

THE ASSEMBLY MESSENGER

Proclaiming the Timeless Truths of the Church to a New Generation of Believers

Volume 98-22

Dear Reader

Continuing our study of reception, we want to get a background on 2 Timothy in this issue to help us see the importance of this book in the functioning of the local assembly under current ecclesiastical conditions. Since 2 Timothy never mentions the word *church* or *assembly*, many simply look at it as a book of general Christian truth to a young man, a close companion of Paul. However, we will seek to show that the book contains vital truth as to our assembly pathway, including with whom we should be in fellowship (break bread).

The Significance of 2 Timothy: Defection Among the Lord's People

In many practical matters of assembly fellowship, including *reception* to the breaking of bread, and consequently to the privileges and responsibilities of the local assembly as gathered, a proper understanding of 2 Timothy 2 is vital. Many have *not* been taught that 2 Timothy was written to give the assembly pathway for *every individual* Christian to walk, *in the condition of widespread defection in the outward testimony of God's Assembly*. In fact, some strongly deny this interpretation. Yet can we think of God not covering the condition in His Word which we find all around us today — the condition of the divided testimony to the truth of the Assembly in practical application? Therefore, we will look at 2 Timothy from this viewpoint of outward division and seek God's mind as to our proper assembly walk. We ask your prayerful and unprejudiced consideration of the following, and again urge you to “search the Scriptures” whether these things are so (Acts 17:11) and to “prove all things; hold fast the good” (1 Thes.5:21).

Background

In 1 Corinthians 1:10-13 we see the *seeds* of division in the Assembly's testimony. Party-spirit was being manifested. It was the *mental-beginning* of denominationalism — of breaking up into groups gathering to some favorite person or doctrine. Yet *outwardly*, the brethren still were one, were still walking in unity. Paul besought them to stay that way, to say the same thing “and there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly united in the same mind and in the same opinion” (1 Cor.1:10, NASB, JND). This was written approximately AD-56 (New Scofield Bible dating).

About eight years later Paul wrote his first epistle to Timothy. He almost immediately stated that he had urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus (in the Roman province of Asia) because some were teaching “strange doctrines” and turning the brethren's minds “to myths and endless genealogies” (1:3-4). There was law-teaching (1:7) and even blasphemies (1:20). Paul had to act in severe discipline (1:20). The trouble *from within* prophesied in Acts 20:29-30 to the Ephesian elders was coming among God's people.

However, the general tone of 1 Timothy is positive, even though there were serious problems that had to be dealt with. Paul thus gave ministry so that Timothy (and we) would “know how one ought to conduct oneself in *God's house* which is the Assembly of the living God, the pillar and base of the truth” (3:15).

Error was still *individual*: “If any *one* teach differently and does not accede to sound words ... he is puffed up” (6:3-4). Some had “wandered from the faith” (6:10) for moral reasons — the love of money (6:10) and even (as often today) because of false “scientific” knowledge (6:20). Think of today's teachings on evolution.

Several years later Paul wrote a second inspired letter to Timothy. What a contrast! There was such discouragement that Timothy essentially had stopped ministering; his gift needed to be *rekindled* (1:6, JND). The fire had almost gone out. Timothy's gifts had stopped functioning as far as being seen and felt by the brethren. What had caused such discouragement? What was the remedy?

Paul's Instructions to Timothy

Paul reminded Timothy that God had not given him a spirit of cowardice when things went wrong, but of “power and love and wise discretion (sound mind)” (1:7). Timothy was not to be ashamed of either the testimony of the Lord or of Paul who again was recently imprisoned (1:8). God is all the support anyone needs: He is able (1:12).

What was needed was a firm grasp of the truths that were unique to Paul's ministry, *the “sound words which you have heard from me”* (1:13) – particularly the truths of the Assembly and the Assembly pathway which was Paul's unique ministry as we have seen in earlier Newsletters, from Ephesians 3.

The key to all this disappointment, and Timothy's special need to clearly have in mind the words that Paul had taught, is seen in 1:15. It says, “All who are in Asia ... have *turned away* from me.” As seen from the consistent use in Scripture of the Greek word for “turn away,” the turning away was not simply from Paul the prisoner of the Lord, *but primarily from the truths of the Assembly which were his unique God-given ministry* (Eph.3:3-10). Paul's very imprisonment was prophetic of the shutting away of these truths from the minds of believers by careless and/or sinful men, particularly as we near the time of our departure from this scene (4:6) – at the Rapture. So, what took place as indicated by 2 Timothy 1:15 is far beyond what we have seen earlier where there was only a *tendency* towards division and where only a few individuals had to be dealt with due to doctrinal or moral sin. However, here, we see a widespread *collective* turning away from the God-honoring Assembly pathway.

We note here in relation to the verb *turn away* (Gk: *apostrepho*) that finding the questionable meaning of a word/phrase by determining its meaning elsewhere in Scripture is a generally recognized method of rightly interpreting Scripture. The Holy Spirit did not use words carelessly! Beside its use in 2 Timothy 1:15, Vine's dictionary shows the word used in Matthew 5:42, Titus 1:13-14 and Hebrews 12:25. Other uses are in Matthew 26:52, Luke 23:13-14, Acts 3:26, Romans 11:26 and 2 Timothy 4:4. We will note its first use in Matthew 5, for a first use is always significant in Scripture in defining a meaning. The admonition is not to *turn away* from the request to borrow something: it has nothing to do with the acceptance or rejection of the person as a person.

