

# The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy, Teacher's Guide

## Lesson 1: Guarding Sound Doctrine

### 1 Timothy 1:1-11

#### Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

This opening passage sets the agenda for the entire letter, and the doctrinal issue at stake is the health of the church's teaching. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus to confront a group who were trading the gospel for religious speculation: myths, genealogies, and law-talk that produced arguments instead of godliness. The lesson is meant to give your class a clear conviction that not all religious teaching is equal, that the standard for sound doctrine is the gospel itself ("in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God," v. 11), and that the complete apostolic message, now preserved for us in the New Testament, is the pattern we hold and guard. This is a fitting place to remind the class that we have no need of new revelation or novel teaching; we have the deposit handed down through the apostles, and faithfulness means holding it, not improving on it.

At the same time, this passage was never meant to leave us merely guarding ideas. Paul says plainly that the goal of the whole charge is love, the kind of love that flows from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith (v. 5). That is one of the most pastorally important verses in the letter. It tells us that doctrine is not the enemy of the heart; it is the servant of the heart. So aim this week at both the head and the heart. Help your students see why truth matters, and help them feel that the truth God gives us is meant to clean the conscience, warm the affections, and make faith genuine.

As you teach, watch for two opposite ditches in the room. Some students treat doctrine as cold and divisive and would rather skip it for feelings. Others love being right and can turn every study into a debate to be won. Paul corrects both. Press your class toward the place where deep conviction and deep love grow together, so that they leave not just better informed, but more like Christ.

#### Question 1

##### Student Question:

*Paul charges Timothy to command certain people not to teach "a different doctrine" and not to devote themselves to "myths and endless genealogies" (vv. 3-4). What does this passage show us about why guarding sound teaching matters, and what was pulling the Ephesian church away from the gospel?*

#### Commentary and Teaching Notes

Begin by setting the scene. Paul had asked Timothy to remain at Ephesus while he went on to Macedonia, and the reason was specific: “that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine” (v. 3). The word translated “different doctrine” means teaching that is off, other than, or out of line with the apostolic message. Help the class feel that Paul is not nervous about honest questions; he is concerned about teaching that quietly replaces the gospel with something else.

Identify what that something else was. Paul names “myths and endless genealogies” that “promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (v. 4). These were religious-sounding rabbit trails, probably drawn from Jewish legends and law, that gave people the feeling of deep study while leading them nowhere near Christ. The test Paul applies is wonderfully practical: does this teaching advance God’s saving work received by faith, or does it just generate speculation and argument?

Draw the principle out for today. Every generation has its own version of myths and genealogies: prophecy charts that predict dates, fascination with the sensational, debates that produce heat but no holiness. The danger is rarely a frontal attack on the gospel. It is a slow drift of attention, where the church gets busy with the interesting and forgets the essential.

Land the question on why this matters so much. A church does not have to renounce Christ to lose Christ. It only has to get distracted from Him long enough for love to cool and the gospel to fade into the background. That is why Paul opens the letter here, and why guarding sound teaching is an act of love, not just an act of defense.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The existence of teaching that is genuinely false or off-center, not merely different in style (v. 3)
- The gospel as the fixed standard against which all teaching is measured (v. 11)
- The sufficiency of the apostolic message, now complete in the New Testament, so that we need no new revelation
- The difference between speculation that produces controversy and teaching that advances God’s saving work by faith (v. 4)
- The pastoral duty to guard, not just to proclaim, sound doctrine

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What are some modern equivalents of “myths and endless genealogies” that quietly pull churches off course?
- How can we tell the difference between a healthy hard question and a teaching that is actually leading away from Christ?
- Why is guarding sound teaching an expression of love for people, and not just a defense of ideas?

## Question 2

### Student Question:

*Paul warns against being captivated by speculation that promotes controversy “rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (v. 4). What kinds of speculation, controversy, or spiritual side-trails most easily pull your own attention away from Christ?*

### Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the first self-examining question, so the goal is not new information but honest reflection. Paul’s phrase “endless genealogies” suggests something that never reaches a conclusion, a study that always promises depth and never delivers Christ. Invite students to name their own versions of that.

Help them see that the side-trails are usually not sinful in themselves. Prophecy, history, theology, and current events are all good. The danger is when the secondary crowds out the central, when a believer can talk for an hour about an end-times theory but cannot remember the last time the cross moved them.

Move the discussion toward the heart, not just the calendar. Ask what these distractions are doing for the person. Often they offer a feeling of insider knowledge, or control, or the thrill of being right. Naming that gently helps students loosen their grip.

