

Guard the Truth of the Gospel

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 19 September 2021

Preacher: Graeme Shanks

[0 : 0 0] Well, thanks so much, Charles. Folks, you are so welcome here this morning. It is just lovely to see you. Let's turn to God's Word together, shall we? And let me invite you to turn back to that letter of 1 Timothy.

Maybe you want to look at the contents page, don't feel embarrassed about doing that, or just get it on your phone. Just remember the five T's in New Testament, Thessalonians, Timothy and Titus. You can have that for free in order, okay?

So 1 Timothy is where I'd love you to turn. And let me tell you three quick reasons why this Sunday has been earmarked in my mind for the last little while. Number one, it's been the return of live singing, which I'm sure you will totally agree with me.

It has been fantastic to do that again. So I've been looking forward to this Sunday for a while because it's the return of live music. I've been looking forward to this Sunday. Number two, because it's often the Sunday where we get new people come to our church family.

We just want to be, just give the best welcome that we can to people at this church. And it's often the Sunday, isn't it, when new students have come or people have come for jobs to our wonderful city.

[1 : 0 2] So if that's you today, you are so welcome here with us. Reason number three, in my head, this has been how we talk about Groundhog Day, right?

Well, in my head, this has been Hedgehog Sunday. Because for the past 18 months, has it not felt that we've kind of been in hibernation? Hasn't it? And all of a sudden, this Sunday feels as we've kind of got new people and as we've started singing again and the numbers are growing, that it kind of feels like we're gradually emerging from hibernation, which is lovely.

So how fitting then, number three, third reason that on this Hedgehog Sunday that we're starting a new letter, that's all about what the local church is supposed to be.

As we gather back together, as we've maybe not seen each other in a long time, isn't it wonderful? I thought it would be great to spend time thinking, spending time in God's word, in this letter, that's all about what we're supposed to be doing as we live our lives in Edinburgh, as a city on the hill, shining the light of the gospel in the darkness, what we're supposed to be doing as a local church.

Maybe you're here today, you picked a good Sunday. If you're new to this church, this is what we're all about. If you've also picked a good Sunday, maybe you're not from a church background at all. You think, what is this stuff all about?

[2 : 1 3] Okay, nice greetings on the way in, the pews are okay, give or take. But what is it that this church believes? What is a church supposed to do? This is a great Sunday and a great series for you to tap into as well.

So 1 Timothy, let me make a beeline for the image that's right at the heart of this letter. And you'll find it at chapter 3 and verse 14, the verse that Charles just read for us just a moment ago.

And it's the image that Paul uses as he writes to Timothy, who presumably is this young pastor in this church in Ephesus. And the church, therefore, this is written to Timothy, but I take it the church in the background are overhearing this letter, presumably as it's read in public.

So they're in your shot of this letter as well. This is the image that he uses that's right at the heart of the letter about what a local church is supposed to be. Now, it kind of taps into one of my favourite TV programmes, which I'm into at the minute.

You know how there's certain moments in life where you're reminded that you're not a certain age anymore? Okay, see, when I was a student, my favourite TV programme was Neighbours. When I was in my 20s, my favourite TV programme was Match of the Day.

[3 : 23] I could only dream of staying up to half past 10 these days. But now that I'm in my 30s, pushing late 30s, favourite TV programme is Grand Designs. The show that celebrates great architecture, cutting 21st century buildings.

Now, here's what I want you to imagine. Imagine a first century version of Grand Designs. Because this church, these people who live their lives in Ephesus, have got a brilliant bit of cutting-edge architecture in their city.

Right? You see, Timothy and the people in this church family who are overhearing the contents of this letter live in a city called Ephesus. Now, we'll maybe see it on the map. That's where Ephesus is.

And it's a city that boasts one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. So they have the temple of the goddess Artemis. As I say, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.

And I guess a bit like, you know, Edinburgh Castle dominates the skyline of Edinburgh. You can be anywhere in the city and you can see the castle. I guess it's a bit like that in Ephesus with the temple of Artemis.

[4 : 33] Now, here's the point. These people get what a temple is. And they get how a roof is held up.

And they get what a pillar does. And so Paul, as he helps them understand what a local church is, I think he taps into this image.

And he says, here is his purpose in writing. Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing these instructions so that, there's the clue, verse 14, If I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household.

And get this, which is the church of the living God and the pillar and foundation of the truth. So there is what a local church is.

