

# Word & Spirit Bible Study Notes on 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus

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# 1 Timothy

## 1 Tim 1:1-4

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

<sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup>As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, <sup>4</sup>nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

### Intro to the letter

The opening verses of this letter do more than tell us who it is from and to. “From Paul to Timothy” would suffice if that was the intention. Instead, as with all his letters, Paul packs the introductory sentences with spiritual truths.

Paul describes himself as an *apostle*. He was aware that he had been given a special responsibility and calling by God, and took it very seriously. His life had a purpose, and the very writing of this letter was part of him fulfilling his apostolic ministry.

Paul describes Timothy as his *son*. This is not just saying that Paul was involved in Timothy’s conversion, but that he has a deep affection for Timothy, and wants to support him by passing on his wisdom and advice. Like a father who teaches his son the family trade, Paul wants to mentor Timothy in how to be a minister of the gospel.

Paul describes God as our *Saviour* and our *Father*. These words describe what God has done for us and how he relates to us. His love for us was not just expressed in a one-off act of rescue, but continues in an ongoing way through his fatherly care for us. This is why Paul can pray with confidence for *grace, mercy* and *peace* for Timothy. These are blessings that our loving Father delights to bestow on his children.

Paul describes Jesus as our *hope* and our *Lord*. Paul’s main hope in life isn’t set on health, wealth, friends, or success. His purpose and goal in life was to know Christ, and he looked forward to nothing more than when he would one day be with Christ. Calling Jesus “Lord” is a recognition that our lives are not our own. We belong to him, and our lives are to be dedicated to his service.

### Purpose of the letter

Why is Paul writing to Timothy? He gets straight to the point. Timothy needs to stay at Ephesus and refute false doctrine. Perhaps Timothy was thinking of moving on, maybe to pioneer a new work elsewhere, or maybe because things were not going well. But Paul’s concern is that the church in Ephesus needs Timothy to fight for truth.

How could false teaching be identified? Here we see two tests that can be applied. The first is one of authority. What is this teaching based on? Is it rooted in the Scriptures or is it

based on something flimsy like myths or genealogies? Maybe these false teachers were taking one or two verses, and building a whole theology on a dubious interpretation of them.

But not only were they to examine the root of the teaching, but also its fruit. This false teaching resulted in believers spending their time in idle speculation, instead of living out their faith. God has entrusted us with the gospel, which we have no right to tamper with, and entrusted us with the task of spreading the good news, which we have no right to excuse ourselves from.

## 1 Tim 1:5-7

*<sup>5</sup>The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. <sup>6</sup>Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, <sup>7</sup>desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.*

### Motivated by Love

What is Paul's motive in instructing Timothy to engage these false teachers? Is this just a power struggle between Paul and some other apostles with equal rights to be heard in Timothy's church? Paul takes pains to point out that his motives are entirely pure.

Ultimately it is *love* that drives him to oppose the false teaching. It is spiritually ruinous to for any church to reject the gospel in favour of any alternative. So Paul's conscience is clear – this is not a battle for power, but a battle for truth.

### Motivated by Selfish Ambition

By contrast, these false teachers are not motivated by love, or a passion for the truth of the gospel. Instead, they have fallen in love with themselves, wanting to be recognised as wise teachers. And in an attempt to appear profound and enlightened, they have allowed their imaginations to run wild, coming up with all kinds of strange ideas and talking about things they don't truly understand.

All of us who teach the Bible probably automatically assume that we fall into Paul's category: we of course have pure motives of love and truth, while those bad false teachers are proud and wrong. But if we were truly wise, we would take the opportunity to examine our own hearts, and be ready to examine whether the foundations of the doctrines we teach really are based on Scripture.

## 1 Tim 1:8-11

*<sup>8</sup>Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, <sup>9</sup>understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, <sup>10</sup>the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, <sup>11</sup>in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.*

### The Purpose of the Law

The false teachers were apparently claiming that their teaching was based on the “law”, which refers here to the commands God gave the Israelites through Moses. Their problem was that they were abusing the law. First, they had misunderstood who the law is for. Paul argues here that the law’s target audience is sinners. The law condemns their unrighteous behaviour, and provides appropriate boundaries they are to live by.

But what of believers? The Bible calls us “saints”, not “sinners”. Does this mean the law is completely irrelevant to us? Paul makes it clear elsewhere that rather than being people who live trying to keep rules, Christians are those who live in accordance with what the Holy Spirit wants. The law shows us those things that God disapproves of, but we have a higher motivation than simply trying to keep out of trouble. We live to please God.

### Contrary to Sound Doctrine

Paul moves on to list several examples of sinful lifestyles. These include being “lawless”, which indicates that Paul does believe there is some kind of ongoing role of the law in the life of a believer, even though it is no longer the primary motivating factor in our lives. He includes several quite generic terms such as “sinners” or “unholy”, and some shocking sins such as violence against parents and murder. The variety of terms reminds us that a sinful life can take many forms, some appearing more respectable than others.

Sexual immorality is, as usual, included in the list. This is a deeply unpopular message in our culture, which wants to be ‘liberated’ as much as possible from any restrictions on our “sex-life”. But the Scriptures maintain that sex is a gift of God to be enjoyed solely within the marriage relationship, and thus any form of sex outside of marriage, including homosexual sex, constitutes rebellion against our Creator.

It is interesting that Paul sums these behaviours up as being “contrary to sound doctrine”. Doctrine is not merely theoretical. The consequences of bad doctrine overflow into the way we behave. So Timothy’s battle against the false teachers is not just to combat wrong ideas, but to confront sinful lifestyles.

### Gospel of the Glory of God

We have seen what rejecting sound doctrine results in, but what constitutes sound doctrine? Paul’s concise summary is that sound doctrine is the gospel of the glory of the blessed God. In other words, the antidote to sin is not the law (good though that may be),

but the gospel, the good news of salvation through faith in Jesus. And a gospel life is one that is now focused around bringing glory and praise to God.

## 1 Tim 1:12-14

*<sup>12</sup>I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup>though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup>and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.*

### Grace for strength to serve

Paul was painfully aware of how undeserving he was, of all people, to have been called to such a noble office as an apostle of Christ Jesus. He makes no secret of his shameful past in which he viciously persecuted the church. He now sees that whilst he thought he was punishing the Christians for their blasphemy, it was he who was in fact the blasphemer, for speaking against Christ<sup>1</sup>.

He says that God has judged him “faithful”. But how can that be, given his unfaithful past? He is surely referring here to the gospel, through which he is given a new righteous status in Christ, not based on his own works, and certainly one he did not deserve<sup>2</sup>. God has not only called him to be an apostle, but given him the *strength* he requires to fulfil the task. The same is true for all believers, regardless of the ministry we have been called to. Through the gift of the Spirit, we are given the strength we need to fulfil God’s purposes for us.

### Grace for faith and love

Is Paul trying to make excuses for himself by saying that he acted in ignorance? Is he saying that he deserved to receive mercy while others did not? I don’t think so. He is simply saying that his life was characterised by unbelief and ignorance, and it required an act of sheer mercy from God if he was ever to escape from his sinful condition. He needed a radical breakthrough of grace, and that is exactly what happened to him on the Damascus road as Jesus broke into his life, and ridding him in an instant of the unbelief and ignorance he had been living in.

Paul sees himself as having received two precious gifts by grace – gifts of faith and love. The man who had once been characterised by unbelief and hatred was now completely changed. He put his faith in Jesus, and learned to love those he had been so hostile to. For Paul, grace was not just a theological word; it had literally turned his life upside down.

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<sup>1</sup> This is, incidentally, one of numerous indications that Paul did indeed see Jesus as divine.

<sup>2</sup> It is alternatively possible that he refers to the fact that the power of the gospel and indwelling Spirit was able to transform him into someone who was faithful / trustworthy.

## **1 Tim 1:15-17**

*<sup>15</sup>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. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honour and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

### **Foremost Sinner**

Paul was in no doubt who his Saviour was – it was Jesus Christ. Jesus was the one who had broken into his life on the road to Damascus. And now he understands that salvation for sinners was the very reason why Jesus had come into the world in the first place. Paul recognised that if Jesus was indeed Saviour and Lord, then his former life of persecuting the followers of Jesus was the worst kind of sin. If anyone was beyond the reach of God's grace, it was him. If anyone deserved judgment instead of mercy, it was him.

### **Perfect Patience**

As he pondered why it was that Jesus so graciously reached out and turned his life around, Paul could come up with only one explanation for such outrageous grace. He had been selected to be living proof of just how patient God is with even the most hostile of rebels. If someone like Paul can simply believe and be rewarded with eternal life, then there is hope for anyone. No one is beyond the reach of God's grace.

### **King of Ages**

Little wonder that Paul breaks out in praise to God at this point. He calls him the "King of ages" – the eternal and everlasting God. Though God the Father is immortal and invisible, his incredible grace involved him sending his Son to become mortal and visible in order to save us. This eternal God is worthy of eternal worship, and for believers, our part in that eternal worship begins right now.



## 1 Tim 1:18-20

*<sup>18</sup>This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, <sup>19</sup>holding faith and a good conscience. By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith, <sup>20</sup>among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.*

### Good Warfare

Paul now returns to giving instructions to Timothy. There is a battle he must fight, and this is probably behind the earlier instruction to stay in Ephesus. Timothy is to play a key part in this war. It is, of course, not a physical war, fought with physical weapons against other people. But it is nevertheless a very real conflict. It seems likely that Paul is referring primarily to the battle against false teachers with the heretical ideas and immoral lifestyles they promote, which Timothy must resist.

There are two pitfalls Timothy must avoid in this battle. One is losing faith. This is the danger that Timothy will be deceived by false doctrine that undermines his confidence in the true gospel. The other is the loss of a “good conscience”. This is the danger that Timothy will allow the lax morals or legalism of these teachers to weaken his own resolve to live according to the gospel.

As a means of encouragement, Paul reminds Timothy of certain prophecies that had been made about him. Our curiosity about the content of these prophecies is not satisfied, but we may guess that they confirmed the ministry to which Timothy had been called<sup>3</sup>. The knowledge that God had spoken to him and called him to this particular task would strengthen his resolve in the face of opposition.

### Shipwrecked

As well as encouragement, Paul gives Timothy a warning. The danger of “shipwreck” is not theoretical but real. He names two people, presumably former believers who have in some way gone off course. These two are mentioned again in 2 Timothy<sup>4</sup>, indicating that they had not simply walked away from the faith, but were now actively damaging the church with their false teaching. Timothy is to take heed that he avoid falling into the same trap they did.

This is a sober reminder for us to guard our own hearts and minds, and also to be aware that attacks on our faith can come from *within* the church. The church needs leaders with courage who can fight uncompromisingly for truth and holiness.

What does Paul mean by saying that he has handed these two troublemakers over to Satan? The most likely explanation is that they have been excommunicated from the church. The damage they were causing was too great and the church needed to be protected. But as with

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<sup>3</sup> See 1 Tim 4:14 which may refer to the same prophecy.

<sup>4</sup> Hymenaeus in 2 Tim 2:17, who appears to be teaching false doctrine still, and Alexander in 2 Tim 4:14 who did Paul “great harm”.

all church discipline, it is done with a redemptive purpose in mind in order to restore the sinner back to fellowship with God and other believers.

## **1 Tim 2:1-4**

*<sup>1</sup>First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, <sup>2</sup>for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. <sup>3</sup>This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Saviour, <sup>4</sup>who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

### **Prayer for All**

Christians are known for praying. We pray together, and we pray on our own. We pray for ourselves, our families, our friends and our churches. But in this passage, Paul urges us to broaden the scope of our prayers to include “all people”. In particular, kings and rulers are to be the subject of our prayers and even of our “thanksgivings”. And living in a time when leaders were often greedy and tyrannical, praying for them rather than against them may not have seemed intuitive to the early Christians.

In our modern democratic societies we often find ourselves with leaders who we find disappointing and unimpressive, but these verses are a call for us to thank God for them and to pray that they rule with wisdom and righteousness.

One purpose of these prayers is that Christians would be allowed to live “peaceful, quiet, godly and dignified” lives. We are not to make a big fuss demanding special rights and privileges for ourselves, but it is appropriate to desire the freedom to live godly lives without fear of persecution.

