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**Dear Tim:  
The Gospel  
According  
to Paul**

**# 1215-B**

**Series: I Timothy**

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# Dear Tim:

## The Gospel According to Paul

It was not too many years ago that a study was done among young men preparing for the ministry. The survey was circulated among students in the leading Protestant seminaries in the United States. The questions asked were these:

1- Do you believe in the virgin birth of Jesus Christ?

44% said yes; 56% said no.

2- Do you believe there is life after death?

29% said yes; 71% said no.

3- Do you believe in the bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ?

46% said yes; 54% said no.

4- Do you believe that Jesus Christ will return to earth as He promised?

2% said yes; 98% said no.

Were this survey done today, the results would be even more blasphemous.

As far back as 1961, a survey done of pastors attending the National Council of Churches' General Assembly in Miami, Florida, yielded these results:

- Only half believed Jesus to be divine.
- Only one-fourth believed that the miracles recorded in Scripture were true.
- One-third declared that the devil does not exist.
- Over one-third denied that they even believed there was life after death.

These were the men who occupied the pulpits of once-great churches, to whom the shepherding of the flock of God had been committed. Twenty-seven years have passed since that survey was taken, and the results today would be so mind-boggling, the very thought of it would crush our concepts of this nation's once-

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great leadership in the cause of Christ.

What happened? How does a nation, how does a denomination, how does a seminary, once so yielded to the proclamation of truth and the priority of sound doctrine, go so far astray? How does the Word of God get so diluted in such a short time?

This is not a new question. A young man named Timothy, called to minister to a thriving young church in Ephesus, must have asked the same question. Less than a lifetime had passed since Jesus had walked this earth. The church, so infused with Truth, had only been in existence a few short years. And yet, already, the enemy had stolen into its ranks and captured the strongholds of the hearts of many of those who held its pulpits. It was Timothy, a young man not naturally endowed with a spirit of confrontation, who was being called upon to stand in the gap and put a stop to it all. If you are like I am, you are not envying this young man for his newfound calling.

But it is a task he must execute, and quickly. His mentor, the Apostle Paul, his father in the faith, has left him in Ephesus as interim pastor and charged him with certain responsibilities. Now Paul has written to young Tim from somewhere in Macedonia, and is outlining the specific things he must do if that church in Ephesus is to grow strong and survive. That letter is the basis for this study, which we pray will help illuminate both the issues and the answers facing that young church, that young man, and each of us.

In our last study, we glanced at the opening words of that epistle, and found Paul referring to himself as a “sent-one’ of Christ Jesus, by the command of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus our hope.” The passage actually reads like this:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

(I Timothy 1:1,2)

### MY TRUE SON

Paul has been a “prisoner” for the Lord Jesus Christ, and now he is, for the moment, at least, freed. But though he is free to go where he wants, he is still only free to do what he has been sent to do. And no man ever accepted that calling with more faithfulness

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than Paul did. It was that same unquenchable thirst to do the Father's will that he wanted to impart to Timothy; and these two letters, one penned from Macedonia, the other from behind those cold prison walls for the final time, were written to make sure that his protégé understood both the gravity of his calling and the greatness of the rewards that awaited his faithfulness to that calling.

Paul refers to Timothy here in the fondest way possible. He addresses him as his "true son in the faith". The word used here for "son" is the one used of someone who is your child by birth (teknon). The word for "true" (gnesios) literally means "genuine, not illegitimate". These were words of great endearment. Paul was referring to Timothy as his spiritual child, one born out of the same spirit, one whose spiritual life has issued forth from his own. These words must have stirred the heart of the young man to both reverence and respect. Was Tim led to Christ by Paul? It would seem so, though it is obvious that he had a godly mother and a godly grandmother. Timothy was not mentioned in the account of Paul's first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:8-21), but by the time of his second visit (Acts 16:1-3), the young man had become a vital part of the church there. Perhaps on that first visit, Paul stayed at Timothy's home. We do not know. Perhaps Paul was the one who ultimately led him to ask Christ into his heart, or maybe Paul took him as a spiritual babe and assumed the responsibility to nurture him in the faith. In either case, the bond between them was even thicker than blood. It was that unbreakable bond of love in Christ that exists when one person leads another into the sunlight of the Son of God. And as Paul's "son in the faith", Tim automatically became accountable to his spiritual father for instruction and direction. Paul now accepts his role and gives Tim specific spiritual marching orders. In a later lesson, we'll look at the way Paul groomed and disciplined this young man; but for now, simply visualize in your mind the depth of their relationship, so you can interpret the intensity of these words.

