

Waging the Good Warfare

1 Timothy 1:1-20

INTRODUCTION

In 1985, Coca-Cola's market share lead had been slowly slipping for 15 consecutive years. So the executives of Coke made one of the most memorable marketing blunders ever: It decided to change the formula of Coca-Cola for something new—new coke! (April 23, 1985)

Now, they didn't do this without any research. The new formula they adopted was preferred in taste tests of nearly 200,000 consumers. What these tests didn't show was the bond consumers felt with their Coca-Cola. There is something to be said for keeping the purity of a time-tested product. The public did not want anyone messing with Coco-Cola.

When the taste change was announced, some consumers panicked, filling their basements with cases of Coke. A man in San Antonio, Texas, drove to a local bottler and bought \$1,000 worth of Coca-Cola. Suddenly everyone was talking about Coca-Cola, realizing what an important role it played in their lives.

Protest groups sprang up — such as the Society for the Preservation of the Real Thing and Old Cola Drinkers of America. Songs were written to honor the old taste. Protesters at a Coca-Cola event in downtown Atlanta in May carried signs with “We want the real thing” and “Our children will never know refreshment.”

So finally, in July of 1985 (just 3 months after the introduction of new coke), the old formula was reintroduced in the market alongside new coke. In 2002, new coke was discontinued because it just couldn't compete with the “real thing.”

This is a great example of ensuring that the original, pure thing stays that way. Likewise, the glorious gospel message should remain pure and not subject different teachings that lead people to fruitless speculations and disunity.

That is the subject of our passage today. In fact, that is a major purpose of the Pastoral Letters in general. The pastoral letters include 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus. All the other letters of Paul (except for Philemon, which is clearly personal) are written to churches. But these letters are written to these men who are to be Paul's apostolic delegates to the churches at Ephesus (Timothy) and Crete (Titus). Their purpose was to root out all false teaching that would threaten the soundness of the Christian message.

Our passage today in 1 Timothy 1 is a prime example of this. In it we will learn that ***we must protect the church from false teaching so that the church can grow in knowledge of the glorious gospel which results in praise to God and love for others.***

So first, let me give you an outline of chapter 1. Like most of Paul's letters, it begins with a greeting (verses 1-2). But then in the rest of the chapter we have an inclusio which begins and ends with Paul's charge to Timothy to guard against false teaching (vv. 3-8 and vv. 18-20).

Specifically, in verse 3-7, Paul tells Timothy that this false teaching will involve people who have a wrong view of the law.

At the mention of the law, Paul writes a short digression about the law (vv. 8-11). In that end of that section, Paul mentions the glorious gospel message which launches Paul into a second digression about the gospel and Paul's testimony (vv. 12-17).

After these important digressions, Paul returns in vv. 18-20 to the task at hand, waging the good warfare against false teachers so that the gospel message remains pure and central.

So let's begin with the greeting in verses 1-2, which will give us some good background information before we launch into the rest of the chapter. (FOLLOW ALONG...)

THE GREETING (1:1-2)

Paul begins by writing:

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

Paul is an apostle because Jesus specifically had called him. In the New Testament an apostle of Jesus signified special followers of Christ who had been with Jesus and had seen him risen from the dead. Apostleship signifies Paul's authority. He presents this credential as a foundation for his instructions in the letter.

Verse 2 tells us that Paul is writing this letter...

² To Timothy, my true child in the faith:

Timothy was a true son, meaning that his Christian faith was genuine.

Paul met Timothy in Lystra. He had a Jewish mother and a Gentile father. From his infancy Timothy had known the Scriptures. Timothy's mother provided the environment of Jewish faith, and Paul nurtured him in the Christian faith.

Timothy was relatively young and was probably lonely and intimidated in Ephesus. I'm sure he questioned how he could ever be a sufficient replacement for Paul.

So, Paul finishes his greeting with...

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

We hear those words so often in the church that we sometimes fail to ponder these great theological concepts. "Grace" is unmerited favor. In the Bible, grace involves our inadequacy that requires the help of someone else. We need grace because we cannot help ourselves.

Next is "mercy." To truly appreciate the concept of "mercy" you must completely understand your own sin and need. Without mercy, we stand condemned.

The last term, "peace," has become watered down in our culture, but "peace" is central to the gospel message. In order to understand the beauty of "peace," we must understand that we were once enemies and at war with God. It's much deeper than just being estranged from God. We were objects of God's wrath destined for destruction. BUT— through the death of Christ on the cross we now have "peace" with God.

So, hear that greeting anew this morning: “Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Now let’s move into the body of the letter which begins with a clear statement of Paul’s main point in verses 3-7:

We must protect the church from false teaching so that the church can grow in knowledge of the glorious gospel which results in praise to God and love for others.

We learn right away in verse 3 that Paul urged Timothy to “stay” in Ephesus specifically to command these false teachers to stop. Paul has apostolic authority, and he is transferring that authority to Timothy so that he might require those teachers to stop spreading error.

But why stop these teachers? What’s the big deal? Well, verse 4 tells us that the effect of this false teaching was promoting speculations and controversies. It brought about endless discussions that were ultimately fruitless in producing love and righteousness.

