

# Notes for the Ones Called-Out to Meet

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## Passing On The Message: “Unfind” The Unfounded

by Dan Trygg

“I... encouraged you... in order that you might instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrine, <sup>4</sup>nor to hold fast to alleged stories and endless genealogies, which bring about speculative controversies rather than the stewardship of God in faith. <sup>5</sup>Instead, the focal point of the instruction is love out from a clean heart, and a good conscience, and ‘unphony’ faith, <sup>6</sup>...concerning which some people, having lost this aim, have turned off toward empty talk, <sup>7</sup>wishing to be teachers of the Law, not perceiving either what things they speak of, nor concerning what things they constantly assert.” I Timothy 1:3-7

This question of unhealthy doctrine, and the friction it causes, permeates the pastoral epistles, II Peter and the epistle of Jude. **Contending for the true gospel message was a constant struggle Paul had to face.** Galatians and Colossians were specifically addressed to confront heretical teaching, ...and the combating of false apostles is one of the major themes in II Corinthians, as well. From the direct opposition of the religious establishment of Judaism (Acts 4-9), and even of false prophets, like Elymas Bar-Jesus (Acts 13), to the legalistic-minded Judaizers (Acts 15:1-5; Gal. 1:6-9; 4:17-5:12), to the more subtle influence of the philosophies of men, and human traditions, or even including the bold claims of so-called angelic visitations and super-spiritual experiences (Col. 2), **Christianity was born into an environment of controversy and doctrinal assault, and grew up under their continual barrage.** In Acts 20, Paul warned about the attacks that would come from both the non-Christian world around them, as well as from perverting, divisive voices within the Church (cf. Rom. 16:17-20; I Cor. 11:17-19). He had experienced both kinds of attacks, and was well aware of the enemy's strategies (II Cor. 2:11), and also the contentious nature of human flesh (I Cor. 3:1-3; Gal. 5:19-21). **It is out of the crucible of his many years of battle-worn experiences,** as well as from the observations he has made as a successful church planter through this same period of time, **that Paul advised Timothy concerning what was necessary and important to do to ensure health and success in his work** with the church under his oversight.

What was Paul's “fatherly advice”? Timothy was apparently in need of encouragement and counsel. The things Paul has to say to him throughout the letter indicate that he was feeling overwhelmed, and maybe even a bit bullied by others. It was not an easy assignment for him, and Paul's words were designed to motivate him to remain steadfast, and to stay focused on the task at hand. He needed to be strong and confident in the Lord, and stand up for what was right and true, even if it meant that others would be resistant to him (1:18,19; 2:14,15; 3:6,7,11-16; 6:11-13,20,21). **Paul's counsel was twofold: (1.) to “remain on at Ephesus”** -- i.e., “hang in there, don't give up, don't desert your post, stay committed to the task”; **and (2.) to “instruct certain people not to teach strange doctrine”.**

**The Greek word** translated as “instruct” in verse three is the same as the “instruction” Paul refers to in verse 5. It is the word parangellō. It means to “give a charge to”. It is **to give someone a message that they are to keep with them, i.e., to refer to, and to follow in an ongoing sense.** So, while Paul was giving encouragement and advice to Timothy, he was also telling him to give definite, clear, direction to these other people, direction that was *expected to be followed*. The same word was used in Acts 5:28 by the Sanhedrin, the ruling Council of the Jews, when they were upbraiding the apostles for not obeying them, “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name...”. **Clearly, the meaning of this word is not only instruction** (i.e., the mere imparting of information), **but also an expectation of obedience.** This word was used in Acts 16:18, when Paul directed a spirit of divination to come out of a slave girl.

It is significant to note, however, that **of the possible Greek words for “commanding” someone, there are several which were used in secular society by people whose office, position, or person gave them superior claims, rights and privileges to direct others.** These words were used in a secular context of a military commander commanding his troops (Matt. 27:58), or of a master commanding a slave (Mk. 13:34). They were also used in a number of places for Jesus' commanding the disciples, or others, and also of Moses' giving commandments in the Law. **These words, however, are never used of leaders in the Church giving commandments to other believers!** The strongest, most authoritative word picture used of church leaders giving direction to those under their care was *this* word, parangellō, which was used to describe passing along the message and charge of *another* person. It was used for informing someone of the duties and responsibilities inherent in their position, ...responsibilities which had not specifically been determined by the will of the person who passes along these instructions, but *by someone else*. In other words, in the Christian community there was *no evidence of positional hierarchy*, no “bossing around”. There was, however, the passing along of directives which *God* has determined, and which rested on *His* authority. **To “message alongside” someone was to recognize that the origin of the command, and the authority, did not rest in you, but in God.** No one of us is any “better” or “higher” than another, in our own right. **All obedience comes**

from **voluntary agreement and trust**, NOT from a top-down enforcement. Ultimately, however, disobedience to God's message will be addressed by God Himself.

