

# Healthy Gospel Fruits Grow from Healthy Gospel Roots

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as we begin, I want to start with a question and to warn you, okay, it is a big question. Who are we as a church?

Okay, what are we here for as a church? If Bon Accord Free Church was setting up new accounts on Pinterest or Twitter, Instagram, TikTok, and we had to kind of put a little tagline next to our logo to let the world know who we were, what we were about, what would it say?

You may remember at the beginning of the year, our denomination, the Free Church of Scotland, shared a new vision for who we are, what we're here for collectively, a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.

And I think that is a brilliant Christ-honoring vision. And so the question is, what about our congregation? What does it mean for us here at Bon Accord to be a healthy gospel church in Aberdeen and for the Shire this year, in the next five years, in the next 10 years?

How do we fit into that wonderful vision? Well, tonight we are beginning a new series, as I say in Paul's first letter to Timothy, who by this time is his right-hand man.

[ 1 : 33 ] And it's a great letter for us to spend time in over the next few months as we consider that really meaty question. because it was written to give us the profile of a healthy gospel church.

If you just turn over and glance down with me at chapter 3, verses 14 and 15. As you turn there, this is where Paul tells us why he wrote the letter.

Okay, so if you highlight your Bible app or make notes, anything like that, these are verses you're going to come back to a lot. Where Paul says, Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing to you with these instructions so that, so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.

Who does God want us to be as a church body? Well, he doesn't ask us, does he, to take a survey among ourselves to work out how our church should work?

Far less does he tell us to ask our neighbors what sort of church they would like us to be. No, God teaches us in his word what he wants us to be as a church.

[ 2 : 56 ] And in fact, the thing I love most, actually, about our Denomination's New Vision is how biblical it is. Okay, we want to see a healthy gospel church for every community in Scotland.

Well, by the time Paul wrote this letter, he had personally planted or helped to grow a healthy gospel church in every major city between Jerusalem and Rome.

Okay, it's thought that this man writing this letter traveled more than 10,000 miles on foot. Okay, to take the good news of Jesus to new places, new people, to start new churches, to build up existing churches.

He's written letters, he's gone to prison, he's trained new workers. So that at the end of his letter to the church in Rome, he can write, I no longer have any room for work in these regions.

If you think about that, he's got his map out on the table, Paul, he's trying to find the next place for him to take the gospel. And he says, it's covered. Incredible, isn't it?

[ 4 : 06 ] I think you've got a picture of what his map might have looked like. Okay, so that's 30 years after Jesus had died and been raised. And there is a church for every community in the eastern half of the Roman Empire.

Okay, we would be thrilled, wouldn't we, to see Scotland, the UK, Europe, the world covered in dots like that, wouldn't we? And yet, even then, for Paul, it wasn't job done, okay, in an early retirement, partly because he wanted to see a church for every community in the world, but partly because a

church for every community is one thing, but a healthy gospel church was quite another. He put lots of letters to churches in our Bibles, and most of them are written to either protect or correct churches that were at risk of becoming unhealthy and non-gospel churches. And his first letter to Timothy is one of those letters. Paul met Timothy some 15 years before. He brought him alongside onto his team. He quickly became one of his most trusted co-workers in the gospel.

And now, as we just read, Paul had given him command of a church, the church in Ephesus, which has itself been going for about 15 years.

[ 5 : 34 ] Only a few years before, Paul had written to the Ephesian church to strengthen them in their walk with Christ. That's his letter to the Ephesians, if you want to have a little read of that later on or in the week.

But as we find out in verse 3 of 1 Timothy, if you glance down there, things have taken a turn for the worse. As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, writes, Paul, stay there in Ephesus so you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.

It's tragically what Paul warned the Ephesian elders about in Acts 20 so many years before has come true. There are wolves in the sheep pen.

And tonight, we're just going to begin thinking about what Paul wants for this church as it stands on the knife edge between life and death. And my prayer is that this will help us greatly as a church over the next few months to see a church in need of life-saving surgery.

Not, okay, hear this, not because I think that we are in need of life-saving surgery, nor because we are the opposite and a picture of kind of perfect and airbrushed church health.

