

1 Timothy Commentary-Steven Cole

This commentary on 1 Timothy represents sermons given by Steven Cole author of several books (see [Amazon listing of books](#)). Pastor Steve's sermons are pithy, practical and packed with pertinent quotes and illustrations to enhance your preaching and teaching of this great pastoral epistle. The material is nicely divided in somewhat of an outline format, with a practical conclusion and pithy discussion questions.

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1 & 2 Timothy & Titus- PEOPLE OF TRUTH IN AN AGE OF DECEPTION Steven Cole

The late Professor Allan Bloom began his best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind* ([Simon and Schuster], 1987, pp. 25-26), by stating, There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students' reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2 + 2 = 4$. These are things you don't think about.... The danger they have been taught to fear from absolutism is not error but intolerance. Relativism is necessary to openness; and this is the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating.... The study of history and of culture teaches that all the world was mad in the past; men always thought they were right, and that led to wars, persecutions, slavery, xenophobia, racism, and chauvinism. The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all.

The view that there is no absolute truth pervades our society. A recent Gallup poll conducted for Americans United for Life found nearly 70 percent agree with the statement: "There are few moral absolutes; what is right or wrong usually varies from situation to situation." Only 27 percent disagreed. And while 50 percent were troubled about the influence of religious fundamentalism, only 36 percent expressed concern about secular humanism's influence (cited in *Leadership* [Fall, 1992], p. 133).

If I could encourage you to read only two books besides the Bible in the coming New Year, they would be John MacArthur's *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Crossway Books) and David Wells' *No Place for Truth* (Eerdmans). The second book is a bit more difficult because it's written from a more scholarly point of view. Both books show that we live in an age of relativity, where the notion of absolute truth has gone the way of the dinosaur and where the evangelical church is rapidly becoming like the world in diminishing the central role of truth.

MacArthur develops a parallel between the current scene and the "Downgrade" controversy of Spurgeon's final years, about 100 years ago. Wells comes at the subject from a broader historical and sociological perspective. But both men show that the church today has minimized biblical truth in favor of whatever works to draw people in. To do this, the church has adopted a marketing approach, where you give the customer what he wants and tiptoe around difficult issues such as sin, hell, judgment, and other politically incorrect topics. The measure of success in the local church has become "is the church growing?" rather than "is the church faithful to the truth?"

The goal, of course, is a good one: To bring people to know Christ and to become a part of His church. But both MacArthur and Wells show that the theologically liberal modernists of 100 years ago had exactly the same goal. The modernists didn't set out to deny the faith. They were afraid that if they didn't make the gospel message "relevant" to their culture, they would lose people. Even so, the church growth movement today is seeking to make the faith relevant to baby boomers and others who have been turned off. To do this, they use modern marketing and management strategies and offer short, uplifting, psychologized sermons that play down truth or doctrine, with the goal of making people feel good. But the end result is the same: By minimizing biblical truth, you end up selling out the heart of the faith.

Today I'd like to explore the proposition that
Since God is the author of truth,

His people must be people of truth.

I'm going to limit myself to Paul's final three letters, called the "pastoral epistles," 1 Timothy, Titus, and 2 Timothy (in chronological order). The concept of God being the author of truth and His people being people of truth runs throughout the Bible, of course. But it is a central theme in these letters which Paul wrote to his two faithful understudies who were seeking to establish the church in pagan cultures. False teachers were threatening the fledgling churches from within. Paul puts a decided emphasis on teaching sound doctrine and refuting false doctrine. In light of where our American culture and the American church are at, there is nothing more important for us to understand and follow in the New Year and in the rest of this decade. To swim upstream against our relativistic culture, we must understand that ...

1. God is the author of truth.

Note Titus 1:1-3. God is the God of truth. By His very nature, He cannot lie. Satan is the father of lies (John 8:44). When we talk about the God of truth, we are not talking about the word "god" or the idea "god," but about "the God who is there," to use Francis Schaeffer's term. He is the God who has always existed and who created everything else. All truth stems from Him. Truth is thus related to who God is as an objective, living Being, and to the universe He has created. In other words, truth is not a subjective experience inside a person's head. Truth is objective and absolute because it stems from God who is objectively existent and absolutely true. There are two important facts concerning God's truth:

A. God's truth has been revealed to the human race.

It has been manifested in His word (Titus 1:3), both the living Word (Jesus) and the written Word.

(1) God's truth centers in the person of God's Son. The word of the gospel which Paul preached was revealed at the proper time in the person of Jesus Christ. In 1 Timothy 2:6 Paul refers to the man Christ Jesus, "who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony borne at the proper time" (same Greek phrase). In 2 Timothy 1:12, Paul significantly affirms not that he knew what he believed (although he did), but rather that he knew whom he believed. His faith was in a person, a man, born in time of a woman, who gave Himself at a point in history as the ransom for our sins.

It is important in our day that we affirm and proclaim that God's truth centers in the historical person of God's Son, Jesus of Nazareth, whose life and person are revealed to us in the Gospel records. He is not a mythical figure. He was born, lived, died, was raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven as is recorded in those accounts.

I emphasize this because the words "Jesus" and "Christ" have become meaningless, empty terms in our modern world. Several of the cults and some of the New Agers claim to be followers of Jesus or to believe in "the Christ," but it is not the Jesus Christ of the Bible and of history they believe in, but a Jesus of their own imagination. And quite often evangelicals invite people to receive Jesus as their Savior when those people know almost nothing of who He is. But our faith does not rest on "Jesus as you conceive Him to be," but rather on the Jesus who lived in history, revealed in God's Word.

(2) God's truth is contained in the words of Scripture. God has revealed Himself verbally or propositionally in understandable language, recorded by His prophets and apostles in the 66 books of the Old and New Testaments. In these pastoral epistles, Paul puts an emphasis on the verbal nature of God's revelation (see 1 Tim. 4:6; 2 Tim. 1:13; 2:15; 3:15-16; 4:2-4; Titus 1:3; 1:9).

This is important to affirm because doctrine or theology is being treated as unimportant in our day. I find it interesting that I preached the basic content of this sermon on New Year's Day, 1984. At that time, my main concern was those who called themselves evangelicals but who denied the absolute veracity of Scripture. While those false teachers are still around, a decade later the main way Satan is attacking truth is by elevating "what works" over what is true.

David Wells observes (pp. 6, 13) that while formerly a pastor's main task was to be a truth broker, who explained and proclaimed God's truth to His people, today it has shifted so that pastors have become managers of the small enterprise called the church and therapists who help people feel good about themselves.

The Apostle Paul always saw proper theology as the foundation for proper living. The first sections of Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians, as well as his emphasis in the Pastoral epistles on "sound doctrine" and teaching (1 Tim. 1:10; 4:6; 6:3; 2 Tim. 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:1, 2, 7) show that biblical faith is concerned with truth as contained in the words of Scripture.

The great theologians, Calvin, Luther, and Edwards, were all pastors; the great pastors, Matthew Henry, Spurgeon, and Lloyd-Jones were all theologians. But in our day, with a few exceptions, the most well-known pastors are theologically shallow. In fact, they make fun of pastors who emphasize theology as being out of touch with and unable to relate to the modern world.

John MacArthur (p. 192) tells of a friend of his who wanted to learn how the so-called "user-friendly" churches were integrating doctrine into their ministries. He sent for a tape catalog, asking for tapes that focused on biblical doctrine. He discovered that by a ratio of more than 30 to 1, the sermons preached in that church dealt with contemporary topics, psychological issues, personal

relationships, motivational themes, etc. Messages dealing with doctrine or even sermons based on biblical texts were rare. Most of the messages would have been immediately transferrable to any con-text, such as a sales convention, a school assembly, or a businessmen's luncheon. If they used Scripture, it was only for illustrative purposes. Doctrine is simply a non-issue with these growing churches that are held up as models for other pastors to follow.

(1) God's truth centers in the person of His Son; and,

(2) is contained in the words of Scripture.

(3) God's truth is preserved and upheld by the church.

Note 1 Timothy 3:15: the church is "the pillar and support of the truth." We need to remember that when Paul wrote Romans and his other great theological treatises, he wasn't writing primarily for seminary professors, so that they would have some good material for their graduate seminars. He wrote these things under the inspiration of God's Spirit for common, everyday people in the churches--people with the same kind of struggles and problems you and I face. Knowing these great truths is the foundation we need to live properly in this fallen world. To say it another way, sound theology is always the basis for sound living.

And it is the church that is to preserve, uphold, and defend these great truths of the Bible. By minimizing biblical truth and putting the emphasis on subjective experience, we're not pro-claiming to our lost culture what it needs to hear from God and, as Wells states, we're in danger of no longer being historic Protestants (p. 102).

This hit me with force several years ago when I was studying the so-called Christian "recovery" movement. I was reading material from a program at the church of probably the most well-known radio pastor in America. The thrust of the material was not on trusting in Jesus Christ as revealed in Scripture--the cross of Christ was not mentioned, let alone central--but rather on trusting in the 12 Steps of Alcoholics Anonymous.

There were Bible verses tacked on to the Steps to make them look Christian. There were statements like, "The 12 Steps work. Trust in the Steps. Work the Steps." While they used the name "Jesus" for the "Higher Power," it became clear to me that "Jesus" (however you conceive Him to be!) wasn't the critical factor; the 12 Steps were the thing. You could make Jesus or Buddha or some statue on your shelf your Higher Power. The name "Jesus" makes the program sound Christian. But the critical factor isn't the Jesus of the Bible. It's the 12 Steps.

What scares me is that these kinds of programs are in most of the large evangelical churches of our day, promoted as being Christian, when in fact they are simply the world's methods with a veneer of Christianity. The church in America has abandoned God's truth in favor of the world's pop-psychology! But we're the ones who are supposed to uphold God's truth in the face of secularism and false religions.

A. God's truth has been revealed to the human race. (1) It centers on the person of God's Son; (2) is contained in the words of Scripture; and, (3) is preserved and upheld by the church.

B. God's truth is knowable and must be believed.

(1) God's truth is knowable. By that I mean that God has communicated with us in intelligible language we can comprehend. You don't need to be initiated into the inner circle to grasp some hidden meaning. This is not to say that there are not deep and difficult doctrines in the Bible. Nor is it to say that the natural man can comprehend the things of the Spirit.

But notice the emphasis on the knowledge of the truth in these epistles (see 1 Tim. 2:4; 4:3; 2 Tim. 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1). The fact that we can know the truth points also to the fact that there is a body of unchanging, absolute truth that is knowable. While we need to avoid the spiritual pride of insisting that our view on non-central doctrines is the only right view, we can have the quiet assurance of knowing that we know God's truth on the major issues that matter, not just about God, but also about godliness (Titus 1:1). And, we can teach truth as truth, not as up for grabs, to our children and to people who are groping for answers about life and godliness.

(2) God's truth must be believed. (Note 1 Tim. 2:7; 4:3, 6; 2 Tim. 1:12; Titus 1:1). Knowing and believing the truth go together. Knowing the truth is not just a mental thing. You must also commit yourself to the truth by faith. This isn't a blind leap. Faith is always based on the knowledge of certain content. You can't honestly believe in Jesus if you know nothing about Him. But there comes a point at which you have enough information and yet there are still unresolved issues. At that point, you will not know more until you believe.

For example, let's say you have come to know through reading the Bible that Jesus Christ is uniquely the Son of God; you have read of His miracles and His teaching; you realize that there is solid evidence that He was raised bodily from the dead; and you know that you have sinned and that Jesus died to pay the penalty you deserve to pay. At that point, you need to make a faith commitment to follow Jesus Christ or you will not gain further knowledge. You will have unanswered questions about difficult issues all your life. The point of God's revealing His truth to us is not to fill our heads, but to change our lives. And that change comes about when we repent

of our sins and trust in Christ as Savior.

It's kind of like marriage. You can read books and interview married people and learn a lot about marriage. You can get to know a potential marriage partner very well. But if you really want to learn about marriage, at some point you have to make a commitment (based on reasonable knowledge!). That commitment changes your life forever. You go on growing in your knowledge of that person.

Christianity, then, is not just a set of doctrines, although it is not void of doctrines. It is a personal knowledge of the living God as He has revealed Himself in His Son and in His written Word. We enter that relationship of knowing both God and His truth through faith in the truth He has revealed as it relates to His Son. The bottom line is:

2. God's people must be people of truth.

We must think in line with biblical truth, speak God's truth, and live in obedience to it. Paul begins First Timothy by warning Timothy of those who misuse Scripture and go astray (1 Tim. 1:6-11). Throughout these letters are warnings of those who have turned away from God's truth (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 6:3-5, 20-21; 2 Tim. 2:16-18, 23-26; 3:1-8, 13; 4:3-4, 15; Titus 1:9-16; 3:10-11). God's truth is addressed to the mind, but it ought to affect speech and behavior, so that God's people live or "adorn" the doctrine of God in every respect (Titus 3:10).

The danger we face today, if Wells and MacArthur are right (and I'm convinced they are) is that we as evangelicals have set aside truth as the center and replaced it with personal experience. Instead of biblical conviction, we elevate tolerance. We are being swept downstream with our culture, so that, as Wells states, "evangelicalism has become simply one more expression of the self movement" (p. 140). He cites James Orr, who wrote in 1897, that the New Testament "comes to men with definite, positive teaching; it claims to be the truth; it bases religion on knowledge.... A religion based on mere feeling is the vaguest, most unreliable, most unstable of all things. A strong, stable, religious life can be built on no other ground than that of intelligent conviction" (Wells, p. 281). Wells concludes, "Intelligent conviction requires for its underpinning and, indeed, its explanation, a truth that is objectively true. Unless truth is objective, it cannot be declared to others, cannot be taught to others, cannot be required of others" (p. 282).

Conclusion

If you were here and recall it, my first message as pastor here was from 2 Timothy 4:1-5, "My Major Task and Yours." I developed the thesis that my major task is to preach God's truth, even when it reproves, rebukes and exhorts; and that your major task is to hear the Word even when it's difficult ("endure sound doctrine"), with a view to obeying it. My major danger is that out of a desire to be popular, I will soften God's truth; your major danger is that out of a desire to feel good, you will go find someone who tells you what you want to hear rather than what you need to hear.

My reason for wanting each of you to read MacArthur and Wells this year (in addition to reading your Bible!) is so you would understand how and why I operate as I do! You will understand why I preach as I do and why I don't follow a lot of the current popular methods in vogue in evangelical circles. You'll understand why I don't hesitate to challenge a lot that is being called Christian in our day, but really is worldly at its core. I am driven by a passion for knowing and proclaiming God's truth. That truth cuts against not only the grain of our culture, but also of much modern evangelicalism. We live in an age of deception. If we want to avoid being swept downstream, if we want to stand as the pillar and support of God's truth, we must become people of the truth. Without it, our Christianity will crumble under the pressures of the modern world. I ask you to commit yourself afresh in the New Year to become a person of truth in this age of deception.

Discussion Questions

1. I've often heard, "What we need is life, not doctrine!" What's wrong with that statement?
2. How can we emphasize truth and yet avoid arrogant dogmatism? Should dogmatism be a dirty word?
3. How can we know when to be tolerant and when to hold firmly to biblical convictions?
4. Biblically, does love take precedence over truth or truth over love?

1,2 Timothy & Titus - Why You Need Sound Doctrine Steven Cole

Certain words and phrases elicit from us either pleasant or unpleasant responses. In the winter, the word "warm" makes us feel cozy. In the summer, the word "cool" refreshes us. The word "love" usually brings forth good feelings, unless you've just been dumped, in which case it may leave a bitter aftertaste in your mouth.

How does the word "doctrine" make you feel? How about "theology"? For most Christians, if they're honest, those words are neutral

at best, but probably on the negative side of the scale. They would associate “doctrine” and “theology” with words like, “dry,” “boring,” or, even worse, “divisive,” “unloving,” “intolerant.” We live in a day of subjective, experience-oriented Christianity where the good words are “love,” “unity,” “acceptance,” and “tolerance.”

Part of the source of this prevailing Christian climate, I believe, is our secular culture. We live in a culture where tolerance is seen as the chief virtue and relativism as our only absolute truth. The late University of Chicago professor, Allan Bloom, forcefully pointed this out in the introductory chapter of his 1987 best-seller, *The Closing of the American Mind* [Simon and Schuster]. He wrote (p. 25),

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative. If this belief is put to the test, one can count on the students’ reaction: they will be uncomprehending. That anyone should regard the proposition as not self-evident astonishes them, as though he were calling into question $2 + 2 = 4$. These are things you don’t think about.

Along with this commitment to relativity goes their allegiance to equality, along with the chief virtue, tolerance. Bloom points out that it has been taught as assumed dogma for more than the past 50 years that relativism is necessary for openness, and that openness is the only plausible stance in light of various claims to truth. “The point is not to correct the mistakes and really be right; rather it is not to think you are right at all” (p. 26). After all, what right do I or anyone else have to say that my view is better than anyone else’s view? This is especially true in the matter of religion and morals, which have been relegated to the realm of opinion as opposed to knowledge (p. 28). Everyone is free to have their religious opinions, but it’s arrogant to say, “My religious view is right and all others are wrong.”

Religion pollster, George Barna’s, research backs Professor Bloom’s observations. He found in a 1991 survey that among the American public, only 28 percent expressed a strong belief in absolute truth. But—get this—among professing evangelical, born-again Christians, only 23 percent accept this idea (What Americans Believe, cited by James Dobson in his December, 1991 newsletter)!

As a pastor, I see this cultural mind-set flooding into the church. It comes through in the common notion that doctrine is divisive and that we need to lay aside all our doctrinal differences and come together in Christian unity. A few months ago I received an invitation to attend a worship service at one of the Catholic churches in town where the former General Secretary of the World Council of Churches was to speak on, “Together on the Faith Journey.” (The World Council is one of the most theologically liberal organizations in the world.)

I have received numerous invitations to attend unity services in which all of the churches of Flagstaff, Catholic and Protestant, come together to express our common faith in Christ. If I dare to bring up the fact that there are some serious, fundamental doctrinal differences between the Roman Catholic Church and those who hold to the teaching of the Protestant Reformers, I am labeled as divisive, unloving, and intolerant. The prevailing mood among American Christians is that doctrine doesn’t really matter; all that matters is love, unity, and worship services which make us feel good.

Gordon Clark wrote, “Since God is truth, a contempt for truth is equally a contempt for God” (*A Christian Philosophy of Education*, p, 158). Jesus Christ claimed, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me” (John 14:6). The New Testament is clear that not everyone naming the name of Christ is truly Christian, because many false teachings quickly moved in to lead people astray. After warning that the way to eternal life is narrow, whereas the way to destruction is broad, Jesus went on to warn, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). It takes a fair amount of discernment for a sheep to figure out that what looks like a sheep really isn’t a sheep after all, but a wolf disguised as a sheep.

No where is this emphasis more pronounced than in the final three letters of the Apostle Paul. Often called the Pastoral Epistles, the letters of First Timothy, Titus, and Second Timothy (in that order) were written by Paul to two of his most trusted assistants, giving them his final instructions on how to shepherd God’s flock. One of the dominant themes in these letters is the need for sound doctrine, based on God’s Word of truth. A cursory reading of these letters shows that Paul’s concern is set against the backdrop of many false teachers who were leading God’s people astray. There are far more verses on this subject than I can cover (I invite you to study this theme for yourselves), but I want to develop briefly the following thesis based on these epistles:

Doctrinal truth is the foundation of the gospel
and is the basis for Christian unity.

I can only touch on three points:

1. There is such a thing as absolute spiritual truth and therefore such a thing as damnable spiritual error.

Note 1 Timothy 1:3-11. Some men were teaching “strange doctrines” which did not further God’s administration which is by faith. Also note the close connection (1:10-11) between sound teaching and the gospel. In 3:15 Paul states that the church is the pillar and

support of the truth, which implies that truth is well-defined and absolute, not relative, and that it is an essential function of the true church to uphold God's truth. This is underscored in 4:1, where Paul warns that in later times some will fall away from the faith by paying attention to the doctrines of demons. The fact that demons are behind much false teaching implies that it can be so seriously wrong that it is damnable. In 4:16 Paul urges Timothy to pay close attention to himself and his teaching, "for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you." In 5:17 he shows that a main job for church leaders is to work hard at preaching and teaching. In 6:3 he warns again of those who advocate a different doctrine, not agreeing with sound words or with doctrine conforming to godliness.

Turning to Titus, notice that Paul begins with these inseparable ideas of truth and godliness (1:1). Further, in 1:9 he states that one of the main jobs for a pastor is to hold fast the faithful word in accordance with the teaching (doctrine), "that he may be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." Clearly, it is not wrong and in fact is both right and necessary for a pastor both to contend for the truth and to speak out against error. I often hear that we ought to be positive. People will say to me, "Why can't you just be loving and positive? Why be critical of others? You're being judgmental!" But both Paul and Jesus did not just dispense positive pearls of wisdom. They both attacked false doctrine and false teachers, sometimes naming names (2 Tim. 2:17).

The fact is that some doctrine is true and leads to eternal life, whereas some doctrine is false and leads to eternal damnation. It is not enough just to be sincere. A few years ago, a number of people bought some bottles of Tylenol. They took the pills in all sincerity, thinking that it would help their headache, but it killed them because someone had laced those pills with cyanide. Sincerity wasn't the issue; the issue was truth. The fact is, everyone has a theology. But the crucial question is, Is your theology in line with sound doctrine that insures salvation, or is it corrupt theology that will lead you to destruction? You had better make sure, because the consequences are staggering! There is such a thing as absolute spiritual truth and error.

2. Spiritual truth is the foundation of the gospel and of spiritual growth.

We have already seen verses to this effect, and many more could be produced from the rest of the New Testament. In the Book of Galatians, for example, Paul contended vigorously against some false teachers called Judaizers. These men believed in Jesus Christ. They made claim of being born-again Christians. But they differed from Paul on one doctrinal matter: They said that in addition to faith in Jesus Christ, a person also had to keep the Jewish law, especially circumcision, in order to be saved. On account of that one doctrinal difference, Paul said that they were preaching another gospel which is not a gospel, and that they were "anathema," which means, eternally damned (Gal. 1:6-9)! Spiritual truth is the foundation of the gospel!

Hear me carefully: Biblical love does not keep silent when it comes to matters of life and death. If you love someone, you must speak the truth when they are in serious error. If someone you love is about to take medicine that you know will kill them, you do everything you can to stop them. Concerning these Judaizers who added good works to faith alone as being necessary for right standing with God, Paul didn't reason, "Well, these men believe in Christ, and unity and love are more important than right doctrine." Rather, he said that these men were accursed because they were preaching a false gospel!

What I am about to say, I say because I love and care for every person here who is from a Catholic background. I want you to understand God's way of salvation so that you can walk out that door tonight knowing that you are right with God through faith in what Jesus Christ has done, and I want you to understand the difference between what Roman Catholicism teaches on this matter and what the Bible teaches.

At the Council of Trent (in 1547), the Roman Catholic Church responded to the Protestant Reformation, including the doctrine of justification by faith. The Canons and Decrees of Trent represent the official teaching of the Catholic Church to this day. The Second Vatican Council in the 1960's declared these doctrines "irreformable." Trent did not deny that we are saved by God's grace through faith. But it added works to faith by combining justification (right standing with God) with sanctification (our growth in holiness subsequent to being justified) and by making justification a process that depends in part on our good works. To quote:

If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified, in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to cooperate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, ... let him be anathema. (Session 6, Canon 9, in Philip Schaff, *The Creeds of Christendom* [Baker], 2:112.)

If any one saith, that justifying faith is nothing else but confidence in the divine mercy which remits sins for Christ's sake; or, that this confidence alone is that whereby we are justified: let him be anathema. (Session 6, Canon 12, in Schaff, 2:113.)

If any one saith, that the justice received is not preserved and also increased before God through good works; but that the said works are merely the fruits and signs of Justification obtained, but not a cause of the increase thereof: let him be anathema. (Session 6, Canon 24, in Schaff, 2:115.)

If any one saith, that, after the grace of Justification has been received, to every penitent sinner the guilt is remitted, and the debt of eternal punishment is blotted out in such wise that there remains not any debt of temporal punishment to be discharged either in this

world, or in the next in Purgatory, before the entrance to the kingdom of heaven can be opened [to him]: let him be anathema. (Session 6, Canon 30, in Schaff, 2:117.)

In other words, the Catholic Church declares that we are justified before God by grace through faith, but not through faith alone, but that our good works must be added to that faith in order both to preserve and increase our right standing before God. This process is not completed at the initial point of faith in Christ, and not even in this life, but only, hopefully, in Purgatory. Thus the Catholic Church denies the sufficiency of the guilty sinner's faith in Christ's sacrifice as the means of right standing with God.

I do not say any of this to be unkind to Roman Catholics. Quite the contrary, I say it because I care deeply that if any of you are Catholics, you come to a biblically correct understanding of this most crucial matter of how a person gets right with God. I say it because many of you have Catholic friends, and I want you to be able to help them see this clearly. And, I don't want us to compromise on the altar of so-called "love and unity" crucial biblical truth that divides Catholicism from Protestantism.

Not only is sound doctrine the foundation of the gospel, it is also essential for spiritual growth. I don't have time to develop this, but it is implicit in the word "sound," which means "health-producing." We get our word "hygienic" from this Greek word.

There is close connection in these epistles between sound doctrine (or truth) and godliness (Titus 1:1; 1 Tim. 1:5 in context; 1 Tim. 4:4-6). For this reason, Paul's final emotional and powerful appeal to Timothy is that he preach the Word, for the time will come when even those in the church will not endure sound doctrine, but will accumulate teachers in accordance with their own desires and will turn away their ears from the truth (2 Tim. 4:1-4). The fact that sound doctrine must be endured implies that it isn't always pleasant in that it confronts our sin and selfishness. But, like vegetables, it's good for you!

I contend that much of the flimsy Christianity of our day is due to the lack of sound doctrine in our pulpits. We must hold firmly to the fact that there is such a thing as absolute spiritual truth and that such truth is the foundation of the gospel and of spiritual growth. One final thought:

3. Sound doctrine is the basis for Christian unity.

There was no unity between Paul and the Judaizers because they were confused about an essential truth on the gospel. He warned Timothy to steer clear of men like Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus, who had gone astray from the truth (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17; 4:14-15; Titus 3:10-11). Love that disregards essential doctrinal truth, especially about how a person is reconciled to God, is not biblical love, because it leads to the eternal ruin of others. Truth on essential doctrines is the basis for true Christian unity. To sacrifice sound doctrine in order to achieve unity is to make ship-wreck of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

A few years ago, at the beginning of a seminary course, the professor told the students that they would work together on one major project during that semester. They would move systematically through the New Testament to categorize every area of truth and determine how many times each area is addressed. Their goal was to find what one thing is emphasized more than any other in the New Testament. When they completed the project, they were amazed to see that warning against false doctrine is emphasized more than any other thing, even more than love, unity, and experience.

I urge you all not to be swept downstream with the cultural current of relativity. There is such a thing as absolute spiritual truth, and it matters greatly! It is essential for salvation and for growth as a Christian. And, while all Christians must be kind and gracious, even toward those in error, we must not be tolerant of serious doctrinal error. To compromise sound doctrine in favor of love and unity is not to love at all.

2 Timothy 3:16 WHY YOU CAN TRUST THE BIBLE

Steven Cole

The Basics About the Bible (2)

Why You Can Trust The Bible 2 Timothy 3:16 (& other texts)

Dr. James Boice ("Does Inerrancy Matter?" [ICBI], p. 9) tells of a minister's gathering where an evangelical argued a point on the basis of the Bible's teaching, mentioning the Lord's return. When he had finished, a professor in one of the leading Protestant seminaries stood up and said, "You cannot appeal to the teaching of Jesus Christ, because we do not know what Jesus really taught. The Gospels are contradictory at this point. Each of them has been written to correct the others. So far as Christ's return is concerned, we have simply got to get it into our heads that Jesus is never coming back and that all things are going to continue on

as they have from the beginning.” In another such gathering, after an evangelical had argued a point a minister came up to him and said, “Why are you always talking about the Bible when you try to make your case? Don’t you know that nobody believes the Bible any-more?”

Boice goes on to cite a survey of clergy in five major U.S. denominations which asked the broad question, “Do you believe the Bible to be the inspired Word of God?” This was weaker than asking, “Do you believe in an inerrant Bible?” or, “Do you believe in verbal inspiration?” Yet in spite of the level at which the question was asked, 82% of the Methodists, 89% of the Episcopalians, 81% of the United Presbyterians, 57% of the Baptists, and 57% of the Lutherans, answered “no.”

There have always been liberal critics of the Bible, of course. But in recent years, there have been attacks against the truthfulness of the Bible from those who claim to be theological conservatives. These critics emphasize the need for personal salvation. They affirm the deity of Christ and His bodily resurrection from the dead. In most cases they even believe that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, the only authoritative guide for faith and practice. And yet they believe that the Bible contains errors in areas such as history, geography, chronology, and science.

A few have even gone so far as to say that the Bible errs on some doctrinal and moral issues. For example, some say that Paul’s teaching on the role of women or his condemnation of homosexuality reflects his narrow, Judaic background and thus must be re-interpreted in light of our 20th century culture.

These new views from within the evangelical camp were ex-posed by Dr. Harold Lindsell in his 1976 book, *The Battle for the Bible* [Zondervan], where he documented the drift in some of the major denominations and at Fuller Theological Seminary, where he taught for 17 years. He was accused of raising a needless controversy. His critics maintain that inerrancy is not all that important, that the real issue is a person’s relationship to Jesus Christ. They argue that to hold to inerrancy is not scholastic and it is to impose on the authors of Scripture standards of accuracy that they them-selves did not hold. Thus evangelicals should not divide over this issue.

But is the inerrancy of the Bible a trivial issue? I think not. If the Bible has erred on some historical facts, then how do we know that it is accurate on other historical events such as Christ’s virgin birth, bodily resurrection and ascension? If we cannot be sure of the historical accuracy of the Bible, how can we know anything about Jesus? The Jesus of the Bible could then be a composite fictional character invented by the early church!

The bottom line is that if we say that there are errors in the Bible, then we proudly sit in judgment on the Bible based on our human knowledge, which is anything but infallible. The most ridiculous example of this recently was a group of supposed biblical scholars called “the Jesus seminar” who met and voted on which parts of the gospels reflect “the true sayings” of Jesus. They plan to publish a Bible edition with what Jesus really said in red letters. But nine of the “scholars” said they wouldn’t put anything in the Bible in red ink! If we sit in judgment on the Bible, then we’re the lords of our lives, free to pick and choose what we wish to obey. I agree with Francis Schaeffer who wrote, “Holding to a strong view of Scripture or not holding to is the watershed of the evangelical world” (*No Final Conflict* [IVP], p. 48).

But must we then close our eyes and take a leap of faith on the matter of biblical inerrancy? Must we blindly refuse to acknowledge or wrestle with problems in the Bible? Must we put our heads in the sand to affirm the Bible to be without error in all that it teaches? Or are there good reasons to trust the Bible? I believe that there are. Today I want to explore the proposition that...

You can trust the Bible because it is God’s Word and it is without error in all its teaching.

1. The Bible is God’s Word.

“All Scripture is God-breathed” (2 Tim. 3:16). As we saw in our last study, the word means breathed out by God, which is to say,

A. God is the originator of the Bible.

The Bible did not come from the best religious ideas of the apostles or prophets. It originated when God spoke to them and through them, resulting in the written words of Scripture. This is not to say that God dictated the words of the Bible. Obviously He used the personalities and styles of the various human authors. But God originated it and thus the final product is preserved from error.

The only verse which gives us a hint of how God accomplished the process of inspiration is 2 Peter 1:21: “No prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy spirit spoke from God.” The word “moved” is used in Acts (27:15, 17) to describe the effect of strong winds upon Paul’s ship. Luke says that the ship was “driven along” by the wind, meaning that it was no longer under the control of the sailors, but of the wind. But just as the sailors were active, though not in control, so the human authors of Scripture were active, but not in control (see Charles Ryrie, *What You Should Know About Inerrancy* [Moody Press], p. 46. The Holy Spirit moved the authors so that the words they wrote were the words God intended. Since the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth (John 16:13), He did not superintend errors. The Bible is the Word of God.

At this point a critic might accuse me of begging the question. I'm saying that the Bible is the inspired Word of God because the Bible says so. But anybody can make a claim like that and it doesn't prove a thing. So how do we verify whether or not the Bible's claim is true?

B. The Bible must be approached properly.

Assume for a moment that the Bible is God's Word as it claims. It would make sense, then, that we must approach it as God tells us to. The Bible tells us that we won't be able to make any sense out of its message if we approach it with a fault-finding, rebellious, unbelieving heart (1 Cor. 2:14; 2 Cor. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:8). Jesus said (John 7:17), "If any man is willing to do [God's] will, he shall know of the teaching, whether it is of God or whether I speak from Myself." In other words, the issue is being willing to do God's will. If we come to the Bible to find fault with it and thus provide ourselves with excuses to continue in rebellion against God, we will find supposed errors. But if we come in submission to God, with the desire to follow His ways, we will see solutions to most of the supposed problems.

Let me illustrate. Theologian Kenneth Kantzer had a friend whose mother was killed. He first heard about her death through a trusted mutual friend who reported that the woman had been standing on the street corner waiting for a bus, had been hit by another bus, was fatally injured and died a few minutes later. A short time later he heard from the dead woman's grandson that she was riding in a car which was in a collision, she was thrown from the car and killed instantly. The boy was quite certain of his facts. Which story was correct?

If you didn't like or trust the grandson, you would conclude that the boy was confused and that the first account was the correct one. Or, if you had a problem with the first man, you could believe the boy's account. Or, you could scoff at both accounts and say that obviously they contradict one another, so neither story is true. Your conclusion would be greatly affected by your approach to the credibility of the witnesses.

What Dr. Kantzer later learned from the dead woman's daughter was that her mother had been waiting for a bus, was hit by another bus and critically injured. A passing motorist put her in his car and sped off to the hospital. En route, he was in a collision in which the injured woman was thrown from the car and killed instantly. Both accounts were literally true! (Told both in "ICBI Update," Summer, 1980, and in *Christianity Today* [10/7/88], p. 23.)

Let's apply that story to the problem of harmonizing some of the seeming contradictions in the gospel accounts, such as Peter's denials or the resurrection narratives. If you approach the problems as a skeptic, you can scoff and quickly conclude, "There are errors in the biblical text." I believe that's an un scholarly and arrogant approach for several reasons. First, the different accounts make it obvious that the various authors were not fabricating a story in collusion with one another, or they would have ironed out these apparent differences. Second, we have no reason to doubt the integrity of these eyewitness accounts. Third, since they were there and I wasn't and since they are truthful men of integrity (as the totality of their writings shows), I would need strong, compelling evidence to say that they are in error, even if I cannot harmonize the accounts.

The proper approach doesn't make all the difficulties in the Bible evaporate. There are some tough problems to resolve, but not nearly as many as critics allege. Dr. Ryrie estimates that if you put together a composite list of the supposed errors, there would be about two dozen, more or less (What You Need to Know, p. 83). But the crucial issue is how you approach those problems. You don't come to the holy God of the universe as a scoffer or skeptic and expect for Him to meet you on your terms. You must come acknowledging your need of God and your sin, asking Him for understanding of spiritual truth. If you come to Him with a submissive, obedient spirit of faith in Jesus Christ, He will reveal to you the truth of His Word. From that posture, you will grow to discover that...

2. The Bible is without error in all its teaching.

This is the heart of the issue concerning the reliability of the Bible. If there are errors in the Bible, then how can we trust it? So how can we be sure that the Bible is without error, especially in view of those who claim to be evangelicals but who also claim that there are errors? There are two ways to reason:

A. Deductive evidence: The God of truth would not inspire error.

A deductive argument consists of a major premise, a minor premise, and a conclusion which stems from the two premises. The whole way of stating it is called a syllogism. Any deductive argument is only as good as its premises. If a premise is faulty, then the conclusion is invalid. This argument would not prove anything to a skeptic, but it ought to carry some weight with those who agree that the Bible is inspired by God. It goes like this: Major premise: God is a God of truth (Titus 1:2; Heb. 6:18; Ps. 119:160). Minor premise: God breathed out (originated) all the Scriptures (2 Tim. 3:16; 2 Pet. 1:21). Conclusion: The Scriptures are God's truth (John 17:17). (This syllogism adapted from Ryrie, p. 40.) A true God can-not originate error.

A second line of deductive reasoning goes as follows: Major premise: Jesus Christ believed and taught that the Bible is trust-worthy

and without error. Minor premise: I believe in and follow Jesus Christ. Conclusion: I must believe that the Bible is trustworthy and without error. To me, this is one of the strongest arguments for the total reliability of the Bible. Everything that Jesus Christ said with reference to the Scriptures shows that He had implicit trust in the totality of Scripture as the authoritative and reliable Word of God.

(1) Jesus believed the Scriptures to be authoritative. Often Jesus referred to the Scriptures as the authority for His actions. He assumed that if Scripture said it, that settled it. In His temptation by Satan, Jesus responded each time with, "It is written" and then quoted Scripture. He refuted the Jewish leaders by referring to Scripture (Matt. 19:3-5; Mark 7:5-13; 12:26). He taught from all the Scriptures as bearing witness to Himself (Luke 24:25, 27, 44-46; John 5:39).

(2) Jesus believed the Scriptures to be the Word of God, not the word of men. He referred to Moses' writings as both the commandment and Word of God (Mark 7:8, 9, 13). He refers to David's Psalm 110 as being spoken "by the Holy Spirit" (Mark 12:36).

(3) Jesus believed in the factual historicity of the Scriptures. He acknowledged the creation of Adam and Eve by God and referred to them as individuals, not as mere symbols of the human race (Matt. 19:3-5). He referred to Noah and the great flood as historical precedent for what will happen when He returns (Matt. 24:37-39). He verified the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and Lot's wife (Luke 17:28-29, 32). He accepted the story of Jonah and the great fish as actual history (Matt. 12:40). There are many other historical references that Jesus made to Old Testament characters, but these represent some of the parts of the Bible which critics scoff at as fictional. But the evidence is that Jesus saw them as true history.

(4) Jesus believed the very words and even letters of Scripture to be authoritative, reliable, and significant. In Jesus' debate with the Sadducees about the resurrection (Matt. 22:23-32), His argument hinges on a particular passage of Scripture (Exod. 3:6), and further on a particular word in that passage (the verb, "is"), and, even further on the tense of that verb, that it is present, not past tense!

In Matthew 5:17-18, Jesus upholds all the Law (a reference to at least the five books of Moses, if not the entire Old Testament) and says that it will all be fulfilled, down to the smallest letter or stroke ("jot or tittle," KJV). The smallest letter is yod, which looks like an English apostrophe. The stroke ("tittle") is a reference to a small extension which distinguishes the Hebrew dalet from resh. His point is that even the most minute details of God's Word are reliable and accurate.

(5) Jesus taught that His own words (which are recorded in the Gospels) were the word of God and thus authoritative and trustworthy (John 12:47-50; Matt. 24:35). Obviously, Jesus affirmed all of the Old Testament and His own words as being the word of God, totally reliable and accurate not only in spiritual matters, but in factual and historical matters as well. If we claim to be followers of Christ, we must follow Him in affirming the complete infallibility of Scripture.

B. Inductive evidence: The Bible has been authenticated as accurate prophetically, historically, and scientifically.

Whole books have been written on each of these points, so obviously I can only skim the surface. Consider,

(1) Prophetic accuracy—There are literally hundreds of prophecies in the Bible which were made in some cases hundreds of years before they were fulfilled with specific detail too great to be mere coincidence. Many of the prophecies in the Book of Daniel, such as the eleventh chapter, which reads like a history of events that happened from Daniel's time up to the time of Antiochus Epiphanes and the Maccabean revolt, about 300 years later. He also predicted the succession of four great world powers: Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome (Daniel 2 & 7). The stunning precision of these prophecies has led liberal critics, who have an a priori bias against the miraculous, to say that Daniel had to be written after the fact, although there are solid, scholarly reasons for believing that the book was written in the sixth century B.C. as claimed.

Ezekiel 26 predicted that the city of Tyre would be destroyed and the ruins scraped off and dumped into the sea. Nebuchadnezzar fulfilled the first part of the prophecy when he destroyed the city in 573 B.C. But over 200 years went by and the city was not dumped into the sea. Then Alexander the Great came along in 322 B.C. and used the ruins of the city to build a causeway out to an offshore island where the people had fled, thus fulfilling Ezekiel's prediction that the stones and timbers of Tyre would be laid in the sea.

But the most detailed and remarkable prophecies are those relating to Christ. As He said, the Scriptures bear witness of Him (John 5:39). It has been calculated that there are over 300 specific Old Testament prophecies relating to the person of Christ. Micah 5:2 predicted Bethlehem as His birthplace. Malachi 3:1 predicted that God would send His messenger to prepare the way before Him, which was fulfilled in John the Baptist (Matt. 11:10). Zechariah 9:9 prophesied that Jerusalem's king would come to her lowly, riding on the colt of a donkey, which Jesus fulfilled in the triumphal entry (Matt. 21:5). Psalm 22 describes the death of Messiah by crucifixion hundreds of years before that was known as a means of execution. Isaiah 53 predicts that Jesus would bear our sins as the lamb of God, silent before His accusers, and that His grave would be with wicked men, yet He was with a rich man in His death. That was specifically fulfilled when Jesus was crucified with the two criminals, yet buried in the tomb of the wealthy Joseph of Arimathea.

Math professor Peter Stoner (*Science Speaks* [Moody Press], pp. 101-107) took just eight of the prophecies which Christ fulfilled and calculated conservatively that the odds of these prophecies being fulfilled in one man just by chance would be one in 10 to the 17th power! He illustrates this number by saying that if you took that many silver dollars, they would cover the state of Texas two feet deep. Mark one, stir it thoroughly into the whole mass, blind-fold a man and let him travel as far and long over the state as he wishes. He must pick that one silver dollar. Those are the odds that Jesus could, by chance, have fulfilled just eight of the prophecies made about Him. As I said, there are over 300!

(2) Historical accuracy—In spite of numerous critical scholars who have attempted to disprove the historical accuracy of the Bible, none have succeeded. One familiar example concerns the Hittite people, mentioned often in the Old Testament. Skeptics in the 19th century scoffed at the Bible's mentioning this race, since there was no corroborating evidence that such a people existed in history. Then, in 1906, the Hittite capital was uncovered about 90 miles east of Ankara, Turkey, silencing the critics on that point.

Critics attacked Daniel's mention of Belshazzar as the final king of Babylon, since Herodotus (450 B.C.) refers to Nabonidus as the final king. But more recent archaeological discoveries of some tablets dated from the 12th year of Nabonidus show that his son, Belshazzar, reigned in Babylon as a co-regent while Nabonidus was away for ten years fighting in Arabia. Thus when Belshazzar promises Daniel that he will make him a third ruler in the kingdom (Dan. 5:16, 29), the book of Daniel is proven to be precisely correct.

(3) Scientific accuracy—Although the Bible is not a science text-book and should not be pushed beyond its intended purpose, there are no proven scientific inaccuracies in the Bible. Obviously, the Bible at times uses poetic language and figures of speech which are not meant to be taken literally (such as the sun setting or rising). Moses did not write Genesis 1 to be a scientific account of origins. This is not to say that it is inaccurate, but rather that Moses' point was not to answer all our scientific questions, but rather to focus our attention on God as the mighty Creator who brought the universe into existence through the word of His power. We need to be careful not to capitulate to science as if it were inerrant (since it often has been proved wrong), nor to hold to our interpretation of debatable texts as if we were inerrant. The Bible, rightly interpreted, is inerrant. We can rest in the fact that there are no proven scientific inaccuracies in the Bible, even though it was written thousands of years before modern science.

Conclusion

John Warwick Montgomery wrote (*Christianity Today* [7/29/77], pp. 41-42),

... the total trust that Jesus and the apostles displayed toward Scripture entails a precise and controlled hermeneutic. They subordinated the opinions and traditions of their day to Scripture; so must we. They did not regard Scripture as erroneous or self-contradictory; neither can we. They took its miracles and prophecies as literal fact; so must we. They regarded Scripture not as the product of editors and redactors but as stemming from Moses, David, and other immediately inspired writers; we must follow their lead. They believed that the events recorded in the bible happened as real history; we can do no less.

I want you to know that there are solid reasons why you can trust the Bible. If you have never investigated its claims carefully, you owe it to yourself to read the gospel accounts about the main character of the Bible, the Lord Jesus Christ. Remember, you must read with a willingness to follow Him if His claims to being the Lord are authenticated. You will find that Jesus is who He claimed to be, God in human flesh, who gave Himself as the penalty for our sins.

If you are a Christian struggling with doubts, you can trust the Bible over and above all modern claims to truth. It speaks accurately and authoritatively to the problems we all grapple with. None who have trusted in God and followed the commands and counsel given in the Bible have been ultimately disappointed. The Bible is a life-changing book. I invite you to commit yourself afresh to read it, study it, and apply its teachings to your life. You can count your life on it!

Discussion Questions

1. Why is the complete accuracy of the Bible important? So what if there are historical errors?
2. How would you answer a non-Christian who said, "I don't believe in the Bible; besides, it's full of contradictions"?
3. Discuss: It is intellectually dishonest to believe in inerrancy when there are still unsolved problems in the Bible?
4. What difficulty in the Bible causes you the most trouble?

1 Timothy 1:1-2 SAVED TO SERVE

Steven Cole

A cartoon showed a picture of a woman lying in her sick bed, obviously in misery. In the sink were stacked piles of dirty dishes. A huge basket of clothes to be ironed sat nearby. Two dirty children were fighting in one corner, and in the other a cat sat licking spilled milk. A smiling woman stood in the doorway and the caption had her saying, "Well, Florence, if there is anything I can do to help, don't hesitate to let me know."

What a picture of the local church! Pastors and church staff are overwhelmed with work. More needy people cry out for their attention than they have time for. Sunday school and other youth programs lack workers. Visitors need a personal call. New people need someone to befriend them. The missions program needs dedicated workers. Facilities need maintenance and improvements. Even some who are involved seem to be committed only when it's convenient. And yet people often say, "If there's anything I can do to help, let me know!"

The fact is, God does not save us so we can sit, but so we can serve. Just as there is no such thing as a non-functioning member of your human body, so there ought to be no such thing as a non-functioning member of the body of Christ. If God has saved you from your sin, He has called you to serve Him in some way in accordance with your gifts and abilities.

What often happens is, you hear this truth taught, so you take a stab at getting involved in doing something for the Lord. But not very far into the process, you find yourself in over your head. You thought you would be serving in line with your gifts and abilities, but you find yourself overwhelmed with inadequacy as you face a situation not in line with or far beyond your gifts and abilities. You thought you would be having a wonderful time of fellowship with others in the body, but instead you find fellow Christians being petty, criticizing you for picayune things. You thought everyone would like you, but they're not being nice. You thought everyone would appreciate your contribution, but instead, you haven't heard a word of thanks. You thought serving the Lord would be kind of fun, but you discover that it's fun like war is fun.

BACKGROUND:

Timothy found himself there. He had been a teenager in a home with a pagan father and a Jewish mother, living in the town of Lystra in what is today south-central Turkey. His mother and grandmother had taught him the Scriptures, but he didn't know that Jesus was the promised Messiah until a rabbi named Paul came to town. Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth and preached the gospel, but then was stoned by the fickle mob and dragged out of the city, thought to be dead. Amazingly, he got up, went back into the city and left the next day. Later he courageously returned and strengthened those who had believed, saying, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22).

Timothy was one who had believed. In the years that followed, he grew in the Lord and was highly regarded by the church for his ministry in their midst. Then the Apostle Paul came through town again and this time he invited Timothy to join him in his itinerant ministry. What an opportunity, to travel and serve with this courageous man of God who had led Timothy to faith in Christ! Timothy would have been in his early twenties, Paul near 50 at the time. For about the next 18 years, until Paul was beheaded by Nero, Timothy served with Paul, as a devoted son would serve his father.

The Book of Acts ends with Paul in prison in Rome. There is good reason to believe that he was released around A.D. 62, shortly after writing the "prison epistles" (Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon, and Philippians). Timothy had been in Rome with Paul (Phil. 1:1; Col. 1:1; Philemon 1), so perhaps after Paul's release, the two men made their way to Ephesus, among other places, where Paul left Timothy to deal with some matters while he went on to Macedonia (Philippi and Thessalonica). From there, sometime between late 62 and early 64, Paul wrote First Timothy to his younger co-worker, to encourage him in his ministry there and to give apostolic instructions on church life for the whole congregation (1Ti 3:15).

Serving Christ with and under the Apostle Paul sounds wonderful and exciting, but it wasn't idyllic! Paul's early message, "Through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God," proved all too true. Timothy often felt like he was in far over his head. Timid and shy by personality, he was not inclined toward conflict; yet he often found himself in the midst of controversy. He was inclined to back off rather than to confront difficult people and situations. Many times he felt like quitting.

And this was one of those times! We often hear people talk about the New Testament church as if it were nearly perfect. I don't know which Bible they read, but my Bible shows that there were some serious problems in many New Testament churches. Ephesus was a town rife with sexual immorality and occult practices. As often happens in such places, the church was being plagued by some false teachers (we'll look next week at who they may have been). Timothy's task is summed up in 1Ti 1:3, 4: "Remain on at Ephesus in order that you may instruct [lit., "command"] certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies ..."

On the surface, that sounds simple. But as you can imagine, people are not detached from their strange doctrines! In fact, people get emotionally attached to their strange doctrines! When your job is to confront their doctrines, they take it personally.

Do you get the picture? Here is this timid, shy, peace-loving, ordinary man who finds himself in a church where some men were teaching some strange things and it was Timothy's job to confront them. No doubt there were people in the church who liked these men and who thought their teaching was helpful and good: "How dare this young man come in here and say that these men are wrong!" So Paul wrote this letter to bolster Timothy and the truth he was proclaiming in this church that had been infected with these false teachers.

The message of the book can be summed up with the command, "Guard the deposit of sound doctrine!" In 1Ti 1:18 Paul tells Timothy that he is (lit.) "depositing" the command to him (to stay on at Ephesus and teach the truth). He doesn't say, "Have fun at the Sunday School picnic"; but rather, "Fight the good fight!" He repeats the command at the end of the book, "O Timothy, guard what has been deposited [lit.] with you."

A number of themes occur under the overall theme of guarding the deposit of sound doctrine. The theme of sound doctrine or teaching occurs repeatedly (1Ti 1:10; 3:2; 4:6, 13, 16; 5:17; 6:3), as well as the warning against turning aside to false teaching (1Ti 1:3, 6, 19; 4:1-3; 5:15; 6:3-5, 10, 20-21). The theme of faith (meaning personal trust in Christ and the Word—1Ti 1:2, 4, 5, 14; 2:7, 15; 4:12; 5:12; 6:11) and "the faith" (meaning Christian doctrine and practice—1Ti 1:19; 3:9, 13; 4:1, 6; 5:8; 6:10, 12, 21) occur repeatedly. Also, the practical outworking of such faith, namely, godliness, is a major theme (1Ti 2:2, 10; 3:16; 4:7, 8; 6:3, 5, 6, 11). A brief outline:

1. Sound doctrine related to the gospel message (1Ti 1).
2. Sound doctrine in the church (1Ti 2-3):
 - A. In church practice (1Ti 2).
 - B. In church leadership and purpose (1Ti 3).
3. Sound doctrine for church leadership (1Ti 4-6):
 - A. To preserve pastors from apostasy (1Ti 4).
 - B. To promote practical pastoral wisdom (1Ti 5-6).

With that as an overview of the book and its setting, let's look at Paul's greeting (1Ti 1:1-2). We can draw the lesson:

God has saved us and conscripted us into service so that we might bring forth true children in the faith.

1Ti 1:1, where Paul identifies himself as "an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior," shows us how God saves us and conscripts us into service. 1Ti 1:2, which addresses Timothy as Paul's true child in the faith shows us that the goal of our service is to reproduce ourselves spiritually, as Paul had done with Timothy.

1. God has saved us and conscripted us into service (1Ti 1:1).

The foundation for any service we render to God must be the glorious truth that:

A. God has saved us.

Paul uses an unusual phrase in this verse: "God our Savior." This description occurs six times in the pastoral epistles (here, 1Ti 2:3; 4:10; Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4) and nowhere else in Paul's writings. It occurs elsewhere only in Jude 1:25, with a similar expression, "God my Savior" in Luke 1:47. In fact, the word "Savior" is only used 24 times in the New Testament, including 10 times in the pastoral epistles and five in 2 Peter.

The designation of God as our Savior is rooted in the Old Testament. But, significantly, when you come to the New Testament, Jesus is designated as the Savior (Luke 2:11), which shows that Jesus is God. His very name means "Yahweh saves." The angel explained to Joseph that the reason for naming the child in Mary's womb "Jesus" is that He would save His people from their sins (Matt. 1:21). One reason Paul may have emphasized this term for God in the pastoral epistles is that the corrupt emperor Nero had assumed the title, "Savior of the world," for himself. Paul is countering that by stating, "No, Nero, you are not the Savior; only God can save!"

