

FOLLOW SOUND DOCTRINE

1 Timothy 1:3-17

The way we behave is a consequence of what we believe. If we believe the wrong things, then we behave in wrong ways. The world has many different belief systems and these beliefs result in many different ways of doing things. The actions we take have consequences. Every action has a reaction. So, what we believe **is** important.

Whether we are talking about governments, economic systems, ways to educate, or religion, those things we consider to be the truths of the system determine the outcomes of life. Probably no area is more greatly affected by our beliefs than that of religion. Certainly nothing has any greater consequences. The question of the authority and infallibility of the Bible is a current issue among many church groups today. Such questions have been around since the Garden of Eden. The seriousness of the consequences of wrong beliefs is so dramatically demonstrated in what happened there that all of us should be really impressed and motivated to *know* the truth and to *live by* the truth.

The early church was confronted with a mixture of truth and error and Paul fought against error and taught others to do the same. One of the major problems in the first century church was a carryover from the Jewish religion that emphasized an adherence to the Law as a means of salvation. Some did not see our salvation being by the grace of God and the ability to do what the Law demands as a consequence of that salvation. Paul wrote to Timothy to instruct him in how to deal with such error.

Timothy was the pastor of the church at Ephesus and as such he had responsibilities in the area of false teachers and false doctrine for which he needed to be aware. One purpose of Paul's letter to him was to instruct or teach him about how he should handle these problems. Timothy had been called to the ministry and his special gifts had been identified in a prophetic message from God to the church. If Timothy was going to fulfill his calling, then he needed to take bold action to stand up against false teaching and teachers. Paul called it "fighting the good fight." We sometimes forget that we are in a spiritual war and that we are to be loyal to God and to His word. We may not understand why we are commanded to do certain things; however, we are still to do them. We may not understand all the spiritual dangers of not believing the entire Bible and taking a proper stand against ungodly practices in our communities. Nevertheless, we need to trust God and take that stand anyway.

False teaching has no place in the church. It weakens the church and its members in particular. If we want to know the major cause of powerless churches in our modern society, then we have to look no farther than the problem of false teaching that denies the power of God and causes us to look to ourselves and other people for solutions rather than to God.

Goal of Spiritual Instruction – 1:3-7

³ As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴ nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵ But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶ For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷ wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. 1 Timothy 1:3-7 (NASB95)

This is the first of four times in Paul's first letter to Timothy that warns against false teachers and false doctrines. We can let unbelief creep into our congregations in the form of high-sounding philosophies that make us feel good about ourselves in spite of sin in our lives and

many lives will be ruined. This was a serious problem in the church at Ephesus and was one of the main reasons Paul left Timothy there when he went on to visit other regions. The first and perhaps most serious error was false or strange doctrine. If our set of beliefs is wrong, then we have little hope of a correct outcome. Examples of false doctrines we can find today might include such ideas of universalism that claims that “in the end” everyone will be saved because a loving and merciful God would never let anyone go to hell for all eternity. Another example of a strange doctrine is that Jehovah was once a man before He became God and that all who are true believers will one day become gods and rule their own universe. False doctrines that we have heard about are such teachings that Jesus was not born of a virgin and that the resurrection did not happen.

The second problem involved those who taught Jewish myths or extra-scriptural stories of historical characters. Such stories which have no basis can hurt the credibility of a teacher. I sometimes hear preachers misuse analogies or examples of things they do not understand and I wonder how much damage they do to their credibility. Apparently, another situation was that some in the early church would build up far-fetched stories based on obscure genealogical points from Old Testament scriptures. We still have such things infiltrating the community of believers today. One example that comes to mind is a story that data generated by NASA scientists regarding the position of the planets have discovered an error in the positions of the planets that can only be explained by factoring in the account given in Joshua of the sun standing still. The problem with that story is that no such calculations have been done by NASA. It is a fabrication that gets forwarded in multiple emails to large groups of people.

