

The Rightly Ordered Church:
Safeguard Sound Doctrine (1 Timothy 1:1-11)
Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on January 21, 2018

Introduction

- ❖ **The way you guard a treasure reveals how much you actually treasure it.** It's all the more obvious when you consider the difference between guarding the local shopping mall and guarding Fort Knox. On one hand, you have security guards with walkie talkies leisurely riding around on Segways. On the other, you have a brigade of trained soldiers, armed with assault rifles, protecting our nation's gold depository. I'm sure the level of dedication and sacrifice that they put into the task will differ compare to mall cops.
 - It comes down to a matter of value. **The more we value something; the more we'll put into the task of guarding it.** If you add up the worth of all the stores in a mall, it pales in comparison to a vault that contains, at last count, \$261 billion worth of gold.

- ❖ **But do you realize that, if you're a follower of Jesus, you're assigned with the task of guarding a deposit infinitely more valuable than gold?** We, the church, have been given the noble task of guarding the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Not from theft per se but from tweaking, twisting, and tampering. We have to guard against any attempt by anyone to teach any different doctrine than what was once for all delivered to the saints, handed down from the apostles (cf. Jude 1:3).
 - That's the burden of 1 Timothy. Paul starts off immediately charging Timothy, in chapter 1:3, to keep certain people from teaching "*any different doctrine*". He says later in chapter 4:16 that Timothy is to keep a close watch on "*the teaching*". And he concludes the letter in chapter 6:20 telling Timothy to "*guard the deposit*" entrusted to him. **So in the beginning, middle, and end of this letter, Paul is calling for the vigilant defense of sound doctrine in the church of Ephesus.**

- ❖ As we begin a new series through this book, it's important to get our bearings straight and identify the main idea of 1 Timothy. Thankfully in some books the author directly says why he's writing. That's the case here. If you turn over to chapter 3:14, Paul explains to Timothy why he left him in Ephesus to pastor the church and why he's writing to him.
 - "*¹⁴I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.*" **Paul is trying to help his disciple Timothy put the Ephesian church into order during his absence.**

- ❖ He's teaching how Christians ought to behave in the church, in the household of God. **This letter is filled with instructions on how to live a rightly ordered life within a rightly ordered church.** Hence the name of our series "The Rightly Ordered Church".
 - There are six major matters that all have to do with the church. Chapter 1 addresses **the church's doctrine**. Chapter 2 discusses **the church's worship**. Chapter 3 is about **the church's leadership**. Chapter 4 focuses on **the church's godliness**, especially that of its leaders. Chapter 5 is about **the church's familial care** for one another. And chapter 6 addresses **the church's contentment** and attitude toward's earthly riches.

- ❖ So our hope and prayer is that the Spirit of God will use our study of this letter to order us rightly. We want to be a rightly ordered church. In particular, as we consider chapter 1, we want to be a church with rightly ordered teaching.
- ❖ To what end? So we can boast about having good theology? Of course not. No, we want rightly ordered doctrine because, as chapter 3:15 says, the church is a pillar and buttress of the truth. **The church's job is to support the truth of God much like a buttress supports and stabilizes a building.** When every wind of doctrine comes storming at us, the church's task is to hold steady the Word of God. To buttress and bolster the truth.
 - Likewise, the church functions as a pillar or column of the truth. **The purpose of ancient Greek pillars was not just to hold firm a roof but to thrust it high into the air for all to see, even from a far distance.** The Ephesians had little trouble understanding this illustration since their city housed the famous Temple of Artemis, one of the seven ancient wonders. It had a hundred Ionic columns, each over 60 feet high, lifting up into the sky a marvelous marble roof that captured the attention of anyone entering the city, even from a great distance.
- ❖ **That means for us, for the church, to be a pillar of the truth is to lift high God's truth. To put it on display for all the world to see, to admire, and ultimately to believe on for their hope and salvation.**
 - If you value the truth of God in the gospel as more precious than a fortress filled with gold and if you value people – especially those who don't yet see the goodness and beauty of God's truth – then supporting and displaying that truth is imperative.
 - **My point is that safeguarding sound doctrine in the church has a very missional aim.** It's not just about getting our theological ducks in a row. It's about displaying the goodness, beauty, and truthfulness of Jesus for all the world to see. Now as we consider chapter 1:1-11, I want to highlight five reasons why a church must be vigilant to safeguard sound doctrine.

