



Text: 1 Timothy 1:3-11<sup>1</sup> (Scripture Reading: 1 Tim 1:1-11)  
Series: Living as Gospel People  
Title: Part 2 -- Profile of a Wrong Turn  
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Most people who end up in spiritual dead ends, never intended to get there. Somewhere along the way, they make choices about spiritual matters that, by degrees, lead them away from the path that God lays down for us in His Word. Our spiritual lives usually get off track by degrees, not by a radical change in our spiritual commitments. What I want us to look at this morning is a group of people who ended up in a spiritual dead end because of a process, if you will, of “death by degrees.” I’m calling it a “Profile of a Wrong Turn” and my hope this morning is that by understanding what happened to these believers many years ago, you and I might become wise and in the wisdom that God supplies, that we might keep on track with Jesus, or make the adjustments in our lives we need to make, so as not to end up in a spiritual wasteland.

Let’s read together God’s Word for us this morning. It’s found in Paul’s First Letter to Timothy, chapter one, verses 1 to 11. I’m reading from the English Standard Version and you can follow along on the screen behind me or in the Bible you brought with you this morning.

**<sup>1</sup> Timothy 1:1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,  
<sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.**

**<sup>3</sup> 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, <sup>4</sup> nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. <sup>5</sup> The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup> Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, <sup>7</sup> desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.**

**<sup>8</sup> Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for**

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**those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers,<sup>10</sup> the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine,<sup>11</sup> in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.**

Paul refers to “certain persons” in the church in Ephesus who were causing problems because of their teaching. The problem with their teaching was simply that it was “different” from Paul’s teaching. And by “different” Paul means “wrong.” Their teaching was not in agreement with the Gospel message preached by Paul and the other apostles. It was “off track” and it was causing trouble in the church (1 Tim 6:5) and leading people astray (1 Tim 5:15). Timothy needed to put a stop to it immediately.

Although he mentions two of these “persons” later in his letter (1:20), Paul prefers to diagnose the problem rather than name the perpetrators. You find that principles throughout Paul’s letters. The problems with which Paul deals usually come with names attached, but Paul is more concerned with helping us diagnose and solve the problem than he is in pointing fingers. Down through the years the names have changed, but the problems have stayed the same.

But there are some pretty strong clues as to who these “persons” were and who they were is important for us to know.

First of all, he speaks of them as “swerving” from important spiritual values and “wandering away” into a spiritual wasteland. These people had at one time been on track with the Lord but something had caused them to “swerve” and “wander.” These were not people outside the church, attacking the faith and trying to draw people away. These were believers in Christ who had gotten spiritually off track.

Secondly, Paul speaks of them as “desiring to be teachers of the law.” In the church structure of that day, the teaching function of the church was conducted by the elders of the church. Later in 1 Timothy we’ll study Paul’s teaching about the role of the various church leaders, but here all we need to note is his instruction in chapter 5 where he wrote...

**“Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.” 1 Timothy 5:17**

Not only were these “persons” believers in the Lord, but they were also church leaders, elders who had been given the responsibility of leading and teaching in the church. That’s why Paul tells Timothy to silence these people. It was precisely because of the damage they could cause to the church that their “different” teaching needed to be stopped. They were trusted teachers but sadly, their teaching could no longer be trusted!



Finally, I'd like to add an almost prophetic element to the identification of these persons. If I'm right that they were church elders who had gotten off track, then Paul seems to have anticipated this eventuality years earlier. Somewhere between five and seven years earlier, Paul had met with the elders of the Ephesian church at the nearby town of Miletus. This is an excerpt of what we read in the Book of Acts about that meeting:

**Acts 20:17** **Now from Miletus [Paul] sent to Ephesus and called the elders of the church to come to him. <sup>18</sup> And when they came to him, he said to them:...**<sup>28</sup> **Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. <sup>29</sup> I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; <sup>30</sup> and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. <sup>31</sup> Therefore be alert, remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish everyone with tears.**

It seems that Paul had it right. "Men speaking twisted things" had arisen from within the leadership team of the church. Some of these very elders may well have been the "certain persons" Timothy was urged to silence. And the reason that all this had happened was because some of these elders had not paid heed to Paul's appeal that they "pay careful attention" to themselves.

