

## 1 TIMOTHY 1:3-7

### VITAL DUTIES FOR THE ELDERS

“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. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”<sup>1</sup>

**M**odern Christendom has witnessed a disastrous failure of the pulpit. Pastors have received this solemn charge: “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.” This charge is given specifically because “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.” I suggest that time of which the Apostle warned has now arrived. Therefore, the elder who will please Him who appoints to holy service, must “always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist [and] fulfil [his] ministry” [see **2 TIMOTHY 4:1-6**].

Since I speak primarily to those who fill roles among the saints that would not qualify as the work of a pastor, why should I take time to speak of pastoral responsibilities? After all, most of us are able to articulate what we expect from our pastor. We expect him to preach, to visit the sick and to care for the needy, to evangelise in the community, to sit in our multiple business meetings for the church—what else is there to do? It is precisely because most professing Christians are unclear about the work God has assigned elders that we need to define that work. It is because churches in this day are organised on a modern business model that superficially resorts to democracy that elders seldom function as taught in the Word. Most churches are run by a board, controlled by individuals who are unqualified for the task they presume to fill. Consequently, they are dysfunctional and marked by disorder.

The role of elders was being defined during the time Paul laboured in the Roman Empire. The Pastoral Letters complete the definition of pastoral responsibilities begun earlier during the Apostle’s service before the Lord. Contemporary Christians often imagine that they know precisely what is entailed in eldership; however, without consulting what was written by the Apostle Paul, and especially what he wrote to Timothy and Titus, believers will adopt a faulty model for building the congregation. This becomes evident when one considers the many churches today have substituted a business model for the spiritual model outlined in Scripture.

Consequently, one observes that in many instances elders are elected rather than being appointed. Again, a primary qualification for eldership is prominence in the community rather than character and calling as outlined in the Word. A distressing number of elders are unable to teach, in fact they never teach; they are convinced that their role is to exercise authority over the congregation rather than shepherd the flock. So, teaching needs to be provided in this day.

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible, English Standard Version** © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved

The eldership is a multifaceted responsibility. Throughout our studies in the Pastoral Letters, we will discover the spectrum of responsibilities imposed on the man of God. Fascinatingly enough, the Apostle begins with responsibilities that accrue to the elder in the opening words of his first letter to Timothy. And those responsibilities, perhaps the most easily neglected of all responsibilities for a pastor, are the focus of our study this day.

**CONFRONTING ERRANT DOCTRINE** — “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.”

The Apostle was going to Macedonia. We cannot say definitively when this was—there is no corroborative account in the account recorded in Acts; however, the context leads us to believe that he and Timothy had been in Ephesus together. Now, Paul needed to go into Macedonia. However, there were problems in Ephesus necessitating someone from the apostolic band to remain behind to address the problems. What is described is not a general dispatch of Timothy as an apostolic emissary, such as when he was sent to the Thessalonians. In that instance, Paul sent Timothy “to establish and exhort [the Thessalonians] in [their] faith, that no one be moved by [the] afflictions [they were experiencing]” [see **1 THESSALONIANS 3:2**]. In our text, Timothy has been appointed to a necessary task precisely because critically unhealthy teaching was being disseminated by some wishing to be elders. Consequently, the Church in Ephesus was in extreme danger because of the false teaching given out by immoral people.

Let me take a moment to state as an essential aside: no church can be healthier than the teaching presented and tolerated. If the teaching is unhealthy, if it is unbiblical and errant, the people will soon exhibit diseased spiritual lives. The tragedy of spiritually unhealthy people is that it is not long until they begin to exhibit and approve of immoral and unethical behaviour. The principle stands—what you accept as truth has an impact in your life.

