



O Timothy

1 TIMOTHY 6:20-21

Baxter T. Exum (#1512)
Four Lakes Church of Christ
Madison, Wisconsin
August 25, 2019

This morning, we come to the end of an extended series of lessons from the book of 1 Timothy. We started back on March 3, and this series has been a great blessing to me as a gospel preacher. I certainly hope that it has been helpful to you as well. Early on, we learned that Paul wrote the letter we now know as 1 Timothy from the city of Rome as he was chained to a soldier in his own rented apartment, in a scenario described for us in Acts 28. He's writing to Timothy, a young man he had sent to Ephesus to try to get that congregation back on track. We won't review everything we've studied over the past several months, but we should remember the theme, the main point of the whole book. Paul tells us the reason why he is writing in 1 Timothy 3:14-15, where he says, ***"I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth."*** So, Paul is writing Timothy, basically explaining how to behave as a part of God's family, how we need to be conducting ourselves in the household of God, the church of the living God. And the lessons we've studied since March have tied into that common theme.

What a blessing it has been to stay with one book of the Bible over the past few months, and I hope (looking back on it), that we appreciate what a blessing it has been. We've looked at a series of smaller chunks of scripture in context, and we have applied these passages to our lives today. I have appreciated the diversity of these lessons. In other words, even though it's all from the same letter, each lesson has been different as Paul moves through what Timothy needs to know (and what the church needs to know). The alternative is that I could have just made up a bunch of sermon topics over the past few months. But instead, we have allowed God's Holy Spirit to set our agenda through the written word over the past few months. And there is a value to that.

But again, the overall theme is the church and how we need to conduct ourselves in the household of God. The church is incredibly important in God's plan. The church is the Lord's body, his kingdom, and we as Christians are a part of it. I am very thankful that I had a good church experience growing up. Not all people can say that. I have an acquaintance online who is always posting about the church he grew up at - they were so legalistic, they were stuck in their traditions, they didn't understand grace - over and over and over again, he rails against his own religious heritage. And every time he says something like that, I am so thankful for the church where I grew up. I know they had a good preacher! The preacher's family was pretty cool and all. And

as a kid, I knew that the church would have issues here and there, but they were some good people. We had some good Bible class teachers, I grew up with a positive impression of the church as a whole, I learned from the singing and the preaching. I loved the fellowship. I loved the donuts at the men's business meetings. I loved the opportunities we had for service. I saw us help the poor. I saw us give rides to the elderly widows. And I also knew that the church itself stood for the truth of God's word. As a child, I saw qualified elders and deacons appointed. I saw church discipline carried out with love, and yet at the same time, it was also decisive. Any attempts to change the divine message were not tolerated. I certainly hope and pray that the children of this congregation will be able to look back with similar memories, because the church is important. And 1 Timothy addresses how the church needs to function.

So today, we come to the last two verses, and we have a final and very personal appeal. The picture on the wall up here, by the way, has nothing to do with the lesson! This is the view from my campsite last week. I usually leave the campground before sunrise every morning to go get breakfast. I figure I can endure anything at night if I know there's a good breakfast the next morning. So, after breakfast one morning, I come back through the campground, and this is what it looks like. So, we are just using this as a background this morning.

But even before we read the passage, I want us to look ahead and notice how Paul starts by saying, ***"O Timothy."*** Some translations handle this better than others, but that little word ***"O"*** is in the original text. Paul always closes his letters with some very personal comments, in his own handwriting. We know that he used basically a secretary to actually do the writing in most of his letters. We've just finished a study of Romans in our Sunday morning class. We might not realize that Paul didn't actually "write" the book of Romans. He dictated it. In Romans 16:22, the Bible says, ***"I, Tertius, who write this letter, greet you in the Lord."*** So, the secretary (or "amanuensis," as he is known) inserts his own personal greeting near the end of Romans. Paul would basically dictate the inspired message to somebody, perhaps because Paul had some very bad eyesight. In Galatians 6:11, for example, right near the end of that book, there is a shift in the letter as he says, ***"See with what large letters I am writing to you with my own hand."*** In other words, if you were reading the original handwritten letter, you would have seen a change in the handwriting. We see something similar in 2 Thessalonians 3:17, where he says, ***"I, Paul, write this greeting with my own hand, and this is a distinguishing mark in every letter; this is the way I write."*** And that seems to be what we have near the end of 1 Timothy as it gets very personal, ***"O Timothy...."*** This is an intensely personal request at the very end. This is important. So, let us pay very careful attention this morning to what it is that Paul wants Timothy to do, and as we finish this letter today, let us do everything we can to apply Paul's words to our congregation here in Madison. Notice, please, 1 Timothy 6:20-21,

²⁰ O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"— ²¹ which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

As we study these last few words in 1 Timothy, I want us to notice two commands, two instructions here...

