

Foundations of an Influential Church

1 Timothy 1:1-2

*"Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,
To Timothy my true child in the faith:
Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord"*

Introduction: Growing up, studying the Bible was difficult. Not just for the fact that I'd rather play outside than read a book (and probably still do), but because I did not understand how to read the Bible itself. It seemed random, out of touch, or beyond my grasp. Sure the stories of the Old and New Testament were interesting, but the prophecy and poetry were out of my mental grasp and there was no larger view of how it all fit together. *Anyone ever feel that way? Your motivation to read something so important is lowered for lack of understanding? Have you ever been able to study a book of the Bible, beyond simply reading it through?*

When the realization came that the Bible was written by real people to real people, in actual places in history, who had real issues the enjoyment of Scripture began to change. It was not a book with weird language and almost a mythical story but one that is grounded in history, that can be read in light of the rules of grammar, that had different genres, and when a word was written it literally meant that word (a 1000 years is actually 1000 years!). One of the first places the Bible clicked for me was in the **epistles**, letters written by one man to another, or one apostle to a church/group of people. This took it out of the realm of fairy tale to reality, allowing me to wrap my arms around the information.

Over the last few weeks we've looked at the question "*How do we choose a church*" with the goal of thinking Biblically about the church itself, her purpose, commitments, and leadership. Now we turn to a **charge to an influential church**, a message from the apostle Paul to his protégé Timothy who he left at the church of Ephesus because this church was dear to his heart and they were facing real problems. This short letter is part of what we call the **Pastoral Epistles**, written by Paul toward the end of his life to his disciples (Timothy and Titus) who were instructed to help put the churches into order. Our **goal through this study** is not only to understand exactly what the point of each verse is so that we can properly apply it, but also walk through it in a way that allows you to understand **how to study it for yourself**. We desire that you will be able to leave here and study the Pastoral Epistles, but also every book of the Bible through a literal lens, historically grounded, applying the rules of grammar to be able to see the **Big Picture** of redemptive history as well as loving the LORD our God with all of our mind! So let's dig into this packed, dynamic, and influential book.

The Setting of an Influential Church

Makeup and Feel of Ephesus

If you sat down and read a letter from someone for the first time you'd want to know something about the **context** of that letter even before the **content**. Context informs content properly, discerning between a personal, corporate, or junk letter in the mail. Far too often we try to read a passage without understanding the time and place of writing. A letter to someone in 1870 England will be read differently than an email sent to you today in Simi Valley.

The letter of 1 Timothy was written to the church in **Ephesus**, a prosperous city within the Roman Empire. It centered along three main trade routes with a river running out to the sea, which allowed it to secure a crucial port for trade. The possibility of trade made it a gateway into the mainland of Asian cities at the time. What happened over time, however, was the build up of silt and sand made it

increasingly difficult to keep that port open, which inevitably meant that trade waned and economics were strained. Even today, the old port is some 7 miles away from the city itself, overgrown with marshland and vegetation. This is important to understand the major industry of the city itself.

Since trade was an unreliable source of income, the city majored on its tourist trade. Ephesus was architecturally stunning, with a number of ornate gymnasiums, stadiums, baths, and libraries, with the crown jewel being the Temple to Artemis, a center of religious, tourist, and banking business. Artemis or Diana, was known as the daughter of Zeus and the twin sister of Apollo. She was the goddess of fertility and the attraction to the temple included fertility rites and prostitution. The Temple was known as one of the **seven wonders of the world** and was a destination for the learned, religious and adventurous alike. The city profited from its practices of the magic arts as well as sale of religious trinkets, locketts, and amulets. When the gospel began to penetrate this teaching and disciples were made, it began to affect the economics of the city, which included a bonfire of 50,000 pieces of silver worth of merchandise (Acts 19:19). It was after this that those on the losing end of this began a riot and tried to get rid of the ones responsible, but the gospel had already taken root. Much like the testimony of the gospel in Thessalonica years before, "***These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also.***" (Acts 17:6), Ephesus was being turned upside down.

