

Stay on the Job (1 Timothy 1)

“Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success.”

That advertisement appeared in a London newspaper and thousands of men responded! It was signed by the noted Antarctic explorer, Sir Ernest Shackleton, and that was what made the difference.

If Jesus Christ had advertised for workers, the announcement might have read something like this: “Men and women wanted for difficult task of helping to build My church. You will often be misunderstood, even by those working with you. You will face constant attack from an invisible enemy. You may not see the results of your labor, and your full reward will not come till after all your work is completed. It may cost you your home, your ambitions—even your life.”

Despite the demands that He makes, Jesus Christ receives the “applications” of many who gladly give their all for Him. He is certainly the greatest Master for whom anyone could work, and the task of building His church is certainly the greatest challenge to which a believer could give his life.

Timothy was one young man who responded to Christ’s call to help build His church. He was one of the apostle Paul’s special assistants. Along with Titus, Timothy tackled some of the tough assignments in the churches that Paul had founded. Timothy was brought up in a religious home (2 Tim. 1:5) and had been led to faith in Christ by Paul himself. This explains why Paul called Timothy “my own [genuine] son in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2).

Timothy was born of mixed parentage: His mother was a Jewess, his father a Greek. He was so devoted to Christ that his local church leaders recommended him to Paul, and Paul added him to his “missionary staff” (Acts 16:1–5). Paul often reminded Timothy that he was chosen for this ministry (1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14). Timothy was faithful to the Lord (1 Cor. 4:17) and had a deep concern for God’s people (Phil. 2:20–22).

But in spite of his calling, his close association with Paul, and his spiritual gifts, Timothy was easily discouraged. The last time Paul had been with Timothy, he had encouraged him to stay on at

Ephesus and finish his work (1 Tim. 1:3). Apparently Timothy had physical problems (1 Tim. 5:23) as well as periods of discouragement, and you get the impression that some of the church members were not giving their pastor the proper respect as God’s servant (1 Tim. 4:12; 2 Tim. 2:6–8).

Ephesus would not be the easiest place to pastor a church. (Are there any “easy places”? I doubt it.) The city was devoted to the worship of Diana, the patroness of the sexual instinct. Her lascivious images helped promote sexual immorality of all kinds (see Acts 19). Paul had done a great work in Ephesus during his three-year ministry, so “all they which dwelt in [the province of] Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 19:10). It was not easy for Timothy to follow a man like Paul! Of course, Satan had his workers in the city, for wherever there are spiritual opportunities, there are also satanic obstacles (1 Cor. 16:8–9).

Paul wrote the letter we call 1 Timothy to encourage Timothy, to explain how a local church should be managed, and to enforce his own authority as a servant of God. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul explained the three responsibilities of a pastor and people in a local church.

1. Teach Sound Doctrine (1:1–11)

From the very greeting of the letter, Paul affirmed his authority as a servant of Jesus Christ. Those who were giving Timothy trouble needed to remember that their pastor was there because God had put him there, for Paul’s authority was given by God. Paul was an “apostle,” one whom God sent with a special commission. His apostleship came by “commandment” from Jesus Christ. This word means “a royal commission.” Both Paul and Timothy were sent by the King of Kings!

Jesus Christ is not only Lord, but He is also our “Savior,” a title used ten times in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; 2 Tim. 1:10; Titus 1:3–4; 2:10, 13; 3:4, 6). To discourage Timothy, the title “our hope” (1 Tim. 1:1) was a real boost. Paul wrote the same encouragement to Titus (Titus 1:2; 2:13; 3:7). Knowing that Jesus Christ is coming for us encourages us to serve Him faithfully.

One reason Christian workers must stay on the job is that false teachers are busy trying to capture Christians. There were teachers of false doctrines in Paul’s day just as there are today, and we must take them seriously. These false teachers have no good

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news for lost sinners. They seek instead to lead Christians astray and capture them for their causes.

Paul used military language to help Timothy and his people see the seriousness of the problem (1 Tim. 1:3). Charge means “to give strict orders from a superior officer.” Paul used this word (sometimes translated “commandment” and “command” in KJV) eight times in his two letters to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:3, 5, 18; 4:11; 5:7; 6:13, 17; 2 Tim. 4:1). He was conveying this idea: “Timothy, you are not only a pastor of the church in a difficult city. You are also a Christian soldier under orders from the King. Now pass these orders along to the soldiers in your church!”

