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W. O. Vaught

Ouachita Baptist University

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THE REAL PROBLEM IN THE JERUSALEM CHURCH

A STUDY OF THE BOOK OF ACTS
NUMBER 116
ACTS 23:12-15

Dr. W. O. Vaught, Jr.
Immanuel Baptist Church
Little Rock, Arkansas

ACTS 23:12-15 "And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him."

ACTS 23:12 "And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul." These "certain Jews" mentioned here were the younger set, eager to prove themselves. Paul had been lonely and discouraged and the whole night passed without any word from the membership of the Jerusalem church. Paul had just brought them a great offering, and you would think they would have shown enough gratitude to at least inquire about Paul's safety. But such is not the case. There was nothing but hostility and pressure from them and instead of helping Paul they were instead forming a plot to kill him. They were glad that Paul was out of the way. These forty young zealots formed a plot to kill Paul, but God had a plan for Paul. Just remember this--when God has a plan for you neither 40 nor 400 zealots can take your life before God is through with you.

From Jerusalem Paul would go to Caesarea and then on to Rome. After more than four years in prison he would be released, would have other mission trips, then would be imprisoned again in Rome and finally would have his head cut off on the Appian Way. Only two people will help Paul through this difficult experience in Jerusalem. One was his nephew and the other was the garrison commander.

Through those difficult days Paul was sustained by two principles--
The first is found in HEBREWS 13:5-6 "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me."

The second is found in PHILIPPIANS 4:11-12 "Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need."

Even though Paul had nothing and no support from the Jerusalem church, he had the presence of God with him. So we learn from this--"Be content with the things which you have." The details of life are not too important. Only one thing is needed and that is the presence of the Lord.

ACTS 23:14-15 "And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you tomorrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him: and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him." This is a picture of this new religious crowd of young zealots. They went to the older religious crowd and revealed their plan. They were bound together under an oath. They were out to get Paul.

In this study we are going to zero in on just one phase of this problem. It is not apparent from this passage in Acts the real reason for this murder plot, and we have to go to another passage to discover the real reason for their bitter hatred of Paul.

The Jerusalem Jews had totally rejected God's plan of grace and that is why they had rejected Paul. They had refused to hear Paul's message. They are pictured here as being determined, at any cost, to take his life. This only explains part of the problem. In Jerusalem there was a large number of pastors in the greater Jerusalem church. They were the ones who had advised Paul to go into the temple and take a legalistic vow, which he did. It was this activity which got Paul out of fellowship with God and almost cost him his life. Now the question emerges--What was wrong with this Jerusalem church and the leadership of the Jerusalem church? We have seen this legalism among members of the congregation, evidenced by this plot to kill Paul, but now we want to examine the pastoral leadership of this church and see what was wrong with these pastors.

2 TIMOTHY 2:1-2 "Thou therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." This is the last thing ever written by Paul. Here he wrote of the problems which come to pastors. Timothy, at the time Paul wrote this message to him, was in a place of leadership among the pastors of the Ephesus area. Now the Ephesus churches were going the same road as the Jerusalem church, and they too were getting away from the original plan God had outlined for them to follow. Paul knew that these tendencies had to be checked, and this is why he wrote to Timothy as he did. Before we look at these two verses in detail, let us look at several words that appear in the New Testament, and let us get their correct meaning.

DIAKANOS This is the noun which is translated "Deacon" but it actually means a servant or a minister. It was used originally in the Book of the Acts for the men who were to handle the business affairs of the church. It started out when they had a problem with the equal and fair distribution of food among the poor widows who held membership in the church. So originally the "Diakonos" was the man who rendered a service ministry in the church. Over in Romans this word "Diakanos" is used politically for an administrator of the state. Over in 2 Corinthians it is used in a general sense for the universal ministry of believers. (This is in 2 Cor. 3:6, and 5:18 and 6:3.) The word "Diakanos" is also used for the pastor of a church in Ephesians 3:7 and Col. 1:23 and 1 Tim. 1:12. "Diakanos" is used for pastor when it is referring to administration. "PRESBUTEROS" is another of these words and it is usually translated "Elder" and this had to do with the rank of the pastor, and it refers to the highest authority in the local church.

"EPISCOPAS" is another of these words and is usually translated "Bishop" and has to do with the work of the pastor and it means to be an overseer. This is the work and function of a pastor.

"POIMEN-DIDASKOLOS" is another of these words. It is a hyphenated word and it means to teach in an assembly just like I am doing right now. You see, every believer has his privacy and you are free to listen or free not to listen. You don't have to accept it when the pastor-teacher puts it out. He has no right to force anything on you. You can reject it or accept it. Your life is to be lived as unto the Lord. Please note this very important point--We must never force people when it comes to the Christian life.

Now in order for us to understand the depth of the problem these Jerusalem pastors and church members were facing, it is necessary for us to look closely at this passage here in 2 Timothy 2:1-2. In our day these verses have been almost totally misunderstood. They can be easily misunderstood unless you correctly translate them. Here we are dealing with the believer's priesthood.

Here we are dealing with the privacy of every believer.

We are dealing with grace versus legalism. This was the problem that proved to be the downfall of the Jerusalem church, and later on ruined the churches of the Ephesus area.

