

How Healthy is Your Diet?

1 Timothy 1:1-11

Studies in the Heidelberg Catechism #1

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IT was interesting being in Europe last week to experience the contrast in diet as compared to the American diet. In Europe the meals are smaller, the food is fresher, and the food is less sugary. Of course here in America where food companies throw in additive after additive and sugar upon sugar to make us come back for more we are all constantly dealing with *dieting*. Last week reminded me of that old adage: You are what you eat.

This is true of your soul as well. Here in 1 Timothy Paul describes not only the content of Christianity but its quality in terms of healthy food. Our reading speaks of **sound teaching** (1:10) and later on in the book of “sound words” (6:3). If you have an ESV like I do you might have a footnote for the word translated “sound” that says “healthy.” The New Living Translation gets a little closer when it translated this as “wholesome teaching.” The word Paul uses was used in the ancient word to wish someone good health.¹ Paul’s point is that you and I are what we eat spiritually. Tonight I want to proclaim that we need healthy doctrine. At the end I’ll explain why.

¹ BAGD.

Healthy Doctrine Leads to Faith

Healthy doctrine leads to faith. Notice the contrast between **different doctrine** (v. 3) and these false teachers' **devot[ion]...to myths and endless genealogies** (v. 4) with the implied standard of doctrine that Paul as an apostle passed down from Jesus Christ himself. In fact, Paul uses this same word **different doctrine** in 6:3 and defines it as what is not in accord with “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.” Throughout 1 Timothy Paul speaks about the opposite of **different doctrine** as “the faith” (1:2; 3:13; 4:1; 5:8; 6:10; 6:21), “the words of the faith” (4:6), “the mystery of the faith” (3:9), and “the good fight of the faith” (6:12). He speaks about “good doctrine” (4:6), “the truth” (2:4; 3:15; 4:3; 6:5), and “the teaching” (4:16; 6:1). And he speaks about “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” (1:11) and “the deposit” (6:20). We can bog down like the commentaries and try to figure out exactly who these teachers of different doctrine were or even what their particular doctrines were, but the relevant point for us is that there *are* teachers who teach different doctrines.²

Look at the outcomes of **different doctrine** and **healthy doctrine**.

Verse 4 says different doctrine **promote[s] speculations** but healthy

² See John R.W. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 43–46.

doctrine leads to salvation by faith because it promotes what Paul calls **the stewardship from God that is by faith**. Literally, *the plan or work of God that is by faith* (Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9; 1:25). And there's something really shocking here for us to consider. Look again at verse 3. Paul says **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**. Now turn back to Acts 20. After three years in Ephesus we read in verse 17 that Paul "called the elders of the church to come to him" and among the many things he said was this in verses 28–31:

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. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert...

The gap between Acts 20 and 1 Timothy 1 is no more than a decade. And already what Paul warned the Ephesians elders has happened! I read a great line by Kevin DeYoung this week saying, "The only thing more difficult than finding the truth is not losing it."³ Brothers and sisters, we need healthy doctrine to have healthy faith. Amen?

³ Kevin DeYoung, *The Good News We Almost Forgot: Rediscovering the Gospel in a 16th Century Catechism* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2010), 13.

Healthy Doctrine Leads to Love

“But doctrine divides. Doctrine causes anger. Doctrine causes a critical spirit.” You’ve heard this, haven’t you? Do you know what the biblical word “heresy” actual means? We use it for false doctrine, but heresy is the creation of parties. In other words, it’s *false* doctrine that is divisive. Biblical doctrine unites. *Healthy doctrine leads to love: The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith* (1:5)—love for God and love for one another as human beings. We see this later in 6:3 where Paul contrasts the different doctrine with not only “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ” but also “the teaching that accords with godliness.” Healthy doctrine is parallel to godly living. Martin Luther spoke of this connection between healthy doctrine and love after he went on a pastoral visit of the German-speaking region of Saxony. He wrote,

Good God, what wretchedness I beheld! The common people, especially those who live in the country, have no knowledge whatever of Christian teaching, and unfortunately many pastors are quite incompetent and unfitted for teaching. Although the people are supposed to be Christian, are baptized, and receive the holy sacrament, they do not know the Lord’s Prayer, the Creed, or the Ten Commandments, they live as if they were pigs and irrational beasts, and now that the Gospel has been restored they have mastered the fine art of abusing liberty.⁴

⁴ Timothy Lull, 471.

Healthy Doctrine Leads to Hope

“But we don’t want to be so heavenly-minded that we’re of no earthly good.” Have you heard that too? I think we American Christians are too earthly-minded and so do not benefit from our heavenly good much at all! Look over in chapter 4. Paul contrasts those who train merely their bodies through abstinence from marriage and food (4:1–5) and us who train ourselves for godliness (4:6). Why train in godliness? Paul goes on to say because “while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (4:8). *Healthy doctrine leads to hope.*

Look in chapter 6. The false teacher “imagin[es] that godliness is a means of gain” (6:5). The false teacher’s doctrine is good for this life only. In contrast Paul says, “godliness with contentment is great gain.” Why? “For we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” Healthy doctrine gives us a healthy perspective on this life and the life to come.

So here in 1 Timothy there are three tests of healthy doctrine: first, does it come from God and promote faith; second, does it promote love

among us; third, does it lead to hope for the life to come?

Why am I saying all this? Because this evening kicks off a series on Christian faith, love, and hope using the venerable Heidelberg Catechism. “But isn’t ‘catechism’ a Roman Catholic thing?” No, it’s a way of teaching healthy doctrine using questions and answers. In fact, it’s a biblical word (e.g., Acts 21:21, 24; Rom. 2:18; 1 Cor. 14:19; Gal. 6:6). Think about Apollos who was “instructed (*katēchēmenos*) in the way of the Lord” (Acts 18:25) or Theophilus, to whom Luke wrote his Gospel, “that you may have certainty concerning the things you have been taught” (*katēchēthēs*; Luke 1:4). The verb literally means “to echo back” and so we use the word to describe the back and forth of questions and answers. Let’s echo back and forth that beautiful first question of our Catechism. Turn with me in the back of the *Psalter Hymnal* to page 8. I’ll read the question if you’ll read the answer:

What is your only comfort in life and in death?

That I am not my own, but belong—body and soul, in life and in death—to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood, and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil. He also watches over me in such a way that not a hair can fall from my head without the will of my Father in heaven: in fact, all things must work together for my salvation. Because I belong to him, Christ, by his Holy Spirit, assures me of eternal life and makes me whole-heartedly willing and ready from now on to live for him.