

## **Confidence or Truth?**

**1 Timothy 1:1-7**

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Imagine, for a moment, that the President were to call you today and were to appoint you as an Ambassador of the United States. Would you take that commission seriously? My guess is that you would. After all, it is no small thing to be tasked with representing a Head of State, not to mention an entire Citizenry, to the world. But, it is no easy task to be in that position. Not only is your every action under review constantly, but most especially, everything that you say is scrutinized, because when you speak, it is as if the President himself is speaking. And so, when an Ambassador speaks, they must ensure that what they say is in agreement with what the one who has sent them has already spoken. No adding to. No taking away. But, speaking only what is in accordance with the policy set forth by the President. They should also speak only the truth (though we know that this often isn't the case). Because if they do not, no matter how confidently they may say it, it is false. It is a lie. And they will be held accountable for it.

In the conversion of Paul in Acts 9 we see something far more significant than an earthly appointment be given to the Apostle. It is no mere President that requests his assistance. No, it is the King of kings who appears to him in blinding light and sends him as "a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel." And, from the beginning we see that Paul is a man of conviction, who takes seriously this charge as an ambassador for Christ as we are told that "immediately he proclaimed Jesus in the synagogues, saying 'He is the Son of God'." And now, years later as he begins this letter to Timothy there is no doubt as to who Paul serves as he says in verse 1 "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope". Now, an Apostle is simply someone who is sent. In other words, it is someone who is given authority as an official representative of the one who is doing the sending (obviously this would typically be

someone of great stature or importance). And we see here that Paul knows that he is representing the highest authority as he refers back to that moment when he was knocked off of his horse and commissioned by God Himself to be the Apostle to the Gentiles. But, just as an Ambassador will also often have many other diplomats to help with the affairs of state, so does Paul have his true child in the faith Timothy, that he has left in Ephesus to help him manage the affairs of the Church, and most importantly, to ensure that the Gospel of Jesus Christ remains pure, untainted with false doctrine.

And in these first few verses of this First Epistle, Paul wastes no time in clarifying to Timothy that this is what is most important, as he begins in verse 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”. Beloved, it has never been, nor will it ever be, easy to confront error. Calling out false teaching, and sin, for what it is will not be comfortable, and it will certainly not be popular. But, as we have often seen throughout Church history, even down to today, men of great faith may struggle at times to stand for the Truth. And our brother Timothy was reluctant, perhaps out of fear or a lack of confidence in the message itself, to address these issues directly. And yet, that is exactly what Paul had left him in Ephesus to do, and that is what Paul is writing him to ensure occurs now. In short, what we see here is Timothy’s pastoral assignment. Paul’s “intention is to instruct Timothy in how to act as Paul’s (and therefore as Christ’s) representative in establishing good order in the church at Ephesus and in responding to specific threats to the believers there.” But, we can safely presume that this letter was not meant for Timothy’s eyes alone. In the Greek text, in the final benediction (6:21) we see the use of the plural form of “you” and so, it is obvious that Paul intended for this letter to be read to the entire Church. Hence why it is also a part of the Canon of Scripture and read in the Church today. In effect, “Paul intends his directives to substantiate Timothy’s authority to implement Paul’s instructions (which are grounded in the commandments of Jesus Christ) in the eyes of the congregation.” He is bolstering Timothy’s authority by providing him with direct proof that it is Paul who is commanding these things.

And he begins by refuting the false doctrine that has begun to spread within the Church. Now, why am I laboring this point? Because false teachers with their “doctrines of demons” are no less common today (amongst our family and friends) than they were in the Ephesian Church, and indeed have been since the Garden of Eden. The enemy of our souls is still using the same strategy if the tactics have shifted slightly over time. He is still trying to outflank the Church, he’s just utilizing slightly different weapons today. Whether it’s attempting to manipulate Jesus to satisfy worldly lusts as in the Prosperity teaching; adding human works unto the perfect work of Christ, Roman Catholicism and Evangelical moralism; the seemingly pious “no doctrine but Christ” professed in many non-denominational churches (which is a doctrine itself by the way); or any one of a thousand others, the enemy of your souls has servants everywhere and in every place ready to lead you astray and without a doubt, our flesh will long for it at every turn. And we do neither them, nor ourselves, any favors by ignoring the lies. Rather, if we presume that we can just “love them through” whatever lie they’re believing, without correcting that false belief, then we are NOT showing them love, and it is the foolish man who pretends otherwise. It is the coward who sticks their head in the sand and imagines that if they ignore something, it will just go away. Beloved, that is what Timothy was tempted to do, and here Paul is setting him right as he urges him to accomplish that task which was set before him. And it is what we are urged to do by his example.

