

# 1 Timothy 1 (Seminar 1)

*Twin Lakes Fellowship*

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If you have your Bibles, I would invite you to turn with me to 1 Timothy 1. Just this past week, a dear friend of mine, Caleb Cangelosi, was installed as the Associate Pastor of the Pear Orchard Presbyterian Church in Ridgeland, MS. Caleb is here with us today. I think I saw him come in. Caleb, raise your hand back there. Caleb is one of the guys, one of the things I love about Twin Lakes is I get to meet young men who give me so much hope for the future, and men like Caleb, men like David Strain, I'd hand them the car keys right now and say, "Just take it, brother. I'm happy to ride in the back seat and you just take me wherever you want to go," because these men love the Lord, they love the word, they're serious about the Gospel, they understand the truth, they are preaching the word, and it just gives me great hope for the future what the Lord is doing in our own midst in the days ahead. And I do hope that all of you are investing in young men like this, that every single one of us in this room is thinking about, "How can we invest in brothers and in sons in the ministry so that a new generation is equipped to serve the Lord in the churches?"

But I had the privilege of preaching at Caleb's installation service and I wanted to go to 1 Timothy 1:3-5, and I'd invite you to turn there because I had this on my mind for the message that I wanted to give as well to the graduation exercises of Reformed Theological Seminary in Jackson and in Washington this year. It's a seminal passage. It's always been important to me and I wanted some time to reflect and ruminate on it and so I want to do that with you for just a few minutes today. I want us to look at 1 Timothy and we'll read from verse 1 down to verse 5, but it's really verses 3 and 4 that I want us to zero in on for a few minutes this afternoon.

So before we read, let's pray.

*Open our eyes, O Lord, to behold wonderful things from your law. We ask it through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.*

1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, 2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 3 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, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Amen, and thus ends this reading of God's holy inspired and inerrant word. May he write its eternal truth upon all our hearts.

We who are a part of the Reformed tradition are often called the Bible guys by some folks around us. Sometimes they are complimenting us, sometimes they are not. Sometimes we are called the truth guys, more frequently that is not a compliment. And we are occasionally called the theology guys, but we are not often called the love guys. We may be famous for our commitment to the Bible and to theology and to truth, but we are not so famous for our love. That is not our reputation in the larger community.

Now, that leads some within the Reformed tradition trying to redress that perceived weakness by a de-emphasis on preaching and word ministry and theology and truth. You see, the logic is this: if we're deficient in love, maybe the problem is we care too much about truth, we care too much about theology, we care too much about Bible preaching. And very often in a desire to promote congregations that love, there is an emphasis on the ministry of deeds or action or charity and compassion in contrast to an emphasis on the ministry of the word. So what I'm saying is often the diagnosis is that underlying this perceived lack of love is the idea that too much Bible, too much truth, too much theology, is a bad thing and what I want to say to you today is that's a wrong diagnosis. That's the wrong diagnosis and it leads to a wrong prescription.

The problem is not the truth. Truth is never the problem. We're the problem, truth is not the problem. The problem is not the truth, the problem is our own hearts and – listen to me closely – our problem is that we don't understand what the truth is for. We don't understand what the truth is meant to do. We don't understand what the truth is meant to produce. We don't understand the end of truth, the goal of truth, the aim of truth, in the Christian life. I confess that as a young man, I was captured by the glory of the truth even when I really didn't understand what the truth was for. But our goal, our aim in ministry is neither loveless truth nor truthless love but love from truth and that's what I want to talk about with you today for just a few moments in our time together.

Now, there is so much in this passage that I'm going to skip over. In fact, I'm already trying to decide what am I not going to say when I have those brief moments with the students at graduation time when their minds are on a thousand things anyway. So I'm going to skip over what I could dwell on in verse 1 where Paul emphasizes that his ministry is by a commandment, the commandment of a God who saves and gives hope through Jesus. I love what Patrick Fairbairn says about that, "It was right that Timothy should feel that necessity was laid upon him in the voice of Paul; that the voice speaking to him was not merely a revered instructor or a spiritual father, but of a heaven-commissioned ambassador who has a right to declare the divine will and rule with

authority in the Christian church. He ministers by the command of God, our Savior, and by the hope of the Lord Jesus Christ." So we could spend a lot of time on a ministry with authority, couldn't we?

