

The Solid Gospel - Kevin Miller, 30 minutes, **1 Timothy 1:1-11** (#527)

Introduction: We live during a time of unsound words. A time when “fake news” and misinformation are on the rise from every possible source and direction and truth has come under attack from multiple angles. A time when Christians are constantly tempted to believe things that are found nowhere in the Scriptures.

Yet our time is not a unique one. The problem of manipulating people with words and trying to build a following from them has existed probably as long as sinful people have gathered into groups. Certainly, this was a problem that Paul had to regularly address in the church – and it’s a problem that we’re going to see come up time and again in our study of **1 Timothy**.

Many – perhaps all – of the problems that Paul addresses here; many of the needs and issues that he speaks to, are similar to ones that our own church is confronted with today. We need these faithful words. We are to be formed by the pattern of sound words, by sound doctrine, by truths we can believe in. And that’s a challenge that we’re going to enter into, together, here in **1 Timothy 1**...

1:1-2 Our letter is written by Paul, the unlikely apostle saved from his pharisaical ways. But this isn’t simply Paul feeling like he needs to give advice to Timothy; no, this letter is written by an apostle who is guided and directed by our Lord.

Before Paul explains the reason for his *letter*, he explains his reason for *writing*. By which I mean, he writes of who God is and who Jesus is. When I say “is,” I don’t mean some sort of philosophical idea, but instead what I mean – and what Paul writes – is that God is our Savior, and Jesus is our hope.

Perhaps you think those should be reversed? So often, we speak of Jesus as our Savior. And that's right and true. Yet here, we have a reminder that our salvation was and is and shall be accomplished not only by Christ's will, but by the will of God Himself. Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, working together in perfect harmony as always – this is how our salvation is secured. Never think that Jesus is the “nice guy” of the Trinity and that the Father and Spirit have it out to get you: nothing could be further from the truth!

When it comes to Christ, here we are reminded of our hope. By this, Paul directs Timothy's – and our – attention towards not only what has happened: Christ's perfect life, His dreadful death, and His glorious resurrection and ascension and His continuing intercession for us. No, Paul wants us to also see what Jesus will someday accomplish. When we speak of the Christian hope, we are speaking in the most inclusive sense possible: past, present, and future. We are speaking of Christ's work that has been set before the foundation of the world, fulfilled through His life here on earth, and will be fulfilled perfectly and fully in the future, when He returns to rule and reign as the rightful King that He is.

Put all that together, and what you walk away with is a letter not just from an older minister to a younger. Instead, this is the God of the Universe directing, empowering, and using Paul to give life-changing truth to Timothy.

Speaking of Timothy, he is the recipient of Paul's letter. But not only him. As we'll read further, we'll see that Paul intends for his teachings to be heard and practiced by the entire church in Ephesus. What Paul wishes for Timothy is grace, mercy, and peace. But, take note: just as with **verse 1**, so it is here. Paul doesn't

simply wish these things in order to be nice or to write a proper letter. Instead, it is Paul's desire that Timothy would have – would experience and enjoy – each of these qualities from God Himself, our Father; and from Jesus our Lord.

Brothers and sisters, these first two verses aren't a mere formality. These aren't throw-away words. Instead, these are meant as the Lord's encouragement toward those who serve Him. These are words for His people, for His servants, and for His church. Everything that follows not only bears His mark of authenticity, but also His grace. Everything that we will study and read should give us a lasting hope. When's the last time you asked the Lord to give you hope as you read His Word? When is the last time that you let the Scriptures encourage you?

1:3-7 Paul's first point is to show God's encouragement to Timothy and those with him. The second point is to demonstrate that there is a huge difference – an eternal difference – between those who rightly teach the faith and those who do not.

Timothy's task, as **verse 3** makes clear, was to remain in Ephesus while Paul traveled on to Macedonia. Why? Because there was a deep need for sound teaching. There were folks within the church who were devoting themselves, and misleading all who followed them, into a pattern of life and belief that did not please the Lord and that was not found in His Word.

There is plenty of speculation about just who Paul is arguing against here. What we know is that these other teachers gave a lot of time and energy to drawing God's people towards myths and genealogies. Not in the ancestry.com sense, but instead there were factions of Judaism that saw certain religious and mystical ideas in genealogy: theories and speculations that were taught in an effort to promote

certain ideas of power and authority. Mix that with a wicked dose of myth, and the result is syncretism, which is a fancy word for what you get when you take parts of one religious or philosophical system and mix them with another. That's what these teachers appear to have been promoting. And the result was endless speculation rather than order. Chaos. Uncertainty. Nothing hope-filled.

