

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: 1 Timothy: Instructions for the Church *
* Topic: Dealing with False Teachers * Scripture: 1 Timothy 1 * 5/5/2024 *

MAIN POINT

In the church, we need to lovingly guard the gospel and live the gospel, without getting distracted by periphery issues.

INTRODUCTION

If you grew up in a family that didn't regularly go to church, what were some of the false ideas about God that you grew up believing?

If you grew up in a family that regularly attended church, what were some of the false ideas about God that you picked up in church?

The book of 1 Timothy contains counsel from Paul on how Timothy should best lead the church at Ephesus. These lessons can be applied to our church today as well. Paul spends the first chapter of 1 Timothy underscoring the importance of the gospel and the importance of not allowing peripheral issues from diluting or derailing the gospel message, which must be the central message of the church. Paul began his letter to Timothy by warning him against false teachers who were distorting the gospel through petty arguments, myths and genealogies. By looking at this letter, we clearly see that God intends the gospel to be a central message that brings us to salvation, orders our lives as Christians, and is shared by the church with the world.

INTRODUCTION TO THIS LIFEGROUP SERIES ON THE BOOK OF 1 TIMOTHY

The sermon series titled "He lives so I..." has just wrapped up at the Heights, and over the next six weeks, the sermons will be covering several stand-alone topics before commencing a series on discipleship that starts in June. The Lifegroup lessons will take advantage of this six-week break to study 1 Timothy.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF 1 TIMOTHY

WHO WROTE 1 TIMOTHY, AND TO WHOM WAS IT WRITTEN

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:1-2

Based on these verses, who wrote 1 Timothy, and to whom was it written?

The apostle Paul wrote 1 Timothy. It is one of three letters written by Paul (1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus) that are known as "pastoral epistles", since they contain counsel about leading a church. It is thought Paul wrote this letter around AD 63, after his release from house arrest in Rome, where he was at the end of the book of Acts. Based on early church tradition, it is believed that after Paul was released from this imprisonment, he continued his work around the Mediterranean, perhaps even reaching Spain (Rom. 15:22-29). 1 Timothy was written during this later period in Paul's life.

The letter was written to Timothy, a young convert of Paul who had accompanied him and was disciplined by him. Paul wrote this letter when Timothy was serving as a church leader at the church in Ephesus.

Based on how Paul addresses Timothy in verse 2, what can you discern about their relationship?

Paul had a close relationship with Timothy and was his spiritual mentor.

THE PURPOSE OF PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

In this letter, Paul provides counsel to this young church leader (1 Tim. 4:12) about how to best lead the church at Ephesus, especially in light of the issues the church at Ephesus was currently facing.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7

According to verse 3, what was one reason Paul directed Timothy to “remain at Ephesus”?

While the exact nature of the false teachers in Ephesus isn't specified, but we do see that they included myths (things that weren't true), and arguing about things that may have been true, but hindered the advancement of the gospel.

According to verse 4, what negative result was occurring at Ephesus due to the false doctrines being taught there?

Paul states the dangerous effects of these teachings included harmful distraction from the main role of the church, to advance the gospel. In other words, these false teachings led to debates and speculations about secondary things rather than encouraging faith-driven devotion and gospel-centered living.

According to verses 5-7, what was Paul's goal in directing Timothy to address these false teachings in the church?

Paul's goal was that if the church returned to the pure message of the gospel, the result would be love, issuing from “a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith”.

“Jesus prays for a unity that gives the world a chance to see... evidence that the Father sent Jesus and that He loves them.” Pastor Randy Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, 3/17/24

“When we start putting descriptors in front of the word, ‘church’ we are moving away from what Jesus is praying for here” (in John 17:20-21). Pastor Randy Hahn, The Heights Baptist Church, 3/17/24

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11

Considering verse 8, when can the law be good in the church? What does this verse imply about when the law can be bad in the church?

What do verses 9 and 10 add to this understanding about the role of the law in our lives?

How does the law point us to our need for Christ?

In verses 9-10, Paul laid out a litany of sins that the law exposes, illustrating the law's limited usefulness. The law exposes our sinful nature but does not offer us forgiveness. Thus, the law demonstrates our desperate need for a savior, whereas the gospel is the only answer to the sin that separates us from God.

Considering verse 11, do you think Paul concluded his warning against false teachers by comparing the law with the gospel?

Throughout the New Testament, we see false teachers leading people astray based on a wrong application of the Old Testament Law (which was fulfilled by Christ) in the church. One false teaching involved the heresy that salvation or sanctification was the result of works, not grace. This false teaching is systematically refuted in the book of Galatians. On the opposite side of the Law-versus-Gospel spectrum was the false teaching that since we are saved by grace alone, we can sin all we want, and this sinful lifestyle is okay before God and not harmful to us. This side of false teaching is covered in the book of James.

