

2 Timothy 1

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[0 : 00] Let's pray together as we begin. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank you for who you are. We thank you for your love for us, shown to us supremely in Jesus Christ. Lord, we thank you that you guide our lives each day.

We thank you that you bless us, that you guide us, that you strengthen us. And our Lord and Heavenly Father, as we gather to hear your word this day, we pray we may receive abundance of blessing.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, it's a pleasure to be with you this morning. I don't want to waste too much time telling you about myself, but just very briefly, so you've got the context, as Paul said, I run the Centre for Enterprise Markets and Ethics, which is a Christian think tank, really, designed to bring Christian thoughts and Christian insights into the world of business, the economy, and so forth.

Prior to that, I was the head of a training college for clergy in Oxford. I've been a pastor. I've been a chartered accountant. I'm an ordained minister of the Church of England. Yes, well, there we are. Among many other things, and written a few books along the way. But it is a pleasure to be here this morning. It's a pleasure to be with you. And thank you, Paul, for the invitation.

[1 : 25] And thank all of you for this welcome in these strange times. Times, though, in which the Lord remains sovereign.

And in which we need, as Luther advised in his 1527 treatise, whether one may flee from a deadly plague. We've been here before.

Don't ever fall into the trap of thinking some of the challenges that we face we've never faced before. Some of you may know, I'm a trustee of the Christian Institute, and I'm, in fact, I'm the chairman of the Christian Institute Board of Trustees, and I gave a series of lectures on the challenges of our current times last September.

Luther wrote about the exact circumstances that we face. Well, that's not what this sermon is about. But the one thing that Luther said was, Do not give up attending upon the word of life in order to hear the word of God.

That was his one overriding theme. Do not give up on attending upon the word of life to hear the word of God. And it's pertinent, is it not, that our passage for this morning is 2 Timothy chapter 1, where we are reminded to be unashamed about the gospel of our saviour Jesus Christ.

[2 : 52] Unashamed. Not arrogant. We're not called to be arrogant about it. We're called to be unashamed about the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

And I wonder if that's going to be one of the characteristics of Christianity over the coming decades, that we are going to have to learn anew how to be not arrogant, but unashamed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our saviour Jesus, who, as verse 10 tells us, Let's say that again. He abolished death.

Oh, the death that the nation is gripped by fear of. The Lord abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

And it is indeed one of the many spiritual complexities of our COVID times. It's not that we should not exercise due care. It's not that we should look after one another.

[3 : 56] It's not that we shouldn't care for those in need or even be concerned about those who are suffering. Of course we should be caring about all of those things. But that we appear as a nation, and indeed much, though not all, of church leadership, to have elevated fear of death above hearing the word of life.

And this is also a reminder that the gospel precedes the church. You cannot form a church without understanding the gospel.

It is, in fact, a classic error. So let's begin by looking at the nature of Timothy's calling and its purpose.

Well, what do we know about Timothy? Well, in 2 Timothy chapter 1 verse 2, We see Paul referring to Timothy as my dear son.

My true son in the faith. Very strong implication is that it is Paul himself who is responsible for leading Timothy to faith.

[5 : 03] I'm not going to give you my life history or my conversion story. But I remember to this day, I'm in contact to this day with the friend who led me to Christ at the age of 21.

Paul writing to Timothy. My dear son. My true son in the faith. We have here a relationship of love. A relationship built around the faith in Christ.

And that's why the relationship between the two of them is close. Verse 3. I remember you constantly in my prayers.

Night and day. Verse 4. I long to see you. Verse 5. I am reminded of your sincere faith. No, they're not together.

But there's a true relationship here. A true longing. A true desire between these two giants of the faith. We also know that this faith was nurtured within Timothy's family through his mother Lois.

[6 : 12] Sorry, through his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. Never underestimate the power of a living faith within a family.

The long, painstaking encouragement. The prayer and the Bible reading most definitely has long-term influence.

When I was the head of a college in Oxford responsible for training Anglican clergy, a challenge in its own right, as you can imagine, I sat down to lunch one day with a group of students and there was a visitor to the college.

And this man turned to me and said, I want to thank you. I didn't even know who he was. I said, well, who are you? And he says, I'm a visitor and I'm here to, you know, look at training for the ministry in this place.

But I said, I don't know you. I don't think we've ever met. Oh, no, he says. No, you haven't met. We haven't met. But I still want to thank you. I want to thank you for my wife. Because 25 years ago, my wife was converted under your preaching in a church in Southampton.

[7 : 21] I never knew. It's exactly the same within the family. You can go 25 years, 30 years praying for children, praying for nephews and nieces, praying for mothers and fathers.