[ 6 : 54 ] No, instead, because Paul's letter to Timothy gives churches in every time and place a picture, a portrait of perfect church health for us to press into and learn and walk in together as we go on into the coming years.

And at the heart of this vision for church health is the truth that we see this evening, that healthy gospel fruits grow from healthy gospel roots. Easy to remember. And for us to see that clearly, Paul first shows us the roots and fruits of an unhealthy, non-gospel church.

Okay, so our first point this evening is false roots and fruits. And we see that there in verses 3 and 4. As we've read, Timothy's to stay in Ephesus and command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

Okay, so there's a problem in the roots of this church because there were people teaching what isn't true. Now, we've all heard lots, haven't we, the last few years about fake news, things that never happened, words that were never said being presented to us as true, disinformation.

Now, while these people who will remain nameless, says Paul, have been spouting fake spiritual news and presenting it as gospel truth. And that has to stop now, says Paul.

[ 8 : 27 ] Command them not to do that. Okay, this is the root surgery that Timothy needs to deal with first. Because everything else will grow out from this.

No healthy church can grow in the soil of false teaching. Now, perhaps you have popped in this evening or you've tuned in online and it is kind of bizarre to hear about this sort of true and false spiritual news, true or false religion.

Isn't faith less about truth and more about how we feel? Perhaps you can't understand how one person's faith can be right and other person's can be wrong.

You know, can't we all be right when it comes to God? But if that's you tonight, let me say this. That only works, doesn't it?

If either we can't really know God or God doesn't exist and we have invented him. Because if God is there and he has spoken and told us who he is so that we can know him truly, be in relationship with him, if God is real, then some things we say about him are true and other things are false.

[ 9 : 49 ] We know, don't we, the bigger the truth is, the more shameless it is to cover it up. What do we call that when that happens in the news? We call it a scandal.

The more important the news is, the worse it is to get it wrong. And there is no bigger or more important news than the good news of God. And so Paul has this to say, first things first, false teaching about God has to stop.

It is poison in the roots of a church. Now, most of us don't kind of carry around, do we, a systematic theology, a big tome in our head, not even in our bags.

It would be very, very heavy. And so that command might maybe set us a little bit on edge. If you've ever sat in a Bible study and thought, I'd better not say anything in case I'm wrong. You don't want to get it wrong. I don't want to speak and someone think that I think something wrong about God. Well, possibly this isn't exactly filling you with confidence to speak the truth in love.

[11:01] But please see here, okay, that Paul isn't speaking to the average Christian or churchgoer. Look, he's pointing out those who are teaching, those who are leading the Bible study.

You see, God knows the difference between those who are taught wrongly and those who teach wrongly. Remember how Jesus dealt with these two groups of people so differently, didn't he? Those who were taught wrongly, he met with such compassion and grace and mercy and love. Those who were teaching wrongly receive his harshest words and condemnation. Remember this? Jesus says, woe to you, experts in the law, because you have taken away the key to knowledge. You yourselves have not entered and you've hindered those who are entering. You teach, as he says. You took away the key to the door. You threw it down the drain so you can't go in and no one else can either. Hey, we know this ourselves, don't we?

[12:07] Exam results have come out recently. Understand one or two people here have done very well. But when exam results come out, some people are disappointed.

Now, if one student fails an exam, well, probably it's because they've skipped classes, been lazy with revision. and they haven't learned properly.

But if the whole class fails the exam, if all the nation's students don't do well in the exam, well, probably the blame lies with the teacher who's failed to teach rightly.

Now, that is still a dangerous thing, isn't it? You don't want to be in that class. In fact, you need to get out of that class. But friends, God knows the difference. He knows the difference in his church between those who are teachers and those who are taught.

And so Paul isn't pointing the finger at you tonight. If there are bits of the Bible that you struggle with, there are things you have doubts about, you have questions about God, if that's you, he is not saying stop.

[13:22] In fact, he's saying don't stop. That's you. Keep engaging. Keep talking. Keep asking. Okay, get yourself to life group when that starts up and participate.

Don't be afraid to share your thoughts. Ask a question and listen. Listen to those who are able to teach. That is the best place for those conversations to happen.

