



GRACE CHURCH

Two Charges

1 Timothy 1:3-7

Grace Church | 8.7.22

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.

We also have another lens with which to view our text this morning. Several months ago we voted to affirm and call Dave Becker as a pastor of Grace Church. Today is the day where we make that official—where we both stand before God and commission him into this new work. So the text today has that bend: not only will it reveal to us the centrality of Biblical, Historic, Christianity, but it will reveal to us the call to both Dave, our shepherd, and to us, God’s people, to guard and protect it. Just as Paul writes to Timothy and to the church in Ephesus with an urge or a “charge”, I have two charges today, both for Dave and for us as a congregation. **The first: guard Christ’s gospel. Second, guard your love.**

Guard the Gospel (3-4)

We guard what we deem valuable. A trite example is the bulky and gaudy phone case you put on your otherwise sleek and beautiful smartphone. A more serious example is the lengths you will go to protect a child from harm. What is it that the church should hold more valuable than anything else? The epistles of 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, commonly called the “pastoral epistles” give us plenty of hints—it has to do with what we believe. When Paul describes the church in 1 Timothy 3, he says it is “a pillar and buttress of the truth”, meaning the church is a support for reality. In Titus, Paul says the primary purpose of pastors is “give instruction in sound doctrine” and “rebuke those who contradict it.” In 2 Timothy, Paul calls upon Timothy to “guard the good deposit”, as a “good soldier”, and here in **verse 3** we find the militaristic language again. The reason, according to Paul, that Timothy has been left in Ephesus to help with the church is to “charge certain people not to teach different doctrine.” Apparently to Paul, the doctrine of the church mattered enough that



he would send Timothy to give a rebuke to those who muddied the theological waters. We guard what we deem valuable.

This is what we mean by Biblical, Historic, Christianity. There is a deposit, passed down to us through faithful generations, a deposit of truth. We treasure it, we value it, because it is Scriptural, Biblical—it's the revelation of God. It's the truth we recite in the creeds, it's the truth we sing together, it's all the compiled system and history of God's wisdom revealed in the Word. But it's also Christian: it's distinctly Christ-centered and Christ-revealed. It's a rule of faith that points us to Jesus. It's not less than our statement of faith, but it's more. 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.

The reason this common faith, this doctrine, is important to guard is not because we are intellectual snobs who like to sit around in armchairs and debate our theological pet peeves. It is important to guard because what Paul says is at stake in **verse 11**, nothing less than the “gospel of the glory of the blessed God”. In other words, the good news which portrays or reveals the glory of God. Get the gospel wrong, fail to see the glory of God. It is important to guard because if not, **verse 19** says, you make a shipwreck of faith. It is worth guarding because truth is valuable: more valuable than comfort, than genius, than status, than wealth. Truth is solid, whether or not you consent to its stability or not.

I notice in this text three aspects of guarding the gospel. **First, guarding the gospel means we may have to step on a few toes.** Notice in **verse 3** Paul's urge to Timothy is for “certain persons”. Clearly there are specific rabble rousers in mind. Dave, you may from time to time have to call out some of us specifically. You will probably have to do so for me—it's part of the call. The gospel is worth that. Because of what Paul says in Acts 20 that some of the coming “wolves” in Ephesus would come from within the church, and because of the example of two co-workers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, it's reasonable to believe the false teachers were already elders of the church. Dave, you are not entering a social club. If we all teach falsely, you must stand strong. This doesn't mean we should mistrust each other—we will get to that later—but simply that when affronts to Biblical, Historic, Christianity come, it's in the form of real people, not nebulous ideas.

Second, guarding the gospel means knowing the gospel. The call is not to teach “different doctrine”. Interesting Paul doesn't say “false doctrine”. What this implies is that there is, again, a set “rule” of faith—a measuring stick by which to gauge what is “different” and what is not. We get a sense of what “different doctrine” means in 1 Timothy 6:3-4,

If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.



What is “different” doctrine? It’s doctrine that does not agree with the words of Christ and accord with godliness. How do we know what is different? It means we must know the words of Christ. The theologian and professor D.A. Carson said he used to start his intro to theology classes with having each and every one of his students define “the gospel” in one word, one phrase, and one sentence. This assignment would be easy, if we learned the words of Jesus. He said the gospel in one word: *kingdom*, when he said “repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”. He said the gospel in one phrase when he said: “*I am*”, and he said the gospel in one sentence when he said: “*the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*”. In other words, the gospel is the good news of the kingdom of God coming to earth through the sufficient “I Am” Son of God sacrificially giving his life.

