

1 Timothy

Fight the Good Fight

Purpose

To know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God

Summary

During his second missionary journey, the Apostle Paul visited Lystra, a Roman colony in the province of Galatia (Asia Minor). There he met a godly young man named Timothy (*Acts 16:1-3*). Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage. His father was a Greek and his mother a Jew, but he was led to Christ by his mother and grandmother (*2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15*). Paul chose Timothy to assist him with his work. To prepare Timothy for his ministry, he was first circumcised (to be accepted among the Jews) and then commissioned by the laying on of hands (*1 Tim. 1:18; 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6; 2:2*). Timothy accompanied Paul during his second and third missionary journeys, which allowed Paul to train Timothy and prepare him for ministry. Paul often sent Timothy as his representative to churches.

When Paul left Ephesus (after having remained three years, *Acts 19, 20*), during his third missionary journey, he left Timothy to stay behind and shepherd the believers there. Paul also warned the Ephesian Elders that “savage wolves” would try to devour the church with false teaching (*Acts 20:29, 30*). His predictions came true, as evidenced in Paul’s letter to Timothy. The Apostle challenged Timothy to “fight the good fight” (*1:18, 19; 6:12-14*), to be a good example to the believers (*4:12, 14*), to be confident in his faith (*2 Tim. 1:7, 8*), and to confront the false teachers. He also sent instructions for how the church should be ordered and governed. Apart from Paul’s two letters to Timothy and a reference in *Hebrews* regarding his imprisonment (*13:23*), we do not know what happened to him.

Themes

- **False Teaching:** Satan has infiltrated the Church and distracted the followers of Christ with errant doctrines. God’s people must know the Word and be vigilant to confront the lies.
- **Fight the Good Fight:** The Church is valuable to God. He gave His Son to die for it. Thus, we must engage in the worthy cause of defending the Church against the attacks of the enemy.
- **Church Conduct:** God’s Church should operate God’s way. Christians (and their Elder leaders) must be careful to incorporate what He prescribes and prevent what He condemns.
- **Widows:** God calls His people to love each other, especially those who are vulnerable (i.e. poor, orphans, widows). Thus, it is necessary that the Church cares for them well.
- **True Prosperity:** The temptation of wealth leads many people to abandon their faith. However, true prosperity in God’s eyes is good works, to be generous and ready to share.

Leading Ideas

- True Gospel teaching will produce love (*1:1-11*).
- The battle for the Church is a worthy cause (*1:12-20*).
- Though men and women are equal, they have different roles to play (*2:1-15*).
- Elders and Deacons work together to meet the needs of the Church (*3:1-13*).
- By nourishing ourselves on God’s Word, we protect ourselves from the enemy’s lies (*4:1-16*).
- God’s people are called to love others, especially those who are most vulnerable (*5:1-25*).
- Believers, content with God’s provision, will avoid greed and ruin (*6:1-21*).

Penmen

The Apostle Paul, after his first imprisonment in Rome (*Acts 28; 1 Tim. 1:14, 15*) and during his “fourth” missionary journey (perhaps from Macedonia, *1:3*).

Recipients

Timothy, Paul’s assistant or protégé and “son” in the faith, and the followers of Christ in Ephesus

Date Written

Somewhere between 62-64 AD, prior to Paul’s final imprisonment

Special Feature

This letter provides the most details in the New Testament regarding the two church offices -- Elders and Deacons

Key Verses

“I am writing these things to you hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed I write so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth.”

1 Timothy 3:14, 15

“Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life which you were called...”

1 Timothy 6:12

¹ “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus, according to the commandment of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus who is our hope, ²to Timothy, my true child in the faith: grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Christ Is Our Hope

Galatians 5:5
Ephesians 1:8; 4:4
Colossians 1:27
Titus 1:2; 2:13
Hebrews 10:23
1 Peter 1:3

Christ Who Is Our Hope

A Reminder of Our Redeemer

Leading Idea

All believers are *indebted* to the Lord Jesus and *serve* at His will.

The person writing this letter identified himself immediately in the salutation, “Paul, an Apostle of Christ Jesus...” (v.1). First, he called himself an apostle. The word “apostle” simply means “one sent,” as one with a special mission. Those apostles with a capital “A” comprised a special category. They witnessed the risen Savior, they established and governed the early Church (under Christ), and they had authority to speak and write the words of God, as a prophet would in the Old Testament.

Second, Paul pointed out that he was an Apostle “according to the commandment of God and Christ...” (v.1). To what commandment was Paul referring? After he encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus (*Acts 9:1-9*), Paul was blinded and taken into the city. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias whom God called to speak to Paul (then called Saul). The Lord told Ananias, “He (Saul) is a chosen instrument of Mine to bear My name before the Gentiles and kings and sons of Israel, for I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake” (*9:15, 16*). Ananias delivered this news to Saul and added, “The God of your fathers has appointed you to know His will and to see the Righteous One and to hear an utterance from His mouth. For you will be a witness for Him to all men of what you have seen and heard.” (*Acts 22:14, 15*).

Another phrase to note in Paul’s salutation is his description of Jesus, whom he called Christ or “Messiah.” Paul wrote that He is “our hope” (v.1). Why would Paul describe Jesus this way? Because we are sinners and cannot save ourselves, meaning we cannot make ourselves right with our holy God, the only hope we have is that someone else will help us. That person is Jesus Christ, who lived a sinless life and then willingly paid the penalty for our sins on the cross, so that we might be made right with God the Father (*2 Cor. 5:21*). Christ, then, is the only mediator capable of reconciling us with our God (*1 Tim. 2:5*). Because Christ was resurrected, we too have the hope of eternal life with Him in heaven. He is our only hope (see more verses in the margin).

The recipient of this letter is Timothy, whom Paul called his “true child in the faith” (v.2; *1 Cor. 4:17*). During his second missionary journey, Paul and Silas visited Lystra, a Roman colony in the province of Galatia (Asia Minor). There they met a godly young man named Timothy (*Acts 16:1-3*). Timothy was the son of a mixed marriage. His father was a Greek and his mother a Jew, but he was led to Christ by his mother and grandmother (*2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15*). Paul chose Timothy to assist him with his work. Timothy accompanied Paul during his second and third missionary journeys, which allowed Paul to train Timothy and prepare him for ministry.

Because of Timothy’s parents, he was certainly looked down upon by the Jews for being a half-breed (Jews despised people who were not fully Jewish, for example Samaritans). Timothy was also looked down upon for his age. Although he was the Apostle Paul’s assistant, he was very young (*1 Tim. 4:12*). Throughout his two letters to Timothy, Paul reassured him of his value and worth in God’s eyes. Calling Timothy “his true child in the faith” would have been encouraging to him. Also, Paul may have been like a father figure to Timothy, disciplining him in the things of God. Obviously, Paul saw something remarkable in Timothy to ask him to assist them in such an important work of God.

When Paul left Ephesus (after having remained three years, *Acts 19, 20*), during his third missionary journey, he left Timothy to stay behind and pastor the believers there. Therefore, despite his age and inexperience, Timothy was the one in authority in Ephesus. Thus, Paul sent instructions for how the church should be ordered and governed.

Finally, Paul included in his salutation a common phrase, “Grace, mercy, and peace” (v.2). These words regularly appear at the beginning and end of his letters.

³ “As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, ⁴nor pay attention to myths or endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith. ⁵But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. ⁶For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, ⁷wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions. ⁸But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, ⁹realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers ¹⁰and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, ¹¹according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.”

The Goal Is Love

Dealing with False Teachers

Leading Idea

True Gospel teaching will produce *love* for God, for others, and for the purposes of Christ.

Paul wasted no time getting to the point of his letter. With only two verses of salutation (v. 1, 2), he immediately began giving Timothy instructions for how to set the Ephesian church in order. When Paul wrote, “Remain on at Ephesus” (v.3), he did not intend for Timothy to be the pastor there but, rather, to represent the Apostle and finish what he started, organizing the church into an effective body. Nearly 2000 years later, we are still applying Paul’s instructions to the church.

The first topic that Paul addressed was false teaching. “Instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines” (i.e. myths, endless genealogies, v.3, 4). Other than understanding the Gospel and its applications, combatting false teachers is a regular topic in the New Testament letters. Satan actively muddied the waters in the message to the church (and still does) so that believers would be confused about the true Gospel. Paul urged Timothy to confront and correct these dangerous men.

Notice here that the teachers in the church were men (v.3). Who were these men? In the context of the letter, more than likely these men were aspiring to be Elders, which explains why Paul wrote so much about how to select and discipline Elders later in Chapters 3 and 5. Paul foresaw this problem of false teaching when he left Ephesus in *Acts 20*. He warned the Elders then that, after his departure, “savage wolves” would attempt to devour the flock and “draw away the disciples after them” (20:28-31). Evidently, Paul dealt with two of these wolves himself already – Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom he “handed over to Satan” (1 Tim. 1:20).

Now, what’s the difference between sound doctrine and strange doctrine? The word “sound” means to be founded in truth or to be right or correct. According to Paul, sound teaching or sound doctrine is that which is “according to the glorious Gospel of the blessed God” (v.10, 11). Any teaching that adds something to the Gospel or that subtracts something from the Gospel is considered “strange doctrine” (v.3, myths, genealogies, etc.), which is not helpful but harmful to believers (v.4, 6).

In this case, men (called Judaizers) were adding parts of the Mosaic Law to the Gospel (v.7), laying rules or rituals on believers which God no longer expected of them (blending Judaism and Christianity). Evidently, these men knew the Law well (or thought they did), but they did not yet understand the Gospel or the purpose of the Law in relationship to the Gospel. Thus, they made “confident assertions” but did not understand “what they were saying” (v.7).

