

The Danger of Departing From The Gospel

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[0 : 00] Well, brilliant. If you would turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 6, as Thomas said, my name's Phil, and a special welcome if you're joining us online and we haven't met before.

It's wonderful to look at God's word together. So let's turn to 1 Timothy chapter 6. We're looking at verses 2 to 10. Teach and urge these things. 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. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain. If we brought nothing into the world and we cannot take anything out of the world, but if we have food and clothing with these we will be content.

But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through the craving that some have wandered away from their faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. Let's just pray again. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would bless your word to us now. You'd give us ears to hear, hearts ready to understand. May we be like fertile soil on which the gospel lands and takes root.

Lord, please encourage and build us up by your word now we pray. In Jesus' name. Amen. Well, if I was to give a title for this morning's sermon, it would be How to Destroy a Church.

You see, sometimes it's necessary to see the consequences of an action in order to understand how dangerous it is. For example, the NHS has for a long time now been putting pictures on the side of tobacco products that show the long-term consequences of smoking. And it's worked to a large extent because people have seen the damage to your lungs, the damage to your liver, visually in front of them. Or you might think of maybe at school or other times you've seen the videos that show you what happens if you don't wear a seatbelt in a car and you see what happens to the body as it hits the windscreen and it's graphic and it's shocking. When we see the consequences of actions, the long-term consequences especially, it helps us to see and know the danger of something. And Paul is doing something similar, I think, in our passage today. You see, in one Timothy, Paul has been telling us what it looks like to be and to grow a healthy gospel church. We've seen that God's church as a family should be a pillar and buttress of the truth, protecting and proclaiming the gospel. And so at the heart of the church, we've seen there must be teaching of the truth.

[3 : 25] The teaching of the gospel is the foundation on which the pillar stands. But what if that's eroded? What if you take away that teaching? What if you take away teaching of the truth?

And so our passage begins with the command, teach and urge these things to Timothy. Teach these things that grow a healthy church. But what would happen if Timothy didn't? What would happen if Timothy thought, okay, look, I've heard everything you said, Paul, but you know, it's just too much effort. It's just too hard. What would be the consequences if other teaching took its place? And for ourselves, the question becomes, well, why on earth should we teach one Timothy at all? Why should we listen to what it has to say?

Well, you know, all of God's word for that matter, what would be the consequences if we set God's word aside? What would happen if we didn't listen to what God had to say?

What would be the consequences? In chapter six, Paul exposes to us the danger and consequences of any alternative teaching or truth. You might say it's the A, he gives us the ABC on how to destroy a church by laying these things out. We're going to look at that under two main points, how to destroy a church. We'll first take away the words of Christ and second take away the

return of Christ. And in contrast, the hope will see that a healthy gospel church instead holds fast to the gospel. And it's worth saying that this is the negative side of the coin. In chapter six, Paul goes through from talking about a danger of false teaching to where it leads, particularly with regards to money, to urging Timothy to live in light of eternity. And then he goes on, as we'll see next week, to what it positively looks like to use our money in light of eternity and to keep guarding against false teaching. So we are looking at the negative side of the coin this Sunday.

Well, let's dive in then to the ABC of how to destroy a church. First of all, looking at destroy a church, you take away the words of Christ. The first way to destroy a church is to not listen or not teach Jesus's words. We see that in verse three. If anyone teaches a different doctrine that does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with Godliness and Paul will go on to say what happens. So what is Paul saying is taught instead? Well, we see in that verse three, Paul gives us three steps to identifying this bad teaching. First of all, teaching different doctrine. Well, you could just translate that as heresy is the same word, different doctrine. Are they teaching something? Is something being taught that is different to what Paul and the apostles say? You know, it could be different doctrine can come in many forms. It could be changing slightly the message about who Jesus is or why he came. In some ways, in many ways, one of the main doctrines under attack right now in the UK in Scotland is the what we've been teaching the children about God's word that God's word is God's word that it is true, that it is authoritative, that it is necessary. Second, we see teaching that doesn't accord was consistent with Godliness. Literally, sorry, teaching that doesn't accord with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ. That's literally, literally the healthy words of our Lord Jesus

