



World Christian Fellowship

www.wcflondon.com

wcflondon@gmail.com

Love: The Goal of True Christian Instruction

***1 Timothy 1:5-7**, Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,⁶ from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

Introduction: The Heart of Theology

Every theological system produces a kind of person. The measure of doctrine is not its internal consistency or its intellectual sophistication. It is the quality of character and community it produces in those who hold it.

Paul makes this astonishingly practical point.

***V 5**, Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith,*

The entire purpose (***telos***, goal, destination) of the commandment he has been discussing is love.

- Not doctrinal mastery.
- Not ecclesiastical order.
- Not spiritual experience.
- Love.

This does not mean doctrine is unimportant.

Paul has just spent two verses insisting on the danger of false doctrine, and he will spend most of this letter elaborating on the content of sound doctrine.

But ***doctrine that does not produce love has missed its destination.***

It is like a river that never reaches the sea, a journey that never arrives at its destination.

- Truth is the road.
- Love is the city to which all roads lead.

The false teachers in Ephesus were, ironically, very doctrinal. They had elaborate systems of interpretation, complex mythological frameworks, detailed genealogical speculations. They were not lacking theological content.

What they lacked was the heart condition from which genuine love flows.

Their doctrine had been severed from its roots, and the result was not love but disputes. Not edification but inflation of ego.

I. The Telos: Love

A. The Greek Word Telos

The **Greek word telos** is one of the most theologically loaded words in the Greek New Testament.

It means *end, goal, purpose, destination*, the point toward which something is moving.

It is used in **Romans 10:4**, *For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes.*

Paul says Christ is the **telos** of the law.

The law was always moving toward Christ as its fulfilment and destination.

In the same way, Paul says here that the commandment of Gospel instruction is always moving toward love as its intended outcome.

Aristotle used **telos** as the central concept in his ethics. Every action, every practice, every discipline has a telos, a final purpose, toward which it is directed.

- ❖ The telos of medicine is health.
- ❖ The telos of education is wisdom.
- ❖ The telos of Christian instruction is ‘agape’ love.

This is the Aristotelian concept baptized into the Gospel.

B. Agape — The Love that the Gospel Produces

Paul uses the word **agape**, not the other Greek words for love.

Eros is romantic or passionate love.

Philia is friendship or affectionate love.

Storge is family affection.

But agape is the self-giving, others-centred, unconditional love that is not driven by the attractiveness of its object but by the character of the one who loves.

This is the love that God demonstrated in sending His Son.

Romans 5:8, *God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

Agape does not come naturally to fallen human beings. We love those who love us, help those who can help us back, and give to those from whom we expect return.

Jesus points out that even tax collectors and sinners do this! (**Matthew 5:46-47**).

What distinguishes kingdom love is precisely its non-conditional character.

- ✓ Love for enemies,
- ✓ Love for the unlovable,
- ✓ Love that gives without calculating return.

This love is not produced by human effort or willpower, but the fruit of the Holy Spirit (**Galatians 5:22**).

C. Love and Truth — The False Contradiction

Our culture has created a false choice between love and truth. We are told that if you really love people, you will not tell them hard truths about sin, judgment, or the exclusivity of Christ.

This is a counterfeit love that is a form of cowardice.

Paul would call it the opposite of love. The most loving thing a physician can do is tell a patient the truth about their diagnosis and prescribe the right medicine, even when the diagnosis is frightening and the medicine is bitter.

The church that abandons truth in the name of love does not become more loving, but it becomes less.

It withholds from people the one thing they most desperately need the truth about their condition and the truth about the cure.

We must speak the truth, but we must speak it in love. And we must demonstrate the love, or the truth will not be heard.

Truth without love is brutality.

Love without truth is sentimentality.

*The Gospel requires both. **Francis Schaeffer.***

II. The Three Roots of Genuine Love.

A. A Pure Heart

Paul identifies three sources from which genuine love flows.

The first is a **pure heart**. The word pure (*katharos*) in Greek means cleansed, uncontaminated, without mixture or alloy.

It is the word used in **Matthew 5:8**, *Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.*

The image is of pure metal from which all foreign matter has been removed, or pure spring water unclouded by sediment.