Notice that Paul did not dismiss the Law of Moses. It still has its place. It is “good,” he said, “if one uses it lawfully” or correctly (v.8). So then, in light of the Gospel, what is the purpose of the Law? God’s Law was never meant to be a means of salvation, a way in which men could have a right relationship with God. No, the Law is impossible to follow completely, and that was the point. God’s standard of righteousness is perfection, which fallen men can never achieve. The purpose of the Law was to convict us of our sin and reveal our need for a Savior. However, after salvation (putting our faith in Christ, who fulfilled the Law perfectly), we are no longer under the Law. Paul wrote, “the law is not made for a righteous person but those who are lawless... the ungodly and sinners...” (v.9). He then listed examples of people who violate God’s Law (v.10).

As Paul’s liaison, Timothy’s task was to confront and correct these false teachers. The effect of their teaching was “speculation” and “fruitlessness,” when the goal should be “the further administration of God” (v.4). Paul clarified his meaning by saying that true Gospel teaching should produce in the lives of believers “love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (v.5). In other words, when one hears the Gospel taught faithfully, he will sense, welling up inside him, a genuine affection for God, for others, and for the mission and purposes of Christ in the world.

¹² “I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, ¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost of all. ¹⁶ Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.”

Even Though

Paul's Testimony

Leading Idea

Even though we were formerly sinners, God *rescued and redeemed* us for a life of ministry.

After Paul explained the correct and incorrect use of the Law of Moses (v. 7-11), he mentioned, at the end of the last passage, “the glorious Gospel, with which he had been entrusted” as an Apostle of Christ (v. 11). Then, he immediately dispelled any thought that he had achieved his apostolic position because of any goodness of his own. In fact, his long list of lawless people (v. 10, 11) may have triggered memories of his own lawless past. Thus, Paul interrupted his instructions to Timothy in order to recount his salvation experience and subsequent call to ministry (v. 12-16).

“I thank Christ,” he wrote, for “putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor” (v. 12, 13). A blasphemer is one who speaks irreverently or disrespectfully of God or Christ, which is a violation of the greatest commandment, to love and honor God (Mark 12:30). A persecutor and violent aggressor describe Paul’s actions towards Christians, while he was a Pharisee, treating Christ’s followers harshly and causing them great suffering (Acts 8:3; 9:1-5; 22:4, 5; 26:9, 11). These actions are a violation of the second greatest commandment, to love your neighbor as yourself (Mark 12:31). Because of his former manner of life, Paul said that he was the foremost of sinners (v. 15, 16), meaning the greatest (or worst) sinner of all.

However, that was not the end of Paul’s story. Perhaps the two greatest words in his testimony are “even though” (v. 13). Even though these things about Paul were true, God saved him and put him into His service. Even though Paul deserved death and judgment in hell, God showed Him great mercy (v. 13, 16). Even though Paul was the foremost of sinners, God’s abundant grace was more than enough to cover his sin (v. 14). The words “even though” could be said of all Christians. None of us deserve God’s grace or mercy. None of us are able to achieve perfection by following the law on our own. None of us can attain to God’s standard of holiness without His help. Even though we all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God (Rom. 3:10, 23), He sent His Son Jesus to save us (v. 15; John 3:16). What a glorious Gospel indeed!

Another key phrase to note here is that Paul “acted ignorantly in unbelief” (v. 13). He was not saying that his ignorance excused his actions or that he was somehow innocent of any wrongdoing. No, what Paul was saying is that he, like those false teachers, was making confident assertions about the Mosaic Law, yet he had no idea what he was saying or doing (v. 7). As a Pharisee, he truly believed that he was God’s agent to protect the Old Testament system (the Law) against contrary doctrines. He had no idea that Christ or Christianity was connected to and a fulfillment of the Law. In other words, Paul was on the wrong side of the debate, even though he sincerely thought he was doing God’s work.

Because of his ignorance, outright rebellion against God, and mistreatment of Christians, Paul said that he was shown mercy. “Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example...” (v. 16). In other words, the Lord chose Saul the persecutor to become Paul the missionary so that others might see that there is hope for them. If God can save someone like Saul, transform his life, and call him to noble God-honoring work, then He can do that with anyone. No one is out of the reach of our God. No one has done too much, strayed too far, or stooped so low that he cannot be rescued by the blood of Christ. Think of all of the “worthless” people Jesus called to follow Him – Zacchaeus the swindler, Mary Magdalene the prostitute, Nicodemus the Pharisee, Matthew the tax collector, Simon the zealot, the Samaritan woman at the well, Saul the persecutor, and me. In God’s eyes, we are all equally sinful; and now, because of Christ, we are all equally saved.

Because of this wonderful truth, Paul inserted a quick line of praise to God. “To the King..., the only God, be glory and honor forever and ever” (v. 17). Each one of us, who has been rescued from a life of sin and redeemed to live a new life in Christ should join the Apostle and shout a hearty “Amen!”

1 Timothy 1:18-20

¹⁸ “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹ keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith. ²⁰ Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.”

Apostasy

Hebrews 2:3, 4
Hebrews 3:12-19
Hebrews 6:1-8
Hebrews 10:26-31

Fight the Good Fight

The Worthy Cause of the Church

Leading Idea

The *battle* for the church is a *worthy* cause, but it is fought in the *spirit* not in the *flesh*.

After Paul paused to share his testimony of God’s grace in his life (v.11-17), he returned to his original thought regarding Timothy’s purpose in Ephesus – to confront the false teachers and set the church there in order. The connector is the phrase “this command I entrust to you...” (v.18), which links back to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines” (v.3). Paul wrote that he was “entrusting” this task to Timothy, signifying that it was a work that he himself started while he was in Ephesus.

Notice that Paul referred to Timothy as “my son” (v.18). The word “son” can also be translated “child.” In the salutation of the letter, Paul called Timothy “my true child in the faith” (v.2). These are terms of endearment not of relation. Paul and Timothy were not family, except as members of the family of God. The phrases “my son” or “my child” indicate Timothy’s youthfulness, Paul’s role in his salvation or discipleship, their similarities in spiritual giftedness, or all of the above.

The command or charge that Paul gave to Timothy to confront the false teachers was “in accordance with the prophecies previously made...” (v.18). The prophecies previously made could refer to two events. Perhaps someone prophesied of Timothy’s ministry before he ever met Paul or Paul prophesied about Timothy’s ministry when he laid hands on him and set him apart for service (4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6). Either way, Timothy was aware of the fact that God had chosen him for this moment, to protect the church from false teachers. God had given Timothy the spiritual gifts of leadership, preaching, and teaching (2 Tim. 2:15, 24; 4:2).

Next, Paul summarized his charge to Timothy – protect the church -- by saying, “fight the good fight” (v.18; 1 Tim. 6:12; 2 Tim. 2:3; 4:7). First of all, it is safe to say that we (believers) are in a fight, a spiritual war against a spiritual enemy. Satan despises God, His Son Jesus, and the church for which He died. Our enemy will do everything in his power to derail it, divide it, and destroy it. Second, Paul called this fight a “good fight,” meaning protecting this church, for which Christ gave His life (Eph. 5:25). The good fight is Paul’s way of saying that the battle for the church is a worthy cause which will accomplish much good in the world, for the church is the pillar and support for the truth of the Gospel (1 Tim. 3:15). Finally, Paul charged Timothy to fight in this good fight, to be a good soldier and do his duty (2 Tim. 2:3). However, this battle is not won in the flesh but in the spirit, with weapons not of this world, against philosophies, ideas, and lies from the evil one. Therefore, we must fight the good fight in the way that God prescribes in His Word (2 Cor. 10:3-5; Eph. 6:10-18).

While waging this war to protect the church, Paul reminded Timothy that it is important to “keep the faith and a good conscience” (v.19). “The faith” here refers to the truths of the Gospel. We are to be faithful or loyal and adhere to the right doctrines of Christianity, being careful not to stray outside of the lines and end up in the ditch. In the meantime, we are to maintain a good or clear conscience, one not plagued by deceit, ungodliness, or malice towards others. Paul reminded Timothy that “the goal of his instruction was love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (v.5).

Evidently, two men – Hymenaeus and Alexander -- had not “kept the faith” and, instead, “suffered shipwreck in their faith,” meaning that they had strayed outside the doctrinal lines and destroyed their credibility and usefulness to God. If these men were true believers, they had not lost their salvation but had believed in lies and had become deceived and apostate (forsaking what was once professed). Hymenaeus is mentioned again in Paul’s second letter (2 Tim. 2:17, 18), as one who had “swerved from the truth.” Alexander is mentioned in other places, but we are unsure if it is the same person (Acts 19:33, 34; 2 Tim. 4:14, 15). Paul said that he “handed these men over to Satan” (v.20), which probably referred to excommunication or removing them from the spiritual protection of the church (1 Cor. 5). His purpose was that perhaps they would recognize their errors and repent (2 Tim. 25, 26).

Good and Acceptable

Praying for Others

¹ “First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, ²for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. ⁵For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the man* Christ Jesus, ⁶who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time. ⁷For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.”

Leading Idea

It is *good* and *acceptable* to God that we *pray* for all people, especially that they may be saved.

After charging Timothy to fight the good fight and confront the false teachers (because teaching God’s Word accurately is vital to the health of a church), Paul began to instruct Timothy on how to set things in order. He started with prayer – “I urge that entreaties, prayers, petitions, and thanksgivings be made on behalf of all men” or all people (v.1).

