

In an article for *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, William Dere-sie-wicz examines the new forms of friendship that have emerged in the age of Facebook. While social media has allowed us the opportunity to be connected to everyone, it more often than not comes at the expense of deep, meaningful, shaping friendship. Dere-sie-wicz points out that friendships have lost their commitment to improve each other's character:

We have ceased to believe that a friend's highest purpose is to summon us to the good by offering moral advice and correction. We practice, instead, the nonjudgmental friendship of unconditional acceptance and support—"therapeutic" friendship. ... We seem to be terribly fragile now. A friend fulfills her duty, we suppose, by taking our side—validating our feelings, supporting our decisions, helping us to feel good about ourselves. ... We want our friendships fun and friction-free

Facebook's very premise—and promise—is that it makes our friendship circles visible. There they are, my friends, all in the same place. Except, of course, they're not in the same place, or, rather, they're not my friends. They're a [superficial likeness or semblance] of my friends—little dehydrated packets of images and information, no more my friends than a set of baseball cards is the New York Mets.

Dere-sie-wicz concludes:

"Friendship is devolving... from a relationship to a feeling—from something people share to something each of us hugs privately to ourselves in the loneliness of our electronic caves."

Wow! There are so many things that stand out to me from that article. A major component of any society (relationships and friendships) have drastically changed since 2004... when Mark Zuckerberg first brought Facebook to our culture. (That wasn't very long ago – and look how much has been transformed!)

While I enjoy Facebook and am a user of it... (and perhaps you are too)... we should recognize this modification of relationships today... and consider what the outcomes might be for the church. (Because culture certainly does influence the church.)

As we relate to one another as church members... do we have the same expectations that govern all other relationships in our lives? Are we seeking inside the church - non-judgmental friendships - that only give us unconditional acceptance and support – even when we openly defy the clear teaching of Scripture? ... If we are... the result is inevitable. ... Christian fellowship will devolve from relationships to a feeling. ... When the church gathers... the best we can expect is little dehydrated packets of connection and community – no more of a real brotherhood than “a set of baseball cards is the New York Mets...”

But you know (as well as I do) that the church is not an invention of society... and culture does not set our standards. ... The church is **God's** idea. That may sound obvious... but not only are we challenged by an external culture... we have a culture within the church that can be equally contesting... offering a large number of conferences... books... and magazines offering advice on how to “do church” today. (LISTEN!) It's easy to forget **the church is not ours to run.**

To be fair... some of the material out there is Biblical and is much needed; however... too much of the advice being offered today ignores the church's marching orders given by the Church's Head - Jesus Himself. ... Please consider the truthful perspective given in the old hymn by Samuel J. Stone:

The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord, She is His new creation By water and the Word. From heaven He came and sought her To be His holy bride; With His own blood He bought her And for her life He died.

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 the Lord of the church has said.

Through the Holy Spirit... He has used the Apostle Paul to say a lot about it... in Paul's two letters to Timothy... and to Titus. ... Today... we begin a new series on first and second Timothy.

The overarching purpose of the book is to teach the proper ordering and conduct of the church... as Paul so clearly states it to Timothy:

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.

This is the key verse of 1st Timothy. It tells us that it is a letter on order in the church and how it ought to live. When you ask the question: *What is the church supposed to look like?* ... 1 Timothy provides one of the clearest answers in all of the Bible. ... It was written from Paul to Timothy (the young pastor of a struggling church.) ... Paul's instructions about what the church is to look like... were meant to encourage Timothy (and anyone who struggles with the hardship of church ministry) – to hang in there!

1 Timothy 1:18-19 (ESV)

¹⁸ This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹ holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,

(Now)... 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.*" If that you... let me urge you to rethink your perspective on 1 Timothy. ... Whether you minister by teaching young children in the church... taking meals to homebound members... or by supporting our church's evangelizing efforts... don't ignore this important book. You might be missing more than you think. Consider just a few important questions we will cover in this sermon series:

- How do Old Testament laws apply to Christians today? (chap. 1)
- Can women teach in the church? (chap. 2)
- Who is qualified to be an elder or a deacon? (chap. 3)
- How do I spot false teachers? (chap. 4)
- How do we prioritize which ministry opportunities to engage in from the many that present themselves to us? (chap. 5)
- How do we best honor God with our finances? (chap. 6)

Start praying for me now... before we come to chapter two – "The Role of Women in the Church." ... I may (very well) find myself in circumstances like Pepper Rogers – the head football coach for the UCLA Bruins many years ago. The Bruins (one year) were in the midst of a most horrific season... and it was affecting every element of Pepper Roger's life. He once described those lonely times... saying: "*My dog was my only friend. ... I complained to my wife how a man needs at least two friends... .. and she bought me another dog.*" ... (I may need another dog when we get to "the role of women in the church" - in 1 Timothy chapter 2.)

Before we break open this letter with chapter 1... verse 1... let me set the scene... just a little more. These two letters to Timothy are the final letters that the Apostle Paul wrote. He is at the end of his life and he wrote them from prison in Rome. Timothy was in Ephesus.