This is a truth that constantly needs to be reaffirmed because the proud human heart constantly does what Nero did--if not to claim to be the Savior of the world, at least to claim to be my own Savior. Proud people think that because they are worthy, or by their own efforts or good deeds or will power, they can save them-selves from God's wrath against their sin. But the message of the cross of Jesus Christ humbles human pride by stating, "No flesh shall boast before God" (1 Cor. 1:29).

We need to proclaim clearly the message that people are lost and need a Savior, not just that they need a little improvement or

help. The gospel message is not, "If your life lacks fulfillment or if you're having a few problems, try Jesus." The gospel message is, "Apart from Christ, you are lost, perishing, under God's judgment! You cannot save yourself. God does not save any who are worthy, because none are worthy. But in His grace, God does save unworthy sinners who take refuge in Jesus and His shed blood on the cross. So trust in Him!"

I fear lest anyone in this church may be serving God who have not first been saved by God. I fear that there may be some who serve God in an attempt to earn His favor. Paul himself had been there. He was zealous in religion, keeping the law outwardly, (Phil. 3:6), advancing beyond many of his contemporaries. But then God, who had set Paul apart from his mother's womb and called him by His grace, was pleased to reveal His Son to Paul on the Damascus Road, and Paul was saved (Gal. 1:13-15).

It's possible to be raised in the church, to be outwardly religious, to be zealous in what you think is serving God, but not to be saved. Make sure that God is truly your Savior. Then you can serve Him.

B. God has conscripted those He has saved into service.

If God has saved you from the awful judgment you deserved, then you are not your own. You've been bought with a price, the precious blood of Jesus; you are under orders. Paul did not dream up the idea of becoming an apostle. It wasn't his career objective, determined by taking a number of occupational and personality tests. He was an apostle "according to the commandment of God our Savior." That means that ...

(1) Those who are saved are conscripts, not volunteers for Jesus. In Sunday School, I used to sing songs about being a volunteer for Jesus. The underlying notion behind that is that you can choose to serve if you want to, but it's optional. But service is not an option for those who are so inclined. Serving Jesus is mandatory for all who have been saved by Jesus! You don't volunteer for Jesus' army; you've been drafted! The only question is, will you be a faithful servant or an unfaithful one?

We need to be careful here, because the church in our day has created a false distinction between those who are supported financially by their ministries and those who are not. The former are thought to be "called" to serve God; the latter are not called, they're just "laymen" who volunteer some of their spare time. But Paul didn't know any such distinction. If you go by this system, Paul was a layman, because he supported himself in ministry most of the time!

But the teaching of the Bible is not that some Christians are called to serve God and others are not. Every Christian is saved to serve! The matter of how you are supported may depend on the type of service to which you are called. Those who labor at preaching and teaching and those sent out as missionaries have a right to be supported (1Ti 5:17-18; 1 Cor. 9:1-14). But God hasn't saved anyone so they can just sit around. Every person God saves is conscripted into serving Him according to how God has gifted him (1 Pet. 4:10-11).

Does that mean that service is easy or without struggles? Not at all! Serving Christ means waging war against the spiritual forces of darkness and warfare is not easy. Sometimes warriors get discouraged. Timothy was prone to discouragement. So Paul shows him from the outset that ...

(2) Christ Himself is our hope in serving. "Christ Jesus, our hope" (1Ti 1:1). What a great phrase! Our hope is not in a religion. Our hope is not in human beings. Our hope is not in a better world. "Our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness!" Christ Jesus Himself is our hope!

Biblical hope is not an uncertain wish for a better tomorrow. Biblical hope is certain, but not yet realized. It is certain because our hope rests on the resurrected Christ, whose bodily resurrection from the grave is an attested fact of history. Our hope believes in the reigning Christ, seated at the right hand of God, far above all rule and authority (Eph. 1:20-23). Our hope waits for the returning Christ, who has given us His sure word that He will return bodily to rule the nations with a rod of iron (Acts 1:11; Rev. 19:15). Hallelujah! Because such a Savior is our hope, we can serve Him and know that our labor is not in vain (1 Cor. 15:58).

What is the aim of our service? Ultimately, it is to bring glory to God. But one of the main ways we do that is by working to bring people into submission to God as His true children.

2. The aim of our service is to bring forth true children in the faith (1Ti 1:2).

Paul addresses Timothy as his "true child in the faith" (or, "in faith," meaning faith in the gospel). The word "true" points to the genuineness of Timothy's conversion as attested by his years of faithfulness in the Lord (Homer Kent, *The Pastoral Epistles* [Moody Press], p. 77). Modern evangelistic methods teach us to follow up a person who has prayed to receive Christ by giving him immediate assurance of salvation. But it takes longer than a few minutes or even a few months to determine if a person's profession of faith in Christ is genuine. Paul expressed concern for the Corinthians and the Galatians that they may have "believed in vain" (1 Cor. 15:2; Gal. 3:4). He said to the Galatians (4:19), "My children, with whom I am again in labor until Christ is formed in you." They had professed Christ, but Paul was not yet certain if they were true children or not.

Paul urged the Corinthians, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you--unless indeed you fail the test?" (2 Cor. 13:5). Peter exhorts his readers, "Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you" (2 Pet. 1:10). John wrote his first epistle to give his readers a number of tests by which they could know that they had eternal life (see the entire book of 1 John, but esp. 1Ti 5:13).

Timothy had grown up in a home with a godly mother and grandmother who had taught him the Scriptures that lead to salvation through faith in Christ (2Ti 3:15). But he had not believed in Christ unto salvation until he heard Paul's preaching. Timothy's experience shows that even if you're in a mixed marriage, as a believing parent you need to teach your children the Scriptures with a view to their salvation. God may use you or He may use your teaching coupled with someone else's preaching to bring your children to faith in Christ.

How can we know if we are true children of God? Many sermons could be preached on this and I must be brief! Note the marks listed here:

(1) True children know the grace of God. Grace is the sweetest sound to those who are true children of God, because it means that He pours out His favor on the undeserving. He calls sinners, not the righteous.

(2) True children know the mercy of God. In his greetings, Paul adds this word only here and in 2 Timothy (the addition in the KJV of Titus rests on weak manuscript support). While grace points to God's forgiveness to the guilty, His mercy points to His kindness to the miserable or helpless. Every true child of God knows His mercy.

(3) True children know the peace of God. God's peace is more than just inner calm, although it is that. It refers to the overall well-being of a person who has been reconciled to God. Such a person experiences God's blessings, even in times of suffering and sorrow. It is a peace that surpasses human understanding (Phil. 4:6-7). God's children know His peace.

(4) True children know God as Father. The Bible reveals God as the kind, caring Father of His true children. Even if you had a harsh, unloving earthly father or no father at home, you can come to know God as your true Heavenly Father as revealed in His Word. One of the marks of believers is that they know God as Father.

(5) True children know Christ Jesus as Lord. The distinction between Christ as Savior and Christ as Lord is a false one. He is clearly both Savior and Lord. If you are not living each day by yielding to Jesus as your Lord, you ought to question whether He is truly your Savior. Many will say to Him at the judgment, "Lord, Lord, we did many things in Your name." But He will say to them those awful words, "I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness" (Matt. 7:21-23). True children know Christ Jesus both as Savior and Lord.

Conclusion

Do you know God as your Savior? If not, do not rest until you do! If so, then know that He has saved you to serve. The aim of that service is to bring glory to Him by you becoming His true child in faith and by your bringing others to become His true children in faith, as Paul did with Timothy.

D. L. Moody was an uneducated shoemaker whom God saved. A man named Reynolds told about the first time he ever saw D. L. Moody, before Moody became famous. Moody was in a little shanty that had been abandoned by a saloon keeper, holding a small black boy in his arms, reading to him the story of the prodigal son. Moody couldn't even read all the words, so he had to skip them. Reynolds thought, "If God can ever use such an instrument as that for His honor and glory, it will certainly astonish me!" Yet we all know how God used D. L. Moody. He can use you and me that way, just as He used shy, timid Timothy. We've been saved to serve!

Discussion Questions

1. Must salvation be a dramatic experience (like Paul's) or can it be a quiet recognition? Cite Scripture.
2. How can a person know if he (or she) is called to "full-time" Christian service? Is the term a misnomer?
3. Is being overwhelmed by inadequacy a sign that you're not in God's will in serving Him? How can you know?
4. Is every Christian supposed to bring others to Christ or is that just the responsibility of those so gifted?

1 Timothy 1:3-7 THE GOAL OF BIBLICAL TEACHING

Steven Cole

A story is told of an elderly man who ran a variety store. At one time it had been a prosperous business, but in recent years he had

become obsessed with trying to keep the store neat and clean. He would spend hours arranging and rearranging the merchandise on the shelves, often refusing to unlock the doors for fear that the store would be thrown into disarray. The appearance of his store became the priority; selling merchandise became secondary.

That sounds crazy, but the same thing often happens among God's people. We get diverted from the true goal of the Christian life and busy ourselves with lesser things. Jesus clearly summed up the goal when He said that the two greatest commandments in God's law were to love God with all our being and to love our neighbor as we do in fact love ourselves (Matt. 22:37-39). Genuine love for God and others is the goal of the Christian life.

And yet we in the church often get caught up with the trivial and neglect the crucial. We strain the gnat and swallow the camel, to use Jesus' phrase (Matt. 23:24). We argue some abstruse point of theology but shred relationships. We get caught up with church programs but neglect the people the programs are supposed to help. We serve on committees but ignore the hurting person in our midst who needs our love. We focus on knowing the Bible but forget that the goal is to change our lives, not to fill our heads.

The church at Ephesus was being diverted from the goal of the Christian life by some false teachers. They were promoting "strange doctrines" (1Ti 1:3, lit., "other doctrines") that is, non-apostolic doctrines. Apostolic doctrine, as contained in the New Testament (which includes the proper interpretation of the Old Testament), is the only truth for God's people. But these teachers had turned aside to fruitless discussion centering on myths and speculations about genealogies. Paul had assigned Timothy the unenviable but necessary task of confronting these men and getting the church back on track. In 1 Timothy 1:3-7, Paul makes the point that ...

The goal of biblical teaching is love
in line with God's truth.

We need to navigate these waters carefully, because we can run aground on a number of extremes. Many shipwreck by saying, "Doctrine just divides people and causes controversy. You can't know for sure that you're right. So forget about theology; love is all that matters." But there is no such thing as biblical love apart from sound theology. Others run aground by assuming a cultural definition of love instead of a biblical one. They think that love means being nice all the time, burying our differences and never criticizing or opposing anyone. But if that's what Paul meant, he contradicts himself within this chapter.

To help us think clearly about the goal of biblical teaching as set forth here by Paul, I want to develop three thoughts:

1. Biblical teaching has been entrusted by God to those who teach; thus they are not free to change the message.

These false teachers were making up their own message, supposedly based on Old Testament genealogies. No doubt they were interesting and entertaining stories. But Paul calls them "myths" and contrasts them with "the administration of God which is by faith" (1Ti 1:4). Most likely these men were teachers of Jewish back-ground who would take names from Old Testament genealogies and make up stories that had no factual basis. Such fables were included in a portion of The Talmud known as Haggadah. Another example of this sort of Jewish myth (Titus 1:14) is The Book of Jubilees, written about 100 B.C., which takes the historical stories from Genesis and embellishes them with all sorts of fictional accounts (William Hendriksen, New Testament Commentary, "Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles" [Baker], p. 59).

By way of contrast to these speculations, Paul asserts that "the administration of God" is "by faith" (v. 4). (The KJV reading, "godly edification," is based on a weak textual variant that must be rejected. The NIV "God's work" misses the main nuance of the Greek word.) The Greek word for "administration" means stewardship or management (see 1 Cor. 9:17; Eph. 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col. 1:25). The idea is that the gospel message is a treasure entrusted by God to men who will give an account to Him on whether they managed or dispensed it faithfully (see 1 Tim. 1:11). Such a steward of the gospel isn't free to modify the message or teach whatever he likes or dislikes or what he thinks his audience wants to hear. He is under orders (1Ti 1:3, "instruct" [NASB] = "a military command") from God to proclaim what God has revealed and nothing else. This treasure of the gospel comes to people "by faith."

In our day, as in every age, there are men who tamper with the apostolic message by all sorts of cultural myths to make it more palatable to people. One flagrant example is Robert Schuller, whose book, *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation* [Word, 1982], carries endorsements by two well-known, supposedly evangelical theologians, one of whom was the president of a major evangelical seminary. The book purports to be based on the Lord's Prayer, but it is an utter perversion of the gospel, in which Schuller states, "To be born again means that we must be changed from a negative to a positive self-image--from inferiority to self-esteem ..." (p. 68). He goes on to say that this happens when we meet "the Ideal One" (Jesus) who receives us as his peer and treats us as an equal! As a result, the core of our life changes from shame to self-esteem and we can pray, "Our Father in heaven, honorable is our name" (p. 69, emphasis his).

What awful blasphemy! The book is full of statements that twist Scripture into conformity with worldly ideas. Yet a prominent evangelical pastor gushes on the book jacket that Schuller is "a communicator of the gospel of Jesus Christ" and that his "theology is traditional"! So you've got to be on guard so that you aren't led astray by those who claim to be evangelical and who claim to base their message on Scripture, but they're merely using the Bible as a springboard to make up their own message. Biblical teachers must be faithful to the biblical text.

2. The goal of biblical teaching is love, properly defined.

Perhaps someone is thinking, "Steve, you're not being very loving toward Dr. Schuller!" That precisely is the kind of cultural definition of love that we must avoid, that love means being nice to everyone and not criticizing anyone or their teaching. If that is love, Paul contradicts himself by telling Timothy to confront these false teachers and by his criticism of Hymenaeus and Alexander (1Ti 1:20). Our definition of love must encompass all of what Paul (and Jesus) did and taught, not just when they were nice!

When Paul states, "The goal of the commandment is love" (1Ti 1:5, lit.) it may refer to the commandment to Timothy to tell these men to stop teaching false doctrine (1Ti 1:3). But in light of Paul's discussion of the Law (1Ti 1:8-11), and the fact that the Law is summed up in the two great commands, to love God and others, Paul is probably extending the meaning of "commandment" to refer to the whole of biblical teaching. Thus he is reminding Timothy that the goal of God's commands as contained in Scripture is that we would love God and others. If these false teachers really knew what God's law was all about, they would be teaching toward that aim, rather than entertaining people with fruitless speculations and discussions.

Paul qualifies or defines "love" in three ways:

A. Biblical love stems from a pure heart

God, who alone can see what is in every heart, weighs motives. If we act in an outwardly loving way toward someone, but our inner motive is to get something back for ourselves or to use the person for our own selfish pleasure or fulfillment, or to manipulate the person for our own ultimate gain, we're not loving from a pure heart. Love from a pure heart is love that has been cleansed from all self-centeredness, love that truly seeks the glory of God by seeking His highest good for the person, even if it means personal sacrifice and loss for us.

The only way we can be freed from our innate selfishness to love in that manner is to be inwardly cleansed by God through the cross of Christ, where God's sacrificial love was supremely demonstrated; and, then, to die to self daily by denying self and walking continually in light of the cross (Luke 9:23). To love from a pure heart requires that we deal with our sin, especially our selfishness and pride, on the thought level. When God's Spirit through His Word confronts our sinful, selfish motives, we must confess and turn from our sin rather than deny or excuse it by blaming others.

We call out to Him for the selfless, pure love that truly seeks the highest good of the other person.

B. Biblical love stems from a good conscience.

The Greek word for "conscience" comes from two words meaning "knowing together" and refers to that knowledge of our-selves that we share together with God alone. Apart from our-selves, only God knows our thoughts and the things we do when no one else is looking. Everyone stands guilty before God because every person, whether religious or pagan, has violated his own con-science (Rom. 2:14-16). The only way we can have a good con-science is to ask God to cleanse us, based on faith in Jesus Christ who died for our sins and was raised so that we might be right be-fore God (1 Pet. 3:21; Heb. 9:14; 10:22).

Then, having been made right with God through faith in Christ, we live each day by maintaining a clear conscience both be-fore God and before people (Acts 24:16). We do this by confessing all sin, even sins of thought, to God; and by asking forgiveness of those we have wronged. If there is anyone you have sinned against and have not sought his (or her) forgiveness, then you aren't able sincerely to love that person as God commands. Even if the other person started the problem by sinning against you, and even if he or she has continued to sin against you and has never sought your forgiveness, you cannot be obedient to God's command to love until you go to this person and clear your conscience by asking his or her forgiveness. Love must stem from a pure heart and a good conscience.

C. Biblical love stems from a sincere faith.

The original phrase means faith without hypocrisy or play-acting. Again, this term goes below the outward appearance and looks at the heart. Sincere faith is directed toward Jesus Christ and results in loving others because you want to please Christ. Hypo-critical faith plays to the audience, ignoring or forgetting that God is watching. You can put on an outward show of faith that looks pious to everyone, but your heart is self-serving. You can act loving to a person's face, but then run him down behind his back.

My roommate once was watching a children's TV program. The host was outwardly kind and sweet toward all the kids. The program ended and the host thought he was off the air, but he wasn't. He turned to a person off camera and muttered, "That ought to fix the little brats for another day!" His "love" was not sincere.

I read about a couple that was expecting a baby. At the office where the husband worked, his fellow workers seemed so caring and concerned about his wife and the expected child. As the time drew near, they would ask, "How's your wife doing? Any news? Is she feeling all right?" It all sounded so sincere, so caring. But then the man found out that there was an office pool betting on the ex-act date of her delivery. They didn't care about the couple or their baby. They only cared about winning the pool! That's not love from a sincere faith.

Thus biblical love stems from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. That means that at its core, biblical love stems from a right relationship with God and the motive of seeking to please and glorify Him. It means that biblical love has the courage to confront someone who is in error or sin, because such a person is not pleasing God and is not helping others to please God. Thus biblical love, which is the proper goal of biblical teaching, does not mean being sweet and nice to everyone. It means doing whatever you can to help people get right with God through genuine faith in Jesus Christ. Biblical love stems from a pure heart, a good con-science, and a sincere faith.

We've seen that biblical teaching has been entrusted by God to those who teach, which means that they aren't free to make up their own stuff. The goal of their teaching must be love, properly defined.

3. "Love" that is not in line with God's truth is not love.

False teachers often emphasize love and unity at the expense of truth because invariably false teachers don't want their own sin confronted by God's Word. They will say, "We need to love every-one and not divide over anything." They're tolerant of everyone except the man who confronts sin and serious theological error. They accuse such men of being judgmental and unloving. But sound doctrine always confronts sin because God is holy and He calls His people to holiness. So-called "love" that tolerates sin that God's Word plainly confronts is not biblical love, no matter how nice it is, because it is not in line with God's truth (see 2 & 3 John).

Since it's easy to be deceived by false teachers who seem loving, but who don't love in line with God's truth, how can we spot them? Much more could be said, but from our text alone, here are five marks of a false teacher:

A. False teachers are often motivated by pride.

Note verse 7: "wanting to be teachers of the Law." They love a following. They're filled with so-called "knowledge." But as Paul states (1 Cor. 8:1), "Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up." It would be a false conclusion, in opposition to all that Paul wrote, to thus discard knowledge. The point is not to be ignorant and sweet! The point is that knowledge of God's truth must always result in a change in our thinking and behavior. But false teachers often have an air of pride and they appeal to the pride of their followers: "If you learn from me, you'll be in the know!"

B. False teachers promote "new" insights supposedly, but not truly, based on God's Word.

God has revealed Himself in history and in His Word of truth that is based on history. Furthermore, His Word is propositional, that is, it makes statements that can and must be taken in their plain sense. But false teachers come up with "new" insights based on a subjective approach or on reading some supposed secular wisdom back into Scripture, even though it's unrelated to the meaning of Scripture in its context. These false teachers were taking the historically accurate genealogical lists in Scripture and making all sorts of fanciful applications from them.

C. False teachers use, but misuse, the Bible.

This is how Satan leads God's people astray. If someone was using the Koran or Book of Mormon, true Christians would immediately put up their defenses. But when someone cites the Bible, it sounds good, especially when the things they say make sense and seem to help you cope with your problems.

That's how all the unbiblical teaching about self-esteem has flooded into the church. It comes from Carl Rogers, although it originated with Satan in the Garden, when he showed Eve how to build her self-esteem by becoming like God. Now it is pervasive in "Christian" self-help books, which often wrongly teach that the Bible commands us to love ourselves. Others begin with the unbiblical assumption that low self-worth is at the heart of most of our emotional problems and then read this back into the Bible as if the Bible taught it.

Like these spinners of genealogical yarns in Paul's day, modern false teachers love to use stories to substantiate their teaching. I've read about a pastor's wife who was suicidal. She had tried to trust and obey God, but that "didn't work." Then she went to the experts, and they got her in touch with her deepest feelings, and now she's a happy, well-adjusted woman. It sounds marvelous, but it doesn't prove a thing, because their counsel is not based on God's truth.

D. False teachers are dogmatic about their speculations.

Paul calls their teaching "speculations" (1Ti 1:4), but then says that they "make confident assertions" (v. 7). It's possible to sound biblical and to speak confidently, but to be dead wrong. I get book catalogs that invariably market some of the modern false teachers by portraying them as the expert authorities on complex problems: "The doctors give you professional help with their proven program."

Christianity Today contributed to this unbiblical nonsense when they wrote (2/10/92, p. 28): "Myth: A pastor is competent to counsel his parishioners. Fact: Most pastors are armed with only a meager knowledge of behavioral therapies. A pastor's calling is, primarily, a spiritual one, helping people to find strength in God's presence and a sense of divine direction in the midst of difficulty." They go on to say that pastors need to link up with professionals who can deal with psychological matters. They're dogmatic that pastors, armed with the Bible, can't give expert help; but those who dispense the world's speculations have the answers for your deepest problems!

E. False teachers love arguments but avoid biblical obedience.

These men in Ephesus loved to discuss their speculations, but they didn't want to confront the sin in their lives (1Ti 1:19). Paul calls their discussions "fruitless," because they didn't result in more godly lives. False teaching is closely connected with sinful living, because God's Word of truth is the only source that confronts our sin to make us holy. The word "sound" which Paul repeatedly affixes to "teaching" (1Ti 1:10) or "doctrine" (4:6) means "healthy," that is, doctrine that produces spiritually healthy Christians. Sound doctrine results in sound believers. Speculations that don't result in godliness are worthless.

Conclusion

Some of you, no doubt, are thinking, "Steve, that didn't sound like a loving message! You were so critical and negative!" I only ask

you to critique me by asking, "Did my teaching accurately explain and apply the biblical text?" I'm not free to change the message, even if it comes across as critical. If Paul was critical of these false teachers, then I must be critical of modern false teachers who promote cultural myths as if they were biblical truths. Love must be in line with God's truth or it is not biblical love, no matter how nice it sounds. Biblical love from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith must be the goal of our commandment. Let's not be distracted from it!

Discussion Questions

1. How can we properly emphasize biblical truth without becoming puffed up with "knowledge"?
2. Note Acts 13:9-10. Was Paul being loving or was he acting in the flesh? How was this "love"?
3. How can we know which truths are worth fighting about and which ones we need to tolerate differences on?
4. Is loving the same as liking? How can we love someone we don't like?

1 Timothy 1:8-11 THE PROPER USE OF THE LAW

Steven Cole

When I was trained to share my faith in Christ, I was taught that I should not mention to a potential convert anything about his particular sins, since that was not the main issue. Yes, you tell him that in general, everyone is a sinner. But you don't confuse the issue by confronting his profanity, immorality, drunkenness, or greed. The only issue, I was told, is his need to believe in Christ, so I should put my focus there. Also, since judgment and hell are sensitive issues, I should downplay them and rather put my emphasis on the abundant life Christ offers here and now. So I was taught and so I practiced for many years.

But I never was completely at ease with this methodology. For one thing, it didn't seem to square with a number of Scriptures. Also, it struck me as being a lot like good salesmanship, where you try not to say anything to turn off the potential customer. But in catering to the customer, it seemed to hold back a crucial part of the truth of the gospel. And, some of the people who "bought the product" didn't seem much concerned with holy living. They were more caught up with having a happy life. For them, Jesus was not so much essential as He was useful, in terms of helping them to enjoy a better life.

The more I read some of the great evangelists from the past, the more I realized that this approach didn't square with how they presented the gospel. They thundered against sin and preached about judgment and hell, so as to strike terror into the hearts of the lost. Their message wasn't so much, "If you'd like a bit happier life, try Jesus." It was rather, "Because of your great sin, you're under God's wrath. Unless you repent and trust in Christ, you will spend eternity in hell." They pled with people to flee to Christ with a lot more urgency than the modern evangelical salesman with his low-key approach: "Try Jesus for just 30 days and see if you aren't totally satisfied."

I came to realize that a major missing ingredient in the most popular gospel presentations of our day is the proper use of God's law to bring deep, lasting, life-transforming conviction of sin. People who are not convicted of their sin and who do not realize their own utter inability to meet God's holy standard by their own efforts are not desperate for what God offers through the gospel.

They're like casual shoppers. A desperate shopper would be a person who has to have bottled oxygen to live. His supply is almost gone because there has been a strike at the company that supplies it. He's down to his last bottle when he rushes in the door of the bottled oxygen company and pleads, "If you can't sell me more oxygen, I will die!" A casual shopper is a person with a closet full of nice clothes who goes strolling through the mall. He doesn't have a great need for anything, but if something grabs his fancy and the price is right, he might be in the mood to buy.

By not preaching God's holy Law, we've given self-righteous, contented people the false impression that they can be casual shoppers toward the gospel when, in fact, their condition is desperate. In 1 Timothy 1:7, Paul wrote to Timothy about some false teachers troubling the church at Ephesus who wanted to be teachers of the Law, but who didn't understand its proper use. In verses 8-11, Paul shows that ...

The proper use of God's Law is to bring conviction of sin so that people are driven to the gospel for salvation.

When sinful men and women learn the righteous demands of God's Law, they should be driven to despair because of their guilt before God. In this desperate state, the good news that Jesus Christ bore the curse of the Law on our behalf and offers pardon and eternal life freely to any who will believe in Him should impel them to flee to Christ that they might be saved. Thus we who have been entrusted with this great news need to know how to use God's Law properly. We must never fall into the error of marketing Jesus as the way to a happier life.

1. The proper use of the Law is not as a means of salvation, but to bring conviction of sin (1:8-10).

We aren't sure exactly what these false teachers were saying, but if they were Jews with a pharisaical bent, they probably were teaching that keeping the Old Testament Law is the means of salvation, while at the same time they were living in a licentious manner. That sounds contradictory, but really it is not. Jesus condemned the Pharisees because on the one hand they were promoting a works sort of righteousness, urging the keeping of the Law (both the Law of Moses and their various traditions); but at

the same time they were inwardly licentious or lawless (Matt. 23:25-28).

It is commonly taught that legalism is on one extreme and licentiousness is on the other and that grace is the balance between the two. But that is not what Scripture teaches. Legalism and licentiousness are actually two sides of the same coin. The common operating principle for both is the flesh. The legalist takes fleshly pride in his observance of certain rules (of course he always picks rules he can keep!), but since he operates in the flesh, he has no power over indwelling sin. Since sin is not being dealt with inwardly, sooner or later, he falls into outwardly lawless behavior. Grace, on the other hand, operates in the power of the indwelling Holy Spirit who enables the believer to judge sin at the thought level and to be transformed in the inner person through the renewing of the mind through God's powerful Word.

Thus we must be clear on both the improper and the proper use of God's Law:

A. The improper use of God's Law is to try to be saved by keeping it.

Paul doesn't specifically address this improper use here, but this was the entire thrust of his life before he was converted. As he explains in Philippians 3:4-6 (also Gal. 1:13-14), he was zealous for the Law, thinking that keeping the Law and the Jewish traditions was the way to salvation. But in actuality, he was a violent persecutor of the church, far in his heart from the inner righteousness required by God's Law. As he explains in Romans 3:20, "by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight; for through the Law comes the knowledge of sin."

God's Law can be compared to a mirror. The purpose of a mirror is not to wash your face, but rather to show you the dirt on your face and drive you to soap and water. The purpose of the Law is to convict you of your sin and drive you to Christ for cleansing. Keeping the Law can't save you because, as we shall see, no one is able to keep it perfectly. Only Christ can save.

If the Law can't save us and if we can't keep it, we are prone to say that the problem is with the Law. But Paul affirms, "The Law is good, if one uses it lawfully" (1Ti 1:8). There is nothing wrong with the law. The problem is our sinful nature. It is only the delusion of our sinful pride that makes us think that we can commend ourselves to God by keeping His Law. When we look more care-fully at the Law, we discover that ...

B. The proper use of God's Law is to bring conviction of sin.

Paul says that the Law is not made for a righteous man (1Ti 1:9). I understand "law" (1Ti 1:9) to refer to the Law of Moses. Paul has just twice referred to it (1Ti 1:7-8) and his list of sins (1Ti 1:9-10) is parallel to the Ten Commandments. When Paul refers to "a righteous man," I take him to mean one who has been justified by faith in Jesus Christ. Such persons are the only ones who are truly righteous, because they have God's righteousness imputed them. A merely good man (by human standards) or a self-righteous man (some take it this way) is still under God's condemnation and thus needs the Law to reveal his sinfulness.

Thus Paul is referring to those who have been declared righteous by faith in Christ. Such persons are not under the Law, but are under grace (Rom. 6:14; Gal. 5:23). This does not mean that they are lawless; they are under the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus (Rom. 8:2), also called the law of Christ (1 Cor. 9:21). Nor does Paul mean that the Law has no benefit for believers. It reveals God's righteous character and how we must live to please Him. But since "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every-one who believes" (Rom. 10:4), we who are in Christ are not subject to the Law's condemnation. The primary function of the Law is to bring conviction of sin to those who are still in rebellion against God.

Thus Paul says that the Law is for the lawless. God's Law speaks to the sinner to reveal his sin and convict him of sin. Paul gives a catalogue of sins that roughly parallels (in order) the Ten Commandments; first, offenses against God; then, crimes against fellow men. Note the parallels:

1 Timothy 1:9-10 Ten Commandments

Lawless and rebellious Ungodly and sinners Unholy and profane

Kill fathers & mothers Murderers

Immoral men, homosexuals Kidnappers/slave stealers Liars and perjurers Whatever else is contrary

No other gods

1. No idols

2. Not take Lord's name in vain

3. Keep Sabbath

4. Honor parents

5. No murder

6. No adultery

7. No stealing

8. No false witness

9. No coveting

In each case except the last (a catch all term), Paul takes a flagrant violation of the Ten Commandments, perhaps to make the contrast between the righteous (for whom the Law is not intended) and the unrighteous (for whom it is intended) more vivid. At first glance, the person of average morals might look at Paul's list and think, "He's not talking about me. I've never done these things."

But a more careful look will convict even the most moral per-son. Who has never been lawless or rebellious against God? Who has

not been ungodly and missed the mark of God's righteousness (a sinner)? Who has not been unholy and profane (to tread on that which is sacred)? Who has not been disrespectful in striking out at his parents, if not physically, in word or thought? Who has not been angry enough to kill someone else, except for the restraint of the law? Who has not entertained immoral thoughts? Who has not taken that which is not rightfully his? Who has not bent the truth? Who has not wrongfully desired that which is another's? On all ten counts we all stand guilty before God!

But it only takes one count to convict us! The Law is like a chain--one bad link means it's broken. "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles in one point, he has become guilty of all" (James 2:10). If you are in a boat in a swift river, 25 feet from a high waterfall, and I throw you a chain secured to a tree on the shore, you are saved. But if there is just one bad link in the whole chain, you're lost. One violation of God's Law brings condemnation. Thus the Law is aimed at those who have not been justified by faith in Christ to bring them to a point of despair so they will sense their condemnation before a holy God.

In my opinion, this proper use of the Law is greatly lacking in our day. Many people think they're doing God a favor to put their trust in Christ as Savior. Others come to Christ with the attitude, "I'll try Jesus and see if He can make me happy." What they need to realize is that they're heading toward the falls! You don't need to sell a man about to plunge to his death the idea of grabbing the life ring. We need to know God's Law so that we can use it to reveal God's holiness to a generation of men and women who have flagrantly violated that Law. The proper use of the Law is to bring conviction of sin.

But God does not leave us in despair. The Law is not revealed apart from the gospel of Jesus Christ.

2. The result of using the Law properly is to drive people to the gospel for salvation (1Ti 1:11).

The fact that the Law is not for the righteous but for sinners is "in accord with (Greek = kata) the gospel of the glory of the blessed God," that Christ bore the curse of the Law for us. The law proclaims, "We ought to obey God, but we haven't; furthermore, we can't." It's not in our will power to do it. And so we're condemned. The gospel proclaims, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us" (Gal. 3:13)! There are three points to note concerning the gospel:

A. The gospel brings spiritual healing

The word "sound" (1Ti 1:10) modifying "teaching" means healthy or whole. It is a predominant theme in the Pastoral epistles; this word occurs in its metaphorical sense ("spiritual health") eight times in these letters, and no where else (in that sense) in the New Testament. The good news is that no matter how spiritually diseased a person may be, no matter how far gone in sin, there is healing in the gospel and in the teaching of God's Word.

The late Malcolm Muggeridge told of an incident while he was in India. While swimming in a river he noticed an Indian woman who was bathing in the same river. She was naked. Muggeridge dived and swam under water to surprise her. As his head rose above the water, the woman turned toward him. Muggeridge froze. The woman was a leper! He retreated with shame, stung by the realization that it was his heart that was leprous.

Religion can clean up the outward person, but only Jesus Christ and the sound teaching of His Word can heal a leprous heart. I don't mean to imply that believing the gospel brings instant, permanent deliverance from lust and other inward sins. We who live in this body struggle against such sins every day (Heb. 12:4; 1 Pet. 2:11). But when we believe the gospel, we are delivered from sin's penalty; as we learn sound teaching, we can experience daily deliverance from sin's power.

B. The gospel reveals the glory of the blessed God.

1Ti 1:11 literally reads, "according to the gospel of the glory of the blessed God, ..." God's glory is the splendor of His attributes. The gospel reveals God's glory--His love, righteousness, mercy, grace, wisdom, and power. God is described as "the blessed God" (1Ti 6:15 is the only other time this phrase occurs in the Bible). This does not refer to men blessing God, but rather to the fact that God is in and of Himself blessed (or truly happy). He is perfect in Himself. The source of all true happiness and joy is found in God through the gospel.

C. The gospel is entrusted to redeemed sinners to proclaim to lost sinners.

"With which I have been entrusted" (1Ti 1:11). As Paul goes on to show, he was the chief of sinners, and yet God saved him and entrusted him with the awesome responsibility of proclaiming the gospel to others. The solemn truth is that God does not save us so that we might live happily for ourselves and go to heaven. He has left us on this earth to proclaim His message of reconciliation to others (2 Cor. 5:18-21). He could have shouted it from the sky or used angels, but He didn't. He uses redeemed sinners to take the message to lost sinners. Sharing the gospel is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. God has entrusted every believer with the gospel to take to a lost world!

Conclusion

One of the greatest evangelists of the 19th century was the British preacher, Charles Spurgeon. Both his father and grandfather were preachers, so he grew up in a home with strict Christian standards. He grew up in an age without the pervasive corruption, sensuality, and violence that bombards us through TV, movies, pornography, and other modern media. Listen to his account of the deep conviction of sin that he went through before he was converted at age 15:

When but young in years, I felt with much sorrow the evil of sin. My bones waxed old with my roaring all the day long. Day and night

God's hand was heavy upon me. I feared lest the very skies should fall upon me, and crush my guilty soul. God's law had laid hold upon me, and was showing me my sins. If I slept at night, I dreamed of the bottomless pit, and when I awoke, I seemed to feel the misery I had dreamed. Up to God's house I went; my song was but a sigh. To my chamber I retired, and there, with tears and groans, I offered up my prayer, without a hope and without a refuge, for God's law was flogging me with its ten-thonged whip, and then rubbing me with brine afterwards, so that I did shake and quiver with pain and anguish, and my soul chose strangling rather than life, for I was exceeding sorrowful.

... For five years, as a child, there was nothing before my eyes but my guilt, and though I do not hesitate to say that those who observed my life would not have seen any extraordinary sin, yet as I looked upon myself, there was not a day in which I did not commit such gross, such outrageous sins against God, that often and often have I wished I had never been born.... Before I thought upon my soul's salvation, I dreamed that my sins were very few. All my sins were dead, as I imagined, and buried in the graveyard of forgetfulness. But that trumpet of conviction, which aroused my soul to think of eternal things, sounded a resurrection note to all my sins; and, oh, how they rose up in multitudes more countless than the sands of the sea! Now, I saw that my very thoughts were enough to damn me, that my words would sink me lower than the lowest hell, so that I could not bear them. I thought I had rather have been a frog or a toad than have been made a man. I reckoned that the most defiled creature, the most loathsome and contemptible, was a better thing than myself, for I had so grossly and grievously sinned against Almighty God....

A spiritual experience which is thoroughly flavored with a deep and bitter sense of sin is of great value to him [who has] had it. It is terrible in the drinking, but it is most wholesome in the bowels, and in the whole of the afterlife. Possibly, much of the flimsy piety of the present day arises from the ease with which men attain to peace and joy in these evangelistic days.... Too many think lightly of sin, and therefore think lightly of the Saviour. He who has stood before his God, convicted and condemned, with the rope about his neck, is the man to weep for joy when he is pardoned, to hate the evil which has been forgiven him, and to live to the honour of the Redeemer by whose blood he has been cleansed (C. H. Spurgeon Autobiography:1 The Early Years [Banner of Truth], pp. 58-59; last paragraph, p. 54).

Today most Christians would think that a boy who thought like that must be from a severely dysfunctional home and that his parents had seriously failed to build his self-esteem. But that's how God used His Law to convict and drive to the cross one of the greatest evangelists in his generation.

Two final thoughts: First, do you know personally anything of what Spurgeon experienced? Or could it be that you mistakenly think that you're a basically good person? Thus, "forgiven little, you love little." Knowing God's holy Law should make us cling thankfully to the cross and walk daily by the Spirit who works God's righteousness in us. Second, do you recognize that if you've believed the good news, you're under obligation to take it to others? Make sure you don't try to "sell" Jesus as the way to a happy life. He came into this world to save sinners (1:15)! Use God's Law to bring His conviction to sinners, so they will flee to Christ to be saved.

Discussion Questions

Are we too quick to alleviate the guilt of a person under conviction of sin? Give biblical support.

Have we watered down the sinfulness of sin and the just condemnation of God in an attempt to make the gospel more acceptable in our age? What are some results of this?

How (practically) can we share God's Law without sounding like we're condemning the person?

Does the Law have any benefits for the believer? What?

1 Timothy 1:12-17 GRACE ABOUNDING TO THE CHIEF OF SINNERS

Steven Cole

The title of my message, "Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners," comes from John Bunyan's autobiographical account of his conversion which he took from the Apostle Paul's words in our text (1 Tim. 1:12-17). In his well-known classic, *Pilgrim's Progress* ([Spire Books], p. 211), Bunyan has Greatheart say to Christian's boys as they journey to the Celestial City, "[Forgetful Green] is the most dangerous place in all these parts. For if at any time the pilgrims meet with any brunt, it is when they forget what favors they have received, and how unworthy they are of them."

I fear that as American Christians, living in this day of a watered down, feel good about yourself "gospel," we have forgotten what favors we have received from God and how unworthy we are of them. My aim today is to get any of you who may have wandered into Forgetful Green out of there as you think again on God's abundant grace that covers all your sins.

The apostle Paul stayed out of "Forgetful Green" by taking frequent trips down the "Memory Lane" of his past, recalling his former sins and the abundant grace of God that transformed him into the apostle to the Gentiles. The story of Paul's conversion is repeated no less than six times in the New Testament (Acts 9, 22, 26; Gal. 1 & 2; Phil. 3; 1 Tim. 1). As Paul rehearses it here again for

Timothy, I can hear his voice crack with emotion and see the tears well up in his eyes as he remembers God's grace in his life. With Paul,

We should often recall how God's abundant grace saved us from our sins.

We must never forget the simple, profound truth, that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost" (1:15).

1. The gospel is the message of God's abundant, trans-forming grace for sinners.

Saul the persecutor was transformed into Paul the preacher. And his case was no exception. In verse 16 he says that his conversion is a model of what God can do with any sinner. None is beyond God's abundant grace. When God's grace in Christ floods into a life, it always radically transforms that person.

A. The gospel is based on God's mercy and abundant grace (1Ti 1:13b-14).

God does not save us because of any worthiness on our part. It is all of His mercy and grace. When Paul says (1:13) that he was shown mercy because he "acted ignorantly in unbelief," he does not mean that he somehow deserved it. He means that he had not willfully rejected the light he had been shown. Scripture draws a distinction between a person who sins in ignorance and one who willfully rejects the light God has revealed to him. The former may be shown mercy, but the latter is in danger of losing the light he has been shown and may be hardened beyond repentance (Num. 15:22-31; 2 Chron. 36:15-16; Prov. 29:1; Heb. 10:26-27; 12:15-17). Thus Paul does not in any way suggest that he merited God's favor. Rather, it was quite the opposite.

God's grace was "more than abundant" (1Ti 1:14). Paul coins a word here by adding the Greek prefix hyper (meaning "above," "over," or "more") to a word that already means "super-abundant," so that his meaning is, "super-super-abundant." God's grace flooded over Paul like ocean waves that keep coming and coming without end. Not only is God's grace more than abundant, but also "the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus" (1:14). God is the supplier of everything we need for life and godliness (2 Pet. 1:3). He gives us the faith to believe in Christ for salvation. He fills us with the love of Christ that slops over from us to others.

Can you honestly join Paul in affirming with regard to your experience, "the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are found in Christ Jesus"? We live in a day when many professing Christians either tacitly or boldly deny the all-sufficiency of God's grace in Jesus Christ. In his excellent book that confronts the modern church's turning from this fundamental biblical truth (Our Sufficiency in Christ [Word], p. 20), Pastor John MacArthur writes:

"My grace is sufficient for you," the Lord said to the apostle Paul (2Cor. 12:9). The average Christian in our culture cynically views that kind of counsel as simplistic, unsophisticated, and naive. Can you imagine one of today's professional radio counselors simply telling a hurting caller that God's grace is enough to meet the need?

In another context ("Servant," Sept., 1991, p. 10), MacArthur tells about being on a radio show where he asked the host if she believed that Holy Spirit, the Word of God, and the living Christ were fully sufficient for our sanctification. She replied that some people can't get in the position to be sanctified until therapy helps them deal with some psychological issues! He responded, "That God can't do His work in you until a good therapist gets it started is a frightening concept." He adds, "Psychology didn't come along as a gift from God to make up for biblical deficiencies in these complex times."

If God's grace and the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus are not more than abundant in your life, the problem is not with God's grace. Either you have not understood this fundamental truth of the gospel, that it is all of grace; or, you have not learned how to appropriate God's abundant grace as the supply for your every need.

B. The gospel is for sinners (1Ti1:15).

None others need apply. Christ came to save sinners. If you're a basically good, churchgoing person, Christ did not come to save you. He came to save sinners only. If you're a person with a few faults and shortcomings, Christ did not come to save you. He came to save sinners only. If you're a person with too much dignity and self-worth to call yourself a sinner, Christ did not come to save you. He came to save sinners only.

The "gospel" we hear preached in our day is a positive message that will help you achieve your full potential or feel good about yourself. It will help you succeed in your family or business. It will solve your problems and give you peace of mind. There are even Christian books that promise to help you lose weight by building your self-esteem. But where is the message that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners? Paul underscores it by saying that this statement is trustworthy and that we should fully welcome it: "Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners."

Even our hymn book has changed the words of Isaac Watts' great hymn, "Alas, and did my Savior bleed? And did my Sovereign die? Would He devote that sacred head for such a worm as I?" One version has it, "for sinners such as I?" (#274, Hymns for the Family of God [Paragon Associates, Inc., 1976). But the other version has softened it to, "for someone such as I?" (# 95, same book).

A woman who was in full-time Christian work said in a class I was leading, "I'm not going to call myself a worm!" I gently asked her if she realized that Isaac Watts took that description directly from Psalm 22, which is a prophetic look at Christ bearing our sins on the cross. I said, "If Jesus called Himself a worm when He bore our sins, who are we to say that we're better than that?"

Of course, we've been redeemed by God's grace, so that now we're His children through faith in Christ. But I fear that many who

claim to believe in Christ have no idea of the sinfulness of their own heart; thus they lack the deep gratitude for God's grace that Paul had because he knew that he was the chief of sinners. We have magnified supposed human "worth" and have downplayed the holiness of God to such a degree that God's grace in salvation isn't seen as all that big a deal. Those who are forgiven little love little. So we end up with a bunch of lukewarm Christians who lack Paul's fervent love for God because they don't realize the depths of depravity from which God's grace has saved them.

Paul calls himself "the chief of sinners" (1Ti 1:15). It is significant that Paul makes this statement, not as a new believer, but after he had walked with God for over 25 years. You can trace a chronological progression in Paul's statements about himself. In 1 Corinthians 15:9 he says, "I am the least of the apostles." In Ephesians 3:8, written later, he says, "I am the very least of all saints." Here in 1 Timothy 1:15, written later still, he says, "I am the chief of all sinners."

He does not say, "I was the chief of sinners," even though he had a wicked past. He had blasphemed (v. 13), which is an argument for the deity of Jesus. As a Pharisaic Jew, Paul would never have blasphemed the God of Israel. What he means is that he blasphemed Jesus, the Son of God. He persecuted the church (v. 13). He was a violent aggressor. The word has the nuance of sadistic torture. But he doesn't say "I was the chief of sinners," but rather, "I am the chief." The closer a person walks with God, the more he is aware of the depths of his sinful nature, which in turn drives him to a deeper appreciation of the grace of God.

Alexander Maclaren said, "The sign of growing perfection is the growing consciousness of imperfection.... The more you become like Christ the more you will find out your unlikeness to Him" (Expositions of Holy Scripture [Baker], 15:332, 333). C. S. Lewis wrote, "When a man is getting better, he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less" (cited by Nathan Hatch, "Purging the Poisoned Well Within," [Christianity Today, 3/2/79], p. 14).

Are you learning that lesson? As you walk with God, are you learning more and more the depravity that lurks in your own heart, which in turn drives you humbly and thankfully to God's grace in Christ Jesus? Maybe you were raised in Sunday School and church, as I was. Maybe, like me, one of your earliest memories is of the time when you invited Christ to be your Savior. You especially need to learn that you are a chief of sinners. Otherwise you will fall into self-righteous pride and self-reliance, and you will never love God much because you won't realize how much you were forgiven.

Thus, the gospel is based on the mercy and abundant grace of God; and, the gospel is for sinners.

C. The gospel transforms sinners into servants of Jesus (1Ti 1:12).

God put Paul into service. If you have a King James Version, it reads, "into the ministry." That's a stained-glass word, if there ever was one. But the New Testament teaches that if God has saved you from your sin, then He has put you into the ministry. You are just as accountable to God for your ministry as I am for mine. Yes, I am paid so that I can devote full time to my ministry; perhaps you have to "make tents" (like Paul) to support yourself in your ministry. But we're all just as much in the ministry (see Eph. 4:11-16, esp. "whole," "every," & "each" in Eph 4:16). None is exempt.

Are you seeking God for the ministry He wants you to have in the Body of Christ? Do you view yourself every bit as much a minister as I am? Do you view your job as a means of supporting yourself so that you can serve Jesus? You say, "But I'm not sure that I can do that!" But notice (1:12), the Lord strengthened Paul, and He will strengthen you to serve Him. He wants you to be faithful. The aim of the gospel is not to get a bunch of people to be churchgoers for an hour and a half on Sundays. It's aim is to transform sinners into servants of Jesus, who live 24 hours a day, seven days a week, so that they might serve Him.

2. We should often recall our own experience of the gospel.

We must not wander into "Forgetful Green." We need to re-member often our former sins and God's grace. That's one reason we are to observe the Lord's Supper frequently: We all tend to forget His great salvation, so He says, "Do this in remembrance of Me." There are four things that recalling his experience of the gospel did for Paul and will do for us, as seen in these verses:

A. Recalling our experience of the gospel will make us thankful (1Ti 1:12).

As Paul thought of the gospel of the glory of God (1Ti 1:11) and how it had saved him from his sinful past, the first word out of his mouth is, "I thank Christ Jesus our Lord." To remember how much we have been forgiven is the surest way to fill our hearts with gratitude.

The Puritan preacher Thomas Goodwin (1600-1630) wrote to his son (quoted by William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Westminster Press], pp. 46-47),

When I was threatening to become cold in my ministry, and when I felt Sabbath morning coming and my heart not filled with amazement at the grace of God, or when I was making ready to dispense the Lord's Supper, do you know what I used to do? I used to take a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came down again with a broken and a contrite heart, ready to preach, as it was preached in the beginning, the forgiveness of sins. I do not think I ever went up the pulpit stair that I did not stop for a moment at the foot of it and take a turn up and down among the sins of my past years. I do not think that I ever planned a sermon that I did not take a turn around my study table and look back at the sins of my youth and of all my life down to the present; and many a Sabbath morning, when my soul had been cold and dry, for the lack of prayer during the week, a turn up and down in my past life before I went into the pulpit always broke my hard heart and made me close with the gospel for my own soul before I began to preach.

Do you want a heart of gratitude? Pause frequently to remember your own experience of the gospel.

B. Recalling our experience of the gospel will make us humble (1:13-15).

Although Paul was gifted, brilliant, and influential, he was not proud. He could honestly say, "By the undeserved favor of God I am what I am" (1 Cor. 15:10). Elisabeth Elliot tells how she once heard her young daughter singing to her kitten, "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like you." We can easily see how the other guy needs God's undeserved favor. But me? I'm not so bad! But I need to realize that God's grace saved a wretch like me. It will keep us from looking down in pride on fellow sinners.

C. Recalling our experience of the gospel will make us useful (1Ti 1:16).

Paul says, "I am an example of God's perfect patience. If He can save someone like me, then He can save anybody!" The word translated "who would believe" is literally "who are about to believe." In other words, no potential believer need despair that his case is too hard for God. He delights in hard cases. If you will believe that Christ will save you, the sinner, then you will have eternal life and be used of God as Paul was.

The key to being used by God is to be authentic in your experience with Him. If He has saved you from your sin and you're applying the sound teaching of His Word (1:10) so that you're growing in holiness, then your changed life will be used to change others. But if you're just a cultural Christian, not confronting your sin with God's Word, not living daily in reality with the living God, then you won't be used by God. Have you found mercy as a sinner before God? If so, God will use you to bring His mercy to others.

D. Recalling our experience of the gospel will make us worshipful (1Ti 1:17).

As Paul thought about what God had done in his life, he broke forth in spontaneous worship and praise. Please note that the attributes of God which Paul praises here are those that separate Him from us, not His grace, love, and patience that Paul has just been extolling. The gospel bids us draw near to receive mercy; but having received it, we also realize that God is altogether apart from us: He is the King of the ages, but we are His finite subjects; He is immortal, while we are subject to death; He is invisible, while we live in the realm of that which is seen; He is the only God, and we are definitely not gods! All we can do is bow in wonder and adoration that such a Being could save undeserving sinners like us!

Do you find your heart welling up with spontaneous worship of God, as Paul did? If you can't recall the last time, maybe it's because you don't pause often enough to remember your experience of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

John Newton, was a wild, drunken sailor. His language was so foul that the captain, hardly a model of piety, rebuked him! He was often put in irons and whipped for his rebellion. He became a slave-trader, falling even further into sin. He narrowly escaped death a number of times. Finally, after nearly perishing in a severe storm at sea, he turned to God and was saved. Even so, he remained in slave-trading for a few years. Eventually, by God's grace, he became a pastor. You probably know him for writing the hymn, "Amazing Grace." He wrote Deuteronomy 15:15 in bold letters and put it over the mantle of his study, where he could not fail to see it: "Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."

He also wrote his own epitaph which read, "John Newton, clerk, once an infidel and libertine, a servant of slaves in Africa, was, by the rich mercy of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ, preserved, restored, pardoned, and appointed to preach the faith he had long labored to destroy." (The above taken from Newton's autobiography, *Out of the Depths* [Moody Press] and from Barclay, p. 46.)

John Newton never forgot that he was a great sinner who had found even greater mercy and grace in Christ. Neither did Paul forget. Neither should we.

Discussion Questions

1. Where's the balance between seeing ourselves as "chief of sinners" versus "saints in Christ"?
2. Which is better, to be saved as a child and be spared a sinful past or to be saved after a few years of sin?
3. How can a person who seems to be "forgiven little" grow to "love much" (Luke 7:36-50)?
4. Is it biblical to say that every Christian is "in the ministry" in an equal sense? If so, what are the implications?

