

Handle God's Word Well

1 Timothy 1:1-11

I like to read and study. I grew up reading books. If I wasn't outside playing with the neighborhood kids, my mother could usually find me curled up in our old easy chair reading a murder mystery or an adventure story. I liked school and enjoyed the pursuit of knowledge. When my fellow seminarians were grumbling about Greek and hating Hebrew, I was enjoying both. I'm excited about apologetics and I can tolerate a little philosophy, just a little.

A spiritual danger lurks for all of us who pursue Bible knowledge. We can fill our mind while emptying our heart. Yet, we desperately need to know God's word. It is our food and our communication with God. How can we grow in our knowledge of the Bible without becoming proud and arrogant? That is what our passage today is about. I invite you to turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 1 verses 1-11. 1 Timothy is about three fourths of the way through the New Testament, before the book of Hebrews.

Let's begin with verses 1-2 and I will provide a brief overview of the book. Read vss 1-2. 1 Timothy is one of four books that Paul wrote to an individual rather than to a church. The other three are 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are called the Pastoral Epistles because they are written to men serving as pastors over a church and all three books provide instructions to those men in how to pastor and lead their churches. Paul is writing to Timothy whom he describes as his true child in faith. Paul most likely led Timothy to faith in Christ.

Timothy's father was a Gentile and his mother a Jew. Timothy's mother brought him up in the knowledge of the OT Scriptures. Timothy was probably one of Paul's converts on his first missionary journey to Lystra, which is in modern day Turkey. Timothy joined Paul on Paul's second missionary journey. From that time on Timothy served under Paul's direction, sometimes with him, sometimes on assignments to churches. As we'll learn from this passage, Paul left Timothy to pastor the church in Ephesus while Paul went to visit the Macedonian churches or what we would know as Greek churches.

Paul wrote this letter sometime after his first Roman imprisonment. The first Roman imprisonment is described in the last part of the books of Acts. Evidently Paul was released from prison sometime after Acts was written and ministered some more before he was arrested again. His second Roman imprisonment finished with his execution.

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy to provide him counsel and guidance on how to lead and pastor the church at Ephesus. The first issue Paul addresses in this letter is the misuse of Scripture. One of the main reasons Paul left Timothy at Ephesus was in order to confront certain men who were teaching strange doctrines in the church. Let's read verses 3-4 and 6-7 to hear Paul's description of the problem. Read verses 3-4, 6-7.

In these verses Paul authorizes Timothy to challenge others not to teach strange doctrines, pay attention to myths and genealogies, or to engage in fruitless discussions. The verb translated as "charge" or "instruct" is a military term, comparable to giving strict orders. Timothy was not to pussyfoot around with these men who were teaching strange doctrines. He was to order them to stop. One of the key responsibilities of the pastors or elders of a church is to safeguard the teaching in the church. False doctrine is very destructive and deadly to the health of a congregation. I'm not talking now about those lesser doctrines over which Christians can disagree. I'm talking about fundamentals of the faith that if you teach contrary to them, you are

really teaching heresy. Fundamentals of the faith would include such things as the person and deity of Christ, the nature and attributes of God, salvation by grace through faith, the Bible as the Word of God, the existence of Heaven and Hell. The Evangelical Free church Statement of Faith identifies what we consider to be the fundamentals of the faith.

We don't know exactly what the strange doctrines, myths or endless genealogies were. Many Bible scholars believe they were Jewish myths and genealogies. The Jews were known to dabble in fictitious expansions of the OT genealogies, inventing names and making up stories. It's not necessary for us to know exactly what those strange doctrines were because every age has its own false doctrines, fanciful stories, and bogus histories. I thought it might be helpful to hear an analysis of the common false teaching that many people hear today from so-called spiritual leaders who are not Christians. This is from Ross Douthat's book, Bad Religion. Read. Really it's the same old new age mysticism that invaded our country back in the seventies. It just keeps reinventing itself.

Although we don't know the content of the false ideas at Ephesus, we can know the result of them. Paul says they gave rise to useless speculation rather than the administration of God which is by faith. False doctrines and false ideas do not further God's mission to expand his Kingdom and to bring more people in submission to Jesus. This then is a valuable test we can use to test doctrine. Does the doctrine encourage people to turn away from their sin and trust in Jesus Christ for their salvation? Does the doctrine exalt Jesus Christ and encourage people to follow him?

