

Proposition: The battle for the truth involves two things, according to 1 Timothy 1:1-4.

- I. The battle involves people (1-2).
 - A. We meet Paul (1).
 1. He knew the Lord's call.
 2. He lived by the Lord's command.
 - B. We meet Timothy (2).
 1. This letter was for his benefit.
 2. It was also for the church's benefit.
- II. The battle involves a problem (3-4).
 - A. We learn about the threat of false teachers (3).
 1. The Word of God is under attack.
 2. The attack is often very subtle.
 - B. We learn about the tactics of false teachers (3b-4a).
 1. Truth can be diluted by subtraction.
 2. Truth can also be diluted by addition.
 - C. We learn about the tendencies of false teachers (4b).
 1. They promote controversies.
 2. They prevent the work of God.

Implication: A sure way to kill a church is to allow non-biblical teaching.

1. Resolution #1: I resolve to cherish God's Word.
2. Resolution #2: I resolve to reject all substitutes.

Some time ago I ran across the following account.¹ "Early in World War II, British commanders realized they were out-gunned by the German army. They also determined that a massive, surprise attack would be necessary to defeat the enemy. To help conceal their weakness and achieve the element of surprise, the Allied army created an elaborate system of camouflage and decoys.

Carpenters, artists, and painters built a fleet of ships, aircraft, guns, and airfields all from lumber, canvas, plaster, and chicken wire. They also made scores of life-size inflatable tanks, complete with gun turrets and authentic paint schemes.

Decoy airfields had working lights, ships had working smokestacks, and floating troop carriers even had crew laundry hanging to dry on deck. Once complete, the decoys were placed away from key targets so enemy planes would spot, report, and attack them rather than targets of real value.

The German army also used decoys, but not without problems. In his book Masquerade, writer Seymour Reit tells of one German failure that became legendary among pilots:

"The German "airfield," constructed with meticulous care, was made almost entirely of wood. There were wooden hangars, oil tanks, gun emplacement, trucks, and aircraft. The Germans took so long in building their wooden decoy that Allied photo experts had more than enough time to observe and report it. The day finally came when the decoy was finished, down to the last wooden plank. And early in the following morning a lone [British] plane crossed the Channel, came in low, circled the field once, and dropped a large wooden bomb."

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹John MacArthur, *Grace to You* newsletter, 6/16/97

We may chuckle at the thought of using chicken wire ships and rubber tanks, but the fact is, decoys work. I've read that thousands of tons of bombs were wasted on fake targets in WWII.

Noted pastor and author, John MacArthur, offers this insight: "There's an interesting philosophy behind decoys. They're not meant to choke off information from an enemy. Just the opposite, they feed your opponent a generous stream of tainted facts that conceal your true picture and paint a false one. Whether they cause him to overestimate your strength, attack bogus targets, or lower his guard, decoys cause your enemy to squander valuable time, resources, and energy."

MacArthur continues: "I believe our enemy is using the same tactic in his fight against today's church. As the father of lies, Satan is a master of decoys. Ones that tempt us to trust his word over God's. Ones that lead us to believe anything but what is entirely true about God. Ones that prompt us to overestimate our strength and underestimate God's. Ones that entice us to doubt what God says about creation, human nature, redemption, justification, sanctification, and Himself."

Beloved, he's right. A battle is raging today, a battle for the truth, a battle for *God's* truth, God's Word, the Scriptures.

There's little room for truth in these days of tolerance. Many people want to hear what makes them *feel good*. Truth is popular only if it results in helping us *feel good*. That mentality has even invaded the church: "Oh, I like hearing God's Word, but only if it makes me feel good. If it makes me feel uncomfortable, I'll go somewhere else." When a person thinks that way, they've just fallen for one of Satan's decoys.

What must we do if we are to win in this battle for the truth? We'll find out this morning from 1 Timothy 1.

