

Blueprint for Truth

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[0:00] Brilliant. Thanks so much. I've met lots of you, but if I haven't met you, my name's Archie. I'm the pastor down at Peebles Evangelical Church. And the reason I've met lots of you, as you know, I was the pastor in training here. So lots of familiar faces.

There are also lots of new faces in the room. And quite a lot of them are really small, which is great. It's lovely to be back. And when Graham asked me to come and preach for you this morning, I just I thought immediately of that passage in First Timothy, because the whole letter of First Timothy really is about something that matters for every church.

So I knew that this would apply to you just as it applies to us in Peebles. And that is remaining faithful to the central truth of the gospel, avoiding and pointing out distractions and distortions of it. So that's what we're going to be aiming at together this morning.

Let me just pray for us again, if that's OK, before we do that. Let me pray. Heavenly Father, I pray so much that your Holy Spirit would be at work amongst us this morning, taking your word and convicting us of the truth.

Lord, I pray that you would give us clarity and that you would give us unity on what is important this morning. In Jesus name. Amen. And a couple of years ago, the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, MIT, did this study where they found that false news, fake news, travels online significantly faster, further and deeper and more broadly than the truth does.

[1:35] If a piece of false news is posted on social media, it is much more likely to be shared and reposted than the truth. What is it about us that we're so attracted to lies?

Why do we find the truth so distasteful? I wonder if you've come across the Just So stories, Richard Kipling's classic children's stories.

When I was a kid, we always used to listen to them in the car on a long journey. And they tell these silly stories about how things came to be. Titles like How the Camel Got Its Hump, How the Elephant Got Its Trunk, that sort of thing.

Well, here's a Just So story about how we came to believe a lie. One day, a man named Truth and a man named Lai stood by a river just outside town.

And Lai challenged Truth to a swimming race. So they took off their clothes and on the count of three, Truth jumped into the river and began to swim. But Lai didn't follow him.

[2:35] Instead, he stole Truth's clothes, put them on and walked back into town. And he proudly paraded around, pretending to be Truth. When Truth got back to the shore and realized what had happened, he was left completely naked.

The only clothes were Lai's clothes, and he wasn't going to wear those. So he walked back into town completely naked. People stared and glared at the Truth as he tried to explain what had happened.

I am Truth, he said. Lai's just stolen my clothes. But the people became suspicious of the naked Truth because he made them feel uncomfortable and awkward.

And instead, they believed Lai because he had clothes on. He didn't make them feel like that. He was dressed properly. He was easier to look at. And just so. From that day until this, people have come to believe a lie rather than believe the naked Truth.

That's a silly story. But of course, it is true, isn't it, that we very often believe a lie when it's dressed up as Truth. And very often, we ignore the naked Truth because of how it makes us feel.

[3:43] You know, I'd much rather that you told me that my hair was looking great than hear the naked Truth about my rapidly receded hairline. And I think that that is essentially true of the core teaching of the Christian faith.

Because the naked Truth of Christianity is pretty simple. It's as old as time. And it's really good news. But it is only really good news if we believe the uncomfortable, naked Truth about ourselves first.

And that is that we need good news. That we are all sinners in desperate need of grace. And so often, distortions lie about the Christian faith.

They might be presented to us as something fresh and new and exciting. And so they spread like wildfire. But at their heart, they undermine that simple, basic and naked Truth about what we're all like as human beings.

Now, of course, that isn't a new problem. When Paul wrote this letter to Timothy nearly 2,000 years ago, the problem was exactly the same. And so we'll see that the task that Paul gives Timothy is to uphold what is true and to expose what is false.

[5:00] So we're going to spend most of our time this morning in 1 Timothy chapter 1. And that's on page 1191 of the Church Bibles. It would be good to have that open in front of you. But before we dive into that passage in particular, let's just get our heads around 1 Timothy as a whole.

Because you might know nothing about the book at all. And if you look at verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1, we get a pretty standard opening to one of Paul's letters. We see it's from Paul. It's addressed to Timothy.

You can read about the relationship between Paul and Timothy in Acts chapter 16. Paul kind of appoints Timothy as kind of like his apprentice. And then between Acts chapter 16 and this letter being written, these two guys, they've traveled many miles together.

