

An “Interview” with Timothy

by Bryan Gibson

Obviously, we can’t do a live interview with Timothy, so for “answers” we turn to everything revealed about Timothy—his preaching journeys with Paul, recorded in the Book of Acts; the scattered references to him in the New Testament letters; and the two New Testament letters addressed specifically to him.

Question: Tell us about your early years—your family situation, your upbringing.

Answer: My father was Greek, my mother Jewish. But that’s not even the biggest difference between them—my mother became a Christian, my father did not (Acts 16:1). Spiritually speaking, both my mother, Eunice, and my grandmother, Lois, had a big influence on me. They demonstrated before me a genuine faith, and they saw to it that I knew the Scriptures from childhood (2 Timothy 3:14-15; 1:5).

Question: You spent the better part of two preaching journeys with Paul. How would you describe your relationship with him?

Answer: Well, here are the various ways he described me: “my beloved and faithful son in the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:17); “as a son with his father he served with me in the gospel” (Philippians 2:22); “a true son in the faith” (1 Timothy 1:2); “a beloved son” (2 Timothy 1:2). He was my spiritual father, in the sense that he brought me to life through the gospel (1 Corinthians 4:15), but we were still brothers in Christ (2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). I carefully followed both his example and his teaching (2 Timothy 3:10-11), but I was not a disciple of Paul. I was a bondservant of Jesus Christ, who sought the things of Jesus Christ (Philippians 1:1; 2:21). Together, we were fellow-workers for Jesus Christ (Romans 16:21; 1 Corinthians 16:10; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). As you said, we did spend a lot of time together, but when we were apart, one thing I knew for certain was that he was praying for me night and day (2 Timothy 1:3).

Question: Before you accompanied Paul on his preaching journeys, he took you and circumcised you (Acts 16:3). Doesn’t that conflict with what Paul taught elsewhere concerning circumcision?

Answer: Not at all. If my case had been like that of Titus, where others tried to compel me to be circumcised (Galatians 2:3-5), then Paul would have stood his ground. What we did was in no way designed to bind circumcision on others; we just felt like it would make it easier to preach the gospel, especially among the Jews who knew my background (Acts 16:3). We understood that “neither circumcision nor uncircumcision avails anything” (Galatians 5:6), but it was going to take some time to convince others.

Question: Did you have any idea what you were getting into, when you decided to travel with Paul and preach the gospel?

Answer: In some measure, yes. I knew all about the persecutions and afflictions Paul faced when he first came to the area where I grew up, specifically in Lystra and Iconium (2 Timothy 3:10-11; Acts 14:1-20). I would have preferred to preach the gospel under more peaceful conditions (1 Timothy 2:1-2), but what I endured as a Christian, and as a gospel preacher—it did strengthen my character (Philippians 2:22), and for that, I'm very thankful.

Question: Tell us about these different churches that you and your companions planted and then revisited during those preaching journeys.

Answer: The main thing you need to know is that we taught the same thing in every local church—whether it was Philippi, or Thessalonica, or Corinth, or Ephesus. That's the confidence Paul expressed in me, when he sometimes sent me back to visit these churches—that I would teach the very same things he had taught, the things given to him by the Lord. For example, here's what Paul wrote to the church at Corinth: "For this reason I have sent Timothy to you, who is my beloved and faithful son in the Lord, who will remind you of my ways in Christ, as I teach everywhere in every church" (1 Corinthians 4:17). Woe to any man who teaches anything different today.

Question: Help us better understand the work of an evangelist. Perhaps you can summarize what Paul wrote to you in those two epistles.

Answer: Preach the word, to the lost and to your brethren—that's the key admonition (2 Timothy 4:2; 1 Timothy 4:6). It's easy to venture off into other things that don't profit, so hold fast to the word (1 Timothy 1:3-4; 4:7; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:16-18; 2:23). You won't find a more profitable source than the inspired word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Be varied in the way you present the word—instruct, command, charge, convince, rebuke, and exhort (1 Timothy 1:3; 4:6, 11; 5:7; 6:17; 2 Timothy 4:2). Your fellow-Christians are your family in the Lord—treat them accordingly (1 Timothy 5:1-2). You can't do all the teaching yourself, so teach others to become teachers (2 Timothy 2:2). Pray for all men, because God is interested in all of them (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Practice what you preach (1 Timothy 4:12, 16). Much more could be said, so be sure to read the two epistles to me in their entirety, along with the epistle to my fellow evangelist, Titus.

Question: And what qualities does an evangelist need to be effective in this work?

Answer: Possess both a genuine faith (2 Timothy 1:5; 1 Timothy 1:5), and a genuine love—a love for God and the souls of others (Philippians 2:20; 1 Timothy 1:5), and a love completely free of prejudice or partiality (1 Timothy 5:21). Must be studious, because to effectively preach God's word (2 Timothy 4:2), he's got to spend a lot of time reading it and meditating on it (1 Timothy 4:6, 13, 15; 2 Timothy 2:15). He's got to be cautious in his approach to God's word, because he doesn't want to stray from the truth, on any point (1 Timothy 4:6; 6:20-21; 2 Timothy 2:14-18). And he has the courage to stand for that truth, no matter what the cost may be (2 Timothy 1:7-8). He is "strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus" (2 Timothy 2:1), so he endures or perseveres to the end (2 Timothy 2:3, 10, 12; 3:11; 4:5). He is humble and gentle (1 Timothy 6:11; 2 Timothy 2:24-25), but not afraid to correct and rebuke (1 Timothy 5:20; 2 Timothy 2:25; 4:2). He's got business to attend to in this life, but eternal life and what

it takes to obtain it—that's his real focus (2 Timothy 2:4; 1 Timothy 6:6-12). He takes just as much heed to his life as he does his preaching (1 Timothy 4:16), and so he maintains his purity—both in heart and in life (1 Timothy 5:2; 2 Timothy 2:22). His example is a sermon in itself (1 Timothy 4:12).