

Title: By Grace
Text: 1 Timothy 6.20-21
Theme: Fulfilling your calling
Series: I Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: Keeping your charge can only be done by God's grace.

Read Text:

I was going to Russia to teach a group of pastors when a mission here in the states asked me to take some funds over to help with a project they were working on. I said, sure, I'd be happy to do so. However, when I was given the cash, then I began to reconsider my nonchalant "sure." Where would I put this? When would the other person arrange to get this from me? How would I know it was him? What if I get robbed? While it was perfectly legal, I'd imagine how this would sound to a border agent if I was ever questioned. I'm carrying money from, not really sure who, to not really sure who, but I know its for a good cause. I'm happy to say, that nothing ever happened like that, but as soon as I got to Russia, I would ask my host about what I was supposed to do with that money, because I felt very responsible and at the same time, vulnerable. It was a great relief to deliver the money, knowing that I had done my job. I had guarded the deposit entrusted to me. It's the same feeling when turning in a lengthy paper or major project for a class or work. It's what truck drivers, school bus drivers, airline pilots all experience when they get their people and packages safely to their destination. Relief. I've done my job. I've fulfilled my mission.

The call to follow Christ as well as the call to ministry brings with it a charge, a mission, as Paul calls it, a deposit that has been entrusted. This deposit that is the gospel, is the essence of the Christian faith. It therefore is the greatest treasure ever. This deposit was entrusted to Paul, Timothy, and others. It is now entrusted to me, to you, to us.

1. **Guard the deposit.** (20a)

This verse literally begins with the stand alone "O". This is an expression of intensity, emotion and direct personal focus. And I think that it is also really helpful to point out that Paul is a single older man and Timothy is a single younger man. Those who are single can feel like a 5th wheel in a married world, and particularly in the church when that church is trying to elevate marriage and protect it. The result can be that if you are single you may feel marginalized. Well, here is one of the most prominent duo in the early church and these guys are both single. Thank God for single men and women who live all out for Christ and the gospel. We are a better church because of you. What Paul is doing here has the effect of the speaker placing his hands on either side of the face of his listener in an effort to speak directly into his heart. Obviously, what Paul is about to say is directed specifically to Timothy, but there is something else that is important to note.

The letter ends with the phrase, "Grace be with you" and the "you" is in the plural form. Once again, we could rightly translate this as "Grace be with y'all." So, while this letter was directed to Timothy, Paul's intent was that it was to be read also by the congregation. The congregation needed to know what was expected from their leaders so that, they could support and encourage the necessary changes that needed to be made. This is further clarified by the fact that this letter

is in the Bible and is good and necessary for every one of us. Here is what leaders are to do. And what Paul says here is nothing new. In fact it is a summary of the entire letter. He started the letter by giving him a charge (1.3), he repeated that charge (1.18), repeated it again (4.11) and again (5.21) and again (6.2) and again (6.13). So,

A. What is the deposit?

When you put all of these together, it is clear that the deposit that has been entrusted to Timothy is the Christian faith itself. This is made very clear in 2 Timothy 1.12-14 (read). The *“pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus”* is the gospel. The gospel was entrusted to Paul who entrusted it to Timothy who was to guard it. But, guarding the gospel that has been entrusted to you is not like my job of guarding money. I did not want anyone to know that I was carrying all this money with me. I hid the money in a pouch that I tied around my neck. But, we do not hide the gospel because the gospel itself means good news.

B. How do you guard the gospel?

Guarding the deposit of the gospel means to invest it into the lives of others by sharing it, explaining it, studying it, believing it and banking your life on it. The best defense is a good offense. The other team can't score if they don't have the ball or the puck. The same thing is true about the gospel. The best defense for the gospel, the best explanation of the gospel is clear, accurate words that are communicated by a life that is changed by Christ. Timothy needed to guard the gospel by continually preaching the gospel to himself and others and by continually applying the gospel to himself and others and by continually expecting that he and others live in view of the gospel. Church, we guard the gospel when we do not assume the gospel. We all need to be reminded of the gospel. Unbelievers need to come Christ. Believers need to be reminded of their hope, their assurance, their confidence, their joy, and their dependency.

The essence of the Christian faith is this:

- 1) There is one God who eternally exists as 3 persons; Father, Son and Spirit.