In order to verify this statement, all one need do is consider some of the great denominations of past generations in our own nation. Does anyone actually believe that the leadership of the United Church of Canada awakened one day and said, “Let’s embrace immorality!” Can anyone actually imagine that the bishops of the Anglican Church of Canada suddenly decided, “Let’s reject the Bible as authoritative and do what feels good to us.” The demise of these once great denominations began when the pastors and rectors began to cast doubt on the Word of God and the people began to tolerate just a little bit of error in the pulpit. Quite candidly, few denominations are left in our nation that are not either moving swiftly to tolerate and promote error or that have not already conceded the battle. Pragmatic arguments already dominate attempts to justify decisions necessitated because of rejection of the Word.

In contradistinction to the steady movement of denominations toward blatant error, consider the instruction issued in the text. The initial responsibility of eldership is defined in the third and fourth verses of the text; presumably, these instructions would apply to all leaders among denominations. To the surprise of many people, the apostolic charge is quite negative. This is not to say there is not a positive aspect to Paul’s charge—there is. So, before considering the negative aspect of the apostolic charge, let’s look at the positive aspect of the charge.

Clearly, the Apostle expects that Timothy, and by extension each person bearing the title “elder,” will promote “the stewardship from God that is by faith.” On the surface, this is a somewhat confusing admonition. The construction becomes clear when we review Paul’s use of the term *oikonomía* that is translated “stewardship.” The word is translated “administration” or “God’s plan” in other translations.

The thrust of Paul's statement is that an elder is responsible to promote God's plan and work, which is to be administered as a stewardship. In other words, an elder is to act out of confidence in what God is doing. An elder is responsible to understand God's work to provide salvation for fallen people and how that salvation is secured. Moreover, the elder is to carry out the labour through faith. God's plan has always been to present His Son as a sacrifice on behalf of fallen mankind. Because people are utterly contaminated in every facet of their being, they cannot please God through their own efforts. If God is to be propitiated, One who is perfect must be presented as a sacrifice in the place of fallen people.

Early in my service before the Lord I made the acquaintance of a Methodist minister. I have previously spoken of my amazement following a conversation with him about his beliefs. He did not believe that Jesus was very God, though he did concede that He might have been a good man. He was convinced that heaven or hell was what you made of your existence now. He did not accept the Bible as infallible or inerrant; it was just another book, the writers of which were inspired much as Shakespeare was inspired. In his estimate, there was no such thing as salvation; each person would live out his or her life and that was the end of the matter. In short, he had rejected virtually the entire belief system of the Faith once delivered to the saints.

I was compelled to ask him why he became a minister. His answer disturbed me then, and it disturbs me now. He said he became a minister because it was an easy job that demanded little of him and ensured that he would enjoy stature in the community. Tragically, this man and his lack of faith is no longer the exception among professed ministers of Christ—embracing the doctrines of demons appears to have become the norm. Lest you imagine that I am picking on Methodists, be assured that I am appalled that many who call themselves Baptists have long since departed this holy Faith. All denominations appear to be riddled with the rot of unbelief as those to whom we look for moral and ethical leadership have deserted the Faith.

As an aside of considerable significance, ministers of Christ—those serving as elders among the saints of the Most High, are qualified by virtue of character and calling. However, in this day credentials and connections are sought as qualification for holy office. This truth will be examined in detail when we come to the third chapter of this particular letter. For the moment, I ask that you examine the character and calling of your elders; those who lead you are to reflect the charter of Him whom they represent and His call must be evident in their lives.

Undoubtedly, those whom Timothy was charged to confront were elders. There are multiple reasons one would draw this conclusion. First, these men presumed to be teachers. They are described in **1 TIMOTHY 1:7** as “desiring to be teachers of the law,” a role reserved for elders [see **1 TIMOTHY 3:2; 5:17**]. Another reason to conclude that these were elders is that Paul, not the congregation, excommunicated Hymanaeus and Alexander [see **1 TIMOTHY 1:20**]. This would imply that the people in question were in positions of power and the congregation believed they could not deal with them. Because the Apostle has given detailed qualifications for eldership in **1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7**, it would appear that unqualified individuals had assumed the position of elder. Thus, Timothy would require this list of qualifications to ensure that those who were unqualified would be replaced. Finally, Paul stresses that unqualified elders are to be publicly disciplined [see **1 TIMOTHY 5:19-22**], indicating that such action had not previously been taken.

