

The Pillar (Part 2 of 4)

One God and One Mediator

1 Timothy 2:3-7

Mark Vroegop

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. ⁷For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (1 Tim. 2:3-7).

For the last few weeks I've been listening to a biography by George Marsden on the life of Jonathan Edwards. The history of the church during the colonial days, the effects of Puritanism, and the seeds of the First Great Awakening are fascinating to me. As I've listened to what was happening during Edward's day and the culture of the church, it has often made me smile. Not much has changed. People are people and churches are churches whether they live in 1750, 1950, or 2012.

Here are a few interesting things that I learned:

- In the thick of the First Great Awakening, many people began to question the spiritual vitality of those in positions of spiritual leadership. To combat this practice, Yale College passed a policy that no student shall question the spiritual genuineness of the members of the faculty or administration nor shall they openly charge members of the College with hypocrisy.
- David Brainard, the famous missionary to the American Indians, apparently didn't get the memo. He was expelled for saying that a certain teacher had "no more grace than a chair."
- There was some controversy during Edward's day regarding church architecture. The Puritans had originally espoused church buildings that were plain, non-descript meeting-houses with no steeples, symbols, or stained glass. But over time, 18th-Century New Englanders desired a more British and Anglican feel to their churches with Georgian architecture and large steeples on their church buildings.
- Further, there were significant questions about the requirements for church membership, who could be baptized, and how seeker-sensitive the church should be.¹

¹ Solomon Stoddard, Jonathan's Grandfather and the pastor whom he followed, believed that communion and baptism should be offered to "non-confessing" Christians in the hope that the church rites would warm them to full faith in Christ.

Part of the value of studying church history is that you begin to learn pretty quickly that Solomon was right when he said, *"What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecc. 1:9). It is remarkable how history – even church history – tends to repeat itself.

How 1 Timothy Helps Us

That is why 1 Timothy is so helpful. Even though this book was written in the first century to a young pastor who was trying to bring reformation to an established church in Ephesus, the principles and foundational truths are still relevant for us today.

The church of Jesus Christ still faces the same enemy and his devices. The temptations, challenges, and ditches on either side may have culturally unique expressions, but on closer examination, there is not much that is new. The challenges may seem new to us, but that is only because of the limits of our historical horizon. 1 Timothy gives us a great deal of help in that it provides time-tested truths as to how the church should conduct or "behave" herself.

Last week we saw the dangers of becoming internally focused. Apparently the church had become exclusive, parochial, and began to act as if their mission was to "hoard the truth" instead of the call to "guard the truth that leads to life." Therefore, Paul called on this church to pray big, sweeping, and global prayers. We learned that central to the church's mission is a calling to "pray for everyone, for kings and all who are in high positions" (1 Tim. 2:1-2).

These verses highlight theme of chapter two which addresses how the church is to "do life" in their corporate worship. I think it was a good reminder for us, especially as we launched Prayer Week, to keep our external focus, and it is just another affirmation as to why our Christmas Offering, over \$600,000 this year given to reach people in Pakistan, is such a vital part of our mission.

1 Timothy helps us know how to think and live in the church of Jesus Christ. Since it is the Word of God and since there is nothing new under the sun, it is a very instructive.

Two Guardrails of Truth

Our text today – 1 Timothy 2:3-7 – identifies two very important guardrails of truth with which every gospel-centered church in history has had to wrestle. Let me explain. Every church has to wrestle with this question: "What are boundaries of exclusivity and inclusivity?" In other words, in what situations and in what circumstances is it inappropriate to be exclusive? And in what situations and in what circumstances is it inappropriate to be inclusive? How "open" should we be? How "closed" should we be?

Paul's particular focus in verse 3-7 is the gospel. He is arguing here for a big-hearted, global vision for the proclamation of the gospel while at the same time arguing for a very limited and narrow understanding of what the gospel is.

Therefore, the two guardrails are 1) don't be exclusive with the spread of gospel, and 2) don't be inclusive with the means of atonement. So Paul is calling us to see the gospel as **universal in scope but singular in means**.

