

Mission Possible

Introduction

Do you know what drives me crazy about advertising? Promises that are not true. Claims that you want to believe but you find out later that you were purposefully deceived. You wanted so badly to believe and you trusted the person making the promises, but they lied...and you bought it.

Telling people what they want to hear is a great way to grow a business or a church. People tend to flock to promises. In the first century, people were making a lot of promises, claims that had to be validated. Many had claimed to be the Messiah, but their claims did not have the backing of the living God.

The message of Jesus was backed with miracles that only God could do. They stamped the message as authentic, trustworthy, and true. While Jesus was here...He refuted false teaching. But he entrusted that role to the disciples who were empowered with the Holy Spirit.

Yet false teachers used the name of Jesus to make their own brand of His gospel. They changed it to manipulate people, benefit themselves, and grow their audience. The sad truth is that people are easy to deceive. The greatest threat to the church in the first century and now is false doctrine. Everything depends upon the foundation of Christ and the purity of His message and His promises to us.

In their book *Health, Wealth and Happiness*, David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge highlight a disturbing trend in the church: "A new gospel is being taught today. This new gospel is perplexing—it omits Jesus and neglects the cross"

For example, Jones and Woodbridge report that 46 percent of self-proclaimed Christians in the United States agree with the idea that God will grant material riches to all believers who have enough faith

IMAGE Although it takes many shapes and sizes, the prosperity gospel promises material and physical blessings in this life so that central elements of the gospel, such as the finished work of Christ on the cross and the forgiveness of sins, take a backseat. Sadly, professing Christians seem to be taking the bait, and not just here in America. The prosperity gospel is sweeping across large portions of the world.

The problem of false teachers and false teaching is by no means a new problem for the church. In fact, these battles are quite old—approximately two thousand years old. When Paul was giving his final instructions to the elders in Ephesus in Acts 20:29–30, he warned them that "savage wolves" would enter the church and wreak havoc, luring away disciples

When we turn to 1 Timothy, we see that Paul's predictions were not exaggerated, and they wouldn't require centuries to play out. False teaching was staring the first-century church at Ephesus square in the face.

For a man like Paul, who gave his life to establishing and strengthening churches among the Gentiles, false teaching was more than just an apologetic hurdle. It was a deadly cancer that had to be removed if the church was to remain healthy and continue its mission.

IMAGE 1 To recap a bit....We studied Ephesus last time. One of the largest cities in the world at that time. 250K people called it home. A million or so passed through each year. A huge library one of the largest in the world at that time and the temple to Artemis a fertility pagan. IMAGE 2

Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles and author of 13 letters in the New Testament, had stationed Timothy in Ephesus to do the difficult work of combating false teaching

Other factors we need to consider include the time and place of the letter. Followers of Christ have always had to face a unique set of challenges related to their ministry context.

For example, pastors and churches in our own culture continue to face complex questions related to who we are as humans. Could anyone have imagined, even a generation ago, that Christians would have to think through biblical positions on cloning or gender reassignment? Nevertheless, we would be seriously mistaken to think we are the first generation of Christians to face complex issues. The church at Ephesus is a case in point.

Consider the context for Timothy and the church at Ephesus in the mid 60s of the first century AD . At this time the city of Ephesus was large, diverse, religiously complex, and flourishing commercially , not unlike a major metropolitan area of the United States today.

Since the temple of Artemis was located in Ephesus, the cult of Artemis was especially influential in this Imperial capital. This cult affected commercial activity, and it seems to have engulfed a number of other cult practices such as “the practice of magic, sorcery, and soothsaying” . Needless to say, Timothy was not ministering in a culture founded on Judeo-Christian values. Ephesus had its own particular brand of sin and rebellion, but this doesn’t mean Paul’s instructions have no relevance for us today.

The many challenges facing Timothy and the church at Ephesus went beyond their immediate cultural context, as difficult as that context must have been. Consider some of the issues Paul addressed within the church: men and women needed to be instructed about their God-given roles and conduct in the church’s gathering, faithful elders and deacons needed to be identified and appointed, widows needed to be cared for properly, and the pursuit of wealth seemed to be a real temptation for some in the congregation. Does any of that sound familiar? Paul’s concerns could easily be copied and pasted into a list of issues the church continues to face in the twenty-first century.

False teaching was not just a nuisance for Paul's new church...it threatened to destroy it. Paul mentioned Hymenaeus and Alexander as two individuals who had to be excommunicated, or

removed, from the church for rejecting “faith and a good conscience....It’s not a good sign when two of your elders have to be taught not to blaspheme!.

