

1 TIM 1:5—THE GOAL OF OUR FAITH

INTRO: Christmas will be here in 2 weeks. Now is a perfect time to reflect on what Christmas and Christianity are all about. With the emphasis on the manger, and the baby, family, and Christmas carols and trees, for many of us the temptation is to think of Christmas in a sentimental kind of way. Or, with all the presents, and parties, and busyness, the temptation is to think of it as a big hassle.

But Christ came into the world to change lives—in fact, to give people everlasting life. John 3:16 says, “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life.” That verse alone is what Christmas—and Christianity—is all about. So let us reflect on what this “everlasting life” that Jesus came to bring us is.

“Everlasting life” is more than just life that goes on for a very long time. Everlasting life is a different kind of life. It is a different type or quality of life. We can’t work for it or earn it. It is a gift that Jesus gives us. It begins when we become connected with Jesus Christ and enter into a new relationship with him by God’s grace through faith. That is called being “born again.” Even that terminology—“born again”—is talking about new life. When that happens then Christ, by means of the Holy Spirit, comes inside of us. He begins living in us in a new way, and working in us, and changing us, so that slowly by slowly we start becoming more like Jesus.

What does this mean for our lives? What does it look like? That’s what we’re going to think about today. There is a verse where Paul summarizes what this new life looks like, indeed, what Christianity is all about. In **1 Tim 1:5** he tells us what the goal of our faith and our life is. If we know the goal, we know where we are going. [**READ 1 TIM 1:5**]

The word for “goal,” or “aim” as the ESV puts it, is *telos* which means “the goal or end, or outcome, toward which a movement is directed.” That’s why the NASB says “the goal of our instruction” and the ESV says “the aim of our charge.” It’s like the target you are shooting at. If you don’t know what you are aiming at—if you don’t know what the target is—you’ll never hit it.

Knowing the outcome, the goal, the aim, is the most important thing in every area of life. That’s why businesses come up with mission and purpose statements. Everything has to be directed toward achieving the mission and purpose—IOW achieving the goal. If you’re cooking, do you want to bake a cake or are you making a pot of chili? If you don’t know what you want to make, heaven only knows what you’ll end up with! According to this verse, the goal or “aim” of our faith can be summarized in 1 word. *What is that word?* [LOVE]

PROP: This verse is telling us that “Christians are people who demonstrate their faith by living lives of love.”

O/S: To see this, we will look at: (1) the importance of love; (2) what love looks like according to this verse; and (3) how we can apply this in our lives.

I. The importance of love

How important is love? It is the central thing. It’s all over the Bible. Let me just give you two examples: **Matt 22:36-40 [SUMMARIZE]; John 13:34-35 [SUMMARIZE].**

Why is love so important? Because God is the source of everything, and “**God IS love**” (**1 John 4:8**). Therefore, the Bible tells us that “**we love because he first loved us**” (**1 John 4:19**). So love is at the heart of who God is; it is at the heart of why he came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ; it is at the heart of Christianity; and therefore love is to be at the heart of us and our lives.

It is this goal, this aim, this entire worldview, that separates Christianity from every other religion in the world. For example, the basic worldview of Eastern religions—Hinduism and Buddhism—essentially is that all is one, this world is an illusion, and the goal is to be liberated from the endless cycle of reincarnation and to lose one’s individual identity and merge with the universe like a drop of water being absorbed in the sea. On the other hand, the basic goal of Islam is jihad, namely, to bring the entire world into subjection to Allah and his sharia law, by force violence if necessary.

Both of these goals are, in their different ways, the exact opposite of Christianity. Christianity views the world not as an illusion but as real, and views all people as having individual worth because they are made in the IOG. Since God is a god of love, if people are to find everlasting life, it cannot be compelled by force or violence.

II. What love looks like according to 1 Tim 1:5

v.5 says that love is to be from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Let's take a look at these:

Pure heart: In the Bible, the "heart" describes the inner essence of our being, the real us. It is the source of who we are and everything we do. What Paul is telling us is that real love can only come from the real you. Real love is from the inside-out.

We can never achieve the goal of love or truly be people of love on our own. Why not? Because naturally our hearts are hard and we can't change our own hearts. In the book of Ezekiel, God called them hearts of stone. But in Ezekiel, God also says that when we come to faith in Him, he will *give* us a new heart; he will take our heart of stone and give us a heart of flesh—IOW a living heart.