I. ...and it starts in verse 20 as Paul wants Timothy to **GUARD** what has been entrusted to him.

He is to ***"guard the deposit,"*** as some translations might have it. We think of guarding a deposit, and we think of putting our money in the bank, or maybe we think of a safe deposit box. We take something that is valuable to us, and we entrust it to someone who is able to protect it. Some of you know that the church has a safe deposit box. Stuart and I went and looked through that box a few years ago, and it was so interesting. We

didn't have the time to look through everything, but there were some important documents in there - old financial records, the incorporation papers, the bylaws, minutes from various meetings, and so on. And we keep those things there, because those records are important. We don't want those things to get lost. We don't want those things to get destroyed in a fire or a flood here in this building. And so we took those items and deposited them in a safe place. We entrusted them to a bank, and they are now responsible for making sure that those items are protected. And in a sense, that is what Paul is laying on Timothy. Timothy is to guard what has been entrusted to him, and it is a sacred trust.

So now, the question is: What is it that Paul is entrusting to Timothy? What is it that Paul wants Timothy to guard? What is it that he needs to be protecting? He doesn't identify it specifically in this passage, but this is the value of looking at this book in context, because as we back up a bit, it's rather obvious that Paul wants Timothy to guard and protect the message from God. He has been entrusted with the gospel. Over and over again in this book, Paul has commanded Timothy to protect and defend the truth of God's word - in Chapter 1, in Chapter 2, in Chapter 3, and throughout this book. It's even in the theme verse we read just a bit ago, with the reminder that the church is the **"pillar and support of the truth."** Timothy, then, as a gospel preacher, is given the mission of protecting the truth. His job is to guard this deposit. He has received a message from God through Paul, and his job is to stay faithful to it. His job is to preach it without changing it.

Even looking forward a short time to Paul's next letter to Timothy, we can skip ahead to 2 Timothy 1:13-14. As Paul writes about the gospel, he says, **"Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to you."** So, Timothy is to guard the message that has been entrusted to him. His job, his only mission as a gospel preacher, is to protect and preach the gospel. He is to protect the message from anybody who might try to change it. This is why Paul has been so concerned in this letter about the danger of false teachers. This is why he has been so concerned about the role of men and women in the church. This is why he has been so concerned about the qualifications for elders and deacons. This is why he has been so concerned about the role of the preacher. It is vitally important that Timothy, as the preacher, guard this deposit that has been made. His job is to protect the message. His job is to keep it pure.

Satan, of course, has launched an all-out attack on truth itself. All around us, the world tries to convince us that what is true for us might not be true for them, that truth is relative, that there is no such thing as absolute truth. But this is not a new problem. This twisting of God's message goes all the way back to the beginning, doesn't it? God told Adam not to eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Satan took that message and tweaked it a bit. In a sense, he made it more severe. Satan tried to get Eve to think that God had said that if she **"touched"** it she would die. God never said that. Satan, then, was trying to make God seem unreasonable. And Eve fell for it. Satan, then, has been assaulting the truth almost from the very beginning. As God's people, then, our job is to counteract that assault. Our job is to know the word, to protect it, and to preach and teach it in its purity. We are to guard this treasure that has been entrusted to us.

It is amazing that this needs to be said, and yet it is even more true today than it was back then: Some, in the name of God, have tampered with the divine message. They have changed it, they have ignored certain parts of it, and they have replaced the preaching of the gospel with stupid and meaningless words. And this leads to the rest of this passage...

