

Defend the Truth
I Timothy
Downtown and Lexington
April 19, 2020

We are kicking off a new series today that we'll be in for the next few months, deep diving into the book of 1 Timothy. I'm so excited to sit in a book of the Bible together and work through it a little bit at a time, not only on Sundays through preaching, but also throughout the week on our own and in our Lifegroups. Hope you'll take advantage of all of the resources we've got on our website with this series.

This book of 1 Timothy is one of three books of the Bible often lumped together as the "Pastoral Epistles" - 1&2 Timothy and Titus. They are written by Paul to 2 different pastors - Timothy and Titus. But these books are not just helpful for pastors. They are written as instructions for churches. Paul even outright says this in 1 Timothy.

In fact, the goal behind the writing of this letter and our whole sermon series, can be found right about halfway through the book. Chapter 3, verses 14 & 15. Let me read it to you. The apostle Paul writes:

1 Timothy 3:14-15

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God

In other words, Paul says I'm writing this letter **so that the church knows what it means to be the church.**

The "Church" is quite simply, **the people of God**. The Greek term for it is "*ekklesia*", which means basically - "*The called out gathered ones.*"

Those who put their faith in Jesus are **called out** of the kingdom of darkness, out of the world -- old ways of living, old ways of being in relationship with others, old ways of viewing our time and money and possessions, old ways thinking -- all of that. Set apart to be holy and blameless before God.

And **gathered together** into the family (the "household") and kingdom of God. God is taking us from one place to another, to be His people, His bride, His Church. So God establishes and brings together His people into **His** Church.

Paul is writing this letter so the family of God knows what it means to live out this identity together.

Now it might sound strange, and a bit ironic, to take a few months to talk about what the church is and how the Church should function in the middle of this season. In many ways, you might feel more disconnected from "church" than ever before. As we experience social distancing and isolation, it might

be hard for us to remember that we are a part of something bigger than ourselves. That we are a part of the family of God.

But we know - even as 1 Timothy 3 tells us here - *that the church is not a building you go to or an event you attend, but it is a family, a **household** that you belong to.*

But then notice specifically how Paul refers to the church at the end of **verse 15**:
The church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

The Church is a pillar and a buttress, or foundation, of the truth. It's a place where notice, "*THE*" truth, absolute truth, is held up, revered, studied, taught, applied, and as we're going to see today in chapter 1 → where the truth is *defended* and *fought for*.

That's what Paul addresses here in Chapter 1. Keep verses 14-15 of chapter 3 in the back of your mind - this letter of 1 Timothy is about how the church should be the church, and how foundational to all of that is that it is a pillar and foundation of *the truth*.

Let's turn now to Chapter 1, Verse 1.

Paul Calls Out False Teachers

I Timothy 1: 1-3

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus.

Alright, pause there. So here you have Paul, writing a letter to Timothy. Timothy is a disciple of Paul's. These were two men who had done ministry work and planted churches together. And one of the churches they planted was the church at Ephesus. It's a pretty crazy story, you'll actually read about it this week in our Scripture reading plan, Acts 19. Riots, exorcisms, false teachers, all this crazy stuff.

And at some point during his traveling around and planting churches, Paul has either sent or left Timothy at Ephesus to pastor the church there. And now he's writing to him, giving him instructions for the church, and he's telling him to stay put. Here's why:

I Timothy 1: 3-7

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

In other words → Timothy, I need you to stay and keep pastoring at Ephesus so that you can defend the truth and tell false teachers to sit down and be quiet.

Picture this scene: Paul writes this letter to Timothy, but it would have been read in front of the entire church at Ephesus. So Timothy, as the pastor gets up in front of the church - most likely meeting in a room no bigger than the living room you're in right now - people sitting around - excited they got a letter from Paul.

Paul says, “Hey it’s me Paul, I love you Timothy, you’re great, grace and peace and mercy from Jesus...**now we need to deal with these false teachers.**”

Paul so understands and believes what he is going to say in **Chapter 3:14-15 - that the church is a fortress of the truth** - that he wastes no time getting right to the point → quick greeting then boom → **Paul starts the letter swinging.**

He says listen - there are people in the church - “certain persons” - teaching false doctrines, and they need to be addressed. He says “charge” them - it’s the Greek word for *command*. Let them know - “Hey, this isn’t going to be tolerated. This is not ok. This is the church of the living God. We teach the truth. We defend the truth. We fight for the truth.”

In fact, this is such a big deal, that even though Paul starts by calling them “certain persons”, he actually circles back around in verses 18-20 and calls them about by name. He says this,

I Timothy 3:18-20

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, holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made a shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

In case you were all looking around wondering who I’m talking about - it’s people like Hymeneus and Alexander. *Cue awkward glances from the rest of the church.* Those guys. They rejected the truth.

False Teaching in Today’s World

Now here in chapter 1, and we’ll talk about this more next week, the false teaching specifically has to do with aspects of Jewish fables and stories and genealogies of Israelite kings. Probably not stuff you’re sitting around wondering about or reading about during your social distancing. Probably not the false teaching we’re going to be susceptible to in our culture today.