Close by pointing back to “the stewardship from God that is by faith” (v. 4). The cure for distraction is not less interest in Scripture but a deeper hunger for Christ Himself, the One all Scripture is finally about.

### Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The difference between good secondary interests and the central matter of the gospel
- Christ as the true center and aim of all faithful Bible study
- The subtlety of distraction as a spiritual danger, not only open sin
- Faith as trustful dependence on God’s saving work, not mastery of religious trivia

### Discussion Prompts

- What is one spiritual side-trail you have caught yourself wandering down lately?
- What does that distraction seem to offer you that Christ Himself offers better?
- What is one practice that helps you keep the gospel central in your study of the Bible?

## Question 3

### Student Question:

*Paul says, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (v. 5). According to this verse, what is the goal of all sound teaching, and how should that reshape the way we think about doctrine?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Verse 5 is the hinge of the whole passage: “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Make sure the class hears that word “aim.” Paul is telling Timothy the target he is shooting at. All the guarding of doctrine has a destination, and the destination is love.

This corrects a common misunderstanding, that doctrine and love are rivals. Paul says the opposite. Sound teaching is the channel through which real love flows. Without true teaching, love loses its shape and becomes mere sentiment. Without love, doctrine becomes a weapon. Paul will not let us separate them.

Walk through the three sources Paul names. Love flows from a pure heart (clean motives, undivided desire), a good conscience (a life with no secret hypocrisy), and a sincere faith (faith without pretense, faith that is actually trusting Christ). These are not three hoops to jump through but a picture of a healthy inner life that produces love almost naturally.

Bring it home by reframing how we think about doctrine. The question to ask of any teaching is not only “Is it true?” but “Is it producing this?” Teaching that is technically correct but leaves a congregation proud, cold, and quarrelsome has missed Paul’s aim. Sound doctrine, rightly received, makes people more loving.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Love as the God-given aim and fruit of sound teaching (v. 5)
- The unity, not the rivalry, of truth and love
- The pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith as the inner soil of genuine love
- Doctrine as a means to Christlikeness, not an end in itself
- A scriptural test for teaching: does it produce love that flows from a clean and sincere life?

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Why do people so often assume that caring about doctrine and caring about love are opposites?
- How would our Bible classes change if we measured them by whether they increased love?
- Which of the three sources of love (pure heart, good conscience, sincere faith) is hardest for you, and why?

### **Question 4**

**Student Question:**

*A pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith are the soil that love grows from (v. 5). Which of these three is God most clearly working on in your life right now, and what would tending it look like this week?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question turns verse 5 inward. Read the three phrases slowly and let students sit with them. A pure heart asks about motives. A good conscience asks about integrity. A sincere faith asks about authenticity. Most of us can feel which one is currently under strain.

Encourage honesty without shame. The point is not to manufacture guilt but to notice where God is at work. A nagging conscience, a divided heart, a faith that has gone a little mechanical, these are not signs God has left us. They are often the gentle pressure of the Spirit inviting us to come closer.

Help students get specific about tending the soil. A pure heart is tended by repentance and honest prayer. A good conscience is tended by making things right and refusing small hypocrisies. A sincere faith is tended by returning to the gospel and to the fellowship of the church. Push for one concrete action, not a vague resolution.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The ongoing nature of sanctification in heart, conscience, and faith
- Repentance and confession as normal parts of the Christian walk, not just the entry point
- The role of the church and worship in keeping faith sincere and alive
- Conscience as a gift to be kept clean rather than ignored

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Which of the three (heart, conscience, faith) feels least healthy in you right now?
- What is one practical way you could tend that area this week?
- Who in your life could help you keep your conscience clean and your faith sincere?

### **Question 5**

#### **Student Question:**

*Some had “wandered away” into “vain discussion,” wanting to be teachers of the law without understanding what they were saying (vv. 6-7). What does Paul show us here about the difference between knowledge that merely impresses and teaching that actually builds people up?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul describes people who “wandered away” from these things “into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about

which they make confident assertions” (vv. 6-7). The picture is of religious talkers who love the role of teacher more than the truth they are supposed to teach.

Draw the contrast Paul is making. There is a kind of knowledge that exists to display the speaker, and a kind of teaching that exists to build up the hearer. The false teachers had drifted from love into talk for its own sake. They had the vocabulary of the law but not its understanding, the confidence of experts without the substance.

This connects to a recurring theme in Scripture, that knowledge can puff up while love builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1). Help the class see that the issue is not how much someone knows but what their knowledge is doing, in them and in others. Teaching that humbles the teacher and serves the hearer is the kind Paul commends.