They've planted several churches. They've co-authored several letters. They've been through some serious suffering together. Which is why, if you notice in verse 2, Paul describes Timothy as his true son in the faith.

He's not his biological son, but he's his spiritual son. He's loved him and cared for him and trained him. They've been through a lot together. So this letter is written by Paul to Timothy.

[6:05] But it's not just for Timothy. It is addressed to him. But if you flick to the very end of the letter, Paul closes with this lovely little line, grace be with you all.

And your translation might just say grace be with you. But that really is plural. And you all is grammatical nonsense. I'm sorry if you're an American in the room. It was our language first.

You all makes no sense. But this is plural. It is you all. And this letter is written to Timothy. But it was intended for the whole church in Ephesus. And it was intended for us.

You know, it isn't always obvious when we take just a few verses like we're doing this morning. But this letter was intended to be read in one go. And it has one big purpose that drives it.

So why is Paul writing this letter? Well, if you look at chapter 3, verse 14, he tells us. He says, So Paul's whole purpose in writing, do you see it?

[7:19] He wants to instruct Timothy and the church in Ephesus on how to conduct themselves. Why? So that they, like a pillar or a foundation, can uphold the truth. Notice that is not our preferences.

It's not our traditions. But it is the truth. And so what is the truth that Paul wants Timothy to uphold? Well, that little purpose statement continues.

It says this, verse 16. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. He, that is Jesus, appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, and was taken up in glory. That is just a summary of the truth.

What has been made known in the gospel in the gospel in those verses is that godliness comes from Jesus. That godliness isn't something we can achieve on our own.

[8:52] Godliness comes from the one who appeared in the flesh, who died and rose again, who has been preached to the nations, who now reigns in glory. That is the truth made known.

You might summarize it like this, that God wants to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ. That's the naked truth, all the way through this letter.

Chapter 1, verse 15. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Paul says, of whom I am the worst. Or chapter 2, verses 3 and 4.

This is good and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Or chapter 4, verse 10. That is why we labor and strive.

Because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe. Just all the way through this letter, Paul is instructing Timothy and the church there on how to live as God's people, rooted in the naked truth of the gospel, that God wants to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[10:10] That is God's plan. He's chosen to reveal and execute that plan through his people, through the church. Which means how we conduct ourselves really matters.

So that's what 1 Timothy is all about. That's kind of the big purpose of the letter. We are now going to park in chapter 1 for the rest of the time together. Turn there if you aren't there already.

Chapter 1. And let me take you back to that town. Truth is naked. I wasn't going to give you a full naked cartoon, but truth is naked. And lies is walking around in truth's clothes.

Which means lies has become plausible and attractive and convincing. And Paul gives Timothy two jobs to expose lies and to uphold truth.

So first, expose the lies in verses 3 to 6. Verse 3. See why Paul told Timothy to stay in Ephesus in the first place? He says, Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

[11:16] Paul has left Timothy in Ephesus to stop people teaching lies. People teaching stuff that is different to what Paul has taught. Teaching stuff that contradicts God's plan to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul isn't actually super specific about exactly what it is that they're teaching. We'll think about it a little bit more. But he's not that specific. He says they're devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

Verse 7 tells us that they're doing that based on a kind of misuse of the law. These are people who pride themselves on their knowledge of the Bible. But again, Paul isn't super specific about it.

It could be a number of ways that they're distorting the truth. And I think he's not specific on purpose. I think it's intentional. Because if Paul had really put his finger on the precise lies that they were telling, we could easily say, couldn't we, well, that's not us.

This doesn't apply to us. In fact, I think quite a lot of the misuse of the New Testament today finds ways to do exactly that. Paul doesn't tell us exactly, specifically what he is addressing.

[12:26] And a misuse of the New Testament might spend lots of time and lots of its energy not studying what Paul and the other apostles actually wrote, but studying the culture into which they wrote.

The culture in Ephesus or in Corinth or wherever else. To try and be as specific as they can about what Paul has been addressing here or there. And they do that in order to be able to say, well, that's not really us.

