

Living in God's Church Today

Warning Against False Teachers

1 Timothy 1:3-7

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Warning Against False Teachers

Scripture

Last week we started a new study in the letters of Paul to Timothy and Titus. These three letters are usually called “the Pastoral Epistles” because they were written to pastors about dealing with pastoral matters in their respective churches. As I hope to show you in the coming months, these letters are highly relevant for us today. So I have titled our study of these letters, “Living in God’s Church Today.”

Paul’s First Letter to Timothy contains instructions about a number of issues, including doctrine (1:3-20), public worship (2:1-15), qualifications for church officers (3:1-16), pastoral leadership (4:1-5:2), social responsibilities (5:3-6:2), and material possessions (6:3-21). The key text of Paul’s First Letter to Timothy is 1 Timothy 3:14–15, where he writes, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.”

Last time I mentioned that Paul most likely met Timothy on his second missionary journey in the city of Lystra. Timothy joined Paul for the rest of that journey. In fact, Timothy became a lifelong assistant to Paul. Sometime after his third missionary journey, Paul was placed under house arrest in Rome. Paul was eventually released and perhaps traveled to Spain. He also had Timothy go to Ephesus to deal with problems – primarily false teaching – that had arisen in the church. It was during this time that Paul wrote his First Letter to Timothy.

As Paul begins the body of his First Letter to Timothy,

he warns against false teachers in the church at Ephesus.

Let's read Paul's warning against false teachers in 1 Timothy 1:3-7:

³As 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, ⁴nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. ⁵The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷desiring 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)

Introduction

Justin Buzzard is founder and pastor of Garden City church. He also writes and blogs. In a 2011 blog post, he wrote:

While I think it is important to be known more for what you are *for* than what you are *against*, just a cursory reading of the Bible shows that it also calls us to deal with false teaching. Why? Because false teaching is dangerous and destructive; it hurts people.

About ten years ago I heard Ben Patterson say something that I will never forget. Ben told the story of a retired pastor who began noticing that his former congregation was sliding away from orthodoxy. The pastor saw this as his fault, noting the one thing he thought he did most poorly as a pastor. The pastor stated, in two sentences, his great failure as a pastor: "I always told people what to believe. My great mistake

is that I never clearly taught my people what NOT to believe.”¹

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to deal with the false teaching that was creeping into the churches in Ephesus. Although Paul's First Letter to Timothy is considered as private correspondence, Paul clearly intended the letter to be read to the entire congregation. He wanted them to know that his apostolic authority was behind his charge to Timothy to address pastoral issues in the churches in Ephesus. Paul's immediate concern in his letter to Timothy was about false teachers.

Lesson

1 Timothy 1:3-7 shows us how to deal with false teachers living in God's church today.

Let's use the following outline:

1. Do Not Allow Teaching of Any Different Doctrine (1:3-4, 6-7)
2. Do Teach Doctrine That Produces Love (1:5)

I. Do Not Allow Teaching of Any Different Doctrine (1:3-4, 6-7)

The first way of dealing with false teachers in God's church today is by not allowing teaching of any different doctrine.

Paul begins the body of his First Letter to Timothy with these words in verse 3, **“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge**

¹ See <https://www.preachingtoday.com/illustrations/2011/march/2031411.html>.

certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.” Paul reminded Timothy of the reason why Paul wanted him to stay in Ephesus, which was to command **“certain persons not to teach any different doctrine.”** The church in Ephesus had been in existence only about 15 years when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, but there was already **“different doctrine”** being promoted in the life of the church. Timothy was charged by Paul to stop the spread of wrong doctrine.

Every church in every era has to stand firm against the infiltration of error. The natural tendency of all people is to embrace what “makes sense” or is “culturally approved.” However, the people of God must examine all teaching in light of God’s inerrant word. No matter how strongly the culture may approve certain teaching, if it is not consistent with the word of God, then it is wrong.

So, for example, in our day, there is a massive push by the culture and by an increasing number in the church to accept the agenda of the sexual and gender revolution. Churches are being urged to accept the culture’s view of sexuality and gender expression. Canada and the United Kingdom are in the process of approving legislation that will essentially forbid the biblical teaching about sexuality and gender. Christians need to be people of the word of God. We need to hold fast to the word of God. Let us be like the Bereans, of whom it was said, “Now the Bereans were of more noble character than the Thessalonians, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true” (Acts 17:11, *NIV*).

