

FAITHFUL TEACHING AND THE FRUIT OF LOVE:  
A SERMON FROM 1 TIMOTHY 1:3–7

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<sup>3</sup> *As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer<sup>4</sup> or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith.* <sup>5</sup> *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* <sup>6</sup> *Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk.* <sup>7</sup> *They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.*

## Introduction

I count it a great joy to be part of this very special weekend here at Kenwood, and I am honored to declare to you God's Word this morning. My wife and I enjoyed several years with David and Christine Palmer at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in Boston, and the Lord has graciously allowed our relationship as families to blossom over the last decade and a half of ministry training and ministry. What a hard and beautiful world we live in, and what a gracious gift from God to provide us shepherds to lead us to the green pastures and to protect us from dark dangers. As we ready our hearts to hear this impassioned, penetrating word from Paul, let's pray.

How needy we are to hear from you, O God. We praise you for your grace in speaking, your grace in enabling us to hear, your grace in enabling us to recognize our neediness and your sufficiency. This is a day to celebrate your commitment to build your church from generation to generation—to provide a shepherd for your sheep, a pastor for the pardoned, a guardian of the good deposit of the gospel supplied to the redeemed. Meet us now. Speak to us now. Change us now, for the glory of Christ and the good of these people I pray. Amen.

The passage that has been read, 1 Timothy 1:3–7, is divided into two parts, both of which relate to a *command* that Timothy was to give some false teachers in Ephesus. Look with me at the passage and notice the word *command* in both vv. 3 and 5. Verses 3–4 address the *nature of the command*, and vv. 5–7 highlight the *goal of the command*. Significantly, the letter is clear that the same dangers Timothy was to warn against, he was to guard himself from as well. As Paul asserts in 1 Tim 4:16: “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.” As such, as we look at the nature and goal of the command that

Timothy was to declare, I want to use the passage both to urge and charge you and your pastor in the same way.

### **The Nature of the Command (vv. 3–4)**

The command itself is unpacked in two parts. What we read first is this: Timothy, I want you to “command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer” (v. 3). Timothy’s father in the faith was Paul (v. 2), who was “an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God” (v. 1). The church is “built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone” (Eph 2:20). When the apostles speak, Jesus speaks, so to turn to a “false doctrine” is to turn away from Christ. Look with me at 1 Tim 6:3–4, where the same phrase “false doctrine” is used: “If anyone teaches otherwise [lit., a false doctrine] and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching,<sup>4</sup> they are conceited and understand nothing.” False teaching has pride at its core, for it is about teaching man’s words rather than God’s. False doctrine promotes a master other than God, but faithful teaching of the Word exalts God and honors Christ. To turn away from the Word is deadly, for in Christ alone are hope and help found. In Christ alone can our sinfulness be overcome and can our lives be saved from the wrath of God. In Christ alone do love and mercy meet to satisfy our deepest longings. There is *one* body, *one* Spirit, *one* Lord, *one* faith, *one* baptism, *one* God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all (Eph 4:4–6).

False teaching can happen so subtly as power players assert their own agenda that has no biblical basis. We must not add to or take away from this Book; to shift to the right or to the left is to move from truth to falsehood, from life to death. To be the saving community that you are called to be, this church must remain faithful to the teaching of the Bible. It is what should guide the preaching and the counseling, and it is what should influence every financial decision and determine and shape every program. Kenwood, be committed to the teaching of the apostles.

The second element of the command is that Bible teachers must remain devoted to the singular gospel that promotes clarity rather than speculation and order rather than chaos. Note v. 4: command certain persons not “to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work—which is by faith” (v. 4). Throughout the NT, the term “myths” always shows up in the plural and stands in direct contrast to the singular message of good news. Myths point to different beliefs about who or what governs reality, about who we are, about what is wrong with this world, and about what the solution is. Along with myths were “endless genealogies.” When read with v. 7, which states that the same group desired to be “teachers of the law,” it seems likely that these false teachers were using the genealogies in Genesis to try to establish some

biological connections in order to justify or invalidate status. But the result of all this was lack of clarity and heightened disorder. It was not “advancing God’s work.”

You can’t test what you can’t find in the Book, and it is only what is in the Book that clarifies the solution for our problem of sin. The world pushes for plurality, for the relativism of truth, for the tolerance of multiple beliefs, not all of which can be equally valid. The Bible and experience testify together that all humans are utterly depraved, sinful in thought and action, and absolutely helpless before a just God. Scripture also testifies that mercy can be enjoyed in Christ Jesus, who alone is *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life; no one comes to the Father except through him (John 14:6). We must keep ourselves faithful to the one true gospel, for it alone is God’s power for saving people from their own sinfulness, from the curse, and from the wrath of God (Rom 1:16).

