

Standing Up for Sound Doctrine

September 25, 2022

I Timothy 1:1-7

This morning, we embark on a new series, 1st and 2nd Timothy. We (I use the word “we” because we as staff chose the series and will do some sharing in the preaching of it) have entitled the series, “A Shepherd’s Heart.” I really think this fits. The books of 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus are often called the pastoral (or shepherding) epistles. They were written by Paul late in his life, giving instruction to younger pastors under his influence about how to pastor (or shepherd) a church. And yes, it fits our circumstance here at Hillcrest as I approach 2023 and eventual retirement. Like Paul, I look forward to being pastoral in my preaching at this stage of life, building into those who will come after me. Much of my time right now is dedicated to that endeavor. So this fits.

But I want to make clear that the Shepherd in the title is actually Jesus, the true Good Shepherd. Paul and the rest of us are only under shepherds, given care of a segment of God’s flock under the direct supervision of Jesus as the Good Shepherd. I ask you to keep this in mind as we work our way through the text. These are not my words here in 1 Timothy, they come to us as the Word of God (as the text will explicitly declare in 2 Timothy 3). I am happy to preach this great text, but they are not my words, they are words written down by one shepherd at the inspiration of the True Shepherd.

These great books are filled with instruction about life in the church, how churches ought to operate, how they are to be led and how those leaders are to be treated. Oh yes, there will be controversial texts. Some will not like God’s instructions here. But a cursory reading of the text would make clear that at the core, the issue most prominent is that addressed in our text of the morning: sound teaching. Jesus’ Church ought to be a haven for sound teaching. Jesus’ under shepherds ought to be counted on to convey truth.

And, as you might expect if the Apostle Paul comes right out at the beginning, that is not always the case. It is not a given that preachers will preach

truth, teachers will teach truth, theologians will actually produce truth filled works. It is not automatic and ought not be assumed. And so, one of the roles of the shepherds of God's people is to make sure truth is taught in the church. That point is really, really clear in today's text. Guarding truth is a central task for those leading God's people. You might also be able to guess that doing so will not always be popular. Pastors are just like everyone else, we like to be liked! Using Scripture to rebuke and correct and train as is mentioned in 2 Timothy 3:16 is not always fun. Rebuking and correcting the people who hire you and pay you is risky!

And yet, this is what leaders are called to do, guard the teaching of the church. That is where we are headed this morning, from the first verses of chapter I. This is an issue of primary importance. Hear these first verses of Paul's first letter to his young protégé Timothy. READ I Timothy 1:1-7.

Main point: Sound doctrine matters.

Admit it: if I were to tell you that this is going to be a sermon about doctrine, many of you would almost automatically tune out. We live in the age and the tradition where doctrine is a VERY secondary issue. We live with the attitude that as long as I have Jesus, nothing else matters. We can be wrong about a whole host of things and it doesn't matter. Just give me Jesus. Now, there is truth in the idea that Jesus is at the core and that all other things pale when compared to Him, but I assure you that doctrine matters, sound doctrine matters. Rooting out false teaching is a very important task for church leadership. You might not think such issues are important, but I assure you that God does. Again and again, we see texts like this one in I Timothy where it is emphasized the importance of sound doctrine. Indeed, Paul here states that was the reason he left Timothy to pastor the Ephesian church. It is THAT important.

So, buckle up. We are in for a ride, and right out of the chute we see the importance of fidelity to the text of Scripture and teaching it correctly. Sound doctrine matters! It matters to God and it ought to matter to you. (3 parts)

I. The authority to lead God's people comes from God. vv. 1-2

By this I mean that it is no small thing to lead God's people, to speak for God, to stand before people and convey the truth of God. It ought to be taken seriously. Again, we will see that theme scattered throughout these pastoral epistles. Timothy, as a young pastor, needed to be reminded that his authority, Paul's authority comes from God. Thus, it is to be taken seriously and guarded diligently.

v.1- Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

Yes, this is just a normal beginning to one of Paul's letters, but as is always the case, the formality of the introduction contains truths that will be important as we proceed through the letter. The words here matter. The writer is clearly identified as Paul, the apostle Paul. He is writing a letter in an official capacity, even if it contains personal information. We will see that "official" aspect later in the letter when he tells Timothy that teaching elders deserve double honor. Clearly, such a statement is meant for the church reading this letter as much or more than for Timothy as the teaching elder. Paul is writing to Pastor Timothy a letter with the full weight of the Word of God, expecting that it will be shared with the church or even churches, preserved for us as the Word of God.