Paul continues in verses 3-4, “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, **nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which**

promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.” False teachers were teaching a “different doctrine,” that is, they were teaching a doctrine that was essentially different than the gospel preached by Paul and the other apostles. Moreover, the false teachers proclaimed **“myths and endless genealogies.”** In his letter to Titus, Paul mentions “Jewish myths” (Titus 1:14), and so Paul may have had in mind mythical histories, like the Jewish *Book of Jubilees*. Moreover, teaching about **“myths and endless genealogies”** led to **“speculations.”** The Greek word for **“speculations”** (*ekzetesis*) means “the work of inquiring into something to immoderation.” That is, they were making all kinds of wild guesses and did not foster the truth.

Timothy was to correct this false doctrine by teaching about **“the stewardship from God that is by faith.”** That is, Timothy was to teach about God’s plan of salvation which is received by faith. He was to teach the truth. He was to correct the error and false teaching by teaching the gospel.

In Paul’s day, all the churches that he planted were under his oversight. So, he could leave Timothy in Ephesus to correct the false teaching. Nowadays, there are all kinds of denominations and local congregations, each teaching something different than the others. Most evangelical churches still hold essentially to God’s plan of salvation which is received by faith.

But that is not the case with liberal or progressive churches. They may teach that Jesus is not the only way of salvation. Or they may teach that God loves and accepts all people, regardless of their beliefs or behaviors. It seems to me that Paul would say to us that we need to pay attention to the word of God and apply his word in the manner he intended. We are not to impose our views upon the word of God but we are to submit our views to the word of God.

Every generation of Christians must stand for the truth of God's word. Today's errors are different than the errors of the last century. One of the challenges facing the Christian Church today is Progressive Christianity. Proponents of Progressive Christianity teach things like taking the Bible seriously but not literally, right actions over right belief, homosexuality is not sinful, and Christ is not the only way to connect with God. Progressive Christians accommodate the culture and want to be accepted by mainstream liberals. Just as Paul urged Timothy to stand against false doctrine, so do we need to stand against the false doctrine in our day.

Continuing on, Paul wrote in verses 6-7, **“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.”** These **“certain persons”** are the same **“certain persons”** mentioned in verse 3. They were most likely elders in the church since they were the ones doing the teaching. The Greek word for **“swerving”** (*astochēn*) indicates misdirection, missed target, and so on. Here it means that the false teaching resulted in a divergence from the apostolic teaching of the gospel.

Before Billy Graham became a household name, Charles Templeton was widely known as an evangelist. In the late 1930s, Templeton preached in evangelistic meetings in 44 states. He was an internationally renowned evangelist. He was a close friend of Billy Graham and, along with Torrey Johnson, co-founded Youth for Christ International. In 1955, Templeton became the Secretary for Evangelism in the Presbyterian Church of the United States, the denomination from which the PCA emerged. However, Templeton “swerved” from the truth of the gospel. Eventually, he became an agnostic about God

and the gospel. It is sad to read about people who have served from the truth of the gospel. At one time, there seems to be a commitment to the truth of the gospel. But, then a small deviation creeps in and over time, there is a complete departure from the truth of God's word.

Paul states that these **“certain persons”** desired to be **“teachers of the law.”** This most likely refers to the Mosaic Law, that is, God's law as recorded by Moses. They apparently wanted to have a role in the Christian Church something equivalent to the role that Jewish teachers had in a Jewish community. The fact that they did not **“understand either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions”** suggests that they were not qualified to teach. They were not able to discern their own errors. Nevertheless, they taught them with great confidence.

Many years ago when I was a pastor in another state, I was invited to join with a bunch of pastors to hear an itinerant preacher address us. He was going to come to town and rent a large room at the university and he was going to teach and heal people. During his presentation to the pastors, he confidently quoted many Bible passages and illustrated with healings during his ministry. Frankly, as I listened to him, I could not make sense of the Scriptures he was quoting. His exegesis was faulty. Anyway, I attended one of his meetings and was appalled to see some people go into trances and dances, but I soon left as nothing of that suggested that any of it was biblical. The lesson to me was to remain ever vigilant for teachers who teach without understanding what they are saying or who make confident assertions that are simply not true.