[6:53] Christ. This phrase, the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ also comes up in 2 Timothy, where it's referring to the gospel. So what happens when you teach any teaching that doesn't agree with the gospel is false. I mean, that may that might sound obvious, but so often, so often we can, we can maybe just not have our ears attuned to checking if something is absolutely in line with what God's word says. You're quite simply if anyone is giving a different message to Jesus, then they aren't his messenger. That's what Paul saying. False doctrine doesn't agree with his sound words. Third, teaching that doesn't accord with Godliness or teaching that isn't consistent with Godliness. The healthy words of the gospel should produce healthy, godly living. And in contrast, what do you see in verse 4? That the false teaching leads to people who are puffed up, who are craving controversies, who are producing envy. You can tell, you know, you can tell, you know a tree from its fruit. That's the same thing that's Paul saying about this false teaching. And you'll know that across this world, God's, God's church faces many threats and persecutions and around the world leaders, church leaders are put in prison, people lose their jobs, churches are shut, they're set on fire. God's people face massive persecution all across this world, but actually often the church is growing fastest in these places where there's persecution by God's grace. However, in some places, other places like the UK, the devil's been much more successful in putting the church in decline, hasn't he? Why? Because while the church doors might remain open, God's word is gradually getting shut. So we've seen what the teaching is in verse 3. Let's look at who the teachers are. We're going through this quickly. Verse 4, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words. You might summarize verse 4 by saying these teachers are arrogant and ignorant, and they crave controversy and quarrels. They're arrogant and ignorant.

It's surely the height of arrogance to say that you know better than God. And yet that's what people were doing in Paul's time. And that's what's regularly happens today when people say, actually, when people treat God's word like pick and mix, and they say, I'm going to have this bit, and I'm not going to have this bit. Because you know what? What Paul says, we're in the 21st century now. What the apostle Paul says about this? Well, he was just a man of his time. We don't want to listen to that. We're 21st century people now. We're going to disregard this. We're going to choose this. Well, that's the height of arrogance and ignorance, because you're saying that you know better than God. What does that lead to? These cheat teachers also crave controversy and quarrels. Now Paul isn't saying it's wrong to ask questions and to discuss the Bible, but the difference comes in our motivation. When we stop treating God's word as God's word, it just becomes another text to dissect. It becomes just like, I don't know what you did at school in GCSEs or whatever the Scottish equivalent is, whether it's Shakespeare or of mice and men. You start talking about what the chapters are and asking all those questions and dissecting it. Rather than the

Bible becoming the very words of God that we should crave, that is life for us. It just becomes something that we can chop and change and pick and choose and is up for disagreement. Who knows what it really says? It just leads to controversy and to quarrels. Who are these teachers, arrogant and ignorant, craving controversy? But who are they? Who are the people who are like this? Well, two words at the start of verse three. Do you notice that? If anyone. It could be anyone. We'll all be sadly aware how God's word is being steadily rejected and filtered out in churches across the world, in cross this country. But Paul's word, Paul isn't telling Timothy especially to just look at all the other churches around him. He's saying he's warning Timothy, isn't he? He's warning the elders in the Ephesian church here and he's warning us. If anyone. That's why in chapter four verse 16, Paul tells Timothy, keep a close watch on yourself and on your teaching. We need to keep a close watch on ourselves because we could also very easily depart from God's word. Just we know that danger from history. If I could just give you a little example from history. Many of you know that the free church was formed in the disruption in 1843 when over 400 ministers and many congregations left the church of Scotland for a variety of reasons. And in that time there were many great theologians and godly men who treasured God's word. But actually it was only 40 years later that liberal theology started to grow. Where did it come? It came through the free church. In 1889 George Smeaton, the lecture of New Testament at the free church college, died and he was a great theologian. His successor was Marcus Dodds. And in his inaugural lecture he said these words, the theory of inspiration called plenary inspiration is an offense to honest men. It is dishonoring to God and it has turned inquirers into skeptics by the thousands. It is a theory that should be branded as heretical in every Christian church. Now in case we don't know plenary inspiration is saying that all parts of the