And what was the ultimate goal of stopping these false teachers? Well, logically, you would think that Paul’s goal here would be doctrinal correctness, right? But what does verse 5 say is the goal? The goal is love. Now, don’t get me wrong, I think Paul did want doctrinal purity, but doctrinal purity without love turns to legalism which just might be worse than the false teaching itself.

With this new authority from Paul, Timothy could go about destroying these false teachers. He could vent all his righteous anger upon them. But that attitude would be just like the false teachers, forgetting the goal of love.

The charge of stopping the false teaching with goal of love shows us the importance of right belief and right living. Sound doctrine and moral living go hand in hand.

Paul is calling for a pure doctrine and a pure life. We need a godly blend of those two things. Living Hope Church, we don’t want you to just be able to spout off the correct answers to doctrinal questions. Why? Because true understanding of gospel doctrine leads to a changed heart and righteous living.

On the other hand, we don’t want to just focus in on ensuring that you live with right behaviors that are consistent with the law. We could definitely help you develop *habits* that are in line with holy living, but you would just be whitewashed tombs, with no gospel life within you.

Listen, Living Hope Church—the call of God on your life is *intense*. God is calling you ever deeper into relationship with him. True discipleship means that you are growing more and more into the image of Christ.

God wants you to completely understand and embrace the gospel so the you might receive mercy, peace, forgiveness and righteousness. The true gospel leads to an ever-growing intensity of love for God and love for others. And this love manifests itself in a desire for others in your life to grow as well.

So—we cannot just go around hitting people on the head because they are believing or doing something wrong. This command to stop false teachers doesn't make us the law police. The goal is love, redemption and restoration.

Unfortunately, verses 6-7 indicates that there were people in the church of Ephesus who did want to be the law police. They wanted to be recognized authorities on Old Testament law, kind of like the rabbis. It seems they wanted to have authority in judging case law. But because they didn't truly understand the gospel or the law of love, they were causing havoc in the church, and Paul wants them stopped.

And this whole issue of the law leads Paul into his first digression in verses 8-11 about the law. We learn that...

Digression #1: Sound, pure doctrine leads to holy, lawful living – the gospel produces right thinking and right doing.

As Paul begins his discussion of the law in verse 8, it's clear that he is not disparaging God's law. "The law is good," he writes, BUT ONLY when it's used lawfully. This means that there is both a right and a wrong use of the law.

So what is the rightful purpose of the law? The reformers, like Luther and Calvin, laid out three primary purposes of the law. John Stott nicely summarizes:

First, the law is *punitive* (to condemn sinners and drive them to Christ)

Second, the law is a *deterrent* (to restrain evildoers)

Third, the law is *educative* (to teach and exhort believers)

So, to which of these purposes does Paul reference in verses 9-11? Well, at first glance, it looks like the second purpose—to restrain evildoers. But as you read Paul's words here, the other two purposes are implied as well. The law exposes and condemns the lawless. But then, after they have embraced the glorious gospel of Christ, it directs them into a law-abiding life.

Look, my friends, we are all fallen human beings who have a tendency towards lawlessness. If we had no laws, many of us probably would steal to get things we want. Many of us would practice immoral behavior of all sorts because we love pleasure. But these things are contrary to the character of God who created us in his image. We need the law to show us our sinfulness, restrain our evil, and lead us to Christ and ultimately into a lawful, loving life!

But unfortunately, even we who know have the law abuse it in various ways. One abuse of Old Testament law today is an overzealous application of it. It is legalism that forgets the law of love. This happens when we focus on some details of behavior while ignoring whole principles. It's like what Jesus told the religious leaders of his day in Matthew 23:23:

²³ "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness. These you ought to have done, without neglecting the others."

God calls us to a deep, all-encompassing life devoted to him. God doesn't call you to a gospel that forgives your sins so that you can then just wait around until you're taken to heaven. No! He has sent the Holy Spirit to live inside you and transform you! Never be satisfied with where you are. Go deeper!

For example, you can give your money to charity organizations that help the poor, which is a great thing to do. But God calls you to a deeper commitment to actually be involved with the poor. To help them personally—not just with temporary, physical needs—but to help them break the cycles that have brought about their poverty, and to proclaim a gospel that can give them a hope and treasure that far outweighs anything in this world. Living that type of life takes commitment, heartache, and change, and it is only brought about by the power of the Spirit through sound doctrine and extravagant love.

All this is why we at Living Hope desire to teach you the foundations of the Christian faith as soundly as possible so that you can tell the difference between “the gospel” and heresy. We want to go deeper and deeper with our understanding and application of gospel truth. Truth requires precision in our presentation, and we must always be on the lookout in pointing out doctrinal inadequacies.

Just last month during Advent, I prayed spontaneously after the song of our worship service. I prayed to the Father, and then thanked Him for taking on flesh. But guess what, my prayer was inaccurate. The Father didn't take on flesh. The Father sent the Son to take on human flesh. It was accidental, but Pastor Ken pointed it out to me later. That incident reminded me of the importance of being precise in our presentation of doctrinal truth. For it is right doctrine that can lead to right living. Wrong doctrine distorts the truth and is dangerous.