Do not be afraid. No, this command to stop is for those who have chosen, notice, to devote themselves to what is wrong and teach it as if it was true.

So that, and there in verse four, they devoted themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Now, we don't know exactly what it is that they were kind of getting up to. Paul says they fancied themselves as teachers of the law.

Some writers suggest they might have come off the rails in the early chapters then of the Torah or Genesis. And you can see how that might have happened, can't you?

[14:22] Remember, we saw those big genealogies, those kind of strange things that went on in our series in Genesis. And it's easy to imagine, isn't it, those who think of themselves as people who have special insights, people who are super spiritual, seeing things in those chapters that just really aren't there.

Perhaps they were trying to work out an endless genealogy from themselves all the way back to Adam, or speculating to fill in the gaps of things that God only really sketches out for us in those chapters.

We don't know what they're doing. It's that kind of thing, though. I wonder if you ever wondered on this. How is it that somebody becomes a false teacher?

How do you get there? Well, one way that Christians can come off the rails is having to have answers for things that the Bible is silent on.

Having to be clear on things that the Bible isn't clear on. You can start off as a genuine question, but if it's not kept in check, that need to know can end up in hours spent digging further and further and further down, away from the clear light of Scripture, and into podcasts, YouTube videos, comment sections.

[15:51] Before long, that Christian can end up going beyond Scripture and claiming as gospel what God has never, in fact, said.

Okay, that's not the only way to become a false teacher, but it is a way. And that is what has happened, isn't it, to certain people in Ephesus, devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

And Timothy has been sent to say, stop doing that. Stop doing that, because this church will not survive if it stays rooted in that soil of false teaching.

How do we know that it is not going to survive? Remember, Jesus says a tree is known by its fruits. And Paul says, if you want to know how bad false teaching is for a church, well, just look at the fruit that it's growing.

Verse 4, such things promote controversial speculations, rather than advancing God's work, which is by faith. You, when Christ and his kingdom stop being the main thing, when the minor points of the law become major issues in our lives and the life of our church, then we know that there is an issue with the roots.

[17:14] Paul adds this in chapter 6, their unhealthy interest in controversies results in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions, and constant friction between people of corrupt mind.

What is he saying? When the unity of our church is torn apart by disagreements and grudges and bitterness over things that really have no place in God's family, well, then we know that the roots are rotting.

Friends, to see how the roots of a church are doing, you only need to look at the fruits. Now, again, let me say, I do not look out at our church this evening and see a bowl of rotting fruits, and I hope that you don't either.

But, okay, I don't want us to go through this letter as if it were a checklist and say, okay, avoid false teaching, check, done.

Now, instead, as we go through 1 Timothy, what we need to be asking ourselves is this. What was it that happened or didn't happen in this church such that it got to the point of needing life-saving surgery?

[18:32] Remember, Ephesus was a good church. Read Acts 20, 19, 20. Read the letters of the Ephesians. If there was ever a church where you would think this could never happen, this was it.

So how does it happen? Well, nobody wakes up today one day and says, I'm going to become a heretic. Okay, a church doesn't suddenly decide to get together and have a vote on whether or not to stick with the Bible.

How does it happen? Day by day, week by week, Sunday by Sunday, month by month, year by year, silly controversies take hold.

Controversial things filter into our bloodstream. False teaching isn't corrected. False teachers are not shown the door. That is how the fruit rots.

And so that's why I'm not inviting us tonight, okay, to cry with shame or to kind of boast in pride about our church. Instead, I'm asking you to picture Bon Accord in 10 years' time and ask, what would need to happen to reduce this church to a bowl of rotten fruit?

[19:50] And Paul says, the thing that will do it is false teaching. Friends, if it can happen in Ephesus, it can happen here.

And so if you love this church, whatever you do, guard your heart, watch your life and doctrine, watch what you're taking in, listen carefully to what you are being taught, come back to scripture. If you are a person who is prone to kind of speculation, controversy, put that to death. If you find yourself looking for the kind of next new thing, the left field preacher with the great ideas on YouTube becoming obsessed with maybe the latest Christian controversy on Twitter, repent of that. Friends, it has never been easier in the whole history of Christianity to find false teachers and false teaching. You would think that it would take great effort, but here's how easy it is.

