

Churches at Risk

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[0 : 00] But we're going to turn now to our Bibles, to our reading this morning, which you'll find in the New Testament in Paul's first letter to Timothy. And we're going to read a little from the beginning and a little from the end of this very important letter for the church.

So 1 Timothy 1, and then stick your finger at the end, we're going to read the last little paragraph in 1 Timothy chapter 6. And I remember that the beginnings and the ends of the letters of Paul are very often a great clue to the purpose of the letter and a great clue to the meat, the main kernel of the content.

And I think the little phrase we see in verse 1 of 1 Timothy 1 is absolutely vital, speaking as it does about God our Savior and about Christ our hope.

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 so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies which promote speculations or controversies, rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

[1 : 37] 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're saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Look down to verse 18. This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies made previously 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, excommunicated, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

And then just turn to the last little paragraph at the end of chapter 6. O Timothy, 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. Grace be with you all. Notice the you there is plural.

[3 : 03] He's speaking not just to Timothy, but to the whole church. Amen. And may God bless to us this his word. Okay, let's turn to 1 Timothy.

I said last week that 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy and Titus are letters which have been much misunderstood in the history of the church. But I hope that I've convinced you that these letters were not written merely to regulate the structure of the church, but to revert, to rescue and to save churches.

Churches that really were at risk. Risk of disaster. To save them from the total disaster of withering into decline and into obscurity and to save them for their true destiny of winning the world for Jesus Christ.

So these letters are a vital message for the church in any age. Because the churches of Jesus Christ are always at risk from exactly the same kind of dangers that they've been at risk from since the very start.

But notice we have three separate letters. Not just sort of one generic letter to the church. And of course, if we're going to understand properly the message of these letters, we've got to understand the specific situations that they were written to.

[4 : 27] We've got to understand the people involved, the place involved, and of course the purpose of Paul's writing. Because no part of Scripture was written directly to us.

Although all Scripture has been preserved by the Holy Spirit for us today. But to understand it, we have to travel back, don't we, to first century Ephesus. To where Timothy was at work on Paul's behalf.

To sort out that strategic church. So vital for that whole area of the ancient world, Asia Minor. Look at verse 1. Paul tells us that this letter is from Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the command of God our Saviour and Christ our hope.

Notice he's asserting the authority of heaven itself for his words. So the church had better listen, because these are God's words. And that's important, isn't it?

It's just worth saying to remind ourselves of today. Often you hear people today saying, well, Jesus didn't say anything about that particular thing, so it doesn't really matter what Paul says. We don't have to take it so seriously.

[5 : 28] Not so. These are words by command of God our Saviour. Paul is writing most probably after he's been released from his imprisonment in Rome.

That's where you find it at the end of the book of Acts. And remember, he writes the Philippian church, that he's expecting that release to happen. Well, after he was released, it seems that he went to Cyprus, to Crete rather, with Timothy and with Titus.

After evangelizing the cities there, he left Titus behind to establish the church, and he needed to do that because there was quite a bit of opposition. And he traveled with Timothy through Ephesus on his way to Macedonia.

But when he arrived in Ephesus, he discovered some major problems that erupted in the church there. Some of the leaders had completely rejected gospel belief and true gospel behavior.

And he says they'd made shipwreck of their faith. We saw in chapter 1, verse 20, among those were Hymenaeus and Alexander, two leaders whom Paul had had to excommunicate, get them out of the way.

[6 : 33] But so threatening was the situation in Ephesus that Paul had to leave Timothy there as his authorized emissary to fight for the future of the true apostolic faith there and to sort out and stem that tide of corruption.

So it was a pretty tough assignment. Well, who was Timothy? He's first mentioned in Acts chapter 16, where Paul, you remember, took him with him on his second missionary journey.

Probably he'd met him the first time a few years before that when he'd gone on his first missionary journey and Timothy had come to faith along with some of his family in Lystra.

You read about that in Acts 14. But he'd clearly grown in faith. He was clearly gifted in ministry. And so Paul recruited him. And in fact, he became a lifelong colleague and a co-worker of great value to Paul in Philippians chapter 2.