[12:50] Bible are equally true. It's just what we've been saying. It's what we've been teaching the kids. But it only took 40 years, 40 years after this rupture and after people leaving the church of Scotland because of what they believed the Bible said before in the seminary people were saying actually look you know it's heresy to say that all the by parts of the Bible are equally true. It doesn't take long. If anyone teaches a different doctrine he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. We all must keep a close watch on ourselves and our teaching. This is pretty sobering stuff but it just gets more sobering doesn't it when we get to the next part of verse 4 we see where does this lead. Well verse 4 these things produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth. Imagining godliness is a means of gain. You see there's a direct link between what we teach or listen to and how we live. Doctrine and godliness are inseparably connected. In order to live as God intends we need to be feeding on God's word and when we lead to feed on something else that leads the breakdown. I don't know if any of you have ever made the mistake of putting petrol in a diesel car or vice versa. I've never done it but whenever I go to the petrol pump

I always double check and I always think wait a second is this petrol or diesel because I know the danger of putting petrol in a diesel car. You know you'll end up driving maybe for a few minutes and suddenly it'll splutter and stop and you've got thousands of pounds worth of damage. Well you could say the same thing as happens to a church. If you have the wrong thing putting in, if you don't have Jesus' words coming into the church, you get an atmosphere like verse 4. You get envy, dissension, slander, evil, suspicion, constant friction. It's like an imagery of an engine without oil. It just grates the gears grind as people don't have the gospel to lubricate their relationships. Why? Because people are deprived of the truth. As we'll see the false teachers in Ephesus were money grabbing, they were taking people's money but far more seriously they were taking the way the truth from people.

They were robbing people of God's word. That's why the church was grinding to a halt. That's why it was going downhill. Take away God's word and you get deprivation. Put in God's word though and you get transformation. You see God's word is living and active. We've been talking about this with the kids because it's such wonderful truth. God's word isn't like any other book. It should come with a warning sticker on the front saying beware because God uses his word to change people. Can I address any of you in this room or listening online who wouldn't call yourself a follower of Jesus? Because have you read the Bible for yourself? I'm not talking about reading it when you're a child or hearing it in Sunday school or your parents taught teaching it to you. Have you read it as an adult? Have you started? Have you opened one of the gospels and asked yourself who is Jesus? What does that mean for me? What has he done? What difference does that make? Can I encourage