These elders hadn't wandered and swerved from "sound doctrine" (v.10) because they lacked an understanding of the Gospel. Paul had spent three years in Ephesus, intensively teaching them the truth. And some years before his ministry there, Priscilla and Aquila, two of Paul's most trusted associates, had spent years in Ephesus teaching them the Gospel. (Acts 18:18-21) It was at Ephesus that Priscilla and Aquila had taken Apollos, the preaching phenom, aside and had "explained to him the way of God more accurately." (Acts 18:26) And Timothy, who now led the church, was Paul's protégé in the faith. (1 Tim 1:2) I don't think there is another church in the New Testament that could claim the quality or depth of teaching that the Ephesian church had received. But some of the elders had failed to "pay attention to themselves" and all that good Gospel teaching was going for naught.

As we unfold this "Profile of a Wrong Turn" I want us to clearly understand that everything we're looking at this morning can happen to you and me. The elders of Ephesus were believers in Jesus just like us. But they didn't "pay attention" to their own spiritual lives and as a result, they wandered away into meaningless, religious nonsense. It can happen to us, too.

What went wrong in the lives of these believers?

**First** of all,



## They focused their minds on the wrong story

Paul told Timothy...

**“charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” 1 Timothy 1:3-4**

There is some debate among Bible scholars about the exact nature of the “myths” and “genealogies” to which Paul refers but a similar comment to Titus helps us narrow the range. There was a similar issue in the church pastored by Titus on the Island of Crete and Paul urged Titus to rebuke those involved for **“devoting themselves to Jewish myths.” (Titus 1:14)**

At about the time the New Testament was being written a movement arose within Judaism that created a whole catalogue of extra-Biblical stories. They were very fanciful stories and you won't find any of them in the Bible. Let me give you just a flavour of the kind of stories that Paul probably referred to as “Jewish myths.” This is a story that was intended to embellish the Biblical account of creation and it was collected by Louis Ginzberg in the nineteenth century and published in 1909 in a collection entitled, The Legends of the Jews.

*“In the beginning, two thousand years before the heaven and the earth, seven things were created: the Torah [i.e. The Books of Moses] written with black fire on white fire, and lying in the lap of God; the Divine Throne, erected in the heaven which later was over the heads of the Hayyot [i.e. angels]; Paradise on the right side of God, Hell on the left side; the Celestial Sanctuary directly in front of God, having a jewel on its altar graven with the Name of the Messiah, and a Voice that cries aloud, “Return, ye children of men.*

*When God resolved upon the creation of the world, He took counsel with the Torah. Her advice was this: “O Lord, a king without an army and without courtiers and attendants hardly deserves the name of king, for none is nigh to express the homage due to him.” The answer pleased God exceedingly. Thus did He teach all earthly kings, by His Divine example, to undertake naught without first consulting advisers.” <http://www.sacred-texts.com/jud/loj/loj103.htm>*

In this same book of legends there are stories about the descendants of Bible characters that are not recorded in the Old Testament and are just as fanciful as this story about the Torah, which is a Hebrew word referring to the Books of Moses. I don't want to drag you through this stuff. My point is that these stories were just stories, but they were stories intended to carry spiritual lessons. Although they referred to Biblical events and Biblical characters they were simply the product of human imagination. But sadly, Paul tells us that these elders of the church fulfilled Paul's warning that...



**“the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.” 2 Timothy 4:3-4**

They focused on human stories, instead of God’s Story. Instead of God’s truth these people chose entertaining and imaginative tales.

Are we in danger from the same kind of diversion? I believe we are. A few weeks ago I was reading a blog about a book of illustration stories that was being sold online to pastors. These are the stories that preachers throw into their sermons to make you cry or laugh or go “ohh.” One of the commentators to the blog pointed out that many of the stories included in this book came from a non-Christian religion to which one of the other commentators said: “That doesn’t matter. A good story is a good story wherever you find it.”

No it’s not. I love good stories. I love to tell good stories at Christmas time and I’m going to be doing that at the JOY Fellowship Christmas luncheon in a couple of weeks. But I always try to make sure that the stories I tell serve the truth of the Gospel.

