



# GRACE CHURCH

## Biblical, Historic Christianity

2 Timothy 1:3-14

Grace Church | 8.29.21

This morning we start a new sermon series for the next three weeks—what we will be doing is walking through our three core values. Core values are simply short statements that sum up the culture and mission of the church. Every church is charged by Jesus to make disciples, this is the great commission of the church, which we sum up here as “Making Jesus Known”. As we make Jesus known, what are we committed to? What are the kinds of assumed and understood realities that we need to advance that mission? Those are core values. These values are simply language, and that is not the most important piece. We could have phrased them in several different ways. The most important piece is the truth behind them. And to help you understand that truth, we want to show it to you from Scripture for the next few weeks. So we start today with our first value. As a spiritual family that makes Jesus known, we value Biblical, Historic Christianity. What does this mean? It means that God’s Word, as it has been passed down and interpreted by faithful Christians in history: from the patriarchs to the prophets to the apostles to the early church to the reformers to us—is revealing to us a common faith. That common faith is shown in the Bible and is a *Christian* faith, meaning it is centered and founded on the person and work of Jesus Christ the Son of God.

It’s quite normal, I believe, for Christians to feel what is called “imposter syndrome”. Do you ever look at your life—the responsibilities you have, the jobs or authority you’ve been given, the success you have achieved—and you just feel like a big fraud? Like you get by, people may even praise you for what you do, encourage you for your outward competence, but it’s like you are living in this fantasy land where deep down you realize no one knows who you really are. And you feel this not just in your jobs, but in your faith. Everyday, they go out into the world with the outward label “Christian”, and yet they don’t act like it. And so what happens? Doubt creeps in. They begin to wonder: “Am I alone in this? Am I crazy to believe this Christian thing?”

I’ve been listening to that new podcast about Mars Hill Church, which was the huge church in Seattle that helped found our church network, Acts29, and then fell apart in a matter of days because their lead pastor, Mark Driscoll, disqualified himself from ministry and all around people began to reveal terrible spiritual abuse and horrifying use of power. And I have mixed feelings about the podcast, but you know when you hear stories like that—stories of men or women or churches who are seemingly strong and vibrant who crash and burn and hurt all sorts of people in the process, or are revealed to be terribly wicked with a veneer of righteousness— all these



reports, piled up over time, begin to bring doubt. They make us ask: “are there any *real* Christians out there?” Have I ever met anyone who isn't just putting on a show?

And the kind Christian culture we swim in is highly committed to doctrinal fidelity, to a system of doctrine given to us primarily by the early church and the reformers, so much so that it's sometimes called “reformed theology.” And we’ve got conferences and websites and celebrity pastors circling all around us, even in that camp, and we look out and see Acts29 and the Gospel Coalition and others and we see what seems like good doctrinal, solid, Biblical foundations, and we think “you know what, maybe I’m not crazy, maybe there are real Christians out there”. And some of those Christians we’ve come to trust, whether in the Christian culture or in our very church, go and screw it all up again and sin gets in and it seems like all the sound doctrine in the world can’t save us from being power-hungry, angry and judgemental jerks. And you wonder why so many among us feel like imposters, why so many of us are searchers, looking for just the right church and fit, because maybe we tend to build churches that seem bright and shiny and new on the outside but are spiritually dead on the inside.

I am not meaning to start my sermon with a rant about other churches. We are here today to talk about *our* church. In a world where so many of us feel like imposters, how can we be a church who is genuinely rooted in reality? How can we be a church who is faithful to stand the test of time? How can we be a church where imposters become genuine disciples, flaws and weakness and all? For that to happen, I’m here to tell you this morning it takes more than innovation. It takes more than new ideas and strong, charismatic leaders. It takes more than flashing lights and loud music and well-run ministry programs. And it takes more than simply the right doctrine on our statement of faith.

