

THE GOAL OF THIS COMMAND IS LOVE

1 Timothy 1:1-11

Key Verse: 1:5

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

Thank God for helping us to study 1 Timothy this summer! This is one of the three pastoral letters of St. Paul (the other two are 2 Timothy and Titus). It was written to a young pastor by his spiritual father and shepherd. May God help us to grow to be shepherds of God's flock as we study this letter!

I. TO TIMOTHY MY TRUE SON IN THE FAITH (1-2)

Look at verses 1-2. *Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.* St. Paul begins this letter to Timothy by introducing himself as an apostle of Christ. Paul knew Timothy well. Timothy was his Bible student, an intern shepherd, a companion in his missionary journeys and a coworker. Yet, he introduced himself as an apostle of Christ. It's like saying, "Dear Timothy: Hi, I am Paul, an apostle of Christ." Why? In fact, in most of his epistles, Paul introduced himself as an apostle of Christ or a servant of God. This was his identity in God. Some people may introduce themselves, saying, "I am the CEO of a Fortune 500 company," or "Hi, I am president of a birdwatchers society." How would you identify yourself to others? Humanly speaking, we are students, teachers, nurses, medical professionals or customer service representatives. We are Americans, Koreans, and Indonesians. We are natives, first generation immigrants, second generations, and 1.5 generations. But what are we in Christ Jesus?

Paul says that he is an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope. Paul had a mandate from God to be one who is sent to share the gospel of Jesus Christ. He did not become an apostle by some human means with a certificate of something. His mandate came from God. He believed firmly that God appointed him to be an apostle. When we have this sense of calling from God, we can also clearly identify ourselves as God's servants. We are missionaries because we have a mission from God. We are shepherds because we take care of God's sheep, not because we have a certificate to hang on the wall.

Look at verse 2. *To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.* Paul was a Jew and Timothy was a half-Greek. They were not related. How could Paul call him "my true son"? Well, Paul and Timothy went back a long time. Their relationship was deep. Paul knew Timothy well, and Timothy knew Paul well. Paul first met Timothy in Lystra during his first missionary journey (Ac 16:1-5). By the time Paul visited him again in his second



missionary journey, Timothy had grown in faith, with the prayer support of his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois. He was willing to join Paul and Silas for the missionary journey. He was also willing to be circumcised to show his commitment to the Lord. In terms of his personality and character, Timothy probably did not look like a leadership material. But Paul accepted his commitment and trained him to grow as a spiritual leader. Timothy became one of Paul's closest friends and coworkers. They traveled together, suffered, cried and laughed together. They rejoiced when their Bible students repented their sins and accepted Christ as their Savior. They agonized when false teachers decimated the ministry of Christ by distorting the truth and planting seeds of doubt. When Paul called Timothy "my true son in the faith," all these things went through his mind. It was a long journey of faith together. Paul did not have his own son, but he felt that Timothy was more than his human son. So he called Timothy "my true son in the faith." I can understand this a little. When I look back, I realize that I have spent more time with some of my Bible students than my human son, studying the word of God, praying and talking together. I do feel that Chris and Josh are my sons in the faith.

II. THE GOAL OF THIS COMMAND IS LOVE (3-7)

Immediately after expressing his affection for Timothy, Paul warned him about the false teachers of the law in the church. Look at verses 3-4. *As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith.* What was going on in Ephesus at that time that triggered Paul's warning?

Paul coworked with Timothy in Ephesus during his third missionary journey, where they spent more than two years raising disciples of Jesus. It was in this city where Paul decided to visit Rome to preach the gospel (Ac 19:21). But not before going to Jerusalem to deliver the relief offerings of the Gentile Christians for the brothers in Judea. Then in Jerusalem Paul was arrested and sent to Rome in chains to be tried by the Roman Emperor. From a Roman prison, he wrote the epistle to the Ephesians in about 62 A.D.

Ephesus was one of the major cities in the Roman Empire in Paul's time, along with Rome, Corinth, Antioch and Alexandria. It was a center for the commerce, politics, and religions of Asia Minor. It was a city that was full of black magic and other occult practices. The temple of the goddess Artemis (Diana), one of the Seven Wonders of the World, was located there. Many craftsmen had a lucrative business selling idols. So when the gospel began to spread, a silversmith named Demetrius incited a riot because he was concerned about losing his income. The church in Ephesus was born in such a difficult environment.