### **Salvation for All**

But the real motivation behind these prayers is salvation for “all people”. By this Paul seems to include both the salvation of the kings and rulers they are praying for, but also the greater freedom for evangelism they will have if they live in a society that is tolerant towards Christianity.

In other words, the desire to lead “quiet” lives is not so the Christians can keep to themselves and enjoy their own religion privately, but so they can share their faith without endangering their own lives or those who respond to the message.

The fact that God desires “all people” to be saved is a provocation to us to keep praying for and witnessing to those who appear to be completely closed to the gospel message. Paul’s own testimony was proof enough that God can save anyone, and armed with this knowledge, we can pray with faith for the salvation even of the rulers of nations.

## 1 Tim 2:5-7

<sup>5</sup>For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time. <sup>7</sup>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.

### One Mediator

The statement “there is one God” is a foundational Christian belief, and one with which the Jews wholeheartedly agreed. Where Christianity parted ways with Judaism was over the role of Jesus. Paul puts it bluntly: Jesus is the one and only mediator between God and humanity. By identifying Jesus as the mediator, he is saying that you can only come to God through Jesus.

But why is that? Wouldn't it be more reasonable of God to provide us with a selection of routes by which we can approach him? The answer is that Jesus is the “ransom” for all people. Through his death on the cross, Jesus paid a price that we could not pay for ourselves. Without payment of this price, we could not be reconciled to God. And so it follows that without Jesus, we cannot be reconciled to God.

### Teacher of the Gentiles

Jesus' death is described as a “testimony” given at just the right time. It is a little hard to understand exactly what this means. Jesus' death on the cross is certainly God's message of good news that the world desperately needed. And this is what leads Paul to talk about his own personal calling to be an apostle.

Paul names three roles he held – an *apostle* – sent to the Gentiles, a *preacher* – proclaiming the gospel to unbelievers, and a *teacher* – building up the faith of believers. He seeks to bring *faith* and *truth* to the Gentiles – in other words, he desires to produce solidly rooted orthodox believers who will not be swayed by false teachers.

You may have noticed the recurrence of the word “all” through these and the preceding few verses. Paul's commission from Jesus had awakened him to the truly universal implications of the gospel. It wasn't just for Jews. We pray for *all* people, even pagan kings and rulers! We proclaim the gospel to *all* people, even Gentiles! God wants to save *all* people, even the worst of sinners!

## 1 Tim 2:8-10

*<sup>8</sup>I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarrelling; <sup>9</sup>likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, <sup>10</sup>but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.*

### Holy Men

Paul now moves to give some specific instructions to the men and women in the church. Men need to make time to pray, and to ensure they do so in the right way. We've already been told to pray for "all people", now we are asked to pray in "every place". Men might spend much of their time in offices or meetings, but they are still to actively seek out times for prayer.

The reference to anger and quarrelling perhaps relates to some issues in the church Timothy was leading. Instead of raising their fists in anger at each other, they ought to be raising their hands to God in prayer. Often it is in the place of prayer that we gain much needed perspective on things that have been frustrating us.

### Godly Women

The problem Paul addresses with the women seems to be dressing inappropriately. Two temptations were possible. On the one hand wealthy women might be tempted to dress in a lavish and extravagant manner, flaunting their wealth in a way that was incompatible with the humility that should characterise believers.

The other pitfall that women can fall into is dressing immodestly. Of course, different cultures have different expectations, but there is difference between dressing to look beautiful and dressing to seduce. Paul suggests that the appropriate way for a woman to draw attention to herself is not through extravagant or alluring clothing, but through a life characterised by good works.

In our own culture, though in many ways very different from the ancient world, both the commands to men and women are still relevant. True masculinity is not about being aggressive and confrontational, and true femininity is not about looking "hot". Instead men and women find their true identity as they pursue a lifestyle that honours God.

## 1 Tim 2:11-15

*<sup>11</sup>Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. <sup>12</sup>I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet. <sup>13</sup>For Adam was formed first, then Eve; <sup>14</sup>and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. <sup>15</sup>Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.*

### Learn Quietly

We come to one of the most hotly debated sections of the letter. Verse 11 is not particularly controversial. It gives explicit permission for women to learn, and gives some instructions about having an appropriately submissive and respectful attitude to those teaching them. We can only guess at what cultural background there is to this command, but maybe Timothy was finding himself rudely interrupted by argumentative women as he sought to instruct the church, hence the recurring instruction to be “quiet”.

What are we to make of Paul’s prohibition of women teaching or exercising authority over men? Paul will shortly be discussing the role of elder, which was a position that included both teaching and exercising authority<sup>5</sup>. So on face value this would seem to indicate that Paul would not appoint a woman to the office of elder.

How does Paul’s prohibition apply to modern day churches? Does it mean women can’t teach? Does it mean they can’t be leaders? To answer such questions properly would require considering all the evidence of the New Testament together which we don’t have space to explore here, but we can at least examine Paul’s explanation for his practice. Why did he place this restriction on women?

### Deception and Childbearing

The trouble is, what Paul says next is very tricky to understand. He starts off with an appeal to the Genesis creation story. Adam was created first, and then Eve. Eve was the one however who was deceived first. So is Paul saying “men come first, and women are gullible”? Not likely, since Adam too ate the forbidden fruit. Some would argue that the Genesis story indicates a creational principle of “male headship”, where the husband is given responsibility to lead in the marriage relationship<sup>6</sup>. And so it may be that Paul sees this creational principle also applying within the church, with males called to exercise the leadership.<sup>7</sup>

Verse 15 ranks as one of the most confusing verses in the Bible. Does it mean that women earn their salvation through becoming mothers? Does it mean that women ought to make

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<sup>5</sup> However, some argue that the term translated “exercising authority” here is a negative word meaning something like control or dominate, and hence something that he would not want an elder to do

<sup>6</sup> See, for example, his teaching on marriage in Eph 5:22-33

<sup>7</sup> Others have argued that it is merely out of missional concern that Paul makes this stipulation, in order that the church might not bring itself into disrepute. Another approach is to see this requirement as relating to the husband wife relationship and not to women in general in the church.

sure they are holy or God will punish them with death in childbirth? Neither option fits with the rest of Scripture's teaching. It seems better to think that Paul is still thinking of the Genesis story. The woman was cursed with pain in childbirth as a result of her sin, and there are reasons to think that the false teachers were discouraging women from marriage and motherhood. For Paul, the priority for women is to live holy lives, and they are also to trust God to protect them through the difficulties of childbirth<sup>8</sup>.

We probably have to admit that we are still somewhat in the dark as to *exactly* what Paul intends to prohibit women from doing in these verses, and what exactly his reasons for doing so were. And this has made it hard for churches to come to agreement on exactly how we should apply them in the modern day. But there is more than a prohibition in these verses. They also contain positive instruction for women, which includes them learning with a godly attitude, and living lives characterised by faith, love, holiness and self-control.

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<sup>8</sup> Even if we remove the obviously unbiblical idea that women could somehow earn their salvation through bearing children, there still remain several options that seem difficult to choose between. Paul may just be saying that women can work out their salvation in the context of motherhood.

## 1 Tim 3:1-3

<sup>1</sup>The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.  
<sup>2</sup>Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup>not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

### A Noble Task

Paul moves on to discuss the qualifications necessary to lead within the church. The early church was not a free for all, even if the exact structures of leadership were still evolving. There were those with a recognised “office” of overseer, which appears to be equivalent to the role of “elder” and so there would normally be several overseers in the church<sup>9</sup>.

It might seem to be an indication of pride for someone to want to be an overseer in their church, but Paul says that it is a noble task, and aspiring to the office is a good thing.

### Qualified to Lead

However, such responsibility is not just handed out to whoever wants it; elders must be appropriately qualified. First, the elder must be *above reproach*, meaning he is free from obvious character flaws. Second, he is to be *the husband of one wife*. By this does Paul intend to exclude just polygamists, or also those who have divorced and remarried, or even single people? Probably the sense is of being sexually pure – if married, an elder is to be exclusively faithful to his one wife. This qualification may also be evidence that Paul expected only men to take this role.

To be *sober-minded* means that an elder takes this responsibility very seriously. Leading the church is not a hobby or an experiment, it is a holy calling. Elders need to be *self-controlled* to avoid falling into sins of various sorts that would again bring the gospel into disrepute. They are to be *respectable*, indicating that even unbelievers are impressed with their quality of life.

The requirement to be *hospitable* may reflect the house-church situation. An elder cannot be private or aloof; he is to welcome people into his home and generously share with others. *Able to teach* is the only real “gifting” requirement, and sheds light on a key role of the elder. He needs to understand the gospel message in order able to explain it to others and to refute false teaching.

Finally Paul lists some specific vices that would disqualify someone from eldership. Men in the church have already been warned against being angry and argumentative, and if there were such aggressive men in the church at Ephesus, they would make bad choices for elders. The reference to drunkenness, perhaps indicates that by heavy drinking, some men were losing their self control and acting in shameful ways.

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<sup>9</sup> Despite the pattern of a sole “pastor” or “priest” leading a church for much of church history, elders invariably appear in the plural wherever discussed in the New Testament.



The command to not be a “lover of money” is also worthy of attention. Someone who appears very respectable and self-controlled may yet be unsuitable to lead in the church because they have a divided loyalty. Jesus taught us that you cannot serve both God and money, and for a leader to idolise money would open the door to abuse of church funds which would bring disgrace upon the witness of the church.

## 1 Tim 3:4-7

*<sup>4</sup>He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup>for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup>He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup>Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.*

### Household Manager

The qualifications for an overseer continue in these verses, and the next one gives some insight into the role of an overseer. The church is God's household, and the overseer functions a little bit like the head of a household, who lovingly protects, cares for, and provides for the members of his household.

So if, (as seems likely to be the norm), the prospective elder was the head of a household, the way he managed his household would be a good indicator of his suitability to lead in the church of God. His parenting skills matter, because he will be called to both teach and discipline new converts, and needs to be able to do this in a loving and gracious way.

### Pride and Disgrace

Elders are not to be recent converts, who may be full of zeal, and yet spiritually immature, opening the door to the kind of pride that comes before a fall. Pride in leaders can cause as much damage as false teaching does. Elders are not to be those who are out to "prove themselves", but those who desire to serve others. The devil, whose own pride brought about his downfall, may be able to more easily trip up a spiritually immature leader.

The final qualification for elders returns to an idea that has already come up several times. Elders are representatives of the church, and therefore their public perception is important. As much as is possible without compromising the gospel, elders should live in a way that earns the respect of unbelievers. Once selected as elders, they should be mindful that any public misdemeanours would not only bring shame on them as individuals but on the church as a whole.

## 1 Tim 3:8-10

<sup>8</sup>Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup>They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup>And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

### Deacons

As well as “overseers” (also known as elders), there was an office in the church called “deacons”. It is hard to pinpoint exactly what their role was, and it may be that they fulfilled many different duties since the name “deacon” simply means “servant”. They may have functioned as assistants to the elders, doing whatever tasks were necessary.

Whilst the deacons were not the senior leadership of the church, their function was prominent enough that it warranted similarly strict criteria. Like elders, their behaviour had potential to damage the church’s witness to a watching and sceptical world.

To be *dignified* is a similar idea to elders being *respectable* – they were to live in a way that earned the respect of onlookers. Not *double-tongued* is a memorable way of saying that they are to be honest and straightforward people, whose word can be trusted. Like elders, excessive love for wine or money will disqualify them from holding office.

Also, like elders, they need to have a firm grasp of the gospel, referred to here as *the mystery of the faith*. And it is not only to be known in theory, but also lived out in life with a clear conscience. This requirement may indicate that the deacons too were involved in some form of teaching or discipleship. They certainly were to be the sort of people younger believers could learn from and emulate.

### Testing

A deacon was not self-appointed, or simply a volunteer. They had to be recognised by the elders of the church. Paul recommends some form of “testing”. This probably involves a period of waiting and watching while proposed candidates demonstrate that their lives do indeed match up to the qualities listed here.

This meant that their daily life was to be examined. It is one thing to appear holy and spiritual in church gatherings, but another to consistently live a holy life in the home and the workplace.

The characteristics listed for deacons and elders are not a special level of holiness that only those wanting to be leaders should strive for. Instead they describe what an authentic Christian life looks like, and all believers should seek to be the sort of people who could fulfil these roles of elder or deacon, even if the opportunity for us to hold such an office never arrives.

