

CARING FOR YOUNG CHRISTIANS

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

Nothing is more exciting than the birth of a new baby. Excitement and love flood your house. Mom and dad spend hours watching their new baby sleep and eat, which is about all a newborn does. When bedtime arrives, excitement and love fill your home. At bedtime it's perfectly normal to peek and make sure the baby is safe. It really takes a lot of special, and deliberate care.

Similarly, when new believers are born into God's family, they need deliberate, specially developed care. Indeed if new believers do not receive strong follow-up, it's probable many of them will drop completely out of fellowship with the church. It cannot be overly emphasized: the church must take its responsibility to nurture new believers seriously.

Nurturing young Christians in the faith is precisely what Paul is writing Timothy about in his correspondences with him. The young church which Timothy had been assigned to serve was filled with new converts to the Christian faith. Timothy had a difficult job for sure since so many of the converts came directly out of paganism. False teachers rising up in the church complicated matters significantly. Was Timothy up to the task? Paul surely thought he was.

Therefore, as we begin our study of 1 Timothy, let's follow the outline below:

- I. The Significance of Greeting Young Christians (vv. 1-2)
- II. The Significance of Guarding Young Christians (vv. 3-7)
- III. The Significance of Guiding Young Christians (vv. 8-20)

I. The Significance of Greeting Young Christians (vv. 1-2)

Paul sets the mark high on greeting believers in the faith. Note his opening words to Timothy, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, *which* is our hope; Unto Timothy, *my* own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, *and* peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord" (vv. 1-2). First, Paul writes of the subject of the greeting. He is an "apostle."

The Greek term for "apostle" is *apostolos*, and literally means "messenger" or "one sent." ***Every believer has a mission, a calling from Jesus Christ.***

Paul was a messenger of God sent by Jesus Christ Himself (Acts 9). In one sense, the term "apostle" is to be exclusively used of men like Paul, Peter, John, and James (including all 12 apostles). On the other hand, there is a "loose" sense of the word since all God's children are on a mission; that is, all are sent by God to some extent. Every believer has a mission, a calling from Jesus Christ.

Moreover, Paul specifically identifies his calling by looking backward to God's redeeming work in Jesus Christ, our "Savior" and our "hope." We come to know God as our Savior through Christ's death on the cross. As we look forward, our hope rests in Him.

Next, Paul identifies precisely what Timothy personally means to him—"my own son in the faith." Nothing is more encouraging than to have a part in leading someone to Jesus Christ. Paul was his father so to speak. Earlier in his ministry, Paul had told the Philippians they had "not many fathers" in the faith (Phil. 2:22; cp. 1 Cor. 4:15).



Reflection Connection

Are you able to point to someone in your life that you may call a “son” in the faith? Why or why not?

Since Paul was his spiritual father, he had an awesome responsibility to Timothy. He was obligated to nurture him in the faith.

After Paul explains the *subject* of the greeting to young Timothy, he switches to explaining the *substance* of the greeting. Three words characterize the substance—grace, mercy, peace (v. 2b). On the one hand, grace and peace describe how a Christian begins his or her spiritual life (cp. Eph. 2:9). Grace is God’s unmerited favor to sinful creatures. Grace is God giving what none of us deserve. Peace is the consequence of grace. Peace always follows grace. Indeed it remains impossible to have genuine peace with God unless we have already received grace from God (cp. Rom. 5:1; Heb. 4:16; Phil. 4:7). Furthermore, mercy being a part of God’s grace, in the basis for our peace with God.

II. The Significance of Guarding Young Christians (vv. 3-7)

Not only how we greet new believers into the church remains significant, but also how we guard and protect their spiritual lives. God calls us to develop safety procedures to nurture their spiritual lives no less than natural parents are responsible to nurture their newborns. Paul writes, “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (v. 3).

The Apostle was giving Timothy a spiritual pep talk—“abide still.”

In other words, Timothy was to hang tough and not give up. Timothy’s church was on fire. Undoubtedly, souls were being saved daily from the powerful preaching Timothy proclaimed. Such a scenario is not uncommon even today. Young pastors arrive in town. The church he came to lead is old, tired, and very much inactive. However, the fiery passion the young preacher

produces as he preaches, visits, and tirelessly works pays spiritual dividends the church has not seen in a long, long time. The church is alive again!

Nevertheless, the job is not over when people are saved; they must also be nurtured and developed like newborn babies. And, young children need perhaps most of all to be guarded. False teachers inevitably attempt to rob God’s Kingdom of a new Christian’s usefulness (cp. 3 John 4). Paul told Timothy that new converts to the faith need two significant elements if they were to be guarded well.

First, new believers must have the *right message*. He insisted that Timothy was to make sure he and others “teach no other doctrine” (v. 3; cp. 6:3). The Greek word for “teach no other” is *heterodidaskaleo*, which means to not deviate from the truth. Paul predicted that false teachers would arise in Ephesus and go

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after the young church (Acts 20:29). Hence, Paul was putting a hedge around acceptable, authoritative teaching. Scholars today call the body of authoritative writing the *Canon* (all 66 books of the Old and New Testament).

