



Please turn to 1 Timothy (p. 932, pew Bible). Please follow along as I read verses 1-7:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

² To Timothy, my true child in the faith:

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

³ 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, ⁴ nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵ The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

⁶ Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

- 1 Timothy 1:1-7

Father, as we study this portion of your holy word this morning, please grant us wisdom to understand it and the will to obey it, for our good and for your glory. Amen.

The eyes of the world have been turned to the Middle East ever since Hamas terrorists launched a surprise attack against Israel on October 7. Their Iron Dome defense system got overwhelmed as thousands of missiles were launched against it in a span of twenty minutes. Afterwards, Hamas militants surged into Israel on paragliders, motorboats and bulldozers. The terrorists killed 1200 people and abducted over a hundred more. Babies, children, women, the elderly and disabled were among those taken hostage. It's a horrific crisis, and we must pray earnestly that lives would be spared and peace would prevail.

One haunting aspect of this whole atrocity is that Israel was caught off guard by the attack. The spokesman for the Israeli Defense Forces said, "This is our 9/11. They got us. They surprised us and they came fast from many spots – the air and the ground and the sea."

Without minimizing the Middle East crisis, I think there is a spiritual parallel to consider. The church too is under assault. It is being attacked on all sides by an enemy that seeks to catch us off guard, debilitate us, and destroy us. This threat is not primarily physical, but spiritual. Furthermore, the attack is so subtle, that careless pastors and congregations won't see it for what it is and will wind up like "the frog in the kettle" scenario.

⇒ You've heard of that metaphor, haven't you? Put a frog in a pot of hot water, and it'll jump out. But if you put it in a pot of tepid water and gradually heat it, the frog will stay in the water until it boils to death.

⇒ The point is: Beware of gradual changes that lead to dire consequences.

Paul issues such a warning to Timothy in the passage we just read. In essence he says:

Guard the Gospel
1 Timothy 1:3-7

It's a message that is most timely for the church today. Paul's strategy is simple:

***Oppose whatever draws people away
from gospel truth.***

That's how you guard the gospel. This strategy is seen in Paul's *commission* to Timothy in verses 3-4, which is followed by Paul's *contrast* between faithful teachers and false teachers in verses 5-7. This portion of Scripture is immensely helpful in showing us the signs of doctrinal drift and the importance of tethering ourselves to the truth of Scripture.

The Commission
(vv. 3-4)

At the start of verse 3, Paul tells Timothy, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, *remain at Ephesus...*" Paul is referring to a previous interaction he had with Timothy which probably occurred after Paul's imprisonment in Rome at the end of Acts. After his release, Paul may have gone with Timothy to Ephesus and then told him to stay there while Paul traveled on to Macedonia. Or perhaps Paul was heading to Macedonia from somewhere else and had sent Timothy a message, urging him to "remain at Ephesus." Whatever the case, here in this letter, Paul is pleading with Timothy to *stay put*.

Why? Because Timothy was in a tough situation and may have been tempted to leave. Years earlier, when Paul had delivered his farewell speech to the church at Ephesus in Acts 20, he had warned them, saying,

²⁹ I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. ³⁰ Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. ³¹ So be on your guard!

- Acts 20:29-31 NIV

By the time Timothy went back to Ephesus, the "savage wolves" were already there. So, life would have been anything but easy for Timothy. His natural tendency would have been to leave Ephesus for more pleasant pastures.

That's what I was tempted to do twenty years ago when I was in a hard situation. I was in my early 30's, right around the age Timothy was when he was pastoring in Ephesus. Conflict in the church became so intense that two different chairmen of the Elder Board resigned and left the church within a year of each other because they couldn't handle the heat. Every time they went to church to worship, they felt like they were going to war. I felt the same way and almost left too. But what kept me there were Jesus' words in John 10:

“I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. A hired hand will run when he sees a wolf coming. He will abandon the sheep because they don’t belong to him and he isn’t their shepherd. And so the wolf attacks them and scatters the flock. The hired hand runs away because he’s working only for the money and doesn’t really care about the sheep.

