

Title: Love means that sometimes you have to say “No”
Text: 1 Timothy 1.3-7
Theme: Protecting the flock
Series: 1 Timothy #3
Prop Stmtnt: A healthy church will have a healthy teaching diet.

Read Text:

In 1999, the Mars Climate Orbiter was launched as the first interplanetary weather satellite. There was much anticipation because of how much data we would learn about the weather patterns on Mars. The unmanned Orbiter reached Mars and executed a 16 minute 23 second main engine burn to establish orbit. It then orbited behind Mars and was never seen nor heard from again. In researching what went wrong, it was discovered that while NASA used the metric system as measuring units, one of the software contractors used the traditional imperial system. This likely resulted in the Orbiter orbiting too close to Mars.

Details matter. In the case of the Mars Orbiter, \$125 million was destroyed, plus, the anticipated information that it was designed to gather and transmit was never realized. Details matter, and the more important the subject matter is, the greater the impact of the details. We understand that when it comes to rocket science, mechanical and software engineering and measuring dosages in medicines. But when it comes to a correct understanding of God and the Bible, it is astounding and tragic, as to how much people have a “hey, that’s close enough” attitude. But, when it comes to the Bible, God does not have a “hey, that’s close enough” attitude.

Details matter when constructing interplanetary weather satellites. Doctrine matters to people. If your interplanetary weather satellites has some faulty programming, then it might burn up. If people believe the wrong truths about God, their souls are at stake and in eternal danger. It matters what you believe, therefore it matters what is being taught. Timothy was left in Ephesus in order to address the fact that there were things being taught in the church at Ephesus that were going to destroy the church.

1. **Doctrinal purity is a must.** (3-4)

Paul uses the phrase “certain persons” in v.4 and in v.6 in reference to teachers (obviously at least two) who were teaching incorrect doctrine. At the end of the chapter he identifies two men by name and explains that they had been put out of the church. But, by saying “certain persons” I take this to mean that Paul knows that there are some guys who are teaching things incorrectly, but he is hopeful that Timothy can help them get back on track. Paul does not name them because they have not dug in their heels and refused to be corrected and hopefully, that will not be the case.

Timothy, you have to address this problem. There are certain persons who are teaching things that are wrong. This is a critical issue. In fact, when Paul was on his way back to Jerusalem, he arranged for the elders of the church at Ephesus to meet him in Miletus.

The account of that meeting is in Acts 20. It is one of the most cherished passages in the entire Bible to me, because it speaks so clearly and passionately about the responsibilities of elders. Paul warned them then that false teachers would arise in the church. In fact he said that some of their own number would arise and would speak twisted things in an effort to draw people after them.

In Revelation 2, Jesus warns the church in Pergamum to clean out their own kitchen because they have teachers who are teaching false doctrine. To those people, Jesus says to repent. *“If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.”* To the church in Thyatira Jesus gives a similar warning because they were tolerating a self-proclaimed prophetess who was teaching false doctrine. Jesus is serious about doctrinal purity because Jesus cares about his bride. He wants his bride protected from wolves who would destroy her.

So, what exactly were these guys teaching that was false? Their false teaching was characterized by myths (1 Tim. 1.4; 4.7; Tit. 1.14; 2 Tim. 4.4) by a misuse of OT genealogies (1 Tim. 1.4; Tit. 3.9), by a focus on the OT law that missed the point of the law and by a desire to be known as a teacher or thought of as being fascinating or novel. It still happens. In fact, it happens a lot. Ten years ago now, Dan Brown’s bestselling novel, *The Da Vinci Code* was released as a movie starring Tom Hanks. The entire story and the sequels is an example of a myth. The story is interesting, intriguing, but not true.

Paul speaks of misusing genealogies. This may refer to fascination with particular blood lines amongst the Jewish people in an effort to claim personal significance by some of the teachers. Whatever it was, the focus resulted in speculations. In other words, this approach to the Bible ignored the plain meaning of the text and instead just raised a bunch of questions that were designed to make the teacher sound really smart.

What was going on in the church at Ephesus sounds like a form of Gnosticism. You need to know term, because it has always been a problem for the church and we must constantly be on guard against it. Gnosticism is the idea that there are secret codes or secret truths that are only accessible to a very few select people. These select people then have unusual (or secret) insight that no one else does, or unusual power and influence.

Modern examples of this show up every once in a while in esteemed theological journals like the *National Enquirer* and other rags in the check-out line at the grocery store. You will see headlines that say, *Secret Bible Code revealed that unlocks hidden messages!* In some cases, a page of the Bible is turned into a giant word search that contains words imbedded within the story.

What does that do to the Bible? 1) It renders the text obsolete. In other words, the actual account is not the real message. The real message is hidden and the actual account is just a tool to communicate the real message. 2) It makes the Bible useless for the common person. Unless you know the code, you can’t find the hidden message. 3) It is absolute nonsense. There is no end to it. If the text is written in code, then how do you know that the hidden message isn’t written in code too?

