

I Witness

Introduction

Paul has just warned Timothy about false teachers. He commands Timothy to take away their platform...to silence them. To protect the truth...the gospel message. Paul told us that the gospel message has been entrusted to him. You expect him to next tell the gospel...how Jesus came, died, resurrected and will return. That is what has been entrusted to him right? Well yes...that is the truth of the Gospel...but Paul was commanded to be a witness...Let's look at what he tells Timothy next.

Now remember, Paul's primary concern in Ephesus is false teaching. Instead of refuting their lies...Paul instructed Timothy to attack them with love.

1 Timothy 1:5 (ESV) 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

We studied this last week...God's love poured through us to others...from believers who love the sinner but hate the sin...who see sinners as victims of Satan's deceptions who need to be set free... love from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith...will silence false teachers. So what does Paul share next? What is the most loving thing that you can share with another person? Let's dive in and see if we can find out.

1 Timothy 1:12–17 (ESV) 12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Paul has just spoken about the aim being love. That love would conquer false teachers. Then oddly, he begins with his own testimony. A testimony no doubt that Timothy already knew. Why start there? And in the midst of all this he gives us one of the most concise, clear and compelling descriptions of the gospel in all of Scripture.....Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Let's unpack this a bit.

1 Timothy 1:12–13 (ESV) 12 I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, 13 though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief,

Paul was entrusted with the gospel because Jesus enabled Paul, and Paul thanked Jesus for that enabling. Paul was enabled for this ministry because he was counted ... faithful for the ministry. Faithfulness made Paul ready to be used by God.

We often see our Christian service as a matter of volunteering. Yet as Christians, in regard to Jesus and His church, we are not volunteers. We are slaves. We are duty bound servants of

Jesus, and faithfulness is expected of such servants. All it requires is faithfulness to do your part of the mission. You don't have to be smart to be faithful; you don't have to be talented or gifted. Faithfulness is something very down-to-earth, and every one of us can be faithful in the sphere God has given us.

Paul said that he is appointed to his service the same word that we get ministry. In the original language of the New Testament, there is nothing "high" or "spiritual" about the word. It just means to work hard and serve. Yet for this former blasphemer and persecutor of God's people, this was a great honor.

With these words, Paul gave Timothy another reason to remain in Ephesus. It is likely that Timothy wanted to leave Ephesus and his ministry there because he felt unworthy or incapable of the work. These words from Paul assured Timothy, "If there is anyone unworthy or disqualified, it should be me. Yet God found a way to use me, and He will use you also as you remain in Ephesus."

The key to ministry is to always remember where you started. Paul recognizes that he is a sinner. First and foremost he was an enemy of God. He was an opponent of God. This would be like Hitler being called to be a key leader in the World Jewish Association. He knows who he was and that drives who he becomes.

Paul said he acted ignorantly in unbelief. The two kind of go hand in hand. Yet God has incredible mercy...unmerited favor.

1 Timothy 1:14–15 (ESV) 14 and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 15 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. 16 But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

God's grace is also purposeful. We see this in verse 14, as it produced faith and love in Paul's life. But there are even deeper purposes in God's grace. It demonstrates God's patience. Verse 14 is really good news to anyone who has ever thought, "God would not save me. I've hated Him. I've turned against Him. I've fought God at every point in my life."

If you think you are beyond the mercy of God, hear this: God chose to take the chief persecutor of the church and make him the chief missionary in the church to show He is patient, He loves, and He invites sinners to believe in Him for eternal life. No matter who you are or what you've done, these words are worthy of full acceptance: "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners"

"To save sinners" is Paul's succinct way of stating the bottom line of the gospel. Jesus did not come into the world to develop new theological or ethical systems. He did not come into the world to make good people better. He did not come into the world to found a new religious establishment.

Nor did He come into the world to create a new social order. Some or all of these things, of necessity, have been shaped and formed because of His coming. But He came into the world to save sinners. Period!

“Of whom I am chief” was Paul’s way of declaring, not that he had committed all or the worst of sins, but that he was as needy of God’s salvation as the worst or the best person by any standard. In that sense, all of us are fellow-chiefs with Paul.

