

Heterodoxy or Orthodoxy

A Tour of 1 Timothy

Doctrine vs. Ethics?

Several years ago I found myself in the middle of a heated controversy which I did not know at the time was far older and darker than anything I could see on the surface. Before telling you a bit more about the controversy, let me ask a question. When you think of “doctrine,” what comes to your mind? “Doctrine” (*didaskalia*, or various forms of it) is found four times in 1 Timothy, or about 4/11 of the total uses of the NT (three more are in Titus). The word essentially begins and ends the letter. Paul talks about “different doctrine” or “strange doctrine” (*heterodidaskaleo*) vs. “sound doctrine” (*hugiaino didaskalia*) or “good doctrine” (*kalos didaskalia*). So what do you think of when you hear words like that?

Probably too many think that “doctrine” is an altogether evil word. “Doctrine divides,” we often hear. But I’m not going to talk about these people today. Our church

believes that doctrine unites. Perhaps many who like doctrine hear this language they think about things like “the doctrine of God” or “the doctrine of the Trinity” or “the doctrine of election” or “the doctrine of Christ” or “the doctrine of hell” or “the doctrine of salvation.” To put it another way, we want to have right *theology*. This is all true, good, and right.

What might be some contributing factors that lead our minds in this direction? Certainly, the Scripture uses the term this way. Something along these lines seems to be in mind in its first use in Timothy. “Charge certain persons not to teach any *different doctrine*, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (1Tim 1:3-4). Hebrews uses it this way when it mentions a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, washings, laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment as being “*elementary doctrines of Christ*” (Heb 6:1-2).

I also think we get this idea from the way our Systematics, Dogmatics, and Confessions of Faith are laid out. The London Baptist Confession begins with the following chapters: The Holy Scriptures, God and the Holy

Trinity, God's Decree, Creation, Divine Providence, The Fall, Sin, and Punishment, God's Covenant, and so on. Systematic and Dogmatic theologies are very similar.

Back to [the controversy](#). For reasons I did not understand at the time, a certain small group of men that we were associated with began strongly pushing a doctrine called [impassibility](#), which the confession speaks very briefly about in 2.1 when it says that God is “[a most pure spirit, invisible, without body, parts, or passions.](#)” Impassibility thus means that God is [without](#) (*im-*) [passions](#) (*passibilis*), or to put it another way, he does not have emotional outbursts like rage or lust or anger. It is [a good doctrine](#) and one that has been held by most since the beginning. So why the controversy? A certain professor had been teaching [a nuanced view](#) of this doctrine in a way that made others very uncomfortable. Soon, he was being accused of heresy, which is amazing when you consider that he said that *he affirmed the doctrine*.

This small group began to teach that [there was no nuance](#) in church history on this doctrine. It was very simple (to use a pun).¹ God is [incapable of change](#) *in any sense*. To change would be to become more or less than God, which is

¹ Impassibility has behind it the doctrine of simplicity. Simplicity teaches that God is not composite; he does not have “parts” that make up the whole. This, of course, makes sense, because to be composed is to be created and to be created means that you are not the Creator but the creature.

impossible. To have a passionate, angry outburst at someone, for example, would be a change in his disposition or temperament and would therefore destroy his perfect divinity. It's much more complicated than that, but that's enough for my purposes here. While I came to believe that they were wrong, the church has always had nuance and differences of opinion on how to speak about this doctrine, I want to show you what ended up coming out in this controversy.

This professor was part of a church (and under the authority of its pastors, including a very particular pastor) where **bad blood** had apparently existed for many decades with this small group of men. To put it another way, they desperately wanted this church out of the Association. They had tried **unsuccessfully before** this with other doctrines in the Confession to get this church to leave. But this time, on what you would think would be an insignificant “error” (if it even was an error), **it stuck**.

Shortly after this church left the Association, something completely unknown to me and most others in it came into the public eye. One of the best known and perhaps most influential men in the modern resurgence of Reformed Baptists, beloved I thought by everyone in the group, had a son. This son had

just been publicly arrested and charged with **child beating and molestation** in a court in Arizona. He was subsequently unanimously convicted on several counts and sentenced to 24 years in prison. To this day he denies all charges.²

This allowed many to see that something **much deeper and darker** was happening behind closed doors that few knew anything about, and this doctrine was being used as a **smokescreen**. A small group of men were **conspiring to aid** a serial child abuser. There was no remorse. No confession of guilt. No admission of wrongdoing by any of them over the course of two decades of hiding activities that a few knew at least something about and at least a couple most likely knew nearly it all.

We've heard these stories too many times. From the massive criminal enterprises involving children amongst **priests and nuns**, to the fall of some very **influential Evangelical and Reformed Christians** with the same sin, the coverups are enormous and there seems to be a near total disconnect between doctrine *and morals*. You must believe absolutely the right "doctrine," but you may behave in ways that are grossly, not to mention biblically, evil.