It was typical in Paul's day, as we learned in our last study, to begin a letter with a form of greeting; a greeting that included not only a statement of who the letter is from and who it is to, but also an expression of blessing on the one receiving the letter. Most of Paul's letters begin: "Grace and peace be unto you", a desire from his heart that the enabling power of God (grace) and the indwelling calm of God (peace) be the controlling influences in

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their lives. He always added, “from God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ”, or something similar, because grace and peace can be found nowhere else. In this one place, however, Paul adds the word “mercy” (eleos). This word, according to most commentators, added a touch of lovingkindness or gentleness to Paul’s greeting. It was more than just a doctrinal statement. It was an expression of love to a son in the faith.

In most of Paul’s other writings, he refers to his Lord as “Jesus Christ”, but in the Pastoral Epistles he uses the phrase for the first time, “Christ Jesus”. He does so more than once, indicating an emphasis on the role of Christ as the Anointed One, and in this greeting he particularly emphasizes the fact that Christ is our “hope”, as in Colossians 1:27, where Paul refers to Christ as “the hope of Glory”. The inference is that Paul was reminding Timothy of the urgency and the finality of a man’s choices where eternity was concerned. There is no hope for man apart from Jesus Christ, period. None. Either a person comes to God on God’s terms (through His Son, Jesus Christ), or he does not come to God at all. And except a man be born again and come to God, he cannot see the Kingdom of Heaven. Christ is not a hope. Christ is The Hope. Oh, that we might live in these latter days as though that truth were a reality to us.

One thing you have to like about Paul is that even though he followed the somewhat “gushy” customs of his day in addressing people, once he got to the point, he got to the point, and in this letter, he gets to the point immediately.

The point is that heresy has invaded the Ephesian church, and unless something is done, the work of the Gospel will be shipwrecked in its infancy. Hence, his immediate instructions to young Tim. It reads:

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer

nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God’s work--which is by faith.

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk.

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They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. (I Timothy 1:3-7)

COMMAND CERTAIN MEN

Very quickly now, Paul hurries into the meat of his letter. There is a sense of urgency throughout this entire epistle, and the quickness with which Paul addresses the issues without many of the additional formalities that are so common, is further proof of the seriousness of the problems facing this young man and this young church. He begins:

“As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.”

The words “urged” and “command” bear looking at first. The word “urged” is translated “besought” in the King James Bible. It is an entreating word, rather than a harsh order, but it is a strong entreaty. The Greek word is (parakaleo) and a literal translation would be “to beg”. It sounds a bit as though Tim might have had plans for himself other than remaining behind in Ephesus. Perhaps he wanted to accompany Paul to Macedonia. We don’t know. But it is clear that Paul graciously but firmly said, “No, Tim, you stay here.” And now he is reminding the lad of both that request and the reason for it. One translator uses the phrase,

“I am writing to you now to reinforce the plea that I already made to you when I urged you to stay in Ephesus, while I went to Macedonia.”

Now he reminds Timothy why he had to stay in Ephesus. It was because there were wolves sniffing around the flock, trying to devour it with false doctrines. His reference is to “certain men”. That means that both he and Tim knew who those men were. They were specific violators of the Truth. He doesn’t name them. He doesn’t need to. But there are specific men who already are in the process of destroying the flock. How are they doing it?

“They are teaching ‘other’ doctrines. Tell them to stop it at once.”