This is an important note about the gospel and the church: **the goal of the gospel is to call sinners to repentance and follow Christ, NOT change culture.** Paul did not come into the city to get rid of cultic worship and the practice of magic. He came to make disciples. When disciples are made, taught, trained, and living obediently, cultures **begin to change**, from the way business is conducted, how money is spent, and how worship is displayed. This is how the gospel can radically change areas, neighborhoods, cities, and even nations.

Makeup and Influence of the church at Ephesus

Paul was not the primary founder of the church in Ephesus, although he was pivotal in growing it up. In Acts 18:18-23, we read that he went there for a short time, but left **Priscilla and Aquila** there (18-19), who then were followed by a Jewish man named Apollos, who was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. He spoke boldly in the synagogue and taught clearly about Jesus. But he had some holes in his theology, so Priscilla and Aquila took him aside and taught him the way of God more accurately. When Paul arrived on his **third missionary journey** (Acts 19:1), he already found some disciples who had not yet received the Holy Spirit. From here he would stay another **3 years** to teach and train elders, leaders, and disciples in the Scripture.

Ephesus was an influential church and from here all the residents of Asia heard the word of the Lord, both Jews and Greeks (Acts 19:10). From the beginning it was effective not only because it had missionaries who brought the gospel, but those who handled the Word accurately so that they could **show by the Scriptures that Christ was Jesus** (Acts 18:26, 28). There was no separation of mission and doctrine, and it was precisely the fact that they were so clear about the Biblical Jesus that made them affective. It was why Paul labored so hard and long to teach the elders, and why he sent Timothy back at this time, with this letter, since false teaching was beginning to weaken the church. This was a constant concern and fight for Paul then and is still the fight for us today, knowing that the church can easily downplay doctrine with the mantra "let's just focus on Jesus" or "let's just focus on loving people", without defining either Jesus or love Biblically. When we fail to do that, we offer sentiment that can pacify emotions for a time but cannot transform hearts to truly love God from a pure heart.

The Players in this Influential Church

Paul: His Path & Role at Ephesus

If we are truly to understand the nature of this book, we have to understand the people it mentions. Paul was the author of the letter to his young protege and padawan in Timothy. We can take for granted that we know who this man is, but it is helpful to know the background of this man who is the greatest missionary and church leader of all time.

Paul grew up in Tarsus and had the rarity of being born into a religious Jewish family who were also Roman citizens by birth (Acts 22:28). He knew his lineage that went back to the tribe of Benjamin and his family kept the strict religious rites of Judaism, as they circumcised him on the 8th day. He was trained in the Old Testament Scriptures as a Pharisee, who was the sect of Judaism who did not compromise or capitulate to the culture but kept the purity of teaching intact in the face of Hellenism and outside influences.

We first meet a zealous young Saul, his Jewish name, at the murder of Stephen. Stephen was stoned to death in Jerusalem after walking through the Old Testament to point to Jesus and calling out the religious leaders of the day for being **stiff necked**. Witnesses to this death threw their garments down at the feet of a young man named Saul (Acts 7:58), and all that went on was approved by this same Saul (Acts 8:1). After this, in his zeal, pride, and self-righteousness he began to ravage the church (Acts 8:3), dragging people out of homes, hunting down Christ followers, and putting people into prison. What is absolutely amazing about this is that God used **pre-conversion Saul to scatter the church into Samaria**, which is what they were supposed to do the whole time. In other words, God used Paul to build his church both **before AND after he was saved!**

It was during this time that Paul's zeal was not satisfied with simply trying to wipe out Christianity in Jerusalem and asked the high priest for permission and a mandate to ferret out believers as far up as Damascus, and bring them back to be tried in Jerusalem. (Acts 9:1-2). On this journey, **Jesus met him, changed him, and charged him**. He was baptized and charged to preach the gospel to Jews, Gentiles, and kings, and to suffer for the name of Christ Jesus (the persecutor becomes the persecuted - when he set out to preach to the Gentiles, he took the name Paul, and never called Saul from then on). From here, though the church was doubtful about his conversion, he was trained by Jesus for several years in **Arabia** (Galatians 1:12, 17-18). After returning, he got connected with **Barnabas** and settled for a year in the church at Antioch (Acts 11:19-28), it was here that Paul taught and undoubtedly honed his craft and love for God's church.

