

# The Importance of the Truth

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Date: 19 June 2013

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, let's turn, friends, to the first letter of Paul to Timothy. And if you have our church Bible, you'll find this on page 991, 991.

And I'll read the first chapter, the whole chapter, from verse 1 to verse 20. So Paul to Timothy, first letter, 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. 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.

[ 1 : 3 1 ] 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.

The 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.

[ 3 : 2 9 ] 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 it be a blessing to us. Well, friends, I'm due to be with you here on Wednesdays for four Wednesdays, today and the following three, and I want to take this first letter of Paul to Timothy as our subject.

It is, I guess, not one of Paul's better known letters, although it contains some very famous and much quoted verses, such as, for example, the love of money is the root of all evils, which you'll find in chapter six.

But it's a precious letter, and it deserves, I think, to be better known than it is. Now, we shan't be able to cover the whole of it in four fairly short talks, but I do hope to cover quite a bit of it and to try to show why it's an important letter for the churches of today.

Now, this is the first of Paul's three short letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, which are known collectively as the pastoral epistles. Pastor, as you know, means shepherd, and so these three letters are particularly concerned to describe the work of the pastor in the local church.

[ 4 : 48 ] And yet, they are not simply for pastors or aspiring pastors to read. They need to be read as well by those who are on the receiving end of pastoral care. Church members who are not themselves pastors need to know what the pastor's responsibilities are, and they need to know what kind of people should be trained up and selected to be pastors, to look after the churches.

I guess we've all come across good pastoral work and poor pastoral work. We've come across effective pastors and less effective ones. And if anyone here should ever be asked to serve on one of those committees which gets appointed when a church needs to find a new pastor, you'd certainly need to read afresh 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus to make sure that you know what kind of person you're looking for.

So today, we'll take the first chapter of the letter under this title, The Importance of Truth. Now let's get a feel of where we are in time and place by looking at verse 3.

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. Now the year in which Paul was writing is probably 58 or 59 or perhaps 60 AD.

Paul had spent a long time in Ephesus and the Acts of the Apostles tells us the story of his initial stay there. And he wanted then to get back to Macedonia which is up in the northern part of Greece.

[ 6 : 16 ] I guess he wanted to go back there to visit the congregations that he'd planted some years before, especially the Philippians and the Thessalonians and to encourage those young congregations. So having gone up to Macedonia from Ephesus and it's about 200 or 250 miles between the two places, Paul then sent this letter back to Timothy, his trusted lieutenant in Ephesus reminding him that he, Timothy, was under orders to stay in Ephesus for the time being.

Remain at Ephesus. That's the clear charge or command of verse 3. Now at this stage, Paul was pretty senior. I guess he would have been at least in his middle to late 50s.

He was known as the apostle to the Gentiles and he was the acknowledged leader of the whole movement to evangelize the eastern Mediterranean area. Timothy was much younger, probably in his middle 30s at this stage.

You'll see that Paul says to him in chapter 4 verse 12, let no one despise you for your youth. So clearly he was still quite a young man. But despite his comparative youthfulness, Paul expected Timothy to be strong, to exercise responsible leadership in Ephesus while Paul was away.

Now Timothy's role in Ephesus was not to be a long-term ongoing pastor of the churches there. It was a a a briefer stay that Paul had in mind. Paul actually lays out in chapter 3 of this letter a clear description of the kind of people that Timothy is to appoint to be the ongoing pastors and elders of the church.

[ 7 : 52 ] So Timothy only has a temporary role in Ephesus which is going to include finding elders for the future. But his first responsibility in the words of verse 3 here is to charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.

Doctrine different from the real gospel. Now if I had been Timothy and I'd been reading those words for the first time I think my blood pressure would have risen somewhat.

I think I would have had that sinking feeling in the pit of my stomach that every pastor gets when he sees that there is a nettle in front of him which needs to be grasped. I think the editors of the English Standard Version that we have here haven't got it quite right when they give this section the title Warning Against False Teachers.

It seems to me that Paul is not simply warning Timothy against these false teachers he's telling Timothy to stop them to put them out of the meeting room if necessary so that their corrupting influence cannot be allowed to run further into the church.

Now this whole letter is directed to Timothy at Ephesus and you may remember that in the Acts of the Apostles chapter 20 Luke paints for us a moving scene in which Paul has reached a place on the seashore called Miletus and he sends for the elders of the Ephesian church to come and meet him on the beach and he gives them a solemn charge a charge to take care of the flock of God which for them of course means the church at Ephesus and Paul includes these words to the Ephesian elders I know 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.

