

Blessings of Spiritual Maturity

I have visited many different churches and discovered the obvious. Every church is different. Every building and the people who attend the church are different. The worship services will vary. But there is one topic with which many church attenders agree. They are concerned about the pastor's theology and what he teaches on Sunday. They want their pastor to teach the Bible. But if you ask them, "What do you mean by he teaches the Bible," you will not learn much!

Ask them, "What does he include in his sermons?" If you do ask, you will learn about their definition of "Bible teaching!" It will become obvious that believers are not using the same definition of "Bible teaching." One pastor's sermon is filled with personal stories

and a few verses from the Bible. Another pastor is accused of teaching a seminary class. The trend in the last thirty to forty years is to avoid any serious study of Scripture from the pulpit. I could illustrate the problem as they leave believ-

ers in junior high school, rather than helping them graduate from the university. Surveys have revealed that some pastors spend more time creating stories and illustrations rather than seriously studying the biblical text, and sharing some new Scriptural truth. We can add rather than teaching what God has said.

The reason this is occurring is that the people are victims of some pastors who lack the desire to dig into the deeper truths of Scripture. Some pastors do not long to know God in a deeper sense. Some pastors do not believe the congregation

can understand the deeper truths of Scripture. The study of Scripture is hard work, but he would rather let someone else do the study and write a book. Then he can learn from him. One seminary student told a visiting guest speaker that he was looking forward to graduating so that he would be through studying the Bible. He planned to teach what he already knew! He was asking about gimmicks that would draw people to the church. Some pastors and teachers are more interested in sharing some fascinating statement in the Bible. They have learned that people are extremely interested in the sensational. Sadly, even unsaved pastors enjoy the title of "pastor" and challenging people to live according to a moral code. So, he uses biblical

texts to persuade them that his view is correct. The result is that people are victims of the pastor's spiritual immaturity and his lack of hunger to know God and the Scriptures.

Sadly, many think that as long as the pastor refers to some-

thing in the Bible at some point in his sermon, then they are studying the Bible. That is a common definition of Bible teaching. But they do not know that there is much more available to them! They have become accustomed to spiritual pablum.

Believers also have widely different criteria for selecting worship music, standards of giving, qualifications of church leaders, the duties of pastors, the role of women in the church, what constitutes false teaching, church discipline, and the care of the elderly. I could add other things to this list.

But I will stop and ask, "What criteria should a believer in



Jesus Christ use in selecting a church to attend?” That is one reason we are starting a new study in the book of 1 Timothy. You are about to learn what a biblical church is. What is God’s design for the church? That is what the book of 1 Timothy is about. That is the theme of the book.

The book of 1 Timothy will teach us about six different areas of church life. In chapter one, we will learn what should be taught from the pulpit. In chapter two, we will discover what should happen during a worship service. In 1 Timothy 3, we learn how to select church leaders. In chapter 4, the apostle will warn us about false teachers. In 1 Timothy 5 there are various instructions about different church members. The last chapter is about the character of the man of God.

OUR STUDY — 1 TIMOTHY 1:1-2. So with that background, let us start our study. We will be examining the first two verses of 1 Timothy. Here is verse 1 of chapter one of 1 Timothy,

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, who is our hope. . . 1 Timothy 1:1 (NASB)

The first fact that we are given is that the apostle Paul wrote this letter. The Greek word for “apostle” is *apostolos*. It literally means “sent one.” In a general sense it means “messenger.” That is, Paul was sent by Christ Jesus.

GOD THE FATHER IS OUR SAVIOR TOO. Then Paul added that He had been “commanded by God our Savior.” This is a very unusual statement. Now listen carefully because it reveals a very important truth about God. This is the first time this phrase appears in the New Testament. This phrase “God our Savior” appears in only three books of the New Testament (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4; Jude 25). So what does it mean? First, we already know that Jesus is our Savior because He died on the cross and was resurrected to forgive our sins. Later in verse 15, Paul said it like this,

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. 1 Timothy 1:15 (NASB)

But here in verse 1, Paul is not referring to Jesus. So, the second point is that Paul referred to God the Father. He called the Father, “God our Savior.” Why do we know Paul referred to God the Father? The answer is that in the Old Testament, God the Father or Yahweh is also referred to as our Savior. Here are a few examples. The first example is Psalm 18:46.

The LORD lives, and blessed be my rock;
And exalted be the God of my salvation,
Psalm 18:46 (NASB)

In this verse, the word “Lord” is translated from the Hebrew word for Yahweh. Yahweh refers to God the Father. That is, God the Father is our Savior. Isaiah 43:3 reveals the same truth. It says,

For I am the LORD your God,
the Holy One of Israel, your Savior . . .
Isaiah 43:3 (NASB)

Isaiah 43:11 also echoes this truth!