Naturally, our worlds revolve around ourselves. But love—by definition—requires someone to love; the beloved. Only by getting a new heart, a pure heart, a heart like Jesus's own, can the focus of our lives be transformed from ourselves to loving God and loving others. That's what the new birth is all about; that's what Christianity is all about.

Good conscience: Does your conscience ever bother you? (You don't have to answer that out loud.) My conscience bothers me when I know what I should do but don't do it; or I know what I shouldn't do but do it anyway. But we can even do the right things for the wrong reasons. That's where a pure heart comes in. With a pure heart, we can know what we should do and do the right things for the right reasons. Then our conscience will never bother us—we will have a good conscience.

Sincere faith. What is sincere faith? Real faith is not just a matter of believing things intellectually, although using our minds is important. Real faith is not just a matter of believing certain doctrines, although doctrine is important. Real faith is lived-out faith. Real faith is where the head, the heart, and the hands all work together. The apostle James talks about this in James 2 where he says [**READ Jas 2:14-17**]. Dead faith is not saving faith—it is the product of dead hearts of stone. But saving faith, lived-out faith, is the product of living, pure hearts. You see, all of this works together.

Remember: Jesus said that the entire Bible can be summarized in 2 commands: "love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as yourself." But how do we know if we love God? We can come to church and say it; we can sing songs about it. But how do we know?

The apostle John gives us the key. 1 John 4:20 says "If someone says, 'I love God' but hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen." What John basically is saying is, "How we do the 2nd command—loving our neighbor—is the proof, is the test, of whether we are really doing the 1st command—loving God. IOW, "How we treat people shows what we really think of God." Why? Because all people are made in the IOG. How we treat God's image shows what we really think of him.

Jesus made this very clear in Matt 25:31-46, the sheep and the goats [SUMMARIZE]. Both the sheep and the goats recognized Jesus as "Lord." What's the difference between them? The "faith" of the goats never penetrated their heart; it never changed their lives—it was just lip-service. The faith of the sheep DID penetrate deeply into their heart. It changed their lives.

Did you ever think it odd that the sheep asked Jesus, "When did we see you?" Why did they ask that? There can only be one answer: They began seeing people as Jesus sees them and treating people as Jesus treated them. But more than that, the sheep took seriously the biblical idea that all people are made in the IOG. So they began seeing *Jesus* in other people. As a result, the sheep started treating *everyone* just as they would treat Jesus himself—and they didn't even realize it!

Why didn't they realize it? Because thinking and acting like Jesus had become second nature to them—Jesus' nature had become their nature. So acting like Jesus acted was no longer unusual or out of the ordinary. They didn't realize they were like Jesus because the way they were acting had become simply the normal way to live—they didn't have to give it a second thought. That's what the Christian life is supposed to be like.

III. How do we apply this in our lives

All of us, as individuals and families, are in somewhat different circumstances: we know different people; we have different skills; our financial circumstances are different. Nevertheless, the Bible and the early church give us principles that are as applicable to our lives here today as they were 2000 years ago. Let me just focus on 2 principles that demonstrate love which we can apply today. If we get serious about this, it can transform our lives and the lives of others.

- First principle: the early church demonstrated astounding generosity to people in need. Acts 4:32-35 [READ]. You need to understand: these people were not members of a commune. They all owned their own property, just like we do. We know that because v.32 tells us things belonged to the people, and v.34 says

that when they saw needs the “owners” of property would “sell” *their property*—even their land and houses—and give the proceeds to the poor.

What was happening was a complete change of attitude about their property. They had a new attitude about property because they had a new attitude about people. They had this new attitude because they had a new heart—a pure heart. Because they had a new heart they started loving their neighbors as they loved themselves. And that translated into what they did with their money and property.

Notice the results of the church living out this new life in Christ. One result, as **v.34** tells us, is **“there was not a needy person among them.”** That is remarkable because most of the early Christians themselves were poor. But when people take care of each other, there is no more “need.” One hand washes the other, so both hands become clean.