But, notice how Paul instructs Timothy to accomplish this task in verse 3. Is he to be “seeker sensitive” and refrain from speaking anything that might be offensive or hurt their fragile feelings? Or perhaps to simply be an example by living a moral life, without ever speaking the Truth? No, Paul instructs Timothy here to “charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine”. A “charge” “refers to a military command, and it demands that a subordinate obey an order from a superior.” And as several of us here at Covenant Presbyterian can attest, there are many times when that command is not something that is pleasant, nor is it necessarily something that we are overly enthused to accomplish. And yet, we MUST obey. And here, Timothy (as the Pastor of the Church at Ephesus) is

shown to have the authority to command, with which comes the expectation of obedience, as he is executing, faithfully, his duties as overseer of the Church. Obviously, this is nothing new. Repeatedly in Scripture we are given commands and expected to obey them. Now, I know that you already know that we are to obey the Lord, but sometimes it is good to be reminded of what we already know. So, here is a brief sampling of what the Lord commands, that we are expected to obey, not to our salvation, as that is in Christ's perfect obedience alone that that is accomplished. But, out of love for the God who has saved us. "You shall have no other gods before me", "You shall not make for yourself a carved image", "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain", "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy", "Honor your father and your mother", "You shall not murder", "You shall not commit adultery", "You shall not steal", "You shall not bear false witness", "You shall not covet your neighbor's house". Those are just ten commands given by the Lord...and obviously there are more that we could cite. Also, notice how every single one of them is restrictive, commanding us to not commit certain actions over against what is good in the eyes of God, because we will visit this idea again. But, the point is this. When the King gives you a command (and here in 1 Timothy He does that through a representative) you obey.

And these certain persons (whoever they may have been) have now been commanded to no longer teach any different doctrine. This different doctrine, at least here in Ephesus, appears to have come in three primary forms. If you look at verse 4 you'll see that Paul begins with two, namely "myths" and "endless genealogies". These issues were obviously well known to Timothy as Paul chose not to go into any further detail concerning the particular false doctrines that were being taught. As such, we can only speculate as to what he is referring to here by these two vague statements. But, in the sources that I have available to me, there tend to be two possibilities that repeatedly make their way to the top of the list. The first, simply given the title here of "myths", is most probably a reference to the "legends of OT figures that are found in many of the apocryphal Jewish writings." And so, it is likely that Paul is

speaking here of the same “Jewish myths” that he warns Titus of in 1:14 of the epistle that bears his name. Which raises a curious point. That although you have two different churches, one in modern day Turkey, and the other on the Island of Crete, they are both being subjected to the same false doctrine. But, this should not surprise us. After all, in just a few short chapters Paul will warn us that “the Spirit expressly says that in the later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” (4:1) But, more than that, do we not see this very thing happening today? Maybe not specifically with myths regarding the OT and OT figures per se. But, have you ever noticed how every Christmas and EVERY Resurrection Sunday there are stories all over the news about the Gospel of Peter, or the Gospel of Thomas...ANYTHING but the Word of God that we have before us in the Canon. And these are the same types of fanciful, and nonsensical, literature that the Ephesians and the Cretans were believing. Stories of an eyewitness account of Jesus’ resurrection, for example, in which not only is Jesus raised, but when he comes out of the tomb He is a hundred feet tall....and he is followed by the Cross (which is now apparently a sentient being itself, because it begins to talk). I mean, it’s complete nonsense. And yet, people believe it.

Or what about this common “myth”, believed and pursued by so many within the Church today, the myth of the right to HAPPINESS. Before I go any further, I want to emphasize that I am NOT promoting some sort of stoicism or asceticism. Happiness is not something that is inherently evil, or contradictory to the Christian life. No, if God has given you a moment of happiness in your life, then you should enjoy the good gift that He has given you. Praising Him for His grace and mercy. But what I AM saying is that the pursuit of happiness for the sake of happiness alone, is IDOLATRY. And yet, so many of us in the Church today have bought into this idea that “if I do everything right, then I will get X, in fact I DESERVE whatever it is that I desire, and when I get it, then I will be happy.” But, and listen carefully here Beloved, this is a type of mysticism, and it has snuck into the Church undetected by many. And, in effect, what we have done is replace the pursuit of Christ with the pursuit of happiness. This idea that