He says of Timothy, I have none like him. So he was a proven servant of the gospel, a beloved son in ministry. And you read multiple references to Timothy through the New Testament.

[7 : 41] And actually, Paul gave Timothy some of the very toughest assignments of all. He sent him to deal with problems in the church in Thessalonica. He sent him to deal with the church in Corinth.

And my goodness, that was a can of worms. And then later on to Philippi. And over a whole decade, Timothy dealt with some of the toughest church situations you could imagine.

And now in Ephesus, he's being handed yet another very, very difficult job. And that's not really the picture, is it, that's sometimes popularized of so-called timid Timothy.

That's a wildly inaccurate view of a man who was in fact a seasoned, a tried and tested and toughened gospel worker. A gospel warrior, indeed.

So of course he was tender Timothy. Paul tells us that he was full of love and prayer for the people of Christ in loving service. But he was also tough Timothy.

[8 : 39] He was a man in whom Paul had complete confidence to wage the good warfare, he calls it, which was necessary for the sake of Christ's church and for Christ's gospel.

And every Christian leader has to be both of those things, doesn't he? If he's not tender, he won't be able to serve Christ's people, Christ's flock, in Christ's way. But if he's not tough, he won't be able to save Christ's flock from savage wolves.

And that also is necessary. So Timothy was both tender-hearted and tough-minded. That's why Paul had great confidence in him to do all that was needed in Ephesus.

So he went on to Macedonia, left Timothy there, but quite soon after he arrived in Macedonia, he wrote this letter and a letter to Titus to underline the authority that they had from Paul the apostle.

And therefore authority from Christ himself to act decisively for the good of the churches. And that's very important to note as well, because these are, as I said, public letters, not just private ones.

[9 : 46] It's obvious, as I said, from the last verse. The greeting is to you all, grace and peace, to you all. It's plural. Explicitly it says that at the end of Titus. But it's equally obvious from the content of these letters.

Listen to what John Calvin says. This epistle was written more for the sake of others than of Timothy himself. It contains many things that there'd have been no need to include had Timothy alone been in view.

His intention was to use what he said to Timothy to give advice to many others as well. And he also notes there were many things at Ephesus that were required to be set in order and that needed Paul's sanction and the authority of Paul's name.

That's absolutely right. So we must see 1 Timothy as a letter not just conveying Paul's apostolic affection to Timothy, a true son in the gospel as he was, but also conveying his full apostolic authority to Timothy as a trusted servant of the gospel who therefore must be heeded, must be obeyed because he also is speaking by command of God our Savior and Christ our hope.

In other words, this letter is not just to encourage Timothy in the task of ministry that he's been given, a tough task, but it's to enable him for that task. He's being authorized publicly in the whole church to have authority over those churches through his teaching and through applying the true apostolic command.

[11 : 19] That's very important. Of course, Timothy is not a normal church pastor as we would think of that today. He's a representative of the Apostle Paul. But the public enabling of his ministry does set a pattern.

And the pattern is this, that in the church, the pew cannot control the pulpit if it's going to be a truly apostolic church. The true gospel leader needs to be able to command and teach with authority.

That's what Paul says in 1 Timothy 4 verse 11. He needs to be able to exhort and rebuke with all authority. He says in Titus 2 verse 15. But of course, where there's real authority like that in church leadership, then there's also real danger, isn't there?

Because, well, you can see it through the very presence of the false leaders and what they've done in Ephesus. The pulpit can also lead the pew astray.

And that's why wherever there is real authority, there must also be real accountability. Christian leaders must be held to a true gospel, to a pure biblical apostolic standard. That's what Timothy was going to have to do with these church leaders in Ephesus.

[12 : 31] And that's something we ought to note here. Now, we have to be careful when we appeal to these pastoral letters for church practice because every church polity, from Roman Catholicism and High Anglicanism, on the one hand, to Exclusive Brethrenism, on the other hand, everybody claims that the pastoral epistles teach their particular form of church government.