Paul says that right order is kept and God’s work is advanced “by faith” (v. 4). Faith is a radical self-surrender to and embrace of Christ and his truth. Faith is the one thing we do that takes the spotlight off of us and puts it all on God. Faith is trusting Christ for the forgiveness of our sins and the fulfillment of all his promises to us, even eternal life. Faith is a being satisfied in all God is for us in Jesus. Paul tells us elsewhere that “everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom 14:23), and the reason this is so is that faith is by nature a recognition of our insufficiency and of Christ’s sufficiency. God’s work is advanced only in the context of the singular gospel, which is enjoyed by faith.

False teaching kills; only the gospel can save. We must never depart to a different doctrine, never depart from the singular gospel. In the pattern of Hebrew poetry, I have created an acrostic that draws on every possible letter of the alphabet to establish the absolute centrality of God’s Word for this world. In this Book, the holy Scriptures, we meet a God who (is) . . .

- All sovereign and able
- Bigger than any enemy
- Cares for the broken who trust his Son
- Devoted to exalting his saving power in Christ
- Excellent in his love
- Forever unchanging
- Good all the time
- Here right now calling for your surrender
- Irresistible when he discloses his beauty
- Just in sending sinners to hell and in saving all who trust in Jesus

- Killed death decisively at the cross and who kills sin progressively in the lives of those who trust him
- Loves magnifying his mercy in forgiveness through Christ
- Moves people to treasure his worth
- Never will leave or forsake those who are his
- Opening doors of help for all who look to him
- Pleased in the redeeming work of his Son
- Quick to respond to all who call on his name
- Rightly passionate to preserve and display his glory
- Seeking all who are surrendered to him
- Totally committed 100% to all who are in Jesus
- Unswerving in his faithfulness
- Victorious over death and sickness, selfishness and suffering
- Working right now for his own
- eXtreme in his curse-overcoming, righteousness-securing jealousy for his bride
- Yet open to save any who admit their sinfulness and need for Jesus
- Zealous for his name and his fame and his mission to save, set free, sanctify, and satisfy sinners by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

Kenwood, “Guard the deposit entrusted to you” (1 Tim 6:20). May the generations yet unborn not curse this church’s leadership for failing to hold fast to the apostles’ teaching and to the singular gospel of Jesus. Feeding people bread made without flour will neither satisfy nor sustain. So feed these people from the bread of life and lead these people to bounty that is Christ. Devote yourself to the singular gospel that grows out of the clear Word of God, trusting that God’s ordered way is best and that God’s way is enough.

### **The Goal of the Command (vv. 5–7)**

So God’s people are to remain faithful to the apostle’s teaching and devoted to the singular gospel. This was the nature of Timothy’s command. But Paul doesn’t end here, for he immediately moves from the *nature of the command* to highlight *the goal of the command* in vv. 5–7. Paul says in v. 5, “The goal of this command is love.”

Love is always the necessary proof that we have encountered God. The whole law is fulfilled in the command to love (Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14; cf. Matt 22:34–40), yet those who desired to be teachers of the law (1 Tim 1:7) never arrived at its ultimate purpose. Look with me at 1 Tim 6:4–5. Here we read that false teachers “have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions<sup>5</sup> and constant friction between people of corrupt mind,

who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain.” False teaching never creates real love. How do people subdued by selfishness enter into the messy world of loving the broken, caring for the poor, adopting the orphaned? How do those overpowered by prejudice cross the tracks or the ocean to minister to those different than themselves? How do we for whom pride prevails take on the role of the servant, leading like Jesus did on the day he washed the disciples feet? It is only by the power of the singular gospel! In life’s journey, we only arrive at love on the path of the apostles’ teaching. As it says in 1:14, love is a fruit of being “in Christ.” No other way makes us love the way God calls us to love.

“The goal of this command is love” (1:5). Paul’s vision was that Timothy would be driven by love and that his teaching and preaching would bear the fruit of love in the lives of his hearers. . . . That an army of men would rise out of their passivity or aggression and begin protecting and providing for their families. That they would help their daughters learn what modesty means, and that they would begin listening to their wives. That they would take initiative in family worship and before turning on the game consider whether there are other needs that should be met. An army of men that would show God, not self, is seated on the throne of their hearts. That women everywhere would stop nagging and start praying, that they would seek God’s face daily and begin serving with joy, respecting their husbands, investing in others, and using their talents for God’s glory and not their own. That young and old alike would not only see needs but be willing to give of themselves to meet them—to give money to save babies or to support the missionary, to serve in the nursery or to teach the junior highers, to love in the strength your trusting God to supply. Jesus came not “to be served, but to serve” (Matt 20:28). May Kenwood be marked by this kind of radical loving.

Love is not easy, for all of us are born with an innate selfish disposition. How can we be saved from ourselves and become more caring, more serving, more loving? Helpfully, Paul tells us in v. 5. Like a grape from a vine or an apple from a tree, love “comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). Let’s look at each of these.

### *1. A Pure Heart*

From the heart “flow the springs of life” (Prov 4:23). “Out of the abundance of the heart [the] mouth speaks” (Luke 6:45). The heart is the factory of our soul that generates all desire, thought, emotion, and action. Our heart determines our identity, and that is why to become a believer we need a new heart and new spiritual influences upon it (Ezek 36:26–27). Here Paul says that love will flow out of a *pure* heart—that is, a heart that has been cleansed, one that has no defilement. Love is only possible where sin is forgiven and offense is pardoned. Otherwise, it is not God-honoring

love. Pastor David and other leaders, teach from a pure heart, and call these people to pursue pardon from God. Show them their sin, and show them the cross.