Works-based theology is enticing because it appeals to our pride by trying to give us credit for our salvation rather than giving God the credit for his grace saving us. And the easy-believe-ism side of the spectrum is enticing for the opposite reason; that we can sin all we want without consequence.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17

What trustworthy saying, or theological truth, did Paul want the church to learn from his testimony?

God's transforming power shines through Paul's testimony. The idea Paul expressed was that "if God can redeem me, He can redeem anybody." Paul reaffirmed the truth that Christ came into the world to save sinners and insisted he was the worst of the lot. To paraphrase his remarks, we might say, "Timothy, let this be a lesson to you. Let my example strengthen your faith in Christ and your confidence in the gospel."

What advantage was there for Timothy in being reminded at this particular moment of Paul's conversion? How might considering Paul's testimony encourage us in our walk with Christ?

Timothy was a young pastor and needed encouragement to continue preaching the gospel and serving in the church at Ephesus in the face of false teachers who sought to discredit the gospel. Paul shared his testimony to demonstrate that there was nothing about him that made him worthy to be used by God, much less saved by Him. This message reminds us that we don't have to advance to a certain level of expertise or holiness before we can be used by God in the advancement of His kingdom.

Why did Paul receive mercy (v. 16)? What does Paul's conversion tell us about the character of God?

God's grace is strong enough to save anyone who comes to Him. Paul's conversion demonstrated God's perfect patience. God is extravagant in His love and mercy when we humbly repent and come to Christ. If we will trust God and lean on His grace, we can be used by Him to encourage the next generation to live boldly for His glory and for the advancement of His kingdom.

Why did Paul transition from sharing his testimony to challenging Timothy to "wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience" (vv. 18-19)?

Paul wanted Timothy to know that when the gospel comes under attack, we must not sit idly by. We must fight both to believe the gospel and to defend it against those who teach false doctrine. There will never be a time when we no longer need God's grace. It is God's grace that saves us, sanctifies us, and sustains us. If we want to live for God, we must always recognize that we can do so only by His grace.

APPLICATION

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

In verse 19, what two things is Timothy exhorted to hold onto, and how do they relate to the false teaching at Ephesus?

Hold on to faith (don't make this a religion about works), and hold on to a good conscience (don't make this a religion emphasizing just how much sin we can get away with under grace).

What negative effect can happen if don't hold on to faith and a good conscience (verses 19-20)?

If we fall for either of these heresies, our faith can be shipwrecked.

What are the secondary issues that are most likely to overshadow the gospel of Jesus Christ at our church if we do not guard against them? How can we guard against them?

PRAYER

Thank God for showing grace to undeserving sinners like us. Ask Him to help us trust His grace and apply the gospel to all areas of our life. Ask for courage and persistence to lovingly stand for the truth given to us through God's word in the church, and patiently and lovingly share the gospel with those outside the church.

COMMENTARY

1 TIMOTHY 1

1:1–2. Paul’s introductory greeting to Timothy and the church at Ephesus comes with authority. In his opening sentence, he drew attention to his apostleship, stating that it came by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope. Right at the start he gave clues about the themes of the letter: salvation and hope. As we believe in the Son and rest in His finished work of paying for our sins on the cross, He removes our guilt and takes away our fear of punishment. He assures us of heaven. In short, He is our hope. There is no hope without Him. The letter was addressed to Timothy (5:2), but it is scripture and is intended to be read by all of us. By addressing Timothy as a true child in the faith, Paul accomplished two things—to encourage Timothy—who was faced with a difficult task of addressing problems within the church, and to let the church know that Timothy came with the authority and approval of Paul. Paul “fathered” Timothy by helping him grow in the faith and ministry (2 Tim. 1:5). Paul concluded his greeting with a blessing: grace, mercy and peace. All three are unmerited good will from God toward those who believe.

1:3. From the church’s beginning there have been heresies, rumors, and defections. During these beginning years, false doctrine attacked the foundations of the faith. Some of the attacks came from without, but others sprang from within. Timothy had been told to stay in Ephesus instead of continuing into Macedonia with Paul. He was to command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer. They undermined basics of faith and belief. Paul called these false doctrines teaching “of another kind.” The standard for truth was the Old Testament, the words of Christ, and the teaching of the apostles. If Christians become grounded in the truth of their faith, false teaching can be stopped before it spreads.

1:4. Paul condemned the false teachings which were being propagated in Ephesus, calling them myths and endless genealogies. The myths of the first century were more than fairy tales; they were legends used primarily to promote immorality. These were stories taken from the past and used to justify behavior that was contrary to God’s call to righteousness. There were teachers who used the Old Testament for invented allegories and frivolous spiritualizing. Truths were spiritualized into metaphor, so that soon they had “proof texts” for their own ideas, biases, and desires. The phrase “endless genealogies” refers to histories and prophetic speculations, guesswork, unclear specifics in the Old Testament and the desire to be viewed as an authority. Such people claimed special knowledge. Paul recognized that these teachings resulted in division. The strange doctrines promoted speculations rather than love and the gospel. Rather than equipping the church, these false teachers were creating factions, confusions, and disrepute for the church of Christ.