## 1 Tim 3:11-13

*<sup>11</sup>Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.*

*<sup>12</sup>Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup>For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.*

### Deacon's Wives

Verse 11 could be interpreted in two ways. It could mean that Paul envisions deacons as a male office and is laying down stipulations for the wives of deacons. Or it could be talking about female deacons<sup>10</sup>.

Either way, it is important that these women are of good character too. This may indicate that, whether or not they had the title of “deacon”, they had a prominent role of serving within the church and so it is important that they avoid behaving in the undignified way that it seems some women in the church were acting. They needed to be exemplary in their speech (not slanderers), in their attitude and thinking (sober-minded) and in their day to day life (faithful in all things). Such women would be an invaluable asset to the church and her mission.

### Deacons

Shifting the focus back to male deacons, Paul again underscores the importance of being exclusively faithful to their wives and running their household in an honourable manner.

Paul wants to remind deacons that the role they have been given is one of great importance and privilege. But in what way does serving as a deacon give you “great confidence in the faith”? Perhaps Paul has in mind the growth in spiritual maturity that comes through serving in the church, which results in an increased knowledge of God and confidence in the gospel. It is often the case that with growth in responsibility comes growth in maturity. Although Paul does not want immature people to be given leadership roles, he surely would have approved of helping young and new Christians to grow by giving them opportunities for service within the church.

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<sup>10</sup> It seems likely that Phoebe in Rom 16:1 is identified as a female deacon

## 1 Tim 3:14-16

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

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

### The Household of God

Paul wanted to visit the church in Ephesus and expound in much greater detail on the things he has written about. However, he has used this letter to stress the most important issues. He describes the church as “the household of God”. Many of the elders and deacons were heads of their own “household”, but Jesus is the head of the church, and to serve in his household is a great privilege and responsibility.

The church does not belong to any one leader, whether an apostle or an overseer, but to God himself. Overseers and deacons need to understand that they are exercising only delegated authority.

The church also the proclaimer, defender and upholder of truth. Those who lead in the church of God must therefore be serious about guarding and declaring the truth of the gospel.

### The Mystery of Godliness

But what is the truth that the church is to defend and proclaim? Paul sums the gospel up (which he calls the “mystery of godliness”), with a short quotation or creed, perhaps taken from a hymn.

First, we see that the gospel is all about Jesus and what he did. He was *manifested in the flesh*, which refers to the incarnation – he came into the world as a human being, which enabled him to die on the cross as our substitute. He was *vindicated by the Spirit*, most likely a reference to his resurrection, which demonstrated that Jesus was not a failed Messiah, but really was who he claimed to be.

*Seen by angels* is perhaps the hardest of the phrases to identify the correct meaning for, but probably refers to Jesus appearing before angelic powers after his resurrection. *Proclaimed among the nations* refers to the very missionary task of the church that Paul is devoting his life to. *Believed on in the world* is an encouraging reminder that the gospel is bearing fruit and people are coming to new life as the message is proclaimed. Finally, *taken up in glory* seems most naturally to refer to Jesus’ ascension, which would mean this hymn is a little out of sequence chronologically, but that may not be the point.

In summary, the foundational truth that the church is built on is the story of Jesus the Messiah, who came to earth, died, rose again and ascended to heaven, and who has commissioned his people to take that message out into the whole world enabling people to experience new life by believing in him.

## 1 Tim 4:1-5

*<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup>who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

### Bad Teaching

We were told at the start of this letter that the church in Ephesus had a problem with false teaching. Paul says that the Holy Spirit had warned that that this would happen. It is hard to decide whether he is referring to predictions in Scripture, or to some charismatic prophecies<sup>11</sup>. Either way, we are not to be surprised when the gospel comes under attack from within the church, but to be ready to defend the truth.

Paul does not mince his words. These false teachers have not just made a few honest mistakes in their doctrine but are *liars*, whose consciences are seared, and to embrace their teaching is to *depart from the faith*. In other words, this false teaching amounts to a rejection of the gospel, and has the effect of cutting people off from the grace of God. It must be opposed vigorously.

### Good Creation

We discover here that the false teaching involved forbidding marriage and certain foods (probably meat). Paul sees these prohibitions as a rejection of God's creation intention to bless us with the world he has made, and with the divine institution of marriage.

It may be that these false teachers wanted to make a distinction between the physical and the spiritual, with the idea that you got closer to God if you avoided certain foods, and stayed single so as to avoid sexual relations.

This verse teaches us to take a very positive attitude to creation. Whilst it is true that we live in a fallen world, the things that God called "good" back in Genesis are still good. We are to give thanks for them and enjoy them as an act of worship to our Creator. The reference to making things holy by the word of God and prayer, probably means that this is how we should properly go about deciding what things are permissible for us. If the word of God declares something to be good, and we can thank God for it in prayer, then no one has the right to forbid it.

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<sup>11</sup> Possibly part of the prophecies referred to in 1 Tim 1:18, or he could even be referring to his own prophecy made in Acts 20:29.

## 1 Tim 4:6-10

*6If 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. 7Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; 8for 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. 9The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 10For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.*

### Training for Godliness

Timothy now has the daunting, but important task of confronting these false teachers. By doing so he will be acting as a good servant of Jesus, and putting the doctrinal training he has received into action.

What these false teachers were promoting could be described as “irreverent, silly myths”. These teachings had no real basis in Scripture, and they did not lead to godliness. They were not only false, but they distracted people from what really matters.

All believers ought to be pursuing godliness. Training in theology and doctrine is worthwhile only if it results in an increasing likeness to Christ. By contrasting training for godliness with physical training, Paul reminds us that although some things in life are permissible, we are to focus our energies on what matters most. And by contrasting the “present life” with the “life to come”, Paul encourages us to consider whether the activities we devote ourselves to have eternal value or not.

### Saviour of All

Paul passionately believed that we are saved by grace, and not through our own effort. But that didn't mean his view of the Christian life was one of idle relaxation. No, he *toiled* and *strived* towards the goal of godliness, and towards the fulfilment of his life's calling. His hope was not based on anything in this “present life”, but on God himself, and therefore he was willing to endure the hardship that a life of mission entailed.

Verse 10 describes God as the Saviour of *all people*. This again draws our attention to the universal reach of the gospel. Paul was convinced that the good news was for all and he was determined to share it with all. But he also says that God is “especially” the Saviour of those who believe. Presumably he means that though the gospel is for all people, not all do in fact respond to it<sup>12</sup>. Only those who believe are in the end saved by the Saviour of all.

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<sup>12</sup> And he may in fact be making reference to the false teachers, who as far as he is concerned, do not believe the gospel.

## 1 Tim 4:11-14

<sup>11</sup>Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup>Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup>Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

### The Gospel in Action

The New Testament gives us various hints that Timothy's personality was "timid"<sup>13</sup>, which may mean that he shied away from confrontations. He may also have felt that because he was a young man, it would be disrespectful of him to oppose those many years his senior. But Paul encourages him to teach and instruct the church with authority and confidence. There are times to politely and respectfully disagree, but when error like this threatens to undermine the gospel message it must be courageously opposed.

Timothy's authority does not just come from his office in the church<sup>14</sup>, but from his authentic godly lifestyle. He was to live a life that was worthy of being emulated, and, as was required of an elder, a life that earned the respect of those who came into contact with him.

For this to be the case, Timothy must allow the gospel to transform every part of his life. The way he speaks and acts, the love he has for people, his faith in God and commitment to the gospel, his sexual purity; all of these things matter deeply. Actions can speak louder than words and if our lifestyle doesn't line up with our doctrine, we cannot expect people to take our message seriously.

### The Gospel in Words

False teaching thrives in an environment where people are ignorant of Scripture. So Timothy is to ensure that the church is well instructed. The first step in doing this is simply to devote time in meetings for the reading of Scripture. There can be a temptation for churches to neglect this because time is at a premium, or maybe even because some parts can seem a bit boring. But God's word is powerful truth that we all need to hear again and again. We must not assume we already know what it says, but be ready each time it is read to hear God speaking to us afresh.

By putting reading Scripture first, Paul is indicating that the *teaching* and *exhortation* that follow are based on Scripture. Timothy is not free to innovate doctrinally; he is to explain what God has already spoken through his Word and then to strongly urge people to live according to that truth.

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<sup>13</sup> See 2 Tim 1:7, although "timid" may be too negative a word to describe him. I imagine he just wasn't quite as bold and assertive as Paul was.

<sup>14</sup> It is not clear what exact role Timothy operated in. He could maybe be described as an apostolic delegate. He was on Paul's apostolic team and seems to have oversight over the church in Ephesus.



## 1 Tim 4:14-5:2

*<sup>14</sup>Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. <sup>15</sup>Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>1</sup>Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup>older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.*

### Use Your Gift

We have heard earlier in this letter<sup>15</sup> that Timothy had received prophecies about his ministry, this verse makes it likely that these prophecies were made over Timothy at some kind of commissioning ceremony where hands were laid on him by elders<sup>16</sup>. Although there are a few notable exceptions, the general pattern of leadership in the church is that leaders are to be recognised by others, rather than self-appointed. The fact that Paul repeatedly appeals to these prophecies indicates that he believes that the Spirit can give direction outside of Scripture that can shape our lives. Obviously those prophecies would have needed to be measured against Scripture before Timothy accepted them as being genuine words from God for him. Knowing that God has spoken to you and called you to a particular task is a great encouragement to persevere when things are difficult.

Timothy is told not to neglect his gift, which given the context probably refers to a gift of teaching and leadership. But the principle applies generally. Those God calls to a ministry, he also equips for that ministry. And so your gifts are to be put into action. Timothy is to “immerse” himself in the calling that God has on his life, in order to grow and progress in his gifting.

### Watch Yourself

Timothy has so far not been taken in by the false teaching, and successfully resisted the temptation to abandon godly living. But he is not to proudly think of himself as being invulnerable to temptation. The Bible does not just stress the importance of beginning the Christian life, it also strongly emphasises the need to *persevere* in the truth and holiness. Those who persevere are promised salvation, and Timothy is to keep going himself, and bring as many as possible along with him. Of course, it is only by God’s grace that we can persevere, but we need to be single-mindedly determined to stay faithful to him.

### Church Family

It seems that Timothy found it difficult to know how to relate to some of the people in his church. How can a young man teach and correct much older people without seeming disrespectful? And how does he appropriately go about relating to the young women (some of whom may be dressing rather immodestly<sup>17</sup>). Paul’s answer is that Timothy is to think of the church as his family. Older men and women should be treated with the same

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<sup>15</sup> 1 Tim 1:18

<sup>16</sup> It is not clear where these elders are from, although it seems unlikely to be Ephesus.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Tim 2:9

respectfulness that you would your father and mother. He is not to avoid young women, but he is to relate to them like you would your sister, without any hint of flirtatiousness. This principle reminds us that leaders in the church are not to view the church members as servants, or customers, but as dearly loved family members.

## 1 Tim 5:3-8

*<sup>3</sup>Honour widows who are truly widows. <sup>4</sup>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. <sup>5</sup>She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, <sup>6</sup>but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. <sup>7</sup>Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. <sup>8</sup>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.*

### True Widows

It would seem that one of the ministries of the church in Ephesus was to provide for widows, who in that culture may well have found themselves financially destitute. They may have also been given ministries of their own to serve the church. However, it appears that some widows were taking advantage of this service.

The widows the church should be supporting are those who have no family of their own to support them, no financial means of their own, and have no prospects of remarriage. Their prayer life should be reflective of their devotion to God and complete dependence on him. By contrast, it would appear that some widows saw this provision from the church as an opportunity to lead lazy and self-indulgent lives. And so a ministry designed to show honour to godly widows, was in danger of being abused by younger widows who simply liked the idea of a single lifestyle funded by the church's generosity.

### Provide for your Relatives

Paul also takes this opportunity to teach an important principle. Just because the church is a family<sup>18</sup>, doesn't mean that our human families no longer matter. We still have a duty of care towards them. Jesus had criticised the Pharisees for pledging to God money that should have been used for the support of their parents<sup>19</sup>. And here Paul says that failure to provide for close relatives who are in need is a denial of the gospel.

