

# PM 1 Timothy 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Holy and inspired word, and we are looking this evening at the first letter of Paul to Timothy, chapter 1, and as in the notices, this will be page 1193, as I found on page 1193 of the Church Bibles.

Paul opens his letter.

So that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations, rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

Now, we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully. Understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatsoever else is contrary to sound doctrine.

[ 2 : 02 ] In accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted. I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.

Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent, but I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Christ Jesus might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life.

To the king of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory for ever and ever.

Amen. This charge I instruct to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

[ 3 : 30 ] By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

We thank God for his holy word and pray that it may be grafted into our hearts, that through it we may be changed. Apostle Paul wrote this charge I instruct to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, holding faith and a good conscience.

In his introduction to 3 John, the American Presbyterian Graham Macken, who died in 1937, wrote, Despite its individual address and private character, the third letter of John is not an ordinary private letter.

Like all the books of the New Testament, it has a message for the entire church. It will come as no surprise to you, friends, I believe this to be very true.

And while it's undeniable that what we now know as 1 Timothy was originally written by Paul to a young man called Timothy, who lived some 2,000 years ago, we should not for one moment think that its relevance to us today is limited.

[ 5 : 03 ] In this sermon, I'm endeavouring actually to pick up from a sermon I heard about a month ago now by the Reverend John Fairfull at Dow and Vale, in which he introduced his hearers to the encouraging promise that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, verse 15 of our reading.

In his sermon, we were reminded of Paul's miraculous conversion and left with some great words of comfort and encouragement. Those who fear God cannot save them would do well to remember the case of Paul.

What a wonderful way that was with which to end worship on that particular Lord's Day, and I hope an encouraging way for us to begin this Lord's Day. Because in our reading, particularly at the end passage, verses 18 through to 20, we were presented with a rather worrying declaration concerning Hymenaeus and Alexander.

These two men are clearly in great trouble, and while we can't be certain of exactly what they've done, we can give it a pretty good guess.

In 2 Timothy chapter 4, verse 14, Paul writes, Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm. The Lord will repay him according to his deeds.

[ 6 : 33 ] While a couple of chapters earlier, in 2 Timothy 2, verse 16, we read that Hymenaeus engaged in irreverent babble, meaning, as we see two verses later, that he swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened.

Now, Ellicott, the 19th century theologian, explains that this resurrection that they claimed had already happened was not the resurrection of Christ, which you and I would say has already happened and would agree, but was actually referring to the resurrection of dead men and women at the last day, which Jesus described in John's Gospel, when he said, Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when those who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.

This false belief, this belief that this bodily resurrection of mankind has already happened, says Paul in verse 19, means that Hymenaeus and Alexander had made shipwrecks of their faith.

They hit the rocks. They are floundering. They are going down. In many ways, they are so close.

And yet, with one misguided move, they have left the safety of the open water and crashed into the immovable object.

They are going down. It is Hymenaeus and Alexander, says Paul just one verse later, who need to learn not to blaspheme.

[ 8 : 17 ] I don't know about you, friends, but I found this word blaspheme to be quite an interesting one. False belief is not what I usually associate with blasphemy.

My experience of blasphemy normally comes from walking down Sottlyhall Street in Glasgow late at night or sitting behind a group of schoolchildren on the number four bus.

My general exposure to blasphemy comes with people swearing and cursing, saying Jesus Christ more than they would if they were a nun in a convent. So, as a good academic, my first response to this was to turn to the dictionary to define my terms, as it were.

The Oxford English Dictionary describes blasphemy as speech, thought or actions, displaying contempt or irreverence for God, sacred or holy things, or people or religion.

And this would appear to agree with my thought. However, it's interesting to see how this definition includes contempt for, or irreverence for, holy things.

[ 9 : 24 ] Maybe you'll recall, if you've ever read the book of Daniel in the Old Testament, how King Belshazzar commanded that the vessels of gold and of silver that Nebuchadnezzar, his father, had taken out of the temple in Jerusalem, be bought, I'm quoting here, that the king and his lords, his wives and his concubines might drink from them.

Just as we know within ourselves, that taking the communion silverware from church along to the pub and asking the barmaid to pour us a pint in them would be wrong, even though they're just bits of silverware, it would be disrespectful to God.

So too, Belshazzar taking the silverware from the temple and using it in his orgy or party was equally wrong. And not only was it wrong, it was blasphemous.

Exodus chapter 20, the Ten Commandments, instructs us that you shall not take the name of your Lord in vain, with a warning that the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes his name in vain.

This is a clear instruction and a warning to us that using names such as God and Jesus in inappropriate ways is simply unacceptable to the Lord.