I have a book of Christmas stories in my library published by a very well known Christian family ministry. I’ve told several of the stories from this book. It contains stories that are both true and fictional, and one of the true stories in the book is set in a town right here in Alberta. It’s a town I’ve driven through. I’ve never read that story at Christmas and I won’t because the religion professed by the people who live in that town doesn’t teach the truth about Jesus Christ. It’s a lovely, heart-warming story, but it doesn’t serve the truth of the Gospel.

People, we are bombarded with stories, especially at Christmas time, and we need to make sure we tell the right ones. In the opening scenes of *Walk the Line* (2005), the recent movie about the life of Johnny Cash, there is a scene where Johnny and his older brother Jack, are talking one night in their room. Johnny is quite young and his brother is no more than twelve. Johnny was impressed by his brother’s spiritual maturity at that early age and in this scene, Jack is reading his Bible. Johnny ribs him about knowing every story in the Bible and Jack responds...

**Young Jack Cash:** Well, you know every song in mama’s hymnal!

**Young J.R.:** Songs are easy.

**Young Jack Cash:** [laughs] It ain’t for me.

**Young J.R.:** There’s more words in the Bible than in The Heavenly Highway Hymns.

**Young Jack Cash:** Look, [Johnny], if I’m going to be a preacher one day, I



gotta know the Bible front to back. I mean **[and here it is, folks!]** you can't help nobody if you can't tell them the right story. (<http://www.allsubs.org/search-movie-quotes/Walk%20The%20Line%20Fr/1>)

What Jack Cash meant was that God's Word is "the right story." We need to know it "front to back." God's Story is the story that we tell! In recent years I've become less and less interested in telling "preacher stories" and more and more interested in sharing God's story with you. Why? Because God's story is the one that will feed your soul, not just entertain you, not just put a smile on your face, not just make you cry or laugh. It's God's story that will give you eternal life; that will feed you; that will strengthen you; that will convict you; that will change your life.

Brothers and sisters, I appeal to you! Let's push aside the "Chicken Soup" we often feed ourselves and let's dig into the meat of God's Word! Let's not get side-tracked by "myths."

Whether it's John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, William Paul Young's *The Shack*, Brian McLaren's *A New Kind of Christian*, or Dawson Trotman's *My Heart, Christ's Home*, you need to analyze the content of everything you read from the perspective of the apostle's doctrine and ask the book hard questions. Let me recommend a test for you to apply to any sermon you hear or to any spiritual book you read. Let's call it...

**The faith test ... Does this teaching conform to the doctrine of the apostles or is it the product of human imagination?**

What happened to these elders? Well, **secondly**,

**They aimed at the wrong goal**

Paul charged Timothy to silence the myth-based teaching of these elders because it promoted...

**"speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." 1 Timothy 1:4-5**

Their teaching produced nothing but lots of talk. The word translated as "speculations" carries within it the note of controversy, what Paul refers to later in this letter as...

**"quarrels about words" 1 Timothy 6:4**

In verse 6 he refers to the product of their teaching as...



## “vain discussion” 1 Timothy 1:6

a phrase which the King James Version appropriately translates as...

### “vain jangling”

They loved to talk. It didn't matter about what – just talk! It was all just a bunch of blah, blah, blah! It was a lot of sound and fury which signified nothing!

But Christian teaching isn't a story about nothing! As we saw last week (3:14-16), the heart of this letter and the heart of our message is the story about Jesus. That's what Paul referred to as “the stewardship from God that is by faith.” The phrase is a bit obscure until we look at how Paul uses the word “stewardship” in some of his other letters. For example, to the Colossians he wrote...

**Colossians 1:24 Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church,<sup>25</sup> of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known,<sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints.<sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.<sup>28</sup> Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ.<sup>29</sup> For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.**

What Paul refers to as “the stewardship from God that is by faith” is “the plan of salvation revealed by God of which we are stewards and to which we must respond by faith.”<sup>2</sup> We are stewards of a mystery that has been revealed – it's the story of Jesus, the Saviour of the world! We have been given this wonderful message to preserve and to share.

And one of the essential results of the teaching of Jesus in the lives of those who believe in him is a life of love. As the Lord himself declared, religious discussions are not the way in which people will know that we follow Jesus. Jesus said...

