

The Goal is Love

(Part 1)

Passages: 1 Timothy 1:1-7
Matthew 5:43-48

Why are you here this morning? Why did you come to church? Think about it: What's the reason why you decided to come here today?

(Ask people to turn and share their thoughts with their neighbour.)

So, what's the reason why you decided to come here today? Some of you may say that it's simply out of habit—it's just what you do each Sunday morning. Others may say that they come for the fellowship...or for the teaching... or the morning tea...or because our Sunday School program is good for your kids.

All these are lovely ideas—and there's nothing wrong with any of them.

But today's passage from 1 Timothy highlights (what I would consider to be) the most important reason why we come together...why we meet... as the church each week. In that passage, Paul tells Timothy (whom Paul had appointed as the new pastor of the church in Ephesus) to encourage his people... his flock... to come together so that they might **grow in love!**

Listen again to what Paul says in verse 5: ***"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith."***

This idea of love is what I want to reflect on with you today. So, let me start by going back to the Apostle Paul's words in his letter to the Ephesians. You see, Paul was the one who started this church in Ephesus, the one that Timothy is now pastoring.

It was Paul who preached the Gospel throughout that city.

It was Paul who called people to convert to faith in Jesus Christ.

And it was Paul who, over the course of one year there, helped these new converts (people who were from a variety of ethnic and social backgrounds... male/female, slave /free, Jew/Greek) to come together

as one new people!

Listen to what Paul says in the letter he wrote to them soon after he left Ephesus.

(Eph 2:1-22) But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ. For he himself is our peace, who has made the two one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, by abolishing in his flesh the law with its commandments and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new man out of the two, thus making peace, and in this one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God's people and members of God's household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit."

Paul had only spent a year there in Ephesus, and yet, over the course of that year, he had taught *these people from diverse backgrounds* how to be a **church**...the Body of Christ...the Temple of the Spirit. Under his leadership, they were growing in love for each other, becoming 'one new people' held together by the love of Jesus Christ and the forgiveness of their sins!

You know, when you think about what was happening in the Ephesian church, you have to admit that it was a **miracle**! I mean, there are very few things in this world that can cause people from different backgrounds to love each other!

Communism tries to do it and continually fails- just look at the problems with Tibet!

Capitalism tries to do it, but it fails- the poor seem to slip through the cracks while the rich get richer!

Even in Australia, with all our talk of equality and a "fair go", we

still have huge problems with racism, backed by a general fear of immigrants.

What I'm saying is, **Jesus Christ is the only One who can truly bring people from diverse backgrounds together as one!** Only He can cause this miracle of love to happen. That's because only Jesus can soften our hearts and change our minds towards people who are not like us.

For a whole year or more, this miracle was happening in the Ephesian church under the ministry of the Apostle Paul. And it was this miracle of love that gave testimony to the world around them of God's power to change human hearts. In fact, Paul called it *'the mystery of Christ'*. In Ephesians 3:6, Paul writes; ***"This mystery is that through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus."*** It was a miracle of love!

But, suddenly, the wheels started to fall off! Why? It seems, from Paul's first letter to Timothy, that *"certain men"* (no doubt, from a Jewish background) began to teach *"false doctrines"*. According to verse 8, they focussed on the Old Testament law...on Jewish rules and regulations about what to eat, what to wear and how to behave...saying that everyone, regardless of your background, needed to conform to it. What's more, they made claims that they were more acceptable to God because they had Jewish ancestry.

Well, you can imagine the uproar! *By focusing on the things which separated them*, the church in Ephesus began to divide! The Gentile Christians would have felt like 2nd-class citizens while the Jewish Christians took control!

That's why Paul writes to Timothy and says, in verse 3, ***"...stay there in Ephesus so that you may 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—which is by faith."***

Now, this background is very important to understand as we come to the key verse of today's passage, verse 5:

1Ti 1:5 The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart

and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

In other words, Paul is telling Timothy: “You must command certain men not to divide the body of Christ. The goal of this command is love!” After all, love is meant to be the hallmark of the church. Love is meant to be the foundation on which the church is built. Love is meant to be the reason why we come together week after week. For the truth is that, although it may be easy to love your own kind, to love someone who’s different than you demands God’s grace! Jesus once said, ***“If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Even the tax collectors do that!”*** (Matthew 5:46)

To love someone across ethnic and social divides is something that constantly needs to be learned! Each week, we need to have our minds and hearts refocused on the centre and miracle of our unity—namely, Jesus Christ, the Head of this church.

But there’s another reason why we come here each week: Each week, we come here to directly fight the temptation to focus on the things that divide us. You see, the devil is a liar and a thief. He comes to kill and destroy all the good things of God. Our unity is one of his main targets! He hates the fact that we are one in Jesus Christ; he hates it when we love one another despite our ethnic and linguistic differences. That’s why Paul, in his earlier letter to the Ephesians, encouraged his flock to ***‘put on the full armour of God’!***

Eph 6:11-12 Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”

So tell me-- Why do you come to church? Perhaps it’s out of habit; perhaps it’s to meet up with friends; perhaps it’s because of for your children; perhaps you enjoy the worship.

But let me say—the most important reason you and I need to come to church is to make a stand, as *‘one new people’*, against the devil. It’s only

as you and I learn to love one another that we prove the reality of God's miracle in our midst...**the miracle of love...**and His power over the divisive forces of the Evil One.

Remember what Paul said to Timothy: *1Ti 1:5* ***The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.***