[10:43] After all, God's name is supremely important and we should not be invoking it as a swear word. We can just think how wrong it would be to use your grandmother's name in a swearing session, then think how wrong it would be to use the name of God in a similar way.

However, as we know, blasphemy is about far more than saying OMG. We know this because Paul describes Hymenaeus' false belief as blasphemy.

But also, because of something Paul said about himself, only a few verses earlier. In 1 Timothy chapter 1 at verse 13, we hear Paul say, Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

Here, Paul is describing the life of Saul, his former self. Saul, as we know, was a nasty piece of work. He gave his all to persecuting Christians and stamping on the fledgling faith.

However, Saul was also a devout Jew. Paul tells us in Philippians that he was circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews.

[11:58] As to the law, a Pharisee. As to zeal, a persecutor of the church. As to righteousness under the law, blameless. Paul would never, in a million years, have taken the name of God in vain any more than he would have eaten pork or broken the Sabbath.

Blasphemy is clearly about more than that if Paul had fallen foul of it. Blasphemy, as we can see from the case of Hymenaeus, is also the act of misappropriating the name of God.

Applying it, if you like, to things that God would not condone. It is the act of saying that God would, or wouldn't, accept a certain behaviour or belief.

In Hymenaeus' case, the blasphemy was declaring, or teaching, that the bodily resurrection of the dead, which we believe will not happen until our Lord Jesus returns, has already happened.

We've no reason to believe that Hymenaeus was shouting OMG, or declaring Jesus Christ when he stubbed his toe, but his blasphemy was every bit as real, and every bit as dangerous.

[13:13] I wonder, friends, and I speak to myself as well as you this evening, whether we have ever known ourselves to misrepresent our faith, to perhaps put a gloss on our faith, maybe make it more palatable to those around us.

Perhaps we've tried to tone down some of the moral absolutes of our faith, make it sound more easygoing. Maybe, in a misguided attempt to encourage people into church and into the faith, we have underplayed some of the, more, to the world at least, challenging beliefs that we hold.

There's no doubt, I confess before you all, that at times I have been guilty of this. In trying to make the faith of Christ more easily acceptable to outsiders, I fear I have misrepresented parts of it.

I have, therefore, blasphemed. Maybe you have too. The question I should ask myself, as Paul instructs Timothy in 2 Timothy 2.15, is, have I rightly handled the word of truth?

And have I avoided irreverent babble? For it will lead people into more and more ungodliness. That is something of a challenge for us, isn't it?

[14:45] For what may have begun as a well-meant attempt to encourage people towards Christ, risks leading to more and more ungodliness. This is why Paul, indeed, why God is so firm on blasphemy.

It is a canker, says Paul, that will spread like gangrene. And indeed, it's my sincere prayer tonight as I speak that the Lord would keep me on the path of truth and righteousness.

And that should be the prayer for all of us as we look toward the coming week. That we may present the gospel in an unabridged, unadulterated form.

This echoes Paul's instruction in 1 Timothy 1, verse 3, to charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine. Perhaps, if you are like me, you found it a little difficult to understand what Paul was meaning when in verse 20 of our reading, he explained that he had handed Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

In my mind, that raises a lot of questions. On the first read, a perfunctory glance, it does rather sound like Paul has given up on them.

[16:04] He's transferred them to another department. He transferred them to Satan as if he were a call centre operative passing you on to get rid of you. One commentator suggested that when Paul declared he'd handed them over to Satan, it meant that he'd stayed away from them so that God could deal with them.

The point, he suggests, of Paul's action is not to punish but to inspire repentance or reconciliation. Another commentator compares this to a reading from 1 Corinthians which we'll see in a moment and explains that the reason that Paul meets out such a harsh apostolic judgment is for the benefit

of all involved.

The church would be purified and the erring individuals would be brought into repentance. The goal for Hymenaeus and Alexander would be that they were taught not to blaspheme.

A further commentator questions whether Paul was actually referring to a Jewish and indeed historically Christian practice of excommunication. Explaining this he writes according to synagogue practice if a man was an evildoer he was first publicly rebuked.

If that proved ineffective he was banished from the synagogue for a period of thirty days. If he was still stubbornly unrepentant he was put under the ban which made him a person accused debarred from the society of men and the fellowship of God.

[ 17 : 33 ] In such a case he might be said to have been handed over to Satan. In 1 Corinthians we have another example of someone being handed over to Satan.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 5 at verse 5 where Paul writes you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

Now this was in response to a case of incest which was discovered in the Christian church in Corinth. Perhaps the idea was that the church should pray that through some sort of earthly suffering he might be brought to the senses of his mind.

Who knows? However, lest this sermon should become full of doom and gloom, let me take you back for a brief moment to that sermon of Mr. Fairfals I quoted at the beginning where we were reminded of those encouraging words of verse 15 the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

In this verse Paul describes himself as the foremost and yet he was shown great mercy at the hands of a great and merciful God.

