

1 TIM 1:1-5—THE ESSENCE AND GOAL OF OUR FAITH

INTRO: You may or may not be aware of it, but there is a mass exodus from Christianity going on in America, primarily among people 30 and under. One study shows that, as of 2021, 42% of people 30 and under claimed no religious affiliation. Further, these younger adults, will raise their children as “nones” — people from nonreligious families. While a tiny percentage of people who have left the church will return to religion, nones rarely embrace religion at any point in their lives. This trend began particularly in the early 2000s and has been swift and steep. The Pew Research Center estimates that Christians will be a minority of Americans by 2070 if current trends continue.

There are many reasons for this. People like Richard Dawkins and Sam Harris have made atheism respectable. Probably 95% of all colleges and universities and the vast preponderance of government schools at every level essentially have an atheist worldview. And there is also a major problem within the church. In his books *UnChristian* and *You Lost Me*, David Kinnaman points out that the vast majority of young people who leave the church cite hypocrisy and judgmentalism by professing Christians—particularly church leaders—as their reason for leaving the faith. In short, we have a major problem.

1 Tim 1:1-5 points us to the answer to this problem. In these five verses, the apostle Paul gives us the heart of what Christianity and the church are all about. He tells us what the basis of our faith is, what we should not be doing, and what the goal of our faith is. What he says is quite simple, yet is profound and practical. If we keep this at the forefront of our mind and our life, it will change the way young people—and everyone for that matter—will view Christianity and the church. This can lead to a reversal of the trend of people leaving the Christian faith. In fact, if what Paul says is applied by individual Christians and the church as a whole, it will make Christianity and the church winsome and appealing to people of all ages. **[READ 1 TIM 1:1-5]**

PROP: God’s love transforms us, so that our love can transform others.

O/S: We are going to consider four things: first, the essence of Christianity (vv. 1-2); second, what the church should not be doing (vv. 3-4); third, what the goal is, IOW, what we should be concentrating on (v. 5); and fourth, some applications of this.

I. The essence of Christianity (vv. 1-2)

In v. 1 Paul calls himself “an apostle of Christ Jesus.” The word “apostle” refers to someone who has been commissioned and sent out with authority for a specific purpose. The essential meaning of “apostle” is conveyed by such terms as “ambassador,” “delegate,” or “messenger.” While Paul was an apostle in a special sense—he was one of the foundational apostles of the church—in a greater sense all Christians have been commissioned as ambassadors, delegates, or messengers of Jesus Christ. So how we represent Christ is of vital importance.

Many years ago, communication theorist Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase “the medium is the message.” What he means is that the way Christians speak, act, and live our lives in general is portraying Christ to people. From what we saw earlier, what many, many young people are seeing is a hypocritical Christ, a judgmental Christ, a Christ who is insensitive to justice or to people’s needs: IOW, a false Christ; an unchristian Christ. That is why they are turned off to Christ and are leaving the church in droves.

Yet that is the exact opposite of the real Christ and what Christianity really is all about. The end of v. 1 points out that Christ is “**our hope.**” Without hope, what’s the point? Without having someone and a future to look forward to, life becomes meaningless and without purpose. When I am in Africa, I always look forward to coming home, because I love my wife and I love my home. Sometimes when Nancy is gone somewhere and I’m alone in the house, I think, “**This is what it would be like all the time if something happened to her.**” Yes, I’d survive, but it’s just not the same. Christ should be something like that for the Christian. He said, “**I will never leave you or forsake you.**” IOW, we are never truly alone. Whatever you are going through, he is with you. And we can rest assured that whatever is happening to us is part of his plan. We can have hope that our lives are not meaningless, but are profoundly important.

Verse 2 then uses three simple words—**grace, mercy, and peace**—that really define the basis and essence of Christianity. The use of “**grace, mercy, and peace**” together summarize the tragedy of humanity’s condition and God’s solution to our plight. What do I mean? Humanity’s condition is that there is a radical depravity or corruption about every person, also called the power of indwelling sin. It affects everything about us: how we think, reason, speak, act, feel, and relate to people and to God. We know what we should do but, because of the power of indwelling sin, we do not do it. The result is that there is no peace between different peoples (families, tribes, nations), and there is not peace between people and God.

Humanity's attempt to solve this problem largely is through religion. There are lots of religions in the world (Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, traditional African religions, etc.). But there are only two *kinds* of religion: Christianity and everything else. What I mean is this: at their core, every other religion has the same basis, namely, you must perform certain “works” (do enough good deeds, make enough sacrifices, deny yourself certain things, pray five times per day) in order to try to “bridge the gap” between a holy God and sinful you. If you do, God may accept you and take you to heaven or nirvana when you die. All such religions are doomed to fail, because our problem is *within us—there is something radically wrong with our “heart”—and we CANNOT change our heart on our own.* No amount of “external” acts (education, good deeds, sacrifices, denials of things, prayers) can change our sinful inner nature. We can't even meet our own standards, let alone God's!