Which, in fact, alone tells us that these letters cannot possibly be principally written to give us a set church order. Otherwise, absolutely everybody in the whole church is wrong.

But there is, nevertheless, clear principle here, isn't there? And that is about the need for both proper authority in pastoral leadership to apply the Word of God with real authority in the church, and also, therefore, unnecessarily, there has to be an accountability to hold church overseers to that true ministry in the face of their natural tendencies to sinfulness and error.

So somehow, both of these things must coexist. That's one reason why we remain a church in the Presbyterian tradition where pastors are ordained as ministers of the Word with authority by a body of other ordained leaders who both confer that authority on those preachers but also bind them in an accountability for their ministry.

Because without the authority of the church's ministry, it's very difficult, isn't it, for any church leader to change sinful behavior, to challenge sinful behavior in a church that doesn't want to hear it. They just sack the pastor.

[14 : 05] So although we don't claim that our system is the only biblical way, it is one way that seeks to maintain that proper authority and that proper accountability for the leadership of the church.

And certainly that is Paul's purpose in commissioning Timothy, to enable him, to ordain him, if you like, to deal authoritatively and effectively with major problems in the church, to save their mission, to save their whole life for the future.

So what was Timothy up against that was so difficult? Well, this morning I want to give us a sort of bird's eye view before we get right down into the detail of this letter.

I want to briefly sketch, and it's on your outline there, three key dangers for the church. I look at two key verses that highlight the purpose of the letter and to graph the one key priority, which we will see again and again as the overwhelming priority that is the one thing that will keep the church in Ephesus, or indeed the church in any age, free from that decline and danger and free for its true destiny.

So first of all, three key dangers, threatening problems that were already evident in the Ephesian house churches. And the first is really the foundational problem, and that is false guardianship.

[15 : 28] There was a threat from the pastorate in the church. The ministry of the church was being corrupted. And sadly, that is nearly always where problems begin in churches, serious problems at any rate.

And that is exactly what Paul the apostle had warned the Ephesian church about not that many years before. If you were here a few Sunday evenings ago, Phil Copeland was preaching from Acts chapter 20.

Do you remember? And Paul, on his way to Rome, stopped off and met with the very leaders of the Ephesian churches and warned them about the future. This is what he said in Acts chapter 20.

Don't turn it up, just listen. I know that after my departure from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things to draw away the disciples after themselves.

Look at 1 Timothy 1 verse 3. Here are men doing what? Teaching different doctrine. Prioritizing speculation. And verse 6.

[16 : 35] Wandering off into vain discussion. So they thought and said they were teaching the Bible, verse 7. They were very dogmatic that theirs was the only true way.

But Paul says, look, their confident assertions are without understanding. They're ignorant. They're wrong. They're twisting. Speaking twisted things. And if you turn over to chapter 6, what you read of is that by their ministry what are they doing?

They're seeking personal gain. Whether it's money or whether it's reputation or popularity or whatever it is. They're seeking a following. They're drawing others after themselves.

It's very striking, isn't it? Exactly the thing that Paul warned them of. And, by the way, exactly the very opposite of what in Acts 20 Paul reminds them that his ministry was like.

I coveted no one's silver or gold, he said. I showed you how to work hard so we can help others. I showed you a ministry that is out to give not out to get.

[17 : 40] Because the Lord Jesus himself said it's more blessed to give than to receive. Paul worked hard. Paul's was a costly ministry. It cost him personally in many ways.

He admonished them, he said, many times with tears because he was willing to challenge people with the truth to call them to repentance. But his was always, he says, a word of grace, Acts 20 verse 32, to build you up, to give you an inheritance with all the saints.

Whereas now, their ministry of these false teachers was talking all about their special and superior understanding of the Bible. And what was the result?

Well, not to build the church up. You see it if you look at chapter 6 verses 4 and 5. What was it? Conceit, unhealthy craving for controversy, constant friction.

Well, friends, where you see that these are the marks of a church, you can be pretty sure that there's a real problem in the pastorate, in the leadership. And one which will threaten its whole life and its whole future.

