

What' the *for* there for?

1. 1 Timothy 2:5

Have you ever noticed how many well-known Bible verses begin with *for*? There's John 3:16, Romans 3:23 and 6:23, 1 Corinthians 11:23 and many more.

The *for* is there for a very good reason. It introduces a truth that SUPPORTS something that the author has written. In fact, the main point of the passage is **not** the verse introduced by the *for*; it's the sentence that precedes it.

In this series we are going to look at a number of well-known verses that begin with *for*, and see what the main point of the passage is. We start today with 1 Timothy 2:5-6a, '*For* there is one God and one mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all' (NIV).

To discover what the above truth supports, we must go back to the previous sentence, which stretches over two verses (3-4), 'This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth'. So Paul tells us about Christ Jesus, the one and only mediator between God and men who gave himself as a ransom for all, as good clear EVIDENCE that God our Saviour wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

But we have to go back a bit further to find the real point of the passage—and in fact many Greek manuscripts put a *for* at the beginning of v. 3. The real point of the passage is Paul's instruction to Timothy in vv. 1-2, 'I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercessions and thanksgivings be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness'. Why? Because that will please God our Saviour, who wants all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. And how do we know that? Because of the man Christ Jesus, the mediator between God and men, who gave himself as a ransom for all.

In other words, we are told that Jesus Christ is the one and only mediator between God and men to get us praying for **everyone** (did you notice that 'all' is a recurring theme?).

One more thing! Did you notice the words, 'first of all' in v. 1? Here is Paul the apostle, writing to the bishop or senior pastor of the church that meets in people's homes in Ephesus, and the FIRST thing he urges Timothy to do is make sure that the church there is a church at prayer! He reiterates this in v. 8, 'I want the men everywhere [in every house where Christians meet] to be lifting up holy hands in prayer...'

So, praise God that we have a mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all. Praise God that the existence of this mediator is evidence that God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Let this knowledge push us to be faithful in making requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving for **everyone**!

What' the *for* there for?

2. John 3:16

Last month we saw that, when *for* begins a verse, it introduces a truth which SUPPORTS something the author has already written. The main point of the passage is **not** the verse introduced by *for*; it's the sentence that precedes it.

Today we look at a very well known verse that begins with *for*: '*For* God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life' (John 3:16, NIV). John gave us this truth to support what he had written in the previous sentence: 'Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life' (vv. 14-15). So let's start with these two verses and see how John 3:16 supports them.

These verses record what Jesus said to a man called Nicodemus. Nicodemus was such a well-known Bible teacher of the time that Jesus could describe him as '**the** teacher of Israel' (v. 10, NASB). This means that he would know exactly what Jesus was talking about when he referred to Moses lifting up the snake in the desert.

- He would know that the incident Jesus referred to is found in Numbers 21:4-9.
- He would know that the people in the desert had rejected God's provision for them. 'We detest this miserable food!' were their words (v. 5).
- He would know that, because of their rejection, God had sent a judgement upon them: venomous snakes which bit the people so that many of them were perishing (v. 6).
- He would know that, when the people admitted they had sinned, God said to Moses, 'Make a snake and put it up on a pole; anyone who is bitten can look at it and live' (v. 8).

Nicodemus would also understand the parallel that Jesus was drawing when he referred to the 'Son of Man' being lifted up.

- The people of his day were rejecting God's provision for them by not welcoming Jesus.
- This meant that they could expect God to send a judgement upon them.
- But there would be a way to escape that judgement: through the 'Son of Man' who was to be lifted up like the bronze snake had been lifted up.

It is clear from John 12:32-33 that Nicodemus would even understand that to 'be lifted up' meant to be put to death on a cross. The people of Nicodemus' time must have referred to crucifixion as being 'lifted up', just as we talk of people being 'strung up' on a gallows.

Finally, Nicodemus would understand what would result from Jesus being 'lifted up'. Just as those who believed in the efficacy of the bronze snake lived, so those who believe in the Son of Man will live—**forever!**

John 3:16 provides EVIDENCE for what Jesus has told Nicodemus. John is saying to his readers, I've told you what Jesus foretold. Now here's the evidence that it's true.