1 Timothy 1:18-20 FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN SERVICE

Steven Cole

Dr. Howard Hendricks tells of the time he saw a young reporter interview Bud Wilkinson, who was then the coach of the top-ranked Oklahoma Sooners football team. The reporter enthusiastically bubbled, "Coach Wilkinson, tell us what contribution collegiate football has made toward physical fitness in America." He was rather stunned when Wilkinson replied, "I do not believe that football

has made any contribution to physical fitness in America.” “What do you mean?” asked the dumbfounded reporter. “I define football,” replied Wilkinson, “as 22 men on the field desperately needing rest, and 50,000 people in the stands desperately needing exercise.” Dr. Hendricks concludes by saying, “What a description of the local church!”

Sadly, Christianity in America is often a spectator sport. You go on Sunday and sit and watch while the pros perform. After all, that’s what they’re paid to do, isn’t it? “But me? Well, you see, I’m just a layman.” But as we saw last week, “there ain’t no such animal in the Bible.” In the New Testament, there is no special class of persons called “ministers” or “clergymen” or “priests.” Rather, every believer in Jesus Christ is a minister and priest before God. Every believer is to be a functioning member of the Body of Christ, with a God-given ministry to fulfill.

I emphasize the point because we have been so indoctrinated with the faulty viewpoint of our culture that it’s difficult to shake. I’ll bet that if someone new in the church asked, “Who is your minister?” most of you would reply without a thought, “Steve Cole is our minister.” Do you know what you should reply? You should say, “Which minister did you have in mind? We have about 300 of them here. If you’re asking ‘Who is it we support so that he can devote full-time to teaching the Bible and shepherding the flock?’ the answer is, Steve Cole. But he is only one minister of many in the church.” We need to challenge faulty cultural views and evaluate everything in light of the Scriptures.

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to confront some false teachers who were leading people astray through their wrong teaching from the Law. That wasn’t a “fun” assignment, especially for someone of Timothy’s timid disposition, so he was probably tempted to look for a more peaceful situation. Paul urges him to remain on and confront the problems (1Ti 1:3). As he reminds Timothy of the gospel he is to preach (1Ti 1:11), Paul is diverted to remind Timothy again of the life-changing power of that gospel as experienced by Paul (1Ti 1:12-17). In our text (1Ti 1:18-20), he returns to his task of urging Timothy to “hang in there” in the ministry to which God has called him.

These verses reveal seven principles of ministry that apply to every believer, because every Christian is in the ministry. These are not the only principles you need to know, nor are they even the most basic. But you won’t survive in Christian service and hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant,” from our Lord without them.

To serve the Lord faithfully, you must understand and follow these principles of ministry:

1. The ministry is a sacred trust to be obeyed.

Paul says (1Ti 1:18), “This command” It’s the same word used in 1Ti 1:3, 5, and refers to the command to promote sound doctrine by confronting the false teachers and their doctrines. It’s a military word that means an order passed through the ranks from superior to subordinate. Paul received his orders from the Lord; he passes them on to Timothy, who is to relay them to the church. The word conveys a sense of urgent obligation. Donald Guthrie writes, “Timothy is solemnly reminded that the ministry is not a matter to be trifled with, but an order from the commander-in-chief” (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries, The Pastoral Epistles [Eerdmans], p. 67).

Paul says that he entrusts this command to Timothy. The word “entrust” is used of entrusting something valuable to someone for safe keeping. It is used of making a deposit in a bank; also of entrusting a loved one to another’s care. “It always implies that a trust has been reposed in someone for which he will be called to account” (William Barclay, The Daily Study Bible, The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon [Westminster Press], p. 51).

The lesson for us is this: The ministry is not an optional choice for the more dedicated. God doesn’t call for volunteers. The ministry is a sacred trust from God to each individual which each person must obey and for which that person must give an account. If God has called you to Himself, then He has called you to serve. His particular orders to you as to how and where He wants you to serve must be seen as a sacred deposit entrusted to you by the commander-in-chief. You’re under orders. And you do your ministry to please Him, not for strokes from others or for self-gratification.

2. The ministry is people building into the lives of people who build into the lives of people.

We can see this principle more specifically in 2 Timothy 2:2, where Paul used this same word, “entrust.” The principle is, Paul entrusted certain things to Timothy; Timothy was to entrust them to others; and the others were to entrust them to others. It’s a process of multiplication, where a more mature Christian imparts life in Christ to one who is younger in the faith so that person can grow to maturity to repeat the process. In 1 Timothy 1:18 we see Paul involved in the process with Timothy, whom he affectionately calls, “my son” (lit., “child”). The word shows that ministry is always in the context of warm personal relationships.

What often happens in the local church is that ministry becomes institutionalized instead of being personalized. In other words, “having a ministry” comes to mean, “I serve on the board of elders,” or on the budget committee, or “I teach Sunday School.” All these are important ministries, of course. I’m not belittling them. But it’s possible to keep the institution rolling along, but to miss the heart of ministry, which is building into the lives of people. I read of a new Christian who was leading a number of his friends to Christ and seeing them begin to grow in Christ. But the people in his church were encouraging him to become one of the sponsors of the high school youth group so that he could have a ministry!

The reason ministry tends to become institutionalized is that we’re threatened by people. We’re afraid to open up and share our

lives. We're afraid to have others be honest with us. It's so much more comfortable just to keep the institution functioning. But the ministry is not an institution. It's people. I define ministry as a person being full of Jesus Christ and slopping over to build others through open, caring relationships.

3. The ministry is in accordance with spiritual gifts.

The phrase "in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you" probably should be connected with 1 Timothy 4:14, "Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery." This probably refers to God's confirmation of Timothy's spiritual gifts through the elders in the church. If this is the sense, it means that Timothy was ministering at Ephesus because of his divinely indicated spiritual gifts, confirmed through these church leaders.

While not everyone's ministry is so dramatically indicated (I think Timothy was an exception), the principle still holds true that ministry should be in accordance with the spiritual gifts God has given you. God has given each one of us spiritual gifts which equip us for unique ministries in the Body of Christ. You can do things that I can't do as well, because I don't have your gifts and personality. When you minister in the area of your gifts, it is usually a source of joy to serve, because you're doing what God has equipped you to do. (I said usually! I'll say more on that in a moment.)

Two cautions are in order at this point: (1) Don't sit around waiting for some special revelation of your gift. Some Christians study the lists of spiritual gifts and pray that God will reveal their gift to them. But they never get involved in serving. Their excuse is that they don't know their gift.

That's a fallacy. Gifts are always revealed in the context of serving. Timothy was already serving the Lord in Lystra when Paul returned to town, Timothy's gifts were recognized, and he was asked to join Paul in ministry. Paul himself, as soon as he was saved, began preaching Christ in Damascus. He went into Arabia for some special training and returned to Damascus, still preaching. He went to Jerusalem and kept preaching. He went to his home region in Tarsus, where there is good evidence that he continued preaching. Barnabas tracked him down and took him to Antioch, where they taught the church for a considerable time. In that context God called him to go out on his first missionary journey. Spiritual gifts are revealed and recognized in the context of serving. So get involved in building people in Jesus Christ, and your gifts will become obvious.

The second caution: (2) Don't neglect serving in certain capacities because they aren't your gift. We're all commanded to do almost every one of the tasks for which there are spiritual gifts. Some people cop out of their responsibilities by saying, "I don't have the gift of evangelism, so I don't have to witness for Christ." Or, "I don't have the gift of helps, so I can't get involved in setting up chairs and tables." That's ridiculous!

As your gift emerges, it should define your primary focus for ministry. But it should not exclude you from tasks that may be unpleasant to your personality. Timothy was a timid soul, and yet Paul is exhorting him to hang in there and confront those false teachers. Being gifted doesn't mean that the Christian ministry is all fun!

4. The ministry is a long fight, not a short picnic.

Paul doesn't say, "Play the good Sunday School picnic," but "fight the good fight." The ministry is spiritual warfare. The word fight signifies a campaign rather than a single battle. To change the metaphor it is a marathon race, not a hundred yard dash. And the enemy is trying to trip you up and get you to drop out.

To serve the Lord faithfully, you've got to realize that you're in for the long haul and it isn't going to be easy. Some people get all excited about ministry, but they burn out. Others get excited until problems hit, and then they quit. Others bail out when they catch criticism (which you will!). Others expect instant results; when it doesn't happen, they get discouraged and quit. Others are so excited about ministry, they don't get any training, and they run dry after a while. All of these problems could be solved if people would realize that the ministry to which God has called each one of us is a lifetime campaign against a powerful enemy. Note that Timothy's fight was against men who were in the church. That's usually where the battle is waged.

5. The ministry is more dependent on personal integrity than on polished technique.

Paul exhorts Timothy to keep "faith and a good conscience." "Faith" is probably a broad reference both to doctrine and to belief. Timothy is to hold to his trust in the truth of the gospel. And he is to walk uprightly. He is not to violate his conscience, which is to be shaped by the Word of God. Belief and behavior always go together. In the case of the false teachers, they had abandoned (the word means "to push away") their good conscience, resulting in the subsequent shipwreck of their faith. Quite often, doctrinal errors are the result of moral problems rather than intellectual problems. Men who teach false doctrine often do so to avoid the moral implications of God's truth in their own lives.

The basis for having a ministry in the lives of others is to have a personal trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and His Word and to walk in obedience to Him: "faith and a good conscience." We live in a day that has gone crazy over methods. Hardly a week goes by without my receiving a flyer promising me proven techniques to increase attendance in this church. While there may be some helpful methods, I tend to avoid such techniques like the plague. The best method for any ministry is to hold on to faith and a good conscience. If you have reality with God, He will use you in fruitful ministry in the lives of others. If you do not, methods will avail you

nothing, and you will suffer shipwreck in the faith.

6. The ministry has casualties.

Some shipwreck their faith. To use the earlier analogy, some go down in battle. That fact is not news to anyone who has been around for a while, but it is important to remember. We all have a tendency to put our eyes on certain church leaders instead of on Christ Himself. Satan can't cause Christ to fall, but he can work on leaders who have a lot of people looking to them for growth. If such a person falls, there are usually a lot of others who fall as well. We need to develop the attitude that says, "Even if (whoever you admire spiritually) falls away from the faith, I'm going to keep serving the Lord Jesus."

Another reason it's important to remember that there are casualties in the ministry is to constantly warn yourself of the danger from the enemy. If Satan can lull you into thinking that the Christian life and ministry to which you have been called is a Sun-day School picnic instead of a war, then you'll let your defenses down and he can get to you. I hear often, as you do, of men who have had effective ministries for a number of years, who have fallen into the sin of adultery. That scares me! It makes me con-front the sin in my heart and be alert to spiritual danger. Satan shoots real bullets! Watch out or you'll get hit!

7. The ministry involves unpleasant tasks at times.

Paul mentions two examples by name, Hymenaeus and Alexander. Hymenaeus is probably the same man mentioned in 2 Timothy 2:17; Alexander may be the same as the man mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:14. At any rate, these men were apparently church leaders who were involved in some sort of sin (violation of con-science) as well as doctrinal errors. Paul had "delivered them over to Satan." What does he mean?

Paul uses the same expression when dealing with the Corinthian man who was openly committing adultery with his father's wife (1 Cor. 5:5). Paul viewed the world as Satan's domain. To be in the church, under the authority of the elders, provides a person with a certain amount of protection from the devil and his attacks through the world. What Paul probably means is that these two men were delivered over to Satan's domain, the world, by being excommunicated from the protective covering of the church and from the fellowship of its members.

Beyond this, there may be the further idea that those in the church were to pray for some bodily ailment to come upon these men to humble them, so that they might repent and be restored to fellowship. The Lord sometimes must strike a person with some severe physical problem to cause the person to turn to Him. The goal of any discipline is to restore, not to punish. Paul's desire was not to get rid of these men, but to see them "taught not to blaspheme."

Sometimes ministering to people involves the unpleasant task of confrontation. On rare occasions, it may have to go before the church and result in formal excommunication, with the prayer and aim of restoration. That is never pleasant, especially for leaders with timid personalities, like Timothy. But it must be done if people are going to grow in Christ and if the body of Christ is going to reflect His holiness and love.

Conclusion

The ministry is not easy. But every person who knows Christ as Savior is called to serve. Knowing and following these seven principles of ministry will help you to be a faithful servant of Jesus Christ:

1. The ministry is a sacred trust to be obeyed.
2. The ministry is people building into the lives of people who build into the lives of people.
3. The ministry is in accordance with spiritual gifts.
4. The ministry is a long fight, not a short picnic.
5. The ministry is more dependent on personal integrity than on polished technique.
6. The ministry has casualties.
7. The ministry involves unpleasant tasks at times.

A little boy went to his first day at first grade. When the clock hands reached 12 noon, he got ready to go home as he was used to doing in kindergarten. The teacher decided to take a positive approach, so she said to him, "In kindergarten you only got to stay here 'til noon, but this year you get to stay all day!"

He looked at her with shock on his face and blurted out, "Who signed me up for this, anyway?"

Timothy probably felt like that as he faced the task of con-fronting the false teachers in Ephesus. That's how you will often feel in ministry! "Who signed me up for this, anyway?" The Lord did! He's the commander-in-chief; we are drafted to serve faithfully in His army.

A pastor had a son who felt God's calling to follow in his dad's footsteps. When the pastor heard it, he said to his son, "Keep close to God, keep close to men, and bring the two together." Wise counsel for faithful Christian service!

If you're not involved in serving the Lord--remember, I'm de-fining service as being full of Christ and out of your fulness seeking to build others--if you're not doing that, I'd ask you to evaluate whether you are walking closely with Christ. You can't give out what you don't possess. The Lord always calls us to be with Him before He sends us out to serve Him (Mark 3:14). The other area you need to evaluate is, are you too self-focused? If you're so busy doing your own thing that you don't have time to serve the Lord, you're too

self-focused. If you're focused on yourself, you won't be looking for opportunities to minister to others.

I heard of a successful Southern California doctor who met Jesus Christ and left his lucrative practice to serve in a primitive country. His non-Christian partner couldn't believe that he would do this. On one of his trips around the world, the unbelieving doctor stopped in to see his former partner.

The Christian doctor was performing surgery on a poor woman in extremely primitive conditions. The non-Christian doctor said, "Don't you remember how much you would have made doing this surgery in Southern California?" "Yes," replied the Christian, "many thousands." "Then why are you doing it?"

"Several reasons. See her clenched fist? In it there are a few coins she will give to our mission. See those kids over there? They will be forever grateful if I can save their mother's life. But there's one more thing--I hope to hear from my Lord someday the words, 'Well done, good and faithful servant.'"

God may not direct you to go to a foreign country. But He does want each of us to live in reality with Him and then to get involved in the lives of others in this church and with those who do not yet know Christ, with the goal of seeing every person know Christ as you do and grow to maturity in Christ as you're growing. That's your job as His minister.

Discussion Questions

1. Does the thought of your being "in the ministry" scare you? How would your life be different if you saw yourself that way?
2. So many today talk about "burn out" in ministry. Why do you think this is so? Is burn out avoidable?
3. How important is it to know your spiritual gift? How can a person know it? What difference does it make?
4. What is the most difficult thing for you in serving the Lord? How do you deal with it?

1 Timothy 2

1 Timothy 2:1-8 THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

Steven Cole

One day Hudson Taylor was traveling on a Chinese junk from Shanghai to Ningpo. He had been witnessing to a man called Peter who was resisting the message, but was under deep conviction. In the course of events, Peter fell overboard. Taylor panicked when he saw that no one made any effort to save the man. Instinctively, he sprang to the mast, let down the sail, and jumped overboard in hopes of finding his friend.

A fishing boat was close by, so Taylor tried to solicit their help. But they wouldn't stop their fishing to look for this drowning man unless Taylor agreed to pay them. Not only that, but to Taylor's consternation, they wanted to barter for every penny he had. Finally, after he agreed to pay them a sizeable sum, they agreed to help. In less than a minute after dragging with the fishing net, they found Peter. But it was too late; Peter was dead. They had been too busy fishing to worry about a drowning man.

What a tragic story! How callused and self-centered those Chinese fishermen must have been to realize that a man was drowning nearby and yet to be more concerned about their own financial gain than about saving his life.

But before I condemn those fishermen, I need to take the log out of my own eye. How concerned am I with people around me who are perishing without Jesus Christ? Do I care more about my own comfort and financial gain than I do about people dying without the Savior? Do I go on about my business day after day, week after week, without any burden for those who need to know Christ as Savior?

You say, "Well, after all, what can I do? I'm just one person, and there are billions who don't know Christ."

For starters, you can commit yourself to prayer. You can meet with others to pray for those who are lost and perishing without the Savior.

You say, "Prayer? Come on, I thought you were talking about a way I could really get involved. You know, a way I could do something that would really make a difference."

That's precisely what I'm talking about. Prayer is doing something. Prayer will make a tremendous difference. The amazing fact is that the sovereign God has chosen to work in response to the prayers of His people.

As Paul begins to tell Timothy how to conduct oneself in the local church (1Ti 3:15), he puts prayer as the first priority (1Ti 2:1, "First of all"). But Paul is not just talking about the need for prayer in general. He is talking about the need for prayer as it relates to the salvation of the lost. He repeats some words and ideas in 1Ti 2:1-8 that show what he is driving at: "all men" (1Ti 2:1); "all" (1Ti 2:2);

“God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved” (1Ti 2:3, 4); “mediator ... between God and men” (1Ti 2:5); “a ransom for all, the testimony” (1Ti 2:6); “preacher and ... teacher of the Gentiles” (1Ti 2:7). Paul is talking about men—people—and not just about a certain few, but about all men. And he is talking about the Savior. His concern is that all would be saved. What he is telling us is that,

Prayer that all people may be reached with the gospel should pervade the life of the church.

We should have such a burden for those who are perishing without Christ that we’re driven to entreat God, who is the Savior, that all people might be reached with the good news that there is a Mediator who gave Himself as the ransom for their sins.

Does such prayer pervade our church? Does such prayer pervade your life? Does such prayer pervade my life? I confess that I fall far short here. I would guess that many of you do too. It’s easy to get like those Chinese fishermen, so busy with our own interests that we’re indifferent to those who are “drowning” nearby. Your prayer life (what you pray and how much) reveals the intensity of your concern. Allow God’s Spirit to speak to you through this portion of His Word.

1. Prayer that all be reached with the gospel is in line with God’s plan (1Ti 2:1-2, 8).

Prayer is not a nicety, but a necessity. God is sovereign, yet His sovereign plan includes the prayers of His people. If we are involved with God’s plan for the world, then we will be praying in line with His plan. We can see four facets of God’s plan in these verses:

A. God’s plan involves all kinds of prayer for all kinds of people.

In 1Ti 2:1 Paul uses four different words for prayer. The words are not altogether distinct in meaning, but there are nuances of difference that reveal different needs that require prayer:

“Entreaties” = prayer stemming from a sense of need. Sensing our lack and God’s sufficiency, our impotence and God’s omnipotence, should move us to pray.

“Prayers” = a general term for prayer to God. One commentator suggests that the word here refers to requests for needs that are always present, in contrast to specific and special needs (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary* [Baker], p. 92). This would include prayer for more wisdom, godliness, repentance, revival, etc.

“Petitions” = means to converse freely; it pictures someone who can go into the presence of the king and talk freely with him on your behalf. It is used of the intercessory work of the Holy Spirit and of Christ on our behalf (Rom. 8:27, 34; Heb. 7:25). It points to the fact that we can go freely before God at any time or in any place to talk with Him on behalf of others.

“Thanksgivings” = this points to the fact that we must express not only our petitions, but our gratitude to God for His gracious answers.

The point of all these words is that we have different needs at different times. But at all times we need God and, therefore, we need to pray.

Not only do we need all kinds of prayer, but also we need to pray for all kinds of people. We have already noted Paul’s emphasis on “all men” (2:1, 2, 4, 6; in these verses Paul uses the Greek *anthropos*, a generic word for “people”). No person is too far gone, too lost in sin, whom God’s grace cannot reach. Nor is there any person so high and mighty, in a position of governmental authority, who does not need God’s grace. All people are sinners who need to know God as Savior. Maybe you cannot speak to the person about God; but you can always speak to God about that person.

Paul here singles out for prayers those in positions of authority in government. In his case, this included the cruel maniac, Nero, who later executed both Peter and Paul, who lit his gardens in the evenings with Christians covered with pitch, burned as human torches. And yet Paul does not call Christians to political revolution, but to prayer. Prayer is God’s means for removing tyrants and establishing peace. Thus the plan of God involves all kinds of prayer for all kinds of people.

B. God’s plan involves the spread of the gospel so that all may be saved.

That, I take it, is Paul’s train of thought between 2:2 and 2:3 & 4. We should pray that those in authority would govern so that we might enjoy a tranquil and quiet life. But the purpose for such a life is not that we might be comfortable and happy, but so that we can grow in “godliness and dignity” with a view toward the maximum spread of the gospel. Both words, “godliness and dignity,” point to the outward manifestation of Christian virtues. Paul is concerned here with the testimony of God’s people. Under persecution, some professing Christians cave in. In times of peace, there is more opportunity for their good deeds to be seen. So the idea is that we should pray for political peace so that we can live in observable godliness so that lost people will be saved.

C. God’s plan requires holiness and harmony among His people.

We are to live in “godliness,” which means being reverent or devout. We are to live in “dignity” (a quality required of church leaders, 1 Tim. 3:4, 8, 11) which has the nuance of commanding respect. A person with these qualities takes God seriously. He doesn’t joke about the things of God. In verse 8 Paul says that men should be “without wrath and dissension.” We are to work out anger and relational problems in private so that we can pray without hypocrisy in public. We can’t pray and work together for God’s plan in the world unless we are walking in holiness and harmony as God’s people.

D. God’s plan designates men as taking the leadership in prayer.

God wants “men” (the Greek word in 1Ti 2:8 means “males,” men in contrast to women) to take the leadership in the prayer life of the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:13 Paul indicates that women may pray in public as long as they are obviously in submission to men (“heads covered”). But both there and here he makes it plain that men are to take the leadership in the church, including this matter

of prayer. The same applies to the home: Men, you need to take the initiative in prayer!

Note briefly the posture of prayer. In Paul's day one posture was to stand and lift their hands toward God. If you study the various postures for prayer mentioned in the Bible, you'll find standing, kneeling, and falling prostrate; sitting is only mentioned once, to my knowledge (2 Sam. 7:18). You'll find the hands lifted heavenward and spread out, but never folded. You will find the head both bowed and lifted up with the eyes looking heavenward (so far as I know the eyes are never closed; see Hendriksen, pp. 103-104). We shouldn't become legalistic about it, but I will suggest that our casual posture in prayer may indicate a casual attitude toward God. In public, Paul and his friends knelt down on the beach and prayed (Acts 21:5).

We've seen that prayer that all people may be reached with the gospel is in line with God's plan.

2. Prayer that all be reached with the gospel is in line with God's pleasure (2:3-4).

Note the words, "good" (beautiful, pleasant), "acceptable," and "desire." God's desire is for the salvation of all men. The Lord told Ezekiel 33:11, "I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that the wicked turn from his way and live." When Christians pray for civil rulers so that there is peace, it allows for the gospel to be preached and men to be saved, which is good and acceptable in the sight of God, who desires the salvation of all people.

I can't answer the theological conundrum, "If God desires that all be saved, why doesn't He save all?" The Bible is clear that God has sovereignly foreordained some to eternal life, while passing by others. Scripture often sets together in the same context the seeming contradiction that God is sovereign and yet men are responsible to repent and believe (Rom. 9:15-18; 10:13). Jesus, who was going up to Jerusalem to die for our sins according to the pre-determined plan of God (Acts 2:23; Luke 13:33), lamented, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, just as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you would not have it!" (Luke 13:34; see Luke 10:22 for contrast). In our text, Paul's concern was to counter the Jew who said that God wishes to destroy sinners and the spiritually proud who said that salvation is only for the elite, by saying, "No! God desires to save all men."

I once heard a man who has a deep burden for the lost tell of how he was praying for the conversion of his neighbor, a man named Ray. Every morning this man would pray fervently for Ray's salvation. On many mornings, he said he would have to wipe the tears from the pages of his Bible as he pled with God for Ray to come to Christ. Then one morning he got the frightening thought, "What if Ray isn't one of the elect?" So he said he prayed, "Lord, if Ray isn't on the list, then You put him there! Make up a new list, if you have to, but bring Ray to know You!" Eventually, Ray did trust in the Savior.

Maybe his theology wasn't precisely correct. But don't get hung up on the theology and miss the obvious application of verse 4: Is my heart in tune with God's heart? Do I desire the salvation of all people? Does my prayer life for the people I know who are without Christ reflect God's pleasure to save all people?

3. Prayer that all be reached with the gospel is in line with God's provision (2:5-6).

I could easily preach several messages on these important verses. They contain much crucial truth in succinct form, and may have been an early creed. There is one God, the fundamental tenet of Judaism: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God; the Lord is one!" (Deut. 6:4). Christians do not believe in three Gods, but in one God who exists in three persons. Although there are many different types of men, there is only one true God for all men, and He has provided only one way of salvation for all.

That one way of salvation involves a mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. In order for God to be reconciled to sinful man, man had to pay for his sin. The price was death, because the wages of sin is death. But God provided a representative man to be the substitute for all other men through His death. He became the ransom, the one who paid the price to release us from bondage to sin and judgment. This ransom is sufficient for all who will receive it.

By calling Jesus a man, Paul is not denying His deity, of course. We saw that he affirmed Christ's deity in 1:13, 15-17; he will do so again in 3:16. A bridge must be firmly anchored to both sides if it is to be usable. As mediator between God and men, Jesus Christ is fully God and fully man, undiminished deity and perfect humanity united without mixture or confusion in one person for-ever. He was the testimony of God, revealed to man at the proper time. He alone is the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through Him. All who come find abundant pardon through His grace. Thus, prayer that all people may be reached with the gospel is in line with God's provision in His Son.

Prayer that all be reached with the gospel is in line with God's plan, pleasure, and provision. Finally,

4. Prayer that all be reached with the gospel is in line with God's procedure (2:7).

God's procedure for reaching people is people. Men, like Paul, who have experienced the saving grace of God in Christ are used by God to reach others. The breadth of God's concern is seen in the irony that Paul, the Jewish zealot, was made apostle to the Gentiles, whom he formerly despised. The word "preacher" means a herald--one who announced to the people the message of a king. He didn't give his own opinions. He relayed the words of the king. "Apostle" stresses Paul's authority as one sent out by God. Paul didn't decide on apostle as a career; he was appointed. Apparently some in Ephesus were challenging Paul's authority, and so he adds, "I am telling the truth, I am not lying." "Teacher" points to Paul's function as one who explained God's message so that people could understand and apply it.

"In faith and truth" point to two sides of the message. "Truth" affirms the reliability of the gospel rooted as it is in the historically validated life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. "Faith" is the means by which a person appropriates the truth. You must

personally put your faith in Christ's death on your behalf.

The point is, God uses those who have experienced His saving grace in Christ to proclaim and explain the message to others. As we pray that God would reach all people with the gospel, we must pray for people to tell them (Rom. 10:14). Jesus told His disciples to pray for workers for God's harvest (Matt. 9:37-38). The catch is, of course, as you begin to pray, God often taps you on the shoulder and says, "What about you? Will you talk to your neighbor about Me?" Those who pray get a burden for the lost and before they know it, they're involved in the process of telling them about Christ. That is God's procedure.

Conclusion

A number of years ago, a man with the China Inland Mission was looking over the records of that work. At one station, the number and spiritual strength of the converts far exceeded anyone's expectations and could not be accounted for by anything unusual or outstanding about the personnel there.

The mystery was unsolved until Hudson Taylor visited England. There, at the close of his message, a gentleman from the audience came forward to greet Taylor. In the ensuing conversation, Taylor learned that the man possessed detailed knowledge of this particular mission station. "How is it," asked Taylor, "that you are so conversant with the conditions of that work?" "Oh," he replied, "for four years I have corresponded with my missionary friend there. He has sent me the names of inquirers and converts, and I have daily taken these to God in prayer." Taylor suddenly realized the answer to the mystery: the daily, specific prayers of this man in England had brought eternal fruit for God's glory in China.

Charles Spurgeon, the well-known British preacher of the past century, saw thousands of people come to faith in Christ under his preaching. His book, *The Soul Winner* (Eerdmans) is one of the best I've read on the work of evangelism. He frequently affirms the importance of prayer as the foundation for winning souls to Christ. On one of his visits to Europe, Spurgeon met an American pastor who said, "I have long wished to see you, Mr. Spurgeon, and to put one or two simple questions to you. In our country there are many opinions as to the secret of your great influence. Would you be good enough to give me your own point of view?" After a moment's pause, Spurgeon said, "My people pray for me." (In Iain, Murray, *The Forgotten Spurgeon* [Banner of Truth], p. 44).

I hope you pray for me, that God would give conversions under my feeble attempts to preach His gospel. (My office is open for prayer during both services.) Pray for yourself, that God would use you to lead lost sinners to the Savior, and don't be content until He answers. Pray for your neighbors, pray for your kids' friends, pray for family members, pray for people in this city, and pray for our nation, that God would convert many. Pray for our missionaries, that God would give them much fruit. Pray for the people groups around the world, especially where there is war or famine, and for those where there is no Christian witness, that God would be pleased to save multitudes for His glory (sign up for "The Global Prayer Digest"). Men, lead your families in praying for the lost.

God can do mighty things in response to our prayers. A. T. Pierson said, "There has never been a spiritual awakening in any country or locality that did not begin in united prayer." Let's not pursue our own interests while men drown nearby. First of all, let us pray that all people be reached with the good news that Christ Jesus gave Himself as a ransom for all!

Discussion Questions

1. If you're praying for someone's salvation, but you don't see results, is it ever right to stop praying?
2. How can a person who lacks a burden for the lost gain and deepen such a burden?
3. If God is going to save the elect, why do we need to practice evangelism?

1 Timothy 2:9-15 THE CONDUCT OF WOMEN IN THE CHURCH

Steven Cole

I've always thought that being a TV weather forecaster would be a pleasant job. You don't have to report on war or tragedies; you just get on camera and tell everyone about the chance of rain or snow or clouds or beautiful sunshine.

But I read recently that TV meteorologists frequently get hate mail and obscene phone calls. People call up and swear at them because the weather isn't what they wanted. One forecaster received a hangman's noose in the mail—as if he were personally responsible for the bad weather!

Being a pastor is kind of like that at times. I didn't write the Bible. God didn't even consult me in the process. I just try to re-port what it says. But sometimes people get upset with me because they don't like the forecast. That's probably going to be the case when I tell you what the Bible says about the conduct of women in the church. I confess, if I could write the script myself, I would not write it as Paul did. But being a Christian means obeying apostolic doctrine, not changing the message to be more compatible with our times. So my task today is to tell you what God's Word says about this sensitive but significant topic.

I have read the arguments of the "evangelical feminists." I wish I could be convinced, because their views are not as culturally

offensive as the traditional view. Besides, I like women, I'm not threatened by women, and I don't have a problem with the idea of women in church leadership--except that I can't escape what to me is the plain teaching of Scripture that prohibits women from exercising authority over men.

Our text is the central one to grapple with. Paul was correcting a problem in the Ephesian church. Presumably, the false teachers whom Timothy was to confront had led astray a number of women in the church, both in doctrine and morals (1Ti 1:19). Ephesus was a sensual city, with temple prostitution devoted to the worship of the goddess Diana (or, Artemis), whose idol had multiple breasts. It was also a center of commerce, with many wealthy people. Apparently some church women were dressing in a sensual and extravagant manner, so Paul corrects this by telling Timothy how godly women should adorn themselves (1Ti 2:9-10; compare 1Ti 5:1, 1-15).

In 2 Timothy 3:6-7, Paul mentions false teachers who enter "households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." Thus the false teachers were appealing to women under a load of guilt who were living by their feelings instead of by God's truth. Of course, Second Timothy was written later than First Timothy. But probably the situation confronted there had already begun when Paul wrote First Timothy. So he corrects this by commanding that women are not to teach or exercise authority over men in the church; rather, their normal sphere of ministry should be in the home (1 Tim. 2:11-15; see Titus 2:3-5). Thus,

The conduct of women in the church should be marked by godliness and submission to male leadership.

In 1Ti 2:9-10, he deals with the proper attire of women which is godliness; in 1Ti 2:11-15, he deals with the proper attitude of women, which is submission to male leadership.

1. The proper attire of Christian women: not focused on outward appearance, but on godliness (1Ti 2:9-10).

Our grooming and clothing says a lot about our values and the way we think. If a woman dresses in a sensuous manner or if by inordinate attention to grooming she emphasizes external beauty, it reveals that her emphasis is on the superficial and worldly rather than on that which is significant from God's perspective. Paul's directive in verse 9 means that Christian women should not dress in a seductive manner nor in a luxurious, fashion-conscious manner that would arouse jealousy on the part of poorer women. Rather, she should put her emphasis on good deeds.

Obviously he is talking about a woman's appearance not only when she attends church, but at all times. He is not prohibiting a woman from looking attractive, as long as she is not seductive or showy. Nor is he putting an absolute ban on a woman's braiding

her hair or wearing modest jewelry. He's talking about emphasis. He was correcting women who went to great expense and effort to braid jewels and expensive ornaments into their hair. Their clothing was showy and expensive. Their appearance did not reflect a value system with God at the center nor did it draw you to their godly character. It focused on the external. It was worldly. It was the wrong emphasis. Christian women should be marked by good works.

I would encourage my sisters in Christ to take to heart Paul's command here to dress modestly and discreetly. "Modestly" (in the original) means to be free from shame; "discreetly" means to have control over one's passions. Many modern fashions are shameful and seductive. They are designed to attract attention to the body and to arouse lust. Men are aroused by sight (that's why pornography attracts men). You may think that your Christian brothers should be free from lustful thoughts. Yes, they should! But you should not put a stumbling block in their way by dressing seductively! "Charm is deceitful and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the Lord, she shall be praised" (Prov. 31:30). So Paul's first instruction is that Christian women must dress properly and put their emphasis on godliness.

2. The proper attitude of Christian women: not assertive, but submissive to male church leadership (1Ti 2:11-15).

Keep in mind here that I'm just your friendly reporter. I didn't make up the script; I just report and explain it. Like it or not, the Bible is not politically correct, in tune with our modern sensibilities. Also, there are many truths in the Bible that are seemingly contradictory or paradoxical. You have to hold both sides in tension, not going off the deep end either way. As we saw last week, God is sovereign in saving whom He chooses, but He commands us to pray for the salvation of all.

When it comes to the roles of men and women, the Bible is clear that both male and female reflect the image of God (Gen. 1:27). Men are not superior over women nor women over men. In Christ, men and women are equal (Gal. 3:28), but at the same time, they are to fulfill different roles. Often in Scripture, the male/female relationship is a picture of the divine/human relationship.

Thus (in Eph. 5:21-25), after instructing all Christians to be subject to one another in the fear of Christ, Paul stipulates that in marriage, wives must be subject to their husbands because the husband is the head of the wife as Christ also is the head of the church. And husbands must love their wives just as Christ sacrificially loved the church. In this way we reflect the image of God, in which the Son is equal to the Father and yet voluntarily submits to Him; and the Father loves the Son. We also reflect the

relationship of Christ to His church, in which He accepts us as His brothers and sisters, and yet we submit to Him.

Paul teaches (both in our text and in 1 Cor. 11:3-16) that there is also to be a gender-based hierarchy in the context of equality in the local church. While it would be wrong to emphasize the hierarchy and neglect equality, it is equally wrong to emphasize equality and throw out any form of hierarchy. While “evangelical feminists” try to explain the hierarchy as a cultural thing (thus not binding for today), every time Paul mentions the subject, he appeals to the Old Testament, not to some cultural factor, for support. So it is a serious error, in my judgment, to take a verse like Galatians 3:28 (“neither male nor female” in Christ) and make it the governing verse by radically reinterpreting the plain sense of other texts, such as 1 Timothy 2:11-15. We need to affirm both aspects of the truth.

In our text, Paul spells out the realm (1Ti 2:11-12); the reasons (1Ti 2:13-14); and the reward for submission (1Ti 2:15).

A. The realm of submission involves activities where a woman would exercise authority over a man (1Ti 2:11-12).

Paul is speaking here about the church, not the home (al-though, as mentioned, women are to be subject to their husbands in the home). It is significant that Paul directs the women to learn. In the Jewish culture, they were not able to go to school to learn the Torah. But Paul wants women to learn as long as their attitude is marked by two qualities: “quietness” and “submissiveness.”

The word translated “quietly” doesn’t mean absolute silence, but rather to have inner tranquility or peace (see 2:2). Women are not to be agitated, assertive rebel-rousers in the church. “Submissiveness” is a military word, meaning under in rank. A lieutenant and a sergeant are equal in personhood, but different in rank. Even so, women are to put themselves in rank under men in church leadership. Paul adds the words, “in entire” (submissiveness) to show that it is more than mere outward obedience; the attitude of respect is included. The implied object of their submission is church leaders (elders) who teach sound doctrine.

The word translated “exercise authority” is used only here in the New Testament and has the nuance of usurping authority or being domineering. Apparently some of the Ephesian women had taken a seminar on assertiveness training and were applying it by teaching even the men in the worship assembly. Paul is prohibiting this since, as he shows (2:13-14), it violates God’s pattern of authority and submission as pictured in creation and the fall.

I realize that Paul opens a host of questions which he leaves unanswered. Can women teach men in a home Bible study (remember, the early church met in homes)? What about Sunday School classes (or “Precept”)? What about the role of women in “para-church” ministries? Can they be in leadership positions over men? What about a woman teaching as long as she is in submission to male elders? What about a woman teaching through writing books or teaching a man individually (as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos [Acts 18:26])? What about all the noteworthy exceptions in Scripture (Deborah, Huldah, Junia, etc.)? What about the many godly and effective women missionaries down through church history?

I can’t begin to answer all those questions! But I can give several principles that apply to the church. First, the office of elder is limited to men (1 Tim. 3:1-7 & Titus 1:5-9 assume male elders, and in every N.T. instance elders are men; also, Jesus chose men as apostles with authority over the church). This means that the office of teaching elder (1 Tim. 5:17) is restricted to men.

The Greek word for “teach” is used almost 100 times in the New Testament, and in only three instances does it refer to teaching individuals (Roy Zuck, cited by Ann L. Bowman, “Monograph” from the International School of Theology, “Women in Ministry: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 2:11-15,” p. 4, footnote 21). So Paul probably had in mind situations where women taught the entire church. Is Paul giving one prohibition (a woman should not teach men in a domineering way) or two (a woman should not teach men nor should she do anything else to exercise authority over men)? The Greek grammar indicates that Paul intends two distinct and yet closely related commands (Bowman, p. 5, footnote 31): A woman should not teach men, nor should she do anything else to exercise authority over men.

So does Paul mean that a godly woman can never teach men? Then how do we explain God’s manifest blessing on women missionaries who have evangelized, planted the church, and taught whole cultures of men and women? We need to be careful not to put God in our doctrinal boxes. He is notorious for doing as He pleases. The many noteworthy exceptional women in Scripture tell us to be careful here.

But the exceptions as well as the plain teaching of passages such as our text show us that the exceptions are just that. The norm should be men in leadership and teaching positions in the church. If God raises up a gifted woman, we ought to recognize her ministry. But even so, she will have an attitude of submission to male leadership. And, she will focus on teaching women. I think Elisabeth Elliot is a modern example of such a gifted woman.

B. The reasons for submission are the order of creation and the order of the fall (1Ti 2:13-14).

It is compelling that every time Paul cites reasons for gender-based distinctions in the church, he goes to the Old Testament. This means that we can’t dismiss this as a cultural matter that doesn’t apply to our day. God could have created Adam and Eve

simultaneously, but He did not. He first created Adam and later created Eve to be a helper for Adam, not vice versa. Paul explains (1 Cor. 11:9): “For indeed man was not created for the woman’s sake, but woman for the man’s sake.” Thus while being equal with Adam as an image-bearer of God, Eve was yet to be subject to Adam so that their relationship reflected the image of God and His relationship to His creation. So Paul is saying (1Ti 2:13) that the order in creation should be reflected in the church.

Then he adds the order of the fall (1Tim 2:14). Paul isn’t implying that Adam was less guilty than Eve, nor is he putting all the blame on Eve. Both were culpable (Ro 5:12). Nor is Paul implying that women are constitutionally more prone to deception than men.

The Bible is clear that we all are easily deceived by sin and false doctrine. What Paul is getting at is that in the fall, the God-ordained roles were reversed. Satan didn’t approach Adam, but rather Eve, so that he could upset the reflection of God’s image in the original couple by enticing the woman to act independently of her husband’s and God’s authority. She didn’t need to remain under her husband or God; she could attain god-like existence by acting on her own.

So Paul is saying here that this role reversal that brought such awful consequences on the human race should not be repeated in the church. The responsibility for teaching and leadership in the church falls on qualified men (1Ti 3:1-7).

How then can women serve in the church? If they can’t assume leadership and teaching roles over men, what can they do? Paul goes on to show that a woman’s normal sphere of ministry is in the home. If she serves in her God-appointed sphere, she will receive her reward.

C. The reward for submission is salvation from the curse (1Ti 2:15).

Many commentators call verse 15 one of the most difficult verses in the New Testament to interpret. As can be expected, many different interpretations have been suggested, each hinging on different lexical and grammatical variables. I can’t go into great detail, but here are a few:

(1) Women will be kept safe (physically; the Greek word for “preserved” is “saved”) through childbirth in spite of the curse of the fall. The problem with this view is that it isn’t true: many godly women have died in childbirth.

(2) Women will be saved (spiritually) through the Childbirth, namely, the birth of Christ, the seed of the woman, who brought salvation to the human race. The problem with this view is, if this were Paul’s meaning, “he could hardly have chosen a more obscure or ambiguous way of saying it” (Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles* Eerdmans], p. 78).

(3) Women will be preserved from insignificance and find fulfillment by bearing children. This imposes an unusual meaning on the word “saved.”

(4) Women will be saved from the corruption of this sinful world by assuming their proper role at home. This is closer to the truth, but it doesn’t grant the normal meaning to the word “saved.”

(5) Women will be saved spiritually (with an emphasis on the future aspect of salvation) if their lives show the fruit of saving faith, namely, submission to God’s order as evidenced by taking their proper role as godly mothers. This is the best view, since the word “saved” in the Pastoral Epistles always refers to spiritual salvation.

This doesn’t mean that a woman earns salvation by bearing children. Rather, it looks at the future aspect of salvation. We are saved by grace through faith in Christ. But genuine saving faith always results in a life of good works and in the development of godly character. The hope of future salvation should motivate us to a life of good deeds now, in spite of the hardships. Paul mentions child bearing to tie in the earlier reference to the fall. In spite of Eve’s sin and the curse (increased pain in childbirth), women who hope in God and His salvation will submit to their role in the home. An evidence of their salvation is their continuance in faith, love, sanctity (holiness), and self-restraint (the same word as “discreetly” in 2:9, meaning control over one’s passions). Thus Paul comes full circle to say that the conduct of women in the church should be marked by godliness and submission.

Conclusion

I’ve spent most of the message explaining a difficult text—difficult exegetically, but also difficult culturally, because it runs against the grain of our modern world. I want to conclude by applying these verses to three areas:

(1) Check your attitude toward Scripture: Defiant or compliant? Because of our rebellion against God, we all have a tendency to shrug off the parts of His Word that we don’t like. If you only submit to the parts of the Bible you like, then you’re just using the Bible to reinforce your sinful desires. Even Satan quoted the Bible with Jesus to support his temptation! The test of whether you are under the lordship of Jesus Christ is when the Bible confronts your preferences. Yes, we need to determine what the Bible means before we apply it. But it’s easy to shrug off difficult truth by saying, “I don’t agree with that interpretation,” when really we don’t want to submit to God. Be careful!

(2) Check your attitude toward the opposite sex: Competitive or cooperative? There should be no war between the sexes in the church. Men should esteem and affirm godly women for their ministries. Women should respect and submit to godly elders in their leadership. Elders are not to lord it over the flock, but to be examples of godliness. The times when elders need to use their authority are rare. If we all submit to God and serve in our God-given roles, there will be cooperation. And, as our text shows, Christian men and women should relate to one another in purity, not in sensuality.

(3) Check your attitude toward the home: A burden or a blessing? Children should never be viewed by Christian women as a hindrance to their fulfillment through a career. Children are one of God's greatest blessings. The responsibility of shaping their character through godly example in the home is more important than any career, male or female, because the whole fabric of society depends on it. If we seek self-fulfillment, even if through a teaching or leadership ministry, we will come up empty. If we deny self and serve in the roles God's Word ordains, He will bless us beyond measure.

Well, that's the forecast, folks! If you don't like it, remember, I don't make up the weather; I just report it!

Discussion Questions

1. Does submission imply weakness or inferiority? Why/why not?
2. Some say that the submission of women was related to the cultural situation of that time. How do you answer this?
3. Is it wrong for a Christian couple to be purposefully childless in order to pursue a career or ministry?
4. Many evangelicals argue that Gal. 3:28 erases all distinctions in the church on the basis of gender.

1 Timothy 3

1 Timothy 3:1 WHO'S IN CHARGE OF THE CHURCH?

Steven Cole

"Who's in charge of the church?" Most American Christians would answer, "The pastor is." And many American pastors are burning out or dropping out because they're overwhelmed with the responsibility of running the church (in many cases, the church is running them!). They feel like a chipmunk running inside the spinning cage-wheel, getting nowhere except exhausted. As a church grows, the pastor's role often changes imperceptibly into a business manager rather than a pastor-teacher. To prevent these problems, we need to answer from the Bible, "Who is in charge of the church?"

Furthermore, most American churches are run like American government. Democracy is assumed. Members have a vote and they use that vote to exercise control. If they don't like the way the pastor or the church board is doing things, they organize a movement to vote them out of office. That's the American way! But it's not necessarily the biblical way. We need to answer clearly from the Bible, "Who is in charge of the church?" so that we don't just do things the American way.

In 1 Timothy 3:1-13, Paul enumerates for Timothy the qualifications of those who serve as overseers (or elders) and deacons in the local church. Before we examine these qualifications (in future messages), I want to take this message to explain some basics about church government. Even though we are affiliated with the Conservative Baptist Association, we have people here from a number of different church backgrounds. Many churches are governed on patterns stemming more from tradition and culture than from biblical principles. So among us we probably have different ideas about church government, including the role and function of the pastor, the elders, and deacons. I want to develop the idea that ...

Christ exercises headship over His church through spiritually mature elders who shepherd His flock.

1. The basic principle of church government is that Jesus Christ is the Head of His church.

Who is in charge of the church? Jesus Christ is! It is His church; He bought it with His blood. The local church does not belong to the pastor, to the elders, or to the congregation. It belongs to Jesus Christ who alone is the Head (see Eph. 1:20-23). No one dare proclaim, "This is my church!" It doesn't belong to any of us. It belongs to Christ the Lord. Never in the New Testament are the leaders of the local church referred to as "head" of the church. Neither is the church viewed as a democratic organization, where the members are free to vote their own minds on issues. The key question in church government is not, "What is the mind of the members?" but, "What is the mind of Christ?"

The church is a living organism, with Jesus Christ as the living Head. The church is not to be organized as a corporation, with the pastor and elder board as the directors and the congregation as shareholders! Webster defines an organization as "an administrative and functional structure." He defines an organism as "an individual constituted to carry on the activities of life by means of organs separate in function but mutually dependent." The church is the latter. While an organism is organized, it is more: it

is living, responsive to the living Head. The church is a living organism in which every member is to be submissive and responsive to the Head and in mutual dependence and interaction with the other members so that the will of the Head may be carried out in a harmonious corporate manner.

So the main function of church government is to allow Christ to exercise His headship over His church. Having that view of church government results in an entirely different way of conducting church business. If you view the church as a democratic organization where every member has a right to vote, you're into church politics. Shortly after I came here, I had lunch with a denominational executive who advised me, "You've got to build your power base as a new pastor in a church." I didn't reply, but I thought to myself, "I'm sorry, but I'm not into building a power base." If you operate that way, you're simply trying to manage and manipulate a bunch of self-willed people expressing their wishes through majority rule. But if the members are living daily in submission to the living Head and seeking to obey His Word, then when they come together to take care of business, they are denying self and reverently seeking what the Lord is saying to His church corporately. That's an entirely different thing than church politics!

To implement this principle, Scripture teaches that ...

2. Christ exercises His headship through spiritually mature elders.

There are two main terms used interchangeably in the New Testament to describe church leaders: "elders" and "overseers" (Titus 1:5, 7; Acts 20:17, 28). "Elders" (Greek, *presbyteros*; see also 1 Pet. 5:1-4) looks at the man himself. It refers to a man of maturity, not necessarily in years, but in spiritual discernment. While the Bible doesn't put any age requirement on the office, I would say that an elder under 30 should be an exception (Jesus began His ministry around that age). Once in a while you see a Spurgeon come along, who began pastoring at 17 and was a godly example and a superb Bible expositor from the start. But that is rare. "Overseers" (Greek, *episkopos*; 1 Tim. 3:1-2) looks at the nature of the work. It refers to men who superintend, watch over, or guard the local church. This term points to a man who is spiritually mature enough to discern spiritual dangers and to guard and guide the flock into spiritual growth.

A third word, "pastor" (= "shepherd"), is used in noun form only once for church leaders (Eph. 4:11), where Paul says that God has gifted some as pastors and teachers, the two concepts being tied together. The verb is used of church leaders in several places (John 21:16; Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2). In 1 Peter 2:24, Jesus is called the Shepherd (Pastor) and Guardian (Overseer) of our souls. Thus human pastors and overseers work under and are accountable to the Lord Jesus, the "Chief Shepherd" (1 Pet. 5:4). The word "pas-tor" looks at the work from the analogy of a shepherd and his sheep.

A fourth word (Greek, *prohistemi*, from a compound, "to stand before or first") means to lead or have charge over (1 Thess. 5:12; 1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12; 5:17; Rom. 12:8). A fifth word (Greek, *hegeomai*, we get our "hegemony" from it) means to lead or rule (Heb. 13:7, 17, 24; Luke 22:26). While it involves authority (Heb. 13:17), it also requires servanthood (Luke 22:26).

The point of these various terms is that there is to be a designated body of leaders in the local church. The Bible prescribes several things concerning these leaders:

A. Elders should be men, not women.

As we saw last week (1 Tim. 2:11-15), leadership in the local church is to be male, not female, in order to preserve God's order instituted in creation, but violated in the fall. Also, every time elders are mentioned in the New Testament, they are men, not women. The qualifications (1 Tim. 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-4) also make it plain that this office is for men ("husband of one wife"). This means that the elder who is supported as the teaching pastor (1 Tim. 5:17) must be a man. Women may serve on the staff of a local church as pastors and teachers of other women (Titus 2:2), but not over men.

B. Elders should be spiritually mature men.

This was already indicated in the terms used for the office: *el-der*, *overseer*, *shepherd*, and *leader*. But it's also spelled out in the list of qualifications. We will examine these more carefully (next time), but for now please note that as a whole the list consists of qualities that reflect spiritual and emotional maturity. "Above reproach" heads both lists (1 Tim. 3:2 & Titus 1:5) as a comprehensive term looking at his integrity and reputation. Of the other qualities listed, only one has to do with ability or giftedness ("able to teach"). The others have to do with his home life and personal ethics, especially qualities that can be readily observed.

C. Elders should be a plurality.

The term is always used in the plural with regard to a single local church (see Acts 14:23; 20:17; Phil. 1:1; Titus 1:5). It may be that one elder had oversight of a single house church. It also may be that one elder, especially the one supported to preach and teach (1 Tim. 5:17-18) will be looked to as the leader among the elders, as Peter was among the apostles and as James was among the elders in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:2-21; 21:18; Gal. 2:9). But the church in a city was viewed as a unit over which there were several elders.

There is wisdom in many counselors (Prov. 11:14) and there is wisdom in sharing the responsibility and authority in the church, so that no single person will dominate without accountability. The only one-man ruler in the New Testament is Diotrephes, whom the Apostle John castigates because "he loves to be first" and he exercised heavy-handed authority by himself (3 John 9-10). The elders

need to be subject to Christ through apostolic authority (now, the New Testament; Diotrephes was not). From that base, they can then relate to one another in harmony as a practical expression of the Body of Christ.

Thus the elders should be spiritually mature men, subject to Christ as Head of His church. How are the elders selected?

D. Elders are selected by God and recognized by the church.

As already mentioned, the church is not a democracy. That may sound un-American, but remember, not everything that is American is biblical. Democracy may be a great way to run our country, but it's a lousy way to run the church. The church is a living organism under the headship of Jesus Christ, subject to His Word. As such, the church must be living in submission to Christ as it seeks to discern His mind in line with the requirements of His Word. That's a lot different than just taking a vote and following the majority opinion!

