

# The Goal of Doctrine

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Preacher: Cory Brock

[ 0 : 00 ] We're starting a new series this morning on the book of 1st Timothy, Paul's Letter to Timothy, and the title of the series is Life and the Family of God.

We've just finished a series on vision and values, our DNA, who we are, why God's put us right here on the royal mile in the city center to be committed to the Gospel for Edinburgh.

And in this letter, this is the very end of Paul's life when he's writing this. It's likely written either 63 or 64 AD. Paul's going to be murdered in 67 for his faith.

And so this is one of the very last things that he wrote, 1st and 2nd Timothy that we have. And it's all about life in the midst of the church family within the church. It's sort of Paul's instructions for life inside the local church and the church walls and what it should look like.

And so really we're just doing vision and values part two with a lot more detail and a lot longer because Paul's going to give us instructions here on worship, mission, community and discipleship over and over again.

[ 1 : 05 ] Now Paul in verse one says, I'm an apostle of Jesus by the command of God. And so he says, I've been given authority to speak to the church by God's pronouncement, by Jesus's command.

And you say, Paul, tell me in your great instruction book here what you want for the church, what you want for the life of our church family here. And he says, well, let me tell you the first thing, the apostle, the first thing he wants us to know is what truth is for.

That's what he says. And that's really the centerpiece of this passage, what truth is for. And we can't say everything about these 11 verses. There's so much we have to leave behind, but the very main point is to get at that.

What is truth for? And so two things this morning. First the problem with truth and secondly the goal of truth. So first the problem with truth.

If you've ever been around a church like today or if you've grown up in a church, especially a Protestant church or you've come into Christian faith and joined a church or been visiting a church for a long time, a Presbyterian church or free church, any Bible-believing church.

[ 2 : 21 ] One of the things that you may have heard, and this has been around for 500 years now, is that Protestant Christians have often been called people of the book.

And people of the book are truth people, people that are very serious about the truth. And St. Columba is a place for nearly two centuries now that's been very serious about the truth, about the truth as it comes out of God's word.

And so more than 150 years ago someone built this pulpit right behind me on Thomas Guthrie's plans that he brought back from the continent. And the symbolic value of it was to say we're serious about the truth, about the truth as it comes out of God's word.

And that's why a tall pulpit like that exists. People of the book are truth people. And that means that they're also doctrine people.

And Paul uses that word doctrine several times in this first 11 verses. And the word doctrine just simply means using the Bible to tell truths about God in your own native language.

[ 3 : 32 ] That's doctrine. Anytime you say a truth about God directed by the Bible in your own native language. And sometimes we copy doctrines straight out of the Bible.

We just take quotes from the Bible and put them right in our theology. Like nothing can separate you from the love of Jesus Christ. That's a quote from Paul. And that's a doctrine.

Sometimes we extrapolate truths, doctrines from the Bible that aren't there as quotes. Like to say we believe in God, Father, Son, and Spirit, the triune God.

God is Trinity. There's nowhere in the Bible that you can pull a quote that says God is Trinity, triune. But we learn that from the Bible. We extrapolate. Now, all this to say is that if you live in the same late modern world that I do, you know very well that doctrine is not popular.

That absolute truth statements are not popular at all in the time that we live. And one of the reasons for that is because of the immense influence of a philosopher, a guy named Michel Foucault, who lived in the middle of the 20th century and wrote philosophy then.

[ 4 : 41 ] Foucault, even if you've never heard of him, is really the father of saying something very important that's affected our current modern life. And this is what Foucault says. Foucault says that any attempt to speak doctrine, absolute truth statements, are attempts at seizing power.

And he says there are no absolute truths. We can't say that. And instead, what doctrine really is, is what people use to lord truth over others.

It's an attempt at what was made famous in that time, a power play, an attempt at seizing power.

Now, here's the tricky thing. Paul, I think Paul would say, we cannot dismiss that outright.

Because for example, in my home state where I grew up and where I've lived before coming back here, Mississippi, in the 19th century, pastors, Christians took the Bible and they pulled out of it statements of truth, so-called doctrines, in order to justify the slave trade that was happening at the time that led up to the Civil War.

And so they took Bible and they manipulated it and they wrote doctrine in order to make a power play, in order to convince people that what they were doing was not grievous but okay and sanctioned by God, right?

