

Paul, The Man and His Work

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- [0 : 0 0] We come now to our Bible reading, so let's open our Bibles, please, at the first letter to Timothy, and you'll find that on page 991 in our church hardback Bibles, page 991.
- And in just a moment I want to read the first chapter. I have seven Sunday evening slots over the next few weeks, and you may know that 1 Timothy has six chapters.
- So what I'm hoping and planning to do is to introduce the letter this evening, and then for the next six Sundays, more or less, we shall take a chapter each week. What I really want to do this evening is to say as much about Paul as about 1 Timothy.
- We'll look at the main purpose of the letter briefly, but we'll also look at the remarkable author of it and ask why he wrote this letter and all the letters that he wrote, and what his great purpose in life really was.
- Paul, the man, and his work. That's our title for tonight. So 1 Timothy, chapter 1. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.
- [1 : 2 8] As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus, that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.
- The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.
- Now we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully. Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.
- I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.
- But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.
- [3 : 1 7] A saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.
- But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

To the King of Ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Amen. This is the word of the Lord, and may the Lord make it a blessing to us this evening. Well, let's turn again in our Bibles to this first letter to Timothy, chapter 1.

[4 : 44] Well, let me start this evening by saying a few things about 1 Timothy, so that we can place this letter, place it in its first century context. You'll see that the first two verses tell us that Paul was writing to Timothy, but as soon as we get into verse 3, you'll see that Paul tells us where Timothy was living at the time, living and working when he received this letter.

So here's verse 3. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, that's up in the northern part of Greece, probably Philippi, remain at Ephesus, that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

Now, geographical test for a moment. Somebody raise a hand, and I'll say, yes, please do speak. If you think you know where Ephesus is in terms of, well, which nation, which country in modern geographical terms is Ephesus in?

Somebody under the age of 25. The older ones know it. Somebody under the age of 25. No, not you. Anybody?

Have a go. Ephesus. Under 30, then. Come on. Somebody over here. Are these bright sparks? Okay. Well, yes. Turkey.

[6 : 02] Kenan Berka. A native of Turkey himself. You're quite right. Now, here's a harder question, not to be answered by you.

Is Ephesus in western Turkey or eastern Turkey? It's a bit of a rectangular kind of shape, isn't it? Is it the west end or the east end? Yes. Western Turkey.

Thank you, Mo, very much. Western Turkey. It's on the coast of the Aegean Sea, and it's about 200 miles more or less due south of Istanbul. There's not much of Ephesus that remains today, just a few broken pillars and that kind of thing.

But in Paul's day, it was a thriving, large, important city. In fact, it was the capital, more or less, of the Roman province of Asia Minor. Now, in the Acts of the Apostles, Luke, the author, tells us about Paul's travels as he preached the gospel and started churches and strengthened churches.

And it's striking to discover in the book of Acts that Paul spent far longer periods of time in the big influential cities than he did in the smaller towns. So if he had come evangelizing Scotland back in those days, well, let's imagine him coming to evangelize Scotland today.

[7 : 15] He would spend far longer in Edinburgh and Glasgow than he would in Ochta, Machti or Dromla, Drucket. The biggest cities are the places to go to because that's where the people meet in much larger numbers and ideas are disseminated and spread abroad.

Now, we learn from Acts chapter 19 that Paul spent at least two years, possibly three years, in Ephesus. And that was a long time for Paul to be in any one place.

But we can be sure that he invested his time heavily in Ephesus because he knew the strategic importance of this city as the capital of Asia Minor.

Now, let's think dates for a moment. Paul's two or three years in Ephesus would have been roughly the years 52 to 54 AD.

And this first letter to Timothy would have been written some six or seven years later in about 60 AD. And during the intervening years, Paul was no longer resident in Ephesus.

[8 : 17] He was moving about. But he kept closely in touch with the churches he'd founded. There was a well-developed bush telegraph system at work. And he was constantly meeting people and exchanging news.