1:5. The reason Paul wanted Timothy to stop these people from continuing in their false beliefs and to prevent them from spreading destructive ideas was love. Instead of controversy, our lives should be marked by love—first for God, then for others. Many people in the world think of God only in negative terms. They blame Him for everything from hurricanes to famine, from economic collapse to car wrecks. God wants the world to operate in a different way. His goal for us is love. God’s definition of love is not sentimental. It is a love that is trustworthy and active. It springs from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. A pure heart refers to wholeness within the inner, spiritual dimension of a person. The heart is considered the control center of thoughts, motives, and spiritual life. The pure heart is cleansed from sin in these areas. Therefore, love which springs from a pure heart is sacrificial (1 Cor. 13), free of selfish motives, godly, honorable. A good conscience had a slightly different meaning for the Ephesians than it does today in Western societies. For first-century people, conscience dealt with a person’s conduct within the chosen group. A good conscience meant living according to the standards and practices which the group (in this case the church) deemed proper and acceptable. It meant living without shame among one’s peers or companions. We view the conscience as if it is concerned with right and wrong on an individual basis. We would do well to recapture the ancient meaning and sense of accountability. Sincere faith assures correct behavior because it comes from the revelation of God. The Word of God provides the directives for Christian conduct and belief. Paul’s desire for the church was to produce people who embraced correct doctrine as formed through the Old Testament, the prophets, Christ and the apostles; people whom Christ had cleansed from sin and who were living in that forgiveness through the continual purifying of their heart. Paul’s vision was that followers of Christ would form a community of sound conduct that kept its members accountable in their behavior and life. He hoped the end result would be a distinctive people known for their love.

1:6. According to Paul, some of the believers had wandered away into vain discussion. The false teachers had turned a different way, their inner spirits becoming muddled by sin and wrong thinking, their behavior ineffective and at odds within the church, their reputations built on controversy rather than love. Because of this, what they taught was meaningless. It was fruitless, or empty, and wrong.

Paul gave some descriptions of false teachers throughout 1 Timothy. They emphasized fables and genealogies (1:4–7; 4:7). They emphasized rigid asceticism, renouncing marriage and certain foods (4:3, 8). They professed a special knowledge of God (6:20).

1:7. Paul asserted that these people want to be teachers of the law. It seems that the driving force of these teachers was to attract admiration and respect, to gain the title “teacher of the law.” They wanted others to regard them as authoritative interpreters of Scripture. They wanted a following. But no matter their desire, they did not know what they were talking about. Their ideas and intricate systems of thinking were groundless. There was no truth in them, despite their confidence. They could assert a position, even when the structure of thought and belief was wrong. But sincerity does not automatically translate into truth.

1:8. Paul declared that we know that the law is good if one uses it properly. Of course the law is good, but like many good things, it can be misused. The good of the law is clear: It shows us what God is like and what He wants us to be and do. The Ten Commandments are a guide for right and wrong in our daily choices. The law stands as an indictment for all those who do not receive Christ and His righteousness. By the law comes the knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:19). Psalm 19:7 says, “The law of the Lord is perfect.” The law reveals sin.

1:9–10. Paul went on to elaborate on the “proper use” of the law as he put forth three pairs or groups of sinners: lawless and disobedient; the ungodly and sinners; the unholy and profane. This catalog of sins covers everything and everyone—those who by outward acts disobey the standard of God; those who defile themselves inwardly as in coveting, hatred, disrespect; and those who are defiantly opposed to God’s authority. No one escapes the judgment of the law. From these broad categories Paul selected perhaps the most abhorrent sins, each with a deliberate tie to “the law”—the Ten Commandments. He listed those who strike their fathers or mothers, as opposed to the command to honor your father and mother (Exod. 20:12); murderers, in contrast to the command not to kill (Exod. 20:13); adulterers and perverts are set against the command not to commit adultery (Exod. 20:14); slave traders are contrasted with the law not to steal (Exod. 20:15), and liars and perjurers contradict the command not to give false testimony against your neighbor (Exod. 20:16). The purpose of the law is to point out how good and holy the Lord is and how righteous His doctrines are. It points out our inability to live righteously as God demands. The law points out our guilt and sentences us to condemnation (Rom. 3:19–20). But the law also guides us to the gospel as given in the apostolic writings. It shows us our need for the Savior (Gal. 3:24). The law does not save us; it points us to the one who can. How amazing then that so many people say they live their lives by following rules or doing the best they can. The words of the hymn “Rock of Ages” expresses our total dependence on God alone: “Not the labor of my hands/ Can fulfill the law’s demands/ All for sin could not atone/Thou must save, and Thou alone.” To conclude his list, Paul included whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine. Sound doctrine produces mature, healthy Christians. Sound doctrine will result in transformed individuals who are morally fit and who love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith (1 Tim. 1:5). True doctrine is not theoretical. It changes lives and produces a new kind of person.

