

What You Believe Really Matters

1Timothy 1:1-11

In his book *Be Faithful*, Warren Wiersbe speaks of an ad that was in the London newspaper some years ago that had thousands of men respond to it. It simply said: “Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger, safe return doubtful but honor and recognition in case of success.” That particular ad was placed in the London newspaper by the Arctic explorer Earnest Shackleton. Dr. Wiersbe then goes on to say that if Jesus Christ put in the local newspaper an advertisement for workers perhaps the announcement would read something like this: “Men and women wanted for difficult tasks of helping to build my church. You will often be misunderstood even by those working with you. You will face constant attack from an invisible enemy, you may not see the results of your labor and your full reward will not come until after your work is completed. It may cost you your home, your ambitions, even your life.” That job description would fit very well the man that we know as the apostle Paul.

Before we turn to 1Timothy, we would do well to examine 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Paul was converted probably around AD 35. When he writes 2 Corinthians it is about AD 56 or 57, so he has been a believer now for almost 2 decades. He has served the Lord on several missionary journeys, and he is nowhere close to the end of his life, and yet already Paul can write these words to the church at Corinth concerning what he had experienced in his service for the Lord Jesus Christ. 2 Corinthians 11:23 reads: “Are they ministers of Christ [speaking of those who are opposing Paul at Corinth], I speak as a fool. I am more in labors, more abundant in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often.” He goes on in essence to say, “Let me expound what I mean by all of this.”

“From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods, once I was stoned, three times I was shipwrecked, a night and a day I have been in the deep. In journey’s often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren, in weariness and toil in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fasting often, in cold and nakedness; besides the other things what comes upon me daily my deep concern for all the churches.” Now it is about AD 65. It is about 10 years later. Paul is no doubt in the final years of his life. We will see later that when he pens 2 Timothy he is in prison in the Mamertine dungeon in Rome. It is his second imprisonment and he does not expect to be released. But when he writes 1 Timothy he is evidently still free, and he is very concerned about his son in the ministry, very concerned about the church at Ephesus. This church had become a very significant beachhead in ancient Asia Minor, modern day Turkey. It is with that backdrop, that he writes this letter to his young son in the ministry. Let’s read 1 Timothy 1:1-11.

Here is Paul, 30 years in the ministry, probably, on a fourth missionary journey. What he is giving is nothing less than wise counsel from a very seasoned veteran. If you were to ask me is there a key verse that unfolds for us, 1 Timothy, it would be 3:15, “For if I am delayed I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the pillar of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” All that Paul is going to say in 1 Timothy is concerned with how the church of God should conduct itself in terms of its theology and also in terms of its ministry.

Timothy is probably in his late 30’s, maybe even approaching his early 40’s. He is at Ephesus, a very trying place, a very difficult place. What Paul says to Timothy can be summarized this way, “What you believe really matters. Truth is not negotiable. It will

determine how you think, and it will also determine how you live.” Paul highlights in these first 11 verses four things about which Timothy must believe rightly.

I. Have confidence in your salvation.

(1-2)

“Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, by the commandment of God our Savior and the Lord Jesus Christ.” Of course Paul was originally Saul converted on the Damascus Road in Acts 9. When he begins his ministry to the Gentiles in Acts 13, suddenly the name moves from Saul to Paul. Some believe that the name change reflects his small stature because the word Paul means small or humble. Others think Paul took the name because he had once been a very prideful and arrogant Pharisee and now he recognized that he needed to be humble and have the mind of Christ. Others have noted that, and this is my own particular persuasion, that Paul’s first Gentile convert in Acts 13 was a man by the name of Sergius Paulis. I think that it may be that Paul took that name as a reminder and in honor of the first Gentile that was converted on his first missionary journey. Paul describes himself as an apostle, a sent one. The word has a technical meaning of those who are with the Lord from the beginning of his ministry until his death, burial, and ascension back into heaven. It was also extended to people like his half brother James and his half brother Jude. Paul of course call himself an apostle in that kind of a way though he tells us in 1 Corinthians 15 he was one born out of due season and that he also sees himself as the least of all the apostles. And yet for us today, the word connotes the idea of a missionary, a sent one. We may not be an apostle in the technical sense, but I like to say it this way: we may not be an apostle with a capital “A,” but every one of us ought to have the heart of an apostle with a small “a.” We should have the heart and the passion of a missionary to take the gospel to those who need to hear about Jesus. Paul tells young Timothy, and he, I think, also intended this to be heard at the church at Ephesus, this

was not something that I chose for myself. This is not something that I aspired to. This was not something that was ever on my agenda. No, I am an apostle of Jesus Christ by the command of God, the God who is our Savior.

