1 TIMOTHY 1:3-17

As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God’s plan, which operates by faith. Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. They want to be teachers of the law, although they don’t understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on. But we know that the law is good, provided one uses it legitimately. We know that the law is not meant for a righteous person, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and irreverent, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral and homosexuals, for slave traders, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me. I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, appointing me to the ministry—even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners”—and I am the worst of them. But I received mercy for this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his

EXPLORING KEY WORDS

A Some of the teachers in the church had strayed from the instruction that centered on Christ.

B These teachers had become fascinated with fairy-tale-like stories and “long lists of ancestors” (GNT).

C The work God gave them to advance His kingdom on earth (Matt. 6:10).

D From devoting themselves to God’s Word, they would grow stronger in His love for them, prompting them to love Him and each other (Matt. 22:36-38).

E “Empty talk” (CEV); “vain jangling” (KJV)

F Like the Pharisees, teachers of the law confronted Jesus—an expert who instructed people in the law of Moses—in His ministry (Luke 5:17; Acts 5:34).

G “The right way” (CEV); “used as it should be” (GNT)

H All people who have been made right with God through Jesus Christ. By repenting and placing their faith in Christ, He made them righteous.

I God’s gift of salvation through Christ alone must remain the bedrock of their faith and instruction.

J Paul gave the Lord all the credit for appointing him as “trustworthy” (NLT) to serve Him.

K “I did not yet have faith and so did not know what I was doing” (GNT).

L Instead of being rightly punished, God gave Paul what he never deserved—new life in Christ.

M “Public Sinner Number One” (The Message)

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extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life. 17 Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

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1. ACCOUNTABLE (1 Tim. 1:3-7)
• Paul directed Timothy to teach the truth faithfully and to hold other teachers in the church accountable for teaching the pure gospel.
• Paul emphasized the goal of gospel teaching is genuine love arising out of godly motives.

2. IN LIGHT OF THE GOSPEL (1 Tim. 1:8-11)
• Paul reminded Timothy that the law pointed to the need for a Savior.
• Jesus did what the law could not.

3. IN RESPONSE TO HIS GRACE (1 Tim. 1:12-17)
• Paul reflected on the difference the gospel had made in his life, being reminded of his own sin and God’s grace expressed to him.
• All are sinners, but God gives mercy to those who believe.

SUMMARY STATEMENTS
As recipients of God’s grace, believers are entrusted with the truth of the gospel message.
• Teachers are accountable to the church and God.
• Salvation is found only through faith in Jesus.
• Believers are an exhibit of God’s grace and mercy for all to see.
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FOCUS ATTENTION
What would being someone’s legal guardian entail? How does that compare to a Christian’s responsibility for the gospel?
- Becoming a guardian is a sacred trust and commitment to accept and assume responsibility for another person, usually a minor or incapacitated adult.
- God has entrusted the gospel to us, a responsibility that we accept by taking actions to safeguard its message.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE
1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7
How are the threats to the gospel message that Paul identified still risks today?
- The desire to pollute the gospel by subtracting from it, adding to it, or inventing something entirely new appeals to everyone’s sinful natures.
- Getting sidetracked with intriguing ideas and speculative questions leads nowhere.
- Chasing different doctrines diminishes our wholehearted faith in the gospel message.

How do godly goals for teaching preserve the gospel’s purity?
- God doesn’t expect us to become mindless or unthinking gospel advocates, but faith will eventually overcome doubts.
- With motives of love, we get to the heart of God’s message, not the things that distract us from it.
- Because we care for others, our message is urgent and persuasive, one we must impress on those we disciple. We’re not just teaching doctrine; we’re instilling love, a pure heart, a sincere conscience, and strong faith.

Why is it important that we call out those who choose to teach a different doctrine?
- Deviating from the message doesn’t benefit teachers or learners.
- Sound teaching depends on trusting in the complete authority of the Scriptures.
- Kindly and respectfully pointing out inconsistencies, misstatements, and errors is part of being obedient to speak the truth in love.

1 TIMOTHY 1:8-11
In what ways have you seen the law used for good?
- Teaching others the law warns them away from the dangers of sinful behavior. Knowing the boundaries and why they exist empowers us to resist sin.

What does illegitimate use of the law look like?
- The law may be used as a stumbling block when we use it to condemn others or fail to contextualize it.
- No person can live up to the law but Jesus, who offers Himself to us by faith as the sacrificial fulfillment of the law—the One who will take the punishment for our sins.