But we deal with and face false teaching and false teachers all of the time. I’m not just talking about that random person on the street corner yelling gibberish or the late-night televangelist. **I’m talking about**

how we are bombarded daily with lies and deceit, things that might even sound really good at first, but are contrary to the truth of God and the truths of the Scriptures.

We deal with this all of the time. In fact, I would argue false teaching and false doctrine and false teachers are more of a problem today than they were for the church at Ephesus. And I think this because of the phone in your pocket and the computer you're watching this on.

In First Century Ephesus, in order for the church to hear false teaching, someone had to physically stand up and say things out loud. You had to be around someone and hear someone talk. Today, a simple scroll through Instagram, or a Netflix show, or a podcast - Christian or non-Christian - or a song on Spotify, or that book you ordered from Amazon - all of this is preaching to us.

Every type of media you consume is preaching a sermon.

- It's telling you a story about **life** and where the good life is found or not found.
- It's telling you a story about **God** - who or what He is and what He's like or not like.
- It's telling you a story about the **world** - how things should or shouldn't be.

We are constantly hit on every side with false teaching and false teachers telling us what we should think and believe and how we should live. And without even realizing it, it creeps into our hearts and our minds...and it creeps into our church, which is supposed to be a foundation of the truth.

Look at what happened by their false teaching, **verse 19** →**By rejecting this, some made shipwreck of their faith...**and not only that but we actually read Paul addressing Hymenaeus again in 2 Timothy chapter 2, where we read that his false teaching is "**spreading like gangrene**".

Gangrene. What a picture. False teaching spreads like gangrene. This infection, often that develops in a wound, and the bacteria is so dangerous and spreads so quickly that if you get infected, you often have to amputate that limb or that part of your body in order to live. It's just a little bacteria in one part of you that can spread like crazy and lead to death. And so it has to be dealt with quickly and decisively.

And Paul says that is what false teaching does to the church.

- This is what lies and wrong doctrine does to our church.
- This is what deceitful ideas that sound good on the surface but are contrary to the truths of God and Scripture do to the church.

It's a disease that even if it starts small - just a little bit here and there - it spreads and spreads and spreads and it disrupts and threatens the life of the church. And Paul says it has to be amputated. It has to be cut off. It has to be dealt with.

Defend the Truth

But if I had to guess, to our 21st century, Modern American minds, what's going on in this passage sounds a little bit overblown. Right? I mean...come on Paul...calling them out by name.

Modern-day example. Put yourselves in their shoes. Imagine a year from now, y'all have sent us out to plant Citizens Church in Charlotte. And we have some people in our church plant who are spreading false teaching. And you hear that your pastors at Midtown write us an email they want to read to the entire church. And in that email they call out by name - both the false teaching and the false teachers. In front of the whole church - hey tell these specific people to stop teaching this specific stuff. Exactly how Paul handles it here.

We might be tempted to think things like:

- How close-minded can you be?
- You would just go and shame them like this. You're shaming them.
- Or maybe...come on, no need to argue over semantics, let's just love people.
- Don't worry about those specifics man, all that matters is love. Just love people man. Love God, love others.

Paul just put them on blast in front of the entire church...called them out by name... He just told Timothy to go on the offensive. To go after false teachers and command them to sit down and be quiet.

Come on Paul...let it go! Just love people.

Why Truth is a Big Deal:

But here's what you have to understand: **The truth is worth fighting for, because the church is worth fighting for.**

Remember chapter 3:15 - this is the church of the living God. This is God's Church.

This is God's family. These are the ransomed people of God that Jesus took on flesh for, entered into humanity for, bore their sin, took their punishment, died the death they deserved. These are the people Jesus (who in John, calls Himself "*The Truth*") purchased for Himself by His blood.

People of Love

So if it's God's Church, if we're God's people - that means we are supposed to be conformed more and more into the people God has called us to be. We're to believe what He has told us to believe and be shaped as He's called us to be shaped. Another way we've said it is that we want to be with Jesus and become like Jesus.

And that, more than anything else, is to be **people of love.**

That's what Paul says in **verse 5. The verse we jumped over earlier. In pushback against false teaching, he says:**

I Timothy 1:5

The aim of our charge [our teaching, our correction, our defending and fighting for the truth] is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

This is what we are called to be as the people of God → What does it mean to be a Christian, what does it mean to be the church → **It means to be a people of love.** Love of God - first and foremost. And then love of others. This is what Jesus says all of the commands of God hang on...this is what being a follower of Jesus is all about.

Love. And not some feeling or emotion of love - self-sacrificing love:

- Love that is modeled after the person of Jesus.
- Love that serves others instead of ourselves.
- Love that seeks good for others, no matter what.
- Love that works to help those around us look more and more like Jesus.

Paul says that's the aim of their charge, their instruction, their teaching, their doctrine. And that's our aim. That's the goal of our teaching, our instruction, our Bible reading, our resources, our LG sermon discussions: **That we would grow into a people of love.**

False Dichotomy

Truth and love have to go hand in hand.