Acts 20:28 states how a man becomes an elder or overseer: "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers." How does this happen? Originally, it was by apostolic appointment (see Acts 14:23). Paul didn't hold elections; he appointed elders. Later he had his delegates, Timothy and Titus, appoint elders (Titus 1:5). In 1 Timothy 3:1-7 and Titus 1:5-9, we have the Holy Spirit-inspired qualifications which we must look for in those who are to be elders. It is the responsibility of the church to seek the Lord (Paul fasted and prayed, Acts 14:23) to discern which men meet those qualifications and are willing to devote themselves to that ministry, and to recognize them as elders.

Thus rather than "voting" for elders at our annual meeting, we should view it as confirming these men as meeting the biblical qualifications. To that end we have elder candidates fill out an extensive personal questionnaire to learn about their walk with God, their home life, etc. The nominating committee interviews each candidate, going over these questions. Also, the committee welcomes any input from the congregation. We want men in office who are examples of godliness.

There are no stipulations in the New Testament as to the number of elders per church. That should be determined by the number of qualified men and the need for shepherding in the church. It is almost impossible for one man to shepherd more than 20 families, so the larger the church, the more elders will be needed.

Although there is no concept in the New Testament of elders serving a set "term" of office, it is not a bad idea to have a fixed term so that an elder can be reviewed by the congregation and so that he can determine whether to continue serving or to take some time off. It's a demanding ministry, and men who work in an out-side job can't always continue in it year in and year out. Also, family pressures change with the ages of a man's children, and so it seems wise to allow him to limit his commitment or renew it as his personal circumstances dictate. I understand that our new church constitution will allow for the elders serving terms, as is currently the case for our deacons.

Thus the basic principle of church government is that Christ is the Head of His church. He exercises His headship through spiritually mature elders. What are those elders supposed to do?

3. The elders' task is to lead by shepherding God's flock.

The various terms used for church leadership as well as several of the key passages reveal several broad areas in which elders are to serve:

A. Elders should provide leadership by example and servanthood.

(See 1Thess. 5:12; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-5.) Elders have charge over the flock and are accountable to the Lord. But they are not to lord it over those allotted to their charge, but to be examples to the flock. Peter reflects the leadership style set forth and modeled by the Lord Jesus, who humbly washed the disciples feet and instructed them, even on that night, that the leader among them should be as the servant (Luke 22:24-27).

Leaders know from the Word and from experience what healthy spiritual maturity is so that they can guide others in the ways of the Lord. Thus as elders humbly walk with God in their own homes (1 Tim. 3:4-5), they lead the church into maturity by their own example.

There are times, of course, when those who lead by servanthood and example must exercise authority. Paul tells Titus 1:9 that an elder must "be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict." There are times when certain practices among God's people must be prohibited and wrong doctrines must be confronted. There are times when church discipline must be carried out. None of these things are easy or pleasant. But servant leadership is not soft leadership. An elder must never be self-willed and use authority for personal power. But he must be strong in leading God's people in truth, which means confronting error.

B. Elders should shepherd God's flock. (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet. 5:2.)

The word "shepherd" is the same as "pastor." The work of pastoring is shared by the elders. It is impossible for one man to adequately pastor a church this large. The ministry of pastoring involves doing what a shepherd does for his sheep: He knows them (John 10:14); he leads them (John 10:3-4); he feeds them and guides them into the rich pastures of God's Word (John 10:9; 1 Thess. 5:12; Titus 1:9; Heb. 13:7); he guards them from wolves (John 10:12; Acts 20:29-30); he seeks the lost and straying sheep

and helps heal their wounds by getting them restored to the Lord (John 10:16; Ezek. 34:4-5); he corrects the erring or rebellious (2 Tim. 4:2); he equips the flock for maturity so that they can serve the Lord as He has gifted them (Eph. 4:11-16).

C. Some elders should concentrate on preaching and teaching. (1 Tim. 5:17-18.)

We will cover this in more detail when we get to these verses. But you will notice that Paul distinguishes some elders who labor in word and teaching. Verse 18 makes it clear that such men should be supported financially in their work. It takes both giftedness and hard work (which means time) to do an adequate job of preaching God's truth. Those who are so gifted should devote themselves to that ministry. In the early church, the apostles were being pressured by the practical needs of the congregation to get involved in administrative matters. But they told the church to select qualified men who could take care of these matters and added, "But we will devote ourselves to prayer, and to the ministry of the word" (Acts 6:4). Sadly, too many pastors in our day allow themselves to get diverted from prayer and the ministry of the Word. The entire church suffers if a few men do not devote them-selves to this crucial work.

D. Some elders should concentrate on administration and oversight. (1 Tim. 5:17.)

The deacons, as we will see, can aid the elders in this important task, just as the first deacons in the Jerusalem church relieved the apostles from ministering to the needy. But the elders should lead by overseeing and by equipping those under their over-sight for various ministries in the church. Remember, an organism is not the same as an organization, but an organism is highly organized. This means that we can't just adopt business management principles straight into the church. But we do need proper organization, delegation, equipping, and oversight for the local body of Christ to function effectively.

Conclusion

Thus the answer to "who is in charge of the church?" is, Jesus Christ is! He exercises His headship in the local church through elders who are spiritually mature men, selected by God and recognized by the church, who through example and servant-hood shepherd His flock.

Note one final thing: In 1 Timothy 3:1 Paul says that a man should aspire for and desire the office of overseer. It is a fine work. The word "aspire" means to stretch oneself out or to reach after. This is not ambition for power and status, but a reaching toward spiritual maturity so that you can serve the Chief Shepherd by helping to shepherd His flock. Some of you men should have this desire from God to become elders. To get there, you should be growing in godliness (the qualities of 1 Tim. 3:1-7) by daily time in His Word and in prayer. You should be shepherding your own family, setting an example in your own home. You should be taking advantage of every opportunity to serve God's people, building caring relationships with others with the goal of seeing them be-come mature in the faith. In other words, the church should not put a man into the office of elder so that he can serve; it should recognize as elders the men who are already living the life and doing the work. We need men who desire that fine work of oversight in this flock. We cannot grow without it. I pray that some of you will aspire to that work.

Discussion Questions

1. What are some practical differences between "church politics" and biblical church government?
2. To what extent do business management principles apply to the local church? Where are there differences?
3. Some churches are heavy on organization and light on organ-ism. Others are the reverse. Where are we?
4. As Americans who love democracy and freedom, we tend to resist submission to authority. Where does democracy conflict or coincide with biblical church government

1 Timothy 3:2-7 WHAT DOES AN ELDER LOOK LIKE?

Steven Cole

I want to read you a letter I received from a man interested in a ministry position in our church: Dear Steve, I am looking for an opportunity for ministry and wondered if your church has a position available. I am a single man in my fifties, short of stature, slightly built, balding, with a beard. My health is not the best. I have difficulty with my vision. But in spite of my physical limitations, I have seen the Lord use me in many ways. I have never been able to stay in full-time ministry for long because of repeated problems with my financial support. But I have always continued serving the Lord, even when I've had to take a secular job. I used to have a violent temper, but the Lord has given me victory over that problem.

As my resume shows, I've been involved in the founding of a number of churches, although I have never stayed in one place for much over three years. I admit I am not a persuasive or eloquent public speaker--in fact I've been criticized over this matter--but I do maintain that the Lord uses me in this capacity and I would like to have opportunities to speak regularly in your church. Some have

complained about my speaking because at times I get carried away and forget about the clock. I must also warn you that my teaching has often stirred up controversy, even to the point of causing riots in some towns. I don't want to hide the fact that I've been sent to prison several times for my part in causing such disturbances. My life has been threatened on numerous occasions and I have been physically attacked several times. A number of evangelical churches are divided in their opinions about me. Even some of the churches I helped found have turned against me.

I have done some writing on various theological and church-related topics, although a well-known Christian leader complained that I am hard to understand in places. I am not particularly strong at administrative details, being somewhat forgetful. But I am a hard-driving, zealous, dedicated man. I believe I could be useful in the ministry of your church, especially in discipling any young men who want to follow the Lord. Please let me hear from you.

Would you choose a man like that for a position of leadership in this church? Oh, I forgot to give the salutation: "Sincerely, Paul of Tarsus." Except for part of the description of Paul's physique, which comes from early extra-biblical sources, all of the above was based on the New Testament.

That fictional, but biblically-based, letter from Paul should show us the importance of understanding the biblical qualifications for a leader in the local church. Human wisdom and worldly standards are not adequate; we must know what the New Testament requires in an elder. As we saw in my last message, the fundamental principle in church government is that Christ is the Head of His church. He has ordained that His headship is exercised through spiritually mature elders who through example and servant-hood shepherd His flock. So we should not "vote" for elders in the style of American democracy. We should confirm as elders men who approximate the qualifications given by the Apostle Paul.

In 1 Timothy 3:2-7, Paul gives us a portrait of what an elder looks like. We learn that ...

Elders must be spiritually mature men.

Paul spells out 15 qualifications so that there are no doubts as to what spiritual maturity entails. Before we examine the qualifications in more detail, several things need to be said:

First, most of these qualities are prescribed elsewhere in the Bible for every Christian, including women. So we all should be seeking to grow in these areas.

Second, spiritual maturity takes time, effort, and discipline (1 Tim. 4:7). There are no shortcuts. We live in a day when we're used to instant everything. But there is no such thing as instant godliness. The crucial question is, Are you involved in the process?

Third, no one is perfectly qualified to be a church leader. These qualities, for the most part, are not the kind of thing where you can say, "I've arrived!" There is always going to be room for growth. If you require perfection, no one would qualify as an elder. But at the same time, an elder should not be in glaring violation of any qualification. If he is weak in any area, he should be aware of it and should be working on that area.

As Paul says with regard to the ministry, "Who is adequate for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16). Then he adds, "Not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves, but our adequacy is from God, who also made us adequate as servants of the new covenant, ..." (2 Cor. 3:5, 6). Every elder ought to have a sense of inadequacy in himself when he considers the office of overseer, but also a sense that God has called him to this fine work (3:1).

With that as background, let's examine Paul's list. I am going to omit several other qualifications added in Titus 1:5-9. Also, I must be brief in order to cover all 15 qualities in one message. If you want to study each characteristic in more depth, I recommend Gene Getz's book, *The Measure of A Man* (G/L Regal Books, 1974). Since the qualifications are not arranged in any obvious groupings, we'll just take them in the order Paul gives them.

1. "Above reproach" (KJV, NKJV = "blameless"):

This quality heads the list in both Timothy and Titus and serves as an overall characteristic of a man's life. You may be inclined to think, "I'll never qualify because I could never be perfect." But Paul isn't demanding perfection. The Greek word has the idea of not having anything in your life that the enemy might lay hold of. In other words, an elder must not be living a double life. In his home life, personal life, and business life, he is living in obedience to God's Word. When he sins, he judges himself and seeks forgiveness from God and others. He is a man of integrity.

2. "The husband of one wife":

This quality is second in both Timothy and Titus, pointing to its importance. Unfortunately, the term is a bit ambiguous, and so different interpretations have been put forth. The phrase is literally, "a one-woman-man." Some take it to mean that an elder must be married, not single; but this would disqualify Paul and Timothy. Others say it means that he cannot be polygamous; but that was rare in the society of that time, so it would be almost irrelevant. Another view is that it prohibits a divorced man from ever being an elder;

but Paul could have said that more clearly if he meant that. Some go so far as to prohibit even a widowed elder from re-marrying; but this seems extreme.

Since the other qualities deal with moral or spiritual characteristics, I think the best view is that a “one-woman-man” is a man who is intimately related only to his wife. He is a faithful husband. He is not a flirt nor is he enslaved to the sin of mental lust. Whether single or married, he has an extended track record of mental and physical sexual purity.

Thus it does not have to do per se with whether or not a man has been divorced in the past. While some men who may have been divorced in the past could qualify for elder if they have matured in this area, other men who may never have been divorced would be disqualified because they do not have victory over a habit of sensual thoughts. An elder must be a one-woman-man in thought and deed. If a church leader commits sexual sin, he needs to get out of any position of leadership until he has established a history of moral purity. A history means years, not months!

3. “Temperate” (KJV = “vigilant”):

The word means to be clear-headed, mentally alert, able to make sound judgments. It originally meant “not mixed with wine,” and came to mean “sober, someone who is able to think clearly.” The verb is associated with alertness in view of the enemy (1 Pet. 5:8) and the end times (1 Thess. 5:6, 8), so it points to a man who has sound spiritual discernment in this evil world.

4. “Prudent” (NIV = “self-controlled”; KJV = “sober”; NKJV = “sober-minded”):

In Titus 1:8; 2:2, 5 the NASB translates this word “sensible.” It means “to be of sound mind,” especially in the sense of not being impulsive. He doesn’t live by his feelings, but by obedience to God’s wisdom as revealed in His Word. Plato defined it as “the mastery of pleasure and desire” (in William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [Westminster Press, p. 80]).

5. “Respectable” (KJV, NKJV = “of good behavior”):

The word means “orderly, decent, modest.” The NASB translates it “discreetly” with reference to a woman’s apparel (1Tim. 2:9). It points to a person who lives in a well-ordered, decent life in every area so that he is becoming to the Lord and His Word.

6. “Hospitable” (KJV = “given to hospitality”):

Literally, the original means, “a lover of strangers.” He is quick to open his heart and home to others. He is not afraid to meet new people. He’s able to make them feel relaxed and welcome. All Christians are exhorted to pursue hospitality (Rom. 12:13) and to be hospitable without complaint (1 Pet. 4:9). This must especially be true of an elder.

7. “Able to teach” (KJV = “apt to teach”):

Since the other qualifications for elder can be developed, I do not take this to mean that an elder must have the spiritual gift of teaching. In 1 Timothy 5:17 Paul indicates that some elders should concentrate on preaching and teaching, while others do not. By “able to teach” Paul means that an elder must know Scripture well enough to be able to set forth sound doctrine and to refute error in a kind manner without quarreling (see 2 Tim. 2:24 where the word is also used). He must be a man of the Word who also understands people so that he can guide people into God’s truth. And since you can never arrive at a complete knowledge of God’s Word, an elder must be continuing to study with a teachable heart.

8. “Not addicted to wine” (NIV = “not given to much wine”; KJV, NKJV = “not given to wine”):

The Bible does not prohibit all drinking of alcoholic wine. Every indication is that Jesus drank wine, not just grape juice, although it was diluted wine. But the Bible warns of the dangers of strong drink: “Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and who-ever is intoxicated by it is not wise” (Prov. 20:1). Drunkenness is clearly a sin (Gal. 5:21). I believe that in light of the widespread problem of alcohol abuse, total abstinence is best, especially for a man in a position of leadership. If a new Christian who has had a problem with alcohol sees you as a mature Christian drinking an alcoholic beverage, and because of your influence goes back to drinking himself and falls away from the Lord, you have caused him to stumble. It is better not to drink any alcohol than to lead a weaker brother into sin (Rom. 14:21; 1 Cor. 8:11-13).

Since an elder is to be temperate, prudent, and self-controlled (a fruit of the Spirit, Gal. 5:23), and since Christians should not be mastered by any harmful practice or substance, an elder should not be enslaved to tobacco, drugs, or even to overeating (that disqualifies a lot of fat pastors!). A spiritually mature man will have control in all these areas.

9. “Not pugnacious” (NIV, NKJV = “not violent”; KJV = “no striker”):

An elder must control his anger so that he doesn’t respond to provocation by decking the other guy. In the home, he doesn’t hit his wife or beat his children. If he has to spank them, he uses control and does not abuse them. To hit a child in the face is never proper discipline. There is no place in a Christian home for physical violence.

(The KJV adds at this point, “not greedy of filthy lucre”; NKJV = “not greedy for money”; but in view of poor manuscript evidence and since it would be redundant in light of the end of the verse [“free from the love of money” or “not covetous”], it was probably added by a copyist from Titus 1:7).

10. “Gentle” (KJV = “patient”):

There are several Greek words translated “gentle.” This word points to a man who is gracious and does not demand his rights. He is not harsh in demanding extreme penalties. An elder must be a man softened by God’s grace so that he deals with people as God has dealt with him.

11. “Uncontentious” (NIV, NKJV = “not quarrelsome”; KJV = “not a brawler”):

The Greek word is amacho. Our slang term “macho,” refers to a man who has to prove how tough he is. That’s the opposite of amacho. An elder should not get into fruitless quarrels, whether over theology or anything else. He is not out to prove his manhood by force or authority. He’s not a spiritual bully or an angry man.

12. “Free from the love of money” (KJV, NKJV = “not covetous”; NIV = “not a lover of money”):

The Bible has much to say about money. It definitely does not say that God wants every believer to prosper financially as the current heresy teaches. Riches are not wrong per se, but they are spiritually dangerous. Paul warns, “... those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful de-sires which plunge men into ruin and destruction” (1 Tim. 6:9). Every Christian, but especially the men who lead the church, must be clear that you cannot serve God and money (Luke 16:13-15).

13. “Manages his own household well” (NKJV = “rules”):

This includes all aspects of a man’s family life--his relationship with his wife, their finances, etc. But especially Paul singles out having his children in submission. The phrase, “with all dignity,” may refer to the man’s manner in dealing with his children or to the children’s proper (dignified) behavior toward their parents (the NIV translates it this way; both are required, of course.) This is an important qualification which has been ignored by many churches in our day. Many pastors should not be in leadership because they have grievously failed on this point. Paul does not mean that an elder’s small children should never disobey or that they must always be perfect little examples. There are no children (except Jesus) born without sin natures.

Paul does mean that an elder’s family life should be exemplary. If a man’s children are rebels who reject the Lord, don’t increase his area of responsibility to the entire church. The same weaknesses that made him a poor father will make him a poor church leader. If his own children disrespect him, he will not have the respect he needs to shepherd the church.

This verse demands that I and the other elders have a priority that comes before ministry to this church, namely, ministry to our families. It is a tragedy for a man to be so involved in church work that he neglects his family, with the result that his children grow up to hate the church and the Lord because of it. And there is no such thing as quality time apart from quantity time. So if I tell you that I am too busy for some church activity, it may well mean that I’ll be at home that night.

14. “Not a new convert” (KJV, NKJV = “not a novice”):

Obviously, a new convert could not have had the time to develop these qualities. It takes time to obtain a thorough grasp of the Scriptures. This is another common error in our day, that of pushing new converts into the limelight, especially if they were well-known as non-Christians (movie stars, musicians, athletes, etc). Or, a guy who is a successful business executive becomes a Christian and immediately is asked to become an elder in the church. Paul says, “Don’t do it!”

Why not? He will become conceited (the original means, “puffed up or clouded with smoke”) and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil. Spiritual pride is a subtle but serious sin. When Satan grew proud, he fell from heaven. When a man who is elevated into a position of leadership too quickly grows proud, he will fall from his position and perhaps even from the faith. Part of Christian growth involves God’s humbling us through trials. A re-cent convert hasn’t yet learned that lesson.

15. “A good reputation with those outside” (KJV = “a good report”; NKJV = “a good testimony”):

He should be recognized in the community as a man of moral character and proper conduct. His business dealings should be honest and right. This should be true of all Christians, but especially of leaders. Non-Christians should not be able to bring the charge of “hypocrite” against a church leader. We may be maligned by non-Christians for our godly behavior, and they often will slander us because our lives convict them of sin. But we should not give cause for reproach by our ungodly behavior. The “snare of the devil” (v. 7) probably refers to the trap which the devil sets for church leaders by getting them to ruin their testimony.

Conclusion

That’s a glance at the kind of maturity God wants to produce in all of His people. In our personal walk with God, in our family life, and in our relationships, God wants us to develop practical spiritual maturity and godliness. He wants us to be above reproach. Elders should be men of spiritual maturity. It is the qualification for leadership in the church. As we approach our annual meeting, and even as we meet tonight to consider calling a youth pastor candidate, we need to look for men who approximate these qualities. Before you all get under a pile and all the elders resign, re-member, we’re looking at a process that takes years. No elder will ever match every quality perfectly. But it’s the direction we need to be growing in. No elder should be in glaring violation of any of these qualities.

Also, please observe that elders are the special targets of the enemy. Twice (vv. 6, 7) Paul mentions the devil in connection with elders. It reminds me of the Far Side cartoon where two deer are talking. One deer has a target on his chest. The other one says, “Bummer of a birthmark, Ernie!” Elders are marked men. If Satan can cause a church leader to fall, he brings down many others.

Pray for me and all the elders, that we would daily be walking in reality before God, judging ourselves according to God's Word. You can respond to this message by being overwhelmed with guilt and running for cover or by responding to God's grace and to the process of growth He wants for us all. I would encourage each of you (not just elders) to pick one or two (at the most) areas where you are the weakest. Study that quality in God's Word and ask God to begin to develop it in your life. Who knows—one day the church may say, "You know, this man looks like an elder!"

Discussion Questions

1. How is the Scriptural method of choosing church leaders different from the methods used in most churches today?
2. If you were going to make a list of qualities of a spiritually mature person (independently of 1 Tim. 3:1-7), how would your list have differed from Paul's?
3. If you had to single out just one of these qualities in choosing a man for church leadership, which one would it be? Why?

1 Timothy 3:8-13 SERVANTS: OFFICIAL & OTHERWISE

Steven Cole

A farmer had a team of horses in which one horse consistently worked harder than the others. The farmer said, "They're all willin' horses. The one's willin' to pull, and the rest are willin' to let him."

Sadly, that's how it often is in the local church. Everybody is willing: a few are willing to work and the rest are willing to let them. Some of you old timers may remember the "Dobie Gillis" TV show from the late 1950's. Dobie's good buddy, beatnik Maynard G. Krebs, had the attitude that work was to be avoided at all costs. Whenever Dobie would say the word "work," Maynard would draw back in a reflex of horror and shriek, "Work!" A lot of people have the same notion—that work should be avoided when-ever possible. That attitude carries over into the Christian life. When it comes to serving in some practical way in the church, some Christians have a built-in reflex that causes them to run for cover. But a survey of the New Testament words "servant" (= "deacon"), "service," and "serve" reveals that

All Christians are servants;
some should be "official" servants.

All believers are called to be servants to the Lord and His church; some should be official servants with the title of "deacon" or "deaconess." Paul gives the qualifications for this office in our text, 1 Timothy 3:8-13. But in order to understand the office, we need to do a brief survey of "service" in the New Testament. Such a survey reveals that

1. All Christians are servants.

There are no exceptions. If a person is a follower of Jesus Christ, he or she will be developing into a servant. That is so be-cause ...

A. Christ is our supreme example of servanthood.

Do you ever marvel that when God took on human flesh and came to this earth, He came as He did? God could have chosen for His Son to be born in Herod's palace, where He would have had the best of every worldly comfort. He would have eaten the finest foods, been pampered and waited upon for His every need. Instead He chose a poor carpenter and his wife! The Son of God grew up in a modest home where He learned the trade of His earthly father. His hands were not the soft hands of a nobleman, but the rough, callused hands of a carpenter.

As His disciples jockeyed for power and position, Jesus told them, "... whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28). On the night of His betrayal, when, if ever there was a time, Jesus needed to be served, He told His disciples, "I am among you as the one who serves" (Luke 22:27). He demonstrated what He meant by rising from that last supper, taking a basin of water and a towel, and performing the servant's task of washing the disciples' smelly, dirty feet. Jesus showed His disciples that ...

B. Christlikeness means serving.

In John 13:14-17 Jesus states, "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

We all know these things. The question is, "Do we do them?" Do what? Wash smelly feet. Do the dirty, servant-jobs. Help people who may not be able to repay us. Such service is part and parcel of being a Christian. Everyone who knows Christ will be like Christ by acting like servants. No exceptions! But, we must also realize that ...

C. Christ has gifted some especially to serve.

There is a spiritual gift called the gift of “helps” (1 Cor. 12:28) or “service” (Rom. 12:7). While all Christians must serve in various ways, some are specially gifted by God for service in supportive, practical, and often behind-the-scenes ways. Those with the gift of service are like the linemen on a football team. They don’t usually share the limelight with the quarterback, but without their hard work and sacrifice, the quarterback couldn’t begin to do his job.

Thus while some Christians will have the gift of serving and devote themselves to that area, all believers should be involved in a lifestyle of serving, because our Lord and Savior did not come to be served, but to serve and we are to be like Him.

A man used to visit a tiny country general store that had a clerk named Jake who seemed to be the laziest man on earth. One day he noticed that Jake wasn’t around, so he asked the proprietor, “Where’s Jake?” “Oh, Jake retired,” the proprietor answered. “Retired, huh?” the man replied. “What are you going to do to fill the vacancy?” The owner replied, “Jake didn’t leave no vacancy!”

I’m concerned that the same thing could be said of so many Christians with regard to their service for Christ: “They didn’t leave no vacancy!” Every Christian should leave a vacancy when he or she moves on, because we’re all called to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

But as you study further the concept of serving in the New Testament, it becomes apparent that ..

2. Some Christians should serve in a “official” capacity.

As the New Testament church developed, these “official” servants came to be known as “deacons” (= “servants”).

A. The office of deacon is recognized in Scripture.

Most scholars agree that the office of “deacon” (= “servant”) finds its roots in Acts 6:1-6. The church in Jerusalem had grown considerably. Apparently, many who had visited Jerusalem for the Feast of Pentecost and were converted had stayed on to grow in their new-found faith in Christ. This created many material needs and led to the temporary arrangement of pooling resources (Acts 4:32) to meet the needs. There were a number of widows in the church without any means of income who were served food on a daily basis.

But a problem arose when the Greek-speaking Jews felt that their widows were being neglected in favor of the native Hebrews. They needed some fair administrators to handle the situation so that the apostles would be free to devote their time to prayer and the ministry of the Word. Although the word “deacon” is not used in Acts 6, it is generally agreed that these seven men were the prototype deacons. They assisted the apostles by serving in practical matters so that the apostles could serve in prayer and the Word. They were officially recognized and ordained for this task (Acts 6:6).

Later, when Paul wrote to the Philippian church, he addressed his letter to the overseers and deacons (Phil. 1:1), singling them out probably because of their role in the gift which the church had sent to Paul. In 1 Timothy 3, Paul also mentions these two offices in his instructions to Timothy. He does not mention deacons in his letter to Titus, perhaps indicating that the office of deacon is not mandatory for every church, but rather should emerge as a church grows and as the need arises. As a church grows, the elders will need help in the administrative details of the church so that they can concentrate on shepherding the flock. At that point, deacons can be recognized in an official capacity.

B. The qualifications and rewards for deacons are spelled out in Scripture (1 Tim. 3:8-13).

As you examine the qualifications of the men chosen to serve in Acts 6 plus those of the men and women described by Paul in 1 Timothy 3, you can see that the requirements for being an official servant are high. We sometimes get the erroneous notion that if you’re really spiritual, you can be an elder, but if you’re only moderately spiritual, then you can be a deacon and help out in the more practical areas. But our text shows that those officially recognized as deacons must be spiritually mature men and women.

(1) Qualifications for deacons (3:8-12): Men deacons: There are eight qualifications:

(a) “Dignified” (KJV = “grave”; NKJV = “reverent”; NIV = “worthy of respect”). The word is the opposite of being a goof-off or clown. A deacon should have a seriousness of purpose about him, so that those he serves sense that he is concerned for them and so they trust and respect him.

(b) “Not double-tongued” (NIV = sincere). He cannot be a man who tells one person one thing, but another person the opposite in an attempt to please everybody. Since the deacon was involved in handling church finances, he had to be a man of his word.

(c) “Not addicted to much wine”. Since wine was commonly served as a gesture of hospitality, it was important for a deacon, making his rounds from house to house, to exercise control or else he could become a drunkard.

(d) “Not fond of sordid gain” (NKJV = “not greedy for money”; NIV = “not pursuing dishonest gain”). Since a deacon’s duties often involved the distribution of money and gifts to the needy, there was always the possibility for embezzlement. A deacon could not be a man who would pursue dishonest gain.

(e) “Holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (the NIV’s “deep truths” is misleading). The “mystery of the faith” is

Paul's term for Christian truth, especially the gospel. It points to that which once was hidden, but now has been revealed in Christ. A deacon must be a man of conviction regarding the central truths of the Christian faith. In addition to sound doctrine, he must be sound in obedience ("clear conscience").

(f) "Tested and found beyond reproach" (NIV = "if there is nothing against them"; KJV, NKJV = "blameless." The word is a close synonym of the word used for elders (3:2). It means, literally, "not called to account." This is to be determined by "testing," which means that a man has an observed track record before he is put into office. You don't put a man into office and then test him to see if he's trustworthy. Test him first and then recognize him.

(g) "A one-woman man" (v. 12). As we saw in the case of elders, the term refers to a man of moral purity. A deacon often ministers to widows and single women, and thus it is especially important for him to be a man who is pure in thought and deed.

(h) "Good manager of his children and household." As in the case of the elder, the home is the proving ground for the deacon. If he fails there, don't increase his responsibility.

From this list, it is obvious that the church should never recognize someone as a deacon in order "to get him involved," or because he's "willing to work." The real issue, as far as holding office in the church is concerned, is proven spiritual maturity, both for elders and deacons.

Women deacons: Right in the middle of his discussion about deacons, Paul inserts a verse about "women" (3:11). Then he returns to his discussion about deacons. The question is, does this refer to deacons' wives or to women deacons (or deaconesses)? In favor of the view that he is referring to the wives of deacons is the fact that the reference is sandwiched between the qualifications for deacon. It would seem that he would finish with one group before moving on to the next. But against that view is the fact that Paul doesn't mention any qualifications for the wives of elders. Why would he do this only for deacons' wives?

In favor of the view that Paul is referring to women deacons is the word "likewise" (parallel to 3:8). Also, in Romans 16:1, Phoebe is called a deacon ("servant") of the church. Women deacons could have been married to men deacons, or to elders or any other men, assuming that their children were raised so that they were free to serve; or they could have been widows or single women devoted to serving the Lord (5:3-16). They probably assisted the deacons in their duties, particularly in ministering to women in the church (Titus 2:2-5).

Paul mentions four qualifications for them:

(a) "Dignified" (NIV = "worthy of respect"). This is the same word used for the men (3:8). They couldn't be goof-offs.

(b) "Not malicious gossips" (KJV, NKJV = "not slanderers"). If they went from house to house with juicy tidbits of private information, they could ruin a church very quickly. They must be able to control their tongues.

(c) "Temperate" (KJV = "sober"), the same quality as mentioned for elders. The word means clearheaded, able to make sound judgments. It refers to someone who does not live by emotions, but by obedience to God's Word. Note that women leaders, as well as men, are required to have this quality. If she is swayed by emotion, she will not be able to lead needy women to God's truth, which is the only source of true healing for their problems. A woman needs to be able to discern truth from error if she is to serve effectively.

(d) "Faithful in all things." She must be trustworthy. She must follow through on assigned tasks. If an elder knows of a family that needs care of some kind, and assigns it to a deaconess, he needs to be able to trust her to follow through.

After listing the qualifications for those who serve in an official capacity, Paul lists the rewards:

(2) Rewards for deacons (3:13):

(a) "A high standing." This probably refers to respect in the church along with good standing in God's sight. Jesus humbled Himself by becoming a servant, and God highly exalted Him (Phil. 2:5-11). Jesus said, "Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted" (Matt. 23:12). A person who humbles himself and serves faithfully as a deacon will be rewarded. Even if the church doesn't notice, God will.

(b)

(c) "Great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus." This could refer both to confidence before God and before man. A faithful servant can go boldly before the Lord in prayer, knowing that he is doing God's will. Also, such a person can have a quiet confidence in dealing with people, knowing first-hand the reality of the Christian faith.

Conclusion

A number of years ago a Newsweek article (9/13/82) dealing with the Mideast conflict began:

HELP WANTED. Experienced negotiator to handle high-level talks among hostile nations. Objective: a just and durable peace. The successful candidate will be familiar with all facets of the situation—political, military and historical. Patience, flexibility and the ability to work long hours are a must. Apply: The White House, Washington, D.C. 20500.

The job description and the qualifications are tough because the job is so crucial. But someone higher than the President and with a job more crucial than peace negotiator is looking for qualified applicants. His help wanted ad might read:

Servant: Someone to do often undesirable work for the sake of the King of Kings. Needs to know the love of Jesus personally and be able to demonstrate it to others. Must live daily in personal contact with the greatest Servant of all in order to continue training. Work requires being on call 24 hours a day to meet needs of family, friends, and even strangers. Must be willing to give up his rights. Pay is often non-existent in this life, but great rewards in the next life. No experience necessary. On the job training begins today, right where you are. (Adapted from Discipleship Journal, Issue 10.)

Whether you're an official servant or otherwise, there are no job shortages if you're willing to wash dirty feet. Ask any elder and we'll find you an opening! Service is not an option for followers of the Son of Man who came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many.

Discussion Questions

1. Agree/disagree: If you're not serving, you're too self-focused. Is every Christian a minister (servant)?
2. How can we promote a servant mentality in the church in-stead of a "serve-me" attitude?
3. Why are the requirements so high to be an official servant (deacon) in the church?

1 Timothy 3:14-16 WHY IS THE CHURCH IMPORTANT?

Steven Cole

If you were to ask the person in the street, "Why is the church important?" you would probably get a wide range of answers. Some would laugh at the question, because for them the church is not important in any way. Others might see the church in the same category as museums: They both preserve things from the past. They're a nice place to visit on rainy days, where you can observe how quaintly people used to live, but they're out of touch with our modern world.

Others might couch their answer in political terms: They view the church as a powerful voting block to oppose the erosion of morality and to preserve the family. Or, some might respond to our question by saying that they see the church's importance as a social institution. It helps meet the physical needs of the poor and the emotional needs of the lonely and distraught. It ministers to people at the pivotal times of life: birth, marriage, death, and times of crisis.

For many American churchgoers, the church is important because it meets many of their personal needs. They shop around for a church that makes them feel good each week. They get a weekly boost that enables them to cope with life.

As we continue our man-on-the-street interviews, we come to a short, balding man with a beard, who looks decidedly Jewish. Somewhat hesitantly, we ask him, "Sir, we're asking people the question, 'Why is the church important?' Would you care to comment?" We're hardly prepared for his answer.

He says, "I believe the church of Jesus Christ is the most important force in the world today. Its task is more important than all the governments and universities of the world combined. There is nothing to compare with it!"

We reply, "That's a pretty strong statement, sir! Why do you say that?" He responds, "Because the most significant event in human history was when the living God took on human flesh and lived among us as the Lord Jesus Christ to bear our sins. And since He ascended into heaven, His church now reveals Him on earth, even as He revealed God when He was on earth." So,

The church is important because it reveals Christ, even as Christ reveals God in human flesh.

That is essentially what our Jewish friend, the Apostle Paul, is saying in 1 Timothy 3:14-16. The church is the continuing incarnation of God incarnate. The word "incarnate" comes from two Latin words meaning "in flesh." It means that God took on a human body in the person of Jesus Christ. And since Jesus ascended into heaven, we now, as His body continue His presence on earth until He returns. Since the eternal destiny of every person on earth depends on his or her being rightly related to Jesus the coming King and Judge of all the earth, nothing could be more crucial than the church!

David Watson wrote, "It is the church that is willing to die to worldly standards that will know the power of Christ's resurrection. It may be envied for its depths of loving relationships or for its spontaneous joy; it may be hated and persecuted for its revolutionary lifestyle exposing the hollow values and destructive selfishness of the society it seeks to serve; but it certainly cannot be ignored. When God reigns among His people, they become a city set on a hill and cannot be hid" (I Believe in the Church [Eerdmans], p. 61).

The Lord wants us as His people to catch a vision of the in-comparable importance of the church in its role of revealing the risen, ascended Christ. In order to catch that vision, we must understand the significance of Christ's incarnation.

1. Jesus Christ reveals God in human flesh. (3:16).

In our text, Paul tells Timothy his purpose for writing, namely, so that God's people would know how to conduct them-selves as members of God's church. A key function of the church is to be the pillar and support of God's truth which centers in the person of Jesus Christ. Thus Paul, in verse 16, quotes an early church hymn to elaborate on the core of truth as it centers in Christ. The best Greek manuscripts do not begin with "God" (as in the KJV) but rather with "who," indicating that we are picking up in the middle of the hymn. The flow of thought, working backward from verse 16, is that Christ is the embodiment of God's truth; and (v. 15) the church is to be the present embodiment of Jesus Christ.

"The mystery of godliness" refers first to God incarnate in Christ. A mystery referred to something that could be known only by revelation, not by speculation. No one can come to know God by human reason alone, but only through the revelation God has given of Himself in the person of Jesus Christ. He revealed what perfect godliness is: God dwelling in us and living through us. Thus "the mystery of godliness" refers primarily to Jesus Christ, but secondarily to us, His church, as we are indwelt by Christ and reflect Him to the world.

This early church hymn is a brief synopsis of the life of Jesus Christ incarnate. It is saying that Christ is God revealed in human flesh; and, as such, He is the only Savior. There are six lines to the hymn:

A. "Revealed in the flesh"

Although the best manuscripts do not say "God," we know from many other Scriptures that Jesus is God revealed in the flesh. John begins his Gospel by writing of Jesus, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." In verse 14, John continues, "And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us"

Larry Richards and Clyde Hoeldtke write,

The doctrine of the Incarnation is distinct and unique to the Christian faith. Many religions speak of appearances of deities in the guise of men or animals. But these are 'appearances' only. None takes the startling position of Christianity, which affirms that the God who existed from eternity and who created all things entered His creation to actually become a human being. Yet this is just the radical affirmation of the Christian faith." (A Theology of Church Leadership [Zondervan], p. 61).

Note that our text implies the pre-existence of Jesus: "He was revealed in the flesh."

B. "Was vindicated in the Spirit" 3

The word is literally, "justified" or "declared righteous." When Jesus came to this earth, He did not come as a mighty King, revealing the splendor of God. He took the lowly form of a servant. Thus the ministry of the Holy Spirit was to declare Jesus to be the Righteous One by attesting to His deity. When Jesus identified Himself with sinners by submitting to baptism, the Spirit "justified" Him by descending on Him as a dove. When He went to the extreme humiliation of the cross and bore our sin, being numbered with the transgressors, the Holy Spirit declared Jesus to be the Son of God by raising Him from the dead (Rom. 1:4). If Jesus had been a sinner, then He would have had to die for His own sins, and God would not have raised Him from the dead. But the fact that God did raise Jesus from the dead proves that He is the Righteous One.

C. "Beheld by angels"

Angels had an interest in the Savior from His conception to His ascension. An angel announced the conception to Mary, angels proclaimed His birth to the shepherds, angels ministered to Him after His temptation in the wilderness, an angel strengthened Him in His agony in the Garden, angels proclaimed His resurrection at the tomb, and angels addressed the disciples at Christ's ascension. Perhaps here the reference is especially to Christ's resurrection, which secured God's ultimate victory over Satan and his demonic hosts.

D. "Proclaimed among the nations"

After the resurrection, the Lord Jesus made it plain to the disciples that the message of salvation was not just for the Jews, but for all nations: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you" (Matt. 28:19-20). There is only one message for every people, that "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3-4).

E. "Believed on in the world"

This is the only means that God has ordained for every person around the world to receive the gift of eternal life: "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life" (John 3:16).

F. "Taken up in glory"

This refers to the bodily ascension of the risen Lord Jesus. It is put last, out of chronological sequence, because "it is the crown of his exaltation" (Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible [Revell], VI:818). Now He is seated at the right hand of the Father, with all authority in heaven and earth. As the angels promised, one day He will return to earth in the same manner as He ascended: visibly, bodily, in power and glory.

Thus this hymn packs a lot of theology in a nutshell: the in-carnation, life, death, resurrection, commission, and ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is God revealed in human flesh, and, as such, is the only Savior.

Before we look at the implications of this truth for the church, I call to your attention the theological depth of this hymn. It is simple, and yet deep. There is a ton of solid theology packed into a small package. We need some hymns like that in our day! Hymns are a great way to communicate theology. Also, we need to evaluate the hymns we sing, because sometimes their theology isn't what it ought to be.

Paul's point in verse 16, then, is that the incarnate Son of God reveals the Father to us. And the connection between verse 16 and verse 15 is, just as Jesus reveals God, even so ...

2. The church reveals Christ to the world (1Ti 3:14-15).

God continues to be incarnate, not only in Jesus Christ, but also in the church. Jesus is God incarnate; the church is Jesus incarnate. Please understand: the incarnation of Christ is unique. One time and only one time in history did God take on human flesh as the baby of Mary, and grow up as a human being to die on the cross for our sins. That event can never occur again. And the incarnation continues on for eternity. Jesus was raised bodily from the dead and ascended into heaven bodily. He will return bodily to earth to reign as King. And yet in another sense, Jesus is not only incarnate in heaven now; He is also incarnate in His body, the church. We are the visible expression to the world of the Savior who is presently in heaven. When I refer to the church I mean, of course, the people of God, not a building. Paul shows the importance of the church by three word pictures:

A. "The household of God"

This term views the church as the extended family of God, with God as the head of the household. It mainly focuses on the relationships which should be built among those in the church which should reflect Christ to the world.

In America, we tend to be individualistic and goal oriented, and it affects our view of the church. We tend to see the church as an organization that ought to have clearly defined goals and offer programs in line with those goals to meet our needs. We like efficiency. If people are attracted to our programs, they will come. But isn't it enough just to gather unto Christ as God's household or family?

I read recently of an American missionary in Papua New Guinea who asked a native for the best route to get from one place to another. The native, with a puzzled look on his face, replied, "There are all kinds of routes, friend." He continued, "We could go through the bush and visit some friends along the way. Or we could take the coastal route. The sun will be strong, but an old man lives there and he knows many stories from World War II. If we take the road, we can talk to some members of my wife's family who live on this side of the river."

The missionary was getting frustrated with all this, thinking, "He just doesn't get it! I want the best route." Then it hit him—his American idea of "best" was the most efficient, easiest way to get there. The Papua New Guinea idea of "best" was determined by which relationships you wanted to build! (From "In Other Words," Jan./Feb., 1994.)

I suggest that the Papua New Guinea definition of "best" was more in line with Scripture. We need to modify our perspective on the local church. We're not just a collection of individuals who happen to meet at the same spot every week for worship and instruction. We are to become the family of God, which implies relationships. While not everyone can know everyone else well in a church this size, there ought to be a network of caring relationships where a person can be nurtured to maturity in Christ in a family atmosphere. As the household of God, the church is to reflect through relationships the person of Jesus Christ, who dwells in our midst.

B. "The Church of the Living God"

He does not say simply, "the church of God," but rather, "the church of the living God." That is, the church is the place where the living God actually dwells and is at work. Just as the phrase "the household of God" focuses on our relationships with one another, so the phrase "the church of the living God" focuses on our relationship with God (Rom. 9:25-26). The word "church" means "called-out-ones." We have been called out of this sinful world to be a holy people, set apart unto the living God who dwells within us and among us.

There's a serious danger which both individuals and churches must guard against—institutional religion. It's so easy to fall into routine Christianity, where you run through your programs and activities, but you don't live in close touch with the living God. You even can have a personal quiet time, but not meet with God. You can go to church and go through the worship service, but you haven't made contact with the living God.

One day several years ago the phone rang in the rector's office of the church in Washington, D.C., where the President sometimes

attended. An eager voice said, "Do you expect the President to be there Sunday?" The rector replied, "That I cannot promise. But we do expect God, and we fancy it will be incentive enough for a reasonably large attendance." (In "Our Daily Bread," Fall, 1986.)

Not a bad answer! We need to expect the living God to meet with us. The church is of vital importance in the world today because we are called out of this sinful world as a holy people, in close relationship with the living God who dwells in our midst. The world should sense that the living God is here.

C. "The pillar and support of the truth"

In one sense, the truth is absolute and independent of us. God's truth as revealed in Jesus Christ is—it is true whether or not we believe it or proclaim it. But in another sense, the church up-holds and supports the truth. David Wells, in his book, *No Place for Truth* (Eerdmans), and John MacArthur, in *Ashamed of the Gospel* (Crossway Books), both argue convincingly that the evangelical church in America has minimized biblical truth in favor of things like modern psychology and American marketing techniques. We're big on spiritual experiences, emotions and methods, but we're weak theologically.

If you don't believe it, read through the Westminster Shorter Catechism sometime. It used to be that every Presbyterian child learned this summary of Christian doctrine. I would venture that most adult American Christians would be at a total loss to answer many of the questions in an adequate manner. For example, question 33, "What is justification?" Answer: "Justification is an act of God's free grace, wherein he pardons all our sins, and accepts us as righteous in his sight, only for the righteousness of Christ imputed to us, and received by faith alone."

Or, question 35: "What is sanctification?" Answer: "Sanctification is the work of God's free grace, whereby we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God, and are enabled more and more to die unto sin, and live unto righteousness." The Shorter Catechism has 107 questions like that, covering everything from the nature of God, of man, and salvation to the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The Longer Catechism has 196 questions! We need to get back to knowing God's truth!

But doctrine is not merely to fill our heads. It is to affect our lives. The truth concerning God incarnate is transforming truth. And so the church acts as the pillar and support of the truth by putting that truth into daily life. As people in the world observe the church, our conduct should undergird and uphold the doctrinal truth concerning our God who was revealed in the flesh.

Conclusion

Why is the church important? Because God has left it here to reveal His Son to the world, even as Jesus revealed God when He was on this earth. As the household of God, the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, we are the current expression of Jesus Christ in the world until He comes. What a staggering job description! Nothing could be of greater importance! Maybe you've been turned off by bad experiences in churches that were institutional—where God dwelled only in name, but not in reality. You need to grasp a new vision of what God intends for His church, locally expressed, and commit yourself to this church. We need to make it happen right here, so that people will say, "I have seen the living God dwelling among His people."

The great composer, Giacomo Puccini, whose operas number among the world's favorites, was stricken with cancer in 1922. But he was determined to write a final opera, "Turandot," which some consider his best. His students implored him to rest, to save his strength, but he persisted, remarking at one point, "If I do not finish my music, my students will finish it."

In 1924, Puccini was taken to Brussels to be operated on. He died there two days after his surgery. But his students did finish his final work. In 1926, the gala premiere was held in Milan under the baton of Puccini's favorite student, Arturo Toscanini. All went brilliantly that evening until they came to the point in the score where the master had been forced to put down his pen. Toscanini, his face wet with tears, stopped the production, put down his baton, turned to the audience and cried out, "Thus far the master wrote, but he died!"

After a few moments, his face now wreathed in a smile, Toscanini picked up his baton and cried out again, "But his disciples finished his work!"

Our Master died, was raised from the dead, and ascended to the Father, leaving us the most important task in the world: to finishing His work, to proclaim His great salvation among the nations. To do it, each one of us must commit ourselves to a living relationship with the living God. We must commit ourselves to one another as members of God's household. We must commit ourselves to know, live by, and defend God's Word of Truth.

Discussion Questions

1. Agree/disagree: The American church is doctrinally anemic? What can we do about it?
2. Which should take precedence in the church: Truth or love?
3. On which of the three descriptions (3:15) is this church strongest and weakest? How can we grow stronger in each?
4. Why do some complain that doctrine isn't practical? How can we avoid dead orthodoxy and yet promote solid theology?

1 Timothy 4

1 Timothy 4:1-5 HOW NOT TO FALL AWAY

Steven Cole

We all know people who have fallen away from the Christian faith. These are people who at one time made a profession of faith in Christ. They may have joined a Bible-believing church. I know some who were seminary graduates, active in ministry. But either they drifted from the Lord or deliberately turned away. They may have become ensnared in a cult or entangled by worldly values or have fallen into moral problems. But they are no longer living as Christians.

If you think such a thing could never happen to you, take heed lest you fall! We're all vulnerable and we are at war with a cunning, deceptive enemy. We need to understand how not to fall away. Paul gives us an answer in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. It is not a complete answer, of course. A complete answer would entail all the New Testament teaching on the spiritual life. But it is nonetheless a solid answer that will help us be on guard so that we do not fall away.

Paul refers to an explicit prophecy by the Holy Spirit that in later times some will fall away from the faith. He may be referring to Jesus' prediction concerning the apostasy during the end times (Mark 13:22), or to other prophecies Paul made (2 Thess. 2:1-12; Acts 20:29). Or Paul may have received a new revelation from the Holy Spirit on this matter as he wrote this letter. "Later times" refers to the entire church age; but there will be a major apostasy just before the Lord's return (2 Thess. 2:1-3). Apparently, some in Ephesus were already turning away from the faith. Paul is telling Timothy these things so that he will be on guard as the problems grow worse. He is saying that ...

To avoid falling away, we must persevere in God's truth with thankfulness.

First he shows the problem of these times—those who fall away from the faith (1Ti 4:1 -3a). Then he reveals the perspective for these times—the outlook we need to persevere (1Ti 4:3b-5).

1. The problem of these times: Apostasy (falling away).

Those whom Paul describes as falling away are people who are not enjoying God and the blessings He provides, but rather have fallen into an outward form of religion in which they deny themselves things, such as marriage and certain foods. In order to see how they got to that point, we need to trace Paul's flow of thought:

A. We are engaged in spiritual warfare.

The Scriptures teach that God not only created the material world, but that He also created spiritual beings. We normally cannot see or hear them, but they are nonetheless real. Some of these beings, called angels, are servants of God. The other beings, demons or evil spirits, are under Satan's leadership. He and they were once angels who served God. But Satan rebelled and a great number of angels followed him. He is now their general and they serve in his army to thwart God's purpose.

Paul says that these false teachers and those who follow them were actually following deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. The errors came through men in the church, but behind these professing Christians were demonic forces (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

We are sometimes surprised when the enemy comes from within the church. We think the enemy is "out there," not in here. But Scripture is clear that men in the church, recognized as leaders, who seem to be men of righteousness, will sometimes rise up to lead God's people astray. Often behind such men are demonic forces.

Scripture shows that demonic influence can be blatant and obvious (for example, the Gerasene demoniac). But also demonic influence can be subtle enough to draw the unsuspecting into its grip. If you've ever been ripped off by a con artist, he didn't walk up and say, "I'm going to steal your money!" He earned your trust, but his intent was to use you for his own selfish ends. That's what was happening in Ephesus, and these deceitful evil spirits continue to work in churches to thwart God's truth by their demonic doctrines.

So often we see things only on the natural plane. But it is crucial that we understand that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). We are engaged in spiritual war-fare!

B. Spiritual warfare involves the mind.

Apostasy (or falling away) always begins in the mind. These spirits are "deceitful" and they teach doctrines that sound biblical but are just slightly off. They are out to fool you in your thinking. But God's people "believe and know the truth" (4:3).

We need to be careful here. On one extreme, there is a wide movement in the American church that minimizes truth. This side says,

"They will know we are Christians by our love," and so they adopt a "peace at any cost" position that dilutes and ultimately destroys essential Christian truth. They emphasize tolerance and doctrinal diversity. If you speak out against error, this side accuses you of being unloving and divisive. But if you go down that road, you end up with the unbiblical view that truth doesn't matter and that there is no such thing as sound doctrine (a major theme in this epistle).

On the other extreme, we can be so zealous for the truth that we shred relationships and end up falling into spiritual pride because we hold to "The Truth."

I get a newsletter from a man who attacks and separates himself from many well-known evangelicals because he finds errors in statements they have made in print or in taped messages. If you go far enough down that road, you end up in a church of one member, because you'll never find another person who agrees with you on every minor point of doctrine.

So you have to determine how serious a matter is and what the consequences will be if people follow this teaching. In the situation Paul is correcting, you might think, "What's the big deal about forbidding marriage and the eating of certain foods?" But Paul saw behind these practices to the heart of the teaching, which was to put a relationship with God on an outward basis. This fosters hypocrisy and pride and leads people away from seeking to please God from the heart. So, Satan is out to influence your thinking. Spiritual warfare involves the mind. But it never stops there.

C. The mind affects our morals.

These men who gave heed in their thinking to the doctrines of demons ended up being hypocritical liars, seared in their consciences (4:2). When God's truth confronted their guilty consciences, instead of dealing with it through repentance, they put on a good front to others as hypocritical liars. Their wrong thinking led them to wrong morals.

The conscience is not an infallible guide. If you violate your conscience and don't repent, your conscience becomes hardened or callused. If that process continues unchecked, you reach a point where your conscience is seared (the word means "cauterized"). You have grown insensitive to sin. You can lie and not even realize you're doing it, because your conscience is seared.

A person who falls away from the faith can go one of two directions, morally speaking: Legalism or licentiousness. Second Peter and Jude describe men who fell away from the faith into licentiousness. They once made claim to be Christians. But their brand of false teaching led them and their followers into immoral behavior (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 18-20). That's one route apostasy can take.

But the doctrines of demons can also lead to legalism, which Paul is addressing here. These men were forbidding marriage and advocating abstaining from certain foods. This was probably an early form of Gnosticism. The Gnostics claimed to be Christians, but they adopted a number of wrong doctrines, one of which was that all matter is evil and spirit is good. This wrong thinking led them into these two wrong extremes morally of legalism and licentiousness. Some of the Gnostics concluded that since matter is evil, we must control the body through asceticism or denying oneself any physical pleasure. Others concluded that since matter is evil and spirit is good, there is a wide division between the two. What you do with your body doesn't matter, since it's all evil anyway. It's your spirit that counts. This led them into gross immorality and indulgence of the flesh.