False doctrine often arises from within the church

- ❖ The first reason is 1) because false doctrine so often arises from within the church. **The greatest heresies in the church have always come from within.** In the 2nd-century, the idea that the Bible, the books of the Old and New Testament, were all divinely inspired by God and contain timeless, unchanging truth was being challenged. And guess who was leading the charge? Not a non-religious skeptic but a bishop named **Marcion**.
 - In the 4th-century, there was a popular teaching gaining ground that affirmed Jesus to be a good teacher but denied that he was divine and equal to God. That sounds like how many outside the church would describe Jesus today, but this was being taught by a prominent priest in the church of Alexandria named **Arius**.
 - And in the 5th-century, the doctrine of original sin – the idea that we're all sinners not just by deed but by nature – was strongly rejected. Not by a secular humanist but by a British monk named **Pelagius**.

- ❖ It's easy to blame outspoken atheists, secularists, and leaders of other world religions for eroding Christian faith. **But in reality, the chief opponents of Christian orthodoxy have always come from within the flock.**
 - The common analogy in the NT is to compare false teachers to wolves. As wolves in sheep's clothing (Mt. 7:15). In Acts 20, as Paul is saying farewell to the Ephesian elders, he charges them to be good pastors who protect the flock of God. He says, "*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.*" (vv29-30)

- ❖ **These wolves will come – not from the academic elite, or the mainstream media, or Hollywood – but from “among your own selves”.** They'll be in sheep's clothing. They'll look like us and talk like us, but they'll speak twisted things to draw us away from Jesus.
 - Sadly it only took five years (according to most estimates of when 1 Timothy was written) for Paul's prediction to come true. If you look at v3 he says, "*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*".

- ❖ **It's very likely these “certain persons” were elders in the church.** They're identified as teachers, and 1 Timothy makes it clear that the responsibility for a church's teaching belongs to the elders (cf. 5:17). If these false teachers did arise from among the elders, then that explains why Paul goes on to cover the qualifications for elders (3:1-7) and how you discipline them if they persist in sin (5:19-20). He already had to deal with two elders. He names them at the end of chapter 1, and now he's charging Timothy to finish the job and discipline the remaining wolves in sheep's clothing.

- ❖ **Friends, this is why we've made such a point at HCC to scrutinize the soundness of a man's doctrine before hiring him as a pastor or appointing him as a lay elder.** With pastoral candidates, it's always been done by the staff through an interview. More recently we've been trying to get our lay elders involved and requiring candidates to fill out doctrinal questionnaires. That same questionnaire is also something we're now asking new elder candidates to complete. Yes, the bar is high but no higher than what Scripture calls for.
 - If he's going to be a shepherd of this church, he's got to be sound in the essentials of the faith. He also needs to know how to theologically engage with contemporary issues. How would he respond to theological pluralism or moral relativism? Is Jesus the only way to God and is sex only for the covenant of marriage between a man and a woman? We need good elders who know how to safeguard these doctrines.

- ❖ **On a personal level, you need to carefully discern the kind of spiritual teaching that you digest on your own.** Take heed of which TV preachers you watch, whose sermons you podcast, and whose books you read. Just because someone has a title or a following or a big ministry doesn't mean they're impervious to teaching falsehood. As we see here in 1 Timothy, false doctrine could very well come from within.

False doctrine often comes in different forms.

- ❖ That leads to the second reason we have to be so vigilant to safeguard sound doctrine. Because false doctrine often arises from within the church and 2) because it often comes in different forms. I see two general forms here in the text.
 - **The first form of false doctrine is teaching that is just plain different from the essentials of the faith.** If you look back to v3, that verbal phrase “*to teach any different doctrine*” is one word in Greek. It’s *heterodidaskaleō*. Hetero-teaching. Different teaching. It’s where we get the term heterodoxy as opposed to orthodoxy. It there again in chapter 6:3. it’s teaching disagrees with the “*sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness.*”
 - This implies a **standard body of teaching** that was being passed down from the Lord Jesus, to his apostles, who were now entrusting this good deposit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also (cf. 2 Tim. 1:14; 2:2).

- ❖ **This good deposit is what we would call the historic, orthodox truths of Christianity.** At the center of orthodoxy is the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s all about what the eternal Triune God has accomplished within human history, through the person and work of his Son, to redeem sinners and reconcile them to himself and to each other in one body, in the Church. These orthodox truths are beautifully captured in the ancient creeds of the church, like the **Apostles’ Creed** or **Nicene**, which we often recite in our corporate worship.

