

Our church values - A church centred on the Gospel

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Date: 02 March 2025

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[0 : 00] Okay, so I want you to grab a Bible again, and we're going to pray in groups at the end, because then I think we can pick up some things to be praying for our church, as well as praying for one another. And we're going to be thinking this evening about being a church that is centered on the gospel. And so I want you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy. We're going to start in 1 Timothy this evening. I'm going to give you a page number when I get there.

1 Timothy is page 1191. 1191. Not quite as pleasing as 345, but 1191. Let me pray for us as we come and look at God's word. Lord God, we want to ask now for your help. We recognize that we're tired, probably, from the things that are going on today. We've got other things on our mind, perhaps, but we want to quieten our hearts before you to listen carefully to what you say in your word. And we want to ask that you might help us. And that as we ask you to help us, we pray that might be a blessing to our church, as we think about what it means to be centered on the gospel. In Jesus name. Amen.

So you might remember, because David left off last week, saying what our values are as a church, values that we haven't dreamt up and made up ourselves, but things which we have seen in God's word together. And we are thinking about over these Sunday evenings. So you get a point for each one that you can remember. Okay. Yes. Center in the gospel. Yeah. That's cheating because it was a, yes, you're gospel-ly centered, because we had LYs at the end of them, didn't we? Okay. So that's one.

Sorry. Prayerfully dependent. Yes. We're dependent on the Lord for everything. Yeah. Locally rooted. So we're in this community reaching these people at this time with the gospel.

This is where we are. Yeah. You know, you've got to go early because it gets harder and harder as it goes on. Yeah. There are seven, right? Six. Six. Lovingly diverse. This is great.

[2 : 28] Yeah. Lovingly diverse. Yeah. So we are from a range of different backgrounds and places and ages. And that is one of the ways we bring glory to God by our difference, yet united in Christ. Yeah.

Thank you. Yeah. We've done prayerfully dependent. Yeah. Yeah. Prayerfully dependent, gospelly centered, locally rooted. Diversity. Yeah. We've done that one. Yeah.

Sorry. Servantly led. Servantly led. Yes. So servantly led. So this idea that how the church is led matters, that the leaders are serving you guys as we, it's all member ministry. It's not, it's not ministry belonging to a few. It's ministry belonging to all of us.

Kingdom minded. Yeah. So we are, sorry, kingdomly, I can't bring myself to say that. Kingdomly minded, right? So we are not just concerned about ourselves, but we're concerned about the kingdom of God. We're concerned about training, sending workers. We're concerned to pray for other nations. We're concerned about the work of the gospel, not just here, but down the road. Okay. So those are the things that we are concerned about. And those are our values as a church. And we are working through them on Sunday evenings. And so this evening we're doing gospel centered. And I want us just to spend a little bit of time in 1 Timothy and Titus. And what I want to do is just read a passage to you. And then I'm just going to work through it really briefly, pointing out how the passage works. And then we're going to talk about the implications of all this together. So pick it up in verse 3 of 1 Timothy chapter 1.

Paul writing to Timothy, he says this, As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus, so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer, or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work, which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and sincere faith. Some have departed from these and have 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. We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous, but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God which he entrusted to me. I thank Christ Jesus our Lord who has given me strength that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service, even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man. I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the worst, but for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. Now to the king eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. Now just work through it with me and let me try and point out how the passage works. Timothy, verse 3, is in Ephesus, right? So he has been commissioned by Paul to stay behind in Ephesus to sort out what seems to be false teaching, that he may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer, verse 3. It seems that there are people, verse 4, who are in or around the church who are giving their time to all sorts of crazy different things. Myths, endless genealogies, promoting controversial speculations rather than advancing

[7 : 26] God's work which is by faith. So they're not promoting faith in verse 4, faith which would lead to love in verse 5, but instead verse 6 is meaningless talk. Now this is I think where it gets even more interesting. In verse 7 it turns out that these false teachers whom Timothy is to oppose are wannabe teachers of the law, not as in the Jewish teachers of the law, but as in Bible preachers, preaching the Old Testament which are the scriptures of the early church. But verse 7, despite the fact that they're teaching the Bible, they're not teaching the truth. They want to be teachers of the law but they don't know what they're talking about or what they say confidently affirm. They're ignorant and they're teaching falsehoods. Now just pause here. We understand what's going on don't we, right? So Timothy is sorting out false teachers in Ephesus, false teachers who turn out to be Bible teachers, teaching what is not true. So it's important isn't it? And we know this, don't we? That not everybody who opens a Bible is going to tell you the truth. The Jehovah's Witness who you meet on your doorstep or at the street corner will tell you that they're going to explain the Bible to you and they're not going to tell you the truth. The devil tempts Jesus by opening a Bible and quoting the Bible at him. False teachers are mugging off the church in Ephesus with open Bibles. They sound theological but they don't know what they're talking about. So the question then becomes how do you spot that, right? How do you spot that kind of false teaching? How do you know whether the person who's opening the Bible to you is telling you the truth or not? Well here comes verse 8. Look down at verse 8.