[ 18 : 52 ] This should give anyone hope but perhaps especially the friends of Hymenaeus and Alexander and maybe even their modern day equivalents. If God could have mercy upon Saul that great murderer and opponent of the Christian church who even oversaw the murder and martyrdom of Stephen if Hymenaeus and Alexander would only come to their senses he would have mercy on them too.

As Mr. Fairfield said those who fear God cannot save them would do well to remember the case of Paul. Now amid all of the talk of Hymenaeus and Alexander Satan and blasphemy it would be understandable if you thought that this sermon was one of doom and gloom a yet another reminder of how sinful we are how much we fail God ourselves each other and that's it.

But friends do not despair for woven through our reading is a greatly encouraging thread which just needs to be unraveled.

You see alongside the warnings about Hymenaeus and Alexander the perils of blasphemy and the handing over to Satan is a piece of encouraging encouragement.

Paul instructs Timothy to continue to wage the good warfare holding faith in good conscience. As in verse 5 so here in verse 19 Paul links thoughts of faith and good conscience together.

[ 20 : 36 ] they are inseparable. Timothy is to wage the good warfare and when we consider all the talk that I've already covered we can see why Paul uses this phrase warfare.

It does sound a bit vicious and dangerous but let us not fail to notice what he wrote in the previous verse where he explained that this was all in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you.

In these nine words we see a very interesting story being told. For prophecies have been made about Timothy.

Now for prophecies to have been made about Timothy in this way there would have been a meeting of the prophets of the church. Only a few weeks ago in our midweek Bible study at Downman Vale we covered Ephesians chapter 4 and saw that God gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry.

And it is clear that this equipping is taking place here. Clearly this group of prophets had met together to discern how God was directing them to deal with the situation that was threatening the church and evidently came to the conclusion that Paul was the man to deal with it.

[ 22 : 08 ] This also happened in Acts chapter 13 where the fledgling church had to discern whether to take the gospel message to the Gentiles or simply restrict it for the Jews.

Timothy had been marked out by the prophets as the man to deal with the situation in the church. He may well have shrunk from the greatness of the task which faced him but Paul encouraged him

with a few considerations.

Firstly, Paul explains that Timothy has been chosen for the task not by men but by God. It would have been one thing if Paul had simply written a letter instructing Timothy to perform this role to do this task to deal with this problem but this instruction came from God through the gathered prophets.

History, church history tells us of a similar thing happening to John Knox. A lecturer in St. Andrews, people were urging him to become a preacher but he utterly refused alleging that he would not run where God had not called him.

However, on further prayer and reflection, the group still felt that the Lord had revealed it was his will for John Knox to become preacher.

[ 23 : 31 ] So gathered together in prayer and concluded after much prayer that they had to publicly charge him with the call. This they did on the following Sunday.

It would be like me standing here today pointing to one of you seemingly at random and say, I've got a message for you. God wants you to do this. While those who were gathered there in prayer would never have described themselves as prophets, it's clear from the annals of history that God had called John Knox to preach and maybe the word of the prophecy was what was needed to kick start him into action.

For John Knox did not want to answer the call. It took a group of people gathered together waiting on the word of God to discern what the next steps should be.

Knowing that he had been chosen by God for the task gave John Knox a fiery confidence, some would even say overconfidence, to bring about reformation in Scotland.

In a not too dissimilar way, Paul says to Timothy, you have been chosen. You cannot let down God and man. When God calls us to a responsibility or a task, let us take confidence from the knowledge that God has chosen us and called us for that specific purpose.

[ 25 : 01 ] We may not have the councils of prophets in our church anymore, but it is still the responsibility of Christian men and women to wait upon the Lord and to seek to do his will.

But what has Paul actually entrusted to Timothy? He has sent him, we read, to wage the good warfare, but has not left him defenseless.

For, in instructing him to fight, Paul has entrusted to him the weapons of faith and a good conscience.

If we look at these, it's just in reverse order, we can consider what a good defense, a good conscience is. Even on the mundane level, we know that when we do something right, it makes us feel good about ourselves.

When we do something wrong, something sinful, once the initial rush has disappeared, it leaves us feeling bad about ourselves, or unclean. as Christians, when we're following the wise instruction of God, obeying his laws and clinging firmly onto Jesus, we can do so, safe in the knowledge that we are doing the right thing.

[ 26 : 28 ] Jacqueline and I found this incredibly helpful when we moved up here. We lost a number of friends in our move. Some people who didn't approve of Jacqueline marrying me in the first place, but we won't go there.

And some people who didn't approve of us marrying and moving so far away from all the people we knew. Yet, deep down, we knew that it was what God had called us to do.

