

One Mediator, Jesus Christ

1 Timothy 2:1-7

A sermon for the Fifteenth Sunday after Pentecost

1 Timothy 2:1-7 is one of the tough texts. I will repeat two verses to show you why. On the one hand, 1 Timothy 2:4 states: "God our Savior who desires all to be saved." On the other hand, 1 Timothy 2:5 states there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.

There are other places in the New Testament that say all are saved. In Romans 5:18: "Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all." This is repeated in a different way in Romans 11:32: "For God has consigned all men to disobedience, that he may have mercy upon all." 2 Peter 3:9: "The Lord is not slow about his promise as some count slowness, but is forbearing toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance."

1 Timothy 2:5-6 states: "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time."

There are other places that say the same. John 14:6: "I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but by me." Acts 4:12: "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." Matt 25:46: Some "will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matt 7:13-14:

"Enter by the narrow gate; for the gate is wide and the way is easy, that leads to destruction, and those who enter it are many. For the gate is narrow and the way is hard, that leads to life, and those who find it are few."

What do we do about God's justice, God's final judgment, and about other religions? There are three basic questions:

- What is Truth in religion for you and me?
- What or who is the one mediator for you and me?
- What about forever for you and me?

Question #1: What is Truth in religion for you and me?

When we look at the present situation in our world, there are important things to see that have to do with God's will that all be saved. There are two ways people look at religion. Some say: Everybody worships God. All gods are really the same. Of course that simply is not factually true. Buddhism is atheistic; it has no God. Hinduism, if you try to put it all together, has a final first cause, but not a personal god; the final cause is an abstraction. Islam is antithetical to the Trinity. There is no way to put Allah and Islam together with Yahweh and Christianity. It's not true that religions are alike, but people say that because they make up their own religion that way.

The other take on this (which is really the same thing) is everybody worships and has religion in his own way. The key word in recent years is the word "spirituality." Everybody is spiritual in his own way. Everybody is religious in his own way.

A Harvard scholar, Wilfred Cantwell Smith (1916-2000) proposed that there's a religion behind all religions. There is a kind of general religion so it doesn't matter if you worship Mother Nature or the Trinity, as long as it's true for you.

There are three problems with this. **The first problem** is that it means everybody is saved. What about justice? **On the one hand**, if everybody is saved because everybody is religious in one way or another, then what about evil? Mao Zedong was guilty of causing 120 million deaths. He was one of the deadliest monsters of all time. What those who hold to universal salvation mean is that everybody is saved including Mao.

On the other hand, there is injustice the other way. If there is only the narrow way, what of people who are mentally ill, or who never had a chance to hear of the Truth of the Gospel?

Behind this lies **the second problem** which has to do with the First Commandment: "You shall have no other gods before me." When people play the game of universal religion, what they are really doing is judging God. That's breaking the First Commandment.

The third problem is that people think universal salvation is about good works. Everybody does some good works, and salvation is really a matter of good works. After all, if you give a cup of water to a thirsty person, that's something. Everybody has done something somewhere, therefore everybody is saved. This, too, leads to

the problem of justice and the First Commandment as well. 1 Timothy 2:4 says it is God's will that all be saved, but this does not mean that God's will follows our way of thinking.

Question #2: Who is the mediator for you and me?

What is "actual" religion? In the word "actual" is the word "act." How do you really act? What functions as the final whatever in your life? What is it that makes final sense?

The common religion of our day is that things are determined by our experience. My feeling, my experience, whatever is true for me. The big word for that is "tolerance." But there are none more intolerant than those whose religion is tolerance. If everything is true, nothing is true. This leads to a certain kind of despair.

But here in Timothy 2:5 it says: "There is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all."

Question #3: What about forever for you and me?

A Christian man's wife was dying of cancer. He said it was terrible. Nothing more could be done for her. But this has to be seen in light of trillions of years. Yes, this is a terrible problem. Yes, we can't do anything. But we know that she is someone for whom the Lord is Lord. In terms of trillions of years, that's the only question. 1 Timothy 2:6: "who gave himself as a ransom for all, the testimony to which was borne at the proper time."

What is this "testimony that was borne at the proper time"? First of all, it's in the Old Testament and that is summed up in the First Commandment: "Thou shall have no other gods before me." You find it already in Exodus 20:3.

1 Timothy 2:6 says: "who gave himself as a ransom." We think of "ransom" in terms of kidnapping, but in the original Greek "to ransom" means: "to buy out of the marketplace." That is, to redeem a slave, to buy a slave free. That he gave his life as a ransom means you and I are slaves. It's important to remember what slavery meant for those people. A slave was like a piece of wood. It was a thing. You could do anything with that slave. And the slave was helpless. It didn't matter what the slave thought, whether the slave lived or died.

But even then God sent his own Son in our helplessness. As Luther writes: "One thing is sure: We cannot pin our hope on anything we are, think, say, or do" (Smalcald III/III/36; Tappert 309). We are helpless. It is beyond all our thinking, it's not our way. God came and saved us, redeemed (the verbal form of "ransomed") us, out of nothing.

There is important comfort in that. It doesn't depend on us. God does it. Absolutely beyond our thinking, our feeling, our doing. He has done it, and we're sure because it depends on him, not us. And we're free because it is the freedom he gives. Amen