

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #1

“It Does Matter What You Believe!”

1 Timothy 1:1-11

The letters written by the Apostle Paul to the young preacher Timothy are part of what is referred to as the “Pastoral Epistles”

(which includes 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus). They are called this because they give some pretty specific instructions to pastors but they are much more than that and it is obvious that Paul had a much wider audience in mind.

Overall the first letter to Timothy addresses six main topics,

1. The Church’s doctrine (1:3-20)
2. The Church’s worship (2:1-15)
3. The Church’s pastors (3:1-16)
4. The Church’s moral behavior (4:1-10)
5. The Church’s social responsibilities (5:3-6:2)
6. The Church’s attitude towards Possessions (6:3-21)

[John Stott. Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus. (Downer’s Grove, Ill:InterVarsity Press, 1996) pp. 38-39]

The letter begins in verse one with the standard greeting, “Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope, (2) To Timothy, a true son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.”

The recipient of the letter is Timothy, his name means “*one who honors God.*” We do know quite a bit about this young man. He was taught the Scripture from early childhood by his mother Eunice and his grandmother Lois (2 Tim. 3:15). He was born of a Jewish mother and a pagan Greek father (Acts 16:1). He was saved during Paul’s ministry in Lystra during his first missionary journey (Acts 14:6-23). Timothy was probably a teenage boy at the time. He became

Paul's disciple, friend, co-worker and dear son spiritually. The words "a true son in the faith" (v2) denote his true or legitimate spiritual birth. By the time this letter is written Timothy has been Paul's constant companion for fifteen years. He has frequently served as Paul's troubleshooter and as such was sent to Corinth (1 Cor. 4:17), Thessalonica (1 Thess. 3:2), Philippi (Phil 2:19) and now Ephesus. He is probably in early to middle thirties by this point in his life.

But perhaps the reason that this letter resonates with us is we can identify with this young man named Timothy. He is not some kind of super-saint but a very really young man with identifiable problems and yet used greatly by the Lord. First, of all Timothy was still comparatively young. All though he was in his thirties by the time of this letter he still considered himself inexperienced and not mature enough for the heavy responsibilities which Paul was laying on him. Secondly, Timothy by disposition was not an outgoing man but by temperament shy and needing affirmation. (2 Tim 1:7). Thirdly, Timothy did not seem to enjoy great physical health. He suffered from some kind of reoccurring problem with his stomach. (5:23).

It Does Matter What You Believe.

A Concern for Doctrine (vv. 3-11)

The concern of the first chapter of the first letter to Timothy is the importance of maintaining true or "sound" doctrine and the refuting of false doctrine. Paul's declaration that there are right beliefs and wrong beliefs strikes a nerve as we begin the twenty-first century. We are daily bombarded with the politically correct view of "pluralism" – which is the belief that all belief systems are equally right and frowns on the attempt to convert anyone. The most prized virtue of our age is tolerance. We live in an age that is tolerant of any belief except the conservative Christian belief system. In our "post-modern" age relativism has convinced a large number of people that there is no such thing as universal or eternal truth.

George Barna the church statistician states that there is "a great deal of ambivalence among Americans with regard to their beliefs. For instance, while 62 percent of the respondents said they have made a personal commitment to Jesus Christ, 65 percent said the term "born again" does not apply to them; fewer than 50 percent strongly agreed that the Bible is the written word of God and is totally accurate in all it teaches." [The Barna Report: What Americans Believe, 1991, quoted in 9-16-91, Christianity Today [www.bible.org/illus - d/doctrine](http://www.bible.org/illus-d/doctrine)]

But we need to understand that it is impossible to be a true follower of Jesus Christ and embrace this all encompassing pluralism that says that all belief systems are equal. We can not be true Christians and reject the idea of absolute truth. Jesus said that he was the truth (John 14:6), that he had come to bear witness to the truth (John 18:37), that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:3) and that the truth will set you free (John 8:32).

When Paul left Ephesus for Macedonia, he left Timothy there to restrain the false teachers and to set the church in order. In verse three he writes, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia--remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, (4) nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith."

When it says that Paul "urged" Timothy to remain in Ephesus (v.1) it seems to indicate that Timothy wanted very much to leave. Perhaps he just wanted to accompany Paul to Macedonia or it could have been that Timothy was ready to "resign" and desired to leave. But Paul encourages him to stay and finish the task.

Paul's prediction that "savage wolves" would enter and seek to destroy the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:29) have come true. But who are they? And what are they teaching?