What exactly is meant by “all” here? Does Paul want us to pray for everyone everywhere or a specific group? The answer is both. The Greek word “all” has two meanings. It can mean “every person” or it can mean “every type of person.” Paul is either saying pray for every person in the world or he is saying to pray for all types of people (those in various positions, social status, nationalities, etc.). To help us with context, we must connect this verse to others around it. Why are we praying and for whom are we praying? Verse 4 is helpful, as Paul stated that God “desires for all men to be saved...”

Again, we are faced with the meaning of “all.” Is it God’s will for every person to be saved or all types of people to be saved? We know from other passages of Scripture that some people will not be saved (*Rom. 9:18-24*). In fact, most people will not follow Christ (*Matt. 7:13; 22:14*). So then, this verse cannot be used to support the false doctrine of universalism, that all people will be saved. So then, what does it mean that “God desires for all men to be saved?”

In light of the previous passage regarding false teachers (probably Judaizers) and connecting to Paul’s interjection of his ministry to the Gentiles (v.7), “all” seems to refer to all types of people – Jews and Gentiles. Judaizers focused only on Jews (or Gentiles who wanted to become Jews), but Paul challenged that view, as God’s vision for salvation is much broader. His intent for salvation is to include Jews and Gentiles (non-Jews), meaning every nationality in the world. Therefore, Paul commanded Timothy and the church to pray for all people, not just Jews, because God desires to save people from all walks of life, people from every tribe, tongue, and nation (*Rev. 7:9*).

On the other hand, it is not wrong to pray for all people, believers and unbelievers. God can and does work in and through all people to accomplish His good purposes. This truth explains why Paul gives the example of praying for kings and those who are in authority. God has delegated His authority to human leaders (i.e. civil government) for our good (*Rom. 13:1-7*). We should pray for people in authority as their decisions affect not only our individual well-being but also that of the church.

Next, Paul gave one of the clearest presentations of the Gospel or “the truth” (v.4) in one verse. “There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ” (v.5). In contrast to the foggy theology of the false teachers, Paul cut to the heart of the message of salvation. There is one God, man is not in a right relationship with Him because of his sin, and he needs a mediator (advocate or go-between) to help him reconcile that relationship. The only person eligible to be that mediator is Christ, and the reason that Christ is the only person eligible for this role is His God-man status. An effective mediator must be able to represent both parties, in this case God and man. Because Jesus was born of a woman, He was human. Because Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit, He was and is of God, divine (what we call the deity of Christ). In theological terms, Jesus was (is) both fully God and fully man (called the hypostatic union). He is the only person capable of reconciling the relationship between sinful men and a holy God. In other words, Jesus is our only hope for salvation.

At the proper time (v.6), Jesus came to earth, lived a sinless life, and willingly offered His life as a sacrifice for sinners, as a ransom or payment to God for the penalty of our sin. While His sacrifice was sufficient for the sins of all people, it is only effective for those who believe and follow Him, for “whosoever believes will have everlasting life” (*John 3:16*).

⁸ “Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension. ⁹Likewise, I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, ¹⁰but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. ¹¹A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. ¹²But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. ¹³For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. ¹⁴And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. ¹⁵But women will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.”

Instructions for the Church

The Roles of Men and Women

Leading Idea

Though men and women are *equally* important, they have *different* God-given roles to play.

Sometimes Paul’s train of thought is difficult to follow. He introduced the topic of prayer in Verse 1 and then returned to it in Verse 8 by stating, “Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray...” While Verse 8 relates to both passages (v.1-7 and v.8-15), I’ve chosen to include it here because of how Paul emphasized the different roles of men and women.

Before proceeding, we need to define what Paul meant by “every place”? This phrase refers to every place that the followers of Christ gathered or assembled for public worship. In other words, “every place” is the local church body (1 Cor. 1:2; 2 Cor. 2:14; 1 Thess. 1:8). What follows, then, are Paul’s instructions for every local church, not just the church in Ephesus.

First, in regard to teaching and praying in those general assemblies, Paul assigned leadership to men (1:3; 2:8; 3:1). The question naturally arises, “Can women pray?” Certainly, they can pray (1 Cor. 11:5). Anyone can pray anywhere at any time, but in the setting of public worship or the gathering of the whole church, the men, more than likely the Elders, are to lead (3:1-7). When men pray, they are to do so with “holy hands and without wrath and dissension” (v.8). In other words, they are to be examples of purity or integrity (holy hands), peacefulness with God and others (without wrath), and unity or faith (without dissension, division, or doubt).

Next, Paul gave instruction for how women should dress at church. The women in Ephesus were evidently distracting others from worship by their appearance (hair style, jewelry, clothing). So then, Paul’s instructions included a general principle and specific application. The general principle relates to every church, but the application of that principle may be different in each church. What was the principle? “I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing...” he wrote (v.9), which addressed the issues of modesty and discretion. Since we are at church to worship God, women should not wear anything to distract from that purpose and draw attention to themselves. If she draws attention to herself, it should be because of her good works (v.10; 1 Peter 3:3, 4).

Paul’s second comment regarding women was that they are to “quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness” (v.11). He added, “I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man but to remain quiet” (v.12). It is important that we view this principle in light of the surrounding passage and letter. The setting is the church, and in particular the general assembly or public worship. Therefore, we cannot carry this principle to areas outside of the church, which would be to apply these verses beyond their meaning. In corporate worship, the responsibilities of teaching, praying, and governing were given to men, particularly the Elders (3:1-7). Women were called upon to respect their authority and submit to their leadership.

Paul’s support for this principle (male leadership in the church) is grounded in creation and the Fall (v.13, 14). In other words, this leadership role aligned with God’s intention from the beginning, as man was created first (Gen. 2:15-18, and woman was taken out of man) and as Eve was the first one deceived by the serpent (Gen. 3:9-11). Evidently, the women in Ephesus were being deceived by false teachers (5:11-15; 2 Tim. 3:6, 7). Male leadership, then, was meant for their protection.

Male leadership (in marriage, in the family, and in the church) does not insinuate that women are any less equal or important. It simply means that men and women have different parts to play. For example, Paul wrote, “Women will be preserved (saved, redeemed) through the bearing of children...” (v.15). He was not referring to their salvation but to their usefulness in God’s plan. Despite their part in the Fall, married women play a vital role, that of having children and raising them to love God. Paul’s instructions are certainly counter-cultural, but they are God’s words to us, meant for our good.

1 Timothy 3:1-7

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

Eldership

Acts 20:17-35
Philippians 1:1
1 Timothy 3:1-7
Titus 1:1-9
1 Peter 5:1-5

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Qualified Leaders

The Biblical Elder

Leading Idea

Elders are biblically qualified men called by God to *lead* His Church.

Within the theme of giving instructions for the church, Paul proceeded to address the qualifications of the two offices -- Overseers and Deacons (*v.1; Phil. 1:1*). The Greek word for Overseer is *episkopos*, which describes a superintendent. When meeting with the Ephesian Overseers, Paul referred to them as Elders (*presbyteros*), which means a pastor or shepherd (*Acts 20:17, 18, 28*). Thus, Elders and Overseers refer to the same group, the God-ordained earthly leaders of His Church.

Paul referred to these leaders in the plural, meaning that each church should have more than one Elder or Overseer. The plurality of Elders protects the church against rogue or dictatorial rulers, and it allows for collaborative leadership and joint ministry to the church. The role of Elders is that of stewards or managers of God’s house (*v.5*). Some of their responsibilities include leading, teaching, praying, pastoring, and protecting the people of God. These responsibilities are weighty and difficult, but Paul called it a “fine work” (*v.1*). Although Paul wrote that men will “aspire to” or “desire” the position of Elder, it is clear in Scripture that their desire will be Spirit-led rather than self-serving (*Acts 20:28*).

In the context of his letter, particularly dealing with false teachers, Paul made sure to tell Timothy that Elders should exhibit certain qualities. For example, the Elder candidate should be a man above reproach (*v.2*, not perfect but without accusation or scandal), the husband of one wife (*v.2*, literally “a one-woman man,” referring to his fidelity and sexual purity), temperate (*v.2*, moderate in his appetites, practicing self-control), prudent (*v.2*, cautious in his decisions), respectable (*v.2*, honorable, admired for his character), hospitable (*v.2*, friendly, kind, welcoming), and able to teach (*v.2*, he can discern, articulate, and apply biblical principles).

Paul continued, saying Elder candidates should not be addicted to wine (*v.3*, not given to drunkenness) or pugnacious (*v.3*, not combative, quarrelsome), but rather they should be gentle (*v.3*, not abrasive but tender), peaceable (*v.3*, humble, unselfish), and free from the love of money (*v.3*, not greedy or covetous). Next, to discern whether or not these men are good managers, Paul told Timothy to observe their families. “He must be one who manages his own household well...” (*v.4*). It makes sense that if he cannot manage his own home, then he will not be able to manage the church (*v.5*). The candidate must “keep his children under control with dignity” (*v.5*). In other words, how the man treats his kids will indicate how he will shepherd the people of God.

Next, Paul said that an Elder candidate should not be a new convert or someone who has not been a follower of Christ for very long (*v.6*). In other words, Elders should be men of experience and tested faith, who have a deep love and appreciation for the Church. A new believer, who does not yet understand the deeper things of the Gospel, who has not yet experienced and withstood the tests and temptations of a life with Christ is not ready to lead or pastor other believers. In fact, Paul wrote, he may become “conceited and fall into condemnation incurred by the devil” (*v.6*). Satan fell prey to his pride and aspired to a position for which he was not qualified. In the end, he was humiliated.