Furthermore, Paul wrote, “Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: *so do*” (v. 4). Many from Jewish backgrounds had been converted to faith in Christ. And, they attempted to bring their Jewish legends and myths over into the teaching of the church. Paul reminded Timothy to avoid such false teaching which could not sustain a person’s spiritual need.

One particular obsession in the first century was with genealogies. Jewish teachers tended to create stories of heroism for virtually every name on each genealogical list in the Old Testament. Paul calls this empty rhetoric. He writes, “From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling; Desiring to be teachers of the law; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm” (vv. 6-7). While Timothy should avoid empty pursuits and vain questions, he should nonetheless encourage sincere questions (v. 4).

Second, new believers must have the *right motive*. Paul writes, “Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned” (v. 5). The “end” of God’s commandments, Paul concludes, is love. It is vitally important how we are taught for such teaching determines how we live.

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Generally speaking, three options exist in our approach to living morally. First, there is *legalism*. Legalists attempt to follow hard and fast rules for every situation. Many times legalists treat the Bible as if it is a reference encyclopedia. The problem is, many decisions we face do not have a direct verse which speaks to it. Hence, legalists tend to “make up” rules, consequently adding to God’s Word.

Secondly, there is *license*. Those who approach life from this perspective often are exactly the extreme opposite of legalists. In other words, whereas legalists add to God’s Word since no verse or passage speaks directly to their circumstances, those who embrace license tend to take away from God’s Word, avoiding many passages which directly speak to their circumstances. Consequently, they end up with morally loose lives.

Thirdly, there is the way of *love*. While love takes very seriously the direct commands of Jesus, those who embrace love attempt to apply Scriptural principles with a balance of both mercy and justice. Each approach depends on the type of teaching one gets. Timothy had to understand this if he were to develop the young believers; so do we.

Reflection Connection

Take a moment and consider the approach which best describes your life—legalism, license, or love. Be honest.

It’s tempting to overlook our weaknesses. Just because one is a legalist does not mean he or she is not saved. Rather it means there is still work for the Holy Spirit to do in one’s life!



In addition, a “good conscience” comes with solid teaching on Biblical “faith.” Believers must learn to live guilt-free lives because they continually confess their sins and live close to Christ (cp. Acts 24:16). The ideal is a “pure heart” free from all wrong desires and ungodly motives.

III. The Significance of Guiding Young Christians (vv. 8-20)

How we greet new believers into the church will matter little if we do not guard them from false teaching. However, the best guard is not to analyze false teaching; as helpful as that may be at times. Some Christian ministries exist solely to expose error. The problem is, just because error is shown to be wrong, it does not mean one is automatically taught what is right. We must be proactive in developing and teaching right doctrine, for it is only truth which can set us free (cp. John 8:32). In short, young Christians must be guided by “sound doctrine.” By “sound” Paul means healthy or wholesome teaching (cp. 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1).

First, Paul makes his case by affirming the law is good. Contrary to those who embrace license, Paul did not throw out the value of moral principles and ethical rules. Hear him once again: “But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully; Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers” (vv. 8-10). The key is, we are “sinners” and have need of moral boundaries. Hence the Law is good if used properly (cp. Gal. 3:24).

As unbelievers, the law showed us our need for a Savior. In that sense, the law never shows us how good we are but how bad we are! It exposes the “lawless,” “disobedient,” and the “profane.” In addition, the law gives us three lessons:

- *Lessons about what we should not do*
- *Lessons about what we have not done*
- *Lessons about what we cannot do*

Looked at from this perspective, therefore, the law is good for us. It acts both as a *mirror* to reflect our unholy, morally ugly image, and a *schoolmaster* to tutor us in what the right thing to do is.

Second, Paul makes his case by affirming the Gospel is glorious. He writes, “According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust” (v. 11). Paul offers the single remedy for a sin-sick soul—the Lord Jesus Christ. Why is the Gospel glorious? Because it is good news about a glorious Savior, a powerful Savior Who can save anybody. The Gospel is glorious because anyone may experience its glorious power to transform a sinful heart. It brings the very glory of God into one’s soul. Salvation is glorious because salvation is rooted in a glorious God!

Third, Paul makes his case by affirming the power of a transformed life (vv. 12-20). Paul was not an armchair theologian interested in theories and abstract principles. Instead he drove home the truth of his Gospel by offering what has no comparable substitute—*his own changed life*. Men may argue endlessly about theory but men cannot deny heart transformation, true Biblical conversion.



Paul powerfully testifies, “And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry; Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did *it* ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (vv. 12-16).

In these verses is a vital key to guiding young believers. Paul’s faith is on display for everyone to examine. And, if Timothy is to both guard and guide his ever-growing church, he must learn to be the spiritual mentor Paul had become. Three ingredients are necessary.