Okay, it's a collection of people in whom God lives by his spirit. Those who have put their faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord, as their saviour, as their king. The spirit of God indwells.

[5 : 33] And that's how it can be said that God, the living God, dwells amongst his people. And just like the pillars in a temple hold up the roof, you guys are the pillars that hold up the truth.

The truth of the gospel for the world to see. You guys are pillars. The local church, and so often we take these letters and we think about them individually.

Well, there's a corporate application here for us as a church. As we live our lives in the city, we are holding up God's truth for the world to see. This is what these guys are supposed to be doing in Ephesus.

Being a community that loves their God with all their heart, soul, mind and strength. They love who Jesus is. They love what he's done. They love the fact that he's coming back. He loves the fact that he holds them in his hand.

They love the people of their city. And they love and care for each other. As King Jesus rules and shapes their lives as a church family, both individually and corporately, as he shapes them and rules them through his word.

[6 : 40] So who rules this church? Not me. Certainly not me. It's King Jesus. How does he rule it? He rules our lives together through his word. And that's why we called this series Church Back on Track.

Because here's the tragedy of this letter. This church in the background here are a train that's running off the track. Here's what's going on in this church.

And we get this later on in the letter. This is what's going on. So right at the heart of this church is bad behaviour.

And I take it the bad behaviour has led to a poor reputation that they might have in their community. And why? What's at the heart of it? They've lost the wonder of the truth of the gospel.

That's what they've done. They've wandered. They've taken their eyes off of it. Certain people have been teaching things. We'll come up to a minute. And they've lost the wonder of the gospel. So here's what I want to do in the time we have remaining.

[7 : 56] And it'll be real quick. We're going to look at the first 11 verses of chapter 1 today. We'll look at the second half of it. Next week it kind of holds us one.

We thought there was too much in it to do it in one. We're going to think about the first 11 verses. Here's what I want us to understand about these verses. A church back on track will guard the truth of the gospel.

It will care about it deeply. About truth. So here's what I want to do in the time we have remaining. A really accessible sermon outline. 1, 2, 3. Okay, I think we can get that?

1, 2, 3. So one action Timothy's to take. Two reasons he's to care. And then three questions I think we've got to ask ourselves as we respond to God's words. Are you up for that?

1, 2, 3. So here's the one action he's to take. You'll see it in verse 3 of chapter 1. Straight off the bat. Paul doesn't mince his words. He doesn't hang around. He goes straight forward to the jugular.

[8 : 53] Stay there in Ephesus. I take it because Timothy's tempted to run. Stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

Now, the false teaching in this letter is a bit of a slippery eel. It's really hard to pin it down. You get clues at the beginning of the letter. You get clues at the end of the letter. Here's what we see at the beginning of the letter.

Verse 4. What are these teachers into? They're into myths and endless genealogies. Do you see that? I take it old wives tales about certain Old Testament characters, what they did.

Certain knowledge that they think they have because they understand these things, because they come from the right family line. What that has led to is puffed up knowledge. So people thinking they're superior to other Christians because they have this.

But I think the bigger clue comes in verse 8. It's the way that they are using the Old Testament law. Now, we might know that in summary form, I guess, as the Ten Commandments.

[9 : 55] Right? And make no mistake, says Paul, verse 10, if you're tracking with me. The law is good. Because it shows us how holy and how different and how above the things of the world the Lord is.

The creator of the ends of the earth. The sustainer of all things. This is how he wants Israel in the Old Testament to live as his holy people.

What a privilege for them to be called to live as the people of this holy God. And the purpose behind it was that people of the nations would look into Israel as they lived their lives in accordance with how God had told them to live.

And the peoples of the nations would look in and say, isn't their God magnificent? The way that they're living their lives. What kind of God is that? That they would see the beauty of the Lord.

That was the purpose. The law is good. But the other purpose of the law was to show human beings like you and like me just how far short we fall of keeping it.

[11 : 06] You know, I remember when I was at uni, a guy that I played football with on my football team, he walked into my, I think it was my room in halls. That guy had a Christian poster up or something like that, right? And he clocked it.

And he starts telling me about his background. He starts telling me about his religious upbringing in Glasgow. He starts telling me about it. And then he starts telling me about how he's asked a lot of big questions. And he doesn't know what's going on.

He doesn't know what he believes anymore. But then he started telling me about how he still tries to keep the Ten Commandments. And I could see his face in that moment visibly drop.