you, these gospels that we have in God's word, their eyewitness testimonies of Jesus' life. You could pick one up at the table in the entrance there. Some of them are there. But God's word makes all the difference. That's why I'd say it comes with a warning sticker because quite a lot of people in this room are here because God's word has changed them, whether they liked it or not. Just on Friday Ian was telling the youth in Finders about how originally he didn't want to become a Christian but then he was reading God's word. As he read God's word it poked and it prodded and it pinned him against the wall until he couldn't do anything but give his life to Christ. That's what God's word does. It transforms people, it saves people, it's powerful, it's living and active. God doesn't just use his word to save, he also uses it to transform. God doesn't change us by simply growing our knowledge of the word. If I asked you what was preached on two weeks ago, probably like me, you couldn't remember. At least not remember the details. But God uses the drip drip drip of us hearing his word on a Sunday midweek throughout the week as we read his word. He uses that drip drip drip to slowly change us. Not because we remember everything but because God's word by his spirit transforms and changes our hearts to become more like Christ and less like the people of that attitude of verse 4. So what do we need to do? Well I hope it's obvious by now. We need to stick with the words of Christ. We need to listen to his words. So can I ask, do we listen? We're just hearing earlier on that how Jesus, these words, they're the bread of life. They're our daily bread. The reality isn't that either that it's Jesus' words or nothing. Something is always going to fill the void in what we listen to. There are so many other voices, so many other competing truths trying to get our attention that if we stop listening to Jesus, we're going to be listening to someone else. It isn't a matter of actually I'm going to stand on my own two feet and I'm an independent man or woman and I can think what I want to think. We're always going to be following some other teaching. So who do we want to listen to? Do we want to listen to Jesus? Because if we don't, over time it leads to shipwreck. We see that in one Timothy, shipwreck of individuals and whole churches. Zach and we need to teach God's word. Now in Timothy we see how he applies that to the elders and those who preach it, who preach and we need to pray for our elders that they would guard and hold fast and faithfully teach God's word. But that also applies to all of us. Whether people are leading Sunday school or whether they're teaching their kids at home or their grandkids or speaking to their nephews and nieces. But also in Colossians 3:16 Paul tells, says that may the word of God dwell in you richly teaching and admonishing one another. We all have a command, we all have a duty to speak God's word, to speak the sound words of Jesus Christ to one another. That doesn't mean we can't have chit chat and talk about the weather at the football or anything else. But the question is, do we ever seek to share God's word with each other? God's word is living and active. We might not know exactly what to say, but do we ever think about how to just speak the truths of God's word, sharing a verse or whatever it is, even by text, to build people up? God's word does wonders. And we also need to then share God's word with other people. I've already mentioned, but God's word saves, it brings people from death to life. It saves people from, it makes an eternal difference to people. So let's stick with Jesus' words.

[20 : 20] So first, if you want to destroy a church, you take away Jesus' word. Second, if you want to destroy a church, you take away the return of Christ. If you take away Jesus' words, it won't be long before you find a very different pattern of life. We've already seen that. It's like if you get on a wrong train and you find yourself far from where you intended to be. If you grab me later, I can tell you about how that happened once.

So about a two hour detour all the way back to Edinburgh when I was trying to get from St Andrew's to Lucas or something like that. You don't want to get on the wrong train. It leaves you far away from where you want to be. But the same thing happens if you start, if you hook your carriage on to the wrong kind of teaching. You'll end up far away from what God wants us to live. And in our passage, we see that this false teaching had ignored Jesus' sound words and it led to a very different kind of godliness. We see that there where they say, imagining godliness as a means of gain. So what is this false godliness? Well, in chapter three, we saw that Jesus' godliness incarnate. In other words, Jesus shows us in his life the pattern for Godlike, Christlike, Christian life. He shows us how we should live in his life. In the era we're seeing in chapter six verse five is that the teachers thought that by living a Christian life, they would gain something, particularly material gain, wealth, money. And if that sounds strange, let me just put it another way. They thought that religion should pay off. And actually, it's really easy to think that way, isn't it? It's not such a strange idea when we put it that way. Because whether or not we're focused on money, we can often think

that there should be some benefit coming back to us for living a godly life, as if, you know, God owes me something. I'm coming to church, I'm reading his word, I'm trying to obey his commands. God owes me. Even if we don't think that will say that out loud. And you do, we see this in various ways. People expect blessing maybe when they live a godly life. Or in contrast, on the other side of the coin, people are shocked when bad stuff happens to them because they think, oh, like I go to church, I'm seeking to live like Christ, why is bad stuff happening? And you see the psalmist cry that out in God's word. It could be really confusing. It could be really subtle. I wonder for us, what do we have any of those kind of expectations? What do we expect from God in this life? What do we think he owes us? A relationship? A marriage? Even children? Or a certain standard of living? A certain level of health? Now these aren't bad things. We're allowed to grieve when these things, when we don't have these things, but there's a difference between desiring these things and grieving when they're not there and actually thinking that God owes us them because that can gradually lead into bitterness. It's really difficult when we grasp and grapple with these things. They're very emotive. They can really hurt, but there's a big difference between, and we need to have right expectations in terms of, well, in terms of what to expect from the Christian life in this life especially. And can I just say, if you're looking into Christianity again, it's worth being clear about the cost. Some people will falsely say that you follow Jesus and you'll get health, wealth and happiness.

