

MINISTRY BY MAIL
Lutheran Conference of Confessional Fellowship
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Sixteenth Sunday after Trinity, September 27, 2020

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(Hymns found in The Lutheran Hymnal, CPH, 1941)

Hymns: 370, 292:1-2, 295, 297, 296:4.

Lessons: Deuteronomy 13:1-5, 1 Timothy 1:1-20, Matthew 7 15-23.

Sermon Text: 1 Timothy 1:1-7

Sermon by Pastor Robert Mehlretter

In the name of Jesus Christ, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

Paul is writing this letter to a man named Timothy, a fellow believer who is to teach and preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ in Ephesus. Paul begins his instructions to Timothy with these encouragements: preach law and preach the Gospel. He tells him – and us – the Gospel saved me, just as it will save you.

Timothy is first of all to ***“command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work.”*** This is law-preaching. But Paul also clearly shows the purpose of this command. ***“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”***

Timothy is to proclaim ***“sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.”*** Today we look at

PAUL’S FIRST COMMANDS TO TIMOTHY

- 1. Command false teachers to stop!**
- 2. False teaching is contrary to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

Paul begins this letter showing that he has the right and responsibility to talk this way to Timothy. The letter begins: ***“Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith.”*** And in his greeting to Timothy he acknowledges, by the inspiration of God, Timothy’s faith and wishes him ***“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”***

What he is writing to Timothy now is not the first time Timothy has heard this. Before Paul went into Macedonia – what we now think of as Greece – he told Timothy to ***“command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.”*** These are the kinds of things that human reason would think are important.

Timothy is to ***“command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.”*** Sometimes our flesh may think that those who seek to preach and teach the Word of God in its truth and purity spend too much time attacking false teachers and other churches for what they teach and practice.

But Jesus is very sharp with his warnings. When he tells us to ***“Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves”*** Matthew 7:15 (KJV) he isn’t saying ‘well, it’s OK if you hang around with false prophets and listen to what they say.’ We are to ‘beware’ of them, just as you must beware of a dangerous dog on a chain when the sign says ‘beware of the dog’. We must be on our guard! False prophets often appear very harmless, as if they are gentle sheep or servants who serve God when they really aren’t. False prophets are ferocious wolves who want to kill your faith and destroy you. When God tells us ***“to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned[;] Keep away from them”*** he gives us a good reason: ***“For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites. By smooth talk and flattery they deceive the minds of naive people.”*** Romans 16:17-18 (NIV)

So the warning is essential for Timothy's day and especially important for us today. For there are many false teachers, especially in churches which claim to be Christian, and even in churches which claim to be "Evangelical Lutheran". When a church attacks any doctrine of the Bible and publicly teaches and preaches such ideas, it is a danger to the faith of everyone who hears such things.

And Paul is telling Timothy to command individuals who apparently were considered to be among those in the church to stop teaching such things. He even mentions some things that were attacking Gospel of Jesus Christ. Such false Christians were commanded not *"to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. These promote controversies rather than God's work--which is by faith."* There are many myths and fables and fictions and lies being presented to God's people. We certainly find them among the unbelievers of the world, but Paul warns against such people who talk about unscriptural ideas even among themselves and to fellow confessors of Christ – to members of the visible church! God's Word must be the important thing to talk about.

Pastor Dommer, when he was the director of a choir traveling to sing at different congregations, had this message for the choir members: People will want to talk about many things. When you stay in their homes, first talk about ideas. Then talk about things. Then when you have totally exhausted talking about ideas and things, then talk about people. What a great commentary on human nature and encouragement to talk about ideas that are important to the Christian!

Scripture is clear that we are not to teach or listen to any false doctrines! Paul is first of all talking about "teachers". But you know that not just "teachers" and "ministers" are those who teach. Everyone becomes a "teacher" by the words they say, what they talk about and debate about. May God guide our words – all of our words – so that they show God's love for sinful mankind!

How easy it is to undermine the work of God! Idle words, gossip, speaking poorly of others are all the work of the devil. Satan can't be happier than when those who profess to follow Christ quarrel among themselves about anything. And Paul here especially mentions *"myths"*, fables, falsehoods, lies. The word comes up two more times in Paul's writing to Timothy. Four chapters later Paul writes: *"Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly."* 1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV) And in the last chapter of his second letter Timothy is told: *"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths."* 2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NIV)

All of these admonitions also apply to all of us, for every one of us is told: *"Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation."* Mark 16:15 (NIV) We are to share the *"good news"*, that is, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Every one of us is included among the disciples of Jesus when he told them, just before he ascended into heaven: *"you will be my witnesses."* Acts 1:8 (NIV) We are to be witnesses to and for the truth of the Bible. We are not to be witnesses and spread the message of unchristian people and false teachers.

All this means that we are to speak of Jesus and what he has done for us. And what has he done for us? 'He died on the cross.' 'He died for our sins'. 'He died to save us from our sins'. The message of the Gospel is the message of the forgiveness of sins.

Did you listen to that sentence carefully? The Gospel is the message of the forgiveness of sins.

What is "the Gospel"? The word "gospel" is thrown around pretty freely in churches that claim to be Christian. The word "forgiveness" is thrown around pretty freely in churches that claim to be Christian. But what is often missing when those words are used? We must ask 'forgiveness for what?' Sin. But sin isn't a popular message for the world. God's Law isn't a popular message. God's law reveals sinfulness. The world doesn't want to hear anything about sin – unless it is some "sin" that they imagine other people committing. One writer even said that people must repent of the "sin" of saying that sexual immorality is wrong! That is a direct contradiction of God's Sixth Commandment!

Surely we admit that we sin daily and much. But don't we also think of others as being guilty of certain sins, and they are the ones who really need to repent? That attitude is the same as that of the Pharisees, who thought and spoke of others as more wicked than themselves.

Not only does Paul urge Timothy to ***“command certain men not to teach false doctrines any longer.”*** He also warns against talking about ***“endless genealogies.”*** The Old Testament is filled with genealogies and they have their place in teaching about Christ. They show Christ’s genealogy and his legitimacy as the descendant of Abraham in whom all the world will be blessed – if they only believe in Christ as their Savior.

But let’s make a modern analogy: The faith of your parents, or the faith of your grandparents or the faith of any of your ancestors won’t save you. When Scripture says ***“Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned”*** Mark 16:16 (NIV) it is pointing to you. It doesn’t say ‘he who had ancestors who believed will be saved.’ Jesus is especially critical of Jews who depended on their ancestry and genealogies to guarantee them a place in heaven. He told them: ***‘I know you are Abraham’s descendants. Yet you are ready to kill me, because you have no room for my word. I am telling you what I have seen in the Father’s presence, and you do what you have heard from your father. ‘Abraham is our father,’ they answered. ‘If you were Abraham’s children,’ said Jesus, ‘then you would do the things Abraham did. As it is, you are determined to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things.’***” John 8:37-40 (NIV)

John the Baptist, too, preached this to the Jews who came to hear his message at the Jordan River: ***“do not think you can say to yourselves, ‘We have Abraham as our father.’ I tell you that out of these stones God can raise up children for Abraham.”*** Matthew 3:9 (NIV)

Paul tells Timothy that the myths, the fables, the talking endlessly about genealogies ***“promote controversies rather than God’s work--which is by faith.”*** God’s work comes to us through the faith he works in us by the preaching and teaching of the Word of God.

Paul goes on about the reason for this command to Timothy – and to all Christians: ***“The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Some have wandered away from these and turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.”*** There are many in the world who fit just that description, but we must look in the mirror of God’s Law, and realize that we, too, are sinners and may be guilty of just the very things Paul warns against.

And despite our sinfulness, which we publicly confessed to one another and with one another just a few minutes ago, we must turn to the Gospel. We must turn to what Jesus has done for us – what he has done for you. What does the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins mean for you? It dare not be false confidence, but confidence that God has given you faith and wants to maintain, sustain, and build up that faith.

We are to ***“have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them.”*** Ephesians 5:11 (KJV)

Yes, as we speak out against false doctrine, just as Timothy was to do, we must not only preach law to show sinfulness, but we are to preach and show the Gospel to show our salvation, first for ourselves, but also for everyone we come in contact with.

We must teach “This is what God says”, “Thus saith the Lord” – both Law and Gospel. And in order to do that we must know God’s Word. We want to continue to ***“grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*** 2 Peter 3:18 (NIV)

God wishes us, too, ***“Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”*** May God’s grace, mercy, and peace come to you daily as you read his Words, the Bible.

May God lead us to do this every day! Amen.