Legalism and licentiousness are not opposed to one another, with grace being the balance between the two. Rather, legalism and licentiousness are two sides of the same coin. Both are devoid of a personal relationship with the living God in which all areas of life are brought under His lordship as a response to His grace. Neither legalism nor licentiousness focus on inner righteousness. The legalism Paul is attacking is as demonic in origin as licentiousness. It is the end result of wrong thinking which stems from deceitful spirits. It leads to pride, not to godliness in the inner person. The attraction of legalism is that it builds up the self.

I say this kindly, but it needs to be said, since the error is so widespread and it is the same error Paul confronts here. I'm referring to the official teaching and common practice of the Roman Catholic Church on the crucial matter of how a person gets right with God. Many Catholics, including some priests, are coming to faith in Christ as Savior. "But according to the most thorough poll of American clergy yet made, over three-quarters of Roman Catholic priests reject the view that our only hope for heaven is through personal faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They hold instead that 'heaven is a divine reward for those who earn it by their good life.'" (Christianity Today [10/23/81], p. 14.)

Those priests are in line with official Catholic dogma as set forth in the Council of Trent (which denied the Reformation teaching of salvation by grace through faith) and the more recent Vatican II, which affirmed the doctrines of Trent. Vatican II teaches that Christ's death was not sufficient for our salvation. We must also keep the sacraments and earn salvation through our suffering and good deeds. Vatican II condemns with anathema those who say that indulgences are useless or that the Church does not have the power to grant them for the task of winning salvation (these and other Catholic teachings are documented by Dave Hunt in "The Berean Call," 4/92.)

Any time a church or an individual teaches that we merit heaven by our good works, they are nullifying Christ's finished work on the

cross. Teaching that a person will gain merit with God by abstaining from marriage (as with priests), by following dietary laws, or by keeping man-made rules leads people into outward religion apart from a relationship with the living God. These are the doctrines of demons. Those who follow such teaching fall away from the truth revealed in God's Word.

This is important for you to understand because recently many evangelical churches in Flagstaff met with the Catholics in a service intended to "proclaim our Christian unity." I want you to know why I and the elders could not in good conscience join such a service and why I stand opposed to the trend among American evangelicals to minimize any differences between Protestants and Catholics. Until the Catholic Church officially recants the Council of Trent, Vatican II, and many other corrupt doctrines, the differences are irreconcilable.

After presenting the problem of falling away, Paul goes on to give the perspective needed to persevere.

2. The perspective for these times: Perseverance in God's truth with thankful hearts.

In contrast to falling away, which in the case of the legalists meant outward religion without the living God, the perspective for perseverance is holding to God's truth with thankfulness. The flavor of 1Ti 4:3-5 is that of gratefully enjoying God and His creation. There are several aspects to such perseverance:

A. Make sure you hold to integrity and truth.

These false teachers had become hypocritical liars (4:2). Hypocrisy means maintaining an outward front to look good while you're violating your conscience when others aren't looking. In order to cover your sin, you have to lie, so you let go of truthfulness. To dodge the conviction that comes through God's Word of truth, you don't confront your life with Scripture. To salve your guilty conscience, you add certain outward practices that make you seem spiritual. That's how Satan gets you to fall away.

The antidote is to hold to integrity and truth, both God's Word of truth and personal truthfulness. If you sin, confess and forsake it, don't cover it up. Daily be in God's Word and let it search your heart so that you can confront sin and grow in holiness.

B. Be alert to the spiritual danger that comes through the mind.

Stay on guard to the fact that Satan and his forces are trying to deceive our minds against God and His truth (2 Cor. 11:3). Satan especially appeals to our pride by getting us to think that we can gain merit with God by keeping man-made rules. We start thinking we're better than others because we keep such rules. Remember this: any teaching that exalts self is from the enemy. God's Word humbles us by teaching that every good gift we enjoy comes from God's undeserved favor; thus we must be thankful to God for His blessings.

Especially we need to be alert to the danger of doubting God's goodness.

In the original temptation, Satan appealed to Eve's mind and got her to doubt God's goodness: "C'mon, Eve! God is trying to hold back something good from you. This fruit will make you like God!" (see Gen. 3:1-6). The serpent was pulling God down ("He's not really good") and building Eve up (exalting self, "you can be like God"). He's still using that false teaching to cause many to fall away.

You must be especially careful to guard yourself from wrong thinking when you're going through a difficult trial. Satan comes along and sows doubts about God's goodness:

"If He were really good, He wouldn't let this happen to you. It's okay to be angry at God; He wasn't faithful to you by letting this happen."

It's in the context of trials that Peter tells us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and then says, "Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith" (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

C. Remember that God wants us to enjoy Him and His blessings with thankful hearts.

Christians are the only people who can truly enjoy life, because we're right with the Creator through faith in Jesus Christ. We know that God is for us and is working all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:31, 28). Thus Paul directs us to give thanks in everything (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18), to be overflowing with gratitude to God because of His great salvation so freely given (Col. 1:12; 2:7).

Paul mentions gratitude twice in our text (4:3, 4). If you're bitter toward God or if you're grumbling about His dealings with you, you're vulnerable to Satan's attacks. Mark it well: The path away from God is the path of ingratitude, of doubting the goodness of God (Ro 1:21; Jude 16). God's people who persevere believe in the goodness of God, even in trials, and thus are filled with gratitude.

And we not only can be thankful for spiritual blessings, but also for physical joys. When Paul says that everything created by God is good, he means, in the context for which God created it. God created marriage and the pleasure of the sexual relationship in marriage. He created good food for us to enjoy. (You can say "Amen!") God has created the beauty of this world for us to enjoy. He

has made human beings in His image. Although marred by the fall, we can enjoy the unique people of this world. We can enjoy the creative abilities God has given to people, such as literature, art, and music. In all these things, we don't just enjoy the gift, but also we enjoy God who has given them for our enjoyment.

I'm not talking about overindulgence or self-centered living. (Paul deals with the need for discipline in the verses immediately following.) I'm saying that the spiritual is not just a segment of life. Rather, all of life is spiritual and sacred, because we live it in a relationship with the Creator who designed it all for His glory and our enjoyment. The Puritans had it right: "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

We make all of life holy ("sanctified," 4:5) "by means of the word of God and prayer." Paul is referring to prayer before meals. We thank God for His provision. When Paul mentions "the word of God," he is referring to God's pronouncement in the creation that everything He made is good (Genesis 1:31). So this extends beyond table grace to all of God's creation which we are to enjoy. When we hike in the mountains or enjoy the company of family or friends, when we enjoy a concert or a good book, we do it with thankfulness to God, the Creator and giver of every good gift (James 1:17). If we know Him, we can enjoy Him through all that He has made.

Conclusion

To avoid falling away, we must persevere in God's truth with thankful hearts. It's not always easy, but even in times of trial, we need to affirm God's goodness and thank Him for His many blessings.

A number of years ago, a magazine editor's life was saved through a kidney transplant. He commented on the difference between his attitude toward life before and after his operation:

"Instead of living life to the fullest, I [formerly] let myself be bothered by things which I just laugh at today. It never occurred to me then to enjoy the coming of spring, a cool drink of water on a hot day, eating good food and all the things that normally we don't notice but let pass by."

I have no reason to think the man knew God. But we do, so we have hope not only in this life, but beyond the grave. Let's commit ourselves to His truth as revealed in His Word. Let's enjoy God and His many gifts to us so that we don't fall away.

Discussion Questions

1. Wrong behavior always begins with wrong thinking. Agree/disagree? Why?
2. How do we find the balance between holding to biblical truth and maintaining unity in love?
3. How would you define legalism? Is it as dangerous spiritually as licentiousness? Why? Why not?
4. What is the difference between asceticism and self-discipline? Between indulgence and proper enjoyment?
5. What are some implications of the truth that all of life is sacred or spiritual

1 Timothy 4:6-10 THE DISCIPLINE THAT MATTERS

Steven Cole

As I watched the downhill ski racers in the recent Winter Olympics, I sat on my couch thinking, "It sure would be fun to ski like those guys ski!" And then, to my surprise, an ad came on where the announcer asked, "Would you like to ski like these experts ski? This miraculous, proven new ski will enable you to ski like a champion! Just put it on, point down the steepest slope you can find, and you will experience the thrill previously known only to Olympic skiers! Only \$499! Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back!"

If I were dumb enough to fall for such an ad, I would deserve the fall that would await me if I put on those skis and headed down a steep hill! We all know that there is no effortless, easy way to be-coming a champion skier. To make the Olympics, those racers have spent countless hours both on and off the slopes disciplining themselves for the goal of winning the gold. Any promise of some miraculous way to do what they do apart from the years of training and hard work they have put themselves through would clearly be bogus.

Yet as Christians we fall prey to hucksters who pitch their spiritual snake oil, guaranteed to solve all our problems: "Attend this conference and your life will be forever changed." We attend and come away on a spiritual high that lasts for a while until the glow wears off. "Have this spiritual experience and you will live on a new level of joy in the Lord." We sign up and it seems to work for a while, but then disillusionment sets in. Read this book, or try this method, and you will never struggle again. But none of these panaceas deliver what they claim.

What's our problem? We're looking for an easy, quick way to get where we can only go by disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness. We're shopping for an effortless way to get what the Bible clearly states comes only through hard work and struggle. There is no way to godliness except through discipline.

In my 17 years of pastoral experience, I have discovered that, more than any other quality, self-discipline will have the greatest influence on whether you do well spiritually or not. Invariably, defeated Christians are undisciplined Christians.

I realize you didn't want to hear that! We live in a society that offers a quick fix to every problem. Whether it's "an amazing new solution" to a health problem, "a miraculous new program to lose weight," or "a proven, effortless way to learn a foreign language," we're suckers to pay hard-earned cash for the promise of easy answers to tough problems. But mark it well: You will not succeed spiritually if you do not become a disciplined person. That's the message Paul is giving to his younger co-worker, Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:6-10.

Maybe you're thinking, "I'd like to be disciplined, but I try for a while and then fall back to my old ways. What's the key to becoming disciplined?"

The key to becoming disciplined is motivation.

Why do those Olympic athletes drive themselves relentlessly for years? They're motivated to win a gold medal. Former Dallas Cowboys coach, Tom Landry, put it, "The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be" (cited by Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [NavPress], p. 18). The key to being a disciplined Christian is to be a motivated Christian.

What is it that should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness? It's that eternal issues are at stake.

Because eternal issues are at stake, we must discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

1. Eternal issues are at stake.

We aren't involved in a game of Tiddlywinks. Eternity is the issue. Nothing could be more important! Paul mentions three eternal issues which will motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness:

A. The fact of eternity itself should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:8).

The King James Version of verse 8 does not adequately communicate Paul's thought. He is not despising bodily exercise.

Rather, he is making a comparison between bodily exercise and spiritual exercise. It's fine to discipline your physical body; it will help you for a few years. But it's far better to discipline yourself spiritually, because it will put you in good stead not only in this life, but also in the life to come. We ought to work much harder at godliness than we do at our games!

The great evangelist, George Whitefield, once told of seeing some criminals riding in a cart on their way to the gallows. They were arguing like a bunch of kids going on a trip about who should sit on the right hand of the cart. Here were men condemned to die that very day, but their focus was on who got the best seat on the way to the execution!

But isn't that exactly like everyone who is living for this life rather than for eternity? You see people in our beauty-obsessed culture who are health nuts. They eat all the proper foods. They take vitamins and minerals. They work out to keep in shape. But the fact is, they're going to die. All their efforts may extend their lives a few years, if they don't get cancer or die in a car crash or some other way. But they're foolish because they're living as if this life is all there is and as if they can extend their lives indefinitely.

One of the reasons we're so spiritually flabby is that we're caught up with the temporal. We tend to think that we and others will live forever. But we won't. The Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter, used to say, "I preach as though I might never preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." The Bible is clear that as members of the fallen human race, we're all in that cart, on the way to the gallows. We'd better be preparing for what lies beyond. Be-cause eternity is a fact, we should discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

B. The fact of the living God should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:10).

"We have fixed our hope on the living God." That is, God is real. He is the God who is there, to use Francis Schaeffer's term. He is not the projection of our minds. He created the universe and all that is in it. Because He is the living God, we can live each day in communion with Him.

If that's not true, we're wasting our time. If there is no eternity with the living God, then eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow you die (1 Cor. 15:32). But if it's true that God is living, and we have fixed our hope on Him, then it should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness.

C. The fact of salvation should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:10).

“God is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.” What does Paul mean? We know that he does not mean that all people will be saved. If that were so, then why did Paul pour out his life for the gospel? Paul clearly taught that Christ is returning to take His people to be with Him, but also to deal out retribution and judgment to those who have not obeyed the gospel (2 Thess. 1:8-9). Not all will be saved.

There are two main interpretations. Calvin (and others) suggests that Paul is using the word “Savior” in a general sense with regard to the world, in that God gives protection and provision even to the wicked. But in a special sense He is the Savior of believers, since He not only gives them temporal blessings, but eternal deliverance from His judgment. The problem with this view is that it forces on the word Savior an unusual meaning that does not fit the context.

A better view is that Paul is countering the false teachers, who said that salvation is an exclusive thing for those in the inner circle who had “knowledge.” Paul is saying, “No, God wants to save all types of people in every place, from every walk of life. He has provided salvation for all, but it is only applied to those who believe in Christ.”

The point is, apart from Christ people are alienated from God, on their way to eternal judgment. But God has provided a sufficient salvation for all who will believe. Since we’re called to proclaim that good news, the fact of God’s salvation should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness.

So these eternal issues—the fact of eternity itself; the fact of the living God; and, the fact of salvation—provide the motivation for the hardship of discipline unto godliness. Then comes the work:

2. We must discipline ourselves for godliness.

What is discipline? What does it entail? I want to sketch what it is and is not. Then I’ll show how to implement it.

A. What discipline is and is not:

(1) Discipline is an ongoing process, not a quick fix.

The verb is a present imperative, pointing to a process. This means that you can never say, “I’ve arrived!” It’s like staying in shape physically: You can do it for 25 years, but the day you quit you start getting flabby. You’ve got to keep at it. So, no matter where you’re at spiritually, 1Ti 4:7 applies to you. It’s a lifetime process.

(2) Discipline involves hard work.

“We labor and strive.” (“Strive” is a better reading than the KJV’s “suffer reproach.”) It’s a word used of wrestlers in an athletic contest, giving every ounce of strength to defeat their opponent. This means that discipline doesn’t come naturally! It’s not something some people are just born with. It’s not a spiritual gift.

By definition, discipline means acting against your feelings because you have a higher goal. We’re being encouraged in our day to live by our feelings. If we violate our feelings, we might do some sort of psychological damage! But if you’re disciplined, even though you feel like that piece of chocolate cake, since your goal is to lose weight, you deny your feelings. Or, you feel like sacking in; but your goal is to be godly, so you roll out of bed, grab your Bible, and spend time with the Lord. It’s not easy and it doesn’t always feel good!

Discipline is something in which both God and you must be involved. “Self-control” is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). That is, when the Spirit of God controls you, He gives you the ability to control yourself. Thus God does it, and yet Paul can tell Timothy, “Discipline yourself ...” You have a responsibility in the matter. It boils down to the question, “Are you willing to pay the price?” If athletes put themselves through years of hard work and training to get a silly gold medal, shouldn’t we be willing to pay the price to be godly?

(3) Discipline means discarding hindrances.

Paul tells Timothy to “have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women” (1Ti 4:7). Some translate it “old wives’ tales.” It refers to the stories an old woman might pass on to her grandchildren. Paul was ridiculing the “endless myths and genealogies” of the false teachers (1Ti 1:4).

The Greek word for “discipline” is *gymnazo*, from which we get “gymnasium.” It came from a word meaning “naked,” because the Greek athletes would strip off their clothing so as not to be hindered from their purpose of winning their event. The point is, if we’re going to train ourselves for godliness, there are hindrances we have to strip off. We have to say no to things that hinder us from our purpose. Of course that includes all sin; but also it includes things that may be all right in and of themselves, but they don’t help you grow toward godliness. It certainly means control-ling the TV set!

(4) Discipline means keeping your eyes on the goal.

The goal is fairly clear: “godliness” (in the Greek) has the nuance of “reverence for God.” So it points to a person who is growing in conformity to God in his character and daily life because he has fixed his hope on God (4:10). He takes God seriously and recognizes the practical implications in terms of developing a godly thought life, godly speech, and godly actions. The way we move toward that goal (in the words of Heb. 12:2) is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus so that we become more and more like Him, especially as we endure the trials God uses to make us more like Him.

(5) Discipline means managing your time in line with your goals.

This point is not directly in the text, but it’s a logical necessity. An athlete works his schedule around his goal. He says no to many good activities so that he can say yes to his daily workout. As Annie Dillard has pointed out, “How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives” (Reader’s Digest, [7/92], p. 137). And how we spend our minutes and hours is how we spend our days. The goal of godliness demands that you spend time each day alone with God in His Word and prayer.

It’s not a question of having a schedule. You have one! We all have the same number of hours in our day. We all make time to do what we want to do. The question is, Is your schedule in line with your goal of becoming a godly person?

(6) Discipline is not opposed to the grace of God.

Many people resist discipline by saying, “That’s legalistic!” It can become legalistic if your motive is wrong. But if your motive is to love and please the God who gave His Son for you, it’s not legalistic. Grace doesn’t mean sloppy living (1 Cor. 15:10).

And discipline, though it sounds restrictive, is the only way to true freedom. Someone who has disciplined himself to play the piano or speak a foreign language is free to do things I am restricted from doing. As we saw last week, Paul talks about enjoying God and then moves on to talk about discipline. They go hand in hand. The disciplined Christian enjoys God in ways the undisciplined person can’t.

(7) Discipline is not driving yourself relentlessly.

Some people get obsessed with discipline to the point that they can’t relax or enjoy time off. We need the balance of Scripture which teaches that God rested after His labor, and so should we. He made our bodies to require sleep. We’re not good stewards if we drive ourselves until we burn out, either physically or emotionally.

Often our problem is that we mess around when we’re sup-posed to be working, so we feel guilty when we try to relax. A disciplined Christian will work hard when he works and thankfully take time for rest and recreation when it’s needed. As far as the Lord’s work goes, it helps me to remember that God is the Savior of the world; I’m not. By His grace, I can labor and strive for His purpose, but I can also relax and not worry that somehow His purpose will flounder without me.

(8) Discipline is not being so rigid that you are insensitive to what God is doing.

This point also comes from the balance of Scripture, not directly from our text. It’s good to be disciplined for the purpose of godliness, but the flesh can abuse that good goal by becoming so rigid that you miss what God is doing. For example, you’re having your devotional time and your toddler bounds into the room and says, “Daddy, look what I did!” You say, “Go away! Can’t you see that I’m reading the Bible!” You’re not being disciplined; you’re being rigid and insensitive to your child. Jesus always did the Father’s will, but He always had time for people who interrupted Him (Mark 5:21-43).

B. How we implement discipline:

(1) By being constantly nourished in the truths of the faith (1Ti 4:6).

The verb is present tense; the meaning is, we must continually feed on God’s Word, or “sound doctrine.” As we saw last week, spiritual warfare involves your mind, and your mind affects your morals. So it’s crucial that you feed your mind on God’s Word through every means—by hearing it preached; by reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on it. God’s Word shows us what God is like and how He wants us to live. There is no such thing as godliness apart from constant nourishment from God’s Word of truth.

If you’re not a reader, learn! God saw fit to record His truth in written form. Almost anyone can learn to read. That may be a necessary step in disciplining yourself for godliness. Meanwhile, get the Bible on tape and listen to it daily. If you don’t have a regular time in the Word, set a realistic goal and stick with it. Start out with 15 minutes a day reading the Bible and 5-10 minutes in prayer. When you’re consistent, you can increase the time. But you need spiritual nourishment from the Word as much as you need to eat. Also, we implement spiritual discipline ...

(2) By being obedient to the truths of the faith (4:6). “... which you have been following ...”

We aren’t supposed to learn God’s Word for the purpose of filling our heads. It is to change our lives. So we always should come to

God's Word with the prayer, "Lord, show me how this applies to me, and enable me to obey it!" It may be a wrong attitude or thought I need to change. Maybe my speech isn't honoring to God. I may need to change my behavior.

The Word often confronts my selfishness. Remember, the goal of the Christian life is not happiness and fulfillment. It is godliness and becoming a good servant of Christ Jesus (4:6). But the beautiful irony is that as we pursue that goal, God blesses us with true joy and fulfillment, because godliness holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come (4:8).

Conclusion

Marla and I both had an Italian sociology professor in college who used to say, "Class, whenever I feel like exercising, I go and lie down for two hours until the feeling goes away." A lot of us can identify with that! Exercise is discipline and discipline is hard work, and who likes hard work?

And yet, like it or not, discipline is essential for godliness. And godliness is essential because eternity is certain. There are no shortcuts, no easy, effortless ways to godliness. But if you have fixed your hope on the living God who is the Savior, can you do anything less than discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness?

Discussion Questions

1. If you knew you had one year to live, how would your life be different? How about one week?
2. Where's the balance between an eternal perspective and long-range goals?
3. What are some "good" (not sinful) hindrances to discipline you struggle with?
4. How do we find the balance between being disciplined and being driven?
5. Jesus was disciplined, but never seemed to be in a hurry. How can we do likewise in our busy culture?

1 Timothy 4:6-10 The Discipline That Matters

Steven Cole

As I watched the 10K runners in the recent Olympics, I sat on my couch thinking, "It sure would be fun to run like those guys do!" And then, to my surprise, an ad came on where the announcer asked, "Would you like to run like these athletes do? This miraculous, proven new pill will enable you to run like a champion! Just take one pill daily and within 30 days, you will run the 10 K in under 30 minutes. Only \$50 for 30 pills!"

If I were dumb enough to fall for such an ad, I would deserve to lose my \$50! We all know that there is no effortless, easy way to becoming a champion runner. To make the Olympics, those runners have spent countless hours disciplining themselves for the goal of winning the gold. Any promise of some miraculous way to do what they do apart from years of training and hard work would clearly be bogus.

Yet as Christians we fall prey to hucksters who pitch their spiritual snake-oil, guaranteed to solve all our problems: "Attend this conference and your life will be forever changed." We attend and come away on a spiritual high that lasts for a while, but the glow wears off. "Have this spiritual experience and you will live on a new spiritual high." We try it for a while, but then disillusionment sets in. Read this book, or try this method, and you will never struggle again. But none of these panaceas deliver what they claim.

What's our problem? We're looking for an easy, quick way to get where we can only go by disciplining ourselves for the purpose of godliness. We're shopping for an effortless way to get what the Bible clearly states comes only through hard work and struggle. There is no way to godliness except through discipline. In my 24 years of pastoral experience, I have found that, more than any other quality, self-discipline will have the greatest influence on whether you do well spiritually or not. Invariably, defeated Christians are undisciplined Christians.

I know, you didn't want to hear that! We live in a society that offers a quick fix to every problem. Whether it's "a miraculous new program to lose weight," or "a proven, effortless way to learn a foreign language," we're suckers. We'll pay hard-earned cash for the promise of easy answers to tough problems. But mark it well: You will not make it spiritually if you do not become disciplined. That's the message Paul is giving to his younger co-worker, Timothy, in 1 Timothy 4:6-10.

Maybe you're thinking, "I'd like to be disciplined, but I try for a while and then fall back to my old ways. What's the key to becoming disciplined?" The key to discipline is motivation. Why do those Olympic athletes drive themselves relentlessly for years? They're motivated to win a gold medal. The late Dallas Cowboys coach, Tom Landry, put it, "The job of a football coach is to make men do what they don't want to do in order to achieve what they've always wanted to be" (cited by Donald Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* [NavPress], p. 18). The key to being a disciplined Christian is to be a motivated Christian.

What is it that should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness? It's that eternal issues are at stake.

Because eternal issues are at stake, we must discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

1. Eternal issues are at stake.

Souls live forever. Eternity is the issue. Nothing could be more important! Paul mentions three eternal issues that will motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness:

A. The fact of eternity itself should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:8).

Paul is not despising bodily exercise. Rather, he is making a comparison between bodily exercise and spiritual exercise. It's fine to discipline your physical body; it will help you for a few years. But it's far better to discipline yourself spiritually, because it will put you in good stead not only in this life, but also in the life to come. This means that we ought to work much harder at godliness than we do at our games! Do you?

The great evangelist, George Whitefield, once told of seeing some criminals riding in a cart on their way to the gallows. They were arguing like a bunch of kids going on a trip about who should sit on the right hand of the cart. Here were men condemned to die in a few hours, but their focus was on who got the best seat on the way to the execution!

But isn't that exactly like everyone who is living for this life rather than for eternity? You see people in our beauty-obsessed culture who are health nuts. They eat all the proper foods. They take vitamins and minerals. They work out to keep in shape. But the fact is, they're going to die. All their efforts may extend their lives a few years, if they don't get cancer or die in a car crash or some other way. But they're foolish because they're living as if this life is all there is and as if they can extend their lives indefinitely.

One of the reasons we're so spiritually flabby is that we're caught up with the temporal. We tend to think that we and others will live forever. But we won't. The Puritan preacher, Richard Baxter, used to say, "I preach as though I might never preach again, and as a dying man to dying men." The Bible is clear that as members of the fallen human race, we're all in that cart, on the way to the gallows. We'd better be preparing for what lies beyond. Because eternity is a fact, we should discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness.

B. The fact of the living God should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness (1Ti 4:10).

"We have fixed our hope on the living God." That is, God is real. He is the God who is there, to use Francis Schaeffer's term. He is not the projection of our minds. He created the universe and all that is in it. Because He is the living God, we can live each day in communion with Him.

If that's not true, we're wasting our time. If there is no eternity with the living God, then eat, drink, and be merry, because tomorrow you die (1 Cor. 15:32). But if it's true that God is living, and we have fixed our hope on Him, then it should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness.

C. The fact of salvation should motivate us to discipline our-selves for godliness (1Ti 4:10).

"God is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." What does Paul mean? He does not mean that all people will be saved. If that were so, then why did Paul pour out his life for the gospel? Paul clearly taught that Christ is returning to take His people to be with Him, but also to mete out judgment to those who have not obeyed the gospel (2Th 1:8-9). Not all will be saved.

There are two main interpretations. Some say that Paul is using the word "Savior" in a general sense with regard to the world, in that God gives protection and provision even to the wicked. But in a special sense He is the Savior of believers, since He not only gives them temporal blessings, but eternal deliverance from His judgment. The problem with this view is that it forces on the word Savior an unusual meaning that does not fit the context.

A better view is that Paul is countering the false teachers, who said that salvation is an exclusive thing for those in the inner circle who had secret "knowledge." Paul is saying, "No, God wants to save all types of people in every place, from every walk of life. He has made salvation available for all, but it is only applied to those who believe in Christ." The point is, apart from Christ people are alienated from God, on their way to eternal judgment. But God will save all who will believe. Since we're called to proclaim that good news, the fact of God's salvation should motivate us to discipline ourselves for godliness.

So these eternal issues—the fact of eternity itself; the fact of the living God; and, the fact of salvation—should motivate us for the hardship of discipline unto godliness. Then comes the work:

2. We must discipline ourselves for godliness.

What is discipline? First I'll sketch what it is. Then I'll show how to implement it.

A. What discipline is:

1) Discipline is an ongoing process, not a quick fix.

The present imperative verb points to a process. This means that you can never say, "I've arrived!" It's like staying in shape

physically: You can do it for 25 years, but the day you quit you start getting flabby. You've got to keep at it. So, no matter where you're at spiritually, 1Ti 4:7 applies to you. It's a lifetime process.

2) Discipline involves hard work.

"We labor and strive." Strive is a word used of wrestlers in an athletic contest, giving every ounce of strength to defeat their opponent. This means that discipline doesn't come naturally! It's not a spiritual gift.

By definition, discipline means acting against your feelings because you have a higher goal. We're being encouraged in our day to live by our feelings. If we violate our feelings, we might do some sort of psychological damage! But if you're disciplined, even though you feel like that piece of chocolate cake, since your goal is to lose weight, you deny your feelings. Or, you feel like sacking in; but your goal is to be godly, so you roll out of bed, grab your Bible, and spend time with the Lord. It's not easy and it doesn't always feel good at the moment!

Discipline is something in which both God and you must be involved. "Self-control" is a fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:23). That is, when the Spirit of God controls you, He gives you the ability to control yourself. Thus God does it, and yet Paul can tell Timothy, "Discipline yourself." You have responsibility in the process. The bottom line is, "Are you willing to pay the price?" If athletes put themselves through years of hard work and training to get a silly gold medal, shouldn't we be willing to pay the price to be godly?

3) Discipline means discarding hindrances.

Paul tells Timothy to "have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women" (4:7). Some translate it "old wives' tales." It refers to the stories an old woman might pass on to her grand-children. Paul was ridiculing the "endless myths and genealogies" of the false teachers (1:4). These things may have been interesting, but they did not contribute toward godliness.

The Greek word for "discipline" is *gymnazo*, from which we get "gymnasium." It came from a word meaning "naked," because the Greek athletes would strip off their clothing so as not to be hindered from their purpose of winning their event. The point is, if we're going to train ourselves for godliness, there are hindrances we have to strip off. We have to say no to things that hinder us from our purpose. Of course that includes all sin; but also it includes things that may be all right in and of themselves, but they don't help you grow toward godliness. It certainly means controlling the TV set and the amount of time you play computer games!

4) Discipline means keeping your eyes on the goal.

The goal is fairly clear: "godliness" (in the Greek) has the nuance of "reverence for God." It points to a person who is growing in conformity to God in his character and daily life because he has fixed his hope on God (4:10). He takes God seriously and recognizes the practical implications in terms of developing a godly thought life, godly speech, and godly actions. The way we move toward that goal is to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus (Heb. 12:2) so that we become more and more like Him, especially as we endure the trials that God uses to make us more like Him.

5) Discipline means managing your time in line with your goals.

This point is not directly in the text, but it's a logical necessity. An athlete works his schedule around his goal. He says no to many good activities so that he can say yes to his daily workout. Annie Dillard has said the obvious, "How we spend our days is, of course, how we spend our lives" (Reader's Digest, [7/92], p. 137). And how we spend our minutes and hours is how we spend our days. The goal of godliness demands that you spend time each day alone with God in His Word and prayer.

It's not a question of having a schedule. You have one! We all have the same number of hours in our day. We all make time to do what we want to do. The question is, Is your schedule in line with your goal of becoming a godly person?

6) Discipline is not opposed to the grace of God.

Many people resist discipline by saying, "That's legalistic!" It can become legalistic if your motive is wrong. But if your motive is to love and please the God who gave His Son for you, it's not legalistic. Grace doesn't mean sloppy living (1 Cor. 15:10).

Although discipline sounds restrictive, it is the only way to true freedom. Someone who has disciplined himself to play the piano or to speak a foreign language is free to do things that I am restricted from doing. In the verses just prior to this, Paul talks about enjoying God and then moves on to talk about discipline. They go hand in hand. The disciplined Christian enjoys God in ways the undisciplined person cannot.

7) Discipline is not driving yourself relentlessly.

Some people get obsessed with discipline to the point that they can't relax or enjoy time off. We need the balance of Scripture, which teaches that God rested after His labor, and so should we. He made our bodies to require sleep. We're not good stewards if we drive ourselves until we burn out, either physically or emotionally.

Often our problem is that we mess around when we're supposed to be working, so we feel guilty when we try to relax. A disciplined Christian will work hard when he works and thankfully take time for rest and recreation when it's needed. As far as the Lord's work

goes, it helps me to remember that God is the Savior of the world; I'm not. By His grace, I can labor and strive for His purpose, but I can also relax and not worry that somehow His purpose will flounder without me.

8) Discipline is not being so rigid that you are insensitive to what God is doing.

This point also comes from the balance of Scripture, not directly from our text. It's good to be disciplined for the purpose of godliness, but you can abuse that good goal by becoming so rigid that you miss what God is doing. For example, if you're having your quiet time and an unsaved friend knocks on your door and wants to talk about spiritual things, you would be too rigid to send him away so that you can finish your quiet time. Jesus always did the Father's will, but He always had time for people who interrupted Him (Mark 5:21-43).

B. How we implement discipline:

1) By being constantly nourished in the truths of the faith (1Ti 4:6).

The present tense verb means that we must continually feed on God's Word, or "sound doctrine." Spiritual warfare involves your mind, and your mind affects your morals. So it's crucial that you feed your mind on God's Word through every means—by hearing it preached; by reading, studying, memorizing and meditating on it. God's Word shows us what God is like and how He wants us to live. There is no such thing as godliness apart from constant nourishment from God's Word of truth.

If you're not a reader, learn! God saw fit to record His truth in written form. Almost anyone can learn to read. That may be a necessary step in disciplining yourself for godliness. Also, get the Bible on tape and listen to it daily. If you don't have a regular time in the Word, set a realistic goal and stick with it. Start out with 15 minutes a day reading the Bible and 5-10 minutes in prayer. When you're consistent, you can increase the time. But you need spiritual nourishment from the Word as much as you need to eat. Also, we implement spiritual discipline ...

2) By being obedient to the truths of the faith (1Ti 4:6).

"... which you have been following." We aren't supposed to learn God's Word so that we can win doctrinal arguments. It should change our lives. So we always should come to God's Word with the prayer, "Lord, show me how this applies to me, and enable me to obey it!" It may be a wrong attitude or thought I need to change. Maybe my speech doesn't honor God. I may need to change my behavior. The Word often confronts my selfishness.

Remember, the goal of the Christian life is not instant happiness and fulfillment. It is eternal joy in God, and that comes through godliness and becoming a good servant of Christ Jesus (1Ti 4:6). The way to lasting joy and fulfillment is discipline unto godliness, which holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come (1Ti 4:8).

Conclusion

Marla and I both had an Italian sociology professor in college who used to say, "Class, whenever I feel like exercising, I go and lie down for two hours until the feeling goes away." Many of us can identify with that! Exercise is discipline and discipline is hard work, and who likes hard work?

And yet, like it or not, discipline is essential for godliness. And godliness is essential because eternity is certain. There are no shortcuts, no easy, effortless ways to godliness. But if you have fixed your hope on the living God who is the Savior, can you do anything less than discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness

1 Timothy 4:11-16 YOUR WALK AND YOUR WORK FOR CHRIST

William Carey, often called the father of modern missions, was a shoe cobbler by trade before he went to India. He kept a map of India in his shop, stopping every so often to study and pray over it. Sometimes, because of his preaching ministry, his shoe business suffered. One day a friend admonished him for neglecting his business. "Neglecting my business?" said Carey, looking at him intently. "My business is to extend the kingdom of God. I only cobble shoes to pay expenses."

No matter what your occupation, every Christian should have Carey's mentality: "My real business is to extend God's kingdom; I just work to pay expenses." In other words, every Christian is in the ministry. Ephesians 4:11-12 states that God gave to the church apostles, prophets, evangelists, and pastor-teachers "for the equip- ping of the saints for the work of service (ministry), to the building up of the body of Christ." My job is to equip you to do the work of the ministry. If you are a saint (= "holy one," true of every believer) then you're in the ministry! Some may be supported so that they work full-time in their ministry. But every Christian, like William Carey, should see their main business as serving God.

Since that is the clear teaching of the New Testament, it ought to be of great concern to every Christian to know how to fulfill the

ministry God has entrusted to him or her. It seems as if there are droves who are either burning out on ministry because they are exhausted, or bombing out of ministry because of moral failure. Timothy's danger was that he would just fade out of the ministry because his timid personality had a tendency to want to avoid conflict. The fact is, you can't preach God's truth without confronting error and offending some people. So Timothy was in danger of neglecting his ministry (1Ti 4:14).

Some of you are not involved in any kind of ministry for the Lord. Maybe you burned out, bombed out, or just faded out. Frankly, ministry is battle, and who likes war? The tendency of the flesh is to let someone else do it, especially if it's a hassle. Maybe you justify your lack of involvement by thinking, "I'm not all that gifted anyway." But remember, in the parable of the talents, it was the guy with only one who buried it and was rebuked by his master because he didn't use it to further the master's interests. If you know Christ as Savior, you're called to serve Him in some capacity. In our text, Paul gives us a basic lesson of Christian service that will enable us to fulfill our God-given ministries:

Your walk with Christ is the necessary basis for your work for Christ.

"Pay close attention to yourself [your walk] and to your teaching [your work]" (1Ti 4:16).

It's the same principle Paul imparted to the Ephesian elders when he said, "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock" (Acts 20:28). First, your walk; then, your work. Your work for the Lord must always be the overflow of your walk with the Lord. I define ministry as being full of Jesus Christ and slopping over onto others. That means that your ministry will be backed by a life of integrity; you are imparting to others what you have because you walk in reality with Christ. If we all would learn this simple but profound principle, that our walk with Christ is the necessary basis for our work for Christ, we would avoid burning out, bombing out, and fading out in the work He has given us to do.

1. Pay attention to your walk with Christ.

One reason the church is often short of workers is that so many who attend church are not walking in daily reality with the living Lord. They have fallen into the American self-centered way of life. They attend church because it meets some of their personal needs. If it fails to meet their needs, they either shop around for another church that does meet their needs or they stop going altogether. They are living for self and using God and the church to help self be more fulfilled. Sometimes volunteering to serve in the church helps meet a need to feel useful, so they sign up. But even their service has a self-focus. They do it because it meets their needs.

If I have just described you, I say to you in love, you are not living the Christian life. The Christian life is not living for self and using God and the church to meet your needs. The Christian life involves denying yourself daily and living under the lordship of Christ. We are no longer our own; we have been bought with the precious blood of Jesus. We no longer live for ourselves, but for Him who died and rose again on our behalf (2 Cor. 5:15). As we live each day with our hope fixed on the living God, He shapes our character in conformity to Christ and then uses our changed lives as a witness of His saving grace so that others come to know Him and grow in Him.

So ministry is not volunteering for Jesus, or doing a job because the pastor or the church needs your help. Ministry is based on dying to self and living to please Jesus. God never calls us primarily to a task. Rather, He calls us to Himself. Before I can do something for God I must be something in relationship with God. I can only impart to others in ministry what I possess from my walk. Therefore, the primary responsibility of every believer is to develop godliness through the daily discipline of a walk with the Lord Jesus.

Timothy was relatively young when Paul wrote this, about 35 (a mere youth from my perspective now!). Some of you think 35 is ancient, but in that culture age was more highly regarded than in ours. Paul wrote, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness" in part for the church, so that they would not shrug off Timothy's teaching with the excuse that he was too young to know what he was talking about. But Paul also wrote it for Timothy. He's saying that even if you're younger in years, you can have a ministry if your message is backed by a godly life.

Paul mentions five areas (the KJV's "spirit" is based on weak manuscript evidence and should be omitted):

A. Speech

There's a convicting one, for starters! How's your speech? Has your tongue been tamed by the power of God's Spirit? As James 3 tells us, the tongue can be an instrument for great evil or great good, depending upon whether it is under the control of the flesh or of the Spirit. Ephesians 4:29 commands, "Let no unwholesome [lit., rotten] word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, that it may give grace to those who hear." There is no place for name-calling, sarcasm, profanity, ridicule, gossip, blaming, destructive criticism, angry words of threat and revenge, griping, complaining, lying, filthy talk, or dirty jokes.

Instead a godly person will use words to build up others and show them grace: encouragement, praise, appreciation, gratefulness,

cheerfulness, understanding, sympathy, testimony, truth, caring correction and warning, and helpful counsel.

So often, even in Christian homes, family members rip into one another with rotten words and never confess their sinful speech and ask forgiveness. Several years ago Marla and I were at a pastoral couples conference. We had just checked into our room when we could hear through the door into the adjoining room a couple exchanging barbed attacks on each other. This was a pastor and his wife, but they sounded like the kind of destructive speech you hear on the worst TV sitcoms! The man was disqualified for ministry because he was not using godly speech toward his wife. Walking with the Lord Jesus means bringing your speech under His lordship and judging yourself when you sin with your words.

B. Conduct (KJV = conversation)

In modern parlance, your lifestyle. This points to your behavior which should testify to your commitment to Jesus Christ. Honesty, integrity, how you spend your time and money, your priorities, your attitude toward possessions, your personal appearance, the way you maintain your home, the way you treat people—all of these factors should add up to show that Christ is Lord of your life.

C. Love

This focuses on your relationships. Biblical love is not a gushy feeling, but rather a self-sacrificing, caring commitment which shows itself in seeking the highest good of the one loved. Since the highest good for each person is that they glorify God in their lives, love is committed to help each person grow in submission to Christ's lordship. Paul spells out the qualities of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Each of us should frequently evaluate our conduct toward others, especially in our homes, by that list.

D. Faith

This could point to faithfulness or reliability, a fruit of the Spirit. Or, it could point to the faith we are to have toward God. We call ourselves believers, and yet all too often we are not believing believers! We aren't expecting God to work. We aren't trusting God with our problems. But in order to carry on any significant ministry, we must be men and women of faith. We have leaned upon God in our own trials and have proved Him to be faithful. So we can ask and trust God to work in the lives of those to whom we minister.

E. Purity

This means moral purity, not just outwardly, but in the thought life. Sexual immorality always begins in the mind. Walking with Christ means taking "every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). As soon as a wrong thought pops into your mind, you confess it and turn from it. You "put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Rom. 13:14).

A survey of American pastors revealed that 20 percent view pornographic material at least once a month (Leadership [Winter, 1988], p. 24)! And only 64 percent of evangelical seminary students think that watching pornographic movies is morally wrong (David Wells, Christianity Today [1/15/88], p. 25)! Is it any wonder the American church lacks God's blessing?

I believe that a man who yields to viewing pornography at least once a month should not be in leadership until he gains victory. Purity in thought and deed is essential for ministry.

Thus your walk with Christ is the necessary basis of any work you do for Christ. Since the Lord wants every member of His body to function in serving Him, pay attention to your walk. You don't have to have all these qualities in perfection before you start serving the Lord. But you do need to be growing in each area, bringing every aspect of your life into submission to the lordship of Christ. Then, as you relate to others, you slop over what you have of Christ to them; you are ministering.

But ministry doesn't happen automatically. It requires attention and work as well:

2. Pay attention to your work for Christ.

"Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching" (1Ti 4:16).

Since Timothy's spiritual gift was in the area of public ministry of the Word, he was to focus on that. Note the importance of the ministry of the Word in the church assembly: reading it (especially in a culture where many slaves would have been illiterate); applying it to life ("exhortation"); and, teaching it (4:13). Paul exhorts Timothy not to neglect his gift (4:14), to take pains in making progress in it (4:15), and to persevere in it (4:16), which implies that it won't be easy or automatic. There is much more that could be said, but I want to point out five things concerning spiritual gifts:

A. God has given every believer at least one gift.

A spiritual gift may be defined as "a God-given ability for service" (Dr. Ryrie). While there are a lot of debatable aspects about spiritual gifts, it's significant that in each of the four New Testament passages dealing with spiritual gifts, it is stated that each believer has one (Rom. 12:3-6; 1 Cor. 12:7; Eph. 4:7; 1 Pet. 4:10). You have not been left out. God has gifted you to serve Him.

B. Your gifts will be recognized and confirmed by the Body.

Normally, believers receive a spiritual gift at conversion. Of course God can bestow other gifts subsequent to salvation as He deems necessary to equip a person for a specific ministry. Apparently God revealed to Paul what Timothy's ministry was to be. The elders at Timothy's home church affirmed Paul's prophecy. So they laid hands on Timothy, prayed for him, and he received the gift of teaching for his task (see 2 Tim. 1:6).

God does not normally reveal your gift supernaturally. As you grow in Christ and get involved in serving Him, other believers begin to confirm your gift. They will say things like "You're good at that," or, "God ministers through you in that area." I remember even when I was in college and would take a stab at teaching, as unpolished as I was, people would tell me how much it had helped them. If every time you try to teach, you see people squirming in their seats, looking at their watches, and not coming back the next time you're scheduled, maybe your gift is in another area!

C. Your gifts must be exercised and developed.

Even though Timothy received his gift in a rather dramatic fashion, he had to work at developing it. Note the words Paul uses to exhort Timothy to exercise and develop his gift (1Ti 4:14-16): Don't neglect it. "Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them." Make evident progress. "Pay close attention." "Persevere in these things." In 2 Timothy 1:6, Paul had to exhort Timothy to kindle afresh his gift. The fire was dying out. The spiritual muscle can atrophy from non-use.

Although spiritual gifts are God-given, they're not automatic or fully developed. You must make a commitment to fulfill the ministry God has given you: "be absorbed in these things." It's a good idea for a new believer (or one who doesn't know his or her gifts) to try as wide a range of ministry experiences as possible. As you do certain things, you will narrow down your field of interest and ability until you discover your area of gift. Then concentrate primarily on your area of gift, while remembering that every Christian is responsible to serve in most areas. In other words, just because your gift isn't helps doesn't mean that you never help others. But you focus in your area of gift. You work hard to develop your ministry skills in that area.

A common mistake many pastors make, especially as a church grows, is neglecting the ministry of the Word. They start doing everything else, or often become more like the manager of a company, and the teaching ministry suffers. But a pastor's main work is preaching and teaching to equip the rest of the church for their ministries (4:13-16).

D. Your gifts, when backed by godliness, should be exercised with confidence in the Lord.

As I emphasized already, giftedness must be accompanied by godliness. But my point here is that when gifts are backed by godliness, they can then be exercised with the quiet confidence that your faith is in God and you're doing what He wants you to do. So when opposition comes (as it often does), you don't quit in anger or frustration. You persevere.

Timothy was a timid fellow. Perhaps he was threatened by the older Ephesian elders. Maybe he felt inadequate ministering in the shadow of a man like Paul. Maybe he was afraid of people. Paul says, "Prescribe and teach these things!" (4:11). The word "prescribe" means to command. It refers to an order passed down a military chain of command. What Paul is saying is, "Timothy, exercise your gift with confidence and authority, backed up by your godly life!" And, persevere when opposition comes (4:16).

Perhaps this especially applies to the gift of teaching. You can't be a people-pleaser and preach God's truth. The Bible isn't God's handbook of helpful hints for happy living. It gives us God's sure truth, His commandments for life. It confronts sin and selfishness. God's spokesman had better not beat around the bush.

Hugh Latimer, who later was martyred by Bloody Mary used to say to himself before he preached at the royal court: "Latimer, Latimer, thou art going to speak before the high and mighty king, Henry VIII, who is able, if he think fit, to take thy life away. Be careful what thou sayest. But Latimer, Latimer, remember thou art also about to speak before the King of kings and Lord of lords. Take heed thou dost not displease Him."

But it also applies to every spiritual gift when the person is growing in godliness. If you're walking with Christ, then you have a vital contribution to make to His body. We should never do it with arrogance or confidence in ourselves. But the point is, God wants to use you to impart something of Christ to others. It's not humility, but rather the sin of being too self-absorbed, if, like Moses when God called him, you refuse to do what God has gifted and called you to do. And you're not being faithful to Him if you quit at the first sign of difficulty.

E. Remember that eternal issues are at stake in the exercise of your spiritual gift.

"You will save both yourself and those who hear you" (4:16). Paul obviously is not talking about being saved by works. We are saved by grace through faith apart from works (Eph. 2:8-9). But there is also a future aspect to salvation. Those who are saved will persevere and they will influence others to be saved as well. This may apply more to those with gifts of teaching or evangelism, but it also applies to someone with the gift of helps or giving or showing mercy. As you grow in godliness and exercise your gift faithfully as unto the Lord, He will use you in the eternal salvation of lost people.

You need to remember this especially when opposition comes. Timothy was not in an easy situation in Ephesus, where he had to confront these false teachers. No doubt he was being at-tacked. It would have been easy to say, "Why bother? Why take this flak? I'm out of here!" But Paul says, "Timothy, remember that eternal issues are at stake! You must persevere in the salvation you have received. Those hearing your message need to be saved and to persevere. So when you're discouraged, when you're being at-tacked, don't quit! Eternal issues are at stake.

Conclusion

Stan Mikita, a star center for the Chicago Blackhawks hockey team, used to get in a lot of fights during games. He stopped one day when his daughter, Meg, who was eight at the time, asked a very grown up question: "How can you score a goal, Daddy, when you're in the penalty box all the time?"

If I might rephrase the question, How can you work for the Lord if you aren't walking with the Lord? If you have trusted in Christ, you're on His team. You're in the ministry. You are as responsible as I am before God to fulfill your ministry. To do it, pay attention to your walk with Christ; that's the foundation. And, pay attention to your work for Him. Don't neglect the gift He has en-trusted to you.

Discussion Questions

1. How would this church be different if every member viewed himself or herself as a minister of Jesus Christ?
2. How godly does a person need to be to get involved in minis-try?
3. How important is it to know your spiritual gift? What difference does it make?
4. Why are so many Christians suffering "burnout"? Is it inevitable? How can it be avoided?

1 Timothy 5

1 Timothy 5:1-2 THE MINISTRY OF CORRECTION

Steven Cole

If you've ever done any boating, you know how essential it is to stay on course. If you steer just a few degrees off the desired course, you can wind up far from where you wanted to go. I read once of a shipwreck that happened because a sailor broke off the small tip of his knife blade while he was cleaning the ship's compass. He didn't remove it, and that little bit of metal pulled the compass off its true reading, resulting in the ship's running aground. A slight deviation, if left uncorrected, can result in great devastation.

It's the same spiritually. Correction is not a nicety; it's a necessity. If our lives veer off-course and continue in that wrong direction, it can result in shipwreck of our faith. Because of that fact, God wants every believer to be involved in the ministry of correction. Often a brother or sister is off course and doesn't know it. God calls us to correct that person in love.

The ministry of correction is essential in the family of God.

It's essential, but never easy. I dislike nothing in ministry more than to have to confront someone with sin in his life. But it must be done. As I emphasized last week, every believer is in the minis-try. And one of the most helpful ministries you can perform is the ministry of correction. Quite often, you can correct a member of the body whom I or the elders cannot effectively correct, because you know the person better than we do. He is your friend, so he's more likely to listen to you than to someone he doesn't know. But it's still not easy to do.

Today I want to talk on how to carry out this ministry of correction properly. We will examine Paul's instructions to Timothy (1 Tim. 5:1-2); but we will also go to some other Scriptures to give us the big picture. I encourage you to take some notes, because you are not exempt from this ministry. Some of you know of fellow believers who need correction. But you haven't gone to them in love and offered correction. Maybe you don't know how or maybe you're chicken. But you're not loving your brother or sister if you let them head toward shipwreck and don't try to correct him or her.

We will look first at some hindrances to this ministry; then at some preliminary questions; finally, at the procedure.

HINDRANCES TO CORRECTION:

There are a number of barriers which prevent us from correcting those who need it. These need to be removed if we want God to

use us in this vital ministry.

1. Fear

We're chicken! It's threatening to confront someone who is out of line. I'll be honest: I struggle with anxiety when I have to correct anyone.

How do you overcome this fear? The only thing that helps me is to fear God more than men and to realize that God will hold me accountable if I see someone going astray and do not warn them and seek to correct them. So I do it out of obedience to God.

If your kids, without your knowledge, were playing on a dangerous street, and if another adult saw them in danger and merely shook his head and said, "They shouldn't do that, they'll get hurt," you would be angry if you found out about it. You would say, "You mean to tell me that you saw my kids in danger, and you didn't do anything about it? Don't you care about anyone except yourself?"

In the same way, God isn't pleased when we see one of His children, whom He purchased with the blood of His own Son, straying onto a dangerous path while we merely look, shake our heads and say, "He shouldn't do that; he'll get hurt," but do nothing about it.

If you care, you must confront. You must warn the person of the danger of His ways, if for no other reason, at least to absolve yourself of responsibility (Acts 20:26-27; Ezek. 3:17-21). Sheep are valuable to the Shepherd (Acts 20:28). If we love Him, they must also be valuable to us.

If you are faithful in this ministry of correction, you'll often get accused of not being loving. But love is not syrupy sentiment. If someone is heading downstream toward a waterfall, is it loving to stand by shaking your head and watching the person cruise toward destruction, or is it loving to do all you can to warn him? Real love has the courage to confront someone who is going astray. We're all accountable to God to love others. Obedience to God means that we must swallow our fears and correct those we know of who are going astray.

2. A misunderstanding of Matthew 7:1--"Do not judge lest you be judged."

This is one of the most misapplied verses in the Bible. We see another believer engaging in sin or heading in a wrong direction and we say, "Well, the Bible says, 'Judge not,' so I can't judge what he's doing. It's none of my business."

If that's what Jesus meant, it would be impossible to shepherd anyone! To minister to people, you must honestly evaluate where they're at in their walk with Christ and do whatever you can to help them move more toward where they ought to be.