He notes that Lord Jesus Christ is our hope. Now very interestingly, most of the time in the Bible, it is God the Son, Jesus who is called the Savior. Yet, here in 1 Timothy 1, and also a number of other times in the Pastoral Epistles, Paul will call God the Father the Savior. He will also call God the Son, Jesus, the Savior. Is this a big deal? Yes! Paul can say the same thing about God that he can say about Jesus. In other words, call anyone the Savior other than God the Father and God the Son and its heresy and nonsense. Furthermore, if he can call God the Father Savior and he can call God the Son Savior, it is not implicit, it is an explicit, a declaration of the deity of Jesus Christ. And so here he calls God the Father our Savior. He is the one who has saved us from sin, the one who has saved us from sins penalty, who is saving us from sins power, who will ultimately save us from sins presence. We call that justification, sanctification, and glorification. But then also he adds, and, I love the full majestic title, “the Lord Jesus Christ, our hope.” What does he mean by our hope? He is the only hope that we have. He is the only hope for forgiveness of sins. He is also the only hope for heaven when you die.

Yesterday we inaugurated our 44th President. Pastor Rick Warren was invited to give a prayer in that particular ceremony. This morning in *Newsweek Magazine* online, Lisa Miller who is no friend of evangelicals, had an article entitled “What Rick Warren Said.” She notes that he both said was what you expected, but also there was an element of surprise. And this is how she ends her article, “Finally Warren made the move that was both inevitable and surprising. He prayed in Jesus’ name. Pastors at previous inaugurations have triggered

controversy and lawsuits for explicitly Christian prayers and pundits wondered aloud whether given the tsunami of press that preceded this prayer, Warren would dare stake out this turf. But, Warren knows who he is. He is a conservative evangelical. There is nothing else for him to do. Once again, his phrasing was deaf; he invoked Jesus for himself, not for the millions on the mall or the billions watching television. ‘I humbly asked this he said in the name of the one who changed my life Jesus.’ She concludes he did a good job and yet the lingering question remains, “Warren’s conservative theology teaches him that there is one path to God, and that is Jesus. So when he wraps his great big arms around Muslims and Jews and homosexuals, does he really believe there is hope for us or is he just being nice?” Well the answer to that question is, and I know Rick, yes, he believes there is hope for them and that hope is found in Jesus. Either they will come to God through faith in Jesus or they will not come to God at all. Call it nice or call it un-nice, I call it loving. If He is indeed the only way, we do no one any favors by not telling them the truth. Paul would affirm there is only one hope, His name is Jesus.

In verse 2 Paul addresses Timothy as a true son in the faith. He is the recipient of grace, God’s unmerited favor; mercy, God’s compassion and kindness; peace, the cessation of all hostility, wholeness, what the Hebrews call “Shalom.” Peace again is from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, or as he says here, “Jesus Christ our Lord.” And so if you quickly unwrap the first two verses what do you discover? We have a mission. We are sent ones, we are apostles. We have a Savior. We have a Lord. We have a hope. We have a family. We have something to believe. We have grace, mercy, peace, and we have a Father. All of that and more is what you and I have in our salvation, a salvation that can never ever, ever be taken away. Paul begins in these first two verses by simply noting some of the blessings that

we have in salvation. You should have confidence in this salvation because you have a Father who will never let you go and you have hope in a Savior whose name is Jesus who will never ever let you down. Have confidence in your salvation.

II. Teach sound doctrine.

(3-4)

Interestingly, the beginning of 1 Timothy is like Galatians. He is so ticked off with the Galatians for abandoning the gospel he just jumps into their business. Here, he is not all that ticked off at Timothy although I do think he is a little put out with him as I will show in just a moment. But, he is so concerned with false teaching slipping into the church at Ephesus he does not have a prayer of thanksgiving or a word of commendation. He just jumps right in and says Timothy; make sure you keep teaching sound doctrine. Verse 3, “As I urged you, (we could translate it “as I encouraged you”) when I went into Macedonia (that is modern day Greece) remain in Ephesus.” Perhaps Timothy was thinking about leaving. Perhaps Timothy was becoming discouraged about what was going on there. Why? He had to deal with false teachers. In addition, Ephesus was dominated by two things: 1) the worship of the emperor, and 2) the goddess of sex Diana. In other words, sex and politics dominated the city of Ephesus in the first century. Not much has changed in 21 centuries! He was having to minister in that context. He now has to confront false teachers within the church who were challenging him. Perhaps timid Timmy did not have a strong constitution. As I like to say, if Paul had a real problem, he sent his Christian hit man Titus. He showed up and cleaned house and set everything right. You didn’t mess with Titus. On the other hand, little timid Tim had a weak stomach. That is why he had to drink a little wine now and then. And, he just didn’t like opposition; he didn’t like controversy. He was easily discouraged, and so Paul said, “Look, I urged you when I went into Macedonia. I know you wanted to go with me. I know