And I tell you what, at that minute I didn't understand it. Kind of just in the door of the faith, didn't really understand it. Oh, but friends, when we consider God's holy standards, who he is, don't all of our faces drop?

As we consider his greatness? I think that perhaps what's going on in the background here, right?

[12 : 09] And we get the list of things here from verse 8 onwards. And I take it these things that Paul mentions, if you track with it, they kind of go with the Ten Commandments.

He's referring to the Ten Commandments. These ones here, I take it in football language, are the ones that are kind of the blatant foes. Okay, these are the ones that go blatantly against the grain of how God has told his people to live.

And I take it the stuff that's going on in Ephesus. But the tragedy, I think, is that the people in the background of this letter, their faces don't drop when they look at the Old Testament law. Their faces, their chins go up.

We don't do these things. We don't do these things. They're using the law as a barometer of their righteousness. We don't do these things. You know, I love Jesus.

Friends, oh, Jesus and the Gospels. You know, I love how he comes across people like that in his day. And what does he say to those who think, we've not done those things.

[13 : 08] We are right. What does he say? He says, you're not committed murder? No, I'm not committed murder. The Pharisees. Well, let's talk about the murder that's going on in your heart. The murderous thoughts that you have against people in your heart.

You might not have aired it. But let's talk about the heart. Are you so confident then? I've not committed adultery, they would say. Sure, but what about those lustful thoughts going on in your mind?

Again, you might have acted out, but what's going on in your heart and in your mind? What's going on? I take it, friends, as we're reminded here in light of what Jesus exposes about our inner thought life, right?

Coupled with, I think, God's design for sex being a good gift to be enjoyed between one man and one woman in a marriage relationship. That's what it says. Oh, but friends, when you consider the breadth of what God says about sexual sin, how can any of us stand?

It's so important, isn't it, friends, that we see the breadth of that. How can any of us stand? Paul gives this list.

[14 : 16] Could it be, friends, that people inside this church, they think they're obeying it? Could it also be that people inside this church are beginning to look down on people who happen to find themselves in this list? Make no mistake, it's wrong.

But are people looking down on these people? Because, you know what, we don't commit these things. Let me just say as a local church, if ever we find ourselves in that place, that is not of Christ.

If our love for him does not spill into love and compassion and pursuing people that they would come to know life in Jesus, if it results in anything other than that, then, friends, we have to ask some big questions about whether we truly know him as king.

Here's what I love. Paul, he says, plays them at their own game. Right? He says, if you want to divide the world into lawbreakers and lawkeepers, right, let me tell you what league I'm in.

I'm in with the lawbreakers. And he throws his hat in the ring with the lawbreakers. Right? This is Paul. This is the church planter extraordinaire of the first century.

[15 : 26] This is Paul, a pillar of doctrine and truth. And yet, what does he say? I am the worst of sinners. I'm in that league. And I'm just in that league. I am propping up that league.

Here's what I love about this letter of 1 Timothy. A letter that is all, and we'll see this in the weeks to come, a letter that's all about godliness. And the need for us to pick up our cross day by day by day, pick up our cross, deny self, and follow Jesus.

And live a holy life which gives worship to our holy God. A book that's all about godliness begins with a celebration of grace. And we'll see this even more next week.

Friends, if you tasted of the grace of Jesus Christ. Something I was rejoicing in this morning. John in this prologue. John 1, 14. Maybe it's 16.

Not sure. You forgive me. What does John say? Jesus Christ came with what? Full of grace and truth. And both of those things are true in him.

[16 : 32] Right? It's not grace and falsity. Because then we couldn't trust them. It's not anger and truth. Because how could any of us stand? It is grace and truth.

And that he would come and make the claim. That the truth will set you free. And so friends, we need to believe.

We need to understand that if we want to know truth. We want to know purpose. We want to know the reason that we were made. We want to know love. That just blows our minds. We want to know forgiveness.

We'll find it nowhere else than in Jesus Christ. And that's what this is saying, isn't it? Paul's point against the false teachers.

If you're trying to do works-based righteousness, thinking you're good enough to get to God, not only is it foolishness, but it's just not the gospel. The function of the law, surely, is to drive us to our knees and say, we cannot do this.

[17 : 34] Even on my best days, I cannot do this. And then look up and see the outstretched hand of Christ stretched out to us in grace. Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.

The words of that old hymn, naked, come to thee for dress, helpless, look to thee for grace. Vile I to the fountain fly, wash me, Savior, or I die.

