

FIRST



A BIBLICALLY SHAPED CHURCH

PART 1

Table of Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Introduction to 1 st Timothy..... | 3 |
| 1 Timothy, Chapter 1 Overview | 7 |
| Lesson 1: Evangelistic Praying (1 Tim. 2:1-7)..... | 11 |
| Lesson 2: What About Women, Paul? (1 Tim. 2:8-15)..... | 19 |
| Lesson 3: The Good Elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7) | 29 |
| Lesson 4: The Good Deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13) | 37 |
| Lesson 5: The Church’s Conduct and Confession (1 Tim. 3:14-16)..... | 45 |
| Lesson 6: Bless God’s Good Creation (1 Tim. 4:1-5)..... | 53 |
| Lesson 7: Pursuing Godliness (1 Tim. 4:6-11) | 61 |
| Lesson 8: Succeeding in Ministry (1 Tim. 4:12-16) | 67 |
| Appendix: Answer Guide | 73 |
| Sources..... | 76 |

Introduction to 1st Timothy

First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been referred to as the “Pastoral Epistles” since the eighteenth century. It is reasonable to consider these letters together since they have striking similarities in style, vocabulary, and setting. These letters stand apart from the other Pauline letters because they were the only ones written to Paul’s gospel coworkers. The Pastoral Epistles deal with church structure issues and, unlike Paul’s other letters, were addressed to men serving in pastoral roles rather than to churches. But we must also recognize these are separate letters with their own distinctives. They were not written primarily to describe church structure or pastoral ministry (contrary to popular opinion), but to teach Christian living in response to the gospel.

CIRCUMSTANCES OF WRITING

AUTHOR: As stated in the opening of each letter, these letters were written by Paul (1Tm 1:1; 2Tm 1:1; Ti 1:1). However, many scholars today assume that Paul did not write them. This opinion is based on the differences from his other letters in vocabulary and style, alleged differences in theology, and uncertainties about where these letters fit chronologically in the life of the apostle. But the differences in style and vocabulary are not troublesome when one considers that authors often use different vocabulary when addressing different groups and situations. Rather than addressing churches in these letters, Paul was writing to coworkers who were in unique ministry settings. Hence we would expect different vocabulary. Also, the traditional view of the historical situation in which Paul wrote these letters is reasonable and defensible. Therefore, in spite of significant opposition by some scholars, there is a solid basis for accepting the Pastoral Epistles as Pauline.

BACKGROUND: Paul most likely wrote these letters after the time covered in the book of Acts. Acts closes with Paul in prison. Traditionally it has been believed that Paul was released from this imprisonment, then continued his work around the Mediterranean, perhaps even reaching Spain (Rm 15:22–29). During this time, he visited Crete and other places. First Timothy and Titus were written during this period of further mission work. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to handle some problems with false teaching there (1Tm 1:3–4). Titus had been left in Crete after the initial work to set up the church there (Ti 1:5). Eventually Paul was imprisoned again, and this led to his execution. During this final imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy to request another visit from Timothy and to give final exhortations as he anticipated his martyrdom.

MESSAGE AND PURPOSE

In each of these letters, Paul instructed one of his younger coworkers in living out his faith and teaching others to do the same. Each letter is concerned significantly with false teaching and its harmful effects in the church. In each letter Paul wrote to affirm his representative before the church, to hold up the standard of right doctrine, and to show that right doctrine must result in proper living.

In 1 Timothy Paul directed Timothy to actively oppose false teaching. He also gave instruction on the type of behavior that should characterize those in the church. The letter to Titus shows a similar purpose, albeit briefer in scope. As Paul addressed the character of church members, he presented it in light of the work of Christ. The message in 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter, is quite different. It is much more personal, a letter from one friend to another. Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the work of ministry after he was gone. Several themes are found in these letters:

THE GOSPEL: Paul expressed a concern for the truth of the gospel. The terms that Paul used in describing the gospel in the Pastoral Epistles are not common in his other writings, but they are not unique to these letters. He referred to the gospel as "the faith" (1Tm 3:9; 2Tm 4:7; Ti 1:13); "the truth" (1Tm 4:3; 2Tm 2:25; Ti 1:1); sound or healthy teaching (1Tm 1:10; 2Tm 1:13; 4:3; Ti 1:9; 2:1); and godliness or sound religion (1Tm 3:16; 6:3; Ti 1:1). Paul may have used these terms because they represent the phrases used by his opponents. As he used them, however, he renovated them for his purposes by attaching new meaning to them.

THE CHRISTIAN LIFE: Paul emphasized the importance of a response of holiness to God's act of salvation (1Tm 2:15; 4:12; 5:10; 2Tm 1:9; Ti 2:12). Holiness calls for behavior that is both positive (Ti 3:8) and negative (2Tm 2:19) in emphasis.

CHURCH GOVERNMENT: The church is presented as a united family ministering to its constituency and organized for service. The church is the family of God (1Tm 3:5, 15), and believers are brothers and sisters (1Tm 4:6; 5:1–2; 6:2; 2Tm 4:21). Paul charged the church with a responsibility to minister to the poor (1Tm 5:16) and to serve as a foundation of doctrinal and ethical truth (1Tm 3:15). Leaders of the church are known as overseers or elders (1Tm 3:1–7; 5:17–19; Ti 1:5–9), and they are assisted by deacons (1Tm 3:8–13).

CONTRIBUTION TO THE BIBLE

These letters are rich theologically and ethically. One of their key contributions is the clear way they show the connection between doctrine and ethics, belief and behavior. While these letters were not intended to provide a detailed account of church government, they do provide some significant insights on this topic. The lists of characteristics for overseers (1Tm 3:1–7; Ti 1:5–9) and deacons (1Tm 3:8–13) are the only such lists in the NT.¹

Outline of 1 Timothy

1. Doctrine Makes a Difference (1 Tim. 1:1–20)
 1. Paul's greeting to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:1–2)
 2. Timothy's charge to confront false teaching (1 Tim. 1:3–11)
 3. Paul's gratitude for gospel grace (1 Tim. 1:12–17)
 4. Timothy's charge restated (1 Tim. 1:18–20)

¹ Ray Van Neste, "1 Timothy," in *CSB Study Bible: Notes*, ed. Edwin A. Blum and Trevin Wax (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2017), 1918–1919.

2. Gospel-Shaped Living and Leadership in God's Household (1 Tim. 2:1–3:16)
 1. Gospel-shaped prayer and orderly worship (1 Tim. 2:1–15)
 2. Gospel-shaped leadership (1 Tim. 3:1–13)
 3. The mystery of godliness (1 Tim. 3:14–16)

3. Instructions for the Church and Its Leaders (1 Tim. 4:1–6:2a)
 1. False teaching in later times (1 Tim. 4:1–5)
 2. Teach and model sound doctrine (1 Tim. 4:6–16)
 3. Encourage older and younger believers (1 Tim. 5:1–2)
 4. Honor widows (1 Tim. 5:3–16)
 5. Honor elders (1 Tim. 5:17–25)
 6. Honor masters (1 Tim. 6:1–2a)²

² *1–2 Timothy and Titus: A 12-Week Study* © 2017 by Brian Tabb. All rights reserved. Used by permission of Crossway Books, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

1 Timothy, Chapter 1 Overview

The Place of the Passage

Paul writes to his dear coworker Timothy with apostolic authority and urgency. Most of Paul's other letters begin with a greeting, followed by a lengthy thanksgiving and prayer. But in 1 Timothy and Titus, Paul moves immediately from a greeting to his reason for writing. Paul urges Timothy to remain at Ephesus to confront false teachers, who lack love, sincere faith, and understanding of the law and sound doctrine (1 Tim. 1:3–11). Paul thanks God for showing mercy to himself, the “foremost” sinner (1 Tim. 1:12–17). Paul's testimony of personal transformation illustrates the truth and power of the gospel, which contrasts with the impotence of the false teaching circulating in Ephesus. Paul then restates his charge to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:18–20).

The Big Picture

In 1 Timothy 1, Paul charges Timothy to confront false teachers and to hold fast to the gospel that glorifies God and saves sinners.

Reflection and Discussion

Read through the complete passage for this study, 1 Timothy 1:1–20. Then review the following questions concerning this introductory section to 1 Timothy and write your own notes on them. (For further background, see the ESV Study Bible, pages 2325–2327, available online at www.esvbible.org.)

Paul's Greeting to Timothy (1 Tim. 1:1–2)

Paul introduces himself as “an apostle of Christ Jesus” (1 Tim. 1:1; compare 2 Tim. 1:1; Titus 1:1). This title signals Paul's status as an authoritative leader called by the Messiah Jesus and commissioned as his ambassador. Why do you think he stresses his apostleship in this letter to his close friend Timothy? How does Paul's apostolic authority relate to his reason for writing 1 Timothy? Compare 1 Timothy 1:3; 3:14–15.

Paul addresses this urgent apostolic letter to “Timothy, my true child in the faith” (1 Tim. 1:2). Similarly, he calls Timothy “my beloved child” in 2 Timothy 1:2 (see also 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 2:1; 1 Cor. 4:17; Phil. 2:22). Why does Paul describe Timothy in this way? How might Paul's opening words encourage Timothy in his challenging mission (1 Tim. 1:3)? How should the Ephesian church respond to Timothy as the apostle Paul's “true child”?

Paul begins all of his letters with the prayer “grace and peace” (1 Tim. 1:2). Grace (*charis*) adapts the Greek salutation “greetings” (*chairein*) and stresses God's undeserved favor through Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:14; Titus 2:11). Likewise, “peace” adapts the Jewish greeting shalom, which denotes wholeness and blessing. Jesus secures our peace with God (Rom. 5:1) and with one another (Eph. 2:14). First Timothy 1:2 and 2 Timothy 1:2 also include the word “mercy,”

which occurs in only these two greetings. What stands out to you about God’s mercy in 1 Timothy 1:13, 16, and 2 Timothy 1:2, 16, 18? Why do you think Paul prays for Timothy to experience God’s mercy?

Timothy’s Charge to Confront False Teaching (1 Tim. 1:3–11)

According to 1 Timothy 1:3–7, what is the problem with the content and fruits of the “different doctrine” some were teaching in Ephesus? How does Paul contrast (in 1 Tim. 1:3–7) his aim and motivation with that of the false teachers? Note at least three differences.

The false teachers seek to teach the law, but lack true understanding of it (1 Tim. 1:7). On the other hand, Paul and his coworkers understand the law’s goodness and proper use (1 Tim. 1:8). The “law” refers to the law given to Moses, and the verses that follow include several significant parallels with Exodus 20:2–17. List allusions to the Ten Commandments found in 1 Timothy 1:9–10.

Christians have often taught that there are three primary uses of the law: (1) to reveal sin, (2) to restrain wrongdoers from committing more grievous sin, and (3) to instruct believers concerning God’s will for our lives. Which of these uses of the law does Paul emphasize in 1 Timothy 1:8–10?

Paul’s Gratitude for Gospel Grace (1 Tim. 1:12–17)

Why does Paul thank Jesus in 1 Timothy 1:12–14? How do these verses relate to the occasion of the letter, described in 1 Timothy 1:3–7? In what ways did Paul’s previous life apart from Christ resemble the false teachers Timothy must confront? Compare 1 Timothy 1:6–7, 20; 6:3–4. Why did Paul receive mercy, according to 1 Timothy 1:12–13? How does Paul’s appointment as an apostle showcase the lavish grace and perfect patience of Jesus Christ (1 Tim. 1:16)? How might you explain to someone else your own experience of Christ’s saving mercy?

First Timothy 1:15 is the first of several “trustworthy sayings” found in Paul’s letters to Timothy and Titus. Look up 1 Timothy 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; and Titus 3:8. What do these “sayings” emphasize about the gospel and godly leadership in the church? How should we respond to these truths?

Timothy’s Charge Restated (1 Tim. 1:18–20)

Paul reminds Timothy of the “prophecies previously made about you,” which probably refers to Timothy’s calling and equipping for ministry (1 Tim. 1:18; compare 1 Tim. 4:14). How might these prophecies help Timothy to fulfill his charge?

Paul “handed over” his opponents Hymenaeus and Alexander to Satan (1 Tim. 1:20). First Corinthians 5:5 describes the final step of church discipline in similar terms. Church discipline is

not vindictive or mean-spirited; it aims to protect and purify the church and to restore the sinner. Why was this action necessary to protect the church at Ephesus (see [2 Tim. 2:16–18](#))? Read through the following three sections on Gospel Glimpses, Whole-Bible Connections, and Theological Soundings. Then take time to consider the Personal Implications these sections may have for you.

Gospel Glimpses

TRUTH AND LOVE. Truth and love belong together. Faithful ministers must guard the gospel and confront false teaching that distracts and damages the church. Right doctrine is essential, but it is a means to an end. The church must preserve the truth for the sake of grace-saturated, faith-driven, Christ-exalting love ([1 Tim. 1:5](#)). Such love fulfills the law ([Rom. 13:8–10](#)) and flows from being united to Jesus Christ ([1 Tim. 1:14](#)). Sound doctrine without love misses the very essence of true Christianity ([John 13:35](#); [Rev. 2:2–4](#)). Love cannot flourish or endure in times of trial apart from the nourishment and motivation of sound doctrine. The gospel is the standard of truth and the catalyst for love.

EXTRAVAGANT MERCY. Paul remembers that he was a blasphemer, persecutor, insolent opponent, and chief of sinners. He was an ignorant, unbelieving rebel, like the false teachers at Ephesus. Then, while Paul was traveling to persecute the church in Damascus, the Lord Jesus appeared to him and showered him with mercy and grace ([Acts 9:1–16](#); [1 Tim. 1:15](#)). This is one of the clearest summaries of the gospel anywhere in Scripture, and Paul stresses that it is “trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.” God’s mercy can reach anyone, even a zealous persecutor like Paul. This precious truth transformed Paul’s identity and ministry, and it should do the same for us.

Whole-Bible Connections

THE LAW IS GOOD. The law is “good” ([1 Tim. 1:8](#); compare [Rom. 7:12, 16](#)). God graciously revealed his law to Israel after rescuing them from slavery in Egypt ([Ex. 20:2](#)) and calling them to be his special people by reflecting his holiness ([Ex. 19:5–6](#); [Lev. 11:45](#)). The law established the terms of God’s covenant with Israel. Those who obey would be blessed, while rebels would be cursed ([Leviticus 26](#)). Jesus Christ fulfilled that law ([Matt. 5:17](#); [Rom. 10:4](#)): he perfectly embodied the grace and truth to which the law pointed ([John 1:17](#)), and he bore the curse of the law that we deserved ([Gal. 3:13](#)). [First Timothy 1:8–9](#) clarifies that the law must be used “lawfully,” according to its intent. Its purpose of restraining sin is not for “the just” (those who do what is right) but for “the lawless and disobedient,” to keep them from further wickedness. Christians are “not under the law” in this sense ([Gal. 5:18](#)). The gospel, not the law, is the foundation for Christian doctrine and practice ([1 Tim. 1:11](#)).

Theological Soundings

GLORY. Human beings are made to delight in glory and transcendent greatness. We celebrate gold medalists and give standing ovations after brilliant performances. These responses to

human glory are pointers to our ultimate design: God made us to see and savor his resplendent glory forever. The glory of God is the summation of the beauty and perfection of God himself. In 1 Timothy 1:11, Paul refers to “the gospel of the glory of the blessed God.” That is, the gospel displays God’s impeccable character and matchless worth. In 1 Timothy 1:16–17, Paul reflects on his personal experience of God’s saving mercy in Christ and responds fittingly with worship. God’s glory will one day illuminate the whole new creation (Rev. 21:23), and his redeemed people will experience consummate delight in seeing and celebrating his supreme glory forever.

A GOOD CONSCIENCE. “Conscience” is a person’s sense of what he or she believes to be right or wrong. Paul’s charge to Timothy is motivated by a “good conscience” (1 Tim. 1:5), and Timothy must maintain “faith and a good conscience” in his ministry (1 Tim. 1:19; compare 1 Tim. 3:9). A good conscience accurately reflects God’s revealed standards for right and wrong and guides a person’s judgments and actions. When our hearts are pure and we think and behave consistently with a good conscience, the fruit is love (1 Tim. 1:5). Someone with a seared conscience has lost all bearings for what is right or wrong, true or false (1 Tim. 4:2); that person feels no remorse or guilt for sinning against God or promoting false teaching. The conscience is a gift from God that we should consistently heed and keep tuned to God’s standards for truth.