The Bible actually promises the opposite, that if we follow Jesus, well, we're following Jesus and so we will live like Jesus. He had no money to his name. He was buried in the borrowed tomb. He had no status or success. His life ended in the most miserable and humiliating and painful way possible. If we follow Jesus, we can expect to be treated like him. And so you might ask, and you might think, well, how on earth can it be worth it? How on earth can following Jesus be worth it? If there's nothing in it for us, or that's what it sounds like?

Well, look at Paul's response to me in verses seven and eight, we're on our second part of our point two, false godliness forgets eternity. You see, false godliness imagines godliness as a means of gain. And notice what Paul says in response in verse six. He says, but godliness with contentment is great gain. He doesn't say godliness isn't great gain. He says, godliness with contentment is great gain. What does that mean? Well, let me just explain because in the process, I think we'll see why following Jesus is worth it. Verse seven, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. In verse seven, Paul gives us one of the most important lessons that you can ever learn in life. And that's that we're all going to die.

[25 : 37] Well, that first Jesus is going to return. Either way, though, we can't take anything with us from this life to the next. I heard the story of a minister who is at a funeral of a wealthy woman and someone curiously asked him, Well, how much did she leave?

And he answered everything. Everything. Her wealth, her success, her respect, her status, her family, her legacy. You can add to the list, everything. So how could godliness be great gain if we lose everything in death? Well, everything hinges on whether this life is all there is.

If this is the only life, well, then grab what you can because you've only got one life. And in that case, following Jesus is definitely not worth it. However, if after we die, we go to stand before God and before us stands either an eternity of death or life, then the equation suddenly changes, doesn't it? Then the only things that have real value are the things that last into eternity, because eternity is far more longer than this little span of life that we have right now.

Just illustrate having an amazing house with a pool and seven bedrooms and a gym that's beautifully perched on the cliff tops, maybe in Carlisle, or maybe somewhat more warmer. Let's go for the Mediterranean if you want. That might be wonderful. But if those cliff tops are being eroded and in five years, those are going to crumble, and that house is going to slip right into the sea, well, it's worth nothing. And at that point, your bicycles are far more valuable because you can take that with you when you go. The only things that have any real value are those things that last into eternity. In the light of eternity, all our money, all our possessions, they become as valuable as monopoly money, trying to cash that in an ATM, it won't work.

In light of eternity, only one thing matters. Are you trusting Jesus? Is your eternity safe with him? In Mark 8:35, Jesus tells his disciples, what does it profit a person to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul? On the other hand, in John 12, Jesus says the wonderful words. He says, I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.

[28 : 17] Trusting in Jesus determines our eternity. And Paul's point in this passage is that though, while money doesn't last, if we're trusting in Jesus there, we can actually invest in something in this life that will last to eternity. You see, godliness lasts. Godliness doesn't gain us entry into heaven. Trusting, we are saved by trusting in Jesus. The point though is that godliness is gain in and of itself, doesn't gain something else. It's gain in and of itself because the Christ-like-ness that God by his spirit grows in us now, God will perfect and reward that in eternity for all who trust in Jesus. That Christ-like life, that's what lasts. That's what it's going to be seen. That's what matters when we're standing around the throne of God. We're in the new creation that Christ brings to pass. Furthermore, godliness is of gain because of the effect it has on others. As we reflect Christ in this life, well, we help encourage and grow others, help others to grow in godliness. Christ's life reflecting off us does a transforming work, as we've already said. As we speak his word, as we live his life, God uses that to change people.