This is an illustration of the concept of "sins of omission". Often we think of sin in terms of doing things that are prohibited. But it is equally sinful to neglect to do something that God has clearly commanded us to do. And honouring your parents through providing for them in their time of need is something that the Scriptures plainly teach. We have no excuse to pass that burden off onto the church if we have the means to help ourselves.

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<sup>18</sup> see comments on 5:1-2

<sup>19</sup> Mark 7:11-12

## 1 Tim 5:9-16

*<sup>9</sup>Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, <sup>10</sup>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. <sup>11</sup>But refuse to enrol younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry <sup>12</sup>and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. <sup>13</sup>Besides that, 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. <sup>14</sup>So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. <sup>15</sup>For some have already strayed after Satan. <sup>16</sup>If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.*

### Older Widows

Paul has instructed the families of widows to care and provide for them, and not to palm them off onto the church for support. But that will leave some widows who don't have any means of support, and in particular, older widows were especially vulnerable, with few prospects of remarriage or employment, and facing health issues. These are exactly the sort of widows that the church should be focusing its time and resources on helping.

But why does Paul also introduce some moral requirements? Is this a callous way of excluding some genuinely needy widows? I think that his point is to shame some of the younger widows taking advantage of the system by describing the exemplary lives these older widows have led. They have given themselves to serving others, doing good works, and been faithful as wives and mothers. They are not trying to take advantage of a free food service; they are now in a genuine time of need and the church ought to honour and serve them.

### Younger Widows

So what was the problem with the younger widows? Why shouldn't they be provided for also? It would appear that the younger widows are being influenced by cultural trends in which wealthy single women were choosing to remain single and being sexually promiscuous. The church is not to provide a service that allows young Christian women to start living like that. In fact, some of them appear to be in danger of marrying unbelievers, which would likely require them to abandon the faith and take up the faith of their new husband.

Paul's judgment is that it would be better for them to re-marry a believer, which would put them into a new Christian household in which they can live out a godly and productive life. This passage reveals that Paul sees an idle lifestyle as a serious sin. In our culture, many people long to win the lottery so that they can live simply for pleasure for the rest of their days. But the Christian must not think of life this way. Whether we have a paid job or not, we are all called to be the type of people who are devoted to good works and serving others.

## 1 Tim 5:17-21

*<sup>17</sup>Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup>For the Scripture says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," and, "The labourer deserves his wages." <sup>19</sup>Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>20</sup>As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear. <sup>21</sup>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.*

### Elders Wages

Paul now moves on to talk the "honour" that is due to elders. It isn't entirely clear what this means, but from verse 18 hints at financial support. The elders who preach and teach would be devoting lots of their time to ministry, and thus have less time to dedicate to earning their own living through regular work. It was only right that the church compensated them for their time and efforts.

By appealing to two passages from Scripture<sup>20</sup> Paul defends the right for elders to be provided for by the church. The "double" honour may then indicate that they needed to do more than merely giving them enough not to starve, but a decent living wage that would enable them to do all that God had called them to.

### Keep it Fair

Obviously those who lead in the church, and especially those who are paid by the church, will from time to time come in for some criticism. Paul does not say that elders are above criticism, but he does require that no unsubstantiated charges are brought against them<sup>21</sup>.

What Paul asks for next is something that many in our culture feel particularly uncomfortable with. He says that sin must be publically rebuked, as this will serve as a solemn warning to others in the church to lead godly lives. It takes very courageous leaders to do this, and also great wisdom and grace is needed if the rebuke is to result in the restoration of the sinner, rather than in them leaving and never coming back. It is important to note though that Jesus taught that correction should initially be given in private, and only becomes a matter for the whole church when the offender refuses to repent<sup>22</sup>.

What is essential in any matters of criticism against leaders, or of charges of sin against believers, is that they are handled with scrupulous impartiality. Timothy and the elders are reminded that God is watching, and sees everything, and any injustice in the church will incur his severe disapproval.

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<sup>20</sup> The first comes from Deut 25:4, whilst the second is found in Luke 10:7, opening up the possibility that some of the sayings of Jesus were already circulating and viewed as equally authoritative to Scripture, even if the gospels had not yet been fully completed.

<sup>21</sup> The requirement of two or three witnesses is based in the OT law (see Deut 17:6;19:15)

<sup>22</sup> See Matt 18:15-17

## 1 Tim 5:22-25

*<sup>22</sup>Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure. <sup>23</sup>(No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.) <sup>24</sup>The sins of some men are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. <sup>25</sup>So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.*

### A Pure Life

So far in 1 Timothy we have seen instructions for who would be appropriate to appoint as elders, and a discussion of how to deal with accusations against elders, and how to discipline elders. Reading between the lines then, it seems likely that some had been appointed to this office who perhaps should not have been. Maybe they were recent converts who had become proud, maybe they were drinking too much, and maybe they had been taken in by false teaching. For these reasons, Timothy is warned not to “lay hands” on men to appoint them as elders without a careful evaluation first.

There is also a warning for Timothy himself. He needs to keep himself pure, and avoid falling into the same sins. We should not proudly assume that we cannot fall to temptation, but resolve with the help of the Spirit to resist the devil.

The instruction that Timothy needs to drink a small amount of wine perhaps indicates that Timothy was afraid that drinking any wine at all would be some kind of compromise that would lead him to sin. Whilst there is a certain wisdom in staying clear of things we think could bring us into temptation, but Paul wants Timothy to know that it is not a sin for him to partake of some wine, and would in fact be a good thing for his health<sup>23</sup>.

### A Conspicuous Life

Part of the reason for not appointing elders too quickly is that sometimes, a person’s sins only become apparent over time. There are those whose lifestyles very obviously rule them out of contention for leadership in the church. But just because someone appears to be holy, does not mean that all is well behind the scenes, and sometimes it is only after a leader is appointed that a problem emerges. This is probably why a period of “testing” recommended for deacons. Allow some time to see whether their character is really what it appears to be.

But just as some sins only come to light over time, so also some types of good works are also only seen over time. Jesus encouraged us not to do our good deeds or giving in a public way in order to earn praise from people. So those who are truly leading godly lives will often be doing good things that aren’t visible immediately to the church leadership. But over time, it will become clear if someone is living a godly life.

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<sup>23</sup> Possibly the water in Ephesus was not particularly clean. The point seems to be that to “keep yourself pure” does not require abstaining from wine, only abstaining from sin

## 1 Tim 6:1-2a

*<sup>1</sup>Let all who are under a yoke as slaves regard their own masters as worthy of all honour, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. <sup>2</sup>Those who have believing masters must not be disrespectful on the ground that they are brothers; rather they must serve all the better since those who benefit by their good service are believers and beloved.*

### Honouring Your Master

In the last chapter Paul talked about the importance of “honouring” widows, of “honouring” elders, and now he instructs those who are slaves that they need to “honour” their masters. And as with the instructions to elders and widows, one of the main concerns Paul has is that the church acts in a way that does not bring the gospel into disrepute.

Slavery was of course simply part of the fabric of society, and as much as its complete abolition was desirable, those who were slaves were not in a position to free themselves. Instead, they had to go about their work in a way that honoured God, and they were to do this by being respectful to their masters.

In our own times, where the context of our work is the employee employer relationship, Christians must still remember they are ambassadors for the faith. If it is known in your workplace that you are a believer, any disrespect you show for either your manager or those who report to you will actively undermine any attempts at sharing the gospel with your co-workers.

### Love or Duty

We might perhaps expect that Christians chose not to own slaves, but we see that this was not the case. However, as Christian “masters” would have been expected to treat their slaves well, and when those slaves were believers, to treat them as brothers.

It may be that in the context of a completely Christian household, where the slaves were given great freedom and treated as equals, there could be a temptation for those slaves to become lazy or disrespectful towards their masters without fear of reprisal. Any unbeliever who saw such behaviour would be shocked and conclude that Christianity didn’t change people for the better.

So the message to Christian slaves is that just because their masters weren’t cruel, didn’t mean they shouldn’t work hard. The motivation had changed, they now work to please God rather than to avoid a beating; their work is now an act of love, not duty. This is the essence of the gospel. As Christians we are slaves of Christ, who is a kind and gracious master. But just because he is kind, doesn’t mean we aren’t to respect and obey him. No, we work out of love for him.

## 1 Tim 6:2b-5

*Teach and urge these things. <sup>3</sup>If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, <sup>4</sup>he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, <sup>5</sup>and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.*

### Different Doctrine

It is all very well saying that Timothy should oppose false doctrine, but if two people are using the Scriptures to argue two different things, then how can anyone know who is right? It seems likely that the false teachers in Ephesus were using the Old Testament as the basis for their teachings, even if they were misusing it. Paul gives Timothy two tests to detect this abuse of Scripture.

First, is the teaching in accordance with the words of Jesus? Though the New Testament was not completed at this time, the first apostles had the important role of passing on the teachings of Jesus to the church. In our day, we are to evaluate all different doctrines according to the teaching of the whole of Scripture.

Second, does the teaching produce a life of godliness? Or does it simply result in arguments and divisions in the church? Right doctrine ought to lead to right behaviour and if the adherents of the teaching are tearing the church apart, it ought to raise serious doubts about the validity of their teachings.

### Craving Controversy

Paul seems to suggest that these false teachers actually enjoyed a bit of controversy. Maybe it was pride that wanted to know better than everyone else. Or maybe it was lust for power, and a desire to win over a large portion of the church to their side. It seems as though there was some financial motivation, with the thought that if they could establish themselves as celebrity teachers, they could earn a good wage teaching their “doctrines”.

There is a lesson here for anyone who seeks to teach Scripture in church. What are our motives? Is there any pride or desire for position or recognition? Our desire should be to serve the church by preaching the gospel faithfully. In these modern days where the internet gives us access to a whole host of competing interpretations of Scripture, we need to resist the temptation to simply follow the latest and most exciting trends, without first carefully evaluating them against the Word of God.



## 1 Tim 6:6-10

*<sup>6</sup>Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, <sup>7</sup>for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. <sup>8</sup>But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. <sup>9</sup>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. <sup>10</sup>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.*

### Godliness with Contentment

It is extremely rare to meet a truly contented person. Almost everyone, it seems, feels unsatisfied with their income, and paradoxically those who have vast wealth still find themselves disappointed with life. The Christian is called in this passage to have a radically counter-cultural attitude to money.

First, we are challenged to be content with what we have. All we need to live is food and clothing, and yet it is easy to be duped by our consumeristic society into thinking we “need” all kinds of extra things. And so life becomes one long pursuit of trying to get a slightly better job, so we can have a slightly bigger house and go on slightly nicer holidays. It’s a pursuit that ultimately ends in disappointment. The gospel calls us to a simple, contented lifestyle.

Second, we are reminded that money is only temporary. When we are born, we have nothing, and when we die, we can’t take anything with us. If we had a truly eternal perspective, we would be working towards building up treasures that last. A life of godliness, not material affluence is to be our goal.

### Love of Money

But doesn’t God want to bless us with nice things to enjoy? Must we all take a vow of poverty? This isn’t what Paul is arguing for. What he is saying is that the desire to be rich is the beginning of a road to disaster. It leads you into temptation, for just about every sin that you can think of has been committed with financial gain as a motive, whether theft, or tax evasion, or perjury, or murder, or sexual immorality. Desire for money also leads to all kinds of bad attitudes such as bitterness and jealousy. It makes us get our priorities all wrong, neglecting our families and our relationship with God. Ultimately it will lead us away from God altogether.

The only antidote to the love of money, is to love God with all our hearts. If he is our treasure, then we will regard money simply as a useful tool to help us lead a life pleasing to God. We all need to regularly examine our own hearts, and ask God to reveal any unhealthy attitudes towards money.

## 1 Tim 6:11-16

*<sup>11</sup>But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. <sup>12</sup>Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. <sup>13</sup>I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, <sup>14</sup>to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, <sup>15</sup>which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, <sup>16</sup>who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honour and eternal dominion. Amen.*

### The Good Fight

There are those who live their lives running after money, and it will inevitably lead to their spiritual destruction. Paul tells Timothy that he needs to run in exactly the opposite direction. Flee from the love of money, and instead run after godliness. This will not be an easy thing to do. The life of pursuing God is a battle, and we need to be prepared to fight against all kinds of temptations and opposition, as the devil is determined to destroy our faith.