In 2 Timothy, we find a unique genre of epistle. The apostle Paul is writing in chains, and it’s his last letter. He knows soon he will be taken for trial, condemned, and executed. So the Spirit of God comes upon him one last time to pen the words of God. And they come to us in the form of a charge and an address to Timothy his spiritual son. No doubt, Timothy felt like an imposter at times. He had to follow Paul! He was young, he had doubts. Would he be able to finish the race as Paul had, faithful to the end? So Paul writes to him, an instructional letter to help encourage him to remain steadfast. This letter is full of incredible exhortation, but for our purposes we settle on **1:14**. What is Paul’s final charge to Timothy—how does he remain faithful when so many fall away? How do we remain faithful? *By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*

There it is: the good deposit. Timothy’s spiritual inheritance has already been deposited into his bank account. His job is vault security, not investment banking. We’ve been charged, like Timothy, to guard the faith, to hold the line. What is this good deposit? Here is my argument this morning. The good deposit of faith that we must hold to at all costs in Biblical, Historic Christianity. So let’s get to the text.

### **The Good Deposit is Historic: We Aren’t The First Ones To Do This. (3-7)**



Paul's final charge to Timothy is first marked by thanks for Timothy's life and friendship in **verse 3**. Most epistles start with doctrine and then move to life. 2 Timothy starts with life, because Paul just can't help it. He thanks God for Timothy, because he knows this kind of gift of such a close relationship is from God alone. But already we notice Paul's language that he is setting up for Timothy. The God he serves is not a personal God—it's a God of his ancestors: the God of Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. Paul is proud of his Jewish heritage. Why does he mention that now? Well, he is at the end of his life. And he is about to appeal to Timothy to carry on his legacy. Paul knows he is simply one link in the chain of God's story. He is bringing Timothy into a long line. Notice too it's with a clear conscience. Paul doesn't suffer from imposter syndrome, he is confident. He knows there are real Christians out there. He is not cynical at the end of his life, he is not deconstructing and doubting. He is firm.

The word "remember" or "remind" is repeated 4 times in this small section. Paul is pulling Timothy back to their intimate past. He remembers him in his prayers daily, because he cannot help but remember, **verse 4**, Timothy's tears. This likely means Timothy is experiencing some hardship occasioning the letter, or simply that Paul is reminiscing all the times where they have wept together. He *longs* to see him, he says. How often do we say that of a brother or sister in Christ? Timothy is Paul's joy, his legacy—his last joy before eternal joy would be a glimpse of Timothy's face.

Notice the personal richness of this text. These are Paul's last words to Timothy, a letter he will read again and again. How does he present the good deposit of faith? Not just firmly, but kindly. Not just truth, but love. Faithfulness for the future is not simply about maintaining doctrinal standards. We can have a solid firm confession of Faith well into the future, but it will not truly be biblical if it does not create a culture of love and affection in Christ. Guarding the good deposit means that we create a culture in our church of Paul and Timothy like love.

How is this love possible? It's because Paul is not starting from scratch. He doesn't have to conjure up this love, it has grown by their sharing together in the heritage of faith. It's grown as Timothy watches Paul and suffers with Paul and weeps with Paul and learns from Paul. And Timothy too, he isn't starting from scratch. Again Paul is *reminded*, **verse 5**, drawing us backwards, to Timothy's sincere and genuine faith. Timothy is real, not an imposter, and he owes so much of that to his past, to his grandmother and mother who had a faith they didn't just practice, but *dwelt* in them. That word *dwelt* is used in Scripture to speak of the Holy Spirit indwelling us, or the word of God dwelling with us—it's an indwelling of presence, an ingesting of truth to the heart. Not just a catechism, but a life of faith.

I love this. Paul is confident in Timothy: not because he has read all the leadership books, or because he even has all the giftings. It's not because he has a large following, or a big brain, or a book contract, or because he is a real innovator and go-getter. What is the number one item on



Timothy's spiritual resume? He follows after his mom. This is Timothy's heritage: he saw mom follow Jesus.

Then we get to what actually is the main point of this section, 3-7. Paul's first exhortation. We know it's the main point because Paul says in **verse 6**: "for this reason". And he uses "remind". He is pulling Timothy back to remind him. His instruction is remembrance, a call to remember. And what Timothy is called to remember is that he is meant always in his ministry to fan into flame the gift of God. What he needs is not a spark to get going, he needs a constant wind to the hot passion of the gospel going.

