

God's House Rules

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[0 : 00] Turn in your Bibles there if you aren't already. 1 Timothy 1, verses 1-2 will be the text I'll cover this morning.

If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the pews that you may use. If you don't own a Bible, please take that Bible home with you today as a gift from our church to you and our helps that you'll continue to be reading God's Word.

Would you please stand with me as we honor the reading of God's Word together? 1 Timothy 1, verses 1-2. Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy, my true child in the faith, grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father in Christ Jesus our Lord.

May God add a blessing to the reading of His Word. Would you please be seated? I'm sure that in your house you have rules. Those rules likely fall into one of two categories.

The first category pertains to orderliness. Who does what chores and when do they do them and how do they do them so that the house doesn't become a mess?

[1 : 21] The second category concerns conduct. What kind of behavior and language is acceptable and unacceptable so that the people living in the household maintain good relationships with one another?

Some of you young people who are living with your parents probably can't wait until you grow up and move out and get your own place so that you can come up with your own rules or have no rules at all.

I remember the first apartment I rented with some friends in college and we didn't want rules. We had rules. We had a lot of rules. We went to a Christian college.

With even more rules than most colleges. We didn't want any rules. But before long, the dishes piled up, the garbage bags mounted up, smells emanated from the bathroom, and debates about sports strained our relationship with one another.

And we realized that we needed some rules. We needed rules to keep us from being evicted from our home and to maintain our friendships.

[2 : 33] We learned that rules help maintain order, allowing us to behave in ways that prevent negative outcomes.

The book of 1 Timothy is a letter written by the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a young man pastoring the church in the city of Ephesus.

Paul gives the primary purpose of this letter in chapter 3 verses 14 through 15. Let's look at that together. He says there, this is the purpose for his writing.

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and a buttress of the truth.

God reveals in the Bible that he is a God of order. In the book of Genesis, we read about how God created everything in an orderly way.

[3 : 39] He established rules and parameters by which the universe functions and operates. When we break God's rules, we sin, and sin hurts the people that God loves.

Sin brings disorder. It brings disharmony. It negatively affects our relationship with God and with one another. Part of the church's purpose is to make disciples, to share the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, to offer God's peace to unbelievers through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, his son, that by faith they will trust in him and be born again and through the new birth receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit.

This new relationship with God as a result of salvation results in a transformation. It produces fruit. It yields results.

It changes a person's behavior. The fruits of the Spirit in Galatians 5, 22 through 24 list those changes of behavior in a person who has been born again.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such things there is no law.

[5 : 04] And those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. Though the sin nature remains, the believer is progressively being made into the image, the likeness of Jesus, which is another aspect of the church's purpose.

In Ephesians 4, 11 through 16, we read about that. And he, God, gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God to mature manhood to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness and deceitful schemes.

Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.

The church is to be a place of fellowship where Christians are devoted to one another, instruct one another, and are kind and compassionate to one another, encouraging one another, and most importantly, as we read in 1 John 3, 11, loving one another.

When the church operates and conducts itself according to God's rules that he has established for his house, the world takes notice of that, and disciples are made.

[7 : 04] We see that in Acts chapter 2, in the very first church, verses 42 through 47. And it says, The church is the body of Christ.

It is his hands, his mouth, and his feet to the world. It's to order itself, and conduct itself, and do the things that Jesus Christ would be doing if he were here on earth physically.

The church is to be Christian, Christ-like, and Christ-following. The church in Ephesus, which Timothy was pastoring, was facing challenges both from outside the church and from within the church that was disrupting it from achieving its God-given purpose.

And so Paul wrote to encourage Timothy to urge him, along with other members of the church, to structure and conduct themselves in ways that would see them achieve God's purpose for his church.

And so the main idea for this morning's sermon is that God commands members of his church to order and conduct themselves in ways that glorify him. The world needs the church because the church has what the world most needs, the truth.