² In 2021, the AZ Court of Appeals reverses the convictions and sentences for four counts of child molestation and remanded the matter for a new trial, not because it found him "not guilty," but because apparently, the previous court had allowed impermissible evidence. At present, he still awaits this future trial.

Now, compare what I've said about the Confession, Systematics, and Dogmatics to perhaps the earliest known Christian document outside of the NT called The Didache. Does that word sound familiar? *Didaskalia vs. didachē*. They are for our purposes the same word.³ “The Teaching” or “The Doctrine.” Let's look at the first few chapters of this document: **The Two Ways** (Two Great Commandments, Golden Rule, Sermon on the Mount), **Gross Sins, Other Sins, Positive Precepts**, **The Way of Death** (returning to earlier chapters), and so on.

These “doctrines” sound quite different from the way the Confession begins. Rather than what we might call theological doctrines, it is focused on *ethical* doctrines. I do not think that the majority of people think of ethics, law, and the Ten Commandments first when they think of “doctrine.”

Yet why shouldn't we? **The Scripture** uses “doctrine” this way.” Again in Timothy, Paul lists off many ethical behaviors (i.e. “**sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers**”) and calls this

³ For example, the *NIDNTT* treats them under the same heading. *Didaskalia* is derived *didaskalos*, denoting the activity of one who is a teacher. *Didachē* is derived from the verbal stem and has the sense of doctrine imparted by teaching. **K. Wegenast**, “Διδασκαλία,” ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard, *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986), 768-69.

“sound doctrine” (1Tim 1:10). He tells Titus to “teach what accords with sound doctrine,” namely, be “sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, in steadfastness” (Tit 2:1-2). More ethics.

Why would people divorce theological doctrine from ethical doctrine? The Confession doesn't. It also has chapters on ethics, including an entire chapter on God's law. Systematics and Dogmatics don't. They have entire sections devoted to the same. And then there are our Catechisms, which are highly focused on ethics. On the other hand, the Didache didn't either. It has chapters on baptism, the Lord's Day, And the Second Coming. I don't even like this separation between theology and ethics, though I understand why we do it. But is not ethics simply the imparting of the knowledge of God's character and holiness to us? Hence, it too is theological doctrine.

So why would there so often be this disconnect between these two kinds of doctrines? It is common in our world. It is common in the NT, especially amongst the Pharisees. The only possible answer is sin. Sin is ethics. In the case of an unbeliever, some love to wax eloquently about God, so long as it doesn't infringe upon their own unrighteous behavior. They'll even gladly talk about ethics, so long as it isn't

focusing on the things that they themselves do (which, of course, they do, they just don't admit to doing; See **Romans 2**). This is the whole point of **straining a gnat and swallowing a camel** (**Matt 23:24**). Beware the leaven-doctrine (*didache*) of the Pharisees (**16:12**).

For a Christian, though, we also might be prone to this, and it could be for a similar reason. We sin too and we don't want to get caught. So, we **focus our attention on "theology"** to the detriment of ethics, disassociating the two kinds of doctrine as if splitting God into parts. The letter of 1 Timothy is written directly at this kind of a situation and today we are going to go through the entire letter looking, by way of also introducing us to its themes.

Structure of 1 Timothy

Let's briefly look at **the structure** of 1 Timothy. No matter how you want to outline the book, it is quickly apparent that this is a major if not the central point. The most common way to break it down is the typical **"outline"** format, numbering it into the constituent parts of an ancient letter. For example, the ESV Study Bible has the **Salutation** (1), the **Body** (2-8c), and the final **"Closing"** (8d). The Body obviously takes up the most space. But as it does, it gives us these two **opening and closing sections**: **"Confronting the**

False Teaching” (1Tim 1:3-20) and “Confronting False Teaching Again” (6:2b-21). Other than the obligatory opening and closing, this is therefore how the letter begins and ends.

ESV Study Bible Outline of 1 Timothy:

- I. Salutation (1:1–2)
- II. **Confronting the False Teaching** (1:3–20)
 - A. The charge to deal with false teachers (1:3–7)
 - B. Proper use of the law (1:8–11)
 - C. Paul: an example of the effect of the true gospel (1:12–17)
 - D. Restatement of the charge to deal with false teachers (1:18–20)
- III. Descriptions of Gospel-Shaped Living (2:1–3:13)
 - A. Corporate prayer and issues arising from it (2:1–15)
 - B. Qualifications for overseers (3:1–7)
 - C. Qualifications for deacons (3:8–13)
- IV. Purpose of Writing: Behavior in the Church (3:14–16)
- V. **Identifying the False Teaching** (4:1–5)
- VI. How Timothy Should Be Shaped by the Gospel (4:6–16)
- VII. How Specific Groups in the Church Should Be Shaped by the Gospel (5:1–6:2a)
 - A. Respectful dealing with church members by age and gender (5:1–2)
 - B. Honoring widows (5:3–16)
 - C. Honoring elders (5:17–25)
 - D. Honoring masters (6:1–2a)
- VIII. **Confronting the False Teaching Again** (6:2b–21)
 - A. False teachers and greed (6:2b–10)
 - B. Timothy’s behavior in contrast (6:11–16)
 - C. Charge to the rich (6:17–19)
 - D. Closing exhortation to Timothy (6:20–21)⁴

⁴ Crossway Bibles, *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008), 2323–2324.