I, even I, am the LORD,
And there is no savior besides Me.
Isaiah 43:11 (NASB)

Other passages that teach the same wonderful truth are Psalm 25:5; 27:9; Isaiah 45:21; Micah 7:7 and Habakkuk 3:18.

God the Father Planned Our Salvation. So, in what sense is God the Father our Savior since He did not die on the cross? The answer is that God the Father created the plan for our salvation. That is the message of Ephesians 1:3-7. It says,

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we would be holy and blameless before Him. In love He predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the kind intention of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved. In Him we have redemption through His blood, the

forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace .
.. Ephesians 1:3-7 (NASB)

Here we are told that the Father planned our salvation. Verse 3 says the Father chose us in Jesus before the creation of the world. Verse 5 says He predestined us to be adopted. That is, He wanted us to become members of the body of Christ. Verse 7 reveals the Father's plan included the forgiveness of our sins in accordance with His grace. In summary, the Father planned our salvation.

God the Father Executed Our Salvation. Another amazing truth is that God the Father was also responsible for Christ's death. Hebrews 10:5-10 teaches that the Father wanted Jesus to come and die for our sins. John 12:27-28 reveals that when it was time for Christ to be crucified, Jesus told the Father that it was time. Then Jesus asked the Father to glorify His name! That is, it was time for the Father to cause Him to die on the cross. Isaiah 53:6 teaches that when Christ was hanging on the cross, Yahweh caused our sins to fall on Jesus (1 Peter 2:24). Isaiah 53:6 says,

All of us like sheep have gone astray,
Each of us has turned to his own way;
But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all
To fall on Him.
Isaiah 53:6 (NASB)

The New Testament also teaches us that God the Father raised Christ from the dead (Acts 2:24; Romans 4:24; 1 Corinthians 6:14; 2 Corinthians 4:14; Galatians 1:1; Ephesians 1:20; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; Hebrews 13:20). John 6:65, 44, and 37 reveals the Father is active in the process of drawing people to Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 tells us that we are saved by grace. That includes grace from the Father.

In summary, Paul's simple three-word statement, "God our Father," teaches us that the Father is our Savior in the sense that He planned and executed Christ's death and resurrection. Jesus is also our Savior because He is the One who died and was resurrected for the forgiveness of our sins. As a result of the Father's plan, Jesus is our prophet, Savior, priest, and coming King. The Father is now actively drawing people to

Jesus via the Holy Spirit.

We have just been given a marvelous insight from a spiritual father of the faith (1 John 2:12-14), and his name was Paul. Now we can read John 3:16 with a fresh understanding. We are told that . . .

For God [the Father] so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NASB)

Before we leave 1 Timothy 1:1, we need to notice that God the Father commanded Paul to be an apostle. This means that God the Father has been and is still active in saving people. Both God the Father and Christ Jesus are our Savior.

When Paul said "Christ Jesus our hope," he did not mean that we wish Jesus might save us. In the New Testament the Greek word for "hope" is *elpis*. It means "expectation." It has the idea of "confident assurance." So immediately in the first verse, the apostle gives us wonderful insight into the roles of God the Father and Christ Jesus in our salvation. The Father planned and is executing our salvation. Then because Jesus died and arose from the grave, He is our confident assurance of our salvation. Colossians 1:27 echoes this glorious news,

... Christ in you, the hope of glory. Colossians 1:27 (NASB)

Paul has laid down the most important fact of a believer's salvation in the opening sentence. In the process, he also has given us another proof of the trinity (John 5:17-18; 10:30; 17:1-5, 11, 21-22).

TIMOTHY — CHOSEN BY THE FATHER. Verse 2 then introduces us to Timothy. He is the individual to whom this letter was written. I should add quickly, that it was also written to the church in Ephesus that Timothy was pastoring. Here is verse 2,

To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Timothy 1:2 (NASB)

Paul says, "To Timothy." Timothy's name appears in the New

Testament twenty-four times. He first appears in Acts 16:1-3. Paul was on his second missionary journey. The year was A.D. 50, and Paul came to the city of Lystra in the southern part of Asia Minor. While in the city, Paul discovered a Christian named Timothy. Timothy's mother was Jewish, and his father was a Greek. Timothy had a great reputation among the believers in the city. As a result, verse 3 says that Paul wanted him to travel with him, and Timothy agreed. Here is Acts 16:1-3.

Paul came also to Derbe and to Lystra. And a disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek, and he was well spoken of by the brethren who were in Lystra and Iconium. Paul wanted this man to go with him; and he took him and circumcised him because of the Jews who were in those parts, for they all knew that his father was a Greek. Acts 16:1-3 (NASB)

Timothy Had Saving Faith. Now the New Testament gives us four characteristics about this man Timothy. These characteristics describe the man that Paul wanted to minister with him. As a result, Paul eventually trusted him so much that Timothy was sent to minister to several churches, and became a pastor to the church in the city of Ephesus. The characteristics of this man are characteristics that every believer should desire. I find it very meaningful that Christ called Paul to be His apostle, the Father commanded Paul to be an apostle, and then Paul called Timothy to follow him. What a high honor!