A pure heart is one that is not divided in its ultimate loyalty.

The false teachers in Ephesus had impure hearts their teaching was contaminated by self-promotion, financial gain.

1 Timothy 6:5, *useless wranglings of men of corrupt minds and destitute of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. From such withdraw yourself.*

Paul describes those who suppose that godliness is a means of gain, and the desire for intellectual recognition.

Their hearts were not wholly oriented toward God and the good of others. The mixture of motives produced teaching that was itself a mixture of truth and error.

Psalms 51:10, *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me."*

The pure heart is not achieved through moral effort but the gift of God to those who bring their impurity to Him in repentance.

The Gospel uniquely produces pure hearts because it addresses the root problem of the self-centeredness that contaminates every human motive.

This is not incidental sequencing on Paul's part:

The conscience does not function as an independent moral compass, but only echoes back whatever the heart already

believes, excusing or accusing according to the standard it has been given.

Titus 1:15, *"their mind and conscience is defiled"*.

A pure heart, then, is not merely the first item in a list but the very thing that makes a good conscience possible.

B. A Good Conscience

The second root of genuine love is a **good conscience**.

The word conscience (***syneidesis***) appears **30 times** in the New Testament and **10 times** in the Pastoral Epistles alone, more concentrated here than anywhere else in the Bible.

This distribution reflects Paul's conviction that conscience is central to healthy ministry and Christian living.

Conscience is the moral self-awareness that evaluates our actions against a known standard, the self-judging faculty within us that either excuses or accuses, bearing witness for or against what we have done.

A good conscience is one that has been cleansed by the blood of Christ.

Hebrews 9:14, *how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself*

without spot to God, cleanse your conscience from dead works to serve the living God?

It is the inner testimony of a person who is living in alignment with what they know to be right.

The false teachers had suppressed their conscience.

1 Timothy 4:2, *speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,*

When we repeatedly do what we know to be wrong and silence the voice of conscience, we destroy our capacity for moral self-knowledge.

The person whose conscience is seared becomes incapable of genuine love because love requires an accurate awareness of oneself and others that a seared conscience cannot provide.

A good conscience is not the same as a comfortable conscience.

2 Corinthians 1:12, *For our boasting is this: the testimony of our conscience that we conducted ourselves in the world in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom but by the grace of God, and more abundantly toward you.*

The clean conscience is not one that has never been convicted, but it is one that has responded to conviction by confessing and forsaking sin.

C. Sincere Faith

The third root is **sincere faith** (Greek: ***anupokritos pistis***, literally *unhypocritical faith, faith without a mask*).

The word hypocrite comes from the Greek theatre term for an actor who performed behind a mask. Hypocritical faith is faith that performs religion for an audience while the heart is elsewhere.

The false teachers in Ephesus were wearing theological costumes. They used Christian vocabulary, they claimed to be teachers of the law (Greek ***nomodidaskalos***, a term carrying all the prestige of the rabbinic office in Jewish culture), they had the appearance of religious authority.

But their faith was performed, not genuine. It was designed to impress, not to express. And because their faith was a mask, their love was a performance too.

Genuine faith trust that has genuinely staked its life on the reliability of God and the completed work of Christ produces a different kind of person.

It produces someone whose security does not depend on others' opinions, whose love does not depend on return, whose service does not depend on recognition.

This is the faith that Paul had in Timothy.

2 Timothy 1:5, the genuine faith that is in you, the faith passed down from Lois to Eunice to Timothy.

III. The Conscience in Theological Perspective.

A. The Conscience in Romans 2

Paul's most developed treatment of conscience outside the Pastoral Epistles.

Romans 2:14-15, *for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, ¹⁵ who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)*

The conscience, in Paul's theology, is the moral dimension of the image of God in humanity.

Even fallen human beings have a conscience, a capacity for moral self-evaluation because they bear the image of a morally perfect God.

The fall has damaged and distorted conscience, making it unreliable as a final moral authority, but has not erased it. This is why even people who have never heard the Gospel

feel guilt, why cultures that have never read the Bible still outlaw murder and theft.

For the believer, conscience has been not merely preserved but cleansed and renewed by the blood of Christ (**Hebrews 9:14**) and the indwelling Spirit (**Romans 8:16**).