What was the order? “Do not teach different doctrines from those taught by Paul!” In the original text there are thirty-two references to “doctrine,” “teach,” “teacher,” “teaches,” and “teaching” in the three Pastoral Epistles. In the early church, the believers were taught the Word of God and the meanings of basic Christian doctrines. In many churches today, the pulpit and choir loft are places for entertainment, not enlightenment and enrichment.

God had committed the truth of the Word to Paul (1 Tim. 1:11), and Paul had committed it to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:20). It was Timothy’s responsibility to guard the faith (2 Tim. 1:14) and to pass it along to faithful people (2 Tim. 2:2).

Paul identified the false teaching as “fables and endless genealogies” (1 Tim. 1:4). Titus faced the same kind of false teaching in Crete (Titus 1:14; 3:9). The false teachers were using the Old Testament law, and especially the genealogies, to manufacture all kinds of novelties, and these new doctrines were leading people astray. The false teachers were raising questions, not answering them. They were not promoting “God’s saving plan” (“godly edifying,” 1 Tim. 1:4), but were leading people away from the truth. Instead of producing love, purity, a good conscience, and sincere faith, these novel doctrines were causing division, hypocrisy, and all sorts of problems.

Paul used the word conscience(s) twenty-one times in his letters, and six of these references are in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2; 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:15). The word conscience means “to know with.” Conscience is the inner judge that accuses us when we have done wrong and approves when we have done right (Rom. 2:14–15). It is possible to sin against the conscience so that it becomes “defiled” (Titus 1:15). Repeated sinning

hardens the conscience so that it becomes “seared” like scar tissue (1 Tim. 4:2).

It is tragic when professed Christians get off course because they refuse “healthy doctrine” (“sound doctrine,” 1 Tim. 1:10). Paul also called it “the doctrine ... according to godliness” (1 Tim. 6:3), “sound words” (2 Tim. 1:13), “sound doctrine” (2 Tim. 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1), “faith” (Titus 1:13; 2:2), and “sound speech” (Titus 2:8). But many prefer the “vain jangling” (1 Tim. 1:6) of those who teach novelties rather than the pure Word of God that produces holiness in lives. It is unfortunate today that we not only have “vain jangling” (“meaningless talk” in NIV) in teaching and preaching, but also in music. Far too many songs not only teach no doctrine, but many even teach false doctrines. A singer has no more right to sing a lie than a teacher has to teach a lie.

The reason for this false doctrine was a misuse of the Old Testament law. These false teachers did not understand the content or the purpose of God’s law. They were leading believers out of the liberty of grace (Gal. 5:1ff.) into the bondage of legalism, a tragedy that still occurs today. The flesh (our old nature) loves religious legalism because rules and regulations enable a person to appear holy without really having to change his heart.

Paul listed fourteen kinds of people who were condemned by the law (1 Tim. 1:9–10). This is one of several such lists in the New Testament (see Mark 7:20–23; Rom. 1:18–32; Gal. 5:19–21). The lawful use of the law is to expose, restrain, and convict the lawless. The law cannot save lost sinners (Gal. 2:21; 3:21–29); it can only reveal their need for a Savior. When a sinner believes on Jesus Christ, he is freed from the curse of the law (Gal. 3:10–14), and the righteous demands of the law are met by the indwelling Holy Spirit as a believer yields to God (Rom. 8:1–4).

Paul (1 Tim. 1:9–10) centered particularly on five of the Ten Commandments in Exodus 20:

No. 5—“Honor thy father and thy mother”—“murderers of fathers and ... mothers.”

No. 6—“Thou shalt not kill [murder]”—“murderers of fathers and ... mothers ... manslayers.”

No. 7—“Thou shalt not commit adultery”—“whoremongers [fornicators] ... them that defile themselves with mankind [sodomites].”

No. 8—“Thou shalt not steal”—“menstealers [kidnappers].”

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No. 9—“Thou shalt not bear false witness”—“liars ... perjured persons.”

It is the “glorious gospel” that saves lost sinners. Paul had experienced the power of the gospel (Rom. 1:16), and he had been entrusted with the ministry of the gospel (1 Thess. 2:4). Law and gospel go together, for the law without the gospel is diagnosis without remedy, but the gospel without law is only the good news of salvation for people who don’t believe they need it because they have never heard the bad news of judgment. The law is not gospel, but the gospel is not lawless (Rom. 3:20–31).

2. Proclaim the Gospel (1:12–17)

The mention of “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” (1 Tim. 1:11, literal translation) moved Paul to share his own personal testimony. He was “Exhibit A” to prove that the gospel of the grace of God really works. When you read Paul’s testimony (see also Acts 9:1–22; 22:1–21; 26:9–18), you begin to grasp the wonder of God’s grace and His saving power.