Today we're embarking on a new journey, a walk through Paul's first epistle to Timothy. Our trek will take us about six months to complete (or so!). Interestingly, the book begins with instructions for helping a church that was plagued by decoys. Here's what we're going to observe in this study. The battle for the truth involves two things, according to 1 Timothy 1:1-4.

I. The battle involves people (1-2).

1 Timothy is a very personal letter, written by Paul (1) to his junior associate, Timothy (2). Timothy was serving as a leader in the church at Ephesus (3), a church in which Paul invested three years of his life (Acts 20:31).

It was eight years later that Paul wrote this first epistle to Timothy, after the events of Acts 28, after his release from prison in Rome, and during his fourth missionary journey (which is not recorded in Scripture). The date was approximately A.D. 63-65.

Don't miss the fact that the Ephesian church was a fairly established church. It had been in existence for some eleven years, had enjoyed Paul's pulpit ministry for at least three of those years, and had already received the letter we call *Ephesians* (around A.D. 60), one of Paul's "meatiest" of letters.

Timothy's assignment in Ephesus was quite different from the one Paul gave Titus in Crete. Titus was working with a brand new church full of baby Christians--his chief task was to get things in order and appoint elders to lead the churches there (Tit. 1:5). But Timothy was working with a church that already had leaders (Acts 20:17 speaks of an earlier incident where Paul sent for the Ephesian elders).

This was a church that had much going for it. But it needed some help to "get over the hump." That help came in the person of Timothy. Paul told Timothy in verse 3, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus." Stay in Ephesus. What for? The key verses of 1 Timothy (3:14-15) tell us: "Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God."

The Ephesian church had grown to the point where it needed some purposeful organization. That's what Paul addresses in this letter, and that's what Timothy was to implement in the church. That's why as you scan the book you'll discover answers to questions like these:

In chapter two--What are churches supposed to do in worship services? What place should prayer have? What are the roles of men and women in the church? What kind of dress is appropriate for worship?

In chapter three--How does a church pick its leaders? Remember, the first set of leaders had been appointed by Paul and Barnabas a decade earlier (Acts 14:23). But Paul and Barnabas were gone. Now the church needed to know how to choose its future leaders. Who's qualified to serve as overseers and deacons?

In chapters four and five--How do established churches deal with false teachers? What should it expect of its pastors? What about benevolent ministries, such as caring for widows? What financial responsibility does a church have to its teaching elders? What should a church do when an elder sins?

In chapter six--What should church members do if they have Christian employers? Or non-Christian employers? What about money? How should churches treat members who have lots of money?

Yes, 1 Timothy is a practical, hands-on type book for churches. I am excited about what this study can mean for us. Wheelersburg Baptist Church is not a new church (120 years and counting!). We are an established church, yet we're facing new challenges. What kind of a church does God want us to be? 1 Timothy can show an established church how to be revitalized, how to move to the next level of kingdom effectiveness.

With that overview, let's talk about the battle. To understand the battle, we need to meet the players.

A. We meet Paul (1). "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." The author is Paul. So much could be said about him--the fact that he wrote nearly half of the books of the NT, and that was perhaps the greatest missionary who ever lived--yet let's consider what he says about himself here. In his introductory remarks, we learn two things about this great servant of Christ.

1. *He knew the Lord's call.* "Paul, an *apostle* of Christ Jesus." Why does Paul use that title in a personal letter to Timothy? Why not, "Paul, your friend," or "Paul, your co-worker?" For one reason, this was no ordinary letter from one chap to another. These words aren't merely suggestions from a buddy. This is inspired, God-breathed counsel from an "apostle."

The verb *apostello* means "to send off on a commission to do something as one's personal representative, with credentials furnished" (Wuest, 22). We could translate the word "apostle" as "envoy," or "ambassador," someone who goes on a mission bearing the credentials of the one who sent him (MacArthur, 4).