Their culture was different to ours. It doesn't apply to our culture today. But that's not how Paul writes. Instead, this is a intentionally broad and intentionally timeless reminder that you can stand in a pulpit and you can teach.

But if your teaching doesn't conform to the central and glorious truth of the gospel, if you miss or distort that in any way, then you are false. There's a particular warning, I think, in churches like ours, because we can think, you know, this is what I've always been taught.

This is what I've always believed. And therefore, it must be wrapped up in that truth. But the truth of the gospel and our traditions are not the same thing.

[13:34] Now, some of our traditions are very good things. Some of them have been shaped by the truth and are shaped intentionally to point to the truth. And I'm not here to say that we should rip up all the ways that we've been doing things, but traditions must serve the truth and not the other way around.

And I think, quite sadly, traditions can actually end up distracting from the truth rather than lending weight to it. Remember the heartbeat, the big storyline of the Bible, that God wants to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Let's just think for a moment about what you get when you lose that central truth. When you lose that, you lose the good news and you end up with empty religion.

There's a friend of mine down in our church in Peebles. He's been in church his entire life. I remember sitting down with him and him just saying, you know, church has always made me miserable. And this is why, because he had always been swinging backwards and forwards from legalism, which always leads to endless guilt and despair, and then swinging to license, that is

persistent sin and confusion and no transformation of life.

But notice, and this has completely changed this guy's life, the answer to legalism isn't license. And the answer to license isn't legalism. If you're struggling with sin, the gospel doesn't say, try harder and you'll be able to save yourself.

[15:08] But it also doesn't say your sin doesn't matter. And so there's nothing to be saved from. No, the gospel says you are a sinner who cannot save yourself.

And so would you look again to Jesus, in whom God has done everything necessary to save you? Legalism and license are just two sides of the same coin.

And we've got to discard it. Paul is telling Timothy that it is his job to expose anything that undermines or distracts from that central truth. To do that is going to be helpful to see where the lies actually come from.

So read verse six with me. Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. What have they departed from? Well, they've departed from the content of the gospel in their teaching.

We've thought about that a bit already. But more than that, back in verse five, he says the goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

[16:09] And not only departed from the content of the gospel, but its fruit, love, a pure heart, a good conscience, sincere faith. Which means, and maybe this is obvious, but people don't normally wake up one morning and decide, I'm going to believe a lie today.

I'm going to abandon the gospel. It happens much more subtly than that. And I think it usually goes like this. There's something in my life that I don't want to call sin.

Something I love or something I want. Or perhaps it isn't me. Maybe it's someone that I love. And I don't want to tell them that what they're doing is sin.

I don't want to tell them that they need to repent. Suddenly the truth becomes uncomfortable.

Because the truth says that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And that is wonderful good news.

But only if I'm prepared to admit that I am one. And prepared to tell you that you are one too. And so there's another option. Instead of bringing my life and your life under the gospel, well, I'll just change the gospel to fit my life.

[17:18] I'll redefine what God calls sin. Then I can decide that something the Bible says I need to be saved from is actually not a problem at all. And if it isn't sin, then I don't need forgiveness for it.

I don't need to repent of it. My life doesn't need to change. I don't need Jesus to save me. See what has happened there. I've found a way to justify myself or to justify you apart from the truth.

Because the gospel doesn't justify sin. The gospel justifies sinners like you and me. It doesn't just tell us that our sin is fine.

It tells us that our sin is so serious that Christ had to die for it. And that his grace is so great that he willingly did exactly that. So when we redefine sin in order to make ourselves more comfortable, we aren't making the gospel kinder.

We're actually just taking away the good news. Saying that we don't really need to be saved. So if you want to expose lies, first, you've got to watch your own heart.

[18:27] Please be really suspicious of the things that you really want to be true because they make your sin easier to live with. And when someone begins to distort the gospel, no matter how attractive that teaching might sound, remember that there is often more going on than just a mistake in their thinking or their theology, but there is a heart behind it.

A heart behind the lie that is captive to the sin that it loves. So if you think again of my just so story, that's the challenge that Paul begins with.

To recognize the lie, even when he's dressed up as truth. And to recognize the naked truth, even when he makes you uncomfortable. Verse 7 gives us a really good example of that.

