

Avoiding Shipwreck

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[0 : 0 0] The reading this morning comes from 1 Timothy chapter 1. You can find that on page 1191 of the Pew Bibles.

! I'll begin reading from verse 1 to the end of the chapter.! As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work, which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

We also know that the 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 the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

I thank Christ Jesus, our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason, I was shown mercy, so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the King Eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.

[3 : 1 9] Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them, you may fight the battle well, holding on to the faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. This is the word of the Lord.

Thank you. Let's pray.

Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for speaking to us and that your word gives us light and life.

We ask that you will give us ears to hear, minds that can understand. And Father, we long that your words would not be simply instruction for our minds, but would be food for our very souls. So we ask that your spirit will be at work in our hearts, that we would be open to change and to follow you. And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.

So this morning, we're starting this new sermon series, looking at this book, 1 Timothy, written by the apostle Paul to the younger leader, Timothy, that he had appointed to take charge of the church that Paul had planted in Ephesus.

[5 : 14] Significantly in this letter, God gives us a vision of what church can be that should take our breath away. My brother-in-law is a structural engineer down in London, and he worked a few years ago on a big project to restore the visitor center for the Cutty Sark. The Cutty Sark is a British clipper ship.

It was built just near here in Dumbarton, and the name, Cutty Sark, you may know, comes from Tamashanta. And this ship, it's an iconic ship, and this large construction team built this fantastically expensive building around it.

It's won lots of awards. It's an amazing building. That's it from the outside there. But the whole building, this is it on the inside, the whole building is designed to display the brilliance of the Cutty Sark.

So it won lots of awards as a building and as a structure in its own right. But all of that engineering and skill is there to make known to others what the Cutty Sark looks like.

Well, when Paul wrote this letter, 1 Timothy, if we just flick over the page, he tells us why he's written the letter. Chapter 3, verse 14.

[6 : 35] Just have a look there. He says to Timothy, verse 14, Although I hope to come to you soon, I'm writing to you with these instructions, so that if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Now, pillars, they hold things up. They hold things aloft and keep them there. And if you want something to stand tall, likewise, you need a good foundation.

Or some translations use the word there, buttress, instead of foundation. A buttress keeps something held aloft for others to see. And this is God's vision here for his church, his people.

That wherever there's a church, wherever in Glasgow or in every place and time that you find a church, everything about us lifts up and displays the beauty of the message about Jesus Christ to the world.

And the reason that God wants his church to do that is in chapter 2, verse 4, back over the page. Strikingly, when Paul introduces himself in this letter, chapter 1, verse 1, he calls God, God our Savior.

[7 : 55] And then he picks up that language again, chapter 2, verse 3. God our Savior, verse 4, who wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth.

How will God achieve that will of his that he wants all people, he wants people everywhere to be saved? Well, it will be through his church ordering ourselves to display the wonder, the beauty of Jesus to the world.

This is really helpful, I think, to look at on a first week in 1 Timothy. Because I've heard people talk about the letter 1 Timothy and what's going on there and say, oh yeah, it's about the church getting its house in order.

It's got nitty-gritty instructions for the church and how we structure and order ourselves. And there is that in 1 Timothy. But it's so important to keep in mind the bigger, breathtaking purpose behind all of that.

God wants people to be saved. And so his church is to display the wonder of Jesus, the beauty of Jesus to the world. And we do that by the ways that the truth we hold to and the lives we live adorn the gospel.

[9 : 12] We're to be like the casement on an engagement ring that upholds and displays the exquisite diamond of the gospel. But as we see that wider purpose, first of all, when we get into the letter, we find that this church needs to take evasive action.

So our first point on the sheets there, Paul's church plant has been blown off course. And we see the issue in verse 3, if you look with me. Paul says, As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

This church in Ephesus got the best start you could ever dream of for a church. The apostle Paul made Ephesus his strategic base for reaching that region with the gospel.

It's now in modern-day Turkey. And Paul stayed in Ephesus for about three years. Extraordinary privilege for that church to have the apostle there, teaching them, living his life among them, teaching the whole counsel of God.

And as he later on on a missionary journey returned to Ephesus, he met the Ephesian elders in Acts chapter 20, and he warned them. He said, After I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock.

[10 : 42] Even from your own number, men will arise and distort the truth to draw disciples after them. So he pleads with them to be on their guard. And he writes this letter to Timothy, still based in Ephesus, just a few years later.

