

Sermon – 27/12/2009 pm

Trustworthy Timothy

Study Text: Philippians 2:19-24

God said it is not good for man to be alone. He ordained for a man and a woman to live together as companions in this world. To do this the man and the woman must share common interests and common goals. Believers of course share a common interest in Christ, along with an interest in the welfare of each other. Husband and wife often form a team in the work of mission.

It is not good for Christian workers to go it alone. But it is not always a man and wife who make up a team. They normally have children who will take up a lot of their time (I Corinthians 7:33). We knew two women who ministered together all over India. They travelled together because it was not safe for a woman to travel alone. They prayed together and ministered together for many years. Paul was not married. Various brothers ministered with him over the years but perhaps the closest of all was Timothy.

The Man

When we are in trouble we like to have those we know best, those whom we can trust, close at hand. In many societies that person will be a relative. Paul however, did not turn to any blood relative but to a brother in Christ. Christian fellowship should be like a family. *Let each of you look out for the interests of others* Paul said (2:4) He was echoing what Jesus said. 'These are my mother and brothers' he said, pointing to his disciples (Mark 3:34). He did not turn away from Mary of course, telling John to take care of her as he hung on the cross.

Paul was in prison in Rome as he wrote this letter. Timothy was there with him taking care of his needs. Prisoners in those days were not clothed or fed by the government. Epaphroditus, a brother from Philippi, was there also but he had not been a travelling companion like Timothy. Of Paul's 13 letters in the canon of Scripture, six include Timothy in the initial greetings, and two are written to him personally. No one else come near to such a consistent and close relationship with the apostle Paul.

Timothy was from Lystra in Asia. He was the son of a Greek father and Jewish mother. He was brought up on the Scriptures (II Timothy 1:5). He is an example of what the Lord does when children are taught the Scriptures. Paul went to Lystra on his first missionary journey and Timothy it seems heard the gospel at this time. When Paul went back to this city he found Timothy to have a good reputation in the church (Acts 16:1). Paul decided to take him along with him on his mission.

Timothy learnt the gospel truths, and how to live them out, from the apostle Paul. Paul was his mentor. He became as passionate about preaching Christ as Paul. He became as self effacing and self sacrificing as Paul in this ministry. *All seek their own, not the things of Christ Jesus* wrote Paul (2:21). All except Timothy that was!

Paul spoke of Timothy's proven character or worth (2:22). He had served with Paul in the ministry for many years. He had faithfully supported Paul in this work. He was like a son with his father. This was a companionship that went across a generation. How amazing that men from two different generations were serving together in the gospel. This is a blessing that we

have, or should have, in the gospel. Jesus Christ does not change. This does not mean that ministry does not change in different circumstances but that in the one situation there should be but one ministry.

For I have no one like-minded, who will sincerely care for your condition (2:20). What an amazing endorsement of the character of this young man Timothy. The word here literally means 'of equal soul'. It means 'of one mind'. To translate as 'no one like him' is inadequate. Here are two men of like minds. They think the same, and they do so because their thinking is that of Christ Jesus. *Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus (2:5).* Paul could have written of Timothy 'his thinking is like that of Christ'. He is not thinking about himself but about others. He is not thinking about himself but about the will of God and gospel of Jesus Christ.

Many years ago my wife had to go to Nepal to visit family while I stayed in India. Communications were very poor in those days. I was not sure when she was returning. In the meantime I was supposed to leave for conference. Trying to decide what to do, I began to think what she would expect me to do. My daughter had no such problem the other day. When uncertain if her husband would like her to buy an item she simply called him on the mobile phone!

'Great minds think alike' they say. I am not sure what great minds are. But if we say Christ-like minds think alike then we can understand this proverb. Paul knew that Timothy thought like him. He was not related and did not like the same foods or the same clothes as far as we know. But in the important things of life, in matters of life and death, in matters of truth and error, they were of the same mind. Paul knew that Timothy loved the believers at Philippi as he did, and wanted them to press on in the faith of the gospel just as he did.