**“By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35**

Please understand that I'm not condemning serious discussion about spiritual truth. There are deep matters of the faith that require serious examination and enquiry. But if in our hard thinking about spiritual truth we lose sight of the goal

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<sup>2</sup> John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, loc. cit.



of love for God and love for one another, then all our talk is, as Paul put it, nothing but...

**“a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” 1 Corinthians 13:1**

It means nothing without love. So here’s another test to apply to the sermons you hear and the books you read...

**The love test...Does this teaching result in love for God and for others or does it merely generate controversy about things that are not central to the faith?**

What happened to get these teachers off track? They focused on the wrong story. They aimed at the wrong goal. And **thirdly**,

**They were directed by the wrong motivation**

Paul says of these swerving, wandering elders that they were...

**“desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.” 1 Timothy 1:7**

The Phillips translation renders this verse...

**“They want a reputation as teachers of the Law, yet they fail to realise the meaning of their own words, still less of the subject they are so dogmatic about.” (J.B. Phillips Translation)**

Paul’s reference to the fact that they didn’t know what they were talking about suggests that he is being somewhat sarcastic in his observation about their “desiring to be teachers of the law.” He later speaks of these teachers as being “puffed up with conceit.” (1 Timothy 6:4)

The description “teachers of the law” was used by Jesus of the religious teachers he encountered who opposed him and called into question his ministry. (Luke 5:17) Jesus’ noted the spirit of pride that these “law teachers” carried with them and he warned his followers not to adopt it. Jesus said of them...

Matthew 23:6 **“they love the place of honor at feasts and the best seats in the synagogues <sup>7</sup> and greetings in the marketplaces and being called rabbi [which means “my teacher”] by others. <sup>8</sup> But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brothers. <sup>9</sup> And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. <sup>10</sup> Neither be called instructors, for you have one instructor, the Christ. <sup>11</sup> The greatest**



**among you shall be your servant. <sup>12</sup> Whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”**

A number of years ago I was having a conversation with a man who was involved in a ministry outside of the local church. We were talking about some issues in his work and I was sharing a concern I had about the way in which he was presenting the Gospel when he told me, quite out of the flow of the conversation, “Well, I am a teacher, you know.”

There was a note of self-assertion in his tone that shocked me. I’m a pastor. By virtue of God’s calling on my life and your calling to me to be your pastor-teacher, I have a recognized office as a teacher in this church. But to my knowledge, I have never defended a point of teaching by appealing to my role as “teacher.” My appeal is to God’s Word. I seek to teach only what the Bible teaches.

As I was internally digesting this man’s declaration to me of his status as “teacher,” James chapter 3, verse 1 came immediately to mind. James wrote...

**“Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.” James 3:1**

This man seemed to have little awareness of the seriousness of his situation. Being a teacher of God’s Word is one of the most wonderful and, at the same time, most frightening callings that God could place upon a man’s life and if anyone wants to be used of God in this work he must understand that fact. John Stott is a man whom God has powerfully used in Bible teaching and preaching for many decades. Some years ago he wrote...

*“It seems that the only preaching God honours, through which his wisdom and power are expressed, is the preaching of a man who is willing in himself to be both a weakling and a fool. God not only chooses weak and foolish people to save, but weak and foolish preachers through whom to save them, or at least preachers who are content to be weak and foolish in the eyes of the world. We are not always willing to pay this price. We are constantly tempted to covet a reputation as men of learning or men of influence; to seek honour in academic circles and compromise our old-fashioned message in order to do so; and to cultivate our personal charm or forcefulness so as to sway the people committed to our care.”<sup>3</sup>*

Apply this test to yourself as well as to the teachers to whom you listen. I’m borrowing this one from John MacArthur’s work on this passage. Let’s call it...

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<sup>3</sup> John Stott, *The Preacher’s Portrait*, p. 122 as quoted in John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, p. 20



**The motive test ... Is this teacher humble and selfless or does he seek the preeminence?**

**Finally,**

**They preached the wrong message**

This is really the result of the other choices they made more than a factor that shaped their departure from the truth. Sadly, although they preached about the Bible the message of the Gospel got lost in all the “speculations” and “vain discussions” that was generated by their fascination with non-biblical stories. They wanted to be “teachers of the law” when their driving passion should have been to be preachers of...