Here is some of what we can piece together about the false teachers: • They were straying in their doctrine (1:3). • They were preoccupied with myths, genealogies, and speculation (1:4). • They misused the law (1:7). • They were apparently immoral (1:19–20). • Their consciences were seared (4:2). • They were forbidding marriage and certain foods (4:3). • They craved controversy and quarrels (6:4). • They were using godliness for material gain (6:5).

The false teachers in the Ephesian church may have been influenced by early seeds of a heresy that later became known as Gnosticism. This heresy came onto the scene in the second century AD after the writing of the New Testament. What seems more certain is that the false teaching in Ephesus had some strong Jewish elements

Whatever the precise nature of the false teaching, we know it was dangerous because it diverted people from the truth of God’s Word. Paul even referred to such false teaching as demonic! The church was not merely dealing with preferences for the style of music—the gospel itself was at stake.

Unfortunately, some Christians have gotten the wrong idea that a book like 1 Timothy is only relevant for the church staff. The urgent message it contains is sometimes passed over because the book is referred to as a “leader’s manual” for pastors. Now this is definitely a book pastors need to be intimately familiar with, so if you’re a pastor, 1 Timothy is certainly in the “must know” column. But that doesn’t mean you can ignore this book if you’re not in a position of church leadership.

Most people won’t say it aloud, but they may be thinking, “I know this book is important, but I’m not a pastor, so I should read something that applies to me.” Is that you? If so, let me urge you to rethink your perspective on 1 Timothy. Whether you minister by taking meals to homebound members or by seeking to evangelize unreached people groups, don’t ignore this important book. You might be missing more than you think. Consider just a few important questions addressed by Paul:

How do Old Testament laws apply to Christians today? (• Can women teach in the church? • Who is qualified to be an elder or a deacon? • How do I spot false teachers? • Which widows should the church support? • What should wealthy Christians do with their money?

Anyone who professes to be a follower of Christ and who is a member of a local church—those two should always go together—needs to know what God has said about how the church is to function

1 Timothy 3:14–15 (ESV) 14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

Did you catch that? This letter is all about how God’s people conduct themselves in God’s household, and Paul was not talking about our personal etiquette in the sanctuary. “God’s

household” is the church, the gathered people of God. This letter was written so that we would know how to conduct ourselves when we come together as followers of Christ for worship and then when we spread out to serve the Lord throughout the week. This book clearly has relevance beyond church leaders. Its message is for every person and for every context.

Paul instructs Timothy to not only speak the truth of the gospel but to live it out. The reason he is so focused on authentic living is that the false teachers were not only speaking lies, they were living them. Jesus had warned them that they would know false teachers by the way they lived their lives.

Matthew 7:15–20 (ESV) 15 “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves. 16 You will recognize them by their fruits. Are grapes gathered from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 So, every healthy tree bears good fruit, but the diseased tree bears bad fruit.20 Thus you will recognize them by their fruits.

Jesus says, forget what they say...they are all going to say what you want to hear....look at the way they live. Do they have the love, joy, peace, patience, kindness and goodness of God? You will know them by their fruit.

Also, Note Paul says the church of the living God. The Living God. His God was like the statue up on the temple of Artemis....a god who is distant and made of stone. Paul proclaimed God...living...alive...interacting...guiding...encouraging and saving us. This idea of a living God, while a comfortable concept for the Jews, was completely foreign idea to the Gentiles. God's lived up on Olympus and man had to try to appease them. Paul taught that the living God lived in your heart and you need no effort on your part to please Him..He already loves you...you just need faith to receive all that He offers.

The church was God’s idea. That may sound obvious, but with the number of conferences, books, and magazines offering advice on how to “do church” today, it’s easy to forget the church is not ours to run. To be fair, some of the material out there is biblical and much needed; however, too much of the advice being offered today ignores the church’s marching orders given by King Jesus Himself. We dare not forget that Jesus Christ is the Head of the church .

Colossians 1:15–18 (ESV) 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The church belongs to Jesus Christ. He founded it by His life, death, and resurrection, and since Pentecost He has continued to build it by His Spirit. Therefore, what matters most in the life of the church is not the church’s website or the latest statistics on what visitors are looking for in a worship experience. What matters most is what our Lord Jesus has said. So with that in mind, let's dive into this incredibly important letter

1 Timothy 1:1–2 (ESV) 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

Ok that is far enough....Letters in the First Century always seemed to start out with the name of the sender, then the audience he was writing to and then a blessing. Paul says he is an apostle of Christ... There is a lot in that statement.