How is the church here? Any news from so-and-so? So he knew what was going on at Ephesus. And he knew that the church there was being badly damaged by false teaching. And that's why right at the start of the letter in verse 3, he urges Timothy to cauterize the influence of the false teachers there.

You must, he says, charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine. Now, he only calls them certain persons in verse 3. But if you look on to verse 20, you'll see that he names two of them as Hymenaeus and Alexander.

And he tells Timothy in verse 19 that people like those two have made shipwreck of their faith. And that is why, verse 20, Paul has effectively excommunicated them.

I've handed them over to Satan, he says, so that they may learn not to blaspheme. In other words, their influence, their teaching in the church has been so wrong and so misguided that it amounts to blasphemy.

[9 : 29] Now, friends, are you beginning to, as it were, pick up the scent? Are you beginning to feel something of the atmosphere of 1 Timothy? Paul loves the church at Ephesus.

He loved all these churches. He had spent two to three years of hard labor establishing this church. And the idea that all his hard work should now be undermined and even destroyed by the influence of irresponsible blackguards like Hymenaeus and Alexander was simply more than he could bear.

So 1 Timothy is, in effect, Paul to the rescue. Paul, although absent physically, is seeking now to rescue the Ephesian church through the courageous leadership of his younger colleague, Timothy, who is currently living there in Ephesus.

Just look on for a moment to chapter 4, verses 11 and 12. Chapter 4, verses 11 and 12. Notice the tone.

Command and teach these things. Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

[10 : 39] In other words, Timothy, you've got to put your armor on, my dear brother, and be tough. You're not to make mild suggestions. You are to command and teach what is right. You are to insist upon the truth of the gospel.

And, chapter 4, verse 12, if people should say, he's only a boy, really. Look at him. He's hardly shaving yet. Don't you tolerate that nonsense.

You show them how to live the Christian life. Set a shining example to them in the way that you speak, the way you behave, the way you love people, the way you exercise faith, and the way you handle your relationships with transparent purity.

The answer to their criticisms will be the quality of your life and example. Now, this makes us ask, how old was Timothy at this time, in about 60 AD?

The answer is that he was probably about 35. In the ancient world, you were regarded as a youth until you were 40. It's encouraging, isn't it?

[11 : 41] Well, it depends which side of 40 you are. It is possible, I guess, that Timothy had a rather boyish face and looked younger than he really was. But certainly his health was rather fragile.

Because if you look across to chapter 5, verse 23, you'll see that Paul advises him to take a little wine sometimes, rather than just drinking the local water.

The local water may have been bad, full of bugs and creating illnesses and so on. So Paul says, take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your other frequent ailments.

So Paul was obviously concerned for Timothy's health, because he knew that a leader who was physically frail would be more vulnerable to the attacks of his opponents. If Timothy had been built like an international rugby prop forward, Paul would have had less anxiety about him.

Bible commentators have sometimes suggested that Timothy was morally frail, as well as physically frail. For myself, I'm not persuaded of that.

[12 : 44] Clearly his physical health was somewhat fragile. But if he was a moral weakling, I cannot believe that Paul would have entrusted him with the heavy tasks that we find him undertaking, not least this major responsibility in Ephesus.

Paul worked with a large network of co-leaders and fellow workers, dozens of them, and perhaps even hundreds. But he says of Timothy in Philippians chapter 2, I have no one like him.

In other words, he stands a head taller than all the others. He is a man of exceptional quality. Now, Paul could not have written like that about somebody who lacked spirit and courage.

Well, if Timothy was about 35 in 60 AD, how old was Paul? The answer is probably about 56. Those who've studied the history of Paul rather carefully reckon that he was probably born in about 4 AD, and he was probably converted on the road to Damascus very soon after the resurrection and ascension of Jesus, perhaps in the year 34 AD.

He was executed in Rome probably in the year 64 AD when Nero was the emperor. So born in the year 4, executed in the year 64, at the age of 60.

[14 : 04] In his letter to Philemon, which was written several years before his death, he describes himself as an old man, though he was probably only about 55 at that stage.