Apply it to the church today. We should honor good teaching and deep study, but we should be wary of any teaching, including our own, that leaves people impressed with the teacher rather than drawn to Christ. The test of sound teaching is fruit, not flash.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The difference between knowledge that puffs up and teaching that builds up (1 Corinthians 8:1)
- The danger of desiring the status of teacher more than the truth (James 3:1)
- Confident assertion without understanding as a mark of false teaching (v. 7)
- Teaching as service to the hearer, not display of the speaker
- Humility as a mark of those who handle God’s word rightly

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the difference between teaching that impresses people and teaching that changes them?
- Why is wanting to be seen as a teacher such a subtle and common temptation?
- How can a class encourage deep study while staying humble and Christ-centered?

### **Question 6**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul describes people confidently making assertions about things they do not really understand (v. 7). Where are you most tempted to speak about God with more confidence than you actually have, and how can humility before God’s word guard your heart?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This question presses verse 7 into the student’s own life. The false teachers made “confident assertions” about things they did not understand. Most of us have done a smaller version of the

same thing, speaking about God or Scripture with a confidence that outran our actual knowledge.

Help students see why this matters. Overconfident speech about God can mislead others and harden our own pride. It is far healthier to say “I am not sure, let us study that together” than to bluff. Humility before the word is not weakness; it is the posture of a true disciple.

Offer a constructive path. The goal is not to fall silent but to speak with both conviction and humility, holding firmly what Scripture makes clear and holding loosely what it does not. Encourage students to anchor their confidence in what God has plainly said rather than in their own cleverness.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Humility before the authority of Scripture (v. 7)
- The danger of speaking beyond what God has revealed
- Confidence rooted in God’s word rather than personal opinion
- Teachableness as a lifelong mark of discipleship

### **Discussion Prompts**

- Where are you tempted to speak about God or the Bible with more confidence than you really have?
- How can you tell the difference between firm conviction and stubborn opinion?
- What helps you stay teachable as you grow in knowledge?

### **Question 7**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul says, “The law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (v. 8), and then lists the lawless and rebellious it is meant to confront (vv. 9-10). What is the proper use of God’s law, and how does it serve the gospel rather than compete with it?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

Paul now turns to the law itself: “We know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (v. 8). He is not attacking God’s law; he is correcting its misuse. The false teachers wanted to be teachers of the law, but they did not understand its purpose. Paul shows them, and us, what the law is for.

Walk through verses 9-10. The law is “not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient,” and then comes a list: the ungodly, sinners, the unholy, those who strike parents, murderers, the sexually immoral, liars, and so on. Paul’s point is that the law functions like a bright light in a dark room. It exposes sin and confronts the rebellious. It was never meant to be a ladder we climb to make ourselves righteous.

Connect this to the place of the law of Moses in God's plan. For the Christian, the old law has been fulfilled in Christ; we are not under it as a covenant (Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8-10). Yet the law still does good work when it shows us our need and drives us to the Savior. Used lawfully, it humbles us; used unlawfully, it puffs us up.

Help the class see how this serves the gospel. The law diagnoses the disease; the gospel provides the cure. They are not competitors. The law that says "you are a sinner" prepares the heart to hear the good news that Christ came to save sinners, which is exactly where Paul goes next in verse 15.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The proper, lawful use of God's law to expose sin and confront rebellion (vv. 8-9)
- The law of Moses fulfilled in Christ, so that Christians live under the new covenant (Colossians 2:14-17; Hebrews 8-10)
- The law as diagnosis and the gospel as cure, working together rather than against each other
- The error of using the law as a means of self-righteousness
- The seriousness of sin as named honestly in verses 9-10

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean to use God's law "lawfully," and how do people misuse it?
- How does seeing our sin clearly actually prepare us to love the gospel more?
- Why is it important to understand that Christians live under the new covenant in Christ, not the old law?

### **Question 8**

#### **Student Question:**

*The list of sins in verses 9-10 is meant to make us honest, not self-righteous. When the mirror of God's law shows you something true about yourself, do you tend to argue, to despair, or to run to Christ? Why?*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

The list in verses 9-10 can make a comfortable reader squirm, and that is exactly its purpose. This question asks students to notice their own reflex when the law of God shows them something true. Do they argue with the mirror, despair at what they see, or run to Christ?

Name the three responses honestly. Arguing protects our pride but keeps us sick. Despair takes sin seriously but forgets the Savior. Only the third response, running to Christ, takes both sin and grace seriously at once. Help students see that conviction is meant to lead to the cross, not to self-loathing or self-defense.