We tend to skim through the greetings of the New Testament as if these were throwaway verses. However, these greetings are so much more than a “Dear Bob” kind of formality. Paul, the author of this letter, was giving us his credentials as an apostle, which means we had better listen to what he said.

in order to be one of the original 12 apostles, an individual had to be present during the earthly ministry of Jesus from his baptism by John to his resurrection and ascension. Jesus sent these men, these eyewitnesses of His ministry, to take the gospel message to the ends of the earth, and several of them were even used to pen the Scriptures.

Unlike the other apostles Paul did not accompany Jesus during His earthly ministry, nor did he see the resurrected Lord before the ascension. In fact, Paul helped to martyr Stephen, the first of thousands of martyrs to come. Paul did not seem to know Jesus before Christ's ascension into heaven. ...so how does He claim to be an apostle? Don't miss this because opponents of Paul didn't. He claimed to have met resurrected Jesus and been specifically sent to the Gentiles. You can read all about it in Acts 9.

This former persecutor of the church was appointed to the ministry by Jesus Himself.

1 Timothy 1:12–14 (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.

In almost every letter Paul writes, he must defend his credentials as an apostle. The fact that he suffers so much for the gospel helps to validate his authenticity. When you look at Paul's life you know he authentically believes what he teaches and that is the point.

1 Corinthians 10:31–11:1 (ESV) 31 So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. 32 Give no offense to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God, 33 just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, not seeking my own advantage, but that of many, that they may be saved. 1 Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.

and he claimed to be the last apostle named.

1 Corinthians 15:7–9 (ESV) 7 Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. 8 Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. 9 For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

Paul claimed to be the last apostle, something those today who call themselves apostles may want to study a bit more. In any event, in this letter he adds something to that....

Paul calls God “our Savior.” We are so used to thinking of Jesus as our Savior that the use of that term to describe God catches our attention. The phrase “God our Savior” occurs only five times in the entire Old Testament and only six times in the New Testament, of which five are in the Pastoral Letters

It is striking to realize that although the word “salvation” appears forty-six times in the New Testament and the word “save” 107 times, “Savior” occurs only twenty-four times. In Paul’s letters it occurs only twice outside of the Pastorals, but ten times within them

Almost half of the appearances of this word in the New Testament, therefore, are in the Pastoral Letters. Such words give Paul’s opening words to Timothy (and also those to Titus) a weight of authority and majesty. This letter demands authenticity. Paul wanted us to know that the truth of the Gospel came from the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. The God who brought about the salvation of Israel time and time again has the authority to command Paul regarding the preservation of the true faith.

Paul goes on to describe Christ Jesus as “our hope.” This phrase does not occur anywhere else, nor does the phrase “God our hope,” but certainly the idea does.

Titus 2:11–13 (ESV) 11 For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, 12 training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, 13 waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ,

God the Father orchestrated everything that The Son did while He was Jesus on earth. Both God the Father and God Jesus and we know God the Spirit gave the command to send Paul to the Gentiles. Paul’s authority to correct false teaching came with impeccable and unchallenged authority.

An apostle by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope. Paul wasn’t elected by men. He was divinely appointed to be an authoritative representative of the risen and ruling Lord. We should not fail to mention that Paul ascribed this command of apostleship to both the Father and the Son. Paul knew that he had to get Timothy to fight for the truth of the gospel and God’s word. He had to establish his authority to speak out against and over some key influential members in the church at Ephesus.

Now to be clear, not everything an apostle said or wrote is authoritative. We only need to think of Paul having to confront Peter’s hypocrisy in Galatians 2 to make this point. Authority does not ultimately rest in a group of men, no matter how privileged their position may be. Rather, Scripture carries this authority

Paul told Timothy elsewhere, “All Scripture is inspired by God” (2 Tim 3:16). Peter put it this way: “Men spoke from God as they were moved by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet 1:21). Men are not inerrant; God’s Word is. The apostles were fallible men whom God used to pen these inspired words. Therefore, the fundamental reason Timothy, the church at

Ephesus, and everyone else since then needs to submit to this letter is because it was breathed out by God.

The fact that God's Word is inspired and inerrant is not only a doctrine to be affirmed; it's a firm foundation to stand on in a culture and a world that suppress and oppose the truth of God. When everything around us seems to be caving in, we need to hear God's Word and submit to it, knowing that what God has said is true and good and right.

It is also essential to see that Paul's instructions here are meant for a wider audience than Timothy....it is essential for every pastor to hear these instructions. The issues that arise in Ephesus are not confined to one time and place, for sin has continued to rear its ugly head ever since the fall... In fact, we can go even further and say that 1 Timothy is essential for every follower of Christ. All of us need to know what God has said about how we relate to Him and to one another in the church. The fact that God chose to include this letter in the Bible means it is relevant for every child of God. First Timothy is God's Word to all of us.