The law or the scriptures is good for you but only if you use it properly. Literally the word there is lawfully. So the law is only useful if it's used lawfully. If the law, the scriptures are used unlawfully, illegally, they are not good for you. So what does it mean to use the Bible in a lawful way?

Well verse 9, the lawful use of the scriptures is to apply it not as a means of righteousness for the smug but as a means of grace for the lawbreaker and the rebel. In other words, you can tell if someone is preaching the Bible lawfully or preaching the Bible Bible-ly because we like adding wise to the end of everything because it's not good news for people who think they're already okay with God but it's good news for people who know they're rebels against God. The people listed in verse 9 and 10.

So if your message is good news for people who are lawbreakers and rebels, ungodly and sinful, unholy, irreligious, murderers of their mothers and fathers, sexually immoral, practicing homosexuality, slave traders even, liars and perjurers, if it's good news for them then you know that you're preaching the gospel, you're using the Bible lawfully. Paul then goes on to give an example. What does this look like when the Bible is used like that? And he gives himself as an example, doesn't he, in verses 11 to 16. Saying that I am this great example of someone who was persecuting the church, someone who was evil and wicked and yet who was saved and transformed by the gospel. And in the center of that kind of personal testimony he comes up with verse 15, a trustworthy saying. Seems as if the early church had a number of trustworthy sayings which were summaries of the gospel that they used in church life. And this is the trustworthy saying. It's on the wall behind me. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. And Paul adds, of whom I am the worst.

So that's Paul in 1 Timothy telling Timothy to put right the false teachers by making sure that the people who open the Bible are teaching it lawfully by being centered on this gospel message about Christ coming to save sinners, sinners, even people like Paul. We're going to come and apply it in a moment. Any questions from 1 Timothy 1? Are you all with me? Yeah? Okay. I got a couple of nods from young people so I'm going to take those. Right. Okay. Titus chapter 3. Turn over a couple of pages to Titus.

[12 : 08] So Titus chapter 3 and verse 1. Okay. So similar situation, not Ephesus but Crete this time. And Titus has been left behind there to put in order. So if you look at chapter 1 verse 5, to put in order what was left unfinished. I think it's literally out of order. So he's like he's putting straight things that are not yet quite finished. And it seems to be the thing that's not finished quite yet in Crete is the need for elders. Elders in the churches in order to lead. So elders in every town.

Interesting, not an elder in each town, but elders in every town. Now listen to how he then expands on this in chapter 3 verses 1 to 11. Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle towards everyone. At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived, and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.

But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful, and they are self-condemned. Now notice that there is another gospel summary at the same sort of sense as in 1 Timothy. Here he says this is a trustworthy saying, I think pointing backwards to the trustworthy saying, which comes about the kindness and love of God our Savior appearing, verse 4, saving us not by the good things that we do, but by his mercy. Mercy seen in this washing of rebirth, so being born again by the Spirit of God, verse 5, the Spirit whom he pours out generously through Jesus Christ our Savior.

Having been justified, declared not guilty by his grace, we become heirs having the hope of eternal life. That's a trustworthy saying, says Paul. And so having shown that trustworthy saying, he then says in verse 8, that ministry looks like emphasizing these things, stressing these things. This gospel message, this trustworthy saying is what you need to stress, verse 8. So it's not just that you need to touch upon this, or it's not just that you at least need to cover this in your teaching program in the church, Titus, is that the emphasis of church ministry is this trustworthy saying, this message of the gospel. This is presumably then is what the elders in every town are to be emphasizing to their churches, because this is what ministry looks like.

[15 : 48] Why should that gospel message be the emphasis of the ministry in the church? Well, because this will do people good, right? It will mean that they be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good, excellent, and profitable. It mean that they will avoid these, again, controversies about genealogies, which are unprofitable and useless, and it will help them build unity, because they will be building on the Lord Jesus Christ, and not on these divisions. It's interesting, isn't it? If you look back at chapter 2, verse 11, we're told that the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good. What trains us in those verses for living a Christian life?

What people need is not seminars on each individual area, an ethical question that they're facing. Those might be helpful, but actually it is the teaching of the gospel which trains people to live a Christian life. The gospel, teaching the gospel, which is, again, summarized, isn't it?