The first characteristic of Timothy is given by Paul. Paul called him, "my true child in the faith." When Paul wrote those words in about A.D. 62-64, he had known Timothy for about fourteen years. Paul knew him very well. The Greek word that Paul used is translated as "true," and means "genuine, or real." With this phrase Paul revealed that Timothy had "saving faith." He had been chosen by the Father to be saved. This is the first essential characteristic of a godly believer. He or she has real faith—saving faith.

Now it is important for us to remember that Paul is writing to Timothy and the churches will eventually read his letter. This means that Paul is telling the churches that Timothy is a believer. Now I wanted to make this point because Paul's statement has special meaning to me. Paul's statement reminded

me that when I was a pastor, no one ever asked me if I was a Christian before they joined the church. They never asked why I thought that I was a believer. Either they just assumed I was a Christian because I taught the Bible and was the pastor, or maybe they were too timid to ask. Maybe it never occurred to them that I might not be a believer and just liked teaching the Bible. Yet, there are pastors and teachers who are not believers.

In 2 Timothy 1:5 we are told that Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice were believers. Then Paul said that he was confident of their faith too! Then in 2 Timothy 3:15 Paul added that from childhood Timothy had been taught the sacred writings. God used the Scriptures to lead Timothy to salvation. So, Paul told the churches that Timothy was a believer. This gives us the first essential characteristic of anyone who desires to be genuinely used by God. They must have saving faith.

Timothy was a Godly Man. The second characteristic of Timothy was that he was a godly man. It is found in 1 Corinthians 4.

Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church. 1 Corinthians 4:16-17 (NASB)

This is an amazing statement. First, Paul urged the believers to imitate himself, "be imitators of me." Then Paul said that Timothy was a faithful man and his behavior would cause them to recall Paul's ways, which are actually Christ's ways. In two sentences Paul declared that Timothy was a very godly man. This gives us the second characteristic of Timothy. He was a godly man. This is another mark of saving faith.

Timothy Humbly Loved the Brethren. The third characteristic of Timothy can be found in Philippians 2 where Paul told the church in the city of Philippi that Timothy had the same concern for them that he did. Here is Philippians 2:19-21.

But I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you shortly, so that I also may be encouraged when I learn of your condition. For I have no one else of kindred spirit who will genuinely be con-

cerned for your welfare. For they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus. **Philippians 2:19-21 (NASB)**

Every time I read this, I am humbled by Timothy. It is obvious from verses 3-4 that Paul had already urged the Philippian believers to look out for the interest of others and not for themselves. He did that because the believers in the city of Philippi did not do that. Now in these verses, 19-21, Paul declared that Timothy was unique. No one else cared for other believers like Timothy did. Paul said, "they all seek after their own interests, not those of Christ Jesus." May I ask, is that true of you? Paul's point was Timothy was unique. So, the third characteristic of Timothy is that he was a humble man who looked after the best interest of others. This is also a mark of saving faith.

Timothy Studied to Know Sound Doctrine. The fourth characteristic of Timothy was that he studied the Scriptures in order to know sound doctrine. We have already read that he knew the Scriptures from childhood (2 Timothy 3:15). Now let's read 1 Timothy 1:3-4.

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. 1 Timothy 1:3-4 (NASB)

Notice that Paul urged Timothy to remain at Ephesus and teach certain men to not teach strange doctrines. Then in verse 4, he gives us more information about Timothy. Timothy already understood what was sound doctrine. Timothy had not stopped studying Scripture. He started in his childhood and continued to study Scripture as an adult.

We will discover several times in 1 Timothy that Paul will urge Timothy to hold on to the faith, study, and avoid the doctrines of demons as a pastor. That reveals that Timothy knew Scripture so well that he could do that. In 1 Timothy 4:15-16 Paul urged him to study the Scriptures even though Paul was not present. That reveals a level of competence in handling Scripture that Timothy already possessed.

CONCLUSION. So the four characteristics that Timothy possessed which we have studied are: 1) he had saving faith;

2) he was a godly man; 3) he humbly loved the brethren; and 4) he studied the Scriptures in order to acquire solid doctrine. These are also marks of a true Christian who is becoming spiritually mature. He or she is becoming a spiritual father. I hope that describes you.

We can be confident that because of Timothy's spiritual maturity he already knew that God the Father and Christ Jesus are both our Savior. I am sure that he already knew that salvation in Christ was certain. Both he and Paul deeply wanted to learn more about the Father. I hope that describes you too!

What a wonderful introduction to 1 Timothy!