Personal Implications

Take time to reflect on the implications of 1 Timothy 1:1–20 for your own life today. Consider what you have learned that might lead you to praise God, repent of sin, and trust in his gracious promises. Note the personal implications for your walk with the Lord in light of the (1) Gospel Glimpses, (2) Whole-Bible Connections, (3) Theological Soundings, and (4) this passage as a whole.

As You Finish This Unit . . .

Take a moment now to ask for the Lord’s blessing and help as you continue in this study of 1–2 Timothy and Titus. And take a moment also to look back through this unit of study and reflect on some key things that the Lord may be teaching you.¹

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Lesson 1 (2-5-23)

Evangelistic Praying (1 Tim. 2:1-7)

2 First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, **2**for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. **3**This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, **4**who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. **5**For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, **6**who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. **7**For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

- 1 Timothy 2:1-7 ESV

Here Paul calls for evangelistic praying **first of all**, setting this sort of prayer high on the list of priorities in his instructions to Timothy. Fervent evangelistic prayer is not only our spiritual duty, but is also an exercise of spiritual commitment that takes much time and energy. As such it is rather easily set aside. Charles Spurgeon warned,

One thing more, *the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer*. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-axe, and your weapons of war, from the armoury of sacred communication with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch His Spirit; you will be fired with the flame that burned in His breast, and consumed His life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when He saw it perishing; and if you cannot speak so eloquently as He did, yet shall there be about what you say somewhat of the same power which in Him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men. My dear hearers, especially you members of the church, I am always so anxious lest any of you should begin to lie upon your oars, and take things easy in the matters of God's kingdom. There are some of you—I bless you, and I bless God at the remembrance of you—who are in season, and out of season, in earnest for winning souls, and you are the truly wise; but I fear there are others whose hands are slack, who are satisfied to let me preach, but do not themselves preach; who take these seats, and occupy these pews, and hope the cause goes well, but that is all they do. (*The Soul Winner* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989], 246–47; italics in original)

What Christian does not pray for the salvation of friends and loved ones who do not know the Lord? The issue in this passage, however, is broader than praying for those close to us. It calls us to prayer for the lost in general; **on behalf of all people**. It raises the issue of whether God answers such prayers, and what part they play in God's salvation purpose...

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to set the church there in order. After his introductory remarks in chapter 1, Paul outlined the specific duties Timothy needed to fulfill. **First of all**, the

church must understand the importance of its evangelistic mission and the role of prayer in fulfilling it. That Paul uses **urge** instead of “command” shows that he speaks from the passion of his heart. **Then** links this passage with 1:18. The first step in Timothy’s carrying out Paul’s charge to him was to deal with the anti-evangelistic exclusivism in the Ephesian assembly.

That Paul begins his teachings on church order with this topic sheds light on the primary focus for the church. If the primary aim of the church were fellowship, knowledge of the Word, or the holiness of the saints, all those goals could perfectly be accomplished by taking us to heaven. The central function of the church on earth is to reach the lost. Paul knew that the Ephesians would never do that as long as they maintained their selfish exclusivism. To carry out their mission in the world they must be made to understand the breadth of the gospel call. And the first feature in understanding that is to come to grips with evangelistic praying. To assist them to do that, Paul gives five elements of evangelistic prayer.¹

Discussion Questions

First Timothy 2:1–2 gives instruction on prayer in at least three categories. Evaluate your own prayer life according to each element:

- a. Do you have a balance among the different kinds of prayer—*requests* for yourself, *praise* for God, *intercession* for others, and *thanksgiving*? In which of these areas would you like to grow?
- b. Consider those who benefit from our prayers: “kings and all those in authority.” Do you pray for these people? Why, or why not?
- c. Consider the purpose of praying for authorities: that we may live peaceful, quiet, godly, holy lives. Why would praying for political leaders give us peaceful, quiet lives?

What does God desire, according to 2:4?

If it is God’s desire that everyone be saved, and no one can frustrate His will (see Daniel 4:34–35), then why is it that not everyone is saved?

What three parties are mentioned in 2:5?

Why is a “mediator” needed?

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 61.

How did Jesus “give himself” as a ransom (2:6)? For whom was He given?

What was Paul’s special task, according to 2:7? In what way(s) was his ministry different from your own? In what way(s) is it similar?

Why is prayer incompatible with “anger” or “disputing” (2:8)?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson is adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995)*]

Main Idea: The central function of the church on earth is to reach the lost. To carry out this mission, the church must faithfully practice evangelistic praying.

1. The _____ of Evangelistic Prayer (2:1a)

While the first three terms Paul uses are virtually synonymous, there are some subtle shades of meaning that enrich our concept of prayer. **Entreaties (or supplications)** is from *deēsis*, the root meaning of which is “to lack,” “to be deprived,” or “to be without something.” This kind of prayer arises from the sense of need. Knowing what is lacking, we plead with God to supply it. As we look out on the masses of lost humanity, the enormity of the need should drive us to our knees in evangelistic prayer.

Proseuchē (prayers) is a general word for prayer. Unlike **entreaties**, in Scripture it is used only in reference to God. It thus carries with it a unique element of worship and reverence. Prayer for the lost is ultimately directed at God as an act of worship, because the salvation of sinners causes them to give glory to Him. In 2 Corinthians 4:15, Paul reveals that all his efforts at reaching the ungodly were to spread saving grace to more and more people so they could give thanks to God, which would abound to His glory.

Enteuxis (petitions or intercessions) appears only here and in 4:5 in the New Testament. It comes from a root word meaning “to fall in with someone,” or get involved with them. The verb from which *enteuxis* derives is used to speak of both Christ’s and the Spirit’s intercession for us (Rom. 8:26; Heb. 7:25). They identify with our needs, and become involved in our struggles. *Enteuxis*, then, is a word not only of advocacy, but also of empathy, sympathy, compassion, and involvement. Evangelistic prayer is not cold, detached, or impersonal, like a

public defender assigned to represent a defendant. Understanding the depths of their misery and pain, and their coming doom, we cry to God for the salvation of sinners.

Thanksgivings are a fourth element in evangelistic prayers. They call for us to pray with a spirit of gratitude to God that the gospel offer has been extended, that we have the privilege of reaching the lost with that gospel, and that some respond with faith and repentance. Thanksgiving is the only element of prayer that will continue forever.

These four nuances enrich our prayers as we pray effectively for the lost. If they are missing, we need to examine our hearts. Do we fully realize the desperate condition the lost are in? Do we really want to see God glorified by the salvation of souls? Do we sympathize with the compelling reality of their lostness, both for time and eternity? Are we thankful the gospel message is extended to all and for our privilege of sharing it? If those components are lacking in our hearts we will be indifferent. If we are indifferent, it is because we are not obedient to these urgings.

2. The _____ of Evangelistic Prayer (2:1b-2a)

Our prayers are all too often narrowly confined to personal needs and wants and rarely extend beyond those of our immediate circle of friends and family. In sharp contrast, however, Paul calls for evangelistic prayer **on behalf of all people**. There is no place for selfishness or exclusivity. We are not to try to limit either the gospel call or our evangelistic prayers to the elect only. After all, we have no means of knowing who are elect *until* they respond to the gospel call. Moreover, we are told that God desires all to be saved (2:4). He takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather delights when sinners turn from their evil ways and live (Ezek. 33:11). So prayer for the salvation of the lost is perfectly consistent with the heart of God. He has commanded all men to repent (Acts 17:30). We must pray that they will do so and embrace the salvation offered to all (Titus 2:11).

Out of the universal group of **all people**, Paul specifically singles out some who might otherwise be neglected in evangelistic prayer, **kings and all who are in high positions**. Because ancient (and modern) rulers are so often tyrannical, and even disrespectful of the Lord and His people, they are targets of bitterness and animosity. They are also remote, not part of the everyday lives of believers. Hence there is a tendency to be indifferent toward them.

Such neglect is a serious sin because of the authority and responsibility leaders have. The injunction here calls for the Ephesian assembly to pray for the emperor, who at that time was the cruel and vicious blasphemer, Nero. Although he was a vile, debauched persecutor of the faith, they were still to pray for his redemption. The request for **kings and all who are in high positions** is not limited to just a petition that they would be wise and just, but that they would repent of their sins and believe the gospel for the sake of their eternal souls.

Paul does not command us to pray for the removal from office of evil rulers, or those with whom we disagree politically. Believers are to be loyal and submissive to their government

(Rom. 13:1–5; 1 Peter 2:17). If the church today took the time and energy it spends on political maneuvering and lobbying and poured them into intercessory prayer, we might see a profound impact on our nation. We have all too often forgotten that “the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses” (2 Cor. 10:4). The key to changing a nation is the salvation of sinners, and that calls for faithful prayer... the ancient church, often in the worst eras of persecution, prayed for Christless rulers. If we would influence our society the way earlier Christians did theirs, we must follow their example.

3. The _____ of Evangelistic Prayer (2:2b)

Prayer for those in authority will create societal conditions favorable for the church’s evangelistic efforts. First of all, when believers are committed to praying for all their leaders it removes any thought of rebellion or resistance against them. It makes the people of Christ into peacemakers, not reactionaries... Also, when the church prays unceasingly for the lost, especially their troublesome leaders, people begin to see the church as virtuous, peaceloving, compassionate, and transcendent. Seeing that the church seeks their welfare, they will realize that it poses no threat to society, but is a welcome friend. And as more and more come to saving faith, through the prayers of Christians, the favorable conditions for the church could increase. The church that is obedient to this mandate will **lead a peaceful and quiet life**.

The church, while uncompromising in commitment to the truth, is not to be the agitator and disrupter of the national life. That is the clear teaching of Scripture. If we are persecuted, it must be for Christ’s sake, for the sake of righteous living (cf. 1 Peter 2:13–23). To promote a **peaceful and quiet life**, believers must pursue **godliness and dignity**.

4. The _____ for Evangelistic Prayer (2:3-7)

This powerful and dramatic passage answers the question “Why pray for the lost?” It is one of the most definitive statements in all of Scripture of the saving purpose of God. It contains several reasons for evangelistic prayer.

a. *Evangelistic Prayer is* _____

God defines prayer for the lost as the noble and spiritually proper thing to do, and our consciences agree. The lost suffer the agony of sin, shame, and meaninglessness in this life, and the eternal hell of unrelenting agony in the life to come. Knowing that, it is the most excellent task to pray for their salvation.

b. *Evangelistic Prayer is Consistent with* _____

Since **God desires all men to be saved**, we are not required to ascertain that a person is elect before praying for that person’s salvation. God alone knows who all the elect are (2 Tim. 2:19). We may pray **on behalf of all men** with full assurance that such prayers are **good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior**. After all, “the Lord is gracious and merciful; slow to anger and great in lovingkindness. The Lord is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works” (Ps. 145:8–9).

How God's electing grace and predestined purpose can stand beside His love for the world and desire that the gospel be preached to all people, still holding them responsible for their own rejection and condemnation, is a mystery of the divine mind. The Scriptures teach God's love for the world, His displeasure in judging sinners, His desire for all to hear the gospel and be saved. They also teach that every sinner is incapable yet responsible to believe and will be damned if he does not. Crowning the Scripture's teaching on this matter is the great truth that God has elected who will believe and saved them before the world began. What mystery!

Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and unfathomable His ways! For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who became His counselor? Or who has first given to Him that it might be paid back to him again? For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen. (Rom. 11:33–36)

c. *Evangelistic Prayer Reflects the _____*

One of the most fundamental teachings of Scripture is that **there is one God** (cf. Deut. 4:35, 39; 6:4; Isa. 43:10; 44:6; 45:5–6, 21–22; 46:9; 1 Cor. 8:4, 6). That runs counter to the pluralistic religiosity of our world, which rejects the concept of any exclusive religious truth. We are taught by the spirit of our age that the gods of the Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, and Hindus are to be charitably considered equally valid. If that were true, there would be many ways of salvation, and hence no need for evangelism. But since there is only one true God, then He is the One in whom all must believe to be saved. There is no other name under heaven by which sinners may be saved (Acts 4:12). Evangelistic prayer recognizes that all must come to the one true God.

d. *Evangelistic Prayer is Consistent with _____*

Not only is there only one God, but **one mediator also between God and men, the man Christ Jesus**. *Mesitēs* (**mediator**) refers to one who intervenes between two individuals to restore peace, or ratify a covenant. The concept of a mediator is seen in Job's lament, "There is no umpire between us, who may lay his hand upon us both" (Job 9:33). Because Christ is the only mediator, all must come to God through Him (Acts 4:12). There isn't an endless series of aeons, or subgods, as the Gnostics taught. We do not approach God through the intercession of angels, saints, or Mary. Only through **the man Christ Jesus** can men draw near to God. The absence of the article before *anthrōpos* (**man**) suggests the translation, "Christ Jesus, Himself man." As the perfect God-man, he brings God and man together. Hebrews 8:6 calls Him "the mediator of a better covenant," while Hebrews 9:15 and 12:24 describe Him as the mediator of the new covenant. All men who come to God must come through Him.

e. *Evangelistic Prayer Reflects the _____*

Ransom is a rich theological term, describing Christ's substitutionary death for us. It is not the simple word for **ransom**, *lutron*, but *antilutron*, the added preposition intensifying the meaning. Christ did not merely pay a ransom to free us; He became the victim in our place. He died our death, and bore our sin. He **gave Himself**.

The phrase **gave Himself as a ransom for all** is a comment on the *sufficiency* of the atonement, not its *design*. To apply a well-known epigram, the ransom paid by Christ to God for the satisfaction of His justice is sufficient for all, but efficacious for the elect only. Christ's atonement is therefore unlimited as to its sufficiency, but limited as to its application... So the infinite price our Savior paid was certainly sufficient for all. "Christ's expiation ... is a divine act. It is indivisible, inexhaustible, sufficient in itself to cover the guilt of all the sins that will ever be committed on earth" (Dabney, 61). Therefore salvation can sincerely and legitimately be offered to all, though only the elect will respond. Shedd writes, "The extent to which a medicine is offered is not limited by the number of persons favorably disposed to buy it and use it. Its adaptation to disease is the sole consideration in selling it, and consequently it is offered to everybody" (*Dogmatic Theology*, 2:482).

f. *Evangelistic Prayer is in Accord with* _____

And for this, Paul writes in verse 7, **I was appointed a preacher and an apostle**. This refers to the great truths that God is our Savior, Christ is our mediator, and Christ gave Himself as a ransom, as discussed in the preceding verses. Paul's divine commission was based on those truths. **Preacher** derives from the verb *kērussō*, which means to herald, proclaim, or speak publicly. The ancient world had no news media, so announcements were made in the city square. Paul was a public herald proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ. An apostle was a messenger, sent on behalf of Christ. If the gospel message was exclusive, that would undercut Paul's calling.

Paul reinforces the truthfulness of his calling **as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth** with the parenthetical statement in verse 7. He affirms **I am telling the truth, I am not lying**. In case some doubted his teaching in this passage, he insists that he is speaking the truth. We, too, are called to proclaim the gospel to the lost world. That call, like Paul's divine commission, is based on God's desire that all be saved. Evangelistic prayer acknowledges our responsibility.

5. The _____ of Evangelistic Prayer (2:8)

Having stressed the importance of evangelistic prayer, Paul now tells us with what attitude we are to pray. The Old Testament saints frequently prayed **lifting up** their **hands** (cf. 1 Kings 8:22; Neh. 8:6; Pss. 63:4; 134:2; 141:2; Isa. 1:15). But Paul's emphasis here is not on a particular posture for prayer. The **hands** symbolize the activities of life, thus **holy hands** represent a holy life. That is a prerequisite for effective prayer (cf. Ps. 66:18). **Holy** translates *hosios*, which means "unpolluted," or "unstained by evil." Those who pray for the lost must not be characterized by **anger or quarreling**. They must be holy in heart and deed.

Conclusion

The greatest example of evangelistic praying is our Lord Himself. Isaiah 53:12 tells us He "interceded for the transgressors." On the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34). God answered those prayers with three thousand converts on the Day of Pentecost, and countless thousands more through the centuries.