But think of his life. He'd so often been beaten and lashed. He'd been bound with chains. He'd been shipwrecked four or five times and yet somehow had escaped. He'd been in prison for long periods.

He covered something like 20,000 miles on foot in pursuing his evangelistic work. He was often famished with hunger. Calvin speaks of his indefatigable endurance.

Now, I think you'd feel old at 55 if you'd been through that lot, wouldn't you? He was a remarkable man. And like his master before him, he was fiercely opposed and profoundly misunderstood.

Let me develop some further thought about Paul and his life and work, because the better we can understand him, the better we'll understand not just one Timothy, but all his letters. Let me start with a key element, a key element in Paul's teaching.

[15 : 09] There's no need to turn this up, but I'll read to you a verse from 1 Corinthians chapter 4. He says to the Corinthians, I urge you, be imitators of me.

Now, that is a fundamentally important part of Paul's teaching. He calls his readers, the readers of all his letters, to imitate him, to follow his example. Now, you might want to say, but isn't that rather arrogant?

What right has any frail mortal to say to other frail mortals, follow my example and imitate me? But Paul does say this, and the more you read his letters, the more you find that he says it again and again in different ways.

For example, he says to the Philippians, Brothers, join in imitating me. He says to the Thessalonians, You became imitators of us and of the Lord. Us in that context is Paul, Silas, and Timothy.

Now, you might want to say, but doesn't the Bible teach us to model our lives upon the life of Christ and to imitate him? Doesn't Jesus say, follow me?

[16 : 16] Doesn't Jesus say, if anyone would come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me? Why then should I imitate Paul when I have the example of Jesus to imitate and to follow?

Well, let's let Paul himself answer that question. He also says to the Corinthians, in 1 Corinthians 11, Be imitators of me as I am of Christ.

Now, do you see how it works? Do you see how the chain links up? If Paul truly imitates Christ, then those who imitate Paul are also learning to imitate Christ.

If Paul truly exemplifies the lifestyle and the values of Jesus, then as we learn Paul's values and lifestyle and teaching, we are learning how to follow and imitate Jesus himself.

Just as the sights on a rifle are lined up together, so Paul's life and teaching are lined up with that of Jesus. And Paul teaches his first century readers and his 21st century readers to line up in the same line.

[17 : 25] To imitate Paul is to imitate Christ. And it's always going to be a challenge to live life like that, because to hold to the true gospel and to the lifestyle of the true gospel will involve suffering and sometimes suffering to the point of martyrdom.

What does Jesus say? You want to come after me, do you? Then you must deny yourself, take up your cross daily, and follow me. Take up your cross. When you have your cross, the cross beam, laid across your back, where are you headed?

The answer is Golgotha. Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote, When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die. In our modern Western world, it's true that Christians rarely have to face martyrdom.

But in many other countries around the world today, our brothers and sisters are being put to death daily merely for holding the Christian gospel. We must pray that the Lord will give them strength to endure it.

Now, friends, don't be downcast, because all this is part of the good news. Jesus says, remember this, Jesus says, The person who is desperate to save his life is the one who will lose it.

[18 : 39] But the person who is willing to lose his life for my sake is the one who will find it. The call of Jesus and the call of Paul is to imitate both Jesus and Paul.

And it really boils down to two main elements. First, a willingness to hold to and to stand by the gospel. And secondly, a willingness to suffer for the gospel.

Holding the truth and being willing to suffer for it. Those two things always go together. Because if we hold firmly to the gospel and to its ethical implications, we will attract the hostility of the non-Christian world.

So what we see in the New Testament is the developing of a family likeness. It starts, of course, from God the Father. Jesus is the exact reproduction of his image.

Paul is then the primary New Testament example of this. And other Christians follow suit. Other Christians right the way down the line.

[19 : 42] And that includes us. The example that we exert today can be very influential for the gospel. Now, just to see this in action, listen to what Paul says to the Thessalonians.