This church have taken their eyes off the glory of the grace that's found in Jesus Christ. They've taken their eyes off the gospel. And so from one action Timothy's to take is if to say, stop doing it.

Here's two reasons to care, and these are a lot quicker, okay? Two reasons summed up in two words. Here's the first word, affection. Do you see that? Verse 5, chapter 1, the goal of this command is love.

Do it because you love people, Timothy. Stand for the truth of the gospel because you love people. And you love people because you're not a good boy.

[18 : 43] You love people because you know who Jesus Christ is. Do you see that, friends? It cannot be the case that we claim to love Jesus Christ and don't love our brothers and sisters. I just love the people of our world.

And we long for them to come to know Jesus. Do it because you love people, Timothy. It'll be hard, but keep on going because you love people. And do you see the three facets of it, which comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

And I take it that just means that love has worked its way right through you. See, being taken in by it and beginning to believe how it works, the people are doing that.

No wonder there's envying quarrels in this church. Because, friends, if we make it our aim in life to keep up with the spiritual Joneses, then that's a breeding ground for pride, is it not?

If all we do on a Sunday in here is try and be more holy than the person next to you, not only is that false and foolishness, but is that not a misery of a life? If that's what we are doing, pretending we're sorted, Timothy's got to stand for the truth because he loves people.

[19 : 59] And he wants them to know the grace that's found in Jesus Christ. Affection. Number two, salvation. Because there's no message like the gospel.

There is no other message. There is no other message. And for those of us here today who know Jesus Christ, who've experienced, who've tasted and seen that the Lord is good in the words of the psalmist, there's no message like it.

That Jesus Christ would come and live the perfect life that I could never live. That he would die for my sin on the cross because I am a lawbreaker. That he would do that.

The kind of love that our God shows. He doesn't just die for the people who he kind of likes. He dies for his enemies. Oh, friends, people's eternal destinies are at stake.

The status of being right with God that Jesus offers. And no other place other than the gospel. That message does God say is the power. Where the power is.

[21 : 01] What Paul would say, the power of God to salvation is the gospel. It is that. And not just that. It's the power to change. That's why so often throughout this letter, we're going to see Paul use words, images like shipwrecked, deserted.

He wants Timothy to feel the weight of this. Of allowing people to settle for believing untruths. And from two reasons to care, and maybe just to try and pinpoint some applications for us.

Here's three questions to ask. Okay, here's number one. Can we spot the false? Because we love the Lord Jesus. Because we want people to know him.

And it's because we want to see one another. Go from strength to strength. In our faith because of him. Friends, can we spot the false? Right, he's, you know, on summer holidays, I used to spend them, when I was at uni, I used to spend them working at the bank.

We'll tell you which one, right? I've got the name of a horse in it, you work it out. But that's always what they used to say, right? The best way to spot a fake note was to get so used to the touch, the sight, and even the smell of a real note that a fake one wouldn't stand a chance of getting into your till.

[22 : 15] That's what they used to say. Great, great way of being trained. So it goes with God's truth. Folks, we need to what? We need to know our Bibles. We need to know, we need to be constantly asking the question, does this match up?

Does it match up to God's word? Right? BBC News, does it match up? School curriculum, does it match up?

God TV, does it match up? Keswick Convention, does it match up? Pulpit on Sunday morning, Brunsfield Evangelical Church, does it match up? Does it match up?

Very quickly, let's return to the theology police, and that would be the wrong thing to take from this, okay? Second question. Do we love one another?

Right? And love one another enough not to settle for people believing a lie? Because the devil would love, isn't it, for us to leave this morning believing a lie.

[23 : 18] Maybe you're sitting here this morning, do you know what? I have blown it. I have exhausted God's patience this time. Surely, friends, not true. Maybe God doesn't love me.

Maybe I've pushed his buttons too often. Right? Maybe he is like a human father. Right? Maybe he is like that. Maybe his patience does work. Not true. Surely there's no hope for me.

Not true. Surely Jesus doesn't know my situation. Not true. Do you see how this works? Settling for believing a lie. Do we love one another, friends, enough?

Even though I know what the Bible says, surely God would be okay with how I'm living because it feels right for me. Not true. And here's the thing. We need to believe that life is found in Jesus Christ.

Why does God give us these things? Why does he tell us how to live? Do you know what? I know my own heart well enough to know that I couldn't figure out what's best for my life. And yet God loves me.