- John 10:11-13 NLT

I had to ask myself, “Am I a hired hand or a shepherd? Am I going to run away, or stay?” The Holy Spirit compelled us to stay, and the Lord stood with us and strengthened us. After four years of difficulty, we went on to experience eight years of blessing and growth.

But Timothy was still on the front end of a tough situation. So, Paul urged him to remain – and then gives the reason: “So that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (v. 3b). The Greek word translated “charge” (*parangello*) is a military term that literally means “to pass commands from one to the other.”¹ Timothy is passing on a command from Paul, who is “an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God” (v. 1). So, Timothy carries the weight of divine authority behind his charge.

This charge was to “certain persons.” We don’t know who they were, but Timothy did. Given Paul’s warning in Acts 20 to the Ephesian elders that some of their own number would arise and distort the truth, it’s likely that some of the men teaching a different doctrine were elders in the church. In verse 20, Paul mentions two men by name – “Hymenaeus and Alexander” (v. 20), who are excommunicated by Paul rather than by the elders of the church. Later in this letter, Paul lists the qualifications for elders as well as how to discipline them when necessary. No easy task for a young pastor!

Timothy’s first assignment is to “charge [them] not to teach any different doctrine.” “Different doctrine” is one word in the Greek – *heterodidaskalein* – a word Paul evidently made up. It means teaching that deviates from a standard,² i.e., the teaching of the apostles. In the first chapter of his second letter to Timothy, Paul says,

Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have received that you have heard from me.

- 2 Timothy 1:13

In his other pastoral letter, to Titus, Paul talks about false teachers that must be silenced. Then he says,

But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine.

- Titus 2:1

Such teaching is based on the truth of Scripture, what Jude in his epistle calls “the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). That body of truth, the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, is the revealed and authoritative word of God.

¹ Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, vol. 14, gen. ed. Leon Morris (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1990, reprinted 2009), 71.

² Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, gen. ed. D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2018), 103.

Paul tells Timothy to *command* certain men “*not to teach any different doctrine*” (v. 3b). That kind of prohibition has become unacceptable in our postmodern, pluralistic culture, which believes there is no such thing as objective truth. Instead, you have your truth, I have my truth, everyone else has his or her truth.³ Yet John Stott rightly states,

No follower of Jesus Christ can possibly embrace this complete subjectivism. For he said he was the truth, that he had come to bear witness to the truth, that the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and that the truth will set us free.⁴ So truth matters, the truth which God has revealed through Christ and by the Spirit. Jesus also told us to beware of false teachers. So did his apostles.⁵

That’s why Paul told Timothy to 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” (v. 4). “Myths” and “genealogies” refer to legendary stories about various persons listed in Old Testament genealogies. We see evidence of such teaching in two ancient Jewish texts. One is *The Book of Jubilees*, written around 125 B.C., and the other is *The Biblical Antiquities of Philo*, written after A.D. 70, about a decade after Paul’s letters to Timothy. These books “go beyond the Scriptures to speculate about the biographies of biblical saints.”⁶

“Certain persons” in Ephesus took a similar approach. “They started with the Bible and made up the rest as they went along. Their teaching was little more than guesswork, the product of a lively imagination.”⁷

That same sort of teaching exists today in many best-sellers. One notorious example is *The Bible Code*. The author, an Israeli mathematician, claimed to have discovered a hidden code in the Old Testament that predicts world-changing events that took place long after the Bible was written – events such as Watergate, the death of Princess Di, and the Gulf War. Many books about the end times fall into this category. It seems that every time something happens in the Middle East, some people scramble for books on Bible prophecy or surf the Internet trying to figure out which prophecies are being fulfilled and “where we are on the timeline to eternity.”⁸ We see this happening right now amid Israel’s war with Hamas – a little Scripture and a lot of speculation “that go[es] nowhere.”⁹

³ Michael Kruger points out that one of the problems with a relativistic approach to religion is that Christianity makes *objective* historical claims that can only be true or false. For example, either Jesus did rise bodily from the grave or he didn’t. Facts are facts regardless of whether a person believes them. Furthermore, relativism is *self-contradictory*. The statement “there is no objective truth” is stated as an objective truth. “Thus, relativism only works if it exempts itself from its own rules.” Michael J. Kruger, *Surviving Religion 101: Letters to a Christian Student on Keeping the Faith in College*, Kindle version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2021), 55.