[9 : 19] We have been entrusted with the gospel, with the continuing ministry and mission of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The world needs the church, and the church needs Christians who act and behave like Jesus Christ. I once visited a doctor who was in really bad physical condition.

And I could tell he knew what he was talking about, but it was hard for me to take him seriously because he didn't take his health seriously. And he is a doctor.

And I think that's the way that many unbelievers see Christians in America today. that Christians don't practice what they preach, and they don't take God's commands in Scripture very seriously. We need to be more serious, more intentional about doing the things and behaving in the ways that God has commanded.

[10 : 28] God has given the church the greatest purpose that there is. Likewise, the church can be a great thing to be a part of when its members conduct themselves in a way that seeks Christ's glory above all.

Likewise, the church can be an awful thing to be a part of when its members conduct themselves in ways that dishonor Christ and contradict his transformative power.

God has given and equipped his church with what it needs to achieve his purpose for it. This requires members who behave like Jesus and leaders who aren't afraid to change what needs changing, confront what needs confronting, guard what needs guarding, and who fight the good fight that needs to be fought.

If you're an unbeliever here this morning, you may have experienced how dysfunctional the church can be. You may have experienced how un-Christ-like Christians can be.

And we're glad that you're here. We acknowledge that we aren't perfect, but we know that Jesus is. And we worship him who died and who rose again to give us life, to forgive us of our sins, and to begin a work in us that one day will result in perfection.

[12:06] And so you're going to hear about him today, and I hope that he and his grace will save you and make you a part of his church, because it is a great thing to belong to the church, the body of Jesus Christ, especially when its members adhere to and conduct themselves in ways that seek Christ's glory above all.

And so in the first two verses of this letter, the Apostle Paul shares two components necessary to keep order in God's house. When that order is kept, and God's people conduct themselves in ways that he's commanded, he will bless that church in ways that will make it a blessing to everyone who is a part of that church, and I think also the community in which that church belongs.

And so the first component is understanding the challenge. Understanding the challenge. To understand the book of 1 Timothy, we need to understand the challenges that prompted Apostle Paul to write this letter to Timothy.

Those challenges will become more clear as we progress through this letter, but I think it's important to summarize some of them today as we begin our study of this book to get a good grasp of the situation in Ephesus, which will better help us apply the principles Paul lays out in this letter for the church back then so that we can better apply it to the church today.

Paul begins his letter to Timothy by introducing himself. He says, Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, by command of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus our hope.

[13:58] Now, what's interesting to note here is that Timothy and many of the Christians in the church in Ephesus knew Paul really well.

Paul visited Ephesus around 50 AD on his second missionary journey and was instrumental in planting the church there. Paul visited Ephesus again on his third missionary journey around AD 54 to 56, and he stayed there that time for two to three years teaching in the city and serving as this church's pastor.

Acts chapter 9 records how the gospel advanced in that city despite intense persecution. Paul wrote 1 Timothy around 62 to 66 AD after his first Roman imprisonment.

And when he got out of prison, he revisited many of the cities where he had ministered, including Ephesus. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to pastor the church, and in this letter, he addresses the challenges Timothy was facing.

Now, Timothy was Paul's protegee and close friend. Before traveling to Ephesus on his second missionary journey, Paul first met Timothy in the city of Lystra.

[15:18] Timothy's mother and his grandmother were devout Jews who were saved and became faithful followers of Jesus. Timothy's father, though, was a Greek, and he was an unbeliever who may have died by the time Paul met him.

In 2 Timothy 3.15, we learn that Timothy's mother and grandmother taught him the scriptures from the time he was a child. And just as a detour here, let this be an encouragement for those of you who have an unbelieving spouse and who face the challenges that that presents you as you try to disciple your children.

Keep being faithful. Keep being faithful to the Lord. Train your children in the ways that they should go. Timothy's dad wasn't a man of faith, but God used the devotion of his mother and of his grandmother to disciple him.

