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FIRST TIMOTHY:
GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH

A Project
Presented to
the Faculty of
The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Ministry

by
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May 2017

APPROVAL SHEET

FIRST TIMOTHY:
GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH

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To my beautiful wife, India,
my best friend and the love of my life,
and to
Drew, Devin, and Christian,
our three sons, who fill my life with joy every day.

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PREFACE

I am thankful for the love, support, and encouragement I have received from so many of my friends and family over the last several years. This work would have not been possible without their help. During those times when I felt overwhelmed, the Lord placed people in my life to offer motivation and encouragement.

I owe a huge gratitude of debt to Dr. James Hamilton for how he has changed my entire way of reading the Bible. Dr. Hamilton's instruction on biblical theology has completely transformed how I teach and preach God's Word. His love and passion for the study of God's Word coupled with his knowledge and insight has been a tremendous source of inspiration to me.

One of the unexpected joys of my experience at SBTS has been the lifelong friends I have made. My seminary classmates have become some of my closest friends. I thank God for the gift of such wonderful friends, and I consider it an honor to have been given the opportunity to study alongside them. I am a better theologian, preacher, and man because of my classmates.

I am also thankful for the support from my church family. I am privileged to serve at Western Avenue Baptist Church, where the entire pastoral staff along with our congregation have loved and cared for my family. I consider it a great honor to serve at such a loving church.

Finally, I am thankful for my wonderful family. Though my dear father passed away this past year, the love and support he poured out to me throughout my life has carried on. My mother is my biggest fan, and I have been so blessed to go over to her

house many times this past year so I could have a quiet place to work on this project. The Lord has blessed us with three great sons, and they are the joy of my life. I am so proud of the godly young men they have become. And my beautiful wife, India, has been incredibly supportive of me ever since the Lord placed a call upon my life for vocational ministry. There is no way I could have completed this project without her encouragement, love, and support.

I have been truly blessed by our great Lord. In the words of the apostle Paul, “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1 Tim 1:17).

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May 2017

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

All successful organizations need strong leadership coupled with sound structure in order to function efficiently and effectively. Whether it is a large corporation or a little league baseball team, a solid plan of operation is necessary for achieving optimal performance. The church likewise needs effective organization and leadership if it is going to survive and thrive. The church must have strong leaders who are committed to leading in a way that holds true to the values and principles set forth in Scripture. But the goal for the church is not higher profits or more wins, rather the goal is to operate in a way that advances the gospel by making it attractive to unbelievers. While there are different books in the Bible that provide guidance for the church, Paul's first letter to Timothy is particularly helpful. In this letter, Paul provides timeless principles and standards of for church and its leaders.

The purpose of this project is to develop a better understanding of Paul's view on how the church should be organized and led. I will be presenting a series of seven sermons that will utilize a biblical theological approach to explore Paul's understanding of how proper leadership should direct the church in correct doctrine and conduct.

Definition and Purpose of Biblical Theology

The term "biblical theology" can take on a multitude of meanings. In its simplest form, biblical theology focuses on the entire storyline of the Bible.¹ Biblical theology is primarily concerned with the overall theological message of the Bible and

¹Thomas R. Schreiner, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 2 (2006): 22.

thus the various parts of Scripture are seen in relation to this overarching storyline. Biblical theology is dependent upon multiple disciplines, such as the historical, literary and systematic aspects of textual analysis. There are different degrees of emphasis placed upon these disciplines, which has led to a variety of ways in which biblical theology is approached.²

There is a distinction between biblical theology and systematic theology. One may ask, “Isn’t all theological study of the Bible biblical theology?” In one sense that may be true, however, there are specific terms given to different methods of arranging how Scripture is organized and studied. Systematic theology is concerned with exploring what Scripture says about a specific topic. So for example, a systematic study of “salvation” would analyze all texts in the Bible that reference this topic in order to formulate a doctrine of salvation. On the other hand, biblical theology is more concerned with the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption throughout history. Therefore a biblical theological study of salvation would trace the historical revelation of salvation throughout all of Scripture. This would result in an understanding of the biblical doctrine of salvation, but with the added benefit of seeing the role salvation plays in the bigger picture of God’s unfolding plan.

As mentioned previously, the overall theological message of the Bible is a primary concern for biblical theology. But what is the Bible’s overall theological message? Is there a center, a main theme that holds the entire storyline of the Bible together? Many different solutions to this question have been proposed. As James Hamilton notes, a center of biblical theology will provide an ultimate reason for what God has done as revealed in Scripture.³ Some of the proposed centers are the kingdom of

²Edward W. Klink III and Darian R. Lockett, *Understanding Biblical Theology: A Comparison of Theory and Practice* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 18.

³James M. Hamilton Jr., *God’s Glory in Salvation through Judgment: A Biblical Theology* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2010), 48.

God, the love of God, the holiness of God, the sovereignty of God, God and the covenants, and God's glory in salvation through judgment.⁴

Biblical theology involves a consideration of the "interpretive perspective" whereby one notes the assumptions and presuppositions used by the biblical author in reference to his interpretation of earlier Scripture, world history and whatever situation is being addressed.⁵ Additionally each of these authors are telling parts of a story, in which they use symbols to enhance and illuminate their message.⁶ Thus the task of the biblical theologian is to factor in all of these elements in order to formulate a better picture of the metanarrative of the Bible.

One of the most important reasons for the study of biblical theology is that it is valuable tool for the preacher in delivering clear and powerful messages. Hamilton says that "if you intend to preach the whole counsel of God, you need biblical theology."⁷ All pastors should be passionate about communicating all of God's word to his people, for as David said, "His precepts are to be desired more than gold" (Ps 19:10). God's people need God's word. Regrettably there is a famine of God's word experienced by the church today.⁸ Preaching that only touches on popular stories within the Bible or uses seemingly random texts of Scripture to aid a topical sermon may deprive the listener from feeding on the whole counsel of God. Biblical theology can be the means by which the discipline of theological study enters into the realm of the proclamation of God's word. Gerhard Ebeling summarizes this idea saying, "Theology without proclamation is empty,

⁴Hamilton, *God's Glory in Salvation*, 53-56.

⁵James M. Hamilton Jr., *What Is Biblical Theology?: A Guide to the Bible's Story, Symbolism, and Patterns* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 12.

⁶*Ibid.*, 61.

⁷James M. Hamilton Jr., "Biblical Theology and Preaching," in *Text-Driven Preaching: God's Word at the Heart of Every Sermon*, eds. Daniel L. Aiken, David L. Allen, and Ned L. Matthews (Nashville: B&H Publishing Group, 2010), 194.

⁸Thomas R. Schreiner, "Biblical Theology and Preaching," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10/2 (Summer 2006), 22.

proclamation without theology is blind.”⁹ Biblical theology should capture the interest of all preachers and teachers in order to shine light on the entire counsel of God’s Word for the benefit of God’s people.

A large cruise ship at sea can be a helpful metaphor for grasping the concept of biblical theology. Consider for example the *Allure of the Seas*, which is currently the world’s largest cruise ship measuring 1181 feet in length and weighing 225,282 tons.¹⁰ In order for a ship of this tremendous weight and size to carry its 6,300 passengers toward its final destination, there are many components that have to work together in harmony and unison. Once the ship sets sail, obstacles may present themselves such as storms, mechanical failures or outbreaks of sickness. However, the goal is to overcome any and all obstacles so that the ship can eventually reach the final destination.

The image of a massive ship illustrates how various parts of the Bible fit within the larger framework of Scripture. Just as the *Allure of the Seas* is an enormous ship with a tremendous amount of integrated parts necessary to set sail, the Bible is an enormous story with a vast amount of interconnected stories. Just as a ship departs with a final destination in view, the story line of the Bible is constantly working toward an ultimate goal. And finally, just as there are various people that board the ship along the way at different ports, there are various individuals and groups of people that are brought into the biblical story and contribute in some way to advance the narrative toward its final destination.

Role of Biblical Theology for this Project

The sermon series that follows will explore Paul’s first letter to Timothy and highlight the importance of Christian leadership and organization. The church must have

⁹T. Desmond Alexander, ed., *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology: Exploring the Unity & Diversity of Scripture* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 104.

¹⁰“Allure of the Seas Overview,” Cruise Critic, accessed November 21, 2014, www.cruisecritic.com/reviews/review.cfm?ShipID=530.

rules and structure if it is going to successfully play its part in advancing the metanarrative of the Bible. Biblical theology will be the map used to chart the course and the guide used to organize the messages while keeping in mind the final destination.

Thomas Schreiner notes this regarding biblical theology:

Biblical theology asks what themes are central to the biblical writers in their historical context, and attempts to discern the coherence of such themes. Biblical theology focuses on the storyline of scripture – the unfolding of God’s plan in redemptive history, so that in every passage we preach we consider the place of the text in relationship to the whole storyline of the Bible.¹¹

In other words, biblical theology will be the guide that shapes the sermons to be preached by illustrating how the passage contributes to the storyline of the Bible. The goal is to present messages that are sensitive to the local context of the passage while keeping in view the big story of the Bible. This involves “reading the Bible in context, not just the near context of the phrase, sentence, paragraph, the wider passage, or the individual book but also the context of the whole canon.”¹²

In order to understand Paul’s theology of God’s plan for God’s church as seen in 1 Timothy, I will use biblical theology as a tool used to understand what influences other Scripture played in shaping his views. Throughout the Bible we see numerous examples of God sovereignly using an assembly of people to advance the story of redemption. We can look all the way back to the gathering of the people of Israel at Mt. Sinai and see how God used them to carry forth His plan. We also see how God used leaders to lead these assemblies. From Moses to David, all leadership ultimately is derived from God’s leadership, who also appointed Christ to be the leader of the church (Eph 1:22-23). Paul was certainly aware of these biblical heroes of the faith, and this awareness would have contributed to his understanding of church structure and the character traits required for the Christian leader.

¹¹Schreiner, “Preaching and Biblical Theology,” 22.

¹²Hamilton, “Biblical Theology and Preaching,” 198.

One of the central themes in Paul's theology is the church's relationship to an unbelieving world. A key aspect to the overarching story of the Bible involves the inclusion and advancement of the church. The church enters this story when the ship leaves the waters of the Old Testament and enters the New Testament age. In the OT, the nation of Israel was considered to be God's chosen people. However, when the NT era was ushered in, the birth of the church took place at Pentecost (Acts 2:1-13) with Jesus Christ as the head (Col 1:18). The individual members of the church are now the building blocks of the church, forming a holy temple in which the Lord dwells by the Spirit (Eph 2:21-22).

Paul clearly states that his purpose in writing to Timothy is so that the church, the body of Christ, would know how to behave, function and carry out the mission of expanding the church to the four corners of the world (1 Tim 3:15). This knowledge is to be both modeled and taught by the Christian leader. Paul wants Timothy, and by extension the local church, to know how to conduct themselves in order to continue the advancement of the church, the bride of Christ, while the church waits for the return of the King.¹³ When new members are added to the church, "disciples are made, the temple grows, the place of God's presence expands, and God's glory spreads over the dry land."¹⁴

Though the church that set sail during the time of Paul looks much different today, it is still the church of Jesus Christ. God has hand selected this church to be part of the journey in His story of redeeming his people to himself. Members on board must know what is expected of them in order to have structure and order. At times sailing may not be smooth and the church will require strong leadership in order to navigate through rough waters. Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, who was leading a new church in

¹³Hamilton, *What Is Biblical Theology?*, 113.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, 106.

Ephesus, because he saw some rough waters ahead for the young leader. God has used this letter not only to instruct Timothy, but to provide the church in all generations with timeless principles so that the church may continue to advance. The church is not just something that is nice and convenient, the church is necessary for God's grand story of redemption.

Familiarity with the Literature

There are many excellent commentaries on the Pastoral Epistles that are now available. However, as D. A. Carson notes, this has not always been the case, at least in terms of English commentaries.¹⁵ Perhaps the rise in scholarly resources now available on the Pastoral Epistles can be attributed to a need to respond to critical attacks that have come upon these letters. These attacks range from questions of Pauline authorship to Paul's view of women in the church.

One of the better known commentaries on the pastorals is *The Pastoral Epistles* by George Knight.¹⁶ This technical commentary provides a verse by verse exegesis of the text, with a focus on the original Greek. This volume does an excellent job of providing in-depth word studies while also engaging the grammatical issues found within 1 Timothy. This volume is part of The New International Greek Testament Commentary series.

Another important contribution to the field of study on the Pastoral Epistles is the International Critical Commentary from I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*.¹⁷ Carson highly endorses this volume stating that it is "packed with thoughtful, well-

¹⁵D. A. Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 7th ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 127.

¹⁶George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992).

¹⁷I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004).

written reflection on every issue of importance.”¹⁸ However, Marshall places a question mark beside the authorship of the pastorals. This has an influence on some of his other positions so this volume must be read cautiously. However, this massive work is still outstanding and important for any study of the Pastoral Epistles.

After assisting Marshall with his above referenced commentary, Towner has gone on to offer his own work on the Pastorals. This massive commentary, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, is part of the New International Commentary on the New Testament series.¹⁹ The volume takes an historical approach and provides some helpful background on the views of both Paul and Timothy. Towner goes against Marshall in that he holds to Pauline authorship for all of the pastorals and his defense of this position is convincing and well stated. Towner addresses other recent critical attacks on the pastorals, and he is not shy about interacting with other relevant commentaries.

William Mounce presents another detailed and technical commentary on the Pastoral Epistles.²⁰ The volume is part of the longstanding Word Biblical Commentary series which focuses on exegesis and exposition. Though this particular volume is a rather long, this scholarly commentary remains readable and interesting. Particularly helpful is his extensive background information about the cultural climate within which Paul was writing and in which Timothy was seeking to lead a local church.

Andreas Köstenberger and Terry Wilder have edited a book, *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, which is a series of twelve essays from various New Testament scholars.²¹ This is an excellent resource for understanding the

¹⁸Carson, *New Testament Commentary Survey*, 127.

¹⁹Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006).

²⁰William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000).

²¹Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder, eds., *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul's Theology in the Pastoral Epistles* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010).

recent debates surrounding the Pastoral Epistles, such as questions regarding Pauline authorship, the role of women in the church, and qualifications for elders. The essays in this volume provide some much needed clarity with these issues. Especially helpful is Köstenberger's essay "Hermeneutical and Exegetical Challenges in Interpreting the Pastoral Epistles," where he makes a convincing argument for Pauline authorship.

Because this project will consist of developing a series of sermons from 1 Timothy, I will use several commentaries that combine application with exegesis. Bryan Chapell and Kent Hughes volume *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit* would fall into this category. In this volume, two masters of homiletics provide a helpful exposition of the Pastoral Epistles. This is part of the Preaching the Word series, which is designed to provide clear exposition coupled with practical application.²² The authors illustrate Paul's biblical worldview and how it applies to today's modern church.

Another recent commentary strong on application is *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. This volume is an addition to the Christ-Centered Exposition series. Different authors take on each of the Pastoral Epistles with David Platt taking on the task of providing the commentary for 1 Timothy. The purpose of this book and every book in this series is to demonstrate how Christ is exalted in all of Scripture.²³ In addition to expositing the text, each section concludes with a series of helpful questions to consider, encouraging the reader to think more deeply upon the application of the text.

Philip Ryken adds to the increasing number of volumes in the Reformed Expository Commentary collection.²⁴ This volume is limited to 1 Timothy and while not a verse by verse exposition, it is a useful commentary for both the preacher and teacher.

²²R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000).

²³David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013).

²⁴Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007).

Ryken is conservative and his reformed theology comes out in his writing. Ryken's focus is on the role 1 Timothy plays in the life of the church leader. He sees 1 Timothy as foundational to the way in which the church is to be modeled both in form and function.

Finally, I will use *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus* by the late John Stott.²⁵ This volume is unusual in that Stott only covers 1 Timothy and Titus, while 2 Timothy is taken up in a different volume. Just as with all of Stott's writing, he provides excellent exegesis with wonderful points of application. Stott is very fair to those who differ with him, though he does not shy away from firmly stating his case and defending his positions.

Why First Timothy for Western Avenue Baptist Church?

Many Southern Baptist churches are seeking to maintain a balance of being biblical in practice and administration while also being relevant within their communities. This is the case for Western Avenue Baptist Church (WABC) in Statesville, North Carolina, where I currently serve as Associate Pastor. WABC is at a point where the leadership is seeking to be faithful to the biblical design and model of the church, while also attempting to grow the church body within a culture that is more and more resistant to anything religious. What should the leadership structure of the church look like and how should this leadership team lead? These questions and more are addressed in 1 Timothy, which is why I selected it for this project. The epistle is “concerned with the pastoral care and oversight of local churches” for Paul provides instruction and guidance for church leaders in dealing with timeless issues.²⁶

First Timothy emphasizes the responsibility and administration of church leadership. This is why Christians often refer to 1 Timothy as a manual or guidebook for

²⁵John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001).

²⁶Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, 28.

the church. It is very practical in nature. This book, along with 2 Timothy and Titus, are often referred to as the Pastoral Epistles, a designation first thought to be given by D.N. Berdot in 1703.²⁷

In his commentary on the Pastoral Epistles, Philip A. Towner discusses the relevance of these letters and notes that Paul takes on the a wide range of topics including “a Christian attitude toward to wealth and materialism, the church’s response to cults, spiritual lifestyle, leadership and authority, the role of women, and discipline in the church.”²⁸ In addition to these corporate themes, the Pastorals also speak to more personal issues such as “the true meaning of godliness, faithfulness to the gospel, suffering and life in the Spirit, responsibility to those in authority, and the importance of Christian witness.”²⁹ The Christian leader has a part to play educating the body of believers about each of these issues.

Paul discusses several items in his letter that are applicable to the modern church. Examples of these include the need to deal with false teachers as well as the necessity of understanding various roles within the church.

Paul knew that Timothy was having to deal with an onslaught of false teachings which had arisen within the church. Therefore, he addresses these issues directly and stresses the doctrinal purity of the church. Paul’s concern for the gospel, the one and only true gospel, is the driving force behind this letter.³⁰ The twenty-first century church likewise is being infiltrated by its own brand of false teachers, from the proponents of the prosperity gospel to those who seek to reinterpret the clear teaching of

²⁷Walter L. Liefeld, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, The NIV Application Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1999), 19.

²⁸Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 13.

²⁹Ibid., 13.

³⁰Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 15.

Scripture on what constitutes sin. Therefore, Christian leaders today need to incorporate the principles and advice Timothy received about dealing with these false teachings and teachers.

Paul also provides guidance for church elders and deacons in this epistle. At WABC, there is one senior pastor along with several additional associate pastors. There is also a board of deacons that basically functions as an elder board. Paul clearly makes a distinction between elders and deacons and therefore part of the aim of this project is to explore the biblical model of how church leadership should be structured in the present context.

The congregation at WABC is starting to feel the pressures of a liberal society seeking to mold and shape the church in an effort to advance a cultural agenda. For example, the incredible shift in society's stance upon homosexuality is putting pressure on the church to adjust and adapt in order to be relevant and tolerant.³¹ Does the church cave in so as to be more appealing to the masses? Or does the church stay firm and let Scripture be the ultimate standard of authority for faith and practice? Church leaders need direction in dealing with these new cultural trends. Paul's letter to Timothy provides this direction and is yet another reason why 1 Timothy has been chosen as the subject book for this study.

While 1 Timothy has great values for church leaders, the letter also has much to say for the individual church member. Because 1 Timothy is often referred to as a "leader's manual for pastors", the benefit for the individual is often ignored.³² This is unfortunate for Paul offers practical advice and instructions for lay members, such as encouragement for practicing the spiritual disciplines and how Christians are to be good stewards of their money. He also discusses how church members are to relate to other

³¹Michael L. Brown, *Can You Be Gay and Christian? Responding With Love and Truth to Questions about Homosexuality* (Lake Mary, FL: Frontline, 2014), 4.

³²Platt, Akin, and Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, 5.

groups and individuals within God’s family. These and other teachings applicable to church members will be developed as a part of this project.

Key Passages Explored in 1 Timothy

Paul wrote this letter to Timothy so that the church might know how to function (1 Tim 3:15). Paul emphasizes the importance of church conduct, and gives instructions for both church leadership and the individual believer. There are certain passages in 1 Timothy that are particularly relevant to this study for they speak directly to issues that WABC is currently encountering. Therefore, this study will only entail passages from 1 Timothy that are most appropriate for the current needs of the church body at WABC.

First Timothy 1:1-11

In this passage Paul instructs Timothy to urge those in the church at Ephesus not to teach a different doctrine than what they had previously received. They are to be on guard against those that promote myths and speculations. The doctrinal purity of the church was a concern for Paul as there were false teachers that were seeking to teach something different than the orthodox gospel. Even though it is not completely clear what these false teachings were, it is evident that it was a “different doctrine” (1:3). Paul is urging Timothy to “guard the gospel.” The church today, WABC included, is still facing the challenge of remaining doctrinally pure because of attacks from both inside and outside the church.

Secular culture is seeking to rewrite the norms of morality as it aggressively attempts to discount and slander the church for seeking to be doctrinally pure. Some within the church walls who seek to readdress how to interpret Scripture, and thus are coming up with different doctrines in the name of tolerance and love. How is the church to respond? Should compromise of the orthodox teachings of Scripture be considered, or does the church hold the line, regardless of the consequences? These are the types of

issues and questions that church leaders face which will be dealt with in this message.

First Timothy 1:12-17

Before the church can respond to the cultural challenges of the day, it must look deep within itself and recognize its own problems. Too often church members have blind spots in regards to their own sins, while seeing with clarity and precision the sins of others. Congregations with highly affluent people can be susceptible to regarding themselves as superior to others. Church members must understand that we are all sinners and that the church of Jesus Christ is meant to be a house for sinners. Along with the knowledge that we are all sinners is the great news that Jesus Christ came to save sinners. That is why he came to earth and Paul clearly spells that out for Timothy when he states “the saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1 Tim 1:15). Paul does not see himself as better than others in any way. He is judging himself and his sins not by the standards of the world, but rather by the standard of God.³³

This sermon will highlight the amazing grace of God by focusing on the mission of Christ. If the church does not grasp the reality that Christ came to save sinners, including the sinners sitting in our pews, then the heart of the gospel will be missed. The Christian leader must prepare the congregation to engage the culture by arming oneself with the gospel. Otherwise, there will be little hope for successfully reaching the lost and shining light on the truth that our culture so desperately needs.

First Timothy 2:1-7

Many things compete for the time and attention of the church family. However, as we will see in this sermon from 1 Timothy 2:1-7, Paul will stress the priority that prayer must play in the life of the church. We see in this passage Paul’s heart for the

³³Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 51.

souls of the lost as he places a special emphasis on praying for them. He also emphasizes the necessity of praying for diverse people groups such as our political leaders. The modern culture has placed prayer in its crosshairs, seeking to remove prayer from our schools and other institutions. Paul's instruction about the priority of prayer is very relevant for the church today. The church needs to constantly be praying for our culture as well as for the lost souls in our midst.

First Timothy 3:1-13

Paul lays out the qualifications for both elders and deacons in this section of his letter. While the qualifications are similar, there are some distinctions which will be examined. However, one of the big takeaways from this passage is that leadership in Christian ministry is based upon a group of character traits.³⁴ Paul provides this list so that the church can identify men to serve in leadership who currently possess these characteristics.

Of the character traits an individual must possess to be an elder, the biggest point of contention within WABC centers around the statement that an elder must be the "husband of one wife" (3:2). This verse has caused confusion for many churches, as there are different understandings as to what Paul's intent was with this requirement. I will explore the various views with an attempt to understand exactly what Paul was wanting to communicate to Timothy about this particular character trait.

First Timothy 4:1-16

For the church to accomplish its mission to advance the story of God's redemption of His people, individuals on the ship have to each do their job. The ministers are called to be good servants of Jesus Christ as they seek to shepherd God's people. They are not called to do the extraordinary, but are rather to faithfully lead, love, and

³⁴Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 78.

minister to the family of God.

Paul's words in this passage are applicable for all believers. He encourages all Christians to do their part in carrying out their calling, which involves training and discipline. Paul emphasizes the need for leaders and laypersons alike to train themselves for godliness. Training is a term that implies that any spiritual development and formation within the Christian will not happen by chance.³⁵ It will take both work and effort. Paul urges Timothy as the leader to both model and teach godliness (4:10). In a culture where godliness seems to be a thing of the past, a proper understanding of godliness for the Christian is vital. As Don Whitney states in his classic book, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, "discipline without direction is drudgery."³⁶

First Timothy 5:1-25

The church is comprised of a diverse group of people. Along with diversity comes the potential for problems to arise. In this passage, Paul will discuss how those in the church are to relate to one another.

Paul begins by providing instruction for Timothy on how members of the family are to treat one another with love and purity (5:1-2). With so many dysfunctional families in our society today, the call is more important than ever for the Christian family to treat one another with love and respect. He speaks to how we should treat people of different ages. He also speaks in some detail about how the church is to care for widows, and he underscores that he is speaking about those who are truly widows. Part of this message will be demonstrating the relevance and necessity of caring for widows.

Paul then addresses the treatment of church leaders, stating that "elders who rule well are due double honor" (15:17-19). Church members today are often confused

³⁵Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, and Neil Wilson, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 83.

³⁶Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 1.

about how their church leaders should be treated in a biblical manner. What Paul means by the term “double honor” will be explained so that church members will know how to properly care for their leaders. He also provides guidance for dealing with elders who have stumbled into sin. This is followed by some comments concerning the ordination of church leaders.

First Timothy 6:3-10

The final message will deal with godliness and contentment. Despite the relative wealth of Christians in the West, most of these believers are not content with their blessings. People in our society seem to always seek to have more and more. This was an issue Paul was dealing with and he urges Timothy to communicate the need for contentment while warning about the dangers of riches. True contentment comes only from reliance upon Christ and not oneself.³⁷ Mounce says this warning is one of the “most powerful condemnations in Scripture of the destructive lure of possessions.”³⁸

This passage is especially important today for WABC as there are many affluent members within our congregation. It is vital for all Christians to be aware of the pitfalls one may fall into when such wealth has been accumulated. As Paul conveys to Timothy, there are dangers involved with money that can lead one down a path of “ruin and destruction” (6:9). Therefore, part of this project will be to explore more deeply into what God says through Paul about money and riches, and then to demonstrate the relevance for the twenty-first century church.

³⁷Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 255.

³⁸Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 341.

CHAPTER 2

WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS

My wife and I both enjoy reading, so we often buy each other books as gifts. In 2003, a new book was released that quickly went to number one on The New York Times Best Seller list, a fictional book entitled *The Da Vinci Code*, written by Dan Brown. I knew nothing about the book except that it was receiving rave reviews as a fascinating work of fiction. I bought my wife a copy as a gift for Christmas. Much to my surprise, my wife had also bought me a copy of *The Da Vinci Code*, leaving us with two copies.

When I began reading the book, I was captivated by the story as it was suspenseful, exciting, full of action, and replete with elements of mystery. It was one of those books that is hard to put down. However, as I got further into the book, I began to read sections that had me scratching my head. Even though the book was fictional, it was filled with what appeared to be historical facts about Christianity. It became difficult to know what was fact and what was fiction. I flipped back to the beginning of the book and noticed the author stated in the introduction that “all descriptions of artwork, architecture, documents, and secret rituals in this novel are accurate.”¹ I had to do some research in order to better understand what he was saying because many of his claims painted Christianity in a negative light.

The book was later turned into a movie, and as the popularity of the story continued, many professed Christians began to question their faith due to the claims made by Dan Brown. A 2006 survey found that *The Da Vinci Code* had undermined faith in the

¹Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Anchor, 2009), viii.

Roman Catholic Church and damaged its credibility.² The damage affected evangelical Christians as well, for many people were taking its claims as fact. The problem with the story is how Brown blends fact with fiction, which has led many who have read the book or watched the movie to question the origins and legitimacy of orthodox Christianity. The teachings Dan Brown promotes are inaccurate, false, and misleading. However, his book is a great example of how easy it is to be swayed and influenced by false information.

While we might expect false claims about the Christian faith from an unbeliever like Dan Brown, most of us would not expect false teaching from leaders within the church. However, today in churches all across the world are preachers and teachers promoting a distorted version of the gospel. These versions of the gospel are sometimes referred to as the “prosperity gospel” or the “health and wealth gospel.” These teachers have taken the orthodox teachings of the church and altered them in ways which promises health and wealth to those who will contribute money to their ministries.