This infinitely good, loving, holy, and righteous God created the world so that he might have a people to live with, who by means of loving, worshiping and fellowshiping with God, would enjoy him and be the cause for his glory and joy to be expressed in many happy ways.

- 2) God created humankind.

So, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth and the very first humans, Adam and Eve. Adam was the representative of the human race. He was the biological father and the representative of everyone “in Adam” which is the human race. What he did would reflect on all of us. There, in a perfect environment, where every need of humankind was met, where there was no death, no disease, no decay, no guilt, no fear, no distrust, no angst, life was indeed utopia. But to Adam and Eve, even that was not enough for in that garden God had placed a tree that they were not to eat the fruit of. It was a simple but powerful reminder, that God is God. He

makes the rules, but look at what the rules are: Enjoy the garden. Enjoy your life. Enjoy one another. It is all yours, just not that tree. But one day, they looked at that tree differently than they had before. The very fact that they were forbidden from eating its fruit became the occasion to wonder what it would be like if they did eat the fruit. Satan, the arch-enemy of God, the wannabe God, strategically placed himself in the garden near the tree and told Eve what her heart had whispered. "God is not good." He is holding good things away from you. There is nothing wrong with eating this fruit. In fact, it will make you like God. The things that Satan said were not only rubbish, they were illogical, but as I say, sin causes brain damage, and in that moment when Eve heard what she wanted to hear, she took matters into her own hand and reached out and took the fruit and ate it and then gave some to Adam who was with her and he took some too. In that moment Adam, as our representative, rebelled. He committed high treason against God. The penalty of that rebellion is death and in that moment, the cloud and fog of death permeated everything. Adam's rebellion brought a curse upon himself, the human race and the creation. The curse was too great for any human to break because the price for the rebellion was too high for any one person to pay. From that moment on, every single human born, has been born into this fog of death and is born with a heart, like Adam's wants to be God. In short, all we are like sheep, we have gone our own way, attempted to make our own rules, do our own thing, and live as if we are God and due to our rebellion, we are sinners who deserve the wrath of God.

3) Christ

God would be perfectly just to punish every single human for every act of rebellion. But, instead, God provided a way of forgiveness. What the first Adam could not do, God sent his Son, Christ to do. Christ came to the earth in the form of a man. Christ was born of a virgin and lived a perfect life in your place. He was so perfect that his world essentially hated him because his life and teaching revealed their rebellion. So, they killed him, which he allowed because it was by means of his death, that he paid the price for the sins of every single person who would ever trust in him. The death of Christ paid in full the penalty of our sin. The death of Christ satisfied the wrath of God against our sin. The death of Christ is so significantly important because it is proof positive that our sin is incredibly serious and at the same time the love of God is infinitely glorious. At the cross justice and mercy came together. The evidence that the death of Christ paid for our sins was set on display when Christ arose from the dead. With our sin being atoned for, death no longer has a hold on me. For the follower of Christ, death is the portal that leads us to live with Christ.

4) Response

This good news that Christ lived the life you could not live and died the death you could not die is not merely information to be intrigued by. This gospel is only good news if you believe it and accept it for yourself. If you truly accept the fact that Christ lived for you and died for you, then you will realize how serious your sin is and you will be broken over it, convicted by it, disgusted by it and will repent of it. Along with repentance, you will look to Christ and believe on him as the only One who can save you from your sin. This believing on Christ means to accept him for who he is (King) and for what he has done (Savior). Because he is King, I submit my life to him and give him the keys. As Savior, I accept that he and he alone is able to pay for my sin.

This means that I can be forgiven of my sin. This means that since Christ paid my debt in full, that there is nothing left for me to pay. This means that forgiveness is not for purchase, which would favor the wealthy, nor to be earned, which would favor the strong. It is for those, and only for those who admit their complete and utter need. Therefore, this salvation is only for people who are humbled by the reality of their sin. Have you ever understood that and have you ever trusted in Christ alone to be your Lord and Savior? If not, why not? Trust him right now!