The renewed conscience, aligned with Scripture and responsive to the Spirit, becomes an increasingly reliable guide for daily living not an infallible guide.

1 Corinthians 4:4, *I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me,*

But a reliable one when properly formed and maintained.

B. The Weak and Strong Conscience in Romans 14-15

Romans 14-15 and **1 Corinthians 8-10** deal extensively with the conscience in the context of the dispute over eating food offered to idols.

Paul distinguishes between a strong conscience, one that has been properly formed and is not troubled by neutral matters that weaker consciences regard as forbidden and a weak conscience, which is overly scrupulous about things that Scripture does not prohibit.

The practical principle Paul establishes is important: stronger believers are not to use their freedom in a way that wounds the weaker conscience.

Romans 14:15, *Yet if your brother is grieved because of your food, you are no longer walking in love. Do not destroy with your food the one for whom Christ died.*

Love governs the exercise of freedom.

The strong may be right in their assessment of what is permitted, but love constrains the exercise of that freedom for the sake of others.

This is a direct application of the principle in **1 Timothy 1:5**, love from a pure heart and a good conscience means that even our freedom is exercised in a way that builds up rather than destroys.

IV. The Failure: From Faith to idle talk.

A. The Word Straying

V 6, *from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk,*

Paul says that some having strayed from these three roots have turned aside to idle talk. The word strayed is used

three times in the **Pastoral Epistles** and **only here in the New Testament**.

It **means to miss the mark**, to deviate from the course, to fail to aim correctly. It is not necessarily a dramatic apostasy but a gradual deviation, a slow drift off course.

The navigational image is instructive.

A ship that is one degree off course will not immediately appear to be in danger. But over a long journey, one degree becomes ten miles, then a hundred, then the ship finds itself on the rocks of a coastline it never intended to approach.

The false teachers in Ephesus did not begin with the intention of destroying the church. They began by neglecting pure hearts, by silencing conscience, by performing faith rather than living it.

Gradual drift is the most common form of spiritual disaster.

B. Idle talk and the desire to be Teachers

The result of straying from love's roots is idle talk, vain, empty talk, and *the desire to be teachers of the law*.

The portrait is both comic and tragic.

People who want the status of being teachers without possessing the substance of genuine teaching. They understand neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

1 Timothy 1:7, *desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.*

This is not merely intellectual ignorance. It is the ignorance of those who have decoupled theology from life.

- They can talk about the law, but they have not been broken by the law.
- They can discuss spiritual genealogies, but they have not been transformed by the Holy Spirit.
- They are theological tourists who have read the brochure but never visited the country.

Their confidence masked something more than ego, however. Their vision of "teaching the law" was an attempt to re-found righteousness on Mosaic performance rather than on grace through faith.

The very system Paul dismantles a few verses later when he insists the law was never given to justify the righteous, but to expose and condemn sinners (**v.8-9**).

Behind the ego was a rival gospel.

James 3:1-2, *My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment. ²For we all stumble in many things. If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able also to bridle the whole body.*

The desire to be teachers, when it outstrips the reality of spiritual formation, is one of the most dangerous conditions in a church community.

The person who talks more than they live, who teaches more than they know, who claims authority they have not been given, is a danger to themselves and to all who listen.

V. Love in the Context of Ephesus.

A. The Social Fabric of Ephesian Religion

In Ephesus, religion was transactional.

You worshipped Artemis because she would protect your trade route, bless your family with fertility, and preserve your city from disaster.

Religion was a business arrangement.

You gave the goddess your devotion and she gave you prosperity.

The concept of a God who acted with unconditional love toward those who could give Him nothing was genuinely foreign to the Ephesian worldview.

This makes Paul's emphasis on agape love as the goal of Christian instruction even more radical.

He was not merely offering a superior religion.

He was introducing a fundamentally different conception of the divine-human relationship.

God does not love His people because they deserve it or because they have performed adequately. He loves them in Christ, unconditionally, for His own glory and their ultimate good.

This love was to overflow from those who received it into the community of believers and beyond.