The one who gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness, and to purify for himself a people that are his own. That trains people. Knowing that gospel trains people to say no to ungodliness, and to live upright, self-controlled lives in the present age. So ministry, says Paul to Titus, is the emphasis of the gospel. Just like in 1 Timothy, ministry is emphasizing the gospel. The lawful use of the law is bringing out the gospel from it. Okay, so that's a summary of those passages.

Any questions about what those passages mean, or are you all with me? Good. Yeah? Okay, great. No questions. That's amazing. I can only assume that you're all much sharper than I am. Right. What I wanted to do then is just put it together for a moment.

Paul seems to be saying something like this, and I think I've put this on the next slide, so hopefully it'll come up. I'm trying to summarize what gospel-centeredness means. There is a message of good news for sinners, a message of mercy, new birth, justification, and eternal hope. Trying to pull out these things in Titus. A message not centered on our works, but on Christ's works. And that message is the emphasis of the scriptures, 1 Timothy, and therefore the emphasis of ministry in the church. I think that's what we're trying to say.

[18 : 28] Yeah? So it's not trying to say... Let me... Am I going to go there, or are we going to talk about that in a minute? No. Well, yeah, let me say this. We're not trying to say, let's kind of boil down what everybody agrees on. Right?

You know this idea of lowest common denominator unity? So the idea that, okay, let's write a list of everything we believe and cross out all the things that we disagree on, and then whatever we're left with, that will be what we build our unity on. It's not that, is it? These are the high truths of the Christian gospel. These are the central truths of the scriptures from beginning to end. And these are so great, and so majestic, and so glorious, and taught from the beginning to the end of the Bible, that the point of ministry and church life is that we emphasize these together, and that draws us to one another. So I want you to write out, or think out, together in groups twos, threes, fours, something like that. What are the implications of that, then, for us as a church together? What does it mean for us to live this out in our church life? So what will that mean? Maybe you want to pick a particular area of church life, so you want to, maybe you're in on the Sunday school rota, or you're on the welcome rota, or you're doing groups during the week, or your youth group, or whatever. What would it look like to have the emphasis of the ministry of the church based on this message of the gospel? Okay, have a think about that. In some ways, there are no wrong answers, and we're going to discuss them together as we come back. So speak to the person next to you, and have a think on that.

Okay, sorry to interrupt your conversations, but let's feedback. So if this is the message at the center of church life, then what's that going to mean for different areas of church activity?

Does anyone want to help us out with what you were talking about in your group? No? Okay. My wife told me that I'm not a lot of the state, she said, so I'm a fan of that.

Okay. You did that beautifully, Clifford, yes. She said, I'm not a lot of the cause on you, so she said the messenger who's standing in the public was the moment message, but I'm getting the message to us.

[20 : 51] Yes, absolutely. Yeah, it's really, really important that the person who is preaching knows this message and speaks it clearly. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

I think you can say, can't you, that until the person preaching has preached the gospel, they haven't really understood the passage. If this is, if we're not, this idea of being gospel-centered is basically the same as being Bible-centered, isn't it? But we, it's not quite enough to say we're Bible-centered, because lots of people say they're Bible-centered, don't they? We want to be gospel-centered, because we believe the Bible says the gospel, right? So, and until the person preaching has shown you how the message of the passage that they are teaching shows us and teaches us the glory of Christ in the gospel, they've not yet preached, right?

Yeah? Great. Hilda, that was really helpful. Thank you. Anything else? I think what you're saying here as well, I must think about this idea of realizing how simple we are, practicing and all of that, it's an element on repentance and all of this.

Yes. I think there's a risk for us staying there, this realization, and always like right now, how simple we are, just realizing. It's a thing that we love to put out there sometimes to show how humble we are and so on. I think the idea of who we use, who we use mercy for life, there is this thing about joy. I think joy needs to get on at the beginning.

There's something about it. Yes. Yeah. That's so helpful.

[22 : 52] The gospel is not about how bad we are. The gospel is about how loved we are in Christ, even though we're bad. Yeah. And again, so it's fair to say too, isn't it, that if you come to a gathering of the church and you're just made to feel bad, I mean, actually Christians quite like that because it kind of, you know, we sort of like that kind of thing, don't we? Or certain Christians do.

We've not really understood the gospel either, have we? We need to go, like, as wicked as I am, I am loved. That's the amazement of Paul in 1 Timothy, isn't it? I was the chief of sinners, and he loved me? And so the kind of wonder of that in the gospel. Yeah, that's really helpful.

Yeah. Yes. Yes. Yes. So Romans 15 verse 7. I don't like the NIV translation of this particularly, but it's because I think literally the way there is welcome. So Romans 15 verse 7, welcome one another then, just as Christ welcomed you in order to bring praise to God. Yeah, there should be a friendliness to our church life, to our church welcome. Christ welcomed us into his family, undeserving sinners.