The truth of that (the gospel) is the only means by which a person can have a right relationship with God. This is the singularly greatest news any person could ever know. And once you know it, you want to know it deeper and you want to live more consistently in view of it. But, even in the church, even among people who profess to believe the gospel, there is always a temptation to lose sight of the importance of the gospel or emphasizing one aspect of it to the exclusion of others. For example, some of you have been influenced by a setting that emphasized your sinfulness while downplaying the completeness of Christ's atonement. The result was fear and worry that you were really forgiven. Others of you have had Christ's atonement emphasized to the exclusion of sin, so that you have no practical sense of repentance. I need to consistently remember the doctrine of sin as presented in the gospel to keep me humble and to remind me not to trust in myself and to always be grateful for what I have been saved from. I also need to consistently remember the doctrine of justification, so that I stay focused on Christ and remember that while I am a great sinner, that Jesus is a greater Savior. Guarding the deposit of the gospel means to guard the entire doctrine and removing things that are distractions to it.

What happens when a church does not talk anymore about sin, but only tells people to believe in Jesus? (What are you believing in Jesus for then? Your coach? Your cheerleader? Your mentor and guide in life?) Jesus did not die on the cross to be your cheerleader, but to be your Savior and King! You need a Savior to change you, not a cheerleader to affirm you. What happens when you only hammer people about sin, but you don't keep pointing them to Christ? You will crush people and make them feel as if they are never good enough and have no hope. It is true that we are not good enough, but by pointing people to Christ, we can see that while we are not good enough, HE is!! What if you talk about sin and Christ, but you never talk about our faith response? Then Christianity will be an intellectual matter and people will have false assurance that because they know certain things, that they are fine. It is not what you know, it is what you believe and base your soul on! Guarding the deposit means to guard the entire deposit and people need to know the entire gospel. But, there are always things and ideas that are distractions to one or more aspects of the gospel.

II. Avoid distractions. (20b-21a)

A. Waste of time - babble

Peanuts cartoon (teacher in school). By using the word "babble" Paul makes it clear that people are saying a lot of words that are either confusing, distracting, in error, out of balance, or (probably) a bunch of speculation that takes your focus off of Christ. Repeatedly Paul warns Timothy that he has to deal with this. This comes up again in 2 Timothy as we will see. Listen, if you are going to be a teacher, or if you are going to have spiritual conversations with others, (which you should) stick with the clear teaching of the Word. In fact, Paul gives very good

counsel in 1 Corinthians 4.6 when he says, “*that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another.*” Parents what do you tell your kids? Color inside of the lines. Stay in your lane. That is so true when it comes to the Bible. God does not tell us everything there is to know, but he tells us everything that we need to know. And everything that we need to know is not only in the Bible, but no single person has ever learned everything there is to know in the Bible. There is always more to learn that God has revealed in the Bible. But, many people are not satisfied with that and become infatuated with new things and speculations.

The history of Christianity is full of potholes and train wrecks from people who become all wound up about one issue and hold to that one issue in exclusion of everything else. That is all that they talk about (irreverent babble) and over time will read the Bible through the lens of that one issue. It does not cause people to love Jesus more, it just gives some people a false sense of superiority because they think they know things that others are ignorant of. It is arrogant and leads to serious error (heresy). When you look at the heresies that Christianity has had to deal with, you see a similar pattern. Someone focused one on doctrine to the exclusion of others and as a result, they distorted the gospel. It is not only a waste of time listening to them, but it is a waste of thought. This irreverent babbling contradicts true knowledge even as it claims to be knowledge that no one else can understand.

B. Waste of thought - contradicting and "falsely called knowledge"

This week I received an email from a guy who claims that he is the only one who can really interpret the Bible. I started to read his argument and quickly realized this guy is not only way off theologically, but his tone was so harsh, caustic and biting, that there wasn't anything that sounded like Christ. Whenever one group claims that they are doing better than anyone else, or that they know it better than anyone else, or they have insight and secrets that no one else does; a good rule of thumb is to run as fast as you can and as far as you can from them. That is what was happening in Ephesus and Timothy had to straighten it out. We find out in 2 Timothy that some of the teachers were saying that the resurrection had already happened. They were overemphasizing one doctrine (position in Christ) to the exclusion of everything else. This happens all the time.