The fact that Timothy was to confront “certain persons” would indicate that those disseminating false doctrine were not in a majority—they were few in number. However, false teachers seem to gain notoriety and a larger following than one might imagine. You may recall that Paul asks in another context, “Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump” [**1 CORINTHIANS 5:6**]? That certainly could apply in this particular instance!

What were these errant elders, these false teachers, teaching? They weren't presenting merely a novel slant on the message of life—they were teaching false doctrines. The Greek term is *heterodidaskaléo*—false teaching. The Apostle uses this word in **1 TIMOTHY 6:3-5**. “If anyone teaches false doctrine (*heterodidaskaléo*) and refuses to agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah, and godly teaching, he is a conceited person and does not understand anything. He has an unhealthy craving for arguments and debates. This produces jealousy, rivalry, slander, evil suspicions, and incessant conflict between people who are depraved in mind and deprived of truth. They think that godliness is a way to make a profit.”<sup>2</sup> Notice that the “false doctrine” is in contrast to “the sound words of our Lord Jesus, the Messiah.” Thus, it becomes evident that Paul was not simply disturbed that the teaching was novel or different—it was false and opposed to the healthy teaching of Jesus Himself.

In another instance, Paul uses this same word to describe something that is far worse than merely being novel. “I’m surprised that you’re so quickly deserting Christ, who called you in his kindness, to follow a different kind of good news (*heterodidaskaléo*). But what some people are calling good news is not really good news at all. They are confusing you. They want to distort the Good News about Christ. Whoever tells you good news that is different from the Good News we gave you should be condemned to hell, even if he is one of us or an angel from heaven. I’m now telling you again what we’ve told you in the past: If anyone tells you good news that is different from the Good News you received, that person should be condemned to hell”<sup>3</sup> [**GALATIANS 1:6-10**]. Here, Paul says that the “different kind of Good News” to which people were turning was “not really Good News at all.” Clearly, what my translation has cited as a “different gospel” is something that is dreadful. It is evident that the Apostle is deeply concerned—and with good reason! Clearly, the believers in that congregation were endangered by this teaching.

Let me caution you with a sobering truth: no believer in the Lord Jesus should imagine that he or she is not susceptible to errant teaching. When we cease to found our teaching on the Word of God, when we begin to accept what sounds plausible or when we cease to adhere to the standard of the Word, we are moving toward irrelevance. I must make a strong statement to those who seek to honour Christ the Lord. The statement I am about to make is not original with me; I learned it from the great British preacher, Charles Spurgeon. In a late edition of the newspaper he published, *The Sword and Trowel*, he wrote: “I have taken a deep interest in the struggles of the orthodox brethren; but I have never advised those struggles, nor entertained the slightest hope of their success. My course has been of another kind. As soon as I saw, or thought I saw, that error had become firmly established, I did not deliberate, but quitted the body at once. Since then my one counsel has been, ‘Come ye out from among them.’ If I have rejoiced in the loyalty to Christ's truth which has been shown in other courses of action, yet I have felt that no protest could be equal to that of distinct separation from known evil.”<sup>4</sup>

Why would any conscientious follower of the Lamb think to remain within a congregation that had departed the Faith of Christ the Lord? When a believer becomes convinced that those leading the assembly have forsaken the Word, when a child of the True and Living God discovers that those who presume to teach are delivering false doctrine, how can that child of God imagine that Christ is honoured through clinging to what is purported to be fellowship when the supposed fellowship has no doctrinal basis? When we support by our presence what is opposed to grace, we become complicit in rebellion against God Himself.