Though our salvation is a gift of God's grace, and not in any way merited by our own effort, this does not mean that the Christian life is one of putting our feet up and enjoying ourselves. The gospel calls us to give ourselves wholeheartedly to a life of obedience to God, in which we will be fighting for truth, fleeing from temptation, and pursuing godliness.

### The Good Confession

Paul says that Timothy has made a "good confession", and that Jesus also made a "good confession". Timothy may well have made this "confession" in the presence of many witnesses at his baptism, where he publicly declared that Jesus was his Lord and he would follow him exclusively for the rest of his life, no matter what the cost. Paul asks Timothy to see to it that he follows through on this promise, just as Jesus refused to back down in front of Pilate.

Timothy is not just to look back to the promise he made, but to look forward to the return of Jesus. We do not know when his return will be, but God knows the "proper time", and our task is to be found living in obedience and purity. The description that follows next of the immortal God as King of kings and Lord of lords is to remind us of just how awesome and majestic God is. When Jesus returns, he will shine with the majestic glory of the invisible God, and we will be able to do nothing but worship.

To see Jesus return in glory will be a wonderful thing for all those who know and love him, but for those living in disobedience to him, it will be a fearful experience. This is why Christians ought to take seriously the lordship of Jesus, and live in such a way that there will be no shame when he returns.

## 1 Tim 6:17-19

*17As for the rich in this present age, charge them not to be haughty, nor to set their hopes on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly provides us with everything to enjoy. 18They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.*

### Dangers of Riches

In this chapter we have encountered some dire warnings about the spiritually destructive effect of loving money, and the godly alternative, which is being content with having enough to simply live. The point is not that it would be a sin to be rich; but that there are dangers associated with it. One of those dangers is that rich people can become “haughty”, which is a form of pride that looks down on people of a lower social status. Those who have enjoyed a measure of financial success in life can foolishly think of themselves as more “deserving” than others. But Christians should remind themselves that everything we have is a gift of God.

The other danger is that we can set our hope on riches. Of course, those who have built up an ample reserve of money are able to use it in the event of losing their job, or needing to pay medical bills or unexpected expenses. But savings cannot ultimately save us, and to put our trust in them is foolish idolatry. The Christian is someone who looks first and foremost to God for provision.

### Right use of Riches

This brings us onto what the right use of riches is. Instead of hoarding what we have as security for the future, those with “disposable income” should use it generously, both by giving it away, and by sharing our property and possessions with others. This requires a recognition that our money is not our own; it belongs to God, and we are merely stewards of it.

It is also worth noting that Paul doesn’t just tell rich Christians to be generous with their money. They are also to “do good” and be “rich in good works”. In other words, they are not to take the “easy” option of just signing a few cheques, but are to be just as engaged as any other believer in hands-on practical service of others.

To back this up, Paul recalls the words of Jesus when he taught us to “store up treasure in heaven”<sup>24</sup>. Rich people often think about what would be a “good investment” for their money. Well the best investment you can make is to give your time, energy and money into the kingdom that will last forever, rather than spending it on a way of life that is passing away. This is the way to true life; however much the advertisers may try to persuade you otherwise.

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<sup>24</sup> Matt 6:19-21

## 1 Tim 6:20-21

*<sup>20</sup>O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," <sup>21</sup>for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.*

### Guard the Deposit

A major focus of this letter has been to equip Timothy to deal with false teaching within the church, and so it is no surprise that Paul's closing remarks are to urge Timothy to stand firm in the truth. The false teachers might sound impressive with their claim to possess "knowledge", but in fact it amounts to "irreverent babble" and is full of contradictions. Often false teaching can seem very exciting and appealing, but if we weigh it carefully against the word of God, its true character will become apparent.

By contrast, Timothy has been entrusted with a truly valuable "deposit". By this, Paul refers to the truth of the gospel, which is God's message, not ours, so we have no right to tamper with it. Every generation of church leaders has the responsibility to pass the true gospel on to the next, without adding or removing anything, and without distorting it or modifying it in any way. The role of Timothy as an apostolic delegate, and the elders he was to appoint in Ephesus was to protect the gospel message from being lost or corrupted. The way they would do this would be through clear teaching of sound doctrine, and through confronting and correcting any false teaching that arose.

### Grace be with you

The task of believers to remain faithful to God within a pagan and sometimes hostile culture is hard enough, without having to also deal with dangers from within the church. And the stakes are high, since Paul warns that this false teaching was causing people to depart from the faith.

It would not be surprising if Timothy was feeling daunted at the magnitude of the task in front of him. He has been called to wage the good warfare and fight the good fight. But he is not doing this alone, and he is not doing it in his own strength. The gospel that he is fighting for is the gospel of *grace*. And it is God's grace that will equip and empower Timothy to fulfil his calling. That same grace is available to us too, as we seek to be faithful to the gospel and obedient to God's calling on our lives.

## 2 Timothy

### 2 Tim 1:1-7

<sup>1</sup>Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God according to the promise of the life that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

<sup>3</sup>I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup>As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. <sup>6</sup>For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup>for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

#### Promise of Life

Paul begins this second letter to Timothy in very much the same way as he did the first. But that does not mean these are idle words. He speaks of the *will of God*, because for him, it is foundational to understand that God is sovereign over his life. He speaks of the *promise of life*, because to him, the gospel was more than just a bunch of doctrines he was convinced of – it was a promise. The Christian life is one of hope. Yes it is true that we are already beginning to enjoy the new life that comes with the new birth, but the full experience of eternal life is yet to come.

#### Beloved child

Paul doesn't just view Timothy as his apprentice, or co-worker, but as a dearly loved child. He earnestly prays for him that God's grace, mercy and peace would be on his life, and longs to see him in person. He gives thanks repeatedly for the work of grace that has already taken place in Timothy's life. This started with the faithful testimony of Lois and Eunice, two women whose consistent godly example and teaching made a deep impact on Timothy. This is an encouragement to parents and grandparents to remember that as we interact with and raise our children, we have the opportunity to leave a legacy of godly influence that will shape their futures.

#### Fan into Flame

We know from 1 Timothy that Timothy had been given prophecies about his future ministry, and had been appointed through the laying on of hands to a leadership role. In other words, Timothy had been called by the Spirit and gifted by the Spirit. But that did not mean he was to be passive and fatalistic about seeing God use him. On the contrary, he was to take bold steps of faith to use the gifting he had been given and to exercise the ministry to which he had been called.

So there was to be no place for fear in Timothy's life. Instead, relying on the power of the Spirit for his strength, the love of the Holy Spirit for those he served, and the self-control of the Holy Spirit to stand firm against temptation, he was to give his all to fulfil the mission

God had given him. We must do the same. What God has called and gifted us to do, we should fearlessly get on with, relying on his Spirit to provide the resources we need.

## 2 Tim 1:8-12a

*<sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, <sup>9</sup>who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, <sup>10</sup>and which now has been manifested through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, <sup>11</sup>for which I was appointed a preacher and apostle and teacher, <sup>12</sup>which is why I suffer as I do.*

### Suffering for the Gospel

These verses give us some insight into the situation Paul was in as he wrote this letter. He had been imprisoned as a direct result of his work as an apostle. Of course he could easily stayed out of jail had he simply kept quiet about his beliefs, but he was determined to fulfil God's purpose in his life even if that meant persecution.

Timothy has a similar choice to make. He can maintain a low profile to avoid suffering, which amounts to being ashamed of the gospel, or he can boldly associate himself with both Jesus and Paul, which would inevitably make him a target for all who were opposed to the Christian message. However, suffering does not need to be endured in our own strength, but the *power of God* is on hand to sustain us through it.

### Life through the Gospel

None of us like to suffer, and so the temptation to compromise or hide our faith in order to avoid opposition is a strong one. But Paul reminds us of the stakes. What God has given us in Christ is of such value, that it would be folly to abandon it just to avoid difficulties.

In a succinct summary of the gospel, Paul reminds us that we have first of all been *saved*, rescued from the judgment to which we were headed. This salvation is purely of grace, and not on the basis of anything we have done. Second, we have been given a *holy calling*, a reminder that our lives have a new direction, significance and purpose. We are not our own, but we now live for the Lord. And third, we are reminded that through Christ death has been defeated, making real life and immortality available to us. It is only in the gospel that we discover the true meaning of life, and find a hope that goes beyond the grave. When we realise the riches God has given us, then suffering in this life, however unpleasant, comes into perspective. We can remain faithful to Christ through it all, knowing that what he has won for us at the cross far outweighs what we may suffer for our association with him.

## 2 Tim 1:12b-14

*But I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed, and I am convinced that he is able to guard until that Day what has been entrusted to me. <sup>13</sup>Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>14</sup>By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.*

### Unashamed

Paul had put his trust in Jesus, and proclaimed a message about Jesus, and had ended up in jail for it. In the eyes of many this would have brought shame on Paul, and constituted proof that his message was false and his ministry a failure. But Paul feels no shame whatsoever. His personal encounter with the risen Jesus leaves him in absolute confidence that he is standing for truth, and that ultimately he will not be let down.

Paul's attitude is a model for all believers. We are to be unashamed of Jesus, unashamed of the gospel, and unashamed of being associated with the people of God.

### Guard the Deposit

Paul closed his first letter to Timothy with an exhortation to “guard the deposit”, by which he meant that Timothy was to hold firmly to the truth of the gospel against attacks from both inside and outside the church. As an apostle of Christ, Paul knows that the gospel has been “entrusted” to him, and that he has a personal responsibility to pass it on faithfully. However, it doesn't all rest on human effort – God himself is at work, enabling his church, through the power of the Spirit to hold fast to the truth.

The gospel was passed on in the form of a “pattern of sound words”, meaning perhaps that Paul had formulated the doctrines of the faith into some memorable creed-like statements, that Timothy would know well and could use in his own teaching<sup>25</sup>. For us, the “pattern of sound words” is found in the Scriptures themselves that bear witness to the teachings of Jesus and the apostolic message.

Paul was at this point close to the end of his life. He was aware that the “Day” was approaching – by which he means the final day on which Jesus will return and all things will be made new. Paul could look forward to that day because he had faithfully fulfilled his own commission to pass on the “deposit” to Timothy, and now he urges Timothy to ensure that he does the same. The same solemn task belongs to every church leader, and to every parent, as we seek to pass on the “pattern of sound words” to the next generation.

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<sup>25</sup> Even in this letter of 1 Timothy, Paul seems to be regularly quoting pre-existing material, which he indicates with “this is a trustworthy saying”



## 2 Tim 1:15-18

*<sup>15</sup>You are aware that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. <sup>16</sup>May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains, <sup>17</sup>but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me earnestly and found me— <sup>18</sup>may the Lord grant him to find mercy from the Lord on that Day!—and you well know all the service he rendered at Ephesus.*

### Fickle Friends

You only know who your real friends are when you go through a time of trouble. There are those who will stick with you through thick and thin, proving that they genuinely care about you, and there are those who will quickly move on to find new friends when you need them most. Paul's imprisonment was a painful experience, as many who he considered to be his friends turned away from him. They didn't want to be associated with a man in jail for his faith, perhaps for fear of persecution.

Particularly painful were these two individuals Phygelus and Hermogenes, who presumably had been notable supporters or associates of Paul. Whether they had departed from the faith altogether, or had just decided to find a different "apostle" to associate themselves with, their actions amounted to a betrayal of Paul, and in effect, to the gospel.

### A Faithful Friend

Thankfully, Paul did have a good friend in Onesiphorus, who was not ashamed to be associated with Paul and his gospel message, despite the risk of being considered by the authorities as a sympathiser or accomplice to a criminal. Onesiphorus and his "household" provided practical support for Paul. This may well have included bringing him food and clothing, as well as visiting him regularly.

What makes the actions of Onesiphorus all the more commendable was that he didn't even live in Rome. He was from Ephesus, but took pains to seek out where Paul was imprisoned so he could offer his support. His attitude is a challenge to us when we have friends who have moved away who are now going through some kind of troubles. Is it "out of sight, out of mind", or are we willing to go the extra mile to get in touch with them and offer them whatever support we can? As Paul indicates, such behaviour will be rewarded by the Lord on the "Day" of final reckoning.