What Paul used to be (v. 13a). He was a blasphemer because he denied the deity of Jesus Christ and forced others to deny it. He was a persecutor who used physical power to try to destroy the church. “Murderous threats” were the very breath of his life (Acts 9:1 NIV). He persecuted the Christian church (1 Cor. 15:9) and then discovered that he was actually laying hands on Jesus Christ, the Messiah (Acts 9:4)! During this period of his life, Paul consented to the stoning of Stephen and made havoc of the church (Acts 8:1–4).

Paul was injurious, a word that means “proud and insolent.” A modern equivalent might be “bully.” It conveys the idea of a haughty man “throwing his weight around” in violence. But the basic causes of his godless behavior were “ignorance” and “unbelief.” Even though Saul of Tarsus was a brilliant man and well educated (Acts 22:3; Gal. 1:13–14), his mind was blinded from the truth (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:3–4). He was a religious man, yet he was not headed for heaven! It was not until he put faith in Jesus Christ that he was saved (Phil. 3:1–11).

How Paul was saved (vv. 13b–15). How could the holy God ever save and forgive such a self-righteous sinner? The key words are mercy and grace. God in His mercy did not give Paul what he did deserve; instead, God in His grace gave Paul

what he did not deserve. Grace and mercy are God’s love in action, God’s love paying a price to save lost sinners. It is not God’s love alone that saves us, for God loves the whole world (John 3:16). It is by grace that we are saved (Eph. 2:8–9) because God is rich in mercy (Eph. 2:4) and grace (Eph. 2:7).

What did Paul’s “ignorance” have to do with his salvation? Is ignorance an excuse before God? Of course not! The fact of his ignorance is related to a special Jewish law (Lev. 5:15–19; Num. 15:22–31). If a person sinned knowingly “with a high hand” in Israel, he was cut off from the people. But if he sinned in ignorance, he was permitted to bring the proper sacrifices to atone for his sins. Jesus recognized this principle when He prayed on the cross, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34). Their ignorance did not save them, nor did Christ’s prayer save them, but the combination of the two postponed God’s judgment, giving them an opportunity to be saved.

Paul stated that it took “exceedingly abundant” grace to save him! Paul liked to use the Greek prefix *huper-* (meaning “an exceeding abundant amount”), and he often attached it to words in his letters. You might translate some of these as “superincrease of faith” (2 Thess. 1:3); “superabounding power” (Eph. 1:19); “superconqueror” (Rom. 8:37). This same prefix has come into the English language as *hyper-*. We speak of “hyperactive” children and “hypersensitive” people.

Paul made it clear that this salvation was not for him only, but for all who receive Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:15). If Jesus could save Saul of Tarsus, the chief of sinners, then He can save anybody! We admire Paul’s humility, and we note that he considered himself to be the “least of the apostles” (1 Cor. 15:9) and the “least of all saints” (Eph. 3:8). Notice that Paul did not write “of whom I was chief” but “of whom I am chief.”

What Paul became (vv. 12, 16). The grace of God turned the persecutor into a preacher, and the murderer into a minister and a missionary! So dramatic was the change in Paul’s life that the Jerusalem church suspected that it was a trick, and they had a hard time accepting him (Acts 9:26–31). God gave Paul his ministry; he did not get it from Peter or the other apostles (Gal. 1:11–24). He was called and commissioned by the risen Christ in heaven.

God saw that Paul was faithful, and so He entrusted the gospel to him. Even as an unbelieving and gospel-ignorant Jewish leader, Paul had maintained a good conscience and he lived up to the light that he had. So often those who are intensely wrong as lost sinners become intensely right as Christians and are greatly used of God to win souls. God not only entrusted the gospel to Paul, but He also enabled Paul to minister that gospel (1 Cor. 15:10; Phil. 4:13). When someone obeys God's call to serve, God always equips and enables that person.

But Paul not only became a minister; he also became an example (1 Tim. 1:16). In what sense is Paul an example to lost sinners who believe on Christ? None of us has had the same experience that Paul had on the Damascus road (Acts 9). We did not see a light, fall to the ground, and hear Jesus speak from heaven. But Paul is a pattern ("type") to all lost sinners, for he was the chief of sinners! He is proof that the grace of God can change any sinner!

