

## From Mentor to Disciple

**Golden Text:** “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” (1 Tim. 1:5)

**Key Thought:** Timothy was like a son to Paul, and Paul’s instructions for him came in light of that relationship and Timothy’s own prophesied role.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 1 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,

<sup>2</sup> To Timothy my true son in the faith:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer <sup>4</sup> or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work – which is by faith. <sup>5</sup> The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup> Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. <sup>7</sup> They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.

<sup>8</sup> We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. <sup>9</sup> We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup> for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers – and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine <sup>11</sup> that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me.

<sup>12</sup> I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength, that he considered me trustworthy, appointing me to his service. <sup>13</sup> Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. <sup>14</sup> The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.

<sup>15</sup> Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst. <sup>16</sup> But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. <sup>17</sup> Now to the King eternal,

immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.  
Amen.

<sup>18</sup> Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, <sup>19</sup> holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith.

<sup>20</sup> Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.

### *Welcome to this Quarter's Study*

Today we begin a new 13 week study of 1 & 2 Timothy. All of Paul's writing are valuable, but these letters seem to have special worth for leaders in Christ's Church.

The New Testament begins with the story of Jesus, and all of it is built upon this story. The four books by Matthew, Mark, Luke and John tell of Jesus' life, his mission and his revelation of his Father's plan. That, in turn, is built on the entirety of the Old Testament, where God's story of His love for mankind is revealed. The relationship becoming flawed left mankind struggling to return, as it were, to the "Garden" now lost to them.

Reconciliation with God became possible through the atoning death of Jesus. The Book of Acts records the amazing story of the Church's explosion across the Mediterranean world and beyond. Jesus, though no longer with them, had directed God's Spirit to empower his followers.

While the Lord grew his Church, Paul, the premier church planter, wrote letters, or epistles, to many of those church plants. He encouraged them, and instructed them in their understanding and practices. Most of his letters went to specific churches but have universal application. Four went to individuals. One, Philemon, was carried by an escaped slave Paul sent back to his master. The three others, commonly called the Pastoral Epistles, went to Timothy and Titus, associates of Paul whom he had left to guide the churches Paul had established.

Let us begin this quarter's study as Paul mentors or disciples his "true son in the faith", as he described the young man Timothy.

### **Bible Learning**

Ten points in this first chapter open our eyes to Paul's message for the young preacher Timothy.

1. "Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith:"

Even when writing to Timothy Paul felt the need to reaffirm his credentials. He saw his “apostleship” as different from the other apostles’, unusual (see 1 Corinthians 15:8).

It also is compelling to note Paul’s clear delineation of God, our salvation’s origin, and Jesus “our hope” whose sacrifice made salvation available. Paul at least marginally stressed here that, as Timothy knew, God is one person, the Father, and Jesus is His only begotten son.

2. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus”

Timothy had been a companion of Paul and Silas on missionary journeys, but it appears that Paul has assigned him to pastor the church in Ephesus. The letter is filled with instructions whereby Timothy would know best how to serve.

3. “so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines”

There seem to always have been those in the churches Paul established who dissented from his leadership. This is one reason he repeatedly stressed his authority as a legitimate apostle.

Timothy would be confronting false teaching. Later Paul names two culprits (v. 20), but there may have been others. Maintaining doctrine seemed a primary task to Paul for Timothy and the church. It appears that even this early on some saw reason, perhaps for personal aggrandizement, to deviate from what they likely had been taught by Paul himself.

4. “The purpose of this commandment is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

When Paul warns of the dangers of deviating from the true doctrines he emphasized these three elements of “the faith”: 1) a pure heart, 2) a good conscience, and 3) a sincere faith. Peter, in 1 Peter 3:15-16, echoes these very elements.

5. “They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about”

This seems to have been a common danger then. Paul confronted it in several of his writing, quite notably in 1 Corinthians. It seems that new converts sought to be leaders for the wrong reasons, though often they were woefully unprepared. Such people were not necessarily lacking leadership skills, they may have needed the foundation of a sure faith.

6. “for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality,”

Sexual immorality was prominent throughout the Roman empire. Some pagan temples even had prostitution as part of their “worship.” It also evidenced itself in the church, so that Paul had to deal with it (1 Cor. 5).

Here Paul specifically mentions “those practicing homosexuality.” That form of sexual immorality was not unusual in pagan cultures. It was known especially among the Greeks (often between adult men and young boys), but was not part of the Jewish culture.

The Old Testament strongly condemns homosexual practice, using the term “detestable” (Lev. 18:22; 20:13). The link of such sexual perversions with Sodom (Gen. 19) brought the term “sodomite” into English.

Paul condemns it here and elsewhere (Rom. 1:26-28; 1 Cor. 6:9-11). Jude, in his seventh verse, makes it abundantly clear this is a perversion. Timothy would know his mentor’s stand, which was then also his.

7. “appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.”

Paul seems genuinely surprised, but elated, over his right relationship with God through Christ. Paul revels in the mercy he had received. He labels himself a “blasphemer,” a persecutor (of the Church; Acts 8:1-3), and a “violent man”. Paul witnessed Stephen’s martyrdom by stoning and gave it his approval. Timothy must have known Paul’s story, but it is as if Paul cannot get over the wonder of his salvation and wants to again tell it.

8. “Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”

In these follow-up comments Paul labels himself “the worst” of sinners and says the mercy extended to him was an amazing story for him to take to the world. Again we are shown Paul’s desire for Timothy to remember that Christ was given to us for the reason of providing the way of salvation. The world received Christ not to just show us an excellent moral code, or even to proclaim God’s coming Kingdom, both of which he did, but to provide the way of salvation, the way of the Cross.

9. “Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience,”

Timothy, born to a Jewish mother who believed, and a Greek father who did not, somehow slipped effortlessly into his call and role. We can read his story in Acts 16, though it is brief.

10. “Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

Paul names two problems in the church he had earlier referenced (v. 6-7). He wanted Timothy prepared to deal with the lack of understanding they, and likely others, showed. Timothy may have understood Paul in saying he had already “handed them over to Satan” to mean they were expelled from the church. There may have been a deeper meaning of them no longer being in Christ’s camp, set aside in preparation for final destruction in the judgment time.

### **Bible Application**

How are we to understand this letter to a young minister nearly 2000 years later? Is it relevant for us? Do its old words have God’s authority to compel us to obey, or are they suggestions?

It may seem easy to answer that here we have God’s directives to His family members, which always need obedience, not revisions. We will be confronted with this issue through 1 and 2 Timothy.

Let’s consider the ten elements named above.

1. “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Saviour and of Christ Jesus our hope, to Timothy my true son in the faith:”

We need to ask ourselves if we believe Paul could actually write with “apostolic” authority. That is the crux of the issue. Does his instruction to Timothy also apply to us? We want to say “yes,” but may be feeling disquietude.

Is there someone you acknowledge as your father in the faith? Who might call you “my true son (or daughter) in the faith”? Are there some you feel you can properly say you have lead to Christ, and whom you proclaim to be your “true son (or daughter) in the faith”? This certainly brings to mind our responsibility to our own children, but also to our grandchildren, and perhaps others as well, friends and neighbors.

2. “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus”

This may not seem applicable, but remembering the church’s early directive from Jesus in Acts 1:8 may cause us to pause and consider.

We are to be his witnesses, as was the early church. They were to do so first in their home environment of Jerusalem, later in the neighboring province of Samaria, and ultimately to the entire world. Perhaps we are to “stay” in our Ephesus, our first responsibility. That way it would be likely to see sons and daughters in the faith from our teaching and witnessing.

Though you may also be called to go elsewhere as his witness, the first call remains with your home area.

3. “so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines”

This can devolve into cutting and tearing up a church, but it is a responsibility for leaders to be alert to that danger. False doctrines may creep in with us being unaware of it occurring.

4. “The purpose of this commandment is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

Love is to be the transcendent value in the church, and in our own character. That is not always easy to achieve, but note that it comes from:

a. A pure heart – that may be the root cause of pain and guilt that makes this love difficult for us.

b. The good conscience is partner to the pure heart. Probably all Christians can recall shameful things from their pasts, but like Paul, who considered himself the worst of sinners, we need to know we are forgiven.

c. The sincere faith presumes knowledge of the faith and a commitment to it. Knowing it and practicing it are both essential.

5. “They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about”

This can be true for pastors and other church officers. It is unwise, it is not spiritual, and it is detrimental to the cause of the Lord.

6. “for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality,”

Tragically, the sexual immorality which is rampant in today’s society too often exists among those of the church. Living together is frequently the precursor to marriage even among church people of various ages, both those who have never married and those who have divorced. Little is said, too often, for fear of offending others of the family, and so it is not acknowledged that there is an offense to God.

Of immediate concern are recent Supreme Court decisions about marriage. Homosexuality is now considered normal, and Christians are declared to be “homophobic” for seeking to uphold a biblical position.

7. “appointing me to his service. Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief.”

Perhaps we wouldn’t consider ourselves to be blasphemers, persecutors of Christians, or violent, but we all know our propensity to sin. And, like

Paul, we are deeply aware of and appreciative for the mercy shown us. That should challenge us in our treatment of others, that we hate their sin but love the sinful ones.

8. “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners – of whom I am the worst.”

Maybe none of us would consider ourselves as the worst of sinners, as did Paul, but any sin separates us from God. Nowhere in Paul’s writings clearly explain sins’ depth and consequences better than Romans 3:10, 23 and 6:23. When the church forgets that this is its message, the world suffers and will miss God’s coming Kingdom.

9. “you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience,”

What Paul wanted for Timothy we ought to want for everyone in our church family, and for friends and family that have not yet come into the “family of faith.” But we need to know that this is a cosmic battle, which with the Lord’s help we can and will win, defeating “the foe.”

10. “Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme.”

That some will depart from the faith, like these two, we recognize only with sorrow and regret for their unwise choice. There ought always be prayer and hope for their return to Christ, out of Satan’s grasp.

### **Life Response and Questions for Discussion**

1. *How* could you become a father, or mother to true sons (or daughters) in the faith, as Paul was to Timothy?
2. *How* would you know if the Lord wanted you to serve in your “Jerusalem,” or your “Samaria,” or beyond? What would those destinations be in your situation?
3. In living out the command to love, what is the *most difficult* aspect for you?
4. *How* can the church better deal with sexual immorality and homosexual practices, aware of God’s attitude toward them and society’s acceptance of them?
5. What do you think Paul would include as “sound doctrine”?
6. Knowing we must rely on God’s mercy and grace, what *expectations* are there for living out our own Christian walk of faith?

### One God, One Mediator

**Golden Text:** “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 2:5)

**Key Thought:** God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 2:1-7 (NASB) [shown in the *Bible Learning*]

#### Introduction

We want to get into the text and try our best to understand Paul’s instructions for Timothy. We will especially need to consider the New Testament times and what Paul’s point was for then, and to decide if what Paul said is still applicable in this day and age.

#### Bible Learning

In this section we will want to consider Paul’s instructions to the young man Timothy. These seven short verses offer at least ten clear instructions for Timothy.

1. “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made”

The Romans were the ultimate political power in their world, though for daily living often local magistrates had more of a role than did the Romans. It seems that Paul was encouraging Timothy, as part of his ministry, to remember regularly the authorities with *entreaties, prayers and petitions*. Timothy would easily comprehend those three, but it is unusual to associate “thanksgivings” with them. That this was an encouragement for Timothy causes us to pause. Perhaps Paul was stressing that along with requests for redress Timothy ought to send thanksgivings to the authorities who controlled much of their daily living.

2. “on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority,”

We notice further that the entreaties, prayers, petitions and thanksgivings were to be first for mankind. Perhaps Timothy’s responsibility to pray for “kings” indicates a plurality of leaders at that level, and then he was to remember all those in authority, such as city magistrates in Ephesus, where he served.



3. “so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity.”

The “so that” is of interest, these entreaties, etc. were given in the hopeful desire for positive results of a tranquil and quiet life in godliness. Paul certainly knew and had experienced troubles due to his witness. He would not want Timothy to have unnecessary troubles.

4. “This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,”

It is perhaps most common to think of Paul referring to Jesus as our Savior. Actually though, the Scriptures Paul used, the Old Testament, make 24 references to “God” as “Savior”. This language is used 11 times in the New Testament, including once in Mary’s song (“the Magnificat”, Luke 1:46-55). God is the source of our salvation, though Jesus is the means by which our salvation is made effective and accomplished.

5. “who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

Paul instructs Timothy that it is God who desires for all men to be saved. Salvation is His plan to rescue mankind from sin and its results. It is also noteworthy that Paul couples God’s desire for mankind’s salvation with “the knowledge of the truth.” Paul’s insistence on this “knowledge of the truth” guided Timothy in his ministry.

6. “For there is one God, and one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,”

This is a paramount teaching from Paul. It is the first and primary teaching from the Jewish Scriptures (emphasized in the “shema” of Deuteronomy 6:4ff). Coupled here with Paul’s clear teaching on Jesus’ humanity, we find one of the strongest statements for the doctrines of “one God,” and the “Sonship of Jesus.” Timothy would not and could not waver from this fundamental truth (which much of Christendom has distorted).

7. “who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony given at the proper time.”

Jesus paid it all, and shed his blood for mankind’s sin. This involved paying the “ransom,” a description used but four times in the New Testament. Twice the gospels have the phrase “as a ransom for many”. Timothy knew that the blood potentially paid the ransom for all, the reality is that it is only paid for some, with others rejecting it for themselves.

Paul, writing in his epistle to the Galatian churches (4:4), stresses that Christ was born into the world at the precise time, the “proper” time.

8. “For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying)”

Paul, remembering his early adult years as a persecutor of the Way (Acts 9:2) feels the need to stress, even to Timothy, his credentials. His appointment and apostleship was different from the other Apostles. He was appointed out of the original order (see Romans 5:1, 1 Corinthians 1:1; 9:1-5) by the Lord, himself, on the road to Damascus.

His appointment was from the Lord, not from men. Be sure and take the time to read Galatians 1:11-12.

9. “as a teacher of the Gentiles”

Paul stressed this as his ministry. He was not averse to going to the Jews, and he often went to them first on his missionary journeys, but he knew his calling was primarily to the Gentiles

10. “in faith and truth.”

Paul keeps coming back to the issue of faith *and truth*, because the gospel truth (Acts 8:12), was already being perverted, as he warned the Galatian churches (Gal. 1:6-9).

### **Bible Application**

1. While the prayers Paul mentions were first directed for Timothy, the same are needed today, as much if not more so. Recent decisions of the Supreme Court show how strong a secular influence there is even on the judiciary. As moral and spiritual darkness begins to cover the land this dictum, which was first for Timothy, is now demanded of God’s people.

Romans 13:1-7 is a challenge for us today. Not only the judiciary’s judgments seem anti-godly, likewise do things coming from our government’s executive and legislative branches. We need to consider that even the initiatives of our government that seem deplorable come from those God has put in place. As with the masters of the cruel Roman legions then, so with any government now. God may have put them in authority even to bringing about our national downfall. That may not be the scenario, but it could be.

2. Though you may consider our system too far gone, you may not consider it so. Whatever your thoughts are we need to actively pray, even entreat and petition our leaders, while knowing full well they may go in a different direction. That is why prayers need to be offered. Remember to include the “thanksgivings” Paul instructed Timothy about, they may be difficult but needed as God’s women and men.