And Timothy became a great man of faith. God still does things like that. Don't you lose hope. By the time 1 Timothy was written, Timothy had been serving in ministry with Paul for about 15 years. He was Paul's constant companion. From the time he began ministering with Paul, we see his name pop up all over the New Testament. He remained in Berea with Silas after persecution forced Paul to flee to Athens.

[16:55] We read about that in Acts chapter 17. He's with Paul in Corinth. We read about that in Acts chapter 18. He was sent by Paul to Macedonia. We read about that in Acts chapter 19.

And he accompanied him on his return to Jerusalem. We read about that in Acts chapter 20. He was with Paul when he wrote Romans. He was with Paul when he wrote 2 Corinthians.

He was with Paul when he wrote Philippians and Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, and Philemon as well. He frequently served as Paul's troubleshooter. Paul would send him to a place, to a church. He sent him to the church in Corinth. He sent him to the church in Thessalonica. He sent him to the church in Philippi. And he sent him to the church in Ephesus. So, the Christians in Ephesus knew Paul pretty well.

Timothy knew Paul extremely well. So why did Paul introduce himself in this letter to Timothy the way that he did? He could have just said, hey Timothy, this is Paul. You know who I am.

[17 : 56] But he didn't do that. Why did he include his office as an apostle, which he received as a command, he says, of God our Savior and of Jesus Christ our hope?

It's because Paul wasn't writing as someone merely expressing his opinions for the church, but as an apostle whom Jesus had gifted to receive and to impart divine truth.

The Greek word for apostle literally means one who is sent. And in the broad sense of that word, many believers in the New Testament were called apostles. However, we also see in the New Testament that word used in a more restricted sense in reference to specific individuals, in reference to the apostles of Jesus Christ.

And that group includes the 12 disciples, minus Judas with the addition of Matthias, and Paul.

These apostles were personally chosen by Jesus and learned the gospel directly from his mouth, not from someone else.

Paul wasn't one of the 12 disciples. He was a Pharisee who persecuted Christians after Jesus rose from the dead, after he ascended into heaven. It was while Paul was on the road to Damascus to persecute Christians, he was trying to put an end to the church, that Jesus Christ appeared to him in his glorified, resurrected form, saved him, and called him to be an apostle to the Gentiles.

[19 : 38] The apostles also received authority and power to cast out demons, heal the sick, and perform other miraculous signs as they proclaimed the good news of Jesus Christ.

Paul was an apostle by command of Jesus, the one through whom God saves, the one in whom there is hope. Again, Timothy knew that Paul was an apostle.

He didn't doubt that that was his office, that that was his title. It was not something that he would have questioned. Here's why Paul shares that position of authority which he received from Jesus as an apostle.

He knew that Timothy faced a difficult situation in Ephesus and he needed the full weight of Paul's apostolic authority backing him as he sought to put God's house in order and instruct God's people to conduct themselves in ways that glorify him.

Timothy would have read this letter to the church in Ephesus and this introduction enforced his position as their pastor whom God had called to undertake this task.

[21 : 06] Now, what were these challenges that Timothy was facing? Well, as we go through the letter, we'll read about them, but let me just tell you what some of them were. False teachers. False teachers were causing members in the church to stray from the truth.

They were teaching deceptive doctrines. They were preoccupied with myths and genealogies and speculations. We'll talk about what those things were later when we get further into this chapter. They were forbidding marriage and encouraging people to observe Old Testament dietary restrictions. They thrived off of controversy and quarrels and they were using the church to get rich. In 1 Timothy, Paul also addresses challenges and issues that Christians in the church face today. How do Old Testament laws apply to Christians?

We'll have the answer for that question in chapter 1. Can women, or what is the role for women in the church? Can they teach? We'll get into that in chapter 2. Who is qualified to be an elder?

[22 : 07] Who is qualified to be a deacon? What is an elder? What is a deacon? We'll read about that in chapter 3 when we get there. Paul also addresses how to spot false teachers. We'll read about that in chapter 5.

And in chapter 6, he gives explanation about how wealthy Christians should spend their money, what they should do with what God has blessed them with. Anyone who professes to be a follower of Jesus is a member of his church and should be a member of a local church.

Those two things go together. And they need to know what God has said about his church and how it must function.

This letter is about how God's people conduct themselves in his house. Because God cares about how we behave when we gather in this place to fellowship and worship him.

This letter doesn't concern how to keep the building, the physical building in order, but how we keep ourselves in order and how we conduct ourselves as followers of Christ, as his church, not just when we meet in this place on Sunday, but every day throughout the rest of the week.

[23 : 29] As the pillar and foundation of the truth, the church of Jesus Christ has a high and it has a weighty calling. But it is an infinitely glorious calling.

The world may not care at all about what we do, how we act, and what we say in this place. But God does. And so should you.

If you want our church to thrive in 2025, then we all must take these commandments from God for his church seriously.

I love this church. This is a good church because our church believes in the authority of Scripture. All churches face challenges, but the one that survives, the one that thrives for the Lord is the one who seeks to do things God's way and conduct themselves according to God's rules for his house. So that's a little about the challenge. Now we move on to the second component, which is receiving the commendation, receiving the condemnation. After introducing himself, Paul addresses the primary recipient of the letter to Timothy, who he describes as being my true child in the faith.

[24 : 58] Again, I've already gone over the background regarding Paul and Timothy and their relationship as mentor and protege. Paul knew Timothy's strengths.

Paul also knew Timothy's struggles. In 2 Timothy, written a few years after 1 Timothy, Paul gives Timothy this encouragement in chapter 1, verses 6 through 7.

For this reason, I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God gave us a spirit not of fear, but of power and love and self-control.

Biblical scholars point out that during this time in 2 Timothy, Roman persecution against Christians intensified under Emperor Nero. They also point out that in 2 Timothy, there's reference to some church members who were resentful of Timothy and his leadership and how a combination of these factors and probably others contributed to a spirit of fear within Timothy.

But Paul stresses to Timothy that being fearful is not a feeling that God gives. So going back to 1 Timothy, Paul here, I think, is giving Timothy a bit of a pep talk.

[26 : 15] Timothy was probably in his early 30s and perhaps had grown comfortable being Paul's associate pastor. He wasn't inexperienced, but I imagine that these challenges would have felt easier in his mind, easier to face if Paul was there with him physically by his side.

I started pastoring my first church on January 1st of 2012 or 11. I can't remember. One of those years. I do know that I was 30 years old.

And for a year before that, I had served as the associate pastor to a great senior pastor, Blaine Fye, who was a great mentor for me.

When he retired, the church called me to be their senior pastor. Now, this church went from having a pastor with over 30 years of experience in being a senior pastor to a pastor who had zero years of experience being a senior pastor.

I remember after a few months in that new role, my dad asked me what the greatest challenge was in going from being an associate pastor to a senior pastor.

[27 : 29] And it was, without a doubt, being in the position to make decisions that affect everyone else in the church. I feared making the wrong decision.

I feared making the right decision that other people would think was the wrong decision. I stressed over making decisions that people would analyze and potentially assume incorrect things because they weren't privy to all the factors that led to that decision being made.

On a couple occasions, I called Pastor Blaine and I basically asked him, what would you do? If you were me, what would you do? I also was blessed to have a senior member of that church who was a deacon who had been a member of our congregation for 60 years.

And whenever I felt unsure about something, I would call him and he would invite me over to his house and we would talk for about two hours. And during that two hours, he would give me a pep talk and I would always leave feeling a whole lot better than when I had it first entered his house. I have mentors still today that I regularly meet with whom the Lord continues to use to encourage me. And so, friend, if you don't have someone like that, I encourage you to pray and to seek someone like that.