And that is quite a thought, isn't it? That it doesn't take long, long at all, for a church that's made a great start to drift off course. An evangelical church, an apostolic church, established on the gospel, holding to the Bible's authority.

Paul is writing because they are in real trouble. So what was the nature of the false teaching? Well, he mentions in verse 4 that these people are teaching myths.

So there's a kind of, what they're teaching has got divorced from reality. He mentions genealogies. And we're not totally sure what's going on.

It may be that some of the name lists in the Bible, that these teachers were getting fixated on them, and teaching around them and myths that surrounded them. But this teaching is a worthless distraction.

[11 : 55] In verse 4, he talks about how the teaching in church is meant to advance God's work and strengthen faith. And what they're teaching isn't doing that. Then in verse 7, what we see is they've become moralistic.

If you have a look at verse 7, they want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they're talking about or what they so confidently affirm. Now the law that Paul's talking about there is God's commands of the Old Testament.

That's what the New Testament means when it talks about the law. It's God's moral commands in the Old Testament. What could be wrong with that, with teaching that in church life?

Well, the problem is when the law gets misused. So he clarifies that in verse 8. He says, we know that the law is good if one uses it properly. It's an issue of misuse.

A bit like when people complain to me that through in the hall, they find fire extinguishers holding doors open. When people complain to me about that, they're not saying fire extinguishers are a bad thing.

[13 : 03] They're saying that's not what they're for. They're not there to hold doors open, especially not fire doors. We're not meant to use them to hold those open with fire extinguishers. It's not that the fire extinguishers are open, it's just this is not for that.

And here we're seeing it's possible for a church to be preoccupied with teaching the commands of the Old Testament to believers, thinking that's what we need now to grow and to change.

And maybe the church wanted that. Because it's possible as a Christian to drift into the mindset of thinking, I know what Jesus has done for me now.

I don't need to hear about him again and again and again. What I need to know now is what do I need to do for God? What do I need to do? But the church here in Ephesus had become moralistic.

And when you become moralistic, you become inward-looking, making what we can do for God the main focus. By the time we get to chapter 4 in the letter, we'll see that they'd gone beyond the commands of the Old Testament and the commands of Scripture.

[14 : 13] And there were rules and restrictions they were adding as well. They'd become a legalistic church. So what Paul does next is he clarifies for us how to use the law properly.

What would be a proper way of using the commands of God in the Old Testament? Look with me at verse 8 again. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous, but for lawbreakers and rebels. And then he lists a set of examples of the behavior that would characterize the non-Christian world.

He seems to be going through the Ten Commandments. And for most of them, he gives us an extreme example of breaking them. So instead of saying that people would dishonor their parents because the commandment is honor your father and mother, he talks about killing people who kill their fathers and mothers.

Instead of saying that you shall not commit adultery, he talks of sexual immorality. And homosexual practice is listed there. We've spoken and talked about the Bible's teaching on that with great care here in other settings.

[15 : 30] But here it's just being mentioned as one example of sexual activity that departs from God's design for Christian marriage.

Then for do not steal, Paul talks about slave trading because slave trading is a form of stealing. It's stealing people's lives. It's abhorrent to God.

So the big idea of this list, these things put together, is that these are behaviors that characterize the non-Christian world. People who are still living in rebellion against God.

And Paul is saying here in verse 8, the law is an appropriate way to address those people with God's word. When you hold it up like a mirror to someone who's not yet a Christian.

All around us, there are people who are not atheists, but the reason they're not in church is they think, even if there is a God, surely I've got nothing to worry about.

[16 : 32] I'm a decent person. And God will see that if they ever meet God. And God wants people like that to realize they need to be rescued by him.

They've fallen short of his glory and they're under his judgment. How are they going to see that? Well, his commands can bring that conviction in people.

As we expose for people the standards of God's moral law, his moral purity, his spirit can work with them to convict people.

And they can see they need a savior and turn to God for that salvation. But that is not to be the main focus of preaching and teaching to Christians in church.

So in Ephesus, as we think about what's going wrong, their leaders are majoring on the minors in the Christian life and their focus is on what we should do for God rather than on what God has done for us.

[17 : 33] And that might seem reasonably harmless. Maybe you've rocked up here this morning and you've not come for the teaching. You know, you come for the community, you like the people, you like the music maybe.

You drift off during the sermon. But if we go on to the end of the chapter to verse 19, Paul actually says in verse 19 that some have suffered shipwreck in their faith because of this false teaching.

In other words, when a church drifts off course, what results is shipwreck. In March, our news was full of the story of the collision in the North Sea.

I don't know if you noticed that. When the container ship, the Solong, and the oil tanker, the Immaculate, collided in the North Sea. The Immaculate was at anchor at the time and the Solong went off course and it crashed into it.

And it was fatal. And in the early stages, it seemed that at least one of the ships was going to sink, which would have been a disaster. And it's transpired that when the Solong drifted off course, there was no lookout on the bridge, keeping watch to notice.

[18 : 48] A couple of weeks ago, we went on a ferry from Newcastle to Amsterdam and back for our family holiday. I was giving a lot of thought to that collision while we were on that ferry.

I was looking out and it was very calm, the water. And the moon, it was very misty. And there was like moonlight. And it just looked eerily like something on Titanic.

And I was thinking, I hope there's no container ship going off course right now. Drifting off course can be, it's easy to spot if you're going in completely the wrong direction, isn't it?

But what if you're just drifting a few degrees from where you ought to be going? What if that's true of a church? Disaster. Heading for disaster.

And soberingly, one of the other pieces of information we have about the church in Ephesus is later in time, from the book of Revelation, the last book of the Bible, where there are seven letters to seven churches.

[19 : 46] And the letter from the risen Jesus to the church in Ephesus says that for all their activity and busyness, they have forsaken the love they had for Jesus at first. And that fits right with the problem that Paul is diagnosing here.

A church that's become focused on what we should do for God instead of what God has done for us. So what's the solution? That's our second point.

Our second point. Paul's appointed leader must take the helm. Have a look with me again at verse three. As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

And then Paul explains, it's this crucial work of a godly leader that will get the church back on track. If you look at verse five, the goal of this command, that's his command to Timothy to stop the false teachers.

The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Now, the rest of the chapter is like an expansion of, it's almost a digression really, on what Paul means and what's going wrong.

[21 : 03] And then he comes back to that command to Timothy in verse 18. And he says, Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you so that by recalling them, you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to their faith.

So Timothy has got a battle on his hands and a godly leader who is willing to contend and steer a church back on track is a great gift from God.

For lots of us, the commands of 1 Timothy do not directly apply to you. It's a letter of instruction to the ordained minister or presbyter or elder of the church, the pastor, Timothy, about how to get God's house back in order.

But the whole church is meant to be listening in. At the very end of the letter, Paul says, grace be with you all or grace be with yous. It's a kind of plural word because the whole church is meant to be listening in as he instructs Timothy.

Why do we all need that? We all need to understand what we are to look for from Christian leaders and what kind of Christian leadership we should want to support and pray for.

[22 : 30] Our picture of the job of a pastor, it can get so confused, can't it? You know, we've got Father Ted and the Vicar of Dibley and that program Rev.

Is it? Remember Rev with the guy who's like essentially a good-hearted social worker with a bit of God and a bit of doubt? Timothy is instructed to take the helm, get hold of it, Timothy, steer the ship, back on course.

It's going to be a fight, but wage the good warfare. And if we think about sailing as a picture for church ministry with this idea of shipwreck, I basically am absolutely clueless about sailing.

I've been once, I'm never going again. But I was just lying down, trying not to be sick. I have no idea how to sail. But if you think about it as a metaphor for ministry, which people sometimes use, we might think, oh yeah, because I suppose there's some challenges in sailing, isn't there?

There's like you get choppy waters and you get stormy winds and they could be like a picture of the problems that people in church ministry would face because of problems on the outside of the boat.

[23 : 42] There's the persecution of the world and people come into church with all kinds of affliction and grief and hardship from the world. But the problems in 1 Timothy are challenges from within.

You see that? They're within the boat, the problems. It's a bit like in the movie *Crimson Tide*, the action is on a submarine. I don't know if you remember *Crimson Tide*, Gene Hackman, Denzel Washington, Darren remembers it.

I've had conversations with people after the 9.30 where we've all realised there's about three films about submarines all at the same time. We couldn't quite work out which was which. But anyway, *Crimson Tide*, where, this is definitely right, where basically Gene Hackman and Denzel Washington are both working on this submarine and Gene Hackman thinks that they should fire nuclear warheads at a Russian ship.