What motivated these men to teach their strange doctrines and pursue myths and genealogies? Paul provides the answer in verses 6-7. They wanted to be Teachers of the Law. They wanted the prestige and honor of being a teacher of God's Word.

It's not a bad thing to want to be a teacher of God's Word. It is a bad thing to pretend to be a teacher of God's Word when you are not prepared to be a teacher. These men did not understand what they were teaching and making confident assertions about. Someone has said that men often yell loudest about that of which they know the least. These men were boldly teaching things which they did not understand. The result of their teaching was not producing love or a good conscience of a genuine faith. Instead these men were straying away from those healthy results and were engaging in fruitless discussions.

You can teach the Bible in a way that produces healthy results or you can teach the Bible in a way that produces unhealthy results. What would be some unhealthy results of faulty Bible teaching? Bible teaching that emphasizes the accumulation of facts and knowledge without any call to action is unhealthy teaching. Charles Spurgeon once wrote, "Read Lavender p. 101." Read Lincoln story p. 41 Shell book. Bible teaching that does not challenge the people in some way to apply the Bible is unhealthy.

A second unhealthy result of faulty Bible teaching is when the teacher teaches false doctrine and encourages either sin or error in his audience. I encourage you to always check what I say or anyone else says first against the immediate context of the passage but then against the broader context of the whole Bible. I will always try to be accurate in what I say, but I am fallible like every other human being. Even when we teachers have the best intentions, we are still flawed people. We don't know everything. We make mistakes in our thinking or simply because we are ignorant of something. You are responsible for what you believe. One goal every Christian should be to get to the point where you can critically evaluate every teacher and preacher you hear. When you're a brand new Christian, that's a hard thing to do, but you should get better at it the more you learn.

One of the responsibilities of the elders is to safeguard the teaching in the church to make sure false doctrine does not creep in. If you look on your sermon outline I have listed Titus 1:5-9 where Paul tells Titus to appoint elders in every city where there is a church. If you look at verse 9 Paul says that part of the elder's responsibility is to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict sound doctrine.

What makes for a really healthy church is where the people also monitor the teaching in the church. Elders should not be the only ones who can distinguish false doctrine from sound doctrine. When most of the people in a congregation are capable of evaluating what they are hearing and check the Scriptures for the truth of what they are hearing, then false doctrine never even gains a foothold, because too many people immediately spot it for what it is. I believe that is the kind of church we have. So many of you are well-versed in the fundamentals of the faith that falsehood could not easily become established here.

So, let's talk about how to teach God's word in a healthy way so that our teaching is not only accurate but that it is also accomplishing what God wants it to accomplish. Just like the Law has to be used lawfully, so handle God's word correctly by teaching to produce love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Let's read verses 5 and 8-11. Read.

God's Law is good if you use it lawfully. When the Law is used in the way it was intended to be used, then it produces a good result. If you use the Law in a way contrary to how it was intended to be used, then you obtain a negative result. By analogy then, if you use the Bible in the way it was intended to be used, then it produces a good result. If you use the Bible in a way contrary to how it was intended to be used, then you obtain a negative result.

How do you use the Law lawfully? You realize for whom the Law was given. It was not given for a righteous person to use. It was given for the lawless, the rebellious, and Paul writes out a long list of sinners in verses 9-10. I'm going to take some time to explain what Paul means by using the Law lawfully and why the Law is not made for the righteous, because there is a lot of confusion on this point.

First, let's talk about the purposes of the Law because it had more than one purpose. I've listed on your outline with supporting Scriptures what the purposes of the Law were and what it was not supposed to do. The Law's purpose is to reveal to people that they have sinned against God. Romans 3:20 says that through the Law comes knowledge of sin. The Law also arouses sin in a person so that they know it is present. By showing sinners that they have indeed sinned, the Law's purpose also was to cause them to realize that they needed a Savior. Galatians 3:24 says, "Read." All these purposes are directed at lawless and rebellious people to convince them that they are lawless and rebellious and that their hope lies not in trying to obey the Law but in being justified by faith in Jesus Christ. So the Law was given for sinners. The Law was not given to help people get rid of their sin because the Law can't do that. The Law was not given to be a means of salvation because no one can be saved by keeping the Law.