So, as Paul concludes this first digression, he states in verses 10 & 11 that the law was given for anything that is contrary to sound doctrine, which is in accordance with the glorious gospel of God. The law of God goes right along with the gospel of God. And at the mention of the gospel, Paul launches into a *second* digression about his testimony and how he came to embrace this gospel. In this digression we learn that...

Digression #2: The pure gospel of Christ Jesus saves us and transforms our lives.

At this point in the letter, Paul cannot continue his instructions to Timothy without first declaring his overwhelming thankfulness to God's saving work in his life.

So, in verse 12, Paul gives thanks to God for three specific blessings: 1) God gave him strength, 2) God considered Paul faithful, and 3) God appointed Paul to His service.

And Paul is so thankful for this because as verse 13 says, He was so unworthy of God's favor. Paul was a sinner and far from God, but God had mercy upon him anyway.

It's so important for you to know today that no matter how shameful your past, God can also forgive you and use you.

Then in verse 15 we are presented with a trustworthy saying that is deserving of full acceptance. This is the first of five trustworthy sayings that we find in the Pastoral Epistles. And this particular saying is a simple and beautiful summary of the gospel message: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.”

From these words we learn several things about this glorious gospel. First, the content of the gospel is completely true and trustworthy. This is contrasted with the speculations of the false teachers. Second, the offer of the gospel is universal. It is for the “world.” Thirdly, the essence of the gospel is that Christ came to save sinners. As John Stott says, “The LAW is meant for the condemnation of sinners; the GOSPEL for their salvation.” And finally, this Gospel must be received by each of us individually. Paul writes that this saying should be fully accepted. Then he writes in verse 16 that he personally received mercy from God.

And isn't it interesting how Paul describes himself as the foremost of sinners? I think this tells us that Paul was so keenly aware of his own sinfulness that he could not conceive anyone who could be a worse sinner than he was. The more Paul understood the depth of God's grace, the more he became aware of his own sinfulness.

And this is an important part of truly understanding the glorious Gospel. What makes the gospel such GOOD news is understanding more fully this BAD news that we are utterly sinful people, completely in need of grace, mercy and peace.

If you think you are really not all that bad of a person, then the gospel message is really not all that good. Until you, like Paul, understand the depths of your sin and the wrath of God that is upon you, only then can you rejoice in the glorious gospel that saves you. Only then can you burst out in spontaneous praise like Paul does in verse 17:

“To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Paul's testimony here speaks to us, doesn't it? It's a story of God's grace in action. Personal testimonies are powerful. That's why we have been trying to regularly have someone give their personal testimony here in our worship services, and we will continue to do so.

Personal experience speaks loudly today. Unfortunately, just plain, good old biblical exposition is not generally held up high today. Now, we at Living Hope are not going to abandon sound biblical teaching, but we believe it should be accompanied by testimony—real, true stories of how the gospel has changed lives. And in turn, those stories remind us that our lives should be lived in continuous doxology—in praise of God.

And now, after Paul has digressed for a second time, he comes back to the main command he is entrusting to Timothy—the charge that...

We must protect the church from false teaching so that the church can grow in knowledge of the glorious gospel which results in praise to God and love for others.

In verse 18, Paul again turns to the charge of resisting the false teachers. Interestingly, he now describes this as “waging the good warfare.” You see, Christian ministry is more than

proclamation; it is combat. It is hard work, and it will, unfortunately, have some casualties—like Hymenaeus and Alexander from verse 20—but it is work that is essential for the furtherance of the Gospel in our culture. The pure Gospel is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes.

Now, the D6 curriculum also includes chapter 2, verses 1-7 as part of the teaching this week. I'm not going to go into that today except to say that it begins the specific instructions as to how Timothy can carry out this charge to keep the church pure. See what 2:1 says? "First of all, then..." You see how it is connected to what he writes in chapter 1?

So, Paul goes on to teach about prayer in 2:1-7, moves to proper worship in 2:8-15, and then on to the importance of respected leadership in the church in chapter 3. That leads into chapter 4, which Pastor Jeff will teach from next week. Chapter 4 continues to reference false teaching and false living that hurts the testimony of the church.

Conclusion

So as we close today—on this day when we learned that **we must protect the church from false teaching**—let's close with two practical tests to apply to all teaching.

The first is the test of faith – Does the teaching come from God, and is it in agreement with the authoritative doctrine from the apostles? In other words, does it line up with the Bible, or is it just a product of human speculation and imagination? The better we know the Scriptures and understand the true and pure Gospel, the better we'll be able to use this test of faith.

The second test is the test of love? Does the teaching promote unity in the body of Christ? If it is sound teaching and promotes unity, it is probably good. Or is the teaching irresponsibly divisive? Does the teaching cause endless, fruitless discussions that result in fighting? If so, we should at least question the teaching's validity.

Living Hope, let us be vigilant in promoting a pure gospel doctrine, one that results in love for each other, and ultimately a continuous praise of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope!