

1 Timothy 1:1-11 — Don't Take Your Eyes Off Jesus

February 5, 2017

Good morning. Welcome to CrossWinds. This morning we are in the second week of our study in 1 Timothy called, What is the Church? Last week was purely introductory. We had a chance to meet Timothy the person, Ephesus — the church he pastored — and we saw the problems he faced. Today, we open the book.

Last week, we saw the main problem Timothy faced was some of the elders in the church were leading people astray. They were no longer turning people to Jesus but their focus was on something else instead of Jesus. As Paul began this letter he zeroed in on church leadership gone bad. He looked at church leaders that took their eyes off Jesus. In these verses he gave us four reasons why the church of Ephesus and why our church must not take our eyes off Jesus.

Why must I keep my eyes on Jesus?

1. The good news of Jesus is not something man created.

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Timothy 1:1–2 (ESV)

Paul used the typical greetings and graces in these types of letters such as saying grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and Jesus Christ. What is noteworthy is not the greetings he gave but the stance he took as he gave them. Notice his stance.

He said, “I am an apostle of Jesus by the command of God and Jesus.” He was not an apostle because he found it on the high school job board and it

looked like it paid well. He was an apostle because God commanded him to be one.

What is an apostle? An apostle was someone directly chosen by Jesus to be an ambassador of the gospel message to the world and plant churches. While on earth Jesus chose 12 apostles. They spent three years in training with Jesus. Jesus then commissioned the apostles to preach the good news after he rose from the dead telling them to go into all the world and make disciples. Jesus also promised the apostles in John 14 that the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all Jesus taught them. That is why we have the 12 apostles. Paul was not part of that group so why did he call himself an apostle?

Paul was an apostle but not in the normal manner of the other 12. Paul began life opposed to Jesus. He was like ISIS against Christians. He spent his time hunting Christians down, arresting them and overseeing their executions. He was one bad dude. Then in Acts 9, he was on the road to Damascus to arrest more Christians when a bright light shown on him blinding him and knocking him on his butt. The light said, "Paul, why are you persecuting me?" The resurrected Jesus appeared to Paul and chose Paul. After that moment Paul did a 180 and went from persecuting Christians to becoming a Christian.

In Galatians 1:17, Paul told us he then spent three years in Arabia. While in Arabia Jesus directly instructed him in the gospel. Jesus then commissioned him and sent him out. This is the same apostolic pattern of being chosen by Jesus, trained by Jesus and sent out by Jesus but it happened to Paul after Jesus' death and resurrection instead of before Jesus' death and resurrection.

Look what Paul said about how he learned the gospel message of Jesus that he taught.

For I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it, but I received it through a revelation of Jesus Christ. Galatians 1:12 (ESV)

Paul told the Ephesians that the gospel message of what God did for us through Jesus was not a matter of his opinion or something he was told by a friend. It was not something he made up in his mind. Paul was specially called by God and instructed directly by God in the good news of Jesus. Paul said that trusting in Jesus Christ alone by faith alone to be brought into a right relationship with God and made into a new person is not up for discussion because it is not his opinion. It is the direct supernatural command of God. In addition, the gospel message preached by Paul was later confirmed to be the same message the rest of the apostles preached.

It is essential we understand the stance Paul took in this letter. The gospel of Jesus Christ dying on the cross for our sin and that we are saved and made into a new person by faith in him alone is not a matter of Paul's opinion or anyone else's opinion. It came directly from God so it is not up for discussion or modification. That is why Paul insisted that focusing on anything other than the message of Jesus is a dead end road.

Paul also called Timothy his true child in the faith. That may be a play on words, since Timothy came from a mixed marriage between a Jew and Greek. Orthodox Jews would consider Timothy an illegitimate child. Paul said the exact opposite. "Timothy is my true child. If you want to know what I would say about Jesus, listen to Timothy. We spent 14 years together. Timothy understands the

truth and unchangeable message of Jesus. He gets it. He may have a weak stomach and a quiet personality but he knows the truth. Listen to him like you would listen to me.”

This stance clues us in on why Paul was so upset that some of the church elders were moving away from Jesus onto other things. Moving onto other things takes you away from the only thing that matters.

