

RUF Bible Study – 1 & 2 Timothy
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1 Tim. 1:1-11

1 This letter is from Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, appointed by the command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus, who gives us hope.

2 I am writing to Timothy, my true son in the faith.

May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.

3 When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. 4 Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God.

5 The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith. 6 But some people have missed this whole point. They have turned away from these things and spend their time in meaningless discussions. 7 They want to be known as teachers of the law of Moses, but they don't know what they are talking about, even though they speak so confidently.

8 We know that the law is good when used correctly. 9 For the law was not intended for people who do what is right. It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders. 10 The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching 11 that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God.

This morning, I did my usual routine of reading the Daily Oklahoman's sports page first. On page 7C, I read this headline: Capel stressing leadership for Sooners this year. It seems that the OU basketball coach is looking for leaders. "We didn't have great leadership last year," [OU Senior] Longar Longar² said. "We had some leadership in there, but it wasn't the type of leadership we needed. Obviously, we have a lot of young guys... We have to show these guys how to get it done."

Leaders. I wonder if Coach Capel is going to read 1 and 2 Timothy to his team this year. He should. It's a book about leadership.

What makes a leader? When you think of leaders, what people do you think of? What qualities do leaders have? You've heard the phrase, "Leaders are born not made." Is that true? Can you be a leader? Do you aspire to be a leader on campus, in your dating relationship, in your church, on your dorm floor, in your house, in your life? Leadership is a hot topic these days. A book comes out on it practically every month and gurus are making a mint in leadership seminars.

Might the Bible have something to say to us about leadership? In this first entry of Paul's letter to Timothy, we see four things about leadership. True doctrine, true life, true faith and true love.

True Doctrine

It's interesting to see that Paul here starts off with doctrine. In our time we might find that surprising. Our culture, our university, the waters we swim in, prizes tolerance above all things. But Paul disagrees, and in the third verse goes right after the false doctrine in the church. In fact, he mentions doctrine seven times in 1 Timothy.

3 When I left for Macedonia, I urged you to stay there in Ephesus and stop those whose teaching is contrary to the truth. 4 Don't let them waste their time in endless discussion of myths and spiritual pedigrees. These things only lead to meaningless speculations, which don't help people live a life of faith in God.

Apparently there were elders and teachers who wanted to have authority over the people. They would read the Bible and then teach about it. But they would teach allegorical, mythical legendary interpretations of the Old Testament, drawing out a legalistic system of works righteousness, and making the Bible prove any point they wanted.

In our day this would be most akin to reading and believing in The DaVinci code, thinking that it explained the Bible. Or the Gospel of Thomas, a text that comes much later out of Gnostic teachings, but will be promoted here at OU in your religious studies classes. Or the Bible Code, a book that came out awhile ago, that mixed up the Hebrew text, reorganized it, and then reported to see all sorts of predictions about the future. Or reading the Left Behind series in order to figure out what the book of Revelation means. Or the crazy speculations about the number 666 and who is the anti-Christ.

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For this series, I used commentaries on 1 and 2 Timothy from Hughes, Stott, Knight, MacArthur, Ryken, and Clinton. The reader should assume that none of the ideas expressed are original to me.

² That's not a typo. He is a true double-named guy.

These are wrong ways to go about it. Should we then give up on doctrine and only preach and teach, study and read practical works? That is the approach of many. Sermons and lessons devolve into a list of How Tos. How to study. How to get along with your roommate. How to date. How to pray. How to share your faith. How to be successful.

Friends, without doctrine, you are doomed to failure on those issues. For what you do comes out of who you are and what you believe. We all have a theology. Do you know what yours is and where it comes from? Take the time to be of sound doctrine. Beware of false teachers. Beware of people who only tell you what to do. You need doctrine. You need the Bible taught you so that you can understand it and get it into your very bones.

“Do you love God now? Will you love him less if you learn more about him? Absolutely not! You will love him more. The more you learn of his excellencies, his holiness, his grace, his mercy, his love, the greater will be your grasp of his character, and the closer to him you will draw.

The greatest need of the church today is not less doctrine, but more doctrine – about God, about salvation, about ourselves, about character, about church, about family. Our greatest need is to know God better – and we can learn more only from his Word.”³

Something new happened on campus here last week. On Sunday night, the nearly 500 students gathered to recite something called the Sooner Oath.

