

Small Group Discussion + Leader Guide

Sunday - August 9, 2026

Preached By: Matt Alexander

“The Church Must Be Set in Order”

Message #1

“Set In Order: God’s Design for His Church” 1 Timothy Series

1 Timothy 1:1-11

Homiletical Bridge:

CIT- Paul commanded Timothy to set the Ephesian church in order by confronting false teaching out of a commitment to sound doctrine.

Thesis- We should set the church in order by confronting false teaching out of a commitment to sound doctrine.

Proposition- I want FC to be set in order by confronting false teachings out of a commitment to sound doctrine.

Probing Question- Why should we confront false teachings out of a commitment to sound doctrine?

Paul gives us five ways Christ sets the church in order:

- I. The Command of Order (vv. 1–3)*
- II. The Corruption of Error (vv. 4–7)*
- III. The Cultivation of Godliness (v. 5)*
- IV. The Clarification of the Law (vv. 8*
- V. The Center of the Gospel (v. 11)*

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Open your time together in prayer. Ask God to give your group pure hearts, good consciences, and sincere faith as you study His Word together. Encourage group members to have their Bibles open to 1 Timothy 1:1–11 throughout the discussion.

CONTEXT AND OVERVIEW

Paul left Timothy in Ephesus with a difficult assignment: remain, confront the false teachers, and bring the church back under the authority of sound doctrine. The church in Ephesus was still gathering. Teachers were still teaching. But beneath the surface, the church had become doctrinally unstable. Paul's instructions to Timothy carry the same weight for the church today. A rightly ordered church submits to Christ's authority through His Word, confronts error with love, and keeps the gospel at the center of everything.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The church belongs to Christ. He purchased it with His blood and He alone is its Head. We are not free to reinvent His doctrine, redefine His mission, or restructure His church according to our preferences.
- Doctrinal drift rarely begins with a dramatic departure. It often begins with a small turn — a minor compromise that, over time, leads to a completely different gospel.
- The goal of sound doctrine is not theological superiority. The goal is love flowing from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.
- God's law exposes sin but cannot cure it. The law provides the diagnosis. The gospel provides the cure.
- The gospel is the center of gravity for the church. When something else replaces it, the church begins drifting out of order.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Opening Question

Use this question to help the group ease into conversation. There are no wrong answers.

1. Think about a time when something in your life gradually drifted off course — a habit, a relationship, a routine. How did you first notice the drift, and what did it take to correct it?

The Command of Order (1 Timothy 1:1–3)

2. Paul writes that he was an apostle "by command of God." Why does the source of Paul's authority matter for how we receive his instructions? How does this shape the way we should approach Scripture as a whole?
3. The pastor said: "Our first question must never be, 'What will work?' Our first question must be, 'What has Christ commanded?'" In what areas of church life is it most tempting to prioritize what works or what people prefer over what Scripture teaches?
4. Timothy was told to remain in a difficult situation and confront false teaching. What makes confronting error difficult? What does faithfulness look like when obedience is uncomfortable?

The Corruption of Error (1 Timothy 1:4–7)

5. The false teachers in Ephesus sounded religious, but their teaching produced speculation rather than faith and arguments rather than godliness. What are some ways teaching today can appear spiritual on the surface while actually pulling people away from Christ?
6. The sermon described doctrinal drift using the illustration of a boat navigating off course by just a few degrees. What are some small compromises or subtle shifts that you have seen lead to larger doctrinal problems over time?

7. Paul says these teachers were "confident but confused." How do we guard against confusing confidence or passion for accuracy and faithfulness? What habits or practices help keep us anchored to truth?

The Cultivation of Godliness (1 Timothy 1:5)

8. Paul says the aim of the charge is love flowing from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. What is the connection between sound doctrine and genuine love? Can you have one without the other?
9. The pastor warned that it is possible to defend sound doctrine with an unsound spirit — to win an argument and wound a brother. How do we hold truth and love together without sacrificing either one?
10. The sermon asked: "Is our doctrine producing humility? Is our theology producing holiness? Is our knowledge producing love?" How would you honestly answer those questions for yourself right now?

The Clarification of the Law (1 Timothy 1:8–10)

11. Paul says the law is good when used lawfully. What is the proper purpose of God's law according to this passage? How does misusing the law cause harm in a church?
12. The sermon stated: "If we refuse to name sin, we cannot faithfully call sinners to repentance." Why is moral clarity essential for a healthy church? What happens to a congregation that avoids naming sin in order to avoid discomfort?
13. The law exposes the wound. The gospel reveals the cure. How does understanding this distinction change the way we share the gospel with others?

The Center of the Gospel (1 Timothy 1:11)

14. The pastor said the gospel is the center of gravity for the church — that when something else replaces it, everything begins drifting out of order. What are some things that can quietly replace the gospel as the center of a church's identity or ministry?
15. Paul says the gospel has been entrusted to him. What does it mean for us, as a church and as individual believers, to be entrusted with the gospel? What responsibilities come with that trust?

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

These questions are more personal. Group members may choose how much they share.

- When you examine your own life, is your doctrine producing godliness? Where do you see growth, and where do you sense the need for correction?
- Is there an area where you have allowed a small compromise to go unaddressed? What would it look like to bring that back under the authority of Scripture?
- Have you trusted in Jesus Christ alone for your salvation — not church attendance, religious knowledge, or moral improvement? If this question is unsettled for you, speak with your group leader or pastor.

PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS

This Week, Choose One:

1. Read 1 Timothy 1:1–11 again on your own. Write down one truth from the passage that you want to carry with you through the week. Share it with someone in your group before the next meeting.

2. Examine your sources. Consider the teaching, podcasts, books, or content you regularly consume. Ask honestly: Is this content producing faith, love, and godliness — or speculation and confusion? Make one intentional adjustment.
3. Pray the pastor's prayer. Use the prayer from the sermon as your personal prayer this week: "Father, make us a church that loves Your truth, guards sound doctrine, and gladly submits to Your design. Protect us from error and doctrinal drift. Give us pure hearts, good consciences, and sincere faith. Use Your law to expose our sin, and keep the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of everything we do. Order us under the lordship of Christ and the authority of Your sufficient Word. In Jesus' name, amen."
4. Have a gospel conversation. Identify one person in your life who needs to hear the gospel. Pray for an opportunity this week to share it clearly and lovingly.
5. Memorize 1 Timothy 1:5. Commit the verse to memory and reflect on whether love, a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith are evident in your life right now.

CLOSING

End your time together by reading the sermon's thesis aloud as a group:

"We should set the church in order by confronting false teaching out of a commitment to sound doctrine."

Then close in prayer. Ask God to order your church under the lordship of Christ, to protect your congregation from doctrinal drift, and to keep the gospel of Jesus Christ at the center of everything you do.

Next Week: Continue in the series "Set in Order: God's Design for His Church" as we move further through 1 Timothy.