It’s a powerful, pregnant sentence that encapsulates the gospel in just nine English words: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” . Here we learn about the gospel, the grace of God, and the glory of God.

Though many years had passed, Paul never got too far away from his conversion experience. And the message that comes through his story is the assurance that if Christ could indeed change him, He can change anyone else.

Paul tells us that Christ Jesus came into the world. So much truth is packed into this one word “came.” We learn that the gospel of God is incarnational and undeniable. Christ Jesus, the Son of God, didn’t first come into being in Bethlehem. He already existed as the Second Person of the Trinity, the preexistent, eternal Son of God who was there with the Father and the Spirit before the foundation of the world. He committed the ultimate act of condescending grace, coming into the world as a baby born in Bethlehem. The One who was with the Father in glory put on a robe of human flesh and came to us. This is the incarnation.

But why did Jesus come? Jesus Christ came to live the life we could not live, to die the death we deserved to die, and to rise in victory over the enemies we could not conquer—sin and death

There is no greater wonder in all of history, and yet Paul tells us it’s true. This is not like the myths and speculations of the false teachers; this is “trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance”. This is reality. It’s undeniable.

This first ‘faithful saying’ is a concise summary of the gospel. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst (15). First, the content of the gospel is true and trustworthy, in distinction to the speculative nonsense of the false teachers and (we might add today) the lies of secular propaganda.

Secondly, the offer of the gospel is universal. To be sure, ESV and NIV say that it deserves ‘full’ acceptance, meaning ‘complete’ in the sense of ‘unreserved’. But original text renders it ‘this statement is completely reliable and should be universally accepted’. This fits the context, since Paul argues in chapter 2 that the gospel must be made known to the nations.

Thirdly, the essence of the gospel is that Christ came to save sinners. The law is meant for the condemnation of sinners; the gospel for their salvation. That Christ ‘came to save’ sounds like one of his own statements. It alludes to both his incarnation and his atonement, and clearly implies his pre-existence.

Fourthly, the application of the gospel is personal. The universal offer is one thing (‘worthy of all acceptance’, av); its individual acceptance is another (‘of whom I am the worst’). He has already called himself ‘the least of the apostles’ and ‘less than the least of all God’s people’;⁶⁸ he now humbles himself further the worst’ (niv) of sinners. Indeed, that is what I am the foremost, he writes, not simply what ‘I was’.

Paul was so vividly aware of his own sins that he could not conceive that anybody could be worse. It is the language of every sinner whose conscience has been awakened and disturbed by the Holy Spirit. We may begin like the Pharisee in Jesus' parable, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men', but we end like the tax collector who beat his breast and said (literally), 'God have mercy on me, the sinner.'

Don't forget, the guy who is writing this letter to the church used to be the church's single greatest threat. He wanted it wiped off the map! Paul oversaw the persecution of Stephen (Acts 8:1), the first Christian martyr, and then he devoted his life to arresting, imprisoning, and killing Christians everywhere he could. In fact, Paul was on his way to Damascus to kill Christians when he met Christ. Amazingly, God caused His grace to overflow to the one person who seemingly deserved it the least.

We learn that the grace of God is unconditional, for there was nothing in Paul to draw God to Him. Paul's salvation originated in God and God alone. And the same is true for you and me. We are not saved based on any condition in us; we are saved solely on account of sovereign grace in God. His grace is unconditional.

1 Timothy 1:16–17 (ESV) 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Not only does God's grace demonstrate His patience; it also leads to God's praise. The apostle was overwhelmed that he would receive mercy from such a King. He knew who he had been, He knew who he had become, and He knew who made that change. Paul took no credit for his ministry. He just considered it an honor to serve the King.

Paul reminds us that God is King. Not just now but of all the ages now and forever. He is immortal He never changes. He never gets tired. Never makes a mistake. Never misses anything. He is royal, impervious to death, and decay will never touch Him. He is beyond the limits of what we can see or even imagine. No one and nothing can compare to Him. He is the only God and will receive honor and glory forever. And then Paul seals his testimony with AMEN.

Testimony always leads us to praise. Paul begins his instruction to Timothy by telling his testimony. A testimony that Timothy knew too well and was probably intimidated by. Paul had an incredible story....Timothy was new at this sort of thing. Why did Paul tell his testimony before anything else?