There are many who spend a lot of time arguing about such things as whether Job was a real person or just the subject of a story. Some get caught up in finding proof that the earth is only 6000 years old. Others get excited when some archeologists find an ancient town mentioned in the scriptures since it provides proof of the truth of the Bible. How do any such arguments help us to have love from a pure heart, a good conscience, or live our lives in faithfulness to the principles of the kingdom of God as revealed to us in God’s word?

What is love from a pure heart? How does this quality demonstrate itself in everyday living? Such questions force us to address the fundamentals of our faith. There is no way to have “pure heart” apart from the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit in our lives as a result of the new birth. The kind of love to which Paul refers is the kind which is poured into our hearts by the Holy Spirit (see Romans 5:5). The answer to the second question is really about the essence of how Christ in us is walked out in our daily lives. This happens from a combination of a transformation of our nature and being sensitive to the direct leading of the Holy Spirit.

An even more difficult subject to tackle is that of a “good conscience.” What does it mean to have a good conscience? Most of us think of conscience as a basic fundamental awareness of right and wrong. Having a clear conscience would imply that a person does not have any awareness of having made and concealed mistakes or committed sins. There is a close association of the concept of consciousness of our actions with conscience. A good example of this is the NIV translation of First Corinthians 4:4 where Paul wrote “My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me.” If we compare this to the KJV of this same verse we see “For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.” The bottom line of this can be summed up in a fairly modern day saying that “ignorance is no excuse for breaking the law.” Most of us are satisfied with a “clear” conscience (ignorance is bliss) and we may not have enough concern about having a “good” conscience. The word translated as “good” has a basic meaning of “untainted.” That then raises

the question of what can “taint” a person’s conscience.

One of the best ways to “taint” or introduce error into our conscience is a commonly practiced process called rationalization. We may do something that is wrong and we feel a tinge or maybe even a pain of guilt that comes from our conscience. If we admit (confess) the wrong, repent and atone (make amends) for the action, then we have likely avoided tainting our conscience. The other choice is to rationalize that the wrong committed was justified because the other person deserved it and in that simple decision we wind up causing our consciences to be “dulled” or tainted. If this becomes an ongoing practice, then we may find ourselves without benefit of the pain or even a tinge of guilt and we might say that we have a “clear” conscience, but we would certainly not have a “good” conscience.

The final part of the triad that Paul mentioned is “a sincere faith” or “faith unfeigned.” The Greek source of the word “sincere” or “unfeigned” can be transliterated as un-hypocritical. It simply means to not be pretending or play acting. What would you expect to see if a person’s faith was just something that he pretended to have? The most obvious evidence is a misalignment of actions and words. If a person says one thing and does something else, then we call that person a hypocrite. The ironic thing about having an insincere faith is that the person who is guilty is many times the last to know – all his friends and acquaintances already know that is the case. A person’s faithfulness is the best indicator of the quality of that person’s faith.

Paul’s contention was that ignoring the first principles and focusing on what can amount to trivia will likely do nothing other than stir up strife in a church and keep it from the mission of the church. The church is called to show the world the love of God in Jesus Christ. Many problems and confusing idea about what is required to be pleasing to God or what is going to happen in the future can come from the misuse (or misinterpretation) of the Old Testament Scriptures.

Paul mentioned a third group that would be a challenge for Timothy. These were those who wanted to be teachers of the law. They were familiar with what the law said but were clueless as to why the law was given and how it fit into the overall scheme of what God was doing in the Plan of Salvation. You may find some people today who have the idea that we will be OK (saved) if we live a good, clean, moral life and help others. We might find others who believe that if they make a confession of faith in Christ, then they can live the way of the world and they will be OK (saved). Though these two ideas are at the opposite ends of the spectrum, both positions show a misunderstanding of the Law and what it is to accomplish.

