

1 TIMOTHY
Part One: Chapter 1
Pastor Rick Henderson January 27-28, 2024

Object Lesson: Follow my lead...

I know that may feel a little too silly for us grown-ups. It is. But it quickly demonstrates the relational imbalance between teaching and example. As we go through this series, this will be our key verse. I'd love for you to memorize it.

1 TIMOTHY 4:16 *Watch your **life** and **doctrine** closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will **save** both yourself and your hearers.*

What we believe is huge. I want to make sure that I'm ridiculously clear about that. Because I don't want anyone to misunderstand me later. It's huge. This is why our very first value as a church is: Take truth seriously. What we believe matters.

And yet, the goal isn't to acquire knowledge and collect information. We need it. We've got to have it. But acquiring knowledge and truth is not THE goal. What does this verse say that the goal is? The goal is salvation. The goal is healing. It means experiencing life to the full—which is why Jesus came.

I know we've got people in this room who grew up on a farm. Is the goal of farming to plant? NO. The goal is harvesting. Teaching and learning, that's planting. Experiencing salvation, life to the full, that's harvesting. 1 Timothy and this series is all about life and truth.

SERIES THESIS: We teach **WHAT** we know but reproduce **WHO** we are.

The silly exercise I did at the beginning was a playful way to illustrate this profound truth. What we show with our lives will always have more force than what we say or what we teach. We need to recognize that power and impact are not equally distributed between the two. That doesn't mean that one is important and the other isn't. We need both.

- If we teach truth but don't model it, we won't have **credibility**.
- If we model truth but don't teach it, others won't have **understanding**.

Both the content of our lives and the content of our beliefs are incredibly important. Making one more important than the other is like trying to say that oxygen is more important than water. It doesn't matter which one you take away—you'll die. You and I need both. Our series thesis is our attempt to take this seriously.

1 Timothy

Grab a Bible or use your phone and find 1 Timothy chapter 1.

Each week we'll share a little bit more about the context and background of this letter. The Apostle Paul wrote this to a young leader named Timothy. His job was to appoint elders or pastors in house churches around Ephesus. They never thought of church as a location. Church is the collection of believers who were organized into a network of congregations that met in houses.

This letter addresses serious leadership issues that Timothy needed to address. But it wasn't just for him. This letter was shared, copied, and distributed among all the house churches. And it was shared, copied, and distributed to churches in other regions as well. Why do that if this is a letter about leadership to a person in leadership?

Leadership is a **DESTINATION** of discipleship.

It doesn't matter how young or how old you are. Career, retirement, gender, income, relationship status—they have no impact whatsoever on your call to leadership. Every single one of us who follows Jesus is called to use the influence we have to help others take a step toward Jesus or to take their next steps with Jesus.

Let's read verses 3-5 and 18-20 together. We'll cover the rest as we go.

1 TIMOTHY 1:3-5, 18-20 As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith... Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

Before we dig in, I have an important question. Who loves ice cream? I love it. It doesn't matter how cold it is, there's always a line at Flapdoodles. So, I know you love it too. Has anybody started craving it because I started talking about it? I'm happy to share my ice cream with you.

Before I do, let's add some toppings.

Who wants some now? Not so much. Based on what we just read and what we will read together throughout this series, Timothy faced a steep leadership challenge. The church at Ephesus took something good, the gospel, and they added in all kinds of things that made it

appear gross, feel gross, and it made life with Jesus utterly unattractive to those inside and outside of the faith. It was harming the church leading to shipwrecked faith.

It's always a good idea for a church to ask itself, if people evaluated the Christian life by what they see in us, is it attractive? Is it appealing? Or is there something about it that just doesn't taste right? I don't believe Paul was angry. He was serious.

1 TIMOTHY 1:3b,5 ...*command* certain people not to teach false doctrines...The *goal of this command is love*, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

It is easy to hold up truth at the expense of love. And it's easy to hold up love at the expense of truth. But in Jesus, and in his gospel, they are united and one is never compromised for the sake of the other. Would you write this down?