3. If we do what Paul instructed Timothy, then we would hope to have the result of peaceful and quiet lives. Studying Church history reveals exceptions to that hope, with many “Radicals” whose seeming anonymity was lost though they had sought to stay away from the authorities. You can read of how their peaceful and quiet lives were shattered in *Foxe’s Book of Martyrs*.

4. It is unthinkable that we would do less than instructed when we are told what our God, our initiating Savior, wants.

5. We are told that God desires: 1) that all would be saved, and 2) for them to come to a knowledge of the truth. We are called to be part of God’s call to all men to come to salvation through Christ. This calls for “evangelism,” the proclaiming of the “good news.” While only about 10% of Christians seem to have the spiritual gift of evangelism, all of us have the call to witness regarding our faith and expectation of the coming Kingdom.

In my experience, and perhaps in your’s as well, we have helped others, some, to come to a knowledge of the truth, but we need a much stronger witness by our Conference and in our churches.

6. Verse 5 is the central teaching of how God and Jesus are related and who Jesus is. It was once memorized by all true believers, and it *ought to be again!* Yes, by everyone! It should begin in the youngest grades and go right to the senior citizens. That verse is the basis on which to develop the rest of the Bible doctrine we hold as precious.

7. God always has had His perfect plan, and He still does today. Many times we feel like He needs to move it on a little faster, but His ways are beyond our ways and our understanding. Remember the long-ago motto, “we must keep on keeping on,” and leave the results to God. Some plant, some water, but God gives the increase.

8. Paul knew to what he was called, but too often Christians never find what God designed them to be. Being God’s new creation, all of us need to seek to discover our assigned roles for which we were designed. Read Ephesians 2:10.

9. In all probability, like Paul our mission is to the Gentiles, for that includes all people but the Jews. It is certain the Jews need the gospel too, but most of our encounters are with Gentiles, just as most of the Church’s members are Gentiles.

10. Are we teaching and reaching first with faith? In our own strength we will fail, but in His strength we can do whatever it is to which we’ve been assigned and called. And it is imperative that we do what we do in truth, the truth revealed in the Bible.

## **Life Response & Our Questions for Discussion**

1. How often should we make entreaties and petitions for our leaders?
2. Which leaders, whether governmental or church should we pray for?  
How often do you raise them up to God?
3. What would you include in “a knowledge of the truth”?
4. How does your church attempt to reach people for Christ, and is it successful?
5. Why do you think many people seem confused by what Paul wrote in verse 5 of our text?

### Who Were the Women Paul Opposed?

**Golden Text:** “Turn away from . . . what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed” (1 Timothy 6:20-21)

**Key Thought:** Paul did not seek in this text to restrict the service of all Christian women.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 2:8-15 (NRSV)

<sup>8</sup> I desire, then, that in every place the men should pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument; <sup>9</sup> also that the women should dress themselves modestly and decently in suitable clothing, not with their hair braided, or with gold, pearls, or expensive clothes, <sup>10</sup> but with good works, as is proper for women who profess reverence for God. <sup>11</sup> Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. <sup>12</sup> I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. <sup>13</sup> For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup> and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup> Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.

#### Introduction

The way this passage is written often has left people guessing about what Paul meant. It seems confusing, as though it contradicts views Paul expressed elsewhere on women and teaching. For example, he wanted women to teach in Titus 2:3, so it’s difficult to think Paul opposed all teaching by women. And it seems likely that Paul found women *teaching men* acceptable in some situations (for example Priscilla teaching Apollos; Acts 18:26). Some say Paul simply opposes women teaching independently and with authority, as in “women should not be pastors”. I do believe that Paul opposed certain women in this passage, but not in the terms just described.

Paul’s comments about Adam and Eve are often seen as implying a teaching about the roles of all men and women. Basically, 1) that Adam being made first shows he was put in charge of Eve, meaning men in general are in charge of women in general, and 2) that Eve was more easily deceived than Adam, and that women in general are more easily led astray than men. I think that people have read the passage this way because they think Paul was trying to explain Genesis to us, though in ways that don’t reflect what Genesis actually says (we will return to this shortly).

## Bible Learning

### 8. I desire . . . The men should pray . . . without anger or argument.

Paul is continuing on his theme of prayer (2:1), now calling for *men* (males) to pray peaceably. (Many places in English Bibles can be confusing about whether the Greek involves “humans” or “males” – as in verses 4-5.)

**9. Also that the women.** I like to read this as Paul calling specifically for the church’s *women* to pray, too, and saying to do so in a way that shows internal beauty.

**10. Profess reverence.** It is not clear if verses 9-10 address vanity, or if they call women not to give in to worldly expectations for their behavior (as with 1 Peter 3:3-4). Either may be true, and either way believers need to behave in a way that shows their worshipful respect for God.

**11. Let a woman learn in silence with full submission.** The word “let” translates an *imperative* Paul used here. He is not saying to “allow” women to learn, he is demanding for them to learn. Many errors were being taught in Ephesus, and it would make sense for Paul to want all believers who were still untrained to learn more. It would not just prepare them to deal with false teaching, but aid in doing good works (v. 10).

Paul’s command was not given in contrast with other, vocal, actions for women (such as praying and prophesying). This verse is not about women always being silent in the church (as some read 1 Cor. 14:34), or about *just* women being submissive (as some read Eph. 5:22 – mistakenly, I believe). We could compare this with 1 Thessalonians 3:12, and Ephesians 5:21.

What should we take from Paul pairing *silence* and *submission* with learning? Perhaps it was just concern for the potential conduct of inexperienced students. But it might be that he was addressing the concerns of family members of these women. Not everyone was comfortable with changing the norm and having women be educated. It has been suggested that when Paul mentioned conflicts in verse 8 these were specific conflicts about that issue, within believers’ own households. Paul may have been trying to settle things by his calls for the men and women, saying that women were indeed to be taught, but reassuring the people that this wasn’t going to become an avenue for bad behavior.

## Questions for Discussion:

Do we expect students to be submissive when learning? Do we expect that some who study will eventually teach?

Do you think Paul was seeking to spur women on to love and good deeds at the same time as he addressed the attitudes of others who might oppose an expansion of their service?

Are there any believers who you think should not submit? How do you understand “submission” as Paul wrote of it?

**12. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent.** It is common to see this verse as about *one* issue rather than *two* (putting an “and” where the NASB chose “or”), so about *teaching with authority over a man*, or *teaching authoritatively*. One difficulty in interpreting this text as about *two* ideas is the biblical evidence of women who were permitted and even encouraged to teach.

Paul may have used his call for believing women to *learn* (v. 11) as a transition to rejecting certain women who had been *teaching*. Paul repeated the word for “silence” (*esuxia*) here, but not “learn”. The women in this verse were not open to learning from true teachers, and they taught falsehoods Paul wished *never* to be advocated to the believers.

My perspective on this verse comes in part from the word translated “authority” here. It is not Paul’s usual word for “authority” (*didaskalo*). The word used here (*authentain*) appears *only* here in the Bible, which calls us to look at extra-biblical Greek to understand it. Liddell and Scott’s *Lexicon*, which covers extra-biblical Greek, defines it as “to have power over” and notes that its root (*authentēs*) can refer to “an absolute master or ruler” (or also “murderer”, particularly of a family member). I think the women who prompted verse 12 had made a false claim to a domineering authority which Paul did not want men or women to seek.

**13. For Adam was formed first, then Eve;**

**14. and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.**

**15. Yet she will be saved through childbearing, provided they continue in faith and love and holiness, with modesty.**

One way people understand verses 13-15 is that Paul is explaining Genesis and thus explaining what he wrote in verse 12. It is true that the New Testament sometimes puts the Old Testament in a new light, but let’s think for a moment about what Paul would be writing about. Genesis tells us Adam and Eve both were created in the image of God and were both commissioned to subdue the earth (Gen. 1:27-28; 5:1-2). They both ate of the fruit and both were punished for doing so. The Hebrew of 3:6 shows Adam was present when Eve picked the fruit, suggesting he was there when the serpent spoke with Eve. So was Adam really not deceived by the serpent? Note that I am not questioning Paul’s words, only questioning one possible interpretation. I think really Paul was expressing his opposition to how a very specific group of women *misused* the story of Adam and Eve.

**Question for Discussion:** If Paul was arguing that women are less trustworthy with truth than men, would that justify *only* restricting women from roles where they teach *men*?

Various people have suggested that this passage involves Paul reacting to false teaching in Ephesus, rather than explaining Genesis in a new way for us. I can't prove that the understanding I prefer is the "real" source of the issue, but here is a brief description.

The group known as the Gnostics (from the Greek for "knowledge", *gnosis*, as in 1 Timothy 6:21), were opposed by the Church in its early centuries. Their belief system was a blend of teachings from Platonists, Manichees (of Persia), Jews, and Christians – among others. Some of their writings reworked the religious writings of other groups. They produced multiple variations on Genesis' creation account.

Many sects of Gnostics existed over time, but most held to a core of issues that began with there being one great spiritual "power" of the universe. Originally that non-material spirit, pure, and powerful, existed alone. Gnostics claimed this spirit-being emitted one or more other spirit-beings, like bearing fruit. Gnostics differed on how many of these beings came to be, some groups proposed there were hundreds of beings. But eventually the creator of the material universe existed. The idea that the world had been created (rather than just always existing) was unpopular in the Roman Empire unless you were Jewish or Christian – but Gnostics did *not approve* of its existence. They thought of matter as bad, and generally explained that it came to be only because one of the lower spirits was foolish enough to create matter (while powerful enough to do so).

To the Gnostics this planet is important because part of what had been emitted from the "great power" was trapped here in flesh. In effect Gnostics claimed to be pre-existent beings who needed the special knowledge that Gnosticism offered so they could escape the world (at death) and rise up to merge into the "highest". (That is a pretty high opinion of themselves.)

It may help put things in context to mention that some Gnostics claimed Christ was a "mid-level" emitted being, come to instruct people in how to escape the world. They differed on what happened at the cross, but they figured Christ *couldn't* die. To some the cross involved playacted suffering, or Simon of Cyrene as a disguised last-minute replacement, etc. To them the main point was that Christ went "back" out of the world (as they thought of it) and they wanted to follow.

Odd as the Gnostics sound, they were a serious threat to Christianity, and were fought for centuries. (Though we could question how successfully the battle was fought.)



Gnostics were open to making various claims in their writings based on Genesis' creation account. Some said Eve was created first, not Adam. They saw the serpent as a helpful "higher power" explaining how to become like "God". And if the serpent was truthful to Eve, of course she was never *deceived* by the serpent about the tree of "knowledge". Rather they said Adam had been deceived by the *creator* about the tree being dangerous.

Verse 15 can also be seen as addressing a Gnostic lie. The majority of Gnostics, with their emphasis on "spirit" and their desire to escape the world, opposed physical pleasure and called for ascetic celibacy to help wean a person off of enjoying the world. But some Gnostics said that any physical excesses *only* involved the body, which would be left behind when the spirit escaped the world. Whether celibate or not, these groups agreed that the ultimate wrong was to have babies. They saw that as trapping "spiritual beings" in flesh. So perhaps Paul's confusing comment about childbearing simply means it does not conflict with salvation to have children – while also emphasizing signs of those who truly follow Jesus: faith, love, holiness and modesty.

Some Gnostic groups even treated women as superior to men and so had females as their main promoters. As I mentioned earlier, I can't prove that all this was the issue in Ephesus. One big question is whether when 1 Timothy was written the teachings I describe already existed among Gnostics. But I think it is likely Paul was addressing *something* odd in that community.

## **Bible Application**

If Paul's point in our text involved arguments both in and outside of the Church regarding the roles and situations of men and women, what can we draw from his words?

Prayer is to be offered in reverence. If reverence demands not quarreling and not trying to convince people through externals like how things look, reverence likely demands a great deal more as well.

Women are to learn – as are men. Likely all students should study with silence and submission. But that doesn't mean teachers are never to be questioned. Paul's own use of Genesis to discuss these issues is a reminder that students should examine the scriptures and not simply accept what they are told (as Acts 17:11 also indicates).

Teachers can make mistakes and need to be questioned about those mistakes, but there are also "false teachers". People in that category are not simply to have what they say rejected, we should not even listen to them. And when we wish to oppose false teaching it may be helpful to state simply some of the biblical points that teaching has wrong.

On a broader point, some Christians have a strong concern with what they see to be violations of “God’s design” for the relationships of men and women (a design which they may perceive in New Testament passages more than in Genesis). And some seem to connect questions about this with secular social change. It seems worth mentioning that the history of examining the Bible’s teaching about women does not emerge from a secular call for “women’s rights”. Rather the source is Christian men and women examining believers’ responsibilities to use their own gifting.

In 19<sup>th</sup> century America Christians saw dozens of biblical texts as supporting involvement by women in areas of ministry which others of their contemporaries did not accept for women. These included texts from Paul, like his comments about Phoebe, Priscilla, Tryphena and Tryphosa, and other named women who served. It also included Paul’s call for service in the body of Christ as we are gifted to serve.

To some extent the interest of Christian men and women in God’s words about women *resulted* in what is now called the “women’s movement”. (That movement is seen as having three waves, with the third starting in the 1990s). The support that movement now gives to immoralities may come in part from examining, and trying to mirror, what men have been allowed – many men have lived unrepentant sinful lives.

For reverent Christian women there is no value in seeking worldly “rights” separate from God’s desires. They seek to understand God’s will. Consider Sarah Grimke, who was criticized for speaking in public at a conference against slavery and then wrote explaining her beliefs about women. Early on she wrote “In examining this important subject, I shall depend solely on the Bible to designate the sphere of woman” (*Letters on the Equality of the Sexes, and the Condition of Woman*, p. 4, 1838).

Grimke’s words come during the period of the Millerite movement, and its public ministry by female speakers. About 100 women proclaimed the coming of Christ at that time. Editor Joseph Marsh not only accepted their writings for publication, he requested them. Some saw these preaching women as a fulfillment of Joel 2 (quoted in Acts 2:38-39), offering evidence of Jesus’ soon return.

Some of these Christian women rejected the course of seeking political change because they looked only to change through the return of Christ. For example some who opposed slavery did not join the abolitionists, but their writings and speeches influenced others who sought political change. Women sought the abolition of slavery, and the vote for women (suffrage), and a prohibition of the sale of alcohol. Some of these women assumed they were bringing about a better world, perhaps even creating God’s kingdom in the post-millennial sense.

It seems that the openness of congregations to women’s public and vocal ministry has fluctuated through time, and the topic has been opened over and over. I wonder to what extent that results from people thinking “maybe our predecessors were in error about reaching a final decision on this”. People like certainty, and this is a text it is hard to be certain about. The approach of Sarah Grimke, and others in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, to our text would probably not have involved Gnosticism. In that sense I am not in continuity with their statements. But they could recognize that Paul seemed to be saying in one place (in translation) things that did not match what they saw elsewhere in his writings and in the Bible as a whole. And they chose to serve as they believed God was directing them.

### **Question for Discussion**

Is it your experience that when people discuss the topic of whether women may teach men in the church they approach it more through biblical texts, or through personal feelings about the issue?

### **Life Response**

I don’t think that Paul’s point in 1 Timothy 2:11-15 was to block women forever from teaching, or from teaching men, or from teaching with authority of the type he permitted for men. But I also can’t say his point in these verses was to say that women should be doing all of those things, he was on a whole different topic. But a great deal of information is available considering what Paul did mean, and we should not ignore it.

Please don’t suppose this topic is irrelevant to you because 1) you are male, or 2) you aren’t interested in teaching anybody anyway. If it is acceptable for females to be pastors, and take various other roles in the churches, that requires us to think about what Christian girls are being taught. While you are at it, think about what your Christian boys are being taught, too – about girls, and also the subject of serving Christ in general. This may seem a little off topic, but how do you speak about those who teach you, when those teachers are not there to hear (but others are)? You may find little clear in this lesson or this text. If so, so be it. But find it clear that you are to pray and be reverent and serve God.

### **Question for Discussion**

Has anyone ever tried to prevent you from doing something you thought would be service to God? Do you think that you have done this? If so, did that person (or you) have good reason to do so?

## Bishops and Servants in the Church

**Golden Text:** “For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” (Eph. 4:12-13)

**Key Thought:** Elders are the ruling body of the church. Deacons (servants) are all people who become believers in God’s good news message.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 3:1-13 (NASB)

<sup>1</sup> It is a trustworthy statement: if any man aspires to the office of overseer, it is a fine work he desires *to do*. <sup>2</sup> An overseer, then, must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, temperate, prudent, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not addicted to wine or pugnacious, but gentle, peaceable, free from the love of money. <sup>4</sup> *He must be* one who manages his own household well, keeping his children under control with all dignity <sup>5</sup> (but if a man does not know how to manage his own household, how will he take care of the church of God?), <sup>6</sup> *and* not a new convert, so that he will not become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. <sup>7</sup> And he must have a good reputation with those outside *the church*, so that he will not fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, <sup>9</sup> *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. <sup>11</sup> Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. <sup>12</sup> Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, good managers of *their* children and their own households. <sup>13</sup> For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

### Introduction

The author of this lesson must begin by offering a brief explanation of his view of church elders and deacons. Traditional Christianity assumes *elder* and *deacon* are actual “offices” in the church as stated by the King James Version in verses 1, 10, 13 of our lesson text. The list of “qualifications” included is the chief reason for supporting this idea. An office, by its nature, creates a status, a rank that separates people. One of the first actions of the

second-century Gentile church was to establish a hierarchical structure of church governance. That structure has existed ever since, and it has caused more trouble for the church than help.

Jesus gave very specific instructions to his disciples: “you know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not so among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many” (Matt. 20:25-28). Jesus set the example he wanted his followers to use to establish and maintain his assembly of believers. The words “served” and “serve” (“ministered unto” and “minister” in KJV) that Jesus used of himself in verse 28 are the words used by Paul for “office of a deacon” (KJV) in 1 Timothy. It does not make sense that Jesus would warn his disciples not to set up officers (lords) while Paul would later do exactly that in his letter to Timothy. This was not Jesus’ plan.

Clearly Jesus sternly warned against “lording it over” fellow believers, but why did he oppose such a structure? Mainly because he was building a body of believers over which he was the head and every believer was some significant part of the body. Every body part is considered important and vital to contributing to the whole (1 Cor. 12:12-25). The hierarchical structure currently present in most churches destroys this idea by separating the leadership of the body from the other believers – the title often used for everyone other than the leaders is *laity*. In many churches in history the result has been dumbing-down the so-called laity, or common people. Also the leaders held closely to themselves what they saw fit to teach, changing doctrine and demanding the rest of the people submit to it. This was not to be the nature of Christ’s church, his body.

What we have in today’s text is an exhortation from Paul instructing Timothy as to what to look for in people to do the work of service (deacon) and oversight (bishop) in the church.

## **Bible Learning**

Paul opens with a trustworthy saying. His pastoral letters include five of these reliable sayings (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:8, 9; 2 Tim. 2:11-13; Titus 3:4-8). “They announce statements summarizing key doctrines. Apparently, these sayings were well known in the churches, as concise expressions of cardinal gospel truth” (from the *John MacArthur Study Bible*, commenting on 1 Timothy 1:15). Three of the five relate specifically to our redemption. But here the reliable saying pertains to bishops (overseers), those to be entrusted to carry on the work of proclaiming the gospel and edifying the church. In 1 Timothy 4 Paul focuses on practices in godliness (v. 8), which is largely

what he asks Timothy to look for in bishops. Even his reliable saying in Titus 3:8 emphasizes “that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men”. This is good advice for all believers.

In our text Paul calls these leaders *bishops*. More often they are referred to as *elders* (occasionally *pastors*). When Paul wrote to Titus he urged him to appoint elders in the churches and gave another (somewhat different) list of traits. These titles all refer to the same leadership role in the church. Bishop refers most specifically to the oversight role, whereas elder is indicative of the dignity of the position and pastor to the caring work of service.

It is worthy to note that the word for bishop means overseer, inspector, guardian and here “the one who does the work of” an overseer. The Greek word does not state specifically that this is a hierarchical office, but a work.

Paul used two terms here which relay a sense of intense interest on the part of the one showing interest in the position. He tells of one who *aspires*, “to stretch one’s self, long after, try to gain”, and *desires*, “to fix the desire upon, desire earnestly, long for”. At the time Paul wrote this Roman persecution was arising against the believers, and it would continue for several centuries. It would take someone with intense interest to be willing to suffer for the cause this work would entail (MacArthur). In some parts of our world similar concerns still exist. In well-to-do countries the demands are of a more complex nature, but not often physical abuse. At any rate the desire to serve must have a sound root within the individual even though the church and other elders must take responsibility in recognizing and giving approval for someone to serve in this capacity.

The bulk of our lesson text centers on what most of us think of as “qualifications” of elders and deacons. An examination of these so-called qualifications will bear out that they are not actually qualifications but traits or characteristics to be found in believers who have incorporated the teachings of Jesus into their lives, their behaviors, their manner of conducting themselves, their inner frame of mind, their ability to consider a better way to live their lives. Below are some brief explanations of these characteristics, paired with example scriptures showing the trait is expected of all believers.

(All definitions are taken from *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, Ethelbert W. Bullinger, D.D., 9<sup>th</sup> Edition 1969.)

## BISHOPS (ELDERS)

*Above reproach* – one in whom there is no just cause for blame (Phil. 2:15).

*Husband of one wife* – a one-woman man or a one-wife husband (Gen. 2:24).

*Temperance* – somberness, especially in respect of wine; sober in mind (Eph. 4:2, 26, 29).

*Prudent* – sober, of sound mind, sane; used of one who follows sound reason, and restrains his passions (Eph. 5:15-17).

*Respectable* – well ordered, orderly, well behaved, discreet (Col. 4:5).

*Hospitable* – loving strangers (Rom. 12:13).

*Able to teach* – willing, able and fit to teach; capable of teaching (Col. 3:16).

*Not addicted to wine* – above reproach in use of alcohol (1 Cor. 5:11).

*Not pugnacious* – especially not one apt to strike; not a fighter (Gal. 5:20-21).

*Free from the love of money* – not eager for dishonorable gain (Col. 3:5).

*Gentle* – a yielding disposition (contrasted with justice, and approximating to kindness) (2 Cor. 10:1).

*Uncontentious* – not a brawler; without battle, peaceful, peaceable (Gal. 5:22).

*Manages his own household well* – one that rules (causes to stand before, to set over) well (becomingly, suitably, properly, excellently, aptly) his own house (Eph. 6:4).

*Keep his own children under control* – submitted, living honorable lives (Eph. 6:4).

*Not a new convert* – not a beginner in the faith; newly planted, a neophyte (that is, a new plant) (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

*Have a good reputation with those outside the church* – bearing witness, certifying; a testimony that informs as well as corroborates (2 Cor. 8:21).

## DEACONS (SERVANTS)

*Dignity* – venerable (conveying an impression of aged goodness and benevolence, respect or awe excited by personal dignity or consecration) (Titus 2:2).

*Not double tongued* – uttering the same thing twice, repeating. He does not ‘talk out of both sides of his mouth’ (Col. 3:9-10).

*Not addicted to much wine* – same as for bishops.

*Not fond of sordid gain* – similar to “love of money” for bishops.

*Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience* – having God’s revealed plan of redemption free from every foreign admixture, every stain (Eph. 1:7-9).

*Must first be tested* – similar idea to ‘not a new convert’ under bishops.

*Beyond reproach* – not accused, with nothing laid to one’s charge (as a result of public investigation) (Phil. 2:15).

*Husbands of only one wife* – same as for bishops.

*Good managers of their children and their own households* – same as for bishops.

## DEACONESS

*Dignified* – same as for deacons.

*Not malicious gossips* – a calumniator, slanderer, accuser, adversary, the devil (2 Tim. 3:2-3, 5).

*Temperate* – same as for bishops.

*Faithful in all things* – passively: faithful, trusty, worthy of confidence; actively: trusting, believing (Matt. 24:45).

In closing this section Paul admonishes Timothy (and the church) that those who serve well (here servants, but equally true of bishops/elders) are worthy of recognition. We don’t need to imagine a ceremony in which worthy servants are given awards for outstanding achievements. It is more about the respect other believers offer them, having recognized that their efforts are truly in line with what was expected of them. This would let them know that heaven looks down on them with great favor and appreciation. Consequently, they will have confidence that they are doing what they have been called upon to do.

As a side point, it is interesting that qualifications of “deacons” are not mentioned in Titus. Paul wrote that letter at the same time as 1 Timothy, and begins it by giving advice on appointing good elders. If there truly was an “office” of deacon would not Paul have wanted Titus also to appoint deacons in his churches, and give him good advice about doing so?

## **Bible Application**

The purpose of bishops (overseers) and servants (deacons) is to grow a people who honor Yahweh in all they say and do. Leaders in the church must help fellow believers grow up into the full maturity of Jesus Christ (Eph. 4:12-13). Too often church members are allowed to warm the pews and believe they have fulfilled their duty in the church. But that is not what is intended. We must *all* grow up to the full maturity of Christ-likeness, especially serving. If Jesus is our example, how will we best apply Matthew 20:28?

We have allowed ourselves to be led to believe that only a precious few individuals are really committed enough to represent Jesus as overseers or servants. But the fact is the moment we become believers we are servants



(deacons) of Jesus and it is incumbent on bishops to link up more mature believers with new believers to help train them in the spiritual way of life and to enlist them in areas of service useful to the whole body of believers.

Consider this profound statement: It must be the goal of all bishops to attempt to make many believers able to do the work of bishops. Where does it say in the Bible that there should only be a handful of bishops in any church? Would Jesus be disappointed if he found a church full of bishops caring for each other and reaching out to encourage new believers?

Attaining the title bishop does not mean such individuals are the most special part of the body. Such individuals should have a heart to serve, just like all parts of the human body performing services essential to the needs of the body. Each serves in whatever capacity they are needed in the church even though they are capable of doing the work of an overseer. After all, aren't bishops servants?

### **Life Response**

Those individuals entrusted with doing the work of a bishop must understand that they are among those who must equip “the saints for the *work of service*, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we *all attain* to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fulness of Christ” (all italics inserted, Eph. 4:12-13). It is unacceptable to allow the attitude in the church that only a handful of individuals can do the work of service. If it makes sense to you, scripturally speaking, that all believers are servants of God, then take up this challenge. Present your new understanding to your pastor and elders and urge them to begin proclaiming and practicing such behavior. Also, set the example by beginning yourself to engage in works of service and helping others to do the same.

### **More Information on Bishops and Deacons**

For more information on Elders and Deacons go to the General Conference website ([abc-coggc.org](http://abc-coggc.org)) and click on “General Conference”, then click on “Events”, then click on “CWS”, and click on “CWS 2011 papers”. That will bring you to a list, at the center of which you will find links for two papers by John Carr on Elders and Deacons in the church.

## Mystery and Asceticism

Most people love a good mystery. Nothing is comparable to a thrilling who-done-it, whether in print form, as an e-book, or via a Hollywood retelling on the big screen. It goes without saying that such novels are a dime a dozen as each new wordsmith gets yet another tale published.

Like most of us, I have favorite authors. Mine are John Grisham and Sue Grafton, each can expertly grab my attention and carry me along with the plot. At the reveal I often find the conclusions shockingly simple, frustrating me for getting so sucked in to the story. I feel like saying “Aw shucks, that was too easy” as I rush to the end of the book and close and shelve it.

The foregoing was oversimplified, but for me it is almost an ascetic experience to grab the latest Grisham/Grafton tale. I read the first 50 pages, and with glassy eyes put everything else in my life on hold until I get it done. Every waking moment catches me in the book’s descriptions and dialogue. I devour chapter after chapter, on into the night and through the next day, or the next two. I know it’s all fantasy, but I can’t help myself. I’ve gotta get Grisham and Grafton.

It seems as though there’s something akin to ascetic mystery involved when Paul pens the following thoughts in the middle of a letter to Timothy, his son in the faith. I picture the young preacher pondering the apostle’s meaning as again and again he reads this passage, which the editors of the New Revised Standard Version headed “The Mystery of Our Religion” (3:14-16) and “False Asceticism” (4:1-5).

### **Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 3:14–4:5

<sup>14</sup> I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, <sup>15</sup> if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. <sup>16</sup> Without any doubt, the mystery of our religion is great:

He was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory.

<sup>1</sup> Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

<sup>2</sup> through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup> They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, provided it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

### **Mystery Religions and Our Religion**

That truth which Paul terms a pillar and bulwark he also calls the "mystery of our religion." He then quotes from a hymn of the faith, its poetic words sounding like a creedal statement believers could use for a mantra. At first glance it seems like Paul uses this hymn to cement in Timothy's thinking that God has inaugurated a plan for the world which far exceeds ordinary mysteries.

There were groups in Paul's time which we now refer to as *mystery religions*. Unlike with the well-known public gods, the worship of these groups wasn't simply expected of people living in a particular place, people became worshippers by choice. Scholars describe the groups as having secret membership rites and some required ascetic behavior – which Timothy is urged to reject. Basically these had been local groups in places like Egypt, Greece, Asia Minor or Persia for centuries, but in the Roman Empire became widespread. The Eleusian Mystery is an exception since it became famous but remained tied to just one place, a temple near Athens.

Early opponents of Christianity pointed to apparent similarities between mystery religions and the Church, in beliefs and in practice. Several church fathers warned against these groups. Justin Martyr referred to their "demonic imitations" of the true faith.

Even in the modern age people try to draw connections between Christianity and the faiths that existed around it in the early centuries of the Church Age. A book published in 1999 argued that Jesus was himself an invented person, in part being made from the existing figures of various mystery cults. (*The Jesus Mysteries: Was the 'Original Jesus' a Pagan God?*, by Timothy Freke, a philosophy and religions scholar, and Peter Gandy, a classics scholar). One example the book offers is the Egyptian-Grecian Osiris-Dionysus, presented as a god made flesh, fathered by deity and with a mortal virgin mother, whose followers were born again through a baptismal rite. Various authors have taken issue with this book's arguments and scholarship. New Testament scholar Paul Barnett described its theories as like those of the Gnostics who hated the idea "that the incarnation of the Son of God" had a physical resurrection. David Allan Dodson, who

reviewed the book for CNN, found it interesting but said that its authors “virtually ignore” ties to “Jewish tradition and prophecy”.

Our outlook on why some aspects of the mystery religions seem familiar in Christianity may be different from that of many people in the world. Perhaps they are one reason those clerics were gathered at Nicea in 325, at the insistence of Emperor Constantine (who had belonged to the mystery religion which worshipped Mithra), to define a God/Christ synergism. Is there really a basis for seeing Christianity as the premiere mystery religion?

### **Background to Paul’s Mystery Hymn . . .**

What did Paul mean when he wrote “mystery of our religion” and used that hymn in his letter to Timothy?

Perhaps the apostle was reminding Timothy of issues which arose during the preaching of the gospel in Asia Minor and Greece. At a healing in Lystra Paul and Barnabas were hailed as “gods” having “come down to us in human form” (Acts 14:11). When Paul rejected the god/man title, the crowd turned on him, stoned him, and dumped his body outside the town (v. 19). After Timothy joined Paul and Silas on the later European mission, a demonic woman of Philippi mocked them to the crowds with: “These men are slaves of the Most High God, who proclaim to you a way of salvation” (16:17).

In Thessalonica Jewish-inspired crowds accused the apostles of creating a king called Jesus in opposition to the Emperor (17:4-7). While Paul waited for Timothy and Silas to join him in Athens, the respected pagan philosophers summoned the “babblers” who proclaimed “foreign divinities” to explain his beliefs, then rejected his message that the living God created all things and sent his resurrected Son for their salvation (v. 18-33).

Paul spent 18 successful months in Corinth, but then jealous Jews dragged his followers before the authorities, resulting in the public beating of accusatory Jews (18:11-17).

Then Paul left for Ephesus, spending two years there in a ministry with strange and mysterious results. Twelve followers spoke in tongues and prophesied. Seven sons of Jewish high priest Sceva were overpowered and wounded by an evil spirit when they used as a mantra the name of Jesus. Believers who formerly practiced magic publicly burned their books valued at 50,000 silver coins. After that frustrated rioting silversmiths, whose idol-making business was suffering, accused Paul of drawing “away a considerable number of people by saying that gods made with hands are not gods” (19:26).

These were all strange and mysterious events, but all life-changing and genuine experiences revealing Him in whom “we live and move and have our being” (17:28).

Why then should we question Paul’s mysterious words to Timothy:  
“[He] [Who] was revealed in flesh,  
vindicated in spirit,  
seen by angels,  
proclaimed among Gentiles,  
believed in throughout the world,  
taken up in glory”?

### **The Hymn’s Phrases**

The hymn’s first phrase seems bizarre. Who is revealed in flesh? This seems similar to the reference to logos made flesh in John’s fantastic prologue (John 1:1, 14).

Obviously Paul is referring to Jesus. By the Spirit of God Jesus cast out demons (Matt. 12:28), and angels ministered to him after his temptation. Paul proclaimed his name and his resurrection to Gentiles, after Pentecost folks from all over Europe (Greece) and Asia (Minor) believed on him, and he was the one who ascended into heaven in glory.

In comparison with what the hymn says we could consider John’s words about the antichrist. That is one of the most talked about negative aspects of the New Testament. We often think of this as one individual, as Paul expressed to the Thessalonians though not using that name (2 Thes. 2:1-10). John labeled as antichrist those who deny Christ’s personal presence (1 John 4:1-5).

Is not this the great mystery of our religion? By the name of Jesus and through the working of God’s Spirit unleashed at Pentecost, the apostles and disciples of the Lord worked signs and miracles – and countless persons took Jesus as savior and Lord. The seemingly strange actions that followed Paul, as noted earlier in this lesson, turned the lives of believers upside down. His mysterious ways have been documented in the Acts and the mystery of our religion is now revealed for all to see and believe and to experience the change as well. As Paul wrote to believers in Rome, this mysterious secret, once hidden, is now revealed: “Now to God who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages” (Rom. 16:25).

In spite of this revealed mystery, some felt the need for unusual rituals, strange demands, and confusing concepts. So Paul warned Timothy against

falling from the vibrancy of faith into the strict demands of religion. We might term what Paul addressed as asceticism gone awry.

### **Asceticism Gone Awry**

Paul labeled it “paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Basic to such teaching was the old idea that the material world is evil and the spiritual world is the only good. It sounds similar to cautions he wrote to the Colossians:

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belonged to the world? Why do you submit to regulations, “Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch”? All these regulations refer to things that perish with use; they are simply human commands and teachings. These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-imposed piety, humility, and severe treatment of the body, but they are of no value in checking self-indulgence (Col. 2:20-23).

Paul called out those who practice false asceticism. He labeled them lying hypocrites. They lacked the caution of an inner voice and made false demands insisting on celibacy and dietary laws (as with separating clean from unclean foods).

These and other such prohibitions continued into the second Christian century. Church father Irenaeus wrote that certain followers of the Gnostic teacher Saturninus “declare that marriage and generation are from Satan. Many likewise abstain from animal food, and draw away multitudes by a feigned temperance of this kind” (*Against Heresies*, 1, 24, 2).

By the fourth century people were isolating themselves in Egypt’s deserts, seeking to cut off contact with the world of people and making various attempts to mortify the flesh. We have stories of people who refused cooked food to remain “fleshless”, or who stood through the night refusing sleep. Another allowed his body to become so dirty that vermin fell from him as he walked. We even hear of a man who deliberately ate salt all summer and refused water. Their mantra: “A clean body necessarily means an unclean soul.” Apparently they operated from a faulty understanding of the words *body* and *soul*.

### **Faulty Asceticism’s Antidote**

The greatest of all mysteries of our religion is that all things are a gift of God. Everything in nature is from God, belongs to God, and is given to God’s people for our good and His glory. God created humans as male and female to reproduce (Gen. 1:27, 28), He made everything good (Gen. 1:31),

and the animal kingdom is meat for humans (Gen. 9:3). Our response to these gifts is the proper asceticism. Paul tells Timothy to use God's gifts in a certain way.

First, we remember that all this comes from God. It is only by Him that life is possible; nothing and nobody lives without Him.

Next, God's gifts are to be shared with each other. No one monopolizes God's gifts. They are free to be used by all.

Thirdly, all these gifts are to be received with thanksgiving. Each meal and all that is taken in is received with grace. The Jews said grace for each type of food. When fruit was eaten, the words of grace were: "Blessed are you, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the tree." With the wine the grace words were: "Blessed are you, King of the Universe, who creates the fruit of the vine." For vegetables: "Blessed are you . . . for fruit of the earth." For bread: "Blessed are you . . . for bringing forth bread from the ground."

By thanking God for all these things makes it sacred. The demons cannot touch it when it is touched by the Spirit of God's grace.

Christians do not serve God by enslaving themselves with rules and regulations and insulting His creation. Christians serve Him by gratefully accepting His good gifts, remembering that this world is where God made all things well, and by never forgetting to share God's gifts with others.

### **Mystery Religion in the Last Times**

At the end of the age another mystery crops up. Some of the faith will do a "stage left" in a strange mystery of departure.

But why?

When Jesus enters the life of a believer, old things pass away, everything is new; each sunrise brings fresh opportunity; all is vibrant. How can "those who have once been enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come" then fall away? (Heb. 6:4-6).

In our postmodern age, when nobody has truth for everybody, and ethics have exited with the loss of moral attributes, anything goes.

There is one more aspect to this final mystery: "Keep yourselves in the love of God; look forward to the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on some who are wavering; save others by snatching them out of the fire; and have mercy on still others with fear, hating even the tunic defiled by their bodies" (Jude 21-23).

### Train Yourself in Godliness

**Golden Text:** “Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

(1 Timothy 4:16)

**Key Thought:** As disciples of Jesus, we are in the process of vigorous training to become like Jesus and reflect the character and conduct of our Father, God.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 4:6-16 (NIV)

<sup>6</sup>If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. <sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. <sup>9</sup>This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. <sup>10</sup>That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

<sup>11</sup>Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup>Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. <sup>13</sup>Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. <sup>14</sup>Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup>Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup>Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

#### Introduction

As both a child and young adult I was quite a fan of movies with the theme of a person aspiring to greatness in some area of life and training for that. I remember watching Rocky aspire to being a great boxer. I can still recall hearing the trumpets playing the song “Gonna Fly, Now” as Rocky trained hard, running through the streets of Philadelphia. I recall his trainer pushing him to work harder, to get stronger. Rocky persevered, he had setbacks, but in the end, his training paid off and he defeated Apollo Creed.



Or there was the young boy who was bullied by other kids, and helped by an old Japanese martial arts instructor who trained him as *The Karate Kid*. (“Wax on, wax off.”)

The formula in these films was nearly always the same, and it always worked. The young eager student learns discipline from the wise older mentor, and through dedication and hard work achieves the dream and victory. Perhaps the reason this pattern resonated with me, and with so many, is that its roots are deep in the human heart. Deep down, we all aspire to greater things. We all hunger to find meaning and validation. And we all recognize that it requires serious dedication and hard work to see it through. And we all need someone to help train and mentor us through the process. For young Timothy, who aspired to godliness, his mentor and guide was the Apostle Paul. Fortunately, Paul’s mentoring of Timothy was captured in God’s word and is available to assist us as we too aspire to godliness.

### **Bible Learning**

As Paul mentors Timothy he helps him keep his goal in mind: to be a “good minister of Christ Jesus”. The word *minister* may require a bit of clarification. We tend to think of a “minister” in one of two ways, as a government official (which may come from our British friends, i.e. “the Minister of Defense”), or as a title for professional clergy (“I’d like to introduce you to my Minister”). Timothy’s goal is not to become a government official, at least in this world’s government, and he’s not necessarily looking to become a professional clergy person. He was aspiring to something different. The word minister comes from the Greek “*diakonos*” and means, literally, “a servant”. It was used to describe one who executes the commands of another, serves the king, or as one who waits tables. A minister is one who serves others. Timothy was aspiring to execute the commands of and serve the King (Jesus) by serving others. His goal was to be an effective servant of his master, Jesus, by becoming more like God in his character.

In order to achieve this lofty aspiration to serve the king, it was necessary for Timothy to enter into a strict training regimen. Paul, acting as Timothy’s trainer/mentor, lays out a training program that is very similar to what Rocky or the Karate Kid, or any athlete who wishes to excel would follow: 1. Good Nutrition, 2. lots of exercise, 3. hard work, 4. continuous dedication toward a goal, 5. good modeling to peers, 6. make use of your particular strengths/gifts, 7. and be sure that your theory and your practice align.

1. Good Nutrition. To train usually requires good nutrition. If we were talking about physical training, we would talk about foods that were

important to reduce fat and build muscle. Someone in training wants to eat healthy food and avoid junk. For one entered in spiritual training to serve the master and execute the commands of the king, they need excellent “spiritual nutrition.” In verse 6 Paul tells Timothy to continue to be “nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” Paul wants Timothy to understand that he needs to feed his mind good spiritual food – the “truths of the faith” and “good teaching”. Fad diets come and go, there has been a grapefruit diet, a cabbage diet, etc., but the only way to get healthy is to regularly eat healthy food. Timothy needed to keep on filling his mind with the good teachings from God’s word.

2. Lots of exercise. Paul wrote: “train yourself to be godly”. He used the word *gymnazo*, which means “to train vigorously”. Of course, we know that physical training often happens in the gym and involves running, weight training, various athletic drills that keep the muscles working. In fact, with repetition, the neural pathways from brain to muscles form a natural superhighway, what they call “muscle memory”. It requires no real thought. The athlete learns to do things automatically. And that’s what sets a world class athlete apart from an amateur. The training Paul calls Timothy to is not physical, but mental/spiritual/behavioral. Learn what Jesus wants you to do, then do them, over and over. The first few times you pray, or witness, or serve in some way, it may feel strange or unnatural, but after practice, it gets easier, and eventually, it simply happens without even requiring much effort.

3. Hard Work. Verse 10 says “that is why we labor.” The Greek word is *kopiao* and means “to grow weary, tired, exhausted” and “to labor with wearisome effort”. The old motto of weight lifters was “no pain, no gain”. Paul wanted Timothy to understand that obeying the King and being faithful in his service was hard work. Sometimes people get confused. Paul clearly teaches in Ephesians 2:8-9 that our work does not save us. We are saved “by grace, through faith” and Paul says it’s “not as a result of works” so that “no one can boast”. That is very true. But as people who have been saved from destruction in the lake of fire by their faith in Jesus Christ and the message of the Kingdom, and who are training to serve Jesus, it requires a lot of hard work. It takes effort to follow the commands of Jesus. To “go and make disciples of all nations” is not an easy task. It takes time, money and effort to train to be a good servant of Jesus. If Rocky could put in hard work to get in physical shape, shouldn’t one training to serve the king of kings be willing to put in hard work?

4. Continuous dedication toward our Goal. Paul uses the word *agonizomai* which means “to endeavor with strenuous zeal, strive: to obtain something”. In 1899 Theodore Roosevelt gave a speech extolling the people of America to live a strenuous life:

I wish to preach, not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife; to preach that highest form of success which comes, not to the man who desires mere easy peace, but to the man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil, and who out of these wins the splendid ultimate triumph.

I think Paul would have agreed. Any reading of Paul’s activities shows that he certainly lived a strenuous life. He wanted Timothy to understand that successful service to Jesus the King requires continuous dedication toward that goal, which includes many hardships and dangers. The road to being a good servant is not an easy one.

5. Good peer modeling. Paul wrote: “set an example for the believers”. The word he chose here is *typos*, “an example to be imitated”. About a year ago my wife went to work for a company which provides customer service. She was appalled at the poor customer service they provided and bad attitudes exhibited by her co-workers to their customers. She set about to do the best job she could to serve the customers. In a year’s time the store moved from being toward the bottom in their district to now being the number one store in their district. Her example of dedicated and caring service was contagious and helped to raise up the level of her peers. Paul encouraged Timothy to raise up the level of service of those around him by providing excellent modeling for his peers.

6. Make use of your Gifts. “Do not neglect your gift” Paul told Timothy. Each person is called to serve the Lord Jesus in faithful obedience, but not everyone has the same gifts. Servants are expected to do whatever the master needs to be done, but it’s important that we not lose our connection with those areas in which we are gifted. We want to excel in those areas where we have been given special ability and aptitude. Those with preaching and teaching ministries may need to, at times, mow the grass and take out the garbage when needed, but even as we roll up our sleeves and help as and where needed, we should never do so fully at the expense of our unique gifting. When everyone is serving and using their gifts most will be able to operate within their areas of giftedness. The problem comes when

people choose not to work using their gifts, this is when others take up the slack and serve outside of their area of giftedness.

7. Make Theory and Practice match up. There is an old joke about a child psychologist who was famous and had written many scholarly articles and learned books on child development and how to be a better parent. One day he had a new driveway being put in and saw, from the window of his house, a neighbor boy pressing his hands into the recently poured and smoothed concrete. The man ran out his door screaming at the child for all the neighborhood to hear, grabbed the child roughly by the arm and pulled the child into the neighbor's yard and toward the child's front door. The boy's mother heard her child's pleas for help and quickly ran out her door. She was shocked to see her neighbor, an eminent child psychologist, treating her little darling in such a harsh manner. She pointed out to the man how poorly his behavior matched with the many books he had written, saying "but I thought you liked children". The man responded "Ma'am, I like children in the abstract, *not* in the concrete."

Paul told Timothy to "Watch your life and doctrine closely." Timothy should pay close attention to what he has been taught and what he believes, but knowing correct teaching will be ineffective if it is not matched up with right behavior.

Paul's final instruction is to persevere, *epimeno*, "to stay at or with, to tarry still, still to abide, to continue, remain". It is easy to get frustrated and give up when hardship happens. Persevering takes a daily commitment to doing what needs to be done. Paul didn't want Timothy to get discouraged and give up when difficulties came – and inevitably they would come. He called for Timothy to keep at it.

### **Bible Application**

In 1941, against the backdrop of World War II, Winston Churchill returned to his boyhood school at Harrow and gave a speech to its student body. They sat with their lives ahead of them, as he had once sat many years earlier. He told them: "Never give in. Never give in. Never, never, never, never – in nothing, great or small, large or petty – never give in". (Sometimes this very memorable part of the speech has been recalled as being his entire text, but he said more. In particular he finished that thought: "except to convictions of honor and good sense".)

To be a good servant of Jesus and to obey the commands of the king requires a tremendous dedication to training. There are things we must do if we will avoid easily giving in. We need to feed regularly on God's word,

put our faith into practice, work hard, maintain continuous dedication toward our goal, set a good example for others around us, use our gifts and make sure that our life matches what we believe. These are all essential elements of a good training regimen. It is hard. There are frustrations, setbacks, times of deep discouragement – Paul was well aware of these. He had experienced all of them himself. He wanted Timothy, and us, to know that the most important element is a strong determination to persevere.

It's getting harder and harder to maintain Christian values with integrity in a world that seems to be going further and further from God's standards of righteousness. Many believers try Christianity, find it too difficult, and abandon their faith, or they simply become apathetic and give up trying to be good servants of God. The number of believers in churches is in a steep and steady decline. I fear that America will soon go the way of Europe and the United Kingdom. Even within the Church of God General Conference we see declining attendance and participation and enthusiasm. It's becoming more difficult in the American continent to find young men and women willing to lead churches as pastors and teachers. Yet in places like Malawi and Mozambique our churches are thriving, often with few resources and far less training. Have American Christians become soft and lazy in their faith? How about you? Would Paul look at your efforts to be an obedient servant of the King and laud your efforts, or would he encourage you to become more vigorous in your training program?

### **Life Response**

Ultimately, the choice is yours what you do with this lesson. Your Sunday School teacher can't make you become a more effective servant of Jesus and a more obedient minister to your king. Neither can your pastor, your spouse or parent. No one can do that for you. You must decide for yourself. The author of this lesson has known for years that he needs to lose weight and get in better physical shape. Many have attempted to encourage, cajole, shame and guilt him into doing so. All efforts failed, until he discovered that he alone was responsible for choosing to go into training to get in shape. Then he made that difficult but ultimately joyful decision. What will you decide about your spiritual training program?

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How well are you doing at "good spiritual nutrition?" Are you spending adequate time studying God's word and books that help you understand and apply it?

2. Are you spiritually healthy, getting lots of spiritual exercise – prayer, worship, witnessing, serving? Where do you need to increase your spiritual exercises?
3. How committed to the strenuous life of spiritual growth are you? (Give some examples.)
4. What's your level of continuous dedication toward a goal? What evidence would you offer about this?
5. Do you raise up the level of your peers in their obedience to God, or do you bring them down? What can you do to increase your positive influence on those around you?
6. How well are you using your gifts? Do you know your gifts? Are any of them not being used? If so, why not?
7. How well does your life match up with your doctrine? Are you living what you believe? What changes do you need to make?

### Widows in the Church

**Golden Nugget of Truth:** “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” (Proverbs 3:27, NASB; Copyright 1995, The Lockman Foundation – NISB Copyright 2000 Precept Ministries International)

**Key Thought:** As Christians we are to be generous, but we must use discretion in our generosity.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 5:3-16 (NASB)

Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, having been the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; and if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, and if she has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

#### Life Need

How many times are we called upon to lend others financial support? If you are like many of us it happens frequently, sometimes more frequently

than we'd wish. It seems like the early Christian church faced a similar issue. Requests for financial assistance overwhelmed them at times, and they needed a plan of action to discern who would be helped, on the basis of the most need. Widows in the church were at the top of their priority list. Many of us have widows in our own families or within our churches – which are an extension of our families, through Christ. It can be problematic for us to discern who most needs help and is most deserving of our charity. This lesson will deal with widows specifically, however I believe some of the same principles apply when dealing with the needs of non-widows who seek our charitable contributions. The Apostle Paul gives us some great guidelines in this department that can help us make wise choices when we are considering donating to those who plead their case with us.

### **Text Excavation**

The early church seemed to have a system whereby widows were to employ themselves with church affairs. Their primary duties would be tending to the sick and aged under the direction of the deacons of the church, and they could be assigned other duties. In return the church respectfully provided their basic financial needs.

The first Christians believed the commandments of their foundational Jewish faith. One of those commandments, found in Exodus 20:12, was “Honor your father and your mother, that your days may be prolonged in the land which the LORD your God gives you.” The idea was ingrained in the early church that parents deserved respect. One way of showing respect towards one’s parents was to take care of them as they aged. This was a way of returning the love and care received from parents by children in their time of need. It would only make sense for a family to take care of its own elderly or widowed relatives as a duty of respect towards them.

Of course there were widows who did not have any family to take care of them. Those who had no relatives were the widows “indeed”, as Paul refers to them. They were unable to receive the help that could be rendered from relatives such as sons, daughters, nieces, nephews, brothers or sisters. With no one to rely upon for assistance the Christian widow would be obliged to put her full trust in God alone. This is presented to God by her consistent attention to prayer in regard to His being able and willing to meet her basic needs. They would be considered the first prayer warriors of the Christian faith because of their diligence on their own behalf. However some widows instead of relying on God to provide for their needs turned to living a lascivious life. They did not follow God’s instructions but rather just did what pleased them, not praying or paying attention to God’s ways. This kind



of woman was spiritually dead in comparison to the first kind of widow who was spiritually alive.

The whole world was watching this new Christian movement and measuring its worth by its words versus its actions. Did the message match up with the resulting actions of its followers? Paul is urging families to take care of their own members who were in dire circumstances. That families first took care of their own widows was a testimony to their commitment to the message of love and charity they were proclaiming they had through Christ. This brings up the idea of Proverbs 3:27: “Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in your power to do it.” Christian families were to meet their own responsibilities, so that the church would be able to care for those who had no family resources. It would also be a testimony to their community that they really did possess the kind of charity they proclaimed having. But if Christian families did not take care of their own relatives it sent the message that they really didn’t possess the true love and charity that is developed within the heart of a growing Christian. They would be considered worse than an unbeliever because their actions wouldn’t match up with the message they were proclaiming.

Widows who were truly widows could be put on a list to receive help from the church, but they had to meet certain requirements. If they were over age sixty they were less likely to get re-married to a man who could conceivably provide for their needs. Also the widow could not be a divorced woman who had re-married and then become a widow, or a woman who was naturally widowed twice because there would surely be family to take care of her needs from either the first or the second marital relationship. The widows were also expected to be of good, noble, character. The scriptures do not say that the widow had to have borne the children she raised, she is just to have shown good ability at raising children. She is given to hospitality, even to strangers. She is to have a servant’s heart, which is an attitude of loving service towards others, and she is also predisposed to compassion towards others and general helpfulness and kindness to those around her. In other words she would have been judged on her acts of mercy. “Those who would find mercy when they are in distress must show mercy when they are in prosperity” (*Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume*) A widow’s qualifications for help were based on her history of mercifulness when she was in a position to help others.

Younger widows were not to be put on the list because it was likely they would remarry. Paul encourages them to do so, to avoid the younger widows becoming busybodies and gossips detracting from the work of the church. Idle hands and tongues could present many problems for the church body.

Also there was the issue that a widow's next husband might not be of the Christian faith and would lead them away from serving in the church. To avoid this, those widows who were younger were not to be permitted to be on the list for church assistance. The older, presumably wiser, widows were less likely to be drawn into spending their energy in negative ways and more likely to instead be of real use to the church in caring for its people.

Paul finishes up by reiterating the fact that believers should take care of their own widows properly and not depend on the church to do it for them. The idea being "Charity misplaced is a great hindrance to true charity, there should be prudence in the choice of the objects of charity, that it may not be thrown away upon those who are not properly so, that there may be more for those who are real objects of charity." (*Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible*)

### **Life Response**

You might ask how this passage relates to us today. Many of our churches have widows as members. Are we taking care of them as we should be? Think about it – when was the last time we even visited one of them who was in a nursing home, or sent one of them a card of encouragement, let alone made sure their basic needs were being provided? As a church body we are likely doing a very poor job today at taking care of our widows. We could choose to do things differently. We could make sure that the widows and elderly of our congregations are being cared for. What a testimony to our communities it would be if we as a church made the effort to take care of them – they would definitely take notice and know that our message and our actions match up. As a volunteer at a nursing home it is heartbreaking to see how many people are just left alone there, with shabby clothes, and nothing else to call their own but the institution-provided toiletries and bedding. No cards, no calls, no visitors – forgotten. Many of these people belonged at one time to a body of believers, and some have family nearby – so why aren't they with them, now, helping them in their time of need? Where is their church family to help take up the slack when their natural family lets them down? We don't have to let this happen, we can do something about it. Whether in a nursing home or not the widows and elderly of our congregations need our loving care more than ever.

On the other side of this coin, for you widows who are in our churches – have we tapped into your natural ability to be spiritual resources for the rest of the body of Christ? Are we encouraging you to be prayer warriors on behalf of the needs of the congregation? Can we call on you to help with the needs of others within our church body? What a testimony to our communities it would be if we could get our act together as the body of

Christ and function in a way where the needs of people are being met all across the spectrum of need. We all receive requests for our charity – why don't we first consider charity towards those in our natural families, and then to those in our family of faith, and after that to those beyond? I believe it would be a challenging yet rewarding spiritual growth experience for all of us. Let's challenge ourselves to not withhold good from those who deserve it when it is in our power to act!

**Questions for Contemplation and Discussion:**

1. Are the widows in your own families being taken care of by their families?
2. Are there ways that your church could do a better job of taking care of its widows?
3. Are the widows in your church being encouraged to pursue any of the avenues of service that Paul suggested, such as being a prayer warrior for the church or taking care of the sick or elderly?
4. How could the church do a better job in encouraging widows in pursuing these avenues?
5. When we are considering giving charitably do we stop to consider if we have provided for our own family's needs first?
6. When we give to charitable organizations, or to people who present their needs to us, how do we determine if they are worthy of our charity?
7. Our charity toward widows, and others in need, is a reflection of God's characteristic of love growing within us. How do you think your reflection looks to others, and to God?

## The Evaluation of Elders

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 5:17-25 (NRSV)

<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching; <sup>18</sup> for the scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves to be paid.” <sup>19</sup> Never accept any accusation against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup> As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest also may stand in fear. <sup>21</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels, I warn you to keep these instructions without prejudice, doing nothing on the basis of partiality. <sup>22</sup> Do not ordain anyone hastily, and do not participate in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

<sup>23</sup> No longer drink only water, but take a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.

<sup>24</sup> The sins of some people are conspicuous and precede them to judgment, while the sins of others follow them there. <sup>25</sup> So also good works are conspicuous; and even when they are not, they cannot remain hidden.

### Introduction

Lesson five in this quarter describes the qualifications of elders and deacons in the church, and its author suggests a new model for church leadership based on what we see in the New Testament. This lesson will look at two issues that lesson did not address, namely how we honor elders who lead well and how we discipline those who don't live up to the qualifications of an elder. Both are addressed in this text.

### Bible Learning

**17-18.** Paul has just written about honoring widows and now he writes about honoring elders. Some have suggested that the context then doesn't necessarily refer to the elders of 1 Timothy 3 but rather to the elderly men in the church. The word *elder* certainly has that connotation at times (1 Tim. 5:1; Luke 15:25; Acts 2:17). In that case it could mean there was a category of elderly men, similar to the widows, who were honored by being supported by the church, and the reference to “double honor” might involve an extra honorarium for those who preach and teach.

However the text seems to assume that all of these elders are ruling or leading but that some will be doing so better than others. While all the elders

were to be capable teachers (1 Tim. 3:2) perhaps not all were able to teach and preach on a regular basis.

That double honor refers to money is obvious from verse 18, where Deuteronomy 25:4 is quoted. Paul quoted this verse in 1 Corinthians 9:9-11 when he wrote about his right to receive financial support even though he didn't take advantage of this right (1 Cor. 9:12). The second quote is from Luke 10:7. Did Paul intend his statement that he is quoting *scripture* to apply to this quote as well? The Gospel of Luke did not exist at this time. If Paul is referring to a written source he might mean the same source that his companion Luke used in writing his gospel. It's interesting that both times Paul quotes the words of Jesus (1 Cor. 11:24-25) he uses the same words as Luke while the other Synoptic Gospels are slightly different. But unless this is the exception, until the end of the second century only the Old Testament was called Scripture (William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*. WBC 46; Accordance/Thomas Nelson electronic ed. Waco: Word Books, 2000, 311). But certainly the Apostle Paul considered the words of Jesus to be as authoritative as anything in the Old Testament.

It should be noted that the word translated as *honor* never refers to a salary but is used for an honorarium. It cannot be said that this text is establishing a professional clergy.

As John Carr suggested in Lesson 5, our churches seem to be organized quite differently than were the New Testament churches. It seems that the elders preached and taught in Ephesus. But so did Timothy. Was he considered to be an elder or is there another category he fit in? Timothy was never called an apostle but Ephesians 4 speaks of prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers. The elders might also be called pastors and teachers.

**5:19.** We will consider this verse separately although it is part of the discussion of sinning elders in 19-22.

This verse seems to be based on the Old Testament laws concerning witnesses (Deut. 19:15). It's also similar to the second step of reconciliation that Jesus gave in Matthew 18:16: "But if you are not listened to, take one or two others along with you, so that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses."

Is Paul saying that no accusation should be received against an elder unless the wrongdoing has been witnessed by two or three people, or is he saying that the accusation should be witnessed by two or three people?

The text is somewhat indefinite. The NRSV supplies the word, "evidence" which is its translation of the word that can also be translated *mouth* in Matthew 18. A word-for-word translation of 1 Timothy 5:19 would be, "Against an elder an accusation do not receive except if not on two or three witnesses."

If we are looking at sins of character we should have two or three witnesses to confirm it. No one is perfect all the time but character or the lack thereof does show through over time.

There are other types of sins and we are painfully aware that even people who claim to be called of God have committed heinous acts. No one would suggest that there would need to be multiple witnesses before such crimes could be investigated.

This author leans toward the idea that the witnesses are to the accusation rather than to the transgression. This is also how I read Matthew 18, that if our first attempt to reconcile with someone was not successful, then invite witnesses. The purpose of the witnesses is not to determine who is right and who is wrong but instead they witness the interaction between the persons involved. Are each of the disputants following Jesus' command to "first get the beam out of your own eye"? In other words, is each acknowledging one's own contribution to the conflict? Are they listening to each other respectfully, speaking to each other respectfully? Are they taking responsibility for their actions or passing the blame to others?

Might it be possible that Paul is suggesting that in the case of elders, believers are to skip the first step of going privately to the one who offended them? This author thinks that is possible.

I have heard leaders who have been confronted about behavior issues reply, "No one has said anything to me." I've said it myself. But over the past 11 years as I've studied how to deal with conflict I've come to the conclusion that we can never expect people to confront someone whom they see as an authority figure. They might fear reprisal and that can be a realistic fear. I've chosen to accept that as a leader I must allow others in authority to bring third-party concerns to me. And I must recognize their authority in witnessing how I respond to those concerns.

Let me add a few words of clarification. This doesn't mean that a person loses one's right to stand before one's accusers. If we're talking about an actual personal offense that must eventually happen, though not without witnesses. But quite often the discussions among church leaders are not about personal offenses but rather how a leader is leading. Those kinds of things should be able to be discussed in the spirit of working toward the improved health of the church.

One other clarification: I'm not suggesting that if a person isn't happy with a leader then it is acceptable to go around complaining about the leader. That's a beam in the eye that should not go unplucked either.

**20-21.** These verses tell us that the sins of the leadership should be taken seriously. The text isn't saying that every person in the church who sins should be publicly rebuked, but rather that elders who persist in sin should

be rebuked before the entire congregation. An elder might sin but then respond with repentance when confronted by the other elders. In that case there is no need for a public rebuke. But when the behavior persists, drastic measures are required. “But the one who did not know and did what deserved a beating will receive a light beating. From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded” (Luke 12:48). “Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers and sisters, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness” (James 3:1).

**22.** Paul makes the seriousness of this charge very clear to Timothy. We might be surprised that angels are mentioned but they will be part of the judgment (Dan. 7:10; Matt. 13:39-42). The statement somewhat echoes this one from Deuteronomy: “then both parties to the dispute shall appear before the LORD, before the priests and the judges who are in office in those days” (19:17).

**23.** Some have wondered why this verse is here in this context. Perhaps Paul realizes that Timothy might need something to settle his stomach after thinking about problems with elders.

The implication of this verse is that Timothy has chosen to not drink anything but water. Since Paul has just been writing about elders being above reproach he might think that Timothy has taken that admonition so far that he is now living an ascetic life. Paul is saying that Timothy does not have to practice total abstinence but that he can take advantage of the health benefits of a little wine. That isn't an endorsement of the social drinking that is practiced today but it also indicates that the teaching of total abstinence isn't endorsed either.

**24-25.** This verse is a warning to all. That truth should be obvious in this day and age where it seems that very little remains hidden for long if there is a cell phone in the vicinity. But people still seem to think they can get away with even murder. God will not be fooled.

## **Bible Application**

We gave considerable attention in the *Bible Learning* to the idea of leaders being willing to receive criticism from other leaders without having to face all of their accusers. The bigger picture is that in this text there is an implication that the elders of the church work together, that they honor those who rule well and they confront those who sin. It's a picture of a team that spurs itself on to winning behavior no matter what kind of heat they face. Can we have that type of elder team today?

One last way the text mirrors real life: it has twice as much written about correcting problems as there is about honoring the good. But we must remember to honor the good.

### **Life Response**

Our text today deals with the certainty that no sin will remain hidden. That's not just for church leaders, it's for everyone. May each one of us pray the prayer of the psalmist:

“Search me, O God, and know my heart;  
test me and know my thoughts.  
See if there is any wicked way in me,  
and lead me in the way everlasting.”

Psalm 139:23-24

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. How do we honor the elders in the church?
2. How does the teaching about elders receiving double honor fit with the practice of our churches?
3. What role did Timothy play in the church? How would we define the role of our pastors?
4. Would you interpret the instruction to not receive an accusation against an elder without “two or three witnesses” as involving witnesses to the *transgression* or witnesses to the *accusation*?
5. Discuss the author’s suggestion that people should not be expected to confront their leaders one-on-one.
6. What does the idea that elders who persist in sin should be rebuked before all tell us about the expectations placed on elders?
7. How can the elders of the church work together as a team that honors preaching and teaching and confronts sin?
8. Will you pray the prayer of Psalm 139:23-24?



## **Fight the Good Fight**

**Golden Text:** “Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses.” (1 Tim. 6:12)

### **Lesson Aim**

*To Know:* Our responsibilities as believers

*To Respond:* Storing up treasure for a future life, and not getting distracted by worldly values.

**Lesson Text:** 1 Timothy 6 (found in the *Bible Learning*)

### **Life Need**

Each day of our lives can present challenges that will consume our thoughts, taking us out of thinking eternally and into thinking temporally. It is truly a fight to keep our minds fixed on God’s word, to remember to apply that Word to each circumstance, letting it guide us. This chapter gives several pointers that can keep us focused on what really matters.

### **Bible Learning**

The chapter begins with advice for slaves. Such comments may seem outside our general lifestyle, but we are all able to take away some important information here.

Let all who are under the yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against. And let those who have believers as their masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but let them serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles. (v. 1-2)

While we are not “slaves” in the sense that they once existed in America, at some point each of us works for someone else. Many of us have been employed by fellow brothers or sisters in Christ. These verses are a good place to consider applying the advice Timothy is receiving. How can we be servants of God, unless our daily lives show the proper respect for both God *and* our employers?

If anyone advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming

to godliness, he is conceited, and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. (v. 3-5)

These verses apply to many “devout believers”. We have all seen “evangelists” who use media to proclaim temporal prosperity and worldly knowledge as a measure of faith. The obvious problem with measuring “gain” in these ways is that we can be led astray by the words of men. In these verses we are reminded to stay with “sound doctrine.” We need to ask ourselves if there are verses to apply to what we are hearing. Can we apply God’s word to the messages we are hearing, and are they harmonious? And, as we see at the end of verse 5, is the message about salvation, or about making a profit?

But godliness actually is a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. And if we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. (v. 6-8)

This is not the typical lifestyle of the American. We want considerably more than food and covering. It has been a blessing to visit brothers and sisters who have simply those items, to spend time with them, live with them, and learn to be content. After a certain amount of time, the “needs” of American life fade, but it seems that after a few weeks back at home, the temporal things take back over. What a dilemma. How can we keep this attitude of contentment? The more we have, it seems, the more we want.

But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang. (v. 9-10)

We have heard before that the word *love* here is the operative issue, but it doesn’t hurt to remind ourselves:

But flee from these things, you man of God; and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness. (v. 11)

Look at the list of things to flee, and place them opposite the things to pursue. Flee. Pursue. These are great words that challenge us to get our lives moving toward eternal life.

Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. (v. 12)

It is important to remind ourselves that holding on to our faith *is* a fight. We have made a confession at baptism, and we also make confession in our daily lives. Do others see our good confession?

I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of Kings, and Lord of Lords; who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light; whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (v. 13-16)

Above all, we should see the truth (doctrinal) about God in these passages. God controls the eternal dominion. He will decide when Christ returns. God alone possesses immortality, and a mortal cannot be in His presence.

Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. (v. 17-19)

It is time to take a look inward. It is time to self-assess. These instructions are for each of us, and they are especially challenging in our times. We need to find a pathway through our lives so that we are fulfilling these “works”, knowing that they are the requirement of passage for the future, the life we want that is eternal.

O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge – which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you. (v. 20-21)

Timothy had the same struggles we do. We can easily get caught up in the knowledge of today, and be pulled away from the valuable work of laying up treasure for the future. It isn’t knowledge that is to blame – it is the “profession” of claiming it as more valuable than God’s word.

## **Bible Application**

Timothy was a young man sent out on the important mission to assist in spreading the gospel to the world at that time. We see in these verses that he is being given some advice about how to handle the problems that he would encounter. We encounter those problems today. We can use these passages to keep from going astray into the world of temporal thinking, and to keep ourselves looking forward to the real treasure of eternal life.

## **Life Response**

As we make the list of things to “flee” versus things to “pursue”, it should help us become focused in the opportunities to participate in those “good works”, the very things that store up treasure of a good foundation for the future.

## **Truths to Emphasize**

1. Respect for God is a necessity.
2. Sound doctrine is important.
3. Godliness brings contentment.
4. Being faithful is a “good fight”.
5. God is the possessor of our immortality.
6. Storing up treasure for a future life involves doing good works today.

## **Questions for Discussion**

1. What things should we flee?
2. What things should we pursue?
3. What things in our lives can keep us from finding contentment?

## I Know the One in Whom I've Put My Trust

**Golden Text:** “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day. . . . Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.” (2 Timothy 1:12b, 14)

**Key Thought:** God is able to guard our salvation and our hope for the future, which we have entrusted to Him, and we are to guard what has been entrusted to us, the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

**Lesson Text:** 2 Timothy 1 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus,

<sup>2</sup> To Timothy, my dear son:

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup> I thank God, whom I serve, as my ancestors did, with a clear conscience, as night and day I constantly remember you in my prayers.

<sup>4</sup> Recalling your tears, I long to see you, so that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup> I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline. <sup>8</sup> So do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner. Rather, join with me in suffering for the gospel, by the power of God. <sup>9</sup> He has saved us and called us to a holy life – not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time, <sup>10</sup> but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior, Christ Jesus, who has destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. <sup>11</sup> And of this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher. <sup>12</sup> That is why I am suffering as I am. Yet this is no cause for shame, because I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him until that day.

<sup>13</sup> What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup> Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you – guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us.

<sup>15</sup> You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.

<sup>16</sup> May the Lord show mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains. <sup>17</sup> On the contrary, when he was in Rome, he searched hard for me until he found me. <sup>18</sup> May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day! You know very well in how many ways he helped me in Ephesus.

## **Introduction**

Have you ever given something which had great value to you to someone for safe keeping? Maybe you told them to “guard this with your life”. Now, you don’t literally mean that they should defend the item to the death, but you say that to let them know that the item is something that is very important to you and you want them to care for it and pay close attention to keeping it safe.

Of course, there are people in the world whose job it is to guard items of value. Most businesses of any size who deal with the public have security guards. To enter most government buildings or sports venues you will have to go through a security checkpoint where guards make sure you aren’t carrying any dangerous items. Banks and museums have security guards to protect their valuable items. Most hospitals have security guards who stay pretty busy. Even some of the larger “mega-churches” now have guards, especially when it comes to collecting and counting money.

It is one thing to guard an object – how much more important is it to guard a person? The movie *Blindside*, the true story of Michael Oher, tackle for the Superbowl Champion Baltimore Ravens, explained his job, to protect the blindside of the quarterback. Even a great quarterback won’t be very effective without a 350 lb man guarding his blindside.

Of course most celebrities and politicians have personal bodyguards. The President of the United States has an army of guards in the protective division of the Secret Service. They are prepared to literally take a bullet for the president. When President Reagan was shot, agent Jerry Parr likely saved his life. Agent Parr pushed the President into the limousine and threw himself on top of the President, and then had the President taken to the closest hospital, which he arranged to be prepared for their arrival.

Today’s lesson involves guarding things more precious than money, quarterbacks or even Presidents – it’s about who we trust to guard our eternal life, and it’s about us guarding the Gospel.

## **Bible Learning**

### *Called to Suffer*

Paul did not have an easy time in his ministry. From the beginning it was known that the task of bringing the Gospel to the Gentile nations would cause a great disruption and Paul would come under ongoing brutal attack. Jesus revealed to Ananias: “I will show [Paul] how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16). Jesus warned Paul at the outset of his mission that his life was going to be very painful. Today Christians are often surprised when they suffer any type of persecution for their faith, but for Paul and the other early believers it was expected. It was more than expected, Paul actually *welcomed* his sufferings, embracing them. “I want to know Christ – yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death” (Phil. 3:10).

### *Not Ashamed*

Paul recognized who called him (Jesus) and to what he was called (to be an apostle and teacher; 2 Timothy 1:11). Because of this Paul was not, in any way, ashamed of the gospel. He did not shrink back from sharing the gospel whenever or wherever he was. He did this because he trusted Jesus Christ fully with his very life. Paul says that it was Jesus who “destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel” (v. 10).

### *Paul’s Trust in Jesus*

Paul’s faith in the person and message of Jesus gave him great confidence. He possessed a deep and abiding sense of security within, knowing that regardless of what people did to him his future life was being guarded by the Messiah, the son of God, Jesus. Listen to the confidence he expresses to Timothy: “I know whom I have believed, and am convinced that he is able to guard what I have entrusted to him for that day” (v. 12). Paul uses the word *peithō*, which means “to be persuaded, to suffer one’s self to be persuaded; to be induced to believe; to have faith in a thing, to trust, have confidence, be confident.” Of course Paul had not always been that way. There was a time when he was the persecutor and enemy of Jesus and his Church. But now he is Paul the Apostle, he was persuaded, by no one less than the risen Jesus himself, to fully entrust his current life and his eternal life into Jesus’ capable hands.

Paul says that he trusts Jesus to “guard what I have entrusted to him for that day”. Paul uses the word *phylassō* which means “to guard, to watch, keep watch, to guard a person (or thing) that he may remain safe, to keep

from being snatched away, preserve safe and unimpaired, to guard from being lost or perishing.”

Paul is fully convinced that what he has entrusted to Jesus Christ, by faith, will be kept safe, it won't be snatched away. When people invest money there is always a risk. Stock prices fall, real estate ventures sometimes collapse when property values decrease, portfolios can plummet, currencies can become so inflated that they lose most of their value. There is no such thing as a “guaranteed” return on investment in the world of finances. However in the spiritual realm Paul was fully confident that what he had invested, his entire life to Jesus Christ, would one day pay huge dividends. He fully trusted Jesus to *guard* his future salvation.

### *Paul's Trust to Timothy*

Paul then tells Timothy that there is something valuable that he, Timothy, needs to guard as well. “Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14). Timothy is to *guard*, or “keep from being snatched away or lost”, the *kalos*, or “precious deposit”, that was given to him. Paul uses an interesting wordplay here. Just as he had entrusted his life and eternal life to Jesus and he had confidence that Jesus would guard it well and keep it for “that day”, Paul is also entrusting to Timothy something precious that Timothy is to guard. What is this precious deposit Timothy is to guard? “What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). Paul preached the Gospel to Timothy. The Gospel was about God's power to “save us and call us to a holy life” (v. 8), and that Jesus “destroyed death and has brought life and immortality to light”. It is a precious deposit that Paul has entrusted to Timothy.

### *Spiritual Power to help Timothy Guard the Gospel*

Fortunately, Timothy has the help of God's spirit, which lives within Timothy and every believer, to help him guard the Gospel. Timothy appears to be, by nature, rather timid (v. 7). He seems to be lacking courage to boldly proclaim the gospel message (v. 8). Paul wants him to understand that as he has been entrusted with the gospel, it is something that must be shared. God gave Timothy and all believers, His spirit which is a spirit of “power, of love and of self-discipline” (v. 7). Timothy must use this spirit to go boldly, with God's power, with God's love for the lost, and with the spiritual fruit of self-discipline, and share this gospel that Paul has entrusted to him with others.



## **Bible Application**

In the beginning of his book *Lifestyle Evangelism*, Joe Aldrich tells the story (fictional) of what happened right after Jesus ascended to heaven. He says that the Angel Gabriel asked Jesus how it went on earth and how his mission was going. He asked if everyone had come to believe the message that Jesus proclaimed. Jesus responded that he had given it to a few men and trusted them to share it with the world. Gabriel, a little incredulous, asks “do you have a back up plan in case those men don’t do what they are supposed to do?” Jesus responds, “No, there’s no other plan.” Folks, there is still no other plan. Look around your Sunday School classroom – we are the plan.

Paul trusted his life to Jesus, and Jesus entrusted the message of life to Paul, who passed it along to Timothy, who passed it along to others. The only reason you and I know about the plan and have access to the precious treasure of the Gospel is because of those who went before you and were faithful to entrust it to others. Of course, there were also many who have abandoned the faith and done nothing with what was entrusted to them. And there have been many who have distorted the message.

Several years ago an art museum in Denver acquired some paintings from a collector. It was not believed that anything in the lot had particular value. Some of it was grimy and looked as though it was covered with 50 years worth of cigarette smoke. Some were thought to be the paintings of students who copied great masterworks. However, some time later something about one grimy work caught a curator’s eye. Through hours of research, cleaning and painstaking restoration, it was discovered that the painting was an original masterwork of an 18<sup>th</sup> century Italian artist, Canaletto. A painting by him similar to that one previously sold for 17 million dollars. This treasure had been covered in smoke and grime and left for years in a basement storage room.

(<http://articles.latimes.com/2013/mar/30/nation/la-na-hometown-denver-20130331> accessed on 7/6/13) At some time in that painting’s history someone failed to properly appreciate and care for the trust its possession represented.

In 2 Kings 22 we learn about King Josiah’s plans for a Temple restoration project. While his messenger was at the Temple the high priest came and said “I have found the Book of the Law in the temple of the LORD” (v. 8). This “Book of the Law” that was found (meaning that it had been lost) was what we call the books of Moses or the Pentateuch. Part of the Bible had been lost in God’s holy Temple. This was the book that told the story of God’s saving acts, His creation, the call of Abraham, the story of the Exodus and Moses’ leadership of Israel across the wilderness, the ten commandments and 600 other laws, the instructions on sacrifices, and the

warnings against the worship of idols. All of this had been carefully recorded – and they *lost* it. That’s not doing a very good job of guarding the good deposit you’ve been given, is it?

How many Christians today are carefully guarding the deposit of God’s word? How many are faithfully and boldly, with the power of God’s spirit, sharing that treasure with others and entrusting it to their safe keeping? Is the faithful deposit of God’s word being properly guarded by today’s Christians? By your church? Do we still proclaim the message with boldness and without shame? Or has our post-modern relativism made believers a bit timid about sharing the message with others? We wouldn’t want to offend or make anyone angry, now, would we?

### **Life Response**

You have been given a sacred trust to which (and for which) many before you gave their lives. Are you willing to join Paul in “suffering for the gospel”? Are you willing to “guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you”? The gospel is the great treasure. Value it. Live it. Share it. Don’t neglect it. Don’t distort it. Don’t lose it. Guard it and share it. When will you go with boldness and make known the riches of God’s word to the world? Start today, and don’t ever quit.

### **Questions for Discussion**

1. What is the most valuable possession that you have entrusted to someone else?
2. What is the most valuable possession that someone has entrusted to you?
3. When was a time that you suffered as a Christian? How prepared for it were you?
4. Paul entrusted his life and eternal life to Jesus. – if you have done this, how does it make you feel?
5. Paul entrusted the Gospel message to Timothy – who has entrusted it to you?
6. To whom have you entrusted the Gospel message? How confident are you of their trust?
7. Evaluate how good of a job modern day Christians and churches are doing with the message that God has entrusted. Give some examples.
8. How does having the spirit of God in you help you to share what has been entrusted to you with more boldness?

## Present Yourself as One Approved

**Golden Text:** “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” (2 Tim. 2:15)

**Key Thought:** We are to be special instruments of God, as 2 Timothy 2:21 says: “Those who cleanse themselves . . . will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”

**Lesson Text:** 2 Timothy 2 (NIV) (shown in the *Bible Learning*)

### Introduction

There was no Bible college where Timothy might be sent. During the time Paul instructed Timothy for his ministry, he was enrolled in “the School of Hard Knocks”. Each of us knows from personal experience, no matter how we were prepared for God’s work, that “hard knocks” came. They seem to be inevitable.

Were you prepared to endure hard knocks? When did you first experience “spiritual” hard knocks? Do churches or parents have the responsibility for preparing their youth? Who “mentored” you in the faith?

With these questions in mind we enter into this week’s fascinating study of Paul’s ongoing instructions for Timothy.

### Bible Learning

In this chapter we again find ten points in Paul’s instructions to Timothy, which we will approach both to understand what they meant to Timothy and how they apply for us and our world. If we do not make application of these words of Paul, then his inspired writings from God are of little value for us. We might find ourselves in the place of those chided by John – “Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.” (1 John 3:18).

It should be our goal to learn what Paul was instructing Timothy and then apply it to our lives today, and not with mere *words* or *speech*, but in *action* and *truth*. Consider these ten points:

1. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

Here is the essence of what Timothy was to do: 1) take what he had heard or learned from Paul, 2) entrust it with some others to know and cherish the same truths (discipling them), and finally 3) those reliable witnesses would then be able to continue spreading these teachings to others. Presumably he followed this pattern in Ephesus and wherever he went in his ministry.

2. “No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer.”

Timothy would have clearly understood Paul’s thought about soldiers, frequently seeing Roman legionnaires. They might have been momentarily distracted before their commanding officer issued an order, but that order required an immediate response. One might wonder if Paul equated himself as a commander here, but more likely he is alluding to the Lord being commander of both Paul and Timothy.

3. “Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this.”

Paul knew that at times Timothy might wonder at what Paul had taught him. There may have been times when, in Paul’s absence and caught up with the daily routine, Timothy might have conducted himself in a lesser way. Knowing mankind’s propensity for such, he encouraged Timothy to think through carefully which of Paul’s instructions were before him, and to know the Lord himself would give him insight.

4. “This is my gospel, for which I am suffering”

There may be differing definitions of what “the gospel” is, for us Acts 8:12 suggests itself, with Phillip’s proclamation of the Kingdom and the things of Jesus. But though there are variations in expression it all is the revealing of God’s plan for mankind, which was the ministry of both Paul and Timothy.

5. “Here is a trustworthy saying:”

To Timothy these couplets were abundantly clear. If Timothy would teach reliable witnesses to endure, and even to die if and when it came to that, then they surely would live and reign with him.

Their reign was not in the present, which for both them and Paul probably contained suffering (perhaps even death for some). Their service promised them a place in the coming Kingdom. The term “Kingdom” may not seem prominent in Paul’s teaching to Timothy, but it is clear that this is the goal for Timothy and for those he taught.

The more ominous couplet for Timothy to teach states that disowning him, perhaps in a lack of witness, involved him also disowning them in a future act that would be permanent. Further they knew that though each of them might chose to be “faithless” the Lord would never do so.

6. “Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.”

This verse is central in Paul’s letter of instruction. It must have challenged this young preacher to face Paul’s words of counsel: 1) “Do your best”, and it appears Timothy did for he is further recorded as faithful in his service calling him a son and a co-worker, and commending him in 1 Corinthians 4:17. It all suggests to us that Timothy did his best, 2) He was to present himself, not just before Paul, his mentor, but before God Himself, which must have been a daunting charge, 3) He is to show himself, through his ministry, diligent, for less than that would be demeaning and leave Paul ashamed of Timothy (Timothy would also feel the sting of shame), and finally 4) He had to be carefully to rightly teach the “word” of truth. Both 2 Thessalonians 2 (especially verse 15), and Jude 3 address the treatment of the Word of the Lord (the Old Testament, but also by now some of the letters were being seen as Scripture). Paul had already seen the gospel distorted and he warned the Galatian churches over it, as he does Timothy here.

7. “Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth.”

False teachings would constantly confront Paul and also Timothy. Of Hymenaeus and Philetus we know very little. They were problems for Timothy because they had departed from the truth, in this case regarding the resurrection.

Use of the illustration of gangrene would have been powerful on Timothy and his followers because there was little that could be done to stop gangrene from spreading to the entirety of the “body” ending in its final destruction. It would have been a fearsome enemy similar to the concern over leprosy back then.

8. “Those who cleanse themselves . . . will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”

Interesting that he writes of cleansing themselves. Though we can’t really cleanse ourselves, we can come to Christ and find cleansing through his death. Perhaps Paul explains it more clearly in the Ephesian letter (which

Timothy would be aware of). We can examine Ephesians 2:8-9 for that idea, and include verse 10 for Paul’s expansion of what he intended with the last phrase of our text, in verse 21.

Being created anew in Christ, God gifts us with “spiritual gifts” (see 1 Cor. 12-14), but note that the Lord also has work He planned for us to do. It must have emboldened and encouraged Timothy to know God was with him and those he taught.

9. “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace,”

Paul was all too aware of the temptations that could entrap Timothy. There wouldn’t be much opportunity for him to slip if he was pursuing “righteousness, faith, love and peace”.

The idea of pursuit of spirituality makes us hearken back to the 15th verse and “studying” or making a real effort. Spirituality must be pursued. Evil, on the other hand, would be quick to pursue Timothy and his witness.

10. “Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

If Timothy were to confront his opponents, they generally would harden their opposition to him and the message he preached and taught.

It was by “gentle instruction” that they might be persuaded. It might not persuade them, but Paul knew the other way had led him to being beaten and imprisoned.

### **Bible Application**

Having an understanding of Paul’s message here to Timothy demands we do our best to understand how those teachings apply to us. Note again those ten points of *Bible Learning* as we try to apply them:

1. “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others.”

What Paul taught Timothy has been called the “theory of multiplication”. Paul taught Timothy, who was to teach others, who themselves would teach even others.

That has the potential for exponential growth. If you taught one and took even a year to ground them in the faith, and then the two of you taught two others for another year, well, it would be phenomenal! Let’s see . . .

Year 1: two of you. Year 2: 4 of you. Year 3: 8 of you. Year 4: 16 of you.

Year 5: 32 of you. Year 6: 64 of you. Year 7: 128 of you. Year 8: 256 of you. Year 9: 512 of you. And so on down the years.

We decide that's silly, so it doesn't happen, but can you see that it is reasonable? Paul said this was the way. What would happen to your church?

2. "No one serving as a soldier gets entangled in civilian affairs, but rather tries to please his commanding officer."

We once sang, in a quartet at a conference in Virginia, *A Volunteer for Jesus*. Its words ended with the challenge "Will you be enlisted as a volunteer?" It is our choice.

We can't be boating, biking, watching our kids play softball, picnicking or the numerous things we can find to do when we get too busy for the Lord. Yes, that means invariably being in church on Sunday. There may be some reasonable exceptions but hardly what is experienced now, especially with children's sports.

3. "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."

The Lord, through God's Holy Spirit, works within to help us understand his overall plan, and perhaps his plan for our church, and for us as his family members.

4. "This is my gospel,"

It is Paul who has said there is not another gospel, even if he tried to preach another way, he should be condemned (see Gal. 1)

5. "Here is a trustworthy saying:"

Are Paul's words trustworthy? Can they be trusted, or do we need to change them? If we can't trust what Paul has said, can we trust his words in other of his writings?

6. "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

With the trustworthiness of Paul's instructions, Timothy would find approval of the Lord, and not be ashamed. Likewise we carefully study to understand Paul's words to us from the Lord.

7. "Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth."

“False doctrines” are so dangerous because they infect others, like a bad apple in a barrel of apples (see 1 Cor. 5). Or it can spread like wildfire, such as those in Colorado this summer.

It is the responsibility of the pastor and elders to watch for any dangerous doctrinal developments and root them out. But it is also for parents and spouses to know what is “right and true” and with gentleness instruct those who may be slipping, to bring them back to the narrow path that leads us on.

8. “Those who cleanse themselves . . . will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.”

It ought to be the goal for all of us to first insure our cleansing by receiving Christ and to follow through with baptism and living holy lives as evidence of our testimony. After that, we need to realize that Christ is in us, and that he has directed his Father’s Spirit to imbue us with what we need, so that we can happily and with joy carry out those tasks for which we’ve been designed. By understanding that it is “God’s Design and Our Discovery,” we become the instruments that are useful to the Master and are prepared to “do any good work.”

That means, yes, what He designed us for, not what we decide we want to do! That ought not to frighten us, but excite us to realize we would only be doing what we’ve been designed for. Each of us is an instrument for God to use to His Glory!

9. “Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace,”

Not only the young need to flee evil desires. In this world they come at us at whatever age we might be. Immorality is rampant in our society and it takes a determined individual, young or old, female or male, to turn away.

10. “Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.”

Just as Timothy had opportunity to observe Paul, so our younger ones need to follow the lead of the pastor and elders in confronting in love opponents of Christ and of truth.

### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. How would it be possible to implement the “theory of multiplication” in our church?



2. How would you have to change to serve as a “soldier” does, in your own church?
3. What is there about Paul’s teaching that seems to make his words incompatible with our modern age?
4. What got you started doing your best in studying and rightly interpreting the words of truth that Paul espouses?
5. How have you experienced the dangers of false doctrine?
6. How did you discover your design by the Lord?

## All Scripture is Inspired by God

### *The “I” Word*

It happens all the time.

It’s said while driving through the Smoky Mountains.

You hear it as tourists gather to watch the sunset on any beach along the west coast of Florida.

Sometimes it’s uttered among morning sunbathers on South Beach near Miami.

It’s a usual response when an NBA strongman flies through the air for an impressive dunk.

It’s even spoken with feeling during a beautiful rendition of the Star Spangled Banner.

It’s heard most often in church to describe a moving song/testimony/baptism/lesson/sermon.

What’s it mean, the “I” word?

### *I-N-S-P-I-R-A-T-I-O-N from the Dictionary*

Strictly speaking, inspiration is an English word meaning divine guidance, and comes from old French and Latin terms so meaning. The Oxford English definition:

noun

1 the process of being mentally stimulated to do or feel something, esp. to do something creative: *Helen had one of her flashes of inspiration | the history of fashion has provided designers with invaluable inspiration.*

- the quality of having been so stimulated, esp. when evident in something: *a rare moment of inspiration in an otherwise dull display.*
- a person or thing that stimulates in this way: *he is an inspiration to everyone.*
- a sudden brilliant, creative, or timely idea: *then I had an inspiration.*
- the divine influence believed to have led to the writing of the Bible.

2 the drawing in of breath; inhalation.

- an act of breathing in; an inhalation.

But when it comes to the statement: “All scripture is inspired by God,” definitions are countless, derivatives are many, and a decisive declaration can be fleeting.

What did Paul mean when he used the phrase in his second letter to Timothy? Take a look at his words in context:

## **Lesson Text:** 2 Timothy 3:10-17 (NRSV)

Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived. But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and is [or, *every scripture inspired by God is also*] useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

### *Biblical Inspiration*

What kind of inspiration or divine guidance did Paul use in this letter? What did he have in mind when he referred to the sacred writings? Are those writings the same as what Paul termed “all scripture”?

Some answers are observed in the text itself. Clearly Paul was Timothy’s teacher, and he presumably used the Old Testament to instruct his young charge. That compilation of scrolls is both sacred and inspired, in Paul’s view.

Returning to the word inspiration, it translates the Greek word *theopneustos* in verse 16. The word literally means “God-breathed,” specifically that the Almighty breathed into human writers His Word. While that is the meaning of the word, there are at least four views of *how* inspiration happened.

### *Four Views of Inspiration*

One view, from neo-orthodoxy, claims that the word of God was God Himself, and thus the Bible is a *witness* to the word of God. As a witness, the Bible cannot be the word of God (that is, God is not the Bible), but the Bible still remains a mediator of the word of God in some manner. Inspiration can only come through the experiences the writers had with God, and because of human sinfulness that could become flawed, as copying errors reveal.

Another view, not widely held, is that inspiration means dictation. It’s as if God dictated the Bible word-for-word to human authors. They recorded

what they heard without any human action of circumstances or personality. When God tells Jeremiah to “speak to them all the words that I command you; do not hold back a word” (Jer. 29:2), and Jesus tells John to “write: these are the words” (Rev. 2:1), it sounds like the prophet and John recorded the exact dictation of the Lord. But in, for instance, letters of Paul, the apostle writes with passion and emotion “Who has bewitched you” (Gal. 1:6), and “God is my witness, how I long for all of you with compassion” (Phil. 1:8), feelings not dictated from God, yet reflecting God’s desired outcome. Clearly inspiration is not merely dictation.

A third view is that Scripture is inspired, yet is limited to certain aspects. God guided the writers, yet gave them freedom to express their own ideas regarding history and the experiences they had. Thus the Bible may contain some events that may not be historically accurate, but the Holy Spirit guided the writers so that the Bible is a reliable source of doctrine. Some of the biblical points which have been supposed to be historical errors have since been verified as historically legitimate through the discoveries of archaeology. This view also harps on errors being responsible for difficult passages.

