

How to Love Unbelievers

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[0 : 00] Church is helping to train pastors in Romania and in the Middle East and in Mongolia! You're helping to raise up missionaries to go to different places.

! When I hear what Walid has done among the Muslims and others and what Doug is doing, and I know what is happening in Romania, and the fact that you have a huge part in that, in supporting all of us to be able to be there, and then in your prayers, you are a part of that.

And I hope you feel that this week, that this has been a chance for you to be encouraged, what God has done through you and through your prayers. And I just praise God for you, and I hope you've been encouraged by that. You are allowed to amen to that, by the way.

You know, as I prepared the sermon, I asked my family. They did not know what the theme of the conference was, but they knew what the sermon was that I wanted to bring forth to you this morning.

And they came up with How to Love the Unbeliever. Now, that's pretty close to the title of the conference, isn't it? And so I believe that God has put this together for this conference, and I want to share it with you.

[1 : 08] If you will turn in your Bibles to the book of 1 Timothy, I'm going to have you follow along with me. But I want to start with a way of introduction about some things that sometimes we have Christianese, that we're so used to, words we're so accustomed to, that I just want to clarify one of those before we get started, and that's the word lost.

Loving the lost. Now, to those of us who are believers in Jesus Christ, who realize that at some point in our life we were lost, we were dead in our sins, we did not know what to do, how to handle this debt of sin, what it was going to mean for the future, and then the truth was brought to us, and we received Jesus Christ, the word lost to us almost has an endearing term of, I was lost, but now I'm found, and we're not embarrassed.

It brings memories of grace to us. But what about to the lost person? When we say we're here to love the lost, and if you're sitting here today, and I hope there are several here today, that need Jesus Christ, and you hear us talk about the word lost, what does that mean to you?

There are two responses that you can have to that. To the person who realizes they're lost, we're kind of glad that somebody recognizes we're lost. You ever been lost driving, and you have that look on your face like...

And somebody walks up and says, excuse me, are you lost? That moment of relief that somebody recognizes I'm lost, and they must, if they're asking, they have an answer.

[2 : 47] You understand? But at the same moment, you're not like, yes, I'm lost. It's that, yeah. There is an issue of humility that comes with that.

When you recognize you're lost, you're glad that there's an answer, but there's a humility, a humbleness that you feel, because you know you're lost.

What about to the lost person who doesn't know they're lost? Ever been there? I've done that, driving in a bad snowstorm. Actually, my son was driving. He was 16, and I wanted him to have winter experience.

And so we were driving through a Chicago blizzard, headed up north, and we were going to go skiing. After a men's retreat, we were headed north, we were going to go skiing in Cadillac, Michigan. So we're driving, and we're just, we had the GPS on, and it was in the back on a laptop computer with a little thing that sat on, a Bluetooth thing that sat on the dash.

And we just, I said, Dave, just drive. Now snow is coming. And it was great for him to drive, because nobody else was on the road. They were smart. So we're driving, and we went about 45 minutes where we saw nobody.

[4 : 00] I mean, there were car tire marks on the road, and then there were car and truck tire marks on the road. Then there were just truck tire marks on the road. Then there were truck marks and snowmobile tracks on the road.

Then there were just snowmobile tracks, and then they quit. And we're still driving. I thought I knew where we were. And he said, it was about eight inches of snow now, and he's got to keep it up to 45 miles an hour in the snow to keep moving.

He goes, Dad, I don't know if I can do this much longer. And I said, all right, I'll drive. And I looked back at the GPS, because we were waiting for it to talk to me and tell us when to turn. And it said, GPS signal lost 45 minutes ago.

Okay, so I was lost and didn't know it. So suppose for a minute somebody comes to you and says, oh, are you lost? And they recognize you're in the wrong area.

But you don't think so. There's not that humble, oh, yes. It's like, what are you talking about? I know what I'm doing. I know where I'm going. The word lost becomes offensive. You understand?

[5 : 02] So what I want you to know that when we say lost, we're not here to offend you. But if you don't know Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, that is a term that we believe identifies you.

And we hope that you will recognize by that sentence, loving the lost. We're not condemning you for being lost. We're loving you because of that position. And I hope you understand that as we go into today's sermon.

We've heard a lot in the last few days about what God is doing. And I had one person tell me, he said, when you guys start listing the things that you're doing, we know you're not telling us everything.

We get tired listening. Do you think that we ever get weary doing missionary work? Do you ever get tired doing the work that God's called you to do right here?

