

CAN ONE PERSON MAKE A DIFFERENCE?

Thinking Right about the Church *Survey of 1 Timothy*



LET'S BEGIN HERE

In 2 Corinthians 2:14–15, the apostle Paul referred to the body of believers as having a “sweet aroma.” In the past few years, unfortunately, the stench of sin has invaded some high-profile ministries, obscuring the fragrance of Christ. Smelling only the rankness, the world has decided that all the church is that way. But the world’s thinking is wrong; there’s still a lot about the church that is fragrant.

Even so, our reputation has been dealt a staggering blow. The body of Christ has become a punching bag for people eager to poke fun. City governments, school boards, and courts seem to have lost their trust in the church as a positive influence. Even Christians are having their doubts.

It’s time to push aside the negative thinking and draw our attention to God’s perspective of His church. He smells the sin, but He also breathes in the sweet aroma of His body of believers. In his first letter to Timothy, Paul highlighted six fragrant qualities that will help us think rightly about the church.



LET'S DIG DEEPER

1. We Are a Body That Is Healthy and Balanced (1 Timothy 1)

Emanating from the first chapter of Paul’s letter are the qualities of health and balance in the church. These characteristics are particularly appealing because we live in a world careening out of control, a world of grotesque extremes.

To a world teetering on the brink, the church offers moral health and spiritual balance. In 1 Timothy 1:3–4, Paul exhorted Timothy to make his church a secure place for frazzled people searching for truth.

Only the church offers these three counterpoints to the messages of a lost society:

- *The goal of our instruction—love:* “The goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1 Timothy 1:5).
- *The core of our message—the gospel:* “It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1:15).
- *The object of our worship—the King eternal:* “Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever” (1 Timothy 1:17).



Quotable

*The church exists
to help those
who hurt to
know that their
greatest source of
strength is God.*

— Charles R. Swindoll



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2. We Are People Committed to Prayer (1 Timothy 2:1–4, 8)

We pride ourselves in our high-tech ability to meet our own needs. Need money right away? No problem—slide the card and out comes the money. Need a quick meal? No problem—pop the package in the microwave and out comes dinner. However, concerning the heart's deeper needs, technology turns us cold. As Paul emphasized in 1 Timothy 2, through prayer, the church is ushered into God's presence and plugged into His power.

Prayer is not passive contemplation; it's an active statement of confidence in God's authority over us. The world has nothing to compare with the peace that comes through prayer.

3. We Are a Representation of God's Unchanging Standards (1 Timothy 3)

In chapter 3, Paul listed the qualification for leaders in the church. These standards have not changed since Paul penned them almost two thousand years ago. The church's leadership—namely, the overseers, deacons, and deaconesses described in the passage—represent an unparalleled level of excellence.

In 1 Timothy 3:15, Paul referred to the whole body of believers as “the household of God,” “the church of the living God,” and “the pillar and support of the truth.” The Lord calls *all* of us, not just the leaders, to a higher standard—as Paul wrote, “so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself.”

However, a list of qualifications is not the final measure of our conduct. Jesus Himself is the ultimate standard (1 Timothy 3:16).

4. We Are a Force for Good in Bad Times (1 Timothy 4)

According to chapter 4, bad times will come—indeed, they are here now. Do you recognize in our world the characteristics Paul warned us to watch for?

- Defection (4:1)
- Deception (4:1)
- Demonism (4:1)
- Hypocrisy (4:2)
- Legalism (4:3)
- Asceticism (4:3)

But in the midst of this whirlwind of evil, the church stands as a bastion of righteousness—as long as its members act out the roles Paul described to Timothy:

- Good servants, nourished on faith and sound doctrine (4:6)
- Disciplined disciples, whose goal is godliness (4:7)
- Exemplary teachers, sharing the hope of Christ (4:10–13)
- Don't neglect the spiritual gift within you (4:14)
- Cultivate our spiritual gifts (4:15)



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5. We Are a Model of Compassion and Discernment (1 Timothy 5)

In 1 Timothy 5, Paul addressed the issue of the church's support of widows. In the first century, church members pooled their money to help widows in need, expressing the compassionate side of Christianity. However, there was another side of the church that brought balance—discernment.

The church is one of the few places where moral definitions and the truth about responsibility are taught. In 1 Timothy 5:17–25, Paul gave Timothy discerning counsel on:

- Paying a fair salary (1 Timothy 5:17–18)
- Confronting a church leader who is doing wrong (5:19–20)
- Doing what is right (5:21–25)

6. The Church Is to Be a Source of Reliable Information (1 Timothy 6)

In the sixth chapter, the church assumes its role as an amplifier of truth. Paul preached on at least seven subjects in this section:

- One's occupation (6:1–2)
- Doctrinal truths (6:3)
- Relational conflicts (6:4–5)
- Personal contentment (6:6–8)
- Money (6:9–11, 17–19)
- Priorities (6:12)
- Life and lifestyle (6:13–16, 20–21)



LET'S LIVE IT

The world may resist the truth of God's Word, but the church isn't in the business of tickling people's ears. Our job is to wrestle with the precepts of Scripture and tell ourselves and others what we need to hear—which may be painful at times. But we can be sure that when we do our job well, when we stick with Scripture, the information we dispense is reliable.

What steps can you take to make the aroma of Christ more fragrant?



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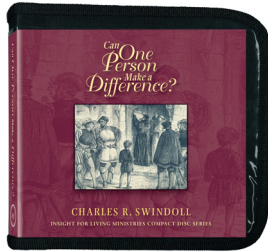
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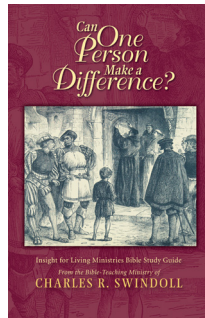


Tools for Digging Deeper



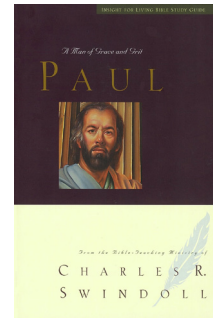
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