Finally, Paul expected Elder candidates to be men of “good reputation outside the church,” so that they would not “fall into reproach and the snare of the devil” (*v.7*). These men should be highly regarded in the community, so as to prove their integrity. In other words, these men will be the same inside the church as they are outside the church, not two-faced, hypocritical, or leading a double life. It should not surprise people outside the church that these men serve in a leadership position inside the church.

Paul listed similar qualifications in his letter to Titus (*1:1-9*). It is clear that he expected the qualifications to be more about the man’s character than aptitude or ability. Unhealthy churches are usually symptoms of unhealthy leadership. Selecting the right men can prevent a multitude of wrongs.

⁸“Deacons likewise *must be men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain,* ⁹*but holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.* ¹⁰These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach.

¹¹Women *must* likewise be dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. ¹²Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own households. ¹³For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.”

“Women Likewise...”

This verse (v.11) is often debated because of its awkward insertion into a passage about men. There are five commonly held interpretations – all women in general, wives of the Deacons, female Deacons (same as men), a third and separate office of Deaconesses, or female assistants to the Deacons.

Defining Deacons as assistants to the Elders, having delegated authority to lead some ministries of the church, and seeing Paul wrote that women should not have authority over men (2:12), the most biblical interpretations of “women” here is either wives of the Deacons or female assistants to the Deacons. Paul only mentioned two offices, so a third and separate office is unfounded.

Assistants to the Elders

The Biblical Deacon

Leading Idea

Deacons are servant-leaders who *assist* the Elders in meeting the needs of the Church.

In Chapter 3, Paul addressed the two offices of the church, that of Elders (v.1-7) and Deacons (v.8-13). Elders are biblically qualified men called by God to lead His Church, but what are Deacons? While the Bible has much to say about Eldership, there is little we know about Deacons. In fact, Deacons are only mentioned in two passages of Scripture (*Phil. 1:1; 1 Tim. 3*). So then, who are Deacons? What do they do, and what qualifications are required to serve in that position?

In the two places in Scripture where Deacons are mentioned, they are listed alongside the Elders, so we know that they serve in an official capacity in the church. Both times Deacons are mentioned, they are listed after the Elders, so we know that they serve under the leadership of the Elders. However, the Bible does not tell us what Deacons do, but we can piece together some biblical hints.

First, the Greek word for Deacon is *diakonos*, which has four possible meanings – a table waiter, a servant or attendant, an envoy or messenger, or an assistant. Our second clue is found in *Acts 6:1-7*. In the early church, the Disciples were overwhelmed by the growing numbers of believers. They could not meet all of the needs. After a complaint arose by some of the widows, the Disciples charged the people to select seven men to assist them, so that they could continue teaching and praying. The two groups, working together, sufficiently met the needs of the church and the Gospel continued to spread. While the words “Elders” and “Deacons” are not found in *Acts 6*, we see the example of leaders (Disciples, Elders) and their assistants (Deacons) working together for the benefit of the people.

After putting all of these pieces together, Deacons are servant-leaders who assist the Elders in meeting the needs of the church. With having such important responsibilities and executing their duties with delegated Elder authority requires them to be biblically qualified (v.8-13). The qualifications are very similar to the Elders, with one notable exception. Deacons are not required to be able to teach.

Paul said that Deacon candidates must be “men of dignity” (v.8, worthy of respect), “not double-tongued” (v.8, having integrity of speech, not hypocritical), “not addicted to much wine” (v.8, not given to drunkenness but practicing self-control), and “not fond of sordid gain” (v.8, not greedy for money or advancement). Deacon candidates should be men who “hold to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (v.9). The Gospel is often described as a mystery (*Matt. 13:11; Col. 1:26, 27; 4:3*). These men must know the truths of the Christian faith, believe them, and apply them to their lives.

Next, Paul wrote that Deacon candidates must be tested before they serve (v.10). However, he did not give any instructions for how to test them, so every church is at liberty to determine how to examine the life, faith, and character of their candidates. The purpose, Paul said, was to discern whether or not these men were “beyond reproach” (v.10), meaning that Deacons are to be role models of the Christian life. There should be no evidence of wrongdoing, immorality, or shameful scandals.

In the middle of the qualifications for men, Paul inserted four qualifications for women, which could also be translated “wives” (v.11, see side note). These women must be “dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate (self-controlled) and faithful in all things.” Deacon candidates must be “husbands of one wife” (v.12, meaning a “one-woman man,” referring to his fidelity and sexual purity) and “good managers of his household” (v.12). No man is perfect in his leadership but there should be evidence of order, love, and discipline in the family, an indication of how he will serve the church.

Though Deacons often serve behind the scenes and receive little credit, they are invaluable to the health of the church. Paul promised a reward for those who “serve well” (v.13). They “obtain for themselves a high standing (place of respect and admiration) and great confidence in the faith.”

¹“But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ²by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in 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 gratitude; ⁵for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. ⁶In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.”

Avoiding Apostasy

Falling Away from the Faith

Leading Idea

By *nourishing* ourselves on the truths of God’s Word, we can *protect* ourselves from the enemy’s lies.

After confronting and correcting some of the opinions of the false teachers in Chapters 2 and 3, Paul now revealed the origin of the false teachers (4:1-6). While it is important to expose the lies of cults, false religions, and errant teaching, it is more important to identify the source of their doctrine, which can only be our spiritual enemy, the Devil. Whatever Satan has in his arsenal, he will employ to distract, derail, divide, or destroy the Gospel and the Church, the kingdom of God on earth.

Paul told Timothy that he had direct revelation from God regarding this matter. “The Spirit explicitly says,” he wrote (v.1). This expression is evidence of God’s divine inspiration of Scripture. These words were not Paul’s words so much as they were God’s words to us. This expression – “the Spirit explicitly says” -- is also confirmation of Paul’s apostleship, that he was directly sent by God to relate His words to others (see also *Acts 20:22-31; 21:11*).

The Apostle wrote that “in later times, some will fall away from the faith...” (v.1). The phrase “later times” refers to the Church Age or that period after Christ’s first advent until His return. As we near the end of the Church Age, the “falling away” rate will increase dramatically (*Matt. 24:12; Acts 20:29-31*), reaching its climax with the rise of the Anti-Christ (*2 Thess. 2:3*). The term “falling away” is the word “apostacize,” which literally means to withdraw, to take a position away from, or to leave.

To “fall away from the faith” simply means to renounce the beliefs that one previously held for another belief system. It does not mean that one has lost his salvation. It is impossible for one to lose salvation because salvation is not his to gain or lose. Salvation is a work of God, not man. Jesus said, “All that the Father has given me will come to Me, and no one will be able to snatch them out of My hand” (*John 10:28*). Jesus also said that “a house divided against itself cannot stand” (*Matt. 12:22-28*). If the Holy Spirit truly indwells a believer, will the Spirit lead the believer to walk away from the Lord? Of course not. So then, when a person “falls away from the faith,” it means one of two things, either that person will return to the Lord in due time (because he is truly saved), or it means that the person was not saved to begin with but only professed to be saved. In other words, the person walking away was a pretender, acting like a Christian but revealing his true colors in the end. John explained it like this, “They went out from us, because they did not belong to us...” (*1 John 2:19*).

People fall away from their faith, Paul said, because they pay more attention to “deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons and hypocritical liars” (v.1, 2) than they do the “words of faith and sound doctrine” (v.6). Part of Timothy’s responsibility was to be a “good servant of Christ” and “point these things out” to the believers in Ephesus (v.6). As Christians, we are to “take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (*2 Cor. 10: 5*), which means that we filter every idea or truth claim we hear through God’s Word. If we don’t, then we too can become vulnerable and more likely to be taken captive by the lies of the enemy (*Col. 2:8*). We may even fall away from the faith.

Although these deceivers know the truth (because it is written on their hearts), they suppress it or reject it, “searing their conscience as with a branding iron” (v.2). They become numb to the truth and embrace philosophies contrary to God’s Word, such as forbidding marriage and foods (v.3-5). In other words, what God says is good, false teachers claim is evil, and what God says is evil, false teachers claim is good. The Devil will always distort the principles of God to derail the people of God.

How are we to combat the enemy’s deceptions? How do we ensure that we do not “fall away from the faith”? Paul gave us the answer. We shield ourselves by “constantly being nourished on the words of faith and sound doctrine” (v.6). By studying the genuine artifact, we can easily spot the counterfeit. By regularly reading and meditating on the truth of God’s Word, He will help us to identify Satan’s lies.

1 Timothy 4:7-11

⁷“But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come. ⁹It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

¹⁰For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

¹¹Prescribe and teach these things.”

The Purpose of Godliness

Investing in the Spiritual Disciplines

Leading Idea

Godliness is intentional, and it requires time and effort.

This passage (v.7-11) is connected to the previous passage (v.1-6), particularly the last verse (v.6) in which Paul wrote, “...Be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.” In contrast to the “word of the faith and sound doctrine” are “worldly fables” or myths (v.7), which Paul told Timothy to avoid (see 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:14-18). He wrote that these things were “fit only for old women,” which was his way of saying that they were just stories, useless chatter, or a waste of time, and not to be taken seriously.

“On the other hand,” he said, do something useful or profitable. “Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness” (v.7). Godliness is a synonym for Christlikeness or piety, a love of God and His Word and a desire to live by His will and ways. The biblical term for Christlikeness is sanctification, which is conformity to the image of Christ. Over time, a follower of Christ should look more like Christ, which is what God desires for His children (*Rom. 8:29; Phil. 1:6; 2:13*). Sanctification or spiritual maturity is a process in which we cooperate with God. Sanctification is a joint effort. God supplies the tools, while we supply the labor. While His Spirit is at work in us, and He uses our daily situations to mold us into His image, He expects us to do our part.