The answer to that is absolutely. I want you to look at 1 Timothy in chapter 1. I believe Timothy was in a state like that. Now when we read this, starting with verse 1, it says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by the command of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true son in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

[6 : 14] As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus, so that you may command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

These promote controversies rather than God's work, which is by faith. Now does it tell us in that verse, or in those verses, the mental state or the emotional state of Timothy?

Does it say anything about that? No. Then why is it that I think he was about ready to give up and throw in the towel? Now, what was Paul urging him to do?

I had to stay there. Well, if Paul is urging him to stay there, what might Timothy be thinking about doing? Not staying there, right? Now this is the first time that Paul has had to say this to Timothy, right?

What did the verse say? As I urged you before, right? So is this the first time Paul's had to bring this up to Timothy?

[7 : 23] It's at least the second time, right? So at least twice now, Paul has come to Timothy and said, Timothy, Timothy, as I told you before, my dear son in the Lord, stay there.

Don't leave. Now, why was Timothy even interested in leaving? Did you know that most missionaries that come off the field, when it's because a lot of it's sometimes health reasons and other things, very rarely is it because of conflict with nationals.

You know, usually it's conflict with other missionaries. Did you know that? That that's where a lot of the conflicts happen. You know, when you talk about ministers who are burned out, rarely are they burned out because there's just so much happening that's good and so much fruit is being produced that it burns them out.

Usually it's when they're working and working and working and they're not able to see the fruit yet. And sometimes it just, you have to till that ground because it's hard and you've got to fertilize it and you have to persevere and you've got to stick to it.

Not seeing immediate fruit does not mean you're in the wrong place. But when you work and you work and you work and you don't see the fruit and you're like, what is this ever going to quit? That's when it's easy to face burnout.

[8 : 38] And Timothy, I believe, since it's the same issue coming up, had dealt with these people that were in his church, that were teaching false doctrines, that he's dealing with this problem.

He's like, at some point, I can't seem to get through to them. I give up. I'm done. I want to go. And he was burned out. He was tired.

Paul comes in and he says, I urge you, Timothy, as I did before. I'm going to try to encourage you, Timothy. I want you to stay there. I know it's tough. But this is what God has called you to do.

Timothy, stay there. Stay there and do what? Like, learn to tolerate them? Is that what it says? Stay there and learn tolerance, Timothy, because then everyone will be happy.

He says, stay there and command them. It's a very authoritative word. There are many words in the New Testament translated into the English word command.

[9 : 39] And this one is a very authoritative military command. Command them to stop teaching the false doctrine. Timothy, get a handle on the situation. I know it's hard.

I know you're worn out. I know you don't want to get into that battle again. You don't think you're going to win. But Timothy, Paul says, my dear son in the faith, get in there and win this one. Defend the faith.

And if you look at 1 and 2 Timothy, the theme throughout both of these is doctrine. And how important doctrine and true doctrine is and how it relates to the way we live our Christian life. Now, all that is background for what I want to talk to you about this morning.

A key verse for me is in verse 5. It says, the goal of this command is what? I want you to say it.

The goal of this command is love. Which command? The command to stay there and deal with the problem? Did Paul command Timothy to stay there?

[10 : 44] No, he didn't command him. What did he do? He urged him. What's the only command here? Commanding the false teachers to stop teaching false doctrine.

The goal of that command is not so that ministry will be easier for you, Timothy, because they'll stop being the resistance. The goal of the command is love.

Love for that person who right now seems to be your enemy. The one who's causing you the problems. Do you know anybody like that? That causes problems? That in your way, when you're trying to do what's right and they're in your way?

You're like, oh God, if you would just remove them from the situation. Imagine, and Paul tells Timothy, Timothy, that the goal of commanding them to stop teaching false doctrine, to confront them and deal with what truth is, the goal of that command is love.

It's love. Keep reading. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart. Not one who's seeking its own comfort, its own desires, but one who's seeking the comfort or the desires or the needs of who?

[11 : 57] Someone else. And we're going to talk about who that someone else is in just a moment. It comes from a good conscience, knowing that you are standing clear before God in doing what you're supposed to do and of a sincere faith because, Timothy, you're going to have to look at these guys you don't think are ever going to change.