**“the gospel of the glory of the blessed God” 1 Timothy 1:11**

Paul is quick to affirm that teaching the Old Testament law is good because it is a holy part of God’s inspired Word. (Romans 7:12) He wrote...

**“Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup> understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners....” 1 Timothy 1:8-9**

The purpose of God’s law is to lay open our hearts and expose our sinful rebellion against God. The law of God presents us with God’s view of our problem but it does not provide us with God’s solution to our problem. Paul wrote to a church in another city that was dealing with a more serious version of the problem that was only beginning to take shape in Ephesus. He told them...

**“we know that a person is not justified [that is, made right with God] by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.” Galatians 2:16**

If all the teachers in Ephesus were doing was teaching about God’s law, all they were doing was talking about the problem without ever offering Jesus as the solution. John MacArthur summarized the issue this way. He wrote...

“The purpose of the law is to show willing sinners their sin (cf. Rom. 3:19), and need of a savior (Gal. 3:24). The law is morally right and good, but the law alone is not good news. The law forces man to recognize the bad news that all are guilty of violating God’s standards. It thus condemns everyone and sentences them to hell (Rom. 3:19-20)...The law, since it shows men their sin, is a



necessary part of the gospel. If there were no bad news that men were lost sinners, there could be no good news of Christ's redemption."<sup>4</sup>

But we need to go on from the absolute and searing honesty of the law to tell people of the "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God." We need to bring people the truth that "through faith in Jesus Christ" the sin that leaves them guilty before God's judgment has been removed from them at the cross of Christ. We need to tell them that the righteousness they lack has been supplied to them by God's gift out of the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We need to tell them that because Jesus died and took our punishment for our sin, God's wrath against our sin has been satisfied and we are at peace with him forever.

Reading Paul's list of sin here in 1 Timothy, I'm sure we can find ourselves somewhere in that list because the message of the Law is that...

**"all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God..." Romans 3:23**

But the message of "the gospel of the glory of God" that follows hard on the heels of the message of the law is...

**"...and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus" Romans 3:24**

When we come to believe in Jesus, everything changes. Paul wrote a list of very similar sins to the believers in the city of Corinth. He wrote...

**"Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,<sup>10</sup> nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God.<sup>11</sup> And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God." 1 Corinthians 6:9-11**

"And such were some of you. But you were..." That's the transformation of the Gospel in a nutshell! That's the work of the law and Gospel together.

I want to leave you with another question to ask; really, it's three questions. Charles Simeon, a wonderful preacher of the eighteenth century whose philosophy of preaching has had a great influence on my own ministry, used these three questions to evaluate every sermon. I have them written out on my bulletin board and I encourage you to write them in the fly leaf of your Bible or wherever you keep important things to remember. You could call these questions...

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<sup>4</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, p. 21, 22



### **The Gospel test...**

#### **#1 Does it humble the sinner?**

Does it bring us to the place where we recognize our bankrupt situation before a holy God and our desperate need for his mercy and grace?

#### **#2 Does it exalt the Saviour?**

Does it present Jesus as our only Saviour from our hopeless situation, as our only and sufficient hope and comfort?

#### **#3 Does it promote holiness?**

Does it direct us to lead lives that seek the glory of God above all things? That's that kind of life that belief in "the gospel of the glory of God" will produce.

Of course, although Paul's concern in this passage is with elders that are adrift, everything we've read applies to individual believers as well. Don't use this test to identify "swerving" leaders and forget to make sure that your own steps are firmly on the path of the Gospel.

As we come to the Lord's Table this morning, we're invited to do just that. Paul directs us to "examine" ourselves (1 Cor 11:28) to see if we're approaching this remembrance of the Gospel of the cross of Christ with a proper appreciation of spiritual realities represented by the Bread and the Cup.

I invite you to a time of reflection and prayer as we prepare to share together in the remembrance of the cross of Christ.

#### **Time of Silent Reflection**

#### **Invitation to the Table of the Lord**

#### **Songs of Communion:**

- You Are My All in All
- Alas & Did My Saviour Bleed (Kauflin)

#### **Benediction**