[18 : 53] A ministry that sees ministry as a means of gain is a ministry that has become corrupted. And the characteristic is, as chapter 1 verse 4 states so clearly, it's more interested in speculation and controversy than in the real stewardship, caring for God's precious household.

And it results in a heart not, in a church full, not of what verse 5 says, love, and pure hearts, and sincere faith. That's the task of all true gospel ministry.

But rather, the very opposite, Paul says, vanity, wandering away into fruitless and foolish folly. That's why you need to pray for church leaders.

Because it's easy to be lured into a ministry that wants people to follow you, that wants to make your disciples, that wants to make you something in the world. Whether it's for monetary gain, like the prosperity gospel pastors that you see all over Christian television, their dripping gold jewelry and their private jets.

Or, whether it's just popularity and a reputation in the evangelical world from your Facebook posts, or your Twitter account, or your controversial inflammatory blogs that you so like writing and other people reading.

[20 : 15] It's a vital matter, isn't it, for the church in any age? Because corrupted pastors will lead to corrupted people. And that's the second thing that we see was already present in Ephesus.

That's why there was a problem of false godliness. There was a real threat to all God's people. The whole membership was being corrupted. And so the church in Ephesus was no longer a pillar and buttress of truth showing God's true holiness to the world, but instead it was showing a corrupted, twisted, pseudo-holiness.

True gospel ministry focuses on God our Savior and on Christ our hope. And so it's constantly urging the church as Paul urges all the way through chapter 6, as we'll see, to focus on chapter 6 verse 11, the eternal life to which you're called.

It's along verse 14 for the treasure, the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ and for the treasure of the future to take hold, he says in verse 19, of that which is truly life.

It's pointing people to the coming of the Lord Jesus. The gospel tells us that the Christian life and the Christian hope is much more than merely this present world.

[21 : 33] But at the same time it teaches us that it's not less than the good creation that God has already given us in this world. And the Christian church, the true Christian church, must have a right perspective on both the present blessings of God's creation and the ultimate future blessings of the new creation.

We're to have godliness with contentment, says Paul in chapter 6, in this world. That is, we're to be longing for the true blessings of eternal life.

not only interested in the things of this world, but at the same time thankful that meantime God has given us many blessings to enjoy richly on earth.

A proper understanding of this world and the next. But look at chapter 4, verse 4. It tells us what had been going on here. Paul says, we're to receive God's good gifts in life as good gifts.

not rejecting his present blessings, not rejecting normal human relationships like marriage and normal human requirements like food and drink and so on.

[22 : 41] Look above to verse 3, you can see that the Ephesian church was warped in its view of holiness. It was embracing a weird kind of asceticism, forbidding these normal things, forbidding marriage, forbidding food and drink, a life of complete asceticism.

That's how to be ultra spiritual, they were saying. What does Paul say? That's the deception of demons. It's the very opposite of real spirituality and real holiness.

And friends, warped and corrupted ideas of what real holiness is is such a common fault in a confused and a corrupted ministry where people think they're being odd and peculiar and subhuman is somehow what God wants.

No, says Paul, that is what the devil wants, not God. Holiness is not weird. Holiness just means wholeness. It means true, wholesome humanity.

It's that very wholesome and fulsome and attractive humanity that we see above all. Well, where? In the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. He didn't repel people as a weirdo, repelling them as sanctimonious religiosity.

[23 : 56] He attracted people. He attracted all manner of people who in fact were repelled by so much of the false piety going on in the received religion of the day. But false guardianship in the church will so often lead to false godliness.

Corrupt leadership leaves a legacy in the church and it's so damaging to the gospel. It's so full of confusion. On the one hand, it fills people's minds with wrong desires for worldly gain instead of eternal gain.

But on the other hand, it fills people often with all sorts of wrong denials of the earthly blessings that God does mean us to have in the meantime. Instead of thankfully receiving from his hand these many good gifts, we resent them.

And no, no, no, says Paul, the world has got to see in the church and from the church not what is bizarre and weird and fanatical, but what is real, what is wholesome, what is truly human.