So notice, in **verse 5**, the contrast: Paul's aim – the aim of the charge that he gave to Timothy back in **verse 3**, is not chaos but love. Not speculation, but a pure heart. Not uncertainty, but a good conscience and a sincere faith. The fruit of these two ways of life and belief couldn't be more different!

Dear church: beware of getting caught up in every teaching or every trend that comes along! Ask "what sort of disciples does this teaching produce?" If the lives of those who follow that kind of teaching don't example love, if they have little care for a pure heart, a good conscience, or a sincere faith, then reject it! Don't give yourself to fruitless and pointless speculation. What might that be in these days? Ideas about random parts of the Bible where only a few words are said, yet people try to elaborate on. Bible "codes." Going beyond what is written about the end times. Trying to read our current situations with government, COVID, and other hot topic views into random Old Testament passages. Beware of such things!

Instead, Paul writes that some people have wandered away from love on account of these. They have given themselves over to division rather than belief. Their goal is to be teachers, yet they don't even understand the very things that they are teaching about. Note the danger: endless speculation leads to lack of Christ-like love. If whatever you are fascinated by doesn't lead to loving as Christ calls us to love, then you need to discard it. If what you believe results in arguments with others

over minute details in the faith or that aren't clearly expressed in the Bible, then you need to re-evaluate what you hold dear. If what you are arguing about isn't the Gospel – if it isn't central to the faith (our own Statement of Faith is a good summary of what is central), then beware! Getting into endless speculations and discussions that don't produce any kind of Christian love and don't result in Christians growing in this kind of a faith, is a worthless task.

Let's not be known for our arguments. Some things are worth arguing over, but Paul is saying that those crucial values weren't what was being promoted in Ephesus. The product of that sort of teaching was utterly useless. Don't give your life, your money, or your time to worthless things. Give them to the Lord! Give them to what His Word commands. Hold dearly to those things, cling to Jesus.

The Lord's encouragement, the difference between those who faithfully teach and those who don't. Lastly: the law points to the Gospel, not speculation...

1:8-11 When Paul brings up “the law” in this verse, we can be confident that he is writing about God's law overall. That's what these folks wanted to be teachers of (**verse 7**), and that's what they seemed to think was important to debate about. Paul isn't saying anything negative about God's law as it is recorded in the Scriptures. Rather, throughout his writings, Paul's point is that the law won't save anyone. It never was intended to. It points to the need for the good news of the Gospel.

Paul affirms that God's laws are good, but that they also have to be applied correctly. The point of the law is to show what is holy and what isn't, what is faithful and what is not. The law is given as a guide, a standard, which condemns the lawless. It isn't a weapon against those who have been justified by Christ.

So Paul's point in giving all of these examples – which, by the way, roughly follow the second half of the ten commandments – is to show the right use of the law, the faithful application of it, rather than how these so-called “teachers” were thinking of it. The point of the law wasn't to give room for endless speculation – instead, it was intended to clearly state what honors the Lord and what doesn't.

Just as the law condemns those who break it, the law also points everyone who will respond to the hope that is found in Christ. What the Lord has preserved in these verses is a picture of Christ's love – that's what sound doctrine leads to, after all. By holding to that sound doctrine – in contrast to what was taught by these false teachers – you and I and every Christian embraces the good news of what Christ will do and how His faithful disciples are to respond.

Which is great news, isn't it? Because in Paul's list of **verses 9-10**, we all have fallen short in some way or another. We all have run afoul of the law. Yet, the good news is that the doctrine that is proclaimed all throughout the Scriptures is marked by God's love. This is the true teaching that Jesus gave and which Paul has now been inspired to elaborate on. This is the gospel of glory which has been entrusted to Paul, and which he is now passing on to Timothy so that he'll pass it on to others. Dear friends, will you hold to sound doctrine? Will you trust the Lord more than what others say? Will you reject anything and everything that runs afoul of this book so that you can feast on the words of life? I pray that you will. And I pray that you'll show others the way to the feast of the Lamb also. Let's pray that the Lord would help us to discern between what is false and what is true, to reject what is wrong and to embrace and share what is faithful: everything that promotes and makes known Christ's love. Build your faith on solid rock, not sinking sand...