- The 'Son of Man' is God's one and only Son.
- You've heard that Jesus died. Well, that was God's doing. He loved this rebellious world so much that He gave His Son to be strung up on a gallows, just as the bronze snake was lifted up on a pole.
- And, just as God did not want the rebellious people of Israel to keep on perishing from snakebite, so He does not want any member of this rebellious world to perish. No, He wants

us all to live forever, if we'll only believe in him!

So, the next time you think of John 3:16, remember that it is there to support vv. 14-15. It is meant to evoke the image of God's Son being strung up on a gallows, just as the bronze serpent was lifted up on a pole. And its purpose? To provide a way for everyone who is currently perishing to **live**, if they'll only believe that Jesus died on the gallows for them and start living for him.

To do: Read Numbers 21:4-9. Imagine the scene. You have just looked at the bronze snake on the pole and have been healed from the effects of your snakebite. Imagine the enthusiasm and urgency with which you run and tell others, 'Just look at that bronze snake over there and you'll be healed!'

Now recall when you first discovered that Jesus had been strung up on a gallows for your sins. Recall how you felt when you asked him to forgive your sins and be your Master. Pray that God will restore the 'first love' you felt for him then. Pray for an opportunity to tell someone today about what Jesus has done for you.

What's the *for* there for?

3. 2 Timothy 1:12

Do you remember what *for* does when it begins a verse? Yes, it introduces a truth which SUPPORTS something the author has already written. The main point of the passage is **not** the verse introduced by *for*; it's the sentence that precedes it.

Today's verse appears in the chorus of D.W. Whittle's hymn, 'I know not why God's wondrous grace to me has been made known'. Whittle contrasts what he doesn't know—how God's grace operates, how faith brings peace, how the Spirit moves and what the future holds—with his knowledge of the one in whom he has believed. An inspiring hymn that encourages us to trust God.

To make his contrast, Whittle put a *But* at the beginning of the chorus. Paul, though, put a *for* there: '*for* I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day'. So why did Paul write that truth to Timothy in the first instance? The sentences before tell us. They read, 'That is why I am SUFFERING as I am. Yet I am **not ashamed**' (NIV).

Not being ashamed is a major theme of 2 Timothy 1. It seems that, when Paul was imprisoned for his faith, many Christians in the area thought it prudent not to visit him in jail, in case they also came to the attention of the authorities and thereby brought suffering on themselves. Paul, though, has another name for their behaviour: 'You know that everyone in the province of Asia has **deserted me**' (15). Nevertheless, that reminds him of someone who hadn't deserted him: 'May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was **not ashamed** of my chains' (16).

Why does Paul write about these people? Because he's worried about Timothy. Timothy believes in the same God that Paul does (5). Yet he's showing signs of timidity (7). So Paul exhorts him, 'do **not be ashamed** to testify about our Lord, or **ashamed** of me his prisoner. But join with me in SUFFERING for the gospel' (8). Then, to reinforce his point, he reminds Timothy of his own experience, 'That is why I am SUFFERING as I am. Yet I am **not ashamed**, *for* I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.'

Yes, believing in Jesus can lead to SUFFERING for the gospel—not necessarily the suffering of prison (though that is the experience of many Christians around the world), but the suffering of ridicule, perhaps ('You still believe that old fairy tale? Only gullible old women believe that!'). And that can lead us to become timid in our testimony and even '**ashamed** to testify about our Lord'.

But believing in Jesus is the reason we should **not be ashamed** of SUFFERING for the gospel. '*for* I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day'. 'I am **not ashamed**' even though 'I am SUFFERING as I am'.

To do:

1. Review this past week! Was there any occasion when I was ashamed of testifying about our Lord? Or was I was ashamed of associating with another Christian who was sharing the gospel?

2. Why was I ashamed? Is it that I 'loved praise from men' [now] 'more than praise from God' [in that day] (John 12:43)? Do I need to remind myself of Jesus' words, 'If anyone is **ashamed** of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be **ashamed** of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels' (Mark 8:38)?
3. Review why I should not be ashamed! 'I am **not ashamed**, *for* I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I've committed unto Him against that day.'

So, by all means let's sing the chorus of D.W. Whittle's hymn with great gusto in church! But let it inspire us also to testify about our Lord with confidence when we're NOT in church!