B. 1 Corinthians 13 as the Exposition of 1 Timothy 1:5

The famous love chapter of **1 Corinthians 13** can be read as the extended commentary on the single word love in **1 Timothy 1:5**. Paul describes **13 qualities of agape love**:

Patience, kindness, freedom from envy and boasting, humility, non-selfishness, non-irritability, non-resentment, truth-rejoicing, endurance, trust, hope, and perseverance.

Every one of these qualities flows from a pure heart (no hidden agendas), a good conscience (no hypocrisy), and sincere faith (genuine trust in God's provision).

The classic verses of **1 Corinthians 13** are not a description of an ideal we must achieve by moral effort. They are a description of the character that is naturally produced when the Holy Spirit is working freely in a person whose heart has been purified by grace, whose conscience has been cleansed by the blood of Christ, and whose faith is genuinely resting in God.

Love is not a programme, but a fruit and fruit grows from roots.

VI. Love and the Ethical Tradition of the New Testament.

A. The Greatest Commandment

Jesus summarises the entire law and the prophets in two commandments.

Matthew 22:37-40, *Jesus said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”³⁸ This is the first and great commandment.³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbour as yourself.’⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets.”*

- Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind, and
- Love your neighbour as yourself.

Paul's statement in **1 Timothy 1:5** that love is the telos of the commandment is not a new invention.

It is the crystallisation of what Jesus himself taught. The entire ethical framework of the New Testament is structured around love as the supreme value from which all other virtues flow.

The connection between Jesus's summary and Paul's statement is explicit in **Romans 13:8-10**, *Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.⁹ For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness," "You shall not covet," and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbour as yourself."*¹⁰ Love does no harm to a neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilment of the law.

Paul is echoing Jesus.

- Love is not the enemy of the law.
- Love is its fulfilment and its goal.

B. The Fruit of the Spirit and the Roots of Love

Galatians 5:22-23, *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.*

It is significant that love heads the list.

Augustine argued that the remaining eight fruits are merely specific expressions of love in particular contexts.

- ✓ **Joy** is love **exulting**.
- ✓ **Peace** is love **resting**.
- ✓ **Longsuffering** is love **enduring**.
- ✓ **Kindness** is love **relating**.
- ✓ **Goodness** is love **giving**.
- ✓ **Faithfulness** is love **persevering**.
- ✓ **Gentleness** is love **yielding**.
- ✓ **Self-control** is love **governing**.

The entire fruit of the Spirit is one fruit, and its name is love.

This fruit does not grow from human effort.

Galatians 5:25, *If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.*

The same Spirit who regenerated us (**Titus 3:5**) and sealed us (**Ephesians 1:13**) is the same Spirit who produces the fruit in us.

Our role is not to manufacture love through discipline, though discipline plays a role in creating the conditions for the Spirit's work, but to walk in step with the Spirit, to remain in the vine.

John 15:4-5, so that the natural fruit of the supernatural life may grow.

C. John's Witness to Love as the Defining Mark

The Apostle John, perhaps more than any other New Testament writer, develops the theology of love as the defining mark of genuine Christianity.

1 John 4:7-8, *Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. ⁸He who does not love does not know God, for God is love.*

The absence of love is not merely a moral failure, but it is evidence of the absence of God's life.

John 13:35, *By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.*

The world does not identify Christians by their doctrinal sophistication or their liturgical practices or their cultural conservatism.

It identifies them or should identify them by their love.

This love is not the world's version of tolerance and affirmation. It is the costly, cross-shaped love that lays down its life for others, that speaks truth even when truth is painful, that serves without calculation of return.

VII. Historical Theology: Augustine on Love

Augustine of Hippo, writing in the **fifth century** in his treatise **On Christian Doctrine**, proposed a **hermeneutical principle** that directly illuminates Paul's statement in **1 Timothy 1:5**.

Whoever, then, thinks that he understands the Holy Scriptures, or any part of them, but puts such an interpretation upon them as does not tend to build up this twofold love of God and our neighbour, does not yet understand them as he ought.

Augustine's principle is that all biblical interpretation must ultimately serve love is the hermeneutical application of Paul's theological principle.

- The purpose of all Scripture is love.
- The purpose of all doctrine is love.
- The purpose of all preaching is love.