⁴ John 14:6; 18:37; 16:13; 8:32.

⁵ John R. W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, The Bible Speaks Today, edited by J. A. Motyer, John R. W. Stott, and Derek Tidball (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 1996), 44.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary, edited by Daniel M. Doriani (NT), Richard D. Phillips and Philip Graham Ryken (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 9.

⁷ *Ibid.* Stott writes, “They treated the law (that is, the Old Testament) as a happy hunting-ground for their conjectures.” Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 44.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament, gen. ed. Joel B. Green (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 111.

Did you know that the Jehovah's Witnesses' cult emerged from an Adventist movement in the 1830s that centered on speculations regarding the date of Christ's return?

This kind of teaching, Paul says, "promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith" (v. 4b). The Greek word for "stewardship," *oikonomia* (from which we get our English word "economy") refers to the organization or ordering of a household, or the responsibility of management that maintains the order. This goes directly to Paul's purpose in writing this letter to Timothy. Right smack in the middle of the letter, in chapter 3, verses 14-15, Paul says,

I hope to come to you soon, but I am 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 the truth.

- 1 Timothy 3:14-15

The church's chief responsibility is to uphold and defend the truth of Scripture, to guard the gospel. If we are not careful to do this, divine revelation will be displaced by human speculation. Some of the central teachings of the Roman Catholic Church (purgatory, the sinlessness of Mary, the veneration of saints, etc.) – are based on human speculation rather than divine revelation. Such speculation draws people away from the truth of the gospel. When you consider that RCC makes up the biggest denomination on the planet, with over 1.3 billion adherents, the dangerous influence of doctrinal drift should steel our resolve to guard the gospel. Philip Ryken states,

Salvation in Christ is the most important thing God has ever planned or accomplished for his people. Therefore, it is the most important message for us to study, to teach, and to live. Nothing should distract us from that message, least of all some idle speculation which goes beyond Scripture. Why waste time when there is God's work to be done?¹⁰

The Contrast (vv. 3-5)

"The aim of our charge," Paul says in verse 5, "is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The word "charge" points us back to verse 3, where Paul commands Timothy to "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." Whereas fanciful teaching gives rise to speculations, questions and controversies, faithful teaching – based on the truth of Scripture – produces "**love**" (*agape*). John Piper sums up the essence of this supreme virtue by saying, "Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others."¹¹

How is such love produced? It issues from three internal features that are brought forth by the word of God:

A pure heart: I love how this reads in the Greek New Testament: *kathara kardia*. *Kathara*, from which we get the word "catharsis" (cleansing), and *kardia*, from which

¹⁰ Ryken, 11.

¹¹ John Piper, *Desiring God* (Portland: Multnomah, 1986), 96.

we get the word “cardiac” (relating to the heart). In Scripture, the heart is the core of human personality, the origin of our emotions and intentions. We use the word “heart” in the same way today, like when we say, “I love you with all my heart.” We’re not talking about our physical organ but about our innermost self. That’s what Paul is talking about here in verse 5. Likewise, Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8).