[ 9 : 46 ] So Paul the Apostle was under no illusions about the dangers that threatened the church at Ephesus and here he is now in 1 Timothy urging his trusted younger colleague to play the man and to command these false teachers to stop their false teaching and the way in which Paul sets out this first chapter shows Timothy the contrast between two incompatible approaches.

So first of all in verses 3 to 11 we have Paul describing the false teachers and helping Timothy to understand why they're so dangerous and secondly in verses 12 to 17 Paul describes himself he's the true teacher who in the words of verse 16 is an example to others who are to become believers in Christ.

So Paul is saying to Timothy there are two ways there are two models there are two incompatible patterns of life and then in the final three verses of the chapter Paul lays on Timothy the charge the command to wage the good warfare to hold the faith and a good conscience.

So Timothy is to pick up the banner of Christ and march into battle and do battle. Not that every aspect of pastoral work involves warfare quite a bit of it does but not every aspect of it is to do with warfare.

The pastor also feeds the flock and cares for the fellowship and loves the fellowship and he has to either oversee or do himself or get other people to do all sorts of mundane things as well to do with money and buildings and even catering and so on.

[ 11 : 26 ] All that ultimately is going to land on the pastor's desk but battling for truth that's an inescapable requirement for the Timothys of this world and this kind of warfare will take any pastor down to the wire and will test him to the very marrow of his bones and happy is the church whose pastor or pastors are willing to do what Paul asked Timothy to do here in verse 3 which is to charge certain persons not to teach different doctrine.

There is an inescapable element of warfare in real Christianity and pastors and congregations who are not prepared to engage in battling for the truth of the gospel will sooner or later become the prey of false teaching.

Well let's look at verses 3 to 11 and we'll see where these false teachers are going wrong. There are two main areas of error which Paul is describing here.

First, they have an unhealthy interest in what Paul calls myths and genealogies and secondly, they are misusing and misunderstanding the Old Testament law.

So first of all from verse 4, charge these people not to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

[ 12 : 53 ] Now the stewardship from God that is by faith, that means the gospel. It's the precious package of truth of which Paul and the other apostles are stewards.

Paul describes it here in verse 11 as the glorious gospel of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. So Paul has this gospel on trust. He's a steward of it.

His job is to guard it and teach it. And to go back to verse 4, he's to teach that this gospel can only be received by faith. So these false teachers are not gospel teachers.

They refuse to pass on the glorious gospel. Instead, they've become fascinated by myths and endless genealogies. Paul describes this kind of teaching in chapter 4, verse 7 as irreverent, silly myths.

Silly myths. And in Titus chapter 1 where he's talking, I think, of a very similar thing, he speaks of Jewish myths. Now there are various documents which have come down to us and survived from the ancient world which give us a flavor of this kind of thing.

[ 14 : 05 ] There's one which is called the Book of Jubilees and it supplies the reader with the names, now listen to this, the names of all the children of Adam and Eve. We're only told of three, aren't we, back in Genesis?

Cain, Abel, and Seth. But this book tells us the names of all their children. Also the names of Enoch's family, of Noah's predecessors and descendants, and the names of all 70 of the people who went with the patriarch Jacob from Canaan down to Egypt when Joseph was governing Egypt.

I suppose you can feel something of the fascination of studying genealogies. It's certainly become quite a popular pastime for people in modern Britain. I think my father used to draw himself up to his full height and tell me with some pride that our family was related to Oliver Cromwell.

Though what evidence there was for that, I have no idea at all. But if you were a first century Jew, and if you could claim that you were descended from somebody like Enoch, who didn't even die, but was taken to be with the Lord, or that Noah was undoubtedly your direct ancestor, you might perhaps feel that blood descent was all you needed in order to be sure of your place in the kingdom of God.

Why seek to be joined to God through a gospel that is by faith when you can have the solid assurance of membership of a proud and ancient Jewish family?

[ 15 : 36 ] I guess we find this even today. There are probably English and Scottish people who are not very different. Why go humbling yourself before the cross of Christ when you might be able to advance the proud claim that you're descended from the Lord of the Isles or the Duke of Norfolk?

So there's the first element in this false teaching, myths and endless. I like that word. It's a sense of weariness, isn't it? Endless genealogies. Now the second element is the Old Testament law.

Paul tells Timothy in verse 7 that these teachers desire to be teachers of the law, but they don't understand what they're talking about, therefore they are palpable ignoramuses. Let's just step outside verses 7 to 11 for a moment to ask the question, what is the purpose of the Old Testament law?

Paul partly answers that question here in verses 8 to 11, but we need to see these few verses in a rather bigger biblical context. Luther and Calvin and their contemporaries in the Reformation worked hard on this question of the purpose of the Old Testament law, and their answer can really be simplified into three component parts, which well represent, I think, what the Bible does really teach.