And if they do that, there will be nuclear war and the world will end. So Denzel Washington, the guy he plays, he has got this massive battle to save the world on his hands on this submarine.

He has to get control of the bridge. He has to get Gene Hackman off the bridge because otherwise everyone on the submarine is going to die and the world is going to end.

[25 : 05] That's the kind of picture we've got here where Timothy has to struggle in the church to stand down the people whose ministry is leading the church off course because the spiritual lives of the church people depend on it and God's desire to save the world depends on it.

What do we make of this language of warfare, of fighting, of battle? It reminds us, doesn't it, there is real opposition, there is spiritual opposition. The real enemy is a spiritual one, Satan, the devil.

And there's human opposition to faithful church leadership and there's real urgency here for Paul to write a letter like this because he thinks he might get delayed.

It's quite striking, isn't it, in chapter 3. I'm coming to see you to help but in case I get delayed I'm writing a letter and having it delivered because this is an urgent problem.

An individual can get shipwrecked in their faith, a church can get shipwrecked, a whole denomination can become shipwrecked and lose its way. It's a battle but what we're not to think with the language of battle is that that battle is won with aggression or rage.

[26 : 30] In 2 Timothy Paul writes a second letter to Timothy and he says that with his opponents he must gently instruct them in the hope that he can restore them and they would themselves escape the trap of the devil.

Timothy's godliness matters as he fights this battle and we get a phrase that really captures that well in chapter 1 verse 19 where he says to Timothy fight the battle well holding on to faith and a good conscience.

So that gives us there one thing about truth, about Timothy's teaching, he has to hold on to the truth, the faith that's been delivered to him that we now have in the scriptures and the good conscience there is this language of godliness, of character, that Timothy has to be godly as he goes about this battle.

That's the command and it's never popular to be that kind of leader in a church. People accuse leaders like this who guard the pulpit, who stand people down from teaching rules in their church or who call out false teachers by name for what they are.

People accuse leaders who do that of being narrow-minded, of being arrogant, of being tyrannical and of course it's possible for a church leader to misstep and be arrogant and be overbearing.

[27 : 56] That can happen, that must be avoided but a leader who seems to us to be very cautious about who is involved in preaching and teaching in the church where they're the pastor.

Even where that causes upset, even when it causes offense, a leader who is willing to stand someone down from the children's ministry or the youth ministry because their teaching is off beam, that kind of leader is what a healthy church needs to get back on course and to stay on course.

I remember a friend in ministry who, a guy preached at his church who was a regular, reasonably regular preacher, he was a lay reader so he had this like, he was on the router, not here and he preached a sermon that had some bits in that weren't right and he's a really nice guy, a really well-liked guy and so people were speaking well of the sermon and my friend in ministry said about it, he said, if it was brain surgery, you would never let that guy into an operating theater again and what he did on Sunday is more important than brain surgery and he stood him down and when people are stood down like that or they're not invited to speak and they wish they were, we mustn't be fooled by qualifications that they have.

I've had people say to me here especially in the early days here, oh you must let this person get involved in the youth work. They went to seminary, you've got to get them on the youth work.

Well what seminary? What does that matter? You know, they trained at ICC in Glasgow or they're a published author, they've written books, they head up a school of Christian mission.

[29 : 57] Well what matters is do they teach faithfully to what's been delivered to us in the scriptures? Is it the saving truth? Is it the good deposit?

And what is their life like? Is it a life of godly character? That's what Timothy needs to watch out for. That's our second point. Timothy must take the helm.

And how does he steer a new course for this church? Well our third point is Paul's gospel must be the wind in their sails. Paul now turns to the message that the church must be centered on.

The straight course of fair winds and following seas. And it's not what we can do for God. It's what God has done for us. Paul just mentions it in verse 11 if you have a look there.

He talks about what conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God which he entrusted to me. And then having said that it's as though Paul can't help himself.

[31 : 01] He describes God's saving work in the most lavish language. Starting with what he once was that he was a blasphemer a persecutor and a violent man.

This was Saul the Pharisee who was full of rage. What he would have said was righteous rage about Jesus and the followers the following of Jesus that had grown up in the synagogues of Jerusalem and spread from there and he made it his ambition to crush it.