And notice the second result of living out this new life in Christ. **v.33** says the apostles were testifying with great power, and God was blessing the entire church. Why? Because the church was doing what God has always wanted the church to do, and the church was living the way He has always wanted us to live. I am convinced that one reason the apostles were testifying with such power is that the people—by their very generosity—were acting so counter-culturally that everyone else took notice.

Everyone naturally puts themselves first. We all naturally tend to hold onto our money and things with a tight fist. But the early church was not like that. They held onto their money and things loosely and had an open hand when they saw needs. God took care of them, and their lives were a powerful testimony to others that Jesus is alive and he changes lives from the inside-out. That is powerful. And it still works today, if only we have the faith to do it.

How do we do this? With respect to our money, how much do we give? One key to knowing this is: Do you keep records and have a budget? How much do you budget for giving: giving to the church, giving to the charities and ministries you believe in, giving to people in need? My guess is, if you do not keep records and have a budget, you are probably wildly overestimating the amount you actually give away.

Also, love is relational. Do you know your neighbors? Do you know their needs? God has put certain people in your life—friends, neighbors, co-workers—that he has not put in mine (and vice versa). As a member of the body of Christ, you can do things to help those people that most non-believers simply will not do, if only you are attuned to the needs.

This applies to the church as a corporate body as well. God has put our particular church in what many would consider a poor location: it is somewhat out of the way and not by major thoroughfares. *That is not by accident.* Have you noticed, almost all the residential dwellings immediately around this church building are duplexes or apartments. There are a lot of single moms surrounding us. Yet how much are we reaching out to them? Not so much.

A few months ago Sally Buss was speaking at a women’s event on dealing with abuse. We actually did give little welcome bags to the duplexes around here. Unfortunately, as I understand it, none of the people we invited other than our own church members attended the women’s event. What are we going to do to establish a relationship with our neighbors to show them the love of Christ? I don’t know, but love is intentional. It seems to me that we need to seriously think about the people we are in proximity to and start acting to develop a relationship with them.

- The second transformative principle is that the early believers treated others, especially other believers, as family. **Mark 10:29-30** says [READ]. What is Jesus talking about? Probably Yazid and most Muslims who leave Islam for Christ know exactly what Jesus is talking about. I know this from talking with many former Muslims in Africa. When a Muslim leaves Islam for Christ, he or she may be disowned by their family, kicked out of their house, lose their job, and even have their life threatened.

Yet they know that even though they have been disowned by their old, earthly family, they have been adopted into a new family: the family of Christ. That’s why Jesus is saying in Christ you receive 100 new brothers and sisters and mothers and children. Who are they? Look around you: these are our brothers and sisters. And what about the homes and farms? What Jesus is saying is as our Hispanic friends would say, *“Mi casa es su casa”*—“my house is your house.” If someone needs a place to stay, they are always welcome at the home of a brother or sister. That is true in our earthly families, and Jesus is saying it should be just as true in our spiritual family. The church IS a family. And one mark of a good family is: a family takes care of its own.

Gal 6:10 summarizes this by saying, “While we have the opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith.” Is that how we feel about others? Our earthly families will end when this life ends. If some members of our earthly families are not believers, we will never see them again. But this family—our new, spiritual family—will continue to be a family forever. Since that is true, it seems to me we should start acting toward each other as if we were a family.

You see, in God's scheme of things, the church is the *true* family. Our physical, earthly families are just the shadow—the church is the true, lasting reality. We tend to have things backwards. If we start thinking and feeling and acting toward our fellow believers with a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith, it will make it much easier to start acting toward *everyone* with a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. Why? Because the church basically consists of people who are not blood relatives—but we are to treat them as if they were blood relatives. So if we can do that with this group of people, then—like the sheep in the sheep and the goats—naturally we will start treating *all* non-blood relatives as if they were blood relatives.

CONCL: All of this works together. Our heart affects our head which affects our hands. What we do on the outside reveals what we are on the inside. Keep the goal, the aim, in front of you. In fact, I think that every Christian should memorize **1 Tim 1:5**. If we think about it and take it seriously—and then intentionally look for *practical* ways in our own lives to apply what it says, people will notice. Like those early Christians, we will be living testimonies that Jesus is alive and he changes lives from the inside-out. Then, when we do some act of love for someone in need, if they ask why, we will all be able to say, “Jesus changed my life from the inside-out, so I can show love to you because he first loved me. God bless you.”