Never, ever forget that the good news of Jesus is simple: it’s about, as Paul says in **verse 15**, Jesus Christ coming into the world to save sinners.

Thirdly, guarding the gospel means believing the gospel is enough. The problem for the Ephesians was, as Paul puts in **verse 4**, devotion to “endless genealogies” and myths. It is most likely Paul is using Jewish genealogies as an example here, that the false teachers were not *intending* to teach false doctrine, but rather that they sought to imitate the Jewish Rabbis, who seemed to have found secret hidden knowledge of the Scriptures through their examination of Jewish myths, created stories about people in Old Testament genealogies. To put it simply—the false teachers of Ephesus were so concerned with the “story behind the story” of God’s faithfulness over time, they forgot the wonder of Jesus. There is nothing wrong with a story or myth to show and illustrate the truth, but the stories and myths are not the end of our devotion. The reason is because they bring speculation.

A modern example of this would be a cultural fascination with angels, or with the end times. From a starting point of scriptural faithfulness, whole ministries and churches have speculated about the certain dates and times of Jesus’ returns, or about the family tree of angels, their names and their roles. They have done so to the point of entirely missing the point: Jesus himself. The gospel is not always enough for them. These speculations distract from the “stewardship”, literally “plan” of faith. Ultimately, the gospel is about believing God; mysterious unfolding of grace, not searching it for the hidden answer key.

I am not worried that Dave will lead our church into undue speculation about blood moons. However, let us take heed lest we fall. It is of vital importance that the good news of Jesus Christ does not become dusty, outdated, boring. It must be enough when the crowds don’t come, when the bills are unpaid. It must still be enough when our church is suffering, persecuted, or simply outdated. It must always be enough.

So I say this clearly: here is the picture of our church that will please Christ. We are not so given over to false niceties that we consistently drift into theological apathy. We love each other enough to confront one another with a tenderhearted, even tearful, disposition. We know the gospel backwards and forwards, not just because we have studied in a book but because we have listened



to the words of Jesus Christ, the book of God. We have experienced ourselves to be the chief of sinners, and Jesus to be the only way, to be more than enough. We are not interested in him in order to pique our curiosity, to move behind and beyond him to more comfortable or tantalizing or mysterious things. We are gospel people, with the plain clarity of Christ's life, death, and resurrection for sinners, on our lips. We overflow with joyful good news. **This is what it means to guard the gospel.**

Guard your Love (5-7)

Perhaps so far the charge to a new pastor, and the charge to our church, has felt rather simple. Believe rightly, don't neglect our doctrine—easy enough, right? After all, Dave has been to seminary, and he got good grades. We are fairly educated, discerning people. If there is a faith passed down through the centuries, surely we wouldn't be naive enough to abandon it?

Let's not get ahead of ourselves. Notice **verse 8** there is a striking correlation between the guarding of our doctrine and the guarding of ourselves. The aim, Paul says, of all of this "bulwarking" and "stabilizing" of what we believe, is *love*. That word there for "aim" is one used often by my wife Allie, who is a teacher at a classical school and is studying for a masters in classical education. It's because it was a word used in a very specific way by Aristotle, the word "Telos" meaning "end". Aristotle refers to *telos* as the ultimate aim or inherent objective of a person or thing. What is the good life? It is found in living up to our ultimate end, the purpose.

The idea is this: if we misunderstand the *purpose*, the *ultimate end*, of right doctrine, we lose it all together. What is the ultimate point of guarding doctrine in **verse 5**? It isn't truth for truth's sake—it is love. We must remember this every time we venture into discussions about right doctrine. Truth for truth's sake is not enough. There are plenty of churches and plenty of pastors who teach false and different doctrine while staunchly holding to their orthodox creeds and confessions. There are those who follow the words of Christ, but do so in a way that does not correspond with Godliness, the character of Christ. It is altogether possible to strive to Biblically correct, to be Historically informed, and yet to be less than Christian. The way is very simple: we mistake the end purpose of our life. Francis Sachefer talked about how the church should be know by its orthodoxy (or rightness) of doctrine, but also its orthodoxy of community. A church really only has right doctrine if that doctrine results in a community of love. Jesus said it like this: "By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

To be Christian is not to go the way of knowledge, it is to go the way of the Cross. Remember the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 13:

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.



Or, you might say:

If Pastor Dave and Grace Church speak in the language of conservative doctrine, reformed theology, and Biblical fluency, but have not love, they are a Facebook rant or a forgotten fad. If they are relevant and popular, and they masterfully exegete the culture and engage the skeptic, if they hold fast to their convictions and if they are the last ones standing for truth in a world that has gone mad, but have not love, they are nothing.