If our doctrine isn't rooted in **LOVE**, and if it dilutes our **UNITY** with Jesus and each other, it's not **TRUE**.

There is room for all kinds of people in our church and every church. Do you know what we can never make room for? Do you know what we can never, ever tolerate? Lies. False teaching. Anything that dilutes our love and our unity with Jesus and each other. We get what we tolerate. And we just can't tolerate that.

This doesn't mean we can't disagree on secondary issues. Of course, we can. You and I are going to disagree on some things. Maybe many things. I promise you there are things you are right about and I'm wrong about. The reason I don't see it like you see it yet, is because I'm either too ignorant or too arrogant. It's one of the two. I'll be patient with you, and I hope you'll be patient with me.

But imagine with me, that there is something that is important to you and it's important to me, but we never agree. Did you know that's allowed? That is totally OK. Not only is it allowed, it should be expected. Many of you know that our elders and I have been studying and discussing men and women in leadership in the church for the past year and a half to two years.

- Should women be restricted from serving in and occupying certain roles of leadership?
- Should women be included in serving in and occupying any position of leadership?

The elders of our church have promised to share what they believe our church's practice should be. That's going to happen at the Annual Meeting on February 4. I hope you come. Even if you're not a voting member, I hope you come.

In week 3 of this series, we are going to get raw and honest about one of the most controversial sentences in the entire Bible. The controversy is 100% about whether or not

women can serve in and occupy positions of leadership. We are going to tackle it head-on. We're not going to flinch. And do you know what?

At the end, not everyone is going to agree. Good-hearted, intelligent, Jesus-loving people will disagree. That's allowed. Do you know why? Because our unity is not grounded in our agreement. Agreement is a pathetic foundation for unity. Our unity is based on our inclusion in Christ. And if we use disagreement as license to divide—we've let a lie smudge and distort the truth and beauty of the gospel.

You think mixing ketchup and mustard with ice cream is bad. Mixing the gospel with disunity devastates our experience of the life that Jesus intended. It devastates our ability to model what we've received from Jesus. And it will devastate our ability to effectively share the good news of salvation.

This is where the gospel is unlike any other approach to life in this world. The gravitational pull in life is to only associate with and calcify into tribes based on similarity. But Jesus takes people who are nothing like each other, and makes us all a part of his body, of which he is the head, and together we grow into greater love and unity because we are in him, connected to him. There's a lot of stuff we are going to agree on, but not everything. And that's OK.

This leads to a really important question. Are there things that we can't disagree on? The answer to that is YES. There are some disagreements which we cannot tolerate. Those things are the essential matters of faith, sometimes called orthodoxy. Some examples include:

- Jesus is fully God and fully human.
- The resurrection literally happened and is a true event from history.
- The only way to be saved is to trust in Jesus and what he did for us.

We hold onto essentials or orthodoxy like this. There can be all kinds of disagreement on nonessentials of the faith. Some examples include:

- How we conduct baptisms
- Views on men and women in leadership
- Styles of music in the church

We hold onto nonessentials of the faith like this. And we hold onto each other like this. If this feels a little too abstract and you want some handholds, maybe think of it like this. Ultimately, a married couple can't disagree about whether or not they are going to have kids. Eventually, they'll have to agree. That's an essential. But they don't always have to agree on how to parent their kids. There is room for a mom and a dad to have different approaches. Sometimes, the dad will practice mutual submission by deferring to the mom's approach. Sometimes, the mom will practice mutual submission by deferring to the dad's approach.

Disagreement on parenting should never result in division in the home and division between dad and mom unless abuse and harm are inserted into the situation. That's exactly what false

teaching does. False teaching always inserts abuse and harm into the church family. That's why the apostle Paul responds so seriously. That's why he uses such strong language.

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FALSE TEACHING IN EPHESUS

- It wasn't based on truth.
- It wasn't rooted in love.
- It resulted in division and disputes and destroyed faith.