And most precious of all, he uses that to save others. Speaking God's word, living his life has eternal worth because God uses that to point people to Christ. God uses that to take people from an eternal destiny of death and hell instead to hope an eternal life. Jesus' word and a godly life is worth it because it can make the difference between seeing your neighbour in heaven and not. And God uses that to save people. Godliness is great gain. The danger though is that we forget eternity and that we're snared by the sparkles of this world. That's so easy, isn't it? Look at verse nine, but those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. Paul gives us powerful imagery here, doesn't he? The world the world and money is like a juicy stake lying on a forest floor. But you go out to grab it. It looks great, but you go out to grab it and suddenly you're caught in a snare. The bear trap snaps shut around your foot and you're stuck. And people hooked on money often end up destroying their lives and the lives of their loved ones and lest by some miracle that hook is wrenched free.

You just think where gambling has taken some people and how their homes and lives have ruined. You just think of the homes that are split apart when someone devotes their entire life to their career and climbing that ladder and they barely see their wife or their husband and their family. And actually that long-term neglect just ruins it because they've chased after money. Paul's right to say money is the root of all kinds of evil. People lie for money. They cheat, they seduce, they abuse, they kidnap, they threaten, they kill. Money is an evil in and of itself, but it's one of the most glittering things that this world can offer and boy is it attractive.

[31 : 59] Money can do so much. Money can fix a lot of problems or at least it looks like that often. And so people die for it. But they die for money both now and for eternity when that's all they chase after. You see they, Paul talks about, they plunge. It's harmful to the eyes that plunge people into ruin and destruction like a person running headlong down a hill chasing a big golden orb only to discover too late that at the bottom of the slope is a cliff and they plunger to everlasting darkness. Money is the source of all kinds of evil. It's true.

Next week we'll think a bit more how it can be used for great good because it can. Paul's going to go on to say that, but for now we see the danger. So in contrast then, we need to remember Christ's return. You might be wondering what any of this has to do with destroying a church. Well, we've just worked through in some ways what happens if an individual forgets eternity and lives for something just in this world. We've seen the destruction that causes. Well, if you want to destroy a church, just get everyone to focus on the here and now and forget eternity because I can guarantee you that you'll produce people who are fundamentally selfish and who are in it for the gain at any cost. If you get a church to take its eyes away from eternity, they're going to be focused on status and money and success and power and all these things that the world is focused on and people are going to be tearing each other apart. You're going to produce everything that we see in verse four and the in slander and friction and all those things. We need to remember Christ's return.

That horizon makes all the difference in what we live for and what we don't live for that horizon makes all the difference in whether Christ matters at all. When we forget the return of Christ and what is on offer then. Well, this world becomes the thing of highest worth.

When we fix our eyes on the return of Christ and we transfer all our hopes onto him, well, he becomes great gain. He becomes the object of supreme worth. When we point our lives towards him and we chase after him, our lives will not only have worth now, but for eternity.

And so I just want to close by encouraging us to hold fast to the gospel. What we've seen and speaking about the words of Christ and the return of Christ, we put that together with the work of Christ that you've been seeing throughout this and we have the gospel.

[34 : 46] How do you destroy a church? You take all those things away. You take away Christ's words. You take away his return. You take away his life and his work. So I want to close by urging you in verse 11. I'm moving and cheating into Thomas Thomas's passage next week on a close by urging you as Paul does Timothy to flee the glittering of this world and instead take hold of eternal life to which we are called to flee all those things and to take hold of the gospel. Take hold of the sound words of Jesus Christ that are life in and light in and off themselves and take hold of the eternity to which he has called us and to look forward to his the new life that we'll have when he returns.

Take hold of the gospel. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you that you give us these kind of sobering passages.

Lord, we sometimes need warnings like this to shock our systems, to remind us what matters and what doesn't, to remind us the danger to our own lives and to the danger to our churches. Lord, we pray that for each and every one of us as individuals and as a church that we would hold fast to your word and that you'd lift our eyes from this life and keep our eyes fixed on the horizon of Christ's return.

It makes all the difference Lord. Help us to remember that. Thank you that Christ died so that eternity, it can be something that we can hope for. An eternity of life with you.

May we long and look forward to that. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.