Here is what they pledged themselves to:

The Sooner Oath

As Sooner Student-Athletes, we pledge to:

- Pursue excellence in the classroom and in competition;
- Hold ourselves to the highest standards of sportsmanship;
- Demonstrate strong character and accountability for our conduct;
- Take pride in our University;
- Honor and uphold the traditions of what it means to be a Sooner;
- Appreciate the privilege of wearing Crimson and Cream;
- Embrace the unique perspectives we each bring to the University;
- Support our fellow student-athletes in their pursuit of excellence;
- Be positive role models for our community;
- Lead with integrity in all of our actions.

We represent the one and only University of Oklahoma.

I am a Sooner!⁴

What were they doing? They were pledging themselves to an oath, a set of beliefs, a statement of doctrine, a confession. They were being indoctrinated. I think it was a great move.

Think about this. When I met my now wife Julie in college for the first time, I thought she was really cool. So what did I do? I tried to get to know her better. I wanted to know everything about her I could. If she was the subject, the subject matter was never boring. I didn't tire of studying her, of knowing about her. I was falling in love with her. Guys, it won't work if you meet a girl to say, “Eh. I don't really want to know more about you, but I like hanging out.” You won't get another date.

Some of you have done this in your fraternities and sororities. But we all should do this in our faith, in our Christianity. What do you stand for? Leaders have a set of beliefs and values that they know and understand. They study these doctrines and know them. Do you care about doctrine? Do you study God like I did Julie?

You should. We must. I don't want you to get into meaningless discussions about genealogies and endless debates. But I do want you to get into meaningful discussions. Let's talk about things. Let's bat some ideas around, maybe even debate a little. You may need to have some opinions and doctrines changed. Learn about the Bible as much as you can. Study theology. Ask good questions. It is important. It is a mark of a leader.

True Life

But doctrine isn't all there is. We all know this. It doesn't work to have a fat head, filled with A+ knowledge and then go out and flunk life. You have to live it.

Apparently, that wasn't going too well in Ephesus, where Timothy was. There were problems. People were breaking the law. What does that mean? It's not that they were having loud parties or drinking underage or breaking the speed limit. Paul writes: *It is for people who are lawless and rebellious, who are ungodly and sinful, who consider nothing sacred and defile what is holy, who kill their father or mother or commit other murders. 10 The law is for people who are sexually immoral, or who practice homosexuality, or are slave traders, liars, promise breakers, or who do anything else that contradicts the wholesome teaching 11 that comes from the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God.*

Uh. That's a pretty serious list there. Killing your parents. Slave traders. Whoa.

³ Hughes, 29

⁴ <http://www.soonersports.com/genrel/081907aaa.html>

But Paul's point is this – right doctrine and right living go together. While it's true that you can't just have right doctrine without living right, it is also true that you can't live right if you are taught wrong. "There is a dynamic connection between our doctrine and the way we live."⁵ These false teachers are leading the people astray, and they need to come back and understand the Bible better. They need to understand the law. They need to live right.

Just think about the law. Why do we have laws? If everyone drove the right speed for where they were, then we wouldn't need them. They curb the wrong in our hearts and lives. Why do we have locks and fences? Because people steal and trespass. If they didn't, we wouldn't need them. Why do we have civil rights and race relation legislation? Because we have to protect people from insult, discrimination and exploitation. If everyone did the right thing all the time, we wouldn't need laws to safeguard them.

The law is good. It teaches us how we should be. You should know the 10 Commandments and live by them. You should learn about the Christian doctrine of your body and your sexuality, and you should live by it. The law teaches you how to live (its third use). It also restrains evil, like we said about the speed limits (its second use). And it drives people to Christ (its third use). It shows you how you are a sinner and in need of grace. It makes you plead on Christ for forgiveness.

Paul says the law is hygienic. That's what the wholesome teaching is. It's healthy and wholesome. It brings life instead of death. The proper use of the law is to wash your hands instead of spreading disease – that is hygienic.