False teachers are not a new phenomenon for they have been around since the inception of the church. That was the case in the pagan city of Ephesus where young Timothy was called to pastor the church. False teachers had emerged within the church in Ephesus and Paul knew these individuals promoting false doctrine had to be stopped. He knew the danger these false teachers would pose for Timothy so from the outset of his letter, he addresses the subject of false teachers and false doctrine. Paul wanted Timothy, as the young pastor of the church, to be prepared to protect the members of the church family from false teachers. Timothy was their shepherd and therefore responsible for their wellbeing and protection. Paul’s instruction about false teachers is just as applicable today for every individual who has been called to lead the church.

²“‘Da Vinci’ Undermines Faith, Survey Claims,” *TODAY.com*, accessed September 9, 2015, http://www.today.com/id/12815760/ns/today-today_entertainment/t/da-vinci-undermines-faith-survey-claims/.

Need

There have always been false teachers within the church promoting unorthodox doctrine. While these distortions of the truth take on different forms and variations, they all alter the clear teachings of Scripture which have been accepted by Christians for the last two thousand years. False teachings are dangerous and destructive. Therefore, we need to be aware of who these false teachers are and the content of their message. We need guidance and instruction on how to address those promoting a different doctrine. We need assurance of the truth of the glorious gospel proclaimed from our church leaders. We need strong leadership today to help navigate us through the murky waters of so much filth and watered down teaching. We need the words from Paul to Timothy on how to address false teachers and false doctrine.

Main Point

The church in Ephesus has been influenced by individuals from within the church who think of themselves as teachers of the law. However, they are teaching a false doctrine. Timothy's charge from Paul is to correct this false teaching. These false teachers are likely elders and men of influence. Paul is encouraging Timothy to confront and oppose those promoting a false gospel.

Preview

- A. Greeting (1:1-2)
- B. Timothy's Commission from Paul (1:3-11)
 - 1. The Problem of False Teachers (1:3-7)
 - 2. The Issue of the Law and Its Use (1:8-11)

Context

Paul charged Timothy to stay in Ephesus to address the situation of false teaching that had begun to emerge from within the church. While the date the church in Ephesus was founded is unknown, it was one of the great early churches. Priscilla and

Aquila were influential in the early stages of the Ephesian church for Paul had left them there when he was on his second missionary journey (Acts 18:18-22). Paul later returned for a three year stay because he understood a church in Ephesus was critical for the expanse of the gospel (Acts 20:31).

Ephesus was a major tourist attraction because it housed the great temple of Artemis, considered one of the seven wonders of the ancient world.³ The cult worship associated with this great temple was widespread, and the entire area was very immoral.

Acts records an incident Paul encountered in Ephesus during his third missionary journey (Acts 19:23-41). Paul's preaching was highly influential and effective in Ephesus, to the point where sales of small shrines of the goddess Artemis began to decline. The silversmith Demetrius led the charge against Paul because his business was suffering, and he wanted Paul's preaching to cease before he lost any more income. Demetrius stirred up the people and a riot broke out with the people shouting "Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!" (Acts 19:28). Paul desired to enter the crowd and make a defense of the gospel. However, his friends prevented him from doing this because they knew of the risk due of the hostility of the crowd. One of the town clerks intervened and pleaded for the mob to be calm and reasonable, thus avoiding what could have turned out to be life-threatening for Paul and others Ephesian Christians.

This was the cultural climate within which the young and inexperienced Timothy was called to lead the church, a culture marked by paganism and hostility toward the gospel. While Paul loved the church in Ephesus and cared deeply for each of the members, he knew the challenges Timothy and the believers would face as they sought to grow a church in the midst of a pagan and sinful city. When Paul left them for the last time, he warned them of the false teachers that he knew would begin to emerge

³Artemis was the Greek goddess of wild animals and the moon, and protector of the household. She was also referred to by the Romans as Diana. At Ephesus she was worshipped primarily as an ancient Near Eastern fertility deity, in whose honor the Greek colonists built a temple.

(Acts 20:25-31).

The warning is similar to one issued by Jesus who said, “Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt 7:15). The false prophets now at Ephesus did not literally wear sheep’s clothing, but rather came disguised wearing the garments of prophets. It did not take long for these false prophets to emerge, for Paul is now writing this letter to Timothy around A.D. 61-63, which is within five years after he left his ministry in Ephesus.⁴ The savage wolves have arrived and are doing great damage to the church, and it is within this context that Paul is writing to Timothy.

Paul’s Greeting (1:1-2)

Before jumping into Paul’s words about false teachers, I would like to comment about how Paul begins his letter to Timothy. When reading our Bibles, there are often many parts of Scripture we either gloss over or ignore all together. In the OT, how often do many of us zip right through the genealogies? Or when we come to the Pentateuch and read through the very detailed descriptions of the construction of the tabernacle or the details of the sacrificial system, it is often tempting to skip over these sections. In the NT, when we read in Matthew or Luke the long list of genealogies, we tend to breeze past them. When we read the epistles of Paul and others, it is tempting to skip over the introductory greeting and jump right into the meat of the letter.

However, we know from Paul’s second letter to Timothy that “all Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness” (2 Tim 3:16). “All Scripture” really does mean all, which would include genealogies, details on building the tabernacle, and even introductions to letters. Therefore, when we come to Paul’s greeting to Timothy, we should pay close

⁴George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 54.

attention to what Paul says for the words are inspired by God and are packed with information that is theologically significant.

When letters are written today, they often begin with a salutation such as “Dear John,” and conclude with a statement of our name, such as “Sincerely, Andy.” However, ancient letters would usually begin with a statement of the writer’s name so the reader would know at the very beginning who the letter was from.⁵ The greeting is what sets the stage for the rest of the letter by identifying the author as well as to whom and to where the letter was being sent.⁶ From the greeting of 1 Timothy, we know the letter was written by Paul because he identifies himself as “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and Christ Jesus our hope” (1:1). He states his name and follows with a declaration of his credentials as an apostle.

The first point worth noting is that Paul is an apostle. However, the term “apostle” can have different meanings in the NT. The word is transliterated from the Greek word *αποστολος* and occurs 135 times in the NT, mostly in the Gospels and Acts.⁷ Paul uses the word 35 times in his letters. The word means “messenger,” or “one who is sent.” Because it has different meanings in the NT, it is important to understand how the author intends it to be used.

An apostle could be one sent out as a messenger of the church, such as when Paul sent Epaphroditus to the church in Philippi (Phil 2:25). Jesus uses the word in reference to the twelve disciples, where in Matthew’s gospel he called them “the twelve apostles” (Matt 10:2). The word is also used in reference to others in addition to the twelve who are recognized as having “authority to proclaim the gospel in both oral and

⁵I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 111.

⁶Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) 94.

⁷Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, abridged ed.(Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 68.

written form, as well as to establish and build up churches.”⁸ This latter use is how Paul is using the term apostle to identify himself. Paul’s pattern of greeting in his more formal letters was to refer to himself as an “apostle of Jesus Christ” (1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, and Colossians). However, in his more personal letters (Phil and Phil) he would refer to himself as a “servant” or “prisoner” of Christ. So it is noteworthy here that Paul would refer to himself as an “apostle” in this personal letter to Timothy, his longtime travel companion and friend. Why would Paul refer to himself in this way?

First of all, Paul is making the case that he speaks as an apostle who has authority directly from the Lord Jesus Christ. He was chosen by the Lord Jesus on the road to Damascus when Jesus proclaimed that Paul was “a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel” (Acts 9:15). As Paul’s traveling companion, Timothy was well aware of Paul’s apostleship. However, Paul most likely intended the Ephesian elders to also read the letter. He wanted to remind those that questioned Paul’s authority of his special calling he received from the Lord himself. He intended this status to persuade the “believers in Ephesus to comply with his commands through his representative Timothy.”⁹

Paul also refers to himself as an apostle of Christ Jesus because it was the will of God that he be an apostle. He emphasizes this special calling he received on the Damascus road by stating it was a direct “command of God our Savior” (1:1). The Holy Spirit set his life apart for a special work to which he was called (Acts 13:2).

Notice that God is referred to as “Savior,” a title Paul normally used for Jesus Christ. The term “savior” was commonly used during this time to reference the Roman

⁸Peter T. O’Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1999), 84.

⁹Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, and Neil Wilson, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, Life Application Bible Commentary (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 1994), 16.

Emperor, which during the writing of this letter was Nero.¹⁰ Paul may be seeking to reinforce that God is the true and ultimate savior, a title that can never be correctly applied to a mere human being. Therefore, Paul makes the point that “God as Savior makes clear that salvation does not come either from the Greek and Roman pantheon of gods or from the Roman emperor, but from God alone.”¹¹

The command came not only from God, but from Christ Jesus our hope. God is the ultimate source of salvation, but Jesus Christ is our hope who will complete our salvation. Jesus is the “embodiment of our faith, the basis for our eternal life.”¹² The apostle Peter writes that our hope is a “living” hope because we serve a living Savior who rose from the dead. Our hope is not grounded in riches, social status, possessions, friends or even our family. Our living hope rest solely on the risen Lord Jesus Christ.

Paul normally used a two-fold greeting formula of “grace and peace.” However, here as well as in 2 Timothy, Paul uses a three-fold greeting of “grace, mercy and peace.” Grace (*χαρις*) is the noun form of the word used to express “greetings.” Paul used the term grace to describe “the gracious goodness which God offers to undeserving sinners. Grace removes the guilt of previous sin and relieves the offender of punishment that is truly deserved.”¹³

Paul also used “mercy,” which is what all Christian need on a day to day basis for protection and guidance. In the OT, we see how the people of Israel continually sinned and rebelled against God. Despite their sin and rebellion he mercifully spares them from His wrath. He loves His people and by his mercy helps those that are discouraged

¹⁰Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 62.

¹¹Daniel C. Arichea, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus* (New York: American Bible Society, 1995), 9.

¹²Barton, Veerman, and Wilson, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus*, 18.

¹³Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 64.

and in need. In the NT, the author of Hebrews states that followers of Christ can “with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Heb 4:16). Timothy needed to be reminded of this mercy from God as he faced hostile opposition from those doing harm to the church.

The third term in the greeting was the Jewish expression “peace” (*shalom*). Because of the salvation one has from God’s grace alone and because of his mercy, the believer can have true peace. The peace of the Christian is different than the peace of the world for believers have the peace of Christ, whom is our peace (Eph 2:14). Many people think of peace as the absence of strife, conflict or war. Others think they will have peace if they have a new job, more money, more free time, or a huge retirement account. However, these sources of peace are temporal and can change in an instant. The peace of the Christian is secure because it is a peace based upon being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. True peace only results when we have a right and loving relationship with God. Martyn Lloyd-Jones writes, “Grace is the beginning of our faith; peace is the end of our faith. Grace is the fountain, the spring, the source. But what does the Christian life mean, what is it meant to produce? The answer is peace.”¹⁴ Peace is a state of wholeness and harmony existing between a person and God which provides a foundation for stability in all of life.¹⁵

Paul wants Timothy to also know that this grace, mercy and peace comes from “God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” The idea of God as Father originates in the OT. In Deuteronomy, we read, “Do you thus repay the LORD, you foolish and senseless people? Is not he your father, who created you, who made you and established you?” (Deut 32:6). As believers, we must grasp this amazing truth that God really is our heavenly Father. Paul wants Timothy to grasp truth as well. The relationship Timothy

¹⁴Richard D. Phillips, *Chosen in Christ: The Glory of Grace in Ephesians 1* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2004), 7.

¹⁵Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 64.

had with his biological father is unknown. Perhaps because of Timothy's choice to dedicate his life to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, tension had arose in their relationship. Regardless of the circumstances, Paul is reminding Timothy and all Christians that no matter what type of earthly father we have, we have a heavenly Father that loves us more than we could ever imagine. This love was demonstrated when Jesus Christ died on the cross for us, even while we were still sinners (Rom 5:8). And Paul points out in the greeting to Timothy that the source grace, mercy and peace also comes from "Christ Jesus our Lord."

The Problem with False Teachers (1:3-7)

When Paul wrote his letter to the churches of Galatia, he strongly condemned those preaching "a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you" (Gal 1:8). He uses the strongest possible language to state what he desires would happen to those preaching a different gospel, namely that they would "be accursed" (Gal 1:8).¹⁶ Paul understands the eternal consequences of false teaching. He knows the danger false teaching can bring to those preaching a false gospel and for those lured away by such teachings.

Paul now commands Timothy to charge those in Ephesus teaching a different doctrine to refrain from such practice immediately. Who exactly are these individuals in Ephesus promoting this different doctrine? While Paul's letter to the Galatians indicated the problem of false teaching come those outside the church walls (Gal 2:4), in Ephesus the source of the problem appears to lie within the church. Gordon Fee notes there are

¹⁶The word *accursed* comes from *αναθεμα*, which refers to "that which has been cursed." Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 63. Paul is using the word in Gal 1:8 to make the strongest possible case against teaching a distorted gospel. The word *anathema*, originally referred "to any object set aside for divine purposes, whether an offering in the temple set aside for divine blessing or the captured booty of Achan reserved for divine cursing (Josh 7:11–12). In time the negative sense of the word prevailed, and *anathema* became synonymous with anything or anyone under the "ban" and hence delivered over to God's wrath for final judgment." Timothy George, *Galatians: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1994), 96.

two reasons to believe these false teachers were elders within the church. First of all, they were “desiring to be teachers of the law” (1:7) and teaching was a duty reserved for elders. Paul even names two of these elders, Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom Paul himself excommunicated (1:19-20). Secondly, the letter contains much instruction for the qualifications required for one to become an elder as well as how unqualified elders would be disciplined and replaced (5:19-25).¹⁷

Paul uses a term for “different doctrine” that may have been a word he invented.¹⁸ The Greek word is *ἑτεροδιδασκαλεω*, a combination of *ἕτερος* (meaning different such as heterosexual) and *διδασκαλος* (meaning teacher). Thus the word has the sense of teaching other things, or teaching “contrary to standard instruction.”¹⁹ These different doctrines were not to be taken lightly and Paul is adamant that Timothy address these false teachers and charge them to refrain from such teaching.

What exactly were these false teachers teaching? We cannot say for sure, though Paul gives a clue when he says they were devoting themselves to myths and genealogies (1:4). Some scholars contend they were teaching an early form of Gnosticism.²⁰ The term “myths” brings to mind the influence of the Greek culture, such as Plato’s using the term to refer to fables and legends.²¹ However, as Fee points out, the terms used for myths and genealogies were never used in reference to Gnosticism. They

¹⁷Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 40.

¹⁸Fee notes the word *ἑτεροδιδασκαλεω* may have been a word coined by Paul as it is only found used by him and then later in early Christian writings. Ibid.

¹⁹Bauer, *Greek-English Lexicon*, 399.

²⁰Myers notes that “the central gnostic doctrine is the ontological dualism between the supreme, ineffable God of love and the material world, considered evil or, at best, indifferent. Between God and matter lie a host of spiritual Powers, collectively termed the fullness of God. From its lowest rank comes the creator, a demiurge identified with the Old Testament Yahweh. Fallen spiritual powers, often linked with astral referents, now rule the world.” Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 421.

²¹Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Exposition Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 8.

are used though in Hellenism and Hellenistic Judaism to refer to the origins of people.²² Therefore, it is likely Paul is referring to an influence of Jewish ideas and thought. In Titus (1:14), Paul mentions “Jewish myths” leading to the possibility that he had in mind mythical histories, like the Jewish *Book of Jubilees* or Philo’s *Questions and Answers in Genesis*.²³

Whatever the exact content of the teaching, it is clear that Paul regarded it as the very opposite of the content of the gospel. The false teachings were a diversion because they took people’s eyes off the truth of the true gospel. He says they promote speculation and stir up unnecessary controversy. These distractions took away valuable time which could be used in a better way to promote and teach the gospel. Therefore something needed to be done because “the greatest danger of heresy in the early Christian communities was that it perverted the gospel.”²⁴

Paul’s warning against false teachers is just as applicable today as it was to Christians in Ephesus. As twenty-first century Christians, we also are exposed to a wide variety of false teachings. One of the most prevalent forms of false teaching we face today is the prosperity gospel. This movement goes by other names such as the “name it and claim it” gospel or the “health and wealth” gospel. The prosperity gospel promises financial and health benefits for those who have enough faith. This false gospel is dangerous and damaging, often leading to devastating consequences for those who fall victim to its teaching. It has led to the financial ruin of many who have made huge investments in ministries which promised a financial windfall for those who contribute large sums of money. This false gospel has disappointed many who hoped to be healed

²²Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 41.

²³D. A. Carson, *New Bible Commentary: 21st Century Edition*, 4th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1994), 1295.

²⁴Chiao Ek Ho, “Mission in the Pastoral Epistles,” in *Entrusted with the Gospel: Paul’s Theology in the Pastoral Epistles*, ed. Andreas J. Köstenberger and Terry L. Wilder (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2010), 249.

by a traveling faith healer. There have even been those who have ignored the advice of doctors and stopped taking medical treatments, and in some rare cases have died as a result.²⁵ When the promises of the prosperity gospel fail to materialize, many people begin to question their personal faith and question Christianity.

In a book entitled *Health, Wealth, and Happiness*, the authors write, “This new gospel is perplexing—it omits Jesus and neglects the cross. Instead of promising Christ . . . this new gospel claims that God desires and even promises that believers will live a healthy and financially prosperous life.”²⁶ What is the appeal of this gospel? Why are so many people attracted to its teachings? One reason the prosperity gospel is attractive is that often the message presented does contain a grain of truth, for God as our Father does love us and can provide both material and physical blessings.²⁷ However, this is not an absolute promise for all people at all times.

Because of its appeal, many have fallen into the trap of this teaching and are in danger. They have a false hope built on the foundation of a false gospel. Advocates of the prosperity gospel marginalize the biblical gospel. They marginalize Jesus, the cross, God’s judgment, and the sinful estate of humanity. Jones writes, “If Jesus is left out of the gospel, then there is no gospel. If the cross is left out of the gospel, then there is no gospel. If God’s judgment against sin is left out of the gospel, then there is no gospel. If humanity’s sin is left out of the gospel, then there is no gospel.”²⁸

Just as Paul warned the Christians in Ephesus not to “devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies” (1:4), Christians today likewise need to be warned to steer clear of the prosperity gospel and its advocates. The modern day false prophets

²⁵David W. Jones and Russell S. Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness: Has the Prosperity Gospel Overshadowed the Gospel of Christ?* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), 14.

²⁶Ibid., 14-15.

²⁷Ibid., 18-19.

²⁸Jones and Woodbridge, *Health, Wealth & Happiness*, 86.

package their message in ways that are slick and attractive on the outside, but on the inside danger is lurking. Christian leaders today are called by this passage to warn believers about the traps and dangers of falling for false teachers and teachings.

Paul next provides the reason he wanted Timothy to charge these false teachers to stop their deceptive practices. He states, “The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith” (1:5). He wanted the leaders in the Ephesian church to put a stop to those promoting false doctrines so that love could be restored among the church body. The love Paul speaks of here is both a love of God and a love for others. This comes from the lips of Jesus who said, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:37–40).

The love of others can only come from a love of God. John Piper makes this point when he states, “Love is the overflow of joy in God which gladly meets the needs of others.”²⁹ The Christian love Paul describes comes from within and includes a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

What does it mean to have love which comes from a pure heart? Hungering and thirsting for righteousness is a sign of one marked with a pure heart. To have a pure heart means one longs to do what is pleasing to God, and thus helpful to others.³⁰ Paul probably has in mind here the beatitude where Jesus said, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8). Those with a heart to know God will have hearts that are pure and filled with love of God and others.

In addition to showing love from a pure heart, the believer is also to show love

²⁹R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preach the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 30.

³⁰*Ibid.*

from a good conscience. The conscience enables an individual to determine the difference between what is right and wrong. It is something within the inner self that allows one to differentiate between what is good and bad. But as Mounce says, “It is not the ultimate judge of what is right and wrong but serves only as a guide since it can be seared by sin.”³¹ When Paul speaks about love issued from a “good conscience,” he is speaking about a conscience that leads a person to make correct moral decisions.³²

The third characteristic of love is that it flows from a “sincere faith.” In 2 Timothy, Paul says, “I am reminded of your sincere faith” (2 Tim 1:5). He was speaking about a faith which demonstrates a trust in God, which Paul felt Timothy had. This type of faith “is sincere only when it is not mere talk, but is genuine trust and confidence in God.”³³ A sincere faith is not a hypocritical faith. We have all seen people who are professed believers who do and say the right things on Sunday mornings. However, they live lives Monday to Saturday that are not reflective Jesus’ teachings. A sincere faith means a real faith that actually influences and directs one’s life to live out the gospel. This faith is linked with love, something the Pastoral Epistles highlight as Paul links faith and love eight times in these three letters (1 Tim 1:14; 2:15; 4:12; 6:11; 2 Tim 1:13; 2:22; 2:10; Titus 2:2).

So while Paul commands Timothy to have love for the church marked by a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, this attitude stands in stark contrast to the false teachers. Paul points out this contrast when he charges the false teachers of wandering into “vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding what they are saying or the things about which they make confident

³¹William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 24.

³²Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 18–19.

³³Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 69.

assertion” (1:6-7). By saying they had “wandered away,” Paul means they had wandered away from a pure heart, good conscience, and sincere faith and had turned to aimless talk which did not lead to godliness. They had missed the mark with regard to the faith.³⁴ These teachers were engaging church members with meaningless talk, which was useless and pointless chatter.

It is difficult to know exactly what Paul meant by the statement “desiring to be teachers of the law” (1:7). Most likely there were men wanting to be interpreters of the law and of OT stories and genealogies. One commentator noted that “Paul pictured the false teachers as aspiring to be like Jewish rabbis and spinning out sterile interpretations of Old Testament stories and regulations. They pretended to be wise sages, but they were really pontificating on truths they did not begin to fathom.”³⁵ The point Paul makes is that these false teachers did not know what they were talking about. Yet despite their ignorance, they were making confident assertions. We can engage in a conversation with someone who is articulate, confident, and passionate about what they are speaking about, yet they can be wrong. We have to be careful when listening to others who are promoting ideas about the Christian faith that seem unfamiliar or different than what we have always understood.

The Proper Use of the Law (1:8-11)

Paul’s letters reveal he is not hesitant to go off on a tangent when an important thought comes to mind. That is what he does at this point in his letter (1:8-11) for he jumps from talking about the false teacher’s misuse of the law to a digression about the proper use of the law. He begins this tangent by saying, “Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully” (1:8). Apparently the false teachers had been misusing the law by adding their own rules and regulations. We get an indication of this later in the

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Ibid., 70.

letter when he refers to some who had been forbidding marriage and promoting abstinence from certain foods (4:3). Paul wants the church to understand that the law is good if it is used properly.

The “law” that Paul mentions would be the Jewish Law (Mosaic Law) and not a general law within the community. The reformed tradition has suggested three primary functions of the law which are the reflective use, the civil use and the use of the law as a guide for regenerate Christians.³⁶ In this particular passage, it would appear Paul has in mind the second use of the law, the civil use in which the law has power in society to restrain those who are under a law unto themselves.

Paul continues his tangent by providing a list of sins that are characteristic of lawbreakers. He first states that the “law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient” (1:9a). What does he mean by stating the law is not for the “just”? Paul is making a point similar to what he made in Galatians (Gal 5:22-23) where he said those indwelt with the Spirit and who are now bearing the fruit of the Spirit “have entered a sphere of existence in which the Law no longer performs its legal functions.”³⁷ The false teachers in Ephesus were taking the law and using it as a means of righteousness for

³⁶The Reformation Study Bible notes three uses of the law. “Its first function is to be a mirror reflecting to us both the perfect righteousness of God and our own sinfulness and shortcomings. As Augustine wrote, ‘the law bids us, as we try to fulfill its requirements, and become wearied in our weakness under it, to know how to ask the help of grace.’ The law is meant to give knowledge of sin (Rom. 3:20; 4:15; 5:13; 7:7-11), and by showing us our need of pardon and our danger of damnation to lead us in repentance and faith to Christ (Gal. 3:19-24). A second function, the civil use, is to restrain evil. Though the law cannot change the heart, it can to some extent inhibit lawlessness by its threats of judgement, especially when backed by a civil code that administers punishment for proven offenses (Deut. 13:6-11; 19:16-21; Rom. 13:3, 4). Thus it secures civil order, and serves to protect the righteous from the unjust. Its third function is to guide the regenerate into the good works that God has planned for them (Eph. 2:10). The law tells God’s children what will please their heavenly Father. It could be called their family code. Christ was speaking of this third use of the law when He said that those who become His disciples must be taught to do all that He had commanded (Matt. 28:20), and that obedience to His commands will prove the reality of one’s love for Him (John 14:15). The Christian is free from the law as a system of salvation (Rom. 6:14; 7:4, 6; 1 Cor. 9:20; Gal. 2:15-19, 3:25), but is under the law of Christ as a rule of life (1 Cor. 9:21; Gal. 6:2).” R. C. Sproul and Keith Mathison, eds., *The Reformation Study Bible* (Lake Mary, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2005), 264.

³⁷Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 45.

Christians. What they should have been doing was using the law as a means of exposing the sin of unbelievers, thus opening up a door for the proclamation of the gospel.

Paul illustrates the sin of law-breaking by providing a list of vices that are of a very serious nature. It is interesting to note how the list of vices corresponds to the Ten Commandments.³⁸

Table 1. Comparison of vice list versus the Ten Commandments

Table 1. Comparison of vice list versus the Ten Commandments	
<i>1 Timothy 1:9-10</i>	<i>Ten Commandments</i>
The lawless and disobedient	Have no other gods
The ungodly and sinners	Have no idols
The unholy and profane	Do not take the Lord's name in vain
--	Keep the Sabbath
Those who strike their father and mother	Honor you parents
Murderers	Do not murder
The sexually immoral – homosexuality	Do not commit adultery
Enslavers	Do not steal
Liars and perjurers	No false witness
Whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine	No coveting

He made no specific mention of the Tenth Commandment prohibiting covetousness, rather he includes the catchall phrase of “whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine.”³⁹ By providing a list so similar to those of the Ten Commandments, Paul is laboring to highlight that the standards of the law are not in opposition to the gospel. John Stott states it well when he says,

³⁸It is generally agreed that commandments five to nine are alluded to by Paul in his list. However, the correlation in the first four commandments is not so clear. Knight argues that there is such a correlation. Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 84. However, others have not been convinced. Marshall concludes that “it is preferable simply to see a general correlation between the list here and the dishonoring of God in the first four commandments. But it is clear that the list has been developed considerably from the inspiration given by the Decalogue.” Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 378-79.

³⁹Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 18.

So the moral standards of the gospel do not differ from the moral standards of the law. We must not therefore imagine that, because we have embraced the gospel, we may now repudiate the law! To be sure, the law is impotent to save us, and we have been released from the law's condemnation, so that we are no longer 'under' it in that sense. But God sent his Son to die for us, and now puts his Spirit within us, in order that the righteous requirement of the law may be fulfilled in us. There is no antithesis between law and gospel in the moral standards which they teach; the antithesis is in the way of salvation, since the law condemns, while the gospel justifies.⁴⁰

Paul's words are still applicable to followers of Christ today. Our efforts and energy should be to use the law to shine a bright light into a dark world. Spending our time bickering over the details of the law among other believers is not what Paul would call a proper use of the law. Rather, taking the truth of the gospel to the battle lines of the unbelieving world is what we are to do as we share the love of Christ to others.

Every summer, our church takes about seventy of our members to the streets of London where we do street ministry in a predominately Muslim district. Many of the Muslims we encounter are from Saudi Arabia who are vacationing in London to escape the heat of their summer season. Our goal is to distribute the New Testament in Arabic to the Muslims because for the majority of these people, this will be their only opportunity to receive a copy of the New Testament. The atmosphere can be dark and one can sense the spiritual warfare taking place, but our call is to take the gospel directly to these people who are living a lost life in a dark world. While many of the individuals try to engage us in useless bickering and fruitless discussions about irrelevant issues, we seek to stay firm in keeping the main thing the main thing: the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Paul's standard of what is and is not sound teaching was "the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted (3:11). This is the gospel he had faithfully preached in Ephesus (Acts 20:17-27).⁴¹ Paul's main objective was for the life-style and conduct of believers to enhance the spread of the gospel concerning Jesus.

⁴⁰John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 50.

⁴¹A. Duane Litfin, "1 Timothy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 732.

The false teachers that Paul was speaking about had devoted their efforts to promoting many enticing replacements for the gospel. This had to stop! Paul was sounding the call for Christian leaders to live and lead in a manner that displayed and promoted the gospel. That call is still valid today for no program, aim, or emphasis in our lives can be allowed to hinder our full involvement in sharing the gospel of Jesus' saving power.⁴²

Conclusion

Whether it is *The DaVinci Code*, the prosperity gospel, or the pagan worship of ancient Ephesus, the Christian faith has always been the target of false teachers. Therefore, the call for strong leaders to stand firm against such false teaching is applicable today as it was for Timothy.