In a general sense, an apostle was a person who was sent to carry the gospel to sinners. In this broad sense, the Bible calls several people apostles: Barnabas (Acts 14:14), Epaphroditus (Phil. 2:25), James the Lord's brother (Gal. 1:19), and possibly Andronicus and Junius (Rom. 16:7).

But in a more restricted sense, "apostle" refers to the Twelve and Paul, men commissioned by Christ Himself. They were personal eyewitnesses of the works and words of the resurrected Jesus. And significantly, apostles were specially gifted by the Holy Spirit to receive and impart divine truth (John 14:26). The church is built on the foundation of the apostle's doctrine (Acts 2:42; Eph. 2:20).

So this is no ordinary letter. It comes from an apostle, a man who was commissioned by Christ and gifted by the Spirit with the task of revealing divine truth. That was his call.²

2. *He lived by the Lord's command.* "Paul an apostle of Christ Jesus *by the command of God* our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope." How did Paul become an apostle? Did he volunteer? No. He was under the call and command of God Himself, specifically "God our Savior [a repeated theme in the pastoral epistles] and Christ Jesus our hope." Remember that in a few moments when we hear the strong tone of Paul's words. He did what he did because of the command of God.

By the way, is that true of you? Do you live by God's commands or something else? A lot of turmoil in churches, in homes, and in our personal lives could be eliminated if we nail down this commitment: "I'm going to submit my life to the Lord's command."

B. We meet Timothy (2). "To Timothy my true son in the faith: grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord." Why did Paul call Timothy "my true son in the faith?" Elsewhere he calls him "my fellow worker" (Rom. 16:21), and "servant of Christ" (Phil. 1:1). Why in this letter does Paul refer to him as "my true son?" For two reasons.

1. *This letter was for his benefit.* Timothy was Paul's #1 right-hand man. By this time, he had served with Paul for 15 years. He had a very close relationship with the apostle. Of the 13 NT letters that Paul penned, he lists Timothy as co-sender of 6 of them, and two were written directly to him. In fact, Timothy is mentioned in all of Paul's letters except three (Galatians, Ephesians, and Titus).

Timothy's background is quite interesting. He was born to a mixed marriage: his father was a Greek, his mother a Jew (Acts 16:1), the diversity of which opened doors of ministry to both cultures. He learned the Scriptures from his mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:15). But he was converted to Christ under Paul, probably during Paul's first missionary visit to Lystra, his home town (Acts 14:6-7). Later, on Paul's second trip, he recruited Timothy for missionary service (Acts 16:1-3), and their friendship flourished. It's noteworthy that Timothy was with Paul during much of his three-year ministry in Ephesus (Acts 19:22)--Timothy knew the Ephesian church well.

So this personal letter was for Timothy's benefit. But secondly...

2. *It was also for the church's benefit.* How so? The issues Paul addressed in 1 Timothy were going to bring changes to the Ephesian church. Paul could just envision some strong-willed saint getting in Timothy's face (remember Timothy was a timid fellow

²There are no longer "apostles" today in this sense of the term. The foundation is complete (Heb. 2:3-4; 2 Cor. 12:12).

anyway; 2 Tim. 1:7), and objecting, "Hold on, young man! What right do you have to change things around here? Who authorized this?!" To which Timothy could pull out his marching orders and reply, "These aren't my ideas. These have come from someone sent by the Lord, an apostle, Paul himself!"

Paul calls Timothy, "My *true* son in the faith." The term means "legitimate child, one born in wedlock." Timothy was a legitimate, genuine son in the faith. That could not be said of everyone who sat under Paul's ministry (see 1:20). That's why there was a battle for the truth in the church.

"Grace, mercy, and peace." A standard greeting. Timothy would need all three in dealing with things in Ephesus, and he had what he needed: grace (God's undeserved favor and help), mercy (the fact that God doesn't give us what we deserve), and peace (the result of God's grace and mercy; shalom; harmony with God in life).