Universal in Scope

The first guardrail is found in verses three and four which call for a universal scope when considering where one should long for the gospel to go. Paul is warning this church about being exclusive or narrow-hearted when it comes to their heart for lost people.

Chapter two opened with a big and broad call for prayers to be offered for everyone: *"First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people" (1 Tim. 2:1)*. Verses three and four provide the undergirding motivation for these big, sweeping, and externally focused prayers:

This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3-4).

Again, the call is for the church to avoid having an exclusive mindset that will show up in lack of prayerful concern for people outside the church. Their prayers should reflect the heart and the desire of God.

The Heart of God

How big is God's heart? Well according to verse three, it is really big! The church had apparently been guilty of limiting their understanding of God's concern for others. So Paul wants to make it abundantly clear that spiritual concern for everyone is what God really loves. He doesn't just love you; he loves the world.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16).

What's more, God loves it when we love the world like he loves the world. That's why Paul uses two phrases to capture this:

- "this is good" – Having a heart like this fits with the heart of God. It is good.
- "it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior" – This is what brings happiness and joy to the heart of God.

Even though God is *our* Savior, he has a heart and a love for the whole world. So should we because it fits the heart of God and pleases him. Those who love him and want to make much of him (see 1 Tim. 1:12-17) will have the same heart. It is good and it pleases him.

The Desire of God

The second reason for a universal scope is the desire or the will of God. An external focus not only fits the heart of God, it fits his plan. The global praying is good and pleasing because of what we learn in verse four: “*who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*” (1 Tim. 2:4).

Now this is a tough passage and it raises a biblical antimony. Are you familiar with the word antimony? I hope that you have room in your theology for biblical antinomies because they are all over the Bible. The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary defines it as a contradiction between conclusions which seem equally logical, reasonable or necessary. J.I. Packer in his excellent book, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, helps us understand theological antinomies. He writes:

*For our purposes, however, this definition is not quite accurate; the opening words should read “an appearance of contradiction.” For the whole point of an antinomy – in theology, at any rate – is that it is not a **real** contradiction, though it looks like one. It is an apparent incompatibility between two apparent truths. An antimony exists when a pair of principles stand side by side, seemingly irreconcilable, yet both undeniable.²*

In this case the antimony is the fact that according to this text God desires all people to be saved but not all are in fact saved. Some have used this text to teach universalism – that all people will be saved (contrast 1 Tim. 4:10) – or to deny the doctrine of election (see John 6:32-51, Eph. 1:3-14). The tension here is that God **desires** all to be saved but not all are **actually** saved.

While I don’t believe that I can fully reconcile these issues, it seems to me that two thoughts are helpful in getting our minds as far around this as we can.

First, I would suggest to you that when Paul talks about “all people,” he is trying to get the church at Ephesus to gain a broader vision than their specific group. When we read this text we tend to make it very individualistic (i.e., “all individuals”), but a strong case could be made that Paul is referring to “all peoples” or “all people-groups.” This seems to fit with the tension that exists regarding the gospel being preached to non-Jews that existed in the early church. It fits with the focus of the Great Commission – “to all nations.” And it seems to fit with what Paul says in verse seven regarding his call to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher to the Gentiles. That is an exegetical argument.

Second, I would suggest that there is room in our understanding of God’s will – as a theological argument – to distinguish between what God desires and what he actually does. That there is a difference between what God would like to see happen and what he actually does will to happen.³ In other words, God can both desire/want all to be saved, but create a real scenario where not all

² J.I. Packer, *Evangelism and the Sovereignty of God*, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 2008), 26.

³ For an extensive and very helpful on this subject see: <http://www.desiringgod.org/resource-library/articles/are-there-two-wills-in-god>

are saved. So there are difference senses or meanings of his will.⁴ In this respect God genuinely desires for all to be saved, but only saves those who actually believe. This tension shows up in 1 Timothy 4:10:

For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1 Tim. 4:10).