It says, They, the false teachers, want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they're talking about or what they so confidently affirm. Do you see the irony in this?

They think they know the Bible, they're teaching the Bible, but they completely misunderstand what the Bible is saying. That's how they end up lying. But verse 7 also gives Paul his kind of way into the truth that Timothy needs to uphold.

[19:42] Because although these teachers have the law badly wrong, Paul tells us in verse 8 that the law is good if one uses it properly. And that leads us into our second point.

It isn't enough for Timothy to expose the lies. He also needs to uphold the naked truth. So what is the truth then? What is the truth about the law in particular in this passage? What are we supposed to do with the Old Testament law? There's lots of stuff in the Old Testament law that is obviously good and applicable today. We all agree it's good not to murder. But there's some quite random stuff too, isn't there?

Like eating shellfish and wearing particular materials together. And there's the really detailed and frankly quite gruesome sacrifices. There's some super specific stuff about where the Israelites were supposed to pitch their tents.

What are we supposed to do with all of that? Well clearly the false teachers have got it really wrong in what they're doing with it. But we can't just ignore the law because verse 8 tells us that it's good.

[20 : 48] So the question is how is it good? Well I think our passage this morning, Paul is telling us that it's good because it reveals sin. It's not the only purpose of the law.

But Paul takes one important use of the Old Testament law to reveal sin. And I guess that is the key use that the false teachers have ignored. So see what Paul says in verse 9.

We also know that the law is made not for the righteous, but for the lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers or murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.

I think Paul's point there is simple. And that is that the law isn't for good people. It's for bad people. And you might assume, well sure it's for bad people, but it's for bad people because it's going to help them become good people.

Surely its purpose is to show them how to live. But that's not precisely true. In fact I suspect that's exactly the kind of emphasis that the false teachers would have used when they talked about the law.

[21 : 55] Instead the purpose of the law that Paul is driving at here is that it reveals sin and it reveals it in all of us. We read the Ten Commandments. Julia read the Ten Commandments for us just now.

And in some ways that's like the Old Testament law condensed into these ten famous commands. Actually if you read the list in 1 Timothy, it kind of maps onto those.

And Paul is using here what would have been strong and shocking examples and extremes of the Ten Commandments at the time. And some of them we obviously still consider extreme. If you notice that, killing your father or mother would be an extreme way to dishonor them.

Slave trading would be an extreme form of theft. And as we read the Ten Commandments, and I think as we read the list here too, we're supposed to get to the end of it and feel quite uneasy about ourselves.

To think, is this me? Am I included in this list? Maybe am I a sinner? If you look at the way Paul concludes his list, he says, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine.

[23 : 05] And so I hope as he concludes in that short statement, I hope we realise that we are all included. I was at Cairngorm Coffee this morning, just before coming to church.

And when I was there, I popped to the loo and there was this little picture of an elephant with the familiar words, an elephant never forgets. But then underneath it said, but sometimes it wishes it could.

And there are things, aren't there, for all of us. Things that we've done. Things that we're not proud of. Things that we wish we could forget.

Because none of us conforms to that perfect standard that we've just been reading off. Paul knows that about himself. See what he says in verse 15 about himself?

I am the worst. I am the worst of sinners. It's easy to fall into thinking that the system of salvation in the Old Testament went like this.

[24 : 03] If you follow the law, you'll be saved. That the way to be right with God is to live up to God's standard. But that wasn't how it worked.

The principle of the law was always, if you want to get right with God by the law, then yes, you would have to keep all of it. But you can't do that. You're not capable of that. It's why the Old Testament system had sacrifices built into it.

Because God wasn't giving his people a set of rules that they were going to be able to keep perfectly. He was giving them a set of rules that would reveal their sin and point to the fact that they

needed a saviour.

And so those built-in sacrifices themselves point to the climax of the whole thing, which is Jesus. The once and for all time sacrifice.

If the principle of the law is that to be right with God, you have to follow the whole law, well, the good news of the gospel says Christ has done it for you. He's kept it all for you.

[25 : 02] And the way to being right with God is by faith in him. And that has actually always been so. In the Old Testament, it was true that trusting that God would do for you what you could not do for yourself, that the sacrifices were a picture of that.

