

Exegetical Brief: 1 Timothy 2:6

"The Testimony Given In Its Proper Time"

By Richard D. Balge

What is the point of reference for the phrase τὸ μαρτύριον καιροῖς ἰδίαις in 1 Timothy 2:6? Modern English versions offer a variety of translations. The verse in its entirety reads:

[Χριστὸς Ἰησοῦς] ὁ δοὺς ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων, τὸ μαρτύριον καιροῖς ἰδίαις. In the New International Version (NIV): "[Christ Jesus] who gave himself as a ransom for all men - the testimony given in its proper time."

The vocable meaning of τὸ μαρτύριον is clear, but what is its place in the syntax of 1 Timothy 2:3-6? What is the testimony? Is it the ransom itself, or is it testimony about the ransom?

Μαρτύριον is in the accusative case, in agreement with and in apposition to ἀντίλυτρον or perhaps to the entire clause "who gave himself as a ransom," that is, "as the testimony given in its proper time(s)." An alternate interpretation regards μαρτύριον as an accusative absolute, without any immediate connection to an antecedent (Robertson, 490).

Of what is the ransom a testimony? It bears witness to the truth of verses 3b, 4 that "God our Savior . . . wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Christ's act of ransom in the place of and on behalf of all confirms that God wants all to be saved. Christ gave himself as a ransom for all in order to effect that salvation.

Among sixteen English translations consulted, only three clearly reflect this understanding of the syntax of τὸ μαρτύριον. *NIV* reads "who gave himself a ransom for all men -the testimony given in its proper time." The *New American Standard Bible (NASB)* is almost identical, reading "all" for "all men" and "borne" instead of "given." The *New English Bible (NEB)* paraphrases "who sacrificed himself to win freedom for all mankind, so providing, at the fitting time, proof of the divine purpose."

J. B. Phillips's *The New Testament in Modern English*, a paraphrase, connects τὸ μαρτύριον with ἀντίλυτρον, but seems to see a different point of reference. Phillips reads "an act of redemption which happened once, but which stands for all time as *a witness to what he is*" (emphasis added). Instead of a testimony to what God wants (all to be saved, v 4) or to what Christ did (gave himself, v 6), Phillips seems to understand the ἀντίλυτρον to be a testimony to who God is (our Savior, v 3) or who Christ is (the one Mediator, v 5). He does, however, make clear that μαρτύριον is in apposition to ἀντίλυτρον.

It is doubtful that other translators would disagree with this understanding of the place of τὸ μαρτύριον in the structure of the Greek sentence. A possible exception is *God's Word*, which begins a new sentence with μαρτύριον: "This message (emphasis added) is valid for every era." Perhaps the reason that others did not interpret μαρτύριον as clearly as *NIV*, *NASB*, and *NEB* did is that they were already struggling with the expression of greater difficulty, καιροῖς ἰδίαις.

Disagreement among the English versions is evidence of this difficulty. In paraphrasing καιροῖς ἰδίαις as "for all time," Phillips includes past, present, and future times. Similarly, *God's Word* reads: "This message is valid for every era."

Others treat the phrase as the idiomatic plural used for the singular, "in its proper time" (*NIV*), "God's appointed time" (*God's Word to the Nations [GWN]*), "the fitting time" (*NEB*), "the proper time" (*NASB, RSV, The Living Bible*, and Beck's *An American Translation*), and "the right time" (*New Revised Standard Version*). Then it is saying that God gave this testimony in his good time. These versions apparently understand καιροῖς ἰδίαις in the sense of τὸ πλήρωμα τοῦ χρόνου in Galatians 4:4, "But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son. . ."

Both *KJV* and the *New King James Version (NKJV)* read "to be testified in due time." That seems to be a "neutral" translation, including the time of Jesus' life and work but not necessarily excluding the successive ages

in which this good news has been preached. The *American Standard Version* (1901) uses the plural, "its own times," but is similar to *KJV* and *NKJV* in its "neutrality." The American Bible Society's *Contemporary English Version* treats the plural *καιροῖς ἰδίαις* as singular but then assigns the present tense to the implied verb: "God shows us this at the right time."

What Paul says in the verse that follows (1 Timothy 2:7) favors the idea that *καιροῖς ἰδίαις* includes not only past but also continuing and future testimony: "And for this purpose [εἰς ὃ] I was appointed a herald and an apostle-I am telling the truth, I am not lying-and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles." That the testimony is to continue throughout this New Testament age is also implicit in the Great Commission and in the prophecy of Acts 1:8, "You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

The translations that require or allow for continuing and future testimony would seem to have caught the meaning of Paul's *καιροῖς ἰδίαις*.

Christ gave a testimony by his atoning sacrifice (v 6). We extend the reach of that testimony when our preaching focuses on Christ's completed work of atonement (v 7).