The stress on a pure heart means that the gospel preacher and the gospel receiver are to be those who cherish Jesus, grieving over their sin and finding in him the cleansing agent. May we say with Paul in v. 15, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst.” The pure heart is not haughty because it recognizes the depth of its own depravity apart from Christ. The pure heart empowers one to love even those who are most difficult to love because it has experienced the sin-overcoming love of God itself. As Paul says in v. 14, “The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” *A failure to love others is a sure sign that the heart is not relishing enough how much it has been saved from, if in fact it has been saved at all.* Look at v. 16: “I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life.” Our love for the unlovable puts the love of Christ—the immense patience of Christ—on display. Love flows from a cleansed, purified heart.

## 2. *A Good Conscience*

Love is also fueled by a “good conscience” (1:5). In Scripture, “the conscience is what we consciously believe to be right or wrong.”<sup>1</sup> Our conscience passes judgment on a decision or action; it produces guilt or commendation in the heart; and it urges right and hinders wrong (Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 24). For Paul, a conscience can be “good” (1:5, 19) or “clear” (3:9; 2 Tim 1:3), but it can also become “seared” (1 Tim 4:2) or “defiled” (Tit 1:15) when people turn from the faith and do what they know is wrong (1 Tim 4:1; Tit 1:14). Love is produced out of a good conscience—one that is free from guilt and wrong motivation and one that knows what is right and then does it. Having received amazing love, we recognize that it is now the right thing to love others, to overcome selfishness in the soul and to serve others. Loving others is not always convenient, but it is right. Bringing in the orphan, supporting the missionary, serving in the nursery, caring for the needy—all these may not seem desirable, but they may be right. Never go against your conscience. Love is born from a good conscience. In vv. 18–19, Paul charged Timothy, “fight the battle well,<sup>19</sup> holding faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.” Don’t shipwreck your faith. Rather, fight the battle well, retaining your trust in God and doing what you know is right. A good conscience will produce the fruit of love.

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<sup>1</sup> Andy Naselli, “The Conscience: What It Means and Five Reasons It Matters,” <http://bcsmn.org/index.php/bcs-media/chapel-messages/item/the-conscience>

### 3. *Sincere Faith*

The last means for seeing love produced is a “sincere faith” (1:5). By “sincere,” Paul appears to address the *type* of faith—it was authentic, genuine, the real deal (see 2 Tim 1:5). The opposite of this kind of sincerity or genuineness is “insincerity” or “hypocrisy” like that mentioned in 1 Tim 4:2. Beginning in 4:1, Paul says: “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup> Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” Paul is looking for an un-hypocritical faith, in contrast to a hypocritical one. Faith for Paul is about dependence on Jesus. It’s about radical affirmation of our neediness and Christ’s sufficiency. It is the only means by which we receive help and hope, salvation and satisfaction from God. Faith in Christ is the decisive human response to God’s saving, transforming work in our souls. And faith always works through love (Gal 5:6; cf. 1 Tim 1:14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:22; 3:10; Tit 2:2; see also 2 Tim 1:7). Trusting in God moves people to live radically. Sincere faith in the pardon and power and promise of God in Christ is what creates missionaries, what reconciles broken relationships, and what moves families to adopt. Sincere faith in the bigness and faithfulness of God is what makes purity a priority, pride an enemy, and love for the broken and marginalized the norm. Sincere faith moves people to give of their time, treasures, and talents for the sake of the kingdom. In short, sincere faith creates love for God and love for neighbor. May your dependence on God be evident, for you can only serve as a channel of grace when you have been filled up with it.

### **Conclusion**

Because many churches around the world have set today aside to remember the orphan, I will mention this example. As a husband and daddy, as a pastor-scholar and friend, I personally feel like I am still in so many ways learning what it means to live a life of love that flows from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. I can say that worshipping with a people under a pastor who takes seriously the good news of Jesus and God’s work in the world has changed me and my wife. We were on a fine journey with three kids, and God got in the way, forcing us to reevaluate priorities and to measure our love. What he did was begin to birth into us a greater sense of his worth and of his sufficiency, and five years ago he moved us into the complex and beautiful world of international, transracial adoption—into the world of love. And where God moves, he supplies.

What may God be calling you to today? Where may he be moving you into new areas of love, into new areas of selflessness for the good of others and the glory of God? Love is the goal of the gospel, and I pray that Kenwood will be a church where the worth of Christ is so magnified that the men and women here would be among

those of whom the world is not worthy, where the needs of the marginalized are met, marriages become a seedbed for ministry, and missions becomes an even greater priority. Stay committed to the gospel with a goal of love. And as you do, they will see your good deeds and glorify your Father who is in heaven (Matt 5:17).