The unanimous use in Scripture of the Greek word *apostrepho* is that it *never* refers to a person because of his personality or external circumstances. Rather, it *always* refers to some mental belief, some doctrine, some principle of life. With this overwhelming weight of inspired evidence, 2 Timothy 1:15 obviously means that the brethren — at least the overwhelming majority of them — comprising the local assemblies of Asia Minor had rejected the narrow pathway associated with Paul's unique ministry of the Assembly. In this manner they turned away from him. Maybe some also lost interest in Paul because he was in jail, but whether they did or not has nothing to do with the interpretation of this verse.

Continuing ... Today, we well know how terribly divided God's people are in their Assembly testimony. How do we know where and how *He* would have us meet together under these divided conditions? Would God leave us without instruction for assembling together in the present sad divided condition? If He did we wouldn't know what to do today since we would only have instructions for solving problems in the condition of Assembly unity. Timothy didn't know what to do because he was facing new conditions. Paul supplied those inspired instructions for Timothy and for ourselves!

Phygellus (whose name means *little fugitive*) and Hermogenes (whose name means *lucky born*) were two who had part in the defection. Note that the meanings of names is another means that the Holy Spirit has made available to help us ascertain the true interpretation of Scripture: these meanings are from J.B.Jackson's *Dictionary of Proper Names*. The above two brothers are contrasted to Onesiphorus (whose name means *profit bringing*). We suggest that Phygellus speaks of those who no longer have any real interest in the truths of the Assembly and Assembly practice *as Paul taught them*, and even work against those truths, often by secretly promoting their own agendas of giving up certain “unpopular” truths. They thus become *traitors* to the stand they once took.

Hermogenes apparently speaks of that second generation of believers who were “lucky” enough (as seen from man's viewpoint) to have been born into families who had a background in Assembly truth and practice. Sadly, these children followed the true Assembly pathway only because their parents did. They had very little exercise

or conviction as to why they were where they were and of how the Lord wanted them to walk. They weren't *opposed* to the truth of the Assembly, just *unexercised* as to it. The same is sadly true today. Both types of people easily defect from Paul's narrow pathway to easier and more popular pathways that make more of man's ideas.

Demas was one of Paul's companions (Philemon 24). His name means *popular*. He also forsook Paul, "having loved this present age" (4:10). The old nature loves to be popular: walking with Paul is not popular! The wording of this same verse seems to sadly indicate that Crescens and even Titus likewise had left Paul's pathway. Throughout "church" history many respected and gifted teachers have given up the practice of assembly truth, taking many others with them to easier and more ecumenical pathways. *How dangerous it is to follow any man except as he is following Christ!* Demas, Crescens and Titus are contrasted to Tychicus whom Paul had sent to Ephesus (4:12) — perhaps to a little remnant still going on with Paul as seen in Revelation 2, some 30 years later. Mark and Luke also were still with Paul.

NOTE: The fact that there was still an assembly testimony in the Roman province of Asia some 30 years later has caused some to deny the interpretation given in this paper as to widespread defection/division in Asia. It is not surprising that a remnant still went on with Paul after a major defection, nor is it surprising that energetic brethren, led of the Lord, strengthened that testimony over the next 30 years. Yet the words in Revelation 2 and 3 show there were still many problems in the local assemblies of the province of Asia, some of them critical in nature.

Onesiphorus was one who brought profit to all who crossed his path. "He sought me [Paul] out very diligently *and found me*" (1:17). He rendered "much service" (1:18). He was *profitable* to God and to Paul. He is our example for today. It is not easy to find Paul's pathway and continue in it, but with *diligence* it can be found and followed. God promises that the diligent seeker will find it (Jn.7:17) — will know God's will.

Timothy was to be like a good soldier who would bear hardships, like an athlete who would run the race by the rules, and like a farmer who had to labor before partaking of his crops (2:3-6). "If we *endure* we shall also reign with Him" (2:12). "Be *strong* in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2:1). All this exhortation and encouragement was needed because there was such trouble everywhere among God's people. Satan was winning a great victory.

People who want to compromise the truth, love to argue. Paul said to ignore such (2:14,16). Rather, strive to "cut in a straight line [handle accurately] the Word of Truth" (2:15). Why? Because false doctrines and practices were abounding. Such doctrines seek to turn the believer from God's narrow pathway. Our collective (assembly) walk seems to be a favorite target since it is the foundation of God's great plan for this age. Judaistic practices suitable to Old Testament Judaism, but not to the Christian Assembly, soon became common in the professing Church. People were not rightly dividing, not accurately handling God's Word. Such wrong doctrines spread like gangrene to the ruin of all, if not stopped (2:17-18). See 1 Corinthians 5:6 and Galatians 5:9. The proper interpretation of Scripture is all important! There is only one *interpretation* although there may be many *applications*.

