

1 Timothy – The Household of God

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵if 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 ESV)

The Aim Of Our Charge

October 17th, 2021

1 Timothy 1:1-7

Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Today we are going to begin our study through the Book of 1 Timothy. But before you turn there, we're going to do a quick survey of the background of this letter to help us to gain our bearings. To that end, I want you to turn with me in your Bibles to Acts chapter 20.

The Background

The letter of 1 Timothy was written by the Apostle Paul near the end of his life. It's impossible to pinpoint the exact occasion that Paul wrote this letter, but the consensus is that it was composed after the events described in the end of the book of Acts. It appears likely that Paul was released from the imprisonment described in Acts 28, that he went on to continue to develop the churches he had planted. Then, he wrote letters of instruction to Timothy who was helping to right the ship in a messy situation in Ephesus and to Titus who was helping the fledgling church in Crete to get off the ground. It seems likely that he was then imprisoned one last time in Rome where he would write 2 Timothy to give a final word of encouragement to his protégé.

Timothy would have been a young man – likely in his late teens or early twenties – when Paul first called him to accompany him in ministry. By the time the letter of 1 Timothy was written, he was probably in his early to mid-thirties. Timothy held a special place in the Apostle Paul's heart. In fact, Paul wrote to the church in Philippi:

I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. ²⁰ **For I have no one like him**, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. (Philippians 2:19-20 ESV)

“I have no one like him!” Paul says. That’s quite a commendation!

It is popular to envision Timothy as a young, frail, timid little man who needed Paul’s constant affirmation. But that’s not the Timothy we see in the New Testament. Whatever deficiencies Timothy possessed; he was no coward. When Paul was chased out of Berea by a dangerous mob, he left Timothy to establish the church. When the church in Corinth was a tire fire, he sent Timothy to help clean up the mess.

That brings us to the final detail we need to unpack as we consider the background of this letter. Timothy had been commissioned by Paul to help right the ship in Ephesus.

Let’s talk about Ephesus for a moment, because the story of that church would be enough to fill an entire sermon – trust me, I considered it! Humanly speaking, there was no reason why the church in Ephesus should have ever gone off the rails. The Apostle Paul stayed with them for THREE YEARS! Can you imagine that? Three years of sitting under the teaching of the most prolific, genius Bible teacher outside of Jesus that the world has ever seen! Look at Acts 20 verses 26-27. Here, Paul is speaking to the Ephesian elders, and he says:

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:26-27 ESV)

“I taught you everything I know!” Paul declares. “If this thing falls apart, it won’t be because I held anything back from you.” But, in that same speech, Paul prophesied that trouble was on the horizon. Look at the warning we find in verse 28:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. ²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ **and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.** ³¹ Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears. (Acts 20:28-31 ESV)

Remember, Paul is speaking to THE ELDERS of Ephesus here. He warns them that from among themselves – from the elder board – WOLVES are going to spring up. That was Paul’s prophecy, and it happened just as he predicted. In spite of the solid foundation that had been laid in Ephesus

– in spite of the fact that this church had been planted and nurtured with everything that they needed to succeed – the wheels fell off and the church went sideways. False teachers emerged – presumably from the elder team that Paul warned on his way out. Some of the leaders in the Ephesian church went off the rails, and as we have witnessed all too many times, when the leaders fall, the people suffer.

That’s the backstory behind this letter.

Before I go further, I want to briefly share with you why I felt led to 1 Timothy. I must confess off the top, I see a lot of Redeemer in the Ephesian church.

We are not a baby church. We shouldn’t think of ourselves that way anymore. We celebrated nine years in September, and we were planted by a 150+-year-old congregation. Pastor Paul and the elders who planted us went over and above priming the pump and doing everything humanly possible to set us up for a future of faithful ministry. We are growing in maturity as a congregation, and we are preparing to build on the incredible foundation that was laid for us. There are exciting days ahead of us! Amen?

Well, the same was true for the church in Ephesus. They had been around for a while. They had benefitted from the Apostle Paul’s hands-on leadership for three solid years! Talk about priming the pump!

But as we will see in this letter, a few years of experience and a solid foundation do not guarantee faithfulness. Listen closely: A church like ours can go sideways in a hurry.