A fourth view, plenary verbal inspiration, states that God inspired the complete text of the Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, including both historical and doctrinal details. Inspiration includes the very words the writers chose to use. Thus Peter, when the disciples gathered to choose a successor to Judas, could say, “Friends, the scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit through David foretold” (Acts 1:16). And Paul writes to Timothy that all scripture, especially the Old Testament is “God-breathed” (1 Tim. 3:16). Peter also wrote “that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came of human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (2 Pet. 1:20-21). As noted earlier in Paul’s letters, God allowed the writers’ own personalities to come through as they wrote. This view recognizes both the human and divine element within Scripture.

### *What Inspiration Is Not*

There are things that inspiration is not. It is not a type of writing in which the human writer’s mind has been suspended. The divine direction with which the biblical authors wrote was not a physical or psychological force. The writers had a certain freedom, spontaneity and creativeness in their writing instead of being forced out of their element.

At the same time, because God used the personality, style, and cultural conditioning of the writer does not imply the insertion of imperfections. They did not distort the truth they were recording. Even Peter observed that

God brought Paul’s uniqueness into Scripture, he wrote: “So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures” (2 Pet. 3:15-16).

In understanding the term inspiration, biblical writing is not to be equated with the inspiration of great literature, even though biblical writing is in fact great literature. Biblical inspiration is the divine revelation of the writing, while inspiration of literature refers to its literary quality

### *Inspiration of the Original Text*

Now inspiration is in reference to the text originally produced by the inspired writers. There are scholars that constantly study early writings to help us understand the original languages of the Bible and to filter out notes that copyists inserted periodically. This meticulous work is titled textual criticism. For example, the earliest texts of the New Testament were written in Uncial script (resembling all capital letters with no punctuation), while later ones were rendered in Minuscule script (with upper and lower case letters with some punctuation). Scholars read the ancient Greek text and determine by context punctuation and paragraphs. The two illustrations on this page are from *The Text of the New Testament* by Bruce Metzger, pages 10, 11. By the 1800s a standard Greek New Testament was printed, and other refinements have been included since.

Today we have a multitude of different languages, translations, and versions that seek to reflect as faithfully as possible the original documents. They all attempt to take us to the original Word. Each one comes to the task of bringing the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the New Testament, originally written in Greek, into today’s English. Some versions are closer to a word-for-word rendering, such as the King James Version, the New King James version, the New American Standard Bible, and the Revised Standard Version and the New Revised Standard Version (the latter does use inclusive language). Others are a dynamic equivalent, seeking to present an idea-for-idea rendering, such as the New International Version, the Good News Bible, the Jerusalem Bible, and others. Some, like the English Standard Version, aim for the best rendering between the word-for-word and the dynamic equivalent.

## *A Two-pronged Declaration*

When we say that all scripture is inspired by God, we are saying two things. First of all, we declare the Bible is the word of God in its historical setting. God has expressed Himself to particular people in a particular form and at a particular time. Every biblical text is a product of specific now-past circumstances. The context of each passage is shaped by the culture, thought-patterns, and language of its day.

When we say in the present tense that the Bible *is* the word of God, we recognize that He continues to reveal Himself through it. The text has relevance beyond its original audience and history.

So because we understand that the Bible *is* God's word for both history and the constant present, *application* of the Bible can be made to present-day issues – within the context of the passage, of course.

## *There is Purpose in Bible Study*

The Bible is more than a unique piece of literature, greater than a collection of literary works, more important than an object of research for enquiring minds. There are five purposes for reading and studying the Bible. Paul enumerates them in today's lesson text, part of his second letter to Timothy. Those same purposes are vital to our spiritual growth today.

**1. Scripture Shows Us Salvation.** “From childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that will bring you salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 3:15, Barclay). Any person seeking the truth about Christ and the salvation he offers must study Scripture. There is no other source which shows us how to have faith in Christ.

**2. Scripture Is Used for Teaching.** “All God-inspired scripture is useful for teaching” (2 Tim. 3:16a, Barclay). Bible doctrine and teaching about Christ can only come from the Scriptures. Any church that has no Bible study will fail to exhibit the most essential element of its reasons for being.

**3. Scripture Reproves.** “For the conviction of error” (2 Tim. 3:16b, Barclay). That does not mean we are to use the Bible for fault-finding in others. Rather, we study the Bible to find fault in ourselves. It shows where we are wrong; the error in our lives. If you ever question your thoughts, motives, and/or attitudes, better get into the Word. There you can discover your reasons for your feelings before somebody else tells you your wrongs.

**4. Scripture Is of Use for Correction (2 Tim. 3:16d).** Not only does the Bible tell you when and how you are wrong, but it offers correction; here's the way to change your wrongs. All theories, all theologies, all ethics are to be tested against the Bible. If there is contradiction with the Word, the theory is to be refused.

**5. Scripture Trains and Equips One for Righteousness and Good Works.** “For training in righteousness that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17, Barclay). There is purpose in Scripture study; it must result in service; it must not be an end in itself; it cannot be merely to enrich our own souls. If personal salvation is all there is as a result, then that person’s salvation is incomplete. An individual is saved when he or she is on fire to save another person.

### **Paul’s Example of the Inspired Life**

Returning to the first part of our text we observe how strong was the impact of Scripture on Paul. No one has done more for the word of God and lived a more inspired life than has the apostle. He survived huge persecutions under dire circumstances, yet remained true to the cause of Christ and spread the faith to both Asia and Europe in so doing. Many lives in countless house churches were impacted by him. He never flinched from his dedication to proclaiming the inspired word of God. A review of his 13 letters reveals his trust in God and His word, all the while enduring tremendous opposition. Timothy well knew all this, and now the great apostle leaves a wonderful trust to Timothy, his son in the faith.

All this comes down to us in our time. How vital is the Bible to the way we live life? How much can we endure to continue the proclamation of the Word? Where are we finding opportunity to spread the truth of Scripture? Are we inspired to live and breathe the Bible as God’s word for today? What is the next thing you will do to be an inspiration for persons to find the God of the Bible?

## “I Have Fought the Good Fight”

**Golden Text:** “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7)

**Key Thought:** Live life fully so you will not have many regrets when you face death.

**Lesson Text:** 2 Timothy 4 (NIV)

<sup>1</sup> In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: <sup>2</sup> Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage – with great patience and careful instruction. <sup>3</sup> For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. <sup>4</sup> They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. <sup>5</sup> But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.

<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day – and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

<sup>9</sup> Do your best to come to me quickly, <sup>10</sup> for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup> Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry. <sup>12</sup> I sent Tychicus to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup> When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.

<sup>14</sup> Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm. The Lord will repay him for what he has done. <sup>15</sup> You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.

<sup>16</sup> At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them. <sup>17</sup> But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth. <sup>18</sup> The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom. To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.



<sup>19</sup> Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus. <sup>20</sup> Erastus stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus. <sup>21</sup> Do your best to get here before winter. Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers and sisters.

<sup>22</sup> The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.

## Introduction

Today's verses are the last words of Paul in Scripture. He is imprisoned in Rome. Unlike his early imprisonment, spent in a rented house under guard, he is chained (2:9) in a cold dungeon (4:13) that is difficult to find (1:17). Paul believed he was near the end of his life, and indeed he was put to death shortly after writing this letter. In this passage Paul gives a personal charge to Timothy that still has application to us today. Then Paul reflects on his own life, and ends with a few personal remarks that give us significant insights into his life and situation.

If your doctor told you that you only had a few weeks to live, once you were able to reflect on your life (after your initial shock and sorrow) what would your thoughts be? Do you have many regrets? Are there things you wish you had done that you have not done? What personal charges would you want to give to your loved ones, your friends, and your church?

## Bible Learning

Paul and Timothy enjoyed a special relationship, and when Paul, realized his own death was imminent he gave a final charge to his son in the faith. He reminded Timothy that this charge was given in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and in view of Christ's judgment that will happen at his appearing and his kingdom. Paul believed that all Christians would appear before the judgment seat of Christ (Rom. 14:10-12; 2 Cor. 5:10). Our salvation is not based on our works, but rather on our faith in Christ's death for our sins. But we will receive what is *due us for the things done . . . whether good or bad* (2 Cor. 5:10) and have to *give an account of ourselves to God* (Rom. 14:12). In light of the need to give an account for how we have lived, the choices we make and the priorities we set, how should we live our lives? It is good for us to remember the account each of us will be giving. Paul makes some suggestions as to how Timothy should live.

4:2 – *Preach the word.* Timothy, and each one of us, needs to be ready to give an answer to everyone who gives us an opportunity to speak of our faith (1 Peter 3:15). The world needs to hear the clear word of God. Today there are many ideas, opinions, and theories swirling about on what is important and how we ought to live, but they are not the answer. The truth is found in the word of God. But how can people know that if they are not

told? The word must be proclaimed clearly, distinctly, boldly, and in love. God’s word offers people hope and joy and a place to belong. We must be prepared to proclaim it in any and every situation.

*Correct, rebuke, and encourage.* It is difficult to correct or rebuke others without offending them. Our goal is to help people come into a saving and meaningful relationship with God through His Son Jesus. Our goal is not to prove them wrong and us right. Yet there are times when people are living lives that are not aligned with God’s word, or they are believing things not taught in Scripture. We ought not to ignore this. We are called upon to correct and even rebuke. But it must be done in love and with humbleness. It cannot be done effectively if people do not know we love them and care about them. Correction and rebuke must come with encouragement. Remember our goal is not to win the argument but to help the person come into a deeper relationship with God and His Son Jesus. Paul reminds Timothy and us that this must be done with patience and careful instruction.

4:3-4 – The time will come, Paul warned, when people would not want to hear sound teaching, but rather would seek out teachers who tell them what they want to hear. I do not know when exactly that time came, but clearly it has arrived! People seek out teachers and churches that make them feel okay about lifestyles they have chosen which are not aligned with God’s word. They follow doctrines and teachings that are not biblical.

4:5 – In light of all these challenges, Paul exhorts Timothy (and us) to not get rattled and upset with these challenges so that we throw in the towel in discouragement. There will be challenges and hardships. Keep on keeping on. Do the work to which God has called you faithfully and to the best of your ability.

### *Paul’s Personal Reflections*

4:6 – Paul likened his own life to a drink offering to be poured out, such as the Jewish people were instructed to do in Numbers 12 and 28. He referred to his death as his departure from the living, and he believed it was imminent.

4:7-8 – Paul reflected on his 30 years of service as an apostle. He is sure he made the right choice in following and serving Jesus. Although he knew great hardship and suffered much as an apostle, he did not have regrets about his life calling. Now he was nearing the end of the race, and he had kept the faith. Paul had worked hard to discipline himself so he could be in this position to finish the race (1 Cor. 9:24-27). Just as the runner received the prize at the completion of his race, Paul knew a crown of righteousness would be given to him. He looked forward to “that day.” On “that day” Paul would receive his crown of righteousness along with everyone else who

longs for the appearing (second coming) of Jesus. You and I will receive our reward at the same time as the Apostle Paul – at that day when the Lord Jesus returns. *Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*

### *Personal Remarks*

4:9-11 – Paul wanted Timothy to come see him. Knowing he did not have long to live, Paul urged Timothy to come quickly. Crescens and Titus had been with him earlier but they had to go on to other places, probably for ministry reasons. Demas, who had been with Paul often (Col. 4:14, Philemon 24) had also left Paul. But Paul indicated that Demas left not for noble purposes, but because of worldly reasons. Paul viewed Demas’ departure as a desertion. Luke, the doctor, was still with Paul.

4:11 – Paul wants Timothy to bring Mark with him and states that Mark *is helpful to me in my ministry*. This is a fascinating admission by Paul. Mark had accompanied Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey, but left them in the midst of the trip (Acts 13:13). When Paul and Barnabas were preparing for a second missionary trip (Acts 15:36-41), Barnabas wanted to take Mark along, but Paul was adamant that Mark could not go with them because he had left them during their first trip. Barnabas and Paul had been the closest of brothers in Christ. When no one else believed in Paul, Barnabas did. He nurtured him in the faith, teaching and training Paul in ministry. Barnabas had been Paul’s spiritual mentor. But they could not settle this disagreement about Mark. Barnabas, ever the encourager, wanted to give Mark a second chance. Paul would not hear of it. *They had such a sharp disagreement that they parted company* (Acts 15:30). How sad that two brothers in Christ could not resolve this. Now, many years later, near the end of his life Paul has changed his opinion about Mark. He wants Timothy to bring Mark with him, for Mark is helpful to Paul in his ministry. Age, circumstances, and experiences have softened Paul in his view toward Mark. It is as if Paul is saying *Barnabas was right in believing in Mark, and I was wrong*. Perhaps Paul wanted to affirm to Mark that he was indeed a valued servant of their shared Lord. Perhaps this is Paul’s apology to Mark.

4:12-13 – The dungeon in which Paul was imprisoned was cold. He wanted Timothy to bring his cloak to warm him. Paul also wanted his scrolls and parchments. Paul loved his books!

4:14-15 – Someone named Alexander had done Paul great harm, and Paul warned Timothy to be on guard lest he too suffer at the hands of Alexander. Paul had instructed the church at Rome to not take revenge but to leave it to God (Rom. 12:19-21), and he followed that practice with Alexander. Christians are not to seek revenge against those who would harm them, but it does make sense to be on guard against such people.

4:16-18 – As Paul reflected back on some of the tough times he had faced, he recalled that God had been faithful, even when no one else could or did stand with him. God gave Paul strength to face and endure those challenges and still proclaim the message of God. God had delivered him from many dangers and perils. Paul had strong faith in the ultimate deliverance in God’s coming Kingdom when he and all believers would receive their rewards (2 Tim. 4:8). The heavenly kingdom Paul looked forward to was the Kingdom of God that would be established at the return of Jesus.

4:19-22 – Paul hoped Timothy could come to him before winter. He ends with personal greetings to his Christian brothers and sisters and a final prayer for Timothy.

### **Bible Application**

This last chapter of 2 Timothy, the last recorded words of the Apostle Paul, gives us a fascinating insight into Paul the person. His final admonition to Timothy shows us what Paul felt was important. Faithfully proclaim the word of God no matter what the challenges. Even if people do not want to hear, even if they twist the truth, even if it is hard, we are to proclaim the truth of God’s message as effectively as we can.

This last chapter of 2 Timothy gives us Paul’s personal reflection on his life. Although it had been challenging and difficult at times, Paul fought the good fight. God gave him strength even when there was no one else to stand with him. Throughout all the challenges, he kept the faith. And Paul knew a better world was coming at Christ’s return and the establishment of God’s perfect kingdom. The challenges of this present life are not worthy to be compared with the glory that awaits us at Christ’s return (Rom. 8:18).

As he neared the end of his life, Paul longed for the company of his close Christian friends. He wanted Timothy and Mark to come see him. He wanted to greet those he loved who were not able to visit him. He wanted his warm cloak and his books. He was ready to die when the time came.

### **Life Response**

What can we learn for our lives today from these final words written by the Apostle Paul? First, we too must faithfully proclaim the message of God for the world. Despite opposition, despite indifference to the truth, despite people’s tendency to only hear what they want to hear, we must do our part to faithfully proclaim God’s word. Sometimes that may involve correcting and rebuking, but it must be done gently and in love and with encouragement. Our goal is to help people come into a saving and fulfilling