And here are their three parts. First, the law is given by God to expose and condemn sin, to show us what sin really is. So for example, the law teaches us that it's sinful to dishonor our parents.

[ 17 : 10 ] It's sinful to kill people. It's sinful to tell lies about other people, to commit adultery and other forms of sexual immorality. So the Old Testament law gives us a careful, clear anatomy of sin.

It describes sin. It teaches us the boundaries between good conduct and sinful conduct. And what does this result in as we begin to see what the law teaches about our sinful state?

It leads to a stricken conscience and to self-knowledge and in many cases, despair. We cry out to the Lord, I'm a sinner. I'm rightfully under your condemnation.

Please save me. So it exposes sin and condemns sin. That's the first thing. Secondly, the law is given by God to restrain evildoers and to restrain evildoing, to curb sin.

So the law has the effect of holding us back when we're tempted to steal our neighbor's property or tell lies about our neighbor. So it's there to curb sin. And thirdly, the law is given by God to teach Christians what the godly life is like, to teach us how to live as God wants us to.

[ 18 : 21 ] So the law promotes love and trust in society. So for example, in teaching me not to steal, it shows me how good it is for society when we respect other people's property.

In teaching me not to commit adultery, it shows me how good it is to value and safeguard marriage. So the purpose of the Old Testament law, first, to expose sin for what it really is, to describe sin.

Secondly, to restrain evildoers from acting wrongly. And then thirdly, to teach Christians how to live in a way that pleases God. You might say the role of the law is to expose, to restrain, and to teach.

So how does Paul engage with all this in verses 7 to 11? Well, clearly, these false teachers at Ephesus were not understanding these things.

Verse 7, Paul says they are without understanding. And in verse 9, he says the law is good if we understand certain things about it. But these false teachers are living in a fog of incomprehension.

[ 19 : 28 ] And from what Paul goes on to say in verses 9, 10, and 11, these teachers were clearly not making any serious application of God's law to the real sin and wickedness of their fellow human beings or themselves.

In verse 9, Paul is saying that the law is there to teach us the real ugly nature of ungodliness. And he specifies violence against parents, murder, sexual immorality, homosexuality, enslaving, I guess we'd call that people trafficking today, and also lying and perjury.

By the way, this is why the promotion of homosexuality, whether in ecclesiastical decisions or in national legislation, is so wrong. Let's look at the end of verse 10.

It is contrary to sound doctrine and does not accord with the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Now we can see, can't we, just by looking at those few verses why the Bible is becoming, these days, a dangerous book to preach and live by in this country.

This is why I said earlier that pastors and preachers who do their work in line with Paul's teaching will be tested. Now think back 50 years or so, as many of you can do.

[ 20 : 51 ] You would know that 50 years ago it would never cross your mind that if you preached the Bible you might be prosecuted or even sent to prison because of your devotion to the gospel or the morality of the gospel.

But the tectonic plates of our society are shifting. I'm well aware that every sermon that we preach here in this place gets put up on the church's website.

There's a little note about it on the bottom of the sheet here. And these sermons therefore fly off to all sorts of corners of the globe. Who knows when our gospel teaching may come back to sting us and testify against us and bring us to the law courts.

Now we either take that risk or we stop preaching the Bible. We close our Bibles and we give way to fear. So we need to pray for our pastors and teachers especially the younger ones who may have a lot to lose by holding true to the Bible.

Well we must move a little bit more quickly. Let's turn now from these false teachers whom Timothy must resist to the true teacher to Paul himself who gives us here I think it's a wonderful brief autobiographical sketch in verses 12 to 17.

[ 22 : 07 ] Really it's his testimony his testimony to the power of Christ to save sinners. Do you see how Paul begins and ends this section? In verse 12 he thanks the Lord Jesus for appointing him to his service and then in verse 17 he lifts his voice to honor and glorify the immortal invisible and only God.

So to Paul what he records here in verses 12 to 17 is a source of great joy and wonder to him. When the gospel is really understood it draws out of our hearts thanks and praise.

One of the great characteristics of the apostle Paul is his constant profound thankfulness to God. He's bubbling over with thankfulness all the time. Now you might have expected Paul having spoken of these false teachers and their corrupting influence you might have expected him to contrast himself with them in rather glowing terms.

Look at those horrible deluded people Timothy and stop them. But by contrast look at me a wonderful admirable example of Christian virtue. But no that's not the way he writes about himself at all.

He speaks of himself not as a man of shining virtue but as a one time blasphemer persecutor of Christians and an insolent or violent opponent.