He announces here that his title as apostle, or sent one, comes by and carries with it the command of God. Now, Paul does not usually begin his letters with this statement, and we quickly see why he frames it that way.

Pastoral oversight, pastoral authority is highlighted in this letter. And so, he frames the letter to Timothy (and his church) that he writes with the full authority of God. Notice as well that double emphasis is given that Christ Jesus is at the center. God sent Him to announce, pronounce the hope that can only come from Jesus. God sent him, Jesus sent him. The words written here are intended to carry weight.

2 To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

He then announces that Timothy is the recipient of the letter and the type of relationship he has with Timothy. “my true child in the faith.” From other texts, we know that Timothy was a close traveling companion to Paul. He was born to a Jewish Christian mother and a Gentile (probably non-Christian) father. Both the Jews and the Gentiles would have separated themselves from him. But Paul took him in as a “true son in the faith.” He was one of Paul’s closest disciples. And we will see from the next verse that Paul trusted him deeply to carry on work that he had begun, here in Ephesus. So, Paul is writing to his disciple, whom he had left in charge of perhaps the church Paul had invested most. Paul trusted Timothy. Timothy was carrying on Paul’s work in Ephesus.

He sends his greeting in typical fashion, grace and peace, appealing to both Jewish and Gentile believers. So, this is a letter from one especially and specifically called of God to lead Jesus’ Church in the first generation. He is writing to a trusted associate who is entrusted to carry that work in one location into the next generation. But we will see that Paul passes on this authority to Timothy within his church. When Timothy spoke, Paul was telling the congregation, his words had weight. They carried the weight of Paul, and God Himself. He was still a flawed man, but his words had weight.

II. Leaders of God's people must combat false teaching. Vv. 3-4

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,

From the note here, it appears that Paul, after he was released from Roman prison as recorded at the end of the book of Acts, traveled a bit to visit churches he had planted. Along the way, he passed through Ephesus. And seeing the situation there, he left Timothy to devote himself to cleaning up the mess that had developed there: people had come along teaching things that were contrary to that which was taught by Paul. It also appears that they were taking small things, trivial things and teaching them as if they were big things. They were making something out of nothing.

But notice the wording here. Timothy is to charge them to stop teaching false doctrine. It is not that he is to just teach truth and trust that the people would choose truth over falsehood, but he is to actively use authority to push them to stop. From Paul's vantage point, there is not just a difference of opinion, no there is truth and anything else.

We live in a world that disdains the concept of truth and falsehood. We lump everything under opinion, and no one can have a claim on truth. Not so. There is true doctrine, and then there is different doctrine, false doctrine, trivial speculation that does not lead people to godliness. And as we see here, it is a chief responsibility of church leaders to make sure truth is taught in their churches.

Back when I was in college a controversy sprung up surrounding the hot button issue of the day. Professors, students, churches were divided, (they still are I might add!). There was a very prominent church on the corner of campus led by a well-known and godly pastor. He found out that some of these academic experts were either teaching or wanted to teach “the other side” of this hot button issue in his church. He ordered them to stop. As you might imagine, he was immediately and thoroughly blasted by the professors who wanted to spread their enlightened version of truth. “Academic freedom!” they cried out. How dare you shut down our voices! We demand the right to have our voices heard.

His answer to them though was quite instructive. They might have academic freedom in the classroom, but he reminded them that there is no such thing as academic freedom in the church. There is truth, and there is falsehood. And his charge as a pastor was to do all within his power to assure that truth was taught in his church. They could teach their “different doctrine” somewhere else. That’s the difference between a church and a school. I was so proud of him and wrote to tell him so. He needed to know that there were young men like me watching his courage and fortitude. Pastors must stand for truth! That’s why God has put us here. Elders, the same.

4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

Here we see that not only were they teaching false doctrine (next week’s text will deal with that), but they added to the doctrines of the church. They went outside the bounds of Scripture and promoted things that could not be backed up by Scripture. They taught myths as truth. They drew conclusions from obscure details that could not be supported by the text. We know from history that such surmising and speculating from textual genealogies was common in that day. They made something out of nothing and taught it with the same conviction as Scripture, but it was nothing but myth and speculation.

Instead, as we see here, we are to use good stewardship of that which has been entrusted to us. It is a body of knowledge, truth, that has been entrusted to us and we must handle it carefully and faithfully in our context, in our generation, passing it on to the next generation.

