

Timothy, Titus and John Mark. Paul treats them as sons, often writes letters to them, some of which will survive and be included in your Bible. Am I jealous?

One time, Paul even instructed Titus to help me.¹

As a matter of fact, I am not jealous. I am more like Paul than they are, but I'm not his son. Like Paul, I am a scholar of the Scriptures. Like Paul, I am a powerful preacher. Like Paul, I can refute and argue with the best of the Jewish teachers. Like Paul, I am better with words than I am with people.² It's not about favorites, it's about legacy. Passing Jesus to the next generation.

One time, Paul sent me to Corinth to help straighten out some of their issues. It was the one and only time I was sent to do that.³ Solving relationship issues is not my gift, but I am such a good preacher that there are many people who prefer my teachings over Paul's.⁴

I am also a lot like Timothy, Titus and John Mark. We have a thorough understanding of the Gospel, the Old Testament Scriptures, and an understanding of doctrinal issues. We know exactly how Paul thinks, and we completely agree with his interpretations and convictions. There is no disagreement among us, although I can tell you that complete accord comes through countless hours of teaching, discussion and debate. We have absolute unity when it comes to the Gospel.

That is why Paul does not spend much time discussing those types of matters in his letters to Timothy and Titus. Why preach to the choir when Paul has critical things to discuss with those who will lead the church after he is gone?

By your calendar, it is about 65 AD. It has been three-and-a-half decades since the death of Jesus and the beginning of the Church. It has been almost two decades since the Council of Jerusalem where it was decided by the Holy Spirit and Church leaders that Christians do not have to follow the Laws of Moses. Paul has completed his first three missionary journeys, been released from prison, and written the letters to the churches that are in your Bible. You might

¹ Titus 3:13

² Acts 18:24-28

³ Acts 19:1

⁴ 1 Corinthians 1:12, 1 Corinthians 3:4-6

expect that things are stable and unified in each church and between the churches. If you expect that, your expectation will be unmet.

We church leaders are still contending with those who believe that Christians should follow at least some of the Laws of Moses. Those enemies of the freedom of the Gospel are known as Judaizers. We are also contending with many other false teachers who more typically have local impact due to their teachings, which are influenced by local religions or customs. For instance, teachings on angels and demons are often influenced by what the people have been taught before or the level of influence that those things have had on people's lives.

In your world today, as an example, there is demon worship in many Central American, Caribbean, and African countries. However, demon worship often tends to be more influential in the rural areas than in the cities. How your missionaries deal with that subject will surely depend on where they are preaching.

Just as your church leaders have to be aware of big picture items for the long-term benefit of your church, they have to deal with smaller items just to survive day-to-day. We are no different, so you see Paul writing accordingly in his letters to Timothy and Titus.

In First Timothy, Paul writes to Timothy about the big picture items Timothy is dealing with as a pastor in Ephesus. These big picture items are: false teachers and false doctrine, disorderly worship, the need for proper church leadership, and materialism.

Paul begins his letter by telling Timothy to command certain people to quit teaching false doctrines and quit talking about things they don't understand. Paul personally knows some of these people from the three years he lived in Ephesus, and later names at least two of them to be Hymenaeus and Alexander, who Paul handed over to Satan so they will be taught not to blaspheme.

As you may remember from Paul's other letters, he is insistent on having unified and orderly churches. He urges that Christians pray for all people, especially those in authority, so that they may live peaceful and quiet lives in holiness and godliness. Paul reminds Timothy that God wants all people to be saved and come to know the truth. (smiles) I'm sure Timothy heard Paul say that a few hundred times.

He goes on to say that in every place he wants men to live lives of prayer and peace, and women to live modestly and with self-control.

In a statement that will be controversial in the modern world, Paul says "I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet."⁵

⁵ 1 Timothy 2:12 ESV

Wow! If Paul had known what a controversy that one verse would cause, perhaps he would have expounded on whether that was just his desire, or whether it is a universal command for all times. Maybe he would have given better direction about whether it was for the Ephesians only, or for all cultures in all times.

Instead, we have to settle with what Peter once wrote about Paul's letters, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand."

Paul continues his discussion of an orderly church by giving a detailed description of how church leaders should be and act. Paul considers the Church to be a sacred institution which holds the position as the *wife* of Christ. An esteemed position, not inferior. And surely nobody would mistreat the wife of Jesus! The top leaders are called overseers, elders, or bishops. The leaders who do mostly service tasks are named deacons. Paul clearly holds these leaders to very high standards.

Paul continues his letter by going after false teachings and false teachers. It is not perfectly clear who he is referencing, but he is certainly against the false teachings so much that he says they are being taught by demons, deceiving spirits and hypocritical liars. Pretty much an all-out attack by Paul. It seems as if these false teachers promised salvation not through the Gospel, but through celibacy, abstinence, belief in myths, and other behaviors. Not on Paul's watch.

I have to smile when I read that Paul writes that Timothy is young, and hints that people disparage him for that reason. You might remember that Timothy started traveling with Paul on the Second Missionary Journey. If he was at least sixteen then, he is more than thirty years old now. "Young" has more to do with Paul thinking of him as a son rather than his chronological age. Paul instructs him to spend his time being devoted to public reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching. Those are good instructions for pastors in all places and times, don't you think?

Paul then returns to instructions for the church. He starts with talking about how the church should treat widows. In that time, widows were likely going to live on the verge of death unless their families or church took care of them. Paul maintains that it is the responsibility of the family first, and if the family absolutely can't, the church should do it. But Paul also makes it clear that the church's funds should be used for widows who need the help, so that nobody will have an unhealthy feeling of being entitled.

As Paul returns to the subject of elders, he says some things that are probably clear to Timothy, but will be puzzling to future generations. You must remember that some of our churches have been in existence for many years, and are very large. We have several elders, some of which spend a majority of their time on church matters.

These elders have an enormous responsibility to teach correctly. When they don't, they are to be corrected. When they sin, they are to be reproved. When they teach and act honorably, they are to receive double honor. What is not clear is whether these elders are to be paid or not.

Paul slips in a little personal advice to Timothy that will cause plenty of controversy in future centuries. He advises Timothy to drink a little wine because of his stomach and frequent illnesses. It makes me laugh to think how people will use that personal advice to justify their actions and beliefs in one way or the other.

Paul winds down his letter by pointing out that false teachers often teach the way they do for personal gain. And, sometimes the hearers of the false teachers, believe what they want to for personal gain. He reminds us that godliness with contentment is very valuable. However, the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. For that reason, people who want to be rich fall into all kinds of traps and have foolish and harmful desires and goals.

He commands those who are financially rich not to be arrogant or put their hope and trust in riches, but to put their hope in God who truly provides. Rich people are to use their riches to do good and be generous, so they will be spiritually rich. Why should they do this? Because they are laying a foundation for a future time when true life will occur for all eternity.

The letter from Paul concludes with these admonitions: run from all kinds of sins, not look away, or walk away, but run! And pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love and gentleness. This cannot be done passively He points out that it is a continual fight. Another part of that fight is to guard the true gospel and teachings that have been entrusted to Timothy's care.

I smile every time I read the end of this letter. Paul sounds so much a father who is sending his son to a faraway country. He gives him instructions, and then says, "Oh, and just one more thing. And just one more thing. And just one more thing." Paul knows his end is in sight, and he is about to pass the baton to the next generation. My hope is that you will do that someday, as well: Pass on the legacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.