It appears that there were three streams of false teaching spilling over into and polluting the church at Ephesus. The first was the teaching of the Judaizers. Those are people who misrepresented and misapplied the Old Testament. What they taught tended to promote and perpetuate racism in the church and burden everybody with rules that they could never live up to.

The second false teaching was the emergence of an early form of Gnosticism. That included things like Eve was created before Adam. Adam was the one deceived, and Eve wasn't even present when Adam sinned. It also heavily emphasized acquiring secret knowledge. The more secret knowledge you got, the more prestige and privileges you earned.

The third stream of false teaching was mixing beliefs and practices based on Artemis worship. The cult of the goddess Artemis was to the religious landscape what Apple products are to watches and cell phones. The cult of Artemis touched everything. We'll dig into this more over the coming weeks, but it flaunted wealth and celebrated lifelong singleness and celibacy.

This chaotic mixture of false teachings resulted in physical fights in the church. There was a social hierarchy based on knowledge and wealth. Sometimes people weren't allowed to get married. There was an explosion of single women who expected the church to help pay their bills. This church faced serious issues. The task of leadership for Timothy centered on living the truth and teaching the truth for the saving and healing of the lives of those inside the church and outside the church. This was urgent!

Are there any urgent issues facing the American Evangelical Church? YES. I can't list them all. But I want to share with you three currents of false teaching that I believe are trying to dilute our unity with Jesus and our unity with each other.

MODERN FALSE TEACHING:

- Power

Any teaching that blends power and control with the gospel brings harm and abuse to the church. Some of the ways this is expressed are bullying tactics, excusing moral failures of

leaders, and blending the gospel with political ideologies. That's been going on for too long in the American Evangelical church. Let's not tolerate it in our church.

- Segregation

Over 80% of churches are predominately or exclusively one ethnic culture. This is where it's really important to remember our series thesis. We teach what we know but we reproduce who we are. Most churches teach that racism and segregation are wrong. But what we are reproducing are churches full of people who look like each other. We tend to produce small groups full of people who look like each other. Let's not be satisfied with that in our church.

- Fundamentalism

The defining feature of fundamentalism is not a commitment to what's most important. The defining feature of fundamentalism is that makes everything equal in importance. There's no room to disagree. Fundamentalism bases unity on agreement instead of basing it on our connection to Jesus. This has broken families and it's broken churches across our country. Let's not tolerate that in our church.

A problem that we have to face is that people use the Bible to teach things that the Bible doesn't support, and biblical writers never intended to communicate. People will use the Bible to teach these three things. That very same thing was happening in the house churches in Ephesus.

1 TIMOTHY 1:7-11 *They want to be teachers of the law, but **they do not know what they are talking about** or what they so confidently affirm. We know that **the law is good if one uses it properly**. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.*

It's our responsibility to know the difference between **USE** and **ABUSE** of Scripture.

Someone once said, "The Bible is like a torture victim. Abuse it long enough, and you can make it say anything you want." We cannot tolerate those who twist the Bible and abuse it, trying to make it say what it never intended to communicate. And we cannot tolerate those who explain away what biblical writers intended to communicate. Both errors do harm to the church.

Depending on our personal temperaments, each of us are probably more vulnerable to one error vs. the other. If you are a person who naturally gravitates toward certainty and control, you might find that you're vulnerable to the temptation of adding extra commands. If you are a

person who gravitates toward nuance and independence, you might find that you're vulnerable to the temptation of removing essential commands. Both errors bring harm and abuse to a church.

All of God's commands are good. We don't need more than he gave, and we don't need less than he gave. We need exactly what he has given to us because they are for our good. John Stott was a beloved scholar, author, and a leading voice among evangelicals around the world. This is what he wrote.