Marshal (and others) notes that this is called an “**inclusio**.”⁵ And inclusio, also called **bracketing** or an **envelope** structure, is a literary device based on a circular principle of framing material so that the beginning and ending match.

The literary structure called **Chiasmus** works similarly, only rather than just one repetition, it has many. We saw last time that many have seen 1 Timothy not merely as an outline with an inclusio, but as a chiasm of several paralleling ideas. In this case, the chiasm begins and ends with this same idea of confronting bad doctrine. However, a chiasm also has a **center** (see the ESV outline too), a kind of heart at which the arrow points. In 1 Timothy, the heart is like the ends, focusing on either good or bad doctrine, depending on how you break down the sections.

Two Examples of the Chiasm of 1 Timothy

A. 1:1-2. Paul greets Timothy as a true child of the Faith, and blesses with grace, mercy, and peace.

B. 1:3-7. Timothy is urged to command against **heresy**.

C. 1:8-11. The reason the Law is established. List of sins.

D. 1:12-17. Jesus came to save sinners. Doxology.

E. 1:18-20. Wage the good war.

A) 1 Tim 1:1-2, Paul to Timothy, a true son: Grace, mercy, peace from God our Father and Jesus Christ;

B) 1 Tim 1:2-20, Timothy’s charge: **guard sound doctrine** from which some have strayed:

C) 1 Tim 2:1-8, Prayers + intercession for those in authority (exercise of authority):

⁵ **I. Howard Marshall**, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (London: T&T Clark International, 1999), 32. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Pastoral_Epistles/jA7UAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=1+timothy+chiasm&pg=PA32&printsec=frontcover.

F. 2:1-8. Pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or quarreling.

G. 2:9-15. Instructions to women.

H. 3:1-7. Concerning bishops.

I. 3:8-13. Concerning deacons and deaconesses.

J. 3:14-16. Instructions to Timothy as a pastor in the Household of God.

K. 4:1-5. Heresies will arise.

K'. 4:6-10. Teach against heresies.

J'. 4:11-5:2. How Timothy should conduct himself as a pastor.

I'. 5:3-16. Concerning widows.

H'. 5:17-25. Concerning elders.

G'. 6:1-2a. Instructions to bondservants.

F'. 6:2b-11. Against **heresy** caused by envy and greed. Quarrelling.

E'. 6:12. Fight the good fight.

D'. 6:13-16. Keep the commandment. Doxology.

C'. 6:17-19. Store up treasure with God, so to take hold of true life.

B'. 6:20-21a. Timothy: guard against **heresy**.

A'. 6:21b. Grace.⁶

D) 1 Tim 2:9-15, Proper exercise/ care of church authority:

E) 1 Tim 3:1-13, Qualification of bishops + deacons:

F) 1 Tim 3:14-15, I write that you may know how to conduct yourself in the house of God;

central axis of the book) 1 Tim 3:16, "And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels; Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory;"

F') 1 Tim 4:1-16, Instruction for Timothy as church pastor:— 1b.4) 1 Tim 1:7b-8a, Exercise

E') 1 Tim 5:1-19, Qualifications of true widows/ treatment of elderly + elders:— 1c) 1

D') 1 Tim 5:20-25, Proper exercise/ care of church authority;

C') 1 Tim 6:1-2a, Proper honor between bondservants and masters (exercise of authority);

B') 1 Tim 6:2b-21a, Timothy's charge: **teach sound doctrine** from which some have strayed:

A') 1 Tim 6:21b, Grace be with you. Amen.⁷

⁶ Joseph Norris, "Heretics in the Latter Days: The Structure of 1 Timothy, Part I," *Theopolis* (June 4, 2014), <https://theopolisinstitute.com/heretics-in-the-latter-days-the-structure-of-1-timothy-part-i/>.

⁷ Christine Smith, "Book of 1 Timothy Chiastic Structure," *A Little Perspective* (Nov 4, 2013), <https://www.alittleperspective.com/book-of-1-timothy-chiastic-structure/>. Many more have seen this, though they vary in the way they flesh it out. See for example Welch in I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, ICC (London: T&T Clark International, 1999), 32. https://www.google.com/books/edition/The_Pastoral_Epistles/jA7UAwAAQBAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=1+timothy+chiasm&pg=PA32&printsec=frontcover; Marko A. Nagasawa, "The Implications of the Chiastic Structure of 1 Timothy on the Question of Women in Church Leadership," *New Humanity Institute* (July 13, 2021), http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul_1timothy-chiasm-&-women-as-elders.pdf.