He loved us and now calls us brothers and sisters, and that should be the welcome that we extend to others. Yeah. Welcome one another as Christ has welcomed you. Yeah. Great. Anything else?

Yeah. I'm going to say something. Thank you. Yes, I'm in Paris. Yes. Yes. So there's an unchangingness, isn't there, to this. Lots of things about our church might change. Lots of things about our church have changed over the last few weeks, haven't they? But this will not change because this is an unchanging message at the center of the scriptures. Yeah, that's really helpful. Thank you.

[24 : 53] Yeah. Anybody else? Anderson, what were Ray and Jeff saying at the back? Anything interesting?

Don't worry. We don't want to back them out on anything. Yeah. Anything from you guys? Okay, what do you do?

Who do you do what you do what you do what you do what you do what you do what you do what you do what Okay, go on.

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who may at times doubt their mercy, doubt their salvation, and is coming back and saying, yes, we are sinful, and yes, we do fall down.

[26 : 50] But can you look at the mercy of Jesus and look at his love and look at what he did? That is our justification on the cross. And look towards heaven because it's coming.

So it's not just preaching the sinners outside, but preaching the sinners all about sin. Yes, great, great. Yeah, thanks, Liz. It means that we've always got something to say that's true and helpful, whether you're not yet a Christian or whether you've been a Christian for years, because this message is what helps us in whatever situation we're facing.

So you might think, oh, they're a church member. I know they're going through a difficult situation. I don't really know much about it. How can I pray for them? You can pray a gospel-shaped prayer for them, and it will be a real blessing and a real help because this is always good news, isn't it?

I think also that implies, isn't it, that the gospel is... So although you can summarize the gospel in a simple way, the message of the gospel is incredibly broad in all its implications.

So the message of the gospel is not just for us to talk about as we gather as a church. It's for you on Monday morning at work, right? It changes the way you do that. It affects how you relate as a family.

[28 : 05] It affects how you think about your life choices and what you want to do. So the gospel is incredibly broad in all of its implications, and we need to be thinking about that as a church and working that out together.

It's brilliantly liberating for the ministry of the church that we equip one another for the Christian life by teaching the gospel because there are so many different situations faced in a really diverse church, aren't there, that we just can't...

We simply can't address them all. But we will equip you for the Christian life by teaching the gospel because of the breadth of the gospel. Yeah. Yes, yes.

Yeah, there's one God and one gospel. Yeah, yeah. The other thing that I wanted to say, and I'll finish with this and then we're going to pray in groups. I think the implication of this is that churches should provide room for disagreement on secondary issues as well.

If we think that at the center of the scriptures is the message of the gospel, which is summarized in these trustworthy sayings and is the teaching from the beginning to the end of the scriptures, there will be things that are not as important as this, right?

[29 : 15] If the scriptures are sufficient to teach us the gospel, that means that what these scriptures emphasize is also what we emphasize and what these scriptures don't spend very much time on, we also don't want to spend all of our time on.

So if something is really important to you personally as a Christian and either you can't find it in the Bible or it's not there very much, you've probably got that thing out of proportion, right?

Because actually the emphasis of the scriptures is part of the inspiration of the scriptures. And so we should allow ourselves room for disagreement on things that the Bible doesn't emphasize. I think, I think I, in a way, the sort of primary and secondary issue thing is maybe not as helpful as the emphasis, de-emphasize thing.

So the things that are really emphasized in the Bible, we should really emphasize and the things that are not so emphasized, we should not, let's emphasize and say that we provide breadth for one another in that way.

Great. Heavenly Father, we want to pray and ask that you might help us as a church to keep this great news of the gospel right at the center of our church life.

[30 : 23] We thank you this is not something that we've made up or dreamt up ourselves, but this is the consistent teaching and message of your word. Thank you that we've not learned it by working it out, but you have opened our eyes to its truth by your spirit.

Thank you that this message of the gospel is good news for everyone who will listen.
Thank you that it continues to be good news for people like us who have come to trust in you yet still struggle in so many different ways.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to be increasingly shaped by this good news of grace in every area of our lives. We want to pray that it would seep out of us in conversations with one another.

We want to pray that it would shape the way that we welcome one another at church. We want to pray that it would shape the way that we pray for each other. So Lord, we pray for those in our church family in particular need.

We thank you that no matter how old we are or however far through the journey of this life we are, that we can say through the gospel that our best years are still ahead of us because we still await this great glory.

[31 : 30] So Lord, we pray and ask for your blessing and your help in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Thanks, everybody. Amen.