2 Timothy 3:16 through Chapter 4

Where do we get our instructions for the needed care in assembly matters and all other aspects of our Christian lives? From the inspired Scriptures (3:16). Our Bibles contain all we need to be completely qualified, fully equipped for every good work (3:17).

The recourse is ministry, ministry, ministry! "Proclaim the Word! Be ready [urgent] in season and out of season, reprove, rebuke, exhort [encourage], with great patience and instruction" (4:2). Those apostolic teachings which the early Assembly persevered in (Acts 2:42) are vital for us today if we want to go on in the full truth.

Conditions will get worse and worse. The apostolic teachings concerning the correct *practice* of assembly fellowship are compromised by most. "The time shall be [it has come] when they will not hear sound teaching, but according to their own lusts will heap up to themselves teachers, having an itching ear, and they [the teachers] will turn away their [the listeners'] ear from the truth and [the listeners] will be turned aside to *fables*" (4:3-4). Fables are things that appear to be true, but in reality are false, although the fable may be moralistic. These fables

in God's things are seen all around us in the mixtures of man's ideas and God's truth. Timothy had to face such fables in the Assembly's outward testimony for the first time because of the recent division/defection. In closing we pray that each will consider before the Lord the significance of 2 Timothy and its bearing on Assembly conditions and conduct today. We will look at 2 Timothy 2:19-22 in the next issue.

Quotes from Well-Known and Respected Teachers

The following are quotes from a few Bible teachers, for it is sometimes profitable to see what others have said in the past. The people quoted all wrote about a century ago. These quotes don't use the word *division*, but they certainly *imply* it; at least the consequences and the path to be walked, now individually, but *with* those seeking the Lord's honor, is the same as if division had occurred in Paul's lifetime. We don't see how 2 Timothy 2 makes sense if all were still walking together. Why then would Timothy have to choose? What was he departing from? Certainly not from those continuing on with Paul even in weakness and failure! It seems plain Timothy's departure was to be from those who were rejecting Paul's pathway and had separated from him to an easier pathway.

Synopsis (J.N.Darby): First Timothy "gives directions for the order of the Assembly; the second, for the path of a servant of God when it is in disorder and failure.... it was written in sight of its [the Assembly's] failure and its departure from principles on which he [Paul] had established it.... the Church has not kept its first estate and [2 Timothy] sets before us the ways of safety for those who seek God and desire to please Him in such a state of things as this.... He could no longer connect them with the general body on earth.... that which bears its name no longer answers to the character given it in the first epistle, the pillar and support of the truth.... a period of unfaithfulness is here contemplated.... the mass had quite turned away from the apostle.... the outward assembly had taken on quite a new character, very different from that which it had at the beginning, and that now the *individual* [emphasis mine] was thrown upon his personal faithfulness as a resource and as a means of escape from the general corruption.... the outward assembly assumes ... the character of a great house ... the man of God was to purge *himself* from the latter, to stand apart and not defile himself with that which was false and corrupt.... [God] allowed the evil to display itself in apostolic times so far as to give occasion for the establishment of this principle by revelation, as that which was to govern the Christian.... whatsoever is contrary to the honor of Christ in those who bear His name, is that from which he is to separate himself.... one cannot walk with those who dishonor Him and at the same time honor Him in one's own walk.... We do not decide who are the Lord's: He knows them. But we are to associate ourselves with those who manifest themselves, such as call on the Lord out of a pure heart."

2 Timothy, W.Kelly: "... in view of deep and growing disorder.... in view of the horrors and dangers which this epistle contemplates.... No need had ever existed for a just abandonment of those who had walked together in the assembly. But here the Spirit of God brings before the apostle's eyes a new and still more appalling result of the increasing power of evil."

Numerical Bible, 2 Timothy, F.W.Grant: "In the second epistle, we may almost say that we miss the house [of God] altogether. There is a *foundation* which remains firm, and that which has become a great house.... Everyone has ... to think for himself ... in the face of everything against him.... through the shipwreck of the professing mass.... However far this turning away in Asia had gone, *yet it is plain that it is a wide defection* ... nor can it be accepted that it refers simply to the abandonment of the apostle when again imprisoned ... the Pauline doctrines ... were very early given up.... Faith marks the need of having the distinct path which the Lord has for each of His own and which we must take up, therefore, as from Him ..."

Resources of Faith Amidst Present Confusion, W.T.Turpin (Johnson Print Shop). "It would be a slur on the love of Christ for His people and His Church to say that we are here allowed to grope our way as best we can in the very confusions that are marked out in this Word — every kind of wickedness increasing and getting to a head on every side — and yet without one single special instruction for us, without one single truth marked out specially by the Spirit of God to apply to the circumstances in which these times involve us. No, it is this special care of God that makes 2 Timothy ... of special and peculiar [unique] value to the saint of God at this present moment.... When I come to 2 Timothy I find the house in confusion. *It is broken up* [my emphasis].... The Holy Ghost has marked

out through the apostle here for Timothy and for the saints of God at the present moment, what kind of conduct and character they were to exhibit and what path they were to pursue in the midst of this confusion.”

RPD