Great leadership is not determined by one's position or status. Rather it is determined by how the leader loves and cares for the people he or she is entrusted to lead. Part of that love and care involves protection. And in the context of the church, it involves protecting the people from those who seek to undermine orthodox Christian doctrine. Christians today are being attacked with an onslaught of heretical teaching from those within the church, as well as from a culture that has undergone a radical shift which opposes anything "Christian." Leaders must have a passion and desire to manage and counter heretical teaching, for this is part of their duty and part of their continuing care of the church.⁴³ The need for strong and bold leadership is greatly needed today as the church body seeks to navigate the rough waters of the current cultural climate.

⁴²Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 72..

⁴³Ho, "Mission in the Pastoral Epistles," 248.

CHAPTER 3

AMAZING GRACE

John Newton (1725-1807) was an English pastor and hymn writer who lived in the eighteenth century. He was the son of an English sea captain and at the age of eleven, he went to sea and spent the next twenty years in the slave trading business. He was nearly killed during a terrible storm at sea in 1748, which almost sank the ship. During this near death experience, his wicked life passed before him and deep conviction caused him to cry out to God for salvation. After his dramatic conversion, he went on to become one of the most powerful evangelical preachers in British history. He was a man who came to see the wickedness of his sin, and shortly before his death he said, “My memory is nearly gone, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.” In the church of London where he served as a pastor, there is still an epitaph which John Newton wrote for himself, which reads as follows: “Sacred to the memory of John Newton, once a libertine and blasphemer and slave of slaves in Africa, but renewed, purified, pardoned, and appointed to preach that Gospel which he had labored to destroy!”¹

Newton’s story is a reminder to everyone that by nature we are all sinful human beings. And at the same time, we are all loved by God so much that he sent his son Jesus Christ here to earth on a mission to save people from their sins. Tim Keller says, “We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared believe, yet at the very same time we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared

¹Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, 1996), 896.

hope.”² As Paul continues his instructions for the church, he pauses to remind Timothy of the life-changing power of the gospel. He wanted to make sure Timothy and the church were clear on the mission of the Jesus Christ, which was to save sinners like Paul, Timothy, and the rest of us.

The Need

We need leaders in our churches today willing to share with the people of God about the amazing grace of God which is displayed and accomplished through the mission of Jesus Christ. The understanding of this amazing grace is vital for all Christians to understand because it shapes our ministry and our lives.

Main Point

The main point of this passage is that Jesus’ mission was to come to earth and save people from their sins. The passage provides a glimpse of Paul’s personal testimony of God’s grace to him. We see in his testimony one of the most clear and straightforward presentations of the gospel in all of Scripture. The amazing grace of God is encapsulated in one short and powerful sentence: “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1:15). The truth of this gospel is so incredible and mind blowing that Paul can do none other than break out into worship and praise of our great heavenly Father.

Preview

- A. The Amazing Grace of God (1:12-14)
 - 1. The Testimony of Paul (1:12-13)
 - 2. The Grace and Love of the Lord (1:14)
- B. God’s Amazing Grace toward All Sinners (1:15-16)

²Timothy Keller, *The Meaning of Marriage: Facing the Complexities of Commitment with the Wisdom of God* (New York: Penguin Books, 2013), 48.

1. The Mission of Christ (1:15)
2. The Mercy of God Toward Paul (1:16)
3. Praise for God's Amazing Grace (1:17)

Context

Paul began his letter by warning Timothy about the false teachers that he would encounter in Ephesus (1:3-11). He knew that the teaching of the pure and orthodox gospel was critical for the growth of the church. Paul then referenced the glorious gospel to which he had been entrusted (1:11). He wanted to show the helplessness of the Law in regards to one's salvation. He also wanted to show there was a good use of the Law which was to bring to light an individual's sin. Paul will now use his personal testimony to show that in contrast to the Law, the gospel of God's grace brings about faith and love (1:14) leading to eternal life. His testimony is a beautiful and powerful display of God's grace for all sinners, regardless of how bad an individual may feel they are. Whereas the Law can only keep a sinner in check, "God's grace brings with it faith and love and offers eternal life."³

In this passage, we will be looking at the grace of God toward the apostle Paul as highlighted in his personal testimony. This grace is not reserved for Paul alone, but is available for all sinners. Finally, we will see how an understanding of this amazing grace leads to worship and praise of the God of grace. God's plan for the church is integrated with and dependent upon the mission of Jesus Christ to come to this world to save sinners.

God's Amazing Grace toward Paul (1:12-14)

The first thing to notice is how the Lord extended his grace to the apostle Paul. This comes forth in a brief testimony by Paul who wanted Timothy to be encouraged by

³Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 50.

the work of grace God had done in Paul's own life. Notice the passion and humility of Paul as he describes how despite his sinful and shameful past, the Lord dealt with him in a gracious manner:

I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. (1 Tim 1:12–14)

Paul begins by expressing thanks to Jesus Christ for the strength to serve the Lord and for entrusting him for the task of serving Christ by proclaiming the gospel.⁴ The strength given to him is more than just an inner strength, but is the strength that enabled Paul to be up to the task of being of service for the work of Christ.⁵ Paul needed this strength because the work of taking the gospel to people throughout Asia Minor was difficult and full of trials.

That same strength is available to each of us as we seek to answer God's call upon our life. You may be a student in an environment hostile toward the Christian faith, however you feel the Lord has called you to bear witness to the gospel in such a setting. Or maybe you are in the corporate world where the path to success is quietly known to require unethical practices, but the Lord has called you to that company where you are to conduct yourself by a different moral standard within that culture. Many examples could be provided, but the point is that we need strength from Christ in order to be up to the task of completing our calling. Paul is reminding Timothy and all of us that this strength comes directly from Jesus Christ our Lord.

The testimony from Paul's own life is powerful. In fact, testimonies can be a

⁴Towner notes that Paul is identifying Jesus here as Christ which is a Christological pronouncement, and that his words are significant for Paul is correcting the teaching of false teachers who were distorting the gospel. Paul is "retelling the story of salvation that presents a Christology that emphasizes the earthly, human character of Christ and his work." Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) 134-35.

⁵ Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 51.

very powerful means of illustrating the grace of God. There is a conference in Louisville, Kentucky that I have attended called Together for the Gospel (T4G). The conference has keynote speakers such as John Piper, David Platt, John MacArthur, Matt Chandler, and Albert Mohler. As amazing as the messages from these well-known speakers have been, what has been in my opinion equally powerful have been the testimonies presented by various lesser known people. Their stories bring to light the life-changing power of the gospel upon sinners, people who previously were without God and without hope in the world. Testimonies have the power to present the gospel via a story which takes theology and powers it with action. These testimonies are illustrations of God's grace which breathe life into theological truths in a way that impacts the listener in a powerful way.

At this point, it would be helpful to briefly summarize Paul's history in order to make better sense of his testimony. Paul was from Tarsus, a prosperous city and center of education in the Cilician plain of southeastern Asia Minor.⁶ Paul's family most likely had some degree of wealth and was involved in the tent making business.⁷ But what was especially important for Paul was the Roman citizenship he had acquired at birth, something granted previously to his family. Roman citizenship carried various privileges which would prove valuable for Paul during his life. These privileges included the right to a fair trial, exemption from degrading penalties like scourging, and most notably the right to appeal from the jurisdiction of a lower court to that of the emperor of Rome.⁸

Paul had all the credentials and the education. He had received rabbinic training in Jerusalem under the teaching of Gamaliel, and Paul had excelled in his training (Gal 1:14). We read in Paul's letter to the Philippians his very own words about his background where he writes, "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in

⁶Allen C. Myers, *The Eerdmans Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 801.

⁷Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 681.

⁸Ibid., 682.

the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee” (Phil 3:4-5). But as Paul will acknowledge, all of these credentials are of no value in comparison to the value of knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior (Phil 3:8).

Paul describes himself to Timothy as once a “blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent” (1:13). Those are not terms of endearment, but rather expose for all to see the wickedness of Paul’s heart. They are not characteristics of someone we would expect to be a leader in the church and Paul wants Timothy to know that God could have used these liabilities against him.⁹ Imagine a pastoral search committee interviewing a prospective candidate for the role of Senior Pastor and asking a prospective candidate to list three things about themselves that the committee does not currently know. And now imagine the committee’s response if the candidate revealed they once were a blasphemer, a violent persecutor of Christians, and a fierce opponent to Christianity. The interview process would probably be cut short. But that is what Paul does here as he wants Timothy to see that his unworthiness demonstrates and highlights the worthiness of Christ. He wants Timothy to remember the amazing grace God provides for wretched sinners. While Paul is thanking Christ for the strength to serve, he is also highlighting that he had first needed God’s grace because of his unworthiness. As one commentator put it, “Before Paul became an apostle, he had to become a Christian, and for this he did not need to be strengthened, he needed to be saved! Only God’s amazing grace could save a wretch like him.”¹⁰

Without a knowledge of Paul’s past, one might think he was over exaggerating to make his point. After all, how could one who wrote so much of the NT be that bad?

⁹Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 73.

¹⁰Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 21.

When we examine his past, it turns out he was a very violent man. In the book of Acts, we learn that Paul is present at the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:54-60). At that time he went by the name of Saul and he was the man who approved of the execution of Stephen (Acts 8:1) and had the garments of the executioners laid as his feet (Acts 7:58). Luke tells us that “Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison” (Acts 8:3). Paul was a man on a mission who was determined to rid the world of Christians. We see him take the initiative to carry out his wrath against Christians as he request permission from the high priest to travel to Damascus in order to take prisoner followers of Christ and bring them back to Jerusalem. Note the description from the book of Acts where we read, “But Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any belonging to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem” (Acts 9:1–2).

The followers of Christ were referred to those as “the Way” for Jesus had said, “I am the way, the truth and the life” (John 14:6). Paul was determined to put an end to this “way,” and he was eager to accomplish this by whatever means necessary. It is almost impossible for us to imagine a scenario today where we would ever allow a man with such a past to lead our church.

Paul appreciated and understood the grace God extended toward him. Therefore throughout his ministry, he wanted to shine the spotlight upon God’s grace and mercy. He wanted people to understand how sinful he was and contrast this with how great His God is. Luke records the testimony Paul gave before King Agrippa while on trial:

I myself was convinced that I ought to do many things in opposing the name of Jesus of Nazareth. And I did so in Jerusalem. I not only locked up many of the saints in prison after receiving authority from the chief priests, but when they were put to death I cast my vote against them. And I punished them often in all the synagogues and tried to make them blaspheme, and in raging fury against them I persecuted them even to foreign cities. (Acts 26:9–11)

Paul had a heart was filled with hate and rage toward followers of Christ. This heart was also filled with a passion to annihilate the Christian faith because he was fully convinced that what he was doing was according to God's will. The lesson we learn from Paul's story is that to be zealous about something is great, but only if it is a commitment to the right thing. Any commitments we have that rank ahead of God are idolatrous. Paul's vision of the truth had been clouded, but that changed when he set out for Damascus and encountered the risen Christ which took place as follows:

Now as he went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And he said, "Who are you, Lord?" And he said, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. But rise and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." (Acts 9:3-6)

Paul experienced first-hand the life-changing power of the gospel. He was a man who had once been obsessed with the persecution and destruction of the Christian faith. But the Lord gave him a heart transplant as He replaced Paul's cold heart of stone with a new heart. Paul was born again and now had a "living" hope because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (1 Pet 1:3). It is amazing to think that of all people, Paul would have been the one chosen for such a prominent role in spreading the gospel. No wonder Paul would burst forth with thanks and praise for his mercy and grace.

How could someone with Paul's history be shown mercy from God? Paul answers this question by saying, "But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief" (1:13b). Paul was not like the Pharisees who had known about and understood the teachings of Jesus but still chose to deny him.¹¹ Rather Paul was a man who did not understand what he was doing nor the ramifications of his actions.¹² He is here making the "a distinction between 'unwitting' and 'purposeful' sinning."¹³

¹¹John F. MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 30.

¹²Ibid.

¹³Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 51. The OT speaks about this distinction between "unwitting" and

As Paul continues, he wants Timothy to see and feel the mercy and grace extended to him. He uses powerful imagery to highlight this grace when he says, “The grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus” (1:14). This overflowing of grace Paul experienced is the same overflowing and excess supply of grace available for us today. This verse led Paul Bunyan to entitle his book *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, an autobiographical account of Bunyan’s own conversion.¹⁴ This overflowing grace is the undeserved and unmerited favor of God.

Bryan Chappell uses imagery from Niagara Falls to illustrate God’s overflowing grace.¹⁵ Niagara Falls are located on the border of Ontario, Canada and New York, USA. While I have never visited Niagara Falls, I have been told the scene of the overflowing water is breathtaking. There are 3,160 tons of water flows over Niagara Falls every second. An artist once painted a picture of the falls, but had failed to give the piece a title. Therefore, the employees at the art gallery gave it the title “More to Follow,” an appropriate name since Niagara Falls pours out billions of gallons of water per year. Likewise, the grace from our Lord continues to pour out in a seemingly endless supply.¹⁶ This amazing, unlimited, and abounding grace is what led Julia Johnston to write this familiar hymn:

Marvelous grace of our loving Lord,
Grace that exceeds our sin and our guilt!
Yonder on Calvary’s mount outpoured,
There where the blood of the Lamb was spilled.

“purposeful” sinning (Num 15:22-31). Fee notes that Paul is not seeking to justify his former conduct, he does appeal to this distinction to offer explanation for God’s compassion toward him. Ibid. Towner further elaborates by saying that Paul “was not maintaining his moral innocence in such statements, but rather his commitment to the Torah and the rituals that assured his covenant purity as a Jew over and against the defilement of the Gentiles.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 140.

¹⁴Paul Bunyan wrote this book while in prison for preaching without a license. The book is based upon Rom 5:20 and 1 Tim 1:14, first published in 1666.

¹⁵R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 44.

¹⁶Ibid.

Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that will pardon and cleanse within;
Grace, grace, God's grace,
Grace that is greater than all our sin!¹⁷

This is a beautiful reminder that “God’s abundant grace was poured out in the life blood of Jesus Christ. The grace which abounds flows from his cross.”¹⁸ Despite the sins of our present or past, God’s grace truly is greater than all our sin. We can never fully understand and appreciate the incredible grace we have received. Personal testimonies such as Paul’s give us a taste of such grace, though we can never fully on this side of heaven have a complete appreciation of such grace.

God’s Amazing Grace toward All Sinners (1:15-16)

There are several verses in the Bible that summarize succinctly the gospel of Jesus Christ. We think of a verse like John 3:16 where we learn that “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” Or in Paul’s letter to the Romans he writes, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom 5:8). From the OT, we have a passage from Isaiah where he writes, “But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed” (Isa 53:5).

Paul provides another succinct gospel summary in his letter to Timothy. This is one of the most important and powerful passages in all of Scripture. In one simple and brief sentence, Paul tells us the reason that Jesus Christ came to this earth as he says, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost” (1:15). Jesus came to earth with the sole mission of saving sinners. Paul wants Timothy to understand that the offer of the

¹⁷Kenneth W. Osbeck, *Amazing Grace: 366 Inspiring Hymn Stories for Daily Devotions*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2010), June 5.

¹⁸Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 23.

gospel is both universal and trustworthy.¹⁹ The statement is simple, yet profound for it contains a message about the power to bring forth spiritual life from spiritual death.

Thomas Bilney (1495-1531), a scholar at Cambridge University, obtained a Greek New Testament from the famous Erasmus. As Bilney studied the volume, one verse of Scripture seemed to be written in letters of light which was, “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” (1:15). Bilney wrote, “This one sentence, through God’s instruction and inward working, did so exhilarate my heart, which before was wounded with the guilt of my sins, that immediately I found wonderful comfort and quietness in my soul. My bruised bones leaped for joy.”²⁰ Bilney would later be burned at the stake but his life committed to Christ lit a candle in the English-speaking world that has never gone out.²¹ What an incredible witness of the life-changing power of the gospel.

The statement “Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners” is packed with meaning and theological significance, from the incarnation to the atonement.²² The terms *incarnation* and *atonement* are terms that many of us have heard of, but perhaps do not fully understand. The incarnation speaks to the fact that God came to this earth and took on human flesh. God became a human being like you and I. Jesus Christ, God’s very own son, left the heavens and came to earth.

The fact that he came to save sinners speaks to the atonement, where Jesus Christ died on the cross bearing the wrath for our sins. This was the only way that we could have our sins forgiven and be delivered from sin and death. Our sins were atoned for by the shed blood of Jesus Christ on the cross. All of our sins were placed upon Jesus

¹⁹John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 52.

²⁰Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 28.

²¹Robert J. Morgan, *From This Verse: 365 Scriptures That Changed the World* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000), Loc. November 23, Logos Bible Software.

²²Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 52.

Christ and he bore the punishment for each of those sins.

Paul continues as he write, “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1:16). Paul is getting personal as he places himself in the position of one who is the worst sinner in the world.²³ He is not saying he is the first person sequentially to have been saved by Christ.²⁴ But he is saying he is the absolute worst of all sinners. Paul’s words could be said by each of us for we should all see ourselves for the sinful person we are. When we realize our sinful condition, then this verse can become personal for us as well for Christ Jesus came to save each of us. Jesus himself said that he came not to save the righteous, but to save sinners (Matt 9:13).

Without Jesus Christ, every one of us would be living a life without hope. For that reason, Paul now makes a statement which offers hope for all who place their faith and trust in Christ as he writes, “But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life” (1:16). If the Lord would show mercy to someone like Paul, a blasphemer and persecutor of Christians, then there is hope for all of us. Regardless of one’s past sins, no matter how horrible they may be, Paul is offering hope to everyone who believes in Christ Jesus.

Tokichi Ichii was a man who had been sent to prison twenty times for many horrific crimes.²⁵ He eventually received a death sentence, but before he was executed he received a New Testament sent by Christian missionaries. Upon reading the New

²³Fee points out that Paul is not using hyperbole nor does he wish here to be overdramatic or morbid about his sinful past. Rather he saying this because of how sinful he actually was prior to his encounter with Christ. And he says that “I am” as opposed to “I was” the worst sinner for he understands that he will always be a redeemed sinner. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 53

²⁴George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 102.

²⁵Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 46.

Testament, the Lord changed his heart and he accepted Jesus as Lord and Savior. He accepted his punishment of death as “the fair, impartial judgement of God.” One of the missionaries visiting him in prison read 2 Corinthians 6:8-10, a passage which deals with suffering. Based upon this passage, Ichii said the following:

This certainly does not apply to the evil life I led before I repented. But perhaps in the future, someone in the world may hear that the most desperate villain who ever lived repented of his sins and was saved by the power of Christ, and so may come to repent also. Then it may be that though I am poor myself, I shall be able to make many rich.

He was executed on the scaffold in 1918 in Tokyo and died with great humility. His last words were “My soul, purified, today returns to the City of God.” God had reached down and saved a man self-described as the worst villain that ever lived, similar to what he had done for Paul 1900 years earlier.²⁶

Praise for God’s Amazing Grace (1:17)

Because of this incredible grace and mercy shown to Paul, the ultimate sinner, Paul breaks out into a statement of praise to God for what He has done for him.²⁷ It is as if Paul cannot contain himself and searches the depths of his vocabulary for words to describe his emotions of gratitude and praise as he writes, “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen” (1:17).

Paul’s doxology includes a list of God’s attributes.²⁸ He describes God as the

²⁶Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 46.

²⁷Paul’s writings reveal a pattern of breaking out into these doxologies when he appeared to be overcome with joy and praise for what God had done in his life (Rom 11:36; 16:27; Gal 1:5; Phil 4:20; and Eph 3:21).

²⁸Fee notes that this doxology, as well as another one later in this letter (6:15-16), has a liturgical flow which is reminiscent of Hellenistic Jewish piety. They were perhaps influenced by doxologies from the Diaspora synagogue. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 54. Knight points out that the doxologies in the NT would usually have three or four component parts. These parts would include the person being praised, the words of the praise, a concluding statement about the eternal duration of the praise, and a final amen. All of these component parts are found in this doxology. Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 104.

King who will never cease to exist for he is the eternal God.²⁹ He will never die, he is invisible, and he is the only God. He is the one who is truly worthy of honor and glory forever. And as our church today is living in times of uncertainty, we can know that “the head of this church Christ, our God, Savior, and King, will ever be on His throne. Though opposition and challenges may come, God is the King of the ages, and He will lead, guide, protect, purify, sanctify, and preserve his church.”³⁰

Conclusion

In this short passage, Paul has given us a glimpse of the amazing grace of God toward Paul and toward all of us who would believe in him for eternal life. His intent was to contrast the true gospel of grace with the false gospel propagated by the false teachers.³¹ Once we grasp just how amazing this grace truly is, we cannot help but to do as Paul did and express our gratitude in the form of worship and praise.

I began by telling the story of John Newton and how his awareness of his sin led him to say, “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Savior.” But what I did not mention earlier was that the grace Newton received from our Lord inspired him to pen one of the greatest Christian hymns of all time. We know the hymn as Amazing Grace and it has been sung by millions of Christians since it was published in 1779.³² In the lyrics of the song, Newton

²⁹The words ὁ βασιλεὺς τῶν αἰώνων are translated by the ESV as “the King of the ages” while the NIV and NASB translate the phrase as “King eternal.” Either translation gives the general idea that God as the king rules in the past, present, and future. Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 105.

³⁰David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 20.

³¹MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 34

³²Robert J. Morgan, *Then Sings My Soul : 250 of the World's Greatest Hymn Stories* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2003), 79. Morgan notes the song was based upon Newton's study of 1 Chr 17:16-17, where King David prays to the Lord exclaiming, “Who Am I, O Lord God?” The title of the hymn was originally to be “Faith's Review and Expectation,” though later was changed to “Amazing Grace.” Ibid.

sought to express the amazing grace of God toward him and a portion of those lyrics are as follows:

Amazing grace! How sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found;
Was blind, but now I see.

'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
And grace my fears relieved;
How precious did that grace appear
The hour I first believed.

The amazing grace that changed the life of John Newton and the apostle Paul is the same overflowing grace that has been shown to each of us. This amazing grace calls for praise and worship. May we never forget that our great Lord and Savior came to this earth to save sinners, like each of us. And may this realization lead us to proclaim with Paul who wrote, "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen" (1:17).

CHAPTER 4

THE PRIORITY OF PRAYER

Bill McCartney, former head football coach at the University of Colorado, is perhaps best known for starting Promise Keepers, a ministry designed to equip men to be godly and leaders within their homes. Before his Promise Keeper days, McCartney's life was dominated by football. He was a standout player at the University of Missouri, and later went on to be an assistant football coach under legendary coach Bo Schembechler at the University of Michigan. Success at Michigan led to a head coaching job at the University of Colorado, where he led the Buffalos to a national championship in 1990. However, despite all of his success, McCartney managed to keep his priorities in line: God, family, and football. While his life has been marked by lapses and controversy, his love of the Lord has been constant. In his autobiography, he writes,

I can and will keep right on praying that every athlete who commits himself to playing football for Colorado will also commit his life to Jesus Christ. It's been my experience that the young men who come from the good homes, the bedrock solid homes that are full of Christian love and care, are the ones who have the best chance to withstand the pressures and meet the challenges of college.¹

Priorities define who we are and what we do. McCartney is a great example of a man who sought to keep his priorities in order. Priorities are not only important for individual Christians, they are also important for the corporate church body. The priorities of the church need to be examined to make sure they align with God's priorities. As Paul continues in his letter to Timothy, he details what should be one of the main priorities for the church in Ephesus, as well as for the church today: prayer for the

¹Laura Amato, "Bill McCartney, 'The Gospel According to Mac': 5 Fast Facts You Need to Know," *Heavy.com*, November 3, 2015, accessed July 7, 2016, <http://heavy.com/sports/2015/11/bill-mccartney-the-gospel-according-to-mac-colorado-football-daughter-espn-30-for-30-tv/>.

lost souls of the world. Here is what Paul writes:

First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. (1 Tim 2:1–7)

The Need

Since the beginning of the church, there has been a need for the body of Christ to engage in consistent, fervent prayer. We now live in a society where there has been a cultural shift in which those hostile toward the faith have sought to marginalize the church. We see the removal of prayer from schools, verbal assaults against those churches that hold to the clear teaching of Scripture, a complete disregard for the unborn, the redefinition of marriage, and an attack on our religious liberties. In the midst of these changing times is a world of people who are hopelessly lost with no relationship with Jesus Christ. The need is for the family of God to be constantly on its knees going to the Lord in prayer and petitioning him to save the lost while also seeking His will, guidance, and strength.

Main Point

The main point Paul makes in this passage is that prayer for the lost should be a priority for the church. Nothing is more important in the life of God's people than to be collectively praying for the salvation of others. We pray for others because God desires for all people to come to a saving knowledge of Himself. We also do not limit our prayers to people we know or like, but rather we pray for all people from the president of the United States to the janitor in the factory.

Preview

First Timothy 2:1-7 shows that prayer for the salvation of all people is to be part of identity of the church. Paul provides the theological motivation for prayer which is grounded in the missional call for the church to engage in the great commission.

- A. Priority of Prayer for the Church (2:1)
- B. Praying for All People (2:2)
- C. Theological Motivation of Prayer (2:3-6)
 - a. God is pleased when we pray for all people (2:3)
 - b. God desires all people to come to the knowledge of him (2:4)
 - c. The only path to God is through Jesus Christ (2:5-6)
- D. Paul's Mission to Proclaim the Gospel (2:7)

Context

The redemptive-historical narrative of Scripture reveals that prayer is one of the means God uses to save the souls of the lost. The storyline of the Bible demonstrates this repeatedly. When the Israelites crafted a golden calf to worship, God was prepared to pour out His wrath upon them. However, Moses interceded on their behalf as he prayed that the Lord would spare them and relinquish His wrath. We read that in response to Moses prayer, “the Lord relented from the disaster that he had spoken of bringing on his people” (Exodus 32:14). In the NT, we read in Acts how Stephen, the first Christian martyr, prayed for those murdering him as he cried out, “‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’ And falling to his knees he cried out with a loud voice, ‘Lord, do not hold this sin against them.’ And when he had said this, he fell asleep” (Acts 7:59–60).

Later in the NT when we come to Paul's first letter to Timothy, we find Paul's instructions for the church to be engaged in prayer for the salvation of others. This exhortation to both Timothy and the church concerning prayer follows his charge to defend the faith against false teachers. Paul has just spent the first chapter discussing the danger and threat posed by those teaching a different and false doctrine. Paul now offers

specifics as to how the church is to conduct itself going forward.² He begins by stressing the need for prayer which will be followed by guidelines in chapter 3 for electing the leaders of the church.

Priority of Prayer for the Church (2:1)

What are the main priorities for the church? What is the church of Jesus Christ to be about? While there are multiple priorities, one of the main responsibilities is to be engaged in prayer. Having just warned Timothy about the dangers of false teachers and the need to fight and contend for sound doctrine, Paul now moves into the *how to* section of his letter. He knows Timothy and the church will be in a fight for the gospel, and he therefore wants to arm the church with knowledge and the spiritual tools necessary to engage and prevail in this battle for the gospel. Paul begins with the words, “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people” (2:1).

The words “first of all” reveal to us Paul’s thoughts about the priority of prayer for within the life of the church.³ He follows these words with an exhortation for the church to engage in prayer for “all people.” One of the most important tasks of the church is to be on its knees in prayer for all people. Paul is thinking primarily in terms of missional prayer, likely due to the erroneous ways of false teachers who may have been exclusive in their prayers by praying only for the Jews while excluding Gentiles.

There are four types of prayer that Paul mentions: supplication, prayer,

²Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 61.

³It is debated as to whether “first of all” refers to that which is most important, or whether it refers to the chronological order of what should be done first. Knight notes that Paul’s normal use of this phrase deals with sequential time, but points out that what is placed first sequentially may also be placed in that position due to its importance. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 112. Towner agrees with Knight in his conclusion that Paul’s placement of prayer after “first of all” indicates its importance. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 165.

intercession, and thanksgiving. All four terms are closely related and delineate different aspects of what should be included in prayer.⁴ Prayers of the church are marked by making requests for specific needs (supplication), bringing these needs before God (prayer), making an appeal to God on behalf of these needs (intercession), and finally expressing thanks to God for His grace, mercy and provisions (thanksgiving).⁵ However, it should be noted that Paul is not providing a recipe for the structure of corporate prayer. In other words, he is not saying we have to follow this sequence when we pray. Rather he uses these four different words for prayer simply as a means of stressing the importance of praying for all people.