But that has always been a danger to the church. Too much of the history of the church has been characterized by this idea that a select few know the inner secrets and the hidden codes, and that everyone else is supposed to blindly follow them. That is garbage! It is damnable garbage. Here are some examples of Gnosticism. Some of them will be blatant and some will be subtle.

- Voodoo, spiritism and forms of witchcraft

Entire villages in Haiti have at one time or another been under the power of the local witch doctor. This person had influence in the underworld so that if you or a family member got sick, you would go to the witch doctor and pay a ridiculously high fee for the witch doctor to drive the evil away. The witch doctor had power that you did not have and used that power to enrich himself.

- The Mormon Cult

The Mormon religion began when Joseph Smith, at the age of 17 supposedly received a visit from an angel named Moroni who told him about golden plates that were hidden close to where Joseph was living at the time in Palmyra, NY. Four years later Joseph got the golden plates and began to translate them, which became the book of Mormon. No one knows where the golden plates are. Everything about the origin of the book of Mormon is very secretive and mysterious. Power and insight is concentrated in the hands of a select few.

- The Roman Catholic Church

The same thing is seen in the Roman Catholic Church. The Pope has the power to damn or to pardon. The official teachings are handed down from the powers that be and the common folk have historically been discouraged from the studying the Bible on their own because, if they do that, they will discover that there are several key doctrines in the Roman Catholic Church that are wrong, particularly as they relate to the doctrine of justification. When you realize this, then you begin to understand why the priesthood is so secluded, why monasteries are so private, and why there have been secret societies and cloisters. It's built around a form of Gnosticism. Many of you grew up in the Roman Catholic Church and you were never encouraged to study the Bible for yourself. You did not need to bring your Bible to church. The attitude was, don't try this at home because you may hurt yourself. Leave the Bible study to the professionals. We will do the thinking for you; your job is just to do what you are told.

- The Prosperity Gospel

The Prosperity Gospel preacher has learned the secrets of how to leverage the power of God for his/her wealth, health, comfort, influence, and as a spiritual Teflon coating that protects that one and family members from all harm. If you want to share in the same blessing, then you need to give generously to the preacher, or do whatever he/she tells

you to do because that leader is the conduit of blessing into your life. They claim to be “anointed” and therefore, they are hands-off from accountability and scrutiny. After all, you don’t touch God’s anointed ones. Be careful. Being an “anointed one” can be code language for desiring admiration, respect and power. Any person (leader or not) in the church who attempts to place himself above accountability to the church is dangerous.

People are attracted to Gnosticism and other heresy in part because they do not know how to read their Bibles. I want you to read your Bible. I want you to understand your Bible. The message of the Bible is not a secret code. The message is plain and I want you to see that you can understand it. That is why the primary preaching diet of this church is a verse-by-verse exposition. This type of preaching helps you be better Bible readers. If you are a good Bible reader, you will be less prone to go off on tangents that are not helpful. Better yet, if you are a good Bible reader who is in conversations with other good Bible readers, then we help one another stay true to the word and stay the course.

Instead of fanciful speculation, we have been entrusted with what Paul calls “the stewardship from God that is by faith.” Stewardship refers to management or oversight. The story of the Bible is the story of God’s plan throughout human history of redeeming a people unto himself. Every person in that plan has had to come to God on the basis of faith, that is, believing what God has revealed. The Bible is the story of God’s redemptive plan in calling a people from out of this world unto himself. Our mission is to understand that and proclaim that. In other words, the gospel has to be central to all of our preaching and teaching. Anything that distracts you from that message is damaging to your soul.

Now, when I get that specific about false teaching, some of you get nervous, don’t you? You worry that people will be upset or offended. The truth is people will be upset and offended. Do you now sense, the weight on Timothy? He had to confront certain persons in that church. That is difficult. Telling people that what they believe are and teaching is wrong is an unpleasant but necessary part of our responsibility. At the end of this chapter, Paul publicly names two men so the church was warned.

Let’s say that some guy is calling some of the elderly people in our church and is telling them, that the elders encouraged him and authorized him to help our elderly people get their finances in order. But, we hadn’t done that at all. And this guy was using the trust that people have in this church as a way to getting them to invest money with him and he was stealing it. In fact, you found out that your mom and dad gave him all their savings. Would you be livid? Yes! Would you be calling me? Yes! Would you want me to warn people? Yes! What if I said, “Sorry, but I have a policy of not saying anything negative from the pulpit. It uh makes people uncomfortable.” Would you be okay with that? Or what if I said, “Hey, I don’t want to judge anybody, or talk down about anyone, but, ummm, hey, uh, sometimes there might be people that aren’t quite as cool as you may think, so be careful when you make big decisions.” Would that do? No! If I loved you, I would seek to protect you. I would tell you who the guy is. I would tell you that he does not have our blessing or authority and that if he calls you, you should call the police. Specifically warning people about danger is not unloving, it is actually loving. Love means that sometimes you have to say “no.” Timothy has to tell these certain persons,

“No.” You cannot teach that. Timothy is most likely going to make people upset because these certain persons have friends and possibly family members in the church. Timothy is going to have to tell some of these certain persons that they are not qualified to teach and that is going to make them angry. Is this an unloving thing to do? Is this an abuse of authority to guard what is being taught? Not at all. It is one of the primary responsibilities of a leader. But, notice what the goal is.