I think to understand that we must dig a bit deeper into testimony...

The power of witnesses and testimony

At one point in my life, I thought that I wanted to be a lawyer....Just like Perry Mason. I loved that moment when someone testified to truth and you knew it could not be refuted. There was something about the courtroom...the drama...when that witness got up on the stand, swore an oath to God and then actually told the truth. Or the damage that was done when someone raised their right hand and spoke lies.

Eyewitness testimony has enormous power to persuade. If the testimony is true it has great power for good...if the testimony is false it has great power for harm....but power it has. The power to persuade...just based on someone's words....their testimony.

You know...you can't be a witness if you didn't see anything. We can't really testify to events that we have not experienced. What good is a witness who wasn't there? I was in Dallas the day JFK was shot. I didn't see a thing..I was 2 years old and never called in front of the Warren Commission. I can't witness what I have not seen.

That is a problem for us...isn't it? I mean when it comes to the gospel message. When we tell people that Jesus was God, that He did miracles and that He died and resurrected....we actually were not there. We believe, but we don't really know. We have faith that those things happened in history but faith always requires a bit of doubt.

And yet Jesus tells us to be witnesses and to share the good news. For years I really struggled with that....God why should people believe Jesus lived, died and lives today just because I believe? And the answer is they shouldn't.

If I got up on the witness stand and told the story of Jesus....since I was not an eyewitness....no jury would decide based on my testimony alone. No rational person would either. Surely they would ask for more proof, additional support, new evidence....something...right?

And this where evangelism gets cloudy. We think that evangelism is proving to western minds that Jesus lived, died and resurrected. We act as though we have to prove that and then convince people that He is their Savior based on our witness. Which of course is flawed because we were not there.

If someone told you that an alien being from another place....came to earth...blessed people, healed some people, died and resurrected and said he would come back....would you believe it? Would you need additional evidence? What evidence would you require? Photos or Video? Look at the moon landing....The truth is that unless you were there and actually witnessed it, you would likely not believe....

What are we missing? Why would Jesus tell us to be witnesses to things that we have not seen or experienced? The answer is...He didn't.

Matthew 28:18–20 (ESV) 18 And Jesus came and said to them, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

Acts 1:8 (ESV) 8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Notice carefully what Jesus said right before He ascended to Heaven. We are commanded to teach them all that Jesus commanded us and two additional truths in Acts...You will receive power...you will be my witnesses...He didn't say..you will be my historians. He didn't say you will be my theologians. He didn't say you will defend me to the world.

Please don't miss this key point that many Christians misunderstand....When we initially share the gospel, there are two components...Living a life obeying what Christ has commanded and being His witness. Your life and your message are what you share. You can only be a witness to what you have actually experienced. Your eyewitness testimony is credible because you were actually there. The events you testify to were truths that you actually experienced in your life, not in the first century.

Too many Christians think that sharing the gospel is all about arguing history....debating theology...defending the Bible...holding your moral ground...attacking false teachers...distancing sinners....and looking dismissively at those who disagree with us. Eventually getting to the point where we just try to scare them into belief with Hell.

Is that really what Jesus left us here to do? This is why I don't really like apologetics...you know Christian and Atheist square off in a debate...We have been doing it for 2000 years and it really doesn't work that well. People just become more entrenched on both sides.

Jesus told us to be witnesses...His Witnesses...throughout the world. In addition, He told the disciples...don't you dare go out and speak for me until you have received the power from on high...Then and only then can you be a witnesses.

So the disciples waited and on Pentecost received the full measure of the Holy Spirit..they were empowered to witness. So in Acts we read about how they testified to what Jesus said, did and what they experienced. God wrote down their testimony in the Scriptures and we read them today. We study what those who were actually there witnessed. They were His disciples...they can testify to what He actually did on earth...you and I cannot. That is their testimony...not yours.

Remember that three things are required to share the gospel...a Spirit empowered believer in Jesus Christ, an authentic and credible eyewitness testimony, and a life that matches what you claim.