That's real holiness. And it's got to see from us the real Christian hope which is a contentment and a thankfulness for all the good gifts God has given us on earth which points us to the greater longing of the joy of heaven still to come.

[25 : 14] But can you see the church in Ephesus was showing people exactly the opposite of that. That's why it was such an unhappy place full of discontent, full of unwholesome friction.

People resenting one another and no doubt repelling the world outside. Well let me ask, is that an entirely unknown problem in the Christian church today?

Well I fear it's not, is it? And all of that you see is inextricably bound up in the third problem. which is that the church was both demonstrating and declaring to the world therefore a false gospel.

There was a real threat to the proclamation of the church because its whole message was being corrupted. Its whole behavior was being corrupted. Why does Paul begin in that very first verse of the letter with speaking about God our Savior and Christ our hope?

Well because everything going on in the Ephesian church demonstrated that they had lost sight of that supreme importance of a gospel that is rooted in the cross of Christ in the past and in the coming of Christ in the future.

[26 : 24] That is, it lost sight in the complete and sufficient salvation of the cross alone for all people, for all people who believe wherever they are, whoever they are.

And it had lost sight in a gospel that promised full salvation yet to come only at the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. And when you lose sight or when you even under-emphasize either of these things, the past focus and the future focus of the true gospel, then inevitably what do you do?

Well you start to focus most of your time and effort on the present. You'll focus less and less on what God has done and on what we are doing.

And less and less on what will one day be ours forever and more and more on what could be ours now. That shift, friends, that shift in the focus is at the root of every single error that has afflicted the church right from the very beginning.

I want you to see how damaging, how dangerous that really can be. We've got to see that. If you lose focus in a gospel on the cross of Christ, on his full and sufficient atonement for all who believe, regardless of background, regardless of pedigree, sufficient even for a blaspheming persecutor like Paul, the chief of sinners, if you lose focus on that gospel of grace, then inevitably you will begin to harbor some kind of idea that it is somehow to do with our merits alongside God's mercy.

[28 : 01] Some worthiness in ourselves alongside the true wonders of our Savior. Whether it's our pedigree, our knowledge, our superior doctrine, our superior spirituality, whatever it is, something we possess that makes us insiders, superior, alongside the universal truth that we proclaim about Jesus.

And then that thing becomes the real key to progress in the Christian life, in maturity, in holiness. that's the way to fulsome Christian experience, to advanced spirituality.

It might begin very subtly, but pretty soon you've moved on from a gospel that is about grace alone, that is about Christ alone as the one and only mediator who saves all people through faith alone.

And it's become instead a gospel of Christ plus whatever it is that we falsely call knowledge, as Paul puts it. Being in the know about our doctrinal superiority or our denominational order which does things the right way unlike yours or our spiritual gifts and experiences or our especially spiritual songs which are the ones that can really lead you to Jesus or our psalms which are the only ones that can really lead you to God or whatever it is that makes your branch of the church, your ideas, the things that make you think you have really got the secret of the truth unlike ordinary Christians.

And what happens if that becomes your gospel? Well, since it's all about what we have to offer now, what we add to the simple gospel, then what happens to evangelism? Evangelism becomes a message for other Christians, doesn't it?

[29 : 50] People inside the church, you want to convert them to your superior branch of the church and spirituality instead of being out trying to convert the pagan world, the people who are on their way to hell and the lost eternity.

And instead of your church engaging with the world, you just start escaping from the world because you're not that interested in evangelism, you're all taken up now with spiritual elitism.

You become inward looking, taken up with yourselves and no wonder then you get stuck with endless doctrinal arguments and controversies and your church becomes marked by friction, by evil suspicion and all the rest of these things Paul talks about.

You're not outward looking, praying for the world, proclaiming the gospel and salvation to those outside in the darkness and you have Christians who are no longer interested in evangelizing the outsider but only elevating themselves as insiders and winning others to that superior position.

religion. And pretty soon then you no longer have an evangelical faith, do you? You have an elitist religion for the insider not for the outsider.