- ❖ **But in every generation, there arises new versions of the same old attacks.** Offering different takes on the Trinity, on the dual nature of the Incarnate Son, on the personhood and work of the Holy Spirit, on the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ, on the reality of sin, judgment, and hell. These are sound doctrines we’ll always have to contend for.
 - And as Protestants, as spiritual children of the Reformation, we have to safeguard the key doctrines known as the **Five Solas**. We believe in Scripture alone as our final authority. Faith alone is our only means to be justified by a Holy God. Grace alone is our only hope of salvation. Christ alone is our only mediator. And God alone deserves all the glory in our salvation. **Our job is not to revise these truths for every new generation but to faithfully pass them down from one generation to another.**

- ❖ Friends, I understand if this idea of safeguarding sound doctrine sounds intimidating. But I wonder if it’s because you think it means debating people. You think it means confronting false teachers and engaging in apologetics. That might be what some of you are called to do.
 - **But God’s primary strategy for all believers to safeguard sound doctrine is to take the time to learn the historic, orthodox truths of Christianity.** Go find a more seasoned believer and ask him or her to disciple you in these matters. Get a copy of Grudem’s *Christian Beliefs: Twenty Basics Every Christian Should Know* and read through it together. **And once you feel grounded in these doctrines, pass it on.** If you’re a parent, start with your children. Otherwise pass it on to anyone younger than you in the faith. The important thing is to pass on the good deposit unchanged, unaltered, exactly as you received it.

- ❖ So there's the more obvious form of false doctrine that teaches heterodoxy. But there's another form much more subtle but still quite damaging. **This is teaching that's speculative without much grounding in Scripture.** This was happening in Ephesus. In v4, Timothy is to confront those who have devoted themselves *“to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”*
 - Commentators aren't sure about the specific myths and genealogies in question. But because in Titus 1:14 (where Paul's dealing with a similar situation) he calls them *“Jewish myths”*, it's likely we're dealing with teachers in the church who were preoccupied with fanciful stories of minor characters that you find in OT genealogies. So instead of being good stewards of the Word – teaching people to put their faith in God's promises – **these teachers were just stoking curiosity with mere speculations loosely derived from Scripture.**

- ❖ If an artist wants to write a fictional account of Jesus's childhood or the life and adventures of a minor biblical character, that's fine as long as it's understood as fiction. But it's troubling when teachers in the church develop whole theologies and practices of prayer based on a very minor OT character (i.e. *The Prayer of Jabez*) or some obscure 1st-century Jewish scholar mentioned in the Talmud (i.e. *The Circle Maker*). That's the kind of speculative teaching that plays fast and loose with Scripture and tends to promote false doctrine.
 - Church, again be on guard and carefully discern the teaching you receive. **Familiarize yourself with enough Scripture so you can tell when teaching is based on mere speculation.** Go on our website and look under our resources tab for our Bible reading plans. Make a commitment this new year to utilize one of the plans.

False doctrine can distract and destroy a church

- ❖ Now the third reason a church must be vigilant to safeguard sound doctrine is 3) because of the way false doctrine can distract and destroy a church. **It distracts us from that task of lifting high the truth of God like a pillar, and in time false teaching will rot a church.**
 - If we keep reading in v5, we see that good elders who exercise good stewardship aim not at speculations but at love. *“⁵The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion”.*

- ❖ **That means our concern for sound doctrine should come from a deep concern for people.** For their hearts to be pure, their conscience to be clean, and their faith sincere. But the false teachers in Ephesus swerved from these concerns and have wandered away, leading others, into empty, vain discussions. That has to be our concern as well.
 - **As a church, we should seek to make our doctrinal convictions sound and clear so might we preempt any needless theological controversies that would distract us from our mission.** Our mission to hold up and hold out God's truth for all the world to see and believe on.

- ❖ In his Second Letter to Timothy, Paul alludes to something similar where he says to "*avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene*". (2 Timothy 2:16-17) **So not only does their false teaching distract, it destroys.** Like gangrene, it will spread and eventually kill the body. It's the very definition of unsound doctrine. It's unhealthy doctrine. When we say someone is of sound body and mind, it means they're healthy. **Sound doctrine is healthy doctrine that encourages and enables a healthy growth of the church.**
 - This is a needed reminder for those of you who, like me, enjoy learning theology, discussing it, and making sure to safeguard it. But again we have to keep asking, "To what end?" Does our theology merely puff up or does it build up the body with love?
 - **Healthy theology is applied theology that speaks to people where they're at – in all their brokenness.** Sound doctrine speaks to heavy hearts that long for purity, to burdened consciences that seek relief, and to weak faith that wants to be sincere. Friends, are you applying your theology to real life people and their real life problems?