We don't know for sure what's going to happen. But amazing things can happen over that period of time. I know numerous examples of husbands and wives praying together.

When a husband or a wife comes to faith for one reason or another, but the other partner doesn't. I've seen at least two examples in my life of the other partner coming to faith after 20, 25 years of praying from the other.

Never underestimate the power of prayer within the family context. Timothy is our example. His mother, his grandmother. Timothy himself.

Lord Shaftesbury is also an example of that. He wrote in his diaries. I might tell you a bit more about this if you come back at five. He wrote in his diaries about the family maid who was a committed Christian.

[8 : 26] Putting him on her knee, teaching him to pray and teaching him to read the scriptures. Verse 6 then tells us to fan into flame the gift of God.

And 2 Timothy, and indeed the pastoral epistles as a whole, seem to suggest that this is to be done through the unashamed testifying of the gospel of Christ, through the proper use of scripture and the advocacy of sound teaching.

We would do well to heed these points. We need that as a nation more today than ever. We seem to have lost our way and lost confidence in the gospel.

And so, in verse 8, Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord. Do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord.

We are to spread the gospel in power and love. A power, however, that is likely to issue more in suffering than triumphalism.

[9 : 36] In the gospel, though, we can have confidence because it is God's power for salvation. Well, what then follows in verses 9 to 10 is a list of examples, really.

Essentially, a succinct summary of the gospel. One of the interesting things about the way scripture is written is that you can find, compact in just two verses, an entire summary of almost everything you believe.

And one could spend a very long time unpacking each word. But I am just going to take us through it in verse 9. We are told, first of all, that God has saved us.

God has saved us. No one else. God has saved us. I have not saved myself. You have not saved me. God has saved us.

And B, immediately following that, God has called us. Just think even of those two implications. God saves, God calls. Just think about applying those in our daily lives.

[10:44] And it will begin to make a difference. God has called us. God has saved us. And God has called us to a holy calling.

And then note the basis of that salvation. Not because of our works. But because of his own purpose and grace. Not because of our works.

But the basis of our salvation is justification by faith. Know that this grace, as it follows here, who has saved us, called us to a holy calling, not because of our works, but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus.

And Christ alone. And Christ alone. So, we find the grace of God present primarily and preeminently in Christ and Christ alone.

There will be two challenges that face the church of Christ, the church of God, over the coming decades. One will be the authority of the scriptures, and the other will be the uniqueness of Jesus Christ for salvation.

[11:54] I don't believe any more than anyone else that we should be rude to people of other faiths. I don't think we should be arrogant. I think we should be loving, caring, embracing, relational. But the only way to salvation, the only name under heaven through which we may be saved, is the name of Jesus Christ.

And we will see the challenge that comes to the church as we begin to proclaim, or continue to proclaim, perhaps I should say, continue to proclaim that uniqueness of Christ for salvation for the whole world will become one of the touchstones of the challenge that we face.

Of course, the two, the scriptures and the uniqueness of Christ are related, because if you don't believe in the authority of scripture, you don't need to believe in the uniqueness of Christ. The two are intricately related.

But I'm just carrying on through this list, really. Note that it says also that the grace, the purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began. Christ is the Lord of history.

Christ towers over history. Christ was present at the creation. Christ was present at the cross.

Christ ascended into heaven.

[13:08] Christ is present in our hearts. Christ will come again to judge the living and the dead.

Christ is not just an individual who popped up a couple of thousand years ago.

Christ was present from the beginning of the ages. In fact, it says before the ages began, right back at creation.

And now look, which has been made manifest through the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, who abolished death, the verse I quoted at the beginning, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.

This is the gospel. This is the good news.

This is what we are to make known. What a summary. No church founded on anything other than this gospel can stand. The gospel proceeds and forms and shapes the church, not the other way around.

[14:12] The nation needs the gospel, not the nation needs the church. We need to get our priorities right.

And then the marvelous verse 11. And of this gospel, I was appointed a preacher, apostle, and teacher.

Some translations say herald, apostle, and teacher. Of this gospel, I was appointed a preacher, and apostle, and teacher.

The first four words are critical. And of this gospel, and no other. I don't know if any of you have ever picked up the Book of Mormon.

Maybe don't answer that question. I don't know if any of you have picked up the Book of Mormon. But if you do, and you open the Book of Mormon, the first page, the fly page, says another gospel about Jesus Christ.

[15:12] And whenever I have a Mormon on the doorstep, I always get them to open that book. And they'll say, what does that say? And it says, and they will say, another gospel about Jesus Christ. And I say, I'm committed to the original.