[ 6 : 03 ] Now Paul is addressing a problem like that here in 1 Timothy 1. And he is saying that people do bad things with doctrine.

People do bad things sometimes with truths and with doctrines. But unlike Foucault, Paul had a very simple distinction that was quite easy to make. And that's that the issue is never a question of whether or not truth exists or if there's access to it, but the issue is people.

Issues the human heart. Issues what we do with it. Now that's exactly what's going on here. Paul is writing to Timothy and Timothy is a young man.

We know he's probably about 20 years old. And we also know that Timothy has a stomach problem. Paul says in a couple different places that Timothy has issues. He has some kind of gastrointestinal issue that continues to plug him.

And we also know from some of the things that Paul says that Timothy is timid as a person. He's fearful. He's young. He's a leader in the church. And he has an air of timidity of fearfulness.

[ 7 : 07 ] And so we know Timothy is young, sick, and scared. And Paul says, Timothy, by my apostolic authority, verse 1, I charge you in the next verse.

I charge you, verse 3. I urge you. I'm giving you the heavenly commission that I'm giving to you. I'm giving you authority and extending authority. And Timothy, you're young, you're scared, and you're sick, but you've got authority from God to do what?

Verse 3, he says to deal with certain persons who are teaching ESV translates it different doctrine. I think it's very literally strange doctrine.

That's the charge. Okay. So certain persons are very likely elders in the church in Ephesus, where Timothy's living.

And what they've done is that they've taken the Christian faith and they've turned it into a power play. And they've manipulated it and they've added things to it. The gospel that Paul preached, they've begun to add things to it.

[ 8 : 13 ] And they're doing it, we're told, at the end of the book in 1 Timothy 6 for their own personal gain. And Paul says that they're selfish and conceited. And so we know that they're doing it in some sense for their own personal gain.

Now it's hard to say exactly what they were teaching, but we know at least has three things, three elements to it. The first is they were teaching, quote, strange doctrine.

That word in verse 3 is actually a word that Paul makes up. It doesn't show up anywhere outside the New Testament at all, outside Paul's writing. He creates it.

And it translates to something like strange doctrine. And then you say, well, what about it, Paul?

Well, the very next verse he says, he makes it clear, verse 4. They're devoting themselves to myths and to endless genealogies which promote speculation.

So in other words, they're taking Jesus in the gospel and they're probably taking mythologies that arose in the time between the Old Testament and New Testament, that 400 year space.

[ 9 : 14 ] And genealogical speculation, all sorts of speculation about angels and astrology was quite often practiced in the midst of this. And they're adding all of this strange stuff to the Christian faith and they're missing the point altogether.

And then the second thing they're doing, we're told, is they're adding the law. We know this from several different places. That's the reason Paul addresses the law. Not the moral law.

At the end of this passage, Paul's going to say that God's moral law is good. What they're adding is saying, we've actually got to go back to the ceremonial law. And that means that you can't eat certain foods.

All the men need to be circumcised. Yes, Jesus is the way to get in, but if you want to stay in, you need secret knowledge that only we possess, speculations, and you need to practice the Old Covenant ceremonial practices as well.

Now the third thing is not a doctrine that they were teaching, but all of this comes with an attitude. It's very clear throughout both of these letters to Timothy that whoever these people were, they had an attitude.

[ 10 : 19 ] And we know that just from verse 6, it says that they were all about vain discussion. And that gets clear at the end of the book when Paul says in verse 4, chapter 6, 4, they were puffed up with pride with an unhealthy love of controversy and a constant spirit of argumentation.

All right? So here's the takeaway. They took the basics of the gospel. They went on first century Facebook and Twitter, and they argued with every single person on their all day constantly about every little point of theology.

And then they started trying to figure out the day Jesus was going to come back again using astrology and all sorts of other things. And then they wrote books about it in order to make money. And in other words, the weirdos got the power and emphasis to put it bluntly. And they forgot the point of the gospels. And this is the same stuff that has turned people away that has been a bad witness for Christianity for century after century.

It's never changed. Social media has just made it worse. But it's infighting, missing the point, and writing weird books about the book of Revelation. Right? This is all, it's always happened.

[ 11 : 31 ] And it happened right here in the first century. And you see, Paul's saying is that the problem with truth, the problem of truth is not truth, it's people.