[24 : 21] And he says, this is how I want you to live as my child, my adopted child. Joy is found in knowing Jesus. Will we speak the truth? When someone says something not right in our small group, and here, sorry, this is question number three.

Will we speak the truth? Okay? When someone says something that's not quite on the money in our small group, friends, do we love one another enough to say graciously, knowing our own hearts?

When something is said from this pulpit that seems not quite right, do you love me? Do you love whoever it is that's up here to say that wasn't quite right?

Help me understand where that comes from. It's why it's so important on a Sunday morning to have God's word open in front of us, our Bibles open, on your phone, whatever it is, because you can say it's what he is saying matching up with what God is saying.

Let me just say I'm so grateful for people over the years who have taken me aside and lovingly pointed out that that's not quite true. And I've known that they've loved me as they've said it.

[25 : 25] I'm so grateful for people in my life like that. Friends, a church back on track, and here's the big thing again this morning, church back on track, will guard the truth of the gospel as it seeks to be a pillar in Ephesus, I guess, that's holding up the truth for the watching world to see.

Now just as we close, do you know I've often wondered as I've walked around the streets of our city is why so many traditional church buildings like ours were built with spires.

You ever wondered that? Why so many built with spires? Well apparently somebody told me this recently and I'm taking their word that this is true, okay, that the concept behind building a church with a spire was that if anyone at any time in the community wanted to know where to go to find truth, to find love, to find help, all they needed to do was lift their eyes up and look out for the local spire.

Makes sense, doesn't it, as a concept. That's a lovely image, the nearest spire and yet friends, how often the case is that when we walk around our city, so many of the spires, what are they now?

They're community centres, they're theatres, they're cafes, you take your pick. In other words, there is no longer in that spire a thriving local church congregation who are holding up God's truth for the world to see.

[27 : 01] You know what we did four years ago? Yeah, I think it was four years ago. We celebrated in this building 50 years of Brunsfield Evangelical Church meeting in this church building.

50 years, right? And what blew me away, I think I was just in the door as the pastor at that point, what blew me away was meeting people who I had never met in my life, hearing names and hearing stories that people were telling, people who have long since moved on from Edinburgh, some even who have died and who have gone to glory, but hearing stories about people who have played their part sacrificially over the years in guarding the truth of the gospel.

Right? Way before I was even born, people were in this building doing it. Have a think about that. People who've sat in these pews, friends, we really are standing on the shoulders of spiritual giants.

That's why it's so important if you're young here today to get to know an older generation because they will tell you triumphs of God's grace and what they have done over the years. But here's the challenge as the class, if I can call it, of 2021.

as we find ourselves here, not by chance, not by luck, we find ourselves here because of God's good purposes for us and for you in this moment that you would be here today.

[28 : 27] The challenge for us as the class of 2021 is to keep on guarding the gospel so that future generations will hear and see and taste that the Lord is good.

So friends, the question as we begin this series and as we finish this morning is will we rise to the challenge of being the generation who keeps on passing the gospel baton on? Will we do it?

We can only do it by God's help and by his indwelling spirit in us. So here's what I want to do just as we close. Let's just take a moment of quiet.

Realize I said a lot of stuff there and I take it as God's spirit, God's word goes forth, God's spirit is moving amongst us. There'll be certain things that are on our minds and on our hearts.

Why don't we just take a moment and let's just still ourselves before him just before we sing and close with our final song. In the words of John chapter 6, because of this many of his disciples turned back and no longer went about with him.

[29 : 35] So Jesus asked the twelve, do you also wish to go away? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom can we go? You have the words of eternal life and we have come to believe and know that you are the Holy One of God.

Our gracious Father, we thank you for who you are today. Father, that you would send your Son for us. thank you, Lord, that Jesus is the Jesus that we see in the Gospels.

Father, we just praise you for your great love for us. I pray for those here today, Lord, who are perhaps doubting your love for them. Those who are perhaps considering, Father, a way of life which is away from your truth.

Father, I pray that you would be moving amongst us. Thank you that in Jesus is one who is all grace and all truth. Oh, our Father, would you help us to fix our eyes on him today to know the life that he offers.

Father, for those here today, maybe for the first time, would you help us to repent, that is to turn away from the things that we would naturally go to. Repent and turn and believe and have life in his name.

[30 : 56] Oh, our Father, we pray these things in his wonderful and in his precious name. Amen.