Unfortunately, many churches today have failed to heed this advice from Paul as the prayer time for the corporate body has turned into nothing more than a routine time to pray for God to meet our needs. We pray for our members who are in the hospital, for our events to be successful, and for our missionaries to be safe. Of course we should pray for God to meet our needs and for the safety of our members, but any idea of extended corporate prayer for the lost and for the fulfillment of the great commission seems to be a thing of the past. John Stott, speaking about the lack of fervent corporate prayer in our churches today, said the following:

I remember some years ago visiting a church incognito. I sat in the back row. . . . When we came to the pastoral prayer, it was led by a lay brother, because the pastor was on holiday. So he prayed that the pastor might have a good holiday. Well, that's fine. Pastors should have good holidays. Second, he prayed for a lady member of the church who was about to give birth to a child that she might have a safe delivery, which is fine. Third, he prayed for another lady who was sick, and then it was over. That's all there was. It took 20 seconds. I said to myself, it's a village church with a village God. They have no interest in the world outside. There was no thinking about the poor, the oppressed, the refugees, the places of violence, world evangelization.⁶

⁴Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 113.

⁵Ibid., 114.

⁶John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 61.

If praying for the spread of the gospel to all people is going to be a priority for the church, then corporate prayer has to be more than a time used for the transition of musicians to exit the platform. It must be a concentrated and intentional time to pray for the Spirit of God to work in the hearts of lost men and women so that their souls may be won to Christ. Also, our time of private prayer needs to be more than a brief thanks for our blessings in order that we can then check *prayer* off of our to-do list. According to Paul, a priority of the church, corporately and individually, is to cry out to our heavenly Father, imploring that all lost people would come to a knowledge of the truth. We pray that the eyes of their hearts might be opened so they can see the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ and that their hearts of stone would be changed into hearts of flesh.

Paul's emphasis on the priority of prayer forces us to examine our own prayer life, both individually and corporately. Do we really pray for the salvation of all people? Are our prayers marked by a sense of urgency for God to breathe life into dead souls? Is our attitude toward prayer marked with reverence and awe, understanding that prayer is an act of worship in the presence of a holy God? If our answer is "no" to these questions, then we need to be on our knees and repent of our prayerlessness, begging our heavenly Father to open our eyes to the importance and priority of prayer for the life of a Christian.

Such a dedication to prayer starts with the leadership in the church. Paul is speaking to Timothy as the leader of the church in Ephesus, urging him to lead this type of prayer for his people. Likewise, pastors and other church leaders today should model this type of prayer for the members of the body of Christ. It can be difficult for members of the church body to seriously engage in prayer if their leaders treat prayer in a casual manner. When prayer in church is nothing more than the type of prayer that Stott witnessed, then it is likely the individual Christian will also pray in a casual and lax manner.

The current cultural attitude toward the Christian faith should give us all pause. The assault on biblical marriages, the devaluation of the unborn, and attacks upon our

religious liberties are concerning for all Christians. However, this is nothing new as the church has been under attack from the evil one from its inception. Followers of Jesus Christ have always been engaged in spiritual warfare, just as we are today. And may we never forget that the greatest spiritual weapon at the hands of the Christian is prayer. In Paul's letter to the church in Ephesus, he concluded with a treatment of spiritual warfare in which he spoke of the whole armor of God, which included "praying at all times in the Spirit, with all prayer and supplication. To that end keep alert with all perseverance, making supplication for all the saints" (Eph 6:18). We pray for all people, whether they be our brothers and sisters in Christ or pagan enemies who are hostile toward our faith. Our priority is to be a people devoted to the fervent and reverent prayer for all people.

Praying for All People (2:2)

The question arises as to what exactly Paul means when he says we should pray for "all people." Is he referring to every single person in our towns, our country, or the world? Or he is referring to all people we personally know? Paul clarifies what he means by "all people" when he says we are to be in prayer "for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way" (2:2). Based upon this elaboration, when Paul says "all people," he means *all kinds of people*. The false teachers were likely limiting their prayers for Jewish people while excluding Gentiles, even though they were living in Ephesus, a predominately gentile city. These prayers also were likely not being lifted up for kings and other people in authority.

Because of their exclusive prayer, Paul wants Timothy to let the people know that the gospel is for all kinds of people: Jews, Gentiles, rich, poor, kings, people in authority, etc. Therefore, prayers are to be made for all kinds of people, including kings and those in authority. The word for king was an all-encompassing term which would

include the emperor all the way down to local leaders.⁷ Paul is intentionally broad as he wants to stress the importance of praying for all those in authority, even the emperor. This would have been Nero when Paul wrote this letter. The concept of praying for kings and rulers has roots in the Old Testament when the prophet Jeremiah instructed the Israelites to pray for the leaders of the cities where they were exiled (Jer 29:7). As one commentator noted, “It was a logical (and theological) step for Paul to interpret the church’s prayer responsibility on the basis of the prophetic instruction, because he knew the very existence of the church was linked to the universal promises that came to expression during that time.”⁸

The message still rings true for the church today as we need to always guard against being exclusive with our prayers. Suppose in our corporate worship we only pray for white Americans or for people who share our political views. Paul would say this is wrong for we should be praying for African Americans, Hispanics, Muslims, Hindus, atheist, etc. He would also say we should be praying for our president, vice-president, senators, congressman and all of those in authority down to our local officials. Do you earnestly pray for those in authority, even if you have strong disagreements with their political positions? Many evangelicals tend to be far too quick to speak harshly about our president on a social media rant, and far too slow to bow at the knees and pray for the man and his family.

Paul adds that prayers for kings and those in authority is necessary so “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (2:2b). The word Paul uses for quiet is the same word he uses later when he says, “let a woman learn quietly” (2:11). Part of what Paul is saying is that Christians are to pray for inner peace marked by a settled contentment. Charles Taylor describes this a longing for a fullness

⁷Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 167-68.

⁸Ibid., 168.

where all of your intellectual, emotional, and physical levels are going toward the same direction.⁹ So in one sense, we pray that we might live a good life such as described by the psalmist who writes, “Behold, thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD. The LORD bless you from Zion! May you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life! May you see your children’s children! Peace be upon Israel” (Ps 128:4–6).

When Paul prays for lives of quietness and peace, he is not arguing for passivity nor is he saying Christians are to withdraw from society in order to relax and enjoy the pleasures of the world. Paul’s desire is for peace so the spread of the gospel can go unhindered. While the early church faced severe persecution, there was a time of peace established by Rome, referred to as the Pax Romana. During this time, Rome used its military might to usher in an era of relative peace. The Pax Romana was very important to Christianity as it paved the way for the spread of the gospel as missionaries could travel the roads Rome had built throughout the Roman Empire.¹⁰ So when Paul speaks of praying for our leaders in order to live a quiet and godly life, his main concern is that the gospel can be proclaimed freely to all people in all areas.

American Christians have historically had free reign in terms of sharing the gospel. While we have brothers and sisters in Christ in other parts of the world who face the threat of losing their life for sharing their faith, that has not been the case in America. However, we are beginning to see a major cultural revolution in America where the future for the rights of Christians is unclear. I recently read where my Alma mater, North Carolina State University, is now requiring students to have a permit before they can speak to other students about Jesus Christ.¹¹ We see situations where bakers and florist

⁹Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 7.

¹⁰Craig A. Evans, *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2000), 774.

¹¹Todd Starnes, “Want to Talk about Jesus? You’ll Need a Permit for That at NC State,” Text.Article, *FoxNews.com*, last modified April 27, 2016, accessed July 14, 2016,

are being forced to shut down their businesses because of their refusal to participate in events that violate their religious conscience. In times like this, we do not need more divisive Facebook posts or boycotts of businesses, rather we need more Christians on their knees praying for our leaders to lead and govern in a way that allows the gospel to be shared and spread freely without fear of physical, verbal, or civil persecution.

Theological Motivation for Prayer (2:3-6)

If one is looking for incentive to pray for all people, then one need look no further than the next verse. Perhaps you do not feel like praying for others or you feel too busy to pray. Whatever the excuse, Paul now provides theological motivation to pray as he says, “This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior” (2:3). This language is rooted in the OT where we find several passages that speak of doing things that are pleasing to the Lord. For example, Moses writes, “And you shall do what is right and good in the sight of the Lord, that it may go well with you, and that you may go in and take possession of the good land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers” (Deut 6:18). Paul incorporates this OT language to emphasize the importance of prayer to God “by comparing it with the role of sacrifices in the old system.”¹²

What more motivation do we need than to know when we pray for others, our Lord is pleased? While God is ultimately responsible for the salvation of His people, God is pleased to use the prayers of His people to bring about the salvation of souls from all corners of the world. Paul wants Timothy to understand that despite whatever other church work needs to be done, our main concern should mirror God’s concern of redeeming His people to Himself.

The prayers offered on behalf of all people are a pleasing aroma to the Lord, for Paul tells us God “desires all people to be saved and come to the knowledge of the

<http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2016/04/27/want-to-talk-about-jesus-youll-need-permit-for-that-at-nc-state.html>.

¹²Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 176.

truth” (2:4). God’s heart is that every human being would know Him and be reconciled to Him. The extent to which God truly desires all people to be saved is debated. After all, if God truly desired all people to be saved, then why are all people not saved? Is Paul preaching a message of universal salvation?

First of all, it should be noted that there is a difference between what God *desires* and *decrees*. If God decreed everyone to be saved, then everyone would be saved. Because God desires everybody to be saved and clearly everyone is not saved, this in no way diminishes God’s sovereignty. God commands us not to murder other people, and yet people are murdered every day. Does that mean God is any less sovereign? Of course it does not, but God’s heart and command is that people would not kill other people. That is what He desires. And the point of 1 Timothy 2:4 is to highlight God’s heart for the redemption of lost people and underline His desire for all people to be saved and come to know Him. Part of what Paul is saying is that God desires *all kinds* of people to be saved, however, he is saying even more than that. The context of Paul speaking against the false teachers promoting an exclusive gospel highlights Paul’s intention to proclaim the universal scope of salvation. He is saying that God desires for more than the Jewish Christians in Ephesus to be saved, for God desires all people including Gentiles to be saved. But this does not diminish the true love and true heart’s desire which God has for all people, not just all kinds of people.

Paul refers to God as “our Savior” (2:3), a designation rarely seen in the New Testament (Jude 25), for normally Savior is connected to God the Son.¹³ As Paul continues, he elaborates on the salvific work of Jesus Christ when he writes, “For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus” (2:5).¹⁴

¹³Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 63.

¹⁴Towner notes that this is Paul’s first Christological statement in the Pastoral Epistles and that the reference to Jesus as the man establishes the association of salvation with the humanity of Christ. Philip H. Towner, “1-2 Timothy and Titus,” in *Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament*, ed.

There are not different gods for different kinds of people.¹⁵ There is only one God, who is the savior of all people and who desires all people to know Him. This echoes the *Shema* from the Old Testament which states, “Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one” (Deuteronomy 6:4). Paul is also bringing to mind a passage from the prophet Isaiah who said,

Declare and present your case; let them take counsel together! Who told this long ago? Who declared it of old? Was it not I, the LORD? And there is no other god besides me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none besides me. Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. (Isa 45:21–22)

God is the only God, and He is also a universal Savior of people for He calls on people from all ends of the earth to turn to Him for salvation (Isa 45:22). Remember Timothy is in Ephesus, a pagan city where the people worshipped a variety of gods. We have epigraphic, numismatic and literary evidence which reveals that the people of Ephesus worshiped up to fifty different gods and goddesses.¹⁶ But the Christian faith is monotheistic so Paul reminds us there is only one God, and only one path that takes us to the one true God. Likely, there were those in Ephesus objecting to the claim of only one God and one way to be saved. We see the same objections today, for many feel there are various ways to enter into heaven. People object to the exclusivity of the Christ saying things like, “Why should not the one God, who wants all people to be saved, save them in different ways, some through Hinduism or Buddhism, others through Judaism or Islam, and yet other through New Age and other contemporary cults?”¹⁷ It is a question asked during Paul’s ministry and a question still being asked today.

G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 892.

¹⁵Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 90.

¹⁶Ralph P. Martin and Peter H. Davids, eds., *Dictionary of the Later New Testament & Its Developments* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 147.

¹⁷John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 68.

I was heading into town recently with my youngest son and he noticed a bumper sticker on the car ahead of us which said “COEXIST.” The letters were spelled out with symbols from different religions. My son asked about the meaning of the bumper sticker and I explained to him the various symbols from the word and what they represented. For example, the “C” is actually the Crescent Moon which is a symbol associated with Islam. The “X” is replaced with the Star of David, representing the Jewish faith. The point being made is that there is not one ultimate truth and not one path to salvation. While this was a great opportunity to teach my son about the exclusivity of the Christian faith, it was also a stark reminder of the worldview of so many right in our midst. Christians are called to coexist with the world, but we are also called to declare the exclusivity of the gospel of Jesus Christ, acknowledging the one and true God of the universe.

Paul goes on to explain that not only is there just one God, there is also just one mediator between God and man (2:5b). Jesus Christ, as the one mediator, has cleared the way for salvation to be made available for all people. By the word “mediator,” Paul is speaking of Jesus in the sense of a negotiator who reconciles fallen man back to God.¹⁸ Paul was addressing the religious elite in Ephesus who were being exclusive in their prayers and missionary outreach, limiting the proclamation of the gospel to those with Jewish roots. For Gentiles wishing to convert, there was a sense in which they had to adapt Jewish cultural practices before they could be welcomed into the Christian church.

But notice how Paul points out that Jesus Christ gave himself as a ransom for all (2:6a).¹⁹ During this time, the term *ransom* was used to describe the payment used to

¹⁸Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 65. The word “mediator” is often applied in Judaism to Moses, for he is the one who mediated the Law to God’s people. Paul alludes to this mediation of Moses in Galatians 3:19-20. Ibid. Towner further elaborates that “the term ‘mediator’ was derived from the Hellenistic commercial and legal world to describe a negotiator who helped two parties to make some kind of transaction.” He further notes that Paul takes the term and uses it in a religious context to depict Christ as the mediator of the new covenant. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 180.

¹⁹The term “ransom” comes from *αντιλυτρον*. Mounce notes this is the only time it appears in

set prisoners free who had been taken captive in war or to free slaves from their masters.²⁰ Paul now takes *ransom* and applies it to how Jesus blood was shed as a payment to pay the price to atone for the sins of his people so they could be set free. Furthermore, Jesus' blood was not shed just for one specific ethnicity, but for all kinds of people regardless of their background or the color of their skin.

The trap these false teachers fell into can easily trap Christians today. It is far too common to see evangelistic outreach initiatives restricted to people groups who look like us, act like us, and have socioeconomic backgrounds like us. The diversity within most American churches is not reflective of the diversity within our culture. So all across America this Sunday, individuals will be going to churches where the people for the most part look and think like they do. The whites will worship with the whites, the blacks with the blacks, and the Hispanics with the Hispanics. It truly is the most segregated hour of the week! As Bryan Loritts says, "The tragedy is not that we would just go to these churches, the tragedy is that we are fine with it."²¹ We have become indifferent to the issue.

Achieving such diversity can be messy and complex, requiring leadership within our churches making difficult decisions backed by taking bold steps as they lead the church family to see the universal offer of the gospel. But bold steps we must take if we are to answer the call we have been given to share the love of Christ with all people. May the seats of our churches be filled with the rich and the poor, with blacks, whites, Hispanics, Asians, etc., and with those that are young and old. We need to see lawyers sitting beside janitors, CEO's beside school teachers, white men next to black women,

this form in the NT. He further points out that many commentators feel the idea comes from Mark 10:45, where Jesus was explaining to the disciples the need to be humble and look to be a servant to others as he Jesus himself came to serve and "give his life as a ransom for many." Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 89.

²⁰Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 91.

²¹This statement was taken from a sermon entitled "One New Man" delivered by Bryan Loritts, and presented at the chapel service at Dallas Theological Seminary on January 18, 2013.

and Asia kids worshiping with Latino children. The church is to be a melting pot where everyone is invited to share in the grace and mercy of Jesus.

How can such diversity within our local church as well as the universal church come to pass? Once again, the answer lies in the command Paul gave Timothy to be people engaged in fervent prayer for all people. We pray that the Lord will draw men and women from all ethnicities to Himself. We pray that God would tear down any racial biases in our hearts so that our desire would be for the salvation of all people.

E. M. Bounds said, "Talking to men for God is a great thing, but talking to God for men is greater still. He will never talk well and with real success to men for God who has not learned well how to talk to God for men."²² In other words, our priority is to be talking to God, going to Him in prayer as we plea for the souls of the lost. Yes, we do talk to others and share the gospel, but the fuel for conversations with the unbeliever at work, in coffee shops, and on airplanes is found in our closets on our knees as we approach the throne of grace.

Paul's Mission to Proclaim the Gospel (2:7)

Paul sums up his charge for missionary prayer as he states, "For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth" (2:7). When Paul dramatically encountered Jesus on the road to Damascus, he was charged by the Lord to "be a witness for him to everyone" about what he had seen and heard (Acts 22:15). This was the charge given to Paul, to be a missionary to the Gentiles so that all of mankind might be exposed to the gospel of Jesus Christ. As Paul has labored to underline the necessity of praying for all people, he now shows how his mission of proclaiming the gospel to all people flows from these prayers. The purpose of his mission is to testify before all people the redemptive, life-saving work

²²E. M. Bounds, *The Complete Works of E. M. Bounds* (Radford, VA: Wilder Publications, 2009), 10.

of Jesus Christ.²³ This should be the purpose of every follower of Jesus Christ. As Ryken puts it, “The salvation first given to the Jews is now extended throughout the whole world. There is one God, one Savior, and one ransom for everyone; therefore, there is one gospel for everyone.”²⁴

Paul was called to be a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher. While there are not apostles today, we do have teachers and preachers called to proclaim the life-changing message of the gospel. The word for preacher could also be translated as *herald*, a term that referred “to someone who would make an important announcement, such as an announcer at an athletic event or a political messenger in a royal court.”²⁵ The church needs heralds of the gospel to take the message of love and redemption to a world in desperate need of the truth. All believers are to be heralds at work, at school, and everywhere there are people who do not know Christ.

Likewise, we are all to be teachers in some sense. This does not mean we have to teach a Sunday school class or lead a small group Bible study. But we are called to do our part in teaching others what it means to be a follower of Jesus. When Jesus gave the Great Commission, he charged us to go and make disciples, and then to teach them all of the commands that he has given (Matt 28:19-20). John Stott said, “What, then, do they proclaim and teach? Jesus Christ, the God-man, the ransom and the mediator, and all that is implied by those truths. To whom do they minister? To the Gentiles, all people of all nations. How do they do so? In faith and truth.”²⁶

²³Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 66.

²⁴Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 71.

²⁵David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 39.

²⁶Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, 72.

Conclusion

Oswald Chambers once wrote, "Prayer does not equip us for greater works—prayer is the greater work."²⁷ Prayer truly is the greater work, and God calls all of us to engage in this greater work. God uses simple prayers by simple, ordinary people to do great things for His Kingdom. Today more than ever, we need churches filled with Christians who make the greater work of praying for the lost a priority and who see prayer as an urgent and lifesaving act with eternal consequences. As Charles Spurgeon once said, "We should pray when we are in a praying mood, for it would be sinful to neglect so fair an opportunity. We should pray when we are not in a proper mood, for it would be dangerous to remain in so unhealthy a condition."²⁸

God's plan for his church is to redeem the lost of this world back to the family of God. One of the means God uses is the prayers of His people. We are called to pray fervently for these lost souls for their eternal destinies are at stake. Spurgeon once more offers encouragement to pray for the lost in these words from his book *The Soul Winner*:

One thing more, *the soul-winner must be a master of the art of prayer*. You cannot bring souls to God if you go not to God yourself. You must get your battle-axe, and your weapons of war, from the armory of sacred communion with Christ. If you are much alone with Jesus, you will catch His Spirit; you will be fired with the flame that burned in His breast, and consumed His life. You will weep with the tears that fell upon Jerusalem when He saw it perishing; and if you cannot speak so eloquently as He did, yet shall there be about what you say somewhat of the same power which in Him thrilled the hearts and awoke the consciences of men.²⁹

So let each of us pray for the salvation of the lost throughout the world. Let us heed the words of Paul to make prayer a priority and something embedded into the DNA of our daily lives. Even when we are busy and our plates are full, may we be a people that always makes time for that which is of greatest importance: lifting those that do not know

²⁷Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Grand Rapids: Discovery House, 2012), October 17.

²⁸Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Salt-Cellars: Being a Collection of Proverbs, Together with Homely Notes* (New York: A.R. Armstrong and Sons, 1889), 58.

²⁹Charles Haddon Spurgeon, *The Soul Winner* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1989), 246-47.

our Lord Jesus and praying that God in his great wisdom, love, and mercy might draw them to Himself. God has a love for all people, and desires for all people to be saved and to know Him. May the salvation of all souls be the desire of our hearts as well.

CHAPTER 5 ELDERS AND DEACONS

Just before midnight on August 10, 1994, the *Columbus Iselin*, a research ship owned by the University of Miami, ran aground on an ancient coral reef off the Florida Keys while it was conducting environmental research. The ship was on the reef for 38 hours during which time two hundred thousand gallons of fuel spilled into the ocean. The damage caused to the ship, the live coral, and the sea life was enormous. There was 163.88 square meters of living coral destroyed as well as many fish and other sea creatures killed. The University of Miami eventually settles with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) for \$3.76 million in natural resource damage claims.¹

The cause of this unfortunate accident was determined by the U.S. Coast Guard to be negligence. Poor leadership from the captain of the ship was deemed to have contributed to this ecological catastrophe. This illustrates what can happen when the one in charge is not qualified to lead in such an important position. The same is also true for the church. For just as this ship polluted the waters it was trying to preserve, those who are not qualified to lead the church can also pollute those people they are charged to shepherd and protect. The necessity of having leaders that possess character traits which would qualify them to lead the church is the subject Paul addresses next in his letter to Timothy.

¹“Columbus Iselin Coral Reef Restoration Project,” accessed October 20, 2016, <http://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/special/columbus/columbus.html>.

The Need

As the church progresses along the historical, redemptive path toward its final consummation, God has chosen in his wisdom to use certain people to lead his people. The character of the individuals designated to lead is of utmost importance. Thankfully, the Lord has not left us in the dark as to the qualifications required for those called to lead the church. Rather, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the apostle Paul has recorded the qualifications required for leaders of the church. The need for the church today is to have individuals leading the church who are living lives consistent with these required character traits.

Main Point

There are two main offices of the church which are elder and deacon. Both of these offices have specific character traits required which are listed in 1 Timothy 3. The list of requirements is used as a measuring stick in order to gauge the spiritual maturity of an individual being considered for leadership. Paul's intention is not to provide a detailed job description of the two offices, but rather wishes to identify the marks of character needed for the Christian leader.

Preview

Paul begins this section by commending the desire for one who seeks to lead the church, referring to this as a noble task. He then lists the qualifications for the two offices of the church, which are overseer and deacon. Paul provides a list of character traits for each office that the individual must possess in order to be qualified to serve. The character traits of the overseer are presented first, followed by a similar list for the deacons. The outline of the section is as follows:

- A. Aspiring to Lead (3:1)
- B. Qualifications for Overseers/Elders (3:2-7)
- C. Qualifications for Deacons (3:8-13)

Context

Paul is writing to Timothy in order to exhort and prepare him to confront false teachers who have emerged within the church at Ephesus. Likely these false teachers had assumed roles of leadership within the church and Paul knows their character is not appropriate for leading God's people. He has already addressed some of the issues concerning corporate worship, and he now addresses qualifications required for church leadership. His concern is not with the duties of the leaders, but rather the character of the individuals called to lead. Paul's list of character traits are in line with the moral virtues of the Hellenistic culture in Ephesus, and are not strictly Christian values.

Aspiring to Lead (3:1)

Paul begins this section with another of his "trustworthy" statements as he writes, "The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (3:1). This is a phrase Paul uses often in the Pastoral Epistles where he wants to emphasize the importance of what he is about to say (1 Tim 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11; Titus 1:9; 3:8).² Paul is getting ready to offer words of wisdom on who is qualified to lead the church and wants Timothy to take note of the importance of the office of overseer and deacon. Today, we might preface our comments with, "you can take this to the bank," an idiom expressing the importance of what we are about to say as well as the certainty of its truthfulness.

What is it that Paul deems to be a trustworthy saying? The answer is, "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task" (3:1).³ I recall a

²Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 79.

³Knight notes that it is not clear whether πιστος ὁ λογος refers to what precedes it or what follows. In favor of the former is the fact that the statement is normally associated with salvation, and the prior verse (2:15) spoke about women being saved through childbearing. However, it is debatable if that verse even references soteriology. Knight argues for the latter, stating that 3:1b would be too abrupt an introduction to the subject matter at hand, but would seem to be in line with the "saying." George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 153.

conversation with a fellow seminary classmate about pastoral leadership. His view was that one should not desire to be a senior pastor, for such a desire is evidence of pride within one's heart. Rather, one who is truly called is humble and serves only because of the calling the Lord has placed upon him. While I understand his heart for humility and caution against pride, I disagree that there should be no desire to serve in leadership. I base my disagreement mainly upon what Paul says in this passage about the nobility of desiring to serve as an overseer. John Stott writes, "Paul is not condoning a selfish ambition for the prestige and power which are associated with ordained ministry. He is rather recognizing that the pastorate is a noble task, because it involves the care and nurture of the people of God, and that it is laudable to desire this privilege."⁴

Paul next presents character qualities required for one to serve as an elder or deacon. Before discussing the traits on these lists, it would be helpful to briefly define the terms used for these offices. There are two titles the Bible uses to describe the same office: overseer and elder. Paul uses the word *episkopos* to refer to the office of overseer, or sometimes defined as "bishop."⁵ Paul will later use the term *presbyteros* to refer to elders (1 Tim 5:17; 19).⁶ The reason there are two terms is because one was Greek in its origin, *episkopos*, and carried a sense of management. The other term, *presbyteros*, was

⁴John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 92.

⁵As noted by Merkle, the term "overseer" comes from the Greek word *ἐπισκοπος* and it can mean "overseer" or "bishop." The word is found four times as a noun in the New Testament and one time in the verbal form. An overseer is one who sees over the people to whom he has been entrusted. Even less frequently used is the term *pastor*, used only once in the New Testament as a noun to refer to a church office (Eph 4:11), and only twice as a verbal form describing the duties and responsibilities of the pastor (Acts 20:28; 1 Pet 5:2). Benjamin Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2007), 55-56. It should also be noted that the word pastor or shepherd is also used to refer to Jesus as the great shepherd (John 10:11). *Ibid.*, 91.

⁶Merkle notes the term for elder, *πρεσβύτερος*, appears sixty-six times in the New Testament and can take on several meanings. It can simply refer to someone older in age in comparison to someone else. Or it can refer to someone advanced in age. It can also be used to refer to an official in either Judaism or the church. *Ibid.*, 62-63.

Jewish and indicated the seniority of one in leadership.⁷ Baptists often hear terms like overseer, elder, or bishop and think of Presbyterians or Episcopalians. However, these terms in the NT were used interchangeably and are very similar in meaning. The Baptist tradition normally refers to the person in this office as the pastor.

The other church office is the deacon, and Paul will lay out qualifications for that office in 1 Timothy 3:8-13. The word *deacon* comes from the Greek word *diakonos* and is often translated as a “servant, minister, or deacon.”⁸

Qualification for Overseers/Elders (3:2-7)

So what type of individual is qualified to lead the church of Jesus Christ? The calling is high, important, and noble and there are certain character traits one must possess in order to lead, which Paul lists in 1 Timothy 3:2-7. What is extraordinary about this list is how ordinary the required characteristics are. Paul does not say the elder must have a resume of special training, education, spiritual accomplishments, or missionary achievements. Rather, the characteristics Paul list are character quality traits which for the most part would be applicable to all Christians. The only exception is the requirements that the elder be able to teach and not be a recent convert.⁹

It should be pointed out Paul is concerned about how the prospective elder is currently living. The character traits he gives are qualities the elder is to presently possess. Paul is not suggesting Timothy go on a witch-hunt and dig around to see what

⁷Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 89. Stott further notes that the title *episkopos* denotes the function of the office, whereas the title *presbyteros* denotes the dignity of the office. He further references work by Dr Alastair Campbell who notes a further difference in the terms, namely that the elders referred to men who were collectively overseers of the churches that met in their homes. In other words, each man was an overseer, and together as a group they are elders. Ibid.