[28 : 58] Find someone with the life experience, the spiritual maturity and the wisdom that you can benefit from. And there are some of you who have that.

You have the experience, you have the spiritual maturity, you have the ability to mentor someone. I encourage you to do that. Be praying either way for someone to mentor you or for someone whom you can mentor.

That is something that I would like to see happening more in our church. But Paul here is using words to encourage Timothy. And they're true words.

He isn't saying nice things about Timothy so Timothy will say nice things about him. He means them. To Paul, Timothy was his true child in the faith.

And I imagine that those words would have meant a whole lot to a young man who probably didn't have a very good relationship with his biological father. In the Greek, the word Paul uses for true is *gencius*, *gencius*, *gencius*, however you say it.

[30 : 07] And it was referred to, it was used to refer to a legitimate child. A child that was born to parents who were married. Paul wasn't married and he wasn't Timothy's biological father.

He's using this in a spiritual sense. Timothy was not just Paul's co-worker or an employee. Paul saw him as his son and he loved him like a father and he was proud to call him his true child in the faith. Paul's words here to Timothy were intended to encourage him and I think as the Holy Spirit ordained it, they are likewise meant to encourage us in our relationship with God our Father.

God in his great love took the initiative to make us his children. 1 John 3, 1 says, see what kind of love the Father has given us that we should be called children of God and so we are.

Galatians 4, 4-7 says, but when the fullness of time had come God sent forth his son born of a woman born under the law to redeem those who were under the law so that we might receive adoption as sons.

[31 : 31] And because you are sons God has sent the spirit of his son into your hearts crying, Abba, Father. So you are no longer a slave but a son and if a son then an heir through God.

Something that will help us in the church to order and conduct ourselves in ways that glorify the Lord is to remember what kind of relationship we have with God and what kind of relationship he has caused us to have with one another.

God doesn't use the business world, CEOs, employees, and co-workers. He doesn't use the sports world, coaches, athletes, teammates, spectators, the political world, presidents, representatives, constituents, or any other grouping or structuring of people to describe the relationship that he has with his church.

He uses the family. Father, son, brothers, sisters. We don't just go to church together, we are to the church together.

We are the family of God. As Paul continues, he talks about how we are made recipients of God's grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Jesus Christ our Lord in the rest of verse 2.

[32 : 57] Timothy needed to receive this commendation, this encouragement, as he worked to put God's house in order and encourage his brothers and his sisters in Christ to conduct themselves in ways that glorified their Father in heaven.

And we need this encouragement too. Because sometimes as a result of our sin, Satan's schemes, or whatever challenges we face or are afraid to face in this sin-cursed world, we forget as believers that in Christ we are totally saved.

We are completely and totally his. That we have been sealed with the Holy Spirit. that heaven is our home and when we have the opportunity or and when we have that eternal perspective I should say, our earthly challenges don't seem so big and they don't seem so great.

Grace refers to God's undeserved favor, love, and forgiveness that frees sinners from the consequence of their sin. Ephesians 2.8 and 9 says, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing, it is the gift of God, not a result of works so that no one may boast.

While God's grace frees us from the eternal consequences of sin, his mercy frees us from its earthly miseries that accompany sin.

[34 : 41] In Proverbs 28.13 we read, whoever conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will obtain mercy. 1 John 1.9 says, if we confess our sins he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

God's peace comes through the Prince of Peace, Jesus Christ who gave his life to atone for our sins. Colossians 1.19 through 20 says, for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the

blood of his cross.

An issue in the Ephesian church was the denial of Jesus' deity and we'll get more into that but we see here early on Paul already making those connections. You can't have one without the other. Jesus is the God man. He wasn't just a man, he was the God man. As God he lived sinlessly as God his sacrifice was totally sufficient and his resurrection demonstrated God's victory over our greatest foes.