Tell them, in no uncertain terms, that any doctrine that is not consistent with what you and I know to be truth is not fair game. They don’t need to hear it, so nobody needs to preach it. The literal meaning of the word is “doctrine of a different kind”.

Now at this point in time, Paul makes a series of statements that fundamentally give us a formula for determining what is, and what isn't, acceptable doctrine. The strange thing is that Satan's activities in the church have not changed a great deal. He has dressed them up, polished them a bit, and changed the language to conform to the age in which we live; but basically "The New Age Movement" and all of the cults of these latter days are only slightly disguised versions of the same lies the deceiver has always told. He was a liar from the beginning and the father of lies.

But remember, he often bases his lies on truth. He does not immediately call God a liar. Remember the encounter in the garden? No, he first raises unanswerable questions, and then takes something God actually said and twists it just enough to destroy grace and dethrone Jesus. It will often be couched in religious, even Biblical terminology. And it will sound plausible, even practical. It will just be...a lie.

The word "command" can be translated "give them an order not to teach those lies anymore". Paul was gracious, but he was not apologetic for church discipline. You don't apologize to a wolf when you see it about to pounce on your loved one. You don't say, "Forgive me, Mr. Wolf, but it would really grieve my heart a lot if you ate my wife". You would go after Mr. Wolf and stand between him and that loved one whatever the cost to you personally, because you recognized danger, whether that one you were protecting did or not.

Paul, here, is recognizing wolves in sheep's clothing, even though the flock may have been totally unaware of their presence or their danger. One reason God placed pastors and elders over the flock was to "guard" the sheep, lest wolves devour them.

Paul specifically declares war on four kinds of satanic lies that were being preached from the pulpit of the Ephesian church. Now mind you, these were lies masqueraded as Christian doctrine. The Ephesians were being exhorted, using the Scriptures as their basis, to believe these things. The four lies and their modern counterparts might look something like this:



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<b>Complaint</b>	<b>Verse</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>	<b>Modern Counterpoint</b>
False doctrine	Verse 3	Teachings which deny or diminish grace	All forms of legalism
Myths	Verse 4	Whatever men add to the gospel as truth	Liberalism; raising unanswered questions
Genealogies	Verse 4	Placing intermediaries between man and God	Any religion or cult that deifies man or angels
Meaningless talk	Verse 6	Failure to teach the basic truths, while affirming them	Traditionalism; those who claim to be what they aren't

Paul divides the offenses into four categories: false doctrines, myths or fables, genealogies, and meaningless talk. Today they might be likened to legalism, liberalism, traditionalism, and the cults that make gods out of either men or angels. All are vicious lies, masqueraded as Biblical reality. And all exist today in updated progressively acceptable forms. We will, in a later lesson, explain more in detail how these groups have moved into today's religious culture, and we will look in our next lesson at Paul's alternative, or the positive side of the "gospel according to Paul".

For today, however, we must close by coming to understand the gravity of the situation in Ephesus and the gravity of the situation in our world today, as well.

Paul had covered the gamut of Biblical heresy in a few short sentences. He had sized up the enemy's battle plan and capsulized it so that Timothy could easily see through these so-called "teachers" who wanted to portray themselves as the expounders of truth; but in essence, Paul says, they don't know what they're talking about, even though (verse 7) they speak with arrogant authority.

The evident enemy in the Ephesian church was a combination of Gnosticism and Judaism. The real enemy in the Ephesian church was Satan, who determined that by slightly altering the

truth, he could derail the Gospel express, parking it on a side track, still visible and in sight, but not going anywhere. That's still his goal.

Gnosticism was only in its early stages, but even then it was deadly. The Gnostic believed that all matter was essentially evil and that spirit alone was good. He believed that matter was eternal as well; and that when God created the world, He had to use this essentially evil matter. That meant that God could not have physically been the divine creator, as we know it, because He could not touch this flawed matter. So He had to send out a series of emanations, they believed, until they got so far removed from God that He could deal with matter and then create the world. The logical next step was, that if matter was evil, the body was evil. From this came two opposite heretical philosophies.