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<sup>2</sup> **International Standard Version** (ISV Foundation, Yorba Linda, CA 2011)

<sup>3</sup> **GOD'S WORD Translation** (Baker Publishing Group, Grand Rapids, MI 1995)

<sup>4</sup> C. H. Spurgeon, “Attempts at the Impossible,” *Sword and Trowel*, December, 1888

Let me say quite plainly, when there can be no spiritual communion, there should be no pretense of fellowship. Fellowship is known and vital error is participation in sin. Complicity with error will ensure that we sin against Him we call Master. When a church has forsaken the sound doctrine of the Word, it has no foundation; and a house with no foundation shall shortly fall, according to the Word of Christ Himself.

Refresh your memories with His teaching. “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” [MATTHEW 7:24-27].

Note the first word in the fourth verse of our text. It is the little word “nor.” Paul is not introducing something additional to the charge of false doctrine; rather, he is expanding what the false doctrine was. The myths and endless genealogies to which Paul refers are likely Jewish in origin. He appears to clarify this when he warns against “Jewish myths” in **TITUS 1:14** and “quarrels about the law” in **TITUS 3:9**. These myths are “irreverent” and “silly” [1 TIMOTHY 4:7], contrary to truth [2 TIMOTHY 4:4; **TITUS 1:14**] and “cleverly devised” [2 PETER 1:16].

Let me help you understand Paul’s concern. Much of the rabbinical Haggadah consisted of fanciful rewriting of Scripture. The Book of Jubilees, Pseudo-Philo’s “*Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*,” with its mania for family trees, and much of what we know as the Pseudepigrapha serve as examples of such Jewish fables and genealogies. To this day, many devout Jews invest considerable time pursuing far-fetched minutiae of rabbinical exegesis rather than seeking what God has revealed through His Word.<sup>5</sup>

Before you assume that I am merely slamming Jewish friends, consider how many evangelical Christians are capable of splitting a theological hair fourteen different ways and never whet the knife! In my lifetime, I’ve observed some strange teachings. Let me share just a few to emphasise what I am cautioning against. I recall a man named John Todd who came teaching a strange doctrine of fear during the late 1970s. He claimed that he had been a witch who converted to the Faith. Ultimately, he gained the ear of a surprising number of evangelical Christians, inciting fear that a coven of witches called Illuminati had infiltrated the Government of the United States and a number of major Christian organisations. He taught people that they needed to stockpile food and water, firearms and ammunition, hiding out in the hills because the witches were about to take over. As an aside, the Illuminati did not take over either the nation or the Christian organisations in 1980 as he taught. There are still picture books that present Todd’s wild stories that are distributed by some groups in Canada and the United States.

I recall students asking me what they should do after they had heard this man speak. My advice to them was to reject all that he said. They were astonished and asked how I could respond with such alacrity. I pointed them to the Word of God that teaches us, “God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control” [2 TIMOTHY 1:7]. Any teaching that urges fear cannot be of God! The man was a fraud and a phony.

The remainder of that story is that John Todd was arrested in May, 1987 for rape of a University of South Carolina graduate student and with sexually molesting two children. He was convicted and in January, 1988 he was sentenced to thirty years in prison.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See **J. N. D. Kelly, The Pastoral Epistles: Black’s New Testament Commentary** (Continuum, London 1963) 44-5

<sup>6</sup> “John Todd,” article, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Todd\\_%28occultist%29](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Todd_%28occultist%29), accessed 2 February 2013

Establish in your mind that any teaching that is built on speculation, any doctrine that cannot be tied to the clear teaching of the Word, any tenet that is not established on the Word, is condemned by Paul's charge to Timothy in this text. The reason such teaching is dangerous is that it leads to "more ungodliness" [2 TIMOTHY 2:16]. Such speculative instruction will "spread like gangrene" [2 TIMOTHY 2:17] and cause people to "swerve from the truth" [2 TIMOTHY 2:18]. Finally, such teaching can only "breed quarrels" [2 TIMOTHY 2:23].

I've thrown out quite a bit of information; permit me to point you to a portion of the Word where this is written. "Charge [believers] before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.'

"Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.