Sound doctrine encourages sound living

- ❖ That question leads directly to the fourth reason to safeguard sound doctrine. 4) Because sound doctrine encourages sound living. If we look back at chapter 6:3, it refers to sound doctrine "*that accords with godliness*" (cf. Tit. 1:1). **That means godly, sound doctrine should correspond with sound, godly lives.** The two should be in accord with each other.
 - **So you could say there's a subtle difference between having right theology versus sound theology.** You can know all the right things about God, about man, about salvation, about the church, about end times. But if that theology doesn't translate into a life of godliness, then your theology might be right but it's far from sound.
- ❖ Look back at chapter 1:9-10. Paul gives us a vice list of heinous attitudes and behaviors, but notice how he ends the list at the end of v10, "*and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.*" **So this unsound kind of living is contrary to sound doctrine.** So if your theology is not just right but sound, then your life won't be characterized by what we find in vv9-10. Rather there will be a soundness to your life where your attitude and obedience to God's law will be growing in a healthy manner.
 - So think about this: **If sound doctrine and sound living accord with each other, then your behavior is a true barometer of your beliefs.** How you actually live tells us more than what you say you believe. So we have to watch both our life and doctrine (cf. 4:16). We have to be committed to soundness in both regards.

Sound doctrine keeps teaching gospel-centered

- ❖ But what makes the difference between having merely right theology versus sound theology? I can answer that by considering our final reason for safeguarding sound doctrine. 5) Because it keeps our teaching gospel-centered. **It focuses our attention on Jesus and his saving work.**

- ❖ This is what I think Paul meant by the right use of God’s law in v8. These self-appointed “*teachers of the law*” were failing to use the law lawfully. We’re going to see in chapter 4 that they were forbidding marriage and the eating of certain foods. **Their teaching promoted a form of morality – that looks godly in appearance – but was void of true spirituality that translates into sound, spiritual living.**
- ❖ So let’s look at vv8-10. I think Paul is saying that sound teachers with sound doctrine will know how to teach God’s law properly, that is “*in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God*” (v11). **In other words, they know how to teach the law of God in a gospel-centered manner.**
 - Read with me starting in v8, “*8Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, 9understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, 10the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, 11in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*”
- ❖ **The Reformers taught that Christians are no longer under the law – that is, under the just condemnation of the law.** Because Christ has fulfilled the law on our behalf – both its requirements and punishments through his substitutionary life and death.
 - But the Reformers taught that Christians were not free of God’s law as if it had no more relevance to us or authority over us. **They taught that there were three proper uses of the law. It 1) restrains evildoers, 2) convicts sinners, 3) trains saints.**
- ❖ **In the first use, the law functions as a deterrent.** Restraining us, to some degree, from sinning. From behaving far worse than we could. In this sense, the law is like a locked door or quite literally a jail cell. Keeping evildoers from doing a greater extent of evil.
 - **In the second use, the law is a handmaid to the gospel.** It convicts sinners of their sin and prepares them to receive the gospel. In this sense, the law functions like a mirror. You look at it and it reveals your sin. You finally see yourself as you really are – as a sinner in need of a Savior.
 - **And in the third use, the law teaches and trains those who have trusted in Jesus.** Those who have received his Spirit who enables true obedience to the law. In this sense, the law is like a tutor training saints, correcting and directing our lives in godliness.
- ❖ Paul’s words touch on all three uses. When he says in v9 that “*the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners*” and so on, it seems like he had the first use in mind. The law is laid down as a deterrent to restrain evildoers.
 - But his words would apply to the second and third uses of the law as well. **When you look at the law (or at a list like this) and if you walk away congratulating yourself for not being as bad as these people, you’re not using the law properly.**

- ❖ If you assume you're the just man, you're the righteous woman, for whom the law was not laid down, then you've missed the point. **It's like when Jesus said he didn't come for the well but the sick.** That he didn't come to call the righteous but sinners (Mk. 2:17). He didn't mean there are some of you who are well and righteous and have no need of him. No, the point is we're all sick. We're all sinners. We're all found somewhere here in this list in vv9-10.
 - **So to properly use the law means we use it see the reality of our great sin but as well our need for the greater mercy of God promised in the gospel.** And as recipients of his mercy, we receive his Spirit who helps us to obey and actually keep the law. That's how to properly read and apply vv9-10. That's what keeps us centered on the gospel and avoiding the error of either legalism or lawlessness.
 - My point is that there are ways to teach the law – or just the Bible in general – that may be right. There may be nothing heretical spoken, and it might promote good behavior. **But if that kind of teaching doesn't point people to Jesus – if it doesn't encourage greater faith in the work of Christ in the gospel – then it's far from sound teaching rooted in sound doctrine.**

- ❖ Church, I don't want us to just be right. I want us to be sound. I want us to commit ourselves to safeguarding sound doctrine as a church. Because it safeguards the gospel. The very gospel we're called to lift high and display beautifully for all the world to see.