The first thing Paul wanted to make sure of in this letter is that it carries authority because it has the authority of God the Savior and Jesus Christ our Lord. But also, we shouldn't bypass this opening greeting without recognizing that 1 Timothy is filled with hope. Yes, this inspired letter is authoritative and timely as it deals with a number of difficult issues in the church, but it's also full of gospel hope

This is apparent right from the start in verse 1 when Paul referred to "God our Savior." Paul was not sent by some nameless deity. He reminded Timothy and all who hear this letter that the God he serves is the saving God of the Scriptures. So we are reminded at the outset of the letter that God is our Savior.

In the next phrase we see more good news. Paul was sent not only by "God our Savior" but by "Christ Jesus our hope." What an encouraging reminder at the beginning of a letter that deals with so many difficult and thorny issues. Christ Jesus is our hope! Surely Paul intended for us to think on the hope that is ours based on Christ's death and resurrection.

1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV) 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

His message...is all about hope.

1 Timothy 1:2 (ESV) 2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

Timothy is Paul's true child in the faith.

The word for "true" (gnesios) is different from the more common one (alethes), which means true as opposed to false. The present word means "genuine" as opposed to illegitimate or fake. The word could be used of a child born within a legitimate marriage, and the implication in the figurative statement here refers to the quality of Timothy's relationship to Paul

Second Timothy 1:5 refers to Timothy's "sincere faith," which "first lived" in his grandmother and mother, Lois and Eunice.

2 Timothy 1:3–5 (ESV) 3 I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. 4 As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. 5 I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

From his infancy Timothy had known the Scriptures, through which he had come to "salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. This repeated terminology about faith and the identification of his believing mother provides a background for Paul's reference to Timothy as his "true son in the faith." Timothy's mother provided the environment of Jewish faith in which he had grown up; Paul provided the nurture of his Christian faith

Paul now designates Timothy as my true son in the faith. For if Paul is an authentic apostle of Christ, Timothy is an authentic son of Paul. Gnēsios ('true' or 'genuine') was used literally of children 'born in wedlock, legitimate'. It is possible, therefore, that Paul is hinting at the circumstances of Timothy's physical birth. Since his father was a Greek, Jewish law will have regarded him as illegitimate. Spiritually, however, Timothy is Paul's genuine child, partly because he was responsible for his conversion and partly because Timothy has faithfully followed his teaching and example.⁹ By affirming Timothy's genuineness Paul aims to reinforce his authority in the church.

Another thing to notice here is that this letter is written to Timothy. Most of Paul's letters are written to the churches. The problem is that at Ephesus the church leadership was part of the problem.

Remember, Timothy is not the pastor at Ephesus, he is Paul's lead delegate or consultant. Paul would instruct Timothy and establish his authority to direct the leaders and elders of the church.

These letters are probably not only for their personal reading but function as public documents attesting the authority bestowed on these two delegates. Paul was sent by God and Timothy was sent by him. Timothy is established in this letter as authoritative because he was Paul's delegate.

This letter, therefore, although addressed to Timothy personally, is not a private communication. It is written to him in his official capacity, and throughout it Paul is looking beyond Timothy to the churches. One clear hint of this is that his final greeting is couched in the plural: 'Grace be with you' the you here is plural...you all.

So what about Timothy? Most readers find Timothy a very congenial character. We feel that he is one of us in all our frailty. He was very far from being a stained-glass saint. A halo would not have fitted comfortably on his head. No, the evidence is plain that he was a real human being like us, with all the infirmity and vulnerability which that entails.

To begin with, he was still comparatively young when Paul addressed this letter to him, for he told him not to let anyone look down on him on account of his youth

So how old was he? It seems unlikely that the apostle would have invited Timothy to join his mission team before he had reached his late teens or early twenties, in which case now, about thirteen or fourteen years later, he would be in his mid-thirties. Nevertheless, Timothy evidently felt inexperienced and immature for the heavy responsibility which Paul was laying upon him

Secondly, he was temperamentally shy, needing affirmation, encouragement and reassurance. So a few years previously Paul had urged the Corinthians to 'put him at his ease' when he came to them. And in his second letter to Timothy he felt the need to exhort him not to be ashamed of Christ, since God had not given us 'a spirit of timidity' (1:7f.). It is not unfair, therefore, to think of him as 'timid Timothy'.