The end of love, however, has teeth. It flows from a foundation, literally “issues” or “is birthed from” a certain disposition. We find in **verse 5** that disposition is 1. Purity of heart; 2. A good conscience; and 3.; sincere faith. So let me go further than saying: “all you need is love”. If as a church we desire to value Biblical, Historic, Christiaity, and if Dave, you desire not to be, **verse 6-7**, those who have swerved away into vain discussion, being confident but without understanding, then we need to remember three things about love.

First, guard the purity of love. What motivates love? It’s the fact that we have been loved. Love is never obligatory. The call of the church is not that we would get along, that we would endure, or that we we would put up with. Pure love comes from deep down, from the depths of the soul. It’s a love that has been cleansed by the purity of the love of God in Christ. I want you to hear what the author Dane Ortlund has to say about the love of Christ in his book *Gentle and Lowly*:

In Jesus Christ, we are given a friend who will always enjoy rather than refuse our presence. This is a companion whose embrace of us does not strengthen or weaken depending on how clean or unclean, how attractive or revolting, how faithful or fickle, we presently are. The friendliness of his heart for us subjectively is as fixed and stable as is the declaration of his justification of us objectively.¹

The purity of Jesus’ love is not dependent on your purity, but his. So the love of the church for one another should be based on the purity we have inherited as those who are in Christ. No matter how ugly and stained we appear to one another, our love can be pure because we have been purely loved in Jesus Christ. We love, because he first loved us.

Second, guard the conscience of love. The essential meaning of “conscience” is the inner awareness of the quality of one’s own actions.² In this context, it was also the peace and confidence that comes with pleasing God. When we guard our love, we gain confidence.

It’s normal to doubt our actions are good. But a healthy and mature church, and a healthy and mature pastor, has a confidence that goes deep into the bones. Peter links this confidence to resurrection in 1 Peter 3:

¹ Dane Ortlund, *Gentle and Lowly*

² Bryan Chappel, *Preaching The Word: 1 and 2 Timothy*



Baptism, which corresponds to this (Noah's flood), now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God.

How do we guard our conscience? We remember our baptism, which is the marker of our death, burial, and resurrection with Jesus. When we feel as if there is never enough we could do to be worthy of the "orthodoxy of community", that we do not have enough love in our tanks, we think on this reality: we are a new creation, a creation of love. You can be confident: Dave, although you will never have enough to love us as we ought, you are not born of this world but of the next. The power of the resurrection is all the good conscience you need.

Third, guard the faith of love. I find this is almost a repetition of the previous points, used to hammer Paul's exhortation home. Love, he says, flows from faith. Not a perfect faith, but a sincere faith, a faith that is willing to say: I know where the power of the gospel lies. Sincere faith understands clearly that it is God alone who saves. Sincere faith sincerely throws itself at the feet of Jesus in failure and in need, no pretenses, no delusions.

And so we come to the ultimate point of my exhortation today: the thing we must guard, the treasure that corresponds to both our doctrine and our love... is faith. The question for every church, for every pastor, for us, and for Dave, is this: do you have faith? This is the question that will be posed to us when we come to God for judgment. Do you trust Jesus? Jesus Christ is our shepherd. Do you trust him to guard his church? When we say that all of our doctrine and all of our teaching and all our belief points us to Jesus, and that anything that doesn't is dangerous and wrong, how does that make you feel? Disappointed, or alive? Do you trust that Jesus himself is enough?

Pastor Dave, God has charged you with a high and holy task. I urge you: don't let us teach different doctrine. I urge you: guard your love. But more than anything else, I urge you: trust Jesus. He bled and died for this church, he shed the most precious resource in history, the blood of God, for these people, for these sheep! He has not commanded you to bear that weight on your shoulders. God have mercy on us, Grace Church, if we expect you to do what only God can do.

What he has laid on you is not burdensome, but light. Enter into the ministry of the bridegroom with this freedom today. His charge, what I charge this church to hold you to, is not to be our Savior. Instead, it is to throw off all the masks, all the charade, and with sincere and childlike trust, put your faith in Jesus. If you do that, again and again, we will follow you to the foot of the cross, and you will fulfill the great "telos" of the pastoral office. And when you arrive at the end of your race, Almighty God will say, on the basis of his Son's great faithfulness and your sincere and imperfect faith: "well done, my good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master".

May your time in service to our church be one small step towards that coming day of joy.