C. Waste of faith (21a)

Have you ever been going down the road and you saw tire tracks going off the road and into a ditch or into a wall? You know that you just went by the scene of an accident. Somebody left the road and the result was a wreck. Think of it like this. Christianity is a road that we travel and the gospel is the line that marks our lane. Paul is saying to Timothy and to us, stay in the lane. He has seen the tire tracks of lives that were wrecked because they started focusing on one thing and ignored the lane markers. But staying in the lane is not easy. There is a constant pressure on a church to deviate from the gospel. The winds of push against us even while within the church people arise who get fixated on one thing to the exclusion of others.

Historically what has happened and what continues to happen is compelling, engaging, articulate people arise in the church who because of their personality and speaking ability are able to attract

loyal people around them. This affirms their authority (they think) and they think that they have discovered a new way to do church or a new idea, or a secret to life that has been overlooked by everyone else. Inevitably it takes people away from the gospel. It either diminishes sin, diminishes grace, or redefines God. The result is heresy.

In the late 1700's the Baptist churches in England were dying. They were dying because they focused on the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in election to the exclusion of about anything else. Now, I love and preach the doctrine of God's sovereign electing of sinners to be his children from the before the foundation of the earth, because it is in the Bible. But, it is not the only doctrine in the Bible. But, you would not have known that in the English Baptist churches. They acted as if this was it, and as a result, they concluded that it was wrong to preach, write, urge, witness or even plead with people to trust in Christ. Their idea was, if God wanted people to be saved, he could do it, and did not need you. Predictably the churches were dying. Add to that the fact that a Scottish theologian named Sandeman who was so focused on salvation by faith alone, was teaching that repentance was a work and that was not necessary for salvation, but was in fact dangerous. He taught that as long as you had a basic intellectual concept of Jesus, that you were a Christian. The result was tragic. The churches had no desire to reach people and had no discernible influence in the community. They spent all of their time studying one issue and patting themselves on the back that they were right on this one issue while the world around them was going to hell and they didn't seem to care less.

I do not know how God's Sovereignty in election intersects with our responsibility to preach and witness nor do I know how God's eternal counsel and decrees are carried out in response to our prayers. I do not need to know. I do not go beyond what is written. What is written is that God is sovereign in electing people to Christ and that I am responsible to share the gospel with every one I possibly can.

So, what can we do as a church to stay in the lane of the gospel? I think the singularly best thing you can do is read your Bibles over and over. Know this Word so that you know the entire counsel of God. And demand that whoever preaches in this pulpit that he preaches the entire counsel of God. What confidence do we have? What hope do we have? I think Paul's final words say it best. There are so many dangers to avoid, how will we ever make it home safely?

III. . By Grace (21b)

This is how Paul begins the letter and now ends the letter. Grace refers to God giving us what we do not deserve. Grace is the result of God's love and mercies poured out upon us even when we were his enemies. God does not save us because we deserve it, nor because we have earned it, nor because we are nice people that he would like to hang out with. God saves us in spite of our sin because God is merciful and he loves to save. That is grace. That is why we often respond when asked "How are you doing?" That I am much better than I deserve. Grace is a reference to God saving us through Christ and keeping us in Christ and growing us by the Spirit to be like Christ and strengthening us and sustaining us with fresh faith to keep believing even in adversity.

Paul understood the importance of this truth and it infected everything about him in a good way. He was a gracious man. He looked for ways to forgive, ways to love, ways to hope, ways to trust,

and ways to be kind. God had been gracious to him and he in turn was now a conduit of that grace to others. The grace of God poured out on him through salvation in Christ was always on his mind. He said hello with grace and said good-bye talking about grace. You get the idea that if you asked him about the weather, politics, the economy or the Tigers that he would end up talking about grace. And this is why Paul lives with such hope.

What will keep Timothy faithful? God's grace. What will keep the gospel alive and going on in this world in spite of false teachers? God's grace. What will keep you believing and protect you from error? God's grace. What will bring you home to glory? God's grace. Grace be to you all.

Conclusion: What difference has this study made in your life? Do you love Jesus more? Do you trust him more? Do you treasure the gospel more? Do you value the church more? Do you see the importance of learning good theology, of seeing how the polity is supposed to work, of even being a member, and serving? What will you do with this? I have preached through every verse and therefore have, by grace fulfilled my charge. What you do with it, is now your responsibility. By God's grace, I pray that it has made a difference.