

Timothy's Credentials

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We have been studying Paul's first letter to Timothy. Paul and Timothy had a wonderful relationship. During his second missionary trip, Paul met Timothy. While Timothy was a young man, probably in his late teens, he had garnered a good reputation among Christians in his hometown (Acts 16:1). Paul mentored Timothy. In time, Paul used Timothy in the work of helping organize local churches.

Paul left Timothy with the church at Ephesus. Timothy was to ground the church in the Gospel. He needed to protect them from false teachers. He needed to help the saints develop in the image of Christ. He needed to appoint elders and deacons and settle disputes should they arise. There was much to be done.

When studying Paul's letters to Timothy, as well as Titus, we tend to relate Timothy to our modern-day evangelist. This is helpful to give a man who aspires to be an evangelist a model. However, this approach fails to acknowledge the unique position of Timothy. Timothy was not just serving as an evangelist like this writer serves as an evangelist.

There are three references made to Timothy's qualifications. These passages indicate that Timothy was given special authority to equip him to take the lead in the work of the local church. Notice the following passages:

1 Timothy 1:18: "This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare."

1 Timothy 4:14: "Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you."

2 Timothy 1:6: "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands."

These texts give us important information about Timothy's credentials. 1). The work of Timothy was prophesied. 2). Timothy was given a gift. 3). A council of elders had laid hands on Timothy. 4). Paul had given a gift to Timothy by laying on his hands.

Readers are left to wonder about the specifics of these credentials. What prophecies were given about Timothy? What was Timothy's gift? Who was the council of elders? The Bible does not reveal this information. Nevertheless, these credentials are what distinguished Timothy from other saints in the church at Ephesus.

Timothy's Credentials & Work

Timothy's work was challenging. He had to confront false teachers. He had to appoint elders and deacons. Should accusations of sin be made against an elder, Timothy was to preside over the dispute. We could understand Paul doing this kind of work. Paul had authority as a divinely appointed apostle. Paul was experienced. Just the opposite was true of Timothy. He was young and unmarried. He was in a position of leadership over people more experienced. How could Timothy operate under such circumstances?

First, Paul frequently reminded Timothy of the need for his good reputation to credential his work. His character was to be used to defend against anyone who might try to discredit his leadership. Second, Timothy's credentials from the council of elders and an apostle gave him authority in his work. No one else in the church was given such authority.

Timothy Using His Credentials

In the fifth chapter of First Timothy, Paul writes about issues that Timothy would have to address in the church. At the end of the chapter, he writes about what Timothy was to do regarding accusations of sin being made against an elder.

Timothy was to receive all accusations of sin made against an elder. Two or three witnesses were to present the accusations to Timothy. If only one member came to him with an accusation of sin, Timothy was not obligated to consider the charge. If the charge did not involve sin, he did not have to accept the accusation.

If the charge was made by two or three witnesses, Timothy was to address the matter with the witnesses and the accused elder. Hopefully, the matter could be resolved between this small group. If the accused elder persisted in his sin and refused to repent, Timothy was to involve the entire church in the matter. Timothy was to rebuke the elder before the congregation. This served as an act of discipline against an erring elder and a warning to the church.

Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear (1 Tim. 5:19-20).

Next, Paul recognized the challenge of a situation like this. He warns Timothy against acting hastily in these matters. He was to act deliberately and impartially. He was not to cave to political pressure that might be put on him when arbitrating such cases.

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality. Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure...The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So

also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden (1 Tim. 5:21-22, 24-25).

A Word of Caution

Paul's letters to Timothy are important for many reasons. They give churches an understanding of the scope of their work. Also, they give us insight into the work of an evangelist. However, a word of caution is in order in this regard.

Timothy's work is not completely analogous to the work of an evangelist today. This is mainly due to Timothy's credentials. With the death of the apostles and the end of spiritual gifts, evangelists today do not receive spiritual gifts. None are credentialed like Timothy. Evangelists today do not have such authority to rule or preside over a local church. Decision-making authority resides exclusively in the eldership.

If an evangelist attempts to rule over a local church, he will create an arrangement which is unbiblical. God designed local churches to be led by an eldership, not a single evangelist. Also, if an evangelist usurps the authority of the eldership, he will cause division.

There are similarities between Timothy and evangelists today. There are also differences which are critical to note. Like Paul told Timothy, we must be careful in our discernment of the Bible in guiding our work as evangelists and congregations (2 Tim. 2:15).