

Proposition: In 1 Timothy 1:3-7, we learn that to win in the battle for the truth we need three things.

- I. To win in the battle, we need the right action (3-4).
 - A. We must cherish the Word of God.
 - B. We must reject all substitutes.
- II. To win in the battle, we need the right aim (5).
 - A. What is it?
 1. Our motive should be love for God.
 2. Our motive should be love for God's people.
 - B. How do I get it?
 1. The source of love is a pure heart.
 2. The source of love is a good conscience.
 3. The source of love is a sincere faith.
- III. To win in the battle, we need the right assessment (6-7).
 - A. False teaching is linked to wrong choices (6).
 1. They turned *from* what pleases God.
 2. They turned *to* what displeases God.
 - B. False teaching is linked to wrong desires (7).
 1. Their desire to teach is good.
 2. But they want to do it for self-promoting reasons.

Implications: Two commitments in the battle for the truth...

1. Commit yourself to use the Scriptures.
2. Commit yourself to use the Scriptures properly.

The story is told¹ about a German machine tool company that once developed a very fine bit for drilling holes in steel: "The tiny bit could bore a hole about the size of a human hair. This seemed like a tremendously valuable innovation. The Germans sent samples off to Russia, the United States, and Japan, suggesting that this bit was the ultimate in machine technology.

From the Russians, they heard nothing. From the Americans came a quick response inquiring to the price of the bits, available discounts, and the possibility of a licensing arrangement.

After some delay, there was the predictable, polite response from the Japanese, complimenting the Germans on their achievement, but with a postscript noting that the German's bit was enclosed with a slight altercation. Excitedly, the German engineers opened the package, carefully examined the bit, and to their amazement discovered that the Japanese had bored a neat hole through it."

Life is full of surprises, isn't it? One surprise that amazes me is how prone we are to abandon God's good gifts in exchange for "fool's gold" alternatives. It happens in marriages--when a man or woman throws away the priceless gift of a God-given spouse in exchange for "freedom" or another person. It happens in parenting--when people take for granted the undeserved privilege of having children, and sacrifice those transplants from heaven on the altar of a career. But one of the surprises that amazes me most is what happens in churches.

***Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹Max DePree, *Leadership Jazz*, pp. 14-15.

The church of Jesus Christ possesses a treasure of inestimable value. What is it? It's the Bible, the very Word of God. The psalmist compared God's revelation to gold, to fine gold (Ps. 19:10). If God's Word is so priceless, you wouldn't expect people to abandon it, would you? You would be shocked that people, even people who profess to belong to Jesus Christ, would cash in the Scriptures for substitutes, wouldn't you?

Yet it happens. Indeed, it *is* happening all around us. People are abandoning God's good gift in exchange for fool's gold. Men and women who've tasted the sweetness of the honey of the Scriptures are seeking to satisfy their taste buds with soured substitutes. And churches which were built on the foundation of the sacred Word of God have gone shopping for a new curriculum, one that supposedly is more relevant and up-to-date.

Frankly, it's surprising. It's surprising that church members would debate the question of whether the Scriptures are sufficient, but across this land, they do. It's surprising, but then again, it's not.

The same tendency existed in the early church. In fact, it was in part what prompted Paul to write the letter we call 1 Timothy, a letter we began to study last week. 1 Timothy is like that letter the German tool company received. It's a wakeup call to those who have overestimated themselves. 1 Timothy reminds us that we're not as smart as we think, that the ideas of men may be impressive, but they pale in comparison with the Word of God.

That's why 1 Timothy begins on a rather sharp note by insisting that churches not tolerate substitutes for the Word of God (1:3 "Command certain men"). Churches are in a battle, a battle for the truth. What do we need to be victorious in this battle? In 1 Timothy 1:3-7, we learn that to win in the battle for the truth we need three things.

I. To win in the battle, we need the right action (3-4).

1 Timothy is a wonderful book, a timely book for us. Paul wrote this letter to his ministry associate, Timothy, to counsel him as he ministered in the church at Ephesus. Paul himself hoped to come to Ephesus shortly (3:14-15), but sent this epistle to guide Timothy in helping this established church "get over the hump."

The Ephesian church was a good church, an established church. It had been in existence for some eleven years by the time 1 Timothy was written. It had enjoyed Paul's teaching during the first three years, and later received from him the letter we call "Ephesians." The church even had elders in place (Acts 20:17).

But this established church was facing some of the special challenges that established churches face. That's why Timothy was there--Timothy wasn't technically the pastor, but an apostolic representative, a church "trouble-shooter." That's also why Paul wrote 1 Timothy--to help Timothy deal with the issues that faced the church in Ephesus.