⁸John S. Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches: A Contemporary Ecclesiology* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic & Professional, 2005), 191. Hammett also notes that when the word is used as a noun, the English Standard Version (ESV) translates the word as *servant* eighteen times, *minister* seven times, and *deacon* only three times. The verb form is used thirty-four times, with the meaning of waiting on or serving someone, caring for another’s needs, or *to serve* in a general sense. Ibid.

⁹Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 109.

the man might have done twenty or thirty years ago, or a time before he was a disciple of Christ. This is not like American politics, where the one seeking to run for an office has their entire life scrutinized, going back as far as when the candidate was a teenager. These political machines bring up dirt and uncover skeletons in the closets of the candidate which might have been reflective of a time when the individual was a much different person with different views and convictions. This is not what Paul is concerned with in terms of the elder, rather he is concerned with the man's present character and walk with the Lord.

While the list of qualifications for the elder appears to be randomly listed by Paul, I find it helpful to break them up into three categories of situational, family and moral qualifications.¹⁰

Situational Qualifications

Able to teach (3:2). Elders are required to be “able to teach” God’s Word faithfully and accurately. This is the one required characteristic that is unique to the elder, for this is not on the list of qualifiers for deacon nor Christians in general. It is also the one character trait which deals with the duties the elder must practice. Because elders are responsible for accurately teaching God’s Word, they must thoroughly know God’s Word. They should be constantly studying God’s Word so they can understand the overall storyline of the Bible as well as have knowledge of the specifics of biblical doctrine. This involves meditation, memorization, and continual study of Scripture. An individual may meet all of the other character traits flawlessly, but if they do not have a thorough knowledge of the Word of God, then they are not qualified to serve as an elder.

Knowing the Word of God is not enough, for the elder must also be able to communicate the truths of Scripture. They need to be able to show others what the Bible

¹⁰Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 109. The list of character traits presented here are categorized according to the list provided by Merkle.

says and how to apply it to their lives. The elder needs to be one who can “persuade people with the Word, plead with people from the Word, comfort people with the Word, encourage people from, and lead the church according to the Word.”¹¹ There are many people who have incredible biblical knowledge but lack the ability to teach and communicate with others. Such a person would not be qualified to lead God’s people as an elder.

Not a recent convert (3:6). Paul states the elder “must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (3:6). Why would Paul require this? Perhaps you know an individual who has come to faith whom you are confident in your heart and mind is uniquely gifted and could do incredible things for the cause of Christ. Why make such a person wait when they have the gifts now along with the desire to serve in a leadership role?

When someone first becomes a follower of Christ, it is often a time of joy and elation. There is a hunger and thirst to know more and more of God’s Word coupled with a desire to grow in the faith. However there is not yet a level of spiritual maturity which is needed to lead the church. Such maturity can only come over time and Paul knows the dangers that loom ahead for the immature Christian placed in a leadership role. He knows how easy it is to “become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil” (3:6). Satan can take an immature Christian placed in leadership and use him in ways that can be destructive for the church. Therefore, all leaders need time for spiritual maturity to be developed so they are better prepared and armed to “stand against the schemes of the devil” (Eph 3:11).

Also, because teaching is a qualification for eldership, new converts need time to study and grow in God’s Word. The level of knowledge they need for teaching cannot

¹¹David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 56.

be gained overnight. Even if someone has spent years reading and studying the Bible prior to their conversion, there is still a time required for that knowledge to go from the head to the heart to the degree where spiritual maturity is present.

So the question arises as to how long should one be a convert before being qualified to serve? Is it one year, five years, ten years, or more? Paul does not give us the precise answer we might wish, so this can be a bit of a gray area. It is a situation that must be examined on a case by case basis where the elders examine the prospect for his level of spiritual maturity. The examination is intended to determine if the prospective elder demonstrates a spiritual maturity where there is confidence this man will be able to faithfully serve?

Years ago, former Dallas Cowboys' star Deon Sanders made headlines when he became a Christian and stated his intention of going into pastoral ministry. I am sure many Christians were thrilled with the prospect of such a well-known celebrity preaching the gospel. Just imagine the incredible impact such a man with his platform could make for the Kingdom. However, in a television interview, Sanders stated that he would need a month to first study the Bible before he began to preach.¹² He obviously had no comprehension of what would be involved in preaching God's Word week after week and was in no possible way qualified to take such a position. One can admire him for his desire and zeal for the Lord, but great zeal and a month of Bible study does not equate to great spiritual maturity.

Well thought of by outsiders (3:7). Paul next tells Timothy the elder “must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil” (3:7). The elder should have a good reputation with people outside the church, which would include people within the community, coworkers, friends, and even family

¹²Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 118-19.

members. Paul knows how Satan is looking for any means possible to get his foot in the door of the church so he may inflict damage. Therefore, Paul warns that elders should have outstanding reputations, otherwise they may fall “into a snare of the devil” (3:7). Just as you would not want to buy a car or insurance from an individual who has a reputation for being unethical, nor would those outside the faith be drawn to our churches if our leaders have a poor reputation. The devil will do all he can to shine the spotlight upon the known flaws of these leaders in an effort to keep people as far away as possible from the family of God.

Family Qualifications

Husband of one wife (3:2). The first family qualification on the list is the requirement that the elder be “the husband of one wife.” This requirement is the most controversial and disputed of the qualifications for eldership. There are four different interpretations as to what Paul meant by “the husband of one wife” which have been proposed: (1) The elder must be married, (2) He must not practice polygamy, (3) He cannot be remarried or divorced, and (4) He must be faithful to his wife.¹³

The first interpretation is that Paul is requiring elders to be married, thus disqualifying all single men for eldership.¹⁴ This view is unlikely, for Paul, Timothy and also Jesus were single men. This would also contradict Paul’s teaching on the opportunities that singleness presents for service to the kingdom of God (1 Cor 7:25-38).

The second view claims Paul is referring to a prohibition against polygamy. Paul does say that the elder is to be the husband of *one* wife. However, this view is not the best option for a couple of reasons. Polygamy was very rare in this culture, therefore

¹³William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 170.

¹⁴Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 92. Stott notes that “only the Eastern Orthodox churches have taught from this text that marriage is obligatory for parish clergy (while requiring their ‘higher’ clergy to be celibate monks).” Ibid.

Paul's point would have been irrelevant.¹⁵ Also, later in this letter Paul states that one of the criteria for a widow to be eligible for support is that they be "the wife of one husband" (5:9). It would be highly unlikely that Paul was speaking of women who had been married to more than one man at the same time, for that would have been unheard of in this culture.¹⁶ Based upon these two reasons, the "husband of one wife" most likely does not refer to a prohibition against polygamy.

The third interpretation claims the elder cannot be remarried, nor can he have ever been divorced. This view is the most controversial and hotly debated. According to this interpretation, if a man's wife dies he must remain unmarried in order to serve as an elder. Also, if the man has ever been divorced, then he is automatically disqualified from serving as an elder. Those that hold this view are seeking to take seriously what Scripture says about this divorce and remarriage. This was the view of the early church that commended celibacy after the death of a spouse. Paul also favored celibacy after the death of the spouse, even though he did allow remarriage in certain situations (1 Cor 7:8-9).¹⁷ Those favoring this view contend that though Paul would allow remarriage in certain situations, he holds these individuals to a higher standard, therefore his general preference is for them to practice celibacy as opposed to remarriage. However, when looking at the qualifications for eldership, these are the same qualities that would be expected from all Christians.¹⁸ Therefore, it would be unlikely that Paul would be holding elders to a higher standard of divorce and remarriage than he would for lay Christians.

Because of the prevalence of divorce within our society and our churches, it is

¹⁵Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 80.

¹⁶ Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 125. Merkle further notes that in the Greco-Roman and Jewish culture, as rare as polygamy would have been (especially among Christians), polyandry would have been strongly rejected. *Ibid.*

¹⁷*Ibid.*, 126.

¹⁸I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 472.

claimed that one who is divorced can never be seen as “blameless,” and in a sense they treat divorce as the unpardonable sin.¹⁹ But this idea is based more on tradition and emotion than on scriptural warrant. The Bible does not say divorce is the unpardonable sin. Also, if a man like Paul who is a former murderer “is able to be forgiven and later serve as a spiritual leader, then it would seem rather arbitrary that a person who remarries cannot serve in such a capacity.”²⁰ Therefore, as much as we hate and discourage divorce, to treat it in a separate category and use it as an automatic disqualifier for serving as an elder is not faithful to the text.

So what does Paul mean by “the husband of one wife?” The final view is the interpretation I hold, which is the view that Paul is referring to the husband’s faithfulness to his wife. We have to remember that Paul is giving Timothy a list a character traits the one in consideration for eldership is to presently possess. Paul is most interested in evaluating the prospective elder’s current walk with the Lord. He wants to see if the man is presently living his life in a way that demonstrates he is qualified to lead God’s people. He is not concerned with what the man did twenty or thirty years ago, possibly before he was even a Christian. His focus is on evaluating the state of the prospects current walk with the Lord and how each of these character traits are currently being lived out. Unfortunately, there have been many good and qualified men who have been prevented by churches from serving as an elder because of going through a divorce. They are automatically disqualified from consideration with no examination of the reason for their divorce, their spiritual state when the divorce occurred, nor their current walk with the Lord.

So back to the question, what does Paul mean by the “husband of one wife?” Paul is stressing the faithfulness of the husband to his wife. He wants to make sure the

¹⁹Hammett, *Biblical Foundations for Baptist Churches*, 167-68.

²⁰Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 126.

elder is a man who loves, respects, and is faithful to his wife. He is totally committed to their marriage and does whatever he can to treat his wife in a way that honors both her and the Lord. The church needs men who are known for how they love and treat their wives. Paul is concerned with the quality of his marriage. The elder should be a “one woman man” such that he is faithful and committed to his wife. He has not engaged in an adulterous relationship, and in fact he does not even flirt with other women.²¹ The way he treats his wife in a loving and honoring way models for the church and community what it looks like to be a Christian husband.

Manage his own household well (3:4-5). The second family qualification for the elder deals with his ability to lead his family well. Paul states that the elder “must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (3:4-5). If a man is going to be responsible for leading God’s family, he must be able to lead his own family at home. Or to state it another way, if a man cannot lead and manage his own family, he is in no way, shape, or form qualified to lead and manage God’s family.

Moral Qualifications

Above reproach (3:2). The first moral qualification for the elder is to be a man who is “above reproach” (3:2). Paul is likely beginning his list with this character trait because the current leaders in Ephesus were living in a way that was bringing disrepute to the church.²² The elder should be well-thought of within the community with no character faults that might cause those outside the church to view the Christian faith in a negative light. This is not to suggest the elder must be perfect and sinless, but rather he

²¹Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 79.

²²Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 169.

is respected by all, and has no ongoing, observable issues in his life. The term “above reproach” is used in a general sense as an umbrella for all of the other requirements that Paul lists.²³

Sober-minded (3:2). Elders are also to be sober-minded, or as some translations say “temperate.”²⁴ While this word is sometimes used in reference to alcohol, Paul is likely not referring to alcohol consumption, as he will talk about that issue shortly (3:3). The elder should have a clear mind and think carefully before making a decision or judgment. As John Stott states, “It is an outward expression of an inner self-control.”²⁵ The sixteenth-century French satirist François Rabelais stated it best when he said, “How shall I be able to rule over others if I have not full power and command of myself?”²⁶ This is an individual who is not rash but approaches whatever task at hand in a well thought-out manner. The church does not want elders who are careless in their decision making process when it comes to the important matters pertaining to our church.

Respectable (3:2). Next on the list is the requirement that the elder be respectable. He is to be a man whom is respected by those in the church and the community. Paul is not saying the elder is simply known for his good manners, but rather he should be a man who is dignified and orderly.²⁷ He conducts himself in a way that others look up to and admire whether it is a home, church, or work. For example, if it is discovered that an individual being considered for eldership is a business owner known for treating customers unfairly and unethically, then this would not be an individual who

²³Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 80.

²⁴The NIV, TNIV, NASB, NKJV and the NET all translate *νηφάλιος* as “temperate.” The KJV translates the word as “vigilant.”

²⁵Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 94.

²⁶*Ibid.*, 95.

²⁷Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 110.

is well-respected within the community and would not be a qualified candidate for eldership.

Hospitable (3:2). Hospitality was something practiced extensively within the Hellenistic culture, for it was considered a matter of honor.²⁸ It is also a trait a man must possess to qualify for eldership. Being hospitable today conjures up images of someone who throws great parties and cooks incredible food. However, that is not the kind of hospitality Paul has in mind. The idea is that the elder should open up his life to others. He is a man who not only invest in his own family, but also invests in the lives of others. He takes time to get to know different people and have conversations with them. He disciples others and seeks to share life with them. A man who is hospitable is not shy about sharing a meal with someone, and his home is known as a place that is open and welcoming to others.

This is a quality all Christians should practice. We need to open our homes and lives to others. In Paul's letter to the Romans, he provided a list of marks of the Christian life which included the statement that Christians should "contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality" (Rom 12:13). We as believers should examine how hospitable we are toward others. Do I open up my home to others? Do I know my neighbors or have I ever made an attempt to know more about them, their families, their interest, and their relationship to the Lord? If the answer is "no" to either of these questions, perhaps we should reconsider our obedience to the command to "show hospitality," and look for ways we can incorporate this practice into our lives.

Not a drunkard, not violent, and not quarrelsome (3:3). In verse 3, Paul lists some negative traits which the elder must not possess. He pairs the prohibition against drunkenness with the call to not be violent or quarrelsome, likely because he

²⁸Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 252.

knows how intoxication can lead to violence and arguments.²⁹ If you have been to a party where there is excessive drinking of alcohol, then you have likely seen first-hand the violent behavior that results from intoxication. The one who drinks in excess demonstrates a lack of self-control and discipline, and is also more prone to violence and the mistreatment of his spouse and children.³⁰

The question that is so often raised is whether the elder should completely abstain from alcohol or be allowed to consume alcohol in moderation. We have to be careful not to add to what Scripture says when approaching this or any issue. When it comes to abstinence, there is not explicit biblical evidence which prohibits all use of alcohol. In fact, Paul will tell Timothy later in this letter that it is good to drink a little wine for his stomach ailment (5:23). The main issue that Paul is addressing deals with the abuse of alcohol, not total abstinence.³¹ Therefore, while I personally choose to abstain from all consumption of alcohol, and would recommend that position for all Christians, this is my personal opinion and cannot be supported fully from Scripture. In addition to this, the elder must also address his conscience and evaluate how his actions may influence another brother to stumble in this area (1 Cor 8:13).

²⁹Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 252-53.

³⁰Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 119.

³¹There has been great debate on the issue of total abstinence. While the Bible nowhere fully prohibits all consumption of alcohol, it is clear that excessive use leads to multiple problems (Prov 20:1; Eph 5:18; Rom 13:13; 1 Pet 4:3). However, the Bible also says that Christians should do all that they can to avoid causing someone else to stumble (Rom 14:21). This is a personal issue and a matter of conscience. Personally I think it would be wise for Christians, and especially those in leadership positions, to abstain from all use of alcohol. This would prevent being a stumbling block to others who are tempted to consume alcohol or who are already addicted. Also, though we all feel we can be controlled and responsible, when one drinks one glass of wine, then there may be time where they yield to temptation and have a second, third, etc. John Piper in a sermon entitled “Total Abstinence and Church Membership” delivered October 4, 1981, stated he felt Christians should abstain from all use of alcohol. His argument was that the consumption of alcohol would violate his conscience. Also he noted that alcohol is a mind-altering drug and addictive. His view is that total abstinence makes a social statement about the devastating effects of alcoholic abuse in our society. This is his personal opinion, and I find myself in total agreement with his assessment.

Not a lover of money (3:3). Finally, elders are not to be greedy for money and possessions. Paul will devote more space to greed later in the letter, but he wants to highlight here that being consumed with the accumulation of riches has no place in the life of an elder. Notice the emphasis that Paul places on the attitude toward money as he condemns the *love* of money. Money itself is neutral, but one is not qualified to be an elder when consumed with the accumulation of money.

This can be a problem in our churches today as we often want those with financial means to be in positions of leadership. Os Guinness says, “If a man is drunk on wine, you’ll throw him out. But if he is drunk on money, you’ll make him a deacon.”³² There is a perception in America that someone with great wealth has been blessed by God, and therefore must be a person with power, abilities, and leadership.³³ However, this is not always the case and we should avoid evaluating potential elders based upon their wealth.

When one is placed in a position of leadership who is greedy for money, the results can be disastrous. Unfortunately, there have been many greedy church leaders who preyed on the members of the congregation in order to fill their coffers with treasure. The damage done by such people is devastating to the members of the church, as well as to those outside the church who now have a distorted view of the Christian faith. The lover of money has no business leading God’s people and His church.

Qualifications for Deacons (3:8-13)

Paul next turns to the office of the deacon and provides a list of required character traits which is similar to those for elders. Before discussing those traits, I need to make some comments about the office itself. We do not find in Scripture duties for the

³²Os Guinness, *The Gravedigger File: Papers on the Subversion of the Modern Church* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 1983), 187.

³³Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 82-83.

deacon as clearly defined as we do for elders. Therefore, there have been differing views as to what the deacon is to do.

The word *deacon* comes from the Greek noun *diakonos* and is translated as a “servant, minister, or deacon.”³⁴ The office of the deacon may have been established in Acts 6:1-6 where we read of an account in which a need arose for some widows to be served, which would in effect free up the apostles who were responsible for praying and teaching the Word.³⁵ The situation as recorded in Acts is as follows:

Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. (Acts 6:1–6)

These seven men were chosen to oversee the daily distribution of food for widows which allowed elders the time to focus on their primary calling.³⁶ The deacon was to care for the physical needs of others whereas the apostle’s attention was mainly on the spiritual needs.

So is the deacon an office of the church? If all we had to go on was the Acts 6 passage, it would be difficult to say for sure. However, we have evidence from Paul’s letter to the Philippians which suggest it is an office. Paul begins his letter by saying, “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus. To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at

³⁴Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 261. Towner notes that while the noun usage is limited, the word group from which it is derived describes a multiple range of Christian ministry and workers. Because of the varied uses of the word group, it is more difficult to establish a precise meaning of how the term *diakonos* was used in its formal application. Ibid.

³⁵The noun *διακονος* does not actually occur in the Acts 6 passage; however, the verb form is used and thus it is thought that the office of deacon is being established here. The same fact that the word *diakonos* is not present leads others to suggest that these seven chosen were not the first deacons. Ibid.

³⁶Merkle, *40 Questions about Elders and Deacons*, 228-29.

Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1). This is the only letter where Paul addresses the church leaders in his greeting. What is interesting is that he makes a clear distinction between church members, elders and deacons.³⁷ Based upon this greeting, it appears that during the time Paul wrote to the church in Philippi, the office of the deacon was recognized within the church body.

Looking back at the duties of the seven in Acts 6, does this mean deacons today are only responsible for the distribution of food for widows? The answer would be “no.” The thing to keep in mind is that a principle was set forth whereby certain people were appointed to lead by serving the needs of the church. Carrying the principle forward provides insight as to the responsibilities of deacons today. The deacons are those the church calls upon to care for physical needs of the congregation, thus freeing up elders to focus on ministering to spiritual needs.

The qualifications for the deacon are remarkably similar to those for the elder. Paul says the deacon must not be addicted to wine, not greedy for dishonest gain, blameless, be the husband of one wife, and one who manages his household well. All of these are on the list for the elders.

There are however some additional traits Paul includes on the deacon list. He states the deacon must be dignified (3:8), meaning one who is respected and well thought of by others.³⁸ The deacon is not to be double-tongued (3:8), referring to someone who says one thing, but does something else.³⁹ Today we might refer to someone like this as

³⁷Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, Word Biblical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2015), 9. Hawthorne notes that “Paul mentions the *ἐπισκοοσποις και διακονοις* in such a way as to distinguish them from the congregation. This implies that he considered them to be persons with some kind of official status.” Ibid.

³⁸Merkle notes that “the Greek word ‘dignified’ *σεμνος* is only found four times in the New Testament (Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:8, 11; Titus2:2). The term refers to something that is honorable, esteemed, or worthy of respect. In Titus and both occurrences in 1 Timothy, the word is used with the meaning of one who is worthy of respect. In Philippians, the word is used by Paul to describe the types of things one should think about, and is translated as ‘honorable.’” Merkle, *40 Questions About Elders and Deacons*, 234.

³⁹Mounce notes that the phrase *μη διλογους* is a very rare term, with no other uses in the Bible.

two-faced, which is not a complimentary term. This is a person who is insincere and cannot be trusted, and Paul is saying such a person is disqualified to serve as deacon.

Paul goes on to say the deacon is to “hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience” (3:9). Paul will touch on the mystery of the faith later (3:16), but here he is referring to the “teachings once hidden but now revealed.”⁴⁰ He wants to make sure that someone called to serve as deacon is sound in doctrine. This requirement would rule out those false teachers who had cropped up in Ephesus. The false teachers had shipwrecked their faith (1:19) and violated their conscience by going against the faith they once claimed.

The deacon is also to be tested before being called to serve (3:10). The last the church wants to do is call someone to serve who has not been thoroughly examined. In the church I where I serve, all prospective deacons go through a comprehensive interview process in order for us to better understand the person’s background, ministry experience, possible struggles, and doctrinal beliefs. It would be unfair to the church and to the candidate to call someone not qualified to serve.

Finally, Paul speaks about the character of the deacons wife when he says, “Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things” (3:11).⁴¹ The wives are to possess qualities of being dignified, not slanderers, sober-minded, and faithful in all things. Once again, the idea is that these women along

Mounce also says suggested definitions include “repetitious,” “gossips,” “saying one thing and meaning another,” or “saying one thing to one person but another thing to another person. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 198.

⁴⁰Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 117.

⁴¹Stott notes that it is not clear whether Paul is referring to female deacons, or to the wives of deacons. The statement begins like v. 8 with the word “likewise,” which would lead one to think that Paul is introducing a new category of female deacons (deaconess). Also, there is no definite article or possessive before women, which would have been expected if the meaning was “their wives.” The argument against this referring to deaconesses is that Paul does not refer to them as deacons, such as how Phoebe was described. Another point in favor of “their wives” is that this sentence is sandwiched in between two sections on deacons, which would make for an awkward structure if Paul was referring to female deacons. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus: Guard the Truth*, 101.

with their husbands are presently living a godly and respectable life. Paul wants to avoid a situation where a deacon's wife turns out to be unfaithful to her husband, or is someone who engages in gossip and slander. Those types of actions can quickly cause great harm to the church.

Conclusion

As the storyline of God's plan of redemption continues to unfold, He uses the means of leaders to help navigate the course to keep the grand story moving in a forward direction. The history of the church has been filled with great examples of Christian leaders who have done wonderful things for the body of Christ. We have also seen numerous examples of people placed in positions of leadership where it was later discovered they had issues in their life. These issues affected their ability to lead while doing serious damage to the church.

The consequences of poor leadership in the church are more severe than just the loss of animal life as a result of pollution from the spilled fuel from a ship. The leadership of the church is leading a ship which carries people to an eternal destination, and there are eternal consequences for failure. We must understand the high stakes involved in selecting leaders and take seriously the character traits listed by Paul. We must use them as a litmus test for appointing our elders and deacons. As mentioned at the start of this chapter, the remarkable thing about these traits is just how unremarkable they are. Our prayer is that God would raise up unremarkable, but qualified, leaders to lead God's remarkable church.

CHAPTER 6

THE GOOD SERVANT OF JESUS CHRIST

Jim Collins' book *Good to Great*, published October 16, 2001, quickly became a huge success with sales exceeding four million copies. Collins examined the practices of very successful companies and sought to identify what it was that transformed these organizations from good to great. Many CEO's have heralded the book as the best management book ever written.¹ We live in a society that thrives on achieving greatness, and where anything less than that standard is seen as mediocre. This premise of *Good to Great* has also infiltrated the church. *Christianity Today* published an article in 2006 entitled "The Good to Great Pastor" where they interviewed Collins about how both pastors and the church can be transformed from good to great. Commenting on church leadership, he said "the Word is too important to let key seats on the bus be occupied by the wrong people."² It is vitally important for the church to have leadership roles occupied by the right people. However, while Christians should seek to be excellent in all we do, are we really in need of great pastors? Is the role reserved for men of extraordinary talents and giftedness? Or can God call and use men of average abilities and intellect to lead His people?

When Charles Hodge passed away, his funeral turned out to be quite a spectacle. The man who was a professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary was well respected and loved by many and on the day of funeral, all of the shops in

¹Alan Murray, *The Wall Street Journal Essential Guide to Management: Lasting Lessons from the Best Leadership Minds of Our Time* (New York: Harper Business, 2010), 11.

²"The Good to Great Pastor," *CT Pastors*, accessed December 6, 2016, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/pastors/2006/spring/7.48.html>.

Princeton closed.³ Once the funeral concluded, a gathering of people joined at the cemetery where various friends of Hodge spoke. The most striking and moving words came from William Paxton, who said the following:

To sum up all, I may say that when due allowance is made for his intellect and his learning, after all his chief power was in his goodness. Christ enshrined in his heart was the center of his theology and his life. The world will write upon his monument GREAT; but we, his students, will write upon it GOOD. He was as good as he was great.⁴

Such an epitaph should be the desire of all ministers called to do God's work. As Paul continues his letter to Timothy, he will take up this subject of what it means to be a good minister. What we will discover is that Paul seems less interested in Timothy aspiring to greatness than in Timothy being a good servant of Christ. The good work of the servant will ultimately highlight the greatness of Christ.

The Need

The era of the celebrity pastor has dawned here in the United States. While there is no shortage today of ministers looking to lead the church, there is a need for ministers who are good servants of Jesus Christ. The need is not for men to enter the pulpit that are spectacular, entertaining, great, or famous. The need today is the same as it was when Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, which is for ministers who are good servant and seek to do with excellence what they have been called to do. The need is for good servants of Christ whose sole desire is to magnify Christ with no regard for themselves.

Main Point

The servant of Jesus Christ is to live life contrary to those of false teachers by

³Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 167.

⁴David B. Calhoun, *Princeton Seminary*, vol. 2, *The Majestic Testimony, 1869-1929* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1996), 56.

studying and adhering to correct doctrine, teaching the Word, being an example to others, and disciplining themselves in the spiritual disciplines. These are the marks of a good servant of Jesus Christ and are what all ministers of the gospel should aspire to.

Preview

Paul lays out in chapter 4 duties and responsibilities for Timothy to carry out as a good servant of Jesus Christ. He desires to help Timothy be the best possible minister he can be. The chapter is organized as follows:

- A. Be Aware of False Teaching (4:1-5)
- B. Being a Servant of Christ Jesus (4:6-16)
 - a. Studying Correct Doctrine (4:6)
 - b. Spiritual Training (4:7-8)
 - c. Teaching and Being a Good Model for Others (4:11-15)
- C. Be Persistent In All of These Duties (4:16)

Context

Timothy is a young minister seeking to lead a new church in Ephesus. Paul knows Timothy's youth may cause him problems as he leads older and more experienced men. Therefore Paul writes to encourage his young pupil, as well as give him practical instructions about how to lead and minister to the church. Paul concludes chapter 3 with the purpose statement of the letter, which is to inform Timothy as to how the household of God is to conduct itself. He follows the summary statement with a confession of the Christian faith referring to the church as the "pillar and buttress of the faith" (3:15). However Paul knows there are those who oppose the truth of sound doctrine. He therefore begins chapter 4 by warning Timothy there a people who will seek to deceive followers of Christ and turn them away from the faith. Timothy will need to exercise strong leadership as a minister of Christ by being able to detect error while commending

truth.⁵

A Good Servant of Christ Jesus (4:6)

The central verse of this message is found in 1 Timothy 4:6 where Paul writes, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.” Paul is instructing Timothy about what it means to be a good servant of Christ Jesus. Paul previously listed the character traits and qualifications for elders (3:1-7). Those traits describe who the Christian leader is to be. Now Paul explains what that leader is to do. What are the duties and responsibilities of a servant of Christ Jesus? While the duties listed by Paul in this section are not exhaustive, they do get to the heart of what Christian ministers are to focus on. As we shall see, the good servant of Christ Jesus is called to equip, exercise and exemplify.

Before looking at these duties of the good minister in detail, a word should be said about the phrase “a good servant of Christ Jesus.” The Greek word for *good* (*καλος*) can also be translated as “powerful, excellent, or beautiful.”⁶ Paul uses *καλος* to describe the minister as one who is noble and does his job well in the sight of God.⁷ He is the kind of man who does the work he is called to do in a manner pleasing and honoring to the Lord.

The reference to *servant* comes from *διακονος*, the same word used earlier translated as “deacon.” Here Paul is not using the word in the technical sense of the office

⁵John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 109.