That was finally satisfied in Jesus, who kept the law for you, died as the sacrifice to bring you to God, that the law was fulfilled. And so Paul says the law is good.

Not for the just, but for the lawless, for you and for me, for sinners in need of a saviour. So it's as if Paul is saying to Timothy, not only do I want you to expose lies, but I want you to point to the naked truth.

Even though that might be more uncomfortable, you have got to remind people that it is the truth that they need to listen to. And just as we begin to finish, I want to observe three things about truth, things that I hope will encourage us and give us confidence in what we uphold.

The first is that truth is constant. What was true 2,000 years ago remains true today. Our sinful nature has not changed.

[26 : 16] The promise of eternal life in the gospel has not changed. Jesus Christ was the same yesterday, today and forever. Truth is constant. Secondly, truth is exclusive.

That is to say, two things can't be true if they contradict each other. Very fashionable today to say things like, that might be true for you, you've got your truth. But of course, that is nonsense.

I hope we know that's nonsense. What is true is true. And especially of the gospel, Jesus is either the saviour of the world or he isn't. Truth is exclusive.

And thirdly, truth is objective. It doesn't care about your feelings. Now that sounds rather brutal. But what I mean is that we can't always trust our feelings.

What we feel is right and good for us isn't always going to be right and good for us. That isn't always going to be easy, but we cannot just define what is true based on how we feel.

[27 : 17] Because God has already told us what is true and it is both constant and exclusive. So Paul's charge to Timothy is to uphold the truth.

And for us as Christians today, that has got to remain our priority. To constantly point one another to the truth of the gospel to ensure that what is taught here never distracts from or undermines the fact that it is God's plan to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ.

That's true as we share that good news with people who don't know Jesus. We had an evangelism weekend down in Peebles a couple of weeks ago. It was brilliant. And over the course of four events, we had well over 100 non-Christians hearing exactly this gospel.

But one of those events was a pre-game breakfast with my teammates at the rugby club. And if I'm honest, as I rub shoulders with those guys week to week and as I seek to share the gospel with them, it is so tempting to soften it.

It is so tempting to make it more universal and easier to fail to point out their sin or to teach judgment for sin. And of course, all of that is with the best of intentions.

[28 : 26] I want them to be able to hear what I say. But if I do that, what I'm doing is just dressing up lies and removing the good news of its goodness and leading people away from the naked and uncomfortable truth.

It's not just true in our evangelism, but also here in church. And so you must make sure that what Graham and the other elders are teaching from the pulpit here is the naked truth.

And you yourself, whether it's with your family or in your home group or in kids' church or over a cup of coffee and a one-to-one, you must be prepared to expose the lies in one another and to uphold the truth.

If you think of my Just So story again, truth is crying out, God wants to save sinners from judgment for eternal life through the gospel of Jesus Christ. And lies dressed up as truth will do absolutely anything, anything at all to distract and deny and distort that.

So watch your hearts, especially when you find yourself wanting something to be true. When the truth of God's word becomes uncomfortable for you, when you're tempted to make your sins smaller

or make grace less necessary, watch your heart and get to know the gospel.

[29 : 45] Know it well enough to recognize a lie when it's dressed up as true. Know it well enough to recognize the naked truth even when it makes you uncomfortable. When someone tells you that you can save yourself, expose that lie.

When someone tells you that you don't need saving, expose that lie and keep pointing one another to Jesus. Because God has entrusted you, this church, with something infinitely precious.

The good news that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Keep holding out that truth to one another, to your families, to this town and to a world that desperately needs to hear it.

I'm going to close in prayer and then we're going to sing together before we come to the bread and the cup. So let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you so much for Jesus.

We thank you that in him you have saved us from sin and from judgment, that you have promised and secured eternal life.

[30 : 50] And I pray that even now by your Holy Spirit you would expose the lies in our hearts, the lies that we tell ourselves. Would you expose our sin?

Would you help us to keep this gospel, this truth, absolutely central to who we are? Lord, I pray so much for this church that you would help them to keep this truth central to all that they do, that it might all be for your glory.

In Jesus' name. Amen.