To understand this problem it is necessary to understand that probably Timothy is one of the most overrated characters in the New Testament. Because of our sentimental attachment for his mother and grandmother, and because of the fact that he was converted early and received his training under Paul, we have rated him rather high. Please remember, he was well trained but weak. He was bullied by some groups in his church and almost had a nervous breakdown and Paul had to prescribe some wine for his stomach condition. Over in 2 Timothy we find he is still weak. The passage we are about to study here reveals his weakness.

The passage begins with "Thou" and it is first masculine, singular pronoun in the emphatic position. So it means, "You, and you only, Timothy." The word for "My Son" is "Technon" and it means an immature son. We would have expected Paul to use the word "Huios" which means a mature son, but he doesn't. The word really means "A young son needing training." Timothy was a student in Paul's traveling seminary and Paul is here speaking to him as such.

"Be strong" is a present, passive, imperative. The reason Paul commands him to be strong is that he is weak. This word is "Endunomao" and it means to have strength on the inside which you don't have. The passive voice means that Paul wants Timothy to receive this strength which he at the present time does not have.

So it isn't doctrine he needs. He learned that line by line from Paul. It isn't that he needs the Holy Spirit, for he has had the Holy Spirit since the time of his conversion.

The next phrase reveals the area where Timothy is lacking--"In the grace." This defines the area where Timothy is lacking. Timothy is lacking in grace. This is exactly the same malady that had infested the pastors of the Jerusalem area. They lacked living in the grace of God. Now if the pastor is not oriented to grace, how can the people be? Like pastor, like people. Titus was the strong man on the team and Titus is underrated just like Timothy is overrated.

So Paul says here to Timothy, "Keep on receiving inner strength in the sphere of grace." Timothy lacks grace orientation. Now this being true, how do you start this grace orientation? Paul gives the answer--
"The grace that is in the Christ Jesus."

Now this is positional truth. God knows how we are all going to turn out and he puts us all "In Christ." Now it is not that Timothy lacks training. He had excellent training from his mother Eunice, and his grandmother Lois. He had been well trained by Paul. Yet somewhere along the line he had failed to orient to the grace of God.

2 TIMOTHY 2:2 "And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also." It is not the responsibility of the pastor to select a few people and work just with those. He is to teach everyone in the church who will listen.

Please notice "And the things that thou hast heard." This refers to the doctrine the pastor has taught. The word for "heard" is "Akouo" and it means the things you have heard in a teaching situation. This gathers up all the teachings Timothy has received in his life. And remember, he had been well taught.

"Of me" means from the immediate source of me. You see, Timothy had been with Paul on his second and third missionary journeys and had been a student in Paul's traveling seminary. So he had been well taught by Paul.

"Among many witnesses" is dia plus the genitive, and it might mean "among" or "through" or "by means of" but here it means "Along with many witnesses."

So the meaning of this sentence thus far is this--

"And the things which thou hast heard from the immediate source of me as we have traveled about in our traveling seminary along with many other seminary students."

Then Paul goes on to say

These same things "Commit thou" and this is an aorist, middle, imperative of "paratithemi" and it means "Deposit."

So Paul is commanding Timothy to become a grace man and deposit doctrine in the ears of his church members.

"Faithful men" here refers to those who are on positive volition and willing to take it in.

The word for men here is masculine. The word "Who" which is related to an antecedent is nominative, masculine plural and refers to some of these faithful men who will be able to teach.

(Illustration--Every time in the Bible where Pastor-teacher is mentioned, the language is always clear--the sex of the Pastor-teacher is always masculine. Nowhere in the Bible does it ever say that a woman ought to be a preacher. This rule never varies throughout the entire Bible. There were a few women judges in the Old Testament, and this came at a time when there was a dearth of male leadership. But nowhere in the Bible can you find any authority for a woman pastor. The language is quite specific at this point.)

So this word "Who" refers to some of the faithful men who will be able to teach. In other words, some have the special gift of Pastor-teacher.

WHAT ARE THESE QUALIFICATIONS?

1. Some, at the point of salvation, receive the gift of Pastor-teacher.
1 CORINTHIANS 12:11 "But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will."
EPHESIANS 4:11 "And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors ~~and~~ teachers;"
2. At the point of salvation those who are given the gift of Pastor-teacher cannot be distinguished from any other member of the congregation--except for one thing. They are males and not females. Here in our passage this "Who" is "Hostis" and is masculine gender.
3. Therefore, this called one must learn doctrine just like any other member of the flock.
4. As doctrine is taught by Timothy to the congregation, those who are in his flock and have been called by the Lord to be a Pastor-teacher will recognize it and respond. From time to time different ones will step forward and respond to this call.

5. Please notice that all in the congregation receive the same teaching--but only certain ones are called to be Pastor-teachers.
6. They must be qualified by growth--then they get special training. This is our Scriptural basis for theological schools.

So the correct translation of this verse is as follows--

"But the Bible doctrine which thou, Timothy, has heard from me, Paul, along with many other students in the seminary, this same doctrine deposit with certain faithful men, some among them will be on positive volition toward doctrine and will learn, and thereby, become qualified to teach others."

Now this was the problem of the Jerusalem church. They closed their ears to truth, they substituted the ritual of the temple for the reality of the Word, and they went down under the discipline of God. —