The fundamental principle that the law is for the lawless applies to every kind of law. For example, the reason we need speed limits is that there are so many reckless drivers on the roads. The reason we need boundaries and fences is that it is the only way to prevent unlawful trespass. And the reason we need civil rights and race relations legislation is in order to protect citizens from insult, discrimination, and exploitation. If everybody could be trusted to respect everybody else's rights, laws to safeguard them would not be necessary. —John Stott

Remember that Paul wrote the goal of his commands to Timothy was love. Jesus said that if we love him, we will keep his commandments. The commands of God are like guardrails, designed for our protection, keeping us safely inside the life of love and thriving that Jesus gave his life so we could have.

I know that in a room this size, there were some of us who winced as I read the list of sins that Paul wrote out. It's easy to affirm that slave trading is a sin. It's not so easy for modern Westerners to get on board with what Scripture calls sexual sins. If I'm talking to you, I want you to give yourself the gift of really seeing what comes next.

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17 *I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom **I am the worst**. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the **worst of sinners**, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as **an example for those who would believe in him** and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

Timothy had some huge issues to address in the church. But Paul didn't emphasize tactics and techniques of leadership. Paul emphasized the gospel and modeled Gospel Fluency.

GOSPEL FLUENCY

- Identify the **CONTENT** of the gospel.

My sin is serious. It's so bad that I have no doubts that I'm the worst sinner there is. Notice that he didn't say I WAS the worst sinner. He repeats I AM the worst sinner. Paul understood the gravity of his own sin, which caused him to reverence the grace and patience of Jesus. I have life because of what Jesus did for me. By his death on the cross he paid for my sin and by his resurrection he gives new life.

- Understand the **IMPLICATIONS** of the gospel.

Both here and throughout the rest of this letter, the implication is that we should be humble and gracious as we lovingly correct those who are in error.

- Apply the **MOTIVATIONS** of the gospel.

Paul ended that little section by breaking out in worship. The motivation to put the gospel in action is love for Jesus, gratitude for Jesus, and love for people. Identify the content of the gospel. Understand the implications of the gospel. Apply the motivations of the gospel.

Let's **DO** as Jesus did and **LOVE** all others the way he loved us.

We are going to model with our lives what it looks like to align with the truth. We are going to talk about and teach the truth. When a lifestyle or teaching contradicts the truth of the gospel, we are going to talk about that too. And we always start with a disposition of love. I don't mean we just say we love each other. We are saturated with love all the way down to our bones. We leave no room for doubt.

And we are humble. We don't have the right to talk about somebody else's error until we are so gripped and grieved by our own sin, that we see ourselves as captains of the sin team. I'm going to put something on the screen. When you are I can say this with integrity, then we are ready.

I'll never be more disappointed in you than I am in me.

I'm suggesting that if this doesn't yet describe you or describe me, our job is to get the gospel in us before we try to get the gospel into someone else. What I'm talking about is not for the faint of heart. What I'm talking about is not weak-sauce Christianity. This is part of life in the gospel that Jesus said will make us like a bright city on a hill for a world trapped in darkness.

What do you think? If this truly described us, would it be easier for people to see the beauty of Jesus and the attractiveness of the gospel? I want to inspire us toward that today. But we probably can't wrap this up without acknowledging something at the end of chapter 1 that may appear to contradict what I'm saying.

1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20 *Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have **handed over to Satan** to be taught not to blaspheme.*

By saying that he was handing them over to Satan, Paul used urgent, figurative language. The church represents where Jesus reigns. Out in the world, Satan reigns. This is an urgent and figurative way to say that they were not allowed to meet when the church gathered in order to protect people.

This is rare, but it does happen. It's never a punishment. It's always about protecting people from harm and abuse.

Let's end by practicing Gospel Fluency. Did you know that Jesus expelled himself so that we wouldn't be expelled? Did you know that Jesus was rejected so that we could be accepted? That's what he did on the cross. He was shamed so that we could be honored. He was condemned so that we could be adopted. He was killed so that we could live.

And when he rose from the dead, he proved it wasn't sentimentality. It wasn't just what he taught. It's what he lived, died, and lived for again. So that in him, and by him, salvation and life are reproduced in us.