But we have the mind of Christ. This is what Paul wrote to another church (I Corinthians 2:16). As believers we have been given the Spirit of God. We no longer think as the world does because we born again of the Holy Spirit. We must put on Christ; we must discipline our minds to think like Christ. This is our sanctification. This is the work of the Holy Spirit. Is your thinking like that of Christ? Could the apostle say of you that you are like minded, or that you are a kindred soul?

The Mission

Being like a son did not mean that Timothy was subservient to Paul. There was no lordship in their relationship. Timothy was not serving Paul; he was serving *with me in the gospel (2:22)*. Paul readily delegated and gave responsibilities to Timothy. Timothy was with Paul when he first crossed over to Macedonia. Further down the track when Paul had to make a hasty exit from Berea, he left Timothy behind. On his next journey he sent Timothy ahead to Philippi to prepare for his coming (Acts 19:22). Later on we see Timothy leading in the church at Ephesus. At the time of writing this letter Timothy was in Rome with Paul.

Too many ministries today involve a figure head who pulls all the strings. Too many ministries come to grief over personal differences, and efforts to gain or maintain the power base. Many renowned missionaries have a tainted record in this regard. They could not work with others and went off to do their own thing. God graciously blessed their labours but this does not mean he condoned the attitude of arrogance and domination. In the beginning Paul himself was involved in a dispute with Barnabas over Mark. Mark was not of the same character as Timothy, although he was with Paul again at this time (Colossians 4:10).

Why does Paul mention Timothy at this point in his letter? Some say that he was giving examples of men who had the mind of Christ, men who were blameless and innocent children of God. Boice writes ‘Paul presents three human examples; Paul himself, an apostle, Timothy, a young minister; and Epaphroditus, a layman’. This may be so but we must remember this is a personal letter and included here are details about his plan to send Timothy to Philippi.

I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly (2:19). Why was he going to send Timothy to this church? Well he says. *That I also may be encouraged when I know your condition (2:19).* Paul hoped to send Timothy, his most trusted partner in ministry, to greet the church and to bring back news from them. He hoped in the Lord. Paul was not making plans without seeking the will of the Lord. His life was in the balance at this time. His future was in the hands of the Lord. This was always the case with Paul. Is it not so with you also?

This church was the fruit of Paul’s labour. He hoped that they were holding fast the word of life, and that his labour was not in vain. To find out how they were getting on in the faith he was going to send Timothy. He was willing to send away his most trusted brother and that at a time of great personal need; such was his love for the believers in this church.

Paul knew Timothy would speak to them just as he would. He would teach them and encourage them while there. He would bring back accurate information about this church. It would be as if Paul was going himself. As we will see in the following chapters Paul has reason to be concerned about false teaching and divisions in his church.

And Me

Paul hoped to send Timothy *as soon as I see how it goes with me (2:23)*. He was awaiting the outcome of his trial before Caesar. He was confident that he would be released but it was not certain. The church knew he was in prison and were praying for him. They sent Epaphroditus to take care of him and get news from Paul. He was sending Epaphroditus back with this letter but without news of his trial. Timothy would convey this news as soon as he found out.

But I trust in the Lord that I myself shall also come shortly (2:24). These words reveal the confidence Paul had in being released – as we saw previously in 1:25. Upon his release he planned to make a personal visit to this church in Philippi.

We note three things here. Firstly Paul’s concern for this church even while he was in chains and awaiting the outcome of his trial – which might be execution. He was indeed a man who looked out for the interest of others, especially their spiritual wellbeing. Secondly, Paul planned everything *in the Lord (2:19, 24)*. He agreed with James in saying ‘if it is the Lord’s will I will do this or that, go here or there’ (James 4:15).

Thirdly, he believed in personal visitation. Christian mission and ministry cannot be undertaken via the media. Paul was of course writing this letter but he was sending it with a fellow worker not a postman. Today we have marvellous means of communication for which we are thankful but nothing can replace personal visits when it comes to the ministry of the gospel.

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