he desires good work.”*

Let’s get one important item out of the way. The word Bishop in this text, or Overseer in other texts, comes from the Greek: Episkopes: meaning overseership, or the act of administrating over the whole business. So what Paul is saying, is the man who wants to be boss, is seeking an honorable position, but friends, it is a position that come with a heavy load of grave or serious responsibilities. Who, seriously, is willing to take on the burden of administering the ‘ecclesia’ or the gathering of believers for God’s purposes?

But there are those who do have the calling and if those folks truly feel the call to take this responsibility as God would be intending for them, then yes, it IS a noble calling, and a calling of God. But are they a fit for the job? This is where Paul lays down the ground rules, for the role of Bishop.

2] “*A Bishop, then, must be blameless, the husband of one wife, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach,--”*

Now Paul launches into a list of personal qualifications for such a one who has felt called to be an overseer. Has such a man ever committed any action in his past, that can be called forward, bringing a black mark on his ability to administer? In those days, I do not believe it was illegal to have more than one wife, but usually that was the lust factor of the civilization, having one wife kept the man honest in his personal relationships, and honest to and with his wife.

This brings up an interesting question, that some scholars have pondered over. Paul states: the overseer should be the husband of one wife, so was Paul married? Pharisees were usually married men, and to be in the Sanhedrin, a member had to be married, but Paul may have gotten his stripes as a Pharisee, but he was young when Christ called him on the Damascus Road, so I doubt very much that he ever found the time to have taken on the role of a husband. He was married to his ministry.

Of good behavior, even today, we will meet or at least hear of those people in high places whose behavior is termed suspect, even some pastors. When we attain positions of high rank, the temptations increase, and so does the submitting to them. Then Paul brings up, hospitality. How accepting will this overseer be? Of anybody in any rank of life? Ever notice that folks of high rank are most hospitable of peers but disregard those of much lower rank? And next we have the ability to teach. When I have attained that level of responsibility, I should be able to teach the next rank regarding the job they themselves seek. In the arena of the Church, I should be able to still teach the simplest child the love of Jesus. I should never be that important that I could not sit down this the child who seeks.

3]--”*not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous,--”*

We come to being sober and this is, frankly, interesting at best, because the main drink of adults in this setting IS wine. And for that matter beer, and fruit brandies, because non-fermented drink went bad quickly without refrigeration. The idea here is staying sober, and not imbibing too much. Usually a person, following a drinking binge, was either passing out or becoming violent, and we have to watch our tempers------don’t ‘we’? Next being satisfied with what I have, and not seeking after more than I really need. Once the bug of making lots of money takes root, the need to make more and more, quickly begins to set in, and we can lose perspective.

Gentleness of person, and of spirit, when I am sober minder, and content with what I have and I have the Holy Spirit within me, I should have that gentleness within, right? Therefore, I don’t need to get into arguments, if there is a difference of opinion, this should be able to be settled without rancor but in a peaceful discussion mode, don’t you think? With this in mind, I don’t need money or possessions so should I lust after those things I don’t have when I probably don’t need them anyway? How many of us could pass this test?

4]--”*one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence, (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the Church of God)?--”*

Asked and answered. This would be the man who knows how to administer over his own house. This is somewhat understood that Paul, not having been married, did not have children. Now it is known that children, at some point in their growth cycle, will exert their brand of independence and the father must know how to shape the child as they grow to assume the responsibility of their independence. Not by strong rule, but by love and careful and wise nurturing, and in teamwork with his wife. The idea Paul puts across, is children, first of all, learn to respect, and a very close second, they learn to be obedient (almost hand in hand). The reasoning for this is because if a man does not have the control and respect of his family, how on earth can he gain respect and maintain control over a gathering of God’s children?

5]--”*not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride, he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.”*

Here is where experience comes in, doesn’t it? How can I become a leader or administrator without actually knowing how to lead or administrate? When I started with Charles Luckman Architectural offices in 1963, an Architect in both New York City and in Los Angeles with smaller offices around the nation, could I have stepped in and run this business of thousands of people with hundreds of projects, successfully? Not a chance. I had to step up into each position, first learning to manage myself, and that was an almost impossible task. I wouldn’t listen to me, so how could anyone else? EXPERIENCE!!!!!

6] “*Moreover, he must have good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach, and the snare of the devil.”*

One thing Mr. Luckman had, was the highest of reputations, from people all over the world, it was a reputation he had earned through hard work and dedication. Another boss I had was Mr. Vincent Kling in Philadelphia, who also was known and respected worldwide. This is what Paul is saying here, the Overseer or the Bishop, must have that respect even among the heathens, where they see his reputation as fully honest and as a true witness of Christ in all he says and does.