Therefore, Paul sent Timothy to a church like ours. He gave warnings and instructions to a church like ours. He laid out a blueprint for how to live faithfully as the household of God – how to build on the solid foundation that had been laid. If we are wise, we will lean in and ask some important questions:

Why did things go sideways in Ephesus?

How can we guard against the same things happening here?

What does it look like to build faithfully on a solid foundation?

Where do we start?

Let's jump into this letter informed by that context and asking those questions. Look with me now to 1 Timothy 1. We're going to be reading from verses 1-7. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

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

²To Timothy, my true child in the faith:

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

³As 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, ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷desiring 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 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

Paul begins this letter by asserting his God-given authority. He describes himself as “an apostle of Christ by command of God our saviour.” Paul opens his letter with a statement of his credentials because he's sending Timothy to kick some false teachers out and to call the congregation out and he wants the church to know that there is DIVINE AUTHORITY behind this shakeup!

When the leadership of a church has succumbed to corruption – when there are people with hands on the steering wheel who are fighting for the wrong team – change doesn't come easy. Paul commissioned Timothy with Apostolic authority to confront and rebuke the corrupt Ephesian leaders and then to rebuild the church that they had been tearing down.

As we study this text, I want to ask a hugely important question, and that is:

How Can The Teaching Ministry Go Off The Rails?

That was the problem in Ephesus. Just as Paul prophesied in Acts 20, so it came to pass. There were men – likely serving as elders! – who had grabbed hold of the teaching ministry and who were leading the church into ruin. How did that happen?

First, this text teaches us that the teaching ministry goes off the rails:

1. When the teachers aren't tethered to the text

Paul tells Timothy in verse 3:

³As 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**, (1 Timothy 1:3 ESV)

“Tell them to stop teaching things that aren't in the text!” That's what Paul's saying here. These teachers were presenting a different doctrine – a different gospel – than that which was passed down by the Apostles. John Stott observes here:

The plain implication is that a body of doctrine exists, which, having been revealed and given by God, is objectively true. It is the teaching of the apostles. Paul constantly calls Timothy and Titus back to it, together with the churches they oversee.¹

Here's what this means: There was an objective standard for orthodoxy even here in the first century. Jesus was so clear in his teaching, and his disciples were so clear in their teaching, that Paul could refer to “the doctrine” without needing to clarify it further! People knew what “the doctrine” was!

We find it in its earliest and most basic form in 1 Corinthians 15. This summary of the faith was being shared just a few short years after the resurrection and it is the earliest recorded creed in the Christian faith. Paul wrote:

For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁴that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, ⁵and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. ⁶Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷Then he appeared to James, then to all the

¹ John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 11.

apostles. ⁸Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. (1 Corinthians 15:3-8 ESV)

This was the heart of the doctrine of the church. The gospel doesn't evolve over time. You don't ever graduate out of the truth once for all delivered to the saints. We've been singing the same song for 2,000 years and it is still the hope of the world! Amen?

And yet. The false teachers in Ephesus had given themselves permission to preach a different gospel! To be clear, they had no such permission. Neither do I. No one has permission to stray from the doctrine that has been passed down from Christ and his apostles. As Paul wrote to the Galatians:

But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. ⁹As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. (Galatians 1:8-9 ESV)

We're not editors. We don't get to change the message to accommodate to our desires. We're not authors. We don't get to add or subtract from the message. We are stewards. A teaching ministry goes off the rails when teachers aren't tethered to the text.

Second, a teaching ministry goes off the rails:

2. When the teachers are attracted to everything new and novel

We see this in verse 4 and in verses 6-7:

nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. (1 Timothy 1:4 ESV)

Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. (1 Timothy 1:6-7 ESV)

Novelty is like a magnet for pride. Have you noticed that?

If we're honest with ourselves, there's something deep inside of us that LOVES the idea of being the smartest person in the room! We love being able to tell ourselves that we are one of the select few who were able to find the truth!

The steady stream of YouTube teachers peddling novel interpretations of the Bible from a dark, dingy room in their basement shows no sign of stopping. The demand never seems to go away.

Let me just say this: If you find yourself growing bored with the old, old gospel story, you are on the edge of disaster! When people become bored with the gospel, they binge on novelty and nonsense. They become enamoured with the teachers who have unlocked the mysteries of the Old Testament! They buy shofars and return to the Old Testament festivals and condemn all of those who have failed to find the hidden meaning. The phenomenon is all too common.