Jesus was talking about hypocritically condemning others for their sins, while you ignore major sins in your own life. He didn't say that we aren't to remove specks from our brother's eye. He did say that we are to deal with the log in our own eye first. That leads to another hindrance:

3. Awareness of personal sins

Sometimes we're hesitant to correct others because we know we have sin in our lives that needs to be cleaned up. If we went to correct a sinning brother, he could point the finger back at us and say, "What about you?" So we don't say anything.

If that's the case, then the obvious solution is, deal with your sins! Confess them to the Lord and turn from them. It is those who are spiritual (spiritually mature) who are to help restore those caught in sin (Gal. 6:1). They do it cognizant of their own propensity toward sin ("looking to yourself, lest you too be tempted"), but not with any known, unconfessed sin in their lives.

4. Laziness

It's always easier not to confront or correct someone. Always! It's always a hassle. It takes effort to arrange a time and get together so that you can deal with the issue. But laziness is hardly a good excuse if a person is heading toward spiritual ruin. Love takes effort. Somewhere we got this crazy idea that love is a spontaneous, effortless feeling. But if love just flowed naturally, we wouldn't have to be commanded so often to do it. To obey, you have to confront your love of self above others, which is where laziness comes from. If you love someone, you're willing to inconvenience yourself to help the other person become what God wants him to be.

5. Relative morality

We live in a culture that believes there are no moral absolutes and that tolerance is the chief virtue. The church has been tainted by this, as seen when a Christian sees another believer doing something clearly against God's Word, but he rationalizes, "Well, it wouldn't be right for me to do that, but maybe it's okay for him."

But if it's against God's Word, it's wrong for anyone. Period! God's Word is our unchanging standard. If someone is violating His Word, then we have the responsibility to correct him in the proper way. Correction assumes that there is such a thing as absolute right and wrong, revealed in God's Word.

6. Uncertainty as to whether or not to correct

This is the hardest area for me. Sometimes it's a judgment call to know whether a problem will correct itself or whether it needs my

involvement. Some Christians ride around with their biblical six-shooter and whenever they see someone slightly out of line, with lightning speed they let him have it right between the eyes with a well-chosen verse. But often they do it out of spiritual pride, not love, and it usually does more harm than good.

We need sensitivity to the Holy Spirit to know when to let something go and when to move in with correction. If you know someone who is engaging in obviously sinful behavior, then correction is not optional. You may not be the one to do it, but you can't let it go without making sure that it gets done (Gal. 6:1). Also, if there is a major doctrinal issue at stake which is affecting many people, you must confront it (Paul and Peter, Gal. 2:11-14). Correction is also needed when you detect a wrong or dangerous habit-pattern in someone's life. For example, if you as a Christian man know a brother who is always checking out and flirting with women, you need to help him before he gets into worse trouble.

Beyond these guidelines, you must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit's promptings in your own life to know whether or not you should correct someone. I recommend that you study Scripture for models, especially how Jesus and Paul corrected others.

Assuming that you have removed the hindrances and you think that God wants you to correct a brother or sister, how do you go about it? I want to give you seven questions to ask yourself before you go to the person; and then, seven guidelines for giving biblical correction.

PRELIMINARIES TO CORRECTION:

1. Is my life an example?

In 1 Timothy 4:12, Paul exhorts Timothy to set an example of godliness. From that foundation, he then can appeal to older men and women, as well as to those younger than himself (5:1-2). (Note also Acts 20:26-27, 31, 33-35; Paul admonished the Ephesian elders from the basis of setting a godly example.) This doesn't mean that you must be perfect, but it does mean that you are walking uprightly with God.

2. Do I have an adequate relationship with the person?

In 1 Timothy 5:1-2, Paul tells Timothy to couch the ministry of correction in family-like relationships, treating the older men as fathers, the older women as mothers, the younger men as brothers, and the younger women as sisters. (See also Acts 20:37-38; 1 Thess. 2:7-11).

It's not always possible to have a deep relationship with those we must correct. But as a rule, the most effective correction takes place when the other person knows from experience that you love him.

3. Do I have the facts?

Proverbs 18:13 states, "He who gives an answer before he hears, it is folly and shame to him." Biblical communication is based on truth. Before you correct someone, you need to make sure that you have the full truth about what is going on, and not just one side (Prov. 18:17) and not hearsay.

4. Do I have the right motives and objectives?

Your motive should be to obey God by loving your neighbor (Matt. 22:39). Your objectives should be to restore the person to a right relationship with God and others and to help him grow to maturity in Christ (Matt. 18:15; Gal. 6:1; Col. 1:28). You need to check your heart before you go.

Your goal is not to embarrass or ridicule the other person. Nor is it to prove yourself right and the other person wrong. Your goal isn't "to give the other person a piece of your mind," or "to put him in his place" or "to get it off your chest." If you take pleasure in doing it, you probably shouldn't do it until you examine your own heart. Remember, your motive should be love and your goal should be to build up the person in Christ.

5. Do I have the right wording?

Jesus says (Matt. 18:15) that we are to "reprove" our brother with a view to winning him. "Reprove" was a legal word used of a lawyer convincing the court of his case. Any attorney worth his salt thinks through what to say and how to say it so as to convince the judge and jury of the truthfulness of his case. So we need to think carefully about what we're going to say so that our brother will be reconciled with God and with anyone he has sinned against.

The classic biblical example is Nathan when he went to confront King David about his sins of adultery and murder. He told David a story about a rich man who was unwilling to slaughter one of his many lambs, but instead took a poor man's pet lamb and slaughtered it for his dinner guest. When David grew angry at this injustice, Nathan sprung his trap by saying, "You are the man!" David was broken with repentance (2Sa 12:1-7). Remember, the goal is to help restore your brother, not blow him away or prove that you're right and he's wrong.

6. Is it God's time for me to go?

When David sinned with Bathsheba the Lord waited about one year, and then sent Nathan. Before that, David probably wouldn't have listened. As it was, he was miserable in his guilt, so he was ready for God's way out (Psalms 38, 51). You must be sensitive to the Holy Spirit as to the right timing.

It's usually not God's time for you to correct someone if you haven't spent time praying about it. A good rule is, "Don't approach a person about a problem until you have approached God about the person." Sometimes God answers your prayers and you don't even have to go to the person. At other times, He will often work to prepare the other person's heart, and He will work on you to give you the right motives and goal.

7. Am I prepared to risk rejection and attack?

Even when you follow all of these preliminary steps, a person often will be defensive and angry at you. Many times he will respond by criticizing or attacking you. If you lose your cool and counterattack him, you just lost your ability to correct biblically. You can't take the person's attack on you personally. You're God's spokesman, and being a prophet is sometimes a hazardous job. But you just calmly stand your ground and keep speaking the truth in love.

After running through this check list of questions, follow this procedure:

PROCEDURE FOR CORRECTION:

1. Be as private as the wrong.

If it's a private matter, don't correct the person in front of others. Don't take someone with you at first if it is a strictly personal matter. Matthew 18:15-17 gives the order: First private confrontation, then one or two more with you, then church action (on a serious matter).

Some matters require public confrontation. In Galatians 2:11 - 14, Paul confronted Peter "in the presence of all." It was a public matter affecting many people, so Paul dealt with it publicly.

2. Be cautious and wise.

Paul tells Timothy to deal with the younger women as sisters "in all purity" (1 Tim. 5:2). Many pastors fall into sin because they disregard Paul's warning. I heard of one pastor who fell into adultery with his secretary. The way it started was that he was on a crusade against pornography. He and his secretary were looking together at pornography that he was going to speak against! That's dumb, but it shows how if you play with the enemy, he'll eat you up!

If you don't want to fall over the cliff, don't go near the edge! You are not invincible. No matter how well-meaning you may be in trying to help another person with their problem, you are susceptible to the same sin (Gal. 6:1, "looking to yourselves, lest you too be tempted.")

3. Be direct and open.

Don't beat around the bush. Don't go behind the person's back and talk about the problem to others who aren't involved. In Galatians 2:11, Paul confronted Peter to his face. He didn't bring up the problem when Peter was not there and try to build support for his point of view. He spoke directly and openly.

4. Be humble, not judgmental.

You are a fellow sinner (Gal. 6:1). The next time, you may be the one needing correction. So you go in humility, with understanding. You do not attack the person, but try to help the person attack the problem.

5. Be gentle, but firm.

"Do not sharply rebuke" (1Tim. 5:1). The word means, don't strike him with words. Don't ride roughshod over the person. "Appeal" is the same word translated "exhortation" in 4:13. It means to come alongside to help. Correcting or giving counsel is the same as teaching, except it's done personally, to help the individual see how Scripture applies to his situation. Many Scriptures that talk about correction also mention the need for gentleness (Gal. 6:1; 2Ti 2:25). Don't blast.

But also, don't let the person rationalize or minimize his sin or shift the blame. You may need to point out the gap between what he is saying and what he's doing. You may need to show him Scripture and ask, "How does what you said (or did) fit with what God's Word says?" You aren't helping him if you allow him to justify sin. You must be gentle, but firm.

6. Be able to point him to God's Word and to the necessary steps toward restoration.

God's Word is our common source of authority. You need to have your case for correction solidly built upon God's Word so that you can gently, but firmly, keep bringing the person back to the issue: What does the Bible say? You want him to know that his problem is not with you; it is with God, whose Word he is violating. Also, be able to direct him to some biblical steps of action. Confrontation alone is not sufficient; you must also bring restoration and healing through the Word. Your goal is to restore.

7. Be persistent if necessary.

Once may not be enough. (Acts 20:3 1, “night and day for three years ...”) You don’t give up if the person doesn’t respond immediately. You may need to back off and continue praying while you wait for the right opportunity. You don’t want to nag and drive him further away. But neither do you give up and say, “I tried once to correct him, but he just wouldn’t listen!” Where would you be if the Lord gave up on you after His first attempt to correct you?

Conclusion

Back during the Communist regime in Russia a joke was going around about Boris the Russian who arrived at the Pearly gates and was welcomed by St. Peter. Showing him around, Peter said, “You can go anywhere you want except on the pink clouds.” “Why can’t I go there?” Boris asked. “Because,” Peter replied, “the pink clouds are reserved for those who did something great.” “But I have done something great,” Boris protested. “I made a speech at the Kremlin confronting the government and all the corrupt leaders.” “Really,” said Peter. “When did this happen?” Boris looked at his watch. “About two minutes ago.”

One moral of that story is that confronting sin doesn’t always work! Sometimes you pay a price! But we shouldn’t do it because it works or doesn’t work. We do it because God has commanded us to love one another. Part of love is this ministry of correction, done in the context of God’s family, in the manner I have outlined today.

Some of you may not have immediate occasion to apply this. But you will soon, if you are committed to the ministry of building people as God wants you to be. Others have immediate situations that require loving correction. I encourage you to obey the Lord in this matter. “My brethren, if any among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save his soul from death, and will cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

Discussion Questions

1. Which hindrance to correction is the most common excuse for not doing it? Can you think of others?
2. Many think of “confronting” as being abrasive. Others think “gentleness” means not being strong. Where’s the biblical balance? Consider how Jesus corrected others.
3. What are some biblical guidelines for knowing when to let something go and when to confront?
4. What is the most difficult part of the ministry of correction for you? Why?

1 Timothy 5:3-16 CARING FOR WIDOWS

Steven Cole

David Lloyd-George once said, “The true test of a civilization is the way it treats its old people.”

A U.S. News & World Report (4/3/81) article uncovered the ugly fact of brutality against the aged by their own families:

Each year, perhaps a million elderly Americans—or about 1 out of every 25—are abused by relatives.... Few people are aware of such abuse, although it occurs with a frequency only slightly less than child abuse.... Only one in six cases ever comes to the attention of authorities.... Victims are likely to be 75 or older, and women suffer more often than men. The most likely abuser is the son, followed by the daughter and spouse....

Though the article described physical, sexual, and extreme emotional abuse, we in the church are sometimes guilty of another form of abuse toward the elderly: apathy. Perhaps many of you reflect such apathy by responding to the topic of this sermon, “Caring for Widows,” with a wide yawn. I must confess that it isn’t a hot topic that I would pick to preach on. But the very length of Paul’s discussion (14 verses) makes it hard to miss. Maybe God is trying to get our attention on a subject we’re inclined to shrug off. God is concerned that His people be concerned about widows.

It’s a problem that will only continue to grow in our culture, as our population ages. By the year 2000, 13 percent of Americans will be 65 or older, with the greatest increase in the over-75 group, which is more in need of physical and financial care. One-half of women over 65 have lost their spouses, and two-thirds of those over 75. Four times as many widows are alive as widowers.

There are numerous passages in the Bible dealing with widows. God has a special concern for them, along with orphans and others in difficult circumstances. Many passages lay down laws to protect widows. God is described as their protector and judge: “A father of the fatherless and a judge for the widows is God in His holy habitation” (Ps. 68:5). “The Lord protects the strangers; He supports the fatherless and the widow” (Ps. 146:9). “Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow” (Deut. 27:19). “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father, to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world” (James 1:27).

It's significant that Paul, learned theologian and visionary apostle, was concerned about the care given to widows in the local church. In these verses to Timothy, he gives some wise, practical counsel, telling us that ...

The church should wisely care for the widows in her midst.

Due to the difficult nature of this passage, I think it best to follow the outline of the text to explain what Paul is saying. Then we'll draw some practical lessons. There are two sections: (1) The duty to support needy widows (1Ti 5:3-10); (2) The duty not to support younger widows (1Ti 5:11-16).

1. The church has a duty to support needy widows (1Ti 5:3-10).

There are four types of widows in these verses: (1) The "widows indeed" (NASB; NIV = "really in need"), who do not have family members to care for them (1Ti 5:3-5, 9-10); (2) Widows with children and grandchildren (1Ti 5:4, 16); (3) Younger widows, who should remarry (1Ti 5:11-15); (4) Widows who live for pleasure rather than for the Lord (1Ti 5:6).

A. Needy widows should be cared for by the church (1Ti 5:3-6, 9-10).

A "widow indeed" is a godly woman over 60 (v. 9) who has been left alone. Either she has no children and grandchildren, or they have died or are so far away as not to be able to render aid to her. This woman has fixed her hope on God (v. 5) and is a woman of prayer. Anna, the godly old woman in the Temple who held the baby Jesus, is an example (Luke 2:36-38).

Paul says that the church should "honor" such widows (1Ti 5:3). This is not to imply that we may disrespect other widows! Paul means that the church should help them financially. (In a moment we'll look at the further stipulations, vv. 9-10). The Greek word translated "honor" has a double meaning. First, it has the idea of a "price" paid or received. From there it came to refer to honor or esteem attached to something or someone due to their value. Thus the word can refer both to material support and/or esteem. In 1 Timothy 5:17, the word has both senses. In 1 Timothy 6:1, it clearly refers to esteem. In our text (5:3), it seems weighted toward material support.

Scholars differ as to whether there was an "official order" of church widows in Paul's time. We do know from a fourth century work called "The Apostolic Constitutions," that there came to be an official order of widows later in church history. It seems at least that Paul is giving requirements for widows who could qualify for church aid. They were to be actively devoted to the ministry of the church, and the church gave them financial help.

In 1Ti 5:9-10, Paul elaborates on the conditions of 1Ti 5:3-5 concerning needy widows. They are to be at least 60 years old. Younger widows Paul advises to remarry. They are to be the wife of one husband, literally, "a one-man woman," the same qualification laid down for elders and deacons (1Ti 3:2, 12). She is to have a reputation for good works (1Ti 5:10), including "bringing up children." This probably means that if she has had children, she has raised them in the faith. But it may also include caring for unwanted orphans. In the Roman world, unwanted children were often left unattended to die. Unscrupulous people would sometimes take them for slavery or prostitution. But a godly Christian woman would take them into her own home to care for them.

Furthermore, she must have shown hospitality to strangers and have washed the saints' feet, a sign of her humility in serving the church. She must have assisted those in distress, which could refer to everything from visiting the sick and helping them to giving counsel and comfort to the distraught. To sum up, she has "devoted herself to every good work." The widows in the church who met these qualifications were recognized by the church as being on "the list" (1Ti 5:9) and they were to serve in various capacities in the church.

In contrast to these godly women, Paul mentions widows who live for "wanton pleasure" (1Ti 5:6). The word means "to live in luxury" (see Ezek. 16:49, LXX, where God condemns Sodom because "she and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease, but did not help the poor and needy"). Thus Paul is referring to a widow who lives in luxury and has no concern for others. Such a woman is "dead even while she lives." She is insensitive to the things of God.

This verse sounds a warning to us American Christians. The spirit of our age is, "I've worked hard all my life. I've saved up enough to enjoy myself. Now that I'm retired, I don't want to be bugged. I'm going to block out the world and its problems and live for me." But a godly person approaching retirement should see it as an opportunity to be freed up so that he or she can devote more time to serving the Lord. Real fulfillment is not found in living for pleasure and self-gratification; that is death. Real fulfillment is found in living for Christ and serving others for His sake.

What about a widow with children or grandchildren?

B. Widows with families should be cared for by their family members (1Ti 5:4, 7-8).

Paul plainly commands that a widow with children or grand-children should be cared for by them. The parents have contributed immeasurably to their children and grandchildren's welfare. Now it is their turn "to make some return" (v. 4) to their widowed mother or grandmother. This is "acceptable" or pleasing in the sight of God (v. 4).

In fact, Paul goes so far as to say that if a person does not provide for his own family (and he clearly includes elderly parents), he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever (v. 8)! Even most unbelievers were kind enough to provide for aged parents. It was Greek law from the time of Solon that sons and daughters were morally and legally bound to support their parents (William Barclay, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* [The Westminster Press], p. 106). The word “provide” (v. 8) is literally, “to think ahead” or “to take thought for,” and is a pretty good case for a man to have adequate life insurance or other provision for his family. (Any insurance salesman owe me a buck.) Thus Paul is saying that if you don’t provide financially for your family—not luxury, but for their needs—you are behaving worse than unbelievers.

To sum up, the principle is, if the family can provide for older widows, they should do so. If there is no family to provide, then such older widows may be supported by the church if they are godly women devoted to serving Christ. If they are living for pleasure, then the church has no responsibility for them. But what about younger widows?

2. The church has a duty not to support younger widows (1Ti 5:11-16).

Paul is wise and practical. He does not want the church to turn into a welfare agency, supporting those who are not serving or who should be carrying their own load.

A. Younger widows should not be supported, but should marry and be devoted to their families (1Ti 5:11-15).

These verses are not easy to interpret. Some understand that the older widows made some kind of pledge to the Lord and to the church to the effect that they would remain single so as to devote their remaining years completely to serve the Lord. If a younger widow made such a pledge, but then started wishing to marry again, she would thus go back on her pledge and incur the censure of the church. Paul is not condemning the natural desire of a younger widow to remarry. What is wrong is the breaking of a pledge.

Others take it differently. The words “previous pledge” (1Ti 5:12) are literally, “first faith.” Coupled with 1Ti 5:15, they argue that Paul was addressing an existing problem, namely, that these younger widows who were put on the support of the church were allowing their desire to remarry to be greater than their faith in Christ, so that they even would remarry an unbeliever.

Furthermore, they were falling into the errors of the false teachers (the terms used to describe these women in 1Ti 5:13 parallel those used of the false teachers, 1Ti 1:6-7; 4:7; 1Ti 6:3-4, 20). Thus they were actually turning away from their first faith in Christ, promoting false teaching, and marrying on the basis of sensual desires, not marrying in the Lord. Thus Paul instructs that they not be supported, but rather marry and devote themselves to home duties, so as to give the enemy no occasion for reproach (1Ti 5:14).

B. Unmarried women in the church with dependent widows should support them (1Ti 5:16).

Some later manuscripts add “any believing man,” probably added by a copyist because the original, “believing woman,” is difficult. Probably Paul, as an afterthought, is answering a question which might arise, “But what if there is no man as the head of the household? Should the church then support the widows in that family?” Paul says that a believing woman should do all that she can to support or assist widows in her family so that the church is freed up to minister to widows truly in need.

Practical Lessons:

1. Godly families are at the heart of a godly church.

And, godly mothers are indispensable to godly families. In 1Ti 5:10, 14, bearing and raising children are mentioned first in the list of good deeds. We live in a day when many Christian women are putting their careers ahead of their duties at home. The notion that a woman should be “just a homemaker” is viewed as a cultural anachronism that we no longer need to follow.

I contend that the biblical model is that the husband normally should be the main provider (1Ti 5:8), even as Christ provides for His bride, the church; and that the wife should be a godly homemaker who manages the home under the husband’s loving supervision. To put it bluntly, a mother’s place is in the home with her children, not in a career. I realize that there are difficult situations where a mother of young children has no alternative but to work. I’m not speaking against that. But I know Christian women who put their young children in day care and go off to work because they’re bored at home! Such a thing would have been unthinkable to the early church!

Listen to this quote arguing that the woman’s proper place is in the home (cited in “Quit You Like Men,” 12/93, p. 20):

Man is, or should be, women’s protector and defender. The natural and proper timidity and delicacy which belongs to the female sex evidently unfits it for many of the occupations of civil life. The constitution of the family organization, which is founded in the divine ordinances, as well as in the nature of things, indicates the domestic sphere as that which properly belongs to the domain and function of womanhood. The harmony, not to say identity, of interests and views which belong or should belong, to the family institution is repugnant to the idea of a woman adopting a distinct career from that of her husband. The paramount destiny and mission of women are to fulfil the noble and benign offices of wife and mother. This is the law of the Creator.

You might be surprised to learn that this quote came from the United States Supreme Court in an 1873 decision sustaining a state law denying to women the right to become attorneys! When the Supreme Court sounds more in line with the apostle Paul than many modern evangelical Christians, you might say, “We’ve come a long way, baby!” We need to elevate again the importance of godly mothers and godly homes.

2. As godly families, we each have a responsibility to honor and care for our elderly parents, especially widows.

Again, this is countercultural. Our society views the elderly as being a bother to our pursuit of personal pleasure. We're so utilitarian that we discard people who no longer can function in a contributing way. But the Bible says that it pleases God when children and grandchildren practice piety by making some return to their parents (5:4). It would be judgmentally wrong to say that every family must take elderly parents into their homes. There are situations where that is not a viable option. But even if an elderly parent must be put in a nursing facility, the children should not abandon them. Even if their minds no longer function properly, they still deserve our loving care and respect.

In a Newsweek "My Turn" article (9/10/79), Milton Gwirtzman noted, "Although Shanghai is one of the five largest cities in the world, it has just one home for the aged. Older people in China don't need Golden Age clubs or retirement communities. They have the most important life-support system of all: active, dignified work in an atmosphere of close family life and community respect." Maybe American Christians can learn from the Chinese what the Bible affirms!

The film series, "Whatever Happened to the Human Race," has a graphic scene depicting the way our culture neglects and abandons our old so that we can pursue our own interests. An elderly lady is wheeled down a white corridor by her children and grandchildren. They kiss her on the forehead and assure her that she will be all right. They leave and a nurse wheels the confused old woman into a darkened room where a TV set is blaring with the obnoxious voice of a game show host. She is abandoned by her family to live out her final days in front of the TV set! It almost makes euthanasia seem like an option! At least it's quicker! But God's way is not abandoning or killing the elderly; it is honoring and caring for them.

3. Godly elderly people can make a valuable contribution to the cause of Christ.

4. Although they may not have the energy of the young, the elderly have more time and the wisdom of a lifetime of walking with Christ. They can be involved in a ministry of prayer (v. 5) and good deeds (v. 10). This can be about as broad as the person wants to make it. They can offer spiritual and practical counsel to younger families. They can serve on church committees. They can visit shut-ins or those in hospitals and nursing homes. They can call on church visitors. They can help in church office work. They can help Sunday School teachers in preparing materials or in managing their classes. They can assist in child evangelism ministries or by calling on the homes of Sunday School youngsters. They can open their homes in hospitality, help out with church socials, volunteer to baby-sit an evening for a younger couple, correspond with missionaries, help mission organizations, collect clothing for the needy, help a shut-in clean house, or use their individual skills in various ways. You name it! There are many opportunities available to the godly older person who wants to serve Christ. Again, I would emphasize that we must deliberately reject the world's thinking about self-centered retirement living. As long as God gives us life and strength, we should live to serve Him.

5. Godly living affects the practical areas of life.

Many people in our day claim to be Christians, but their lives are no different than those who do not know Christ as Savior. The gospel Paul preached urged people to "repent and turn to God, performing deeds appropriate to repentance" (Acts 26:20). Believers are to be zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14). We don't live to serve ourselves, whether we're 20 or 80. We live to serve Jesus Christ and to lay down our selfish interests for the sake of those for whom Christ died. We are deliberately to reject the cult of self-fulfillment, and "through love serve one another" (Gal. 5:13), not just in "spiritual" ways, but ministering to the total person.

Amy Carmichael, the missionary to India, was criticized for becoming too involved in humanitarian efforts because she sought to rescue little girls from being sold as temple prostitutes. She retorted,

"One cannot save and then pitchfork souls into heaven.... Souls are more or less securely fastened to bodies ... and as you cannot get the souls out and deal with them separately, you have to take them both together" (cited by Ruth Tucker, *Guardians of the Great Commission* [Zondervan], p. 134).

So, as a church and as individuals, we must be involved in practical good deeds that minister to the total person. We must minister wisely. We are not to support someone who is living for pleasure. The church must not take on responsibilities that God has assigned to families. If people are able to work but refuse to do so, Paul was clear: they shouldn't eat (2 Thess. 3:10)! Each one must bear his own load (Gal. 6:5). But neither can we, as the church, turn our backs on the truly needy, especially on elderly widows. God cares for the widow who trusts in Him. So must we!

Discussion Questions

1. Agree/disagree: The many convalescent homes in America reflect our lack of concern for the aged.
2. Is a live-in arrangement for aged parents always in the best interest of all parties concerned? Why/Why not?
3. Can you build a biblical case for a Christian woman choosing a career track rather than motherhood? Is it sin for Christian mothers to work outside the home?
4. Why do you think that more elderly people are not involved in actively ministering in the church?

1 Timothy 5:17-18 PAYING YOUR PASTOR(S)

Steven Cole

Three small boys were bragging about their dads. The first boy said, "My dad writes a few short lines on paper, calls it a poem, sends it away, and gets \$25 for it." "Well, my dad," said the second boy, "makes dots on paper, calls it a song, sends it away, and gets \$100 for it." "That's nothing," declared the third boy. "My dad writes a sermon on sheets of paper, gets up in the pulpit and gives it, and it takes four men to bring in the money!"

Our text for today deals with the subject of pastors and pay. I confess, it's not easy for me to preach on these verses for a couple of reasons: First, money is never easy to talk about. It hits about as close to home as you can get. Many people have the notion that the church is always pleading for money, and so whenever the subject comes up, they grab their wallets and put up their defenses.

But if you've come to this church for any length of time, you know that we do not emphasize money. My normal method is to preach consecutively through a portion of Scripture. If money is in the text I come to, I preach on it. But if anything, we probably under-emphasize it. We don't have fund raising campaigns or stewardship drives. We don't solicit pledges or approach individuals for donations. I believe that God's people need to know what God's Word says about money (and it has much to say). I believe you need to be informed as to where we're at financially as a church family. Then, as you respond to the Lordship of Christ, He will enable you to be good stewards of the money He has entrusted to you. I agree with Hudson Taylor's familiar statement: God's work done in God's way will not lack God's means of support.

Another reason this is a ticklish text for me to preach is that it deals with the subject of a pastor's salary, and I am a pastor! I resemble these remarks! Sadly, the public scandals of recent years, exposing TV preachers who live in luxury by exploiting people, have given the subject of pastors and pay a black eye. So any time a pastor talks about money, especially as it relates to his pay, people think he's crossing a line he shouldn't cross.

I'm glad that we hit these verses just after I got a raise, so that no one can accuse me of using a sermon to hint about my personal needs. I'm not teaching on this text because it needs to be applied in my case. I'm teaching on it because it's a part of God's Word, and we all need to understand and obey God's Word. My understanding of the New Testament is that Christian workers should be careful not to make their own needs known, except to God in prayer, and that God, who hears in secret, will meet their needs as they trust in Him.

I realize that this goes against the way the modern church goes about fund-raising. While I don't condemn others who hold to differing views, I believe you can build a biblical case for Christian workers mentioning others' needs, but not their own. If you're interested, I'd be glad to loan you my master's thesis which deals with this subject. I don't want my comments to be taken in any way as a hint of need on my part. With Paul I can say, "I have received everything in full and have an abundance" (Phil. 4:18).

But we do need to understand what God's Word teaches about supporting those who labor in the gospel. Paul is saying ...

Churches should make sure that pastors who work hard in leading and feeding are highly respected and well-paid.

To understand these verses, we need to keep in mind the historical situation in Ephesus where Timothy was ministering. Some of the elders had fallen into false teaching and were leading some of the flock astray. Paul wanted to affirm the office and ministry of the leaders who were doing their job well by encouraging the church to continue supporting such men financially (5:17-18); but also to give some guidelines for the correction and, if necessary, censure, of those who were in sin (5:19-25). We need to probe four areas to understand Paul's teaching in 5:17-18: (1) The definition of "elders"; (2) the department of elders; (3) the duties of elders; (4) the duty of the church.

1. We need to define "elders."

The terms "elder," "overseer," and "pastor" are used inter-changeably in the New Testament to refer to the same office or leadership position in the church (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; 1 Pet. 5:1-4). "Elder" focuses on the character of the man, that he is spiritually mature. "Overseer" (1 Tim. 3:1, 2) looks at the task, which is to superintend or watch over God's church. "Pastor" means "shepherd" and looks at the task from the common picture of the church being God's flock of sheep.

The terms are always used in the plural for local churches. There is never to be a one-man ruler over a church or a single man to do the work of shepherding. Unless it's a very small flock, the task is simply too much for one man, even if he works at it full time. Since the early church met in homes scattered around a city, it may be that a single elder was over each house church, but when the church in a particular city is referred to in the New Testament, it always refers to the elders (plural) of the church (singular), such as Ephesus (Acts 20:17) or Philippi (Phil. 1:1).

Some elders (or pastors) may be paid so they can devote their full attention to the work of shepherding and teaching God's flock, whereas other elders support themselves by other work. While the paid elders may have greater influence and responsibilities due to their ability to give more time to the work, or due to their training, or to their knowledge of Scripture, no elder is the head of the church. Jesus Christ is the living head of His church, and the elders collectively oversee Christ's church as they learn to seek His mind and to submit to one another and work in harmony under the authority of God's Word.

2. We need to understand the department of elders.

As we saw in 3:1-7, elders are appointed to their office by virtue of their spiritual maturity and godly character, not because they went to seminary or because they're popular, likeable men, or for any other reason. Seminary training is helpful if a man is going to devote himself full time to teaching God's Word, but it must be accompanied by spiritual maturity or he may "fall into reproach and the snare of the devil" (3:7). If a man is going to be supported financially in ministry, he needs to be "free from the love of money" (3:3), so that he doesn't fall into the trap of using ministry to get rich.

Since an undisciplined man can waste a lot of time in the ministry, Paul mentions (5:17) that he must "work hard" at preaching and teaching. The biblical support he adds of the ox threshing and the laborer reinforce the condition that an elder who is supported must not be lazy. I have known men in ministry who use their time in a sloppy fashion. If they were employees of a secular company, they would be fired. I'm not talking about over-work, which is another sin many pastors fall into. But a pastor needs to be conscientious about working hard, since he is doing the Lord's work.

A pastor had three young men installing insulation in the attic of his church building. He sat down with them to eat lunch and one of the men, having noticed that the pastor had spent his morning reading, asked about his duties. "Do you have a job be-sides serving as pastor of this church?" he asked. When the pastor replied that this was his only employment, the worker asked, "Well, Reverend, could you work if you wanted to?" (Reader's Digest [2/87]).

I've often been asked whether I do this full time, and when I answer yes, have been asked, "What all do you do?" I guess people think, "A pastor's pay isn't very good, but the hours are great—just Sunday mornings!" But believe me, there aren't enough hours in the week to do the things demanded by shepherding a church this size. But even so, a man must not be lazy, because you have to determine your own schedule, so it's possible to become sloppy with your time.

Paul had already given the same requirements about hard work and freedom from the love of money to the Ephesian elders: "I have coveted no one's silver or gold or clothes. You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my own needs and to the men who were with me. In everything I showed you that by working hard in this manner you must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive'" (Acts 20:33-35). So elders, especially those who are supported financially, must conduct themselves in a godly manner, being on guard against laziness and greed.

3. We need to understand the duties of elders.

We could come up with more categories, but here Paul gives two broad duties of elders or pastors, leading ("rule") and feeding ("preaching and teaching").

A. Elders must lead God's flock.

"Rule" (NASB), "direct the affairs of the church" (NIV). The Greek word is only used six times in the New Testament in this sense. It means literally, "to stand before" and thus has the meaning of "lead," "manage," or "superintend." It is used in Romans 12:8 to refer to the spiritual gift of leadership. In 1 Timothy 3:4, 5, it refers to the elder (and in 3:12 to the deacon) who "manages his own household well." In 3:5 management is compared to "taking care of" the church of God. That word is the same word used of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34-35) who took care of the injured man. Thus "to rule" has the nuance of assuming responsibility for the care of those under his leadership, as a good husband and father is to do for his family.

Thus one major task of elders is that of "ruling" in the sense of overseeing or shepherding the church. It does not mean to "lord it over" people (1 Pet. 5:3), but rather to care for people, to guard them from error, to admonish them, and to help each one grow to maturity and fruitfulness in Christ.

Note that this is a skill that a man can grow in. Some elders "rule well." It's not an easy task, so each man needs to work at it. In Romans 12:8 Paul says that the person with this gift should exercise it "with diligence." In 1 Thessalonians 5:12, it is translated "have charge over you in the Lord" and is also linked with diligent labor. That means that even if you're gifted, leadership doesn't happen effortlessly. The church doesn't run on autopilot. It involves diligent work to lead well. Things need to be dealt with. It's always more of a hassle to take the initiative to correct situations that are off-course. It's easier to procrastinate and let things slide. So one of the major duties of elders is to be diligent to rule well, to do the hard work necessary to take care of God's flock.

B. Elders must feed God's flock.

Paul singles out elders who "work hard at preaching and teaching." Not all elders are going to have the gift of teaching, al-though all

should be able to teach (1 Tim. 3:2) in the sense of sitting down with someone and explaining the basic Christian truths. But some will be gifted in teaching and they should work hard at it.

And it is hard work! Preaching involves about 9/10 perspiration and 1/10 inspiration. It takes time to study, pray, and think in order to be accurate, clear and interesting, and to apply it practically. I average about 15 hours to prepare a sermon I've never preached before, and 8-12 hours to rework a sermon I've already preached. I can't just dust off an old sermon and give it again. I need to get back into the text and allow it to speak to my heart in a fresh way and to think about how the people I'm speaking to need it applied. Before a man can preach properly, he must allow the Word to preach to him. As John Calvin said, "It would be better for the preacher to break his neck going into the pulpit than for him not to be the first to follow God."

It would be almost impossible to devote adequate time to that task plus be involved in oversight of the church and hold down a full-time outside job. Thus Paul instructs the church to support the elders who work hard at preaching and teaching.

I don't see a major distinction between "preaching" and "teaching." The words here are literally, "in word and teaching." Some people have told me that I'm a teacher, not a preacher, because I don't yell and shout at people in a preachy voice. But the Greek word for "preach" means "to proclaim as a herald" who announced the message of the king. In that sense, preaching means to set forth the authoritative word of the King.

Teaching is setting forth and explaining the truths of the Bible. I agree with Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who said, "The greatest need in the Church today is to restore this authority to the pulpit" (Preaching & Preachers [Zondervan], p. 159). As I've said before, God's Word doesn't give us helpful hints for happy living. The man who speaks for God had better not waffle! God's people desperately need a sure word from God on how to live in this evil world.

We live in a day when preaching, especially doctrinal preaching that sets forth the great truths of Scripture in a systematic fashion, is viewed as out-of-touch with where our TV-oriented culture is at. Sermons keep getting shorter and shorter, and sometimes are replaced by drama and storytelling. But Paul clearly elevates the need of the church for strong leadership and for solid preaching by directing that those who labor in these ministries receive double honor. That leads to ...

4. We need to understand the duty of the church: To give such men "double honor."

There is some debate over what Paul means by this term. Clearly, verse 18, which explains ("for") verse 17, shows that Paul is referring primarily to pay. Some take "double" literally and say that these elders should be paid twice what the widows (5:3) or the non-teaching elders were paid. I understand "double" to mean "ample" (Theodoret, a fifth century theologian explains it by a Greek word meaning "more" or "greater"). The Greek word, "honor" can mean either honor or pay or both (as we saw last week; see 5:3; 6:1). So Paul is directing that elders who work hard at preaching and teaching should be highly respected and well-paid.

Honor and pay are related. A Newsweek cover story a few years ago [9/24/84] on American school teachers dealt, in part, with the problem that teachers in our country are not respected. It stated, "One reason for the disrespect, of course, is money." If we underpay someone, we don't respect him. You can shrug off free advice, but if you pay a counselor \$100 an hour, you're more likely to respect and follow what he tells you. Many churches expect their pastors to survive on a subsistence salary, but then, to their detriment, they don't respect either the man or his message.

Paul supports his point from two Scriptures: Deuteronomy 25:4, which commands that oxen should not be muzzled when they are threshing; and, Luke 10:7, Jesus' words about the worker being worthy of his wages. (Note that Paul put Luke's gospel on a par with Old Testament Scripture.) The Scripture comparing pastors to unmuzzled oxen may not seem too complimentary. But as Paul argues in First Corinthians 9:9-11, it's an argument from the lesser to the greater. If God showed concern for oxen to be "paid" for their work, doesn't He care much more for those who labor in the gospel? They have a right to receive a decent wage for their work.

Charles Spurgeon once had the officers of a small country church ask him to recommend a pastor for them. But the salary they were prepared to pay was so small that he wrote back to them, "The only individual I know, who could exist on such a stipend, is the angel Gabriel. He would need neither cash nor clothes; and he could come down from heaven every Sunday morning, and go back at night, so I advise you to invite him" (Autobiography [Banner of Truth], 2:108).

Grace Church, pastored by John MacArthur, is often asked to recommend pastoral candidates from among the young men who are trained there. When they send out a man to candidate, they also often send some of their elders to talk to the leaders in the prospective church. On one occasion a few years ago, a church was offering the new pastor \$12,000 a year, which was not adequate for his needs. The elders from Grace Church dismissed the pastor for a few minutes and then told the elders, "Each of you get out a piece of paper and write down your annual salary." The average came out to \$24,000. They said, "Start him at \$24,000." To their credit, they did it!

That isn't necessarily the way to determine a pastor's salary, but our text does show that a pastor's salary should not show

disrespect for the man or his office. Wayne Grudem observed, "Scripture doesn't caution us against paying our ministers too much, but it does caution against paying them too little" (Leadership [Spring, 1981], p. 67).

Someone once pointed out to baseball great, Babe Ruth, that he made more money than President Hoover, and asked whether Ruth thought he deserved to make more than the president. The Babe replied, "Why not? I had a better year than he did." I heard Bill Yaeger, a veteran pastor, say, "Remember, it's the Catholics who take a vow of poverty. But we're Protestants!"

Conclusion

Please remember what I said at the beginning of this message: I am amply supplied and content. I am not asking you to apply this message to me. But I would ask you to ask yourself, "Is my giving to this church pleasing to the Lord?" As I've taught before, giving 10 percent is not the New Testament standard. Neither is it biblical to view 10 percent as belonging to God and 90 percent as yours to spend as you please. The New Testament teaching is, God owns it all. We merely manage it for Him. We are to give generously (2 Cor. 8 & 9), as God has prospered us (1 Cor. 16:2). We all just finished doing our taxes. If you didn't give enough to make it worth your while to fill out Schedule A, you're not giving generously to God's work.

We have just adopted a new church budget that is lower than last year's budget, but still requires an increase in giving over last year's giving to meet it. We still owe over \$40,000 on the house next door. If we could pay it off, it would free up both that house and the one across the street for ministry. In addition, there are many improvements that could be made on our facilities if funds were available. Also, we are at a size where we could probably use another full-time staff pastor. But we can't do any of these extra things if we fall short of our bare-bones budget.

Increases in giving don't come out of the air. They are the result of God's people trusting Him by increasing their giving and then doing it regularly and faithfully as unto Him. I do not know what anyone except me gives to this church, so I have no one in particular in mind. I just ask you to go before the Lord and evaluate whether He is pleased with your giving.

The late radio Bible teacher, J. Vernon McGee, used to admonish his radio audience by saying, "Friends, if you go into a restaurant and eat their food, you pay the bill. But some of you are being fed by this ministry and aren't paying." My job is to work hard to lead and to feed you. Some of you may need to ask whether you're paying your tab!

Discussion Questions

1. Why have Christian workers traditionally been underpaid? Is this biblical?
2. Does our church emphasize money: a) too much; b) not enough; c) about right? What do you base this on?
3. Some argue that to communicate with people in our multi-media culture, we need to shorten and adapt preaching (more drama, stories, etc.). Agree/disagree?

1 Timothy 5:19-25 CHURCH LEADERSHIP: KEEPING IT GODLY

Steven Cole

Moral failure among pastors is happening with shocking frequency in the American church. A Leadership survey (Winter, 1988, pp. 12-13) revealed that one out of eight pastors have committed adultery since they've been in local church ministry. Almost one out of four admitted to doing something they feel was sexually in-appropriate. One out of five acknowledged fantasizing at least weekly about sex with someone other than their spouse. If you widen the question to monthly, the number grows to over one out of three.

When a church leader falls into sin, it always wreaks havoc to the cause of Christ. The more visible and well-known the leader, the greater the harm. Some in the church justify their own sin by thinking, "If that strong leader fell, then who am I to resist?" Divisions arise in the church between those who advocate tolerance and love toward the fallen leader and those labeled as unloving because they call for his removal from public ministry. The world mocks the whole thing and shrugs off the gospel.

So it's crucial for the church to put godly men into leadership and to make sure that they remain that way. How can we do that? How can we do everything possible to insure that our church leaders are godly men? And, if and when a church leader does fall into sin, how do we deal with it properly?

These are the questions Paul answers in 1 Timothy 5:19-25. Some of the elders in Ephesus had fallen into false teaching and ungodly conduct, which always goes with false doctrine. Paul doesn't give a comprehensive answer, but he brings up two crucial safeguards to help keep church leadership godly: First, the proper exercise of church discipline toward sinning elders (5:19-21); and second, the careful selection of elders (5:22-25). He is saying that ...

To keep church leadership godly, elders must be disciplined properly and selected carefully.

Since some in Ephesus had already fallen, and, perhaps, rumors and accusations were circulating about others, Paul deals first with the remedial process of discipline before going on to talk about the preventative steps to take in selection, so that the church will put only godly men into office.

1. To keep church leadership godly, elders must be disciplined properly (5:19-21).

This section is like strong medicine: you don't want to have to use it, but it's good to have on hand in case you get sick. I hope we never have to apply these verses in our church, but we had better know that it's in our "medicine cabinet" in case we ever need it.

The verses reveal three aspects of proper discipline of church leaders: The need for factual evidence (5:19); the need for public rebuke (5:20); and, the need for impartiality (5:21).

A. Proper discipline of church leaders requires factual evidence (5:19).

Paul is citing the law of Moses here. Deuteronomy 19:15 states, "A single witness shall not rise up against a man on account of any iniquity or any sin which he has committed; on the evidence of two or three witnesses a matter shall be confirmed."

It's a simple principle: a case must be tried on the basis of factual evidence, not hearsay or rumors. Paul specifically applies it to church leaders here because they're more liable to false accusations and slander than others, especially men who preach God's truth. Satan is always trying to discredit the authority of God's Word. One method he often uses is to attack the credibility of the man who teaches the Word. If people doubt his integrity, they can easily shrug off his exhortations to godliness. So Satan often stirs up people who have been offended by the preaching of God's truth or who are upset because a church leader has had to confront them privately about their sin. They spread half-truths and outright lies to discredit the man and his message.

What do you do if someone comes to you with something damaging against me, one of the other elders, or some Christian leader? It's important to the testimony of Christ that we handle such situations in a godly way. If the person is spreading rumors or gossip, he needs to be corrected. If he has a legitimate problem, it needs to be processed according to Scripture. I've found these five questions (which I got from Bill Gothard) to be useful:

(1) "What is your reason for telling me?" Widening the circle of gossip only compounds the problem. Why do I need to know this? If the person says, "I just wanted you to know so you could pray," then you should caution him not to say anything more to anyone before he checks out the facts and takes biblical steps to deal with it (Matt. 18:15-17; Gal. 6:1). Gossip flatters our pride by giving us "inside" information. But we must resist both the temptation to listen to it and to encourage someone else to give it unless we're part of the solution.

(2) "Where did you get your information?" Refusal to identify the source is a sure sign of gossip. Is there more than one independent witness? If not, the accusation should not be received and the accuser should be shown this Scripture and warned about spreading the charges any further.

(3) "Have you gone to those directly involved?" If the person has not gone to those involved, he is probably more interested in spreading gossip than in helping to restore the one or ones who have sinned.

(4) "Have you personally checked out all the facts?" It's easy for "facts" to get distorted as they travel from one person to another or when they're given by a person with negative motives.

(5) "Can I quote you if I check this out?" A person spreading gossip won't want to be quoted by name. They don't want to get involved in the messy business of helping confront and restore a person in sin. They're just spreading an evil report.

(6)

Thus the first need in disciplining an elder is to get factual information. If the charges are true, then there is a second need:

B. Proper discipline of church leaders requires public rebuke (5:20).

The proper translation here is, "Those who are sinning," meaning, those guilty of the charges who do not repent. Sinning means some clear violation of God's Word, not just something someone doesn't like or agree with. I once was called in by another church to arbitrate a conflict where a deacon had sent a letter to the entire congregation charging the pastor with not feeding the flock and not visiting the members enough. The pastor hadn't sinned and the deacon hadn't talked directly to the pastor about the situation, so the deacon was in sin.

If it is a public sin, such as false teaching on some major issue or a sin that is in public view, then a public rebuke may be called for as a first step (as Paul did with Peter, Gal. 2:11 ff.) If a leader has gone public by writing a book promoting serious error, then it requires public rebuke, either in print or verbally, to warn God's people (Titus 1:9). Paul often named individuals (1 Tim. 1:20) and

specified the nature of the false teaching (2 Tim. 2:17-18; Titus 1:10-16).

But normally the steps of private rebuke (Matt. 18:15-17) need to be followed before any public rebuke is made. The goal is never to blast the man, but to restore him. If he repents after private rebuke, it may be necessary for a public confession to the church. Depending on the seriousness of the sin, the man may need to step down from his office until he rebuilds a godly reputation. While moral failure need not disqualify a man from public ministry for the rest of his life, he can't possibly restore the necessary qualifications of being above reproach, a one-woman man, and having a good reputation with outsiders in a few months (1 Tim. 3:2-7).

Public exposure of sin, especially in a church leader, is just the opposite of our human tendency. If a church leader sins, we're inclined to cover it quickly and keep it under wraps, or perhaps gossip about it. But to expose it seems like it would damage the reputation of Christ or the church. And so we "hush-hush" the matter. I know of situations where pastors who sinned morally are just quietly moved to new places of ministry. Thankfully, I've also received several letters from churches or Christian organizations exposing the sin of a leader who fell, asking prayer for his restoration.

If we don't deal with the matter God's way, Satan will deal with it his way. It will lead to gossip, slander, divisions, and greater sin in the body. God's way is to deal with the matter publicly. There are three values of rebuke before the church:

(1) Public rebuke clears the name of God and His church from association with and toleration of evil. If a church leader sins and the matter is covered up, there are still going to be leaks. When the leaks spread, people begin thinking that the church tolerates evil. That erodes trust in the message we proclaim and in the holy God we serve. Thus God's method, even in the case of His choicest servants, is to uncover the sin before everyone. As the Lord said to David after his sin with Bathsheba, "Indeed, you did it secretly, but I will do this thing before all Israel, and under the sun" (2 Sam. 12:12). God wants evil exposed so that the world may know that He is apart from all sin and does not tolerate it.

(2) Public rebuke causes others to be fearful of sinning (5:20). Fear is not necessarily a bad motivator, if it keeps us from sin. Public discipline, especially of a church leader, makes people see the gravity of sin. It causes a healthy fear of God. If people know that church discipline will be administered impartially (5:21), they will be fearful of becoming the object of such rebuke and will avoid sin.

(3) Public rebuke causes the sinner himself to be fearful of sinning again (5:20, "also"). No one would want to go through something like that again. If the church is consistent in carrying out discipline, it will act as a deterrent to sin.

Thus, proper discipline of church leaders requires factual evidence and, in some cases, public rebuke. Paul adds a third need for proper discipline:

C. Proper discipline of church leaders requires impartiality (1Ti 5:21).

Church discipline will be effective only if it is applied impartially. If a man of influence is shown leniency, while a less powerful man is treated harshly, much harm will be done to the church.

Paul here invokes a solemn charge to Timothy: "in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of His chosen angels, ..." "God and Christ Jesus" are contained under the same article in the Greek, which points to the deity of Christ. God is the ultimate judge, who has committed all judgment unto the Son (John 5:22, 27). Church discipline is carried out in the presence of the Lord (Matt. 18:15-20). The elect angels are probably included to bring up the awesome picture of God on His holy throne, surrounded by the angels, or because when Christ returns in judgment, He will use the angels as reapers.

Why does Paul lay this heavy charge on Timothy? I think he did it because Timothy, by nature and personality, was a timid soul who loathed confrontation. Thus he would have a tendency to back off from confronting a powerful elder who was in error. But to do so would be to be partial in administering discipline, which undermines the whole process. Thus Paul is saying, in effect, "Timothy, fear God more than any powerful man. Maintain these principles without bias or partiality."

Thus to keep church leadership godly, elders must be disciplined properly. That is the remedial step which the church is required to take. But there is also a preventative step which the church must take so that church leaders will not fall into sin:

2. To keep church leadership godly, elders must be selected carefully (5:22-25).

An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. If we want to avoid having leaders fall into sin, then we must use caution (5:22) and careful observation (5:24-25) in the process of selecting them for office. Sandwiched in is a brief digression about Timothy's health (5:23).

A. The need for caution in selecting elders (5:22).

Some interpret the laying on of hands to refer to the restoration of a repentant elder. But in light of the usage in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6) I take it to refer to a public commissioning of elders to their office. Since some elders had fallen into sin, Timothy may be inclined to hastily appoint others to re-place them. But if he did and those men were not well qualified and fell into sin, Timothy would have a part in their sin. So Paul warns him to keep himself pure.

The mentioning of keeping himself pure brings to Paul's mind the other danger of the false teachers, namely, their bent toward asceticism (4:3). He does not want Timothy mistakenly to think that he should abstain from all wine, especially in light of his frequent

health problems. So he digresses to give his son in the faith some fatherly advice, namely, to drink a little wine for medicinal reasons.

Since Paul digressed, I will too. The moderate use of wine is not prohibited in Scripture, but drunkenness or being enslaved to alcohol clearly is. Drinking any alcohol is dangerous, since it is physiologically addictive. No one plans to become an alcoholic. It sneaks up and ensnares you unawares. Also, since we live in a culture where so many are enslaved to alcohol, we need to be extremely careful that we don't cause our brother in Christ to stumble. If a believer who has had a problem with alcohol sees me drinking and is led back into enslavement, I have sinned against my brother. For that reason, I choose to abstain.

A second part of this digression is to note that Paul didn't say, "Timothy, claim your healing by faith!" He was recommending a medicinal use of wine and a sensible recognition that Timothy needed to take care of his body. Good nutrition, proper rest and exercise, and using medicine when we need it are not opposed to a life of faith, but rather are a part of being good stewards of our bodies as unto God. Yes, we should pray for healing; and yes, we should thankfully use modern medical knowledge.

Coming back to the subject, Paul goes on to urge ...

B. The need for careful observation in selecting elders (5:24-25).

The manner in which Timothy can avoid appointing unqualified elders is to take his time (5:22) and observe the lives of these men carefully. Careful observation will reveal two classes of men:

(1) Those unfit for office (5:24). There are two categories here: Those obviously unfit—their sins march on ahead of them for everyone to see; those not so obviously unfit—their sins follow after them, but eventually come to light. At first glance, they may seem qualified, but time will show their track record, that they are not godly men.

(2) Those fit for office (5:25). Again, there are the same two categories: Those obviously fit for office—their good deeds are evident; those fit for office, but not so obviously. The last half of the sentence is a bit confusing, but I take it to be parallel to verse 24, so the sense is, "Those good deeds of other men are not so evident at first, but they can't be hidden in the long run."