A third way of outlining the letter is a kind of **modified chiasm**. In a normal chiasm you get an ABCBA or ABCCBA structure. In this modified view, you get an ABC[D]ABCABC structure. But false doctrine begins each section:

<p>A. False teachers 1:2-20 B. Personal encouragement 1:18-20 C. Exhortation 2:1-3:16 Prayer 2:1-8, omen, 9-15, overseers 3:1-7, deacons 8-13 D. Summary of mission 3:14-16</p>	<p>A. False teachers 4:1-16 B. Personal encouragement 4:12-16 C. Exhortation elders 5:1-2, widows 5:3-16, elders 5:17-21, impartiality 5:21-25, servants 6:1-2</p>	<p>A. False teachers 6:3-10 B. Personal encouragement 6:11-16 C. Exhortation wealth 6:17-21⁸</p>
--	--	---

Therefore, no matter how you slice it, 1 Timothy is dealing with false teaching in the church. It is at **the beginning, in the middle, and at the end**. So how does this work itself out in terms of a letter to Timothy?

Two Kinds of People in Church

We begin the letter with **two people**. The first is **the authority**. He identifies himself as “*Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our*

⁸ Admin, “1 Timothy,” Biblical Chiasm Exchange (April 15, 2016), <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2016/04/15/1-timothy-1-6/>.

hope” (1Tim 1:1). We’ll talk more about why Paul puts it exactly this way in a later sermon. Here, I simply point out that what he is doing is identifying himself as a Christian. This is not only due to what happened to him (he became an apostle of Jesus by the command of God), but as we will see, because of the doctrine he believes in and teaches to others.

The second person is the recipient. He says, “To Timothy, my true child in the faith” (2). Technically, it does not say “my child,” but “[a] true child in the faith.” In other words, the emphasis is not on Paul as the *origin* of Timothy’s faith, but on the genuineness of Timothy’s faith. This makes Timothy identical to Paul: both are true believers.

In this way, the Apostle has set up a very appropriate opening to a letter that is going to focus on false vs. true doctrine. Vs. 3 opens the body of the letter with the opposite. “As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (3-4). These “certain persons” (the pronoun “some;” *tisin*) are thus immediately contrasted with Paul and Timothy. However, it is important to see that Timothy has authority over them.

This means these are not governors of Ephesus or pagans at Artemis' temple. They are people *in the church*. That's the only way Timothy would have the authority to “charge” (*parangellō*) them in this way. The word can mean to command or order.

At this point *we do not know the spiritual status* of these certain persons, but we are being set up to be able to test the truth of the matter. We do know that their doctrine is *doing something terrible* in the church. Like leaven to yeast, it permeates the entire loaf of bread. He next says, “*the aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith*” (5). In other words, what is being taught is having the opposite effect of love. Corrupted hearts, guilty consciences, and hypocritical faith are resulting in *lack of love* among the brothers and sisters in the church.

Orthodoxy vs. Heterodoxy

This is coming through the “*different doctrine*” or better, *heterodoxy* (*heterodidaskaleo*) of these self-proclaimed “teachers.” *Heterodoxy* is essentially the word used, so what is it and then let's talk about testing the truth of the matter. Heterodoxy, as the ESV translates, literally means

“different” or “other” doctrine. To know what that could possibly be, however, there must be a previously established and recognized **opposite**. We call this “orthodoxy.” **Orthodoxy** comes from two words, *ortho* (“right, true, straight”) and *doxa* (“thought,” “teaching,” “opinion,” “praise”).

Just here we run into a world of problems in a postmodern world. Postmodernism denies that orthodoxy is even possible. There is no such thing as “right” anything. Rather, all truth is simply *-doxy*, something that *seems* right or wrong *to any individual*. Reality is, there is **no such thing as right or wrong**, only *opinion*. Each culture (subculture, micro-culture, etc.) *chooses* what it wants to be right or wrong, but the next is free to change it. This is probably the most important reason why so many Christians hate the very idea of doctrine in our day. It is a major reason why we so often hear people say, “**Don’t judge.**” They aren’t taking the Bible in its context. Rather, they are infected with postmodern relativism, which is according to any historical measure of orthodoxy—heresy! Oh, the irony.

What’s the **difference between heterodoxy and heresy**? Both words are often found together. The New World Encyclopedia has a great explanation.

