

NOTES FROM TIM GAMSTON'S SERMON- Sunday 9th June 2024 am

TITLE: "The truth matters" TEXT: 1 Timothy 1 v 3-11

Series: "Guarding the deposit" Pt 2: Scripture references from the ESV

1 Timothy 1:3-11 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. ⁶ Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. ⁸ Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ the sexually immoral, men who practise homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, ¹¹ in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Without trust, it is impossible to have healthy relationships.

The truth matters

Nowhere is that more important than when it comes to the word of God. The Bible tells us that God cannot lie – if he could then he would not be God. Everything that he has spoken to us in his word is truth.

We can have confidence in the Bible

The Bible gives us the basis for a healthy relationship with God. He speaks and we can trust him. Knowing God through his Son, Jesus Christ, is the very essence of eternal life. Those entrusted with teaching the truth must be faithful to the truth, for our eternal destiny rests on it.

The truth matters for our eternal salvation

What happens when those entrusted with teaching the truth wander away from it?

Paul and Timothy faced this issue in the churches in Ephesus. In his three years in the city, Paul had evangelised, established congregations, and taught the church. Many people had been saved and set free from occult practices, but Satan set out to destroy the work. The city was stirred up against Paul and he was forced to leave.

During his travels, Paul stopped at Miletus and called for the elders of the Ephesian church to meet him there, when he issued a warning about a danger that they were facing. **Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, of 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 everyone with tears. (Acts 20:28-31)**

People would arise, from among those who were entrusted with teaching the Bible to the church, and those people would teach twisted things, drawing believers away from the truth in order to have their own following.

Just six years later, the very thing Paul warned about had happened (**w3-4,6-7** above). Those entrusted with teaching the truth were teaching what was false. Timothy was charged with stopping the men from doing this. He was to silence the false teaching in the church. Why does this matter?

The truth matters for the church's wellbeing, for the glory of God and for the unity of the church.

To help Timothy understand why this is so important, Paul identified the characteristics of false teachers and false teaching, and showed the damaging effects of it. He also showed how the church can protect itself against this.

- What does this have to do with us?

We have elders here who:

- Are committed to rightly understanding God's word, seeking to live it out in their own lives and to faithfully teach it to us as a congregation.
- Guard the pulpit, not allowing those who hold to different doctrine to teach in this church
- Hold to the Elder affirmation of faith

Why do we need to know the characteristics of false teachers and false teaching, and how to protect ourselves from it?

- Elders who turn away from the truth is not just a 1st century problem - it happens in the 21st century too.

Paul warns church leaders to pay careful attention to themselves because even the most externally godly leader could have the opposite inner character to what Paul says is necessary for genuine love (v5).

- Instead of that inner character, it is possible that a church leader in this church could have a sinful heart rather than a pure heart, an evil conscience rather than a good conscience or a hypocritical faith rather than a sincere faith. That might show itself in him being drawn away from truth and teaching false doctrine. We pray that this will not happen, but it is entirely possible that it could. We need to know when it is happening.
- In today's world, we have easy access to many teachers and teaching, which requires us to have discernment. The internet has opened up a whole new world for false teachers to spread false teaching. Online book sellers give easy access to books from false teachers. There are countless opportunities to go to conferences etc which claim to be Christian but are not faithful to the teaching of Christ.

The Elders have control over what is taught in this building. They cannot monitor what is read or listened to outside of the church, but they can equip the church to recognise false teachers and false teaching.

We can identify false teachers by asking two questions.

1. **What is the source of their teaching?** As an apostle, Paul had been entrusted with the true gospel (v11) which gives us the good news that a person is put right with

God by faith in Jesus Christ alone. This brings glory to God because it exalts God as Saviour. The Holy Spirit had breathed out God's word to him in direct revelation.

The source of Paul's teaching was Christ Jesus.

In contrast, those who were teaching a different doctrine were getting their teaching from **myths and endless genealogies (vv3-4 above)**. Rather than interpreting the Old Testament in the light of the gospel of Christ, these people were looking for something 'deeper' that was not actually there. They took the law and used it in an unlawful way, with the result that the true gospel of God's glory was hidden under a blanket of speculation. This still happens today. One example is a book called *The Bible Code* (pub 1997) which claimed that there were hidden messages encoded in the Hebrew text concerning (amongst other things) the assassination of President Kennedy and men landing on the moon!

In recent years, Paul's teaching on justification by faith has been called into question. Those who write this kind of false teaching often do so very persuasively so how can we protect ourselves when these new theories appear?