Man, they have dug in their heels and they're standing firm in their false doctrine and they're teaching other people and you've got to get in there and tell them to quit teaching other people. This is a church where you're going to teach the truth and you've got to get in there and tell them to stop. But, but, but Paul, you don't know these guys. Man, I've talked to them before and they don't listen. Well, listen, Timothy, you need to do this but you're going to have to do it with sincere faith.

Believing that God can change even those guys. Is there anybody that you know that is such a sinner you just can't believe that they would ever accept Jesus Christ?

Man, they're just so hard and fast in their ways. They're so dogmatic about what they believe. Believe me, God's changed worse.

[13 : 09] Do you believe that? Then do you believe that God can change that person you're thinking about? A sincere faith says, you know what, I'm going to go into this knowing it's not me that's ever going to change one person but God can change anyone.

And so this is what Paul is telling Timothy. He says, Timothy, the goal of this is love. Now I want you to see how Paul teaches Timothy to love this enemy or these enemies that are against him.

Look at verse 6. Some have wandered away and have turned to me to this talk. Now watch this, verse 7. They want to be teachers of the law but they don't know what they're talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

They want to be teachers of what? The law. Who's talking here? Paul. Does Paul know anything about being a teacher of the law?

What had Paul become? I mean, back when he was Saul, before he was Paul, everything these guys ever dream of being, he's already been there, done that.

[14:19] Right? They're hoping, they're hoping to be teachers of the law and Paul says, I was a teacher of the law and I went as high as you could get. Now when he describes these guys, how does he describe them?

They want to be teachers of the law but they don't know what they're talking about. Isn't that what he says? They're acting in ignorance.

What was the attitude of Jesus towards the soldiers that beat him when he was on the cross?

Father, forgive them. They don't know what they're doing.

They're acting in ignorance. How does Paul describe himself at the time he was a teacher of the law? If we look down to verse 12, I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me faithful appointing me to his service even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man.

When was he those three things? When he was a teacher of the law. Right? So speaking of that time, he says, I was shown mercy because I acted how?

[15:43] In ignorance and unbelief. Paul says, Timothy, my son, do you love me? Yes, Paul. You're like a father to me. Okay, then listen, I'm telling you, you gotta put a stop to what they're doing.

But not for your sake, Timothy, but for their sake. It's not so your ministry will be easier, so your church will flourish and ministries are gonna go without opposition, but for their sake, Timothy. Can you love those guys because they're doing wrong? Because they're doing wrong because they don't know any better. I didn't know better when I was doing exactly what they're doing.

What did he do? He just took the face off of those unbelievers and put his own face in front of Timothy. You see that? He says, Timothy, do you understand?

You love me. We're like this. Take that love and look at the other guys who were in the same position I was in when somebody loved me, when Jesus Christ loved me and brought his grace to me and when he changed me.

[17:01] Was Paul still what those guys are or had he changed? Oh, he changed. Now, Timothy liked Paul. You see why it takes a sincere faith and a pure heart and a clear conscience to look at those guys and instead of seeing them for who they are, see them for who they could be?

Listen, that's how you love the lost. We get so wrapped up in what they're doing to us, we can't love them. But if we can let go of that and begin to see them for who God sees they could be, if we share the gospel with them and if God gets a hold of their life and if God can change them and if grace comes on them, what will they be?

I was at Liberty University just a couple weeks ago for their missions conference and the president of Wycliffe Translators was there and he posed this question and it hit me like a rock when he posed the question and the more I've thought about it, the more I can't, I can't even imagine it.

I go into countries where there is no gospel. You've got to understand that. They've never read the Bible. They don't know anything about God. I want you to imagine what your worldview of life, daily life, would be if you had no biblical principles, no understanding of God, no Bible verses, no godly person around you setting the example.

You had no Bible influence on your worldview. What would you be thinking like? We need to see those people and put ourselves in that position before we give up the opportunity to love them because had it not been for God being merciful and bringing his message to us, who would we be?

[18:57] We'd be no different and the way you're going to learn to love the lost is to see ourselves and what we would have been and that's what, that's exactly what Paul is doing. He says, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance.

In verse 14 now, 1 Timothy chapter 1, the grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

Remember, he's talking to Timothy. Now, I want you to think about this for a moment. Look back at verse 2. To Timothy, my true son in the faith, and then he gives his greeting.

What's it say? Grace? What? What's next? Mercy and peace. If you were to go back to Romans and 1 Corinthians and 2 Corinthians and Galatians and Ephesians and Philippians and Colossians,

every book, he has the same greeting.