⁶Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 405. The word *καλος* has the basic sense of “what is ordered or sound.” The word is also translated as “good” in the moral sense and is usually synonymous with the word *αγαθος*. Ibid., 402.

⁷I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 549.

of deacon, but in the general sense of serving in the ministry of the Lord.⁸ Servant can also be translated as “minister,” which would apply here because Paul is addressing Timothy as the minister of the church in Ephesus. The idea is for Timothy to lead the church of Jesus Christ in a manner which is marked by excellence and integrity.

Paul is not telling Timothy he has to do the great or spectacular. Some believers assume an effective Christian leader has to do something radical or grand. Many Christian leaders feel that if their church does not see amazing growth, then they are somehow a failure. Church members can also be made to feel that if they do not do something radical, such as moving overseas to be missionaries, then they are lesser of a Christian. May we never forget that God alone is good and great (Luke 18:19). The Lord has called us to be good servants by doing the things he has commanded us to do. God is more concerned that we do the basics well, with our hearts bent toward magnifying Him, as opposed to trying to do the great in order to shine the spotlight upon ourselves.

Equipping God’s People

One of the main responsibilities of the minister is to equip and educate the people of God. Paul knows that followers of Christ will need to be equipped with knowledge about how to walk the walk as a disciple of Christ. They will need both street knowledge and head knowledge. They will need to know biblical doctrine for their own spiritual growth, but also for their own protection against false teaching. Paul writes, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed” (4:6). What are the “things” Paul refers to? While he may be referring to everything he has said up to this point in the letter, he likely has in mind the preceding verses which are as

⁸John F. MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 158.

follows:⁹

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (4:1–5)

Paul is telling Timothy to put these things before the church, meaning these warnings about how some may be deceived by evil forces which can lead people to leave the faith. These evil forces are devious, deceptive, and persuasive as they prey on immature believers. He knows how immature Christian can be easily led astray by false teachers. He makes a similar statement in Ephesians when he says believers are to be mature and should “no longer be children, tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning, by craftiness in deceitful schemes” (Eph 4:14).

The same warning needs to be heeded by the church today. The world is full of false teachers promoting a false gospel which is hand-crafted to tickle our ears while promising to satisfy our materialistic desires. John MacArthur argues the church is paying the price today for our failure to think biblically and theologically. His words are as follows:

It has allowed the infiltration of all sorts of error. That, in turn, has led to the church’s becoming confused and weak. Convictionless preaching, consisting of watered down teaching, platitudes, and weak theology has replaced doctrinally strong expositional preaching. The resulting legacy has been one of charismatic confusion, psychological encroachment, mysticism, even psychic and occult influence. Much of that chaos can be attributed directly to the failure of pastors to think critically and preach with conviction.¹⁰

The excellent minister must maintain a balance between being pastorally compassionate and upholding truth. The pastor who is timid, insecure, and people

⁹George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 193.

¹⁰MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 159-60.

pleasing will make the sheep feel good while they are being eaten alive by wolves. We need pastors who spend less time petting their sheep and more time protecting them.

Part of equipping the saints involves teaching correct doctrine. Paul's reference to *these things* includes the content of what is being taught. The minister cannot just defend the people from erroneous teaching, for he must also explain and teach doctrine in a way that is biblically accurate and applicable to life. All of the discussions, teaching, studies, and instruction Paul has given to Timothy is now in turn to be given by Timothy to the brothers and sisters of the church. He is to instruct them carefully on what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ. The good minister deliberately and faithfully explains the doctrines of the Christian faith.

The good minister also encourages Christians to be students of God's Word. They should be "trained in the words of faith and of good doctrine" (4:6c). The word for *trained* (*εντρεφω*) carries the idea of being "nourished."¹¹ This applies to the minister, but also to every follower of Christ. Just as we have to feed our physical bodies daily with food, we also have to feed our spiritual bodies with a steady diet of Scripture. The Bible is more than a book of sentimental thoughts and self-help advice. The Bible is the holy and inspired Word of God that we need daily to feed our souls, to instruct us how to walk the Christian walk, and to remind us of the gospel of Jesus Christ. We need to treat our time with the Bible more like a multicourse meal that we feast upon slowly, and less like grabbing a candy bar as we run out of our house to work.

I have never read a biography of a Christian who made an impact on the world who was not a fervent student of God's Word. The great evangelist George Whitfield (1714-1770) worked in a tavern as a young boy. Every night after the bar was closed, he would go upstairs with a stolen candle and continuously read through the Bible. His

¹¹The TNIV, NKJV, and NLT translate *εντρεφω* as "nourish." The NASB translates the word as "constantly nourished" attempting to reflect the present tense of the participle which nicely highlights the continual experience of the intake of God's Word.

constant intake of Scripture helped to form and prepare him for the calling God placed upon his life. Jonathan Edwards referred to the Bible as a treasure that was to be read and enjoyed, as he explains in this illustration:

If there were a great treasure of gold and pearls hid in the earth but should accidentally be found, and should be opened among us with such circumstances that all might have as much as they could gather of it; would not everyone think it worth his while to make a business of gathering it while it should last? But that treasure of divine knowledge, which is contained in the Scriptures, and is provided for everyone to gather to himself as much of it as he can, is a far more rich treasure than any one of gold and pearls.¹²

May each of us treasure Scripture in this way such that we consistently consume and meditate upon its eternal truths.

Exercising Discipline (4:7-10)

As concerned as Paul is for Timothy to care for the people under his care, he is equally concerned that Timothy look out for his own needs as well. Part of being a good minister is to exercise the spiritual disciplines on a consistent basis. Paul knows the necessity of godliness in the life of the Christian. Therefore, he urges Timothy to seek after and crave to be Christ-like in who he is and what he does.

Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (4:7–10)

The saying “you are what you eat” can be applied to the Christian life. What we feed upon spiritually influences the health of our walk with Christ and our effectiveness as a Christian. That is why Paul emphasizes the continual nourishment we need from a regular diet of Scripture. But we have to be careful about what we mix in with our spiritual diet. If we feed upon the junk food that Paul refers to as “irreverent,

¹²Jonathan Edwards, *Sermons and Discourses, 1739-1742* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 97-98.

silly myths,” then our spiritual health will suffer.¹³ The false teachers were serving up a tray of false teachings that were heretical and godless. These teachings were frivolous and not worthy of Timothy’s attention for they would only distract him from more important matters.¹⁴ This is great advice today, for there are those who wish to engage us in pointless catfights about issues which serve no purpose other than to cause a distraction.

What should the spiritual regimen of the Christian consist of? Paul answers using an athletic metaphor by saying the Christian should train oneself for godliness (4:7b). The Greek word for *train* is γυμναζω, which is where the word gymnasium is derived. This was a Greco-Roman way of describing the training required for participation in athletic events which were popular at that time.¹⁵ The word literally means to be “naked,” for the Greeks often would compete in athletic events unclothed so they would not be hindered in any way.¹⁶ Ephesus, like most other Greek cities, had a gymnasium where young men would spend much of their time developing their physical strength and skills. Paul is using language that would relate to Timothy and his listeners. He wants Timothy to see that just as an athlete trains for a sporting event, the Christian is to train themselves for godliness.

If the objective of the training is godliness, then this begs the question as to what is meant by *godliness*. We saw Paul use this word earlier in chapter 3 when he said, “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness” (3:16). The Greek word for

¹³R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 114.

¹⁴Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 134.

¹⁵Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 116.

¹⁶Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 115.

godliness is *ευσεβεια* and is defined as “to be pious.”¹⁷ The idea behind godliness is an attitude of reverence and awe that the Christian owes to God.¹⁸

Don Whitney uses 1 Timothy 4:7 as the basis for his book *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*.¹⁹ He demonstrates how godliness, which he defines as being more Christ-like, is the goal of the spiritual disciplines.²⁰ These disciplines should be the heart and soul of the Christian life. While going through an extensive study of the spiritual disciplines is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will briefly mention what is meant by the spiritual disciplines and why they are an important not only for the minister, but for all believers.

We need self-discipline in all areas of life, whether it be diet, exercise, work ethic, or our spiritual life. However, Paul is quick to point out that the development of our spiritual life far exceeds that of physical training. His reasoning is based upon a comparison of the temporal versus eternal. He points out that “while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (4:8). When we gain muscle or shed pounds, the benefit is for the here and now. When the guys at the gym with the ripped bodies are in their sixties or seventies, those ripped bodies will likely have a much different shape. But spiritual training is more valuable because it yields both temporal and eternal results. Those who practice the spiritual disciplines will be more spiritually fit for eternity while also being

¹⁷Kittel, Friedrich, and Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, 1010. The term is used fifteen times in the New Testament, with thirteen occurrences in the Pastorals. Paul’s use in the Pastorals denotes a manner of life for the Christian. The word “is not just outward worship, nor a mere concept of God, nor a virtue, nor an ideal but rather deals with everyday conduct in honoring God as Creator and Redeemer.” *Ibid.*, 1012.

¹⁸Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 171.

¹⁹Donald S. Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2014), 4.

²⁰*Ibid.*

an individual who is now able to reflect God's image to the world.²¹

What are *spiritual disciplines*? A simple definition would be that they are practices found in the Bible which aid and promote spiritual growth.²² They are the daily habits of spiritual development such as prayer, Bible intake, meditation, fasting, worship, evangelism, serving, silence and solitude, and stewardship. They are practices done both individually and corporately with the goal being more like Christ.

We often think of discipline in negative terms for it is seen as something oppressive, limiting, painful, and miserable. We say we will discipline ourselves to eat less food, often never with any real excitement about giving up our sweets and treats. Or we say we will begin exercising every morning, bringing to mind the dread of waking up an hour earlier so we can head to the gym. Whitney speaks to this point and says that “discipline without direction is drudgery.”²³ In other words, if we exercise any type of discipline without a clear goal in mind, then that discipline will be an activity of misery and dread. However, when we visualize the end-result, then the practice of the discipline is a joy. When my desire to wear those pants that no longer fit exceeds my desire for my favorite cookies, then the discipline morphs from drudgery to delight.

This is true for the spiritual disciplines as well. If one says to themselves they are going to pray and read their Bible every morning without any clear direction, then the task will soon be reduced to another item on a to-do list to be checked off. However, when we realize these disciplines are a means to godliness, becoming more and more like Jesus Christ, then these disciplines become parts of our life we look forward to. They are no longer tasks we have to do, but rather are disciplines we get to do. This should be the attitude of every believer.

²¹Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 117.

²²Whitney, *Spiritual Disciplines for the Christian Life*, 4.

²³*Ibid.*, 19.

The world in which we live is full of distractions, making the practice of spiritual disciplines both more difficult and more necessary. Social media has conditioned our minds to want information in quick bites. We wake up in the morning and check our email, texts, Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram. We check our smart phones constantly throughout the day and our minds never seem to have a chance to slow down. Therefore, when we try to pray or read our Bibles, the task can be very difficult as our minds are racing. We never get to a point where we can slow down and enjoy time alone with God.

How is your prayer life? How consistent and fruitful is your time reading the Bible? If you find yourself struggling in this area, I would challenge you to take the advice of Paul and discipline yourself for godliness. Make spending time with God your first priority. When you awake in the morning, reach for your Bible and not your smart phone. If we want to have lives more reflective of Christ, we need to spend more time with him through prayer and the reading of Scripture.

The life of Lt. General William K. Harrison gives us an amazing example of a man who disciplined himself to read God's Word daily.²⁴ He was the most decorated soldier of the 30th Infantry Division and the first American to enter Belgium in World War II. He received the Distinguished Silver Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and the Purple Heart. During the Korean War, he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command and was President Eisenhower's choice to negotiate the end of the war.

I think it is accurate to say that this was a busy man. Despite the busyness of his life and the importance of his responsibilities, he always held reading God's Word as his number one priority. He began reading through the OT once a year and the NT four times yearly while he was a twenty-two year old cadet at West Point. Even when he was at war, he would still find time to read his Bible. At the age of ninety when his eyesight failed, he

²⁴R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006), 76-77.

had read the OT seventy times and the NT two hundred and eighty times. His friends and associates bore witness to the impact this made on his life, for they testified that every aspect of his life was influenced and informed by Scripture. While perhaps we will never read through the Bible as often as this man did, his story illustrates that we can all engage in the spiritual disciplines more than we do, despite how busy we might be.

Paul adds one additional point concerning the pursuit of godliness saying, “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe” (4:10). Scripture never promises that following Christ will be an easy road to follow. Rather, we are promised that there will be difficulties along the way including the hard work which is required of all Christians. Paul says this pursuit of godliness is something to which we “toil and strive,” suggesting the task will not be easy. But we continue to persist in our efforts to live godly lives because of the hope we have in life beyond this present life. We view all of the trials and tribulations which the Christian walk may bring through the lens of an eternal hope in our eternal God who is the Savior of all men. Paul is not saying all individuals are saved, but rather that God is the Savior of those that believe (4:10c).²⁵

An Example to Others (4:12)

So far we have seen that the good minister is one who equips his people while also exercising spiritual discipline. Another mark of the good minister is that he is an example to others in how to live out one’s faith. Paul writes, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity” (4:12).

²⁵A literal reading of *ὅς ἐστιν σωτήρ πάντων ἀνθρώπων* could lead one to conclude Paul is a Universalist. Knight notes that would be a complete contradiction from the rest of Scripture, including other writings of Paul (1 Thess 1:6; 2 Thess 1:8-9; John 8:24; Matt 8:12; 13:41-42). Paul makes it clear in these passages that there will be some who will bear the wrath of God’s punishment. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 203. Rather, Paul is simply wanting to highlight that though God is capable of saving all people, the ones who actually receive salvation are those that believe.

Despite Timothy's young age, Paul encourages him to be a model for others in all areas of life. Though we do not know his exact age, Timothy was obviously a young man who was now in a very important position.²⁶ Paul does not want Timothy's age to be an excuse for not leading. On the contrary, he is to be an example for other believers to follow. Members of the church in Ephesus should see godliness in the life of Timothy as a model of how their lives might be more Christ-like.

Paul begins by saying Timothy is to be an example to others with his speech, for he knows the power of our words to be used for either good or bad.²⁷ Have you ever had someone cast a hurtful word at you? Are there words that were loaded into the barrel of someone's self-righteous shotgun that were pointed at you? Did these words land on the target of your heart and cause a wound that has never completely healed? Or are there words you have spoken to others that were cruel and unkind, and to this day you regret ever making those comments? Perhaps you still wonder if the one who was on the receiving end of those words still remembers and is still wounded. On the other hand, do you recall a time when someone came along at just the right time and offered a word of encouragement that you will never forget? Maybe it was a word which completely changed the course of your life. If you can say yes to any of these questions, you have experienced first-hand the life-changing power of words. We read in Proverbs that, "Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Prov 18:21). The words we speak have power to cause great harm, but also the power to

²⁶Though Timothy was young, he likely was not very young, such as in his teens or twenties. Fee suggests that he may have been between 30-35 years old. And since this was a culture that placed a high value on the leadership of elders, it is significant that Paul would entrust a leadership role to someone as young as Timothy. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 106-7.

²⁷Towner notes that some contend that "speech" here refers to the specific speech used in preaching. However, while this may be part of Paul's intent, he likely is using the word in a more general sense which would include speech in all areas of life. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006) 315. Lea agrees with this assessment and says "speech here refers to all types of verbal expressions." Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 137. I would argue that our speech would also include the words we express in the words we write in our letters, emails, and social media.

bring about great blessings.

All Christians should be aware that the world is listening to our speech and reading our words. Therefore, we must strive to use words that are honoring and glorifying to the Lord. There is no place in the Christian life for gossip, slander, and hate speech. Paul talks about this in his letter to the Ephesians when he says, “Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear” (Eph 4:29). These words should serve as a filter to be placed over our mouths that we sift all of our words through before communicating. Are the words we using corrupt? Do our words build up and encourage others? These are great questions to ask before communicating in both verbal and written form.

Though Paul did not live in a world with the internet, I would argue that his plea for exemplary speech would be applicable to social media. Some of the posts I read by Christians on Facebook about our President and other political leaders are horrific. The content of their words is laced with venom designed for the sole purpose of puncturing a wound into the hearts of those with different opinions. It does nothing to promote a civil conversation, but rather ignites rage, stokes the fire, and gets others upset. We should also remember that whatever is posted on social media cannot be recalled. Just as an arrow which has left the bow cannot be retrieved, a social media post or email cannot be retrieved once the send button is pushed. So before posting anything on social media, I would urge you to slow down, think carefully about what you are posting, and ask yourself why you are posting? Is the post showing the love of Christ to others? Is what you are posting doing anything to bring glory and honor to the cause of Christ. Are your social media practices a good example to others as to what it means to be a follower of Christ?

The good minister should also be an example to others in how they conduct themselves. While this applies to all believers, it is especially important for ministers to

watch their conduct since their lives are public and visible. There are few things more damaging to the cause of Christ than when a minister says one thing from the pulpit and does something else out in the world. The minister should be genuine and sincere by practicing what he preaches. He will not be perfect, for he is a sinner. But his heart's desire should be to live out his faith in a way others seek to model. The minister's life should proclaim to the world that "he is God's man, all the time: at home, at church, at the grocery store, on the freeway, on the playground, at the barbershop, and everywhere."²⁸

The good minister is also to exemplify love toward others. Paul is not referring here to an emotional and experiential feeling. Rather he is speaking about a sacrificial and service oriented love. Jesus himself said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). When I first joined the staff as Associate Pastor at my current church, I asked my Senior Pastor for advice on how to be successful in ministry. I will never forget his response as he said, "The best piece of advice I can ever give you is to first of all love God, and then love our people. If you truly love our people, you will succeed in pastoral ministry."²⁹ The minister is called to love all people, especially people under his care, and exemplify this love to others.

Finally, the good minister should be an example in the inner qualities of faith and purity. Paul is not using "faith" in reference to one's belief, but rather to one's faithfulness exhibited to others.³⁰ A good minister is a man who can be trusted and has an unshakeable commitment to his people. He also models purity, which includes sexual matters and an inward purity of the heart. Unfortunately, there have been far too many cases where the minister failed in the area of sexual purity. Sexual sins can cause great

²⁸Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 183.

²⁹The Senior Pastor I am referencing is James Cartin, who retired from Western Avenue Baptist Church in August of 2015 after serving there twenty-eight years.

³⁰Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 123.

harm to the individuals involved as well as to the church family. The church needs men called to the ministry to heed Paul's command to remain faithful to their calling and pure in their inner being.

The Primacy of God's Word (4:13-16)

Finally, the good minister should be dedicated to the Word of God. He needs to hold the Bible in high esteem and his entire ministry must revolve around the proclamation of the truths of Scripture. Not only should he devote time to the personal study of the Word, he should also herald the Word to the masses. Paul's exhortation to Timothy includes a charge to publicly read Scripture as well as preach and teach what has been read.³¹ Paul's words are as follows:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim 4:13-16)

The public reading of God's Word is no longer seen as an integral part of worship in many church circles. This is unfortunate for it deprives people from hearing the pure Word of God. One thing I enjoy doing on vacation is visiting other churches. While I recognize I have my biases, I often walk away from these services scratching my head due to the little emphasis and exposure to God's Word. There seldom is a dedicated time for reading Scripture. When Scripture is read, it is often limited to a verse or two that has no connection to the message. Paul's charge to Timothy, and to us, is to devote time to publicly read Scripture. To devote oneself to reading Scripture implies that there

³¹Fee points out that some contend that Paul's instruction to Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, preaching and teaching are not to be used as a model for worship. Seeing this as a model of worship is too narrow and does not take into account other aspects of worship such as "prayer (2:1-7; 1 Cor 11:2-16; singing (Col 3:16; 1 Cor 1:26), charismatic utterances (1 Thess 5:19-22; 1 Cor 11:2-16; 12-14), and the Lord's Supper (1 Cor 11:17-34)." Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 107.

is work and preparation done first by the minister in private.³² Ministers should approach the reading with careful thought, preparation, and prayer. And because this is a public reading of Scripture, it is a very important practice because it is the Word being cast out to the masses.³³ The reading should be accompanied by an exposition of the text in order to clarify what is being read.³⁴

Martyn Lloyd-Jones (1899-1981) is considered one of the greatest preachers of the twentieth century.³⁵ He understood the primacy of preaching God’s Word and was unshakable in his commitment to exposing and expositing the text. He also believed the minister should take the proclamation of the Word seriously with a sense of gravity and humility. His desire was for the spotlight to be focused solely on the Lord and not the preacher. In a recent biography of Lloyd-Jones, Steven Lawson makes the following observation about the minister as a preacher:

Lloyd-Jones believed the man who is called to preach comes under a sobering humility. He believed that this person is overwhelmed with a deep sense of his own personal unworthiness for such a high and holy task and is often hesitant to move forward to preach for fear of his own inadequacies. . . . Though he is compelled to preach, he is at the same time fearful of doing so. He is sobered by this weighty assignment to speak on behalf of God. He trembles at the stewardship entrusted to him and the accountability that comes with it.³⁶

This pattern of reading Scripture followed by explanation and application is a

³²Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 111.

³³Ibid. Guthrie notes this would have been even more important during this time because very few people had access to Scripture. We live in a time in America where our homes are filled with Bibles and we have easy and inexpensive access to them. That was not the case in Paul’s day and this “scarcity of manuscripts would have made the public readings essential for the life of the church.” Ibid.

³⁴MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 176.

³⁵Martyn Lloyd-Jones was a doctor who was called to leave the medical field to enter vocational ministry. He was a Welsh minister who was influential to the British evangelical movement of the twentieth century. After preaching in Aberavon for a decade, he then moved to Westminster Chapel where he became known for his verse by verse exposition of Scripture. Many of his sermons are available at the MLJ Trust website.

³⁶Steven J. Lawson, *The Passionate Preaching of Martyn Lloyd-Jones* (Sanford, FL: Ligonier Ministries, 2016), 37.

pattern ministers would be wise to follow today. This should be a central part of our worship, just as it was when Ezra publicly read and explained the Word of God to the people of God (Neh 8:1-8). Sadly, in many churches today that pattern has been replaced with a performance oriented service where the minister picks and chooses a few passages to supplement his “five steps to a happier life.”³⁷ These watered down messages are more like a motivational speech than a biblical exposition. We desperately need churches to follow Paul’s instruction by dedicating time for the reading and proclamation of God’s Holy and inspired Word.

Conclusion

God in His infinite wisdom has chosen to use shepherds to care for, protect, nourish, and teach His people. The good minister is the shepherd who desires to be faithful in his calling. He should carry out these responsibilities while remaining humble and pure. He also recognizes that though he may be a shepherd, he is not the chief shepherd. His sole allegiance and responsibility is to God and not others. God is the one whom he serves and the one whom he has dedicated his life.

G. Campbell Morgan (1863-1945) was a British evangelist as well as a renowned biblical scholar. Because of his success and popularity, Morgan was constantly in demand to speak and preach. He was also given many different types of offers from various people and organizations. John Wannamaker was a well-known merchant in Philadelphia and he became enthralled with the preaching of Morgan. He approached Morgan and offered to put up one million dollars to build a new church sanctuary if Morgan would agree to come and be their pastor. To the surprise of many, Morgan turned down the generous offer, something that Wannamaker was not used to having happen to him. However, Campbell Morgan went on to explain that “I am God’s man. If I did that, I

³⁷Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 187.

would become Wannamaker's man."³⁸

We need churches filled with God's men whose lives line up with Paul's description of a good servant of Christ Jesus. While many churches crave unusually gifted ministers who are more akin to a CEO or motivational speaker, God's Word tells us the real need is for the good and faithful servant. The good minister is to equip and protect, to exercise personal discipline, to be an example to others, and to expound and explain God's Word to God's people. May our churches in America and around the world be filled with more men of God faithful to their calling than men of the world faithful to themselves.

³⁸Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wycliffe Handbook of Preaching and Preachers* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1984), 210.

CHAPTER 7

RELATIONSHIPS WITHIN THE CHURCH

One of my favorite television shows as a young boy was *The Brady Bunch*, a sitcom that aired from 1969 to 1974. The show was about a family brought together when Mike Brady, a widowed man with three sons, married Carol Martin, who was also widowed and had three daughters. As one might expect, life with such a blended family proved to be quite complex and interesting, making for many comical scenes. Imagine if the size of your family doubled overnight and you now lived under the roof with people of the opposite sex who you previously did not know. Everyone's chores, responsibilities, and schedules would now be different. People that at one time were strangers would now be family members and you would be expected to love them as family. While the show mainly depicts the lighter side of this diverse family, in actuality joining a man with three sons to a woman with three daughters would likely cause strenuous and complex relationships.

The early church in Ephesus might have felt such tension in their relationships among each other. Life together for these Christians was more than meeting for an hour on Sundays, for their lives were interconnected every day. The early church was for the most part an extended family which consisted of people with different backgrounds, social status, genders, and religious traditions. Just as the Brady family had to learn to adapt to each other, likewise the members of the early church had to learn how to relate to each other as members of the family of God.¹

¹N. T. Wright, *Paul for Everyone: The Pastoral Letters: 1 and 2 Timothy, and Titus*, 2nd ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2004), 53. The inspiration for this illustration came from N. T. Wright, where he shares about a couple he personally knows that has eleven children. The couple were both widowed and each brought children into the family when they married.

As Paul continues in his instruction to Timothy, he now turns to the subject of relationships within the church body. He narrows his focus by addressing relationships with people of various ages, widows, and elders. In this chapter we will explore what Paul has to say about each of these unique relationships, the challenges they present, and the proper way the church is to relate to these groups.

The Need

The household of God is a melting pot of people with differing demographics and backgrounds. While the people in the church come from different biological families, they are all part of the family of God. Just as members of a family need to get along with one another, the members of the family of God also have to live in harmony with each other. Therefore, there is a need for the members of the household of God to have instruction about how to deal with a diverse population.

Main Point

Members of the church of Jesus Christ are all part of the same family and are thus called to love and care for one another as they treat everyone with love, dignity, and respect.

Preview

Paul gives Timothy instruction for how the household of God is to care for one another, with specific advice for the care of people of different age groups, widows, and elders. The section breaks down as follows:

- A. How to Treat People in Different Age Groups (5:1-2)
- B. Proper Care of Widows (5:3-16)
 - a. Special Care for Widows in Need (5:3-8)
 - b. Widows Who Serve in the Church (5:9-10)
 - c. Instruction for Younger Widows (5:11-16)

C. The Care and Protection of Elders (5:17-25)

- a. Honoring Elders (5:17-18)
- b. The Protection of Elders (5:19)
- c. Rebuking Unrepentant Elders (5:20-22)
- d. Appointing Elders (5:23-25)

Context

In the previous section, Paul gave Timothy instruction about how to serve God's people well by being a good minister. He now shifts his attention to the responsibilities the church has to minister to certain groups within the household of God. Timothy is leading a church in the pagan city of Ephesus where these secular people are watching how the new Christians treat each other. Therefore, Paul urges Timothy to instruct the church on how to relate to different groups of people within the Christian community in order to "win the esteem of the largely heathen population in Ephesus."² Paul focuses his instruction on how to relate with people in different age groups, widows and elders.

Relationships with Different Age Groups (5:1-2)

Being a relatively young man thrown into a very important leadership role can be challenging. Timothy was likely beginning to experience firsthand some of these challenges as he was now the leader of the church in Ephesus. Though Timothy's age is never given, he was likely quite young when he received this letter from Paul, possibly in his mid-thirties.³ Understanding the challenges young Timothy might encounter with

²Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 144.

³John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 35-36. Timothy's age is not known for sure, though he would have been comparatively young when Paul wrote him this letter for Paul had previously urged Timothy to not let others look down upon him due to his young age (4:12). Fee estimates his age to be likely between thirty and thirty-five. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 106-7. Stott similarly notes that he may have been in his early to

people of different ages, Paul encourages Timothy to treat people in all age groups with honor and respect. We are all part of the family of God and therefore we should treat everyone in this family with honor and respect with no exception due to one's age or gender. Paul therefore urges Timothy to "not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women, as sisters, in all purity" (5:1–2).⁴

We are all culturally conditioned to show respect to the elderly. This is not just a Western cultural standard, but one that is universal in most cultures. China has an Elderly Rights Law which mandates that children visit their elderly parents, regardless of how far they may live away. In fact, to disobey this law comes with severe punishment including fines and even imprisonment. In Korea, honor and respect is coupled with an emphasis on the celebration of age where the 60th and 70th birthdays come with a large-scale party and feast.⁵

While respect for the elderly is a cultural norm, it is also God's will.⁶ In this passage, Paul begins with the command for young Timothy to refrain from rebuking elderly men but to rather encourage them as a father. The idea is not to respect them just as an older man, but to respect them as one's own father. That specification is packed

mid-thirties because it would have been "unlikely that Paul would have invited Timothy to join his missionary team prior to his late teens or early twenties." This letter was written approximately thirteen years after Timothy joined Paul, thus putting his approximate age in the early to mid-thirties. "The ancients considered this age to be within the limits of youth." Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 36.