Okay, in the podcast app that I use to listen to sermons, while the algorithm has pieced together, I like listening to church sermons. And now it says, if I enjoyed the preaching at St. Andrew's Free Church, perhaps I would next like to listen to Joel Osteen.

[21:18] Now, I've not had the courage to tell the good folks at St. Andrew's this, but it would be funny, wouldn't it, if it wasn't so serious, if that wasn't being sold to Christians across the world day after day.

So where do we need our roots then to keep the right fruits growing? Our second point tonight, healthy gospel roots and fruits.

Where does Timothy need to repot this church so that it will grow well? Well, just have a glance there at verse 5. Spot, if you can, the root and the fruits.

Paul writes, the goal of this command is love, fruit, which comes from roots, a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

And those three healthy gospel roots, they're going to crop up again and again in this letter. A pure heart, here we could talk about an undivided heart, a heart that isn't torn between two masters.

[ 22 : 24 ] A good conscience, conscience we know in ourselves that we're not living a double life. We know that we're not worshiping Christ on a Sunday and indulging our sin on a Monday.

And a sincere faith, a faith that is without hypocrisy. We're not in two minds about Christ. We know who it is we have believed in and our faith is settled on him.

And Paul's point is that this is simply a Christian heart and conscience and faith. We think of it as three C's, a clean heart, a clear conscience, and a candid faith.

And again, tonight, if you hear those words as a challenge, and you're wondering, do I have those things? Well, the surest way to know is this.

We just flick back briefly to those verses in chapter 3 we looked at at the start. Paul wants us to know, doesn't he, how to live as God's family in the church? But where does he say that true godliness comes from?

[ 23 : 30 ] Well, have a look at the next verse, verse 16. Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great. He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, believed on in the world, was taken up in glory.

Where are the roots of a godly life buried? Well, it's all in that little word, isn't it? He. He.

He appeared. He was vindicated. He was seen. He was preached. He was believed. He was taken up. Who are we talking about? He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Do you see that? The mystery of living the Christian life is not an idea. It is a person. He is where true godliness is rooted. And so how do you and I know, okay, if we have a pure heart, a clear conscience, a sincere faith?

Well, if our heart and conscience and faith is rooted in the gospel of Jesus' birth and death and resurrection and ascension, his call to repent and believe the good news.

[ 24 : 43 ] So the key question for you and me tonight is this. Is your faith rooted in the gospel? Is your trust in him?

It is possible, isn't it, for people who think they belong to Christ to find themselves one day with a heart that is trying to serve two masters and with a conscience that allows them to kind of live and keep up a double life and a faith that is trying really hard to make life look like a Christian when inside you just know it's not real.

And friend, if that is you, then tonight you do not need pruning. Paul says you need repotting. It's not that you need to try harder, knock off some rough edges, lose some habits, try really hard to be a Christian.

No, in the words of Jesus, you need to be born again. You need a new heart and a clean conscience and a real faith and only Jesus gives that to us.

So, the invitation is this, put your trust in him. He put your roots down deep in his life and death and resurrection. Draw your life from him and you will be a Christian.

[ 26 : 09 ] That is the secret, that is the mystery to being part of God's family and it's really no mystery at all. He is where life in God's family begins.

And if your faith is in him tonight, then brothers and sisters, let me assure you, you will have a pure heart, a clear conscience, a sincere faith.

Of course, we still struggle, don't we? I do. But we do not let our hearts be split in two. We don't let our conscience be hardened.

We don't let our faith become insincere. No, we keep short accounts with sin. We turn back to him quickly when we turn away. Because notice, the healthy gospel roots, they're not rooted, are they, in a pure hands, in a good life, but in healthy gospel teaching, not in who we are, but who he is.

The way of life, the love, is the fruit, but at root, it is the gospel of Jesus. Jesus. And bringing this full circle, friends, that is why our teaching as a church is so vital.

[ 27 : 23 ] Teaching, preaching, speaking, the truth of the gospel in love, that is not one of the things we do as a church. That is the thing we do as a church.

That is why our life groups will be centered around a time of studying the Bible. That's why the best part of our service on a Sunday is given over to preaching. It's why we have this building, why we have the tech, the facilities to spread the message.