Do you know Jesus? Are you trying to be like him? If you don't know him, he's brought you into this place to hear about him.

[36 : 07] We are all sinners, we all fall short, way short of God's glory, God's standard. We don't measure up. And God in his grace sent his only son, Jesus Christ, to live the sinless life that you and I are incapable of living and who willingly died on the cross to atone, to sacrifice, to shed his blood, to bear the wrath of God, to endure the consequences for our sins.

And he rose again on the third day after he died as proof that he is victorious over sin, Satan, and death.

And all these things God has to give you. If you believe by faith in who Jesus is, then you'll be saved, you'll be transformed, you'll be a part of his church forever.

For those of you whom he has saved, for those of you whom he has made a part of his church, I don't know what challenges you're facing, but if you're in Christ, take courage.

As we go through this book as a church, we might realize that there are some things about our church that don't match what we read in Scripture and we need to put those things in the proper order.

[37 : 47] That might mean change. And change is a good thing if it's what God wants, if it's what God's commanded and directed us to do. As we go through this book, you might realize there's some things about your conduct and the conduct of others that needs changing so that God will be more glorified in this place, in our church.

So knowing the challenges, knowing the commendation, what should we do with this? I think it's simply to commit to conduct yourself in ways that glorify the Lord. Commit to conduct yourself in ways that glorify the Lord.

In Luke chapter 10 verses 38 through 42, Jesus is visiting and he's in the house of two sisters, Mary and Martha. And Martha, you've got to imagine, Jesus is in your house and she's wanting everything to be perfect.

She's wanting everything to be right. She's wanting everything to be clean and in order. And she's busy doing all of these different things while Mary, her sister, is seated at the feet of Jesus and she's learning from him.

And Martha can't stand it. Why is my sister not helping me? Can she not see all the work that I'm doing? I can imagine her going around the house and just shooting glances at Mary trying to make eye contact like, why aren't you helping me?

[39 : 21] And Jesus being omniscient knows all these things and he says to Martha, basically stop it. Mary has chosen the better part to sit at my feet and learn from me.

And so as we talk about order and as we talk about conduct in the church, please don't misunderstand that what Paul is talking about here, what I've preached about, isn't about all of those other things, but it's about us as God's people spending time at Jesus' feet and learning about him so that we can be more like him.

And so I encourage you to commit yourself to that. You won't know how to be like Jesus unless you spend a lot of time with Jesus. Spend time at his feet in prayer and in his word.

That's my encouragement for you today. If you believe in New Year's resolutions, make that your New Year's resolution. Make that your resolution for always until we see Jesus face to face.

To commit yourself to be with him so that you'll conduct yourself in ways that glorify him because he's worthy. Let's pray. Lord, what a privilege it is to be saved by you.

[40 : 54] What a privilege it is for you to continue to be at work in our lives as your spirit makes us more like you. God, it's a great thing.

It's the greatest thing to be saved by you and to be made a part of your body, to be placed in your church. God, so often, like the church in Ephesus and so many other churches, we major on minor things and the major things we just kind of forget about or ignore.

So, Lord, I pray for us at Highland Park as we go through 1 Timothy together that you would speak to us, that you would reveal to us the things that maybe are not in the right order, that we would order them rightly.

And, Lord, in whatever ways that we may not be conducting ourselves in ways that glorify you, Lord, that you would change our hearts and our minds, that we would conduct ourselves like you. And, Lord, first and foremost, I pray that for all of us, we would desire to spend time at your feet. Lord, that we would desire to learn from you, that we would desire to conduct ourselves more like you, that our greatest desire would be to glorify you in our lives and to be a church that reflects how wonderful, how gracious, and how good you are to those who are a part of it and those who are outside of it in the hopes that they will know who you are and be saved as you've been gracious to save us.

[42 : 33] Lord, we need your help in all of these things, and we trust that you will provide them. Thank you for loving us in your church. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.