The Law was not given for righteous people. From Paul's letters we know that the only people who are righteous are those who have been declared righteous through faith in Jesus Christ, so you can substitute the term "Christian" for the word, "righteous." Christians are actually dead to the Law as a governing system. Paul says in Romans 7:4 "Read." You can read the larger context of Romans 7:1-4 which says that when we joined with Jesus we died to the rule of the Law. You no longer live under the control and direction of the Law, you live under the control and direction of the Holy Spirit. You'll find out that he sometimes convicts you not to do things that the Law doesn't even cover.

So, how does a Christian use the OT Law lawfully? The OT Law still teaches us. In many cases it still does describe what is wrong. In other cases it doesn't, but even when the Law is no longer in force we can learn spiritual truth by discerning what the original purpose of the Law was. That original purpose is usually still relevant, but it may be accomplished in a different way in this age of grace.

Paul's whole point in his argument is that the Scripture is of utmost importance and value to you, but you do have to use it or apply it in the correct way. He uses the Law as an example of a portion of Scripture that you have to apply in the correct way. The Law's main purpose is to convince non-Christians that they have truly sinned against God and they need to come to Jesus to be justified by faith in him. Christians are not to use the OT Law as the governing principle in their life.

One correct way to use the Law that Paul models in verses 9-10 is that he has identified sins mentioned by the Law that are still sins. He provides some general terms and some specific terms. The general terms are lawless, rebellious, ungodly, sinners, unholy, and profane. The specific terms are those who kill parents, murderers, immoral people or fornicators, homosexuals, kidnappers, liars, perjurers, and anything else contrary to sound doctrine.

I'm not going to expound on each of those terms because they are just examples to make Paul's point, but I will note that fornication and homosexual behavior are clearly identified as rebellious behavior. Fornication is the more general term that refers to any sexual behavior outside of marriage and homosexual is the narrower term that refers to sexual behavior between people of the same sex. Even some Christians appear to ignore what the Bible clearly teaches on these matters.

If we are going to teach the Bible correctly, what does that look like? Paul provides the answer in verse 5. Bible teaching done correctly should produce the following results when the listener responds positively to it. Sound Bible teaching produces a growing love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Stated another way, if you are studying and responding to God's word in the correct way, then you should see in yourself a trend toward more loving behavior out of pure motives, a conscience free of any continuing sin, and a humble and honest faith. You are responding to the Word of Christ correctly when you are becoming more like the Christ of the Word.

Let me flesh out those three qualities a little more. Love from a pure heart. Love is not primarily a feeling. Biblical love is the determined effort to do what is best for another person. The best is determined not by the person being helped or the person helping, but by God. So, love is not giving the other person what they want or even what they think they need, but giving them what God has declared they need. Love cannot be divorced from righteousness. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13, love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. In our culture many people excuse unrighteousness by saying that it's okay because people love one another. But their definition of love is not the Biblical definition. True love never encourages someone to disobey God.

True love comes from a pure heart, meaning that the person's motives in doing the loving act are pure. I can still do the right thing for a person but from the wrong motives. I may try to bless someone in order to manipulate them later. I may act kindly to them in order to get something from them. True love from a pure heart means that my loving act is solely for the purpose of loving God and loving them. There are no selfish motives hidden beneath my good deed.

A good conscience means that I have no outstanding sin accounts with God. I have confessed what I know to be sin in me and, as far as I know, there is nothing else I need to confess and forsake.

A genuine faith means a faith held without hypocrisy. I am who I appear to be. I am honest about my failings, but also recognize the good things God is doing in me.

On your sermon outline I placed at the bottom three bars representing love out of pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. On a scale of 1-10 why don't you take a moment right now to evaluate yourself on all three scales? This is for your benefit, not for anyone else to see unless you want to discuss it with someone else. Pause.

Do you need to change the way you study Scripture? Do you need to focus more on asking yourself how to apply the passage to your life? Do you need to ask more what you need to change? Sound biblical instruction leads to love out of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

I would like to close with a story that illustrates the effects of good Bible teaching. Read story in Lavender 77. Steer clear of strange doctrines, myths and fruitless discussions but rather let God's word produce in you love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.