

Article of the Month – April 2012

Missiological Observations in the NT (9) – 1 Timothy

By Steef van 't Slot, Ph.D.



Paul gives us alternative missionary-selection criteria, based on his experience as persecutor of the church. He states that God would rather have a zealous, unbelieving *ignoramus* than a decent but lukewarm pietist.¹ Should we not pray more often for revolutionaries, terrorists and religious fundamentalists to come to Christ, and to be called to service in the Kingdom of God?

Paul instructs Timothy to minister with the spiritual gift he received during an occasion of dedication or ordination under the laying on of hands by the elders,² through a prophetic word. It may have been the gift of evangelistic ministry but there are also definite *duties* coming with such an office,³ although it should not be expected of any worker to continually work outside his combination of gifts. Staying within that mixture avoids burn-out.

The next issue is the tough one of church discipline. Hymenaeus and Alexander have been handed over to Satan.⁴ We read about such a disciplinary action only once more.⁵ At that occasion the reason was *moral*, in this case it could have been *doctrinal*.⁶ When people have caused the destruction of faith of others in the church, the only drastic solution seems to be to separate them from the congregation which they have infested with their erroneous teaching. This 'handing over' can best be seen as excommunication, a placing outside the church,⁷ back into the world, Satan's domain.⁸

Paul – the missionary himself – undertook the action in both cases, as founder of the congregations. His actions were probably meant as *remedial* rather than *punitive*.⁹ Delivering people into the hands of Satan meant placing them outside the spiritual protection of the church to a place where (physical) harm might befall them¹⁰ to such an extent, that it was hoped that they would repent and return to Jesus Christ. It seems that such disciplinary action occurred more in churches which were newly planted by missionary pioneers than in older and more established ones.

¹ 1 Tim. 1:12-16

² 1:18; 4:14

³ 2 Tim. 4:5

⁴ 1 Tim. 1:19,20

⁵ 1 Cor. 5:5

⁶ Look at 2 Tim. 2:17,18

⁷ Compare with Jesus' ruling in Matt. 18:17

⁸ See 2 Cor. 4:4

⁹ Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles – An Introduction and Commentary*, 1977:68,69

¹⁰ Compare e.g. with Acts 5:1-11

Paul's admonishment to pray and intercede for all in authority is not only meant to please God, or for the church to lead a comfortable, unhindered life.¹¹ The key lies in the next verse:¹² [so that] 'all men ... be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth'. This applies not only to local evangelism but also to cross-cultural missions. Paul worked under different people groups as 'herald ... apostle ... and teacher ...to the Gentiles'.¹³

Paul encourages and advises especially new missionaries, short-termers and first-term career workers who have no command of the target-people's language as yet.¹⁴ As long as they do not master the local vernacular, they can still *set an example in life, love, faith and purity*.¹⁵ The other guidelines apply to workers who have adjusted sufficiently to their host culture.

Although Paul speaks about widows in chapter 5, many faith missionaries also find themselves in situations like that of the widow, by calling day and night to the Lord for help.¹⁶ Yet they must meet certain criteria to be entitled to support.¹⁷ Not all of them do however¹⁸ – which may not have to do much with physical age, in the case of missionaries, but rather with not functioning adequately.

¹¹ 1 Tim. 2:1-3

¹² 2:4, Similar to the thought, expressed in 2 Pet. 3:9

¹³ 2:7

¹⁴ 4:12,15,16

¹⁵ See also my article on 2 Corinthians, of July 2011

¹⁶ 5:5

¹⁷ 5:9,10

¹⁸ 5:11,14