Grace and peace. Grace and peace. Grace and peace. Grace and peace. Grace and peace. Not gravy and peas. Grace and peace.

[20 : 09] Grace and peace. Until he gets to this pastoral epistle, which, by the way, I think is a wrong name for it. He's not, he has a pastor, so I'm okay with calling it a pastoral epistle, but he was a missionary trained by Paul, moved around from Corinth to Ephesus.

He traveled with Paul, started a church in the home of Aquila Priscilla, which he's pastoring here in Ephesus when Paul writes him. So he's a missionary pastor. It's a missionary epistle if you ask me. And he gets to here and he says, I know what you're dealing with. I'm about to ask you to stay and deal with some people that are against you, so grace, mercy, and peace.

It's the first time he brings up mercy in his greeting like that. I don't know if it's because in order to deal with this, Timothy, you're going to need the mercy of God, or if it's, you're going to need God's mercy to deal with those people, or if it's both.

But God's mercy is a huge part of this, and he says, in verse 15 now, here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. The Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, the lost, those people that realize they're lost and they're looking for a way like Cornelius or the Ethiopian eunuch who realized something was missing and they knew they were lost and can't somebody show me the way?

[21 : 40] To Saul, who was on the road to kill other Christians and didn't know he was lost and thought he was doing the right thing because out of unbelief he was ignorant of the truth.

And if you'd have told Paul, Saul, on that way before the Lord showed up to him on Damascus, Saul, you are lost, brother. He would not have been humble and said, well then thank you for showing me the way.

He just said, who are you to tell me I'm lost? Right? So from extreme to extreme God is ready to reach all of them and Paul recognizes it now and he says, look at this, I love this.

He said, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst. Meaning to Timothy, stating very clearly to Timothy where on the scale of worst to easiest to deal with would his enemies be above or below Paul?

Timothy, you're mad at those guys. Listen to me. You would not have liked me. You see what he's doing? He's putting himself in the position of the lost, making Timothy look at him.

[23 : 02] I want you to see when Paul does this and when we do this, when we humble ourselves enough to do what Paul is doing, it will drive us to love the lost because there's no mistaking in this passage Paul loves the lost.

Right? But look what else it does when we're willing to humble ourselves this way. He says, verse 16, but for that very reason I was shown, there's our word again, mercy, so that in me the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life.

He's saying, look, I was the one called out in class where the teacher uses an example. Anybody like to be that student? I always found a way to be that student.

I don't know why or what I did. I didn't like it. It's not enjoyable when we're called the example of wrongdoing. But instead of hiding from that, Paul doesn't say, yeah, and I'm glad he saved me, but man, those are really rough years for me.

because Paul focused on his sinful past and then the mercy that came upon him and the forgiveness of sins that was given to him, look what happens to him.

[24 : 29] He says, I'm going to read the last half of that verse again. It says, to be an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life, now to the king, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honored and glory forever and ever.

Amen. What happened? He's talking about how bad he was. And within two verses, he's, hey, God is awesome.

He's dancing. He's amen and amen and amen and amen. I could just see Paul writing a letter, breaking his pencil. Oh, give me another one. But a minute ago, he's talking about how he was an example of sinfulness.

But it caused him to think about the greatness of God. How often do you think about your past to remind you of what you were, not to be sorrowful in it, but to remember what God has done.

It's awesome. Are you grateful that God forgave you? I mean, I am. I hate the thought of what I would be without the biblical worldview of Jesus Christ and what he's done for me.

[25 : 43] There are lost people around you that don't have that. It's not that they've just rejected. Some have. But they don't even know what's being offered. And don't assume that your neighbor knows just because they live in America or just because they live next to you.

Or like Waleed said, with the church that was right down the street from his house, never shared the gospel with him until he walked in. They just assumed people around would know. Well, mm-mm.

So when you see that enemy and the harder they are to deal with, the more you need to look at yourself. Because the minute you realize I was bad and God saved me and there's people like Paul that are worse than me.

Paul admitted he was a worse sinner. And yet God reached them. I'm going to worship God because I can see ahead of time what God's going to do in the lives of those people. That's faith. It'd be a real hard job to be a missionary to people you absolutely knew are never going to receive Jesus Christ. We do it in the hope that they're going to because God's big enough to reach them. Not because we're smart enough to convince them but because God is big enough to reach them. [26 : 53] Does this make sense to you? We learn to love them because Paul said, of the worst of them that was me.