It's why we want to encourage relationships with each other, with people outside the church where the truth, the gospel, can be shared, where doors for the gospel fly open.

And that's not because other things that we do are less valuable, but because everything else that we do and everything else we are as a church is a fruit, a fruit that grows from the root of teaching, preaching, and speaking the gospel of Christ.

I'm not a massive gardener. You guys can give me tips later if you want, but we had tomatoes in our garden this year. And inevitably, after months of sort of tender, loving care, Hugh got to eat them, but my very own mom and dad who came to house it while we were away.

[ 28 : 44 ] I'm not sore about it, okay? But the whole point of the plant is the fruit, isn't it? Okay, that's why you grow tomatoes, to eat the tomatoes.

Okay, and there are a few more pleasant things, are there, than pulling a tomato warm from the sun off the plant and eating it. But when I went to water them, okay, all those months, I didn't put the water on the green tomatoes.

Okay, I didn't feed the fruits. I watered and fed the roots so that the fruits would grow and someone would get to eat them.

Okay, we water and feed the roots so that the fruit will grow. And so, what is the gospel fruit, then, that grows from the gospel roots?

Well, says Paul, the goal of our command is love. Love. Okay, that is the fruit that we cherish, that we love eating, sharing in, that grows from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

[ 29 : 52 ] Okay, and I said this before, but I don't look at our church and see a bowl of rotten fruit at all. Instead, I do see this, love. Someone said to me on their way out a few months ago, there's a lot of love in this church.

There's a lot of love in this church and brothers and sisters, it's true and we praise God for that.

Okay, I'm beyond thankful for this church. I'm beginning to understand why Paul gushes, okay, at the start of his letters when he thinks and gives thanks for the churches that he cares for because, again, this letter, it's not to bash us over the head and nor is it to put us on a pedestal.

It is to say again, think of our church in 10 years time and ask ourselves, what needs to happen to keep that healthy gospel fruit growing?

Okay, for our church to be filled, filled, filled with love, filled with the fruit of godliness, overflowing with self-giving love and kindness and generosity?

Well, we keep the teaching of the gospel pure and central and we keep cherishing the fruit of love that grows from it.

[ 31 : 11 ] We water the gospel roots and we cherish the gospel fruits. And that is effectively, okay, what this letter is all about. It's that pattern, that gospel pattern pressed into every area of church life, church membership, church leadership, because this is what makes the church what it is, what makes Bon Accord what we are, the gospel of Jesus Christ.

And so I hope you're excited and I also hope that you're prepared. You see on the face of it, this letter is written for one man, Timothy, but there's a surprise for us in the very last verse.

Listen to how Paul signs this off. grace be with you all, you all. This letter is like a father speaking to his son, knowing that the rest of the family have their ears pressed up against the wall to overhear what is being said.

Okay, that is how Paul writes this letter to his true son in the faith, with the church listening in. So, who are we and why are we here?

Well, let us find out together as we listen to Paul's words. And let us pray together now for God's help to do that really well. Let's pray. gracious father, how we thank you that you have revealed your son to us, that he came, that he lived, that he died, that he rose again, that he has been preached, that his name is known throughout the world, that he has been believed on by generations of people throughout earth.

[ 33 : 02 ] God's love we thank you that we are among them purely by your grace. Lord, we thank you for those who shared the gospel of Christ with us.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to be those who share the gospel of Christ with those who have not heard him. For we know, our father, that this is the root of all godliness, life in your family,

and we love our father to belong to your family.

Lord, we pray that you would help us as we listen to this letter to grow in our understanding of what you would have us be, to grow in our desire for Christ, to grow in our love for one another.

Lord, we pray that you would help us to make our priorities clear. Lord, that you would give us a passion for your word and the gospel, and Lord, that that would fuel all kinds of service, all kinds of life and love, Lord, in this body.

Lord, how we pray that you would build us up by your spirit, and that the gospel would overflow, Lord, into our lives and into our streets and neighborhoods, our workplaces, our schools, and that you would draw people to yourself as we grow together, the body of Christ.

[ 34 : 23 ] For this we pray in his name. Amen. Amen.