## 2 Tim 2:1-7

*<sup>1</sup>You then, my child, be strengthened by the grace that is in Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup>and what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. <sup>3</sup>Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. <sup>4</sup>No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him. <sup>5</sup>An athlete is not crowned unless he competes according to the rules. <sup>6</sup>It is the hard-working farmer who ought to have the first share of the crops. <sup>7</sup>Think over what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything.*

### Faithful Men

Paul has just shared the sad tale of many friends who proved unfaithful to him, although Onesiphorus was a notable example of loyalty. Now Timothy is urged to find his own faithful friends, who can be entrusted with the gospel message and in turn teach it to others. This is ultimately how the “good deposit” will be preserved through the generations. Faithful teachers of the Scriptures, strengthened by grace, will ensure that the apostolic message lives on. Paul uses three illustrations of the character required of Timothy and the “faithful men” he is to choose.

### Soldier

First, they are to be like soldiers, whose focus is on the mission at hand. They are not free to pursue their own interests, but are dedicated to doing what their commander instructs them. Such is their commitment that they are even willing to suffer for the cause. We need to have a “wartime mentality”, reminding ourselves that we have all been given a commission from Jesus our great leader, and that the focus of our lives is to seek first God’s kingdom, not our own interests, even if that means suffering.

### Athlete

Second, they are to be like athletes, who similarly have a strict focus on the goal ahead of them. Here the emphasis is placed on keeping the rules. An athlete can be disqualified and fail to win the prize. Similarly there are ways in which we can be “disqualified” in the Christian life. These would include falling into sin, and succumbing to false teaching. We are to have the athlete’s single-minded dedication to completing the race, and avoiding anything that would eliminate us from contention.

### Farmer

Third, they are to be like farmers. The work of a farmer is less glamorous perhaps than a soldier winning battles or an athlete winning medals. But farming is about faithful hard work that results in a harvest. This is an encouragement for any whose service of the Lord seems to be hard work with little obvious fruit. There will be a reward, even if it takes a long time to come.

Paul’s comment in verse 7 encourages us to ponder these images of the Christian life, and allow God to speak to us, giving us understanding. This principle applies to all of Scripture – it is to be carefully meditated upon, and as we do so, the Spirit is able to reveal its truth to us.

## 2 Tim 2:8-13

<sup>8</sup>Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup>for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup>Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup>The saying is trustworthy, for:

*If we have died with him, we will also live with him; <sup>12</sup>if we endure, we will also reign with him; if we deny him, he also will deny us; <sup>13</sup>if we are faithless, he remains faithful—for he cannot deny himself.*

### Suffering like Jesus

Paul has already proved he was willing to suffer for the gospel, and is challenging Timothy that he too needs to be ready for this. Of course, the gospel message itself is all about Jesus, who endured great suffering in order to fulfil the Father's calling on his life. However, even though Jesus' suffering actually resulted in his death, it was not the end of the story. God had not let him down, and raised him back to life.

The fact of Jesus' resurrection lay behind Paul's willingness to persevere despite persecution. Through raising Jesus from the dead, God vindicated the message of Jesus, proving that the gospel is true and worth living and dying for. Jesus' resurrection also functions as a promise to us of our own future resurrection to eternal life. The resurrection also functioned as a motivation for Paul to press on with evangelism. He wanted as many as possible to benefit from this great salvation, and to encourage those who already believe to remain faithful.

But how could he do this if he was stuck in prison, unable to travel around the Roman empire preaching the gospel and encouraging believers? Even though he was in chains, he knew that the word of God itself could never be chained up. Through his letters, and through the work of other faithful pastors and evangelists, the good news was continuing to spread.

### Alive with Jesus

Paul quotes from a hymn that summarises the benefits of the gospel but has a very challenging message. Jesus died, and then returned to life. And we too are called in the gospel to die to our sins and our old way of life that we may live. Jesus endured to the end, and now he reigns. And likewise we are called to endure to the end, that we may reign with him. Jesus, like his Father, is completely faithful. The challenge to us is whether we too will be faithful, since if we deny the Lord, we are warned that he will deny us<sup>26</sup>.

The stark language of this hymn may suggest that our salvation rests on our own effort. But that conclusion would be to ignore the grace of God. God does not just call us to himself and then leave us to continue in our own strength, but gives us his Spirit that we can endure suffering, and remain faithful. The road ahead may not be easy, but God is with us.

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<sup>26</sup> Although remember that Peter was forgiven for denying Christ. What is in mind here is a person who abandons the gospel in order to avoid suffering.

## 2 Tim 2:14-19

*<sup>14</sup>Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. <sup>15</sup>Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. <sup>16</sup>But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, <sup>17</sup>and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, <sup>18</sup>who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. <sup>19</sup>But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity."*

### Rightly Handling the Word

There is a right way, and a wrong way of interpreting the Scriptures. The right way involves approaching the Scriptures with faith and humility, allowing God to speak to us through them, accepting what his word says, believing it, and seeking to apply it to our lives. This approach to Scripture will be gospel-centred, because it recognises the centrality of the apostolic message of Jesus' death and resurrection, and it will be grace-filled, because it recognises the essential nature of the gospel as a free gift.

The wrong way is approaching Scripture looking for evidence to back up opinions we already hold, or coming up with novel and esoteric interpretations of passages that no one else has seen before. This was the approach of a number of false teachers in Ephesus. Their approach caused all kinds of unfruitful debates about words, and Paul bluntly describes it as "irreverent babble". He does not view this as a legitimate diversity of opinion. This approach to Scripture ends up being a denial of the gospel, leading people to their spiritual ruin and allowing them to justify all kinds of sinful behaviour. Unless Timothy confronts this head-on, it will spread right through the church like gangrene, causing immense damage.

### Rightly Understanding the Resurrection

Two teachers and one false doctrine in particular are singled out for attention. Whilst the resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact, the resurrection of believers has not yet happened. In other words, Christians remain mortal and will continue to die until the return of Jesus, when we will be raised with immortal and incorruptible bodies. Maybe these false teachers were suggesting that those believers who had died were not truly saved.

Paul utilises two quotations to warn people from associating with this false teaching. The first, from Numbers 16:5, is actually a warning rather than the encouraging thought that it might at first appear. In Numbers 16 we read about Korah, who led a group in rebellion against Moses' leadership. But God judged them severely for rejecting his chosen leader, and the ground opened up and swallowed them. These false teachers are therefore warned that rejecting Paul's God-given apostolic calling and message is similarly foolish.

The second quotation, which is more a summary of Scripture than a direct quote, states that those who claim to be the Lord's people should depart from iniquity. In other words, the sinful behaviour of these false teachers reveals that they cannot be the Lord's people. Those who follow them have departed from the "firm foundation" of God's Word.

## 2 Tim 2:20-22

*<sup>20</sup>Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honourable use, some for dishonourable. <sup>21</sup>Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonourable, he will be a vessel for honourable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.*

*<sup>22</sup>So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.*

### Ready for Good Works

If you had some people round for a meal and needed a container to put the potatoes in, you wouldn't use the washing up bowl, or the dog's water dish. Each "vessel" in your house has its own purpose, and you wouldn't consider changing that use, certainly not without thoroughly washing it first. Paul uses this analogy to suggest that as people, we have a choice about what use God will put us to. If we allow ourselves to be impure through sin, then he can't use us for his holy purposes, but if we are cleansed through the forgiveness Jesus provides, then we are the sort of "vessel" he is able to make use of.

Though we must be careful not to push metaphors like this too far, it is a helpful picture for a number of reasons. First, as "vessels", we are owned by the "master". Second, it is up to the master to assign uses to each vessel – we do not dictate to him, but seek to know his will for our lives. Third, being "useful" means we allow the master to both fill us and empty us. This reminds us of the example of Jesus, who was filled with the Spirit, and who "emptied" himself, pouring himself out in sacrificial loving service. And fourth, the main point Paul is making here is the importance of being clean, which speaks of purity.

### Pursuing Righteousness

The pathway to holiness is expressed in practical terms. Negatively, we need to "flee" from youthful passions. The Bible is realistic about the sort of temptations we face, particularly when living in a culture that considers it perfectly natural and healthy for a young person to indulge whatever desires they may have. The antidote is to turn from these and run in the opposite direction, actively pursuing the type of things that please God, such as righteousness, love, faith and peace.

The people who pursue these things that God wants, are characterised as those who "call on the Lord". The life of holiness is a prayerful life. Neglecting time in the presence of God in prayer invariably results in succumbing to temptation. As we spend time with God that our wills and desires become aligned with his, that we confess and are cleansed of our sin, and that we are filled afresh with his Spirit.

## 2 Tim 2:23-26

*<sup>23</sup>Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*

*<sup>24</sup>And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, <sup>25</sup>correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, <sup>26</sup>and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.*

### Avoiding Quarrels

Although Timothy will need to confront and correct the false teachers, there is a real danger that he will end up getting caught in quarrels. And quarrels often bring out the worst in people as frustration boils over and harsh and insulting words are spoken. So Timothy needs to cultivate virtues of kindness, patience and gentleness as he deals with those who have been deceived by this false teaching. His own teaching gift must be put to good use as he patiently instructs them from God's word.

In our own day of many denominations and religions, and with the internet providing access to Bible teachers of all kinds of theological persuasions, we are just as likely to find ourselves embroiled in debates over doctrine as those in Ephesus were. We need to ensure that we are not only standing on the side of truth, but that we are arguing for that truth in a way that is consistent with the gospel, with the fruit of the Spirit evident in the way we respond.

### Avoiding Traps

What will help Timothy to be gentle with these people who have embraced the false teaching is the realisation that they have fallen into a trap laid by the devil. They have been duped and need to come to their senses, and have been enslaved and need to be set free. So instead of getting angry with them, he needs to have compassion for them. They are not beyond hope, and if Timothy is wise in the way he deals with them, they may be brought back in repentance, which will involve them rejecting these false teachings and embracing the true gospel.

The same compassion needs to be evident in our own lives, particularly when we encounter those from groups such as the Jehovah's Witnesses or Mormons, whose version of "Christianity" represents a severe distortion of the Bible's teaching. Instead of just trying to win arguments against them, we should seek to lovingly win them over to the truth, and rescue them from the trap in which they have become ensnared. Paul believes that repentance is a gift that God graciously gives, and so we should never assume anyone is so deceived that they cannot be awakened to the truth.

## 2 Tim 3:1-5

*<sup>1</sup>But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. <sup>2</sup>For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, <sup>4</sup>treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup>having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

### Last Days

These verses paint a bleak picture of what life will be like in the “last days”. But when will these last days take place? Is this some future period of social collapse that will mark the imminent return of Christ? Paul actually believed that he was already living in the last days. The people he describes are already around in first century Ephesus and Timothy needs to avoid them. As we shall see, he is not primarily referring to unbelievers. The godless value system of the culture had infiltrated the church, and these were people who professed to have faith but contradicted it by their lifestyles.

So we should not be surprised to encounter the same problem in our own time. Though the church ought to be characterised by holy people living righteous lives, if we allow the world’s values to shape us instead of the Word of God, all kinds of moral compromise will follow. Paul urges Timothy to “avoid such people”, knowing that they have the tendency to drag others down to their way of living. It is one thing to tolerate unrighteous behaviour and attitudes amongst our unbelieving colleagues and neighbours, but within the church, such blatant disregard for God’s standards of holiness is unacceptable.

### Selfish People

A few themes emerge from within the catalogue of sins Paul attributes to these people. They are fundamentally selfish. Instead of loving God, they idolatrously love themselves, money and pleasure. At the heart of all sin is putting ourselves in the place of God, and living to please ourselves rather than him. This self-enthronement is the height of arrogance, and so it is no surprise that these people are described as proud and conceited. They have a sense of superiority and entitlement.

Their self-centredness invariably results in relationship break-down. They have no respect for others, even their own parents. They completely lack self-control, living as they please, and doing whatever feels right to them. But the biggest shock of all is that they are in some sense religious. They have the “appearance of godliness”. But their religion is a fraud - it lacks the power of the Spirit. It is a religion of self-righteousness, self-justification, and self-indulgence.

The description of these people is so extreme, that we are probably thinking that it couldn’t ever apply to us. But before we congratulate ourselves for not being like this, we must ask ourselves a searching question. Do I just have the “appearance” of godliness, or do I have the real thing? Under the surface, am I self-centred, or God-centred? What evidence of the power of the Spirit is there in my life?