“you get what you deserve, bad for bad and good for good” is much closer to Hinduism than it is to Christianity. Do you see that? The idea that if you do what is good/right, then you WILL get what is good/right in return is the very essence of the idea of Karma. And yet, this is NOT how we, as Disciples of Christ, are to live. This is NOT the reason that we were made. And it is NOT the truth of the reality that we see every day. And yet, there are those who teach quite CONFIDENTLY that this should be, and in fact IS, the highest aim of the Christian life. They teach that all you have to do is get into a “spiritual rhythm” (a new catchphrase being touted in Evangelical circles) and things WILL start going well for you. What foolishness. No, the TRUTH of the matter is that we have believed a lie, and we must turn from that lie back to the Truth of Christ and His Gospel. Now, I can tell, that some of you are skeptical that this is an issue, even in the Church at large, but especially in Reformed circles. Well then, let me give you one example of how we tend to do this in our own lives. Consider what you tend to pray about, or for, when you come before God. My guess is that it tends to be for God to “fix” whatever you think is going wrong in your life. Kids acting up...God, make THEM better. Marriage difficult...God, change my SPOUSE. I’m struggling at work....God make my BOSS understand. Something is not the way that I think it should be in MY life...GOD, FIX IT because I’ve done everything that I’m supposed to do. I’ve done ALL that is right according to the self-help books on the shelf at the so-called Christian bookstore. But, Beloved, when we do this we FORGET what life is for. We FORGET why God made us. Beloved, happiness, as a feeling, is elusive. Pain and suffering in this life is the norm. And this is NOT a bad thing. Because God uses suffering and failure in our lives to grow us in faith. And, in fact, it is often FROM those times of trial that we typically grow and experience true joy. Because He has made us to worship Him and to be conformed to the image of Christ THROUGH suffering, through trial, and through pain. Turn with me to Romans 8 and verse 28. “And we know that for those who love God ALL things (Beloved, “ALL things” includes the difficult trials and excruciating pain both physical and emotional), ALL things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.” OK, so what is

this “good”. “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” There you have it. Beloved, “do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you.” (1 Peter 4:12) We are NOT to run from the trials of our lives, NOR are we to encourage others to do so, whether our brothers and sisters in Christ or the unbeliever on the street. In fact, you are to run TO Christ in these times. And, if you offer people Jesus as a form of relief from their trials then you are offering them a vain and ultimately fruitless promise. If you are offering them Christ as a “fix all” and NOT as a Savior from the wrath of God, then you have offered them NOTHING but an idol.

So, why do we believe this then? Why would we rather have this false doctrine, than the gospel of the glory of the blessed God? Because the heart of man is deceitfully wicked. In our flesh we long for ANYTHING but the TRUTH. But, praise be to God, that He has shown mercy to His elect. That He has given His chosen eyes to see and a heart to LOVE the Truth. But, beloved, take heed lest you too should fall. Because Jewish myths, Apocryphal Gospels, and Evangelical mysticism and moralism are not the only threats. They are not the only threat today, and they were not the only threat for the Church in Ephesus.

And we see that clearly in the fact that there is another false doctrine listed here in the Text. And that false doctrine that Paul speaks of are “endless genealogies.” Again, we cannot be for sure exactly what Paul is speaking of, but the general consensus is that this likely refers to “an early form of the detailed speculations (often combined with Jewish myths) that developed in Gnosticism concerning the origins of the world and the innumerable spiritual beings supposedly involved in creation.” So, if this is true, what we see here, in its essence, is an attack on the Word of God. And this attack is, again, no less prevalent today. How is this an attack on Scripture...you may ask? Very simply it goes directly against how God Himself has told us that He created all things that are in existence. And I would simply

point you to passages like John 1, Genesis 1 & 2, and many others. But, if you will, turn with me quickly to Colossians 1:15-16. And we will clearly see that it is God and God ALONE who has created ALL things. “He (that is Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation (firstborn here refers to his stature as preeminent). For by him ALL things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities---ALL things were created through him and for him.” But, again, this is simply speculation as to what Paul could be referring to, and this is not where he focuses his attention. Rather, that comes next as he explains the result of these false doctrines.

Look again to verse 4, where Paul continues, saying that these myths and endless genealogies “promote speculations “. Another way of saying this is that they raise questions that have no answers. Listen to what John Calvin says concerning this. “He (Paul) judges of doctrine by the FRUIT; for everything that does not edify ought to be rejected, although it has no other fault; and everything that is of no avail but for raising contentions, ought to be doubly condemned. And such are all the subtle questions on which ambitious men exercise their faculties. Let us, therefore, remember, that all doctrines must be tried by this rule, that those which contribute to edification may be approved, and that those which give ground for unprofitable disputes may be rejected as unworthy of the Church of God.” So, rather than edifying their brothers and sisters in Christ, these speculations, aroused as they were by myths and genealogies, only tore down. Instead of unifying them in one Spirit, they divided the Body. And how often, beloved, do we raise contentions to the detriment of the Church? Even though a subject is not necessarily, or inherently, sinful does NOT mean that we are free to speak of it. We must ask ourselves that if a brother or sister is weaker in the faith, will we cause them to stumble? Do we CARE if they stumble? Often, in our pride, we do not. Dear ones, this ought not to be so. Rather, we are to bear one another’s burdens and encourage them in Christ. To promote our own pet theological proclivities or raise subjects that we know others disagree with only builds up our own pride and is