But here is what you must see. The entirety of 2 Timothy is Paul's charge to Timothy to fan into flame and guard the deposit and not be ashamed, even when suffering and pain comes. Notice verse 7, he is preparing Timothy, because he will feel fear. He is telling Timothy: God will, by his Spirit, give you the power, love and self-control to finish the race. This is Timothy's charge, this is our charge. But the question is that is so important: how does Timothy receive this charge and this power to uphold it?

The end of **verse 6**, it is given through the hands of Paul. Timothy's charges and Timothy's power to uphold that charge of faithfulness, the text says, begin when Paul lays his hands on him. Now this doesn't come *from* Paul: **verse 7** says it comes from God's spirit. But it does come *through* Paul. Paul, as Timothy's spiritual father, is the conduit of God's calling and blessing on Timothy. Timothy received the gift of of God *through* Paul. *Gift* in scripture is used all the time by Paul, always to refer to either the gifts of the Spirit or the gospel itself. I think in context with this chapter and book, the gift is the good deposit. Timothy is charged to consistently breathe oxygen into the gift that is the fire of the good news of Jesus, which he received *through* Paul.

Why is this important? Because, friends, we have received the same charge as Timothy. We need, as a church, to keep going, to fan into flame, to guard the deposit. God may not have us around for forever, but we need to keep going towards faithfulness as long as we exist. And we receive the power for this from God's spirit, but the way that he gives it to us is so often *through* one another.

We do not receive the gift of god, whether it be spiritual gifts or the gift of the Gospel itself, simply by personal assent to god. We need to purge from our brain the ideas of Western individualism that teach us that we are disconnected from history and from one another. C.S. Lewis calls it "chronological Snobbery", the idea that all things new are necessarily better. This idea is not Christian. We stand firm for biblical doctrine into the future not because it is what we have always done, or because it is a worthless religious and ceremonial principle, but because we are one link in the chain of God's redemptive history. The saints who were faithful in the past are calling out to us as a cloud of witnesses urging us to not break the link, and the saints of the future are calling back to us urging us to not break the link. Biblical fidelity as a church body is not about our own personal preferences or comfort, it is about taking part in the great work of God through the centuries, and not missing out on the blessing.



No, your legacy will not likely carry on beyond a few years in the eyes of the world. But your spiritual legacy, as a worker in God's field, and a son or daughter and his family, will last far beyond you. We are not alone. We are The heirs of history, because God is a god of history, and we are God's. So you may be sitting there and when I say historic Christianity you think dusty, dead, lifeless, academic, boring. But what I want you to hear, is that you matter, and the faithfulness of this church matters, because we are not the first ones to do it. Instead of being a church whose sole focus is on doing something new, we can have the confidence of knowing that we are not crazy, and the peace of knowing we don't have to reinvent our faith. When we feel like imposters, we look to our past, we read of the faithfulness of generations, and we fan into flame the gift of God.

### **The Good Deposit is Biblical: We Didn't Make Any Of This Up. (8-12a)**

The link between these two concepts is strong, as evidenced by the "therefore" in **verse 8**. Because Timothy has this rich heritage, and because God himself has given him a Spirit through this heritage of spiritual power and love and self control, he is not ashamed of the testimony of God, or of the people of God. So often when we look into the past, we see the failures of the church, and we are ashamed. Or we see the suffering of the church, and we are timid. But by God's grace, we can be a people who *share* in the suffering of the church and are not ashamed of the gospel that has been preached and has made enemies for thousands of years.

Because, you see, it's not only Timothy's spiritual ancestry that gives him confidence to guard the good deposit, it's the fact that the deposit is worthwhile. I can sit here and tell you: thousands have died for this message: honor them by continuing the line! But if the message isn't good and true, you've lost me. You are only appealing to my sense of duty. But Lois and Eunice and Paul didn't die for nothing. The good deposit is not just family legends, the good deposit is the truth of God himself.