When Paul was in Ephesus... he engaged in a mighty two- to three-year ministry... preaching first in the synagogue... and then in the hall of Tyrannus (training men from around the region). His ministry was filled with extraordinary power... so much so that the idol-making industry suffered substantial economic losses. Eventually the famous Ephesian riot led by the idol-makers' guild broke out (Acts 19).

Those tumultuous years marked the firm establishment of a powerful beachhead in the most important city of the Roman province of Asia. Ephesus became the command center for the evangelization of Asia Minor. The church in Ephesus was supremely crucial to Paul's ministry... and in his poignant farewell address to the Ephesian elders he gave this clear warning:

Acts 20:25-31 (ESV)

²⁵ And now, behold, I know that none of you among whom I have gone about proclaiming the kingdom will see my face again.

²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸ Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.

Now... as he writes this first letter to Timothy (around A.D. 64)... about five years have elapsed since his ministry in Ephesus. ... Trouble has come to the church from within — those savage wolves are now in the very sheepfold. ... And before he was imprisoned... Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with the problems.

The church at Ephesus was dealing with the deadly serious problem of false teaching. ... 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” (1:19-20.) ... It’s never a good sign when two of your elders have to be put out of the church as blasphemers!

With the purpose of 1 Timothy in mind (the proper order and conduct of the church)... let us turn to Paul’s carefully phrased greetings to Timothy... which are meant to uplift and encourage him in his unnerving ... (“Herculean”) leadership task.

1 Tim 1:1-2

The letter opens with a warm greeting from one close friend to another. A seasoned and scarred apostle (bearded and no doubt balding) wrote as a man who understood the rigors of ministry. ... Nevertheless... he included the title “apostle”... which might seem strange in a personal greeting to his closest associate. ... That would be like my signing a note that I leave on the kitchen table at home to one of my immediate family members:

“Love,

Dr. James E. Hofman, Senior Pastor Living Water Church...”

Citing my titles and credentials would be entirely inappropriate. ... And so it would seem that Paul doing it in his letter to Timothy – is - (as well.) ... It seems inappropriate (however) until we realize that this letter was to be read to the entire church. (You see)... Paul wanted his hearers/readers to know that his teaching is authoritative... and the delegate who administered it to the community (Timothy) was to be regarded as an extension of the apostle himself. ... In view of the difficult task that faced Timothy... this may have been an encouraging reminder for him as well. So there are at least two reasons why Paul’s opening was entirely proper.

First, it helped the church in Ephesus. Paul wrote to Timothy... but as Paul’s credentials were read in the presence of the church... a basic rule of every 1st century culture would come to mind: “*Treat an envoy (representative or ambassador) as you would the sender himself!*” God sent Paul... and Paul sent Timothy as though he were Paul himself.

Second, it helped Timothy be confident. It may have helped Timothy (a soldier in God’s army) feel less alone and be reminded that he was reading the words of a comrade-in-arms. Unfortunately... ministry brings its share of loneliness. ... But God had authorized Paul’s ministry. ... And Timothy could stand with the same authority to teach and to lead.

Please take another look at the second part of verse one...

1 Tim. 1:1b

The additional phrase “*and of Christ Jesus our hope*” makes it even more encouraging... because *hope* in the New Testament means **certain** hope. The concept of hope in the Scriptures is not wishful thinking - contrary to its usage in modern English (“*I hope it doesn’t rain Saturday*”). ... When the Bible uses this word (“hope”) - **that hope** is a **sure** thing.

For Christ Jesus to be our hope is a very comforting thought. It means we have every reason to believe He will take care of us. It is impossible for those who are in Christ to be in a hopeless situation. That is certainly something Timothy needed to hear. One would think he turned that phrase over and over in his mind as he went through the rigors of ministry—*Christ Jesus our hope*.

So from the onset of Paul’s letter to Timothy... the Apostle is really pouring it on! Paul is on **offense**. (He is not on defense.) ... He expresses confidence and authority... in order to inspire Timothy to do the same. These inspiring words were matched by Paul’s tender address to Timothy – “*To Timothy, my true son in the faith (v.2)...*”

The church at Ephesus was to recognize in Paul’s affection... the stamp of approval (particularly in light of the difficulties Timothy was facing.) Timothy was young and somewhat shy. We will see in chapter four that Paul wrote: “*Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young*” (4:12), and in 2 Timothy he warned him: “*Flee the evil desires of youth*” (2:22). (John Stott calculates that he was in his mid-thirties.)

Not only was Timothy young... he was also *timid*. So Paul reminds him: “*For God did not give us a spirit of timidity*” (2 Timothy 1:7). Earlier he had encouraged the Corinthians: “*If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am*” (1 Corinthians 16:10). ... “*Timid Timothy*” needed encouragement.

Timothy also appears to have had nagging stomach problems... for which Paul advised: “*Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses*” (1 Timothy 5:23). So we conclude that Timothy (by nature) was not a “missionary commando” — a “Seal Team Six type of guy”. ... And this is probably why we find him so endearing. He is one of us. He does not intimidate anyone. He is so un-Paul. But he took on and was faithful to his *unnerving* ... (“Herculean”) assignments from Paul. ... [P A U S E] ...