It was a great work of God. But now,

certain leaders within the church were teaching false doctrines, causing believers to stumble. Paul was deeply concerned and urged Timothy to stop this dangerous trend.

So what was so dangerous about what certain men did in the church? Paul says that they devoted themselves to myths and endless genealogies. They promoted controversies rather than God's work which is by faith (4). Some of them had wandered away from the pure gospel and turned to meaningless talk (6). Why would they do this? Apparently they were motivated by their own ambition to be recognized as teachers of the law (7). They talked a lot about this and that to promote themselves. Their arguments were based on myths rather than facts. Perhaps they integrated into their preaching the rich traditions of the Greek mythologies that the people of Ephesus were familiar with. They would also go on with endless genealogies. They emphasized where they came from, who their ancestors were, and what their family background and family ties were. Perhaps they said things like, "I am a fourth generation Pharisee," or "My uncle's cousin used to be a synagogue ruler." Maybe some others said, "My father graduated from a top seminary school in Jerusalem and my brother is also a lawyer."

Again, what was so dangerous about injecting little mythology and genealogy into their preaching? Wouldn't it make a sermon more interesting and spicy? After all, these were some of things people would be interested in hearing. They seemed innocuous enough. But the problem was that they took away people's attention from the main point of the gospel. If 60% of their Sunday message were about myths and genealogies, it meant that 60% of the message were not about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Then 60% of people's mind would be occupied with things that would not give them life from God.

Paul says that their teachings promoted controversies. After hearing such sermons, church members would have many heated discussions on the finer points of the teachings. Some would have considered them excellent sermons because of that. The problem was that such teachings, while interesting, did not produce any spiritual fruit. They took away people's attention from the gospel of Jesus Christ. What the false teachers did was not God's work, which is by faith (4). They did not build up the congregation to be men and women of faith, to live by faith and to serve the Lord by faith. That is why St. Paul urged Timothy to command them not to do such things.

Then what should have been the focus of their teachings? What should be the main point of our preaching? It is, of course, Jesus Christ. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, "For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures..." This is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures. Because of our sins, we were doomed to eternal condemnation. But Christ set us free from our bondage to sin and death by paying the price of our sins with his own life. Christ was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. He opened the door to the kingdom of God for us. We now have a new life and a new hope. We are a new creation in Christ. The old has gone and the new has come! (2Co 5:17)

As a new creation in Christ, we now live a new life with a new hope, a new value system, and a new direction. We used to follow whatever our sinful nature urged us to do. Now, we struggle to obey the word of God. We used to have hopes for this world, things like money, fame, human love, recognition and approval from other people. But now we have a hope to spend eternity with our Lord Jesus. So we struggle to live a life of faith, doing what he told us to do while waiting for his return. We used to value the things of this world. Now we value spiritual things. We still struggle with all of these. But our direction is very clear. We are not headed to the graveyard; the finish line of our race is heaven. So you can see how damaging it was for the Ephesian believers to hear messages on myths and endless genealogies. These things took them back to their old lives. So Paul urged Timothy to stop them.

Look at verse 5. *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* Paul urged Timothy to command the false teachers to stop teaching false doctrines. He said, “The goal of this command is love.” The real motive of the false teachers was to promote themselves. They wanted to show off their knowledge and gain power and prestige among the believers (7). They had no desire to build the genuine Christian community. But the goal of Paul’s command was to build them up to be a loving community. This is what Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: “If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing” (1Co 13:1-2).

God loves us. Jesus loves us. Jesus said, “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (Jn 13:34-35). He said the two most important commandments are to love God and love our neighbor (Mt 22:37-39). So love is the main goal of our ministry. We all want to be loved. And we should love God and love our neighbor. But what does it really mean to love?

As we say time and again, love is more than a feeling. Love is more than an idea. Look at verse 5 again. *The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.* Genuine love comes from a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith. The false teachers could not help to build a loving community because they had an ulterior motive. They did not have a pure heart and a good conscience. Most of all, they had no sincere faith in God.