Do we pray for the lost like that? Do we have the passion that inspired John Knox to cry out, “Give me Scotland or I die”? Is our attitude that of George Whitefield, who prayed, “O Lord, give me souls or take my soul”? Can we, like Henry Martyn, say, “I cannot endure existence if Jesus is to be so dishonored”?

God honors evangelistic prayer. Standing among those who killed Stephen was a young man named Saul of Tarsus. Could it be that the great apostle’s salvation was in answer to Stephen’s prayer, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them”? Evangelism begins with evangelistic prayer.²

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 75.

Lesson 2 (2-12-23)

What About Women, Paul? (1 Tim. 2:8-15)

⁸ I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; ⁹ likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, ¹⁰ but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. ¹¹ Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. ¹² I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. 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—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

- 1 Timothy 2:8-15 ESV

If you're looking for a passage of Scripture that runs directly counter to the prevailing wisdom of our culture, then 1 Timothy 2:8–15 is a good place to start. Our culture is terribly twisted on issues of gender and sexuality, and the pressure for the church to compromise and conform on these issues is great... We live in a culture, in a world, and (sadly) amid a church marked by rampant sexual immorality, skyrocketing divorce, the degradation of marriage, and the confusion of gender. The current debate over homosexuality and same-sex marriage is just one example of these disturbing trends. But these issues are much larger than mere politics, and as pastor John Piper has reminded us, the results have been disastrous:

Confusion over the meaning of [manhood and womanhood] today is epidemic. The consequence of this confusion is not a free and happy harmony among gender-free persons.... The consequence rather is more divorce, more homosexuality, more sexual abuse, more promiscuity, more social awkwardness, and more emotional distress and suicide that come with the loss of God-given identity. (Piper, "Vision," 33)

The issue of manhood and womanhood strikes at the core of who we are and who God is, which makes a passage like 1 Timothy 2:8–15 sound laughable to the world. However, this passage is essential to the church. God's Word is not out of line, and it is not out of date; it is true and right and good. May we repent of our unbelief and arrogance and gladly submit to God's good design.¹

¹ David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 1 Ti 2:8–15.

Discussion Questions

What is the main point of 2:9–10? Is Paul primarily interested in what women wear, or in something else? Explain.

What does Paul command in 2:11–15? State what you believe he is saying in your own words.

What rationale does he give for his commands?

Is this passage intended only for the church at Ephesus? Or is it universal?

Why do you think Paul goes back to the Genesis creation account to support his teaching about women's role in the church? What is he trying to get at?

What points of controversy do his words raise?

How does the current sexual climate of our culture affect the church's view of men's and women's roles?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson is adapted from *David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013)]

Main Idea: Men and women should glorify God in the church by gladly submitting to the commands and patterns laid out in Scripture.

I. To _____ **Men in the Church (2:8)**

When we come to this text, we need to remember that it does not stand alone. It is tied to what comes before it in 1 Timothy and, as we'll see in chapter 3 concerning elders and deacons, what comes after. Paul was calling Timothy and the church at Ephesus to pray and to worship in light of the following realities: God's desire for the salvation of all people (2:4), God's deserving of the worship of all people (2:5), and Christ's death for all people (2:6). So we've already seen

in chapter 2 *who* to pray for and *what* to pray for. Now Paul is telling us who we need to *be* as we pray—men and women who bring glory to God in the church.

So this text does not stand alone in 1 Timothy, but neither does it stand alone in history. Paul was clearly addressing situations and problems that were evident in the church at Ephesus in the first century, and these instructions don't just come out of nowhere. They were written to a specific people at a specific time, and though we don't have all of the details, some things are clear from this passage. In verse 8 Paul talked about men who were either not leading in prayer at all, or they were praying in the church while fighting with one another. On the other hand, verses 9–12 talk about women who were wearing some distracting things to church, and they were apparently disrupting the teaching and leadership of the church in some way.

Nevertheless, even though these various instructions to men and women come out of a specific historical context, God's Word still applies to *all* people at *all* times. But in order to understand how it applies to all people in all times, we've got to put ourselves in the shoes of the people who were first hearing these words.

A. *Pray with _____ before God.* It makes no sense to hold on to sin in your life while approaching a holy God in prayer. Instead, humbly confess your sin, be cleansed by the mercy of God through Christ, and then pray with purity before God. Though Paul was addressing men in verse 8, all followers of Christ need to ask themselves the following question: Is there a deliberate sin that I am holding on to in my life? If so, confess it now. Don't play games with God. Be pure before Him.

B. *Pray with _____ before others.* This is what it means to pray "without anger or argument." Ask yourself another question: Is there anything in my life right now that is unreconciled with another brother or sister in Christ? Is there anger, quarreling, or conflict? If so, make it right. Peace with God is artificial if there is not peace with others.

II. To _____ **Women in the Church (2:9–10)**

After addressing the men, Paul turns his attention to women who had become a distraction in the church. We can infer that this was the case from his instructions in verse 9. So what exactly was Paul talking about here? Do we need to post security officers at the entrance to the church in order to check for braided hair and costly jewelry? This is another situation where it's helpful to understand the culture into which Paul was speaking, a culture that in many ways is parallel with our own.

A. *Adorn yourself with _____.* Like many ancient cities into which Christianity was born, Ephesus was filled with sexual immorality. It was common for women to use ornate fashion to attract attention to themselves, sometimes in seductive ways. But Paul gave the women in the church at Ephesus an altogether different exhortation: **Adorn yourself with modest dress.** And consequently, Christian women today should also have a different motivation in their dress than the surrounding culture.

First, Paul said, **do not draw attention to physical beauty**. Women should not dress in a way that draws other people's attention, particularly men. Their clothing should be "modest," a word that can have sexual overtones (cf. Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 83)... Along the same lines Paul gave Christian women another exhortation: **Do not draw attention to worldly wealth**. Part of the point of mentioning the "hairstyles, gold, pearls" and the "expensive apparel" is that these things were highlighting the distinction between the wealthy and the poor in the church.

B. Adore God through a _____. Don't miss Paul's point here. He's not saying, "Don't adorn yourself with anything." Instead, he's saying, "Adorn yourself with godliness." This is what matters—the fruit of faith in Christ. Paul calls on Christian women to be adorned "with good works, as is proper for women who affirm that they worship God." When you look in the mirror, look for good works. Jesus' words in Matthew 5:16 come to mind: "Let your light shine before men, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven."

May God raise up women across our churches who refuse to get up any day, especially on Sunday, and think, "What can I wear today that will make me look good to the people around me?" Instead, may our sisters in Christ ask, "How can I dress, and what can I do today that will draw the most attention to the glory of my God?" Women in the church should not distract others but instead live to attract others to God.

III. On the _____ **Roles of Men and Women in the Church (2:11–15)**

Paul continued addressing women in the rest of chapter 2. Again, he was likely addressing specific things that were going on in the church at Ephesus. We know from chapter 4 that teachers at Ephesus were encouraging men and women not to marry and thereby undercutting the beauty of marriage. And we see in chapter 5 that younger women were not getting married but were instead spending all their time gossiping in the church. When we turn to 2 Timothy, we find out that a group of women were giving in to false teaching and living according to worldly passions (2 Tim 3:6). So what we have in Ephesus is a problem, likely a significant problem, with women undercutting godly doctrine, godly behavior, and godly leadership in the church. Keep in mind, however, that Paul was not just picking on women here. He just spent all of chapter 1 railing against men in the church who were teaching false doctrine. The apostle was addressing a variety of issues in this letter.

First Timothy 2:11–15 represents one of the most controversial passages in the New Testament. As we think about how to understand these verses, we need to begin by considering two principles of interpretation, both for this passage and for any passage of Scripture.

A. Two Principles

1. The principle of _____: We interpret each Scripture in light of all of Scripture. This fits with what Paul said in 2 Timothy 3:16, that "all Scripture is inspired by God," or as the NIV translates it, "All Scripture is *God-breathed*" (emphasis added). Among other things this verse

tells us that Scripture has one author, God. And since we know that He does not contradict Himself, whenever we see two passages that *seem* to contradict each other, we should look at each passage in its context with the conviction that the passages are ultimately unified.

2. *The principle of _____: God has revealed scriptural truth in the context of specific historical and cultural settings.* God has revealed scriptural truth in the context of specific historical and cultural settings. For example, the letter of 1 Timothy was written from Paul to Timothy for the church at Ephesus in the first century, so we have a specific historical and cultural context. This should lead us to ask at least two questions when we approach the text. First, what part of the text is cultural expression (which changes)? Secondly, what part of the text is central revelation (which never changes)?

The specific example Paul gives is “elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel”; the general principle he is commending is “modest clothing ... decency and good sense.” The examples will vary in different cultures, but the principle will remain the same. Clearly God has said to all people of all times in all cultures not to be adorned with things that draw other people’s attention for the wrong reasons. That principle always remains true. If something is part of God’s central revelation, and not merely a cultural expression, then we submit to His Word.

B. Two Reminders

1. *God created men and women with equal _____.* Therefore, to demean men or women is to sin against God. Paul’s instructions in 1 Timothy 2 have nothing to do with the *value* of men and women; rather, he was talking about the *roles* of men and women. Men and women are different and distinct in their respective roles. Man was created with a role that complements woman, and woman was created with a role that complements man. And this is all by God’s good design. It is even in the nature of God. Once again, the relationships of the Trinity provide us with a helpful analogy.

2. *God created men and women with _____.* God’s good design is seen **in the home** as husband and wife relate to each other with specific, complementary roles. In Ephesians 5:22–32 Paul instructed wives to submit to their husbands “as to the Lord” (v. 22), and husbands were commanded to love their wives “just as Christ loved the church and gave Himself for her” (v. 25). In a similar way, 1 Timothy 2:11–15 tells us that there are also complementary roles **in the church**. Men and women have distinct roles to fulfill when God’s people gather together. But remember, Paul’s instructions in this passage are not new, for they accord with what we see all the way back in Genesis 1–3. Whether in the home or in the church, God has assigned equal value to men and women, yet with roles that complement each other.

C. Two Prohibitions

1. *Women should not _____ as elders/pastors/overseers in the church.* We know Paul encouraged women to teach in some settings, since Titus 2:3 makes clear that older women should teach younger women. Paul was not making a blanket statement, as if women like Beth

Moore were in sin. But what, then, was Paul saying? To understand the apostle's point, it's helpful to connect these two distinct prohibitions—do not teach and do not exercise authority over a man. This perspective is warranted from the broader context of 1 Timothy.

In chapter 3 Paul talked about elders, or pastors, with authority in the church. And these elders express their authority by doing what? By teaching. In 1 Timothy 3:2 we see that the ability to teach is a qualification for an elder, so that you lead the church through the teaching of God's Word. That's the only authority anyone has to lead in the church. We see the same thing in 1 Timothy 5, where Paul said in verse 17, "The elders who are good leaders should be considered worthy of an ample honorarium, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching." So the picture in 1 Timothy is clear that elders do two primary things: they lead and they teach. To put it another way, they teach with the authority to lead. Therefore, when Paul said women are not to teach or exercise authority over men (1 Tim 2:12), he was pointing specifically to the two primary responsibilities of elders.

At the very least two things are being prohibited in 1 Timothy 2:11–15. First, based on what we've just discussed above, it is clear that **women should not teach as elders (or pastors or overseers) in the church**. Men who don't have a gift of teaching or who don't meet the qualifications of an elder in 1 Timothy 3:1–7 likewise should not teach as elders in the church. We'll see more about elder qualifications in the next chapter, but Paul was making clear here that even a woman who has a gift of teaching is not intended by God to teach as an elder. Instead, **women listen willingly to the biblical instruction of elders**. When the text says that they should "learn in silence with full submission" (v. 11), it is not saying that once a woman steps into the gathering of the church, she should go mute. We know that because at other points in the New Testament we see women praying or prophesying when Christians gather (1 Cor 11:5). This text is simply saying that a woman should listen attentively with a teachable spirit to the God-ordained leaders in the church when they are teaching the Word.

Paul and other New Testament authors also made clear that **women should teach in various settings of the church in accord with elder instruction**. This means that, outside of elder leadership, there are all sorts of teaching possibilities for women. In addition to the command in Titus 2:3 for older women to teach younger women, Scripture mentions a number of instances where women played a significant teaching role. Consider the following:

- Timothy received instruction from his mother and grandmother (2 Tim 1:5; 3:14).
- Priscilla and her husband Aquila both took Apollos aside and "explained the way of God to him more accurately" (Acts 18:26).

There is also a more general teaching role in the New Testament, applying to both men and women. For example:

- Men and women both make disciples, which involves going, baptizing, and teaching people to obey everything Christ has commanded us (Matt 28:19–20).

- Paul told the whole church—men and women—to be “teaching and admonishing one another” as the word of Christ dwelt in them richly (Col 3:16).
- Paul seemed to allow for women praying and prophesying in public worship, though with proper humility and submission (1 Cor 11).

Women who are gifted at teaching should use their gifts to build up the body of Christ but not in the role of elder. Their teaching should be in accord with, and not contrary to, what the elders of the church teach. Of course, this requirement applies to both men *and* women who are teaching in the church.

2. *Women should not _____ as elders/pastors/overseers in the church.* Instead of exercising authority, women should “learn quietly with all submissiveness” (v. 11 ESV). By God’s grace **women submit gladly to the servant leadership of elders.** I emphasize the term “servant leadership” because it needs to be emphasized, for elders are intended by God to lead by serving, or more specifically, by serving the body with the Word of Christ. An elder or pastor is intended to love, care for, nurture, and serve the body of Christ by diligently and wisely teaching the Word of Christ. And as this happens, Paul said, women (and other men who are not elders) should gladly submit to such servant leadership. They shouldn’t rebel against the leadership of qualified, Christlike men in the church.

Does that mean, then, that a woman can never be in any type of leadership position in the church? I don’t think that’s what Paul was saying at all. Based on the rest of the New Testament, **women should lead in various positions of the church under the authority of elder leadership.** In other words, when they submit to elders, women are free to lead in a variety of different positions. They are intended by God to thrive in various ministries across the church.

When you look throughout the New Testament, you see women teaching, helping, serving, equipping, and spreading the gospel. As John Piper has said, “The fields of opportunity are endless ... for the entire church to be mobilized in ministry, male and female. Nobody is to be at home watching soaps and reruns while the world burns. God intends to equip and mobilize [all] the saints [under the leadership of] a company of qualified men who take primary responsibility for leadership and teaching in the church” (Piper, “Freedom to Minister”). Don’t tell Lottie Moon or Amy Carmichael or Elisabeth Elliot or Kay Arthur that they are sidelined in the church. These women have embraced exactly what Scripture has outlined, and they have thrived for the glory of God through ministering in the church.

D. Two Questions

1. *As a woman teaches/leads, is she reflecting _____ in Scripture?* We see women doing many different things in the New Testament, and where we see these things happening in healthy ways in the early church, we can be encouraged to see the same things happening in the contemporary church. Just as you see older women commanded to teach younger women in the New Testament church (Titus 2:3–4), so that needs to happen in our churches today. You also see women teaching children, so it is good for us to foster teaching

and leadership roles for women among children. (However, please don't forget that our children also need to see prominent men leading them in the church as well!)

2. *As a woman teaches/leads, is she reinforcing _____ in the home?*

We want to be careful not to undercut God's design in the home with the way we lead in the church. Especially in our day, we want to display godly, humble, loving, and sacrificial leadership by men in the church in a way that models that kind of leadership for men in their homes. And we also want to display glad, willing, godly submission of women in the church that models that kind of life for women in their homes. When we gather as God's people, we should point one another toward biblical faithfulness on these issues of gender.

E. Two Reasons

1. _____ *in creation: God gives authority to man.* As Paul says in verse 13 of our passage, "Adam was created first, then Eve." This statement tells us that what Paul is saying here is not just cultural expression—this is central revelation. The basis for what Paul says goes all the way back to Genesis 1–2 when God created man *before* woman, a reality that undergirds the headship of man. Paul is not basing his view merely on human opinion, which changes, but on divine revelation, which never changes.

2. _____ *of creation: man abdicates authority to woman.* When Paul said in verse 14 that it was the woman and not the man who was deceived, he was not saying women shouldn't lead because they're more easily duped. No, he was pointing back again to the picture of sin entering the world in Genesis 3, when Satan subverted God's design by approaching Eve instead of Adam, thereby undercutting Adam's responsibility as the leader of his home. In turn Adam sat back and did nothing, and God's design was distorted. In short, sin entered the world when man abdicated his God-given responsibility to lead. Man didn't step up with godly, gracious leadership. Paul used this truth to say to the church that God's design in the home and in the church is good. God's design for qualified men to lead as elders is good, just as God's design for godly men to lead as husbands is good.

F. Two Things We Don't Know For Sure

1. *Is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about _____ through the offspring of Eve?* Some commentators have said that this verse is a deliberate reference to the fact that, even though the woman ate the fruit first and sin entered the world through her, the promise remains that the Savior would enter the world through her. According to Genesis 3:15, a child would be born through Eve's line that would one day trample the serpent.

2. *Is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about the _____ of women nurturing children?* In light of the ways women's roles in the home, in marriage, and in bearing children were being undercut by false teachers, could it be that Paul was simply emphasizing the one facet that, without question, only women can do—bear children? A culture can do everything possible to minimize the differences between males and females, but this distinction still remains. No guys are giving birth. Paul was possibly saying that God has created women uniquely, and their responsibilities are uniquely good in the church, in marriage, and in bearing

children. All of this should be embraced in faith and love and holiness. In other words, women who are truly followers of Christ must and will persevere in obedience to God's will (though never perfectly) as they anticipate full and final salvation. These are the two most plausible interpretations.

G. Two Things We Do Know For Sure

1. Women are _____ as they glorify God in the distinct roles and responsibilities He has entrusted to them. There is meaning and significance behind a woman's gender, so sisters in Christ should be working out their salvation, not as generic persons but as women of God with inherent beauty and value as well as distinct giftings and opportunities. Sisters in Christ should thrive in their roles as wives, mothers, and women of God.

2. Women are _____ not through the birth of a child but through the death of Christ, who died to make us the men and women God created us to be. For that matter, women and men are saved through the death of Christ. Sin has disordered this world we live in, and Satan has distorted God's design for our manhood, our womanhood, our marriages, our families, the church, and the culture. But Christ has come, and He has conquered sin and trampled the Devil. In Christ we can all thrive. **He died to make us the men and women God created us to be.** Will you submit to God's good design?

Conclusion

Paul's command in v. 12 that women not teach or exercise authority over men in the church runs counter to a strong egalitarian emphasis in Western culture. And yet it is of a timeless nature in that it is grounded in God's design for man and woman at creation and supported by the scenario at the fall where the woman usurped the man's leadership and the man abdicated his leadership role with disastrous results. Far from being an isolated passage, the present unit is part of a pervasive biblical pattern of male leadership and male-female partnership. God's design for man and woman is one of dignity, respect, and partnership, and its application in our day calls for great wisdom and discernment.²

² Andreas J. Köstenberger, *1-2 Timothy & Titus*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander, Thomas R. Schreiner, and Andreas J. Köstenberger, *Evangelical Biblical Theology Commentary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2021), 120.

Lesson 3 (2-19-23)

The Good Elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

3 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ²Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

- 1 Timothy 3:1-7 ESV

No church can operate for long without a capable leadership team at the helm. Therefore Paul set down general guidelines for choosing people capable of doing the job. No one, of course, is perfect; but Paul laid out some fairly lofty qualifications for those who would desire to become part of the church's leadership team. If character has tended to count for less and less in secular leadership, it continues to count for a great deal in those who would hold office in the church. It is certainly not for everybody—especially the calling to teach. As another author of Scripture reminds us, “Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly” (James 3:1).¹

Discussion Questions

What is the relationship between the terms “overseer” and “elder”? Consider Titus 1:5–9; Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1–2.

When Paul writes, “Here is a trustworthy saying,” does that mean his other sayings and instructions aren't as trustworthy? What is the point of this phrase?

How is personal desire connected with the office of overseer in 3:1? Why is it important?

How could such a desire be easily perverted?

¹ The Navigators, *LifeChange: 1 Timothy*, ed. Karen Lee-Thorp, The LifeChange Bible Study Series (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress, 1996), 57.

In what way is being an overseer a “noble task”?

How does each qualification Paul lists make a better leader?

What does Paul mean by the qualification “able to teach” (1 Tim. 3:2), and why is this essential to the duties of an overseer or elder? Consider 1 Timothy 5:17; 2 Timothy 2:24–25; Titus 1:9.

Paul stresses that overseers and deacons must manage or lead their households well (1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12). What does this look like? What do you think is the vital connection between managing a family well and managing a church well?

What dangers could a young convert be exposed to if he were given a leadership role within the church?

Why is it important for an overseer to have a “good reputation with outsiders”? How would the lack of such a reputation make it easier for someone to “fall into disgrace” and “into the devil’s trap”?

Would you add any elder qualifications to Paul’s list in 1 Tim. 3? If so, what?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000)*]

Main Idea: A biblical model of church leadership is necessary for the church to display the glory of Christ in its worship and in its witness.

I. A Noble _____

Paul begins by first affirming leadership as a noble aspiration: “Here is a trustworthy saying: If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task.” The apostle hopes that certain men will aspire to leadership. The literal sense of oversight being a “beautiful task” may

convey even more of Paul's feeling. Such aspiration in a man is a lovely thing. How beautiful it is when a man sets his heart on the virtues essential to spiritual leadership.

*He who would play a leader's part
On a noble task has set his heart.*

I hope some young men who read this study will set their hearts on spiritual leadership. It is an excellent pursuit. At the same time, an overweening desire for position is reason for automatic disqualification. Such ambition indicates that a man does not understand either the job or what will be required personally and professionally.

II. Noble _____

This said, Paul now lists the noble qualifications for spiritual leaders—here called “overseers” (*episkopoi*, from which we get the word *bishop*). The word is interchangeable with another Greek word, *presbyteroi* (“elders”)—Acts 20:17, 28 and Titus 1:5 indicate they are synonymous. Thus the *episkopoi* here are church elders. The following characteristics are not exhaustive but represent the bare minimum for elders if they are to grace both the church and the world.

His _____.

Paul begins with a general charge as to the elder's reputation—“Now the overseer must be above reproach” (v. 2). This refers to his *observable conduct*. This apparently summarizes all the following qualifications, for we see that the final qualification is also about reputation: “He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap” (v. 7). Such should be his reputation that if the elder's name were posted for comment, no one would be able to bring a substantiated charge against him in respect to *anything* in the following list. High qualifications indeed!

His _____.

First place is given to the elder's marriage—“The husband of but one wife” (v. 2)—literally, a “one-woman/wife man.”...The standard here for elders is extraordinarily high. But not in the way it is so often misinterpreted. The common misinterpretation is *quantitative*—that he can have had only one wife. Thus, if he had been divorced or widowed and remarried he could not be an elder. The moral loophole in this quantitative interpretation is that a man can be married to only one woman his whole life and not be a one-woman man. It allows moral rationalization.

The correct sense here is not quantitative but *qualitative*. The man is truly a one-woman man. There are no other women in his life. He is totally faithful. He does not flirt. There are no dalliances. As George Knight says, he is “a man who having contracted a monogamous marriage is faithful to his wedding vows.” As the *New Living Translation* has it, “He must be faithful to his wife.” So the bar is set high. And no cleverness, no ancient or postmodern verbal sleight of hand can get around it! The accredited overseers of the church, who are called to teach doctrine and exercise discipline, must themselves have an unblemished reputation in the area of sex and marriage.

His _____.

The next three qualities, “temperate, self-controlled, respectable” (v. 2), group well under the heading of self-mastery. King David, who had sinned so grievously in respect to marital fidelity, ironically became an example of self-mastery amidst the misery and rebellion that followed his sin and repentance. His remarkable self-control occurred during Absalom’s rebellion when, as David fled from Jerusalem, one of Saul’s descendants, Shimei, followed alongside David pelting him with stones and tossing dirt on him as he shouted curses. Only a word and one of David’s soldiers would have dispatched him.

But with immense self-mastery David saw that Shimei’s cursings were not unexpected for the situation and left vengeance to God. The episode concludes, “So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself” (2 Samuel 16:13, 14).

Here in 1 Timothy’s triad of self-mastery, “temperate” means “clear-headed,” and David was that. “Self-controlled” means exactly what it says, and David was that too. “Respectable” refers to how people saw David. In this situation David was at his greatest! “Better ... a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32). This “temperate, self-controlled” respectability is a must for every leader. Titus too says it is a necessity for leadership (Titus 1:8). And it is possible, with God’s help: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22, 23). It is a self-mastery that comes from God. The elder must be mastered by God.

His _____.

Then there is the matter of his ministry, which is given a twofold description—“hospitable, able to teach” (v. 2)...Hospitality (*philazenos*, “love of strangers”) is a telltale virtue of the people of God. Paul told the Roman church to “Share with God’s people who are in need. Practice hospitality” (Romans 12:13). “Practice” means “pursue” or “chase” and sometimes means “strenuous pursuit.” Christians, and especially leaders, are not simply to wait for opportunities for hospitality but are to pursue them. They are to do it “without grumbling,” as Peter says (1 Peter 4:9).

Today’s elder must be a joyous host. He must invite people to his table. His home must be open. Hospitality is all over the New Testament. And the writer of Hebrews offers an enchanting motivation: “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some people have entertained angels without knowing it” (13:2). These are God’s thoughts on hospitality!

Hospitality is paired with “able to teach” as the other elder ministry distinctive. Paul gives it fuller expression in Titus: “He must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it” (Titus 1:9). This demands that the elder be a student of the Word, a man who compares Scripture with Scripture and can communicate it and, when necessary, defend the faith.

His _____.

Next there is the demand for the elder's temperance —“not given to drunkenness” (v. 3)—literally, “not lingering beside wine.” ... Paul repeats this warning to deacons in verse 8 (“not indulging in much wine”) and again to elders in Titus 1:7 (“not given to drunkenness”). This must be taken to heart today by church leaders in a culture that romanticizes drinking—*In vino veritas* (“there is truth in wine”).

His _____.

Temperance is logically followed by a prescription for a particular temperament in the elder—“not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome” (v. 3)...The Greek translated “not violent” is literally “not a giver of blows” and is metaphorical for a pugnaciousness that corresponds to quarrelsomeness. These are elder no-no's. Gentleness is the elder's approved style. This was Jesus' style as well—he was “gentle and humble in heart” (Matthew 11:29). It is also a fruit of the Spirit (cf. Galatians 5:22, 23). Paul describes this requirement fully in his second letter to Timothy: “And the Lord's servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Timothy 2:24, 25).

His _____.

Money—specifically, one's attitude toward it—plays a big role in elders' qualifications—“not a lover of money” (v. 3)...If a man has lots of money, that means God has blessed him (never mind what the Bible says about the situation); it means he's smart (well, maybe); it means he's a good manager, a practical man; that he has power; it means he can lead. Oh really? Paul speaks so explicitly to the contrary in the Pastorals. “People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs” (6:9, 10). And again in Titus 1:7, “Since an overseer is entrusted with God's work, he must be blameless—not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain.”

The point is not whether one is rich or poor. The disqualification, out of hand, for church leadership is to be “a lover of money.” Some of the richest men I know are not lovers of money. But the truth is, it is hard to have a lot of money and not love it. It is also hard to be poor and not love money. Whatever the case, one cannot love money and be qualified for church leadership.

His _____.

As Paul details the last three qualifications, he becomes more descriptive. Regarding the elder's home he says, “He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him with proper respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?)” (vv. 4, 5). This principle was especially cited because churches in those days met in homes—and very often the elders' homes. Also the word translated “family” here is *oikos* (literally, “house”) and is the same word used in verse 15 as a metaphor for the church.

Thus, the man who fails at the family *oikos* is thereby disqualified from the other *oikos*, the *church*. The commonsense application is straightforward, and its disregard has brought great trouble to God's people over the centuries—beginning with Eli of old (cf. 1 Samuel 3:13).

The word *manage* (4, 5) translates *proistamenos*, which is a word for 'leader', combining the concepts of 'rule' and 'care', and which Paul uses elsewhere of presbyters (5:17 and perhaps Rom. 12:8). It indicates that, although pastoral ministry is a servant ministry characterized by gentleness, a certain authority also attaches to it. One cannot expect discipline in the local church if pastors have not learned to exercise it in their home. (Stott)

His _____.

The logic of the next qualification is evident: "He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil" (v. 6). The language here is so expressive—"become conceited" means "filled with smoke," full of hot air, we might say—a la-la-land of self-centered fantasy that would leave them open to the same judgment passed on the errant elders for their pride, mentioned earlier in the letter. Humility seasoned by experience is an indispensable qualification for eldership.

John Stott notes, "Doubtless pastors were first called 'elders' because that is what they were, senior in age and mature in faith. Although the modern western custom of ordaining people in their twenties straight from college has much to commend it, it also has its dangers, if they have had insufficient time since conversion to put down roots and to grow up in Christ. The main danger (apart from not being mature enough to bear responsibility) is pride (too much responsibility too soon). They may become conceited. *Typhoō* is a colourful verb meaning to 'becloud' (from *typhos*, 'cloud' or 'smoke'). It describes people like the false teachers (6:4) who live in 'cloud-cuckoo-land', a realm of self-centred fantasy. Such people will fall under the same judgment as the devil (6). That is, the judgment passed on the devil for his pride will be passed on proud presbyters too. So humility is a necessary qualification for the pastorate, including humility before God in a life of personal devotion, faith and obedience."²

His _____ *again!*

The final qualification takes us full circle back to the matter of one's reputation, which is where we began—"He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (v. 7). "A good reputation" is literally a "beautiful witness"—"He must have a beautiful witness with outsiders." And indeed he will if *his reputation* is "above reproach," if *his self-mastery* is evidenced by his being "temperate, self-controlled, respectable," if in *his ministry* he is "hospitable, able to teach," if *his temperance* is evidenced by his "not [being] given to drunkenness," if *his temperament* is "not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome," if in respect to *his money* he is "not a lover of money," if *his family* is in order, if *his maturity* is established. Such a life will have a beautiful symmetry that adorns the gospel.

² John R. W. Stott, *Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 98–99.

Conclusion

You may be surprised to find that almost everything in the list in 1 Timothy 3:2–7 is expected of every follower of Christ. Other than being able to teach, these qualifications are intended by Christ for every member of the church. We might even say the qualifications for being an elder simply revolve around exemplifying the character of Christ. *Leaders* in the church are to be *models* in the church. This is why Hebrews 13:7 says to “imitate their faith.” This truth ought to weigh on anyone who aspires to lead in Christ’s church, since a man cannot lead the church somewhere he is not going himself. Here’s **the bottom line: What will happen if the church imitates this leader?**

Here are some questions to ask of a leader in the church. These questions have been taken from 1 Timothy 3:1–7; Titus 1:5–9; and 1 Peter 5:1–4, and they are grouped under four different categories.

In His Personal Life

- Is he self-controlled?
- Is he wise?
- Is he peaceable?
- Is he gentle?
- Is he a sacrificial giver?
- Is he humble?
- Is he patient?
- Is he honest?
- Is he disciplined?

In His Family Life

- Is he the elder in his home?
- If he’s single, is he self-controlled?
- If he’s married, is he completely committed to his wife?
- If he has children, do they honor him?

In His Social/Business Life

- Is he kind?
- Is he hospitable?
- Is he a friend of strangers?
- Does he show favoritism?
- Does he have a blameless reputation (not perfect but above reproach)?

In His Spiritual Life

- Is he making disciples of all nations?
- Does he love the Word?
- Is he a man of prayer?
- Is he holy?
- Is he gracious?

In the end no one will fulfill these qualifications perfectly. Each of us has numerous sins to confess daily. However, elders ought to live lives worth imitating, lives that reflect the character of Christ. They need to know the Word, teach the Word, and obey the Word so that others in the church will be instructed and spurred on to greater faithfulness. Who in your church do these qualifications bring to mind?³

³ David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 1 Ti 3:1–7.

Lesson 4 (2-26-23)

The Good Deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13)

⁸ Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. ⁹ They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless. ¹¹ Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. ¹² Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. ¹³ For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

- 1 Timothy 3:8-13 ESV

Having discussed such spiritual qualifications for elders in 3:1–7, Paul now turns to those of deacons in 3:8–13. The standard for deacons is in no way inferior to that required of elders. Elders who lead and deacons who serve perform different functions, but the spiritual qualifications required for both are essentially identical. There is no drop-off in spiritual quality or maturity from overseers to deacons. The only difference is that overseers are “able to teach” (3:2).

Diakonos (**deacon**) and the related terms *diakoneō* (“to serve”), and *diakonia* (“service”) appear approximately 100 times in the New Testament. Only here and in Philippians 1:1 are they transliterated “deacon” or “deacons.” The rest of the time they are translated by various English words. Only in those two passages is the deacon elevated to official status. The rest of the time the terms are used in a general, nonspecific sense...Everyone is a deacon in the general sense, some are specially gifted by the Holy Spirit for service, but still others hold the office of deacon. They model spiritual service for everyone else. They work alongside the elders, implementing their preaching, teaching, and oversight in the practical life of the church.

Paul wrote 1 Timothy some thirty years after the birth of the church on the day of Pentecost. The church had grown and developed to the point that there was a need for official deacons. They would function as models of spiritual virtue and service. To ensure that those given that responsibility were worthy, Paul lists several qualifications they must be measured by. As with elders, those qualifications relate to their spiritual character, not their function. In fact, no specifics are given in Scripture as to the duties of deacons. They were to carry out whatever tasks were assigned to them by the elders or needed by the congregation. In 3:8–13, Paul lists those qualifications for deacons. He then closes by mentioning the reward for those who serve faithfully.¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 124–126.

Discussion Questions

First Timothy 3:8–13 lists several qualifications for becoming a deacon. Discuss each one, comparing them with the qualifications for overseers.

Although applied specifically to deacons here, why are these qualities important for all Christians?

Paul says that men who are under consideration for becoming deacons must first be “tested” (3:10). What kind of test do you think he has in mind? What sort of test would be appropriate?

First Timothy 3:11 lists several qualifications for the wives of deacons. List them and discuss the importance of each.

Paul says that deacons who serve well “gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith.” Why do you suppose this is? Does this apply only to deacons, or to others as well? Explain.

Is someone in your church currently not in a leadership role who seems to fit the qualifications?

In what ways do all members of a church “minister” and “serve”?

What are some unbiblical job descriptions of “deacons” you have seen in churches you have attended?

What is the biblical argument against women serving as deacons? What is the biblical argument in favor? Which do you find most compelling? Why? What part does tradition play in your opinion?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000)*]

Main Idea: A biblical model of church leadership is necessary for the church to display the glory of Christ in its worship and in its witness.

I. Deacons' _____ (vv. 8-12)

1. _____ (v.8)

Although the deacon does not hold a teaching office, his position does require an elder-like bearing...Respectability is the operative word here, and in the original language it is defined by terms all beginning with “not.” First, they are to be “sincere” (literally, “not double-talkers”). He is not the kind of man who says one thing to one man and a different thing to the next...One can trust this man. He is respectable because he is credible, and he is credible because he is truthful. Second and third, he is also “not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain.” To reference Os Guinness, he is not drunk on wine or money. A man drunk on either does not deserve respect. To be a deacon is to embrace a position of character from first to last.

2. _____ belief. (v.9)

Though the deacons are not required to be “able to teach” as are elders, “They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience” (v. 9). More exactly, they must hold to “*the mystery of the faith.*” *Mystery* is a term commonly used by Paul to describe something that was once hidden but is now revealed to those who have spiritual discernment. Here it means the good news of the gospel. It is called “the mystery of the gospel” in Ephesians 6:19.

The Old Testament mystery was, how can God forgive sins? It was answered by Jesus’ death as the Father’s incarnate and sinless Son suffered the wrath we deserved, thus making forgiveness possible (cf. 1 John 2:1, 2; Romans 3:9–26). The mystery was made clear by Christ, and thus it is often called “the mystery of Christ” (cf. Ephesians 3:4; Colossians 4:3). This is what deacons must understand and hold on to: Christ Jesus died on the cross for their sins (indeed he became sin for them), and if they believe, trusting in his atoning work alone, they will be saved. In a word they must understand the mystery of the cross.

3. _____ belief. (v.9)

But there is more—a deacon must hold on to the mystery of the faith “with a clear conscience.” That is, what he understands must not only inform his life, but he must also live by it “with a clear conscience.” A man’s faith is in great shape when his conscience does not reproach the way he lives.

This matter of conscience is dominant in 1 Timothy. At the beginning of the letter Paul emphasized the necessity of a good conscience when he told Timothy to command the false teachers to stop spreading their errors, explaining that “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and *a good conscience* and a sincere faith” (1:5, italics added).

Next he told Timothy that essential to fighting the good fight is “holding on to faith and a *good conscience*” (1:19, italics added). Thus when a deacon holds on to the mysteries of the faith (the cross-centered gospel) “with a clear conscience,” he is in great shape! His belief has penetrated his soul and is informing his life.

But we must also remember that conscience alone is not enough, because our conscience can deceive us.. if your conscience is seared by sin, it is of little help. Jonathan Edwards likened conscience to a sundial and God’s Word to the sun. Only the light of the sun will give the correct reading. Moonlight cannot work. Candlelight is folly. Both will mislead you. The sunlight of Scripture will always tell the truth. And when we live by the truth “with a clear conscience,” we are in great shape.

4. _____ (v.10)

Next there is the matter of testing. The reason testing is required of deacons, and not in the preceding qualifications for elders, is that everyone was already aware of the testing required for eldership. Testing for such leaders is alluded to in 5:22, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands,” and also in verse 24 of that chapter, “The sins of some men are obvious ... the sins of others trail behind them.” The testing here in 1 Timothy 3 does not refer to an official deacons’ test or even a probationary period, but a testing as to reputation—the positive and negative evidences in a candidate’s life.

The reality is that these men may in time become elders. So early in the process the church is charged to be very careful. Pressures will inevitably come as these deacons exercise their ministries, and their inner lives will become evident. We are like saturated sponges. If we apply pressure to a sponge, we immediately see what fills it. The pressures of their ministry would reveal what they were made of.

5. _____ (v.11)

Paul is telling Timothy that a deacon must have a wife who has a respectability that matches his own, that his wife’s qualifications are part and parcel of his qualifications for the office of deacon. Indeed, she will be expected to help him fulfill his duties. There is immense common sense here not only as to the nature of marriage in which two become one, but in the strength that a godly couple will bring to a deacon’s ministry. The character qualifications of deacons in verse 8 and of the parallel qualifications for their wives in verse 11 insure that they will not only be mutually respectable but will have the same heart for ministry.

6. _____ (v.12)

Next, qualifications similar to the domestic qualifications for elders are demanded of deacons. He must be a one-wife man. No other woman can have his affections maritally, mentally, or emotionally. His wife ought to occupy his full horizon. He must love her as he loves himself. “He must pursue his own joy in the holy joy of his wife” (John Piper). He rejects as treachery anything that would alter his loving focus.

Alongside this, the domestic qualification of a well-run household—“and must manage his children and his household well,” a necessity if one is to minister to “God’s household” (v. 15)—is understood and embraced. The logic is impeccable, and the outcome is predictable, whether the church heeds this advice or rejects it.

II. Deacons’ _____ (v. 13)

The deacons “who have served well” will get a twofold reward—before men and before God. As to the first, “Those who have served well gain an excellent standing” before the people they serve. They will have the respect of and influence with the congregation. Though the office of deacon is not primarily a teaching position, it has its own eloquence...the deacon’s life speaks. Because of his *elder-like* respectability, his *informed belief* as he holds to the mystery of faith, his *living belief* that issues in “a clear conscience,” his *tested* life oozes with character. His *help-mate* is his best qualification, and he is graciously *domesticated* in relation to his wife and children. All of this provides him an excellent standing with his people. His authority goes far beyond words.

As to the second aspect of the deacons’ reward, they have “great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 13). They have confidence, even boldness, in their own faith in Christ. There is an ever-deepening confidence in drawing close to God in Christ. If it is true that what the leadership is in microcosm, the congregation will become in macrocosm (and it *is* true!), then the character of those who fill the office of deacon as well as that of elder is of utmost importance. We must pray for such leadership. We must seek such leadership. As is the leadership, so is the church.

Here’s a set of questions we might ask to discern whether someone should serve as a deacon:

- Is this person honorable?
- Is this person genuine?
- Is this person self-controlled?
- Is this person a sacrificial giver?
- Is this person devoted to the Word?
- Is this person faithful? (not perfect, but morally pure)
- Is this person honoring Christ in the home?

III. What About Women?

This is the million-dollar question. We’ve already seen that elders must be men, but what about deacons? There are basically two schools of thought on this question. Bible-believing scholars and pastors that I respect greatly differ on this difficult issue. And depending on what tradition you were raised in, you’re probably already inclined to one of these positions. But the reality is that it is not up to our preference on this issue; it’s up to the Word. Yet, even while we agree that the Word is the final authority, the Word is not entirely clear or explicit in this instance.

Some believers may look at this passage and think, “This issue *is* clear in Scripture. Can’t you read?” After saying that deacons must be “worthy of respect” and that they must have certain character qualifications in 1 Timothy 3:8–10, Paul then went on to say the following in verse 11: “Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything.” So both deacons and their wives have to display Christlike character. Doesn’t that pretty well settle the issue? How can women serve as deacons if Paul talked about deacons having wives? This is a valid question, but there’s more to consider.

We certainly don’t want to succumb to pressures from the culture when we interpret Scripture, and we don’t want to come to the text with an agenda; however, based on Scripture, I do believe it’s possible for women to serve as deacons in some settings. Let me give four reasons I believe this to be so.

First, some English translations of verse 11 address “their wives,” but the pronoun “their” is actually not in the Greek, the original language of the New Testament. Some translators think it is implied, but it’s certainly not explicit. There’s some ambiguity here, though it’s very possible that the best translation for verse 8 is not “their wives.”

Second, we need to ask this question: Why would Paul talk about deacons’ wives and not elders’ wives? This is especially curious given that more is said about an elder’s responsibility in the home according to 1 Timothy 3:1–7. Despite the fact that elders have stricter qualifications, there is no mention of their wives.

Third, the overall structure of the passage seems to lead to the conclusion that Paul was not referring to the wives of deacons in verse 8. He used the word “likewise” to transition from talking about elders in verse 7 to talking about deacons in verse 8. Paul then used this same word “likewise” in verse 11 (translated “too”) to transition into talking about deacons’ wives or, as I am trying to argue, deaconesses. It doesn’t seem natural for the flow of the passage to run like this: first elders—likewise deacons—likewise deacons’ wives. The following seems more likely: first elders—likewise deacons—likewise deaconesses.

A fourth reason for understanding the role of deacon to be open to men and women is the role given to Phoebe in Romans 16. She is referred to as a “servant of the church,” and the word used comes from *diakonos*, which would seem to point to a diaconal role. When you couple this with the picture of women who played integral leadership roles in the mission of the church, the case becomes even stronger. Paul specifically mentioned 17 of these women. The issue is not whether women can be leaders but how the Bible describes their role in the context of a local church.

When you consider the responsibilities we have outlined for deacons above—they meet needs according to the Word, they support the ministry of the Word, and they unify the body around the Word—then there is no biblical evidence whatsoever that these responsibilities should only include men. Even with this understanding, however, we need to be careful. The reality is that many churches have deacons that play a significant leadership role over the entire church, and

if that's the case, then women should not serve as deacons in those churches because they would basically be serving as elders.

There is much biblical evidence to affirm women who lead in various ways, such as hospitality, children's ministry, and visitation. It may be an adjustment for many people to think of deacons in this way, but I think we're on safe ground in the Word. In fact, I think the Word should lead us to make this adjustment if we want to be obedient in this area. In the end we want everything we do in the church to conform to God's design for the church.²

Conclusion

Given what we've seen about elders and deacons, what does this look like practically? Two applications stand out. First, **the church appoints and follows servant leaders who are wholeheartedly committed to accomplishing the mission of Christ.** This follows from what we've seen above. How does the Spirit appoint elders? Through the church. So we ask the Spirit of God to show us who these men are in the church. Scripture is obviously not specific about particular names, but we ought to pray for the Spirit's guidance in helping us discern which men are qualified to serve as elders. These are men who, according to Hebrews 13:17, we want to obey. Remember, it's scriptural to obey your leaders.

Second, **the church affirms and honors leading servants who use their gifts to build up the body of Christ.** This includes a variety of ministries within the church carried out by both men and women. Depending on the church, these roles may look a little different... These men and women are doing what is outlined in Scripture, and they should be honored, prayed for, and relied on to provide unity around Christ and His mission. That's the end goal.

The church is composed of ministers who multiply the gospel throughout the world. Following the appointment of deacons in Acts 6:1–6, we read about the result in verse 7: “So the preaching about God flourished, the number of the disciples in Jerusalem multiplied greatly, and a large group of priests became obedient to the faith.” The problems that arose in the church were threatening the growth of the church, but when biblical, Christ-honoring leaders responded, the church reorganized for multiplication. Acts 6:7 is the by-product of a biblical structure of church leadership: elders (servant leaders) gave themselves to prayer and the ministry of the Word, and deacons (leading servants) met needs, supported the ministry of the Word, and unified the body of Christ. And together all members of the church are to minister in order to see the multiplication of the gospel throughout our neighborhoods and among the nations. May it be so in all of our churches.³

² David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2013), 1 Ti 3:8–13.

³ Ibid.

Lesson 5 (3-12-23)

The Church's Conduct and Confession (1 Tim. 3:14-16)

¹⁴ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. ¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

- 1 Timothy 3:14-16 ESV

Vince Lombardi, the Hall of Fame coach of the Green Bay Packers football team, was notorious for his emphasis on fundamentals. His teams won championships because they could block, tackle, and execute better than anyone else. It is said that once, frustrated by his team's poor performance, he held up a football and said, "Gentlemen, this is a football!"

Like Coach Lombardi, the apostle Paul knew well the importance of going back to the fundamentals. He penned this letter to Timothy because the church at Ephesus was starting to drift away from the basic truths of the Christian faith. Like the Ephesians, we need regularly to be reminded of the foundational truths of our faith. The church today sponsors a bewildering variety of highly specialized ministries, everything from race track evangelism to bowling leagues for blind bowlers. People can get lost in the superficial. Further, the Bible contains such an inexhaustible treasure of knowledge that some seem to become lost in its depths. It is all too easy for churches and believers to get so involved with peripheral matters or theological minutiae that they lose sight of the primary matters. Paul writes this passage as a reminder that the church must give its attention to the essential truths.

These verses also mark a turning point in 1 Timothy. They come at the end of the first three chapters, which contain positive instruction, and before the last three chapters, which contain negative warnings. Verse 15 gives the heart of the church's mission, verse 16 the heart of its message. Before taking us to those crucial realities, however, Paul gives some background information in verses 14 and 15.¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 133–134.

Discussion Questions

Paul gives several names to the church in 1 Timothy 3:15. What does each term add to your understanding of the body of Christ?

- a. God's household:
- b. The church of the living God:
- c. The pillar and buttress of truth:

Why is "the mystery of godliness" that Paul writes about in 3:16 "great" beyond all question?

Would an unbeliever visiting your church be convinced that God dwells among you? Why, or why not?

First Timothy 3:16 is apparently an ancient hymn composed about Christ. What does each stanza of the hymn teach you about Christ? See if you can locate other Scripture references that support your assertions.

- a. He was manifested in the flesh:
- b. He was vindicated by the Spirit:
- c. He was seen by angels:
- d. He was proclaimed among the nations:
- e. He was believed on in the world:
- f. He was taken up in glory:

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [Unless otherwise noted, this lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000)]*

Main Idea: Paul clarifies the purpose of his letter to Timothy: To provide instructions on proper conduct in the church.

I. GOD'S _____ (v. 15b)

Before we take up the matter of the church's conduct and confession, we must take a good look at Paul's description of the church nestled in the last half of verse 15 where he employs three graphic phrases:

1) *God's household.*

"Household" here is undoubtedly metaphorical language for "family" because that is what it means in verses 4, 5, 12 where the word is variously translated "family" or "household" (cf. also Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:19). So the church is a family—with God as the Father, believers as his children and therefore brothers and sisters, and elders and deacons as leaders to help the family carry out the Father's purposes.

The fact that we are family has profound implications. For starters, it means we are in eternal relationship—we will always be brothers and sisters. If you are not getting along with your brothers and sisters, the "eternal" aspect may not seem so inviting. But the happy fact is, in Heaven it will be the redeemed, perfected family with whom we will dwell.

Actually, living below with the saints we know is meant to be and can be glorious—if we draw close to the Father. The Apostle John alludes to this in 1 John 1:3—"We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." There is an implicit relational triangle here, with God (Father and Son) at the pinnacle and believers at the bottom angles. So the closer our relationship to him, the closer we become to one another.

2) *The church of the living God.*

In the Old Testament God is called "the living God" to emphasize the deadness of idols. It is also a favorite designation for God in the New Testament, being used some fifteen times. It emphasizes that he is "eternal" and "immortal" (cf. 1 Timothy 1:17; 6:16). It stresses that he is the source of life and the One who communicates life to believers in Christ (cf. 1 Timothy 1:16). "What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: 'I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people' " (2 Corinthians 6:16). "And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit" (Ephesians 2:22).

Because God dwells in us, when we come together we come as "the church [the congregation] of the living God." This is the great glory of assembling together on the Lord's Day. All of us, indwelt, make up the dynamic assembly of the living God, and this induces vast spiritual encouragement among us.

Here's how this works: Listening to the Word of God alone is a good thing, and singing to God alone is also a good thing. But singing to God together and hearing his Word preached together is better! Our hearing and singing intensify when we are with brothers and sisters in whom God also dwells. "At home," says Martin Luther, "in my own house there is no warmth or vigor in

me, but in the church when the multitude is gathered together, a fire is kindled in my heart and it breaks its way through.”

This is why God’s Word is adamant that we believers meet together. “Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (Hebrews 10:25). TV church won’t do! Neither will cyber-church. People indwelt by the living God need the real thing—they need to regularly assemble with fellow temples of the living God. The Sunday gathering is an assembly of the living God!

3) *The pillar and foundation of the truth.*

“Pillar” and “foundation” (or buttress) are graphic architectural metaphors. A foundation is essential to the building; a building is only as good as its foundation. The church provides the solid bedrock of truth. Pillars stand upright on the foundation as columns and give the building its structure and beauty. The church as a pillar upholds the truth. Of course, the truth comes from God. God is the source of truth and not the church. But whenever the church is faithful to God’s Word, it is the foundation and pillar of God’s truths in this world!

This awesome reality lays equally awesome responsibilities on the church. Just as a foundation undergirds a building or a pillar supports the roof, the assembly of believers has been appointed to uphold and undergird, in this world, the truth that God has revealed through Christ. This is a divine call to allow the Word of God to saturate all of life. *How exactly do believers uphold the truth?* John MacArthur notes eight ways:

First, by _____ it. Paul gave testimony to Felix saying, “I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law, and that is written in the Prophets” (Acts 24:14). His belief in God’s Word extended to the New Covenant revelation, as Paul made clear when he spoke to the Corinthians: “We also believe, therefore also we speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). The many exhortations to hear the word also refer to hearing with faith. Jesus said in Matthew 13:9, “He who has ears, let him hear” (cf. Rev. 2:7, 11, 17, 29; 3:6, 13, 22). Christians cannot uphold the Word if they do not hear it and believe.

Second, by _____ it. The psalmist wrote, “Thy word I have treasured in my heart, that I may not sin against Thee” (Ps. 119:11). It is not enough to hear the Word, it must be hidden away in the memory. Only then can believers “always [be] ready to make a defense to everyone who asks [them] to give an account for the hope that is in [them]” (1 Peter 3:15).

Third, by _____ on it. Joshua 1:8 says, “This book of the law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it; for then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have success.” In addition to hearing and memorizing the Word, believers must meditate on it.

Fourth, by _____ it. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul urged him to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, handling accurately the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

Fifth, by _____ it. Jesus said in Luke 11:28, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God, and observe it.” It does little good to hear the Word, memorize it, meditate on it, and study it if we do not obey it.

Sixth, by _____ it. Paul told the Philippians that he was “appointed for the defense of the gospel” (Phil. 1:16). The truth will always be attacked, and the church must be ready to defend it.

Seventh, by _____ it. Paul reminded Titus that believers are to “adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect” (Titus 2:10). Having a mind controlled by the Word of God produces godly behavior (Col. 3:16ff.).

Finally, by _____ it. In obedience to our Lord’s command, believers are to “go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:19–20). The supreme mission of the church is to uphold the precious legacy of God’s Word. What a privilege to support the truth given us by our Savior (cf. John 17:14).²

These three descriptive phrases together make a compelling picture. As the church, we are family (“household”). And together we are to love as brothers and sisters who share the same heredity. We are “the church [congregation] of the living God.” We come together as multiple temples of the living God, alive in dynamic, quickened community. As the church, we are “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” The truth of God’s Word is the bedrock, mortar, and bricks of our lives.

II. HOUSEHOLD _____ (vv. 14, 15)

The verse in which this beautiful description of the church is embedded is the key verse in understanding what 1 Timothy is all about—namely, that there be proper conduct in the church. Verses 14, 15 read together make this very clear: “Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.”

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 137–138.

Conduct in the church was such a concern to Paul that virtually all of chapters 2 and 3 are a call to exemplary conduct—to holy behavior and uncontentious prayer (2:1–8), modest dress (2:9, 10), Biblical church order (2:11–15), and godly elders and deacons (3:1–13).

The motivation for this exemplary conduct was openly evangelistic, as mentioned in 2:3, 4: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth.” And here in the key verse of 1 Timothy, the call to proper conduct in the church is made even more compelling by understanding that we are family, a gathering of people indwelt by the living God, the repository and heralds of truth. When the people of God live out what they are in Christ, God is pleased to enhance the preaching of the truth of the gospel.

III. HOUSEHOLD _____ (v. 16)

Paul’s two main concerns, as expressed in this text, are about the church’s *conduct* and then the church’s *confession* in respect to what they believed about Christ. Having stated that the church is “the pillar and foundation of the truth” at the end of verse 15, Paul naturally moves on to the subject of the truth of Christ. He does so by quoting six lines from a creedal hymn about the person of Christ, which he introduces by saying, “Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great” (v. 16). Whenever Paul uses the word *mystery*, he uses it to reference Christ as the revelation of the heretofore hidden plan of salvation. So in saying here that the “mystery of godliness is great,” he is presenting the person and work of Christ as the key to godly conduct. Jesus makes godliness possible. Then comes the Christ-saturated hymn:

*He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory. (v. 16)*

The six lines of the hymn fall into three pairs of contrasting couplets.

1) The first couplet describes how Christ was _____: *He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit.* Jesus’ appearance “in the flesh” is a reference to his birth and incarnation. The eternal Son, the architect and judge of the universe, who is without beginning and without end, spoke to the Father before he became a man:

*“Sacrifice and offering you did not desire,
but a body you prepared for me;
with burnt offerings and sin offerings
you were not pleased.
Then I said, ‘Here I am—it is written
about me in the scroll—
I have come to do your will, O God.’” (Hebrews 10:5–7; cf. Psalm 40:6–8)*

Then, so to speak, he stood at the rim of the universe and dove headlong past a billion stars, through the Milky Way, and into the womb of the Virgin Mary, where he swam and grew until his birth that cold winter's night. "He appeared in a body," sang the early church. This was the initial revelation of Christ. "For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form" (Colossians 2:9).

The second half of the couplet—"vindicated by the Spirit"—refers to the corresponding bookend of his earthly life—his resurrection. Romans 1:4 explains that Christ "through the Spirit of holiness was declared with power to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead." Likewise Romans 8:11 speaks of "the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead." So the first couplet sings of the supernatural *incarnation* and *resurrection* of Christ that revealed him as the Messiah. This is the Jesus that the church must confess. Anything less is blasphemous.

2) The second couplet sings of the _____ of Christ: *seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations*. This couplet contrasts the witnesses—heavenly angels and earthly nations. One is supernatural, the other natural. One is superhuman, the other human. The angels saw everything. Angels foretold the birth of Christ to Mary and then to Joseph (cf. Luke 1:26–38; Matthew 1:18–24). At his birth, as my mind sees it, the sky was filled with angelic witnesses who sang:

*"Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to men
on whom his favor rests." (Luke 2:14)*

After Christ's temptation, "the devil left him, and angels came and attended him" (Matthew 4:11). In Gethsemane as he sweat as it were great drops of blood, "An angel from heaven appeared to him and strengthened him" (Luke 22:43). Angels witnessed the Resurrection and sat by his empty tomb (cf. Luke 24:4, 23). Angels comforted the disciples as he ascended to Heaven (cf. Acts 1:10, 11). And presently Jesus is adored in glory by vast angelic hosts who sing, "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" (Revelation 5:12). And this same Jesus will return with his angels as our King and deliverer (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4:16). He was indeed "seen by angels." They could not get enough of him, and never will! The angels were the least removed from him, and the Gentiles were farthest removed. And he "was preached among the nations." The whole realm of intelligent creation saw him. There was cosmic witness to Christ on earth and in Heaven.

3) The third couplet sings of the _____ given to Christ: *believed on in the world, taken up in glory*. Here we see his reception in two separate geographies—earth and Heaven. He "was believed on in the world." Regarding this the Apostle John wrote, "He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:10–12). And again, "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). We have believed on him in the world! Because of this, Paul's triumphant shout is ours!

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his unlimited patience as an example for those who would believe on him and receive eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:15–17)

At the end, his earthly reception was crowned with his heavenly reception—“was taken up in glory.” This, of course, refers to Christ’s ascension. If the angels sang in wonder at the birth of Christ when he came down to earth, how they must have sung when he returned to Heaven! What a shout must have gone up when the everlasting gates lifted for the King of glory! They were all there to meet him—the angels who raised their flaming swords at the gates of Eden, the angel of the Apocalypse who stood with one foot on the sea and the other on the land, the archangels Michael and Gabriel.

Here is the point: The magnificent Christ of this grand confession makes possible the godly conduct that Paul so earnestly desires. We are the church. We are family—“God’s household.” God is our Father, and we are brothers and sisters. We are “the church of the living God.” He lives in each of us. We together are “the pillar and foundation of the truth.” And because of this, what we believe and confess about Christ is everything.

We confess that he was revealed by his incarnation and resurrection. We confess that he was witnessed by heaven and earth. We confess that he was received in earth and in Heaven. Because we are the church, and because we confess such a Christ, we can and must conduct ourselves in a way that brings glory to him. As the apostle told another church, “So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God” (1 Corinthians 10:31).

Conclusion

In six short stanzas, this hymn summarizes the gospel. God became man, died for our sins, triumphed over death, was honored by angels and feared by demons, and ascended into heaven. This message was preached all over the world and many believed and were saved. That is the heart of the message it is our mission to proclaim to the world.

There once was an old church in England. A sign on the front of the building read “We preach Christ crucified.” After a time, ivy grew up and obscured the last word. The motto now read, “We preach Christ.” The ivy grew some more, and the motto read, “We preach.” Finally, ivy covered the entire sign, and the church died. Such is the fate of any church that fails to carry out its mission in the world.³

³ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 143.

Lesson 6 (3-19-23)

Bless God's Good Creation (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

- 1 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV

Since creation, the earth has been the battleground between God and Satan. God calls mankind to respond to His Word, and Satan tries to lure them to follow lies. Some claim satanic perversions to be the truth from God. Sadly, even some who profess to follow God's truth turn away from it.

Such deviations from the true faith are nothing new. Among the many examples of apostasy in the Old Testament was King Amaziah of Judah...The New Testament also has its share of apostates, men like Judas Iscariot (John 6:70–71) and Demas (2 Tim. 4:10). The church at Ephesus had seen Hymenaeus and Alexander depart from the faith (1:18–20). Church history from New Testament times until our own day is replete with examples of apostates. They have turned aside to follow **deceitful spirits and teachings of demons**. It is fallen angels, those demonic beings, who energize all false religion. Like their evil master, Satan, their deception is effective because they disguise themselves as angels of light (2 Cor. 11:14)...

The presence of apostate false teachers at Ephesus is indicated from 1:3–7, 18–20. In chapters 2 and 3, Paul dealt with some of the ramifications of their false teaching and corruption of the church. He countered their deceptions with the divine design for men and women in the church, and the spiritual qualifications for true church leaders. Chapter 3 closed with a creedal statement affirming what apostates most directly deny and what is the central truth of the Christian faith: the Person and work of Jesus Christ. In chapter 4, Paul returns to his discussion of the false teachers themselves. The battle lines are thus sharply drawn. While not always popular in our day of toleration and "love," there is a biblical mandate to deal directly and firmly with false teaching.¹

¹ John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 145–146.

Discussion Questions

Where did Paul get his knowledge of “later times”? How certain is this knowledge?

How does Paul characterize the false teachers of 4:2? Do they know that what they are teaching is false? Explain.

What orders did these teachers give their followers (4:3)?

What was wrong with these orders?

What is the main point of 4:4–5?

What false doctrine have you heard on radio, movies, TV, or the Internet?

When you are faced with what you know (not just suspect) is false teaching, how should you react?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *John F. MacArthur Jr., 1 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995)*]

Main Idea: While not always popular in our day of toleration and “love,” there is a biblical mandate to deal directly and firmly with false teaching.

I. The _____ of Apostasy (4:1c)

The key to unlock this passage is the phrase in verse 1, **some will fall away [or depart] from the faith**. There will be those, like Judas, Demas, and the false disciples of John 6:66, and those often warned in Hebrews, who abandon the faith. **Fall away** is from *aphistēmi*, which means “to depart from,” or “to remove oneself from the position originally occupied to another place.” This term can refer to a simple geographical leaving (cf. Luke 2:37; 4:13; Acts 5:37; 12:10). But in the spiritual sense, it refers to those who come very close to the truth that saves, only to leave. Jesus used this verb when He described some who hear the gospel as being like seed

falling on soil that has rockbed below the surface: “Those on the rocky soil are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no firm root; they believe for a while, and in time of temptation fall away (*aphistemi*)” (Luke 8:13). Here it is used to describe apostasy, to identify the tragic reality that some will act like Judas and turn their face from eternal joy to choose hell.

An apostate is not someone struggling to believe, but one who willfully abandons the biblical faith he had once professed. As already noted, **the faith** refers to the content of divine revelation that constitutes what Christians believe (cf. Jude 3). This phrase, then, describes an apostate, a rejector of Christ from within the ranks of the church.

II. The _____ of Apostasy (4:1a)

Whereas apostasy should sadden and outrage believers, it should neither shock nor surprise them, because **the Spirit explicitly says** that it will occur. This prediction is part of His ongoing revelation in Scripture on the subject of apostasy. In the Old Testament, He warned of the consequences of apostasy (Deut. 28:15:ff.; Ezek. 20:38), and gave numerous examples of apostates (Ex. 32; 1 Sam. 15:11; Neh. 9:26; Ps. 78). The New Testament also warns of apostasy, particularly at the time of the end just before the Lord’s return. Our Lord warned of false christs who would deceive many (Matt. 24:4–12). Paul wrote to the Thessalonians about the wholesale departure from the faith that will take place during the future time of tribulation (2 Thess. 2:3–12). Peter and Jude warned of mockers, who, in the end time would depart from the faith (2 Peter 3:3; Jude 18). The apostle John cautioned that “it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18; cf. 4:1–6). But apostasy, though escalated in the end time, is not limited to that era. The writer of Hebrews exhorted his readers, “Take care, brethren, lest there should be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart, in falling away from the living God” (Heb. 3:12; cf. 5:11–6:8; 10:26–31).

Paul knew that Ephesus would not be spared efforts to deceive people into abandoning the truth. In his farewell address to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:29–30 he said, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”

As the revelation from the Spirit in Scripture shows, apostasy is predictable, and inevitable. There will always be those who make a temporary response to the gospel, but have no genuine faith in God. We should not be surprised when they leave, and should remember the words of John, “They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19).

III. The _____ of Apostasy (4:1b)

Paul defines the time frame in which apostasy will take place as the **later times**. The **later times** include, but are not limited to, the eschatological future. The first coming of Christ ushered in the **later** or last **times**, which was the Messianic era. First John 2:18 supports this fact when it says simply, “Children, it is the last hour.” First Peter 1:20 states that Christ “has appeared in these last times for the sake of you.” The writer of Hebrews informs us that God “in these last days has spoken to us in His Son” (Heb. 1:2), and “now once at the consummation of the ages [Christ] has been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself” (Heb. 9:26). From the first coming of our Lord to His return, through all this age of the church, apostasy will occur and escalate toward the end when “most people’s love will grow cold” (Matt. 24:12).

IV. The _____ of Apostasy (4:1d)

As already noted, apostasy is generated by demonic beings. Ephesians 6:12 says that the battle for the truth and the kingdom of heaven is a struggle “not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.” **Paying attention to** is from *prosechō*. The verb expresses more than merely listening to something. It means “to assent to,” “to devote oneself to,” or “cling to something.” The present tense of the participle shows that apostates continually cling to demonic teaching. They understand the facts of the gospel intellectually, and outwardly identify with the Christian faith. Since their hearts are not right with God and they do not have the Spirit to teach and protect them (cf. Jude 19), however, they are lured away by *deceitful spirits*.

Apostates are not actually the victims of sophisticated university professors, false religious leaders, or wickedly clever writers or speakers. They are the victims of demonic spirits, purveying lies from the depths of hell through such humans. False teaching is thus something far more than a human aberration, it is nothing less than the **doctrines of demons**. Satan and his agents have concocted all manner of lying theologies to confuse and deceive. To sit under false teaching that contradicts the truth of Scripture is to be taught by demons, and to put one’s mind and soul in jeopardy. It is no wonder, then, that the Bible cautions against exposing oneself to false doctrine. In his second epistle, the apostle John wrote,

Many deceivers have gone out into the world, those who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh. This is the deceiver and the antichrist. Watch yourselves, that you might not lose what we have accomplished, but that you may receive a full reward. Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting participates in his evil deeds. (vv. 7–11)

We are to rescue those under the influence of false teaching like we would snatch a stick out of the fire, being careful not to get burned ourselves (Jude 23).

The history of demonic seduction dates back to Satan's successful tempting of Eve in the Garden of Eden. Throughout human history, culminating in the terrible influence of demons in the Tribulation (Rev. 9:2–11; 13:14; 16:14; 18:2, 23; 19:20; 20:2, 3, 8, 10), **deceitful spirits** will ply **doctrines of demons**. Through God's mercy, however, true believers will not succumb (Ps. 44:18; Heb. 6:9; 10:39; Jude 24–25).

V. The _____ of Apostasy (4:2)

Demonic false teaching is purveyed through human agents. While the source is supernatural, the agents are natural. The phrase **the hypocrisy of liars** translates two nouns in the Greek text and could be rendered "hypocritical or deceitful lie-speakers." To purvey their hellish teachings, demons use human deceivers who speak their lies. They may be religious leaders, and appear outwardly good and devout. They may teach in an ostensibly Christian college or seminary. They may pastor a church, or write theological books or commentaries. Though they wear the mask of religion (even Christianity) and wear a mask of piety, they do not serve God, but Satan. They blaspheme God. Sitting under such teachers has no redeeming value, and it results in being exposed to spiritual gangrene (2 Tim. 2:17–18).

The false teachers are able to go about their devilish business without restraint because they are **seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron**...The false teachers can carry out their hypocrisy because their consciences have been destroyed. **Conscience** is the faculty that affirms or condemns an action (cf. Rom. 2:14–15). It is the sensitivity to right and wrong that controls behavior. Paul looked to his conscience as the divinely given witness to the condition of his soul (cf. Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:3). The apostle has already stated that false teachers reject "a good conscience" (1:19), which is the very goal Paul pursued (1:5). The false teachers' consciences have been so ignored and misinformed that they have become like scar tissue burned senseless, which cease to function. With scarred consciences, they feel no guilt or remorse as they purvey their false doctrines.

VI. The _____ of Apostasy (4:3a)

Anything contrary to Scripture can be the entry point of demonic teaching. We might have expected the apostle to follow his severe comments about demon doctrine with examples like denying the Trinity or the deity of the Savior, or rejecting salvation by grace. But Satan is so subtle and seeks to gain a foothold on territory more easily yielded. Paul gives a sample of what was being taught at Ephesus. The deceivers there were focusing on two seemingly minor teachings: that spirituality demanded avoiding **marriage** and **abstaining from foods**. As is typical of satanic deception, both of those teachings contain an element of truth. There is nothing wrong with singleness, and such a state may aid spiritual service. First Corinthians 7:25–35 honors those designed by God to be single. Nor is fasting wrong; it is an important accompaniment to prayer (cf. Matt. 6:16–17; 9:14–15). The deception comes in seeing those as essential elements of salvation. The devising of human means of salvation is a hallmark of all false religion.

VII. The _____ of Apostasy (4:3b-5)

The fundamental error of such apostate teaching is that it rejects divine revelation. *All* false teaching is a denial of God's Word. All through the Pastoral Epistles, Paul confronts false teachers for their treatment of Holy Scripture (cf. 1 Tim. 1:3–11; 6:3–5, 20–21; 2 Tim. 2:14–18; 23–26; 3:13–17; 4:1–4; Titus 1:9–16; 3:9–11). Contrary to the false teaching plaguing Ephesus, God created both marriage and food and pronounced them good (cf. Gen. 1:28–31; 2:18–24; 9:3). God created marriage and food to be **gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth**. How then can it be right to deny them to men? God made marriage and food for the same reason He made everything else—to give man joy and to bring Himself glory (cf. 1 Cor. 10:31). Unbelievers, while they enjoy marriage (“the grace of life”—1 Peter 3:7) and food, do not fulfill that ultimate intention and praise God for them. So in the truest sense, God made marriage and food for **those who believe and know the truth**, because they are the ones who will glorify Him for such gracious goodness. How foolish to abstain from his kindness and thus deny God the right to be glorified for their enjoyment!

The Ephesian deceivers refused to recognize that **everything created by God is good**. They flatly denied the goodness of God's creation, which would have led them to understand that **nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude**. Paul once again emphasizes that God's purpose in giving good things to men is so that, in their enjoyment of those gifts, they would praise Him. By gratefully receiving God's gracious gifts, believers fulfill that noble intention for which those things were created. The doxology of Romans 11:36 sums up this perspective: “For from Him and through Him and to Him are all things. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.”

At the close of creation week, God pronounced everything He had created “good” (Gen. 1:31). Those good things from God that believers gratefully receive are **sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer**. To be **sanctified** is to be set apart for holy use. The **means** by which that is accomplished are **the word of God and prayer**. **Prayer** obviously refers to the thanksgiving that expresses gratitude. **The word** seems to refer to the very word in Genesis 1:31, that everything God made was good. There is a double sanctifying, or setting apart from all that is sinful. But it is also possible that Paul has in mind more than Genesis 1:31, namely, the New Testament gospel.

In the Pastoral Epistles, the **word of God** refers to the message of salvation (cf. 2 Tim. 2:9; Titus 2:5). Through that message, believers have come to know the truth in Christ. Part of that truth is that Christ has abolished the dietary laws. According to Mark 7:19, our Lord “declared all foods clean” (cf. Acts 10:9–15; Rom. 14:1–12; Col. 2:16–17). The dietary regulations were temporary, intended to teach Israel the importance of discernment and to isolate the nation from the pagan societies around them. To reimpose them now would be to manufacture a works righteousness system that denies the work of Christ and dishonors God. If believers understand that the gospel has abolished the dietary laws, and in **prayer** offer God thanks, they can receive all His good gifts, and He will be glorified.

Mandatory celibacy and abstinence from foods in general or particular is the teaching of demons. It denies the goodness of God's creation, and robs Him of the glory and praise He is due for that goodness. It also is a denial of God's truth, as revealed in His Word. Mere externalism neither pleases God nor promotes genuine spirituality.

Conclusion

Apostasy is an ever-present danger to the church. Believers can avoid the false teaching that feeds it only by giving heed to God's Word. They would do well to pay attention to the warning issued by the writer of Hebrews: "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were thus occupied were not benefitted" (Heb. 13:9).²

² John F. MacArthur Jr., *1 Timothy*, MacArthur New Testament Commentary (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 155.

Lesson 7 (3-26-23)

Pursuing Godliness (1 Tim. 4:6-11)

⁶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. ¹¹ Command and teach these things.

- 1 Timothy 4:6-11 ESV

It is clear that when the Apostle Paul focused on the practical life of the church, the godliness of the people was of intense concern. Of the fifteen occurrences of *godliness* in the New Testament, thirteen are in the brief span of the Pastoral Letters (1 and 2 Timothy and Titus), with a whopping nine in 1 Timothy alone. Since the Pastorals are the last of the old apostle's letters, the matter of godliness is naturally charged with final urgency.

For Paul *godliness* is no static, stained-glass word. It is active—kinetic obedience that springs from a reverent awe of God. It is the Isaiah-like action that has a man, awestruck by God, rise from his face saying, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8). Awe—then action! Godliness is not piety as we generally think of it—upturned eyes and folded hands. Godliness cannot be cloistered. The godly among us are those people whose reverent worship of God flows into obedience throughout the week. Only God-struck doers of the Word can rightly be termed godly.

Furthermore, true godliness is rooted in the mystery of Christ...Jesus is the essence and wellspring of godliness. He lived in godliness, and now as ascended Lord he gives us godliness. Godliness is not external but is the inner power to live a godly life (cf. 2 Timothy 3:5; 2 Peter 1:3). The mystery of Christ makes godliness possible. Jesus strikes us with awe and then enables active obedience...In the following paragraphs (vv. 6–10) Paul lays out the correct approach to godliness—which, ironically, he describes as coming through *diet* and *discipline*.¹

Discussion Questions

How was Timothy to respond to false teachings (4:6)? What example does this suggest for us?

¹ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 104–106.

What is Timothy to avoid in 4:7? Why? What is he to pursue instead?

How could he, and we, do this practically?

What comparison does Paul make between “physical training” and “godliness training” in 4:8? How easy is it for you to keep the proper balance? Explain.

When you hear the word *godly*, what picture comes to mind? Why? Who is the most godly person you know personally? What makes this person godly?

For what did Paul “toil and strive” in 4:10? In what sense did he toil and strive for this—to gain it, or for some other reason?

“Universalists” believe that everyone will ultimately be saved. They take passages such as Luke 23:34; Romans 5:18; 1 Timothy 4:10, and 2 Peter 3:9 and teach that no one ultimately will be lost. How would you answer such a contention?

What kind of physical training do you do? What kind of godliness training do you do? Which of the two do you spend the most time on?

How can you practically pursue godliness? (See Psalm 4:3; 32:6; Acts 8:2; 2 Corinthians 7:10–11; 11:2; 2 Timothy 3:12; Titus 2:12; 2 Peter 2:9; 3:11)

Is there anything in your life for which you can honestly say that you “toil and strive”? What do you think you *should* be laboring and striving for? What would it take for you to change your habits or behavior, if that is required?

Was there anything from last week’s sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000)*]

Main Idea: In 1 Tim. 4:6–10, Paul lays out the correct approach to godliness.

I. _____ FOR GODLINESS (vv. 6, 7a)

Paul first addresses the matter of a good spiritual diet. To have a good spiritual diet, one must:

1. *Reject* _____.

Essential to a health-giving spiritual diet is rejection of junk food, here described as “irreverent, silly myths.” The trash that was coming from the false teachers was “godless” in that it was radically opposite to what is sacred...The primitive history of the Old Testament was overlaid with ridiculous legends, its genealogies were given absurd symbolism, and then it was sugarcoated with demon-inspired asceticism that promised spiritual superiority through sexual and dietary abstinence. Junk teaching! Reject it, says Paul.

2. *Dine on* _____.

Positively, Paul encourages Timothy to “put these things before the brothers.” In doing so, he tells Timothy, “you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (v. 6). Timothy is to be continually feeding himself with the content of the gospel and apostolic teaching. Significantly, this nourishment in the Word was essential to Timothy’s being “a good minister.” A Bible diet is essential to godliness.

II. _____ FOR GODLINESS (vv. 7b-10)

The famous command to exercise abruptly follows the command to reject the diet of false teaching.

A. _____ *to exercise!*

The call to “train yourself for godliness” is highly expressive...“Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying. Run until your feet are like lead, and then choose to sprint. Pump iron until your muscles burn, until another rep is impossible, then do more.

This call comes to us all, and we can see its wisdom throughout all of life. The discipline of training 10,000 hours enables some of us mortals to run 100 meters in 10 seconds. Years of memorization and study of German may free us to speak Deutsch with the best. Hours watching game films can free a defensive back to play with utter abandon. But when it comes to spiritual matters, we hesitate. *Discipline* sounds so much like legalism. But such thinking is mistaken. Legalism is self-centered, but discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, “I will do this thing to gain merit with God.” The disciplined heart says, “I will do this thing

because I love God and want to please him.” Paul knew this difference well, and he never gave an inch to legalists, even while challenging Christians to “train yourself to be godly.”

Paul brought legendary disciplined energy to his service of God and yet viewed his labor as a product of free grace, reasoning, “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Grace is the red blood of a disciplined life.

What is so important to note here is that “train yourself for godliness” in its context primarily refers to training ourselves *in and by the Scriptures* for the purpose of godliness. Our *diet* is to be the Scriptures, and we are to *exercise* ourselves in them. We will become godly only through the most godly Book ever written—God’s own Word.

This call is for all of us who know Christ—regardless of how busy we are or how demanding our occupation. Billy Graham has shared that his medical missionary father-in-law Nelson Bell (who ran a 400-bed hospital in China, often on his own) made it a point “to rise every morning at four-thirty and spend two to three hours in Bible reading. He didn’t do his correspondence or any of his other work. He just read the Scriptures every morning, and he was a walking Bible encyclopedia. People wondered at the holiness and the greatness in his life.” I asked a personal friend, Dr. Ken Gieser, who worked with Dr. Bell about this, and he affirmed every word.

The call to discipline ourselves in the Word for the purpose of godliness is not a call to engage in legalism. We will not in this way gain standing before God. But we must for the right reasons train ourselves in God’s Word—train ourselves to listen to its preaching, take notes, check cross-references, read the Bible regularly (the *One Year Bible* is an immense help), exercise the discipline of purchasing tapes of the Old and New Testaments and listening while commuting or exercising, and so on.

B. *The _____ of exercise.*

Physical exercise does have “some value.” It pays off health-wise. For this reason I jog and lift weights and minimize my intake of doughnuts and Twinkies. But the value of physical exercise is limited. Arnold Schwarzenegger will not take his massive biceps or cannonball deltoids into eternity—or probably even to the grave. But there is no doubt that physical exercise has profited him. But training for godliness has *unlimited* benefits both in this world and in the coming world (“holding promise for both the present life and the life to come”)—because the Christian life is one life. The godliness that comes from training in God’s Word has unlimited value for every environment...True godliness will make us better employees and employers, better spouses, and better members of Christ’s Body.

Furthermore, the fact that “godliness has value for all things” applies to our own lives in this temporal environment and in our coming eternal environment—the soul’s true climate. When godly lives move into the new climate, their godliness will bloom like an ever-unfolding flower for all eternity. Godliness will continue its occupation begun on earth—that of serving God to his glory. And who knows what reward the fruits of godliness, spoken of metaphorically by Paul

as “gold, silver, costly stones”(1 Corinthians 3:12), will receive from God? So godliness has unlimited value right now as we live out our lives, and will for all eternity.

As he wraps up his thoughts in this section, Paul raises high the hope that comes from the pursuit of godliness: “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (v. 10). Paul is not suggesting that all people will be saved, because his other writings make it clear that this is not the case (cf. 2 Thessalonians 1:7b–10; 1 Thessalonians 1:10). The final phrase—“especially of those who believe”—simply describes those who are saved. Confidence in salvation is the possession of believers alone. Paul’s purpose here is not to plumb the question of the wideness of God’s grace but to make it clear that those Christians who have placed their hope in the living God and pursue godliness will not be disappointed.

Conclusion

We certainly will not be disappointed if we have believed in Christ who is “the mystery of godliness” because he lived out all godliness and imparts to and inspires godliness in those who are in him. And this hope will grow ever larger if we avoid the lures of thinking that our godliness will increase if we employ fleshly denial of things that God has declared good for all. We can all grow in godliness if we cultivate the life within us by feeding and training ourselves on God’s Word. It is all a matter of diet and discipline.

Step into God’s gym and “train yourself to be godly. 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. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance” (vv. 7b–9).

Lesson 8 (4-2-23)

Succeeding in Ministry (1 Tim. 4:12-16)

¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- 1 Timothy 4:12-16 ESV

The Ephesian church was troubled by false teachers, some of whom were actually in leadership. No congregational “call” had been extended to Timothy. Rather, the Apostle Paul had picked him up by the scruff of the neck and dropped him there like a player on his apostolic chessboard. There is no indication that anyone in Ephesus had asked for him to come, much less appointed or elected him to leadership. We sense from the opening chapter of this letter that Timothy would rather be somewhere else (cf. 1:3).

Timothy was timid by nature, certainly in part because he was young. He was not a “take charge” kind of guy (cf. 1 Corinthians 16:10, 11). The consensus is that he was in his mid-thirties—which may not seem so young to us. But in a culture where one’s elders were highly regarded, and in a church where the elders would have been older than he, his relatively young age was a handicap.² Second Timothy 1:7 records Paul’s apostolic nudge for Timothy to assert himself: “For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power.... ”

The combination of Timothy’s retiring nature and relative youth made him a natural target for critics. “Who is this pipsqueak to tell us what to do? We need a man with experience!” I am sure there were times when Timothy awoke in the Ephesian night with a pain in his sensitive stomach and murmured, “What am I doing here? Help me, Lord.”

Paul was not unaware of Timothy’s inner feelings. Notwithstanding his own apostolic boldness, Paul had “been there” himself. He knew the pressures and gut-wrenching concerns of pastoral responsibility (cf. 2 Corinthians 1:8, 9; 7:5–7; 11:28, 29). So Paul addresses Timothy in very personal, intimate terms in these final thoughts of chapter 4 as he urges Timothy to “Command and teach these things” (v. 11)—that is, to oppose the false teachers’ asceticism as “things taught by demons” (4:1) and to instruct the church as to the proper diet and discipline in the Word, so necessary for godliness. The old apostle’s advice to his young charge has become classic wisdom for all, young and old, who desire to thrive in ministry.¹

¹ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 112–114.

Discussion Questions

Why might others look down on Timothy (4:12)? How was he to counteract this tendency?

Grade yourself on the five aspects of a believer's conduct that Paul mentions in 1 Timothy 5:12. On a scale from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent), what grade would you give yourself in: (a) speech; (b) life; (c) love; (d) faith; (e) purity? What do your grades suggest you need to do, if anything?

To what was Timothy to devote himself in Paul's absence (4:13–14)? What is so critical about each of these activities?

Have you neglected the use of any God-given gifts (v.14)?

What reason does Paul give in 4:15 for diligence in pursuing the ministry? What did Paul want to see happen? Why was this important?

What charge did Paul give Timothy in 4:16? What reason did he give for the charge? How is this the same for us today?

Was there anything from last week's sermon that was especially challenging? Convicting? Encouraging?

Lesson Outline [This lesson was adapted from *R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000)*]

Main Idea: Timid Timothy was in a tough spot—pastoring a church that had not called him—ministering to a people who despised his youth and inexperience. But he succeeded 1) because he was godly in character, 2) because he focused on the Word, 3) because he exercised his gift, 4) because he worked hard, and 5) because he carefully watched his life and doctrine. Paul's advice to Timothy in this text has become classic wisdom for all, young and old, who desire to thrive in ministry.

I. **SUCCEEDING THROUGH** _____ **(v. 12)**

Paul's initial advice has to do with godly character...The natural inclination when our leadership is challenged is not godliness but the opposite—to become defensive and respond with sarcasm or a put-down or to pull rank and become “presidential” (“I’m the chief here!” “Ever

hear of the cloth”?) or to become coldly above it all, aloof, or grieved (“How could you ever question me?”). Any young believer (and some old ones too) can easily succumb to such responses. But ministry is thus diminished.

Paul’s advice is to be an example of a lovely fivefold godliness that begins with the tongue—“speech.” If a minister gets himself in trouble, it is usually with his mouth...So Paul commands Timothy to “set an example ... in speech.” Show people what a self-controlled tongue is. That is of first importance for the preacher. “When words are many, sin is not absent” (Proverbs 10:19). “He who answers before listening—that is his folly and his shame” (18:13). “The mouth of a fool feeds on folly” (15:14). “The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil” (15:28). “The lips of the righteous know what is fitting” (10:32). “He who guards his lips guards his life” (13:3).

Along with this, Timothy is to be an example “in life.” “Speech” and “life” go together because they are both observable conduct. “Life” here means “manner of life.” In the day-in, day-out humdrum of existence—at the gas station, in the grocery line, at the soccer game, washing the car—we must be an example to all who believe.

In addition to his observable “speech” and “life,” Timothy’s godly character was to shine in the more abstract, inner qualities—“in love, in faith and in purity.” Timothy was to be loving in every circumstance and to all persons, exhibiting his faith through faithfulness, and to be pure not only sexually but in matters of the heart.

So we see that Paul is telling Timothy that Christian leadership is a matter of godly character from beginning to end. The ministry is a character profession. Godly character creates moral authority. Ultimately, godly character wins over those who would naturally look down on one’s youth. The first thing, second thing, and third thing for a young pastor is the cultivation of character! Not to do so is to despise his youth by neglecting to grow in godliness when he is most flexible.

II. SUCCEEDING THROUGH _____ (v. 13)

This charge to godly character is followed by Paul’s command that Timothy ground his ministry on God’s Word. Verse 13 is a landmark text in defining the major work of the pastor and the worship of the church. The “public reading of Scripture” was not new. It was already a part of Christian worship that had been adopted from the Jewish synagogue (cf. Luke 4:16, 17; 2 Corinthians 3:14). The roots of this are found in the Old Testament, in Nehemiah where we read of the men and women of Israel standing from “daybreak till noon” as Ezra read the law (cf. Nehemiah 8:2–8). This is one of the reasons many congregations stand for the reading of God’s Word in our worship services.

Not only did Christian churches adopt the custom of the reading of the Old Testament from the synagogues—they added to it readings from the apostles’ letters and the Gospels (cf. Colossians 4:16; 1 Thessalonians 5:27). This meant that the apostolic church put the apostles’

writings on the same level as the Old Testament. The early church had two public readings—one from a portion of the Old Testament, and then from the apostolic writings...The overall effect of this regular reading of the Old and New Testaments at worship was twofold: 1) It emphasized the radical continuity between the Old and New Testaments. 2) It meant that the authority of the preaching that followed was secondary to and derived from the reading of Scripture.

According to Paul's directives, the reading of Scripture was to be followed by Timothy's attention "to preaching" (i.e., exhortation) "and to teaching" (doctrinal instruction). This is the defining point. As John Stott, the acknowledged master of Biblical exposition in the English-speaking world, has said: "It was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read." Biblical exposition was the apostolic norm. Therefore, any preaching that does not guide the listener through the Scriptures is an aberration from the apostolic practice.

Paul calls young Timothy to be radically Biblical in his preaching—expositional. He was to be the very opposite of the false teachers and their "godless myths and wives' tales" (4:7) and "endless genealogies" (1:4). The truth is, without the centrality of the Word and its exposition, there is no proper worship. Paul cites Word-centeredness as the key to young, timid Timothy's success.

III. SUCCEEDING THROUGH _____ (v. 14)

As young, reticent Timothy suffers under the glare of those who look down on him, the question that keeps running through his head is, "Do I have the right stuff?" So Paul affirms that he does indeed have it but also adds a bracing command: "Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you" (v. 14).

Paul charges Timothy to remember that electric moment in the past, somewhere with Paul in his travels, when the young man knelt, and Paul and the local elders fixed their hands on him, intoning prophecies and prayers about his giftedness and future ministry. Paul has alluded to this in 1:18—"Timothy, my son, I give you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by following them you may fight the good fight." And Paul will do so again in 2 Timothy 1:6—"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."

This almost certainly had to do with his calling and gifting for ministry as a preacher of the Word. This is apparent from the repeated charges Paul gives to Timothy to minister the Word in 2 Timothy (2:15, 24–26; 3:14–4:5). Timothy had heard with his own ears that God would enable and bless his preaching. There is wisdom here for everyone who has been called. If God has called you to ministry, he has gifted you.

Underlying Paul's command is the unspoken maxim, "Use it or lose it." That is why he told his young disciple, "Fan into flame the gift of God." Timothy's gift here is not a once-and-for-all, unchanging endowment from God. It has to be used and cultivated. As we know, shy Timothy did use his gift and was counted as a key player in the apostolic church. What practical wisdom we see here for ministry. *Use it or lose it!* This is true for anyone in ministry. And it is doubly true for those younger believers who are gifted for ministry.

IV. SUCCEEDING THROUGH _____ (v. 15)

As we have surveyed Paul's advice to Timothy, we have seen that young Timothy will succeed, first, if he pursues *godliness*, second, if he bases his ministry on the *Word*, and thirdly, if he utilizes his *gift*. Now Paul links Timothy's success to his *diligence*. The diligence commanded here echoes the athletic metaphor of verses 7–10, where Christians are urged to train themselves for godliness. So it is a call to diligent sweat. But the sense is intensified by "give yourself wholly to them" (literally, "be in these things so as to be absorbed in them"). As Philip Towner said it, "Live and breathe these things." Timothy is to give all he has—all his life—to being godly, to the ministry of the Word, and to exercising his gift of preaching.

V. SUCCEEDING THROUGH _____ (v. 16)

Paul's ending advice to Timothy has given the church a famous, and on the surface enigmatic, saying: "Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers" (v. 16). The opening line is an exquisite summary. "Watch your life" refers to the fivefold example of godliness commanded in verse 12: "in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity." "Watch your ... doctrine" references his preaching and teaching (v. 13), which are to be exercised since he has been gifted for ministry (v. 14).

The balance of life and doctrine is the key to spiritual success. Doctrine has everything to do with life, because what we believe about God determines how we live. The more we know about God and his workings, the more we will love him, and the better we will serve him. Do you love him now? Will you love him less if you learn more of him and his Word? The great need of people today is to know more of God—to know more doctrine. Doctrine is the most practical thing in life!

On the other hand, godly lifestyle has everything to do with maintaining doctrine because if we do not live according to what we know of God and his Word, we will either disbelieve or will attempt to change his Word. This is exactly what has happened with so many who have departed from the faith.

So we need to "watch [our] life and doctrine." What am I like? Am I consistent? How is my "speech"? How is my "life"? How is my "love," my "faith," my "purity"? How is my "doctrine"? Is it truly Biblical? Or is it secularized or syncretized? Do I really believe what I say I believe? And am I believing it more as time goes on?

This is all so important for your ministry because if you “persevere in them ... you will save both yourself and your hearers” (v. 16). Paul is being instructively enigmatic here because he taught again and again that salvation comes only through God’s sovereign mercy and grace. He left no doubt—we do not and cannot save ourselves. His point is that those who persevere in life and doctrine will persevere in salvation.

Conclusion

Timid Timothy was in a tough spot—pastoring a church that had not called him—ministering to a people who despised his youth and inexperience. But he succeeded 1) because he was godly in character, 2) because he focused on the Word, 3) because he exercised his gift, 4) because he worked hard, and 5) because he carefully watched his life and doctrine.

Such lives work out their own salvation (Philippians 2:12). They save themselves and then save their hearers. How is your “life”? How is your “doctrine”?

Appendix: Answer Guide

Lesson 1: Evangelistic Praying (1 Tim. 2:1-7)

6. The **Nature** of Evangelistic Prayer (2:1a)
7. The **Scope** of Evangelistic Prayer (2:1b-2a)
8. The **Benefit** of Evangelistic Prayer (2:2b)
9. The **Reason** for Evangelistic Prayer (2:3-7)
 - a. Evangelistic Prayer is **Morally Right**
 - b. Evangelistic Prayer is Consistent with **God's Desire**
 - c. Evangelistic Prayer Reflects the **Uniqueness of God**
 - d. Evangelistic Prayer is Consistent with **the Person of Christ**
 - e. Evangelistic Prayer Reflects the **Fullness of Christ's Atonement**
 - f. Evangelistic Prayer is in Accord with **Paul's Divine Commission**
10. The **Attitude** of Evangelistic Prayer (2:8)

Lesson 2: What About Women, Paul? (1 Tim. 2:8-15)

I. To **Divisive** Men in the Church (2:8)

- A. Pray with **purity** before God.
- B. Pray with **peace** before others.

II. To **Distracting** Women in the Church (2:9–10)

- A. Adorn yourself with **modest dress**.
- B. Adore God through a **Christlike demeanor**.

III. On the **Distinctive** Roles of Men and Women in the Church (2:11–15)

- A. Two Principles
 1. The principle of **harmony**.
 2. The principle of **history**.
- B. Two Reminders
 1. God created men and women with equal **dignity**.
 2. God created men and women with **complementary roles**.
- C. Two Prohibitions
 1. Women should not **teach** as elders/pastors/overseers in the church.
 2. Women should not **lead** as elders/pastors/overseers in the church.
- D. Two Questions
 1. As a woman teaches/leads, is she reflecting **God's pattern** in Scripture?
 2. As a woman teaches/leads, is she reinforcing **God's priorities** in the home?
- E. Two Reasons
 1. **God's design** in creation.
 2. **Satan's distortion** of creation: man abdicates authority to woman.
- F. Two Things We Don't Know For Sure
 1. Is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about **salvation** through the offspring of Eve?
 2. Is 1 Timothy 2:15 talking about the **significance** of women nurturing children?
- G. Two Things We Do Know For Sure

1. Women are **sanctified** as they glorify God in the distinct roles and responsibilities He has entrusted to them.
2. Women are **saved** not through the birth of a child but through the death of Christ, who died to make us the men and women God created us to be.

Lesson 3: The Good Elders (1 Tim. 3:1-7)

I. A Noble Aspiration

II. Noble Qualifications

His **reputation**.

His **marriage**.

His **self-mastery**.

His **ministry**.

His **temperance**.

His **temperament**.

His **money**.

His **family**.

His **maturity**.

His **reputation** again!

Lesson 4: The Good Deacons (1 Tim. 3:8-13)

I. Deacons' Qualifications (vv. 8-12)

1. **Elder-like**. (v.8)

2. **Informed** belief. (v.9)

3. **Living** belief. (v.9)

4. **Tested**. (v.10)

5. **Help-mated**. (v.11)

6. **Domesticated**. (v.12)

II. Deacons' Reward (v. 13)

Lesson 5: The Church's Conduct and Confession (1 Tim. 3:14-16)

I. GOD'S HOUSEHOLD (v. 15b)

First, by **believing** it.

Second, by **memorizing** it.

Third, by **meditating** on it.

Fourth, by **studying** it.

Fifth, by **obeying** it.

Sixth, by **defending** it.

Seventh, by **living** it.

Finally, by **proclaiming** it.

II. HOUSEHOLD CONDUCT (vv. 14, 15)

III. HOUSEHOLD CONFESSION (v. 16)

- 1) The first couplet describes how Christ was revealed
- 2) The second couplet sings of the witnesses of Christ
- 3) The third couplet sings of the reception given to Christ

Lesson 6: Bless God's Good Creation (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

- I. The Certainty of Apostasy (4:1c)
- II. The Predictability of Apostasy (4:1a)
- III. The Chronology of Apostasy (4:1b)
- IV. The Source of Apostasy (4:1d)
- V. The Purveyors of Apostasy (4:2)
- VI. The Content of Apostasy (4:3a)
- VII. The Error of Apostasy (4:3b-5)

Lesson 7: Pursuing Godliness (1 Tim. 4:6-11)

- I. DIET FOR GODLINESS (vv. 6, 7a)
 1. Reject bad doctrine.
 2. Dine on good teaching.
- II. EXERCISE FOR GODLINESS (vv. 7b-10)
 - A. Called to exercise!
 - B. The benefits of exercise.

Lesson 8: Succeeding in Ministry (1 Tim. 4:12-16)

- I. SUCCEEDING THROUGH PERSONAL GODLINESS (v. 12)
- II. SUCCEEDING THROUGH THE WORD (v. 13)
- III. SUCCEEDING THROUGH GIFTEDNESS (v. 14)
- IV. SUCCEEDING THROUGH DILIGENCE (v. 15)
- V. SUCCEEDING THROUGH BALANCE (v. 16)

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Discussion Questions taken from:

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