We've created a false dichotomy between love and truth. We've created a world in which we think it has to be one or other. You can't be loving and defend the truth at the same time. Because to us, defending the truth means you're probably a jerk. And we overwhelmingly have a culture that values its definition of love and inclusivity at the expense of absolute truth.

So we hear about what happened in 1 Timothy, and how Paul calls these guys out by name in front of the whole church - tells Timothy to command them to stop spreading lies...and we are more upset about the fact that people are being called out and told to stop, than we are about the fact that they are spreading lies that are disastrous and dangerous to the people of God?

When we talk about confronting false teaching you might think → "That doesn't matter, let's just go love people." **That would be unloving to tell them they're wrong. But Paul is saying** → "**Timothy, I need you to confront those false teachers, so that we can go love people.**" **Defending the truth is an act of love when false teaching is wrecking the faith of the people of God.**

Don't create a false dichotomy in your head. Don't believe the lie that defending truth and being people of love are separate. What Paul's saying is actually the complete opposite. The aim of right teaching, right doctrine, defending the truth is that we will grow into a people of love. That's the whole point. That's the whole goal. You can't separate out the two. Lies have to be called out and uprooted and truth must be

defended so we can learn what is right, cling to what is right, and grow up into maturity that God invites us into.

The church is to be a pillar of truth stewarded in such a way that we grow up into lives of love.

You can't grow into the type of love God calls you to, unless you are willing to fight for and defend right doctrine because right doctrine is what leads to right hearts which leads to right love.

He's saying to Timothy - don't ignore false teaching and just focus on love...BUT correct false teaching so that we as the people of God, as the church, can actually grow up into love.

False Teaching → False Living

But if we're not careful to defend the truth, to fight for the truth, to value the truth and dismiss the lies, it will shipwreck all of this. It's lies that work their way from the inside out - gangrene that starts small and spreads and infects the life of the church - deceitful ideas and false teaching that infiltrate our hearts and our minds and our church and totally ruin any chance we have to be people of love.

Because → **False teaching leads to false living.**

You believe a lie, eventually you'll start living out that lie. You believe a falsehood, eventually you'll start living out that falsehood.

Let me just show you a few examples of how false teaching leads to false living:

- **If we don't fight against the lie that we should just do our own thing and look out for ourselves and cut negative people out of our lives - we won't grow up into people of love.** We'll be crushed by apathy and self-security, instead of people that learn to give our lives away for others. People that value others more than ourselves. That bend to help the person in need. That give of our time and money and possessions to help and serve. It starts small - well that person they're just a little annoying, and then it spreads and spreads until we cut out anyone who seems to be "draining" in our lives.
- **If we don't fight against the lie that we are born as pretty good people.** And anything bad we choose to do is because of some bad in our past - bad parenting, bad friends - whatever. The lie that we are born as good people with all good intentions and good deeds and it's only our circumstances to blame for our wrongs - we won't grow up into people of love. Because growing into a person of love requires believing the truth of the gospel - that we are born sinners, separated from God, and yet Jesus made a way for us to be forgiven and washed clean and made new. And if we can't own our own sin before God, we're never changed by the Holy Spirit, we're never freed by the gospel.

- **If we don't fight against the lie that everything in our lives should revolve around our kids - we won't grow up into people of love.** We won't learn to prioritize the spiritual health of our families and our church family over their next activity or class or sports practice. We will cater to their every whim and every emotion, instead of actually loving them in a way that provides for them, cares for them, but also works to grow them up to be flourishing members of society that love God, love others, and pursue good in the world.

I could go on and on and on and on. False teaching all around us - inside and outside the church - and it keeps us from being **people of love**. It keeps our church family from being people of love.

An Invitation for This Series

I'll land the plane here...**In this series**, we're going to talk about some uncomfortable stuff...

- Gender roles
- Authority
- Wealth and Money

And it might feel like - man why are we talking about all of this stuff? Are we just trying to pick fights? There's a global pandemic going on for pete's sake.

But the goal is not to pick fights or say things just for the sake of saying things. It's not to argue or to see how many emails we can get this week.

It's because we believe what the Bible teaches here→ **That the church is the household, the people, of the living God. And we're called as the people of God to be built up in love - to mature in our faith and grow in love for God and love for others...And that actually flows out of and requires the truth and right doctrine and right teaching.**

So the truth must be taught and proclaimed and held onto and defended.

The first seven verses of 1 Timothy are an invitation to us as we enter into this series. That we would live out what the Bible says the church is - a pillar of the truth. That we would step into all of the resources we have to learn to fight false teaching and lies and defend the truth in our hearts and in our church so we would grow up in love as the family of God.

The Church is God's means to spread His Kingdom. Nothing can stop it, not even a pandemic. God cares about His Church and the more we learn to love what God loves, to hold fast to and defend His truth the more His kingdom will be made known in our lives, in our cities - Columbia, Charlotte - and wherever God will lead us.