First, Paul testifies as a thankful servant (vv. 12-14). He describes the man he is, the man he has become since Christ lit up his life. “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,” he shamelessly proclaims. Why? The Lord *called* him. In this section, he mentions “me” three times. Not because he is being selfish, however. Rather he cannot get over the absolute mercy and grace bestowed upon a sinner such as himself; in his words, the “chief of sinners” (v. 15). God called him, “putting him into the ministry,” serving the Lord Jesus. Such a spiritual thrill stirs the hardest heart! God appointed Paul to serve Him. He did no less for Timothy nor for us.

Additionally, God not only called him, but “enabled” him. He clothed Paul with the adequate strength and gifts to do exactly what He desired. No believer is called by God to do what he or she lacks in either ability or gifting. If power is vacuous or gifts are lacking in doing a particular Christian ministry, one is right to question whether or not God has placed a call to do the ministry. God calls *and* equips for the service He desires us to accomplish. God chooses; God entrusts; God enables. What a glorious God we serve! Paul was a living, breathing example of what a transformed man is—a *thankful servant*.

Second, Paul testifies as a terrible sinner. He had not always been the thankful servant. After testifying about the man he is, Paul speaks about the man he was—“who was before...” The transformation in Paul’s life could not be mistaken. It was the equivalent of black/white polarities, the difference between night and day so to speak. A three-fold description unfolds. He begins with his status as a “blasphemer.”

The term comes from a word which means “to speak evil against.” Did Paul blaspheme God? In one sense he did not. In fact, he firmly believed he was serving God, even when he persecuted to the death Christian believers (Acts 8:1-5; 9:1). In another sense, he was surely “speaking evil” against both the

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Reflection Connection

Reflect on your spiritual journey. Are you able to pinpoint a time in your life which separates the person you used to be from the person you now are? Explain.



church and Jesus whom the church followed. The resurrected, ascended Lord Jesus personally spoke to Paul (then Saul), “I am Jesus whom thou persecutest...” (Acts 9:5).

Hence, Paul also speaks of his status as a “persecutor.” At one point, he mentions himself as “exceedingly mad” against the church (Acts 26:11). Paul’s heart was once enflamed by hatred, vengeance, and punishment against everything he had come to love. He was, therefore, “injurious” to himself and all with whom he was in contact. He was on a train headed for hell!

The man he was before Christ is not the man he is after Christ. Perhaps the sweetest words from the Apostle’s heart are captured by his phrase, “but I obtained mercy”! Nothing can argue down a transformation like Paul’s. Indeed nothing possesses more fuel in guiding young believers than following after a worthy model in Christian discipleship. If Timothy was to properly develop the young believers in his church, he would need to model the Christian life like no other. Indeed young believers could have no greater mentoring than the mentoring of a godly model as a guide. The same principle holds as true today as it did then.

Third, Paul testifies to a triumphant Savior. The man he was is not the man he is. The reason? The message he now proclaims the world over, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (v. 15). Paul knew if God could save him, He could save anybody. In fact, he employs himself as a mold, a pattern for the world to examine. He writes, “Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting” (v. 16). The Greek term translated “pattern” is *hypotypōsis*, and refers to a sketch or pencil drawing an artist might use to paint the entire picture. The sketch serves as a “pattern” to keep the artist focused on the boundaries of the work. Hence, Paul is God’s pencil drawing, a sketch so to speak which serves as a rule of thumb for any sinner no matter how terrible the sinner may be. If God can transform the “chief of sinners” God can transform anybody!

No wonder Paul ends the section on a note of praise to a *triumphant Savior*, “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen” (v. 17). Afterwards, Paul exhorts Timothy to continue fighting a good fight (v. 18), ever being on guard against those who, like the man he used to be, blasphemed the work of God (vv. 19-20).

Golden Greek Nugget

Paul speaks of two men—Hymenaeus and Alexander—whom he “delivered unto Satan” because of their blasphemy (v. 20). They had “made shipwreck” their faith (v. 19). The Greek term translated “have made shipwreck” is *nauage*, and comes from two other Greek words meaning “ship” and “to break.” Flowing from that, the term implied being stranded. Hymenaeus and Alexander were stranded in their faith. Paul makes no indication whether the men were saved but out of fellowship with God or spiritually lost at sea so to speak. Whatever their spiritual condition, they had become a liable nuisance to the Gospel. Hence, Paul says he “delivered them to Satan.”

Wrap Up

In this study, we have heard Paul’s counsel to a young pastor struggling to develop the spiritual lives of new believers. Paul’s divine advice given was three-fold: learn to greet the new believers; learn to guard the new believers; learn to guide the new believers. Many approaches to developing new Christians can be assembled from various resources in every Christian bookstore. However, no greater strategy exists than the three-fold strategy Paul reveals to nurture new believers in the faith.