I'm committed to the only gospel about Jesus Christ. Not another one. Of this gospel and no other, I was appointed a herald, a preacher, apostle, teacher.

Why would we want to proclaim a gospel that wasn't true? Why would we wish to be an ambassador? Why would we wish to be a proclaimer of a gospel that was not true?

This is the true three-fold ministry. Preacher, apostle, teacher. Preachers that take and speak out of the gospel, that carry the message.

Ambassadors, bringers of the good news. Second apostle, we must deal with this. What does it mean there when it says we are preacher, apostle, and teacher?

[16:14] It's not that we are apostles in the sense of the office that was reserved for those who had seen the risen Christ, but that we are commanded to undertake apostolic tasks.

That's what we are called to do. Planting churches, appointing leadership, the discharge of faithful and sound teaching. That's what I essentially understand to be the apostolic task.

Establishing new churches, appointing elders in every town, and maintaining the true and faithful gospel and teaching of the Lord Jesus. And the third appointment was that of teacher.

Verses 13 to 14. Follow the pattern of the sound words you have heard from me in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.

Guard the good deposit entrusted to you. Well, one thing that tells you is that there is contained within the scriptures a body of true and sound teaching, the deposit, that is good because it comes from God, the good deposit, and that we are required to guard.

[17:34] Guard the good deposit entrusted to you. And I just want to take a minute or two looking at the nature of this true teaching and conversely of false teaching.

Paul asserts the centrality of sound teaching, but he points out that some will abandon it. He mentions this in 2 Timothy 1, verse 15.

He mentions it again in 2 Timothy 2, verse 17, 1 Timothy 20. Individuals who have abandoned the faith. And later on in 2 Timothy, in chapter 4, he says people will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

And they will turn their ears away from the truth. Now, we all like to be right. I mean, I would be delighted to rewrite the Bible.

Shock, horror. I would remove all the bits that challenge me. I would make it absolutely wonderful, absolutely marvelous, and it would fit in with every single one of my beliefs, emotions, thoughts, fears, so that I wouldn't be challenged in any single way.

[18:56] And you could all rewrite the Bible, and we'd all do it differently. The point is, we have the Scriptures as received. The point is, we are called to submit and to change and transform our own lives, or to allow our own lives to be changed and transformed, not by our own feelings, emotions, and wisdom, but by the wisdom of God, by the Scriptures once received, once delivered to the saints.

The very opposite of gathering around those who simply like to hear the itching ears. It's imperative for us to realize that we are dealing with a spiritual battle, and that spiritual battle is about apostolic truth.

And the Bible is quite clear that there is a distinction to be drawn between true and sound Christian teaching and false teaching. A friend of mine, I'm quite happy to name him in public, a friend of mine, Michael Nazarelli, formerly a bishop in the Church of England, formerly the Bishop of Rochester, has said on a regular basis publicly that we have underestimated the importance of the commands to refute false teaching.

We have underestimated the importance of the commands to refute teaching that is false. Just think about that doctrinal norm that is set out for us in the New Testament.

The apostles' teaching, Acts 2.42. The faith, 1 Timothy 1.19 and 1 Timothy 4.1. The truth, Titus 1.1. Sound doctrine, 1 Timothy 1.10.

[20 : 40] The trustworthy message, Titus 1.9. That which has been entrusted to you, 1 Timothy 6.20. The good deposit, which we've just referred to in verse 14.

The solid foundation, 2 Timothy 2.19. In other words, in the words of Jude 3, the faith once delivered to the saints.

This is the faith of Jesus and his disciples. This is the faith of the apostles. This is what constitutes true teaching, deviation from which constitutes false teaching.

That's why. And the same apostolic teaching is exactly what we have preserved for us in the Bible and in particular in the New Testament. And that's why the authority of Scripture is so critical.

2 Timothy 3.16. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuting, correcting, and training in righteousness. But as I said, the Scriptures also teach in no uncertain terms that false teaching and false teachers are to be exposed, shunned, and rejected.

[21 : 56] Acts 20.29-31 warns of false teachers emerging in our midst who will distort the truth. 1 Timothy 1.3 talks of commanding people not to teach false doctrines.

Titus 1.9 calls upon us to refute those who oppose sound doctrine. And 2 Peter 2.1 refers to false teaching as destructive.

Well, let me just briefly deal with what was the nature then of this false teaching. And I want to try and help you find a framework for categorizing the false teaching you may hear and may come across.

Because we find it difficult. We don't like the idea of standing against false teaching. We'd much rather be positive. We'd much rather be sort of open, if you like, in that way. So I want to try and give you a framework for helping us understand what might come at us in terms of false teaching. And in essence, I think false teaching can be gathered into three categories. False ethical teaching to do with behavior. False doctrinal teaching to do with belief.