Value of Sound Doctrine – 1:8-11

⁸ But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹ realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers ¹⁰ and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, ¹¹ according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. 1 Timothy 1:8-11 (NASB95)

The problem was not the law itself but was a result of misapplication of the law. The law was not intended to limit the freedom of the righteous but to define the error of the unrighteous. If we are operating from a pure motive of love, then the limitations of the law are not an issue because love fulfills everything required by the law and more.

Paul named those to whom the law applies. These are the people who make having laws necessary. Paul started his list with couplets of three groups: lawbreakers and rebels, ungodly and sinful, unholy and irreligious. Gill’s Commentary points out that these together do a thorough job of violating the first four of the Ten Commandments.

The basic cause for breaking rules (laws) is the rebellious nature of man. We can see this

even in small children. If you tell a child NOT to do something, then most of the time, he or she will be determined to do it as an act of defiance. Unless this tendency is controlled at an early age, the child grows up to be a defiant adult who has no respect for authority. Our prisons are filled with such people. The ultimate rebellion is man's defiance of God and His authority. This is exactly what SIN is and this causes us to be less than that for which we were created. In the Genesis account, God said, "Let Us make man in Our image." Sin made us "ungodly" or not aligned with the image of God. When we are out of alignment with God, then we fail to see that He has made us a special part of His creation and that we are to be different from the rest of the animal world. We are special and should behave as a child of the Most High God.

If we examine the remainder of the list that Paul wrote nearly two thousand years ago of what such people do, then we can easily see that it is as up-to-date as tomorrow's newspaper. These transgressions can be shown to be specific violations of the rest of the Ten Commandments. Murdering or striking father and mother is a violation of the fifth commandment, murderers would be in violation of the sixth commandment, next we see adulterers and perverts (in the NIV) and that would be a disregard of the seventh commandment and a lot more, kidnapping or slave trading is stealing a person's life and is prohibited by the eighth commandment, while liars and perjurers are contrary to the ninth commandment. The catchall category of "whatever else" is a likely reference to the tenth commandment since the character fault of "envy" can be linked to all the other violations addressed in the list.

Where does "teaching of the law" and taking a stand against pornography, abortion, gambling, sexual perversion, and many other evils, in our society fit into the role of the church in today's culture? There needs to be a prophetic (proclamation) voice in our culture that makes those who are lost aware of the error of what they are doing. Without such awareness, there will be no conviction and without conviction, there will be no repentance and the end result is that those who are without Christ are literally going to hell. We should applaud the action of churches that stand against ungodly practices. Refusing to perform or even recognize homosexual marriages and the ordination of homosexual as ministers may be criticized by the media or other churches. However, God's word is clear on such issues. We are to please God and not be concerned about pleasing the world. A clear caution is that we should never promote such a change in behavior as the means of salvation but as the result of salvation.

Example of the Transformed Life – 1:12-16

¹² I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. ¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:12-16 (NASB95)

After Paul had enumerated the many ways people harm themselves and others when they ignore or abandon God, he realized how blessed he was because of Christ's intervention in his life. This passage may be close to a realization expressed by some as "but for the grace of God, there go I." By his own admission, Paul was deeply involved in gross misapplication of the law and the purpose for which it was given. He was certainly not involved in many of the egregious sins such as lying, adultery, stealing, and murder (close call there with Stephen), however, he recognized that what he did do was still sin and rendered him guilty before God. Whether or not Paul was objectively the "worst of all sinners" can be debated, but the point is that sin is sin we should not get bogged down in comparison of the degree of the sinfulness of various sins.

Paul considered his life experience as evidence of the efficacy of the purpose that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Such personal evidence is the starting point for sharing the gospel message with others. Some might asked, upon hearing the plan of salvation, “how can I know that what you are telling me is true?” The best answer is “my life is proof that the gospel message is true.”

Praise to God – 1:17

¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (NASB95)

Paul realized that deliverance from sin and the consequences of sin is a provision from the God of all Creation and something which man is unable to accomplish.