You became imitators of us and of the Lord. Now, that's a good start, isn't it? Let's see how he goes on and fleshes it out. You became imitators of us and of the Lord.

For you received the word, that's the gospel, in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you became examples to all the other believers in Macedonia and Achaia, northern Greece and southern Greece.

So Paul is saying that the Christians in Thessalonica learned to imitate both Paul and Jesus because they received the gospel and held to it in much affliction.

The reason for that was that they were immediately persecuted by their families and their neighbors in the city, immediately. But by holding on to the truth and being prepared to suffer for it, they, in their turn, became examples for many other people in Greece to imitate.

[20 : 47] So Paul's teaching is this. Jesus taught the truth and held to the truth and suffered for the truth. I do the same, says Paul, because I follow his prior example.

Timothy and my other colleagues demonstrate the same family likeness, and all other Christians fall into line and embrace the same pattern, and then, in their turn, become examples for others to follow.

Now, some of you may know that, historically, there's been a bit of a problem with all this. There are some theologians, some theological writers, who really ought to know better, who've tried to force a wedge between Paul and the Lord Jesus.

And they've said something like this. Jesus is the teacher and exemplifier of true Christianity. The true gospel, in its original purity, is found in the four gospels, in the teaching of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, or the teaching of Jesus in the four gospels.

But when Paul came along, he took things off in a different direction. He muddled the waters with all his doctrine. He spoiled the purity of the real thing. Now, friends, if that is true, I am the woolly mammoth.

[22 : 03] The people who talk like that need to open their Bibles afresh and study them more carefully. It's as we keep on studying both the gospels, the four gospels, and the letters of Paul, that we see ever more clearly how they are singing from the same song sheet.

And just bear this in mind as well. Think of Luke, Luke the evangelist, a faithful teacher of the words and works of Jesus. Now, he left, as you know, a two-volume work to the world.

Part one is Luke's gospel, and that records the life and teaching of Jesus. Part two, the Acts of the Apostles, records the things that Jesus continued to do through his apostles.

And Luke devotes the major part of the book of Acts to the life and work of Paul. If anybody had said to Luke that there was a discrepancy between Jesus and Paul, he would have said, my friend, you need to read the New Testament more carefully.

Imitate me as I imitate Christ. That is Paul's message. For Timothy, in 1 Timothy, that meant holding on to the truth, opposing false teaching, and being prepared to suffer.

[23 : 14] Well, let's move on now from the imitation of Paul and of Christ to the way that Paul thinks about truth and false teaching. As we've seen in chapter 1, verse 3, Paul's fundamental charge or command to Timothy is to stop this false teaching, which is creeping into the Ephesian church.

Over the next few weeks, we shall come to see, I trust, what this false teaching looked like. But for the moment, let's simply think about the principle involved. Perhaps you turn on with me to chapter 6, verse 3.

Chapter 6, verse 3. Where Paul fires both barrels of his shotgun at the kind of false teacher who is damaging the gospel work in Ephesus. So chapter 6, verse 3.

If anyone teaches a different doctrine, that means a false doctrine, and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.

He is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth.

[24 : 33] Now that is an emptying of both barrels of Paul's shotgun, isn't it? Deprived of the truth. That is the ultimate deprivation.

Look back at chapter 2, verse 4, with that phrase in mind, deprived of the truth. Chapter 2, verse 4. God desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

And then look down just an inch or two to chapter 2, verse 7. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle. I am telling the truth.

I am not lying. A teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Now look on to chapter 3, verse 15. 3, 15.

Do you see how Paul describes the church there as the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth? Paul uses the phrase the truth 40 times in the course of his letters.

[25 : 36] But of course he's following the example of the Lord Jesus. Jesus often speaks of the truth. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. He said to Pontius Pilate, just before the crucifixion, for this purpose I've come into the world to bear witness to the truth.

Everyone who is of the truth listens to my voice. And Pilate responds, what is truth? There you have the Savior confronting the cynic.