We do not perfect godliness overnight, neither do we drift into godliness by accident. Godliness is intentional, and it requires time and effort. Paul used the word “discipline,” which insinuates training, exercise, or practice. There are activities in which we as Christians can participate, that will help develop godliness or Christlikeness in our lives. In other words, we can discipline ourselves for spiritual fitness and usefulness. Thus, we call these exercises the spiritual disciplines. The spiritual disciplines include activities such as worship, prayer, service, giving, accountability, etc. However, the most important discipline is Scripture intake, which includes reading, studying, meditating on, and memorizing God’s Word. That’s why Paul told Timothy to “nourish himself constantly on the words of the faith and of sound doctrine.” All of the other disciplines are informed by and revolve around Scripture intake. Without it, the other disciplines are (or can be) misguided or misunderstood.

Next, Paul contrasted bodily discipline with godliness. “Bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things...” (v.8). We should take care of our bodies by eating right, sleeping, and exercising. Our bodies are temples of God (*1 Cor. 6:19; 2 Cor. 6:16*). However, our bodies are temporal. They will not last. Our spirits, on the other hand, are eternal. Therefore, according to Paul, we should invest more time in our spiritual fitness than our bodily fitness, for “godliness holds the promise of the present life and the life to come” (v.8). “It is a trustworthy statement,” Paul wrote, “deserving full acceptance” (v.9), which means that this truth is an important point. Don’t miss it.

Paul continued, “It is for this” – godliness, Christlikeness, sanctification – “that we labor and strive” (v.10). “Prescribe and teach these things,” he told Timothy (v.11). So many Christians misplace their priorities and focus their attention on worldliness instead of godliness, on physical fitness instead of spiritual fitness, on things that are a waste of time and resources in the big picture, when we are called to a higher purpose. “We have fixed our hope on the living God...” (v.10), not on this world, not on our bodies, and not on ourselves. What about you? On what do you spend your time and energy? Are you disciplining yourself for worldliness or godliness?

Finally, Paul referred to God as “the Savior of all men, especially of believers” (v.10). He was not advocating universalism here, that all men will be saved, otherwise he would not have added “especially of believers.” While God is the hope of all men, all men do not view Him as such. His gracious call is extended to all men but only some will accept Him as their Savior. His general grace or goodness is extended to all people, but only believers receive that grace for the salvation of their souls.

¹²“Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. ¹⁵Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.”

Be All In

Spiritual Maturity

Leading Idea

God uses our spiritual *discipline* to encourage others to spiritual *devotion*.

Paul shifted his attention from false teachers (Chapter 1) to church order and offices (Chapters 2 and 3) and next to personal encouragements to Timothy (4:7-16). Here he added to his charge of disciplining himself “for the purpose of godliness” by focusing on Timothy’s character and spiritual gift. First, Paul challenged Timothy not to allow his age to be a stumbling block. As Timothy was a young man with authority in the church (as Paul’s assistant), older church members naturally questioned whether or not someone his age was deserving and capable of handling such a position. Unfortunately, youthfulness has a stigma attached, that young people are unwise, immature, inexperienced, and irresponsible.

However, spiritual maturity is not dependent upon one’s age. Just as there are spiritually immature elderly people, there can be spiritually mature young people (i.e. Joseph, David, Daniel). Thus, Paul challenged Timothy not to let his age be a barrier to his leadership potential, but instead, to “show himself an example of those who believe” (v.12). The best way for leaders (especially younger ones) to gain respect is not by flaunting authority but by influencing others with a godly example.

After addressing Timothy’s character (example), Paul focused on his spiritual gift. “Give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching” (v.13). He wanted Timothy to combat the false teachers by sharing the truths of God’s Word. The people did not have a personal copy of the Scriptures (the Old Testament then), as we do, so they needed to hear it read (*Neh. 8:8*). They also needed to have the Scriptures explained (teaching) and to be challenged to obey them (exhortation).

These activities – reading God’s Word, teaching it, and exhorting people to follow it – fell in the parameters of Timothy’s spiritual gift(s). Thus, Paul challenged Timothy not to “neglect the spiritual gift” within him (v.14). Every believer has the Spirit of God indwelling him (*1 Cor. 3:16*), and the Holy Spirit equips believers with at least one ability to serve and bless others, to do the work of ministry (*1 Cor. 12:4-18; Eph. 4:11-13*). Timothy’s spiritual gift was preaching or teaching (*2 Tim. 1:6; 2:15; 4:2, 5*), and it was affirmed by Paul, someone with the gift of prophecy, and the Elders (presbytery), by the laying on of hands (v.14; see also *Acts 16:1-3*). The laying on of hands is a public affirmation and commissioning to the work God has called one to do (*5:22*).

To demonstrate the seriousness of his appeal to Timothy -- to read God’s Word, to teach it, and to exhort people to follow it -- Paul reiterated his challenge several times. “Take pains with these things,” he wrote (v.15), which means to plan, practice, or exercise. “Be absorbed in them” (v.15). The word “absorbed” is not in the original language. It has been added by translators to help readers understand Paul’s meaning. His original words were “be in them,” meaning to be engrossed in these things, to be consumed by them, to be focused on and dedicated to them. Simply put, Paul was saying, “Be all in!”

Paul encouraged Timothy not to neglect his spiritual gift so that his “progress would be evident to all” (v.15). He was not telling Timothy to show off but to make sure that his spiritual maturity overshadowed his age. None of us should neglect our spiritual gifts but exercise them for the good of others to the glory of God. We are all works in progress. We should all be advancing, moving, growing, charging ahead, and never apathetic, plateaued, or neutral.

Finally, Paul wrote, “pay close attention to yourself (character) and to your teaching (doctrine), persevere in these things,” meaning don’t give up (v.16). By doing so, Timothy would “ensure salvation” for himself and those who heard him (v.16). Paul was not advocating salvation by works but rather leading people down the right path, towards spiritual maturity. Salvation is evidenced by one’s perseverance and faithfulness. In other words, Timothy’s preaching and example would ensure that both he and those in the church would stay the course and avoid apostasy, unlike the false teachers.

¹ “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, to the younger men as brothers, ²the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity.”

May I Appeal?

Church Relationships

Leading Idea

A respectful *appeal* is always recommended over a harsh *rebuke*.

At first glance, these two verses seem out of place. Paul shifted from addressing false teachers (Ch. 1) to giving Timothy instructions in regard to men, women, and church offices (Ch. 2, 3), to providing Timothy with personal encouragement (Ch. 4). Next, Paul resumed addressing issues in the church, particularly with ministering to widows (5:3-16). However, these two verses (5:1, 2) are wedged in between all of that.

While the Apostle Paul demonstrated organization in his letters, he is well-known for inserting thoughts out of order. In our day of technology, it is easy to go back into a document and edit it as thoughts arise, but Paul did not have that luxury when writing his letters. When a new thought came to mind, he simply inserted it at that point, even though it disrupted the flow of the letter. Think of it as an “Oh yeah, by the way, I forgot to mention...” moment, which often confuses us as readers.

Consider these verses (5:1, 2) as an extension of Paul’s challenge to Timothy (in the last chapter) regarding his age. “Let no one look down on your youthfulness,” he wrote, “but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe” (4:12). As a young leader of the church, having authority over its members (as Paul’s assistant) and trying his best to establish right doctrine and practice, it would be very important how Timothy treated people. Rather than be a dictator or an authoritarian, he had to be an example of Christian conduct. Treating people in a kind and classy way would only help his cause.

First, Paul told Timothy, “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father...” (v.1). To rebuke someone means to reprove him, to charge him with a fault, or it can mean to refute him or set him straight. Notice that Paul did not say that rebuking an older man was out of bounds, but rather that Timothy shouldn’t rebuke him sharply. In other words, it is okay to confront a man about his sin. What is important here is the way in which we do it. Remember, Timothy was dealing with false teachers, most of whom were older than him.

What did Paul suggest? He instructed Timothy “to appeal to an older man as a father” (v.1). In other words, showing respect for one’s elders (someone older than you) is the best approach. The word “appeal” here means to ask, encourage, or comfort. The idea was for Timothy to come alongside a man and gently redirect him rather than to reprimand or scold him like a child for his actions.

Second, Paul suggested appealing to younger men as brothers (v.1). Rather than be domineering or managerial, an older brother is to act more like a mentor, someone who helps little brother with wise counsel. Rather than play the role of a dad, Paul was recommending Timothy disciple young men like a guide who points one in the right direction.

Next, Paul told Timothy to appeal to older women as mothers (v.2). One should never treat his mother harshly; rather the Scriptures implore us to “honor our father and mother” (Eph. 6:2). To honor means to esteem or revere, by treating one with dignity. Again, Paul did not suggest that correction was out of bounds, but that correction should be done with gentleness, kindness, and respect.

Finally, Paul encouraged Timothy “to appeal to younger women as sisters in all purity” (v.2). A good brother will treat a sister with love and respect, in a kind, gentle, and protective manner. However, young women fall into a different category than everyone else because of the element of physical attraction. Thus, Paul added the reminder that these relationships must be above reproach with “all purity.” Church leaders are not immune to the dangers of lust, indiscretion, or unbecoming conduct. They must set in place moral boundaries and accountability to prevent falling into sin themselves.

Widows Indeed

Caring for the Church

³ “Honor widows who are widows indeed; ⁴but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God. ⁵Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. ⁶But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. ⁸But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.”