Heterodoxy (“other teaching”) is thus the opposite of orthodoxy. However, heresy—from *hairesis*, derived from the Greek verb to choose—is a more extreme form of orthodoxy’s opposite, involving *a conscious choice against right teaching*, rather than simply a mistakenly held opinion. People who consciously deviate from orthodoxy by professing a doctrine considered to be false are most often called heretics, while those who deviate from orthodoxy by removing themselves from the perceived body of believers (i.e. from full communion, are called schismatics). A person holding a heterodox opinion, on the other hand, may sometimes be allowed to remain in a church body or other institution, even though he or she disagrees with some of its doctrines.⁹

Orthodoxy presupposes a standard or rule of doctrine that is accepted by a group of people. But biblically speaking, this standard or rule is not the creation of men. This is partly the reason that Paul almost always puts his Apostolic authority at the very beginning of his letters. His authority to teach comes directly from Jesus Christ, whom he met on the road to Damascus on his way to kill Christians, but was miraculously converted to believe in and called to serve—by

⁹ “Heterodoxy,” *New World Encyclopedia* (Dec 22, 2017), <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Heterodoxy>.

the Lord himself. Throughout the Scripture, the stated **origin of doctrine** is God. This doctrine comes to his people by means of **the Second Person** (the Son of God) directly and through his immediate friends—the prophets or apostles as taught also by the Third Person (the Holy Spirit). Hence, orthodoxy says the church is, “**Built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone**” (**Eph 2:20**). “**No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid...**” (**1Co 3:10**).

But Jesus not only taught us the foundation. At the root, this foundation *is* Jesus Christ himself. “**... other than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ**” (**10**). He is the foundation in Zion, a stone, a tested stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation (**Isa 28:16**). He and who he is as taught to us in the Holy Scriptures are “the Rock” (**Dt 32:4**) and upon this Rock Christ builds his church (**Matt 16:18**). All of our doctrine is ultimately about him. Any doctrine that therefore deviates from **who Christ is, how he has revealed himself** through his immediate friends, or which works its way into the church to foster and nurture **immoral ethics** and behaviors contrary to the word of God is heterodox.

Paul tells Timothy that it is his job **to command** those who teach such things to stop. But this means that indeed,

Timothy must make judgments against people. Likewise, as he represents the church at Ephesus as its pastor, so also the church must make judgments. This means, “Don’t judge me” cannot possibly be a universal proverb. Rather, as Paul tells the Corinthians, “What have I to do with judging outsiders? *Is it not those inside the church whom you are to judge?*” (1Cor 5:12). The rest of the letter therefore gives Timothy and his church the ability to test the truth of the legitimacy of the confession of faith of these teachers. Are they really Christians? Here’s how you tell.

What follows is not an exhaustive list, that’s basically impossible to create. But it is a list of things that Paul was concerned about for the Christians at Ephesus. I hope to highlight many of them in order to give you an understanding of what kinds of things constitute making such judgments as well as highlighting this interplay between theological and ethical doctrine.

False/Bad/Wrong Doctrine

Vain Talk: The Ten Commandments (the Law) and the Gospel

Let’s begin by looking briefly at several things that were being taught specifically by these “certain people.” Again, the first thing that is said is that it is “different doctrine”

(1Tim 1:3). Heterodox theology. But he gets more specific immediately. He speaks about “myths and endless genealogies” (4). We are going to look at this in much more detail next time. Today we will simply define them.

When people hear “myth” (*mythos*), they usually think tall tale, legend, fable, fiction. However, even the Bible dictionaries realize that this is only a secondary definition. Primarily it means “‘speech, conversation,’ also of ‘narrative’ or ‘story’ without distinction of fact or fiction.”¹⁰ It can be in relation to a public speech, a conversation, a thing said, fact, matter, a thing thought, unspoken word, a saying, a talk of men in the form of a story.¹¹ Genealogies are easier to understand. These are lists of names that trace origins, or better, pedigrees. “Look where I came from!” That seems to be the idea in mind here, as these people were clearly tracing their authority backwards in order to prove why they should be listened to now.¹²

The important thing about both is the context in which they are said to “promote speculations rather than the

¹⁰ “Mythos,” William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 660.

¹¹ “Mythos,” Henry George Liddell et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1151.

¹² For next week, think about how often we hear people in our circles tracing back their authority to such and such a person in the faith (Calvin or Luther or the Puritans or some Reformed Baptist etc.). This is not necessarily wrong. We need to look at why it is being done.

stewardship from God that is by faith” (4). “Stewardship” (*oikonomia*) is literally the management of a household. It can mean something like “good order” (see ESV note). In other words, somehow these myths and endless genealogies are attacking the way the people are “doing” church. Specifically, they are attacking “faith” and “love” (4-5).

