

TIMOTHY'S WORK IN EPHESUS (PART 2)

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In studying about Timothy's work in the city of Ephesus, we have seen that his labor included opposing doctrinal error, appointing qualified elders and deacons, and edifying the brethren during a time of persecution, which was causing them to reject the Apostle Paul. As we study Timothy's work further, we see that he truly did build wisely, and his good work there endured for decades into the future. Therefore, a great eternal reward awaits Timothy for his work in Ephesus. This is the encouragement that all Christians are given in 1 Corinthians 3:7-14: "So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; *but God that giveth the increase.* Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor. *For we are laborers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.* According to the grace of God which is given unto me, *as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.* Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; *and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward."*

The battle against false doctrine continues

Timothy's battle against false doctrine in Ephesus was still raging when Paul wrote to him in 2 Timothy. Doctrinal error was eating like gangrene and threatening to overthrow the faith of some, as with Hymanaeus and Philetus, who were teaching that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim 2:14-18). Foolish and unlearned questions were engendering strife (2 Tim 2:23). These false teachers were characteristic of the "perilous times" of these last days, and their folly would be manifest to all men (2 Tim 3:1-9). But these "evil men and seducers" were growing "worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" (2 Tim 3:13). The people were not enduring sound doctrine, but were heaping to themselves teachers to scratch their itching ears with fables instead of the truth (2 Tim 4:3-4). To counter this, Timothy was told to "preach the word" both in season and out of season, and to "reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Tim 4:1-2).

Finding faithful men to teach others

Materialism and worldliness were still persistent problems in Ephesus as the Second Epistle to Timothy was written (2 Tim 2:4). Paul urged Timothy to continue the method Paul had used in Ephesus many years before, of finding faithful men and committing the word of God to them so that they would be able to teach others also (2 Tim 2:2; compare Acts 19:8-10). Paul was obviously still heavily concerned about the church at Ephesus up to the very end of his life on

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earth. His involvement with the congregation spanned some 14 to 16 years. Aquila and Priscilla were back in Ephesus when 2 Timothy was written (2 Tim 4:19). They had been in Ephesus from the beginning of the work (Acts 18:18-26), but had gone to Rome within the year or so between the end of Paul's three years in Rome (1 Cor 16:9), and the completion of his third missionary journey (Rom 16:3). Now they were back in Ephesus, but we do not know long they stayed. We also do not know how much longer Timothy stayed in Ephesus. Somewhere around this time, Peter wrote his two epistles to "the strangers scattered" in Asia, among other places (1 Pet 1:1), and the first epistle emphasized enduring sufferings for righteousness' sake, and the second epistle emphasized resisting false doctrine, both messages being right in line with what the Ephesians were told in 1-2 Timothy.

The endurance of the work in Ephesus

The next and last glimpse of the church at Ephesus that we have in the scriptures is in the book of Revelation. The apostle John wrote Revelation as a prisoner on the isle of Patmos (Rev 1:9). Patmos was located in the Aegean Sea, about 65 miles (100 km) southwest of Ephesus. We do not know for sure if John had become personally involved with the church at Ephesus or with these other six churches of Asia to whom letters were written in Revelation chapters 2-3. But we do know that these churches of Asia were the abiding fruit of Paul's and Timothy's labors in Ephesus beginning about 45 years before. Everyone in Asia had heard the word of God through Paul's work in Ephesus (Acts 19:9-10). Paul had written the Corinthians about being a wise master builder on the foundation of Jesus Christ so that the work would last (1 Cor 3:5-15), and its endurance for close to half a century is a testimony to the quality of Paul's work, which was continued by Timothy. Timothy also had obviously done his job of stamping out false doctrine in Ephesus well. Close to 30 years after 2 Timothy was written, Jesus testified that the Ephesians could not "bear them which are evil" and had tried false apostles and found them liars (Rev 2:3). They hated the deeds of the Nicolaitans, which Jesus also hated (Rev 2:6). Though we do not know the specific doctrines and deeds of the Nicolaitans with certainty, we do know that they preached and practiced false doctrine (Rev 2:15). It is clear the church at Ephesus strongly opposed any form of false doctrine and sinful behavior. Not only that, the church at Ephesus had also borne and had patience (Rev 2:1-3), which comes through overcoming fiery trials on one's faith (Jas 1:2-4). They had labored for Christ's name's sake and not fainted. Endurance and resisting error were central messages given to these brethren, or their fathers, via Paul (1-2 Timothy) and Peter (1-2 Peter) many years before. Timothy personally worked with this congregation to instill those things. If we build wisely on the foundation of Jesus Christ, as Paul and Timothy did, then God is able to give increase to our work, which may produce eternal fruit to His glory, and an eternal reward for us!