Leading Idea

Christians are called to *love* and care for one another, especially those who are most *vulnerable*.

In keeping with the theme of church instruction, Paul turned his attention to widow care. The Lord has always expected widow care to be a high priority for His people. In fact, in Israel, widow care was built into the law (*Deut. 24:19-21*). In the early Church, we see Christians caring for widows (*Acts 6:1-7*). James even wrote, “Pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God is this – to visit orphans and widows in their distress...” (*James 1:27*). The followers of Christ are called to love and care for one another, especially those who are most vulnerable.

What is interesting to note here is the close connection between widows and officers of the church. In *Acts 6*, we find the Apostles attending to the spiritual and practical needs of early Christians. However, they became overwhelmed by the needs and asked for assistance. Seven men were chosen and commissioned to the work. While the words “Elders” and “Deacons” are not used in *Acts 6*, the example is set for church leaders (Elders) and their assistants (Deacons) to work together to meet the needs of the church, which include widow care. Earlier in his letter to Timothy, Paul addressed both the offices of Elders and Deacons (Chapter 3). It is not a coincidence that Paul addressed the issue of widow care, since these men were (and still are) primarily responsible for it.

Paul started this section with a simple command, “Honor widows who are widows indeed” (v.3). Who are “widows indeed,” and what does it mean to honor them? To honor someone means to esteem or respect them, but in this sense, it would also include meeting their practical, even financial, needs. However, if too many widows relied upon the church for help (especially financial help), the church could suffer. Therefore, Paul clarified that only “widows indeed” should receive financial support. A “widow indeed” is one without family – children and grandchildren (v.4), who has been “left all alone” after her husband has died (v.5).

Before a widow turns to the church for help, she should first turn to her own family. Paul challenged family members to “practice piety” and “make some return to their parents, for this is acceptable in the sight of God” (v.4). Piety here denotes duty, devotion, or responsibility to care for someone who has earned a right to it. Thus, Paul charged children and grandchildren to “make a return to their parents and grandparents” who have earned the right to be cared for, having invested so much time, money, and effort in their families over the years. Caring for family, of course, honors God’s commandments (*Ex. 20:12; Eph. 6:2, 3*).

Children and grandchildren who do not care for their own widows “have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers,” Paul wrote (v.7). Christ taught us to love and care for one another. Therefore, to neglect needy family members is hypocritical to the Christian faith and teaching. Even unbelievers, non-Christians, take care of their family members. How much more should we who proclaim to be followers of Christ? Neglecting family members would be a reproach on Christians, the Church, and even Christianity as a whole (v.7).

Regarding “widows indeed” – those with no family to care for them – Paul told Timothy to prescribe or teach those things that would encourage them to live above reproach, meaning a life of integrity. A demonstration of that lifestyle would be evidenced by the way she “fixes her hope on God and prays night and day...” (v.6). On the other hand, a widow who was pursuing “wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives” (v.6). The word “dead” here could have two meanings. Either the woman is spiritually dead (unsaved), though physically alive, or the woman is a Christian, but she is not living in such a way that honors Christ. Since Paul is talking about caring for widows in the church, it is likely that these are Christian women living ungodly lives. It would be wrong for them to receive help from the church and live a life a dishonor. God expects them to be above reproach (v.7) and to glorify Him.

⁹ “A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, ¹⁰having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints’ feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work. ¹¹But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, ¹²thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. ¹³At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention. ¹⁴Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach; ¹⁵for some have already turned aside to follow Satan. ¹⁶If any woman who is a believer has dependent widows, she must assist them, and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.”

The List

Widows to Assist

Leading Idea

If the Church is going to *support* a widow, then she must be a woman of *character*.

Once Paul defined a “widow indeed” (v.3-8) – one who has no family to support her – he gave Timothy further instructions for discerning which widows the church should financially support. Obviously, the church could not support every widow, as it would become financially burdened. Those widows with family members were to turn to them first for help. Likewise, Paul made sure that the church supported only women of good repute, so as not to be a reproach to the body of Christ. Therefore, the widows who met his seven requirements were put on “the list” (v.9).

First, Paul set the age limit at sixty (v.9), which was very old for that time. A woman who is sixty or older would most likely not remarry; therefore, she would need financial help. Second, this woman must be the wife of one man (v.9). In other words, she is a woman of sexual purity who was faithful in marriage. Third, this woman must have a “reputation for good works” (v.10), meaning she has a good name because she has consistently displayed honorable character. A reputation is built over time, by repeated actions and words. Her actions and words have been commendable throughout her adult life.

The fourth requirement for a widow to be put on “the list” was that she “has brought up children” (v.10), meaning not only was she a mother (one of God’s primary purposes for women) but a mother who raised honorable God-fearing children. In other words, she has invested her life in those who are the future of the church. Fifth, the woman must have “shown hospitality to strangers” (v.10). Hospitality, which is receiving and entertaining guests with kindness, is an expression of loving one’s neighbor. It would not make sense for the church to support a widow who was not loving or kind.

Next, this woman must have “washed the saints’ feet” (v.10), meaning that she has a love for the church, for fellow believers, and she has been an example of Christlike service to them. Then, Paul wrote that this woman must have “assisted those in distress” (v.10). If a woman has not assisted others in their distress, how could she expect for the church to assist her in a time of distress? Finally, this woman must be “devoted to every good work” (v.10). Not only does she have a reputation for good works, but she is devoted to good works, meaning she looks for ways to honor God by helping others.

Next, Paul turned his attention to those who should not be added to “the list.” “Refuse to put younger widows on the list,” he wrote (v.11). Younger women still have “sensual desires” which cause “disregard for Christ” (v.11), meaning these desires distract women from being focused on Christ. Thus, they want to get remarried. Paul was not condemning marriage. His concern was that women would be pulled away from their commitment to Christ, especially if they married unbelievers. She may even “incur condemnation” for having “set aside her previous pledge” (v.12). Her pledge may be to Christ alone, to remain celibate after her husband had died, or by marrying someone outside the faith, which Paul strongly discouraged (2 Cor. 6:14, 15). This woman would be throwing away a relationship with Christ to get an ungodly husband.

Another reason not to put younger widows on “the list,” Paul said, is that they “learn to be idle gossips and busybodies” (v.13). Just as people on welfare tend to become dependent, lazy, and unproductive, so would women who receive financial help from the church. They would have a tendency to do nothing but stir up trouble rather than find ways to serve others and glorify God. Thus, Paul urged younger widows to get remarried and to busy themselves caring for their husband, home, and family (v.14), rather than give the enemy an “occasion for reproach.” Some widows, Paul wrote, had already “turned aside to follow Satan” (v.16), referring to those, perhaps, who had been deceived by false teachers (2 Tim. 3:6, 7). Finally, Paul urged women who have dependent widows in their family to support them (v.16), which goes back to his original argument, that family should support family so that the church could focus on those women who were “widows indeed.”

1 Timothy 5:17-25

¹⁷“The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, “YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING,” and “The laborer is worthy of his wages.” ¹⁹Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. ²⁰Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. ²¹I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, to maintain these principles without bias, doing nothing in a spirit of partiality. ²²Do not lay hands upon anyone too hastily and thereby share responsibility for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. ²³No longer drink water exclusively but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. ²⁴The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their sins follow after. ²⁵Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.”

Double Trouble

Elder Leadership

Leading Idea

Good leaders are worthy of *double honor*, but poor leaders will not be worth the *double trouble*.

While Paul addressed many topics in this letter, regarding how the church should function, most (if not all) of them have revolved around its leaders. The Ephesian church suffered from wayward, ungodly, unbiblical leadership. That is why Paul directed parts of his letter to false teaching (Ch. 1), to the appropriate roles of men and women (Ch. 2), to Elder and Deacon qualifications (Ch. 3), and to proper widow care (5:3-16). Again, in this passage (5:17-25), the Apostle concentrated on leadership, specifically how to install, protect, reward, and even admonish Elders.

First, Paul instructed Timothy to honor examples of good leadership. “The Elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching” (v.17). Elders are responsible for the leadership of the church and their responsibilities include ruling and preaching or teaching. “To rule” here is to stand in front, meaning to lead, oversee, or manage (Acts 20:28; 1 Peter 5:2, 3). The Church is to be led by Elders (plural), not by Deacons, not by a single Pastor, not by staff members or domineering congregants. While the tasks of Elders and others may overlap, ultimately the responsibility and accountability fall on the Elders (Heb. 13:17).

Elders are not only to lead out in the decision-making or governance of the church (rule well) but also in the ministry of God’s Word (preaching, teaching). While preaching and teaching are similar, Scripture separates the two (Eph. 4:11; 1 Tim. 4:13). Preaching involves speaking God’s Word and exhortation, exposition, and/or admonition in order to convict and affect life change. Teaching is more instructional and includes knowledge-based explanation and practical how-to application.

Because of the distinction Paul gave for ruling and preaching/teaching, some churches distinguish between ruling Elders and teaching or serving Elders, while other churches combine the two roles. Paul’s remarks target those Elders who did both, govern and preach or teach. He wrote that they are “worthy of double honor” (v.17). To honor someone is to respect or esteem him. But, in this sense, honor can also include meeting practical needs (i.e. financial, as in “honor father and mother” in their old age, or “honor widows indeed”). Thus, Paul added two passages of Scripture supporting his statement (v.18, Deut. 25:4; Luke 10:7). Notice that he used an Old Testament and New Testament reference and equated both to Scripture, meaning that they are equally authoritative as God’s Word.