He and Barnabas were sent out from Antioch on what is known as his **1st missionary journey** (Acts 13-15), and it would be important to note that it was on this trip that they went to a city called **Lystra** (Acts 14:8-23), where a young disciple named **Timothy** was most likely saved. After Paul and Barnabas had a disagreement over John Mark and separated, Paul went on a **2nd missionary journey**, retracing some of his steps and coming once again to **Lystra**, where Timothy had grown over the 2 years time into a man of character and good standing. This is where he took Timothy with him and from where Timothy became his most trusted ally and faithful friend (1 Cor. 4:17). Paul would leave Timothy in places like Thessalonica (Acts 16:10) and Berea (Acts 16:14), knowing that he would communicate truth and Paul's heart.

It was Timothy that he was entrusting the church at Ephesus with, and Timothy that he trusted to set the church in order, even though he was a young man. But who was this man?

Timothy: His Role & Function at Ephesus

Every parent has hopes for their kids: *walk in the truth, make good decisions, be a person of godly character, be a servant, choose good friends/spouse, and take all they learned and put it into practice.* Timothy was Paul's great hope. He was his **true child in the faith** (1 Tim. 1:2), his beloved child (2 Tim. 2:2), and beloved and faithful child in the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17). Most likely, Timothy was a personal convert of Paul, a young disciple who Paul loved as a son and entrusted much to. This is the beautiful expression of the family metaphor, as a young man without a godly influence from a father had one in Christ! When we evangelize and make disciples, we can point to generations behind us. I remember our time in **Kyrgyzstan** that the young 20 somethings who were following Jesus could point to spiritual kids and grandkids at our gatherings, as sharing the gospel had spread like a fire. ***Who can you point to as spiritual children/grandchildren in your life? This has nothing to do with marital status or child bearing, but ALL about the fulfillment of the Great Commission!***

We get a well formed view of this young man Timothy. He was raised in the Scriptures by his mom Lois and grandmother Eunice, who had high hopes for him by naming him Timothy, which means "honored by God" or "one who honors God" (Acts 16:1; 2 Tim. 1:5). His Father was a Greek, which most likely means that he was not a God follower, never converted, and may not have been around when Paul came to Lystra. (SIDE NOTE: This is why it is so important to raise our kids in the truth, to "buy truth and not sell it, to buy wisdom, instruction and understanding" - Proverbs 23:23 - since it lays a foundation for the gospel to be built on).

Where Paul was bold and passionate, Timothy would have been more on the passive side. He had an affectionate personality (2 Tim. 1:4), but could take cover in timidity (2 Tim. 1:7). He seemed to have some amount of physical ailments and stomach issues (1 Tim. 5:23), and needed to be buoyed up by Paul in the face of opposition (1 Tim 4:12). If Paul was the bold lion, Timothy was the cuddly cat who loved Paul and people, but not conflict. ***Do you know what that makes Timothy? Yep, a lot like most of us!*** Paul was uniquely gifted and his personality allowed him a large capacity and band width to accomplish much, where Timothy seemed to be much more of a "NORMAL" guy. But this *normal* guy ended up doing extraordinary things in the name of the Lord. **How?**

- He was well spoken of by his home church (Acts 16:1) which flowed out of godly character
- He submitted to Paul's request to be circumcised so that he wouldn't put a stumbling block before the Jews he'd minister to (Acts 16:3)
- He willingly left the comfort of home, friends, and the life he knew to follow Jesus and help Paul
- He did the work of the Lord (1 Cor. 16:10), not his own
- He genuinely cared about others (Phil. 2:20)
- He sought the interests of Jesus Christ, not his own (Phil. 2:21)
- He served Paul and the gospel as a faithful son to a father (Phil. 2:22)

This defined Timothy's greatness: not giftedness (although he was - 2 Tim. 1:6-7), or firey personality or verbal eloquence. He was a true servant, willing to sacrifice and follow Christ wherever He brought him, willing to do what was right when it was hard, to go beyond what was comfortable to speak truth to those who strayed, to allow his life to be put under a microscope (even if he'd rather just go home and read), all because he refused his own life to follow something better in Jesus. The church could certainly use leaders like Paul, but will be radically changed when it is full of Timothy's.