II. **...because we continue and we find that not only are we to guard the word, but we are to AVOID WORLDLY AND EMPTY CHATTER, WE ARE TO AVOID THE OPPOSING ARGUMENTS OF WHAT IS FALSELY CALLED "KNOWLEDGE."**

The word ***"worldly"*** goes back to a word that was sometimes used to refer to things that were not considered holy or special in some kind of temple. It's the idea of "common." ***"Empty chatter"*** is just that - words that don't matter. Going on and on about nothing. Some of you know I can't stand morning drive radio. It drives me nuts. If I have to drive anywhere in the morning, I just about lose it trying to find something on the radio - stupid, meaningless conversations. It's hard to even find straight up news these days. And FM is a thousand times worse. Everywhere you turn - meaningless conversations, celebrity gossip, profane discussions, empty chatter. Sometimes this happens in families, where we go on and on and even argue about things that don't matter. It happens at work. It happens everywhere. But Paul's big concern here is that it must not happen in the church. Timothy is to guard the deposit, and he is to avoid getting caught up in worldly and empty chatter.

Even religious discussions can very easily drift into ridiculousness, especially if we allow ourselves to wander away from the word of God. Some of you know that I found an awesome breakfast place near my campsite down in Tennessee last week. It's actually a combination of a gas station, bait shop, and grill - those are the best places! But I would get there when they opened at 6 a.m., and I made some friends among the locals, and as soon as they found out I was a preacher, they had all kinds of questions and comments. And we had some good discussions. There was a really nice guy there, though, who started talking about how he would see visions, and the Spirit would speak to him directly. And at that point, discussions on faith get a little weird, don't they? Because if he is claiming that the Spirit tells him one thing, but the Bible says something else, somebody is wrong. Apparently, the Spirit told him to empty his bank account to go buy a guitar! But it is really difficult to establish right and wrong if we do not share a common authority. And this seems to be what Paul is warning about here: Guard what has been entrusted to you (the word of God), and avoid worldly and empty chatter. Avoid that which is ***"falsely called knowledge."*** Notice: Paul is not opposed to knowledge! Instead, he is opposed to what is falsely called ***"knowledge."*** Some people will come in, appearing to be very knowledgeable about some things, but what they are teaching is not true. According to verse 21, they have ***"gone astray from the faith."*** To ***"go astray"*** is to miss the mark. The word Paul uses here was used to describe an arrow missing a target. If we get caught up in these worldly and empty words, we can end up missing the target completely. And Timothy is not to get caught up in that. He is to guard the word of God, and he is to avoid anything that might pull him away from it. And it is incredibly important. If we as God's people do not keep the deposit, we are like a bank that loses those things that are entrusted to its care. We have missed the point completely.

Conclusion:

As we come to the end of this book, we find that Paul closes with the words, ***"Grace be with you."*** And the word ***"you"*** here is plural, reminding us that although the letter is addressed to Timothy, Paul expected many others to read it - the elders of the church in Ephesus, the congregation itself, and certainly many other congregations as the letter was copied and passed around almost immediately. Paul is reminding them here that guarding the deposit and turning away from worldly and empty chatter is a group effort. As a church, our mission is to hold on to the word of God, to protect it, to guard it, and to turn away from anything that might threaten to pull us away from it.

As a congregation, we guard what has been entrusted to us by honoring the word of God in everything we do. When we come together to study the Bible, we had better study the Bible! When a man gets up to preach, that lesson had better come from the word of God. As elders, we need to make sure the church is continually fed on the unadulterated word; otherwise, we have lost our right to exist as a congregation. As individuals, we guard what has been entrusted to us by honoring the word in our own lives. We read it, we study it, we appreciate it, we love it, and we allow it to change our lives. We obey it. As Jesus said to his followers in John 8:31, ***"If you continue in My word, then you are truly disciples of Mine."*** As individuals, we want to be disciples of Christ, and as a group, our goal is to be a church of Christ, a church belonging to Jesus, a church dedicated to keeping the deposit of scripture that has been entrusted to us.

As a church of Christ, we invite all people to obey the gospel, to join us in this quest to know Jesus more and more every day and to follow him to the best of our ability. We fail. We are mere human beings. But our goal is to be like him the best we can. We know from scripture that God sent his Son Jesus as a sacrifice for sin. Once we get to a point in life where we have sinned, then we must do what he has told us to do in scripture. We respond to God's love by turning away from sin, by publicly confessing Jesus as the Son of God, and by allowing ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism, for the forgiveness of our sins. We are then born into God's family, the church. If you would like to study this further, if you have any questions at all, we would ask that you pull one of us aside after the service today, and we would be happy to look into the word of God with you. But if you already know what you need to do, and if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing together...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com