[31 : 04] Well that has been the story, hasn't it, of so many churches and so many church traditions through the years and sadly it's still so today to the detriment of the true gospel. And in the same way when you lose the focus on the future of the gospel when you underplay the fact that the glory of true life is not yet and comes only when our Lord Jesus comes again well then it's easy isn't it to seek all your ideas of spiritual gain in the present.

It's no longer about what you know you will have one day but it's well what could we have now? Whether it's prosperity now and that virus has infected the church all over the world today or whether it's a desire for healing now and the miraculous now that dominates the life of the church or whether it's special views about special holiness now whatever else it is history has thrown up so many ways that the true message of the church has been corrupted turning the focus away from the apostolic focus on the finished work of the cross of Christ in the past and the future reality of the coming of Christ in the future.

turning away then from the gospel of grace of God our Savior and the gospel of glory the gospel of Christ our hope do you see? But always the shift's the same it's always a shift from the future to the present or from God's work in the past to our work now.

Whether it's in Roman Catholicism and all the focus is really on what the priest does now at the altar for you in the present. Well the charismatic movement's emphasis where it's all about what the praise leader does now in the present to lead you into that special experience of God that you haven't otherwise got.

Or whether it's the liberal social gospel which makes it all about what the church is doing now building the kingdom of Christ on earth today and so on and so on it's always the same.

[33 : 08] Wherever the church has lost its anchor in the true gospel with its essential focus on salvation by grace alone that's for everyone and on glory that is forever whenever it is lost that it is wandered away as Paul says pierced itself with many pangs.

And that is why Paul wrote this letter just because the whole future of the church in Ephesus and therefore that whole region of the world was under threat. And so these leaders had to be confronted and the whole church had to be returned wholeheartedly to the genuine gospel.

And two key texts show us this clear purpose in writing the letter. The first is in chapter 1 verse 3 where after no special greeting no praise no thanksgiving Paul is straight into battle.

Chapter 1 verse 3 What are you to do? Charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine. Tell them to stop and make them stop is what Paul is saying.

The charge in verse 18 do you see? It's to wage war on that kind of damaging ministry because that is good warfare. It's warfare that will save the church and save people.

[34 : 26] And friends sometimes that requires a fight. Paul calls it the fight for the faith. And he says that is part of Christian leadership. We saw it last week also in Titus 1 verse 9 didn't we?

A Christian leader has got to be able to teach the truth yes but also to rebuke and to resist error. Not seeking unnecessary fights not being quarrelsome no of course not.

Unhealthy controversy he says keep away from that. But not shirking necessary fights. Sometimes Christians can be terribly squeamish about that kind of thing can't they?

Some Christians just cannot cope with the very idea of any sort of conflict. They think it's wrong for Christians or churches ever to get involved in any kind of conflict like that. But friends sometimes it is necessary because wolves are savage.

They will destroy the church of Jesus Christ. and we cannot be naive. That is Paul's word to us. And a man who cannot wage war with wolves cannot be put in oversight of the precious church of Jesus Christ.

[35 : 39] If the church's people and if the church's proclamation are to be preserved we need leaders who are able to say no you can't teach that.

No we will not be party to that in our church. No I will not let you do that. Depart. Now that kind of leadership will never gain a wildly popular following let me tell you.

That kind of leadership will not grease your palm with gold. But only that kind of leadership and only that kind of Christian leadership in every aspect of the church's life.

In every group large and small and in family life and home life. Only that kind of leadership will keep the people of God from swerving wandering off into pseudo-Christianity and ultimately wandering off into destruction.

Real Christian leadership is tough because it's a fallen world we live in. It's a fallen church. So it will be painful and costly.

[36 : 46] And you will only be able to bear it if your mind and your heart is filled with Christ our hope and if your eye is fixed on the appearing of our Lord Jesus the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

And the only judgment that will ever really matter on your life and your ministry. So a faithful leader must confront falsehood and fight for the faith Paul.

And second key text 315 a real Christian leader must also challenge the church to live the truth. Paul says I'm writing so that they will know how one ought to behave to behave as what they really are an outpost of heaven here on earth the household of God the living God to be a pillar and buttress of his truth in this world.