⁴Paul earlier used the word *πρεσβυτερος* when speaking of the office of the elder (4:14). However, the context here is that he is using the word to refer to an age-based category of older men. Knight notes there is further support from papyri found which have examples of the use of *πρεσβυτερος* being used to describe the relationships between older and younger groups of people. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 213.

⁵Katrina Marinez-Carter, "How the Elderly Are Treated around the World," last modified July 23, 2013, accessed December 13, 2016, <http://theweek.com/articles/462230/how-elderly-are-treated-around-world>.

⁶Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 195.

with meaning for Scripture is explicit about the importance of honoring parents. The fifth commandment states that everyone is to honor both their fathers and mothers (Exod 20:12). We read in Leviticus that the Lord commanded Moses to speak to the people of Israel and say, “You shall be holy, for I the LORD your God am holy” (Lev 19:2). This command is followed by the command for everyone to “revere his mother and father” (19:3). God takes the command to honor and revere parents very seriously.⁷ And the culture within which Timothy was living was a culture where the father was to be shown great respect and honor.⁸

No specific instructions are given as to how honoring parents should be carried out. The way of showing honor and respect is going to vary from culture to culture. Here in America, showing respect to the elderly might include addressing them with proper titles, being polite, being patient, and offering to help them with various needs.⁹

A word of caution is in order, for this passage is not saying younger men are to allow older men to do as they wish. There may be times when a young man like Timothy may be called to speak the truth in love (Eph 4:15) to an older man who may have fallen into sin. However, he is to do so in a way that is respectful and encouraging. He approaches the elder with tact, grace, and respect just as he would treat his own father.

Paul also encourages Timothy to treat younger men as brothers (5:1c). Paul uses family language once again when he refers to these younger men as brothers. In the

⁷Many other biblical passages speak about the honoring of parents. For example, Proverbs has numerous passages about the treatment of parents as such as Pro 19:26; 23:23, 25; 30:17. Paul in Rom 1 runs through a list of sinful acts which marks the deplorable state of the unrighteous, and on that list of is the sin of being disobedient to ones parents (Rom 1:19-31). Paul also references the sixth commandment when he says to “honor your father and mother” (Eph 6:2). Scripture is clear children of all ages are to show honor and respect to their parents.

⁸Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 114.

⁹Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 196.

early church, referring to other believers as a sibling became a common practice.¹⁰ Peter urged Christians to “love the brotherhood” (1 Pet 2:17). Paul likewise in his letter to the Romans instructed believers to, “Love one another with brotherly affection. Outdo one another in showing honor” (Rom 12:10). This is something we do today when we refer to men and women believers as “brothers” or “sisters” in Christ.

The idea of treating brothers with love and humility was grounded in the OT. For example, we read in Leviticus, “You shall not hate your brother in your heart, but you shall reason frankly with your neighbor, lest you incur sin because of him” (Lev 19:17). Another familiar example is the story about Jacob’s son Joseph who continually showed love for his brothers, despite their horrific treatment toward him (Gen 45-50).

Loving one as a brother might also involve confronting him about his sin. If we truly love someone, then we will call them out when we see them engaged in a sinful act. To turn a blind eye to someone we know is having an affair, viewing pornography, or stealing from their employer is not love. True love confronts these believers with the truth spoken with firmness, seriousness, and love. We cannot control the reaction of the one we confront, but we can control how and what we say about such matters. John MacArthur says that “brotherly confrontations are to be done in humility and love. That is the spirit to be present when confronting a younger man.”¹¹

Paul also speaks to relationships with both older and younger women when he tells Timothy to treat “older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity” (5:2). The idea is the same as it was for men in that women of all ages are to be treated as members of God’s family. Older women are to be treated with honor and respect as mothers. The OT commands mentioned previously about honoring fathers applies to mothers as well. The fifth commandment says to honor your father and your mother (Exo

¹⁰Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 114.

¹¹John F. MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1995), 188-189.

20:12), not just your father. Timothy as a young minister was to love and minister to these older women under his care just as he would his biological mother. Perhaps Paul had in mind the mother of Rufus, a woman Paul said “has been a mother to me as well” (Rom 16:13).

C. S. Lewis is known mainly for his prolific Christian writings, but he was also a man who strove to live out the Christian faith. He served in World War I with a man named Paddy Moore and they became close friends. They pledged to each other that should something happen to either of them, the survivor would look after the others mother. Moore was killed in combat and Lewis held true to his word as he treated Moore’s mother as his own mother for the next thirty years.¹² Lewis provides for us a beautiful example of treating an older woman as one’s own mother.

Paul also speaks about relationships with younger women whom he says are to be treated “as sisters in all purity” (5:2b). Paul adds the provision that younger women be treated purely, suggesting he is concerned that men not look at these women with lustful eyes. Timothy, as their pastor, is to refrain from pursuing any type of physical relationship with them for such behavior would be sinful and damaging to the church. A young minister could lose his entire ministry instantly by entering into a sexual relationship with any woman except for his own wife. As a minister of the gospel of Jesus Christ, nothing pains me more than reading about another pastor who has given into his fleshly desires by entering into an adulterous relationship. His actions destroy his marriage, his family, his reputation, and his ministry. All men who are believers, not just ministers, should treat women with purity just as they would their own sister. Practically speaking, it would be wise for ministers to avoid meeting with a woman in private. Counseling a woman could be done if there was someone else present. But a good rule of thumb is to “not meet with any woman unless she is my wife, sister, my daughter, or old

¹²George Sayer, *Jack: A Life of C. S. Lewis* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1993), 177-78.

enough to be my mother.”¹³

The Proper Care of Widows (5:3-16)

According to the U.S. Census Bureau 800,000 people are widowed each year in the United States. There are 13.6 million widows in the United States. Over 11 million of the widowed in the US are women. At least 245 million women around the world have been widowed and more than 115 million of them live in devastating poverty. Losing a spouse is ranked number one on the stress index scale; making this one of life’s most devastating events. On average 75% of the survivor’s support base is lost following the loss of a spouse or significant other which includes loss of support from family and friends.¹⁴ These numbers are staggering and highlight the real need worldwide for the care of widows in our communities.

What role should the church play in caring for widows? Does Scripture provide any guidance with respect to widow care? If the church is to care for widows, other questions then arise as to which widows are to be looked after, and who is responsible for providing such care. Each of these questions are taken up by Paul as he continues his discussion about relationships within the church family.

Before looking at Paul’s instruction regarding the care of widows, it would be helpful to see God’s heart concerning widows. During Paul’s day as well as in OT times, the loss of a husband often left the wife in a very difficult situation both socially and financially. The husband was the primary wage earner and was responsible for providing the means for food, clothing, and shelter. But after the husband was deceased, the widow would often fall into poverty making her very vulnerable.¹⁵ Both the OT and NT shows

¹³Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 198.

¹⁴“These Are The Statistics,” *Widows Hope*, last modified October 12, 2013, accessed December 16, 2016, <http://www.widowshope.org/first-steps/these-are-the-statistics/>.

¹⁵Brian Croft, Austin Walker, and Mike McKinley, *Caring for Widows: Ministering God’s Grace* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2015), 15.

us God’s love and concern for widows. The following are examples from Scripture which reveal God’s heart for these women:

You shall not mistreat any widow or fatherless child. If you do mistreat them, and they cry out to me, I will surely hear their cry, and my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children fatherless. (Exod 22:22–24)

And in his teaching he said, “Beware of the scribes, who like to walk around in long robes and like greetings in the marketplaces and have the best seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at feasts, who devour widows’ houses and for a pretense make long prayers. They will receive the greater condemnation.” (Mark 12:38–40)

These verses are a reminder of the special love of God for widows and for the need they have due to their vulnerability. Because we live in a fallen world, the people in our midst are marked by sin. Unfortunately, these sinful people can act in deceitful and shameful ways in order to take advantage of the vulnerable in our society. Widows were, and still are, prime targets of those who would exploit and take advantage of others.

Paul begins his instruction about the care of widows by saying, “Honor widows who are truly widows” (5:3). But which widows are *truly widows*? The answer comes from Paul himself when he says, “She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day” (5:5). Paul says a true widow is a woman whose husband is deceased, leaving her to live by herself with no other family to provide support. She is a godly woman whose hope is in the Lord, and she continually goes to Him in prayer. These are widows who are to be shown honor, which would go beyond merely emotional support but would also entail financial assistance.¹⁶ Because of the financial need required, Paul wants to be clear about who are the true widows and in need of assistance. Not all widows would be in need, for some would have received a dowry from their father, which could be used for financial support.¹⁷

¹⁶Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 129.

¹⁷Ibid., 130. John Stott notes from research by Bruce Winter about the dowry system in the

Though the church is to help widows in need, the church is not the primary source of support when there are other family members capable of providing care and assistance. Paul says, “But if a widow has children or grandchildren, let them first learn to show godliness to their own household and to make some return to their parents, for this is pleasing in the sight of God” (5:4). The children or grandchildren should be responsible for caring for their loved one, not the church. They owe a debt to their mother who brought them into the world and who also loved, supported, and nurtured them.¹⁸

Paul lays out a stern warning for those who do not provide for members of their family as he says, “But if anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for members of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (5:8). This is strong language and should be concerning for a believer negligent in caring for family members. As a pastor, one of the most disheartening things I encounter is visiting an elderly widow who has children who have neglected the care of their mother. Often these children are in the area and are perfectly capable of providing care and assistance. However, for whatever reason, they rarely call, visit, or write. There is a recent phenomenon known as “granny dumping” where the elderly and sick are left at the doors of hospitals and nursing homes, leaving the financial and physical support to others.¹⁹

As a follower of Jesus Christ, this is not acceptable and goes completely against the will of God. On the contrary, it is “pleasing in the sight of God” (5:4) to provide love, nurture, and care for one’s widowed mother or grandmother. But for those

Graeco-Roman culture: “The dowry, which was provided by the bride’s father, always accompanied a woman to her marriage. It constituted an important legal aspect of marriage. In the event of a husband’s death, the laws governing that dowry were clearly defined. A widow was cared for by the person in charge of that dowry. Two options were open to her. If she had children, she might remain in her deceased husband’s home. There she would be maintained by the new ‘lord’ of the household, possibly her son. She could also return to her parents, taking her dowry back to her family.” Ibid.

¹⁸MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 198.

¹⁹Croft, Walker, and McKinley, *Caring for Widows*, 78.

who neglect such duties, Paul says they are “worse than an unbeliever” (5:8). He is not saying a person negligent in caring for his widowed mother is eternally condemned, but rather the actions are “worse than a person who makes no profession of faith.”²⁰

Paul also says one qualified as a *true* widow places her hope in God (5:5). She is a believer who loves the Lord and spends time with Him in prayer and the Word. Such a description brings to mind Anna, the prophetess and widow who was in the temple continually worshipping and praying as she awaited the promised Messiah (Luke 2:36-37). Practically speaking, Paul is saying the church is only responsible for widows who are believers. Does this mean we are not to provide care or assistance to widows who have needs and are not believers? Paul’s instruction does not mean we cannot care for unbelieving widows, rather he is making the point that the church is only responsible for those who qualify as true widows. If there is a widow in your neighborhood who has no family and is not a believer, then if you are willing and able to assist her in whatever way you can, that is a good thing to do, though it is not required.

Having given instruction for true widows, Paul moves on to discuss other widows and what roles and responsibilities they are to be given. He makes a distinction between older and younger widows in order to determine how they might serve the church family. He begins by referencing a list where widows over the age of sixty can be enrolled if they meet certain requirements. Paul writes, “Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work” (5:9–10).

²⁰Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 118. Paul spoke to the joy brought to the Lord by caring for family members in verse 4 and returns to this thought in v. 8, but here showing the severe consequences of not providing such care. Fee notes the *ab-ba* chiastic structure in this section (1 Tim 5:4-8): “(a) word to the relatives (v. 4), (b) words to the widows (v. 5), (b’) judgment on disobedient widows (vv. 6-7), and (a’) judgment on disobedient relatives (v. 8).” Ibid.

While there is debate as to the intent of this enrollment, it is likely Paul is referring to widows who served in some type of official capacity and were assigned certain duties and areas of service.²¹ While the nature of these duties is not known for sure, we can turn to Paul's letter to Titus for a clue. In that letter Paul gives advice for older women of the church stating, "Older women likewise are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled" (Titus 2:3–5). This passage outlines what demonstrates godliness in older women of the church.

One of their primary duties was to be a good example to younger women. They were to teach the younger women how to love and care for their husbands and children. They also showed them how to work in their homes and how to be submissive to their husbands. Doing these things in a faithful manner leads to God's Word not being reviled. When this passage is placed alongside 1 Timothy 5:9-10, we begin to get a clearer picture of what was required of older women in terms of character and work.²² Widows who were able would be in a position to participate in these works of serving younger women.

Paul also has words of instruction for younger widows as he encourages them to remarry (5:11-14). We have to keep in mind Paul is addressing the church in Ephesus

²¹There are different opinions about the function of this list of widows. One view sees the list intended for those who are in need of support and care. The other view is that Paul is speaking about a special designation of widows who are qualified and capable of serving the church in certain capacities. Knight takes the former view stating that "this is a list of elderly widows without other means of support which is clear from the context." Knight, *Pastoral Epistles*, 221. Towner takes a similar view stating that "the text suggests that the main theme is care for widows." Towner, *The First Letter To Timothy*, 345. Stott takes the latter view reasoning that the pledge to remain single indicates "the register is not for widows needing support, but widows capable of offering service. Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus*, 132. Guthrie argues for a hybrid approach saying, "It seems preferable to suppose that special duties in the church were reserved for some of the older widows receiving aid, and that some official recognition of this fact was given." Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 116.

²²Croft, Walker, and McKinley, *Caring for Widows*, 80.

where certain false teachers were forbidding marriage all together (4:3). Perhaps some of these women, including younger widows, were causing problems for the church and Paul is wanting to correct this issue.²³ His concern is that when they are widowed, they have too much free time and “they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not” (5:13). These young widows should not be put on the list, but instead they are encouraged to be remarried.²⁴

There are two main reasons Paul gives for refusing to have younger widows on the list. The first is his belief that it will be very difficult for a young widow to honor her pledge to Christ when she experiences sensual desires which lead her to get married. He is worried she will make a vow she cannot keep that would place her under “condemnation for having abandoned their former faith” (5:12). When sensual desires arise, she may become resentful and even hostile toward God.²⁵ The condemnation does not mean that she will lose her salvation, but rather such an action would bring a blemish to the body of Christ in the eyes of outsiders. Paul is not suggesting that remarriage is sinful for the widow, but rather the sin occurs when one remarries who has previously vowed to remain single in service to God.²⁶

The second reason younger widows should remarry is because of their immaturity which leads them to “not be doing what they should be doing.”²⁷ They can

²³David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 2013), 83.

²⁴Paul uses the Greek word *παραιτεομαι* (refuse), which is a strong word highlighting the need to be emphatic in ensuring that young widows not be put on the list. Paul also used this same word (1 Tim 4:7) when he urged Timothy to avoid at all cost the heresy of false teachers. William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 289.

²⁵MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 211.

²⁶Charles R. Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2014), 110.

²⁷Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 122.

easily become idle, and this can lead to various problems such as engaging in trivial activities, gossiping, and becoming a busybody. All believers can fall into these sins, but Paul knows young widows with so much free time at their disposal will have more opportunities to engage in these sinful practices.

Paul's advice is to "have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander" (5:14). In today's society, this seems primitive and old fashioned. I read in an online column the following question posed by a reader: "When I read some of the things Paul wrote about women I understand why many (especially Non-Christians) consider Paul to be a male-chauvinistic-sexist pig. I will make my question very simple and specific: Did Paul hate women?"²⁸ This reader is not alone in her concern that Paul appeared to have a negative view toward women.

But is that true? Did Paul really hate women? While some of Paul's writings can appear difficult when read through the lens of our culture, a consideration of the first century cultural context will reveal quite the opposite. Life for women during Paul's day was quite difficult. The cultural norm was to value the birth of baby boys because this would continue the family. Newborn girls were seen as a burden, with their main value coming from their ability to produce heirs.²⁹ Paul's teaching about the roles and value of women actually was counter-cultural. Charles Swindoll summarizes Paul's view on women as follows:

While Greek and Roman custom expected families to care for their own, public assistance didn't exist outside Hebrew culture. Gentile women without the protection and provision of a man usually had to choose between prostitution and starvation. Surprising as it may seem today, Paul's instructions to Timothy represent a giant leap forward for women in the first century. He drew upon his Hebrew heritage, which valued all people as bearers of God's image and, therefore, worthy of dignity.³⁰

²⁸"Does the Apostle Paul Hate Women?," *Crosswalk.com*, accessed December 23, 2016, <http://www.crosswalk.com/church/pastors-or-leadership/ask-roger/does-the-apostle-paul-hate-women.html>.

²⁹Swindoll, *Insights on 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 105.

³⁰*Ibid.*

When we take a closer look at Paul's instruction for young widows, we see Paul is actually helping them avoid the consequences of falling into destructive sins. She would be able to enjoy the love of her husband while also being occupied with raising the children and managing the household. To our ears this sounds so old fashioned, but in that culture it would have been a much better situation for the young widow as she would be giving the "adversary no occasion for slander" (5:14). She would also be living under the care and protection of her husband, thus avoiding the possibility of being taken advantage of by men with evil intentions.

The Care and Protection for Elders (5:17-25)

The topic of elders comes up once again in this letter.³¹ Paul previously presented the character traits needed to qualify as an elder (3:1-7). He also gave instruction for how elders can effectively serve and shepherd the people under their care (4:6-16). Now Paul approaches the subject of elders again as he provides guidance for the church regarding their responsibility in caring for elders. While the demands and responsibilities of elders are great, they are just men who face challenges and have basic needs which must be met. Paul summons the church to make sure these leaders are well served, cared for, held accountable, and carefully selected.

Paul begins by instructing Timothy to "let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching" (5:17). What does Paul mean by "double honor?" The Greek for *honor* is τιμη,

³¹Fee notes that Paul likely writes this section in response to the false teaching that was taking place in Ephesus. He begins by showing his concern for the care and provision of the elders, but then shifts his focus to the need and urgency to reproof those elders who are teaching false doctrine. This is followed by instruction regarding the selection of elders to lead going forward, with Paul likely having in mind selecting elders to replace the false teachers. While the placement of this section may appear puzzling, the "location in the argument is related in part to the relationship of the false teachers to the younger widows and in part to the need finally to deal with the elders specifically - good and bad, but prompted by the bad." Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 127-28.

which means to “value, honor or recognize.”³² However, the word can also be used in reference to an “honorarium,” a financial payment for services rendered. The idea of an honorarium is the meaning here as Paul is exhorting the church to honor these elders by financially supporting them for their leadership and care of the church. Double honor is not suggesting elders be paid twice as much as the average occupation, but rather they should be paid an amount considered generous and adequate to support the basic needs of the elder’s family.

Paul uses Scripture to make his case that elders should be compensated. He turns to both the OT and NT when he says, “For the Scripture says, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,’ and, ‘The laborer deserves his wages’” (5:18). The first reference comes from Deuteronomy 25:4, a passage that spoke to the need of feeding oxen who threshed grain. Paul’s point is that just as the oxen who tread out the grain deserve to be fed, how much more should elders who are charged with leading God’s people be provided for.³³ The second quotation comes from the lips of Jesus (Luke 10:7) to make a similar point that just as a laborer deserves his wages, likewise the elder should be supported. Both references solidify Paul’s strong admonition that the church be generous in supporting those in charge of caring for them.

Those in leadership are human beings and are subject to falling into sin like everyone else. Therefore, it is important that measures be put in place to address how to respond if an elder stumbles into sin. Paul begins by saying charges should only be brought against elders when there are at least two or three witnesses (3:19).³⁴ Special

³²Gerhard Kittel, Gerhard Friedrich, and Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament: Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), 1182.

³³MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 220.

³⁴Paul is drawing this principle from the Old Testament teaching where multiple witnesses were required before finding someone guilty of a crime (Deut 17:6; 19:15). The Jews of Paul’s day would have been protected from the law, and he therefore wants to make sure that the leaders of the church would have similar protections.

protection for elders is not being argued for by Paul, but rather he wants to make sure they are protected against capricious accusations.³⁵ Those in church leadership are easy prey for wicked people seeking to harm the church, thus making elders targets of possible false accusations.

However, when there is evidence of sinful patterns in the life of the elder, the church must intervene and impose discipline. Notice Paul's strong language as he calls for public rebuke when he says, "As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear" (5:20).³⁶ This is not to suggest that an elder be publically rebuked for every single sin committed, but rather for those sins that have become habitual and ongoing. When the sin persists, Paul wants to ensure the sins of elders are not shielded from the public. Rather, offenders should be brought before the congregation where their acts are made known publicly.³⁷

Confronting others engaged in habitual sin is not easy or enjoyable. Our instincts are to turn the other cheek and ignore the problem, as most of us hate the prospect of addressing someone else about sin in their lives. When the guilty party is a church leader, then the difficulty level is heightened. Timothy likely would have dreaded taking such a stance against the false teachers in Ephesus for "it is easy to imagine that tempers would have run high" among the current elders in control.³⁸

Any such actions against elders should be done without prejudging or showing

³⁵Lea and Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, 155.

³⁶It is not clear who "in the presence of all" refers to. Marshall suggests that the reference is to the elders and not the members of the church, though he sees how the principle could be extended to the entire congregation. I. Howard Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (New York: Bloomsbury T&T Clark, 2004), 618. Knight claims Paul's intent is that "all" is a reference to the congregation, and not restricted to elders. He appeals to the similarity of Jesus teaching on church discipline in Matt 18. His argument is that "since the level at which the sin of the elder is being dealt with is that of two or three witnesses, the analogy with Mt. 18:15–18, particularly v. 17, 'tell it to the church,' would point to 'all the church, as more likely.'" Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 236.

³⁷Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 236.

³⁸Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 228.

favoritism. Paul writes, “In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of the elect angels I charge you to keep these rules without prejudging, doing nothing from partiality” (5:21). Any charges made against someone else must always be done in a fair and ethical manner. John Calvin commenting on this passages said, “There is nothing harder than to pronounce judgment with complete impartiality, so as to avoid showing undue favor, or giving rise to suspicions, or being influenced by unfavorable reports, or being excessively strict and in every case to consider nothing but the matter in hand.”³⁹

Paul concludes this section the church’s relationship to elders by speaking to the ordination of the church leaders. Paul has previously said that elders are not to be recent converts (3:6a), and he now cautions the church to “not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (5:22a). The idea is that the church should be very careful, thoughtful, and patient when electing men to lead God’s people. Once again Paul roots his teaching in the OT where we see the practice of the people laying their hands on the Levites as they offered their service to the Lord (Num 8:10-11). When Joshua was commissioned to lead the people of Israel, Moses was instructed to lay his hands on him before the congregation (Num 27:18-20). Paul likewise teaches that elders called to serve should be ordained by the laying on of hands. The reason for this practice is so that the hands can identify “the persons being prayed for and publicly commissions them to the ministry to which God has called them.”⁴⁰ These individual are visibly and publicly being recognized as having been set apart for role of leading and shepherding the church.

One of the main reasons the church should be patient in selecting elders is that it allows time for a proper and thorough examination process. Paul knows that sometimes what you first see is not what you get. He notes “the sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later” (5:24). Taking time to

³⁹John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles of Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 264.

⁴⁰Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 140.

examine the candidates allows sins that may be hidden to surface, thus preventing the church from mistakenly ordaining someone unqualified to serve. Bryan Chapell offers a helpful word of warning as he says:

The detection of sin and faulty character is easy with some people, but in others it is a very subtle task. So we must be prayerfully discerning. We are good at spotting gross sins, but the subtle, unseen sin may be even more damning because it resides silently in the depth of the spiritual being, close to the heart. Be careful! We must not be fooled by showy lives and spectacular gifts, for an evil heart may lie beneath them.⁴¹

Conclusion

The church is made up of a diverse group of people with unique personalities, interests, and gifts. However, we are all part of the family of God and are called to love and care for one another, despite our differences in opinions, gender, ethnicity, or status. How we relate to others within the church family speaks volumes to the outside world. When the world sees the church engaged in bickering over trivial matters or neglecting to care for those in need, then our witness for the gospel is diminished. When leaders are elected who have not been thoroughly vetted and then turn out to be involved in a secret sinful activity, the world opens its mouth and screams “hypocrites” while closing their ears to the preaching of the gospel. This should not be.

For this reason, Paul’s advice in 1 Timothy 5 should be taken seriously by the church today. We need to love and respect those who are both older and younger than we are. We need to make sure we are caring for those who are the most vulnerable, our widows and orphans. We need to be led by men of integrity and character who love God’s people and desire to serve them. The advancement of God’s grand story of redemption is dependent on a church that loves and cares for its own, making it desirable for others on the outside to be part of such a family.

⁴¹R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 143.

CHAPTER 8
A CHRISTIAN VIEW OF POSSESSIONS

Introduction

The ring-tailed lemur is a primate found only in the African area of Madagascar. They resemble monkeys and are known for the distinctive black and white rings on their tails. They are also very difficult to capture, as men who trap animals for zoos in America will testify. However, the Zulus who are native to that area have been catching these animals for many years. Surprisingly, the secret to success depends on knowledge of how these ring-tailed creatures think. The Zulus do not use steel traps, but rather a melon growing on a vine. A small hole just large enough for the lemur to insert its hand is cut in the melon. The bait for the trap are the seeds already in the melon. When the lemur places its hand in hole of the melon, it will grab as many seeds as possible and clinch them in the fist. However, with a closed fist the lemur is not able to remove the hand. Surely when faced with possible capture, the animal will release the seeds and flee to safety. But such is not the case for the desire to have the seeds is overwhelming, allowing the Zulus to easily capture the ring-tailed lemur.¹

Unfortunately we see a similar scenario play out with humans when overcome with an uncontrolled desire. I am not referring to a desire for seeds, but rather an overwhelming longing for material possessions. The quest to obtain wealth has led to the rise and fall of both nations and individuals. Christians are not immune from greed nor the devastating effects of such sin. This will be the subject of Paul's next section of his letter as he warns Timothy, the church in Ephesus, as well as the church today as to the

¹Charles R. Swindoll, *Living above the Level of Mediocrity* (Dallas: Thomas Nelson, 1989), 150-151.

perils and pitfalls which awaits the person who hungers for wealth and will not release their grip upon the riches of this world.

The Need

Western culture bombards individuals with the message that everyone can live the good life by acquiring more and more possessions. This materialistic view has also infiltrated the church, and unfortunately many church leaders and members have bought into the lie. The church today needs leaders who are willing to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ and not the gospel of wealth and materialism. The church needs all believers to be living their daily lives content with the blessings God has provided which results in true peace, fulfillment, and joy.

Main Point

Followers of Jesus Christ are to be satisfied in the things of God which are eternal and not the temporary riches of the world.

Preview

Paul returns to the topic of the false teachers and warns Timothy about the dangerous results of their false doctrine. He wants Timothy to see a better way for himself and the people he leads.

- A. The Dangers of False Doctrine and Teachers (6:3-5)
 - a. Doctrine Contrary to the Teaching of Jesus (6:3)
 - b. The Negative Results of Viewing Godliness as Gain (6:4-5)
- B. Contentment of the Christian (6:6-8)
 - a. The Great Gain of Godliness (6:6)
 - b. A Proverbial Statement (6:7)
 - c. Satisfied With the Basic Necessities of Life
- C. The Love of Money (6:9-10)

- a. The Trap of Money (6:9)
- b. The Love of Money Which Leads to Evil (6:10)

Context

Having previously discussed inner relationships within the church body, Paul shifts his attention once again back to the false teachers who had infiltrated the Ephesian church. His concern was that the content of the doctrine and the methods of the false teachers could affect the witness of the church to the people of Ephesus.

The false teachers were teaching doctrine that did not square with the teachings of Jesus. Though the precise details of their erroneous teaching are not spelled out, we do see clues from Paul's warnings about the types of false teaching that was taking place. The end goal for these teachers appears to have been to benefit or profit in some way from their leadership positions. Paul wants Timothy to be crystal clear that the real source of gain for the Christian is not in the acquisition of possessions or status, but rather in being content with the blessings God has provided. This type of teaching would be counter-cultural in the lavish city of Ephesus where the influence of the Greek culture promoted the accumulation of the finer things of life.²

The Dangers of False Doctrine and Teachers (6:3-5)

Paul revisits the subject of false teachers and teaching one last time. He is concerned about the purity of the doctrine being taught as well as the character of those leading and teaching. This concern leads him to remind Timothy once more about the necessity of having godly men with pure motives lead the church.