## 2 Tim 3:6-9

*[Avoid such people].<sup>6</sup>For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions,<sup>7</sup>always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.<sup>8</sup>Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.<sup>9</sup>But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.*

### Weak Women

Paul has described a terrible situation where those in the church are living just like unbelievers, and this leaves the door open for kinds of other abuses. Some devious men were seeking to build up their own following, and were deliberately singling out certain women. The suggestion here is that these women were easy targets because they lacked the Spirit's power and were already morally compromised in some way. In this spiritually vulnerable state they would more easily be duped by false teaching.

### Corrupt Men

The false teachers are likened to "Jannes and Jambres", but who on earth are these two opponents of Moses? Their names are not found in the book of Exodus. The answer is that according to Jewish tradition, they were the magicians Moses encountered in Egypt. They seemed powerful and impressive at first, but ultimately they were exposed as frauds. Paul is confident that their movement will not succeed in the end, but like Moses, Timothy will need to stand up to them, and defeat them with a superior display of truth and power.

There are a number of lessons for us in these verses. First, we should seek to help and support those who are more spiritually vulnerable and immature, as they could become victims of unscrupulous false teachers. Second, we should not be surprised when opposition to the gospel arises from within the church itself. It is one of the devil's favourite tactics, and we need to be ready to stand firm against it. Third, we are to take heart in the knowledge that God's truth and power will prevail no matter the how great the opposition. Equipped with God's Word and his Spirit, we have the resources we need to stand firm against temptation and deception.



## 2 Tim 3:10-13

*<sup>10</sup>You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, <sup>11</sup>my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. <sup>12</sup>Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup>while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

### Who to follow

With so many false teachers around, who is Timothy to look to as a role model? Paul does not consider it arrogant to set himself forward as an example. He wants Timothy not just to follow his doctrine, but also to look at his way of life, how he lived out the gospel he proclaimed. There was an authenticity about Paul. He practiced what he preached, and he was willing to suffer for what he believed. Compared with the selfishly motivated false teachers, there was no doubt about whose faith was genuine and whose was fake.

What Paul says in verse 13 seems quite extreme. We like to think that persecution should be a very rare exception, and that most Christians should enjoy a pleasant trouble-free life. But persecution is presented here as an inevitable result of living a godly life. Of course, there are different levels of persecution. For some believers, beatings, imprisonment and even execution is faced. For those of us in western democracies it might simply being ridiculed, or finding ourselves at odds with increasingly secular laws. But the principle still applies. Following Jesus has a cost, and those who are truly committed to him will face consequences.

### Who to avoid

Of course, not all in Ephesus are looking to Paul as an example. They have been seduced by the ideas of the false teachers. They are in real peril as they are on a downward spiral. Small compromises with sin, if not repented of, lead to bondage to sin. The cycle of false teaching is also self-perpetuating, as those who have been deceived themselves become deceivers as they teach their poisonous ideas to others.

These verses challenge us to consider who we look to as role models. It is not necessarily the popular and successful people who are worthy of emulation. Instead, we should look for those like Paul, who are committed to the truth of God's word, whose lives contain abundant evidence of Spirit-empowered godliness, and who remain faithful to the Lord even in the face of suffering or persecution. We all need spiritually mature and wise people to help us in our walk with God, and we should all be seeking to become the sort of exemplary followers of Jesus that others can look to and learn from.

## 2 Tim 3:14-17

*<sup>14</sup>But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it <sup>15</sup>and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. <sup>16</sup>All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup>that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.*

### Wise for Salvation

In his two letters to Timothy, Paul has devoted a lot of space to warnings against false teachers. But is this all simply a power play? How can Timothy know for sure whether it is Paul or his opponents who are in the right? What is the standard by which we can discern truth from error? Paul answers this with an appeal not to his own authority, but to Scripture.

Timothy's religious upbringing meant he knew the Scriptures well. He not only had a thorough grasp of their contents, but firmly believed their message. So he would be able to test both Paul and his rival's teachings against Scripture and see for himself that Paul's apostolic gospel message was indeed faithful to God's Word<sup>27</sup>.

The most important reason to know the Scriptures is not so you can do well in Bible quizzes, or even so you can spot a false doctrine, but to make you "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus". In other words, God has given us the Bible in order to bring us to faith in Jesus as our Saviour. All approaches to Scripture that don't promote faith in Christ are to be avoided.

### Equipped for Good Works

But God's Word doesn't just stop at telling us how we may be saved. It is intensely practical and speaks to every area of life. Every part of it is inspired by God, which means we should pay attention to the whole of it, instead of focussing on a few favourite parts.

God's Word is our source of truth about God and ourselves, and it also functions as our training manual for righteous living. As we read it we learn what God wants us to know and how he expects us to behave. This means that God's Word will be confrontational, as our wrong ideas and sinful habits are challenged. We should expect the Spirit to graciously convict us as we read the Bible.

The purpose of the Bible is not simply to warn us against false beliefs and sinful actions. It contains a call for us to devote our lives to participating in the mission of God, which will involve all sorts of "good works".

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<sup>27</sup> Of course, at this point in history, much of the New Testament was still in the process of being written. Nevertheless, the gospel message is the fulfilment of the Old Testament, and Paul's teaching was in agreement with the other apostle's message which would later form the New Testament alongside Paul's writings.

The equipping we need to fulfil God's purposes for us will come as we allow him to direct our lives through his Word. The Bible therefore is not some kind of optional book you can read if you want to score some spiritual bonus points with God. Its message is vital for our salvation, our sanctification, and our mission.

## 2 Tim 4:1-4

*<sup>1</sup> I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: <sup>2</sup>preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. <sup>3</sup>For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, <sup>4</sup>and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.*

### Preachers of the Word

If the Word of God really is what Paul says it is, a book inspired by God, a book that makes us wise to salvation, a book that equips us for everything God calls us to, a book that shows us how we should live, then it is vital that Timothy passes on his knowledge of God's Word to the other believers. He is to make teaching the Word his consistent and regular habit, regardless of the changing circumstances of life.

God's Word must be the authority and bottom line for all preaching and teaching in the church. Those who disobey or contradict it must be rebuked, and those who are through laziness or ignorance not living in accordance with it must be urged to bring their lives into line with it. This requires patience, as lifestyle transformation takes time and is not usually achieved with just a single sermon.

The command to preach the Word is not a nice optional extra that Timothy can choose to ignore if he likes. Paul gives this command in the most solemn and forceful way he can, reminding Timothy that he will one day stand in the presence of God to face the judgment of Christ. Teaching the Word is a vital part of the job description of all elders in the church, and those who faithfully fulfil this obligation can look forward to that day on which they will be commended and rewarded by Jesus himself.

### Preachers of Myths

Sadly, not everyone will be receptive to the Word of God. We much prefer to hear messages that affirm rather than confront us, and so Paul warns that some will simply seek out preachers whose message they find comforting or exciting. In our own consumeristic society with easy access via books and internet to a huge variety of different teachings, this danger is just as present for us.

The challenge of these verses for elders is the importance of providing clear Biblical teaching that equips their church members to recognise and reject false teaching. And the challenge for all believers is to weigh everything we hear against the Word of God. What God says is not always what we would like to hear, but it will always do us good.

## 2 Tim 4:5-8

<sup>5</sup>As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfil your ministry.

<sup>6</sup>For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup>I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup>Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

### Fulfil Your Ministry

As Paul draws his letter to a close he issues a quickfire series of reminders to Timothy. First, he is to be *sober-minded*, mindful of the fact that he is in a spiritual battle and the stakes are high. Second, faithfulness to the gospel will result in opposition, so he needs to be prepared to *endure suffering*. Third, despite the internal problems within the church, he is not to lose sight of the bigger picture. There are many in Ephesus yet to be reached with the gospel, so he needs to *do the work of an evangelist*. Finally, in keeping with the prophecies already referred to in this letter, he is to remember the ministry that God has called him to and seek to fulfil it.

Timothy would have been tempted, given the difficult situation he found himself in, to retreat in some way, whether by moving to a new place, or by stopping evangelising, or by avoiding confrontation with the false teachers, or even by withdrawing from the church and simply focusing on his personal relationship with God. None of these are acceptable options. When God calls us to a ministry, we need to be committed to being obedient to that call, even if that means suffering and hardship.

### Finish the Race

Paul isn't asking Timothy to do anything he hasn't done himself. Paul's life story was one of persevering despite severe opposition. He realises that it is likely that he will soon be executed, and will stand face to face with Jesus. The prospect of execution must have been a very unpleasant one, and yet Paul's outlook is full of joyful hope.

The basis for his confidence is that he knows he has remained faithful to the Lord. He fought for truth right to the end. Like a runner in the Olympic games, he kept on going right to the finish line, and now he knows he will be rewarded for it. He refused to abandon the faith even when it put him in great danger.

Does this mean Paul thinks he has earned his salvation by his perseverance? Absolutely not. But he does believe that it is only those who endure to the end who can have confidence about facing the "righteous Judge" on the "Day". Fortunately, we are not required to endure in our own strength. The Holy Spirit is given to empower us to finish the race.

We should also not make the mistake of thinking that it is the threat of judgment that kept Paul going. His motivation was love for Jesus and a longing to be with him. Those who "love

his appearing” are those whose devotion to Jesus is so strong that for the joy set before them, their loyalty to him cannot be broken whatever the devil throws at them.

## 2 Tim 4:9-18

<sup>9</sup>Do your best to come to me soon. <sup>10</sup>For Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. <sup>11</sup>Luke alone is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is very useful to me for ministry. <sup>12</sup>Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. <sup>13</sup>When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and above all the parchments. <sup>14</sup>Alexander the coppersmith did me great harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. <sup>15</sup>Beware of him yourself, for he strongly opposed our message.

<sup>16</sup>At my first defence no one came to stand by me, but all deserted me. May it not be charged against them! <sup>17</sup>But the Lord stood by me and strengthened me, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion's mouth. <sup>18</sup>The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed and bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever. Amen.

### Friends and Enemies

Over the years of his missionary journeys Paul made many friends, and always worked in teams. Many of his co-workers were continuing to serve the Lord in other places. But there is also a note of sadness here as we hear of some who seem to have given up on the race. Demas has fallen in love with this present world, and has lost sight of the hope to come. There are fierce enemies to contend with, such as Alexander, who could become a threat to Timothy also.

Perhaps the greatest tragedy was that at his trial, no one came to speak in his defence. Paul was left all alone. Yet he graciously prays for the forgiveness of the cowardly believers who failed to stand with him. Now, with Luke alone willing to associate with him, Paul asks Timothy to join them. He asks for a cloak to be brought, perhaps indicating the cold conditions he is being kept in. But he also asks for certain books and parchments to be brought. Even in prison, he wants to continue with his study of the Scriptures and writing of letters to encourage the churches. He will put every moment to use for the cause of the gospel.

### The Faithful Friend

Paul understands and appreciates the value of Christian fellowship. That is why he wanted Timothy and Mark to join him. But he also knew that the ultimate comfort comes from knowing that God is with you. And as he stood alone in the Roman courtroom, he became aware that Jesus was standing there with him, strengthening him.

There was a real possibility at that first hearing that Paul would be executed. But God spared his life on that occasion because his mission to preach to the Gentiles was not quite complete. Paul now finds himself fully at peace. He knows God's plan cannot be thwarted, and that his heavenly reward cannot be taken from him. Even if he is to be executed, Timothy stands ready to carry on the task of mission, and Paul will be with his Lord. No wonder he breaks out in worship.

## 2 Tim 4:19-22

<sup>19</sup>Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. <sup>20</sup>Erastus remained at Corinth, and I left Trophimus, who was ill, at Miletus. <sup>21</sup>Do your best to come before winter. Eubulus sends greetings to you, as do Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brothers.

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

### Final Greetings

Paul closes his letter with some final personal greetings. Some of the names we know, such as Prisca and Aquila, a couple who faithfully have served God together. Others we know nothing else of, such as Trophimus who was so ill he had to be left behind. Even Paul, who had so often been used in miraculous healings, did not always see his prayers answered in the way he would like. The presence of sin, sickness and death cause us to long for the return of Christ, when we will be able to enjoy life as God always intended it, free from suffering and sin.