2. Taking my eyes off Jesus separates me from life with God.

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. 1 Timothy 1:3–4 (ESV)

For some of the elders, the simple message of Jesus became a boring message. They started teaching a different message or what they thought was a more sophisticated message. I don't believe they went completely pagan and had no interest in Jesus. I believe what they did was take Jesus out of the front seat of their teaching and put him in the back seat of their teaching. They didn't make Jesus the main thing. Jesus became an accessory. The problem is Jesus is not an accessory to our faith like power locks are an accessory on our car. Jesus is the only way to know God. Jesus is the only way to be forgiven. Jesus is the only way a broken life is restored.

The most amazing event in the history of the universe is the Son of God, who created the entire universe, took on a human body in the womb of Mary to live the perfect life we cannot live, to die on the cross and pay for our sin, to rise from the grave and beat death and to return to the right hand of his father and to offer to forgive all of our sin and make us the most blessed beings in the entire

universe for all of eternity and to make us into completely new people. If that is who Jesus is and what he has done for us, how can we make him into an accessory? One of our greatest mistakes is making too little of Jesus, not too much of him.

Look what Paul said about this in Galatians when he talked to the church in Galatia which was starting to focus more on the Old Testament law than on Jesus.

Let me ask you only this: Did you receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith? Galatians 3:2 (ESV)

Paul said to the Galatians, "Did any of you become a Christian and have your life totally changed by obeying the Old Testament law? What changed your life, obeying the Old Testament or simply hearing the good news of Jesus and combining it with faith?"

Does he who supplies the Spirit to you and works miracles among you do so by works of the law, or by hearing with faith... Galatians 3:5 (ESV)

He also said our lives with God are not just begun by faith but they are sustained by faith. Does God keep doing amazing things in your life because you focus on scrupulous obedience to the Old Testament law or because you continue to live and walk by faith in Jesus from day to day?

The obvious answer to Paul's rhetorical questions are that everything from beginning to end of our Christian life is begun and sustained by simple faith in Jesus.

Look at Paul's strong language to the Galatians about what he wishes would happen to anyone that would either dilute the message of simple faith in

Jesus, pull people away from simple faith in Jesus or preach a message other than faith in Jesus.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed. Galatians 1:6–9 (ESV)

Paul said if anyone is distorting the simple message of Jesus Christ, let them be accursed. Some translations use a more literal word to represent the Greek saying, “Let them be anathema.” That means let them be devoted to eternal destruction. Paul said, “Let them go to hell.” When Paul said that anyone preaching or teaching anything other than Jesus can go to hell, you know he was serious.

3. What takes my eyes off Jesus?

Spiritual speculation takes my eyes off Jesus.

In Ephesus, what were people focusing on instead of Jesus? There were two main distractions. The first thing people began focusing on instead of Jesus were myths and genealogies. There are not a lot of details given on what these were but a little historical investigation helps. Last week, I showed you that Ephesus was a highly cultured and literate city. I also showed you a photo of the remains of their library. People in the city were interested in literature, learning and books. There was a fair amount of extra-biblical Jewish literature of the day that featured myths and genealogies which was popular reading.

One book was called The Book of Jubilees. It was written in 125 B.C. It covers the biblical history of the book of Genesis but it groups the Genesis story

by Jubilee years. Pastor Jordan and I did some research in this book and we found that the book of book of Jubilees adds a bunch of details that are not in Genesis. One example is that it tells us that at the beginning of creation all the animals talked, like in the land of Narnia. It says that God took away animal speech. It provides all kinds of details are that are not in Genesis 1-3. It is a bunch of speculation. It is like reading a Dan Brown novel. It is a lot of repackaging biblical truth then adding speculation to it. The book of Jubilees is fascinating reading that you would be tempted to recommend to a friend. The problem is that it is all speculation. It is a work of fiction littered with biblical facts that ends up making biblical truth confusing. Most importantly, it take people's eyes off Jesus.

Another book of the same style at that time in history was called The Biblical Antiquities. It was written around 25 A.D. and covers biblical history from the time of Adam up to King Saul. Just like the book of Jubilees it deletes some Bible material, changes other Bible stories and adds additional facts that are not part of the Bible. It is engaging reading but it is a work of speculation that the Old Testament doesn't give.

The point is these kind of books were popular, just like The DaVinci Code was at one time popular in our culture. The problem is they are based on an overactive imagination. They have enough biblical truth to sound enticing but then they draw you away from the truth.

The result is people are focusing on religious fantasies, not reality. People are fascinated with truth that takes their eyes off Jesus.