He begins with a conditional statement found in 1 Tim 6:3-5, which in the Greek is one long sentence.³ The protasis clause is as follows: "If anyone teaches a

²Gerald F. Hawthorne, Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds., *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1993), 249.

³Fee notes that this conditional sentence is constructed as a "simple present particular, meaning

different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness” (6:3). In this one phrase, we see several traits of false teachers. First of all, these false teachers propagate a different doctrine.⁴ Paul’s teaching indicates there is a standard of teaching in the Christian faith and any deviation from this standard is a false teaching.

The second trait of false teaching is it alters the teaching of Jesus. Paul has spoken previously about the teaching of a different doctrine (1:3; 10), but here he adds that correct teaching is grounded on the “sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ.” While Paul could possibly be referring to specific instruction from Jesus such as from one of the gospels, he is likely referring to a teaching which originates in the entire message of the Lord Jesus himself.⁵ This is teaching that feeds the hearts and souls of believers which Peter referred to as “pure spiritual milk” (1 Pet 2:2). The Ephesian teachers were abandoning the truth of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ and turning to a gospel that either added to or took away from Christ.

The same false gospel is still being promoted in churches around the world today. Any time we add to the gospel, we begin to lose the gospel. When we see terms like “the social gospel,” or “the health gospel,” we have added to the gospel to the point where we no longer have the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. We are in need of churches who cling to the pure gospel and who are committed to the teaching and proclamation of

that both parts of the sentence express the way things actually are. Such conditional sentences are used when an author is quite certain of his premise. He further notes that the “if” clause (protasis) found in v. 3 highlights what the teachers in Ephesus were not teaching, while the “then” clause (apodosis) in vv. 4-5 shows the results of the false teaching of a different doctrine. Gordon D. Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, Understanding the Bible Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1989), 140-41.

⁴As noted by Mounce, the phrase “teaches a different doctrine” comes from ἐτεροδιδασκαλει, a word found in the New Testament here and 1 Tim 1:3. It is a combination of ἕτερος (other) and διδασκελεω (to teach). Mounce defines the word as “to teach something that is essentially different, in this case different from what Timothy is to teach.” William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2000), 337.

⁵Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2006), 394.

Scripture. We do not need the “cowboy church” or the “biker church,” we need the church of our Lord Jesus Christ where he alone is at the center of all we do. The teaching and preaching of the church should center on Christ and Christ alone.

Paul gives a sense of Christocentric teaching when he refers not as Jesus as “our Lord Jesus Christ.”⁶ By invoking the title Christ, Paul is calling to mind the expectation of the Messiah as promised in the OT. Jesus himself was the one who said that the Scriptures “bear witness about me” (John 5:39). On the road from Emmaus, Jesus gave his traveling companions what may be the most amazing teaching ever as “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself” (Luke 24:27).

One final trait of false teachers is that their teaching does not “accord with godliness” (6:3). Sound biblical teaching should lead to godliness and transformation in the life of the believer. Evidently, this was not the case in Ephesus as teachers were teaching doctrine that was not promoting godliness in the life of the believer. The hearers of their teaching were not experiencing a transformation because heretical teaching will not lead to godliness.

In the apodosis of the clause, Paul describes the attitude of false teachers who choose to teach doctrine not in accord with the teaching of Jesus and which does not lead to godliness in the life of the believer. In a rapid fire output of negative traits, Paul speaks to the attitude, mentality and motivation of the false teachers. He begins by saying they are “puffed up with conceit and understand nothing” (6:4a). The New English Bible translates this as a “pompous ignoramus.” To say one is “puffed up with conceit” would be similar to our modern expression that someone is “blowing smoke” or is “full of hot air.”⁷ This is a man who thinks he knows more than he actually knows for he actually

⁶R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit, Preaching the Word* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2000), 155.

⁷John F. MacArthur, *1 Timothy, The MacArthur New Testament Commentary* (Chicago:

“understands nothing.”⁸ His arrogance comes from his spiritually bankrupt teaching, for he has replaced the words and teaching of Jesus Christ with his own teaching. Paul speaks often in his letters (1 Cor 1:18-4:21; 8:1-3; 2 Cor 10-12; Col 2) about “those who abandon the truth of the gospel think of themselves as wise, or in the know, and are thus bloated with self-importance, when actually they understand nothing.”⁹

Paul also characterizes the false teachers as those having “an unhealthy craving for controversy and quarrels about words” (6:4b). We see a contrast here between the sound teaching of Jesus and the unhealthy cravings for controversy. These men loved to engage in meaningless talk and debates. The controversies were arguments that had gone beyond the point of a useful and productive discussion.¹⁰ These cravings for spiritual divisions lead to envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and friction. This is where the road leads for those who “are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain” (6:5).

Envy is first on the list of negative fruit produced by those craving spiritual division. The sin of envy can easily lead people astray for it is one of those subtle sins we can clearly see in others, but so often fail to see in ourselves.¹¹ Envy causes us to be resentful at others because of what they have coupled with what we do not have. Tim

Moody Publishers, 1995), 241. The word *conceited* comes from τυφωω, a word figuratively meaning “to becloud” or “to delude” and in this context it speaks to the arrogance of the false teacher. Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 1021.

⁸Quinn and Wacker note that Paul’s only use of *μηδεν επισταμενος* (“understands nothing”) is found here in 1 Tim 6:4, though there are nine occurrences in Acts, as well as in Mark 16:48; Heb 11:8; Jas 4:14; Jude 10. They also note that the sense of the word for *επισταμενος* is that of personal acquaintance, knowledge by experience, and encounter. The word used in 1 Clement 45.3 where it refers to a genuine knowledge of OT Scripture is similar to Paul’s use here in 1 Timothy to described these false teachers as “understanding nothing.” Jerome D. Quinn and William C. Wacker, *The First and Second Letters to Timothy*, Eerdmans Critical Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1999), 488.

⁹Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 141.

¹⁰Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 395.

¹¹Jerry Bridges, *Respectable Sins* (Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007), 16.

Challies notes three evil components of envy:

Envy makes you feel resentment or anger or sadness because another person *has* something or another person *is* something that you want for yourself. Envy makes you aware that another person has some advantage, some good thing, that you want for yourself and, while he's at it, he makes you want that other person not to have it. This means that there are at least three evil components to Envy: the deep discontent that comes when you see that another person has what you want; the desire to have it for yourself; and the desire for it to be taken from him.¹²

Envy can strike at the heart of Christian leaders when they look at other churches and observe the size of their congregations, the facilities, or the community respect of their leaders. The envious leader makes disparaging comments about other growing churches while making excuses for why their church has not achieved such success. They fail to see that the church is not their church, but is God's church and he can bless and use churches of all sizes and demographics.

Closely tied to envy is "dissension" which produces disunity and chaos within the church. Paul also coupled envy with dissension in his list of sins found in Romans 1:29 and Galatians 5:20-21. When the envious sees the spiritual gain of others, they do things which leads to strife and divisiveness.¹³ For example, when a pastor sees another pastor land a book deal or be invited as a keynote conference speaker, the envy leads to whining and being critical. This attitude stirs the waters of dissension within the church body.

Next on the list is "slander," which results when Christians begin to speak about others with the intent of harming someone's character and reputation. When malicious talk about others begins to spread within the church, the result is a people who have "evil suspensions" and there is no longer trust among members. The downward spiral continues as the slander and evil suspensions lead to "constant friction among people" (6:5a). As one commentator put it, "The symbol of the church becomes not the

¹²Tim Challies, "The Lost Sin of Envy – How Envy Behaves," *Tim Challies*, May 1, 2012, accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.challies.com/christian-living/the-lost-sin-of-envy-how-envy-behaves>.

¹³Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 156.

cross but a glowing mushroom cloud.”¹⁴ All five of these negative results of false teaching demonstrates that when the minds of people become twisted and depraved, relationships within the church are affected as well.¹⁵

What is the root cause which prompts false teachers to act the way they do? What is their motivation for teaching a different doctrine which leads to all of these evil outcomes? Paul tells us the answer when he states these corrupt teachers feel that “godliness is a means of gain” (6:5b). In other words, they are greedy. They have no interest in being godly, but only in being selfish for personal gain. They see leadership in the church as a means of filling their pockets with wealth while boosting their egos with power and notoriety.

The history of the church is filled with many unfortunate stories about how scrupulous individuals saw the church as a vehicle for personal gain. Simon the magician was a man who was enthralled with the miracles he saw performed by the disciples. He professed himself as a Christian and was even baptized. However, in his heart was a desire to perform miracles himself. He sought to buy spiritual power with money because he felt this kind of power would bring him fortune and fame (Acts 8:9-24). As we have dawned upon the 500th year of the Reformation, we are reminded of Luther’s disdain for the selling of indulgences by John Tetzel, known for his chant “as soon as a coin in the coffer rings, the soul from purgatory springs.”¹⁶ Tetzel was a man who promoted a false teaching in order to gain material wealth.

As the headwinds of the Cultural Revolution today press against the walls of the church, pastors and leaders are faced with a dilemma. Do they hold fast to orthodoxy, risking the backlash which is sure to come from those who see the Bible as antiquated

¹⁴Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 157.

¹⁵John Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2001), 147.

¹⁶James P. Eckman, *Exploring Church History* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2002), 50.

and oppressive? Such a backlash could result in the loss of members and financial support. Or do they compromise on their beliefs and soften the edges of Scripture to accommodate the demands of the culture? Unfortunately, we are already seeing some leaders back down from orthodoxy in order to appease those who would fill their coffers with treasure.

Consider the example of Rob Bell, former pastor of mega-church Mars Hill Bible Church in Grandville, Michigan. From interviews he has conducted along with the books he has written, it is evident he has decided to ride the tide of the Cultural Revolution by promoting unorthodox doctrine. In an interview with *The Christian Post*, he said the following: "We're moments away. I think the culture is already there. And the church will continue to be even more irrelevant when it quotes letters from 2,000 years ago as their best defense."¹⁷ God forbid that the church would ever quite quoting, reading, studying, and preaching the letters of Scripture. May we never underestimate the power of the gospel and of God's Word to change the hearts of sinful man. In his book *Love Wins*, his main point is that hell is not forever. He argues that in the end, God's love will prevail and nobody will have to experience eternal torment. While perhaps his motives are pure, this teaching goes against the clear teaching of Scripture and the position of the church since its inception, and is therefore cause for concern. In a review of *Love Wins*, Kevin DeYoung concludes with this powerful statement:

When God is shrunk down to fit our cultural constraints, the cross is diminished. And whenever the cross is diminished we pain the hearts of God's people and rob them of their joy. Just as damaging is the impact of *Love Wins* on the nonbeliever or the wayward former churchgoer. Instead of summoning sinners to the cross that they might flee the wrath to come and know the satisfaction of so great a salvation, *Love Wins* assures people that everyone's eternity ends up as heaven eventually.¹⁸

¹⁷Michael Gryboski, "Rob Bell: 'I Don't Use the Word Christian, Jesus Would Be Mortified Religion Started in His Name'," accessed January 9, 2017, <http://www.christianpost.com/news/rob-bell-i-dont-use-the-word-christian-jesus-would-be-mortified-religion-started-in-his-name-164330/>.

¹⁸Kevin DeYoung, "God Is Still Holy and What You Learned in Sunday School Is Still True: A Review of 'Love Wins,'" *The Gospel Coalition*, March 14, 2011, hoaccessed January 9, 2017,

Contentment for Christians (6:6-8)

Following the warning of the evils of greed, Paul proceeds by showing what it means for the believer to be content with the blessings and provisions of God. He shares principles applicable to Christians for all times and every culture.¹⁹ While the false teachers saw godliness as a means of personal gain, Paul wants Timothy to see that “godliness with contentment is great gain” (6:6). The gain he refers to is spiritual gain, not financial. Also, did you catch what type of gain results from contentment? It is “great” gain. John Calvin said this gain is “itself a sufficiently great gain to us, because through it we become not only heirs of the world but are enabled to enjoy Christ and all his riches.”²⁰ Our great gain is the enjoyment and joy found through Christ that we are able to enjoy now and for eternity. The faith one places in Jesus Christ is the ultimate investment, for the returns are eternal and unlimited.²¹

Godliness is a means to gain, but only when it is combined with contentment (6:6). What does it mean for the believer to be content? Christian contentment means one is satisfied with God’s provisions and is not constantly seeking to have more things of the world.²² It is an attitude of the mind where one’s dependency is on God alone and independent of external circumstances.²³ Paul expresses in greater detail his source of contentment in his letter to the Philippians:

<https://blogs.thegospelcoalition.org/kevindeyoung/2011/03/14/rob-bell-love-wins-review/>.

¹⁹Hughes and Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus*, 157.

²⁰John Calvin, *The Second Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians and the Epistles of Timothy, Titus and Philemon* (Edinburgh: Oliver & Boyd, 1964), 254.

²¹Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2007), 254.

²²The word *αὐτάρκεια* has the idea of “self-sufficiency,” which Bauer notes was a favorite virtue of the Cynics and Stoics. Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 152. Towner notes that Paul was clearly in touch with this theme of “self-sufficiency,” but that he added a Christian basis to it by tying it to “godliness.” Godliness is not about getting more and more, but about “a living out of covenant faithfulness in relation to God, that finds sufficiency and contentment in Christ alone whatever one’s outward circumstances might be.” Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 399.

²³Thomas Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Holman Reference, 1992), 168.

Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. (Phil 4:11–13)

Contentment can be found in any situation when one's reliance and security is in Jesus Christ. He is the foundation and anchor of the soul in good times and bad, or as Paul says "in any and all circumstances" (Phil 4:12). Contentment is not simply a human virtue, but rather is "based on the sufficiency provided by God the Father and Jesus Christ."²⁴ Jeremiah Burroughs, in his book *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment*, likens contentment to a rare stone which "is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which freely submits to and delights in God's wise and fatherly disposal in every condition."²⁵

Paul backs up his call for contentment by reminding us that "we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world" (6:7). I am sure most of us have heard the expression that "you cannot take it with you." Such an expression rings true when we lose a loved one and see all of the deceased possessions that remain. These possessions remind us the truthfulness of Paul's words that "we cannot take anything out of the world." The idea of leaving our possessions behind at death brings to mind Job's response to the devastation he endured at the hands of Satan. Job said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return. The LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1:21). We get a glimpse into the mind of Solomon as he considered the vanity of his wealth when he writes, "As he came from his mother's womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand" (Eccl 5:15).

This eternal perspective is important for both the wealthy and the poor. The

²⁴MacArthur, *1 Timothy*, 251.

²⁵Jeremiah Burroughs, *The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment* (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1964), 19.

believer blessed with material riches needs to understand that when they die, whatever they have acquired will remain behind. The believer who is poor needs to remember that the spiritual riches they have in Christ far exceed the temporal wealth of the world. Paul is telling us to have an eternal perspective, for this will lead to a life of true joy and satisfaction.

Contentment also leads one to desire and pray for the basic necessities of life. Paul says that “if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content” (6:8).²⁶ He is arguing for contentment with the basic essentials of life because such an attitude eliminates greed.²⁷ With that thought in mind, virtually all Western Christians today should be content. The vast majority of us have more resources than we need. Compared to the rest of the world, we are incredibly rich in terms of material wealth. One reason it is so hard for many Christians to pray with any sense of desperation is because we do not have many real needs. The Lord told us to pray, “Give us this day our daily bread” (Matt 6:11). How many people do you personally know who did not have bread to eat this week? When was the last time you or someone in your family was truly hungry due to a lack of food?

I was in Cubulco, Guatemala several years ago visiting villages where they have basically nothing. They live day to day not knowing for sure from where their next meal will come. However, what struck me was their sense of joy, and yes contentment. Praying for the Lord to provide their daily bread was serious and important for they depended upon God to meet their needs every day.

Unfortunately we live in a world which highlights what we do not have so that we will crave more possessions. If only we had that new car, think how happy we would be. Or if my family had that house on the lake, just imagine the parties we could throw,

²⁶Mounce notes that this idea of contentment in our “food and clothing” is seen in “both the words of Jesus (Matt 6:25-34; Luke 12:22-32) and in Stoicism.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 343.

²⁷Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 144.

not to mention how our friends would admire our success. These thoughts pollute our minds to the point where we are never satisfied, never content, and always craving for more. We go in debt to buy a house we cannot afford to impress people we often do not even like. Our cultural climate makes it very difficult to take seriously Paul's call for contentment. His words to be content with food and clothing appears to most to be an impossibility, for the world screams that contentment comes only from having more possessions.

Paul is not calling Christians to seek a life of asceticism. The Lord has blessed many of His people with wonderful gifts that can be enjoyed now with thanksgiving (4:3-4). Paul also says God "richly provides us with everything to enjoy" (6:17). We can and should enjoy the incredible blessings the Lord has provided. Paul's plea to be content with "food and clothing" is not the maximum believers can receive, but rather is the minimum standard with which we should be content.²⁸ We do not seek to live in extreme poverty, nor do we seek lives of extravagance. We seek the simple life, summed up well by the Evangelical Commitment to Simple Lifestyle written by the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelism in 1980:

We lay down no rules or regulations, for either ourselves or others. Yet we resolve to renounce waste and oppose extravagance in personal living, clothing and housing, travel and church buildings. We also accept the distinction between necessities and luxuries, creative hobbies and empty status symbols, modesty and vanity, occasional celebrations and normal routine, and between the service of God and slavery to fashion. Where to draw the line requires conscientious thought and decision by us, together with members of our family.²⁹

The Love of Money (6:9-10)

Paul now reverses course as he talks about what happens when someone is not content, but rather is consumed with a desire for material wealth. He likely has false

²⁸Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 150.

²⁹"LOP 20 – An Evangelical Commitment to Simple Life-Style," *Lausanne Movement*, June 20, 1980, accessed January 12, 2017, <https://www.lausanne.org/content/lop/lop-20>.

teachers in mind when he says, “But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (6:9).³⁰ While Paul is referencing false teachers, his words are applicable to Christians in general because all believers are in danger when their desires are centered on wealth. His concern throughout the letter is for the entire “household of God” (3:15).

Paul’s warning provides a sequence of steps that greed uses to take one down further into destruction. The downward spiral begins with a “desire to be rich.”³¹ Those who long for wealth envision all of the power, happiness, and notoriety which they believe riches will provide. Once this desire for wealth sets in, a person will fall into three outcomes. The greedy person will first of all become entrapped as he falls into temptation because he is disillusioned by the benefits of wealth.³² This is followed by falling “into a snare,” a trap from which one cannot escape. The image is of an animal lured into a trap by a desire for food. It is the animals craving for the food that leads it to enter the trap and get caught. Once caught in the trap, escape is virtually impossible. Likewise, once the trap of greed is set, escape can be difficult.

The greedy also falls into “many senseless and harmful desires” (6:9c). Paul wants us to see how greed can take one down a path toward a variety of sins. The power of the desires becomes like a drug addiction so that the more you have, the more you crave.³³ Paul says these desires are both foolish and harmful. It has been said that “gold is

³⁰Paul is likely speaking here about people who want to be rich and not already wealthy. The wealthy are addressed later in the letter (6:17-19).

³¹Fee, *1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*, 144.

³²Paul uses three nouns to illustrate the negative outcomes into which the greedy fall. Knight commenting on each of these notes that the first is *πειρασμος* which refers to an “enticement to sin” or “temptation.” The other word is *παγίς* which means a “trap” or “snare,” used here in the figurative sense. The third noun is *επιθυμίας* which refers to a “desire,” “longing,” or “craving.” All three work together to show the seriousness of the consequences of falling into greed. George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 255.

³³Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 152.

like seawater for the more one drinks of it, the thirstier one becomes.”³⁴ Thus these harmful desires “plunge people into ruin and destruction” (6:9c). The word “plunge” paints a picture of one drowning in a sea of total chaos. This person trapped by greed has allowed wealth to become “a personal monster which plunges its victims into an ocean of complete destruction.”³⁵ How often have we seen someone become so consumed by money that they throw away everything in life of true importance.

I once had a neighbor who had a serious gambling problem. His desire for getting rich quick blinded his eyes to reality, and soon he was entrapped in a downward spiral from which he could not escape. As his losses continued to mount, he began to search for more ways to pay off his debt. One day I saw my neighbor’s picture on the front page of the newspaper. The story reported that he had been arrested for embezzling millions of dollars from his employer. His desire for wealth cost him his job, his home, and his reputation. It also cost him years of time away from his wife and daughter as he sat in prison. There are horrible consequences for people consumed with an insatiable desire for wealth.

The final verse of this section is one of the most well-known and misquoted passages in all of Scripture. Paul writes, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs” (6:10). This was an adaptation of a proverbial statement which would have been well known in the Greek culture.³⁶ The verse has also become a proverbial statement today, though it is often misquoted as “money is the root of all

³⁴Ibid.

³⁵Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 113.

³⁶Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 256. Knight notes there was a similar expression in Greek antiquity which said “the love of money is the mother-city of all evil.” Paul uses the NT hapax *φιλαργυια* (love of money) to show “what characterizes one who places his or her heart on possessing money, so violating the first commandment of the Decalogue, the commandment of love.” Ibid.

evil.”³⁷ The revision to Paul’s words is totally inaccurate, for money itself is neutral. Money has many good uses which can be of benefit to many. Money is what we use to fund our missionaries and buy food for the poor. Money is what we use to acquire our basic human needs. However, money can also be used for the purchase of evil things such as illegal drugs and pornography. Paul’s concern is with our attitude toward money. He says it is the “love” of money that leads to problems. When our hearts desire is to love and crave money, then we are sowing the seeds for a root which can lead to all types of evil.

While the evils which result from the love of money are vast, Paul only mentions two. He begins by saying that because of the desire for money, “some have wandered from the faith” (6:10b). This is consistent with what Jesus said at the Sermon on the Mount when spoke about laying up treasures for ourselves in heaven. He concludes by saying, “No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money” (Matt 6:24). We cannot make money our god alongside the God of the universe. We all have to make a choice as to who we will serve. The rich young ruler Jesus encountered had to make a choice, and he chose to walk away from Christ (Matt 19:16-22). Why did he choose that path? The passage tells us he “went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions” (Matt 19:22). His love of his wealth and possessions exceeded his love for the Lord. We see this same scenario play out far too often today as people abandoned their faith in pursuit of the temporal pleasures of this world.

The second evil outcome for the lover of money is they have “pierced themselves with many pangs” (6:10c). When the pursuit of money becomes the chief end

³⁷Mounce notes that Paul is not suggesting that the love of money is the only source of evil, but rather one among others. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 346. Also, Paul is not conveying the idea that the love of money is a root of every single instance of evil. Rather, as Bauer notes, *πας* can mean “everything belonging in kind to the class designated by the noun ‘every kind of’ or ‘all sorts of.’” Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, 631. Paul is speaking about every category of sin, not every individual sin or evil committed. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 346.

of a man or woman, then disappointment and grief are sure to follow when one discovers the lie of materialism. The grief will be like a sword that pierces the soul. John Chrysostom once said, “Desires are thorns, and as when one touches thorns, he gores his hand, and gets him wounds, so he that fall into these lusts will be wounded by them, and pierce his soul with griefs.”³⁸

Scripture has numerous examples of individuals who suffered greatly due to greed. In the OT, we read about Achan who caught a glimpse of a beautiful cloak and some silver and gold on the battlefield. His desire for these things led him to take them for himself, which was a violation of God’s command. He lost his life as well as the life of his wife and children due to his greed (Josh 7:1-26).

In the NT, we see where greed infiltrated the hearts of Ananias and Sapphira leading them to secretly held back money for themselves. Peter told them they had “not lied to man but to God” (Acts 5:4). They also paid the price of death due to their longing for riches (Acts 5:5-10). The ultimate example would be the greed displayed by Judas Iscariot who betrayed the Lord Jesus for the sum of thirty pieces of silver. His grief plunged him into depths of despair to the point he took his own life (Matt 27:3-10). These examples demonstrate the truth found in the words of Solomon who said, “Whoever is greedy for unjust gain troubles his own household, but he who hates bribes will live” (Prov 15:27).

Stories of the devastation caused by greed are not limited to the Bible. John Stott shares a story about Jay Gould, a nineteenth-century American financier. When Gould passed away, he had an estimated estate of \$100 million. Despite his incredible wealth, his last recorded words were, “I am the most miserable devil in the world.”³⁹

³⁸John Chrysostom, “Homilies on the Epistles of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon,” trans. and ed. Philip Schaff, *The Early Church Fathers-Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers, First Series: 14 Volumes*, ed. Alexander Roberts, 2nd ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1994), 469.

³⁹Stott, *The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, 153.

Here was a man who at the end of his life saw the temporal nature of material wealth. He experienced firsthand sorrow and grief impaled through his heart because of the lie he had bought that riches will lead to joy, peace, and contentment.

Conclusion

When Christian leaders begin to let the pursuit of riches guide their actions, the results for them and the church are harmful. Paul understands this, and therefore he provides very strong words of warning about the dangers of having a wrong attitude toward money. However, his words are applicable for all Christians in all times. A healthy attitude toward possessions leads to a healthy church body.

The believer is called to be content and generous with God's blessings. Paul later in the letter says those who have been blessed materially "are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share" (6:18). Do we hoard our possessions for ourselves as we store our treasure for this short life? Or are we generous with God's gifts as we look for opportunities to make a difference in the lives of others, thus storing up treasures in heaven? Hopefully we are the latter as we have hearts that desire to share the love of Christ with others through our actions, words, and resources.

Rich Mullins was a well-known Christian song-writer and singer, best known for his hits "Awesome God" and "Step by Step." Mullins grew up in Richmond, Indiana and he developed and love of music at a very early age. As a young boy, he attended a Quaker church where he was able to develop his musical skills. He eventually produced his own album in 1985, which propelled him to instant success allowing him to travel all over America for the next twelve years. Despite his incredible success, he never let the lure of money take hold of him. He was determined to live the simple life of loving others and sharing his faith. What is interesting is Mullins never knew how much money his albums and concerts generated because all of the profits went directly to his church. He only wanted to be paid the average salary in the U.S. for that year, with the rest of the

money given away to various ministries.⁴⁰ Here is a man who refused to take the road toward riches which leads to sorrow. He refused to clutch the seeds of wealth in his hands. Instead he chose to walk emptyhanded down the path toward Jesus which leads to eternal joy, peace, and life. May this be the path all of us choose to follow.

⁴⁰Francis Chan, Chris Tomlin, and Danae Yankoski, *Crazy Love: Overwhelmed by a Relentless God*, rev. ed. (Colorado Springs: David C. Cook, 2013), 154-55.

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ABSTRACT

FIRST TIMOTHY: GOD'S PLAN FOR GOD'S CHURCH

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This project consists of a series of sermons on 1 Timothy intended to be presented to the church. The sermons argue that the church is essential for God's plan for the redemption of His people, and therefore God has put in place rules and structures in order for the church to effectively accomplish its mission. Chapter 1 provides background information about the sermon series by providing a sampling of major resources used along with a brief description about the passages covered in the sermons. There is also a discussion about biblical theology and the role it plays in the sermons.

Chapter 2 is a sermon on the dangers of false teachers and teaching and the threat such teaching poses for the church today. The church needs leaders willing to protect the people from the influence of these heretical teachers.

Chapter 3 looks at Paul's reminder to Timothy about the amazing power of the gospel to change lives. In this sermon, Paul's own testimony is discussed in order to demonstrate how God's grace can extend to anyone. When the church understands the amazing grace of God, then they will be compelled to respond by sharing this good news with others.

Chapter 4 talks about the priority of prayer for the church. While there are many things the church can be doing, prayer should be one of the main priorities. The content of the prayer should include a plea for lost souls to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 5 deals with the leadership in the church. The qualifications for both elders and deacons is discussed. In order for the church to function properly, men with certain characteristics are needed to lead, love, and serve God's people.

Chapter 6 provides more specific details about what make someone a good servant of Christ Jesus. The sermon demonstrates how a good minister is to equip the people with sound doctrine, exercise personal discipline, be an example to others, and have a ministry centered upon God's Word.

Chapter 7 discusses the various relationships within the church family. The sermon talks about how the church is to relate to people of various age groups, as well as some specific instruction for the care of widows. Also covered is the church's role in the care and protection of its elders.

Chapter 8 talks once again about the false teachers that pose a threat to the church. The motive behind their actions is a desire for material possessions. In contrast to the desires of false teachers, the people of the church are to be content with God's provisions. The love of money and possessions is dangerous and there is a real need for God's people to be aware of the consequences for those who place the pursuit of riches over God.

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