Therefore, my conclusion is that Paul's point here is about the big-heartedness and the loving desire or will of God in contrast to the narrow-minded, hard-hearted, and self-focused mind-set that this church was apparently embracing.

A right understanding of the gospel should lead to a broad and universal appeal for people to come to faith in Jesus. Something is terribly wrong when the church or people in the church are only concerned about their spiritual needs or growth. It would seem that such a group does not really understand what the gospel really is all about.

So what do you do if you find that your heart is smaller than what it should be? What do you do if you find yourself living in a "Christian ghetto" with Christian friends, Christian classes, Christian books, Christian music, and Christian activities? Guilt won't work more than a few weeks. It never does.

We need to rehearse the gospel. We need to think what it means for Christ Jesus to save sinners among whom you are the foremost (1 Tim. 1:15). We need see how the gospel transforms our sense of mission and purpose in the world. We need to meditate upon and marvel at what comes next in the text: "One God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (2:5). The scope is universal, but it is singular in means.

Singular in Means

The second guardrail of truth is related to essence and substance of the atonement. The first danger was the possibility of being too narrow with the proclamation of the gospel. But this danger is in not being narrow enough. Exclusivity of who the gospel can reach is one danger, and inclusivity as to how people are saved is another danger.

Paul presents the theological highlights of the atonement in the verses that follow, and he does so in a way that seems to be part of some early creedal formula.⁵ What follows is a great summary of the core truths of the Christian faith. This is **the** truth that leads to life.

⁴ A great example of this would be the will of God as it relates to the crucifixion of Jesus. God certainly did not condone or desire the sinful actions of Judas, Herod, Pilate or the crowd, yet Acts 2:23 tells us that Jesus was delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God. God willed the death of Jesus while not "willing" the sinful actions of the people involved. God planned the death of his Son while not desiring the sinful actions or removing the moral culpability of those involved.

⁵ Gordon Fee, The New International Biblical Commentary – 1-2 Timothy, Titus, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 65.

First, Paul says that “there is one God.” This was a familiar way and a particularly Jewish way to talk about God (see Deut. 6:4), and the intent of the Old Testament was to stress God’s unity in the mist of the polytheism of the culture that surrounded Israel.⁶ However, here it seems to mean more. Paul seems to be saying that the fact that there is only one God means that he is God over all peoples, thereby bridging the former point into what comes next.

The next statement is “there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” This is an extremely exclusive statement. While there is one God over all people, there is only one mediator. Paul evokes an image of a vast sea of humanity and a singular majestic God who are separated, and between them is a mediator.

The idea of a mediator is a very important concept in the Bible. To be a mediator means that there are two estranged parties, and through a third party (the mediator) the two estranged parties are brought back together again. Probably the first historical time that we hear this kind of language is in Job 9:33 where he longs for someone to “lay his hand on us both.” Moses was also considered a mediator in that he delivered the covenant between God and his people (Exodus 20:18-21). Further, the high priest was a mediator, particularly on the Day of Atonement. Along with the other priest, he would participate in the daily sacrifices, but on the Day of Atonement he would enter the Holy of Holies and sprinkle blood in the mercy seat to expiate the annual sins of the entire nation (Lev. 16). The people had no access to the Holy of Holies; they needed the high priest to mediate their atonement. They could not do it; only he could. But it only lasted a year.

Enter Jesus. The fact that 1 Timothy 1:6 says “the man Christ Jesus” is extremely important because his mediation will not involve an animal sacrifice; rather, it would be the once-for-all sacrifice of himself as the representative of mankind. Hebrews 9:11-14 gives us a beautiful picture of the significance of that sacrifice:

But when Christ appeared as a high priest of the good things that have come, then through the greater and more perfect tent (not made with hands, that is, not of this creation) ¹²he entered once for all into the holy places, not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing an eternal redemption. ¹³For if the blood of goats and bulls, and the sprinkling of defiled persons with the ashes of a heifer, sanctify for the purification of the flesh, ¹⁴how much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, purify our conscience from dead works to serve the living God ¹⁵Therefore he is the mediator of a new covenant... (Heb. 9:11-15a)

But there is more. The writer of Hebrews connects the mediatorial actions of Jesus to another action: redemption.