The result is people are focusing on the latest speculative truth rather than the actual truth.

This whole discussion may sound far fetched but it isn't. There is nothing new under the sun. Today, we have a book on the market called The Bible Code by Michael Drosin. He claims there are secret messages in the letter sequences in the Hebrew text we can unlock using computers. He claims his Bible decoder method contains the prediction of Watergate, the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, the election of President Clinton and the 1929 stock market crash. These codes are supposedly found by putting together every third letter or every fourth letter of the Hebrew Bible and seeing if they make words. Many people have bought his book and this book is now a series. There are three books in the series so far. Is this true? Are there secret code words hidden in the Hebrew text of the Old Testament by looking at the every so many letters?

Mathematically there is no problem with just sheer probability creating a few recognizable words. The Old Testament is a big book and if a computer scans the entire Hebrew Bible looking every second letter, or every third letter or every fourth letter, chances are you will put together a few words. Second, the deepest problem with this is people start to become focused on computers scanning the Bible for random words, instead of focusing on Jesus. This book causes people to drift away from Jesus.

Another example is The DaVinci Code by Dan Brown. Even though the book claims to be fiction, many young Christians can't tell where the facts and and the fiction begins, because just like The Book of Jubilees, Dan Brown mixed

fact and fiction together. In addition, the whole purpose of Dan Brown's fictional novel is to undermine our confidence in the Bible by suggesting there was a conspiracy to cut out certain books or letters that should be in the Bible but are absent today. He talks about books like The Shepherd of Hermas and the Gospel of Thomas. The truth is those books existed during biblical times but they were never recognized to be part of the Bible in the first place. They were kept out for good reasons. There wasn't a conspiracy behind their exclusion.

Another example is the book Heaven is for Real. This book is the story of a young boy who supposedly died and went to heaven. People are reading this book hoping it will give them more information about heaven. By 2014, it sold 10 million copies. In 2016, the movie by this same name grossed \$101 million. This book is an extremely popular way many people try to learn about heaven. The problem is the book is based on myth and speculation. It is not based on authoritative truth. If we want to know the truth about heaven, we don't read Todd Burpo's book about what a little child claims he saw, we read the Bible and see what the apostles — who were inspired by God — said about heaven.

For example, when the book says that everyone who goes to heaven gets wings, what do we do with that? The Bible doesn't say everyone in heaven has wings. Who are you going to believe, the speculations of a child or the Bible? In addition, this book gets our eyes off of Jesus and the gospel. That is the biggest problem.

Another recent book that captured the attention of many Christians is The Four Blood Moons by John Hagee. In the book, Hagee claimed God would bring

catastrophe on the Earth during blood moons. A blood moon is a series of four lunar eclipses that correspond with Jewish Old Testament holidays. The latest blood moon phase that he warned against began on April 2014 and ended in September 2015. Here is the problem. What great catastrophe happened during that time? Nothing. The book is speculation. For a while it became the latest thing for Christians to read. The problem is many Christians found themselves focused on Hagee's speculations during that time instead of Jesus.

Hebrews 12:2 tells us to always fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith. Don't let yourself get distracted. It will kill you.

Another example of Christians becoming distracted by speculation are many of the teachings in the Catholic church. Where does the teaching of purgatory come from? It isn't in the Bible. It is Catholic church speculation because the Catholics don't believe Jesus paid for all of our sins so we need to pay for some of our sins. Where does the veneration of saints come from? Where does the adoration of Mary come from? It doesn't come from the authoritative teaching of the apostles. It comes from speculation. It is theological guess work.

Misuse of the Old Testament takes my eyes off Jesus.

Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions. 1 Timothy 1:6-7 (ESV)

Paul said another way some Ephesians were getting distracted from Jesus is they were using the Old Testament law the wrong way. Paul said, "These guys think they are biblically smart but in reality they don't know what

they are talking about.” You know what these kind of people are like. They think they understand the Bible but in reality they don’t know enough to understand what they don’t understand. They are like 14-year-old students on the first day of driver’s education. They think they know how to drive a car when in reality they don’t know how much they don’t understand about driving. Look what Paul said about how we are to use the Old Testament.

Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted. 1 Timothy 1:8–11 (ESV)

Paul said the purpose of God’s law is to reveal sin and to restrain sin. In these examples, Paul worked his way through extreme violations of the Ten Commandments to show us how God’s law restrains our sin.