2. Godly affection is the goal. (5)

Why is Timothy charged with doing this? It is not because Paul is a power-hungry ego-maniac who freaks out when people don't do what he wants. *“The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”* Paul is not only referring to this specific responsibility that Timothy has, but is speaking about his ministry and Timothy's ministry, and I believe the aim of all pastoral ministry. We are to do what we do because we love God and we love his people.

Leaders, if we are going to love our people, then our hearts must be pure, our consciences must be clear and our faith must be sincere. Congregation, if your leaders are going to love you, they must have pure hearts, good consciences and a sincere faith. Those three terms are overlapping descriptions of a life that is committed to being genuine.

A person with a pure heart is not a person with a perfect heart. Only Jesus has a perfect heart. A person with a pure heart is a person whose internal life is characterized by repentance and faith. A person with a good conscience is someone who engages in self-evaluation. This person is introspective in a good way and seeks to bring everything in his life in order. This person has no outstanding conflicts that he has not attempted to reconcile in good faith. A sincere faith speaks of a person who truly relies upon God. This person's trust in God is not for show, it is real. When alone, when struggling, when disappointed, when facing difficulty, a person with a sincere faith, simply cannot walk away from God. They may not understand everything that is going, but they cannot walk away from God.

Do you see what Paul is doing here? He knows that motivation is a very important issue. People want to know, why are you doing this? Why are you telling these certain persons that they are wrong? Is it a control issue? Is it a money issue? Is it pride? Paul anticipates that question for himself and for Timothy and reminds Timothy of what their motive is. *“The aim of OUR charge...”* This is what motivates us. As leaders in the church our motivation is to care more for our people than we do our own comfort. Leaders who care more about you than they do themselves will be willing to tell you “no” especially when it is unpopular. (Parents, the same thing is true for you.)

But, there are people who arise in the church who (v.6) swerve from these. Their motivation is not from a pure heart, good conscience or sincere faith. They are saying something up here in an effort to cover-up what is going on down here. Their goal for teaching or leading is not godly affection for their people, nor godly affection in their people. They are using the position of leadership as an opportunity to ‘make it about

them. But, anything other than doctrinal purity from a heart of godly affection is going to be a disaster.

3. Anything else is disastrous. (6-7)

V.6 says that certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussions.... I take “by swerving from these” to be referring to the threefold description of godly motives in v.5. In other words, a person who cares more about himself than he does his people will be willing to change his message in order to get the desired response from them. If my primary goal is for you to like me, then I will avoid anything that may cause you to get upset with me. If my primary goal is for you to respect me, then I will try to appear as if I have it all together. I will drop hints and say things that will give you opportunities for you to be impressed. If my primary goal is to get power, then I will seek to arrange my words in a way that will put me in a better position of leverage. In each of those examples, what is going on? I am using words on the surface as a disguise for my true intentions.

I think many of you know what I am talking about. People will tell you something, but there is an agenda behind their words. Their words do not always match what their true goal is. And this is why this so dangerous. The church is a people who are dealing with the ultimate truth of the gospel. The gospel is the most important information in the entire world. The gospel is the good news that Christ died on the cross in order to pay the debt of your sin in full. And by faith alone, in Christ alone, you can be forgiven of your rebellion and wickedness and be completely cleansed, declared righteous and placed into the family of God forever. You can be guaranteed of life forever and ever with God. That glorious message is more valuable than all of the wealth in the world. So, you can see how conflicting, how devastating it is, when people either twist that message or they use that message as a cover-up in order to amass power, wealth or influence for themselves.

But, not everyone who is a danger to the church knows that he or she is a danger to the church. In verse 7, Paul describes these teachers as certain persons who desire to teach the law, but they do not know what they are talking about. They are saying things, perhaps with sincerity, but it just isn't true. Just because a person desires to be a teacher, does not mean that he should be. One Sunday a guy came up to me and said, “I think the Lord is calling me into the ministry.” I said, “He's not. There are other things he wants you to do, but that isn't one of them.” How could I say that? I had to. He was clueless and worse yet, he wasn't teachable. The issue is not, “do you feel called”? The issue is, are you qualified? If you are not qualified, you are not called, no matter what you feel. Feeling does not trump theology. Pragmatism does not overrule truth. But, if you do not know the truth, then the church will default to pragmatism.

This book is all about leadership. Think of the people in your life who have had the greatest influence on you for good. Now, think of the people in your life who have caused you the greatest harm. My guess is that the people who have done you the greatest good are those whose public life and private life were one and the same and the people who have done you the greatest harm are those whose public life was radically different than

their private life. This book is about the leaders' life and doctrine. The leader's life has two parts: public and private. When doctrine is good, but life is bad, the result is devastating for the church. When doctrine is bad, life will eventually go bad. The result is a dying church. When doctrine is good and the public life and private life of the leaders and people are whole, the church is then an awesome weapon for good.