Because the Elders’ leadership, responsibility, and ministry are vital to the health of a church, the men in that position should be held to a high standard (3:1-7), carefully scrutinized, and held accountable for their actions. Honorable leaders are targets for spiritual attack, temptation, and sin. Therefore, Paul provided instructions for how to accuse, discipline, and rebuke apostate Elders (v.19-21, similar to Matthew 18:15-17), all of which should be done “without bias or impartiality.” The idea is that Elders should be protected from flippant accusations but, at the same time, they should be held accountable for wrongdoing. The process of rebuking an Elder should even be done publicly, in order to demonstrate the seriousness of sin and prevent others from committing the same mistakes.

Much of the headache of poor leadership can be avoided in the selection and testing process. Thus, Paul said, “Do not lay hands on anyone too hastily...” (v.22). In other words, churches should not be in a hurry when choosing or commissioning Elders; rather they must take their time and select men of character. Otherwise, instead of having Elders worthy of double honor, they will have Elders who prove to be double trouble, and they will have been responsible for their appointment. Most of the time both the good and bad of men are obvious (v.24, 25). Members are not responsible for sins that are hidden from them, but to appoint men with obvious character flaws is a shame and they will pay for it. Finally, it appears that a side issue in Ephesus was the place and/or dangers of alcohol. Paul affirmed the medicinal benefits of wine and permitted Timothy to drink “a little” to help his stomach.

1 Timothy 6:1, 2

¹“All who are under the yoke as slaves are to regard their own masters as worthy of all honor so that the name of God and *our* doctrine will not be spoken against. ²Those who have believers as their masters must not be disrespectful to them because they are brethren, but must serve them all the more, because those who partake of the benefit are believers and beloved. Teach and preach these principles.”

Honorable Employees

Glorifying Christ in the Workplace

Leading Idea

Christ-followers should be careful not to *discredit* or *dishonor* the name of the Lord in the *workplace*.

Towards the end of his letter to Timothy, Paul inserted thoughts regarding two more issues in the Ephesian church – the behavior of slaves (v.1, 2) and the love of money (v.3-10). Since the overarching theme of Paul’s letter is to combat false teaching, it is likely that these were topics being distorted by ungodly leaders. Thus, Paul set the record straight by giving God’s perspective.

Regarding the issue of slavery, some general principles must be set in place before understanding Paul’s comments. First, the Bible does not condemn slavery. In fact, Scripture mentions slavery often, as a reality of the ancient world. Unfortunately, in both the Jewish and Roman cultures, there were those who were servants for one reason or another.

Second, the slavery of the Bible is not the same as the slavery or human trafficking that we know in the West. The European slave trade, that was eventually exported to America, was based on nationality, skin color, inequality, kidnapping, and perpetuity (never-ending). Slavery in the Jewish culture was based on debt payment. If one could not pay his debts, he could work for or enslave himself to his lender, until the debt was paid. After the debt was paid, the slave was freed. In America, this type of relationship was called indentured servitude.

Third, the Bible does not condone slavery based on nationality, skin color, inequality, kidnapping, or perpetuity. Scripture affirms that all people are created by God, in His image, and are, therefore, equal (*Gen. 1:27*). All people have the same rights to be protected. Even in the Jewish system of slavery, they were not allowed to kidnap people for profit (*Ex. 21:16*). Paul, likewise, condemns wrongful slave traders earlier in this letter (*1:8-10*). So then, we must be careful not to equate slavery today to the slavery of the Old or New Testament. If Paul were speaking to American Christians today, he would use the terms “employee” and “employer.”

The phrase “under the yoke” (v.1) was an idiom to describe someone who was not free to practice self-determination, for one reason or another, but rather was under someone else’s control (like cattle), hence a slave. It is possible that false teachers were stirring up rebellion in the minds of slaves, causing trouble for slave owners in Ephesus. Paul warned against such behavior as it reflected poorly on Christ and His teaching (v.1). Instead, those “under the yoke” should treat their “masters” with honor and humbly and dutifully submit to their authority. Imagine if an employee used Scripture to complain or grumble against his boss’ authority, decisions, schedule, duties, or pay. The employer would not respect Christianity but rather would look at it with disdain. He would want nothing to do with Christ.

Regarding Christian employers (“masters who are believers,” v.2), Paul urged slaves “not to be disrespectful” but to “serve them all the more” (v.2). His reason was that “those who benefit are believers and beloved” (v.2). Again, imagine the difference between working for a Christian and non-Christian employer. While we may not agree with the non-Christian’s goals, decisions, or lifestyle, we should be respectful and do our job well. But, if we are fortunate enough to work for a Christian employer, whose business goals, decisions, and lifestyle honors Christ, then we should do everything in our power to help him succeed. His success may lead to spreading the Gospel or helping the poor and underprivileged or benefiting the Church somehow.

Paul told Timothy to “teach and preach these principles” (v.2). Here, again, he differentiated teaching and preaching (as was mentioned in the last chapter). This expectation insinuates that principles were being taught by others (false teachers) that conflicted with Paul’s words. The idea is that we should not do anything to discredit or dishonor the name of the Lord, His teaching, or His Church. The followers of Christ should be the best employees, glorifying God in the workplace (*Matt. 5:16*).

³“If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, ⁴ he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, ⁵and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. ⁶ But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. ⁷ For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. ⁸ If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. ⁹ But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.”

Godliness – True or False?

A Biblical View of Money and Materialism

Leading Idea

A mature believer, who is *content* with what God provides, will find *freedom* from greed and ruin.

Before Paul closed his letter to Timothy, he addressed one final issue regarding the false teachers in Ephesus – their love of money. Evidently, these men were abusing their position of leadership in the church (Elder) and feigning godliness for financial gain. Unfortunately, this problem still plagues the Church in America today. Megachurch personalities, TV preachers, and health-and-wealth proponents prey on ignorant people to fill their pockets. For many, ministry is a for-profit industry (v.5). Satan still uses his age-old temptation of wealth to distract and destroy Gospel-centered living and teaching.

The Apostle Paul had some strong words for these men. First, he established the Gospel of Christ as the standard of right doctrine, “sound words,” and true “godliness” (v.3), and anyone who advocates something different is conceited (arrogant, self-centered) and ignorant (“understands nothing,” v.4). Second, Paul wrote that false teachers not only teach what is wrong, but they also produce what is wrong – disputes, envy, strife, abuse, suspicion, and friction (v.4, 5). Ignorant people, “deprived of the truth” (v.5), are taken advantage of by men of “depraved minds” (v.5).

The truth is that “godliness (or true Christian living) is, indeed, a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment” (v.6). The word “gain” here is “a profit or advantage” and is meant to be for spiritual not financial gain. Notice that contentment frees us from the trappings of money. To be content is to keep one’s desires within limits, to be satisfied with the minimum (v.7, 8). Such an attitude gains us a peace of mind, an internal rest, and an unselfish and generous heart.

True godliness and financial gain are not complimentary but contradictory. Jesus said, “No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth” (*Matt. 6:24*). Contentment is the key. Our needs are very simple, Paul said, “food and covering” (v.8). Everything else is superfluous or unnecessary. We come into this world with nothing and we will take nothing with us into the afterlife (v.7), so why do we cling to worldly goods as if they are precious or valuable? Furthermore, if we view our possessions as gifts from God – His not ours – then we will be content with little or much.

Discontentment, which is a dissatisfaction at the present state of things, does not allow the mind to rest. Discontentment is often caused by comparing ourselves to others and believing that the grass is greener on the other side, that more stuff produces more happiness. Before we know it, the enemy has caused us to lose focus on the things that matter to chase that which does not matter. Thus, Paul issued a severe warning – “Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (v.9). In short, greed is insatiable and destructive.

Solomon, who was the wealthiest man who ever lived, gave us similar warnings. “Do not weary yourself to gain money...,” he said (*Prov. 23:4, 5*). Why? “He who loves money will not be satisfied” (*Eccl. 5:10*). Making money has a diminishing return. The more one makes, the more one “needs” to fulfill his desire. Thus, chasing money is an endless pursuit that leads to ruin. “What does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?” (*Matt. 16:26*).

Money itself is amoral, meaning neither right or wrong, good or bad. When money is viewed correctly, as a gift of God to be used for His glory, then money can be a good thing. Paul condemned the love of money (v.10), the desire to be wealthy, not money itself. That desire leads one away from the things of God to harmful paths. Much of the evil and oppression in the history of the world has an underlying theme – someone’s desire for more money or the things it could buy. That desire can only be replaced with the Christlike desire of contentment, a product of the Spirit of God. A mature believer, who is content with what God provides, will find freedom from greed and its destructive tendencies.

¹¹“But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness. ¹²Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, ¹⁴that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen.”

Man of God

The Life of a Follower of Christ

Leading Idea

The man or woman of God is known by what he *flees* from, *follows* after, *fights* for, and is *faithful* to.

Near the end of his letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul addressed the issue of false teachers and their love of money (v.3-10, 17-21). Inserted in the middle of that topic, as was typical for Paul, are personal remarks for Timothy, whom he called “man of God” (v.11; 2 Tim. 3:17). He challenged Timothy to separate himself from false teachers, as a true follower of Christ. Pastor John MacArthur said it best, “The man [or woman] of God is known by what he flees from, follows after, fights for, and is faithful to” (*MacArthur Study Bible*). Let’s consider this passage in light of those four aspects.