Notice I did not mention Scriptures. Sharing the gospel message does not initially require that you pull out your Bible. Telling people who don't know God that the Bible says this...or the Bible says that...will convince them no more than if someone told you that the Koran said this....or the Book of Mormon said that....If we don't know God then His word doesn't really matter to us. Relationship always precedes rules .

Funny how Satan has convinced most Christians that they don't know the Bible well enough to share the gospel when it is not even necessary in the process....Please hear me clearly...the Bible is critically important... we as believers base our lives on God's truth. Everyone who puts their faith in Jesus will surrender to it....but it is not involved in the initial process of sharing the gospel

Jesus didn't say that you will receive power and to go refute every argument, silence the critics and convince people with our incredible intellect. Why? Because there is no logical argument that would convince someone to surrender to Jesus. You don't reach salvation with your mind...you surrender and find Him with your heart.

Jeremiah 29:12–14 (ESV) 12 Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. 13 You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart. 14 I will be found by you, declares the Lord,

You will find me when...you seek me with ALL of your heart....When you get to the point where you have to know...He meets you there...in your heart. Because He is love...and love connects at the heart.

Intellectual debates stimulate the mind....Testimony penetrates the heart.

So leave your Bible behind...skip the Roman Road...don't mention the Scriptures...don't try to go back and prove what happened historically 2000 years ago...Don't argue with anyone intellectually....Yes I said that....Just do what the disciples did...Make sure that you have the power from on high and go witness what you have seen.

So...what have you actually seen God do? Did you see Jesus walk on water? Did you see Jesus raise people for the dead? Did you see Jesus set the captives free? Did you see Jesus die on the cross? Were you at the tomb when He resurrected? Did you see Him reappear on the road to Emmaus? No...you are not a credible witness to those things.

But you may be thinking...the Bible says...yes it does..but that book means nothing to a non believer. It means everything to us...not much to them. Save those things for later.

1 Corinthians 1:18 (ESV) 18 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.

1 Corinthians 2:14 (ESV) 14 The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

So the non believer will not accept the things of God and will not understand the story of the cross...do you see the problem here? Do you see why evangelism seems such a challenge to us?

Just like you need the Spirit before you go and share your testimony....People need the Spirit before they can understand the Bible.

You and I are commanded to witness...to tell people only what we can testify to. To tell the truth...the whole truth and nothing but the truth so help us God.

Evangelism is not about defending the Scriptures...or arguing with people...it is simply telling the truth about what you have experienced...nothing more...nothing less....we call it your testimony. Every believer has a testimony of what God has done in their lives. Nothing to do with Scriptures, or debates...this is what I have actually experienced with God. This is my experience. This is my eyewitness testimony...I can swear with absolute certainty of the things God has done in my life.

As the essence of the gospel is Jesus Himself, so the essence of Christian witness is telling how the story of Jesus has shaped our own stories. No one can argue with your experience. You say you experienced it and they must either accept it or reject it.

So we tell our testimony...This is where I was...this is what happened when I surrendered to Jesus...and this is what has happened in me since then. Only you can testify to what God has done in you. Only you can share what God has done in your life....no one else has the witness that you have. Each one of us have different testimonies. Unique stories carefully crafted by God. Evangelism is simple....go tell people what Jesus has done in your life and why you place your hope in Him.... "one beggar telling another beggar where he had found bread."

1 Peter 3:14–15 (ESV) Have no fear of them, nor be troubled, 15 but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,

With gentleness and respect...is that how you would describe Christians on social media, televisions, and in churches?

No memorized Scriptures...no Roman Roads...no detailed arguments about creation...people living in a fish or the size of Noah's Ark...that can all come later...They will not understand all of that right now...they don't have the Spirit.

You may say...but why would they believe me? My story isn't powerful...my testimony is not that important...really? I dare you to tell God that... Every one of us was an enemy of God and through His Spirit we heard a testimony that led us back to Him.

I became a believer in Jesus because I found a neighbor who shared the incredible story of how God transformed his life. I looked at his life and I saw that he truly lived what he believed. He shared with me what God had done in his life. I had heard many testimonies before...I ignored them...but this one I just knew was true and was for me. How did I know that? What made this testimony of this man life transforming for me?