In verse three when Paul commands them to "teach no other doctrine" – this is literally one word in the original Greek (*heterodidaskaleo*). It comes from the combination of (*heteros* – different and *didasko*- teach) and therefore means a different kind of teaching from that taught by the Apostles. In other places Paul warned the Galatians because they desert the grace of Christ for "another" or different gospel (Gal 1:6) and he warned the church at Corinth was being led astray to a "different" Jesus, a "different" Spirit and a "different" gospel (2 Cor 11:1).

Paul's charge to the church at Galatia is worthy of consideration at this point (Gal 1:8-9), "But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed. (9) As we have said before, so now I say again, if anyone preaches any other gospel to you than what you have received, let him be accursed."

Of what these false teaching in the church in Ephesus actually consisted of we are given the briefest of clues, in verse four, where we are told they are teaching "fables and endless genealogies." What are these "Fables" or myths? They are human interpretations, fantastic reasoning and far fetched mystical explanations. The "endless genealogies" are probably the use of the Old Testament genealogies to support their fanciful interpretations of Scripture. The consequences of these false teaching are that; they promote division -"cause disputes" (v.4), and that they ultimately lead individuals away from the truth (v.7). Paul is saying that the pursuit of these "fables and genealogies" for the entirety of their lives will never profit them as far as salvation goes.

In verse five Paul writes, "Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith."

The communication of the gospel in truth and accuracy produces love from:

"A pure heart" – has to do with motives.

“A good conscience” – this is not talking about just feeling good about our past actions but it’s talking about a conscience which leads to do the right thing now. A good conscience as used here is the moral sensitivity that shows us what is right and what is wrong.

“A Sincere faith” - a faith that goes beyond mere outward appearances. Timothy himself was marked by such a faith (2 Tim. 1:5)

But because some have chosen the pathway of false teaching verse six reveals, “...which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk.” The course of this false teaching is that they have “missed the mark” and have turned aside from the truth. The consequence in verse seven, is that “desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.” Their ambition is to become “teachers of the law” but their arrogance is seen in that they do not know what they are talking about. They do not even understand what they are teaching even though they do it with confident assertion.

Verse eight declares the purpose of the law, “But we know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully.” Paul plainly declares the purpose of the law in Romans 3:20, “Therefore by the deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight, for by the law is the knowledge of sin.” The purpose of the law has always been the same, to show man his need for salvation. The law can declare us guilty but it cannot make us right. In Galatians 3:24 Paul declares that the purpose of the law has always been to show us our need for a Savior, “Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith.”

Paul then illustrates the type of person for whom the Law was made, verse nine “... the law is not made for a righteous person, but for the lawless and insubordinate, for the ungodly and for sinners, for the unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, (10) for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers.”

First he deals with the sins against God just as the first four of the Ten Command-ments do, he lists the “ungodly, sinful, unholy and profane.”

And then he deals with those sins against other people, “murderers, adulterers and (sodomites) homosexuals, kidnappers, liars and perjurers.” And to make sure that nothing is omitted Paul ends verse ten with “and if there is any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine. ”

So how is one to know what is “sound” doctrine? Norton Sterret, in “How to Understand Your Bible,” states very concisely some of the major principles that need to be adhered to when building a sound theological base from one’s own study of the Bible:

1. Base doctrine on the literal statements of the Bible rather than on the figurative portions.
2. Base doctrine on plain statements rather than on obscure ones.

3. Base doctrine on the teaching passages rather than on the historical ones.
4. Base doctrine on all the relevant passages, not on just a few.

A word study from Scripture can be useful to learn some doctrines. But keep in mind that there are doctrines which have no one word in the Bible to describe them. There are passages in which a doctrine is presented but the actual word does not occur. Some doctrines have more than one word to express them.

5. Be sure that each passage is understood through the general principles of interpretation.
6. Be cautious in formulating doctrine by inference.
7. Beware of doctrinal speculation.
8. In forming, holding, and teaching doctrine, emphasize what the Scripture emphasizes.
9. Seek the practical import of the doctrine.

[quoted in Hans Finzel, *Opening the Book*, (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1987), p. 318]

Conclusion

“We have gotten accustomed to the blurred puffs of gray fog that pass for doctrine in churches and expect nothing better. From some previously unimpeachable sources are now coming vague statements consisting of a milky admixture of Scripture, science, and human sentiment that is true to none of its ingredients because each one works to cancel the others out.

Little by little Christians these days are being brainwashed. One evidence is that increasing numbers of them are becoming ashamed to be found unequivocally on the side of truth. They say they believe, but their beliefs have been so diluted as to be impossible of clear definition. Moral power has always accompanied definite beliefs. Great saints have always been dogmatic. We need a return to a gentle dogmatism that smiles while it stands stubborn and firm on the Word of God that lives and abides forever.” [A. W. Tozer. www.bible.org/illus.-d/doctrine]