

GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

1ST TIMOTHY 1:3-7

Notes on

1 Timothy 1:3-7

Paul has offered his heartfelt greetings to his beloved friends and colleague. Usually, at this point Paul would offer a section of thanksgiving, but as in his letter to the Galatians the problems he is addressing cause him to skip this and get right to the point. And as with the Galatians, the problem is that false teachers have infiltrated the church and are making progress in their anti-Gospel agenda.

There are many theories concerning the exact nature of these false teachers and their teachings. From this section of the letter it is clear that the essence involves their promotion of speculative ideas, opposing or distracting from the basic truths of the Gospel of Christ. Instead of Jesus Christ, they were magnifying various myths, genealogies, Jewish laws and deceptions that tended to justify immorality, to fuel controversy and to produce a following and material gain for themselves. They seem to be men who were themselves leaders and teachers in the Ephesian church who have gone astray (Paul had warned about such “twisted” teachers - see Acts 20:30). Paul tells Timothy to command these teachers to stop what they are doing.

v.3 - Ephesus... Found on the west coast of Asia Minor (modern Turkey), it was the capital of the Roman province of Asia... In this major center of culture and trade was the massive Temple of Artemis one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World... Here also was one of the most important churches in Asia as a base for Christian mission... Paul had ministered here for more than two years (see Acts 19)... Timothy is to remain here. It is not certain whether Paul was there with him and then had to leave or was instructing him from somewhere else... **charge certain men...** the word for “charge” here means “command” in a military sense... Paul is giving Timothy authority to give strict orders and expect them to be obeyed...

v.4 - myths and endless genealogies... these are likely from speculations about pagan legends and Jewish history, similar perhaps to those today who place essential emphasis on unverifiable legends about the 12 apostles or contemporary guesswork concerning Christ’s return... these teachings were causing **speculations** (or controversies) instead of furthering

Warning Against False Teachers

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.

- 1 Timothy 1:3-7

God’s work (redeeming people through a saving relationship with His Son)... The triviality and irrelevance of the false teachings were nothing like the vital realities of the Gospel...

v.5 - love (*agape*)... Timothy’s charge is not merely a “just say ‘No!’” to the falsehoods, speculations and strife: The goal is to produce *love*, to bring a new spirit of love among these believers. And this love is going to come from... 1. **a pure heart...** “heart” refers to the center of one’s being, the totality of one’s moral affections... Jesus said such people would “see God” (Matthew 5:8)... 2. **a good conscience...** this indicates that a person is mindful of the rightness or wrongness of their actions in God’s eyes and actively avoids self-reproach by their good choices... 3. **a sincere faith...** genuine, truthful, unfeigned... unlike that of the false teachers whose “faith” was a pretense in service of their self-serving objectives...



The Ruins of Ephesus

v.6 - These false ones have **wandered away** or “missed the mark” because they have **swerved** or “turned off course” from these three love-producing virtues... Thus instead of love, they produce nothing but **vain discussion**.

v.7 - desiring to be teachers of the law... These teachers, likely coming from a Jewish background, want the honor and title of “rabbi/teacher” like those who teach the Mosaic Law... They are trying to make a name for themselves as Jewish teachers through their clever speculations, incorporating certain parts of the Christian faith but essentially undermining the truth and power of the Gospel... Paul’s indictment of them is stinging: They are **without understanding...** They don’t know what they are talking about, but this does not dissuade them from making **confident assertions** which simply show their foolishness.

Read & Reflect - 1:3-7

First Reading: Which of these titles would you give to this section of Paul's letter?

- Timothy's Challenge
 Orders from the General: Guard the City
 Rogue Leaders
 Fake Teachers & God's Real Apostle
 God's Work vs. Worthless Ideas
 Love Is the Goal, Truth Is the Way
 Other _____

I chose this title because...

Search & Consider

1:3 - What does Paul tell Timothy to do? Why?

1:4 - a. What seems to be the problem in the Church in Ephesus?

b. What does devotion to "myths and endless genealogies" produce?

c. How is this different from the "stewardship of God" and His work"? (What is God doing in Ephesus? - see verses 1 & 2)
How do people cooperate with God in His work?)

1:5 - a. Timothy is supposed to tell the errant teachers to stop! According to Paul, what is the goal of this command? How do you see these things (silencing falsehood & promoting love) relating to one another?

b. What does it mean to have... 1) a pure heart?... 2) ...a good conscience?... 3) ...a sincere faith?

1:6-7 - Do the "certain persons" Paul is referring to have these things? Why not? What does this suggest about what they are teaching and why it should be rejected? What goals are they working for?

Apply

1. Do you think the Church still struggles with false teachers today? Can you think of any examples?... Or... What kinds of “vain discussions” have you seen as a result of false or worthless teaching?

2. Have you seen the restriction of false ideas (particularly those that deny God or deflect from His work) promote real love? When?

3. Has the presence or absence of love ever helped reveal to you the truth or falsehood of what someone was saying to you? When?

4. How do you respond to the idea that love springs from a pure heart, a good conscience & a sincere faith? How can you work toward these things (and so toward love) in your own life? What is one step you will take this week?

For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 1:3-7

A. OPENER... Which of these do you think is the worst “false teaching” that people have believed (or maybe believe still)? Can you think of a worse one?

1. The world is flat!
2. The king will do what is best for his people!
3. This ship, the Titanic, is unsinkable!
4. Smoking is good for you!
5. Indians (or pick another foreign race of people) are sub-human savages!
6. The key to happiness is having lots of money!