Woe to the church that leaves its people to wander into stupid to the shipwrecking of their faith! But DOUBLE WOE to the church who appoints those lovers of novelty as elders! That is a sure-fire recipe for disaster!

The error that was being spread in Ephesus doesn't seem to fit with any other heresy that we find in the early church. It appears to be an indistinguishable hodgepodge of silliness. Paul doesn't provide a clear, point by point response to the error in this letter, because it seems as if the false teaching was too ridiculous to even respond to. Commentator William Mounce notes:

Paul must deal with the Ephesian opponents differently from those in Galatia who had a formulated teaching that could be described and evaluated. Paul cannot logically and theologically argue against empty chatter and quarrels about words.²

When you walk away from corporate worship, you should walk away with a clearer vision of God. You should walk away with a better understanding of His word. You should walk away with a deeper appreciation of the gospel. Settle for nothing less! That's what you should expect here. That's what you should demand here!

² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles – World Biblical Commentary*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2000), lxxv.

That's what the Ephesians expected in their gatherings. Yet, Christians were walking away from corporate worship in Ephesus more confused than when they had arrived! The teachers were waxing eloquent about genealogies and mythologies and speculations. Paul tells us that they were "swerving" away from the truth. They took their eyes off of the gospel and started looking around at shiny new novel teaching and, before they knew it, they were in the ditch. You tend to wind up driving where you're looking. Make sure your teachers are looking at Jesus.

Third and finally, the teaching ministry goes off the rails:

3. When the teachers aim at anything other than love

This is so critical. Look with me at verses 5-6:

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion (1 Timothy 1:5-6 ESV)

The aim of our charge as stewards of the Gospel is love. Did you know that? The proper proclamation of the word should result in love for God and love for others. Once love is removed – once the emphasis or the end of our preaching is placed anywhere else – we've lost the plot!

This happened in Corinth. Do you remember that? They deemphasized love and become overly infatuated with their spiritual gifts. And do you remember what Paul said to them?

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. ² And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³ If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing. (1 Corinthians 13:1-3 ESV)

If your doctrine leads to pride – if your Bible study produces boasting – if your church has any ambition that has supplanted the chief aim of loving God and loving one another – then you've MISSED IT!

Why did these Ephesian elders go off the rails? They had swerved away from – they had de-emphasized – the need for a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. As a result, the doctrine that they taught no longer led to love.

They were meant to minister from pure hearts, but we will learn in chapter 4 that they had become liars.

They were meant to lead with a good conscience, but we will learn in chapter 5 that they were persisting in sin.

They were meant to preach with a sincere heart, but we will learn in chapter 6 that some of the elders had depraved minds and had developed an unhealthy craving for controversy.

As I open the Bible week after week and preach to you from this pulpit, my AIM – my great ambition – is that, by the grace of God, you would walk away from the preaching of the word equipped and inspired to LOVE GOD MORE and to LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOUR MORE! I want you to leave with a zeal that's rooted in love! An obedience that's motivated by love! A life that is overflowing with love!

The sad thing is – even after Timothy shared this letter with the Ephesians – even after he stayed with them and prayed with them and worked with them – they ultimately missed the mark. In Revelation 2, Jesus writes a letter to the church in Ephesus. This is after Timothy's time with them. Jesus commends them for their zeal. He commends them for their refusal to tolerate false teaching – so they got that right eventually! But they missed this most critical piece. Jesus wrote:

But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. (Revelation 2:4 ESV)

The aim of our charge is love.

From the overflow of my heart, I speak. From the overflow of Gary's heart, and Harry's heart, and Clyde's heart, and Keith's heart, they speak. Pray for your elders – that God would enable us to

minister from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Pray that we would lead with an aim to love – a greater love for God and a greater love for His people.

How does a teaching ministry go off the rails? It goes off the rails when the teachers aren't tethered to the text, when they are attracted to everything new and novel and when they aim at anything other than love. In light of all that we have seen, I want to propose three resolutions for us as a church moving forward.

Three Resolutions

First:

1. Resolved – We will be careful and prayerful in our appointment of elders

The Bible provides clear qualifications for elders, and a church that ignores those qualifications is inviting the kind of mess that Timothy is here attempting to clean up. We will flesh this out in greater detail when we hit chapter 3.