- A theological system, however, internally consistent, that does not produce love in those who hold it has missed the point of theology.
- A biblical interpretation, however, textually defended, that does not lead to greater love for God and neighbour has failed the primary test.

This does not collapse into subjectivism. The idea that any interpretation is valid as long as it seems loving.

Augustine's principle is governed by the content of Scripture itself.

The twofold love of God and neighbour as defined and demonstrated in the whole counsel of God, not as defined by the interpreter's preferences. But it does mean that the telos of all theological work is not doctrinal mastery but the formation of love.

"Love and do what you will.

If you hold your peace, hold your peace by love;

if you cry out, cry out by love;

if you correct, correct by love;

if you spare, spare by love.

Let love's root be within you, and from that root nothing but good can spring." — **Augustine of Hippo, Homilies on 1 John**

Conclusion.

*Jackie Pullinger was a young **British woman fresh out of music college** when, in **1966**, she felt God calling her to **Hong Kong** with no organisation behind her, no salary, and no plan beyond the belief that He was sending her.*

*She ended up in the **Kowloon Walled City**, a single square mile of **the most lawless real estate on earth**, ruled by Triad gangs, packed with brothels and gambling dens, and home to one of the highest*

concentrations of heroin addicts anywhere in the world. Police rarely entered it.

Pullinger moved in.

She learned Cantonese, started a youth club for the street children nobody else would touch, and then, drawn simply by need, began sitting with heroin addicts through their withdrawal. Not in a clinic, with medication and monitoring, but on the floor of her own small flat, night after night, holding men who screamed and convulsed, with prayer as the only “treatment” she had to offer. There was no guarantee any of them would survive the night, let alone get clean. Many of the men she nursed had done monstrous things to feed their addiction. She loved them anyway, expecting nothing back, calculating no return.

Over the years, hundreds of the most hardened addicts and Triad members in the Walled City were set free from addiction, not through willpower or a programme, but through what she called simply **“the fruit of the Holy Spirit doing what nothing else could.”** Several of the very men she nursed through withdrawal became pastors and leaders of the ministry she started, **St. Stephen’s Society**, which still works among addicts around the world today.

When asked, decades later, how she sustained years of that kind of love with no funding, no strategy, and no guaranteed outcome, Pullinger’s answer was not about resilience or willpower. It was about roots: a life saturated in prayer, a heart she kept returning to God to purify, a faith she refused to let become

performance. **“Love is not sentimental,”** she has said. **“Love is very tough.”**

*This is **1 Timothy 1:5** lived out in one of the darkest corners of twentieth-century Asia. Not a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith as theological categories to be studied, but as the actual, costly root system from which an ordinary young woman produced love that changed hundreds of lives no one else would touch.*

The goal of Christian instruction is love.

Not the sentimental imitation of love that avoids hard conversations.

Not the doctrinal rigidity that wins arguments and loses souls.

But the love that flows from a heart God has purified, a conscience Christ has cleansed, and a faith that is real.

That is the love that changes the world.

That is the love to which all true teaching points.

APPLICATION FOR DAILY LIFE

- 1.** This week, examine your motives for serving in the church. **Is it love for God and for others, or is it the desire for recognition, reputation, or belonging?** Bring your honest answer to God in prayer.
- 2.** Read **1 Corinthians 13:4-7** and **identify one quality of love that you most need the Holy Spirit** to develop in you this season. Pray specifically for it each day this week.

3. **Conscience check: Is there an area of your life where you have been silencing the voice of conscience?** The good news is that **1 John 1:9** promises that confession leads to cleansing. Do not wait. Return today.
4. Practise sincere faith this week by identifying one area where you have been performing religion for others rather than living it before God. **Make one change that no one but God will see.**
5. **Find someone in your church or community** who disagrees with you on a theological or practical issue. Engage them this week with the goal of love and understanding rather than winning the argument.
6. **Meditate on Matthew 5:8:** Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Journal what it means to you that the goal of purity is not moral reputation but the vision of God.
7. Read **the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector** in **Luke 18:9-14** as a study in the difference between performed religion and sincere faith. **Which person represents your default posture before God?**