When he spoke I could feel the presence of God as he shared his testimony...The testimony was validated not by what he said, but by what the Holy Spirit did in that moment. He didn't save me...He just used his witness...his testimony to introduce me to the Holy Spirit.

Ephesians 2:7–10 (ESV) 8 For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God,

And this is the key to evangelism...the most important thing for us to understand...

John 6:44 (ESV) 44 No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.

Do you see evangelism the way Jesus planned it?

Go witness to the world what you have experienced with me....your unique witness... and let the Holy Spirit do everything else.

If your testimony falls on deaf ears or is met with hostile resentment...just move on...the Holy Spirit has not yet prepared that heart to receive...Move on and keep throwing seed. There is nothing wrong with your testimony as long as it is true....you be His witness and let someone else be the judge and jury.

When you ask God to use you and your testimony to reach others...stand back...the gates are about to open.

Romans 10:13–15 (ESV) 13 For “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved.” 14 How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? 15 And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!”

Matthew 9:37–38 (ESV) 37 Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful, but the laborers are few; 38 therefore pray earnestly to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into his harvest.”

God never wastes pain or tears. Whatever He has taken you through He gets you through. The most difficult moments of your life were likely allowed so that you could share that experience with someone else in the same situation....Evangelism is not wasting what you have witnessed...not keeping silent about what God has done in your life. It is also not about glorifying your past sins.

And let's be careful in our testimonies that we don't make sin appear to be anything other than it is. It is always the product of unbelief—the conscious refusal to trust and obey the loving God. It is always the mark of ignorance, and Paul does not equate ignorance with innocence. Notice that Paul did not go into gory details about his past behavior. He was much more interested in getting to the point of the grace and salvation of Christ. We do well to be on constant guard against glorifying past sins through dwelling on them, pandering to the curiosity of vicarious thrill-seekers.

Many times I have heard testimonies in which past sins were virtually glorified. After hearing some testimonies, many say...“I guess the only way I could possibly be anybody in Christian witness would be to become a junkie and a prostitute, and then get converted!” They have a point because of the way the testimony had glamorized past wickedness. There's a difference between testifying to God's power to change a person's life and intentionally, or unintentionally, glorifying sin

But the other side needs to be stated. There is nothing in our past that needs to be hidden. Paul has nothing to hide because God has forgiven everything in his past. This doesn't mean that he started every testimony or every conversation with the rehearsal of past sins. But it does mean that he exercised his freedom to share them whenever he felt it appropriate and helpful to his witness.

Someone right now is desperate to hear your story...I don't know who or where they are and you may have to share your story to deaf ears before you find them....but God will guide you to them.

There is nothing better in a crisis than to have someone come alongside of you who has been through what you are going through and can testify to the power of God to sustain, guide and lead them. You are that person for someone....Make sure you have the Holy Spirit and then allow the Spirit to guide you to witness.

The context of this letter is that false teachers are in Ephesus and they need to be silenced....Silenced with love...our aim is love. You don't silence critics by arguing with them....you likely have no ability to truly silence those who are enemies of God.

There is only one thing that will truly silence God's enemies....and that is God Himself. He must reveal truth to them...He must change their heart. Even the most incredible testimony of what God has done in your life has no impact without the Holy Spirit. Jesus said don't go until you receive power from on high...the Holy Spirit.... or as Paul tells Timothy....love that comes from a pure heart...good conscience and sincere faith.

Your testimony is your story and the way you are living your life...period. That is what you are to share with others. I began today by asking...what is the most loving thing that you can share with another person? Is is the testimony of what God has done in your life.

What is the difference between your testimony and that of a false teacher? What silences them? The presence of the Holy Spirit....You have something they do not. When you share with others they will feel the presence of God...false teachers can't do that.

Paul is going to tell Timothy that the way he lives out his faith will be his greatest witness. Eventually yes it will be time to open the Bible and teach those who have the Holy Spirit the truths of God's word.

Yes there will be time when believers are held accountable for the way they live their lives. There will be a time to serve Jesus their new Lord....but it all begins with a mess, a messenger and the message.

The message has never changed....The mess gets their attention...and you are sent by God to be their messenger...To share your testimony with gentleness, love and respect...trusting the Holy Spirit to do all the work. Let's Pray.