Also in verse two... we (*almost*) find Paul’s standard greeting. In all of his *other* letters... (the only exception being *Timothy*) Paul’s greeting is “*Grace and Peace to you...*” ... But to Timothy... Paul adds one more – “mercy”! “*Grace, **mercy**, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*”

This word can shade towards the idea of *pity* or *compassion*. It recalls the Hebrew *hesed*... with its overtones that those who receive this benefit have a need they cannot fulfill themselves. ... The word *mercy* here carries the idea of God’s special care for a person in need. So Paul reminds Timothy that God’s unearnable love and peace will overshadow his servant - even in the most difficult of circumstances.

After a relatively short (but encouraging) greeting... Paul got right down to business. ... He offered his younger friend two specific directives... probably in response to something he heard about as happening in Ephesus.... (Stay in Ephesus... and stop the false teaching.)

1 Tim 1:3-4

When Paul used the word in verse 3 (“*urge*” – “*as I urged you...*”) he used a word that is closer to the idea of “beg” (παρακαλεω). Paul had to beg Timothy to stay. He did not want to stay... so Paul pled with him not to leave... but to complete the work there.

Timothy was to command the false teachers to cease and desist. ... (You know)... the first thing that we see in this letter for what the church is to look like... is that it is to be intolerant with false teaching (in other words false doctrine.) ... Now that is not an ideal that many people have for the church. People in the church today often insist that we must be tolerant (in the name of maintaining peace and Christian testimony to outsiders) – and so it puts up with a lot of garbage! ... BUT - Paul places a premium on RIGHT TEACHING! We are not to be tolerant of people’s opinions that differ with Scripture.

The first picture we get – of Christ’s design for what the church should look like... is that it guards its teaching.

Now Folks... it would not serve any beneficial purpose for me to go into much detail... but we would be a much larger church today – if your elders and I did not believe the church is to be like this.

There have been many attempts in recent years to steer our church away from the clear teaching of Scripture... In one case it was as blatant as the teaching of a system of work's-salvationism... In other cases it was because we would not allow extra-Biblical rules and standards that defy Scripture to be employed. ... At one time we were challenged to allow modern psychology to push aside Scripture's instruction on a matter.

You know... the more culture has its way in transforming the concept of relationships in the church (*that relationships are to consist of unconditional acceptance and support*) – the less accepted this picture of the church in Timothy will be - (that the church is to guard its teaching.) ... And any church that guards its teaching... will (likely) go through a pruning process.

What were the false teachers at Ephesus teaching... that Timothy had to put an end to...? I read a lot of commentators who saw certain clues... but no one can be certain. From what we see in verse 4... the next several verses... and throughout this letter... we know that it was extra-Biblical material... that distracted from the Apostles teaching (which has since been written for us as Scripture.)

It's effect was elitism... snobbery... and disunity in the church. False teaching often does that. Those who believe “new” or “different” teaching will look down on the others as “simple” or unspiritual.” They are induced

with pride for what they have discovered. This is much different from the aim of right teaching.

1 Tim. 1:5-7

(I have to say this...) Given the importance of right doctrine so far in this letter... we might have expected that the goal of the command in 1:5 would be doctrinal correctness. “*The aim of our charge is pure doctrine...*” But it isn’t. Instead it is *love*.

Paul is saying that teaching right doctrine can (and needs to) produce love among those who hear – not pride! ... We want to be a people who love God and love others out of the overflow of a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ... Paul tells us that teaching right doctrine produces that kind of response.

(LISTEN!) ... There is a dynamic connection between our doctrine and the way we live. ... This truth is directly opposite to much contemporary Christian thinking. ... Often today we hear people say, “*We don’t need more doctrine. What we need is practical preaching.*” ... Now... we must certainly agree that preaching must be applied. ... But we must not agree that there is no connection between the doctrinal and the practical. We clearly see (here) that there is! ... Here is how it works:

Learn doctrine so that you will know God better! Our great need is to know God more richly. Because it is as John Piper says: “*Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others.*” ... [P A U S E] ...

In wrapping up... I think that it is important to observe that Paul's ***first*** instruction to the young pastor (Timothy) was essentially this: "*Guard the teaching!*"

This is a fascinating way to open the letter... especially when we consider all the challenges surrounding the church at Ephesus.... Ephesus was a city filled with paganism and rampant immorality and idolatry... and because of these cultural pressures... Paul's first concern was to tell Timothy that he must keep people from teaching false doctrine.

If we lose the battle of maintaining Scripture's integrity - we lose everything. We may think other things are more urgent or more in need of addressing in the church — things like prayer... leadership... evangelism... materialism... lust... perversion... or caring for one another. Paul would get to all of these things eventually... but he began by telling Timothy to guard the church's teaching.

As we get closer to the Lord's return – it will get harder and harder to recognize false teachers. ... Years ago... I used to listen to a radio program called "The Bible Answer Man." The host was a Christian apologist by the name of Hank Hannigraff. I will close today by giving you his telltale sign of a false teacher. I think this is profound.

"False teachers invite people to come to the Master's table because of what's on it – not because they love the Master."

Right teaching will always lead you to a greater love for Christ – and for other people.