The one who is truth incarnate meets a man who has neither the will nor the capacity to understand truth. Well, inevitably, truth has sharp edges.

And Paul's teaching, like the teaching of Jesus, is constantly distinguishing between what is true and what is false. 1 Timothy, like all of Paul's letters, is frequently drawing lines between what is true and what is false.

Look, for example, at chapter 1, verse 6. Chapter 1, verse 6, where Paul tells us a bit more about the false teachers. 1, 6. Certain persons, by swerving from these, these are a good conscience and a sincere faith, from verse 5, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, silly talk, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

[27 : 05] Bold, confident speakers who don't know what they are talking about. Now, it's this business of drawing lines between what is true and what is false, which is so foreign to the spirit of our age today.

And this is one reason why Paul's teaching can come as a shock to modern ears. Imagine this scenario. Imagine you're a university lecturer in religious studies.

And you decide you're going to have a meeting. You publicize in your university that you're going to hold a meeting to discuss the merits of the various world religions. And you announce in your publicity that students of all faiths and none are welcome to attend.

So a number of students gather at the appointed time and place. And you sit them down and serve them coffee and so on. And then you start the meeting. And you say to them, I'd like you all to talk about your religions and your outlook and to tell us what it is about your particular position which is so good.

And then he looks at one particular person and says, Will you start for us, my friend? Your name is Vijay. Vijay, yes. Hindu. Yes, from North India. Is that right? Yes, yes.

[28 : 17] Well, Vijay, tell us about your faith. So Vijay waxes eloquent for a minute or two. And then the lecturer says, Well, thank you very much. That is quite fascinating. A rich, ancient, historical tradition.

So many strands. So colorful. Now you, sir, what's your name? Muhammad. Ah, tell us about your faith. So he tells us about Islam.

And after he's spoken, you then say, A wonderful religion of the book, Islam. Your descriptions of prayers on a Friday and the rigors of Ramadan and your hope to be in Mecca soon, possibly even next year, are most uplifting.

Now, young lady, tell us about yourself. Where are you from? Devonshire. Devonshire. Lovely county. I've been there. Lovely. And your name? Your name is Tusky?

Tusky. Ah. Is that short for anything? Wild boar tusk. Ah. Good. Good. Tell us about your position. How would you describe your Iron Age pre-Christian paganism?

[29 : 24] Really? Really? So in the springtime, as you feel the rhythms of the annual cycle of birth and death, and as you plunge your hand under the soil and feel the power of its fertility, the worms and the slugs and even the centipedes, and then you rub the life-giving soil into your hair, oh, this is riveting.

I had no idea. Friends, I'd better stop there, hadn't I? I think I'm caricaturing, but I guess you get the point.

But the modern world that we live in and rub shoulders with, that we're part of, it thinks that any kind of religious talk has its own validity, that it's true at some level, and therefore must be accepted, as long as it doesn't lead to terrorism or murder.

Now, Paul and Jesus live in a completely different atmosphere. For our good, for our eternal blessing, they insist on drawing lines between what is true about God and what is false.

And this is what Paul is doing throughout 1 Timothy, as he urges Timothy to teach the truth and to shut the floodgates on this false teaching, which is threatening to overpower the young church at Ephesus.

[30 : 43] Well, let's move on now to another point. Why has Paul written this letter to his younger colleague? I know I've begun to answer that question, but there is a right and wrong answer to the question.

Let's turn again to chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. Verses 14 and 15. I hope to come to you soon, he says, but I'm writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth.

Now, when you read those verses, and particularly verse 15, you might well think, aha, this is the key to understanding why Paul wrote this letter. He's hoping to visit Timothy and the church at Ephesus in the near future, but he knows that he may well be delayed, so he sends the letter on ahead to teach Timothy, quote, what is the right way to behave in the household of God, which is the church.