Tie this to the rhythm of the Christian life. We never outgrow our need for honest self-examination, and we never outgrow the gospel. A healthy believer is one who can hear hard truth about themselves and respond by turning again to Jesus, who came to save exactly this kind of sinner.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- Conviction of sin as a gift that leads to Christ, not to despair
- The danger of self-justification when confronted by God's word
- Repentance as the believer's ongoing response to conviction
- The gospel as good news specifically for sinners (v. 15)

### **Discussion Prompts**

- When God's word convicts you, what is your usual first reaction?
- What is the difference between godly sorrow that leads to repentance and despair that leads nowhere?
- How does running to Christ change the way we handle our failures?

### **Question 9**

#### **Student Question:**

*Paul measures all teaching by whether it is "sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God" (vv. 10-11). What does it mean that healthy teaching is teaching that fits the gospel, and how can we tell the difference between teaching that is merely interesting and teaching that is genuinely sound?*

#### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This is the doctrinal high point of the lesson. Paul closes his list by saying the law confronts "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted" (vv. 10-11). Here Paul gives us the measuring rod for all teaching: the gospel itself. Sound doctrine is teaching that fits the gospel; unsound doctrine is teaching that contradicts it.

Unpack the phrase "sound doctrine." The word "sound" means healthy, the kind of teaching that produces spiritual health in those who receive it. Paul will use this language again and again in these letters (1 Timothy 6:3; 2 Timothy 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1). Healthy teaching makes for healthy Christians, while sick teaching breeds pride, division, and decay. The test is not how new or exciting a teaching is, but whether it accords with the apostolic gospel.

This is the place to address new revelation directly. Paul speaks of a gospel "with which I have been entrusted," a fixed deposit handed down through the apostles. We do not measure teaching by private impressions, fresh prophecies, or claims of new revelation, because the

complete New Testament is now our authority (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The gospel of the glory of the blessed God is the standard, and that gospel is preserved for us in the inspired apostolic writings.

Help students apply the test practically. Much teaching is interesting; not all of it is sound. A teaching can be clever, popular, and even partly biblical, and still pull people away from the gospel of grace through faith expressed in obedience to Christ. Train your class to ask of everything they hear, including from this very study: does it fit the gospel of the glory of God revealed in Jesus, or does it quietly compete with it?

Finally, marvel at the phrase “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.” Sound doctrine is not a dry rulebook. It is the radiant good news about a glorious and happy God who saves sinners. To guard sound doctrine is to guard something beautiful, the truth that displays the glory of God in the face of Christ.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The gospel as the fixed standard for all sound (healthy) doctrine (vv. 10-11)
- “Sound” teaching as that which produces spiritual health, a key theme of these letters
- The completed New Testament as our authority, against claims of new revelation (2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- The gospel as a deposit entrusted to the apostles, handed down and preserved, not reinvented
- The glory and gladness of God as the heart of the good news we guard
- Discernment as the skill of distinguishing teaching that is merely interesting from teaching that is genuinely sound

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What does it mean that the gospel itself is the measuring rod for sound teaching?
- How should the truth that we have a complete New Testament shape the way we evaluate new teachings or claimed revelations?
- What is one teaching you have heard that sounded appealing but did not actually fit the gospel of grace and obedience to Christ?

### **Question 10**

#### **Student Question:**

*Look back across these eleven verses. Paul longs for truth that ends in love, a conscience kept clean, and a faith that is sincere. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take because of it.*

### **Commentary and Teaching Notes**

This capstone draws the whole passage together. Paul has moved from guarding doctrine (vv. 3-4), to the aim of love (v. 5), to the misuse of the law (vv. 6-10), to the gospel as the standard (vv. 10-11). The thread running through it all is that truth is meant to produce transformed people, not just informed people.

Invite students to look back and name what God has stirred. Perhaps it is a conviction to value sound teaching more highly, or a distraction to lay down, or an area of heart, conscience, or faith that needs tending. The goal is for each person to leave with something specific, not a general nod toward growth.

Encourage one concrete step. Spiritual formation happens in particulars: a conversation to have, a habit to begin, a sin to confess, a truth to dwell on. Help your class turn the truth of this passage into a single act of obedience this week, trusting that Christ is the one forming them through His word.

### **Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues**

- The purpose of sound doctrine as transformation into Christ's likeness, not mere knowledge
- The Spirit's use of Scripture to form believers over time
- Obedience as the natural response to truth received in faith
- The integration of head and heart in genuine discipleship

### **Discussion Prompts**

- What is the single most important thing God has shown you in this passage?
- What is one concrete step you will take this week because of it?
- How can this class help one another move from knowing the truth to living it?