And we take good things and we use them in bad ways. And so that means that it's really important to say that it's always a bad argument, always a bad argument to say, to argue against the Christian faith or any other religion for that matter by saying, well, look at what people in the past have done in the name of Jesus Christ.

People have started wars, they have supported the slave trade, they have gone on the crusades, whatever you might want to list, murders have happened in the name of Jesus, absolutely. Just like every other religion.

And in the name of atheism as well. It's always a bad argument because it says nothing about the nature of what's true. All it says is exactly what Christianity teaches.

And that's that people's hearts are broken and bent reads and we always take anything we can get our hands on and we do bad things with it. And we've got then, we've got to get more specific here because Paul does, there's a bigger problem in the passage and it's more fundamental than that we take stuff and we break it.

[ 12 : 50 ] The problem is not just that people do bad things with truth, Paul is saying here that the real problem is that we are prone to miss the point of truth entirely.

And he hints at that in verse four. He says that false teaching promotes speculation, but truth teaching, teaching the truth is the stewardship of God.

And then you say, well, Paul, what does that mean? And that leads us to point to, and that's the aim of truth. So secondly, finally, the aim of truth. Paul says really clearly here what the point is, and this is a moment where we've all got to lean in and listen closely to Paul because this is the end of Paul's life.

And he's saying, I want to, in just a few words, tell you the entire point of ministry, the point of Christian ministry, the point of doctrine, the point of truth, why it all exists and it's right there in verse five.

And this is it. The aim of our charge from God, verse five, is love that issues from the truth.

[13:57] So the point of it all, Paul says, is that truth doctrine would issue forth in love. And Ligger Duncan, my former Boston pastor, I read him on this text this week and he puts it pithily.

He says, Paul is a truth guy and Paul is a love guy. And he won't pith those against each other. And that's very important because people will often today, Christians even will often today look at churches and will talk about churches and will talk about the landscape of churches in our city or another city and use that in a form of dating each of them and figuring out where we're going to go, right?

And what will people say? They'll say, that church is a truth church. It's a doctrine church. That church is a church where you're going to get great teaching. You're going to hear the Bible clearly preached.

They're serious about theology. So if that's you, that's your personality, that's where you should go. But that truth of that church over there is a love, that's a love church. And that's where you're going to feel accepted immediately, where you're going to feel like there's a warm community and that you're loved no matter what, right?

And Paul says, no. No way. There can never be separation between truth and love. We've got to be truth people and love people. And actually the confusion is that it's the only way to get true love, the love that he's talking about here is when it grows up from the soil of true doctrine, that they can never be separated from one another.

[15:27] The problem is never the truth, we can never be committed to loveless truth or truthless love, but love that issues from the truth. A sure way, we've seen from the 20th century, and it carries on, but a true way to kill a local church is to abandon, change, or manipulate the doctrines of Christianity that have come from the very beginning, from apostolic authority in the name of love, to change them and conform to modern preferences on the name of love.

It doesn't breed love because truth breeds love. It ends up killing the local church, and we've seen that over and over again. So we've got to ask as we turn to the end here, what exactly Paul, do you mean here by love?

If truth and doctrine is for love, what is love? And this is what he says, he puts it clearly in verse five, that you need three things in order to love, in order to be growing up in love.

He says we need a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith. Now a pure heart, commentators will say that this is probably a connection to Matthew chapter five, when Jesus says, blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God.

So Jesus uses that phrase, Paul uses it again here, and the heart in the New Testament is the seat of all affection. It's the place from which you love and desire.

[16:52] And so he's saying a pure heart, Matthew five, is a heart, what does it mean to have a pure heart, one that longs to see God? Meaning that you actually want God more than you want your stuff, more than you want your finances and your reputation and your security and whatever it may be.

It's to want God more than idols. And you see why that has everything to do with being able to love, because when you want God more than your stuff, you're not preoccupied with the things of the world.

You have space to love. So we need a pure heart. And apparently we need a good conscience, he says. That is relief from the inward judge, our conscience that's shouting guilty all the time at us. We need a restful, non-accusing conscience instead of an accusing conscience. And the reason for that is when your conscience is screaming guilty at you all the time, you're necessarily introspective.

You can't get out of your own head, you can't get out of your own heart, you're always trying to deal with your own problem, which is your guilt and shame. And so you don't have space in your life to turn outward. And so you need a good conscience if you're actually going to love.

