

Behaving In The House Of God

"These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly; but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth" (1 Tim. 3:14).

There are a few certainties as well as a few uncertainties surrounding this first letter to Timothy. It is certain the letter was written to Timothy, Paul's beloved son (1:1). It is certain Timothy was in Ephesus (1:3). It is certain Paul entertained hope he could shortly see Timothy where he was (3:14). Not so certain is where Paul was when the letter was written; nor again when the letter was penned. Was it sometime on Paul's journeys, before imprisonment which brought him to Rome; during his imprisonment, or written during a brief release from prison some think he had?

Trying to fit this letter as having been written during either the second or third journey of Paul is fraught with much difficulty. To begin with, although Timothy did accompany Paul on portions of his second journey; the Ephesian church (where Timothy was when the letter was written) did not have its real beginning until Paul returned there at the commencement of his third journey, although at he ended his second journey Prisca and Aquilla were left there to await his return (Acts 19:1f; 18). Clearly the letter was not written during Paul's second journey. As far as the third journey is concerned; the bulk of that time was spent with Paul, himself, in Ephesus. The only time he was not was as he was facilitating the gathering of funds for Jerusalem's relief and a brief visit to Corinth at the conclusion of that journey (Acts 20:1f). Timothy was Paul's company on that part of his journey; thus Timothy was not in Ephesus. The second option is that the letter was a prison epistle, but if so, it bears no internal evidence that it was. The fingers "seem" to point to a brief release of Paul from prison, but as to where he was and when the letter was written simply cannot be determined.

Yet, while Paul hoped shortly to join Timothy in Ephesus, reason dictated such might not occur. So, he wrote that Timothy *"might know how men ought to behave themselves in the house of God."* It is certainly evident that the *"behavior in the house of God"* to which Paul alluded, dealt with the instructions of how men and women were to live; of which things Paul already has addressed, and will address again as the letter continues. He does not have special reference to behavior in an assembly when disciples came together for worship.

The House of God. This phrase is a figure of speech in which "house" is named to indicate those who reside in the house. The jailor, and all his house, were baptized in the morning hours after they heard Paul preach (Acts 16:31-33). The house, i.e., the family, is God's family. Becoming a part of that family is sometimes called a birth, as in John 3:3, 5. Sometimes we are said to be God's children by an act of adoption (Eph. 1:5). In either sense, we are God's family. God is our Father, Christ our elder brother, and all we are brethren. Paul hastens to add that the house of God is the "*church of the living God.*" It is astonishing to see the many terms New Testament writers use to convey the idea of what the church is. It is a flock (Acts 20:28). It is Christ's bride (Eph. 5:26). It is Christ's body (Eph. 1:22f). It is God's kingdom (Mt. 16:18-20). It is God's vineyard. And, Paul says the church is the pillar and ground of the truth. The church must be the voice which disseminates the truth; it must be the support of the truth. Let none of us be accused of "misbehaving" in the house of God!

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