Guess what agenda item Paul placed first on Timothy's "to do" list? It might surprise you. Verse 3, "As I urged you when I went into Macedonia [Paul's fourth missionary journey], stay there at Ephesus so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer."

Agenda item #1--deal with the fallout of false teaching. I say "fallout" because apparently Paul had already dealt with the ringleaders, Hymenaeus and Alexander, according to verse 20. But the fallout of their influence continued to plague the church. False teaching is like cancer--it spreads. And like cancer, it needs to be cut out or it will destroy the body. A bandaid will not do.

So to win the battle for the truth, here's where we start, with right action. What kind of action is that? To review where we left off last week, it's a twofold choice.

A. We must cherish the Word of God. And to do that we must secondly...

B. We must reject all substitutes. That was the thrust of Paul's admonition in verses 3-4: "Command certain men [not many, but it doesn't take many to do much damage in churches] not to teach false doctrines any longer [that's dilution of the truth by subtraction] nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies [that's dilution by addition]. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith."

David Wells, in his book *No Place For Truth*, describes how the contemporary church is abandoning a commitment to biblical truth; theology is disappearing (106):

"The disappearance of which I am speaking is not the same as the abduction of a child who is happily playing at home one minute and then is no longer to be found the next. No one has abducted theology in this sense. The disappearance is closer to what happens in homes where the children are ignored and, to all intents and purposes, abandoned. They remain in the home, but they have no place in the family. So it is with theology in the Church. It remains on the edges of evangelical life, but it has been dislodged from its center."

What must we do to change the tide in this battle for the truth? The answer is clear, according to Paul's counsel to Timothy: we need right action. We must cherish the Word of God, and reject all substitutes, even substitutes that have a pseudo-biblical sound to them (like "myths and genealogies" in verse 4). What else?

II. To win in the battle, we need the right aim (5).

Which raises two questions.

A. What is it? What kind of motivation should be in our hearts as we respond to the attack of false teaching? Listen to verse 5, "The goal of this command [a military term] is love." Chew on that. The goal of *this command*. What command? Paul's command to Timothy to silence those who teach non-biblical or extra-biblical ideas.

Perhaps Paul has in mind a possible objection: "But, Paul, aren't you being a little harsh? It's not very loving to tell someone they can't do what they *sincerely* believe God wants them to do (in this case, teach). What's your aim, Paul? What's your motive for telling Timothy not to allow certain people to teach?"

To which Paul answers, "My motive, my goal is *love*." There's an important insight here for us. Our society emphasizes personal *rights*. "I've got a right to do what I want to do," and if you stop me, you're being *unloving*. Not necessarily. Paul's goal in exhorting Timothy to block the false teachers in the Ephesian church was *love*.

What does that say to us? What kind of motivation should we have in this battle for the truth? Our aim is love, but love for whom? It's a twofold love...

1. *Our motive should be love for God.* And closely related...

2. *Our motive should be love for God's people.* Jesus said that the essence of the Law is to "love the Lord with all your heart, soul, and mind," and "to love your neighbor as yourself."

The Greek term for "love" here is *agape*. *Agape* love is selfless, sacrificial love (see 1 Cor. 13:4-7). It's the kind of love that prompts a person to take risks, not for personal gain, but for the glory of God and the good of the other person.

Just think about it. What would motivate Paul to write the things he just wrote? Didn't he know his words would irritate the false teachers? Didn't he know his counsel would make Timothy feel uncomfortable (remember, Timothy was no "natural" when it came to confrontation)? Yes, he knew. Why then? His reason for writing such stern counsel was *love*--a selfless love, a love that was willing to take risks, if necessary.

By the way, isn't that what Jesus did? Didn't He lay aside His personal interests when He left the glories of heaven and robed Himself in the flesh of humanity? And didn't He put aside self when He stretched out His arms on the cross of Calvary? What motivated our Lord? The same two-fold love that characterized Paul and should us--love for God and love for God's people. Which leads to a second question...

B. How do I get it? If the right aim is love, how do I obtain that kind of love? And how can I tell if I truly have a loving motive? What's more, if I don't, how do I get it? According to verse 5, this kind of love flows from three sources: "The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." Here's where love begins, source #1...

1. *The source of love is a pure heart.* In the Bible, the "heart" stands for the part of you no one sees, the seat of your affections. It's the core of your being, the fulcrum of feeling and faith (Hendriksen, 61).