The other thing the law of God does it is reveals our sin. The problem is some of the people in Ephesus were trying to use the Old Testament law to make themselves feel better. God’s law is not there to make us feel better. It is there to make us feel depressed. It makes us realize how much we need Jesus. This is one of my favorite ways to say it:

The Old Testament law is not a ladder up which we climb to God. It is a mirror that shows us how far short we fall from God.

Let me show you how to use the law properly. This morning, who thinks of themselves as basically a good person? Raise your hand. Most of us think of ourselves as good people. Just like a mirror, God’s law shows us what we do not normally see about ourselves. The law in Exodus 20:13 says you shall not

murder. At first, most of us feel good because we haven't killed anyone recently. The problem is when we come to the New Testament it helps us better understand this law. This law is not just talking about the act of murder on the outside but the heart of murderer on the inside.

Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. 1 John 3:15 (ESV)

Has anyone here ever hated someone? According to the law, you are a murderer in your heart.

Exodus 20:14 says we shall not commit adultery. Many of us think we are doing well on this one because we have been faithful to our spouses. Look what Jesus said.

But I say to you that everyone who looks at a woman with lustful intent has already committed adultery with her in his heart. Matthew 5:28 (ESV)

Jesus said that if we have lusted after people in our hearts, we have committed adultery in our hearts. Has anyone done that? Everyone will admit to lust. If you don't you are a liar. According God's law, we do not have a room full of good people. We have a room full of murderers and adulterers who are guilty and desperately need that sin taken away. That is why we need Jesus! Do you see why the proper use of the Old Testament law is to be a mirror, not a ladder, and we are to let it drive us to Jesus, not let it draw us away from Jesus?

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. Romans 3:20 (ESV)

4. Setting my eyes on Jesus is the only way to become a loving person.

The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

Paul said the aim of the charge of the gospel message is love. If we focus on Jesus, we will have a good conscience because he forgives our sins. The second thing that happens is we develop a pure heart because Jesus changes our desires. The result of fixing our eyes on Jesus instead of spiritual speculation is that we become more and more of a loving person.

We love because he first loved us. 1 John 4:19 (ESV)

Just as we focus on the one who loves us, that love that flows into us will flow out of us into our relationships with everyone else. The opposite is true. When we drift away from Jesus, instead of love becoming the dominant character in our lives, pride and selfishness becomes the dominant part of our lives. When a church drifts from Christ, it fills with division instead of love. Marriages that focus on something other than Jesus become places of fighting and frustration.

Sometimes people come to me and ask if I could recommend a good book on marriage because their marriage is on the rocks. They want marriage techniques. The truth is the book you need to have a more loving marriage is the Bible. Immerse yourself in the New Testament. Place your faith in Jesus. Walk with Jesus. Talk with Jesus in prayer and God will make you into a loving person and your marriage will be transformed. You don't need the wisdom of man, you need the transformation of God. That is why Paul said the aim of the gospel is love.

Applications

1. **Remember the gospel is not the opinion of men. It is the revelation of God.** Paul wanted the Ephesians and the Galatians to know that placing our

simple faith in Jesus to save us and have new life is not something he made up. That is directly from God. It is not up for discussion. In addition, if we look at how people are born again, how their lives are transformed and how Christians continue in Christ it is always nothing more than by faith in Jesus. If that was true then, it is true now.

2. **Don't get distracted from Jesus. He is the only way to know God.** In the ancient world there were many distractions from Jesus. There were the distractions of spiritual speculators that distracted people's interest from Jesus. The same thing is true today. Don't get caught up in the latest cultural crazes that take our eyes off Jesus. In the same way, don't get distracted by misuse of the Old Testament. The law of God is not there to make us feel better. It is there to make us feel worse. It is not a ladder up which we climb to God, it is a mirror to show us how far short we fall from God. Its job is to show us our need and drive us to Jesus, not make us feel better about ourselves.
3. **Focusing on Jesus makes us loving people. Focusing on anything else leaves us selfish people.** We love others because he first loved us. When we focus on Jesus, the incredible undeserved love God has for us begins to flow through us. When we get distracted from Jesus, we will become selfish, bitter and divisive people. We become less like Jesus in every way. The best thing we can do for our marriage, our church and our family is to walk with Jesus and become a loving person like him.



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