For now, let me give you a really practical application this morning: In a little less than a year, our brother Clyde is going to return to Cornerstone after fulfilling his one-year-commitment of leading us through this launch. That means, in a little less than a year, we will need to install another elder to lead in his place. I am not exaggerating in the slightest when I say that no decision we make as a congregation this year will be more significant to the future health of this church than that one.

Start praying now that God would raise up a man who will be able to faithfully serve in that role. Start praying now that God would guard us against anyone who would teach a different doctrine, or who would become infatuated with novelty, or who would lead with an aim to anything other than love.

As the leaders go, so goes the church. Be careful and prayerful in your appointment of leaders.

Second:

2. Resolved – We will cultivate a culture of accountability

Now, there are biblical and unbiblical ways to hold leaders accountable. We're going to unpack that in greater detail in the coming weeks. But for now, this text is a needed reminder that the title of "elder" or "pastor" or "overseer" does not mean "infallible" or "unquestionable" or "above the law."

On two occasions that I can remember, I have had people from this congregation pull me aside to share their concerns with something I had taught. They did so respectfully. They did so with their Bibles in hand. And, while I confess that my flesh didn't love those experiences in the moment, I am very thankful that they happened! Those encounters reminded me that I am not the pope. My interpretation of the Bible is not infallible and, from time to time, I might even draw a conclusion that you will disagree with. And, if it appears to you that I have missed the mark, I want you to know that the door to my office is open.

And if you meet with me and you still feel that something is off, I want you to know that you can bring it to the elders. Did you know that their primary responsibility is to guard the teaching ministry in this church? It's true! If I am preparing a sermon and I'm unsure if I'm handling the text faithfully, I ask them. If they feel that I've mishandled a text, they tell me. And, if I continuously mishandle the text and stray from the centre, they will remove me. We have baked accountability into our cake.

That needs to be a non-negotiable moving forward. And it applies to more than the teaching.

The character of our leaders and teachers must also be above reproach. We must resolve as a church to deal honestly and openly with sin – from the top down. We'll discuss this in greater detail in the coming weeks, but let's resolve today to never, ever, conceal things that need to be brought to the light. We've seen how that story ends. The church has a MISERABLE history of sweeping sin under the rug to protect its own. Let's resolve to never let that happen here. Let's be the people who have the hard talks. Let's cultivate a culture of accountability. Third and finally:

3. Resolved – We will tether ourselves to the Word of God

The first two resolutions are impossible unless we adopt this third and final resolution. How will you appoint qualified elders if you never bother to open your Bible to find those qualifications!

You need to read your Bible to discern when the teaching from the pulpit is going astray. You need to read your Bible to identify sinful attitudes and actions that have crept into the church. You need to read your Bible!

If this church is going to stand as a defence for the truth in this city – if this church is going to thrive as the household of God – then this church must be FILLED with men and women and boys and girls who look to the Word of God as their final authority for truth! This church must be filled with people who refuse to settle for anything less than the gospel once for all delivered to the saints! This church must resolve to fill the pulpit with men who can declare with the Apostle Paul:

Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all, ²⁷ for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God. (Acts 20:26-27 ESV)

Settle for nothing less from the pulpit!

But, and here's where some of us need a correction, settle for nothing less in the home! Honour your elders, but don't make idols of them. They are to lead, and to correct, and to equip, but they are not to do your Bible reading for you! You should listen to us in the same way that the Bereans listened to Paul. We read in Acts 17:

The Berean Jews were very glad to receive Paul's message. They studied the Scriptures carefully every day. **They wanted to see if what Paul said was true.** (Acts 17:11a NIRV)

Let us resolve today to be men and women of the Word!

We are heading into our tenth year of ministry here at Redeemer City Church. Isn't that remarkable? There is so much that could have gone wrong! Yet here we are. The Lord continues to grow us. He continues to bless us with little ones in the nursery. He continues to bring new people in from the community. Praise God! But let's be on guard against the danger of complacency. This church can go sideways in a hurry.

May God raise up godly men to continue to lead this congregation until His return. May He guard us against corruption and grow us in integrity and holiness from the leadership down to the nursery. And may He cultivate in us an unflinching commitment to the authority of His word. To that end, let's pray together.