A third term is used as a synonym. He calls it “vain discussion” or “fruitless discourse” (6). Fruit against makes us think of ethics as the “fruit” of the Spirit is the opposite of the “works of the flesh” (Gal 5:19-23). And indeed, Paul has the law of God on his mind, for he immediately says, “We know that the law is good...” (1Tim 1:8) and then goes on to list a dozen examples that closely parallel the Ten Commandments (9-10). To put it another way, the vain discussion, myths, and endless genealogies are attacking the eternal moral law of God in the churches. Ever heard, “We are not under law, but under grace” be used to do this very thing? There’s nothing new under the sun. But it is this list of twelve things that Paul calls “sound doctrine.” Therefore, the heterodox doctrines of these “certain people” are directly opposed to the Commandments of God.

However, they are also opposed to “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” (11). In other words, they are not

merely attacking ethics, but also **basic theology**. As I said, we ought to be careful about how we distinguish between these. The heart of all biblical doctrine is Jesus, and these things are said to concern the Gospel, the Good News of who Jesus is and what he has done for sinners.

Salvation through Faith in Christ

It is the doctrine of salvation that next concerns the Apostle. He launches into his own history of salvation, presumably as a counter to the endless genealogies. He need not go back generations, only to the call of Christ upon his life (12-13). This created in him “**faith and love**” (14). And Paul recognizes that he is the **chief of sinners** that did not deserve such grace (15). But God saved him to display his “**perfect patience**” as an example to all who would believe (16), to the Glory of the Only God (17).

This story of salvation is then put in sharp distinction to the **shipwrecking of the faith** of two different persons in the church at Ephesus: Hymanaeus and Alexander (20). Their crime? They were “**blaspheming**” God. At this point, Paul seems to change subjects, moving away from false doctrine.

However, closer inspection shows that he has not fully changed topics.

He begins to talk about praying and how we are to **pray** for “**all people**” (2:1). Why? Because God “**desires all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth**” (4). Paul has just spoken about his own salvation, so he is **not really changing subjects**. This means that the false teachers were saying that we should not in fact pray for everyone and that God does not in fact desire this. He shows next how this is a frontal assault on God and **the one mediator** between man and God—Jesus Christ (5), who gave himself as a ransom for all (6), including not only Jews, but Gentiles (7).

Hands and Hair

Prayer becomes a kind of **middle topic** between God’s patient salvation and these false teacher’s wrath and anger. He says that men should pray in every place “**lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling**” (8). Again, notice the way the doctrine leads to immoral behavior. Not praying for certain people lead these false teachers to lift their hands against others, causing great disruptions and hatred in the church towards some people.

The bodily act of men raising **hands of rage** is used as a **bridge** to women who have **hair of braids**. The worship of God was being filled with disruption, in their case with **immodesty**, **lack of self-restraint**, **flaunting** of personal riches (9) and a **lack of godliness** and good works (10). Apparently, it was not just men causing the problems. Women were doing their own fair share of teaching (11-12), not in according with biblical theology and ethics or with the pattern of creation (13). As we will see when we come to all of these passages, but especially here, you must read **the context** to understand what he is talking about. But it should be obvious that what he is talking about is leading to disturbance and disorder and disobedience to God, and that's what we are focusing on today.

Officers and Wives

Chapter 3 appears to **change the subject again**, but does it really? In one sense, it does. He moves to elders and deacons, those shepherds and servants of the church that are appointed by the church itself. And yes, it does give us instructions about how such things should take place. But in another sense, he isn't really changing subjects at all. Rather,

what he is doing is moving from place to place in the church and noticing how the false teaching is corrupting the entire loaf of bread.

While we often focus on the lists provided to make sure that an elder or deacon are “[qualified](#),” I believe Paul is coming at this from a different direction. The reason he gives the lists is to demonstrate that [the strange doctrines](#) were fostering a culture where personal integrity, godliness, ordered lives, self-control and so on were not being pursued even at the highest level of authority in the church. They just didn’t care. So when you see these lists, you are to understand that most likely, at least some of the church leadership was the opposite.

Obviously, [it wasn’t all](#) of them, because Timothy was one of them! But he was warning them about those who were perhaps already there and those in the future that God desires [shepherds](#) not wolves, servants not [slave-drivers](#). These lists of things like being [above reproach](#), being [sober-minded](#), [self-controlled](#), respectable, hospitable, gentle, etc. are to be high on the list rather than cut off the list by a pair of scissors, whether done in protest, ignorance, rebellion, or indifference.

Like the previous chapter, the lists deal first with **the men** (those bearing the office: **3:1-10**) and then with **the wives** (**11**) and then back again (**12-13**), because the church is made up of male and female all equal in Christ, but each subject to their Master's will for the roles they are to play.

Centrality and Necessity of the Gospel

Again, we **seem to change subjects**. We move quickly from officers to a seemingly out-of-place discussion on the Gospel. **1 Tim 3:16** gives us this wonderful little **poem**, probably an **early creed** or **song** about Christ. Six points take us from his **birth to his ascension**. But why? One reason is that, again, Christ himself is the ground of the church. Just before giving Timothy this saying, the Apostle tells him that we are to conduct church in these ways because that's what **"truth"** (**15**) does. It creates **order, harmony, peace** among the brothers and submission, faith, and hope towards God. This is godliness, which is personified in Jesus himself who came to us as one of us, died for us, was vindicated as God, believed on in the world, proclaimed to the nations, and taken up in glory. The Apostle has never strayed far from his original subject matter of false doctrine and teachers.