So Paul is saying that people aren't always what they appear to be on the surface. Men should not be selected for leadership in the church on a superficial or hasty basis. They don't always turn out to be what they seem to be at first. Carefully observe their way of life, especially in their home (3:2, 4, 5). Also, how is their public reputation (3:7)? Don't put a man into church leadership unless he has a proven record of godly character and good deeds.

Conclusion

We always are in danger of drifting with our worldly culture rather than confronting it with God's truth. The theme of our culture is tolerance of anything except someone who is not tolerant. It has affected the American church. A recent Christianity Today news article told of two well-known Christian authors who are under attack from what the article described as "self-appointed heresy hunters." Yet as the article quoted from one of the authors, it is clear that she has fallen into seriously false and non-Christian teaching, which she excuses as a failure on her part to communicate. But the tone of the article was that these "heresy hunters" are hounding these poor victims.

The Bible is clear that elders are not only to exhort in sound doctrine, but also to refute those who contradict (Titus 1:9). But the mood of our day is that we can't criticize or judge anyone, no matter how far out of line they are, because that implies that we're right and they're wrong, and that doesn't fit with the supreme virtue of tolerance.

During the time of the Reformation, many Catholic priests had mistresses and illegitimate children. Many of them were greedily misusing church funds to live in luxury. One major distinctive of the Reformed churches was a return to church discipline. They sought to hold their pastors and members accountable to the holy standards of God's Word. God greatly honored that return to righteousness among His people.

Although you get accused of being hateful when you confront sin and call people to holiness, and although some do it wrongly because they lack compassion, it is not hate, but the love of God that confronts sin and false doctrine. Sin and teaching contrary to God's Word destroy people. Holiness and sound doctrine save

people from God's judgment and build them in the joy of the Lord. Our God is holy. We His people, and especially we who are church leaders, must be holy ourselves in all our behavior. God's word to all of us from these verses is, "Keep yourself pure from sin" (5:22b).

Discussion Questions

1. When is it proper to expose false teaching by a Christian author or well-known leader? When is it not proper?
2. When does talking about someone who is not present cross the line into sinful gossip?

3. How should we respond when someone shares with us something inappropriate about someone else?
4. How can we faithfully carry out church discipline without becoming sinfully judgmental?

1 Timothy 6

1 Timothy 6:1-2 HOW TO BE A GOOD CHRISTIAN VICTIM

Steven Cole

We live in a society where almost everyone can claim victim status. A humorous T-shirt pokes fun at this. It pictures a huge auditorium with a convention banner welcoming "Adult Children of Normal Parents." Two people are in the audience.

It's not far off the mark. Recovery movement guru John Bradshaw has said that 96 percent of us come from dysfunctional families. Americans are flocking to a variety of specialized self-help groups where they focus on how the traumas from their pasts have impaired their lives. Every sort of problem and even criminal behavior is being excused because the person was a helpless victim of something or other.

A jury acquitted Mrs. Bobbitt from emasculating her husband because she was a victim of his abusive and selfish behavior. Another jury can't decide to convict two brothers who admit to blowing their parents into oblivion with a shotgun, because they were abused as children. The guy who shot the abortion doctor is claiming that the pro-life propaganda made him do it. A robber in New York was beating a 71-year-old man senseless when two police officers heard the screams and responded. In the ensuing scuffle, the mugger was shot and the bullet cut his spinal cord, leaving him paralyzed. He sued the city of New York and a jury awarded him \$4.3 million in damages (in Reader's Digest [6/90], p. 196)!

Thankfully the world is waking up to the stupidity of this non-sense. Atlanta psychiatrist Frank Pittman observed that "the adult child movement, by declaring practically everyone to be a victim of imperfect parenting and therefore eligible for lifelong, self-absorbed irresponsibility, has trivialized real suffering and made psychic invalids of those who once had a bad day" (cited in The Los Angeles Times [11/4/92], p. E10).

But let's suppose you truly are a victim. Maybe a parent or a spouse abuses you verbally and emotionally. Perhaps you suffer racial discrimination. Or, on a lesser scale, maybe you're being treated unfairly at work. Maybe you're a victim of reverse discrimination, where you get passed over for a promotion because you're not classified as a minority. How should a Christian respond when he or she is truly a victim of abusive or unfair treatment?

(Let me clarify from the start that if you are being abused sexually or physically, you should immediately seek outside help so that the situation can be stopped. While you still need to apply the things I'm going to talk about today to your attitude, I do not want you mistakenly to think that God wants you to endure such abuse passively. A sexual offender or a violent person needs to be brought under the law. If your attitude is right before God, there is a proper place for confrontation, as we saw in 1 Tim. 5:1-2.)

How should you deal with it if you are the victim? How should you counsel a victimized person who comes to you for help? Do we have a right to get angry at God for letting this hap-pen? Should we rail at God and get all our rage out? Should we vent our rage toward the ones who abused us by hitting a pillow or yelling, "I hate you"? Or, perhaps we should take a positive approach and build our self-esteem. What a downtrodden person needs is self-respect! So we tell ourselves over and over how wonderful we are.

The world offers all sorts of solutions for those who are victims. Some sound reasonable. Some even sound biblical and are espoused by Christian counselors who quote verses to support their points; but they often mix biblical truth with subtle error. We need to rely on God's Word alone to learn how Christians who are mistreated should respond in their difficult situations.

In the history of the sinful human race, slaves rank among the most victimized people of all. Slaves were literally the property of their owners, who could use them and dispose of them as they saw fit. They were viewed and often treated as animals. This is brought out in Paul's descriptive phrase, "under the yoke." Slaves, like oxen, were under the yoke of their masters, used for the profit and benefit of their owners, with no personal rights. Estimates vary, but anywhere from one-third to over one-half of the Roman population in Paul's day were slaves. Many of them were becoming Christians. How should these victimized people respond to the unjust situations they found themselves in? Should they lead protest marches? Should they revolt? Should they express their rage at God, at society, at their owners? Should they focus on building their self-esteem?

In 1 Timothy 6:1-2 Paul gives an answer. It's easy for us to sit in church and say, "Preach it to those slaves, Paul!" But Paul isn't just preaching to slaves in a far away culture that no longer exists. His words apply to every believer today who is a victim of abusive, unfair treatment. He shows us all how to be a good Christian victim. I offer five observations:

1. Life isn't fair.

You didn't want to hear that, did you? But it's true! Most of the slaves in the Roman world of Paul's day were born that way. It wasn't that they committed a crime or got into debt and ended up as slaves by consequence of their own foolishness. They were born as

slaves.

That isn't fair, is it? It isn't fair that some people are born into comfortable homes in America, with plenty to eat and good medical care, while others are born in poverty in countries like Somalia or Afghanistan, where they can barely eke out enough to survive, assuming they don't get shot or step on a land mine. It isn't fair that some people have parents who love them and treat them kindly, while others are neglected and abused by their drug-using mother and her latest boyfriend. Let's face it, life is grossly unfair and the Bible never pretends any differently. Sin and its devastating effects make this evil world a most unfair place.

But may I point out that you don't solve the problem by eliminating God. The Communists thought they could solve the problem of unfairness by creating a classless society where every-one has equal status and opportunity. But it didn't work because they didn't deal with the intractable problem of the selfish, greedy human heart. So those in power abused their position for their own advancement. The haves still clung to what they had, while the have-nots greedily scrambled to take it away from them.

By taking God out of the equation, you extinguish the only true source of hope in an unfair world. If there is no God, then this is just a dog-eat-dog world where the toughest, meanest dogs manage to survive a few more years than the weaker dogs. If you happen to be born as a caged, diseased dog with a cruel master who beats you every day, "Sorry about that!" Determinism, the view that victims are at the mercy of outside forces, offers no hope except to try to get into better circumstances. But even if you succeed, you'll soon die, so what have you accomplished? Taking God out of the picture doesn't solve the problem of unfairness.

The Bible is clear that if we got what was fair, we all would go straight to hell, because we've all rebelled against a holy God. Every one of us has cast off God's rightful rulership over us and has sought to live for self and for pleasure, to the disregard of God and others. When we say, "I don't deserve to be treated as I've been treated," we only reveal our pride that lifts ourselves up against a holy God, as if we have some claim on Him. We all deserve His wrath because of our rebellious, self-willed ways. Any earthly comforts we enjoy are not because we deserve them or have a right to them. They only come from His undeserved kindness.

2. Life can have hope, no matter how unfairly you've been treated.

The good news of the gospel brings hope to those who despair. The gospel can shine into the most rat-infested, foulest prison cell and give instant hope of eternal life to a condemned prisoner. In Paul's day, the good news that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners," even the worst of them (1 Tim. 1:15), meant that these people who were treated as human work animals could become gifted members of the body of Christ, with equal status with their masters before God. They became heirs of the hope of eternal life with God in heaven. Slaves were becoming saved through faith in Jesus Christ!

Political or economic solutions offer only superficial hope to the oppressed. Paul could have organized opposition to the institution of slavery. He could have called for a campaign for everyone to write their senator in Rome and protest this awful injustice. Maybe he even could have led an armed slave revolt. It certainly would have been a just cause. Or he could have organized the slaves into trade unions, to give them power to fight for better working conditions, higher wages, health care, and paid vacations.

But even if he had succeeded, what would he have accomplished? Slaves would have lived better and easier lives. But they'd still die and go to hell if they did not repent of their sins and trust in Christ. While I'm not suggesting that Christians should not work for social causes, it is true that comfortable people are the most difficult to reach with the gospel, because they don't sense their need to be right with God before they die.

So Paul preached the gospel to slaves and to slave owners, because it alone is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes (Rom. 1:16). It alone can transform the self-centered, greedy human heart into a new creation who loves God and others. It alone can loosen our grasp on the things of this world and put our focus on the life to come. It alone meets the most basic need of every human heart, to be reconciled to the holy, eternal God. If you're a mistreated victim, God offers the same hope to you today, of having your sins forgiven and knowing the living and true God through His Son Jesus, who died to pay the penalty for all your sins.

But there's a third thing you need to know. Life isn't fair; but, life can have hope, no matter how unfairly you've been treated, if you will believe in the gospel.

3. Becoming a Christian doesn't solve all your problems.

These slaves weren't instantly liberated from their slavery the minute they believed in Jesus. Many died as slaves. The next morning they still had to get up and meet the demands of their master. They still had to do difficult, distasteful chores. They still had to work long hours with little time off. Abusive masters weren't suddenly transformed into nice men just because their slaves were now Christians. Circumstances weren't much different for these slaves who had become Christians.

In fact, the demands on them probably increased because of their new faith. Their owners now taunted them with, "If you're such a good Christian, why are you complaining about your work load?" As Christian slaves, they could no longer steal from their masters as they used to do and as all the pagan slaves still did. And then Paul has the nerve to tell them that they need to honor these brutes and work even harder! No griping allowed! Life didn't get easier; it got harder as Christian slaves.

We have to be careful that we don't misrepresent the gospel when we tell people that God has a "wonderful plan" for their lives or that He offers them "abundant life." God's wonderful plan may be that you suffer from a debilitating disease or that you get tortured or martyred for your testimony. It may be that you suffer rejection and slander because you stand for God's truth.

Read Hebrews 11. God's abundant life for some was that they "conquered kingdoms, ... obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, ... put foreign armies to flight, ... received back their dead by

resurrection” (vv. 33-35a). We read that and say, “Amen!” Keep reading: “Others were tortured, ... and others experienced mockings and scourgings, yes, also chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, ... they were put to death with the sword; they went about in sheepskins, in goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, ill-treated ..., wandering in deserts and mountains and caves and holes in the ground” (vv. 35-38). Make sure you include all that in your concept of the “abundant life”!

Someone may be wondering, “If becoming a Christian doesn’t promise me the good life and the solution to all my problems, then why do it?”

4. Becoming a Christian does deal with your root problem.

Your root problem is your selfish rebellion against God that alienates you from His holy presence. If that problem isn’t dealt with through the cross of Jesus Christ before you die, you will spend eternity away from God’s presence, suffering eternal punishment. Becoming a Christian through faith in Christ takes care of that most basic need.

It also continues to deal with your root problem, which is living to please self rather than living to love God and others. Put yourself in the place of a slave in Ephesus. You’re a new Christian and you’re suffering under a cruel, insensitive master who treats you like a work animal. Or, perhaps you’re blessed to have a Christian master, and you assume that Paul will tell him to treat you decently. But along comes this letter and Paul confronts your attitude and performance as a slave, and he doesn’t say anything to slave owners!

To all slaves, but especially to those with pagan masters, Paul says, “Regard them as worthy of all honor” “But Paul, don’t you realize what abusive tyrants these guys are? They don’t care about anyone but themselves! When I’m exhausted, when I’ve already put in a long day, and they have a need, they don’t give any thought about me or my needs. They just say, ‘Do this,’ and I’m expected to hop to it. What about my needs, Paul?” Paul says, “Your need is to honor these men.”

But why, Paul? “So that the name of our God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.” There is something higher than our happiness and our rights, namely, God’s glory. How we act toward an abusive person bears witness of the God we serve and of the kind of selfless love He calls us to model. We’re the only Bible a lot of pagans will ever read. Can they tell by your attitude, by your hard work on the job, by your refusal to retaliate when you’re wronged, by your returning a blessing in word or deed when you’re insulted, what it means to follow Jesus? By honoring that abusive authority figure (boss, parent, husband, government leader), by serving him all the more because we are Christians, we honor God and the teaching of His Word. And if the authority is a Christian, then rather than slacking off, we owe even better service with proper respect, since they are believers and beloved.

John Calvin, always an astute observer of human nature, comments (Calvin’s Commentaries [Baker reprint], on 1 Timothy, p. 151): Owing to the false opinion of his own excellence which every person entertains, there is no one who patiently endures that others should rule over him. They who cannot avoid the necessity do, indeed, reluctantly obey those who are above them; but inwardly they fret and rage, because they think that they suffer wrong. The Apostle cuts off, by a single word, all disputes of this kind, by demanding that all who live “under the yoke” shall submit to it willingly.

In other words, our sinful flesh is always quick to defend self, justify self, excuse self, and exalt self by blaming others. “Sure, I did wrong, but I was a victim! I was mistreated! What about the other guy and what he did to me? If he would just treat me decently, I’d treat him decently. You can’t expect anybody to put up with the crud I’ve had to put up with!” But God does expect us who have been redeemed to confront our selfish attitudes so that we honor God and love others, even our enemies, by our attitudes and actions toward them. It is especially when they wrong us that we have the greatest opportunity for testimony.

Becoming a Christian means beginning a life of radical self-denial. Jesus described it as taking up your cross daily to follow Him (Luke 9:23). The cross wasn’t a slight irritation a person had to learn to live with; it was a slow, tortuous means of death. Be-cause of the fall, we all come at life with a “me first, I deserve fair treatment, I have my rights” attitude. Even the non-Christian philosopher Allan Bloom saw this when he observed that “everyone loves himself most but wants others to love him more than they love themselves” (The Closing of the American Mind [Simon and Schuster], p. 118).

God confronts us by saying, “No, love Me first; honor My name by your life. And, love others as you do in fact love yourself. Think of them more highly than you do of yourself, even if you’re a slave and your owner isn’t a nice person. And don’t just do it with a self-pitying, martyr complex. You must actually love those who mistreat you and show it by serving them all the more!”

Good grief! That’s tough stuff! There’s a fifth point:

5. Dealing with the root problem of self is a lifelong process, not a once-and-for-all deliverance.

“Teach and exhort these things” (6:2b). They are present imperatives, implying an ongoing process. This isn’t a decision you make once and it’s settled forever. It’s something we all need to learn and practice every day for the rest of our lives. So we need constant teaching and exhortation to hang in there. Teaching is necessary to counter the false teaching that appeals to the flesh that tells us, “You have a right to be treated fairly! You don’t have to take this! Assert yourself!” Exhortation is necessary because we all get weary and are tempted to take the easy way out of tough situations.

Jesus taught that this is a lifelong process for those who follow Him when He said, “If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me” (Luke 9:23). To sum up Paul’s word on how to be a good Christian victim:

Christian victims must continually confront their selfish attitude and replace it with love for God and for others.

Conclusion

Let me repeat: If you are being abused sexually or physically, this Scripture does not mean that you should silently endure it. A

person who violates you sexually or physically is not only breaking God's law, but also the laws of this country. He needs to be confronted and punished for his crimes. Neither does this Scripture mean that we should never confront an abusive authority figure. Love means seeking the highest good of the one loved, which sometimes requires proper confrontation. If you're being sexually or physically abused, seek the help you need to get it stopped now.

But this Scripture does confront our selfish, "I've got my rights," "I don't have to take any mistreatment," "I'm a victim, so I'm not responsible" attitudes. It confronts our disregard for God's honor above all else through the way we conduct ourselves in our homes and in the world. It confronts our love for self over our love for others, including our enemies. It calls us to the radical following of the One who laid aside His rights in order to save us from the judgment of a holy God. Brothers and sisters, let's not be overcome by evil, but let's overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21)!

Discussion Questions

1. When (if ever) is it right to stand up for our rights? (Consider Acts 16:35-40; 22:24-29; 23:1-5; 25:10-11.)
2. Does denying self mean becoming "a Christian doormat"? What does it mean?
3. How far should Christians go in seeking political or economic solutions to social problems?
4. Don't true victims need some self-respect rather than self-denial?
5. When should we confront an abusive person? How far should we go in enduring mistreatment?

1 Timothy 6:3-5 RELIGION FOR FUN AND PROFIT

Steven Cole

Religious false teachers down through the centuries have known something in common, namely, that religion can be fun and profitable—for them, at least. They have proved that you can make a good living in the religion business. Some, like Reverend Ike, openly flaunt their materialistic greed. His creed is, "I don't want pie in the sky when I die; I want cash in the stash here and now!" Asked how much his church is worth, Ike replies, "A lot of money. This is a very successful, prosperous, multimillion-dollar operation, and I'm very happy to say that." He also claims not to know his personal salary, but explains, "It's whatever I need." (Newsweek, Dec. 20, 1982.)

Others promoting the so-called "Word of Faith" teaching or "Health and Wealth gospel" tell people that it's God's will for all His people to be financially successful. They quote verses to back up their teaching and flaunt their own wealth as proof positive. As you know, Jim Bakker is doing time for defrauding his constituents and illegally using ministry funds to support his lavish lifestyle. But many others are still aggressively promoting this false and damaging teaching.

In our day when false teachers abound perhaps more than at any other time in history, and when, due to the mass media, they have greater access to more people than ever before, how can you be discerning so as not to be led astray? How can you distinguish a false teacher from a true one?

Paul gives an answer in 1 Timothy 6:3-5. It is not a comprehensive answer, of course, which would require developing a thorough understanding of the whole Bible. But it's an answer that exposed the false teachers in Ephesus; and if they would take heed, it would keep many unsuspecting people in our day from falling into false teaching. Paul is saying that ...

Teachers who promote gain rather than godliness are not from God.

Sound doctrine—spiritually healthy doctrine—is not focused on personal gain, either for the teacher or the pupil, but on godliness. Of course, godliness is actually a means of great gain, as Paul is quick to point out (1Ti 6:6). But in 1Ti 6:5 Paul is talking about the gain of self-seeking and personal fulfillment. It is using religion for selfish ends.

Have you ever wondered how the cults ensnare so many people? Basically, they identify unmet felt needs that people have and then offer ways to meet those needs apart from the living and true God. They usually prey on people who profess to be Christians, but who are untaught or unstable in their walk with God. For example, in her book, *My Turn* (excerpted in Newsweek [10/23/89]), Nancy Reagan tells how she got linked up with astrologer Joan Quigley. Mrs. Reagan was upset over the assassination attempt on her husband's life. To calm her fears, she had tried prayer and had talked with religious leaders, such as Billy Graham and Donn Moomaw (her pastor).

But then one afternoon her friend Merv Griffin mentioned this astrologer, who claimed that she could have warned the Reagans in advance about the fateful March 30th, when the president was shot. Mrs. Reagan called her and the astrologer responded with the warmth and compassion the First Lady needed. This began many months of counsel, which cost Mrs. Reagan dearly—she won't disclose how much, but just says that "it wasn't cheap." When Mr. Reagan found out about it, his response was, "If it makes you feel better, go ahead and do it. But be careful. It might look a little odd if it ever came out." In other words, the bottom line is not whether

it conforms you to God's Word of truth, but rather, "How does it make you feel and how does it look to others?"

What Mrs. Reagan did has been done by millions of professing Christians in our country. They have not diligently sought the Lord and judged their own sins in order to grow in godliness. Trials come into their lives and they don't know how to deal with them. All they know is that they are not at peace. Along comes some false teaching that offers them a solution. It mingles enough Bible to make it sound Christian. They buy into it, never realizing that they are seeking personal gain or happiness rather than godliness. That's how false teachings gain momentum. So Paul's teaching here that teachers who promote gain rather than godliness are not of the Lord is quite relevant in our day, and we would do well to hear him closely.

We aren't sure historically just who these false teachers were. They could have been the Gnostics, who prided themselves on their esoteric "knowledge." They may have been "Sophists," men who charged for giving entertaining, oratorical lectures. But whoever they were, Paul shows four ways that they promoted gain rather than godliness. These errors apply to the false teachers of our day.

1. False teachers promote gain through wrong content.

Note (v. 3), "different doctrine," "sound words," "doctrine conforming to godliness"; (v. 4), "disputes about words"; (v. 5) "the truth." The content of their teaching was in error. As we have seen in 1 Timothy, doctrine matters greatly! Jonathan Edwards observed, "The ideas and images in men's minds are the invisible powers that constantly govern them." What you think always affects how you behave. Satan always begins his attacks through wrong thinking. Wrong theology leads to wrong living.

We live in an anti-theological day. Some pastors of successful churches even boast, "We're not into theology!" They emphasize management, methodology, and technique. They analyze their target audience and design church programs to attract this demographically-defined swath of the population by meeting their felt needs. But as seminary professor, James Means, argues, "Every great movement and ministry in Christendom has been fueled— nay, driven—by theology, not by hot new technology or Madison Avenue technique" ("Focal Point," April-June, 1994, p. 8).

You may not even be aware of it, but you have a theology. If I were to ask how many of you have read a theological book in the past year (or in your lifetime), the number would probably be quite small. You may not be able to articulate your theology, and you may even be bored by the subject. But even so, you do have a theology, and your theology, to a large extent, determines your behavior. What you think about God, human nature, sin, salvation, judgment, and other biblical themes greatly affects how you live each day.

In our day, the prevailing theology is man-centered, heavily subjective and relative. By man-centered, I mean that people conceive of God as the servant of mankind. He is not the sovereign, omnipotent, Creator-God who fashioned man for His purpose. Rather, He is a sort of Cosmic Aladdin's genie who exists to make man happy. "Do you have problems in your life? Try God! He will meet all your needs and give you a happy life!" The emphasis is on man's needs rather than on God's glory.

Here's how this works out in life: You have a guy who has lived a self-centered, sinful life. Then, personal tragedy strikes. His response is, "How could a loving God let this happen to me?" He's saying, "If God exists, He should be there to serve me and make me happy. It doesn't matter that God is sovereign or that I have sinned and deserve His judgment. All that matters is me, and I'm in a jam now, so God, You help me!" God isn't central; man is. And that wrong theology determines how the person reacts when problems hit.

Most American theology is not only man centered, but also subjective and relative. What I mean is that one's experience of God takes precedence over the objective truth about God. God is not seen as an objective, absolute Being with certain unchangeable attributes and with absolute moral laws which stem from His nature. Instead, God is however you experience Him. So professing Christians say things like, "If you're into a God who judges sin, that's okay for you. But my God is a God of grace and love." Personal feelings and experience are central, not objective revealed truth.

Note the two pegs Paul uses to measure sound ("healthy") theology by (v. 3):

A. Sound doctrine centers on the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sound doctrine always points to the centrality of Jesus Christ and His sacrificial death on the cross.

"Christ Jesus as Lord" (2 Cor. 4:5), "Christ is all" (Col. 3:11), "Christ crucified" (1 Cor. 1:23), "Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Cor. 1:24), "Christ in you, the hope of glory" (Col. 1:27), "every man complete in Christ" (Col. 1:28)--the centrality and supremacy of Christ are the themes Paul majored on.

Whether he lived or died, Paul's goal was that Christ would be exalted (Phil. 1:20). Sound theology does not center on man, but on God and His eternal purpose in Christ.

B. Sound doctrine conforms to godliness.

That is, it is not subjective and relative, it is not "God, however you may experience Him." "Godliness," a dominant theme in the pastoral epistles, means conduct in line with God and His revealed truth (see Titus 1:1), especially as revealed and taught by the Lord Jesus Christ. Thus whenever you hear someone promoting man-centered theology, where God exists to please man, and subjective, relativistic theology, beware! They are promoting gain, not godliness, through wrong content.

2. False teachers promote gain through wrong motives.

Paul doesn't mince words--he says that these false teachers were motivated by conceit or pride (v. 4). They claimed to have knowledge. They apparently went to great lengths to expound the nuances of various words and to give their insights on controversial questions (v. 4). But Paul says that they acted out of pride and they didn't understand anything. They loved a following.

They thrived on being up front and displaying their knowledge. They prided themselves on being the experts.

Godly teaching always humbles our pride and exalts the Savior. False teaching trifles with God and builds up man. Charles Simeon, a godly Anglican pastor who was used greatly by God almost two centuries ago, had three aims in his preaching: to humble the sinner; to exalt the Savior; and, to promote holiness. I once shared this in a sermon and explained that those were the things I keep in mind as I prepare sermons. They are fairly evident goals, if you read your Bible. But I was taken aback when several people in the church who were in full-time ministry criticized those objectives. They were taken in by the false teaching that says that a main need is to build everyone's self-esteem, so they disagreed that we ought to endeavor to humble sinners!

This wrong motive of pride is tied up with the man-centered theology I mentioned earlier. False teaching starts with man, centers on man, and builds up man. The reason it thrives is that because of our sin, we are all prone to exalt ourselves against God and to accept any teaching that makes us feel good (subjective theology) without confronting our sin. We don't want to be stripped of our self-reliance, to admit that we are lost and destitute in our-selves unless God is gracious to us.

But biblical theology starts with, centers in, and finishes with the cross of Jesus Christ. And one of the central facts of the cross is "that no one should boast" (Eph. 2:8-9; 1 Cor. 1:18-31). When we understand the cross, we can only sing with gratitude (Augustus Toplady, "Rock of Ages"),

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the fountain fly,
Wash me, Savior or I die!

Thus Paul shows that false teachers promote gain through wrong content and wrong motives.

3. False teachers promote gain through wrong conduct.

Out of the man's wrong content and wrong motives develop wrong conduct. Pride leads to envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth (vv. 4-5a). Their conduct stems from their motives. Since they promote themselves more than Christ, they're competitive towards others. They put down others to build themselves up. They are always engaged in controversy. But their goal is not to build Christ's kingdom, but their own. So they dominate people through intimidation rather than shepherd people out of love.

We would be in error to conclude from verses 4 & 5 that all theological controversy is wrong. Some people are so prone to peace and unity that they condemn as divisive anyone who refutes theological error or exposes false teachers. But that is precisely what Paul is forcefully doing here: refuting error by exposing and attacking these false teachers. Some say, "We shouldn't criticize or bring up negatives; just teach right doctrine." But that's naive and not biblical. Paul not only attacked false teaching and false teachers (as he does here); he also told Titus (1:9) that a qualification for elders is that they "be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict."

But the difference between Paul's methods and those of the false teachers was that Paul's attacks on false doctrine were not selfishly oriented, whereas the false teachers were promoting self. Paul wasn't out for personal glory, to make a name for himself (1 Thess. 2:6). He wanted God's truth, especially as centered on the gospel, to prevail. With John the Baptist, Paul could honestly say, "[Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). He had the good of God's flock in mind whenever he confronted error. Whenever we must correct error or confront false teachers, we need to examine our hearts and root out any pride or self-seeking to make sure that our goal is biblical love.

Thus false teachers promote gain through wrong content, wrong motives, and wrong conduct. Finally,

4. False teachers promote gain through wrong values.

"Who suppose that godliness is a means of gain" (v. 5). (The KJV "gain is godliness" is not correct.) That is, these false teachers were living for material values above spiritual values. They treasured the temporal above the eternal. Instead of being prophets of God, they were making a profit on God. Apparently, they were living well off their "ministries" and flaunting it.

As Paul has just shown (1 Tim. 5:17-18), it is proper for a man who labors in the gospel to be adequately supported by the gospel. But it is wrong for a man in the ministry to focus on money or to profiteer from the gospel. I've always been bothered by pastors who negotiate their salary package as those in the world do, or who move to a new church because of a pay increase, unless their current situation does not provide for their needs (not their wants!). It is wrong for all believers to live for this world's values. "Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15).

In *This Was John Calvin* (Baker, pp. 164-165) Thea Van Halsema tells the story of Cardinal Sadolet, a high-ranking Roman Catholic official who had tried to coax Geneva back to Rome, who passed incognito through Geneva. He wanted to have a look at the famous Protestant reformer. He stood amazed in front of the simple house on Canon Street. Did the famous Calvin live in this little place? He knocked. Calvin himself, in a plain black robe, answered the door. Sadolet was dumbfounded. Where were the servants who should have been scurrying about to do their master's bidding? Even the bishops of Rome in that day lived in mansions

surrounded by wealth and servants. Archbishops and cardinals lived in palaces like kings. And here was the most famous man in the whole Protestant Church, in a little dark house, answering his own door.

Pope Pius IV said of John Calvin when he died, "The strength of that heretic came from the fact that money was nothing to him." In the Church of Rome at that time, such an attitude was unheard of (*ibid.*, p. 164). Quite often, you can spot a false teacher by his wrong values. If he is living for the things of this world, it should send up a red flag.

Conclusion

Thus Paul is saying that teachers who promote gain rather than godliness are not from the Lord. They may do it through wrong content, wrong motives, wrong conduct, or wrong values. But in one form or another, they are saying that you should pursue personal gain, not godliness.

There are many false teachers and many forms of false teaching in our day. One widespread heresy goes by different names: "the health and wealth gospel," "the word-faith teaching," "name it and claim it," or "positive confession." Hank Hanegraaff of the Christian Research Institute says that it may be the greatest threat to the church from within (*Christian Research Journal*, Winter/Spring, 1990, p. 31). I would contend that psychology is by far the greatest threat to the church from within, but the word-faith teaching is certainly dangerous and not sound doctrine.

The main message goes like this: God wills your prosperity and health. All poverty and sickness come from the devil. If you are not wealthy or if you are sick, it's because you have not made a positive confession of faith. When we speak a word in faith, it must come to pass. Since God has promised to answer the prayer of faith, we can virtually command God and He will do it, especially with regard to physical healing or material prosperity, which are His will.

I don't have time to go into the details of how these false teachers twist the Scriptures. But the heart of their error stems from a man-centered theology. God exists to make everyone be happy and feel good. And man can control God. If you simply ask in faith, God must do it, because He's promised (so they say). They deny what the Bible plainly teaches, that God uses sickness, suffering, and poverty in the lives of some of His most faithful saints. And they make everything dependent on man, because faith, not the sovereign God, is the key. I've heard of people who hold this teaching telling dying Christians that if they just had faith, God would heal them. That's not only cruel; it's hypocritical. I've yet to see any 200 year-old proponents of this teaching! Its emphasis is on personal gain, not godliness.

There are many people who claim to be Christians, but they are simply using God for personal gain. As long as God treats them well, as long as they feel good, as long as life is reasonably comfortable, they come to church and live as Christians. But they aren't judging their sins by Scripture and seeking to grow in godliness. And as soon as some tragedy or trial hits, they fall away. The problem is, God was never central in their lives. They weren't seeking Him and submitting to Jesus as Lord. Rather, God was a convenient means to achieve their goal of personal happiness and success. But self was at the center of their lives.

Maybe you're wondering, "Doesn't God promise to meet our needs?" The answer is a conditional "yes": "Seek first His kingdom and righteousness, and all these things will be added unto you" (Matt. 6:33). If you're seeking first personal happiness or gain, then you're deluded if you think you're following Jesus. You're just into religion for fun and profit. We should submit to Him and obey Him because He is the living Lord who gave Himself for our sins. Whether we enjoy a relatively trouble-free life or go through terrible suffering, we persevere because we know that He alone is the living and true God. May we all be on guard against all teaching promoting gain, and may we commit ourselves to enthrone Jesus as Lord and to grow in godliness.

Discussion Questions

1. Paul says the "knowledge puffs up." How can we know the Bible well (so as to avoid theological errors) and yet avoid spiritual pride?
2. How do you know which theological issues are significant enough to draw swords over and which are not?
3. What are some of the dangers of the "positive confession" teaching?
4. Is it wrong to offer the gospel as the solution to a person's needs? Use Scripture to support your answer.

1 Timothy 6:6-8 PRESCRIPTION FOR CONTENTMENT

Steven Cole

The Russian author Tolstoy tells the story of a rich peasant who was never satisfied. He always wanted more. He heard of a wonderful chance to get more land. For 1,000 rubles he could have all the land he could walk around in a day. But he had to make it back by sundown or lose all his money.

He arose early and set out. He walked on and on, his greed driving him just a little farther as he saw new territory. Finally he realized that he had to turn back and he had to walk very fast if he was to get back in time to claim the land. As the sun got lower in the sky, he quickened his pace. As the sun neared the horizon, he began to run. Finally, he saw the starting place. His heart was pounding rapidly and he was gasping for breath, but he gave it everything he had and plunged over the finish line, fell to the ground, and collapsed, just seconds before the sun disappeared below the horizon. A stream of blood poured out of his mouth and he lay dead.

His servant took a spade and dug a grave. He made it just long enough and just wide enough and buried him. The title of Tolstoy's story is "How Much Land Does a Man Need?" He concludes by saying, "Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed."

Although Tolstoy penned his tale in 1886 in Russia, it speaks to our times. A T-shirt put it: "All I want is a little bit more than I'll ever have." Let's face it: the world instills in us the attitude, "To be happy, I need more." That's the underlying assumption behind all advertising: "You can't be happy until you own our product. If you want to enjoy life, then you need this. And you can buy now, pay later, on our easy credit plan!"

And so we take the bait. Of course we need two incomes to support that kind of lifestyle, so both husband and wife go to work. We spend our lives collecting trinkets and toys, in bondage to our credit cards.

But one thing is lacking in this frenzied pursuit for material things: Contentment. Many Christians get sucked into the swamp of discontent. Are you a contented Christian? Think over this past week: Was your time spent pursuing godliness with contentment, or was it consumed with going after material things? I'm not talking about the basics--food, clothing, and shelter. I'm talking about a lifestyle marked by the pursuit of all of the junk that Madison Avenue tries to convince us that we need.

Our text shows us that God has called His people to a life marked by contentment. Becoming a godly person brings us great gain--not necessarily in the material realm, as some false teachers in Paul's day and in ours say--but in the inner person. Part of the gain of godliness is contentment. But how do we gain contentment? How do we extricate ourselves from the pervasive appeals of our materialistic culture so that we can be content with what we have (Heb. 13:5)? In these verses (1 Tim. 6:6-8) Paul shows us that Contentment comes from having the priority of godliness, not gain, and the perspective of the eternal, not the temporal.

1. Contentment comes from having the priority of godliness, not gain.

Paul has just (1Ti 6:3-5) confronted the false teachers who sup-posed that godliness was a means of (material) gain. But then with a play of words, he clarifies that godliness is actually a means of great gain, when accompanied by contentment (v. 6). Godly people have the inner peace of knowing that they are right with God and that whether they live or die, they belong to Him because He is truly the Lord of their lives.

Paul is simply presenting the two choices of masters Jesus gave: God or mammon (money). Note verse 9 in contrast with 1Ti 6:11: a man of God must flee from the desire to get rich and pursue godliness. Fleeing and pursuing are opposites. Take your pick: You can pursue godliness, or you can pursue material gain. Those are the only options. You may not choose both.

Do you wrestle personally with the radical exclusivity of Jesus' words, "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Luke 16:13)? He didn't say, "You should not serve God and mammon," but rather, "You cannot serve" them both. Most of us try to work out a compromise: How about if I'm 60 percent for God and 40 percent for mammon? But Jesus knew our hearts, so He drew the line in the sand as if to say, "Choose your lord! Will it be God, in which case you relinquish all right of ownership? Or, will it be mammon, in which case—let's say it plainly—you are not serving God?"

Does this mean that to follow God you have to take a vow of poverty? No, when we come to 6:17-19 we'll see that it is possible to be both good and rich. But let's not be too quick to squirm out from under Jesus' radical demands! There ought to be an observable difference between the lifestyles of Christians, whose Master is God, and pagans, who are seeking contentment by living for the things of this world.

If God is truly my Master, so that I find contentment by pleasing Him, it will show up in how I spend money and in how much I give to His cause. That's why I think tithing is a misleading concept. If you follow God, you don't just pay Him off with ten percent and then you're free to squander the rest as you like. He owns it all; you just manage it for Him. An outsider ought to be able to look at your checkbook and tell who your Master is!

We would be wrong to judge one another when it comes to material possessions. Each person must answer to the Lord. But it would also be wrong not to judge ourselves! We need to ask our-selves honestly, "Am I seeking first God's kingdom and righteousness, or am I seeking first the things of this world?" My use of money and things do, in fact, reflect my priorities. I believe that Jesus and Paul are both clear, that we must seek to live as simply and economically as possible ("food and covering"), and free the rest to further God's kingdom. If you don't struggle with this continually, you're probably living for gain, not for godliness. Contentment comes from having the priority of godliness, not gain.

2. Contentment comes from having the perspective of the eternal, not the temporal.

1Ti 6:7 focuses us on the transitory nature of life and of the futility of putting our hopes in temporal things. You can't take it with you! A lot of people get caught up in climbing the ladder of success only to find that the ladder was leaning against the wrong wall! A sad article in last Sunday's paper told of how the once-mighty baseball slugger Ted Williams is, at 75, barely able to move, due to several strokes. This man who achieved the pinnacle of athletic success and fame can hardly plod along with a walker now. Williams is quoted as saying, "Supposed to be the golden years. You wonder." If we are leaning our ladder against the temporal which will perish instead of the eternal which will outlast this world, we are climbing it in vain.

How can you tell if your life is marked by the eternal perspective? If you are living for the eternal, not the temporal, you will experience three facets of contentment: freedom from greed; freedom from anxiety; and, freedom from circumstances as the basis

for happiness.

A. The eternal perspective will result in freedom from greed.

(Note Luke 12:13-21, esp. Lk 12:15). Have you ever thought about how we rank various sins? We have our lists of really bad sins and of those that aren't so bad. Where does greed rank in your list? It's almost a virtue in America!

If you look up every reference to "greed" or "covetousness" (the same thing), you will find that most often it is mentioned right next to sexual immorality. In 1 Corinthians 5:11 Paul says that we should not even associate with any so-called Christian who is covetous. In Colossians 3:5 Paul says that greed is equivalent to idolatry. Greed is a serious sin! It will create a number of problems. Let me point out just two:

(1) Greed creates family conflicts (Luke 12:13).

These two brothers were at odds because one wouldn't divide the family inheritance with the other. But when Jesus gives this warning against greed, the text implies that He is applying it to the man who felt cheated, not the other man (who may not even have been present). Isn't that interesting! I would have expected the Lord to say, "You have been wronged! What a greedy brother you have!" But instead He warns the man about his own greed!

Greed creates relational conflicts. How about it, wives? Are you content with what your husband provides? Husbands, are you greedy for your toys, so your wife is left without adequate money for the household? A classic place to watch the fur fly between family members is when a family member dies. I read some time ago about one of the nephews of the Ford family who was suing another family member because his multi-million dollar inheritance wasn't as high as he thought it ought to be!

(2) Greed creates perverted values (Luke 12:16-21).

The man in the parable valued personal affluence and comfort above riches with God. He sought contentment, and verse 19 sounds like he had it. But it didn't last. The only kind of contentment worth having is the kind that lasts. So what if you have plenty stored up for years to come if you die tonight? So what if you work all your life to put aside a nice little nest egg for retirement if you can't be guaranteed of enjoying it?

I read somewhere that the average life expectancy of the American male after retirement is three years. It's not wrong to plan for retirement. But if you're living for the day when you can quit work and live for selfish pleasures, then greed has perverted your values. You're not living for the eternal kingdom of God, but for the enjoyments of this life. Focusing your life on the eternal perspective will result in freedom from greed.

B. The eternal perspective will result in freedom from anxiety.

(Luke 12:22-34). While the Bible does not prohibit and even encourages us to make prudent provision for future needs (Prov. 6:6-11), it never teaches that the way to be free from anxiety is to save enough to cover every future need. While it would be irresponsible not to provide for our family's needs, it would be worldly to trust in our provisions or to greedily store them up for ourselves with no view of our stewardship to the rightful owner, namely, God. Our anxiety over money often reveals both greed and a lack of faith, which the Lord here rebukes.

The key to overcoming anxiety with regard to financial matters is given in verse 31. It's a conditional promise. You must do something: Seek for His kingdom. Then God will do something: Add these things to you.

What does it mean to seek God's kingdom?

God's kingdom is the realm where He is king. There is a future aspect of the kingdom, in that some day Jesus Christ will return to earth bodily to reign. But there is also a present aspect of the kingdom, namely, submitting yourself to Jesus Christ as King and seeking to bring others under His reign.

How you do that will vary, depending on your spiritual gifts, personality, and other factors. But whether through leading a Bible study, through quiet conversation over dinner, or by helping a neighbor fix his car, or what ever—by your lifestyle and by your words you are committed to one objective: to see Jesus Christ enthroned as King over all.

Do you seek God's kingdom? Let me give you some questions that will help you answer that question honestly:

- (1) What do I want most in life? When I reach the end, what do I want to look back and see that God did with my life above all else?
- (2) What do I think about the most? We all have a lot to think about—family, jobs, future, the news, school, friends. But what occupies your mind when you are alone? Do you think about the cause of Christ and how you fit in?
- (3) How do I spend my spare time? You may be saying, "What spare time?" If you're a workaholic, that says something about your values. The way you spend your time reflects what you are seeking in life. It may be obvious, but it needs to be said: Jesus did not say "Seek first the TV set and all these things shall be added unto you."
- (4) How do I spend my money? Where you put your money is where your heart will be (v. 34). Jesus did not say, "Where your heart is, there your treasure will be." It's the other way around. Your heart follows your treasure. If you put your treasure into the stock market, your heart will follow. If you put your treasure into recreation, your heart will follow. If you put your treasure into the kingdom

of God, your heart will follow.

Godfrey Davis, who wrote a biography on the Duke of Wellington, noted his advantage over other biographers: "I found an old account ledger that showed how the Duke spent his money. It was a far better clue to what he thought was really important than the reading of his letters or speeches." I would encourage you to invest wisely in that which furthers the kingdom of God. That will include giving generously to His cause, of course. But it also includes spending your money on developing relationships with people you're seeking to win or build in Christ (Luke 16:9). Take your family on a short term missions trip. Invest in attending a good conference to increase your ministry skills, such as the Precept training or the Self-Confrontation course. Rather than cluttering your home with junk, why not invest in good Christian books and worship tapes to help your family grow in Christ?

(5) Who are my heroes? Whom do you admire the most? Why? Is it someone who has climbed the ladder of financial success? Or is it someone who has accomplished much for the kingdom of God? Your heroes reflect your values.

The eternal perspective means seeking God's kingdom above all else. It will result in freedom from greed and in freedom from anxiety.

C. The eternal perspective will result in freedom from circumstances as the basis for happiness.

Contentment means that you are focused on the eternal. You are aware of the shortness of life. Therefore, your life is committed to seeking first the kingdom of God, the only thing that will last. Since you trust in the sovereign God, you're not tossed around by changing circumstances.

You can see this principle illustrated throughout the Apostle Paul's life, but perhaps nowhere as clearly as in Philippians 4:10-13. The theme of Philippians is joy, and that is quite remarkable, because Paul was in difficult circumstances. He was in prison under false charges (and had been for over two years!). Other Christian teachers were attacking him. The legalists were trying to win over his converts. The church in Philippi had some conflicts between members. And Paul had been short of funds, until a gift arrived from Philippi. And yet he overflows with joy.

To be dependent for contentment upon whether the economy is in an upward swing and your stocks are doing well and you are in fairly good health and are relatively free from problems is to be in bondage to circumstances. At best that's a shaky sort of contentment, because life is filled with problems and uncertainties. Real contentment involves having the eternal perspective, and it frees you from circumstances as the basis for happiness.

Conclusion

There is a legend about a rich man who had a dumb servant. One day the master got exasperated with him and said, "You've got to be the most stupid man I've ever known. Look, I want you to take this staff and carry it with you. If you ever meet a man more stupid than you are, give him the staff."

The servant took the staff. He met some pretty dumb men, but he was never sure if they were more stupid than he was, so he kept the staff. Then one day he was called back to the castle. He was ushered into his master's bedroom where the master said to his servant, "I'm going on a long journey." The servant asked, "When will you be back?" The master said that he would not return. The servant asked, "Well, sir, have you got everything prepared for the journey?" The master said, "No, I really haven't made much preparation for it."

The servant said, "Could you have made preparation? Could you have sent something on?" The master said, "Yes, I guess I had a lifetime to do that, but I was just busy about other things." The servant went on, "Then you won't be back to the castle, the lands, the animals, the servants?" The master said he wouldn't be back.

The legend concludes that the servant took the staff he had carried for many years and said to the master, "Here, you take the staff. I finally met a man who was more stupid than I."

There may be some hearing these words who are reasonably content in life. You're in good health, your needs are met, you enjoy many good things in life, you have a nice family. But your contentment is not tied in with godliness. It's the contentment of circumstances. Being diagnosed with a terminal illness, becoming paralyzed from an accident, losing your job, the death of loved ones—any of these unforeseen events would plunge you into despair, because you're not living for the eternal, but for the temporal. You need to see that true contentment only comes from making godliness your priority and eternity your perspective.

Others may profess to be Christians, to have the hope of heaven, but you've gotten caught up in the pursuit of the things of this world. It's an easy trap to fall into. You need deliberately to reaffirm your commitment to God and to free yourself from the dominion of mammon. That might mean having a giant yard sale and giving the proceeds to the Lord's work. It definitely means getting out of debt and becoming faithful in your stewardship. It means getting your priorities straight and setting some goals in line with them.

God has called His people to a life marked by contentment. Contentment comes from having the right priority--godliness, not gain; and the right perspective—the eternal, not the temporal. Jim Elliot, who was martyred at 28, wisely wrote in his journal when he was a 22-year-old college student, "He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose." You can't keep the things of this world; you can't lose the promises of God regarding eternity. Order your life in line with that truth, and you will know God's contentment.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is it not possible to serve both God and mammon?
2. Is it possible to pursue career success, with its financial re-wards, yet not to serve mammon?
3. How can we determine what “a simple lifestyle” means? Must every Christian live simply and give the rest away?
4. How can we know when we’ve crossed the line from prudent provision for the future into hoarding?

1 Timothy 6:9-10 THE LOVE OF MONEY

Steven Cole

Have you ever dreamed about what it would be like to win the lottery or the Reader’s Digest Sweepstakes? Do you ever think about what it would be like to be rich? Just last week I saw in Newsweek how an Indian tribe in Minnesota makes enough money off their bingo and other gambling operations to pay each member of the tribe \$400,000 a year. I found myself thinking, “Wow! Just think of how I could live if I got \$400,000 for just one year! We could get a new car, we could take an expensive vacation, we could remodel our house. We could buy the clothes we wanted without always having to shop for bargains.” Of course, I always spiritualize it by saying, “And, I could give a lot to missions, too! I could even pay off the church’s mortgage on the property next door.”

The extent to which you find yourself sending in your Reader’s Digest and Publisher’s Clearinghouse sweepstakes entries as you daydream about getting rich is the extent to which you need to hear this sermon, because you probably have at least a trace of a love of money. And even though this is a mostly Christian audience, it probably wouldn’t hurt adding, “the frequency with which you play the lottery.” “More than half of all Protestants—and nearly half of those who said that religion is very important to them—reported having gambled at least once in the last year” (in Christianity Today [7/14/89], p. 54). Almost one-fourth of our general population plays the lottery weekly. However we may rationalize it, the lure of gambling is the desire to get rich.

As American Christians, living in a state where even the government runs ads enticing us to gamble, we need to consider carefully the Apostle Paul’s words, “But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang” (1 Tim. 6:9-10).

Commentators are quick to point out that Paul is often misquoted as, “Money is the root of all evil.” It is not money, but the love of it that is a root of evil, they say. Our money isn’t the problem, but our attitude toward it. We all hear this and exclaim, “Whew! I guess I’m okay, then, because I have the right attitude toward money.”

But not so fast! While money may be neutral, we need to realize that it is dangerous. The reason money is dangerous is the same reason loaded guns are dangerous: they both can be used only by one kind of people—fallen sinners. Both money and loaded guns can be quite useful in certain situations if you’re careful. There’s nothing I’d rather have than a loaded gun if a angry bear was charging at me in the forest. But even so, I’d better treat it with respect and know how to use it or it could harm me or my loved ones as much as the bear could. Money deserves the same cautions as a loaded gun: If you’re not careful, it can destroy you and your family! Paul is telling us that...

The desire for money will deceive and ultimately destroy you.

Paul outlines a three step process: (1) The desire for money; (2) The deception of money; (3) The destruction caused by money. The desire draws you in; the deception gets you comfortable and oblivious to the danger; the destruction polishes you off. This pattern is followed in verse 9 and repeated in verse 10 for emphasis:

The desire: “want to get rich” (1Ti 6:9), “love of money” (1Ti 6:10);

The deception: “snare” (1Ti 6:9), “wandered away” (1Ti 6:10).

The destruction: “ruin and destruction” (v. 9), “away from the faith,” “pierced themselves with many a pang” (1Ti 6:10).

1. The desire: The decision to pursue riches is a root sin.

In Greek, “root,” is placed first in the sentence for emphasis. The love of money is not the only root of evil, but it is a powerful one. Phillips paraphrases it: “For loving money leads to all kinds of evil.”

Definition: What does Paul mean by “the love of money”? Does he mean that it’s wrong to enjoy material things? Are we sinning if we purchase and actually enjoy anything above the bare necessities of life? If that were so, Paul would not state (1Ti 6:17) that God “richly supplies us with all things to enjoy.”

Here’s a definition I came up with as I pondered Paul’s words: The love of money is a decision or desire to pursue wealth for personal consumption and luxury.

The love of money can be either a deliberate decision (“want to,” 1Ti 6:9) or a desire (= lust, v. 9) that hasn’t been carefully thought through. In either case, the person has a goal in life to make a lot of money so that he can enjoy life in style. The goal may stem from a lack of contentment, which in turn may be due to not having the purpose of godliness or the perspective of eternity (as we saw last week in 1Ti 6:6-8). It may stem from “the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the boastful pride of life” (1 John 2:16), which tempt us all. But the love of money is an aim, a goal, a focus.

As with all lusts, there’s an emotional element to it. It’s not completely rational. It tugs at you from inside. The person “longs for” money (1Ti 6:10). The Greek word means to stretch oneself out, to reach after, to aspire to. It is used positively of a man aspiring to the office of elder (1Tim. 3:1). It points to an inner desire. The word Paul used for “love of money” (philarguria = love of silver) points to the love of emotion and friendship (phileo). So we’re talking about a goal that sometimes is a deliberate choice, and sometimes just a strong inner longing to be rich. It stands in opposition to the contented Christian whose aim is godliness because his focus is on eternity, not on this fleeting world.

Often this desire for wealth stems from pride, which the Christian world now erroneously labels “low self-esteem.” The person is seeking the affirmation and status that wealth brings. He needs to prove to himself and others that he really is somebody, and one way to do that is to make a lot of money, live in luxury, and impress people. Biblically, the person doesn’t need “proper self-esteem,” but to judge his pride and self-focus, and to find contentment in God. Because all of us are prone to pride, we all need to be on guard against the love of money. They go hand in hand.

The Principle: The root determines the fruit.

The love of money is a root sin. That is to say, it lies beneath the surface and nourishes any number of other sins. The root in this case bears several kinds of fruit. But whatever the variation, the fruit is sin because the root is sin. The root determines the fruit.

Hear me carefully: You are free to choose the root, but not the fruit. You are free to plant any kind of seed you want in your yard this spring. But once they take root, you’re not free to pick a different kind of fruit. If you plant an apple tree, you may not later pick peaches. We’ve got some weeds in our yard that send down tap roots that could support a tree. Once those weeds take root, they spread and will take over your entire yard if you let them. If evolution and the survival of the fittest were true, these weeds would have taken over the world before animal life ever came into existence! If you let the love of money take root, it’s like those weeds. It will dominate you and in the end, you will reap ruin and destruction.

Think through the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:3-17). The love of money (or covetousness, the tenth commandment) can be the root cause of breaking the other nine.

Commandment 1: “You shall have no other gods before Me.” Jesus said, “You cannot serve God and mammon.” Either money is your god, or God is your God.

Commandment 2: “You shall not make for yourself an idol ...” Colossians 3:5, “Greed, which amounts to idolatry.”