II. The battle involves a problem (3-4).

It's interesting that agenda item #1 for Timothy, indeed for any established church, is dealing with people who teach things other than the Word of God. We learn three things about the problem facing Timothy, in verses 3-4.

A. We learn about the threat of false teachers (3). "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 long." The threat of false teachers is nothing new. Paul states, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia."

The implication is that following his release from prison in Rome (Acts 28), Paul spent some time ministering with Timothy in Ephesus. Apparently, he left Ephesus to go to Macedonia (as part of his fourth missionary journey?). But before he left Ephesus, he urged Timothy to stay. I think the wording indicates Timothy wasn't too keen about the idea--he wasn't a fighter by nature; controversy took its toll on him. But Paul needed him to remain. The *church* needed him to remain. Why? To deal with the threat of false teachers.

It's possible that Paul had already taken care of the ringleaders. Notice verses 19-20, "Some have rejected these and so have shipwrecked their faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme." Paul had kicked these two ringleaders out of the church, but he was fearful of the damage they'd already caused in the church. So he left Timothy behind. Timothy wasn't the pastor of the church (in my opinion)--the church already had teaching elders (i.e. pastors). Nor was he an apostle. Timothy was an apostolic representative, a local church troubleshooter. And there certainly was trouble brewing in the establishment at Ephesus. Verse 3 highlights two important lessons for us.

1. *The Word of God is under attack.* Since the first century to this day, it's true.

2. *The attack is often very subtle.* Perhaps you're thinking, "Ah, come on, now. We don't face the threat of false teachers, do we? We've got a doctrinal statement!" To answer that, let's look at a second item relating to the problem.

B. We learn about the tactics of false teachers (3b-4a). "I urged you...stay there in Ephesus so that you may command [a strong term] certain men ["some" in the KJV; indicates that the false teachers were few in number, but big in potential damage; they were not outsiders, but quite likely elders in the church who had drifted--remember Paul

warned the elders of that potential in Acts 20:30]." The text continues: "Not to teach false doctrines any longer, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies."

Frankly, there are two ways to dilute truth. If I take a jar of lemonade, I can dilute it in two ways--one is by subtraction (add less lemonade concentrate), the other is by addition (keep adding water). Both ways will dilute the lemonade. So with truth.

1. *Truth can be diluted by subtraction.* That's the easiest false teacher to spot--the one who subtracts from the Bible, the apostate who denies the fundamentals. That was happening in Ephesus by men such as Hymenaeus and Alexander. But...

2. *Truth can also be diluted by addition.* This, apparently, was also happening in Ephesus. Yes, some false teachers teach false doctrine (they're described in verse 3). But some don't deny the truth; they just crowd it out with non-biblical "junk" (as described in verse 4).

They "devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." Commentators speculate what Paul has in mind here. The Roman world was full of teachers who loved to speculate about life's issues with romantic tales and fables. The gnostics did that. But there's perhaps a Jewish element here, too. In first century Judaism, there was considerable interest in family pedigree (or genealogy). They used the OT, but not in the way God intended. They used the Scriptures to come up with legends and allegories about the patriarchs. For instance, the Book of Jubilees is full of "mania for family trees," as commentator J.N.D Kelley puts it (pp. 44-5).

What were these false teachers actually teaching? It's hard to say--we'll learn more next week in verses 6-7, and later in chapter 4. It's easier to conclude what they *weren't* teaching than what they were--they *weren't* teaching the Word of God.

A question: Which kind of false teacher is the most dangerous--the person who dilutes God's truth by subtraction or addition? The teacher who blatantly attacks the Bible, or the one who ignores it? The pastor who openly denies the existence of hell, or the one who spends so much time on peripheral issues that he never talks about hell? The Sunday School teacher who outright questions the virgin birth of Jesus, or the one who's always chasing rabbit trails and fails to teach his students the whole counsel of God's Word? Which is more dangerous? I think the latter, because it's easy to spot and deal with the blatant critic, but what dealing with a teacher who says he believes the Bible but chooses to teach everything but the Bible is like trying to pin down a wet, water melon seed.