What kind of heart produces true love? A "pure" heart. The Greek term is *katharos*, which originally meant "clean" as opposed to soiled or dirty (Barclay, 33-4). The term was used of corn that had been winnowed and cleansed of all chaff. It depicted an army that had been purified of all cowardly and undisciplined soldiers so that all that was left were the fighting men.

So a pure heart is a heart with unmixed motives. It belongs to the person who isn't interested in showing how clever he is. His only desire is to know God better, and make Him better known.

That's not what certain men were doing in Ephesus. Apparently, the goal of the false teachers was to put on a show, to impress people with their learning. In contrast, Paul's goal was love, the kind of love that flowed from a pure heart.

One time David asked an important question: "Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place (Ps. 24:3)?" And the answer: "He who has clean hands and a *pure heart*...(Ps. 24:4)." To love, you must have a pure heart.

2. *The source of love is a good conscience.* The conscience is "the God-created self-judging faculty of man (MacArthur, 18)." It either accuses or affirms (Rom. 2:14-15). Your conscience can be polluted (Tit. 1:15) and seared (1 Tim. 4:2, as in the case of false teachers: "Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron").

To exhibit true love, you must have what kind of a conscience? A *good* conscience. That's a conscience that is free from feelings of guilt. How important is it to you to have a good conscience?

It was very important to Paul. On one occasion, when he was on trial before Governor Felix, Paul's shared these words in his defense (Acts 24:16): "So I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man." If your goal is to have people like you, the time will come when you will compromise your conscience. True love comes from a good conscience. Thirdly...

3. *The source of love is a sincere faith.* The KJV says, "a faith unfeigned." The phrase literally means "faith in which there is no hypocrisy." There is no pretense in real love, no tongue in cheek, no shifting eyes, no ulterior motive.

What does sincere faith look like? We have a picture of it in 2 Timothy 1:5. It was Timothy: "I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also."

Timothy was a man who was willing to lay it all on the line for Jesus Christ, no matter what the cost, not for money, not for fame, not for perks, not for men's praise. That's sincere faith. And that's at the heart of true love.

Without that kind of faith and love, a church is nothing more than a religious club.

Do you agree with the following statement? Not everything that is called love is really love. Do you believe that? It's so easy to say, "I'm your friend. I love you." Or, "Listen to me. I'm telling you this because I love you." Or, "I just feel so good when you're around. I really love you."

How can you tell if you're exhibiting true love? According to God's Word, true love springs from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. If you want to be a more loving person (and which of us can't improve here?!), ask God for these. Allow His Spirit to produce these in you in increasing measure: a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Watch the sequence here: heart, conscience, then faith. That's the order the Spirit used in your conversion, as William Hendriksen describes (61): "When a sinner is drawn to Christ, *the heart* is first of all regenerated. The result is that the man's *conscience* begins to plague him in such a manner that, having come under conviction, he is happy to embrace the Redeemer by means of a conscious, living *faith*. Hence, the sequence *heart, conscience, faith* is entirely natural."

We need something else if we're go win the battle for truth: the right action, aim, and...

III. To win in the battle, we need the right assessment (6-7).

Listen to Paul's assessment of the false teachers in Ephesus: "Some have wandered away from these and 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."

How does false teaching get into the church, anyway? Where does it originate? In the biblical assessment, it's linked to two things.

A. False teaching is linked to wrong choices (6). What wrong choices did the false teachers make in the 1st Church of Ephesus? First...

1. *They turned from what pleases God.* Verse 6 indicates they "have wandered away from these." They've swerved. The Greek term means "to miss the mark." It's what happens when you're driving your car, and you throw your roadmap in the backseat thinking, "I don't need that!" And the next thing you know you're off track.

That's what false teachers do--they toss aside God's roadmap. Oh, they may not deny the Bible--they'd lose their audience if they did that--they just *ignore* the Bible.

Paul says they wander away "from these"--the goal of false teachers is not love marked by a pure heart, a clean conscience, and a sincere faith. As someone has observed

(MacArthur), their goal is to "fulfill their egos and to fill their pockets." It starts with a wrong choice--they choose to turn away from what pleases God. Next...

2. *They turned to what displeases God.* Verse 6 concludes: "Some have...turned to meaningless talk." The AV depicts it as "vain jangling." It's the idea of empty chatter, beautiful words that lack substance.

Here's the tragic choice. Certain people chose to turn from the kind of teaching that accomplishes God's work to the kind of teaching that impresses people, but is fruitless.