Commandment 3: “You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.” How many people have cursed when they have lost a lot of money?

Commandment 4: “Keep the sabbath day holy.” Many are too busy pursuing riches to set aside one day each week for the Lord.

Commandment 5: “Honor your father and mother.” It is common for the love of money to set children against their parents, or even to kill them to get their money.

Commandment 6: “You shall not murder.” How often murder is because of money!

Commandment 7: “You shall not commit adultery.” How often a woman goes after another woman’s husband because she wants his money!

Commandment 8: “You shall not steal.” Robbery, theft, and fraud wouldn’t exist if people did not love money.

Commandment 9: “You shall not bear false witness.” How many lie in order to make money!

So the tenth commandment, “You shall not covet,” is, indeed, a root sin that can lead to many other sins. The first step toward destruction is when we don’t root out of our hearts the weed called “the love of money.”

2. The deception: The delusion of riches follows the desire.

The desire draws you in. If you don’t confront your love of money and yank it by the roots every time you see it spring up in another corner of your life, it will delude you until it takes over and destroys you.

Note 1Ti 6:9: “fall into temptation and a snare.” “Fall into” is used of an animal falling into a pit. A snare points to something hidden and unexpected. In verse 10, the word “wandered away” comes from a root word meaning to go astray, often with the thought of deception. So the picture is that of an unsuspecting animal stepping on some branches only to discover, too late, that they cover a deep pit. The animal falls in and is trapped.

The reason the pursuit of riches deceives is that money does not last and it never brings true happiness. You can be as wealthy as Mrs. Onassis was, but it won’t extend your life if you get terminal cancer. As someone has written (Reader’s Digest [12/83]),

Money will buy a bed but not sleep; books but not brains; food but not appetite; finery but not beauty; a house but not a home;

medicine but not health; luxuries but not culture; amusements but not happiness; religion but not salvation; a passport to everywhere but heaven.

The late pastor, Ray Stedman, told of how he discovered, to his amusement, that undertakers are sometimes called on to provide suitable clothing for the deceased to be buried in. They make special suits for such occasions that look just like ordinary suits, except that they have no pockets. Their customers don't have any need for pockets. They didn't bring anything into this world, and they're not taking anything with them.

Ray also told of picking up a hitchhiker once. As they drove along, Ray tried to talk to him about the Lord. The conversation turned to wealth and the young man said, "I hope I can be like my uncle. He died a millionaire." Ray said, "What?" He said, "He died a millionaire."

Ray said, "No, he didn't." The young man said, "What do you mean?" Ray replied, "Who has the million now?" He said, "Oh, I see what you mean." Money doesn't last.

And it can't buy true happiness. Some of the most miserable people in this world are the entertainers who can buy anything they want, but they are lonely, alienated, unhappy people. In 1983, Johnny Carson's third wife, Joanna, was divorcing him. She asked for \$2.6 million a year in temporary support while she awaited the outcome of their divorce suit. She needed \$21,625 a month for her Bel Air home—including \$4,945 for servants, \$3,185 for maintenance and security, \$1,400 for groceries and \$800 in telephone bills. Other monthly expenses include \$37,065 for jewelry and furs ("Throughout the course of our marriage I have dressed stylishly," explained the 42-year-old former model), \$5,000 for clothing and department store purchases, \$2,700 for travel, \$10,000 for two New York apartments and \$12,000 for "gifts to friends and relatives." Johnny, who was earning more than \$15 million a year, was able to joke about it: "I heard from my cat's lawyer today," he quipped. "My cat wants \$12,000 a week for Tender Vittles" (Newsweek, 10/31/83).

You don't have to read between the lines to see that even though they are wealthy, here are two unhappy people. Money can't bring true happiness because it can't reconcile us to God or to other people, because it doesn't deal with our sinful self-will that alienates us from God and others. Only Christ through His death on the cross can forgive our sins. Only Christ can deal the death-blow to our love of self as we enthrone Jesus as our rightful Lord. He said, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it. For what is a man profited if he gains the whole world, and loses or forfeits himself?" (Luke 9:23-25).

When you come in faith to the cross of Christ, you begin a lifelong process of death to self-love. You begin with Christ by surrendering the pride and self-love that says, "I can save myself. My good deeds are enough to commend me to God." Instead, you realize that you have rebelled and exalted yourself against a holy God. So you come to Him for mercy and transfer your trust from self to what Jesus did when He took your penalty on Himself.

You continue with Christ as you began (Col. 2:6), learning each day to die to self, to crucify the desires of the old man, and to live in submission to Jesus as Lord. When you sin against God, you confess it and yield again to His rightful dominion over you. When you sin against another person, you seek their forgiveness and learn to love them as God commands. Because you are reconciled to God and to your fellow man, you find that the benefit of this often painful process of death to self is life indeed. And because the love of money is really just a means toward the love of self, part of the daily process of death to self is crucifying the desire for riches.

Thus first is the desire for riches. If we don't confront and crucify it every time it raises its head, it leads to the deception of riches. Deception leads to:

3. The destruction: The deterioration and demise of the person is the final result.

Note 1Ti 6:9: "plunge men into ruin and destruction"; and, verse 10: "wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang." The word "plunge" is used in Luke 5:7 of boats filled with fish beginning to sink. An overloaded boat can stay afloat in calm seas, but any waves will swamp it and suck it to the bottom. A person pursuing riches can go along looking fine, but he isn't prepared for a crisis. He hasn't been living each day by trusting God and looking to Him, so when he is swamped by a catastrophe, he has no where to turn. He goes down.

People who pursue riches "wander away from the faith." The picture here is of a person getting lost. No one plans to get lost. It happens when you think you know where you're going. Often, it's when you think that getting off the trail will provide a shortcut. But you get deceived and confused. Pretty soon you're far from where you wanted to be. In the same way, pursuing riches often seems like a shortcut to happiness. But if you go off in that direction, you'll soon be far from the faith, lost and confused. The word "pierced" means literally, "to put on a spit." If a person pursues riches, he ends up on Satan's barbecue spit!

You'll recall that Jesus, in His parable of the sower, talked about the seed that fell on thorny ground. The thorns grew up with the seed, and eventually choked it out. He explained that this represents those who are "choked with worries and riches and pleasures of this life, and bring no fruit to maturity" (Luke 8:14). My understanding of that parable is that the only seed representing saving faith is that which holds fast the Word and "bears fruit with perseverance" (Luke 8:15). The seed on the rocky soil and that on the thorny soil made a profession of faith, but time proved it to be a superficial claim.

In other words, those whose faith is genuine will persevere. Those whose faith is an empty profession will claim to believe in Jesus, but their lives prove differently. As Paul describes them, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed" (Titus 1:16). Those who truly believe in Christ will root out the temptations that lure people to destruction. When Satan sets his trap of pursuing riches, a person born of God will resist and flee,

seeing it for what it is (1 Tim. 6:11). Every time greed rears its head, a believer must deny that worldly desire, and rather, live sensibly, righteously, and godly in the present age (Titus 2:12).

Conclusion

Maybe you're thinking, "Well, I'm not rich so this doesn't apply to me." But you're mistaken on two counts: In the first place, living in America means that even though you're poor by American standards, you're rich by the world's standards. Second, Paul doesn't say, "Those who are rich," but rather, "Those who desire to get rich." Many times those who lack money have more of a craving for it than those who have it. Paul's warning here is strong medicine, and although it sometimes doesn't taste good, we need it to get well.

Whatever your financial situation, you are prone to the love of money because, as I said earlier, it's tied in with the love of self to which we're all inclined. Let me give you a few test questions that you can ponder to see whether you need to pull some weeds of greed from your own life:

1. You just won \$100,000 in the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes. Is your first thought, "How can I spend it on myself?" or, "To whom much is given, much is required. As God's steward, how does He want me to invest this money for His purposes?"
2. How often do you daydream about striking it rich and how you would live in luxury if you did?
3. Which would make you happiest: Inheriting \$100,000 or hearing that 10 people trusted in Christ because of your testimony at an evangelistic meeting?
4. You have just heard of a passing opportunity to invest in a company that will most likely bring you a healthy profit. You have also just heard of a passing opportunity to invest in a missionary endeavor that will most likely bring a number of people to Christ. Which excites you the most?
5. Is your spare time consumed with the pursuit of financial security and the enjoyment of worldly pleasures or with the pursuit of godliness for yourself and others?
6. John Wesley remarked in early life that he had known only four men who had not declined in religion by becoming wealthy. At a later period in life he corrected the remark and made no exception. Do you love money? Remember, the desire for money will deceive you and leads to ultimate ruin. Flee from these things, you man or woman of God!

Discussion Questions

1. Is it wrong to work hard to try to get ahead financially?
2. Is treating money and things carefully opposed to not loving money? Why not?
3. Where does an obedient Christian draw the line on luxury (having anything more than the bare necessities)?
4. Is it sin to want a nicer house, furniture, car, etc.? How do we assess such desires in light of 1 Tim. 6:9-10?

1 Timothy 6:11, 12 GOING THE DISTANCE

Steven Cole

Question: What do diets, exercise programs, marriage, and the Christian life have in common? Answer: It's fairly easy and even fun to begin, but it's not so easy to hang in over the long haul. Eugene Peterson, in his book, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction* (IVP, pp. 1112), writes,

One aspect of world that I have been able to identify as harmful to Christians is the assumption that anything worthwhile can be acquired at once. We assume that if something can be done at all, it can be done quickly and efficiently. Our attention spans have been conditioned by thirty-second commercials. Our sense of reality has been flattened by thirty-page abridgments.

It is not difficult in such a world to get a person interested in the message of the gospel; it is terrifically difficult to sustain the interest. Millions of people in our culture make decisions for Christ, but there is a dreadful attrition rate. Many claim to be born again, but the evidence for mature Christian disciple-ship is slim. In our kind of culture anything, even news about God, can be sold if it is packaged freshly; but when it loses its novelty, it goes on the garbage heap. There is a great market for religious experience in our world; there is little enthusiasm for the patient acquisition of virtue, little inclination to sign up for a long apprenticeship in what earlier generations of Christians called holiness.

The Christian life is not a hundred-yard dash; it's a marathon, a "long obedience in the same direction." Starting well is easy; finishing well is another matter. We all will encounter numerous hindrances. But, like Bunyan's Christian, those whose burden has been lifted at Calvary will persevere.

In the final section of this letter, Paul tells Timothy and us how to go the distance. Timothy found himself in a difficult situation that

was seemingly not suited for his timid personality. He had to confront the false teachers who had arisen among the Ephesian leaders by refuting their errors and by teaching the truth. No doubt he was catching flak from many in the church who had been led astray by these men and their errors. So Paul, like a coach at half time in a rough game, reminds Timothy of the game plan and challenges him to hang in there, even though it's not easy. He gives four commands in 1Ti 6:11,12 that are pillars for perseverance: Flee; pursue; fight; and, take hold:

To persevere, a man of God will flee worldliness, pursue godliness, fight for the faith, and take hold of eternal life.

The Greek text of 1Ti 6:11 begins with the emphatic contrast, "But you, O man of God, flee these things." In contrast to the false teachers and those who follow them in their love of money, you must run in the opposite direction. The title, "man of God" is used in the Old Testament of men like Moses, Samuel, Elijah, David, and a few prophets. It means a man who belongs wholly to God, who follows God's Word in every aspect of life. A man of God has a certain dignity and aura about him so that when you're with him, you sense the presence of God, because his life is so entwined with God. There's no greater title that any Christian can covet for himself or herself than to be called a man or woman of God.

But it doesn't happen automatically! "Some (v. 10) ... but you (1Ti 6:11)!" To be a man or woman of God, you must resolve to stand against the tide. You must flee worldliness, pursue godliness, fight for the faith, and take hold of eternal life.

1. To persevere, a man of God will flee worldliness.

(When I say "man of God," forgive me for not being politically correct, but I'm including women.) Right off we're struck by the irony of what Paul commands Timothy: "But you, O man of God, flee!" You would expect, "But you, O man of God, stand firm," or "fight." Real men don't flee, do they? Can you imagine a football coach saying, "Listen, team, the men on the other team are big and tough. When they come at you, I want you to turn tail and flee!" You don't win by fleeing, do you?

But Paul knew that there are times when the way to victory is to flee, not to fight. We're commanded to flee immorality (1 Cor 6:18), idolatry (1 Cor. 10:14), youthful lusts (2 Tim. 2:22) and, here, to flee the love of money and false doctrine; but, James 4:7 tells us to resist the devil and he will flee from us. So we need to know when to fight and when to flee.

All the commands to flee can be summed up by saying, "Flee worldliness," what John calls "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the boastful pride of life" (1 John 2:16). The lust of the flesh refers to the strong desires to gratify ourselves by living by feelings rather than by obedience to God. The lust of the eyes refers to the desire to increase pleasure by acquiring things and outward status rather than by developing godly character. The boastful pride of life refers to self-centered living that focuses on this life in disregard of God and eternity.

Satan used these three avenues to tempt Eve. Scripture says that she "saw that the tree was good for food" (Gen. 3:6)--it would satisfy the desires of her taste (appealing to "the lust of the flesh"). Also, "it was a delight to her eyes"--it looked good outwardly (an appeal to "the lust of the eyes"). And, "the tree was desirable to make one wise"--she wouldn't need to rely on God's wisdom any more if she had her own (it appealed to "the boastful pride of life").

Each of these temptations is a differently veiled form of exalting self: the lust of the flesh, to gratify self; the lust of the eyes, to enhance self, both in one's own eyes and in the eyes of others; and, the boastful pride of life, to increase reliance on self and decrease the need to depend totally on God. The false teachers, whose doctrine and way of life Timothy was to flee, were into self. They were puffed up with pride (1Ti 6:4); they didn't submit to Scripture, but rather used it to promote their own selfish views, but without holding to its truth (1Ti 6:4-5); they were into religion for personal gain, not for godliness (1Ti 6:5).

I am ashamed to say that earlier in my ministry, I promoted some of false teaching on self-esteem that has flooded the church. God graciously opened my eyes to it, in part, through my reading of John Calvin's Institutes of the Christian Religion. The entire work is edifying, but he has two wonderful chapters that would get us back on track if we would read and follow them: "The Sum of the Christian Life: The Denial of Ourselves"; and, "Bearing the Cross, a Part of Self-Denial" (Book III, Chapters VII & VIII). To quote him briefly,

There is no other remedy than to tear out from our inward parts this most deadly pestilence of love of strife and love of self, even as it is plucked out by Scriptural teaching.... Let us, then unremittingly examining our faults, call ourselves back to humility" (ed. by John T. McNeill, translated by Ford Lewis Battles [Eerdmans] III:VII:4).

Whenever a teaching appeals to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes or the boastful pride of life, we need to take off as fast as we can in the opposite direction. To persevere in the Christian life, the man of God must flee worldliness, especially the love of money that simply furthers the love of self.

2. To persevere, a man of God will pursue godliness.

We aren't just to run from worldliness, but also to run to these six character qualities. The word "pursue" is sometimes translated "persecute"; it has the nuance of eagerly going after something. It implies effort, diligence, and determination. In other words, you won't accidentally attain these qualities by hanging around church buildings long enough. You've got to go after them deliberately over the long haul.

A. Pursue righteousness:

Here the word refers to conformity to the standards of God's Word. When we trust in Christ as Savior, God declares us righteous in our standing before Him based upon the atoning sacrifice of His Son. It is a judicial action in which God puts our sin on Christ and He credits Christ's righteousness to our account. This is called "justification"; as Paul argues in Romans 3 & 4, it is by faith, not by works.

But, having been justified (declared righteous) by faith, the Christian must then pursue a life of righteousness. As John states, "Little children, let no one deceive you; the one who practices righteousness is righteous, just as He is righteous; the one who practices sin is of the devil; ... By this the children of God and the children of the devil are obvious: anyone who does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor the one who does not love his brother" (1 John 3:7-8a, 10).

Obviously, Christians sin (1 John 1:8, 10). But the pursuit of the Christian is not toward sin, but toward righteousness. During a Monday night football game, an announcer observed that the Chicago Bears' running back, Walter Payton, had accumulated over nine miles in career rushing yardage. The other announcer re-marked, "Yeah, and that's with somebody knocking him down every 4.6 yards!" A Christian may get knocked down by sin every few yards, but he gets up and keeps moving toward righteousness. It's his pursuit.

B. Pursue godliness:

The word is closely related to righteousness. It has the nuance of reverence or awe in God's presence. A godly person lives with an awareness of God's holy presence, and so he fears God and flees from sin. As we saw in 1Ti 4:7-8, we must discipline ourselves for the purpose of godliness. You won't roll out of bed some morning and find out that you magically attained it overnight. You won't get it by going to a spiritual conference or having some emotional experience. You have to diligently discipline yourself to pursue godliness.

C. Pursue faith:

Some commentators understand it to mean "faithfulness," that dependability which is a fruit of the Spirit and should be present in every believer (Gal. 5:22). But it also can refer to the trust in God that consciously relies on Him in every situation of life. As Hebrews 11, the great chapter on faith, shows, men and women of faith believe the promises of God and live in light of them, even in the face of not receiving what is promised, because they trust that God will fulfill His sure word in heaven if not in this life (Heb. 11:13-16).

Again, you need to pursue faith. You don't wake up some morning with vigorous faith any more than a guy with bulging muscles went to bed one night as a 98-pound weakling and woke up looking like Mr. America! How do you pursue faith? By trusting God in the frustrations, irritations, and trials that He sends your way. You deliberately humble yourself under God's sovereign hand and cast all your anxieties on Him through prayer, knowing that in spite of how it may seem, He does care for you (1 Pet. 5:6-7).

Instead of learning to trust God with the little trials, many Christians grumble and chafe under them. They flatter themselves into thinking that if a major trial ever hits, they'll trust God then. But it's the small irritations that God uses to build our faith as we submit to Him and seek Him each day. We need to pursue faith in our daily circumstances.

D. Pursue love:

We often have the mistaken notion that love just flows effortlessly. If we have to work at it, it must not be love. But why would the Bible so often command us to love one another if it didn't require diligent effort? In our day of self-focused Christianity we're being told that we must learn to love ourselves before we can love God and others. But the Bible assumes that we all love our-selves quite well. The command to love our neighbor as ourselves is built on that premise. Calvin notes,

And obviously, since men were born in such a state that they are all too much inclined to self-love--and, however much they deviate from truth, they still keep self-love--there was no need of a law that would increase or rather enkindle this al-ready excessive love. Hence it is very clear that we keep the commandments not by loving ourselves but by loving God and neighbor; that he lives the best and holiest life who lives and strives for himself as little as he can, and that no one lives in a worse or more evil manner than he who lives and strives for himself alone, and thinks about and seeks only his own advantage (II:VIII:54).

E. Pursue perseverance:

The word is not "patience" (KJV, putting up with difficult people), but perseverance or steadfastness, which means bearing up under difficult circumstances. We only can pursue perseverance by daily trusting in God as we hope in the promise of His coming and the blessings we will enjoy throughout eternity with Him.

F. Pursue gentleness:

The word doesn't mean meekness in the sense of weakness. Timid Timothy wouldn't need to pursue that quality, since he seemed to have plenty of it! Rather, it means strength under control. The root word was used of Alexander's horse, a mighty and powerful animal, but completely broken, responsive to its master's commands. As the very next word shows, a gentle man must fight. But he doesn't fight for his own way, out of self-will, but for God's way in submission to God's will.

To persevere, the man of God must flee worldliness and pursue godliness as expressed in these six qualities: righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness.

3. To persevere, a man of God will fight for the faith.

The Greek reads, "the faith," meaning the Christian faith as revealed in the truth of God's Word. As we've seen, sound doctrine is essential for sound Christian living. So Satan attacks sound doctrine, often with subtle errors and truth out of balance. So the Christian must, in the words of Jude 3, "contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints."

The history of the Christian church consists of repeated battles where the enemy introduces destructive heresies, those heresies are confronted, and the truth is clarified and proclaimed. That's what Paul is doing in First Timothy. Many other New Testament letters have the same polemic thrust. The great church councils and creeds, while not carrying Scriptural authority, were attempts to correct false teaching and to set forth sound teaching. The Reformation consisted of godly men like Luther and Calvin combatting the corruption and false doctrine that had permeated the Roman Catholic church and setting forth the great truths of Scripture.

In every age, there are peace-lovers who promote unity, love, and tolerance as the chief Christian virtues. They say that we shouldn't attack false teachers or expose their errors. If you dare to say you're right and someone else is wrong, they accuse you of pride. So in the name of humility, we're supposed to tolerate every kind of error!

But, as J. Gresham Machen, who stood valiantly for the truth earlier in this century, observed, not only was Paul a great fighter, but also all the great men God has used down through the centuries: Tertullian fought Marcion; Athanasius fought the Arians; Augustine fought Pelagius; and Luther and Calvin fought the popes. He concludes rightly, "It is impossible to be a true soldier of Jesus Christ and not fight" (cited in *Fundamentalist Journal* [3/83], p.34). To persevere, we must flee worldliness; pursue godliness; and, fight the good fight of the faith. Finally,

4. To persevere, a man of God will take hold of eternal life.

You may be saying, "I thought Timothy already had eternal life. Why does Paul tell him to take hold of it?" To grasp Paul's thought, we must note three aspects of the Christian experience set forth in this verse:

First, God calls us to salvation or the obtaining of eternal life. Salvation never begins with man, but with God. We all were dead in our transgressions, not only unable to call on God, but hostile and opposed to God, objects of His wrath (Eph. 2:1-3). If you have eternal life today, it is not because you first decided to call upon God, but because God, being rich in mercy, first called you and imparted eternal life to you as His free gift, according to His sovereign purpose (Eph. 2:4-10).

Second, we respond to God's call and His imparting life to us by faith. Faith is a matter of the heart, but it is expressed outwardly through a public confession in baptism. Paul reminds Timothy of when he "made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses," a reference to his baptism.

Third, we take hold of the eternal life God has graciously imparted to us. This refers to the process of laying hold of that for which we were laid hold of by Christ Jesus (Phil. 3:12). God has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ (Eph. 1:3), but we must take hold of those blessings, first by discovering them in God's Word, and then by implementing them in daily life through faith.

Conclusion

Mario Cuomo, governor of New York, tells of a time when he was especially discouraged during a political campaign: "I couldn't help wondering what Poppa would have said if I told him I was tired or--God forbid--discouraged. A thousand pictures flashed through my mind, but one scene came sharply into view."

The Cuomo family had just moved into a new house, their first house with some trees. One tree, a great blue spruce, stood about 40 feet tall. But one night, less than a week after they moved in, they came home in a terrible storm to find that tree fallen, its roots pulled almost entirely from the ground. The family was dejected as they stood looking at this fallen giant. But Poppa, who stood barely five feet six, was determined. He declared, "Okay, we gonna push 'im up!"

"What are you talking about, Poppa? the roots are out of the ground!" "Shut up, we gonna push 'im up!" You couldn't say no to him, so they got a rope and stood, pushing and pulling in the rain, and eventually got that great tree back in the hole, and then propped

and staked upright again. Poppa declared, "Don't worry, he's gonna grow again."

Cuomo reports that if you were to drive past that house today, you would see a straight, 65-foot blue spruce, pointing up to the heavens, with no hint that it once had its nose on the asphalt (cited in Leadership [Winter, 1993], p. 49).

Maybe as a Christian, like that tree in the storm, you're fallen and discouraged. God wants you to stand upright again and to sink down roots so that you can weather the storms ahead. The roots that you need to persevere are to flee worldliness, to pursue godliness, to fight for the faith, and to take hold of the eternal life to which He has called you. Easy? No! Fleeing, pursuing, fighting, and taking hold all imply hardship and effort. But with Paul, Timothy, and many others who have gone before, God will give you strength to go the distance as you seek to obey His Word.

Discussion Questions

1. Some teach that if you're struggling or exerting yourself, it's the flesh. What verses show this to be false?
2. Can a Christian expect to reach a point where the Christian life is an effortless victory or must we always strive against the world, the flesh, and the devil?
3. Was Paul loving the false teachers by fighting against them? When is it loving to fight rather than unite?
4. How can you know when to flee (v. 11) and when to fight (v. 12)?

1 Timothy 6:13-16 INTEGRITY UNDER FIRE

Steven Cole

A recent Newsweek (May 19, 1994) opened with an article re-counting President Clinton's legendary ability to lead people "to believe that he agrees with them entirely ... without ever quite committing himself to their position ... a gift" they noted, "given only to the best politicians."

During the Gulf War several years ago, a man wrote to his Senator, urging him to support the ejection of Iraq from Kuwait. He received a letter agreeing with him, stating the Senator's strong support for President Bush's response to the crisis. But he also received a second letter, sent by mistake, thanking him for opposing the war, pointing out that the Senator himself had voted against the war resolution! The Senator must have taken lessons from the politician who was asked where he stood on an issue. He replied, "Some of my friends are for it; some of my friends are against it. And I'm for my friends!" Someone has observed that politicians and crabs are creatures who move in such a way that it is impossible to tell whether they are coming or going!

Integrity, the character quality of being above reproach, true to your word, and not compromising your principles even when you're under fire, seems to be in scarce commodity among politicians and, sadly, even among many Christians and Christian leaders. But Christians should be people marked by integrity, especially when we're under fire. If we waffle when the pressure is on, it hurts our witness and people shrug off the great message we stand for.

That's especially true of Christian leaders. If we fudge on integrity, the enemy uses it to dilute the power of the gospel we pro-claim. As with banking or the stock market, integrity is the name of the game when it comes to ministry and the preaching of the Word. For the sake of Christ who gave His life for His church, we who preach the Word must strive to be men of integrity. But that puts pastors in a bind, because like most people, pastors like people and want to be liked. But preaching uncompromising truth and preaching against sin is not always popular. You learn early in ministry that you can't please everyone. So you're tempted to play the politician, to try to make everyone think that you agree with them.

Timothy was feeling the pressure to compromise. Timid and peace-loving by nature, he had to stand strongly against the false teachers in Ephesus. It would have been easy to water down essential truth in the name of peace and unity. So after exhorting him to fight the good fight of the faith and reminding him of the good confession he had made at his baptism, Paul (in 6:13-16) gives a solemn charge to Timothy to maintain his integrity in his ministry above all else, even if it means persecution or death. He states the aim: to maintain his integrity under fire; and he gives three great facts which, if Timothy will stay aware of, will motivate him to such integrity: God's presence; Christ's coming; and, God's sovereign supremacy.

To maintain integrity under fire, live with an awareness of God's presence, Christ's coming, and God's sovereign supremacy.

1. The aim desired: Integrity under fire.

"I charge you ... keep the commandment without stain or reproach." The question is, what does Paul mean by "the commandment"? In light of the context and the thrust of the whole book, the best view is that Paul means that Timothy maintain his personal integrity and that he discharge his ministry above reproach (so Calvin, Matthew Henry; see 4:16, "pay close attention to your-self and your teaching"; 6:20, "guard what has been entrusted to you"). He is charging Timothy before God that he live in such a manner that neither his personal life nor his ministry would bring any blot on the name of Christ.

Such integrity rests on a foundation beneath the surface, where no one but you and God can see. That foundation is laid a brick at a

time, as you live each day with your thoughts and private deeds laid bare before the God who sees all (Heb. 4:13). Do you spend time each day alone with God, opening your heart to Him, allowing His Word to search the thoughts and intents of your heart (Heb. 4:12)? Do you judge sinful thoughts, confessing them to God and forsaking them as you seek, rather, to set your mind on the things above?

Men, you can be sitting in church and glance at an attractive woman and allow your mind to be filled with lust. Or you can be out of town, where no one knows you, and be tempted to indulge the flesh through pornography. No one sees your heart, except you and God. Integrity is built on judging and forsaking such thoughts and deeds. Women, you can sit in church with a smile on your face, yet be filled with jealousy and bitterness toward another woman who gossiped about you. Whatever the secret sin, you're building a life of integrity if you remember that God knows your heart, and you live in obedience to Him even though no other human being is watching.

Some years ago Psychology Today (10/83) reported the results of a poll of more than 650 readers. The question posed was, "If you could secretly push a button and thereby eliminate any person with no repercussions to yourself, would you press that button?" Sixty percent said yes--69 percent of the men, 56 percent of the women. One man posed an intriguing question: "If such a device were invented, would anyone live to tell about it?"

Jesus said that murder begins in the heart where anger, bitterness, and hatred go unjudged (Matt. 5:21-22; Mark 7:21-23). So that's where a life of integrity must be built a brick at a time. Such integrity is built in secret, but it manifests itself under fire. The pressure brings out what has been built in. Paul gives Timothy three things that he must keep before him that will motivate him to build such integrity into his life:

2. The awareness demanded: God's presence, Christ's coming, and God's sovereign supremacy.

A. The awareness of God's presence will motivate us to a life of integrity.

"I charge you in the presence of God ... and of Christ Jesus" (1Ti 6:13). The close association of God and Christ Jesus, plus the assumed omnipresence of Christ, point to Jesus' deity. Paul reminds Timothy that both God the Father and Christ are listening in and watching as he gives this charge to Timothy. Keeping in mind the fact that God and Christ are always with us will motivate us to live each moment to please Him, whether or not anyone else is there.

Note how Paul describes both God and Christ here. God "gives life to all things." Christ Jesus "testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate." Why does he use these descriptions in this context? Because Timothy was under fire in his ministry! Paul wanted him to remember that the God in whose presence he lived and served is both the giver and sustainer of life itself. If evil men threatened to kill Timothy, God could either preserve him from death or give him courage to be a faithful witness unto death, even as Christ faithfully bore witness to Pilate, rather than seeking to save His life by softening His witness. Though the cross is foolishness to many, Timothy should remember Christ who bore witness even through the cross, and not shrink from preaching God's foolishness through which He is pleased to give eternal life to all who believe.

I read about a pastor in India who felt God's call to go to the second most sacred site for a Hindu pilgrimage and plant a church there. His wife chose to go with him, taking along their children, even though the last missionary who tried to live there had been murdered and his head placed in the temple. They went and lived in poverty, in filthy conditions, with no human means of support.

In the fifteen years he has been there, this man of God has been beaten many times, he has been threatened with being skinned and thrown into the sea, his oldest son has been beaten and threatened with crucifixion for preaching, and the schools he has built for pastors have been burned to the ground, and he has built them again. But he perseveres, willing to lay down his life for Christ, because he trusts in the God who gives life to all and he knows that Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate is with him.

Most of us know nothing of such hardship. I sure don't! I hear a lot of American pastors talk about the stress of ministry, and I don't deny that there are pressures. On a few occasions I've had some angry people calling for my resignation. I've joked to Marla, "At least so far no one is after my life; they're just after my job!" But whatever pressures you or I face to compromise our testimony to God's saving grace in Christ, we can stand firm if we remember the presence of God, who gives life to all, and Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate.

B. The awareness of Christ's coming will motivate us to a life of integrity.

Paul goes on to urge Timothy to "keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will reveal in His own time" (literal translation). Although Christ is always present spiritually, He is not present visibly until that glorious moment when He will come again and take us to be with Him.

Jesus told the eleven, as they were anxious about His impending departure, not to be troubled, but to trust in God and in Him, because He was going to prepare a place for them. Then He promised, "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). Jesus' second coming is as sure as His word! Unless He was a liar or imposter, we can count on His promise and know that one day soon He will appear and that we who have believed in Him will be caught up "in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:17).

Any delay in Christ's coming is certainly not due to God's in-ability, as Paul's final crescendo of praise makes clear! Rather, it is due to God's sovereign timing--He will bring it about "in His own time." As Jesus told the disciples just prior to His ascension when they inquired about His second coming, "It is not for you to know times or epochs which the Father has fixed by His own authority; but you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses ..." (Acts 1:7, 8). In other words, we are to get on with His work, aware that He is coming, but not sure exactly when.

The 20th Century Fox company once advertised for a sales-man and got this reply from an applicant: "I am at present selling furniture at the address below. You may judge my ability as a salesman if you will stop in to see me at any time, pretending that you are interested in buying furniture. When you come in you can identify me by my red hair. And I will have no way of identifying you. Such salesmanship as I exhibit during your visit, therefore, will be no more than my usual workaday approach, and not a special effort to impress a prospective employer." (In "Bits & Pieces," 3/85.)

I don't know if he got the job, but his attitude was what ours should be as we conduct ourselves in this world. We don't know when our Lord will return; we just know He's coming. So we ought always to live without stain or reproach, ready to meet Him.

Thus Paul is saying that to maintain integrity, especially under fire, we must live with the awareness of God's presence and of Christ's soon coming.

C. The awareness of God's sovereign supremacy will motivate us to a life of integrity.

Paul's mention of God's sovereignly fixing the time of Christ's return leads him to an outburst of praise as he thinks on who God is. Verses like this overwhelm me as I think about preaching on them, because I can scarcely grasp them myself, let alone say anything to make them more meaningful to you. "Who is adequate for these things?" (2 Cor. 2:16)!

(1) God is blessed. This means that He is perfect and sufficient in and of Himself, that all satisfaction and joy are inherent in God's very nature. He did not create the universe or the human race to fulfill some lack in Himself. God wasn't lonely or needing fellowship before He created man. Nor is God frustrated or unhappy with the way history is going, as if it were out of His control. Although Scripture pictures God as displeased with our disobedience and rebellion, nothing we do can disturb the deep, abiding, settled blessedness of God.

(2) The blessed God is the only source of true blessing and joy for His creatures. As Jesus taught in the Beatitudes, we can only know true happiness when we are rightly related to God who possesses such blessedness infinitely in Himself. We may find fleeting happiness in relationships or things. We may find passing pleasure in art, beauty, nature, or sex. But true and lasting satisfaction can only be found in God Himself who is blessed.

(3) God is the only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords. The Greek word, *dynastes*, refers to the inherent capacity of someone to carry something out. God delegates authority to earthly kings as He wishes, but they are nothing in His sight, and He can dispose of the mightiest earthly ruler as a man flicks an ant off his arm. The proud Nebuchadnezzar ruled over the greatest kingdom on earth, but God humbled him like a beast of the field so that he might learn that "the Most High is ruler over the realm of man-kind, and bestows it on whom He wishes" (Dan. 4:17, 25, 32). God is the only Sovereign!

When God graciously restored Nebuchadnezzar to his throne, he tells us, "I blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him who lives forever; for His dominion is an everlasting dominion, and His kingdom endures from generation to generation. And all the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing, but He does according to His will in the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of earth; and no one can ward off His hand or say to Him, 'What have You done?'" (Dan. 4:34-35). We as creatures can only know true blessing when we humble ourselves under the sovereign hand of the Almighty God!

The title, "King of kings and Lord of lords" that here is ascribed to God the Father is also given to the Lord Jesus Christ in His second coming, which proves His deity (Rev. 17:14; 19:16). It would be blasphemy for a mere creature to share this exalted title with the only Sovereign of the universe. Any teaching that diminishes the supreme sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ is from the devil, whose one goal has been to overthrow the sovereignty of the Triune God.

(3) God alone is immortal (lit., "free from death"). He is the only uncreated, self-existent being who is not subject to death. The Father has life in Himself and gives it to whomever He wishes, and Jesus claimed the same divine attribute for Himself (John 5:26, 21). Proud men exalt themselves as if they will live forever. God sends an invisible virus or microbe and lays the strongest of men in the dust. The mighty Alexander the Great conquered the world but died in his early thirties in a drunken stupor with a raging fever. Only God is immortal!

(4) God dwells in unapproachable light. This refers to the splendor of God's inherent glory, and especially to His unapproachable holiness. No sinful human being could even dare to draw near to God apart from His grace in Christ any more than we would dare to put a man on the sun. He would be instantly consumed. We can't even look at the sun for more than a split second without being blinded. Even so much brighter is God in His splendor!

(5) God is invisible. "Whom no man has seen or can see." God is spirit and cannot be apprehended by our finite human senses. We could never come to know such a great and mighty Being through our own reason or will power or human ability. But God

condescended to reveal Himself to us in Jesus, who is the visible manifestation of the invisible God. Jesus said, "Not that any man has seen the Father, except the One who is from God; He has seen the Father" (John 6:46). He further claimed that no one knows "who the Father is except the Son, and anyone to whom the Son wills to reveal Him" (Luke 10:22). We can't even come to know this sovereign, immortal, unapproachably holy, invisible God unless the Lord Jesus chooses to reveal Him to us!

So with Paul, we can only be overwhelmed with worship as we proclaim, "To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen." If we maintain an awareness of the sovereign supremacy of our God, we can also maintain our integrity as men and women of God, even when we're under fire.

Conclusion

John Piper, a pastor in Minneapolis, writes about a Sunday when he decided to preach on the greatness of God in His holiness and majesty as revealed in Isaiah's vision (Isa. 6). Normally, of course, Piper would have worked on applying such truth to his flock. But on that day he felt led to make a test of whether the portrayal of the greatness of God in and of itself would meet the needs of people.

What he didn't realize was that not long before that Sunday one of the young families in his church had discovered that their child was being sexually abused by a close relative. This family was there that Sunday and sat under his message. Piper reflects, "I wonder how many advisers to us pastors today would have said: 'Pastor Piper, can't you see your people are hurting? Can't you come down out of the heavens and get practical? Don't you realize what kind of people sit in front of you on Sunday?'

Some weeks later he learned the story. The husband took him aside after a Sunday service and said, "John, these have been the hardest months of our lives. Do you know what has gotten me through? The vision of the greatness of God's holiness that you gave me the first week of January. It has been the rock we could stand on" (in *The Supremacy of God in Preaching* [Baker], p. 10).

Is proper theology and sound doctrine practical or impractical? What need do you have, what problem do you face, that can-not be met by getting a bigger vision of the Almighty God? Is your aim to keep God's commandment without stain or reproach, but you're feeling pressure to compromise your testimony? Then get a bigger awareness of God: of His presence which is always with you; of the soon appearing of the already-present Lord Jesus Christ; and of God's sovereign supremacy. By His grace you will join Timothy and many other saints who have glorified God by testifying the good confession. You will live with integrity, even under fire.

Discussion Questions

1. Why is integrity so rare, seemingly even among Christian leaders?
2. The trend today is for Christian leaders to be "vulnerable," sharing their faults. But Timothy was to live "without stain or reproach." Where's the balance?
3. One popular pastor and author says we need to be more "man-centered" in our theology. Why is this fundamentally flawed?
4. How (practically) can we gain a bigger view of God's sovereign supremacy?

1 Timothy 6:17-21 HOW TO BE GOOD AND RICH

Steven Cole

Is it possible to be good and rich? After watching the rich young ruler walk away from eternal life, Jesus said, "Truly I say to you, it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:23-24). He meant a literal needle, not a low gate in the wall of Jerusalem, as is sometimes taught. He was saying that it's impossible, not merely difficult, for the rich to enter God's kingdom. He instructed His followers: "Sell your possessions and give to charity; ..." (Luke 12:33). "So therefore, no one of you can be My disciple who does not give up all his own possessions" (Luke 14:33). "You cannot serve God and Mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

James cries out, "Come now, you rich, weep and howl for your miseries which are coming upon you. Your riches have rotted and your garments have become moth-eaten. Your gold and your silver have rusted; and their rust will be a witness against you and will consume your flesh like fire. It is in the last days that you have stored up your treasure! Behold the pay of the laborers who mowed your fields, and which has been withheld by you, cries out against you; and the outcry of those who did the harvesting has reached the ears of the Lord of Sabaoth. You have lived luxuriously on the earth and led a life of wanton pleasure; you have fattened your hearts in a day of slaughter" (James 5:1-5).

In the Revelation, John depicts the judgment that will befall the rich, "And they threw dust on their heads and were crying out, weeping and mourning, saying, 'Woe, woe, the great city, in which all who had ships at sea became rich by her wealth, for in one hour she has been laid waste!'" (Rev. 18:19).

We have recently studied the words of Paul (1 Tim. 6:9-10), "But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and

some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang.” After reading such portions of Scripture, we must ask ourselves: “Is it possible to be both good and rich?”

You may be thinking, “That question doesn’t concern me, because I’m not rich and I never will be.” Not so! Perhaps none of us are super rich. But by world standards, we’re rich. Our homes have indoor plumbing, electricity, heat, and furniture. We own many convenient appliances. Most of us own at least one automobile. We all have several changes of clothes. We enjoy clean drinking water and have access to the world’s best medical care. We’re all rich!

Because we’re rich, and because the Bible contains so many warnings to those who are rich, we need to consider carefully Paul’s words in 1 Timothy 6:17-21. Even though money is dangerous, as we saw in 6:9-10, it is possible to be both good and rich if we become generous people, with our hope fixed on God, with the right perspective toward material things.

To be good and rich, we must aim to be rich toward God.

Being “rich toward God” is Jesus’ phrase. After telling the parable of the foolish rich man who planned to store up much for himself, only to find himself standing before God that very night, Jesus warned, “So is the man who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:21). The only way to be both good and rich is to strive to be rich toward God. Paul shows us four ways to aim for that goal:

1. To be rich toward God, guard against the dangers of riches.

Paul mentions two specific dangers for all who are rich:

A. Guard yourself against pride.

The word “instruct” is the same word translated “charge” (1Ti 6:13). It’s a military word meaning “command.” Paul isn’t dispensing helpful hints here, but God’s authoritative command for His people. “Conceited” is used only here in the New Testament, and means to be high-minded, to think you’re better than others. Pride is a problem for everyone, but especially for those who are rich. It’s easy to look down on the poor and think, “If they would work as hard as I do, or, if they just used their heads like I do, they wouldn’t be poor.” In other words, “I am the reason I’m rich. I worked hard; I used my smarts. I deserve it.”

A person with that kind of high-minded attitude is not going to be generous. He’s going to hang on to what he thinks he has earned. Even those who have money they acquired through no effort of their own are often proud of the power and prestige that comes from their wealth.

Paul gives the right attitude (1 Cor. 4:7): “... what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?” God has given us all we have. Like Job in days of old, it all could be taken away in a day. If we want to be rich toward God, we need repeatedly to judge our pride.

B. Guard yourself against trusting in riches rather than in God.

“Command those who are rich ... not ... to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, ...” Riches are “uncertain” because they pertain to “this present world” (1Ti 6:17), which is passing away. If the Lord tarries, we, too, all will pass away, along with our possessions, and stand empty-handed before God. All the money in the world will be worthless then. Proverbs 11:4 states, “Riches do not profit in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.” Although we all know that intellectually, we’re still prone shift our security for the future to our finances rather than to God.

Let me say it plainly: If you aren’t right with God, then you’re not set for the future. You may be the richest person in the world, but you’re going to die and in that moment, you will face God. If Mammon has been your god rather than the living and true God, you will come under His awful wrath, not His mercy. The only way to be right with God is to turn from your sin and put your trust in the only substitute whom God provided for our sins, the Lord Jesus Christ.

If you’re rightly related to Him as His child through faith in Christ, then the final part of verse 17 applies to you: God richly supplies you will all things to enjoy. As a loving Father, He provides His children not only with what we need, but often He delights to give us many other good things as well. But we need to be careful never to forget the Giver and get caught up with the gift.

Paul shared with the Philippians 4:11-13 how he had learned to be content in whatever state he was in, whether he had plenty or whether he was in poverty, because Christ was the source of his contentment. If we fix our hope on God Himself, then we can enjoy everything good as coming from His loving hand. We can overflow with thanksgiving for life itself, for food, housing, clothing, family and friends, material possessions, and the beauty of His creation. Even if all this is taken away, we can still have the joy of knowing that our sins are forgiven and that we will live eternally with Him.

Most of us need to loosen our grip on things and tighten our grip on the Lord. We need to be good stewards of the things the Lord allows us to have and we can rightly enjoy them, but we also need to hold them loosely. Have you ever thought about what you’d miss the most if your house burned to the ground? We once had about three hours to evacuate our house due to a forest fire that threatened our area. We grabbed our pictures, a few irreplaceable items, some sentimental things, musical instruments, enough clothing to get by for a few days. The rest can burn. It’s a good lesson on where your hope really rests.

Is your hope really in God Himself? Or, could it be in your things? With things, you’ve got moths, rust, and thieves to contend with,

as Jesus pointed out. If your happiness or hope is tied up with things, you'll be a nervous wreck trying to protect them. If you trust and hope in God, then you can rightly enjoy what He allows you to have, but let things go if He takes them. Albert Schweitzer rightly said, "If you have something you can't live without, you don't own it; it owns you."

So to be rich toward God, guard against the dangers of riches: pride; and trusting in things rather than in God Himself.

2. To be rich toward God, be rich in good deeds.

"[Instruct them] to do good, to be rich in good works" (1Ti 6:18). The Apostle Paul was abundantly clear that no one is saved by good works, but only by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. But he was equally clear that everyone who is truly saved by faith is saved for good deeds, to walk in them (Eph. 2:8-10). If a person claims to be saved by faith, but his life is not growing in holiness and good deeds, his claim is suspect.

A story is told of a man years ago in a village who sold wood to his neighbors. He always took advantage of them by cutting his logs a few inches short of the specified four feet. One day the word spread that this woodcutter had been converted. No one believed it, saying that he was beyond being reached. One man, however, slipped quietly out of the store where the discussion was going on. He soon came running back in excitement and shouted, "It's true! He has been converted!" Everyone asked, "How do you know?" "Well, I went home and measured the wood he sold me yesterday, and it's a good four feet long!" That convinced the crowd!

Rich Christians should be rich in good deeds as an evidence of their overflowing gratitude to God for His gift of eternal life. It should include being generous with finances, as we'll see in the next point. But, also, rich Christians aren't exempt from giving their time and labor to help others or to work for Christ. Not only by our words, but also by our lives, we should show that we are children of God, rich in good works.

3. To be rich toward God, be generous and ready to share.

Christians should not be stingy, but generous, because our God is generous and kind, especially to the undeserving. We were alienated from God, in rebellion against Him. He had every right to condemn us. But instead He sent His Son to pay the penalty for our sins. As Paul expresses it in Romans 8:32, "He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?"

As God blesses us with more income, we ought to look for how He wants us to give more, not just use it to improve our life-styles. Gallup polls have shown that as income goes up, people give less proportionately. A 1989 poll showed that households earning under \$10,000 gave away 5.5 percent; those making \$50,000 to \$60,000 gave away 1.7 percent; and those with incomes of \$75,000 to \$100,000 donated 3.2 percent. As I've said before, we need to get out of the tithe mentality. If you earn a decent income and only give 10 percent, I believe you're robbing God (Mal. 3:8-10). Start at 10 percent and work up from there, but don't get stuck there. Re-member, God owns it all; we're just His managers.

During the summer of 1970, God changed my life as I read for the first time George Muller of Bristol, by A. T. Pierson. Muller's life showed me that I could live by faith in God and that He answers prayer. Muller founded an orphanage that grew to over 2,000 children. He never solicited funds, except in prayer to God. But one secret of Muller's success with God was that he lived very simply and generously gave away vast sums to missions.

In 1874, for example, he received for personal income (from donations) 3,100 pounds. That was a tidy sum in those days, and he could have lived lavishly. But he and his family lived on 250 pounds and gave away the rest (he lived on 8% and gave away 92%). To put that in today's money, if the 250 pounds were equivalent to \$25,000, then Muller received \$310,000, but gave away \$285,000 and lived on \$25,000! From 1870 on, Muller personally fully supported 20 missionaries with the China Inland Mission. Over the years 1831-1885, I calculated that he gave away 86 percent of his income to the Lord's work! God funneled it in the top, but Muller kept the bottom open, never hoarding it or squandering it on personal luxury.

Do you want to know a main reason we aren't generous givers? We don't trust God! We mistakenly think that we've got to cover all possible contingencies, and so we're afraid to give because we aren't trusting in the living God to meet our needs in the future. But it's a great adventure to trust God by giving and then trust Him to supply our needs.

I heard about a man who wasn't giving as he should. His pastor pushed tithing, giving 10 percent, but this man didn't see how he could give that much and still meet his bills. The pastor said to him, "John, if I promise to make up the difference in your monthly bills if you fall short, do you think you could try tithing for just one month?" As a moment's pause, John responded, "Sure, if you promise to make up any shortage, I guess I could try tithing for one month." The pastor shot back with, "Now what do you think of that! You'd be willing to trust a mere man like myself, who possesses so little materially, but you couldn't trust your Heavenly Father who owns the whole universe!"

Another reason we don't give generously is that we're sloppy, impulsive managers of the Lord's resources. We get caught up with American consumerism, mistakenly thinking that we need more junk and we need it right now. So, we spend money we don't have on junk we don't need. Let me put it bluntly: If you're in debt, you don't have money to spend on entertainment or meals out. If you're in debt and not giving above 10 percent to the Lord's work, you don't have money to spend on non-essentials (a new TV set or better computer is not essential!). If you're in debt, then you aren't "ready to share."

Maybe you're wondering, "How much are we supposed to give?" The New Testament answer is, "Give as God has prospered you"

(1 Cor. 16:2; 2 Cor. 9:8-11). C. S. Lewis said, "I do not believe I can settle how much you ought to give. I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditures on comfort, luxuries, amusements, etc. are up to the standards common among others with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little."

So, to be rich toward God, we must guard against the dangers of riches, namely, pride and trusting in money; we must be rich in good deeds; and, we must be generous and ready to share.

4. To be rich toward God, focus on the reality of eternity.

"Storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life in-deed" (1Ti 6:19). Do you want to store up treasures that are absolutely secure for the future? Then put your money where neither moths nor rust corrupt, where thieves can't break in to steal (Matt. 6:19-21). Anything you invest in this life can be taken from you. Anything you invest in eternity is secure in the bank of heaven. If you had thousands of dollars in paper money that you needed to store in a safe place, you wouldn't put it in a shack in a forest known for its frequent fires. And yet people who take a measure of caution in making sure their earthly goods are safe never stop to consider that the earth is going to burn (2 Pet. 3:10). Only what you invest in God's kingdom will remain.

I find it ironic that Sigmund Freud's favorite story was about a sailor shipwrecked on a South Sea island. The natives captured him, put him on their shoulders, carried him to their village, and set him on a crude throne. Little by little the man learned that it was their custom each year to make some man a king for a year. He liked that idea until he began wondering what had happened to all the previous kings. He discovered that after the year was up, the kings were banished to a deserted island where they starved to death.

The sailor didn't like that idea, but he still had some time left. So he put his subjects to work, building a house, transplanting fruit trees, and planting crops on the island. So when his year was up, as he knew it would be, he was banished, not to a barren island, but to a place of abundance. Too bad Freud didn't apply it!

We all know that we will die and face eternity. We only have so many years to be storing up treasures in heaven, by giving generously to God's work. It would be short-sighted and foolish of us to live well here but to have no regard to that which certainly lies ahead.

To be good and rich, we must work to be rich with God by guarding against the dangers of riches, by being rich in good deeds, by being generous and ready to share, and by focusing on the reality of eternity.

Conclusion

Paul concludes with a final warning to Timothy (6:20-21) which I'm just briefly going to touch on. He appeals to Timothy to guard the deposit (lit.) which God had entrusted to him by avoiding the empty speculations of the false teachers, who claimed to have knowledge, but didn't know what they were talking about. This brings him full circle back to the warnings of chapter one. Paul meant the deposit of the gospel as well as the spiritual gifts Timothy had been given.

Not just Timothy, but each of us who knows Christ has been given a deposit from God: the gospel message, the truth of God's Word, the spiritual gifts and the material resources He has entrusted to us. Each of us is accountable to God to guard that deposit by being faithful managers of all we have received, so that we may someday hear from our Lord, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Next week I'm going to devote the entire message to a specific application of this text. I'm much in prayer about it and would ask you to pray that I would faithfully deliver God's message for this church at this time. I ask you to be in prayer this week, asking God to open your heart to what He may want to do through you in response to that message.

I would also ask you to seek God about whether you are being faithful to store up riches in heaven. Do you view all that you have as belonging to God, not to yourself? Do you view yourself as God's manager, accountable to Him for how you handle all He entrusts to you? Do you evaluate your income, your possessions, and your spending in light of God's purpose? Is your aim to become rich toward God?

The late comedian, Jack Benny, who joked often about his miserly love of money, had a skit where he was walking along when an armed robber accosted him, stuck a gun under his nose, and ordered, "Your money or your life!" There was a long pause; Jack did nothing. The robber impatiently said, "Well?" Jack replied, "Don't rush me, I'm thinking about it."

God's Word clearly says to each of us, "Live for yourself now, store up treasures on earth, and miss out in eternity; or, invest generously in eternity now, become rich toward God, and you will take hold of that which is life indeed." We shouldn't have to think very long about our decision!

Discussion Questions

1. How do we decide how much to give to the Lord's work and how much to spend on our own enjoyment?
2. How do we decide how much to save for future needs (kids' education, retirement, etc.)? When does prudent savings cross the line into hoarding?
3. Is it sinful for American Christians to live in luxury when people live in utter poverty in other countries? How do we determine

an appropriate lifestyle?

4. How can we tell if our trust has shifted from God to riches?