ultimately empty. Regardless of whether it is “lawful” or not, if it causes a brother or sister to stumble then it is empty of Christ, and therefore it is empty of love. And yet, those of us who have been called as stewards of the faith, all Christians but especially ministers of the Gospel, are accountable to the Lord for our conduct in leadership and preservation of the message of Christ, and must be above all, faithful to our Master. We are to promote “the stewardship from God that is by faith.” For God has given us stewardship over one faith, delivered to us through His holy, inerrant, and infallible Word. That faith which is a gift from God in the proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. And in Him we are to have the same aim as Paul and Timothy.

Look now to verse 5 where we see what this aim is. “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Here Paul is speaking directly of the charge being issued to these “certain persons” who are teaching the false doctrines. Namely, that they are to cease teaching these things immediately. But, notice, that this is not out of a desire to simply remain the top theological leader of the day by keeping others, especially women, under his thumb. This epistle, as Bart Ehrman and others would have us believe, is not here because one faction of believers was ultimately more successful at spreading their message than another group. And even though the losers message was EQUALLY valid, the winners get to write history, and so here we have it. No, this epistle is here, beloved, because theology matters, and ideas have consequences. False doctrine, very confidently preached from the pulpit, has damned many professing Christians to hell and, if allowed to persist in the Church, will condemn many more. So, Paul is not seeking to keep his place atop some fictitious hierarchy. There is no need. He has already been made THE Apostle to the Gentiles by the Lord Himself. God made the hierarchy, God chose who would be in those positions, and it is God you will answer to if you seek to ignore what those men have written. Paul doesn’t have to PROVE himself to anyone. No, this epistle is here because Paul is ALREADY an Apostle of the Lord Jesus Christ and, as such, he MUST warn, and he MUST correct. For that IS love. Love is doing what is best for the

object of our love, NOT simply allowing them to do or believe whatever they would like INSPITE of the damage that they are inflicting upon themselves. And so, it is a love that flows from a heart made pure by the blood of Christ that warns and corrects. Paul knows all to well, what it is to believe a lie. He has not forgotten what havoc he was on his way to inflict upon the Church when Christ shattered his illusion and opened his eyes to the beauty of the Gospel. A point he will make abundantly clear in just a few verses. So, likewise, we must not focus upon a misguided understanding of what we believe love, and in fact the very nature of God, to be and count as irrelevant what follows. Rather, the argument can and has been made that we should do the opposite as we look at the grammatical structure of the sentence in context. When we do this, we see that the love mentioned here is “FROM a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

To this point Calvin says: “if love is first mentioned, it does not therefore hold the first rank of honor, since Paul shows also that it springs FROM faith. Now the cause undoubtedly goes BEFORE its effect. And, if we carefully weigh the whole context, what Paul says is of the same import as if he had said, ‘The law was given to us for this purpose, that it might instruct us in faith, which is the mother of a good conscience, and of love. Thus, we must BEGIN with faith, and NOT with love.’”

So, we should begin with faith. But, Paul does not say that it is only “faith.” And I put that in quotes for a reason. Beloved, you canNOT simply have faith in YOUR own self-determined faith. NO! It must be a faith that is IN Christ Jesus, and Paul says here that it is a “sincere” faith. But, this word “sincere” is terribly misused today. So, it is critical that we understand what he means by his use of this word. Because if we take the modern usage of this word “sincere” and apply it in this context we will undoubtedly destroy any rational meaning and understanding of this text. And yet, that is what often happens. You see, people presume that being “sincere”, meaning feeling REALLY strongly about a subject, automatically makes them correct. But, beloved, one can be VERY “sincere” (which is actually defined as free of deceit, hypocrisy, or falseness) about your beliefs and still be ABSOLUTELY WRONG.