Someone has described it well (Hendriksen, 63): "The path which these people have taken is not even a detour. It is more like a dead-end street beyond which lies a swamp, in their case the swamp of 'futile talk,' useless reasoning, argumentation that gets nowhere..., dry as dust disputation...Yes, their vaunted learning has finally landed them in the no-man's land of ceremonious subtleties, in the dreary marsh of ridiculous hair-splitting. And the owner of the quagmire is. . . Satan, who heads the welcoming committee."

1 Timothy 6:3-5 tells what God thinks of the choices false teachers make: "If anyone teaches false doctrines and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain."

How else does false teaching get into the church? First, it's linked to wrong choices.

B. False teaching is linked to wrong desires (7). "They want to be teachers of the law [that's their desire, to be teachers], but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm." We learn two things about their desires.

1. *Their desire to teach is good.* They want to teach God's Law. That's okay. God gave the Law. Next time we'll explore Paul's discourse on the Law in verses 8-11. The problem wasn't the Law. The biggest problem had to do with their desires. Yes, their desire to teach is good, but...

2. *But they want to do it for self-promoting reasons.* The text says, "They do not know what they are talking about." Now, that's a problem! Have you ever been subjected to listen to a teacher who didn't know what he was talking about, but kept talking like he did?

Beloved, be careful. Just because someone has charisma is no guarantee he knows what he's talking about. Just because he talks loudly, or fluently, or has a colorful flow-chart doesn't mean anything. Our world is no different from Paul's--it's full of people who speak without thinking.

It's a strange thing, but opinions fly when you start talking about the Bible and religion. There are a lot of self-touted "experts" out there. William Barclay's observation is noteworthy (32-3):

"The strange thing about religious argument is that everyone thinks that he has a right to express a dogmatic opinion. In other fields we demand that a person should have a certain knowledge before he lays down the law. But there are those who dogmatize about the Bible and its teaching although they have never even tried to find out what the experts in language and history have said. It may well be that the Christian cause has suffered more from ignorant dogmatism than from anything else."

Ignorant dogmatism. That's what was happening at Ephesus.

Why do teachers teach and people tolerate such "vain jangling?" The fact is, it's appealing to the flesh. Wiersbe says it well (211), "The flesh loves religious legalism because rules and regulations enable a person to *appear* holy without really having to change his heart." Let's talk about implications. In practical terms what do you need to do in this battle for the truth?

Implications: Two commitments in the battle for the truth...

1. *Commit yourself to use the Scriptures.* We seem to have lost the sense of the seriousness of handling God's Word these days. John Knox knew it. This great, God-blessed, Scottish reformer understood the seriousness of preaching. When he was called forth to preach the gospel, he "burst forth in most abundant tears, and withdrew himself to his chamber. His countenance and behaviour, from that day till the day he was compelled to present himself to the public place of preaching did sufficiently declare the grief and trouble of his heart (Barclay, 50)."

D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, one of Britain's greatest preachers, knew it. He wrote that teaching the Word is such an awesome task that a godly man "shrinks from it. Nothing but this overwhelming sense of being called, and of compulsion, should ever lead anyone to preach (Stott, *Preachers and Preaching*, 107)."

In *The Preacher's Portrait*, John Stott comments (122): "I cannot help wondering if this may not be why there are so few preachers whom God is using today. There are plenty of popular preachers, but not many powerful ones, who preach in the power of the Spirit. Is it because the cost of such preaching is too great? It seems that the only preaching God honours, through which His wisdom and power are expressed, is the preaching of a man who is willing in himself to be both a weakling and a fool. God not only chooses weak and foolish people to save, but weak and foolish preachers through whom to save them, or at least preachers who are content to be weak and seem foolish in the eyes of the world. We are not always willing to pay this price. We are constantly tempted to covet a reputation as men of learning or men of influence; to seek honour in academic circles and compromise our old-fashioned message in order to do so; and to cultivate personal charm or forcefulness so as to sway the people committed to our care."

Will you commit yourself today to use the Scriptures? But not just use them...

2. *Commit yourself to use the Scriptures properly.* The false teachers in Ephesus were using the OT, but not properly. They were ignoring context, and using Bible verses to say what they wanted to say. We must resolve to use Scripture properly.

This applies to music, too. To quote Wiersbe again (211), "Far too many songs not only teach *no* doctrine, but many even teach *false* doctrines. A singer has no more right to sing a lie than a teacher has to teach a lie."

As a church, let's resolve to rightly divide the Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15). Whether you teach or sing or listen, commit yourself to using the Scriptures properly.