Brothers and sisters, there is a lot of things you can get into on this campus. Some of them of course are great. Friendships you'll form. Activities that will enhance your life. And so on. But there are bad things too. Things that will stain your conscience. Things that might seem fun at the time, but you'll regret later. Think about the love of Christ for you. Call a friend if you get in over your head. Make good choices. I know I sound like a parent here, but it's important. Don't drink. Don't have sex, of any kind. Put on a porn blocker on your computer. Go to class. Don't flunk out. Don't stay up all night.

Leaders have credibility. They have integrity. I think the Sooners instituted this new oath because they are trying to fix a behavior problem, one that they've had with their athletes for some time. According to soonersports.com, it was to "remind students of their standing in the community and their responsibility to others." People are getting arrested. Athletes are lying and stealing. They're getting into a lot of trouble. They aren't seeing themselves as leaders, as representatives of the university's name and reputation.

You are the same. The life of a leader is that of a true life. Don't rely only on what you say, but make sure what you say affects what you do.

True Faith

So we not only have true doctrine and true life, but we have true faith.

Paul writes to Timothy calling him, "*my true son in the faith.*" Later he says he wants the people to have a "genuine faith."

Let's look at these two men for a bit, something we've neglected to do to this point. Who are these two?

Paul you probably have heard of if you've been to church a few times. He is the one who persecuted Christians because of his zealous Judaism. But Christ himself struck him in Acts, and he had what certainly was an "encounter with Jesus." This changed his life, since he now knew that Christianity was true. He studied and then he became a leader in the church, a writer of many of the books in your Bible, a church planter and a missionary. He truly was a leader. But remember this: he had a shady past, and he apparently was a small man, not the 6'2" blond haired, blue eyes, charismatic leader you might think of. But one thing is for certain – he was an apostle. He was sent by Jesus Christ, by God. He is a leader in the truest sense because of this call.

What about Timothy, the man Paul was writing to. Timothy was young, timid and had stomach problems. I think of him a shy guy, maybe introverted, with acid reflux flaring up now and then. I could be wrong on that, but it is a good image to set the stage. Paul left Timothy in Ephesus to help the church and the elders. And he is also a leader. We know that Timothy grew up in a home of believers, and was taught Christianity by his mother and grandmother. That's unlike Paul, who came at his faith later in life.

What this tells us is that there is no stereotype of a leader. You can be short or tall, fat or skinny, have acid reflux or be in perfect health. You can be timid or assertive. You can be any sort of major from any sort of town, with any sort of background, with whatever story you have. You can be a leader.

If you have faith. In our context we're talking about a saving faith and a continuing faith in the gospel news that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners.

Going back to the law for a second, we remind ourselves that the law is a part of the gospel. There is bad news – you are sinners. There is good news of Christ's redemption. God hates sin. He is holy. He is just and will punish sin. The gospel does not ignore this but has a solution for it. Jesus of Nazareth came, lived a perfect life and died, and rose again. He lived the life for you; he died the death for you; he rose again to prove he could and did conquer death.

A genuine faith then sees this and believes it. It matters. When we say the Christian Oath, like the Apostles Creed or the Nicene Creed, it *matters* to us. We aren't just saying words. We're believing them. That is faith, a genuine faith.

⁵ Hughes, 28

Or think of it this way. A true son or daughter of the faith has: a saving faith; a continuing obedience; a humble service; a sound doctrine; and a courageous conviction.

I know many of you grew up in church. You may have gone to youth camp every year since second grade. Do you really believe it? Now that you're out from the watchful eyes of your parents, how will you live? What will you believe? No one is making you come to RUF or get up and drive to church – will you come? Will you have a genuine faith in college or will that be on the backburner?

Leaders believe things. They live a life of integrity. And they have faith in a greater picture, a bigger story than just themselves. That's how they inspire others to follow them. They get out of themselves and have a vision of what can be. Do you have this sort of faith? Are you connected to the biggest story of them all?

It's a new semester. For some of you, it's a whole new life. What is it going to be like? Will you believe the gospel today? Tomorrow? Will you actually be a Christian, having a sincere, true, genuine faith or will your "faith" be a sham? Believe.

True Love

The last thing we see here is the final part of leadership in our text. *5 The purpose of my instruction is that all believers would be filled with love that comes from a pure heart, a clear conscience, and genuine faith.*

The goal is love. Paul, concerned with teaching Timothy how to lead, tells him to hold fast to true doctrine, to pursue vigorously a true life, to live a life of true faith, and to fill others with a true love.