When you read the extensive list of people for whom the law was written, what provides comfort?
- The righteous person keeps the law, which the Bible defines as not a burden (1 John 5:3).
- On the other hand, the broad, sweeping category of the “sinful” identifies every person as a lawbreaker.
- Tucked among the extraordinary sinners, such as murderers and kidnappers, are the petty, the irreverent, and the liars, which points back to the inclusive nature of a law that—outside of Christ—judges each of us as lawbreakers.

1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17
Why is a personal testimony such a rich and powerful tool for communicating the truths of the gospel?
- Being as brutally transparent as Paul was about his sinfulness and life before Christ communicates our need for a Savior.
- In describing himself as the worst of sinners, Paul proclaimed hope for every other sinner out there.
- Personal testimonies are always unique to individuals, but God extends the same mercy and grace that He gave to Paul to everyone who believes.

SUMMARIZE & CHALLENGE
Because God has called us to act as guardians of the gospel, what can we do to live out that responsibility?
- In order to know the truth, we must be faithful students of the Word.
- Holding others accountable for what they teach is part of our responsibility as Christians.
- Sharing a personal testimony with others can be a wonderful tool for helping someone else understand the gospel.
- Personal Challenge: Have you taken the time to write your testimony or rehearsed it verbally? Recall the person you were before Jesus saved you. Would you, like Paul, describe yourself as the worst of sinners? If grace is a life-changer, what can you say is different for you? Whether it’s a change in thought patterns, sinful behaviors, or radical lifestyle adjustments, articulating Christ’s impact communicates the gospel.
MISSPELLED AND UNGRAMMATICAL COPY AND RED INK PENS

Before the session, copy a few paragraphs from a news article or prepare some copy of your own to use in an exercise with the group. Change the wording to include grammar, spelling, and punctuation mistakes. Make copies of the page for each member of the group and distribute, along with red ink pens. Explain to the group that you want them to become proofreaders.

Say: Professional proofreaders consider themselves guardians of the language. In other words, factual reporting aside, they try to ensure that whatever they publish is immaculate in content and without spelling, grammar, or punctuation errors. Challenge the group to find, circle, and correct the errors in a friendly competition to determine who is the best guardian of the language.

Say: In the same way that proofreaders are charged with being guardians of the language, Christians are charged with being guardians of the gospel. Read 1 Timothy 1:3-11. Emphasize: It’s up to us to keep the gospel message pure, clear, and on point. There’s no place in the gospel for communicating a doctrine with errors, uncertainty, or confusion, and there’s no excuse for allowing others to do it either. When it comes to teaching, the standard is high and holy because it’s about the very souls of the ones who receive it.

Read 1 Timothy 1:12-17. Point out that Paul shared the gospel by telling the difference Jesus made in his life. Close by praying that the group would protect the truth of the gospel and share its impact on them.

GOD’S EXAMPLE OF LOVE

Have you noticed how the theme of love runs throughout 1 Timothy 1:3-17? Paul brings it to our attention early in the passage when he clarifies the goal of our instruction: “love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith” (v. 5).

We experience God’s love for us in ways that constantly refresh us as we serve Him. His love makes a difference in us. It changes our focus and enables us to enjoy the honor He has given us to be His children. But it doesn’t stop there. Once it makes a difference in us, God’s love makes a difference through us. His love for us gives way to our love for others.

Therefore, teaching God’s Word with the goal of love in mind doesn’t require us to have refined intellectual capabilities. Neither do we have to possess unique communication skills. Instead, teaching with the goal of love requires that we approach our work with “a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith” (1 Tim. 1:5).

As Paul focused our attention on the goal of love in our instruction, he brought up his personal walk with the Lord. He testified about his own experience with God’s love for him. He considered himself to be the “worst” sinner ever born (v. 15). Yet God saved him and gave him the privilege of sharing the gospel of Christ with everyone everywhere. Love fostered God’s eagerness to pour out His remarkable mercy and grace on Paul. As a result, God’s love transformed Paul, nourishing his faith so he could share the good news of Christ.

Paul drew a sharp contrast between people who had received Christ and others who had rejected Him. Notice that Paul developed a list that contained the kinds of people who had violated God’s law (vv. 9-11). All of them had one trait in common: They had turned their backs on God with their sinful behavior. No matter how much they tried to justify what they had done, God’s law wouldn’t allow them to ignore or dilute the hard truth. His law deemed their actions as sins for which they would be punished. However, God’s love for them would fuel His mercy and grace if they turned to Him. Just like Paul, they could be made new in Him. That’s how God’s love worked then, and His love still works in Christ the same way today.