What was it that Timothy was to pass along to "certain people"?

(1.) **"Not to teach strange doctrine"**. If they were to teach, they were to **stick with what they were getting** from Paul and Timothy. Anything divergent, or not the same as that, was not appropriate. There was plenty of good content with which to teach and build people up that did not require getting into new, different, and obscure things.

(2.) **"Nor to hold fast to alleged stories"** -- The Greek word for **"alleged stories"** is **muthos**, from which we derive the English word "myth". What makes something a myth, in the NT Greek sense of the word? One key characteristic is that **a muthos is a narrative or story based on things that are not established fact**. It can take the form of fanciful, poetic ideas, which depart from actual, historical or Biblical fact, ...similar to our common modern-day usage of the term, "myth". Church history has certainly been peppered with teachings and theories based upon an imprecise or fanciful interpretation of a Biblical account.

It is important to see that the Greek word, **muthos**, is **not just about fanciful stories, however**. A **muthos** **may also claim to be factual, but is based upon a secret source of information**, one which often is **not open or available for investigation and confirmation**. This information was known only to the "initiates" in a group, and not freely known to those outside. Many **"alleged stories"** make up the "insider propaganda" of **conspiracy theories**. They tend to be full of "insider" testimonies, or sources of information. This "secret" or almost "forbidden" quality actually adds to the intrigue and the emotional "hook" of such propaganda. **Groups that promote such theories, even though they often have a large number of Christian people in them, are leading people away from the focus that God wants us to have (i.e., agapē) and into suspicions, fear-based opinions and rumors**. They often employ stories that are designed to outrage us, and fuel the fires of both fear and anger to keep us listening to them.

Another common hotbed of this kind of "alleged stories" are groups with an **unhealthy focus on Bible prophecy**. For many years, I have seen individuals and organizations repeatedly employ unestablished rumors and make questionable associations. They are always bringing up some new angle, some new twist, to get people worked up to believe that "the end is at hand". They will often offer special "insider information" to those who will donate to their group, ...and frequently the quality of their "news reports" is *not* based on hard fact, but on allegation, rumor, suspicion, or wishful thinking. **Paul tells Timothy to pass the directive along: "Don't hold on to such things." Stick with what is clearly known and taught**. I know people who have spent countless hours listening to programs, tapes and speakers, reading books and other literature on subjects like these. For what? So that they become promoters of the same claptrap? If they had invested the same time and energy into their pursuit of Jesus, coming to understand the basis of "love from a clean heart, a good conscience, and an unhypocritical faith", they would be very different people today. Instead, they come across as suspicious, judgmental, filled with allegations and stories that seem undocumented and incredulous. They present a very strange image of what a Christian is, ...one often rejected by "outsiders" because of the unhealthy, invalid thinking process, and the suspicious undercurrent of their teachings.

**Another characteristic of both of these kinds of groups is** that, since they rely on sources of information which are not generally available to all, **they create a dependency upon themselves**, instead of on Christ Himself, or on what is clearly and easily available to all. They become the priests, the mediators of the "hidden knowledge", and with this dependency comes an unhealthy amount of power. The apostle Paul noted about the Judaizers, "They eagerly seek you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out, in order that you may seek them" (Gal. 4:17).

(3.) **"Nor to hold fast to... endless genealogies"** -- Focusing on your family heritage, or even spiritual succession, is an irrelevant distraction from what is truly important. Christ removed us from old curses, or even past blessings, in that He has made us a new humanity in Himself, and treats each of us as individuals. Digging around in the past can quickly become another vain distraction from what is to be our true call. Most of the Biblical examples of people who made much of their ancestral roots were the false teachers and opponents of the spokesmen of God (e.g., Jn. 8:33-44). **They tried to use their spiritual pedigree to claim a greater degree of righteousness or spiritual insight than others might have**. "Pedigree" was equal to superior power and a higher rank, in their frame of thinking. Paul, by contrast, purposely made the effort to allow the fruit of his life speak for him, i.e., he let his "walking" do the "talking" (II Cor. 12:6). Even though he could have competed against those who claim any spiritual pedigree (II Cor. 11:16-33; Phil. 3:1-11), he chose to count it as loss for the surpassing sake of knowing Christ.

**These three areas, myths, speculations, and genealogies are distractions from the true stewardship of God, which is to learn to walk in agapē-love**. All three of these areas are somewhat speculative in nature. They have no sound foundation in the Scripture to support their claims. They are built upon unwarranted conclusions, untestable allegations or unreliable assertions. They are baseless, and should not be pursued or delved into. They are to be released, shunned, rejected. "Un-find the unfounded" in the sense of do not hold on to it, or delve into it more. **Focus your time and energy on the clear things, especially those leading to agapē love**.