So you conclude, this letter is about how to organize church life. It's a kind of manual on church structures, the sort of thing that a Church of England vicar might receive from his bishop, a book on how to make the best of life in your parish church.

instructions about prayer in chapter 2, the appropriate roles of men and women in chapter 2, the qualities of elders and deacons in chapter 3, the role and work of the parish minister in chapter 4, and caring for needy and elderly people in chapter 5, even the payment of the clergy in chapter 5.

[32 : 24] Now, Paul does deal with all those subjects in this letter, but we would be wrong to think that Paul's main reason for writing was to provide a manual for how to structure church life.

Paul has a much more urgent reason. This is not about structuring the church. This is about saving the church, saving it from false teaching. This is why Paul begins with his passionate plea in chapter 1, verse 3.

And just look at how he ends the letter at the very end. Chapter 6, verses 20 and 21. This gives, again, a feeling of the urgency. O Timothy, guard the deposit.

That's the gospel and all the gospel ethical teaching. Guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge, for by professing it, some have swerved from the faith.

And swerving from the faith is leaving the fold of Christ's church, departing from Christianity altogether. There's something more at stake here than the selection of deacons or the pay of the clergy.

[33 : 30] Now, you may remember a most important scene that took place a few years before Paul wrote 1 Timothy. It was several months after Paul had left Ephesus following his long stay there.

He was passing down the Aegean coastline and he summoned the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him on the beach at Miletus. Luke records this meeting very carefully in Acts chapter 20.

No need to look this up, but I'll read part of what Paul says to the elders of Ephesus. I know, he says, that after my departure, fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.

And from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after them. So fierce wolves are going to infiltrate from the outside, but trouble will also arise from within the ranks.

How did Paul know that? Because he knew human nature only too well. Also, perhaps, because he realized that some of these very elders, men whose characters he knew well, were already showing signs of pulling away from true gospel faith.

[34 : 44] So Timothy's job, like Paul's, is to protect the flock from the wolf that comes raiding from outside and from the influential person within the fold who leads people astray.

Jesus, of course, used very similar language. He said, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

Now, if the wolf wore wolf's clothing, there'd be no problem. We'd recognize him immediately. But it's when he puts on a woolly fleece and he says, that's when he's not so easy to detect.

But Timothy's job is to detect him, to muzzle him and to show him the door. So all this shows us that the Timothys of this world, in other words, those who pastor the churches, have to be resolute in defending the flock.

Think of the kind of young man who is contemplating a life in pastoral ministry. There could be some such here this evening. What do people say about this young man?

[35 : 48] How do they describe his character? Oh, he's a lovely young man. I've known him since he was knee high. So nice. Sugar and spice and all things nice.

But the question is, does he have backbone? He'll need it if he's to keep the wolf out of the sheepfold. If he's going to pastor Christ's flock properly, he's going to have to ditch his niceness.

If he's going to love the Lord's flock, love them, he's got to guard them. Well, years ago I took a holiday in Turkey. I imagine a number of you have been there as well. But I was one of four young men a long time ago, and we hired a Volkswagen Beetle.

We flew to Istanbul and hired a Volkswagen Beetle. And we drove many miles in the western part of Turkey, exploring the highways and the byways. And when we were off the beaten track on minor roads, in the middle of nowhere, we often passed an isolated farmhouse.

And several times a huge dog would come rushing out of the farmyard, baying at us. And these great big yellowish dogs, are they still there, Kenan? They probably are.

[36 : 56] But these great big yellowish dogs, they had a huge collar around their neck with big spikes sticking out of it. They really meant business. If we saw one of these coming, we hopped back into our Volkswagen as fast as we could.

because their job was to guard the farmyard and their master's property and flocks. Now, there are times when the pastor has to be like that. If at some future point, you're involved in appointing a new pastor for a congregation, don't appoint somebody who is sugar and spice and all things nice and nothing else.

You need a pastor who loves the flock sufficiently to guard them with determination. We're nearly done. But let me just mention one more thing about Paul before we finish.

It's to do with the great struggle and battle which Paul had to fight during all the long years of his ministry from 34 to 64 AD. Can we turn to 1 Timothy 2, verse 7?