What's the *for* there for?

4. Romans 3:23

Can you recite Romans 3:23 from memory? Let's hear it, then! ***For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God.***

Very good, but you haven't finished the sentence—and that can make quite a difference to the meaning, as we shall see in a moment! The NIV puts vv. 23-24 this way, ***For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus.*** (*Justified* means 'declared not guilty'—NLT.)

'Hold on a minute', you say. Did Paul really write that ***all ... are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus?*** Surely not!

Ah, that's where the *for* can help! Once we understand what that *for* is there for, we'll understand who the *all* refers to!

Now, you'll remember from previous studies that *for* introduces a truth that SUPPORTS something the author has already written. So, what is it that precedes Romans 3:23-24? In the first instance, there's a short sentence that also begins with *for*: ***For there is no difference*** (v. 22b). Go back one more sentence, though, and you'll find a truth of Scripture that is really exciting.

Let's start with the background to this exciting truth. If you read Romans 1:18-3:20, you should get more and more depressed. First of all, there's a 1st Century description of godless Britain in the 21st Century (yes, I know Paul was writing about the Roman Empire, but where the shoe fits...). Then you'll learn that, even though the Jews have God's written Law, they are just as bad as everyone else. ***Jews and Gentiles alike are all under sin*** (3:9). Consequently, ***no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by observing the law*** (3:20).

Now for the truth that verses 23-24 of Romans 3 are supporting (I've added some words to the NIV to make the meaning clearer):

But now a righteousness from God [that is] apart from law has been made known.
[It is one] to which the Law and the Prophets testify.

This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.

For there is no difference.

For all [of us believers] have sinned and come short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus.

Yes, Romans 3:23 is supporting a truth that is addressed to all of us who believe in Jesus Christ! Paul isn't talking about the godless world outside (he dealt with them before, as I noted above). No, he's saying to you and me:

- *All of us believers have sinned* (past tense in the Greek)
- *All of us still come short of the glory of God* (present tense)
- *All of us are still being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Jesus* (also in the present tense).

God declares me 'Not guilty!' in 2004, but it is not because I've now made it (no, I still come short of his glory), nor because I became a Christian in 1957, nor because I've been a member at

the Pastures since the 1980's. No, God in his grace still declares me not guilty because of *the redemption that came by Jesus*. Now, that's worth getting excited about in 2004!

To do:

A discussion group I recently attended was observing that many church services no longer have a time of **confession** when we acknowledge our sinfulness before God. As you approach the Throne of Grace today, acknowledge afresh:

- I have sinned;
- I have come short of your glory, O God;
- I thank you that, in your grace, you declare me 'Not guilty!' through the redemption that came by Jesus. Praise the Lord!

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5. 1 Corinthians 11:23

I hesitate to write about the *for* at the beginning of this well-known verse, as a number of us have heard Rev. David Mills preach on the same topic. Maybe you've forgotten what he said, though, so here goes!

How often you have heard these words during a Communion Service: ***For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you...*** (NIV)? (To give you an idea, 45 years times 24 Communion Services a year come to over 1,000!) But have you ever asked what the *for* is there for? Let's find out!

Remember: when a *for* begins a verse, it introduces a truth that SUPPORTS something the author has already written. The main point of the passage is **not** the verse introduced by *for*; it's what precedes it.

So, what precedes 1 Corinthians 11:23? In the first instance, these words: *What shall I say to you? Shall I praise you? Certainly not!* (v. 22b NIV).

And why won't Paul praise the Corinthians? Go back past two more *for*'s (at the beginning of vv. 22 and 21) and you'll find this assertion: *When you come together, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat* (v. 20).

And why did Paul write that? Because (*For—☺*) *when you come together as a church, there are divisions among you* (v. 18). (Paul also talks, in v. 21, about drunkenness in the service, but I'll not pursue that topic, as I hope it's not a current problem in Communion Services!)

So let's put these verses together! Paul is saying, *When you come together as a church and there are divisions among you, it is not the Lord's Supper you eat!*

And why is this so? Because the Communion Service shows that *we are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf* (1 Cor. 10:17). We cannot be one body if there are divisions among us.

In order to deal with the problem in the Corinthian church, Paul added some more familiar words: *Therefore, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. [To avoid that,] a person ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without recognising the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgement on himself* (vv. 27-29).