[18:04] But thirdly, you also need sincere faith. And he means by this that you can't just have outward religion, religious practice, but you've got to have inward certainty that the things that you sing about, you actually believe.

That you really do believe that there is going to be something when your eyes close in death, that your eyes will arise again in the life hereafter in front of the face of Jesus Christ.

That sincere faith here. And you need that because if you don't have hope beyond this life, then you're going to be forced to spend this life accumulating all the pleasures you possibly can. Now one more thing, one more thing, and that's that you've also got to know that the word love is specific here. And my wife pointed out to me this morning when I was talking to her about what I was preaching on, and this is sort of an inside joke, so I apologize.

But when I was here before, from 2013 to 2018, I got made fun of this quite often because it just kept coming up in sermons. But it has to be said because it's basic Bible, this is the word agape. [ 19 : 08 ] And it's the word for love. It's a specific word for love. There are multiple words for love in Greek, and this one here is agape.

And it's important to say that because agape is defined in the Gospels in a specific way. And that's that Jesus says love, this love is to lay down one's life for a friend, it's self-sacrificial outpouring to the point of great cause.

Now look, let's take stock here. Paul sees what Michel Foucault did not see. And that's that truth can never be a power play if it's united to love, to true love, to agape.

Because real love is self-sacrificial. It never takes doctrine to do wrong things. It never takes doctrine and truth to beat over people's heads. Instead, the ground of truth produces real love.

But listen, look, I hope that when you heard me talk about verse 5 there, those three things you need that you, maybe if you're like me, you said, I don't know that I have that.

[ 20 : 19 ] I don't know that I have a pure heart and a good, clean conscience and a sincere faith. At best, each of those areas for me as a Christian are half-hearted at times, right?

And look, that is exactly why truth and love can never be separated. That's exactly why truth and love can never be separated.

Because the truth, what Paul is saying here is that the truth has to have its way with you in order to love. The truth has to get down all the way to the core. The truth does in order that you could have what Paul is talking about here.

And you see, we asked what is love, but we can ask also what is truth. And in the middle of history, in the land of Israel, a gentle and lowly man stood up in the midst of the synagogue and said, I am the truth.

And this is what philosophy misses. That truth is not fundamentally a set of words. Truth is fundamentally a person, a human being. It's not a philosophy first, it's a human.

[ 21 : 28 ] And when Jesus Christ said, I am the truth, he meant I am God, and I've come to tell you what reality really is, what it's like, and I've come to teach you how to love. And you see, again, truth can never be a power play because the truth himself came into the world to lose all power.

The truth himself came into the world taking on the weight of human sin because we always manipulate the good things God has given us. And he didn't use it for a power play.

He came in ultimate self-sacrificial love to bear the weight of human guilt in himself. That's truth. And you see, go back to the three things again. You say, in order to love love well, I need a pure heart.

And no person has that. No person wants God more than their idols. Nobody does. That's fundamental to Christian thought, to Christian doctrine. And Jesus Christ comes into the world and says, well, I'm going to replace your heart of stone with a heart of flesh.

I'm going to do that for you. And you need a good conscience. And nobody has a good conscience. Everybody is wracked with guilt and shame. And even if you don't feel that, it might be because your conscience has hardened over time.

[ 22 : 43 ] But the guilt is still present. There are no good people, no matter what the contemporary world says. And we can say alongside Foucault, yeah, you're half right. I have taken true things and manipulated.

I take truths and make them half truths. I use them to manipulate my spouse and my children and people around me. I'm bent and broke. That's every human. That's all of us, right?

And Jesus Christ comes and says, the question is not, do you have a good conscience? But what are you going to do with your guilt? And in him, in him, the judge that we deserve became the judged for us.

So that today by faith you could say, in him my sins have been dealt with, my conscience is clean. No matter how I feel, no matter how I feel about it, Jesus has cast my sins away.

And we need sincere faith. And because Jesus Christ died as a man in the middle of history and rose again on the third day and there were more than 500 witnesses and they touched him. [ 23 : 48 ] And the fact that so many people saw it, it turned the Roman Empire upside down in nothing but a century, you can say that if this man really did rise from the dead, then I can believe in things that I currently can't see.

And if that's the case, then you're free in your life to love, to love on the ground of truth. Now, we'll close with this. If you listen to Foucault and who says that truth is power, it's manipulative, doctrine always seeks control.