First, Paul told Timothy to “flee from these things” (v.11). “These things” referred to the list of issues related to the false teachers (v.3-10) – “a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, constant friction, wanting to get rich, foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction, wandering away from the faith, and piercing oneself with many griefs.” Followers of Christ are called to stand out from the world, not to conform to it (*Rom. 12:2; 2 Cor. 6:17; 1 John 2:15, 16*). In other letters, Paul told Christians to flee from immorality (*1 Cor. 6:18*), idolatry (*1 Cor. 10:14*), and youthful lusts (*2 Tim. 2:22*). Though “we were formerly darkness, we are now children of light. We must live, therefore, as children of light... above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation” (*Eph. 5:8; Phil. 2:15*).

Second, Paul told Timothy to “pursue” or follow after several things – righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (v.11). Followers of Christ, especially teachers and leaders, are to be examples to others of Christlike character (similar to *1 Tim. 4:12*). A life that honors God is about more than what we say no to. An honoring life includes what we say yes to. We are to flee from many things that will distract, discourage, destroy, or discredit our Christian walk, but in our turning away from the things of the world, we must turn to the things of God and draw near to Him (*James 4:6-8*). To pursue means to follow with haste or to chase. Pursuing God is intentional and relentless.

Fleeing from the temptations and traps of the world and following after the things of God are not easy. The struggle is real, and the battle is difficult, but the battle and its reward are worth the effort. Thus, Paul told Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith” (v.12; *1:18*). He followed with “take hold of the eternal life to which you were called” (v.12). He was not insinuating that we earn our salvation or that salvation is somehow in our hands, rather Paul was challenging Timothy to seize the opportunity that Christ afforded him at the cross, to live a life free of the world’s pitfalls. Timothy had confessed his new life in Christ “in the presence of many witnesses” (probably at his baptism), so Paul was urging Timothy to fulfill that calling before others.

Finally, Paul charged Timothy to be faithful, “to keep the commandment without stain or reproach” until Jesus returned (v.13, 14). What is the commandment that Timothy was supposed to keep? Was it to “fight the good fight of faith”? Did “the commandment” relate to all of Paul’s instructions in his letter? Was “the commandment” the calling on Timothy’s life to preach and protect the Gospel? Considering the context in which Paul said, “keep the commandment,” he may have been referring to “taking hold of the eternal life to which you were called.” Or Paul’s statement could apply to all of these. It seems that Paul was reiterating his message to remain diligent and stay focused on his duties.

To give weight to his charge, Paul appeals to God (the Father), “who gives life to all things” (v.13), and Christ (the Son), “who testified the good confession before Pilate” (v.13; *John 18:37*). Paul reminded Timothy who they “work” for – the One who will return, the One who is the sovereign King of Kings and Lord of lords, who possesses eternal life, who dwells in absolute, unapproachable purity and light, and whom no man can see because of his sin (v.14, 15). It is for Christ that we “fight the good fight,” for His honor and not our own (v.16). May we be faithful to do our part in that battle.

¹⁷“Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, ¹⁹storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.”

Life Indeed

A Good Foundation for the Future

Leading Idea

True life or “life indeed” is about having an *eternal* perspective, using money for *God’s* purposes.

As Paul neared the end of his letter to Timothy, he provided instructions for those who had money. He had already addressed the issue of the false teachers and their love of money (v.3-10), and he had given Timothy a personal charge to “flee from these things” (v.11-16). Now, the Apostle explained how followers of Christ should view and steward their wealth in a way that honors God.

Paul addressed his comments to “those who are rich in this present world...” (v.17), but who is considered rich? In American life, one has to earn millions to be considered wealthy, but compared to people around the world, nearly all Americans are in the top 1% of the wealthiest people on the planet. However, in God’s economy, if you have anything more than food and covering, you are rich (1 Tim. 6:8). Wealth is a relative term. It means one thing to one person and another to someone else. Compared to the beggar on the street corner, we are rich. Compared to our next-door neighbor, we might be “poor.” In God’s view, if we have more than what we need, more than the essentials, then we are considered rich. In other words, Paul’s words relate to most of us.

His instruction to us – the rich – is, first, not to be conceited (v.17), which means to have a flattering opinion of oneself, to be prideful or arrogant. Those who have money typically are full of themselves, thinking that they are better than others. Riches and pride are almost always connected. It is rare to meet a humble rich man. Second, Paul instructed us – the rich – not to fix our hope on the uncertainty of riches (v.17). Money is temporal or fleeting, as one’s health, meaning it may be here today, but it could be gone tomorrow. Therefore, we should never put our trust in something so unreliable. Often, wealth is tied to circumstances and circumstances can change suddenly and drastically.

Third, instead of fixing our hope on riches or money, Paul told us to “fix our hope on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy” (v.17). Unlike money, God is constant, stable, reliable, faithful, and trustworthy. He is always there, He does not change, and He is never going away. Also, money is a gift from God, one of many things He supplies for us to enjoy. Thus, we don’t glory in the gift or money we have, we glory in the Giver who provides the money we have. Remember, it is the Lord who gives us the power to make wealth (*Deut. 8:18; 1 Sam. 2:7; 1 Chron. 29:12*).

Finally, Paul encouraged us – the wealthy of the world – “to do good” with our money, “to be rich in good works,” which, in God’s eyes, is to “be generous and ready to share” (v.18). Insinuated here is that hoarding money for ourselves is not good, rather it is good to give our money away. If all things belong to God (which they do, *Ps. 24:1*) and our money is a gift from God (which it is), then we are stewards of His money. Our money is His money, and we should use it in ways that glorify Him.

Certainly, we are to use money to meet our needs (which are not the same as wants), but once our needs are met, we should begin to look around us at ways to meet the needs of others. Christians are to participate in God’s redistribution of wealth program, which is voluntary not forced as with the government. God gives to His people generously so that they can, in turn, give to others generously. John Wesley’s rule of life was, “Do all the good you can, by all the means you can, in all the ways you can, in all the places you can, at all the times you can, to all the people you can, as long as you can.”

Using money to bless others is one example of a “good work” and a way to “store up treasure for a good foundation for the future” (v.19). We cannot take money with us to heaven, but we can invest in others on earth and “lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven” (*Matt. 6:20*). By doing so, we are “taking hold of that which is life indeed” (v.19, see also v.12). In other words, life is not about making money, having money, or spending money on selfish pleasures. True life or “life indeed” is about having an eternal perspective and using money for God’s purposes. True life is about the future not the present.

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

Guard Dogs

Protecting the Truth from the Lies

Leading Idea

God’s people are “guard dogs,” protecting the truth of the Gospel against the lies of the enemy.

After writing a lengthy letter to Timothy, the Apostle Paul turned full circle and ended the way he opened – addressing the issue of false teachers. He urged Timothy in Chapter 1 to “instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines... which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God...” (1:3, 4). In the last few lines of his letter, he challenged Timothy to “guard what has been entrusted to you...” (v.20). What exactly had been entrusted to Timothy and how was he supposed to guard it?

Paul and his teammates brought the Gospel to Ephesus. They shared the truths of Christ and the message of salvation. They also established a church there. Paul described the universal Church as the “pillar and support for the truth” (3:15), so one of the purposes of the Ephesian church was to promote and protect the truth of Christ in that area. Paul assigned Timothy the responsibility (or “entrusted it to him”) to stay in Ephesus on his behalf and “guard” the Gospel from these dangerous men (2 Tim. 1:14). To guard means “to secure against injury, loss, or attack, to protect, or to keep in safety” (*American Dictionary of the English Language*, Webster 1828).

Paul’s charge to Timothy is applicable to all Christians. In a sense, every follower of Christ has been entrusted with the valuable treasure of the Gospel and should be on guard to protect it from harm. We are, in essence, guard dogs. Guard dogs are always on alert, they are sensitive to noises, and they sniff out danger. When they sense something is wrong, guard dogs bark, chase down invaders, growl, snarl, and even bite if necessary.

What does it look like in the Christian life to guard that which has been entrusted to us? First, we pray against our spiritual enemy, who is always prowling about, seeking someone to devour. He cannot defeat the Church, but he still wants to distract or damage it if he can. Second, we must teach what is right, which requires knowledge of what is right. We must be students of the Word. We must know the truth in order to identify the lies. Third, when we identify the lies (false teaching), we must expose and refute it, which requires courage. Fourth, we must make disciples of others and “recruit” them to the cause. There is strength in numbers. That’s why Paul instructed Timothy to appoint Elders in the church. He even gave Timothy specific qualifications Elders should have (3:1-7), so that they might guard the church in an official capacity (2 Tim. 2:2). These are just a few of the ways that we can guard the truth of the Gospel against those who would do it harm. Are you a “guard dog”? Are you equipped with knowledge, courage, vigilance, and perseverance, to protect the truth from the lies?

The reason that Paul charged Timothy with the responsibility of being a “guard dog” is because predators are lurking near the flock and carrying people away. When he met with the Ephesian Elders, Paul said to them, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock... for I know that savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock (Acts 20:28, 29). Those pretenders among us, who listen to, believe, and even promote “worldly or empty chatter and opposing arguments” (v.20) end up “going astray from the faith” (v.21). While these things are professed as “knowledge” (*gnosis*, from which we get the word Gnosticism), they are really lies that must be confronted. Satan will do everything in his power to undermine the effectiveness of the Gospel and weaken the Church. Thus, our work of defending the Gospel from its enemies is never-ending, that is until Jesus returns.

Paul closed his letter with his signature statement, “Grace be with you.” The “you” here is plural, which tells us that Paul intended for his letter to be read to all the members of the church in Ephesus. His sign-off is perfect, particularly as it relates to the topic at hand. On our own, we cannot battle the enemy and succeed. We can only be successful as Gospel “guard dogs” with the grace of God. Without His help, we are doomed. With His help, we cannot be defeated (*Rom. 8:31*).

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