What is the *unworthy manner* that we are to avoid? Drunkenness, yes, but, more fundamentally, **divisions** among us. We are to avoid **visible** divisions, reflected in a tendency to form cliques with people of our own class, age group or colour, while being less than welcoming of those who are different. But we are also to avoid divisions reflected in our **attitude**: 'I'm not going to church when *he*'s preaching', 'I turn off when they sing those modern choruses', etc.

So, what are we to look for when we examine ourselves before partaking of the bread and the cup? Evidences and causes of division!

Jesus told us exactly what we are to do if there are divisions among us: *if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift* (Matt. 5:23-24).

He doesn't talk about **us** having something against a fellow Christian; if we're in that state, God doesn't even forgive our sins (see Matt. 6:15). No, it's if a **fellow Christian** has something against us that we are to go and be reconciled to him or her. Otherwise, when we approach the table of the Lord, it won't be the Lord's Supper that we'll be eating.

So, when the preacher next says, *For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you...*, remember what the *for* is there for, and don't approach His table with divisions among you.

To do before the next Communion Service:

1. Is there anyone you haven't yet **forgiven** for something they did to you (see Matt. 6:16)? If there is, then you need to forgive them first.
2. Are you aware of any **divisions** between you and other members of your congregation? Check whether there are by asking yourself, 'Who am I not speaking to?', 'Who am I trying to avoid?', etc. If you find such divisions, then go out of your way to bridge them. *As far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone*—Romans 12:18.

What's the *for* there for?

6. To support a command!

During the past five months I have emphasised that, when *for* begins a verse, it introduces a truth that SUPPORTS something the author has already written. The main point of the passage is **not** the verse introduced by *for*; it's what precedes it.

If you grasp this idea, it could revolutionise the way you study Scripture, because the *for* will direct you back to the main point of the passage. This is particularly important for us when a *for* follows an order to do something. God doesn't want us to get hung up with the theological niceties of the information introduced with *for*; he wants us to get on and obey the command!

You can see this in 2 Timothy 1:6-7. Paul reminds Timothy to *fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.* Paul didn't want Timothy to spend a lot of time meditating on how the Holy Spirit is *a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline*, rather than one of *timidity*. He wanted Timothy to get on and fan his gift into flame!

Here are two more commands that are followed by a *for*.

- *Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near* (Matt. 4:17). If you have sins of which you need to repent, don't get hung up on what Jesus meant when he said, *the kingdom of heaven is near*. Just repent of those sins!
- *So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets* (Matt. 7:12). Jesus didn't intend you to spend a long time working out how doing to others what you would have them do to you *sums up the Law the Prophets*. He intended you to get out and *do to others what you would have them do to you!*

Have I made my point? Good! So how about you answering some questions, instead of me! (You'll find my answers at the end of the article.)

1. What is the main point of the following teaching in Romans 13:8?

Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, **for** he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law.ⁱ

2. What is the main point of the following teaching by Jesus (Matt. 16:24-27)?

If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. **For** whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. **For** what good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? **For** the Son of Man is going to come in his Father's glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done.ⁱⁱ

One last point to conclude this series. When a writer follows a main point by information introduced with *for*, he often uses a word translated as *therefore*, *so* or *then* to introduce his next main point. In 2 Timothy 1:6ff, for example, the next main point starts with *So*. The following diagram shows the main points of this passage:

MAIN POINT: I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

SUPPORT: **For** God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline.

MAIN POINT: **So** do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner.

Now, a final passage for you to look at!

3. Make a diagram to show the main points of the following teaching in Galatians 6:9-10:

Let us not become weary in doing good, **for** at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up. **Therefore**, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.ⁱⁱⁱ

May the Lord richly bless your studies of His Word!

ⁱ The main point in Romans 13:8 is, *Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another.*

ⁱⁱ Jesus' main point in Matt. 16:24-27 is, *If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.* The other sentences each support the point of the previous one.

ⁱⁱⁱ The main points in Gal. 6:9-10 are shown in the following diagram:

MAIN POINT: *Let us not become weary in doing good,*

SUPPORT: **for** *at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.*

MAIN POINT: **Therefore**, *as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.*