Paul outlines it to us in **verses 9-10**. Here is the good deposit that is worth suffering for: God saved us and called us to a holy calling. Here are two past action verbs. Saved is an event that happened in the past: it's a pulling out of, a snatching out of from death or destruction. And *called* is also a past action. It's not like calling you on the phone and hoping you answer, not like calling out or a conversation. The word here is firm—it's referring to the electing power of God to call his own people to himself. How do I know this is talking about God's sovereign actions, and not Timothy's response? Because of the rest of **verse 9**. Paul is telling Timothy: you can share in suffering for the deposit of faith, and you can do it by the power of God, because the deposit you are guarding is not dependent on your clever defense of it. It's a faith, a message, a deposit, a gift, that has teeth to it, that is full of God-action. Not only that, but this deposit is not just given to you in time—it's actually been given in Jesus Christ *before the ages began*. This deposit that you are guarding is not your idea, and it's not valuable because you say it is. It's worth suffering for and dying for because it is God's idea from the very beginning, before time itself.



Paul was seeing by the Romans as an upstart, a criminal worthy of death for propagating his unique religious ideals. Jesus too was seen as unorthodox, a overthrower of Jewish doctrines and laws, a blasphemer of god, an innovator. But what we are seeing here and reminded in this text is that none of that is true. The gospel of God displayed in Jesus Christ is not novel, and it never has been. It is eternal. So again we are reminded that we are heirs of an eternal story, a deposit of faith through the saints that has existed and will exist for all the ages. Friends, this is confidence. This is a firm foundation. You are not crazy to believe the gospel. You are not crazy to suffer for it. You do not have to be ashamed of it. You don't have to dress it up with fancy relevant trappings to make it valuable. The gospel is that God saved and called his own to holiness based on his sovereign grace alone and not their works, from before time. That is a message that stands on its own.

Why do I say that this message is *Biblical*? Well, because of **verse 10**. The good deposit we are entrusted to guard not only comes to us from eternity past, but it is actually manifested in time. So it's historical. But notice how it manifests in time. God doesn't just say: "I'm going to save and call my own abstractly". No, he reveals his plan, he manifests his plan, through the *appearing* of Jesus Christ. The incarnation is the moment in time where the good deposit of the faith that we are guarding became visible and tangible, it's where the salvation and calling came to life. That is why Paul calls Jesus *Savior* and *Christ*. God saved us through the savior, and he called us through the Christ, which means anointed one, the promised one from eternity. What is Christ's work? He abolishes death and brings life and immortality to life. In other words, with the work of Jesus Christ in his death and resurrection, death and darkness die and life and light come to life. Jesus Christ is the very focal point of history: he is what makes the deposit *good*, he is the gift of God we are to fling into flames, his gospel is the foundation of the church that makes it faithful.

But why again, do we call it *Biblical*? It's very simple: the Bible is the story of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. Every iota of the Bible before Christ is interpreted in light of him, and every iota after Christ is interpreted in light of him—he is the interpretive key of the Bible, because it is a story about him. So if we are to be a church that guards the good deposit, we must be Biblical, because the Bible brings us face to face with Jesus Christ, the manifestation of our faith. But it's not just that. The Bible doesn't just tell us of Christ, the Bible *shows* and *reveals* Christ to us. The Bible is the Word of God because it is his revealing of himself, and Jesus is also called the Word of God, because he reveals the Father he is the incarnate word of God. What does this mean? It means that we treasure the Scriptures, because in them we not only read about Jesus on every page, we are drawn into treasure and rejoice in the glory of the Triune God *and* be transformed to God.

For to this day, when they read the old covenant, that same veil remains unlifted, because only through Christ is it taken away. Yes, to this day whenever Moses is read a veil lies over their hearts. But when one turns to the Lord, the veil is removed. Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.



Only through Christ is our veil taken away, where now we can be thoroughly Biblical. We guard the Bible, we preach from the Bible, we are a Word kind of people. We didn't make any of this up. We don't preach our opinions. We don't encourage one another with personal anecdotes. It's why we are careful and intentional about what we sing, what we say in our service. It's why we saturate our liturgy with Bible. We don't have to be clever: God has spoken to us in Jesus.