That's what this is all about after all. We're not trying to create doctrine machines, people who can only pass multiple choice tests on obscure Bible texts. We don't want to take a behavior modification approach, and make people into do-gooders who always follow rules and don't even know why. We don't want a shallow faith, just barely passing. We want love. Jesus says that the two greatest commandments are to love God and to love people.

Love brings it all together. If I love my wife, I want to get to know her better, more and more. If I love my wife, I want to act correctly, to have her respect and the credibility of a life that she can trust in. If I love my wife, I believe things, I have faith in her, and I commit to her in my marriage vows. I love her.

I think that leaders love things. I had a job before I came here where I was in charge of a \$1.2 million grant that had been given to our ministry. I directed the whole project. I had a new desk, new laptop. I could make the best tshirts you've ever seen because money was no object. I flew to places for meetings.

And I was miserable. I didn't love what I was doing. I like it. It was okay. But I didn't love it. So I couldn't lead it well. Once I realized that, I turned it over to someone who did love it. It was a good choice for me and for the ministry.

What do you love? What are you about? What are your passions? What do you like to talk about the most? What do you spend money on? Where does your free time go?

Leaders love things well. They make choices to spend time with things they love. They spend money on the things they love. I want to encourage you to love Jesus. To love the Bible. To love church. To love worship. To love serving others. To love well.

But what if you can't? What if you've already screwed up. School just started, but there have already been opportunities to blow it. There have been parties. There has been time to get drunk, to hook up, to look at porn, to gossip, to hate, to be lazy, to miss church. What about last year or last summer? Do you have a spotless record going back to 2006?

What do we do then? Are we disqualified from ever leading again? Do we have to be perfect?

No. There is one more word, and it's a blessing for you today.

Before he goes into the doctrine, Paul writes, "*May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.*"

There is a God. He is God the Father. His son is Jesus Christ, our Lord. They give you grace, mercy and peace.

Grace is God's undeserved favor for you. It is love and forgiveness that frees sinners from the ultimate consequences of sin. You need grace today. Embrace grace today. Don't think that you can start the school year without it. You cannot work out enough to forgive yourself. You cannot study enough to forgive yourself. You cannot punish yourself or the people around you enough to forgive yourself. Only God can ultimately forgive you from your sins. There is grace, friends.

There is also mercy. Mercy frees you not from the consequences of sin, but from the misery that accompanies it. Mercy deals with what we see of pain, with misery and distress, with the results of sin. It is the special care in a time of need, help to those who cannot help themselves, help to the wretched, and help to the helpless. For some of that this is you right now. You're already in over your head. You are lonely or sad, wondering if you might be pregnant or if you'll always be single. You are wondering if this is your place after all. There is mercy for you. Talk to someone. Talk to me or Brittany. Get mercy.

And there is peace. Peace is the result of grace and mercy. Peace is harmony with God and stillness of the soul. Peace is stability welfare, health, tranquility, and harmony. The Bible calls this shalom. All as it should be. You can actually have peace. Some of you are at war with yourselves, your parents, your world, your boyfriend, your professor. There is peace available. Peace with God. Personal peace and peace between people.

This is how Paul greets the church, and how I greet you at our initial meeting.

Grace – God’s ongoing forgiveness to you

Mercy – God’ sympathy and concern for you

Peace – God’s tranquility and stability within and among people in the Christian community

Christian, those things are for you today. If you aren’t a Christian, don’t you want to have grace, mercy and peace.

You can. Ask God to give them to you.

For all of us, we can be leaders.

I don’t know if the Sooner Oath will work or not. I think it’s a pretty good idea to make them stand up there and recite an oath about what it means to be a Sooner, to be responsible and to live the life of a leader on campus.

Now, I don’t have compliance officers to make sure you live as Christians. I don’t have tutors to make sure you pass your classes. I’m not giving scholarships out. I can’t put your name in lights, or guarantee a huge crowd to cheer you on. I also can’t kick you off the team if you stop showing up and pulling your weight.

But I do have something. This is *the glorious Good News entrusted to me by our blessed God*. Indeed it is Good News!

“May God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord give you grace, mercy, and peace.