And I'm going to skip over what I could say about Paul's encouraging word. Even in his salutation, he gives a benediction. Did you notice that in verse 2? Even in his salutation, he can't even say, "Hello, Timothy," without blessing him. But before he gives him that beautiful blessing, "Grace, mercy and peace," it sounds like he's ending the worship service, doesn't it? "Grace, mercy and peace," before he does that, he has to pause and say, "It's not just to Timothy, it's Timothy, my true child in the faith. Timothy, you're my son in the faith. I love you like my own son. I'm proud of you. I'm thankful to God for you. I cherish you like my own child in the faith." And let me just say again: are you encouraging young men in the Lord like that? Is it deliberate that, "Lord, where can I encourage a young man who may well preach the Gospel to thousands and minister to the people of God for decades?" Am I looking out to encourage the men who will do that when I am dead and in the grave?

I'm going to skip over that and I'm going to go to two things that I want you to see in verses 3 and 4 and in verse 5. Two things I want you to see in this passage. When you're in 1 Timothy, you are in the beginning of the world's all-time bestseller on pastoral ministry. This is the New York Times #1 worldwide bestseller in pastoral theology, the pastoral epistles. Now, we should never shortchange Thessalonians. 1 & 2 Thessalonians are masterpieces of pastoral theology but here it is. And the world's all-time leader on pastoral theology doesn't begin like you might think it would begin. It begins with these words after he's identified himself, after he's greeted Timothy, he begins with this as his first exhortation, "I left you in Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine or devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies." So the very first thing out of Paul's mouth is a negative exhortation. He says, "Timothy, here's job 1: teach your people not to teach or heed false teaching." There's the first exhortation: teach your people not to teach or heed false teaching.

Look at the language, "charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine." That doesn't mean variety, it means heresy. It doesn't mean preach the same sermon every Sunday morning, give them the full scope of the ordo solutis, it means teach them not to teach false things and teach the people not to listen to those false teachers teaching false things, "nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies."

So we have a negative exhortation to actively check false teaching as a part of your ministry and there are so many things I want to say about that, but Paul tells you if you look at the end of verse 4, he tells you why false teaching is so bad and here it is, "which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith." Why is truth so important? Because the kind of love that Paul wants to grow in the Christian congregation does not grow in the soil of falsehood, it only grows in the soil of truth. That is why truth is so important. Only truth can edify. So you cannot correct lovelessness in a congregation by promoting truthlessness. The truth is the necessary soil of the love that you want to grow. Downplaying doctrine, making peripheral theology,

backburnering the Bible is not the way to produce a more loving congregation. It's the certain way of producing a less loving congregation.

There is no such thing as truthless love, at least not truthless Christian love. And by the way, the world is telling us today that there is, that truth is the great impediment to Christian love, and that until we get rid of the truth, we will not be able to love. Do not listen to the world and do not listen to the world when it gets into the church and tells us that. So Paul begins by saying, "Here is the reason why it's so important to keep false teaching from flourishing in the church: it is a spiritual dead end. It doesn't lead to Christian maturity, it leads to speculation."

When I was a seminary student, the second semester, the first semester of my second year, my middle year, I went home to my home congregation and the elders of the church asked me if I would meet a young man who had been attending the church for a period of time and I think had joined the church and who had started his own Bible study and had gathered a couple of dozen people to himself, and he was teaching them, from what the elders could gather secondhand, some pretty strange stuff. And so I made an appointment to meet Tom and he came to my house and I opened the door to welcome him in and he stuck out his hand and he introduced himself to me, I kid you not, as the world's leading expert in the little horn of Daniel. "Hi, Tom. I'm Ligon." "I'm the world's leading expert in the little horn of Daniel." Why is it the crazies always go for eschatology? When a conversation begins that way, you know it's going downhill from that point.

We talked for four fruitless hours as I tried to figure out what it was that he was inculcating into this little group of a couple of dozen people, his own strange views on eschatology. But at one point in the conversation, I had to ask him, "What would it matter if what you are teaching is true or not? Because all that you have to offer is speculation. It doesn't lead anywhere in the Christian life." And the Apostle Paul was saying that to Timothy, "It is so important that you preach the truth because anything but the truth is going to lead to fruitlessness in the congregation."

But here's what I really want you to see. Look at verse 5. Here, Paul exhorts Timothy to minister in light of the goal of the apostolic instruction. Just hear what he says, "The aim of our charge," or maybe if you're looking at a different translation, "the goal of our instruction, the goal of what we are exhorting you with in our preaching, the goal, the aim, the end of our ministry is." Now, just pause. Do you hear what Paul's saying? Paul is about to tell Timothy what he's shooting for in his apostolic ministry. Every one of us in this room ought to be all ears. Paul is about to tell us what he wants to see his ministry produce and he can give it to you in one word: love. He's a truth guy because he wants his congregation to love. He wants them to be characterized by love. That's why Paul's a truth guy.