you maybe wanted to go somewhere else, but I said no, you remain in Ephesus that you may “charge,” it’s the same word translated “commandment” back in verse 1, that you may command some that they teach no other doctrine.” Now, later in chapter 1 you will read of two men in verse 20, Hymenaeus and Alexander whom Paul says I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme. Evidently Hymenaeus and Alexander were already within the church. Perhaps they had some position and some following. Evidently they were teaching a contrary doctrine. He will use repeatedly in 1 and 2 Timothy the phrase that you see at the end of verse 10, “sound doctrine.” And so he says to him I want you to charge them, I want you to command them that they teach no other doctrine. Question: what were they doing? They were like many people today. They were majoring on the minors and they were minoring on the majors. They were getting involved, like many a seminary student, in a theological debate that was not going to lead anywhere. It wasn’t going to build the body up. It wasn’t going to draw them closer to Jesus. It gave them the chance to show off their intellectual dexterity. It gave them the opportunity to engage in theological gymnastics, but as far as building up the body it was not contributing at all. Nothing has changed has it? Tragically churches get filled with people like that and what it does is it tears down, it doesn’t build up.

Now notice what Paul says in verse 4. “I ask that you teach them not to give heed to fables, endless genealogies which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.” That is a troubling phrase, or at least a somewhat mysterious phrase, because we cannot be certain for sure as to what exactly he meant. Evidently it was something like this. They were taking the Bible, and they were taking the stories of the Bible and the genealogies of the Bible and they were trying to find hidden meanings. Perhaps they were already being

influenced by some Greek tendencies as they were trying to find hidden meanings beneath the plain meaning of the text. In addition, they were evidently spinning some traditions that they were placing on equal authority to the Bible. In other words, what they were doing was going beyond the plain meaning of Scripture. They were going beyond the basic teaching of the text, and they were trying to add things that they thought indicated a greater spirituality, a greater intellect, and a deeper insight into the Bible. Paul says bottom line, all that this kind of stuff does is it causes disputes rather than godly edification, the building up of the body which takes place in faith. Their problem was they got their focus off of Jesus, they got their focus off of the Bible, and they were talking about extraneous things that really were not going to be helpful. Furthermore, no one could be absolutely certain about these things anyway.

Once more, God has given me the joy of being in theological education now for almost 20 years. For most of that period of time I taught systematic theology. I love theology. I enjoy teaching theology. I enjoy studying and reading theology, but I also know this. Where the Bible stops I need to stop. And what the Bible majors on I need to major on. I may have some particular views on certain things that I think fall in line with the thrust and tenor of scripture, but am I going to minor on the majors and major on the minors? No. That is not going to build up the body. That is not going to reach more people for Christ. What it is going to wind up doing is dividing the church, or if not dividing the church, causing factions to develop. When that happens the church is not going to be effective. I will be honest with you. I would not be a part of a church that wanted to fight all of the time about Calvinism. I would not be a part of such a church. I am pre-millennial and pre-tribulation in my eschatology. But I am not going to be part of a church that wants to fuss and fight about the time of the rapture, who is the anti-Christ, who is the false prophet, who has to know to the

last detail about the seal judgments and the trumpet judgments and the bowl judgments, who has to dot every theological “i” and cross every theological “t” when it comes to exactly what is the nature of the millennium. I have some opinions about all of that, but those are some minor things, not major things. What is major? The major thing is that Jesus is coming again. The major thing is there is going to be a heaven, and there is going to be a hell, and the difference is Jesus. Now that is what really matters. And that is what we need to major on. But unfortunately you had here in 1 Timothy a bunch of theological egg-heads, a bunch of scholastic snobs, and as a result of that the church was suffering. Paul says to Timothy, “Step up to the plate; play the man, and shut that stuff down. So, we have to have confidence in our salvation, we have to teach sound doctrine and...

III. Avoid useless arguments.

(5-7)

Verse 5, “Now the purpose of the commandment is love.” Love. It is love that is essential to the health of the body. How does love blossom and grow and spread throughout the church? Well he tells you. It comes 1) from a pure heart, 2) from a good or a clear conscience, and 3) from a sincere [it could be translated “unhypocritical,” from a sincere, genuine, unhyprocritical] faith, from which, tragically, some having strayed and have turned away to idle talk. They are teaching those things which are divisive; they are teaching those things which are useless, nothing but empty talk. He says that they desire to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm. In other words, yes, they were involved in teaching the Old Testament, the Bible for the very early church, but they were interested in speculating about the genealogies, they were interested in fabricating fables and mythology about some of the people, some of the personalities.

They also were legalists. They were pharisaical. They claim to be experts in the law, and yet Paul says they do not know or understand what they are affirming. However, they were absolutely sure that they were right and if you doubted it they were happy to tell you on every possible occasion. Paul says, don't major on the minors. Stay focused on Jesus and His gospel. Don't try to find things in the Bible that are not there and avoid these useless arguments.