...so that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance, since a death has occurred that redeems them from the transgressions committed under the first covenant (Heb. 9:15).

⁶ Fee, 65.

This is the same idea expressed in 1 Timothy 2:6 with this the statement “who gave himself as a ransom for all.”

To pay a ransom or to redeem someone meant that a price was paid in order to secure someone’s freedom. However, in this case, there is no money that is exchanged. Jesus **becomes** the ransom. Some time ago I quoted D. A. Carson on the subject of propitiation or the appeasing of God’s wrath:

In Christian propitiation, God the Father sets forth Jesus as the propitiation to make himself propitious; God is both the subject and the object of propitiation. God is the one who provides the sacrifice precisely as a way of turning aside his own wrath. God the Father is thus the propitiator and the propitiated, and God the Son is the propitiation.⁷

Jesus gave himself as a ransom; he became the propitiation. There is one God and one mediator. This statement is incredibly exclusive. Since there is no other mediator, “*there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (Acts 4:12). Jesus himself said, “*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6).

There are not multiple paths to God. There are not various means to be forgiven. There is nothing that you can do to pay for your sins. Jesus exclusively claims to be the only way to the Father. Paul calls him the one mediator. And the reason for this is because there is no one else who is both God and man, no one else who lived a sinless life, and no one else who bore the wrath of God. But he did! The single sacrifice of Jesus is exclusively effective in appeasing the wrath of God. Nothing else will work. Therefore your only hope is to receive Jesus.

You see, the amazing thing about this text is that it comes full circle. After talking about the universal scope of God’s heart and singular, exclusive means of atonement, Paul once again adds the word **all**. In other word, God has opened wide the floodgates of his grace. Today there is a mediator between you and God; his name is Jesus.

What Should You Do?

This is the greatest news in all the world! And everyone who hears this text needs to do something with it.

First, the Bible calls you to believe on his name. To believe on his name means that you stop believing in yourself; it means that you stop all the attempts to justify yourself – trying to tell God why you aren’t so bad. The reality is you know and God knows what you’ve done. The guilt that you feel for the bad things you’ve done is a sign that God is both real and merciful. You see, he loves you enough to make you feel bad about violating his law.

⁷ D. A. Carson, Scandalous – The Cross and Resurrection of Jesus, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Publishers, 2010), 64-65.

Believing in Jesus means that you stop trusting in yourself and you start trusting in Jesus. It means that you repent of your sins and receive Jesus as your Lord and Master. It means that you realize that there is no other way for you to be right with God. You need Jesus, and my guess is, you know it. So why not receive him right now? Why not receive this one mediator who became your ransom?

Secondly, for those of us who've already received Christ, you need to hear verse seven.

For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (1 Tim. 2:7).

This was the specific calling on the apostle Paul's life. Now I'm not suggesting that you become a preacher or a teacher, but the point is here that Paul was "all-in" when it came to this gospel message. He was passionate about the power of the gospel, and he was determined not to be ashamed of it (Rom. 1:16). And so let me ask you three questions as we close:

1. How's your heart? Is it big enough? Do you have overflowing love for lost people?
2. What's your motivation? Are you living through the gospel today? Do you see the beauty and the power of what the gospel can do in your life?
3. What do you see? Is your vision big enough, broad enough, global enough, and external enough? What is the calling on your life?

The gospel of Jesus Christ was meant to be exclusively effective through Jesus but inclusively open to all who would come. The gospel is universal in scope but singular in means. And to what end?

To bring in the day when this text takes place:

And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. ⁹And they sang a new song, saying,

*Worthy are you to take the scroll and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth" (Rev. 5:8-10).*

© College Park Church

Permissions: You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. www.yourchurch.com

Scriptural Citations: Unless otherwise noted, all Biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.