[23 : 11] And false ecclesiastical teaching to do with church practice. I think all false teaching can be gathered into one of those categories.

False ethical teaching about moral behavior. False doctrinal teaching about belief. False ecclesiastical teaching about church practice. Now, in 1 Timothy 4, 3, two things are specifically mentioned as false teaching.

Forbidding to marry and abstaining from certain foods. Let me just turn to that. The Spirit successfully says that in later times some would depart from the faith, et cetera, et cetera, by forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from foods that God created to be received.

So there's an example given there of two activities, two behaviors that are deemed to be wrong. The problem is that in each of the cases cited, the Bible teaches the opposite.

The Bible commends marriage. It doesn't command. It commends marriage. And it explicitly states that no foods are to be seen as unclean.

[24 : 37] Hence, that teaching to abstain from marriage or to not eat certain foods is false. And it might be described as false ethical teaching.

That was just an example from the scriptures. We know that our nation and too many of our churches swim in false ethical teaching because we have lost the grip on the standard provided by God.

So moral precision is replaced by moral equivalence. And so, that is why when you get into the arguments, and yes, they're difficult, yes, they're complicated and complex around same-sex marriage, you will hear constantly advocated, but what matters is the love.

And we find it difficult to combat that because we're in favor of love too. and we don't want to be seen to be putting people down, but actually, that's an example of false ethical teaching because it goes completely contrary to the teaching set out in the Bible.

So moral equivalence is not a way forward when it comes to the scriptures. Then, secondly, in 2 Timothy 2.18, a little after our passage, the false teaching there is asserting that the resurrection has already taken place, a reference, presumably, to the resurrection to final judgment.

[26 : 09] That was in 2 Timothy 2.18. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus who have swerved from the truth saying the resurrection has already happened.

Presumably, the reference there to the second coming of Jesus and the resurrection to final judgment. Another example in 2 John verse 7, there's a warning against those who deny the incarnation of Jesus.

This might be described as false doctrinal teaching. Doctrine is not an optional extra.

There's an enormous pressure, I think, in many parts of the church today to resist too much position in doctrinal formulations. and I understand the complexities. I mean, I recognize that.

But doctrine is not to be avoided. Doctrine is to be taught because unless we teach doctrine, we will not know what constitutes false doctrinal teaching. So we are required to teach the doctrines of the scriptures.

[27 : 16] And then thirdly, and finally, a couple of examples, 2 Timothy 3.4, Titus 1.14, referring to myths and human commands, especially Titus 1.10, over the insistence on circumcision.

1 Timothy 4.7, there's reference to godless myths and old wives' tales. I sat on the General Synod of the Church of England for 10 years. Godless myths on old wives' tales were rampant, I can absolutely assure you.

All the stuff too often added on to the truth by the church. false teaching will invariably fall into one of those three categories.

And it's just maybe helpful to you when you're trying to assess something. Is this a false doctrinal teaching? Is it false ethical teaching? Or is it false ecclesiastical teaching?

And just help you understand that and respond to it in a proper way. Well, we need to draw to a close, but I just want to finish by saying, you know, there's a clear link to be made between sound teaching and godly living.

[28 : 27] You see, what people try to do, what too many people in the church try to do, is say there's a distinction between sound teaching and godly living.

And so, for example, I know of individuals who will say, well, we recognise that the Bible teaches this, but pastorally, we must do that. no, no, no, no, no.

It is not possible to pastorally do something that is good, wholesome, and healthy, that is contrary to the teaching of the scriptures as set out in the Bible. Sound teaching and godly living belong together, not apart.

How could one's pastoral response possibly be godly if it's contrary to that which is set out in the scriptures? 1 Timothy 4, 7, Timothy's urge to train yourself to be godly.

And verse 16, watch your life and your doctrine closely. Didn't Richard Baxter in the, in the reformed pastor, didn't he divide the work into two parts?

[29 : 28] The oversight, the oversight of the self and the oversight of others. The oversight of the self. Sound doctrine and godly living. Closely related.

Sound doctrine without godly living is arrogance. There are sadly too many examples of that. Of such arrogant soundness, if you like, from the front, completely mismatching with the behaviour in life.

That's arrogance. But godly living without sound, well it's not possible, is it? Living without sound doctrine is self-delusion. What does this mean for us today?

What does all of this mean for us today? Commend the truth of the gospel. Be unashamed of the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave his life for us.

Stand for what is right. Resist that which is false. but also try to see the link between what we believe and what we practice, how we live.

[30 : 40] Preach the gospel and live the gospel. Amen.