"So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels" [2 TIMOTHY 2:14-23].

The deviations and troubles that would plague the faithful began with a failure to "rightly handle the Word of Truth" and failure to "test everything" [1 THESSALONIANS 5:21]. Surely, those who teach are responsible careful presentation of divine truth. They are not to build doctrine for the people of God from tradition; rather, the teacher who will please God the Father must appeal to the Word for what is taught. To stray beyond the boundaries of the Word is to introduce that which is unhealthy and which can only contaminate the faithful saints seeking to honour the Lord Christ. False teaching can only lead to speculations rather than the knowledge of God.

Before continuing in this study, I believe it beneficial for us to discover how to discern doctrinal error when it presents itself. Christians have convictions and preferences; distinguishing between the two is critical. *Preferences are expressions of secondary matters*; they are in theological parlance, *adiaphora*—indifferent matters. Followers of the Master should not condemn fellow believers over secondary issues. Whether we practise a congregation form of church governance or whether we practise a Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical governance should not cause any believer to anathematise fellow Christians. We should each be convinced in our own mind, and avoid destroying one another over inconsequential matters.

This is but a practical application of the apostolic instruction to avoid making an issue out of foods. "Food will not commend us to God. We are no worse off if we do not eat, and no better off if we do. But take care that this right of yours does not somehow become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone sees you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will he not be encouraged, if his conscience is weak, to eat food offered to idols? And so by your knowledge this weak person is destroyed, the brother for whom Christ died. Thus, sinning against your brothers and wounding their conscience when it is weak, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if food makes my brother stumble, I will never eat meat, lest I make my brother stumble" [1 CORINTHIANS 8:8-13].

Elsewhere, the Apostle would write, “Do not, for the sake of food, destroy the work of God. Everything is indeed clean, but it is wrong for anyone to make another stumble by what he eats. It is good not to eat meat or drink wine or do anything that causes your brother to stumble. The faith that you have, keep between yourself and God. Blessed is the one who has no reason to pass judgment on himself for what he approves. But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because the eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin” [ROMANS 14:20-23].

In contradistinction to preferences are convictions. *Convictions are foundational truths based on what is revealed in the Word.* Convictions consist of essential doctrines that cannot be dismissed without denying the Faith. At a minimum, all Christians will hold the following as convictions. Jesus Christ is truly and fully God. He was born of a virgin and lived a sinless life. He presented His life as a sacrifice in the place of sinful man. He was buried and rose from the grave on the third day. He was witnessed as truly alive before ascending into the heavens where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. Salvation, the forgiveness of sin, is the free gift of God received through faith in Jesus the Son of God, without any work on man’s part. This Living Saviour is coming again for all who are born from above. This testimony is presented in the Bible which is the written Word and which is to be received as inerrant and infallible.

**SEEKING TRANSFORMATION** — “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” There is an unfortunate disconnect between doctrine and life that is frequently witnessed among God’s people in this day. Some claim to hold to pure doctrine; others claim to live to pure lives. However, the Word of God does not permit us to distinguish between doctrine and life. Those who are born from above love truth because God the Father is truth. Because the child of God loves truth, he or she will seek to live as one who is true. This is such a vital point and I am compelled to rephrase and restate this truth so that none will miss what is said: the Faith is transforming. Saying one is a Christian no more makes one a Christian than saying that one is Jewish because he or she was born in a bagel factory.

Throughout the Gospels are warnings against presumption. Jesus warned, “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness’” [MATTHEW 7:21-23].

The Christian that pleases God is one who fulfils the Great Commandment and the second which is related to it. Jesus spoke of these commandments in MATTHEW 22:37-40: “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbour as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

I’m telling you no secrets when I caution that much of modern Christendom has been reduced to formulae—do this, and God will do that; act thusly, and God will perform in this manner. Of course, all such talk is errant, for God deals with us on the basis of grace and mercy. We are not treated as our sinful condition deserves to be treated—God shows us mercy. Still, much of Christendom imagines that the Faith can be reduced to the performance of duties. Consequently, most churches are composed of people who feel good about themselves because they are confident that they are doing what is required. I caution you that salvation is by faith; and the one who is saved will be transformed by the Spirit of God living within.

