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1 Timothy 1:1-2

Introduction

Introduction to 1 Timothy

The first verses of Paul's letter to Timothy make it clear from the start that this is not just a letter from one friend to another. This is a letter from an apostle of Jesus Christ. As an apostle he wrote to Timothy, whom he called his "true son in the faith". The word "son" was often used by a teacher for his disciples. Timothy had been taught by Paul, and Paul saw him as his son. They had a very close bond.

Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, this letter is part of the Bible; consequently we too are disciples of Paul and of the Lord Jesus Christ, who sent Paul as his apostle. This is fundamental to the way in which we must read this letter.

Time of Writing

Paul wrote this first letter to Timothy sometime during his third missionary journey, which took place between 53 and 57 A.D.

This letter indicates that Timothy was in Ephesus and that he was responsible for the care of the congregation there. We can read more about Ephesus in Acts 19 and 20. These chapters deal with the apostle Paul and his work in Ephesus during his third missionary journey.

From 1 Timothy it appears that congregational life in Ephesus was thriving. A lot was happening. Not all of these developments were positive, however; in fact, there was cause for concern. Paul wrote

about adversaries, for instance, in 1 Timothy 1:20 (Hymenaeus and Alexander). He also mentioned heresies.

During his second journey Paul had been in Ephesus, but only for a short while (Acts 18:19-21). It was during his third missionary journey that Paul worked in Ephesus for a significant length of time. Through his work a congregation was formed.

For several reasons, it is not possible to date this letter after the third journey.

First of all, Timothy was still young (4:12). It was during Paul's third missionary journey that Timothy started to take trips on his own, being sent by Paul. One of those trips must have been to Ephesus, at which time Paul wrote him this letter. Had it been later, after the third missionary journey of Paul, Timothy would have been older and more experienced; he would have been working in Ephesus for approximately eight years by then. One would not expect, then, that he would be looked down on because of his youth.

Secondly, in this letter Paul gave many instructions regarding practical matters pertaining to a congregation still in the process of formation. The letter of Paul to the Ephesians, written during Paul's imprisonment in Rome, is reminiscent of a later date. It deals more with dogmatic issues, rather than practical matters.

Thirdly, in 1 Timothy 3:14 Paul wrote that he hoped to come to Ephesus soon. That would not have been possible after the third journey, because Paul had then learned through the Spirit that he would no longer come to Ephesus (Acts 20:25, 38).

During the third missionary journey of Paul, he was in Ephesus for a period of three years (Acts 20:31). In Acts 19:8-10 we read about a period of two years and three months. Paul apparently took a short trip from Ephesus to Macedonia and Achaia, that is, Greece (see 1 Corinthians 16). Before Paul went on this trip, Timothy had been traveling to Corinth. Soon after Timothy came back to Ephesus, Paul left on his

Questions and Points for Discussion

1. Some say that this is a personal letter from Paul to Timothy. We can learn from it but we must keep in mind that what Paul wrote to Timothy is not necessarily meant for us. Do you agree with this? Why or why not?
2. What is the difference between an apostle, like Paul or Peter, who spoke the Word of God, and a minister who explains and proclaims the Word of God from the pulpit?
3. Paul wrote that he is the worst of sinners, and needed Christ's mercy (1 Timothy 1:14-16). Why is it important that Paul knew this about himself? What does this teach us about the attitude of the preacher on the pulpit and of the church in this world?
4. Paul wrote in this and other letters (e.g. 1 Corinthians 2:1-5) that he came with the Word of God, and not worldly wisdom. With this warning in mind, can you see how we might hinder the preaching of the gospel?
5. In this letter, Paul gave instructions to Timothy about building up the congregation. Are these meant only for the early church, and must we do it differently today? Can we learn from these instructions about the structure of the church, the offices, etc?
6. Do we understand the meaning of Paul's salutation at the beginning of this letter, and also at the beginning of our worship services? What does it teach us about our attitude towards God?