So, the first way of dealing with false teachers in God's church today is by not allowing teaching of any different doctrine.

II. Do Teach Doctrine That Produces Love (1:5)

And the second way of dealing with false teachers in God's church today is by teaching doctrine that produces love.

Paul writes in verse 5a, **“The aim of our charge is love.”** Paul's purpose in commanding Timothy to charge the false teachers not to teach false doctrine was to bring about love. The two great commandments, as given by Jesus, are to love God and to love one another. False doctrine does not produce love. It produces error, confusion, inconsistency, and distrust of others. True doctrine, on the other hand, produces love. Love for God and love for one another.

Think of other religions. They all promote and teach false doctrine. There may be elements of truth in what they teach, but every one of them is false. And some of them even have elements that promote hatred and violence. And they do so in the name of their religion. However, biblical Christianity produces love – love for God and love for one another.

Consider any healthy church. One of the notable features of a healthy church is its commitment to biblical truth. And along with that is a demonstrable affection that the brothers and sisters in the body have for one another. They care for one another. They support one another. They love one another. That is what biblical truth produces.

Paul continues in verse 5b, **“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”** The *English Standard Version* of the Bible translates the Greek word “*ek*” as **“that issues from.”** It could be translated simply as “from.” The verse would then read, **“The aim of our charge is love *from* a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”** It seems that Paul's point is

that love arises from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. A **“pure heart”** suggests the seat of one’s personality, the person’s very self. It is the seat of one’s mind, emotions, and will. A **“good conscience”** refers to being conscious of whether one’s actions and attitudes are right or wrong before God. And a **“sincere faith”** refers to an active belief in God and the gospel, and it is accompanied by a lifestyle that evidences the integrity and authenticity of such a commitment.

When a person becomes a believer, there is a complete life transformation. It is not merely making a profession of faith but nothing or little else changes for the person. A believer now loves God with all of his heart, mind, soul, and strength. He also loves his neighbor as he loves himself. But these are not merely feelings that have been transformed. A believer’s heart, conscience, and faith are all transformed as well. He now thinks differently, acts differently, and believes differently than he did before his conversion. The point is that everything changes for the believer.

So, the first way of dealing with false teachers in God’s church today is by not allowing teaching of any different doctrine. And the second way of dealing with false teachers in God’s church today is by teaching doctrine that produces love.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the false teachers in 1 Timothy 1:3-7, we should commit ourselves to growing in our understanding of God’s truth as we live God’s church today.

In *The Story of Christian Theology*, theologian Roger Olson writes:

A popular misconception – perhaps a Christian urban

legend – is that the United States Secret Service never shows bank tellers counterfeit money when teaching them to identify it. The agents who do the training, so the legend goes, show bank tellers only examples of genuine money so that when the phony money appears before them they will know it by its difference from the real thing. The story is supposed to make the point that Christians ought to study truth and never heresy.

The first time I heard the tale as a sermon illustration I intuited its falseness. On checking with the Treasury Department's Minneapolis Secret Service agent in charge of training bank tellers to identify counterfeit money, my suspicion was confirmed. He laughed at the story and wondered aloud who would start it and who would believe it. At my request he sent me a letter confirming that the Secret Service does show examples of counterfeit money to bank tellers.

I believe it is important and valuable for Christians to know not only theological correctness (orthodoxy) but also the ideas of those judged as heretics within the church's story. One reason is that it is almost impossible to appreciate the meaning of orthodoxy without understanding the heresies that forced its development.²

Your elders do a great job of making sure that truth and not false doctrine is taught in this church. But I want to remind you that it is the responsibility of every believer not only to grow in our understanding of truth but also to be on the alert for false teachers.

Living in God's church today requires all of us to be vigilant and on guard against false teachers. So let us commit ourselves to growing in our understanding of false teaching and of God's truth as we live God's church today. Amen.

² Roger Olson, *The Story of Christian Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1999), 20-21.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

Sermons by Rev. Freddy Fritz

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1. <https://tampabaypresbyterian.org/SermonAudio>.
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