B. 1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7... Share your Personal Study Guide answers... As time permits, you may also want to focus on these questions...

1. Why do you think Paul is so concerned about “truth”? How does this shed light on the vehemence of his opposition to those who are teaching “different doctrine?”
2. Why is the postmodern notion that “truth is subjective” (each of us makes up our own truth) a serious defamation of God? How is it a significant challenge to us who proclaim the Good News of Jesus Christ?
3. Why is it important that we respond to this challenge with LOVE as well as TRUTH?

C. FINAL THOUGHT... What have you learned about the inseparable relationship between TRUTH and LOVE from this study? From your life experience?

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The Nature of TRUTH: Rock Solid & Utterly Resistant

Truth is discovered, not made. And our task, as human beings made in God's image, under His eternal Lordship and in His real world, is to preserve truth, not to improve it. One of the foundational and unsettlingly truthful things Jesus said was this: *I Am the Way, the Truth and the Life*. And lest we get caught up in the endless speculations of imprecise English translation, Greek grammar and definite vs. indefinite articles, Jesus added: *No one comes to the Father except through Me*. In Paul and Timothy's day, apparently, there were those who were cleverly trying to make their own versions of the Good News of access to God the Father, of salvation, through Jesus (and through *Him alone* and not by any presumed personal adherence to laws and practices). Their versions made them bigger and Jesus a little, or a lot, smaller. These opportunistic and self-promoting false teachers presented their ideas as improvements on the truth that Paul and others were proclaiming.

Their efforts were *illegitimate* (see last issue), & such efforts continue today. John Stott in his book on 1 Timothy & Titus, Guard the Truth, says this in his introduction: *The apostle's overriding preoccupation throughout all three Pastoral Letters is with the truth, that it may be faithfully guarded and handed on. The pertinence of this theme, at the end of the twentieth century, is evident. For contemporary culture is being overtaken and submerged by the spirit of postmodernism. Postmodernism begins as a self-conscious reaction against the modernism of the Enlightenment, and especially against its unbounded confidence in reason, science and progress. The postmodern mind rightly rejects this naive optimism. But it then goes further and declares that there is no such thing as objective or universal truth; that all so-called 'truth' is purely subjective, being culturally conditioned; and that therefore we all have our own truth, which has as much right to respect as anybody else's. Pluralism is an offspring of postmodernism; it affirms the independent validity of every faith and ideology, and demands in shrill tones that we abandon as impossibly arrogant any attempt to convert somebody (let alone everybody) to our opinion. In contrast to this relativization of truth, it is wonderfully refreshing to read Paul's unambiguous commitment to it.*

In response to a proponent of this "no such thing as real truth" postmodern view, I would simply say: "So let me get this straight. You are saying there is no such thing as 'universal truth' which you are now declaring to be a universal truth and using as such. I would suggest that real TRUTH, by its nature as absolutely resistant to attempts to change it or deny it, and as an expression of its immovable rootedness in the Almighty and Everlasting God, is showing itself, logically and powerfully, to be rock solid against your attempts to play fast and loose with it."

In response to such a slippery approach to truth, Paul the Apostle told Timothy: *Certain persons, by swerving from these (a pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith), 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.* (1 Tim. 1:6-7).

In response to such a slippery approach to truth, Paul the Apostle told Timothy: *Certain persons, by swerving from these (a pure heart, good conscience and sincere faith), 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.* (1 Tim. 1:6-7).

The Dynamism of TRUTH: Producing Love by Purposeful Design

Jesus made another foundational statement to His followers toward the end of His earthly life: *By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another* (John 13:35). Followers of Jesus bear a mark, and that mark is love, and that love is evident to people around His followers. I would suggest that real TRUTH does not merely exist: *It does something*. TRUTH is rock solid, immovable by nature: It doesn't change because we or any other powers want it to. But this real, deep, TRUTH that doesn't move will and must *move us*. When TRUTH, rooted forever and irremovably in the Living God, is discovered and embraced by people, it produces something. It produces something by God's design. It produces *LOVE*. (See 1 Corinthians 13 for a good definition of this love.) TRUTH that doesn't produce LOVE may not really be "truth" at all. They go together.

Paul makes this quite clear at the beginning of his 1st letter to Timothy. Right after he charges Timothy to guard/defend/preserve the truth found in and revealed by God, he says this: *The aim of our charge is love...*

It is a modern tragedy that we have found a way in our minds and in our culture to pit truth and love against each other. Ultimately this pits God against God. If we proclaim what is true and someone doesn't like it, our words are declared "unloving." And all the while it is those who are promoting falsehood and demanding that we let everyone believe and behave according to their favorite self-destructive lies who are actually unloving. Real love means truth. Even when we prefer the "truths" we have made up (a nice definition for falsehood).

It is a greater tragedy, though, when we Christians, thinking ourselves to be faithfully following Christ and upholding His truth, exhibit nothing of the mark Jesus said His followers would bear: Love. When we declare a truth that never seems to move us, when we refuse to sacrifice anything for people who don't deserve it (like Jesus did), when we insulate ourselves from those we see as morally inferior (like Jesus did not do), it would seem that at best we have a "truth" that is incomplete, containing elements of falsehood we are unable or unwilling to acknowledge and release. God help us. Real truth produces love. Otherwise it isn't real.

Let us love

not in word or speech,
but in truth and action

1 John 3:18