Permit me to expose a serious problem among the professed people of God. The Master said, “By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” [JOHN 13:35]. The Spirit of God prompted the Apostle of Love to write, “Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love” [1 JOHN 4:7, 8]. If the mark of the one born from above is love for the brotherhood of believers, how is it that we know so little about one another and spend so little time with one another? If love characterises the child of God, how is it that so many church boards imagine that they show love for the Saviour by despising the ones whom He sent to serve as shepherd? If those who are loved by God in turn love the people of God, how is it that so many of the leaders use the church as a stepping stone to better positions or as a means to grab power?

There is a serious flaw in the logic presented by the churches of this day. I remind you that the love of which Jesus spoke and of which Paul wrote is love that flows from choice. The love of Christ is not emotion—it is choice; it is from the will. This love entails self-denial and self-sacrifice for the benefit of others.

Paul is endeavouring to produce a congregation that demonstrates what God requires—love toward Him and toward those who are His. The false teachers are seeking followers after themselves. False teachers will boast of how many people attend their services; godly teachers will rejoice in those who seek Christ and walk in His way. False teachers can only see the numbers of those looking to them as experts; godly teachers look intently into the heart of those to whom they minister in order to see the image of Christ reproduced in them. The Apostle, and every elder who endeavours to follow the Master, seeks to build a congregation marked by love. Such a congregation is apparent whenever one comes into their presence. The people love God and they love one another. They seek to honour God and treat one another with respect.

The Apostle says that this love arises from three sources: a pure heart; a good conscience; and a sincere faith. ***Love requires a pure heart*** that is reflected in the life of one who has been washed by regeneration [see TITUS 3:5]. Recall the words of the Psalmist:

“Who shall ascend the hill of the LORD?  
And who shall stand in his holy place?  
He who has clean hands and a pure heart,  
who does not lift up his soul to what is false  
and does not swear deceitfully.”

[PSALM 24:3, 4]

A pure heart is witnessed in the one whom God has qualified to ascend the hill of the Lord, and who is thus able to stand in the holy place.

***A second prerequisite for love is a good conscience.*** The Greek word that is translated “good” speaks of that which is perfect, that which produces pleasure, satisfaction and a sense of well-being. Conscience is the faculty of man that God created to provide self-judgement. The conscience either affirms or condemns an individual. The mind knows the standard of right and wrong; and when that standard has been violated, the conscience reacts to accuse, producing guilt, shame, doubt and fear. Those with a pure heart will not be condemned because they will maintain a blameless conscience. In the south, we would say they keep short accounts with God. Peace, confidence, hope, joy, courage and contentment result from a conscience that does not accuse. In that case, love flows.



*The final source of love is “a sincere faith.”* This is faith without pretence; this is faith that endeavours to please God and seeks to build the faithful. Writing the Romans, Paul encouraged such faith that grows love when he wrote, “Let love be genuine. Abhor what is evil; hold fast to what is good. Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor. Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord. Rejoice in hope, be patient in tribulation, be constant in prayer. Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” [ROMANS 12:9-13].

This is the unique intertwining of faith and love that Peter anticipates among the faithful. “Having purified your souls by your obedience to the truth for a sincere brotherly love, love one another earnestly from a pure heart” [1 PETER 1:22].

Those who are born from above bear the imprimatur of the Living God on their life. Jesus didn’t hesitate to expose a serious flaw that marked the religious leaders of His day. Jesus said to the religious leaders, “If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and I am here. I came not of my own accord, but he sent me. Why do you not understand what I say? It is because you cannot bear to hear my word. You are of your father the devil, and your will is to do your father’s desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks out of his own character, for he is a liar and the father of lies” [JOHN 8:42-44]. Much the same could be said of the hummingbirds occupying the eagle’s nest of congregational leadership among far too many of the churches in this day.