- We need to ask where the teaching came from.
- Is it from an interpretation of the Bible that keeps the historic Jesus at the centre, or does it come from some historic secular myth?

2. What is the fruit of their teaching? Paul clearly states that his purpose in silencing the false teachers is love (v5)

He wants the church to be a loving community

We may find it hard to understand that confronting people, and issuing a firm command to 'shut up' will lead to a community that loves God and one another, but Paul is showing us something (vv4,6) that we really need to grasp:

Where there is false teaching, there will be disunity.

He follows through later with this: **If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound^[b] words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness,** ⁴ **he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions,** ⁵ **and constant friction among people who are**

depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. (1 Timothy 6:3-5).

False teaching often begins with a person who is proud, thinking too highly of themselves, and wanting recognition and respect. Their teaching brings envy, division, slander, and constant friction, and, in overanalysing some truth in the Bible, they take it to an illogical conclusion, producing a novel but heretical idea. That person then seeks to draw followers to themselves and, rather than producing the inner qualities of **v5**, it produces speculation, fruitless discussion and finally the evil that Paul talks about in **vv9-10**.

- Whether listening to these people online or in person, you end up confused, angry, envious (because they appear to have insight that you do not possess) or thinking that sin is ok.

The source of their teaching is not Christ and the fruit of it is disunity and eventual godlessness.

Right teaching means you end up rejoicing in Jesus as your saviour from sin, with a heart filled with love for God and his people, and a desire to live for the glory of God.

How can we protect ourselves? Paul is clear that these people need to be silenced.

- In the church context, that means not allowing them to preach, warning the church about them and if necessary, naming them.
- In our own personal lives, it means not reading their books or listening to them (online or in person)

However, we also need to do something positive.

1) We need to take hold of sound doctrine. Although we need practical teaching that is applied rightly,

Right behaviour comes from a foundation of sound doctrine

Paul links behaviour and doctrine (**v10**), for where there is false doctrine, people's lives will be sinful. Doctrine is simply truth about God, ourselves and salvation. What we believe about God is vitally important if we are going to live right.

The more truth we know about God, the more we will have the potential to love him.

It is possible to know a lot about God, but still not love him, as is true for demons. However, if you do not grow in your knowledge of God, you will certainly not come to love him more. We come to love the people near to us better as we spend more time with them. When we love God first and most:

- We will love his people and the church will become a loving community
- We will be less inclined to follow those whose teaching comes from myths and legends, resulting in disunity and godlessness.

Sound doctrine is the foundation for building lives of love for God and others

2) We need transformed hearts (v5).

Jesus taught us that: **Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.** (Matthew 5:8). Sin in our hearts is like dirt on the windows. It obscures our vision of God. We need a pure heart in order to see God more clearly and thus to love him more dearly. We also need:

- A good conscience – the awareness that God approves of us, not because of anything in us, but because of the work of Christ alone
- A sincere faith – so that what we believe and what we do are in agreement. If we believe that we are to love God and love others, then our actions are to show this love.

Love is produced when there has been an inner transformation.

3) We need gospel grace. Paul speaks about right and wrong use of the law (vv8-11), showing us that:

The gospel accomplishes what the law is unable to accomplish

- The law can show me what God requires of me and where I have sinned against God, but it cannot change me.
- The law is powerless to create in me the kind of moral excellence that it requires of me.

When you come to Christ, confessing your sin and seeking him, then you are justified, declared righteous, and Christ begins his work to transform you.

Christ creates within you the pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith

out of which flow love for God and love for others.

All of which explains why the truth matters. We must silence those who teach different doctrine and build our lives on a foundation of sound doctrine which keeps Christ alone at the centre.

We will never behave rightly in God's household if we do not have a solid foundation of sound doctrine.

If we do not behave rightly in God's household, we will be ineffective in our witness outside the church.

The truth matters if we are going to:

- Recognise those who do not teach the truth
- Love God, love others and live right

If we are going to have a healthy relationship with God and one another, the truth of Christ matters for us as a church.

We need elders who are committed to the truth of God's word and are seeking to rightly understand it. More than that, we need to know that our elders are seeking to live it out in their own lives and then make sure that it is taught to the church. The Elder affirmation of faith, although not gospel, is the foundation of what we believe as a church and it is what is taught in the church precisely because we believe it to be the truth.

- Pray for our elders that God will enable them to stay true to his word, true to his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, and teach truth.

Above anything else, the elders need our prayers.

- This passage is a warning to us. False teachers must be silenced, and we all need to take care to listen and read with discernment, seeking out that which is sound teaching.

The truth matters.