The Situation Facing this Influential Church

Extension of Apostolic Authority

A few other observations to consider in these first few verses. I bring you back to verses 1-2 and we see Paul calling himself "**an apostle of Christ by the command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope.**" There are several key principles to glean here:

1) Notice that Paul claimed to be an **apostle**. This word, in the broadest sense, was used for someone who was *appointed for a special task or function*, like a messenger, steward, or ambassador. In the New Testament, we see this special function applied to the churches as there were messengers of the churches to the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 8:23), such as Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25). However, there also were specific apostles, or Apostles with a "big" A, that were foundational to the starting of the church itself (Eph. 2:20), and this group was small (only 13), would not be reproduced, and had to meet certain requirements:

- Their task was to proclaim and preach Christ (Mark 3:14)
- They were commissioned personally by Jesus (Matt. 28:19ff; Mark 16:14; Luke 24:48; John 20:21-23; Acts 1:6-8)
- They had seen the risen Christ (1 Cor. 9:1; Acts 2:32; 3:15; 13:31)
- They were Spirit empowered (Acts 1:8) and accompanied teaching with signs and wonders (2 Cor. 12:12; Acts 5:12)

An Apostle carried a particular authority that came directly from Jesus. He was not taught by others but by Jesus Himself (Gal. 1:12). It was this authority by which he taught the church, appointed leaders, and corrected false teaching. It was this authority that he was extending to Timothy, who would have to teach on his own but who was representing Paul. Timothy was NOT AN ELDER of the church. When the apostles died they passed on their authority to elders/pastors in churches who would teach, lead, correct, and evangelize. There is not apostolic succession today, since the church has all it needs to be faithful: the gospel, a risen Savior, a completed canon of Scripture, and the Holy Spirit to guide.

2) Paul's only authority came from Christ Jesus and God the Savior - Paul was not rogue or a maverick, but came in the name of Christ Jesus. Its fascinating that most other writers in the New Testament (Peter, James) use the phrase Jesus Christ. Why? They actually knew Jesus as a man. Paul knew Jesus only as Christ, His Savior, Lord and teacher. He came in the name of Christ and the command of God the Savior, which is not a typical title either. Sometimes we think of Jesus as Savior and God as mean, the one whose wrath we need saving from. Most often people have an easier time relating to Jesus than God in the sense that Jesus seems to relate better with us, but Jesus actually points us to the Father and reconciles us to Him. That is how Christ Jesus is our hope.

Current Crisis

Timothy was to walk in the authority given to him by Paul to charge certain leaders not to teach different doctrines, to proclaim the right ones, to demonstrate a life of holiness, discipline, love, and doctrine, and to care for those who could not care for themselves. Our enemy will always try to invade our churches from within, where savage wolves dressed like sheep will come in and persuade people away from Biblical doctrine (Acts 20:29-30).

Future Dilemma

There is one other way our enemy can take a church down as he did in Ephesus. It seems like Timothy was successful in bringing in pure doctrine and getting the church back on track, but within 30+ years,

another fateful attack entered the church: ***they abandoned their first love.*** Within a few generations of Jesus' death and resurrection, the church grew apathetic in love for God and others. They labored. They called out evil. But they did not cultivate a loving heart for God and others.

This is our challenge. We are faced with lives that are busy, full of good things. But if we learn one thing from the origin and end of the church at Ephesus: ***we must make every effort to maintain a soft heart and love for our Savior, through the truth, and allow everything else to flow from that.***