And through the difficulties that have followed, the ups and downs, the twists and turns of the Christian life, we have found such great comfort and solace in the knowledge that whatsoever the world may think of us, we know that we have made the decisions we've made, taken the steps we've taken, in accordance with what we felt God has called us to do.

Linked to this, Timothy, this Christian soldier, is to take faith. It may seem an obvious instruction, and perhaps it is, but let's consider how desolate our lives would be without this gift of faith.

I can stand here this evening and confidently say that I do not fear death. I can only say this because I believe in a God of eternal life. I can say, as did the psalmist, the Lord is on my side, I will not fear.

[ 27 : 51 ] What can man do to me? When we consider the warfare in Eastern Europe at the moment, soldiers fighting for Ukraine's freedom are fighting in the faith that they will succeed.

Of course they are. If they didn't think they would succeed, if they thought they were just going to be unnecessarily killed and then lose eventually, they would have given up months ago.

So too, as the Christian, we have the great encouragement of faith-fuelled hope, which tells us that whatever is going on around us, God's will, will come to pass.

All around him, Timothy was seeing people struggling and failing. He had just been warned of two notorious wrongdoers and had been tasked with rooting the problem out in his church.

He was a young man, thrust into a position of responsibility, and great was the price at stake. Yet Paul was encouraging him to hold fast to his saviour.

[ 29 : 00 ] As Macken said, like all the books of the New Testament, it has a message for the entire church. The message, although written for Timothy, is not just for Timothy, it is for you and me as well, friends.

Those of us sitting here this evening, the Christian who has just come to faith, or the Christian who has grown up in it, it's a message of encouragement, an encouragement to hold fast to our saviour. So, if you're listening to this, and you're an elder or a church leader, as indeed Timothy was, you may feel discouraged when you hear stories of yet another fallen pastor, another preacher embroiled in some scandal or other.

You may feel disheartened if people aren't responding to the gospel message in the way that you prayed they would. Be encouraged, and hold fast to God in faith and a good conscience.

If you are a young person, as Timothy was, you may be discouraged when you're around fellow young people at school, college, work, university, folk who don't believe.

[ 30 : 14 ] You may be tempted to live and behave as they do, tempted to be as they are. You may see them having great fun in indolent and ungodly lives, and who knows, from time to time, may be tempted to give it a go yourself.

Be encouraged, and hold fast to Christ in faith and a good conscience. If you are a new Christian, as Timothy may well have been given his age, you may be discouraged when you have your first, your second, your third, your twentieth setback in the faith.

You may have come to faith with other people. But be discouraged when they fall away or make shipwreck of their faith. Be encouraged, and hold fast to Christ in faith and a good conscience.

If you don't fall into any of those categories, but are a Christian, as indeed Timothy was, you may be discouraged when all around you see society turning away from Christ, Christ.

As you look at the Scotland of old, the land of the book, and see how far we've fallen, you may have children or other family members who do not believe. You may think that you are not doing enough to witness to other people.

[ 31 : 38 ] You may not think your prayer life is up to scratch. You may even wonder whether it is all worthwhile. friends, be encouraged, and hold fast to Christ in faith and a good conscience.

But how? I can hear you crying in your hearts. In this world of despair and darkness, can we be encouraged and hold fast to Christ? For this, I ask you to indulge me in just yet one more illustration.

Back down in Essex, my father, has a little boat. It's about 17 feet long. It's painted bright yellow. It's moored just off the coast of an island town called Mersey.

When he returns from a sail, he ties it to a buoy, which is anchored to the seabed. He gets back onto dry land and trusts that that buoy will hold fast.

He goes about his daily work. He knows that in good times and bad, that little boat remains attached to that little buoy, which is attached firmly to the ocean bed.

[ 32 : 51 ] As the sea rises and falls, as the sun scorches and the wild winds blow, the little boat remains firmly anchored in its place. Not once in all the years he has owned the boat has it slipped its mooring.

We can remember the words of Hebrews chapter 6 at verse 19, and you're seeing my boys' brigade side coming out now, where we read, we have Jesus as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul.

And so I leave you with this thought, friends. In the crazy world in which we live, are you clinging to your anchor in Jesus Christ?

Are the winds blowing all around you? Are the currents threatening to drag you out to sea? Are you surrounded by people who have taken the wrong path?

And are you tempted to follow them? Are you seeing the journeys that they're taking and despairing that you can do little to help? As you look back over the last year, do you see a time of great joy and jubilation, or do you see a time of misery and sadness?

[ 34 : 09 ] Is it all too much? Take Paul's advice. Cling tight to your faith and good conscience.

Hold firm to your anchor in Jesus Christ, for he is a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, and he will never slip.

And now to him alone be all glory, this night and forevermore. Amen.