- That’s good news. But it’s preceded by bad news, because Jesus also said, “What comes out of a person is what defiles him. From within, out of people’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immoralities, thefts, murders, adulteries, greed, evil actions, deceit, self-indulgency, envy, slander, pride, and foolishness. All these evil things come from within and defile a person” (Mark 7:20-23 CSB). Likewise, the Lord says in Jeremiah 17:9, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.”
- Even worse, we are incapable of cleansing our own hearts. The Lord also says in Jeremiah, “Can an Ethiopian change his skin or a leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil” (Jer. 13:23). Jesus told the most religious people of his day, “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and the dish, but inside you are filthy – full of greed and self-indulgence” (Matt. 23:25 NLT).
- So, left to ourselves, we’re dirty and doomed. But the good news is that “the blood of Jesus Christ [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). Jesus died for our sins and rose from the grave so we could be cleansed and forgiven. This is the gospel, the good news of salvation. Jesus told those who believed in him, “You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you.”

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt. 5:8), and “the blood of Jesus Christ, [God’s] Son cleanses us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The message of salvation is plain and simple. “Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved” (Acts 16:31). He will give you a pure heart.

And a good conscience: The conscience is a God-created, self-judging faculty – a person’s “inner awareness of the quality of [his or her] own actions.”¹² Paul writes in Romans that our consciences either accuse or excuse us (Rom. 2:15). The problem with our conscience prior to salvation is that it’s corrupted. It’s charred by sin (1 Tim. 4:2). In Titus 1:15, Paul writes, “To the pure, everything is pure, but to those who are defiled and unbelieving nothing is pure; in fact, both their mind and conscience are defiled.” But, praise be to God, the gift of salvation includes “a good conscience.” We are approved by God on account of Christ and have nothing to fear on the day of judgment. Plus, we have the capacity to serve God now. Hebrews 9:14 says, “How much more will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without blemish to God, cleanse our consciences from dead works so that we can serve the living God?” (CSB).

The life-giving word of God creates in us “a pure heart and a good conscience...”

¹² R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy & Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word*, edited by R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton: Crossway, 2012), 30.

And a sincere faith: A faith that's real, not phony. Philip Towner writes, "The attached adjective, 'sincere' (*anhypokritos*) stresses the integrity and authenticity (and complete lack of deception) of this commitment, primarily as seen in the response of lifestyle that accompanies belief."¹³ Eight times in his pastoral letters, Paul links faith and love.¹⁴

Love, therefore, is the "active response to God's grace, expressed in sacrificial service done on behalf of others."¹⁵ The grace of God, through the truth of the gospel, creates in us "a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith" that issues forth love. And "love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the need of others."

Why settle for anything else? Yet, sadly, some people do. In verses 6-7, Paul says, "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." Ignorance and arrogance are a dangerous combination. Yet both of these undesirable qualities characterize fanciful teachers. Hughes and Chappel write in their commentary,

It was not so much that they set out to be heretical. They simply wanted to "go deeper" into the Scriptures. They wanted to go beyond the "simple" exegesis of Paul, and by giving the people and events allegorical meaning, simple stories would reveal fantastic truths. They did not set out to abandon the gospel ... but in fact their progressive accretions smothered the gospel.¹⁶

How do people drift from the gospel? One step at a time. That is why we must "embrace God's truth" and *oppose whatever draws people away from it*. John Stott gives us two practical tests for all teaching:

1. **Test of faith:** Does it come from God (revelation), or from human imagination (speculation)?
2. **Test of love:** Does it promote unity in the body of Christ? Or, if not (since the truth itself can divide), is it *irresponsibly divisive*,¹⁷ promoting needless controversy?

Right doctrine promotes the glory of God and the good of the church. False doctrine does neither. So, whatever you do, *guard the gospel*. It is the only thing that truly saves us. It is the only thing that truly unites us. It is the only thing that truly sustains us in difficult times. Nothing is more precious than God's word! Remember: the gospel we defend today will be celebrated for all eternity.¹⁸

¹³ Towner, 116.

¹⁴ 1 Timothy 1:14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Timothy 1:13; 2:22; 3:10; Titus 2:27.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁶ Hughes and Chapell, 27.

¹⁷ Stott, 46.

¹⁸ David Platt, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, edited by David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2013), 21.