The Last Times and more Heresy

As if the letter begins again, ch. 4 shows us more specifics about the false teachers. It says that they “devote themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (4:1). The supernatural aspect of what they are doing now rises to the top for all to see. This is not just bad theology, its source is demonic and satanic, which means that there is in fact very evil motivation behind the teaching. Hence, he calls them “liars whose consciences are seared” (2). That motivation and lying is for the purpose of destroying Christ’s church from the inside, through infiltration.

He gets more specific about what these teachings could be. They forbid marriage, require abstinence from foods that God created good (3). The teaching was a form of asceticism and legalism, the avoidance of outward indulgences, which in other places we learn are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh (Col 2:23). They merely have the appearance of wisdom but are in fact forms of self-made religion or “will-worship” as the KJV called it. The reality was these outward acts that impressed people as “super-spiritual” were deceptive manipulations that conceived other sin and caused it to grow.

Again, he brings up “silly myths” which are irreverent (1Tim 4:7). Clearly, certain myths were being used to justify these kinds of practices. It can’t just be telling stories. They promoted the opposite of “godliness” (7-8), which alone holds promise for the present life and the life to come.

These false teachers were truly bloated with their own self-importance. Their pride caused them even to look down upon their pastor, because he was “young” (12). They were rebuking older men as outsiders and younger men as foreigners (5:1). They even did it to the women (2). They were not honoring widows (3), they were not taking care of the members of their own household (8). Again, he moves to the women, for even some widows were taking advantage of the church, rather than going to their own family for help (4). Some were as every bit as licentious as the men (11) and were abandoning the faith (12). They were idlers, busybodies, gossips (13). And they were straying after Satan (15). Do you see how the false doctrine lead to immorality which lead to the abandonment of the Faith itself? That’s the chief concern. The church exists to help this from happening. But when it is infiltrated by bad doctrine, it loses its power to loose and to bind. It becomes worldly. And people flee from God rather than to him.

It seems that the elders were being **taken advantage of**. They weren't being paid (17-18). They were being accused of all sorts of mischief (19), by those who themselves were "**persisting in sin**" (20), sins which were already evident in some cases, but would appear later in others (24).

The false teaching was creating a **chain reaction**, and the Adamic-bomb of sin was expanding to every nook and cranny. Slaves did not regard their masters with honor (6:1); **masters** were disrespecting their servants (2). The people were craving controversy, quarreling about words and this gave birth to every manner of suspicion and slander and dissension and evil (4) and friction (5).

They were using Christianity as a means of **getting wealthy** (6). There's nothing new under the sun. They were **not learning contentment** (9), but instead were **full of the love of money** (10), which itself caused more to wander from the Faith. All this was coming from "**irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called 'knowledge'**" (20). Thus, the letter ends on the same note it began.

As you can see, the relationship between **false teaching and false living** is tied together. You cannot and must not separate ethics and theology, for all of it is true doctrine. Doctrine is ethical. Ethics is doctrine. But what about this

idea that **doctrine divides**? Is that really true? Not if it is true doctrine; not among the saints. Let's briefly look at some of the things that Paul uses to counter the lie. What counters lies? **Truth**. True doctrine, true theology, true teaching from God the Source and his Beloved Son Jesus Christ that penetrates the heart through the mind thanks to the Holy Spirit.

True/Good/Right Doctrine

We saw that all this bad doctrine was originally contrasted with the stewardship or “**good order**” from God that is by **faith (1:4)**. What then are stewardship and faith is not **right doctrine** or orthodoxy? The same holds true for “**love**” which he says comes from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith (**5**). These are the first doctrines that counter the false teachings.

The lawful use of the law (8) is the next doctrine that Paul says counters false teaching. In fact, this is what he calls “**sound doctrine**” that is in accordance with “**the gospel of the glory of the blessed God**” (**11**). Interesting that the law is not contrary to the Gospel but is literally in accordance with it.

The Gospel is at the very center of all orthodoxy. Specifically, Jesus Christ is the Lord (12), fully of mercy (13), patience (16), and grace, the giver of faith and love (14). This Jesus “came into the world to save sinners” (15). This salvation, eternal life (16), comes to the worst, which means that the doctrine of human depravity is a necessary corollary to salvation from sin. This is all to the Glory of God, the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the Only God (17).

Timothy is told that he must fight for these things. “Wage the good warfare” (18). Hold firm the faith and a good conscience (19). For this battle is against Satan himself (20).

Supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings (2:1) are various forms of talking to God that help us wage this war. It is a mighty weapon that we use on behalf of “all people,” including those in authority (2), so that we can lead peaceful, quiet lives of godliness. Understanding that God desires all people to be saved (4), and that he sent Jesus to be the mediator (5), a ransom for all (6), is the impetus for our prayers.

Holy hands are to be lifted up to God *in supplication* (8). Hair and dress are to be modest (9-10), a reflection of our good works. Women are to be submissive (11) and quiet (12)

as a reflection of their submission to Christ, who made woman out of man (13), so that as they continue in faith, love, holiness, and self-control they will be saved (15). Qualifications for elders and deacons (3:1-10) likewise teach us about self-restraint, order, love, and truth.

Do you see how such **contentious doctrines** as these in our day are given for the benefit of the church, rather than its hinderance and the dehumanizing of people? All of this was modelled by Christ himself in his incarnation, ministry, passion, and glorification so that we might follow his example. This is a great mystery: Godliness (14-16), and it is a very pillar of Christ's church.

Understanding God's world that he gave **marriage and food** as gifts to be received with thanksgiving through faith (4:3-5) allows us to enjoy God's world in humble service to him. Teaching them to others (6) demonstrates our **obedience** to the Lord. It is godliness (8), something that like a finely tuned **athlete**, we must train hard to achieve. It is the end to which we toil and strive as we set our hope on God and his Christ who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe (10).

Conducting ourselves in a manner **worthy of the Gospel**, in speech, love, faith, and purity (12) is good

doctrine that wins people over through grace. Devoting the church to the **public reading** of the Scripture, to preaching, and teaching inculcates orthodoxy into the minds of the people (13). Guarding our doctrine closely will “**save ourselves and others**” (16).

Treating older men as fathers, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sister, demonstrates the **household and family** that the church has become (5:1-2). Honoring widows (3) shows God’s care for the less fortunate. Ordering our own households, putting burdens where they properly belong, working hard, taking care of our children (4-12) allows us to be above reproach.

Keeping a close eye on our **tongues and hands** (13-17) allows us to work and speak things that are honoring and uplifting. Giving servants of God and master (6:1-2) the **respect** they deserve not only in word but in wages lessons burdens and shows compassion (5:18). **Rebuking sin** (20), refusing to entertain it (19), being impartial (21) keeps us pure (22) and guiltless (24). These things keep us from being puffed up with conceit and foolish (6:4). It keeps friction in the church at bay. They keep us from loving the world and its riches (5-10) and instead allows us to think to that which is lasting and forever, our inheritance of heaven.

Paul tells Timothy to flee the bad and instead to pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness (11). This is “fighting the good fight of faith” (12). It is taking hold of eternal life to which we are called (12, 19), just as Jesus did before Pilate (13). It keeps us above reproach (14), so that we will receive our reward from the only Sovereign King of kings (15-16).

What a great hope the church has. Can you see that true doctrine does not in fact divide. Its purpose is exactly the opposite. It is not to be feared, but followed, not forsaken but embraced. When we do, God’s church becomes on earth a glorious reflection of what he is in heaven and will be in the Age to Come. That reflection can be here, now. Just as her people can be saved here, now. It begins with faith in Jesus Christ. May we together learn in coming weeks why an entire letter is taken up with orthodoxy and heterodoxy. May we learn to make right judgments, so that we might grow into mature believers as we await the Coming of our Lord.

Bibliography

- Admin, “1 Timothy.” Biblical Chiasm Exchange (April 15, 2016). <https://www.chiasmusxchange.com/2016/04/15/1-timothy-1-6/>.
- Crossway Bibles. *The ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.
- “Heterodoxy,” *New World Encyclopedia* (Dec 22, 2017), <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Heterodoxy>.
- Marshall, I. Howard *The Pastoral Epistles*. ICC. London: T&T Clark International, 1999.
- “Mythos.” Henry George Liddell et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 1151.
- “Mythos.” William Arndt et al. *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 660.
- Nagasawa, Marko A. “The Implications of the Chiastic Structure of 1 Timothy on the Question of Women in Church Leadership.” *New Humanity Institute* (July 13, 2021). http://www.newhumanityinstitute.org/pdfs/paul_1timothy-chiasm-&-women-as-elders.pdf.
- Norris, Joseph. “Heretics in the Latter Days: The Structure of 1 Timothy, Part I.” *Theopolis* (June 4, 2014). <https://theopolisinstitute.com/heretics-in-the-latter-days-the-structure-of-1-timothy-part-i/>.
- Smith, Christine. “Book of 1 Timothy Chiastic Structure.” *A Little Perspective* (Nov 4, 2013). <https://www.alittleperspective.com/book-of-1-timothy-chiastic-structure/>.
- Wegenast, K. “Διδασκαλία.” *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*. Ed. Lothar Coenen, Erich Beyreuther, and Hans Bietenhard. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986: 768-69.