IV. Use God's law in concert with the gospel.

(8-11)

What is the purpose of God's law? That is a very interesting question among theologians. What is the purpose of the law of God? The Ten Commandments? We know that the Ten Commandments cannot save us. Is there a problem with the Ten Commandments? No, there is a problem with you, and there is a problem with me. We can't measure up to that standard. So why is it that God gave us the law? I think there are at least four reasons. I will note them and highlight the one that Paul seems to focus on in this text.

- 1) The law of God reveals His character and holiness. The law of God reveals the character and holiness of our God.
- 2) The law is a mirror and a teacher to lead you to Christ. In Galatians 3:24 where Paul says the law is a school master, a school instructor, to lead you to Christ. As a mirror it shows you and me our sin, and as a teacher it informs us we can't measure up to this standard of perfection. But Jesus did it for you.
- 3) It is a guide for life. Now, it is a guide that by virtue of our trusting Christ and the indwelling Holy Spirit is internalized that we live out through the ethic of love. In other words, we now recognize that we do not murder, and we are not even to have a murderous thought. We now understand that we are not to commit adultery, and

we're not even to have an adulterous thought. And so the guide for life is now internalized in Christ through the Spirit. The Law reveals the character and holiness of God, it is a mirror and teacher that leads us to Christ, it guides us for life now internalized by the Spirit, and...

- 4) It restrains evil. That seems to be the purpose that Paul highlights here because look at what he says in verse 8, "We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully." We know that the law is not made for a righteous person. We know that righteousness can only come through faith in Christ as we receive His righteousness. It is not for a righteous person, but for, and what he does is he basically walks you through, in a general fashion, the Ten Commandments. Three phrases are packaged in a both/and kind of way. Notice he says it is for the lawless and the insubordinate. It is for the ungodly and for sinners, and it is for unholy and the profane. If you are looking at the first commandments, the first four or five, this is a good way of summarizing them. It speaks to people who are lawless, in rebellion against God, ungodly which means they are idolaters; they are sinners, unholy and profane. Then he gives you a listing of sins that line up for the most part with commandments five, six, seven, eight and nine. The law is given for murders of fathers and murders of mothers. You say there are places in the world where that happens? There have always been places in the world where that happens. He said it is also for man-slayers, those who murder in general. He says in verse 10 it is for fornicators and for sodomites. The word fornicator is a word that deals with any type of sexual conduct outside the parameters of marriage between a man and a woman. It is that general word in the Bible that talks about any type of sexual immorality. It would cover

premarital sex, extramarital sex, and unnatural sex. But Paul gets very specific and he says it is also for sodomites. It is for homosexuals. We should not hate homosexuals. In fact we should not hate any sinner. Were it not for God's grace we would be right there with them. And yet again we do no one any favors by watering down, discounting or even rejecting the clear teaching of the Bible. The Bible says outside the covenant of marriage, between a man and a woman, any type of sexual conduct, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is sin. And so the law is for fornicators and sodomites, it is for as the New King James says kidnappers. The word actually is used in the ancient world for slave traders, those who would go and capture a person and then sell them into slavery. How our founding fathers and how our brothers and sisters in Christ in the 1700's and the 1800's failed to see this application to the slave industry in America I simply do not understand. He said it is also for liars, for perjurers, and, just in case I left anything out, if there is any other thing that is contrary that is in opposition to, "sound doctrine."

The word "sound" is the word in Greek from which we get our word hygiene. Hygenia, it is a word that means healthy, hygienic. And so what he is doing is using a beautiful image in terms of the metaphor here. He is saying look; there is a certain kind of doctrine that brings healing. And there is another kind of doctrine that brings sickness. There is one kind of doctrine that will make you well and there is another kind of doctrine that is filled with disease. How do we make sure that we stay in the realm of that sound, healthy doctrine? He tells us in verse 11: "It is all according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust." I have often said, give me 10 minutes with any one of you. Let me ask you some basic

questions about what you believe about Jesus and His gospel and I can pinpoint pretty close 95% of the rest of your theology. Why? Because what you believe about Jesus and His gospel will determine what you believe about the Bible. It will determine what you believe about God. It will determine what you believe about man. It will determine what you believe about salvation. It will even determine what you believe about the Holy Spirit, the church and the end times. That is why Paul emphasizes sound doctrine. Mark it down. It is centered in Jesus and it grows out of His precious wonderful gospel; that He came into the world as Paul was saying in verse 15 of this chapter: “He came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief.”

Stay close to Jesus, stay rooted in the gospel and you will live in a world of healthy doctrine; not doctrine that is diseased; not doctrine that ultimately that could lead to your spiritual death.