One said that the body, with all of its desires and instincts, was evil, so it must be held in check at any cost. This led to severe asceticism. The other extreme was, that if the body were evil, it didn't matter what you did in the flesh; the spirit was all that mattered. This led to amoral behavior. Nothing you did with the body was relevant; therefore, there were no limits.

From this line of thinking, then, it proceeded to assume that there would be no such thing as the resurrection of the body. It was a kind of theology that spawned intellectual arrogance, immorality, and legalism, all in one package. But Paul made it clear that the legalistic portion of their doctrines had Jewish roots. This was possible, for often the Gnostics and the Judaists joined hands; the Gnostics looking to climb a ladder of ancestry to get back to God, the Jews holding on to the heritage of their ancestors as the basis for their righteousness.

One thing we must realize is that the evident symptoms of this kind of theological maneuvering were of eternal significance, and they would ever be with us until Jesus comes again.

They were characterized by four basic evidences of spiritual sickness, yet disguised as spiritual truth. Those four were:

1- Pride. These men had the only answers. Their gospels became increasingly exclusive. Verse 7 says, "they want to be known as teachers of the law (as experts), though they really aren't." Their pride is in the office, not in the truth. In chapter 6, verse 4, Paul describes these men as "proud, knowing nothing, but delighting in controversy".

2- Constant contention. They were contentious men, always stirring up strife, creating divisions through what Paul calls “speculative intellectualism”, they delighted in producing questions, not answers. Read I Timothy 1:4, 6:4, II Timothy 2:14, and Titus 3:9. This was characteristic of their theology, and it left the church always in a state of disarray, for the believer was not preoccupied with serving in love, but with digging out new theological insights that had no real answers and no real bearing on eternity.

3- They were driven by a desire to present something new. Their theology had to undergo continual change until they came up with something that caught the fancy of the people, and then they would build upon that erroneous foundation other doctrines as well.

4- They were often overtaken with the temptation to profit from their popularity. According to I Timothy 6:5, and Titus 1:11, they saw gain as godliness, as God’s hand of blessing on their ministry.

The end result was a church filled with factions, fiction, and frustration, ever driven to acquire more knowledge, never driven to humility before God that demanded Lordship. New information took the place of eternal transformation, and the doctrines they espoused were doctrines that tantalized the flesh, either in some form of uninhibited freedom or some kind of legalistic straitjacket to salve its guilt. Both were wrong, and both denied the basic premise of salvation, which is grace, and the basic requirement of the Christian faith, which is Jesus plus nothing. And if left to itself, the church was headed for Disaster Gulch by way of Heresy Parkway. And it would only be a matter of months.

So Paul’s message, through Timothy, to this young church was singular: “Get back to the basics”. Stop listening to those who would lead you astray. The answers aren’t in legalism, liberalism, traditionalism, or fanaticism. The answer is in the person of Jesus Christ.

Here it is: “love, which comes from a pure heart, is freed by a clear conscience, and is utterly genuine in its faith.” (verse 5). That’s Paul’s antidote for the serum of heresy. In our next study, we will examine those words one by one.

For now, however, ought we not to reexamine the emphasis of our spiritual lives in the light of the opening words of this epistle?

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It isn't how much we know that interests God; it's how much what we know has changed us that interests God. Man, left to himself, will always have "itching ears" for something new and a driving desire to become proud of how much he knows.

But man, inhabited by and controlled by God, will be characterized by a deep sense of humility, a servant heart, a transparent spirit, and a pure life. He won't be "ever-learning, never coming to a knowledge of the truth". He will be ever spending time in the presence of his God, and ever breathing His Word into his life.

Apparently it doesn't take long for a church or an individual to be led off course. It didn't take the Ephesians long. And the lies they bought have been all dressed up in 20th century jargon and reintroduced into our society as a new kind of truth.

Paul said, "Dear Tim, these guys are off course. Tell them to stop it. Now."

That's message number one from the gospel according to Paul. It is a sobering message, indeed.

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