True godliness is saying means living Christian lives and living life together as a church that showcases healthy wholesome humanity to this world in all our relationships inside the church and outside the church.

And we're to live says Paul all the way through the letter with an eye to the outsider adorning the gospel. That's the whole emphasis in chapter 2 and 3. And we're to live with our hearts set on the future on eternity serving Christ and his gospel together not serving ourselves not burdening the church that's what the whole of chapter 5 is about we're to be a forward looking church with a focus on eternity and its great concerns not a sideways looking church taken up with the ephemeral passing things gaining them in this life and we're to be an outward looking church focused on evangelism not inward looking arguing with elitism religion and discord three key problems two key texts but it could all be summed up really in one great overriding priority in just one word evangelism evangelism the only way that the church is going to be kept from wandering away from its calling in any age is if above all it is completely focused on bringing the true hope of the eternal gospel to the whole wide world that's what

[39 : 08] Paul is saying all the way through this letter it's there in the opening verse as I said chapter one verse one it's a sacred trust of the glorious gospel focused on God our savior and Christ our hope that is the truth that he tells us in chapter one has the power to transform anyone even a blaspheming persecutor like Paul even the chief of sinners that's why in chapter two his first command is for prayer for all people everywhere and for the gospel to go out through all the world because God wants his saving message to reach all people so in chapter three all his concern about leaders is so much to do with their reputation with outsiders so outsiders will not be put off from hearing the gospel so in chapter three he quotes that little hymn about God being manifested in the flesh in Christ why well so that he will be proclaimed to all the nations and believed in the world that reminds Timothy in chapter four that the task of ministry for him and the other leaders is to toil and to strive because

God is the savior of all people and you Timothy have to be an example of striving for that end to one chapter five when you wonder why on earth are there all these domestic issues here about widows and everything he's telling them the church must not be distracted must not be burdened kept away from its true task of gospel ministry by descending into a social work department enormous that be deprived of its true ministry by not being able to pay its pastors so they can do the vital work you see the whole letter is about guarding the gospel and the mission of the true gospel and the only way that true gospel will be guarded and preserved in the church is if it is a church proclaiming the gospel to the world in evangelism Paul is saying the word of God is not put into the church's hands to fuel the speculation of insiders so that we can argue and fight about secondary things and tertiary things and more and more trivial things that is what leads to vanity to conceit to controversy constant friction well that's true we know that no the

Bible is put into our hands says Paul for evangelism for proclamation to the world the Bible is not meant to fuel fights within the church it's given us for the fight for the world and its salvation not the wrong warfare bad fights fruitless fights but isn't that so so often the truth about what really goes on in the Christian church people are caught up with all sorts of battles and contraptions just go online and read some of the Christian blogs no actually don't don't go online and read Christian blogs so often they are full of nothing but unhealthy controversy so listen friends if we are going to learn from Christ's apostle here he is telling us that we have to be a church with an overriding priority for evangelism for proclaiming and demonstrating the gospel of Christ in this world adorning the hope of the eternal gospel for the outsider and for the whole wide world evangelism alone is what will save the church from elitism evangelism is alone the thing that will save the church from escapism and withdrawing from the world evangelism is the only thing that will stop us turning into a church consumed by envy by evil suspicions and in the end by ultimate error so

I want Paul's words in chapter 4 verse 10 to be etched into our minds to this end we toil and strive because we have our hope set on the living God who is the savior of all people that is of those who believe three key dangers two key texts but one key priority let's pray heavenly father we confess that your church in so many times and in so many places has descended into the very opposite of what you have called us to be and we confess that our own hearts so easily and so naturally turn inwards instead of outwards and turn constantly to the present instead of the future glory of the kingdom of our

Lord Jesus so we need you Lord we need your Holy Spirit day by day we need one another as we teach and instruct and encourage one another to be true to God our Savior and Christ our hope that our lives and our church life together may sound not an uncertain note but with absolute clarion clarity the message of God who in Jesus Christ has opened the gate of heaven to all who will believe and that we are those who proclaim him and him alone for salvation so help us for we ask it in Jesus name Amen