So don't let someone pit the truth against love. The truth is for love. Paul is looking for truth produced love, love which is produced by the work of the Holy Spirit using his truth in the hearts of people, and he's about to tell Timothy the goal of his apostolic instruction. "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a

sincere faith." In other words, Paul is saying, "Timothy, the goal of my apostolic ministry as I declare the truth, as I preach the word, as I exhort with sound doctrine, is to see disciples who love, that is, who live self-giving lives for God and others." And that kind of love is only produced by apostolic truth. You can't have apostolic love without apostolic truth. Apostolic truth is unto that love. The kind of love that Paul is talking about, Christian love, comes from truth that has taken hold of the inner man, our inmost being. And look at his language. Where does it issue from? From a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. In other words, this love flows from a heart which in faith union with Christ by the work of the Holy Spirit, has been gripped by the truth in such a way that three things, three things are leading to love in life.

1. A pure heart. What is Paul talking about there? He's talking about the desires. Jesus says in the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God." A pure heart is a heart with one desire, one longing, one affection, to see God and that's the great battleground of the Christian life. The battleground is the desires and here's the thing: you and I can't change the desires. You and I can't change the desires. We're almost like Ezekiel in Ezekiel 37 and the Lord says, "Okay, now here's what I want you to do. I want you to change their desires." And you kind of turn to the Lord like Ezekiel does in Ezekiel 37 and you say, "Yeah, how do I do that?" And do you know what the Lord says? "Prophesy, son of man, prophesy over those dry bones." And what are you to declare? Do you declare practical tips on how to be more loving? You declare the truth and Jesus takes that truth and he shapes the desires of his people. You can't get to their hearts, he can. But you get there with the truth that he has given you in the word and especially the truth about what he has done and Jesus shapes those desires.

Second, and a good conscience. Paul is talking about a conscience that is self-aware and is informed by the word of God. You know, it seems to me that there are many people today that are trying to get relief from conscience by denying the consequences of their ongoing sinfulness in their communion with God and the biblical answer to the relief of an accusing conscience is just so much better than that. It's just so much better than that. So these people, Paul says, are freed from guilt, not by denying the consequences of their ongoing struggle with sin but by reveling in the reality of the one who has borne their guilt and their condemnation in their place. And what happens to that kind of person? Instead of working so hard and being so turned in to try and deal with your guilt, suddenly you are set free to be able to think about other people and that's the only way you can love. Love is not self-centered, love is focused on others. You can't be focused on others until you have a good conscience, a conscience that has been delivered from the sense of condemnation by what God has done for us, and you can only know that if the truth has been declared.

And third, Paul says, and a sincere faith. That is, an unfeigned faith focused on Jesus.

Now, notice all of those things together lead to a person who is set free from self to live for God and others. God has set them free. Their desires are now redirected. Their conscience is cleansed. Their faith is focused. And now set free from bondage to guilt and to self-preoccupation they can do what? They can love because love is serving each

the other at our own expense and you can't do that if you're self-preoccupied. You have to be set free in order to do that. So the Apostle Paul says, "That's what happens when apostolic truth is proclaimed and the Spirit takes that truth and Jesus takes that truth and shapes a heart by that truth and produces a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." We are in the business of God-created love in the lives of blood-bought disciples and that means we are in the business of truth created love. And if we are unloving, it is not the fault of the truth. It is because the truth has not had its way with us yet, or perhaps that we do not yet know what the truth is for.

It is my prayer that we will be so captured by the truth that people will not say, "Oh, they're loving. They don't get caught up in all that theology and truth." Or say, "Oh, they're all about the truth and they're about theology but there's not an ounce of love in them." But that people will say, "Look at the love that the truth has produced in them. Look at the love that the truth has produced in them."

A number of years ago, David Brooks, a secular Jew who writes for the New York Times and Washington Post and the National Review, had just discovered the writings of John Stott. He had been frustrated with the way evangelicals were depicted in the mainstream media, often being represented to the world through the towering intellectual personages of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell, and he had encountered enough evangelical leadership to know that there was much more substance to evangelicalism than Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell. And so he stumbled across the writings of John Stott and he devoured them and he met a rigorous intellect who really cared about the Bible and truth and theology and even Christian ethics in areas where those ethics were unpopular with the world, and yet he also met a man that was undeniably loving. And he tells us that when he read John Stott, he said it was like reading Mr. Rogers but with a backbone of steel.

Well, I'm not exhorting you to be Mr. Rogers today but I am exhorting you to be men of love with backbones of steel, men who are the products of truth produced love, and so who hold and proclaim truth tenaciously but are not satisfied until it has had its way with you and with your people, producing love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.