1 Timothy 2, verse 7. Paul writes, For this, that's this gospel, I was appointed a preacher and an apostle, I'm telling the truth, I'm not lying, a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

[38 : 14] Now, why does he include that little phrase in brackets? I'm telling the truth, Timothy, I'm not lying. Why does he write like that? Timothy was Paul's most trusted friend.

Does Paul have to back up something he writes to his dear friend with a phrase which is almost like an oath? The force of that phrase is almost like the times when Jesus says, Verily, verily, I say to you.

It's a phrase that flags up that what is about to be said is hugely important. So what is Paul saying here that is so important? Look back to verse 4, chapter 2, verse 4.

God desires all people, all people, to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. All people. The gospel, therefore, is for everybody.

For the Johanssons of Iceland, the MacDougals of Scotland, the O'Neills of Ireland, the Smiths of England, the Schmitz of Germany, the Sitting Bulls and the Bald Eagles of North America, the Ho Chi Mins and the Chiang Kai-shek of the Far East.

[39 : 13] It is for everybody. So look back to verse 7. What is this hugely important truth that Paul is reminding Timothy of? It's about his appointment by Jesus to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

Now this was Paul's great battle and struggle in the first 30 years of the church's life. In the spiritual realm, or the heavenly realms, Paul was battling with Satan and his web of lies and deceit.

But on the ground, Paul's chief battle was to persuade people of Jewish background that Gentiles could enter the flock of Christ without having to enter through a doorway marked Judaism.

In other words, without having to submit to circumcision, kosher food laws, and the other trappings of Judaism. Now think of us here today. I imagine that just about every person here this evening is a Gentile.

Do we today, in our church meetings and Bible study groups, do we have to have long and earnest discussions about circumcision and kosher foods? We don't.

[40 : 20] Such things hardly ever cross our minds. Those subjects are no longer live issues. They're as dead as the dodo. So why do we today not have to argue those subjects back and forth with each other?

The answer is that Paul, by the grace of God, won that argument 19 and a half centuries ago. But humanly speaking, for him, it was the struggle of his lifetime to win that argument.

This is why so many Jews hated him. They thought he was a traitor to Moses and to the cause of Judaism. Paul even had to struggle over this at times with leading apostles like Peter and James.

But the Lord gave him eyes to see what others were not able to see, that Gentiles could enter the kingdom of God without the rigmarole of all the food laws and circumcision.

The benefits of the gospel are not obtained through the rituals of Jewish religion, but only through trusting what Christ has done.

[41 : 20] So this was Paul's great struggle, and we would not be here today in this place if he had been defeated and marginalized. And in almost every place in his letters where Paul is grappling with false teaching, it is this kind of Jewish cultural teaching that he's battling against.

In Romans, in 1 and 2 Corinthians, in Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus. It is this kind of battle. Now for us today, thank God, we no longer have to argue the case for not needing circumcision and kosher foods.

We have different battles to fight, but where we can follow Paul's example is in his determination to guard the one true gospel against counterfeits.

We have to battle against other types of false religion today, and against much that is not necessarily religious in a formal sense, but is nevertheless massively powerful, against atheistic materialism, against self-indulgent hedonism, and of course many forms of idolatry.

Well friends, we'll aim to get into the thinking of 1 Timothy chapter 1 next week, but let's be strengthened, let's be strengthened by our association with Paul. He is the apostle to the Gentiles, therefore he is our apostle and our teacher.

[42 : 43] We're to follow his example because he follows Christ's example. So let's be like Paul as he battles for the truth with enthusiasm and with joy.

Let's bow our heads and we'll pray. Dear God, our Father, have mercy upon us in our weakness, we pray, and help us to follow the example of this apostle whom you raised up to be the teacher of the Gentiles.

And we do pray that through our work here at this church and in many other churches, this wonderful glorious gospel of faith in Christ and salvation for eternity will be powerfully broadcast.

And we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.