So how can we love God and love one another? This is a good question for each of us to revisit from time to time. Sometimes we hear people saying, “That church has no love.” What do they mean by this? How can we build a loving church? Again Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13: “Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres” (1Co 13:4-7). Love begins with our attitude toward others. We must learn to be patient with them, be kind to them, rather

than envy them or be boastful. But most of all, love involves action. True love results in action.

What did God do for us when he loved us? He sent his one and only Son Jesus to save us. What did Jesus do because he loved us? He gave his own life for us. Jesus says in John 14:15, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." He said, "Do you truly love me? Feed my lambs" (Jn 21:15).

Love comes from a sincere faith in that when we believe in God who loves us, we respond to his love by doing things he wants us to do. Sometimes we find it difficult to love a person. How can you love a person who attacks you and criticizes you after you spend much time and money to take care him, as one of our coworkers recently experienced? It seems impossible to love such person if we only follow our feelings. But Jesus commands us to love such persons. It is possible when we acknowledge that love is more than a feeling. It is a willful decision. It involves a decision to act. We can pray for them. We can say kind and encouraging words to them. We can buy them hamburgers when they are hungry. We can teach them the word of God. We can rebuke them in order to help them to repent their sins and believe in Christ. We can help them to come to know the love of God personally. In this way, we can also make love the goal of our ministry.

So let us make a decision to love one another today. Let us begin with one act of love for someone we don't like. We can begin with a kind word or a kind act. We can buy a birthday gift or at least birthday card. If not, a simple "Happy Birthday" will do. You may say, "But I have to mean it when I say it." That's true. Remember, however, love is more than a feeling. It is a decision. If we wait until we feel like loving someone, the moment may never come. We should not wait until other people become "better" before we love them. We have to approach them first with an act of love. This is what Jesus did for us. We were not so hot when Christ loved us. This is what Romans 5:8 says, "But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Jesus showed his love for us, not because we deserved his love. He died for us while we were still ugly sinners. Let us remember this when we struggle to build our community of love together.

III. THE LAW VERSUS THE GOSPEL (8-11)

The false teachers in Ephesus aspired to be excellent teachers of the law. Ironically, they did not know what they were talking about or what they so confidently confirmed (7). So in verses 8-11, St. Paul teaches about the nature of the law and its relationship to the gospel. Look at verse 8. *We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.* We know that the law is good and necessary, for we have a sinful nature. If it weren't for speed limit on highways, some of us might drive really fast to harm us or others. If it weren't for the 10th commandment, we might feel fine doing all the coveting of our neighbors' houses, their wives and their nice automobiles. The law functions well to help us to know what is right and what is wrong. We get that. But what does it mean to use the law properly? How can we use the law improperly? To answer these questions, let us think about the law as St. Paul explains it. Look at verses 9-11. *We also*

know that law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious; for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers--and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

First, the law is made for lawbreakers. In the list of various lawbreakers, Paul includes two different types of offenses. The first type is about our sinful nature or our sinful attitude towards God including ungodliness and unholiness. The second type is about what we sinners do, things like killing, committing adultery, lying and perjury. God set boundaries for sinners by giving us the law. The law tells us when we trespass God's boundaries. In that sense, the law is made for lawbreakers.

Second, the law is not made for the righteous. This means that the law is not made to make a sinner righteous. The law cannot make us become right with God. The law can help us to realize that we are sinners, but it is unable to save us from sins. Only God can do that. Only Jesus can save us. Only Jesus can make us righteous. To imply that the law can make us righteous is to use it improperly. The false teachers in Ephesus were apparently doing this. They did not know what they were talking about. The law can show us only that we are sinners and we need Christ to be saved.

Third, the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel. When we receive the glorious gospel, we are changed from within. We can live according to the leading of the Holy Spirit rather than following laws and regulations. The sound doctrine conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, the gospel of Jesus Christ, that God forgives our sins when we come to Christ with repentance and commit our lives to him.

We learned today about the father-son relationship in Christ between Paul and Timothy. Paul urged his son Timothy to command the false teachers to stop talking about meaningless things but to hold on to the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The goal of his command is love. May God help us to build a Christian community in which we love Jesus and love one another!