1:11-12. Paul offered his personal testimony as a contrast to the false teachers and leaders in the Ephesian church. Paul’s words matched his life; his manner corresponded with the truth. When our character and lifestyle harmonize with our beliefs, we become a powerful example of God’s truth and reality. Paul was an example to all believers, and specifically to Timothy and church leaders, of how life and doctrine must complement each other.

Paul began his personal testimony by directing attention to Christ. Whatever Paul was able to point to in his life as exemplary was because of Christ Jesus. Paul had an amazing life of powerful ministry for God. His life and work brought about tremendous results for God’s kingdom. Even so, Paul knew it was because of God from start to finish. He was the giver of power and strength.

Paul had demonstrated faithfulness throughout his ministry, and in God’s economy this resulted in greater ministry and responsibility. God knew Paul would be faithful and so put upon him the great responsibility of

taking the gospel throughout the known world. So Paul gave thanks, because he knew that who and what he was came from God. Paul did not select his role in life. God clearly and specifically called him (Acts 9:15). He was appointed by God.

1:13. Paul looked back at his life, described himself prior to his conversion as a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an insolent opponent. The first mention of Paul (then called Saul) was at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:57-58; 8:1). While an angry mob stoned Stephen, Saul looked on with approval. He opposed the work of God, and he was contemptuous of Christ. He harassed the people of God. He was brutal, having people imprisoned. Despite his history, God had mercy on him (Acts 9).

1:14-17. There is no doubt that Paul's salvation was due to the grace of our Lord. Having just recounted how he lived before his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus, his rescue from sin can only be attributed to the overflowing grace of God. Paul struggled for words to express the greatness of God's grace.

Not only was he saved; he was changed, receiving the abundance of faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. The flood from which grace springs also brings forth faith and love. All are gifts of God; all are evidences of those who are captured by the gracious salvation of God in Christ. Perhaps Paul was drawing a contrast between himself and the false teachers with whom Timothy had to deal. People may claim to know God, but the truth of this love will be revealed by their faith and love.

1:18. By reminding Timothy of God's call, Timothy would be reassured of God's greatness and grace, and Timothy's authority and responsibility to take action. These prophecies, given in the past, were words given from God defining what kind of person Timothy was and would become. The calling affirmed his gifts and God's investment in him for spreading the gospel and bringing Him glory.

For those called to ministry today, it is equally good to remember that an entry into God's service is just that—service to God. The church and its people are to be served with love, faithfulness, sound teaching, and discipline. Still, it is to God that final responsibility and devotion belong. God Himself enlists and equips His servants.

Paul called Timothy to remain obedient and true to God's selection of him as His minister/worker so that he may strongly engage in battle. The warfare is the struggle in which all Christians engage when their efforts are focused toward honoring Christ and accepting responsibility for personal holiness. This is a militaristic term that admits to a hostile environment (Eph. 6:12).

1:19. Paul continued by describing what was personally involved in "waging the good warfare," instructing Timothy to hold on to faith and a good conscience. Faith is the complete gospel, the pure doctrine and knowledge of Jesus Christ and God. In dealing with false teachers, Timothy must be certain of truth and hold on to it and not be pulled into error. Satan deals in deception, and truth is the response that defeats such arrogance. A good conscience is a life lived blameless before God and others. It is not perfection. But it is a life against which no one can bring a legitimate charge. Such a person is free of guilt before God and before the community of believers. Paul wanted Timothy to maintain what he believed and to act on it. Timothy had huge responsibilities ahead of him. Paul was handing the torch of ministry to this young son of the faith. But in many ways our responsibilities are exactly the same. We also have the faith delivered to us through the Scriptures. We also carry a conscience that scolds us when we sin and affirms us when we believe and live the faith. The command to fight the good fight to hold on to faith and a good conscience is continuous, stretching down through the centuries to all believers.

With the challenge came a warning for those who reject divine instruction. Strange doctrine, wrong motives, sinful habits—and a life can be lost through the abandonment of faith.

1:20. Paul put forth two examples of men at the church of Ephesus who had shipwrecked their faith. These men had been spreading false ideas about God and Christ. Paul stated that he delivered them to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme. Obviously not everyone will repent, but the church is called to practice loving discipline so people will awaken to their sin and turn back to their Lord.