[ 23 : 31 ] There it is in verse 13. He simply could not forget he could never forget what he had been and what he had done. And he sets this down on paper for Timothy and for us to show how wonderful and undeserved is the power of God's grace.

If you and I begin to forget the power of grace we'll start to think of ourselves as being rather nice people who have been given a helping hand by God although perhaps being rather nice we hardly really needed it.

But the truth is that although perhaps you and I didn't do what Paul did perhaps you and I didn't hound Christians to prison and death in the way Paul did we have all been by nature every last one of us here has been by nature a determined resolute opponent of God.

There was a time when we considered him superfluous to our needs and our lives. But look at Paul's words there in verse 14. And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Grace means the undeserved kindness of God which is determined to rescue a lost and hostile individual. This grace says Paul overflowed for me it's like a mighty river bursting its banks and what did this irresistible overflow bring to me?

[ 24 : 59 ] The faith and love that are richly present in Christ Jesus. I think of what this means in Paul's case. It means that the Lord exchanged his unbelief for faith and his hatred and he was a very hating man for love.

The hate-filled unbeliever became the love-filled trusting servant of Christ. Now that's conversion. Loving exchanged for hatred and believing given for unbelief.

No wonder Paul goes on to say in verse 15 the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost.

And then in verse 16 he offers an analysis of his conversion. He tells us why Christ had shown him such great mercy. 16 But I received mercy for this reason that in me as the foremost sinner Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

Now that verse 16 is a very interesting statement and it offers hope to those who might think of themselves as hopeless or hopeless cases.

[ 26 : 19 ] Paul is saying I am the foremost the worst sinner. And if you think of yourself as being in the front rank of the world's most horrible sinners Paul is saying I'm up there with you.

In fact I was worse than you. I hated Christ. I hated Christians. In fact I arranged for many Christians to be murdered. But mercy was shown to me the worst of sinners.

Why? Verse 16 So that Jesus might use me as an example. That he might display his perfect patience towards a vile sinner like me.

So that other people seeing how he treated me should put two and two together and realize that he would treat them in the same way. So let me say this friends if you're a person like Paul like Paul as he was a blasphemer an insolent opponent filled with unbelief and hatred whether you're here today in this hall or perhaps listening somewhere over the internet look at this verse 16 and realize that the Lord who showed such perfect patience to Paul is willing to show the same perfect patience to you.

Why? So that end of verse 16 you might believe in Christ and have eternal life. The mercy and patience shown to a man like Paul is still available today in 2013.

[ 27 : 50 ] That's the wonder of the gospel still available. So what Paul is doing in this first chapter of his letter is to contrast false teaching which ruins the church with the power of the true gospel which saves needy sinners including the worst of sinners and he's saying to Timothy stop the false teaching and teach the true gospel and then finally in the last three verses of the chapter it's as though Paul puts his hands on Timothy's shoulders you know how people do an older man to a younger man he puts his hands on his shoulders he looks him in the eye and he says to him Timothy you must do these things my child I'm entrusting to you this charge and the phrase this charge probably refers to the whole of this letter and to the many instructions that it contains but if Timothy is to discharge his sacred trust it's going to mean battle and that's why Paul uses this phrase at the end of verse 18 waging the good warfare and how is Timothy to wage the good warfare by doing two things as verse 19 puts it he's to hold faith in other words to keep faith with Christ to keep the faith of Christ and he is to hold a good conscience holding the faith means attending to something outside himself it means sticking to the truths of the

Bible and the gospel whereas holding a good conscience means attending to something within himself examining his conscience and keeping in close touch with it lest he should begin to slip and slide away from the ethical lifestyle that the gospel teaches so friends let's pray for our Timothys because we need plenty of them in our country today if false teaching is to be countered and wholesome and godly living is to be fostered we need to have our Timothys to be full of the gospel of mercy and grace and the perfect patience of Christ the saving gospel which made Paul so grateful grateful to the depths of his heart and made him cry out in verse 17 to the king of ages immortal invisible the only god be honor and glory forever and ever amen let's bow our heads and we'll pray together our great god the king of ages you are indeed immortal and invisible and the only god but to us who are mortal and visible you've entrusted us with this charge to hold out the wonderful gospel to keep to it and to oppose and to stop false teaching please have mercy we pray upon us and upon the churches of our country and we ask you that in your mercy you will raise up plenty of people who are willing to do as Paul did and

Timothys who will preach and lead churches in the way that Paul instructed his own Timothy to do and we pray that the result will be honor to your name the uplifting of Christ in our nation and a return to real gospel and Bible priorities and life and we ask it all in Jesus name Amen Amen