

statement and revelation of truth, not just in spoken words, but as John wrote - **The incarnate Word of God** (John 1:1-4).

As a result, the message of the church is that:
to know Jesus **is** to know God; to hear the words of Jesus **is** to receive the truths of God.

When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, his trusted co-worker in Christ, his message was one for Timothy to be strong, and to guard and entrust the truths of God to faithful people, because they are truths to be made known to all who seek truth.

Now, as a custodian of God's truth, this is not always an easy thing to do, and Paul was concerned that Timothy, in his service for the Lord, would face trials, hardships and various kinds of opposition.

We read in vss.3-6, how Paul gave Timothy three illustrations of endurance, in order to strengthen and encourage him in his life ministry for the Lord. The illustrations were of a soldier (vss.3-4), an athlete (vs.5) and a farmer (vs.6), and they spoke of:

- 1] **staying focused on the work at hand,**
- 2] **living a disciplined life of obedience,** and
- 3] **being sure of the promise that all service for the Lord was not in vain.**

And then, in vs.8, Paul summarised two of the key elements of the truth that had been entrusted to Timothy and the church.

Firstly, the resurrection of Jesus is a truth that lies at the very heart of God's message of hope, forgiveness, renewal, faith and new life.

Without the resurrection of Jesus, all we have is a dead hero. With the resurrection, we have a victorious risen Lord.

Secondly, Jesus, as the descendant of David, is the rightful heir and king to God's promises to Israel, and the fulfilment of OT prophecies.

The coming of Jesus did not take place in a vacuum of uncertainty in human history. The coming of Jesus was purposed and planned from the beginning of time, and God has consistently proclaimed and prepared the world for his coming.

In vss.14-17, Paul then urged Timothy, with great instruction, to focus on

the essentials of our faith in Jesus and teach the believers at Ephesus what it means to be the People of God.

Let's read the words of vs. 15, as if they were written to each one of us:
“Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

For Paul, one of the greatest distractions to the ministry of the church are fruitless arguments on non-essentials, or worldly ideas that have no place in our ongoing walk with the Lord.

Unfortunately, church history has too many examples of both, and so we need to be constantly vigilant. After all, what does it matter how many angels can stand on a pinhead. And, on a more contemporary front, what are we saying about the value of God-given life if we support programs like IVF and surrogacy on one hand and abortion-on-demand on the other hand?

In vs. 17, Paul described such distracting and fruitless arguments as like gangrene in the life of the church, slowly decaying and eating away the vitality and living fabric of the church. Instead, let us give our attention to what the Lord himself says in the scriptures, rather than only listening to scholars espousing their own particular thoughts and ideas.

As such, the scriptures are our textbook, our instruction manual for living, and we need to handle God's word very prayerfully, and avoid getting caught up in false doctrines and teachings, as happened with Hymenaeus and Philetus.

Even today, there are some examples of debates taking place in Christian circles that have the potential to seriously distract the church from its core ministries, and undermine the faith walk of many.

Some of these debates involve issues such as euthanasia, abortion, homosexuality and bisexuality, legalised bigamy, homosexual marriage, the age of consent or responsibility, gender reassignment: and the list goes on.

To all these debates and issues, both past and present, Paul made a profound declaration that takes the sting out of them all. In vs. 19 he said, “God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: **‘The Lord knows those who are His.’**”

God's truth cannot be altered, compromised or argued away. It stands firm for all time, and **HE** knows everyone whose lives have been established on **HIS** truth.

Conversely, He knows everyone whose aim is to twist, distort and manipulate the words of God's truth to suit their own ends; whoever they are and whatever their motivations may be. Nothing is hidden from God.

Finally, Paul addressed Timothy with this serious charge: *"Flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. (vss.22-24)*

What a lesson for us all today. As the People of God, called and established through Christ Jesus, we also, at all times and in all places, should pursue **righteousness** (ie. right attitudes and values before God);

we should pursue **faith** (ie. a right relationship and dependence upon God);

we should pursue **love** (ie. a right attitude and relationship with others);

we should pursue **peace** (ie. a right countenance and behaviour toward others),

and all this should arise out of a **pure heart** (ie. one free from all selfish desire and manipulative intent).

This was Paul's instruction to Timothy, and it was Paul's hope that, as Timothy lived out, with purity and integrity, his walk with the Lord, others would see it and emulate it in their own lives.

In this way, his teaching would validate his life and his life would validate his teaching.

For the church, this new life we have as the People of God, is based on God's truth, and there is no place for individual carnal ambitions or desires.

In the same way, there is no place for vain arguments that have no basis in the good and perfect will of God, and that only serve to hinder or undermine the teaching of God's truth and the ongoing ministry of His church.

As Paul often urged, our life in Christ should be one of unity and integrity before the Lord. Therefore, let a right understanding of God's word, based on careful study and proven application, lead us in all truth.

Let patience and gentle words be the hallmark of our lives as we seek to point people to read what God has to say in scripture concerning many of life's real and pressing issues.

Like Timothy, we press on in our life of service for God, based on His truth revealed in the Lord Jesus, recorded in scripture and affirmed through His Holy Spirit.

Amen