We need to get rid of the truth in order to love more. That's what the modern world says. What you're left with actually is a world of individuals who live in their own little realities.

And all of reality ends up being defined by the way you feel about it. And so morality becomes all about the way you feel and whatever you desire. And that means that the world has seven, eight, nine billion coming realities.

If this is true, that is utter chaos. It doesn't work. It doesn't fit reality. It leaves people who embrace this completely unfulfilled.

[ 24 : 54 ] And we could say to Foucault, look, if you want to say that all doctrine, all religious truth statements are really just desire for power, that's a doctrine. That's a doctrine in itself.

And it's a grand doctrine to say that all truth is really just a power play. And so the same critique applies to his own statement. The Christianity comes into the world and says, the point of truth is love.

And the truth himself is ultimate love. He lost every bit of power for me. And then he took it back up as king. And for that reason, I know that my conscience is clean if I trust in him today.

I know that I have a pure heart, not because my heart's actually pure, but because my heart was united to his heart. And his heart is pure. And I have sincere faith and hope. And so I'm free to love. Now, again, I was reading my old pastor from First Pres. Jackson, where I was from a while ago this week, Ligand Duncan. He points to a story of journalist David Brooks.

[ 25 : 55 ] David Brooks is the very famous secular American Jewish writer. And David Brooks, some time ago, decided to do an exposes study of Christian evangelicalism in the United States and the United Kingdom.

And he said that he wanted to find out something more about Bible-believing Christians than the cheap critiques that he often heard whenever XYZ celebrity pastor commits some public sin. And that becomes all of what Christianity really is, Bible-believing Christianity. And so David Brooks says, I was looking for something more than a caricature from the public media. And this is what he says.

I finally found it when I read John Stott. John Stott is the great Anglican theologian who died in 2011. Great Christian thinker and pastor. You can't read enough John Stott.

Pick up some John Stott. But this, I just want you to hear what he said about Stott as a Christian man. He said this, in Stott, I found a rigorous intellect who cared about the truth, who was committed to biblical ethics, even when unpopular, and a man undeniably loving from top to bottom.

[ 27 : 12 ] And he said, reading Stott is like reading Mr. Rogers with a backbone of steel. Now I wasn't sure if Mr. Rogers was a universal reference here. I'm getting heads yes and no.

So think David Attenborough meets Thomas the Tank Engine, niceness. That's Mr. Rogers. Mr. Rogers with a backbone of steel.

That's the point here. Paul is saying we have got to be, the life and the family of God, we've got to be truth people with spines of steel, committed to hearing God's word, to saying no matter what the culture thinks, I will see reality the way God says it is.

And I'll love theology and I'll love what God said and I'll hunger to know more and I want the Bible and I want people who have written about it so I can feed on it more and more. And I believe this passage, Paul gives a list of sins six times in his letters he does this where he lists off sins.

And you read through this list and he is saying, two things he's saying, there is a bad way to use this list of sins. And that's to not, to beat people with it and not love people.

[ 28 : 17 ] There's a bad way to think that obeying the law will get you into the kingdom. But he also says, nevertheless, he calls it at the very end that this list, the moral law, what God has said is good is, quote, sound doctrine.

Ethics is doctrine. It's truth because it's the way God has defined it. We've got to have spines of steel on the one hand. And then Paul says, truth people with spines of steel, committed to what God has said, truth people have got to be loved people as well, that God's truth would be the soil in which our love grows.

Christianity is for people. In Jesus Christ, the truth came for people. And so we've got to love people. And so today we've got to turn our eyes to the truth, to Jesus Christ himself, loving what he said, loving his word, loving his theology, reading and digesting and hungering, but never forgetting what it is for, what it is for.

And that's agape, this genuine self-sacrificial love to look more and more like the Jesus who loves people himself to the point of great sacrifice.

Let's pray and ask that God would do that for us. Father, we ask that you would make us truth people and love people simultaneously, that no matter what the world thinks about theology and ethics, about all that your word says, that we would remain committed, and that we would also never say but, but only and, and that we would be full of love because of that truth.

[ 29 : 57 ] And so use the truth to wield in us not spirits of argumentation and nitpicking, but of self-sacrifice and pouring ourselves for, for the people of this city, Lord, and for each other.

And so we ask that that would be our hearts collectively as a church in the name of Jesus. Amen.