**AGREEABLE DOCTRINES OF DEATH** — “Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”

False teachers are contrasted to those who are appointed by God to be elders. False teachers have dirty hearts—hearts that have not been cleansed by the Gospel. These self-appointed leaders know the language of Zion, but they do not have the Spirit; they know the words to the song, but they cannot sing the melody. They have guilty consciences that constantly condemn because it is triggered by impure hearts. They have hypocritical, false faith that cannot produce love for God. They create their own rules because they are ignorant of the mind of the Spirit. They have a pious veneer that they have crafted from their own desires. Producing an errant standard, they imagine they are living up to God’s perfect standard even while deceiving themselves. Paul says they are “without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”

False teachers want to be “teachers of the law,” but they are unqualified to act in that divine capacity. They don’t want to learn the law, nor do they desire to know God. Consequently, they are incapable of serving the people of God in love. They can only bluster and demand obedience to their self-made rules. Their motivation for ministry is promotion of their own feelings; thus, they must accept the censure that attends all such efforts—censure stated by James when he 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].

What is truly tragic of those who swerve from love, is that what they are teaching seems so agreeable. However, the error they have embraced carries the distinct aroma of death. Today, there are more opportunities to hear the preaching of the Word than ever before. How do people who have access to so many biblical messages, people who have access to more churches, people who have access to more Bibles than at any time in history seem to plunge so avidly into error?

Here are some significant reasons for the plunge into error. First, there is a determined effort to silence any history of the Faith in public schools. This leads to widespread ignorance and even overt hostility toward righteousness. Again, we witness a virtual dearth of family Bible reading and instruction in the home. The family seldom spends time worshipping together in the evening. Pastors are preoccupied with administrative duties rather than the ministry of the Word. More time in community related events and counselling means less time teaching and preaching the Word. Finally, there is an absence of doctrinal preaching in this day.

Let me draw this message to a conclusion by noting seven deadly sins of the pulpit as composed by Steve Murrell.<sup>7</sup> This list is not original with me, but it certainly speaks to the problem exposed in the text; it is worthy of consideration by each believer, especially if he is a minister of the Word. I encourage you to write these down, comparing them to what is declared from the pulpit where you worship.

1. **Preaching Christ Without the Cross**—no-cost Christianity. Paul was determined to know and preach nothing except Christ and Christ crucified [1 CORINTHIANS 2:2]. Today it seems we preach everything but Christ and the cross, causing many to walk as enemies of the cross [PHILIPPIANS 3:18].

2. **Preaching Salvation Without Sanctification**—no-change Christianity. So many claim Christ today with no evidence or change in their lives, and the pulpit is at least partially to blame.

3. **Preaching Decisions Without Discipleship**—no-commitment Christianity. I know we are getting crowds and decisions, but are we making disciples?

4. **Preaching Love Without Lordship**—no-compliance Christianity. Jesus is Lord, and because He is Lord, He heals, delivers, provides and saves.

5. **Preaching Prosperity Without Purpose**—no-cause Christianity. God blesses us so that we can be a blessing.

6. **Preaching Blessing Without Birthright**—no-covenant Christianity. Esau threw away his birthright and still expected a blessing. It does not work that way. If we want the blessing, we must accept the covenantal responsibilities that go with the birthright.

7. **Preaching Revival Without Reformation**—no-transformation Christianity. We are called to be salt and light, to impact individuals and cultures, families and nations. The Gospel is supposed to be transformational.

As we dig ever more deeply into the Word with the Apostle, my prayer is that God will transform us, creating the image of His Son in each one. Amen.

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<sup>7</sup> Steve Murrell, "Seven Deadly Sins in the Pulpit," 7/18/2012, <http://www.sermoncentral.com/pastors-preaching-articles/steve-murrell-seven-deadly-sins-in-the-pulpit-1309.asp>, accessed 14 November 2012