Thirdly, Timothy was physically infirm, and suffered from a recurrent gastric problem. For Paul referred to his habitual ailments, in particular to his stomach. He even prescribed a little medicinal alcohol: 'Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses' (5:23).

So this is the profile of Timothy which we can construct from a number of Paul's references to him. He was young, diffident and frail. These three handicaps might have been thought to disqualify him from taking charge of the churches in and around Ephesus. But they endear him to us, and the grace of God was sufficient for his need: 'You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus' (2 Tim. 2:1).

I think it is important to really notice how different Paul and Timothy were. We tend to think mentors and disciples are all the same. But while Paul was being shipwrecked, beaten, stoned, and left for dead....Timothy was trying to settle his stomach and his nerves. I think they probably drove each other a bit crazy.

Paul gives the idea that a follower of Jesus is a swashbuckler...Timothy the introverted shy nerd...and the truth is that God wired each of us for the mission that He called us to. I think these two played off of each other very well. Probably a good cop bad cop kind of thing

God selected Paul and God selected Timothy. I don't think that they would have chosen each other. They were too different. But each of them needed what the other had. They were interdependent upon each other. They made each other better than each would have been alone.

The People in this room may seem really different to you too....yet God brought them here and empowered them for the same mission that He has called you to. They bring what you do not have, they can do what you can not do, they need you and you need them. That is what God designed....we call it the church. And we call it Remnant.

Then Paul gives an expression of kind wishes or encouragement. He mentions three things....Grace, Mercy and Peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we see a list in Scripture we slow down....Grace Mercy and Peace....notice these are supernatural blessings...this is not the grace, mercy, and peace that we try to muster up for each

other....these are given from the throne of God to us. He essentially said may you have God's Grace, God's Mercy and God's Peace.

Each word tells us something about the human condition. For 'grace' is God's kindness to the guilty and undeserving, 'mercy' his pity on the wretched who cannot save themselves, and 'peace' his reconciliation of those who were previously alienated from him and from one another

All three issue from the same spring, namely God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord (2b). Thus Father and Son are now bracketed as the single source of divine blessing, as they were in verse 1 as the single author of the divine command which constituted Paul an apostle.

This letter is written for all churches of all times. Some issues are specific to Ephesus but others instruct us even today. We are going to see six major topics addressed in this letter to Timothy.

1. How to preserve the church's doctrine and keep it intact uncorrupted by false teaching.
2. Second is the church's public worship, its intercession for all men everywhere. Including the roles of men and women in the conduct of it.
3. The letter addresses the church's pastoral leadership. The conditions of serving as a deacon or elder.
4. Paul calls for personal godliness in living our moral truths.
5. He addresses the church's social responsibilities, not only to widows but to elderly and slaves.
6. He addresses and corrects those who follow the prosperity gospel and the church's attitude to material possessions.

Here is wisdom for the local church in every generation and every place. Let no-one say that Scripture is out of date. Calvin, when dedicating his commentary to the Duke of Somerset in 1556, called this letter 'highly relevant to our own times'. More than 400 years later we can make the same claim. Truly 'the Bible speaks today'.

There is a lot to look forward to in this letter. We are going to be challenged, scolded, and encouraged. It is an authoritative letter to us too....we will need to wrestle with its truth. Surrender to its authenticity and teach it with utmost accuracy.

This is a letter to pastors and leaders...but we will learn that we are all in ministry...every one of us. We could easily change Timothy's name to our own as this letter is to us...As you and I leave this place today, we are entering the mission field where we have been planted.

Each of us uniquely gifted and created for the role God has given to us. We will either appear to others as authentic or as false teachers. Not because they label us but because we label ourselves. It is not that people decide if we are true followers of Christ.....God our Father does.

He is the one who flows the fruit of the Spirit through us. We are not authentic because we work at it, we are authentic because He works thorough us.

Paul tells Timothy to make sure that his life is seen as moral, loving and worthy of a Christ follower. He tells us the same. People should be able to tell that we are followers of Jesus without us telling them. Our lives, our church, everything about us should be different from the world around us.

Ephesus had a population of 250,000. That is the population of St Petersburg. The original church at Ephesus....about like Remnant. This small band of followers lived lives and shared the gospel against enormous odds because they believed that they could. They literally shut down the pagan souvenir and idol business. A small group of committed people surrendered to and empowered by the Holy Spirit can change the world.

That is what Jesus came to do. That is what the gospel message is all about. As we study Ephesus my prayer is that we realize that we are examining ourselves. As we listen to Paul's instructions to Timothy that we realize God is speaking through them to us. And as you and I leave this day to our mission, we become the change we want to see in the lives of those around us....Let's pray.