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Church History

## **The Friendship of Paul and Timothy**

### **Pt.1**

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There is a common stereotype about Paul: he was one who preferred to work by himself. The fact is, however, that Paul is rarely found without companions. Paul “delighted in the company of his fellows.” And of his companions the dearest must have been Timothy. Though he was probably twenty or so years younger than Paul, Timothy became the Apostle’s closest friend. In the words of F. F. Bruce, the Bible commentator, Timothy

*“Readily surrendered whatever personal ambitions he might have cherished in order to play the part of a son to Paul and help him in his missionary activity, showing a selfless concern for others that matched the apostle’s own eagerness to spend and be spent for them.”*

Timothy had joined the Apostle Paul's ministry team early in what is termed Paul's second missionary journey around 48 or 49 AD (Acts 16:1-3). As they travelled, Timothy saw first-hand Paul's "doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions" (2 Timothy 3:10-11). Timothy grew to know the details of Paul's theology and doctrinal convictions.

He learned that at the heart of all genuine Christian theology is God: the Father, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit. He came to be grounded in the fact that the gospel is centred on the death and resurrection of Christ, the only way that men and women can come into a relationship with this God, the one true and living God.

Timothy also saw the way that Paul lived, how he made decisions and determined the best use of his time. And all of this came together with Paul's purpose for living, namely, the glorification of God and of his Son, Christ Jesus.

He observed Paul's love for the church and compassion for those who were held in the darkness of sin. He saw the way that Paul responded with patience and perseverance in difficulties and the fact that the Apostle did not

waver in his commitment to Christ despite persecution and affliction.

As Paul and Timothy spent this large amount of time together, Timothy's soul began to mirror that of Paul and his mind became increasingly attuned to the wavelengths of the Apostle's thinking. Thus, Timothy's friendship with Paul would have been a means by which God sanctified the younger man, giving him an ever-increasing richness of thought about God and the gospel, and an ever-growing desire for holiness and conformity to Christ.

In 1 Corinthians 15:33 Paul urges the Corinthians to recognize that "evil company corrupts good habits." Intimate friendships with evil characters will invariably have a negative effect on our lives. Likewise, one can say that "good company promotes good habits." This was the effect that Paul would undoubtedly have had on Timothy.

This was the effect that friendship with the eighteenth-century Baptist Samuel Pearce (1766-1799), a man of great personal holiness, had on the Congregationalist William Jay (1769-1853). Jay, was an influential minister in Bath, England, and made this comment about the last time that he saw Pearce alive: "What a savour does communion with such a man leave upon the spirit."

Probably the clearest text that outlines what Timothy meant to the Apostle Paul is Philippians 2:19-22: "...I have no man like-minded." The Philippian church had been evidently experiencing some measure of disunity. Paul mentions it explicitly in chapter 4 when he urges Euodia and Syntyche "to be of the same mind in the Lord" (vs. 2). In chapter 2 Paul devotes a lengthy section of this letter to resolving this problem, and he begins by urging the Philippians to be "likeminded"—the same phrase that he uses in Philippians 4:2—"having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind" (Philippians 2:2-4).

To illustrate this, Paul encourages the Philippians to meditate on the example of Christ, whose mind and heart were focused not on his own personal interests but on those of fallen humanity (Philippians 2:6-8), and he illustrates it further from the life of his friend Timothy (Philippians 2:19-22).