Timothy if you're going to hate those guys hate me first because I was worse and the only difference between me and them is God's grace which you had nothing to do with.

Will you change your attitude towards the lost? Instead of seeing them as in the way of the church and in the way of things and the way of ministry and the problems they cause you believe me these guys were causing real problems for Timothy in his church.

The problems are not going to go away. Will you get on your knees and say, oh God change my attitude towards them let me see myself in their shoes.

Let me see what I would have been had I not had the knowledge of scripture that they're missing. When Jesus said to the soldiers father forgive them they don't know what they're doing one could argue yes they did they tightened up their fist they pulled it back and as they swung it across his jaw did they not expect it to hurt?

[28 : 16] They knew what they were doing but did they really know the audacity that they had to be smiting the son of God? did they know that?

They didn't and Jesus in his infinite knowledge said oh I feel sorry for them because they don't realize what they're doing and he loved them while they beat him who are we to lose love for some lost person because they make life uncomfortable for us will you love the lost?

Let's pray dear heavenly father I want to thank you for the love that Paul displayed in this chapter the need to love the lost we don't love them by tolerating and allowing it to go by and not standing firm on the truth there is only one way to salvation through Jesus Christ Jesus said I am the way the truth and the life no one comes to the father but by me so Lord help us to stand in the truth but to love the sinner enough to tell them the gospel message while heads are bowed and eyes are closed I want to talk to you believers for a moment I believe we have believers here of all levels of maturity but I think every one of us every one of us including myself struggles with the love for the unbelievers that cause us problems

I first want you to talk to the Lord and ask him for forgiveness of that sin I believe it's a sin to hate the lost ask him for forgiveness for that and ask him to give you his heart of love and patience and understanding towards the unbeliever even when they are mistreating you unjustly and if the Lord lays on your heart a specific name and you can ask him to do that Lord lay on my heart a specific name if he puts on your heart or in your mind a specific name in a moment during the invitation I'm going to ask you to step forward and by coming forward and you can pray with somebody if you want or you can just stand here and pray to the Lord you can kneel at the stairs turn around kneel at the front row sit on the front row I don't care have a time of prayer with the

Lord and then go back to your seat but by doing so you are committing to the Lord that I will pray! for that person and I will seek an opportunity to share the gospel with that person within the next two weeks to a month I will pray about it and then I'm going to go and I'm going to talk to them I'm committing myself to do that by coming forward and praying and going back you are committing to the Lord that you are going to actively do something about that lost soul maybe this week has stirred someone else to say you know what I want to give my life to be a missionary if God wants

me and I'm going to head in that direction until God closes the door that challenge was given to me at 11 years old and I took it and I followed that and I pursued missions until God shut the door for a certain time and then eventually he opened it and now we're again right where he wants us to be that was done at 11 years old I didn't know for sure I would be a missionary but I told the [32 : 04] Lord if you want me to be I'm willing to go that could be a teenager youth it could be an adult it could be somebody already in a career who says okay Lord I'm willing to start looking at it and I'll head that way until you shut the door if that's a decision you're willing to make this morning I'm going to ask you to come forward and tell Pastor Kenoyer that this is a decision that you want to make I got one more I want to talk to the lost now and I say that term very endearingly not judgmentally do you need Jesus Christ he is a holy perfect God that hates sin and yet he's commanded us to love you because he loves you he sees that what you need was the knowledge and belief you needed the knowledge that Jesus Christ died on the cross paid for your sin rose from the dead out of love for you and offers the free gift of salvation and he just wants you to hear that and believe it will you accept that message today it's a simple thing and if that's a decision you're willing to make today

I want you to come forward and speak to me or Pastor Kenoyer and say I want to make that decision and we'll put you with somebody who will open up the scriptures and answer any question that you have so you can with 100% clarity make the decision to accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior and not be lost any longer but to be found and to be with us who rejoice that we understand we used to be lost but now we found the way through Jesus Christ as we stand together in just a moment I'm going to pray and then we're going to sing together during the song we're going to have an opportunity for you to come forward let's pray dear heavenly father I pray that you would help us to make decisions now before you commitments not just to hear it let it go in one ear and out another not to feel like we've been challenged but to make a decision to do something about it in this I pray in Jesus name amen stand together
God's put a matter on your heart that you need to care for publicly you or a brother give very pointed challenge and as we are singing if God lays that matter on your heart you come forward and settle that with him