I mentioned that Satan uses "decoys" at the beginning of our study. Listen to another observation by John MacArthur about decoys (newsletter):

"One obvious decoy Satan has used to exploit the church and weaken our defenses is psychology's rise to power. Psychology is the perfect decoy. It obscures the sufficiency of God's Word, convinces believers that His resources can't solve complex problems, and slips in an unbiblical alternative. An alternative that supplants effective spiritual resources with ones that look real but only weaken us. Spiritual canvas and chicken wire."

"The fallout has been devastating. People with marital conflicts or common problems like anger, anxiety, jealousy, and lust now believe their only hope is professional intervention. While few churches would deny Scripture's ability to address our spiritual needs, many still lean heavily on psychological principles, or worse, hand over the 'complex' cases to secular counselors."

"As a result, believers are not only missing the joy and blessing the biblical solutions offer, but also compounding their problems by applying anti-biblical remedies. As with all effective decoys, this one has led to frustration, failure, and the squandering of valuable time and energy."

Perhaps you're thinking, "Pastor, why do you keep warning us about 'Christian Psychology'?" The answer is because so much of it is a subtle erosion of the Truth of God's Word, yet many believers are opening their arms wide and embracing it. It's just as dangerous to make the Bible peripheral as it is to deny it. What's even worse is to take non-biblical, humanistic teaching, sprinkle-coat it with a few Bible verses, and then call it "Christian" counsel. My plea is, "Be careful, beloved, be careful."

What was Timothy supposed to do about it in Ephesus? It's a strong term in verse 3, a military term: "command" ("charge," AV) certain men not to teach." Thirdly...

C. We learn about the tendencies of false teachers (4b). Namely, two...

1. *They promote controversies.* "These promote controversies." Or, as the KJV puts it, they "minister questions rather than godly edifying." Again, it's not just the blatant false teaching that's the problem. It's the subtle preoccupation with non-biblical or *pseudo*-biblical issues. That kind of teaching distracts the church. It causes controversy. It keeps the church from majoring on its greatest treasure, the Word of God.

2. *They prevent the work of God.* "These promote controversy rather than *God's work*--which is by faith." The Greek term is *oikodomian*, and carries the idea of building. Here it refers to what God is building, that is, to God's work or God's saving plan. What is that plan? Paul clarifies, "Which is by faith." That is, God's plan for saving people is by faith. The way God works is through faith in His Son, Jesus, not human works.

Sometimes I'm asked, "Pastor, why don't you preach more on issues?" My response is, "Which ones?" If I pick the issues I think are important (or someone else tells me is important) and preach them week after week, this church will get out of balance. But if I preach the Scriptures, I'll hit the issues God puts on the agenda, and in so doing, I'll promote the "work of God, which is by faith." So what's the point of our study?

Implication: A sure way to kill a church is to allow non-biblical teaching.

A sure way to deform the Body of Christ so that it loses the beauty God intended is to tolerate non-biblical teaching. That's why I want to invite you to make two personal resolutions in response.

1. *Resolution #1: I resolve to cherish God's Word.* Beloved, the battle for the truth continues. The names have changed. Paul and Timothy are in heaven. Now we're on the battlefield, not the Ephesian church. The key to the strength of this church is a mutual commitment from each of us to cherish God's Word.

If you resolve to cherish the Bible, it'll change your life. It may require that you get up 15 minutes earlier so you can spend time in the study of the Scriptures. It may require you to change the way you schedule your weekends, so you can make the public teaching of God's Word a priority. Do you cherish God's Word? If you can't answer "yes" perhaps it's because your relationship with the Lord is out of whack. You need His grace today.

2. *Resolution #2: I resolve to reject all substitutes.* Perhaps there are decoys that have been hindering you from cherishing God's Word. Will you reject those today?