Having an incredibly strong emotional pull towards something regardless of, and in many cases in denial of factual support, does not make you correct. In fact, it makes you deceitful. Which is the opposite of being sincere. And, so, we must clarify what is meant here. The Greek word translated here as “sincere” is *anupokritos*. Which means, unfeigned or undisguised. So, you can easily see why the translators chose the English word sincere. But what this means is that Paul is not saying that these people are to stop teaching something other than what he wants them to teach because he FEELS really strongly about it. No! That is absurd. Rather, what he is doing, I believe, is making two distinct points. First, that his faith, and that of Timothy as well, is GROUNDED in the truth of the Gospel. They are not frauds who do not truly understand why they believe what they SAY they believe, but still expect to be believed because they are really passionate about what they’re teaching and can speak confidently about it. And, second, that he is giving this charge, this command, to stop teaching the false doctrine BECAUSE his faith is grounded in the truth. And it is the Truth that will set us free.

But, now Paul moves in to the third false doctrine that is being taught in the Ephesian Church. Look at verse 6. “Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.” Again, we see Paul refer here to “certain persons”. Without naming names, at this point, (which Paul shows in other places that he has no problem doing and therefore neither should we given the proper circumstances), Paul has now begun speaking to these men (and possibly women considering 2:12) directly, and is, in effect, shaming them, first into silence, and then Lord willing into repentance. So, that raises two questions. First, how does he do that? And, second, WHY would he do that? First to the how. He mentions that “by swerving from these”. What are the “these”. Simply what he has just said in verse 5. Love, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. So, he first makes it obvious, before he even reiterates WHAT they’re teaching, WHY they’re teaching is fundamentally flawed, it is self-serving. Rather than teaching out of a love for others,

they are teaching out of a love for themselves. And as such they have wandered into “vain discussion”, that which is theologically purposeless and only builds up pride. One Pastor put it this way. This is “speech that is aimless and has no logical end. It is essentially irrelevant and will not accomplish anything spiritual or edifying to believers...False doctrine leads nowhere, but to the deadening end of human speculation and demonic deception.” It’s empty. And it’s empty because they do not understand, in an orthodox way, what they are trying to teach. Don’t get me wrong. They understand COMPLETELY what they WANT to teach. They desire to teach the Law as the MEANS to self-righteousness and morality, but this only shows that they don’t understand the nature of the Law that they are trying to teach. And they certainly don’t understand the Law of Christ. What these individuals were doing was speaking with absolute confidence, not because they were correct in their doctrines or speaking the truth as delivered by the Lord to His people for their edification, but rather because they could speak well (perhaps being trained in rhetoric as Augustine was) and therefore easily convince people of their points. And because the people could be convinced, they believed themselves to be correct. But, beloved, just because others think that you have good points, or even because you can prove others wrong, does not automatically prove that you are right. So, you must ask yourself, do you want confidence...or TRUTH? Because confidence can be VERY convincing. For example, Calvin (speaking of the Roman Catholic Church of his day concerning this text) said this; “What shall I say as to their vast labyrinths about the hierarchies of heaven, relationships, and other contrivances? It is a matter that has NO END. The Apostle declares that in all these is fulfilled what is said in a well-known ancient proverb, ‘ignorance is rash.’” You see, the Roman Catholic Church has great confidence in what they teach, and they are able to convince many, even to this day that what they teach is true. But, it is a lie. Bottom line, “The false teachers in Ephesus, and the false teachers today, wanted the kind of prestige that was enjoyed by the Jewish rabbis: but they were not concerned about truly learning the

law and teaching it to others. Instead, they imposed on believers in Ephesus a legalistic heresy that offered salvation by works.”

And that leads us back to the second question. WHY is Paul, in effect, shaming these people into silence? Turn with me, if you will, to Colossians 2:16, and we'll read down through 3:4, and we will end here. “Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. These are a shadow of the things to come, but the substance belongs to Christ. Let no one disqualify you, insisting on asceticism and worship of angels, going on in detail about visions, puffed up without reason by his sensuous mind, and not holding fast to the Head, from whom the whole body, nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments, grows with a growth that is from God. If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations—'Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch' (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”

Why is Paul shaming these people into silence? Because he would rather that they be ashamed of their lies, for a moment, so that they might be brought back to the TRUTH, than leave them to their lies. Because those lies will lead themselves, and others, to hell. Why is Paul shaming them into silence now? So that they may yet, one day, praise Christ in the presence of the angels. And, Beloved, as we are ALL ambassadors of Christ in this world we have been charged to correct those false doctrines that have snuck into the Church, stealing the joy that is ours in Christ Jesus. But, you cannot do this if you do

not understand the Gospel, and you certainly cannot do this in your own strength. So, dearly Beloved in the Lord, search the Scriptures to see if these things are so. And as the Holy Spirit illumines the text and instructs you in the doctrines of our faith. Go forth and speak CONFIDENTLY the TRUTH of Christ.

LET US PRAY.