Christianity alone is different; it is unlike any other religion in the world. Christianity alone recognizes that on our own we *cannot* change our own hearts and we *cannot* bridge the gap between us and God. Only God can do what we cannot do—*give us a new heart.* So he came to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. Christ was unique in all of history: He was fully God and fully man at the same time. He alone never sinned. That qualified him to step into our shoes, and on the cross, take our sins, our guilt, and the punishment we deserve onto himself. On the other hand, his obedience and righteousness are imputed to us by our faith in him. IOW, he takes all the bad in us and all the judgment and condemnation we deserve, and gives us credit for all the good in him. Every other religion essentially says, **“If you want God or the gods to accept you and take you to heaven, it is up to you to work hard enough.”** Christianity alone says, **“It is *not* up to you, because there is *nothing* you can do; instead, it is all about what Christ has done for you.”**

That is what grace, mercy, and peace are all about. “Grace” essentially means “undeserved favor” (IOW, receiving a good gift that we have not earned and do not deserve). “Mercy” is the other side of the coin—it's *not* receiving the bad consequences (God's wrath, judgment, condemnation, and hell) that we *have* earned and *do* deserve. “Peace” is the great thing we need: peace within ourselves; peace among people; and peace with God. When we come to Christ in faith—understanding and believing who he is and what he has done—he frees us from our past, he comes to live inside of us in the person of the Holy Spirit, and then he works in us to change us on the inside to make us into the kind of people we were created to be in the first place. That is the gospel. And it leads us to:

II. What we should NOT be doing (vv. 3-4) [READ]

The main things mentioned here are not teaching “**strange doctrines,**” and not paying attention to “**myths and genealogies.**” When Paul says that people should not teach “strange doctrines,” in essence what he is saying is, **“Teach the gospel and the implications of the gospel.”** That should be the focus, not other things. We began by talking about why masses of young people are leaving Christianity and the church. One reason may be that many churches are not concentrating on what is most important, namely, Christ; the gospel; and the implications of the gospel for our lives.

“Myths and genealogies” are basically human accounts of things and traditions about our origins. It is nice to know what family, tribe, race, and nation we are from. We all draw our identities from such things. But to draw our *primary* identity from any such things is not Christian and can lead to terrible divisions and evil. The holocaust against the Jews in World War II and the genocide in Rwanda in 1994 stemmed from myths and, especially, genealogies. Both were based on the idea that **“my group is better than your group, so we're going to wipe you out.”**

Racism, tribalism, or ethnic favoritism is not acceptable for anyone who takes the name of Christ. Christians of all races and tribes must think of themselves as *Christians* first and as members of ethnic, national, political, economic, or other categories second. It is true that **“blood is thicker than water.”** However, for Christians the blood of *Christ* must be seen as the common blood that binds us together, not the blood of family, tribe, or race. That is why **Gal 3:28** tells us, **“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”** Paul is basically telling us to **“major on the majors.”** And that leads us to v. 5:

III. What we should be concentrating on: the goal of our faith [READ]

The word for “goal,” or “aim” as the ESV puts it, is the Greek word *telos*, which means **“the goal or end, or outcome, toward which a movement is directed.”** It's like a 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 v. 5, the goal or “aim” of our faith can be summarized in one word. *What is that word?* [LOVE]

A. 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). 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 also 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 and 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. Additionally, since God is a god of love, if people are to find everlasting life, it cannot be compelled by force or violence.

But the implications of this are more radical that we might realize. Jesus said, “**If you only love those who love you, what reward do you have?**” (Matt 5:46) We are to show love to all kinds of people, even the unlovable, even our enemies. Why? Because Christ showed his love for us when *we* were *his* enemies! And if we have a pure heart, and a good conscience, and sincere faith—we will. We won’t be able to help it.

B. What love looks like

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; they are self-centered; 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’ own, can the focus of our lives be transformed from loving 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**]. What's the difference between the sheep and the goats? The main difference is that 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 the same question the goats asked, "When, 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 is the life of love. That is what the Christian life is supposed to be like.

C. 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 to 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 missions, 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. The key is budgeted, percentage giving—right off the top. Doing that breaks the hold that money and our consumer culture have on us and frees us to see that our money, like our very life, is a ministry for Christ.

Also, love is relational. How well 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 their needs. That will take time and effort, but it is worth it to show them the love of Christ. Love is intentional. It seems to me that we need to seriously think about the people God has put us 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? 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 that 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? If your earthly brother or sister needs a place to stay, aren't they welcome to stay with you until they can get their own place and get back on their feet? Of course! That is true in our earthly families. 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.

This will affect how we live and what we do in every area of our lives. In **Acts 10** Peter had been given a vision and shown that God does not show partiality between Jews and Gentiles. Peter, a Jew, had been eating with Gentiles but later withdrew himself and stopped eating with them. As a result, in **Gal 2** the apostle Paul confronted Peter publicly, called him a hypocrite, and said that Peter was not being "*straightforward about the truth of the gospel*" (**Gal 2:14**). Peter was denying the very gospel he had preached by the way he was treating the Gentiles *in his private life*—who he ate with. The issue for us may not be who we eat with, but this same type of issue occurs any time a church or an individual Christian denies people membership, positions of leadership, fellowship, or full equality because of ethnic, socio-economic, or other similar reasons. What this is telling us is: the practical implications of the gospel are radical and transformative; they affect our attitudes towards people, our relationships, and all areas of our lives.

Is that how we feel about each other? 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 (the church)—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. That is what Christianity and the church are all about. That is what we are to be like.

CONCL: What we do on the outside reveals what we are on the inside. Our heart affects our head which affects our hands. Keep the goal, the aim, in front of you. In fact, I think that every Christian should memorize **1 Tim 1:5**. If we take this seriously—and then intentionally look for *practical* ways in our own lives to apply what it says, people will notice. God's love will transform us, so that our love can transform others. Like those early Christians, we will be living testimonies that Jesus is alive and he changes lives from the inside-out. Then, if someone asks us why we do what we do, 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.**"

Think if all the church was like that. Young people would not be *leaving* the church in droves. Instead, they would be *attracted* to the church in droves, because everyone wants to be part of a loving, others-centered family of people just like Jesus. That is real Christianity, and it works. May God grant us the ability to live this kind of life all the time, with whomever we are with. If we do, I think we will be amazed at what God will do through us.