But there is a special application of this to today's people of Israel, Paul's countrymen, for whom he had a special burden (Rom. 9:1–5; 10:1–3). The people of Israel, like unconverted Saul of Tarsus, are religious, self-righteous, blind to their own law and its message of the Messiah, and unwilling to believe. One day, Israel shall see Jesus Christ even as Paul saw Him, and the nation shall be saved. "They shall look upon me whom they have pierced" (Zech. 12:10). This may be one reason why Paul said he was "born out of due time" (1 Cor. 15:8), for his experience of seeing the risen Christ came at the beginning of this church age and not at its end (Matt. 24:29ff.).

Paul gave a third responsibility for the local church to fulfill besides teaching sound doctrine and proclaiming the gospel.

3. Defend the Faith (1:18–20)

Again, Paul used military language to enforce his statement, for the word charge (1 Tim. 1:18) means "an urgent command handed down from a superior officer" (1 Tim. 1:3). Paul also reminded Timothy that God had chosen him for his ministry. Apparently some of the prophets in the local assemblies had been led by the Spirit to select Timothy for service (see Acts 13:1–3 for an example of this procedure).

It was not easy to serve God in pagan Ephesus, but Timothy was a man under orders, and

he had to obey. The soldier's task is to "please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier" (2 Tim. 2:4), and not to please himself. Furthermore, Timothy was there by divine appointment: God had chosen him and sent him. It was this fact that could give him assurance in difficult days. If you are God's servant, called by the Spirit, obeying His will, then you can "stay with it" and finish the work. These assurances enabled Timothy to war the good warfare.

Paul changed the illustration from army to navy (1 Tim. 1:19). He warned Timothy that the only way to succeed was to hold fast to "faith and a good conscience." It is not enough to proclaim the faith with our lips; we must practice the faith in our daily lives. One man said of his hypocritical pastor, "He is such a good preacher, he should never get out of the pulpit, but he is such a poor Christian, he should never get into the pulpit!"

A good conscience is important to a good warfare and a good ministry. The magazine editor H. L. Mencken defined conscience as "the inner voice which warns us that somebody may be looking." But a man with a good conscience will do the will of God in spite of who is watching or what people may say. Like Martin Luther, he will say, "Here I stand; I can do no other, so help me God!"

Professed Christians who "make shipwreck" of their faith do so by sinning against their consciences. Bad doctrine usually starts with bad conduct, and usually with secret sin. Hymenaeus and Alexander deliberately rejected their good consciences in order to defend their ungodly lives. Paul did not tell us exactly what they did, except that their sin involved "blaspheming" in some way. Hymenaeus said that the resurrection was already past (2 Tim. 2:16–18). Alexander was a popular name in that day, so we cannot be sure that the man named in Paul's next letter to Timothy (2 Tim. 4:14) is the same man; but if he is, no doubt he withstood Paul by teaching false doctrine.

"Delivered unto Satan" (1 Tim. 1:20) implies an apostolic discipline (see 1 Cor. 5:5) and disassociation from the local church. The verb "learn" (1 Tim. 1:20) means "to learn by discipline." When a Christian refuses to repent, the local fellowship should exercise discipline, excluding him from the protective fellowship of the saints, making him vulnerable to the attacks of Satan. The fellowship of the local church, in obedience to the will of God, gives a believer spiritual protection. Satan has to ask God for permission to attack a believer (see Job 1—2; Luke 22:31–34).

Each local church is in a constant battle against the forces of evil. There are false prophets and false teachers, as well as false christs. Satan is the originator of false doctrines, for he is a liar from the beginning (John 8:44). It is not enough for a local church to teach sound doctrine and to proclaim the gospel. The church must also defend the faith by exposing lies and opposing the doctrines of demons (1 Tim. 4:1).

It is important that our ministry be balanced. Some churches only preach the gospel and seldom teach their converts the truths of the Christian life. Other churches are only opposing false doctrine; they have no positive ministry. We must be teachers of healthy doctrine ("sound doctrine," 1 Tim. 1:10), or the believers will not grow. We must preach the gospel and keep winning the lost to Christ. And we must defend the faith against those who would corrupt the church with false doctrine and godless living. It is a constant battle, but it must be carried on.

Timothy must have been greatly helped and encouraged when he read this first section of Paul's letter. God had called Timothy, equipped him, and put him into his place of ministry. Timothy's job was not to run all over Ephesus, being involved in a multitude of tasks. His job was to care for the church by winning the lost, teaching the saved, and defending the faith. Any task that did not relate to these ministries would have to be abandoned. One reason some local churches are having problems is that the pastors and spiritual leaders are involved in too many extracurricular activities and are not doing the tasks God has called them to do.

It might be a good idea for our churches to take a spiritual inventory!

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