## **The Deposit is Christian: It's Who We Believe, Not Just What. (12b-14)**

With a deep breath, we must acknowledge that a church like ours can be rooted in historic Christian practice, can learn creeds and catechisms, and can put Bible verse proofs on all our beliefs and practices. We can have a solid statement of doctrine, we can teach rigidly according to it, and we hold the line when we are called to deny it. And yet, for all this, we may not really be Christian. See, we can be unashamed of our church heritage, unashamed of the teachings of the Bible, and actually still be ashamed of Christ and his gospel. The Israelites who hung Jesus on a tree were historians, rooted in their faith. They were Biblicists too: steeped in the words and law of God. They were not ashamed of Yahweh or his people. But they were ashamed of his Messiah.

I have been reading a biography of Francis Schaeffer, and I was struck by part of his story. He had been following Christ passionately as a pastor, teacher and missionary for several years. But there was a point in his life where he experienced a severe crisis of faith. He locked himself up for several days, determining that he had to rethink everything. He was suffering from imposter syndrome. He began to question: "are there really any *real* Christians out there? And if not, than Christianity cannot possibly be true!" But Schaeffer's doubts didn't come from the orthodox doctrines of the faith, they came from the lack of "spiritual reality" he saw in the church and in himself.

I took about two months, and I walked in the mountains whenever it was clear. And when it was rainy, I walked back and forth in the hayloft over our chalet. I thought and wrestled and prayed, and I went all the way back to my agnosticism. I asked myself whether I had been right to stop being an agnostic and to become a Christian. I told my wife, if it didn't turn out right I was going to go back to America and put it all aside and do some other work. I came to realize that indeed I had been right in becoming a Christian. But then I went on further and further and wrestled deeper and asked, "But then where is the spiritual reality, Lord, among most of that which calls itself orthodoxy?"<sup>1</sup>

See, for Schaeffer, he realized there are two kinds of orthodoxy, two kinds of Christianity. One is orthodox doctrine: what you believe. But the other is orthodox community: how it comes out. And the crisis he came to is that you can appear to have one without the other. Paul says it like this later in his letter to Timothy, that he will encounter people who have "the appearance of godliness, but deny its power." You can appear to have great doctrine, biblical and historic, but in reality, you are less than Christian. Why?

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<sup>1</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Form and Freedom In the Church*



Because the good deposit is not just historic and biblical, it is Christian. And what separates true Christianity is not just its doctrine. It is that, but it's more than that. What separates true Christianity from heresy is what its doctrine *does*. Paul is not ashamed, and neither should we be, of the faith, because the doctrine is good. But there is another reason, look in **verse 12**.

What does the text say? I am not ashamed, for I know *what* I believe? No. I am not ashamed, for I know *whom* I have believed. I am convinced that I am able to guard until that day what has been entrusted? No. I am conceded that *he* is able to guard. And **verse 13**: Timothy, follow the pattern of sound words or sound doctrine, how? By the faith and love that are in Jesus, and by the Holy Spirit that he has sent to dwell with us.

The foundation of our church is not just historic, nor is it merely Biblical. It is Christian: which means that the real power for true spirituality is not in what we believe, but who we believe. Now, we need to believe rightly, that is so important. We must guard our doctrine. But more so, we must make sure we are seeing the goal, which is God himself. We do not guard ourselves: he guards us and let's us play a part. Our confidence is not in our ability to be faithful, it is in Christ alone and his faithfulness. When we understand that, then Biblical, Historic Christianity will be anything but dusty. It will be vibrant, it will mean we forgive one another, have grace for one another, welcome one another, love one another, long to see one another, give the gospel to one another. It will mean that we are really, truly, Christian. And when that happens, the masks can come off, the charades can stop. We can all recognize that on our own, we are imposters. That without Jesus, there are no true Christians. But in him, by his power, we aren't playing church, we are the church. In him, we are real, and we can be faithful to guard that real, genuine deposit until Christ calls us all home or sends us all out.