B] 1 Timothy 3: 8 through 13; (read)

1] “*Likewise, Deacons must be reverent, not double tongued, not given to too much wine, not greedy for money,--”*

Paul now turns to the workers in the Church. And their reputations. When one is actively involved in Church work, people outside the Church see who they are, what they are doing, but they also see is, outside the Church, who they are without the Church to cover them. They might have that pious look about them as they enter the doors of the Church, but as they leave, what kind of person do they become? What I see here is a contrast Paul is making between the folks involved with the Christian Church and much of the Jewish leadership in the Temple as well as who the Pharisees, Sadducees, Rabbis and Priests, and what that leadership had fallen down to. They had been all holy and as they walked the streets in their special garments denoting their official capacity, they walked to be seen and admired, and fawned over.

For the Deacon, he had to be a true believer, and honest in what he says as well as what he does, and like the Overseer staying sober, lest the heathen see him in that drunken state and a bad reputation is cast in the church. Also being content with the money he makes and has, not seeking what is not his. The world IS watching.

2]--”*Holding the mystery of the faith with pure conscience.”*

Do people see Jesus in you? Do they see you living out your faith in ‘fear and trembling’? The idea here is the mystery which is the Gospel of Jesus Christ and the salvation He offers through His death and resurrection so the idea is, do they live as if the mystery is within them and can their collective faiths be so discernable, that it becomes a witness to those around them who do not believe? In other words as we saw in the beginning church in Jerusalem, the Deacons had a ministry also.

3] “*But let these first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.”*

Paul states, “look at the qualifications and then apply them to those within the body to see who might be truly qualified, to serve as Deacon, and THEN going through the processes to make them as Deacons, if they are willing to serve”. Do we see what Paul is saying? Anyone who seeks to be a Deacon should pass a qualification test, do they meet the criteria as Paul has laid down? Too many times in Churches today, these leadership positions outside of the Pastor, are elected by friendships or feigned importance of the candidate, and not by these Pauline qualifications.

4] “*Likewise, their wives must be reverent, not slanderers, temperate, faithful in all things.”*

And now to the distaff side of leadership. And remember, this is in the days of Roman and Greek societies, (And Ephesus being essentially Greek in a Roman controlled society) where in many cases, women dominated leadership roles and Paul sought to put the roles of men and women back in sync with God’s operating model. This does NOT MEAN that women are to be subservient to men in all things, but all are to be aware of the differences that God made between men and women and honor the distinction.

What we have here, is the wives, as their husbands’ partners, should be just as reverent and strong in their beliefs, and not given to the back-yard gossip, even-tempered, and fully supportive of their husbands’ decisions.---- Now folks let it be understood, I am not against women in leadership roles, and frankly in many cases, it is hard to find men to fill certain leadership roles anyway. This includes teaching in Churches. But as long as women remember HOW and WHY God created the distinction of the species to begin with, with her reverence she is equal in all things.

5] “*Let the deacons be the husband of one wife, ruling their children and own house as well.”*

This will hearken back to the Overseers and the ideas of being in leadership in the home, and not having a home of contentiousness. Are the children respectful and obedient to the father and mother? Again it comes to ability to lead in small things which leads to being compared to the ability to lead in bigger things.

6] “*For those who have served well as Deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

One thing about being and working at being a Deacon, is the true blessings one will receive from God as his or her work is finished on earth and that person is welcomed into Heaven with a “Well done Good and Faithful servant!” And on earth the accolades of a faithful witness on succeeding generations and folks outside of the fellowship. From any leadership position one takes within the Body is well thought of, and rewarding on its own.

C] 1 Timothy 3: 14 through 16; (read)

1] “*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write o 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.”*

Paul is laying out the groundwork for Timothy to follow. Paul is thought to be in the Macedonian area, either the city of Philippi, or any town in that region and Ephesus is across the Aegean Sea. Now Paul’s plan is to, apparently, come and visit the Churches throughout Asia Minor starting in Ephesus which was the major seaport in Asia Minor. But as he says, he Paul, has written this letter so Timothy is brought up to date regarding how to get the Church in Ephesus organized, and in appointing the needed leadership. The importance of this is that the Church, the gathering of the believers, is the base or foundation that has been given by God, which is the Truth.

Now read this verse again carefully; Timothy is being given a special task of administration, and this is important in that Timothy is thought to be still young and being young would the people pay attention to him? Do you see this point? Paul apparently saw in Timothy that leadership ability he has been describing that was needed in the Church, and Timothy was to show through the work of the Holy Spirit that he was able to mold the Ephesian Church into the model Church that was needed to grow Christianity in that region.

2] “*And without controversy, great is the mystery of Godliness: ‘God was manifested in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen by angels, preached among Gentiles, believed on in the world, Received up in Glory.’”*

And with this ‘Truth’ there is no argument or debate, and here Paul delivers a basic Truth or ‘creed’ such as we have today; delivered in verse form, where the mystery of godliness or holiness comes with God coming to earth as a physical man, and endowed with the Holy Spirit, seen by Angels, (note that the Angels ministered to Him), and with the Apostles, He was preached among the Gentiles, and the world has heard and believed and Returned to His Glory in the Heaven.

This is what Timothy needs to know and understand in his ministry there.