And so when the first Christian was martyred Stephen Saul was there approving of his killing and then driven by his anger at Jesus and his followers Saul got permission from the priest to leave Jerusalem and go to other cities and towns and round up the Christians and have them imprisoned.

But in verse 13 he says he was shown mercy the mercy of Jesus appearing to him on the road to Damascus and saying Saul Saul why do you persecute me and being brought to see that Jesus is the one promised by the scriptures he was shown mercy and he uses overflowing language for it in verse 14 the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus and then he gives us this wonderful gospel statement verse 15 here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst and Anglicans we're in Anglican church Anglicans owe a lot to this verse Thomas Bilney was born in 1495 and he studied law and as a young man he started reading the Bible and because of his because of his learning he could read the Bible which not many people could at the time and he came to this verse 1 Timothy 1 15 and he says this in his writing

I chanced upon this sentence of Paul almost sweet and comfortable sentence to my soul this one sentence through God's instruction and inward working did so exhilarate my heart being before wounded with the guilt of my sins and being almost in despair that immediately I felt a marvelous comfort and quietness so that my bruised bones leapt for joy and from that moment on the scriptures became more pleasant to me than the sweetest honey Thomas Bilney started meeting with others in the White Horse Inn in Cambridge taking the writings of the Bible and discussing them rediscovering what Jesus had done and working out how to bring that back into the church where it had been forgotten and in August 1531 he was arrested for preaching the gospel and for distributing William Tyndale's

[34 : 15] Bible the English translation of the Bible so that people could read God's word for themselves and he was burned at the stake as a heretic and he was the first martyr of the English Reformation but by his death the spark had been lit of the Reformation people were converted through him who took the work on and got that gospel of God's grace back into the church thanks to the Spirit's work as Thomas Bilney read those words Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst now why would God show mercy even to Saul this great nemesis of his people of the early church well he tells us in verse 16 for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me the worst of sinners Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life do you see what he's saying maybe that's true of some of us as well today that God would choose to show mercy and patience to us so that no one else could think oh well it's too late for me because they would see us and they'd see

Paul the nemesis of the church and think well if they couldn't be excluded there's hope for me and there is hope because today verse 14 the grace of God is abundant overflowing verse 16 his patience is immense there was a painting of Niagara Falls that was issued to an exhibition and the artist left it untitled and all the other paintings in the exhibition were titled so the gallery gave it the name More to Follow that's what they called this painting of Niagara Falls More to Follow because even though hundreds billions billions of litres of water spill over the falls every year there'll always be more to follow that's the picture here of God's grace for his people whatever we've done there is always more grace coming Martin Luther wrote this about God's grace just as the sun is not darkened by the whole world enjoying its light and could light up ten worlds so is Christ our Lord an infinite source of all grace so that even if the whole world would draw enough grace and truth from him to make everyone an angel the fountain would not lose a drop but would always run over he is always full of grace now that grace in Jesus had seized hold of Paul it gripped him and I hope that each of you could tell your own story like this everyone here who is already a Christian of how

God saw the worst in you and he poured out his grace his patience his love his mercy and for Paul and for any of us whose hearts have experienced that saving work ourselves the result comes in verse 17 he writes now to the king eternal immortal invisible the only God be honor and glory forever and ever amen so you see there's like a paradox there that the church in Ephesus had become fixated on moralistic teaching as though that would kind of bring order to the church but what it does is lead the church inward looking and judgmental but here is real change when we stay in the deep waters of the gospel of grace the result is that your heart is changed to delight in God and burst with praise for God praise that flows out into changed living and proclamation as we make

Jesus known to others folks our time has gone but chapter 1 has charted the course for our church when we come to church before you think tell me what I should do for God come asking tell me what God has done for me tell me again tell me the old old story that I may take it in that wonderful redemption God's remedy for sin and God is saying to us this morning a church whose godly leaders make that message of God's saving grace the wind in our sails becomes like that building we saw at the beginning the cutty sark building that through us through our lives and our doctrine the gospel is revealed and displayed in all its beauty to a watching world Amen let's take a moment to reflect on what God's been speaking to us just a minute of personal reflection and then

Catherine and the band will lead us to sing together in response to God's word and while we're singing there'll be prayer ministry over at the back as well if you'd like prayer for anything you can go and see the team there to pray pray for voy!

[39 : 56] ! voy! voy! voy voy! voy