The truth is that there is always, will always be a natural slide toward falsehood and myths and speculations. The pull against truth is constant and compelling. In our generation, this has surely been true about abortion and life issues. I remember being told by someone I respect in the next generation, “We have to just admit defeat on abortion. The war is over.” No. The war over truth concerning life is not over. And yes, recently there has been a significant, but partial victory in the courts. But the war is not over, the war will never be over. Right now, we must fight against early, pharmaceutical abortions. They are just as wrong as later, surgical ones. But you wouldn’t know that from the politicians, the press, and popular culture. The same battle rages on concerning sexuality and gender, but that would take a whole sermon to just scratch the surface. But I cite these two examples to remind us that we are in a war with our culture over truth, and within the church, leaders have a charge to protect and teach truth.

III. The teaching of God’s Kingdom is purposeful. Vv. 5-7

We do not just teach for teaching sake. We do not teach or preach to impress people with our knowledge, or to get them to increase their knowledge. Indeed, the last thing Paul says at the end of the letter is that some have pursued “knowledge” and swerved from the faith. The pursuit of knowledge, of facts is not the goal of biblical teaching and preaching.

5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Pompous, erudite

The aim, the purpose goes the heart, the core of our being. It is an attitude toward God, toward others, toward self that is characterized by self-sacrifice, clear thinking, and integrity of faith. This is the opposite of trying to impress people with our knowledge. This means we do what we do because we love people. We do not teach simply for the sake of teaching, but we do it because we love people and want them to know the truth. Can you see what is the highest priority? Not the conveyance of knowledge, but concern for the people. Why do so many of our adults spend so much time teaching kids each week at Sow, Grow, Go, and Multiply (the names of our ministries to children)? Do we not have something better to do? No, this IS what we do. We show God's love to the kids of our community. We want them to know the truth. Our actions spring from our hearts, our passions, our self-sacrificial love for our Lord and for them. Ministry comes from our core. We pass this core to the next generation.

6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion,

Not everyone has that same motivation. They are not operating out of sacrificial love, they do not have renewed, clear thinking, they do not embrace the faith as passed down from God. They are motivated by other things. They are in pursuit of other things. They desire respect, acclaim from peers, they want to be liked. They want to be known as hip and cool. And so they leave the truth and swerve into things that do not matter and are of no earthly good. They love a good debate. They love stirring up controversy. They love setting themselves up above others, smarter than your average bear, beyond the thinking of mere mortals.

I call them pompous, erudite, elitist. Their aim is to have others regard them as the smartest people in the room. We all know such people! Such

highbrow attitudes might have their place elsewhere in society, but beware when they creep into the church! Our task is not to come up with new and interesting things. Our task is to faithfully convey the truth that has been entrusted to us.

Let me let you in on a dirty little secret from my world. Do you know what sermons are the hardest for me to preach? Christmas sermons. Why? Because we are saturated with music for a month which contains the basics of the biblical narrative. Everyone is convinced that they know everything there is to know about the birth of Christ. And they come to church wanting to see if Pastor Curt can come up with something new! Admit it, you do! You would be disappointed if you just heard what you already know. There is always pressure to present new, the more familiar, the more pressure. Okay, enough pastoral whining!

I desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

They desire to be known as teachers, smart teachers, more knowledgeable than anyone else. They should be concerned with truth, faithfulness, passing on what has been entrusted. Instead, they are seeking to make names for themselves. And we see here that the result is they don't know what they are talking about, in spite of their confidence in their perspective.

I think of the note found by the church custodian on the pulpit on Monday morning, "Point weak here, pound pulpit hard!" You can't make up for lack of truth through confidence. Truth is truth.

You can be a really deep thinker. You can be very articulate. You can draw huge crowds. But in the context of the church, unless you are faithfully conveying the truth of God, you are wasting your time. The standard is faithfulness to the text. You are measured by your love, by your heart, by your conscience, by the sincerity of your faith. When those things are lacking, when what is taught fails to convey the truth of Scripture, church leaders have a

responsibility to shut it down. This was an item of first importance to Paul. Truth matters. Sound doctrine matters.

If we believe this passage is the Word of God, then what should be different about our lives?

- 1) We will care about sound doctrine.
- 2) We will weigh teaching by Scripture, not by lofty words or popularity.
- 3) We will be bold in confronting false teaching.
- 4) We will remind ourselves of the responsibility that comes with the authority granted to us.