Time is short for Paul, so he urges Timothy to come before winter. Presumably he intends to give Timothy instructions about how the ongoing mission of the church should proceed. There are others named here as well, reminders that God continues to raise up people to fulfil his mission and even though a leader so significant as Paul should die, the church of God will prevail.

### You are not Alone

Paul has spoken in this letter of the encouragement that comes from knowing God is present with you in suffering. He wants Timothy (and us) to know the same. Whatever circumstances we find ourselves in, we too can know that the Lord is present with us by his Spirit. His grace is sufficient to enable us to endure suffering, persevere through difficulties, and remain faithful throughout.

This letter of 2 Timothy is a personal and poignant one. It reminds us that we are in a spiritual battle, and of the importance of persevering. It calls us to faithfulness to the Scriptures and challenges leaders to resist false doctrine. It gives us a sobering reminder that as followers of Jesus we too will experience persecution and suffering as he did, but we are not alone. Jesus stands with us whatever go through, and our endurance is fuelled by the joyful hope and eager anticipation of our future reward.



## Titus

### Titus 1:1-4

*<sup>1</sup>Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God's elect and their knowledge of the truth, which accords with godliness, <sup>2</sup>in hope of eternal life, which God, who never lies, promised before the ages began <sup>3</sup>and at the proper time manifested in his word through the preaching with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Saviour;*

*<sup>4</sup>To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Saviour.*

### From Paul

Paul could have just started this letter off with a simple “from Paul, to Titus”, but his opening sentence amounts to something of a gospel manifesto. He had a strong sense of his personal identity and calling. He was a servant and an apostle, and had been commanded to preach. But he was no self-appointed, self-important maverick. No, it was Jesus who had given him this commission and God who he was serving.

He sets out the goals of his ministry. He is working for faith, truth, and godliness, which lead to eternal life. “Faith” is fundamental to the Christian life, which is a life of complete trust in Jesus not only as the one who can save us, but also as the one who we follow. The “truth” speaks of the gospel message, as revealed in the Scriptures, which we are called to believe. The gospel is more than just forgiveness for sins, it is life transformation, and so “godliness” is the natural outworking of faith and knowledge of truth.

The gospel is also more than just lifestyle change in the present. There is a future hope associated with it, the hope of eternal life. Does this sound too good to be true? Can we really believe it? It rests on the character of God himself. God has promised it, and he never lies. The historical facts of the incarnation, life, death and resurrection of Jesus are themselves fulfilments of promises God made centuries before in his Word, and this gives us the confidence that he is a God who can be trusted.

### To Titus

We know from other letters that Paul often travelled with Titus<sup>28</sup> and held him in high regard. Though they are currently separated, serving God in different places, they are held together with a bond of common faith. Paul views Titus like his own son, and this was how he exercised his apostolic ministry, in the context of a deep mutual respect and loving friendship. So when he prays for grace and peace for Titus, these are no hollow words. He genuinely cares for him, and earnestly desires God's blessing for Titus.

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<sup>28</sup> There are lots of references to Titus in 2 Corinthians, especially in chapters 7 and 8. He is also mentioned in Gal 2:1,3 and 2 Tim 4:10

## Titus 1:5-9

*<sup>5</sup>This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you— <sup>6</sup>if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup>For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup>but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup>He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.*

### The Need for Elders

Paul was never in one place for a long time, so when he moved on, new churches needed to have spiritually mature leadership in place that would ensure that the churches remained faithful to the gospel. So he would sometimes leave behind one or more of his apostolic team, to continue the work, and ensure that each church was built on a solid foundation. This is what happened with Titus on the island of Crete, where there were now churches in a number of towns<sup>29</sup>.

However, this was only a temporary measure. The ideal is for every church to be led by elders, and so Titus' task was to identify suitable leaders and appoint them. Elders, or overseers, as they are sometimes called, form the leadership team of a church, and the New Testament pattern is that there should be more than one. But Titus is only to appoint someone to this office if they are of suitable character. An ill-chosen elder can do more harm than good, so Titus would also be training those with leadership potential, as well as appointing those who were ready.

### The Qualifications of Elders

The list of qualifications is very similar to the one in 1 Timothy 3, and is focused much more on character than gifting. One of the very practical ways Titus is given to assess someone's suitability for eldership is to look at the way he raises his children. Do they respect and obey him, and share his faith? If not, that is a strong indicator that he will not be able to lead well in the church.

His life is to be free from obvious sins<sup>30</sup>, whether sexual immorality, or anything associated with a lack of self-control, such as drunkenness, anger, or greed for money. This is important because an elder is an ambassador to unbelievers, and an example to believers. Moral failure in leaders will cause outsiders to dismiss the church's message, and those inside the church to assume that behaviour is not important.

As well as the absence of obvious vices, and elder's life should display abundant evidence of godliness. This is manifest in such characteristics hospitality, generosity, servant-heartedness. Whilst Paul does not explicitly say that a leader must be Spirit-filled, the

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<sup>29</sup> It is also possible that Paul never went personally to Crete, but that others from his apostolic team or churches he had founded were responsible for taking the gospel to Crete.

<sup>30</sup> The phrase "above reproach" or "blameless" is repeated twice in this passage

description we have is of a person in whose life the fruit of the Spirit are present in abundance.

The final qualification is doctrinal. Elders are to be firmly committed to the truth of the gospel. They are to know it well enough that they can teach it, and are also able to detect and refute heresy when it arises.

## Titus 1:10-16

*<sup>10</sup>For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. <sup>11</sup>They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. <sup>12</sup>One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." <sup>13</sup>This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, <sup>14</sup>not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth. <sup>15</sup>To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled. <sup>16</sup>They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.*

### Silence Them

Paul has just explained the need for elders who can combat false teaching, and in these verses he describes the problems the church in Crete is facing. There seems to be a variety of different heresies, and those promoting them are causing all kinds of problems for the house churches. These opponents lack respect for the apostolic authority of Paul and they have the audacity to ask for payment to peddle their errors. One such group, who Paul calls "the circumcision party", are doubtless attempting to incorporate adherence to the Jewish law into Christian faith. Other groups seem to be compromising Christian holiness by allowing the ungodly practices characteristic of the Cretan culture to creep into the church.

Titus' job is to "silence" them, which involves refuting their teachings from Scripture, and asserting his own authority in the church.

### Rebuke Them

The preferred method of "silencing" these false teachers is not to kick them out of the church, but see them brought round to a place of sound doctrine. This means confrontation is required. Titus, along with the newly appointed elders must be prepared to rebuke where necessary. The poem about Crete that Paul quotes reveals that the culture on this island was known for being particularly degenerate. This meant that there would be a lot of re-education required as converts learned what it means to live in a God-honouring way.

It is hard to determine exactly what Paul means by "to the pure, all things are pure". Perhaps the "circumcision party" were attempting to prohibit the eating of "unclean" meats. His point would therefore be that you cannot be defiled by what you eat. By contrast, these purveyors of "Jewish myths" have defiled consciences, and their lifestyle reveals that their claim to know God is in fact false. So however many external rituals they go through, they cannot make themselves pure.

False teaching in the church can come in both libertarian and legalistic form. One group gives the green light to all kinds of sin, while the other imposes a ban on all kinds of legitimate practices. Neither is compatible with the gospel, and the church must be prepared to confront both errors.

## Titus 2:1-5

*<sup>1</sup>But as for you, teach what accords with sound doctrine. <sup>2</sup>Older men are to be sober-minded, dignified, self-controlled, sound in faith, in love, and in steadfastness. <sup>3</sup>Older women likewise are to be reverent in behaviour, not slanderers or slaves to much wine. They are to teach what is good, <sup>4</sup>and so train the young women to love their husbands and children, <sup>5</sup>to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.*

### Older Men

This section of the letter begins some specific instructions aimed at different sub-groups within the community, including older and younger men, older and younger women, and slaves. Although the ethical demands of the gospel are the same for everyone, Paul was concerned to give very practical teaching addressing the diverse circumstances of life within the church. These instructions are in accordance with “sound doctrine”. In other words, right doctrine is not abstract truth to be believed, but has implications for every aspect of our daily lives.

Older men are addressed first. They may be in a position of wealth and authority within their communities, but they should not abuse their position. Instead of simply getting whatever they want, they are to exercise self-control. The dignified way they conduct themselves should be an example that younger men in the church can aspire to. In particular, they should be men of faith in God and sacrificial love for others, and should steadfastly persist in both.

### Older Women

Some of the older women in the church may have found themselves in a position they could overindulge in wine, which often would lead to gossip or foolishly irreverent talk. They needed to stop wasting their lives like this, and instead put their time to good use by disciplining the younger women in the church. This is an important principle in the church – those who are spiritually mature should seek opportunities to give spiritual input into the lives of others.

### Younger Women

The sort of training the younger women require is very practical. It includes how to relate to their children and their husbands. It may be that in this culture, some younger women left everything to the household servants, enjoying a self-indulgent lifestyle, and being generally disrespectful to their husbands. This is not the sort of behaviour that will help the church’s witness.

In our own day there are lots of pressures for young women to conform to what society says is good for them, so the church must present a compelling picture of the sort of God-honouring alternative lifestyle that Christian women should aspire to. Paul wants the older women in the church to be at the forefront of this training.

## Titus 2:6-10

*<sup>6</sup>Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled. <sup>7</sup>Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity, <sup>8</sup>and sound speech that cannot be condemned, so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us. <sup>9</sup>Slaves are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, <sup>10</sup>not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour.*

### Younger Men

Having addressed younger women, who are to be trained by the older women, Titus himself is to get involved with the training of younger men. It seems that Paul has a kind of mentoring in mind. Although there is an important place for preaching about these matters, often a more interactive discipleship approach can be better for tackling practical issues of daily life, in a context where questions can be asked, real life situations can be handled, and honest discussions can be held.

What the young men need most is self-control. The barrier to sin for young men in their culture, as in ours, is very low. They need to be clear in their minds what it means to be a godly young man. Titus can be a model, demonstrating a life characterised by good works, but also exemplary in speech. There are countless ways in which we can misuse our tongues, and so one of the most basic lessons for men is learning how not to speak, and what the right way to speak is.

### Slaves

Those who were slaves did not have an easy life. The expectations on them were high and they had few rights. They may have felt justified in getting away with whatever they could. But Paul urges Christian slaves to apply the gospel to their own lives and give the same kind of joyful, obedient service to their masters that all Christians owe to God. Stealing from their masters, whether by taking food or money, or by wasting their time, would doubtless come to light and would result in their masters thinking that the Christian gospel does not change people for the better.

In fact there is a very strong evangelistic theme running through all the commands in this section. Whether it is women honouring their husbands, men having integrity, or slaves being honest, Paul recognises that the world is watching, and when a person who calls themselves a “Christian” behaves disgracefully, it causes onlookers to reject the Christian message outright.

So if a Christian in the workplace is known as the sort of person who will take a “sick day” off when they are well, or claims more on expenses than they really spent, or runs personal errands on company time, they should not be surprised if their employer is not interested in hearing about Jesus. How we behave really matters. It matters to God, and it matters for the sake of those who don’t yet know Jesus.

## Titus 2:11-15

<sup>11</sup>For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, <sup>12</sup>training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, <sup>13</sup>waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ, <sup>14</sup>who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works.

<sup>15</sup>Declare these things; exhort and rebuke with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

### The Grace of God

Having given a series of very practical instructions for how we are to behave in our daily lives, Paul now introduces one of his favourite topics – the grace of God. It is not that Paul believes in a “balance” between grace on the one hand, and holiness on the other. He explains here that it is in fact grace that motivates and trains us to live these remarkably counter-cultural lives. In these verses we learn several truths about the nature of grace.

First, *grace is for all*. We are told here that God’s grace extends to all people. Not just the good ones. Not just the chosen Jewish people. God gave the ultimate demonstration of his grace in sending his Son to be the saviour of the world.

Second, *grace brings salvation*. We had done nothing to earn or deserve God’s saving intervention in human history. The only thing we had deserved was judgement, and we had no way of earning our way back into God’s good books. The only basis on which we can receive salvation is as a free gift.

Third, *grace brings transformation*. God intends more than simply letting us off the hook for our sins. He also wants total life transformation, and to rescue us from the self-destructive sinful habits of our former life. Far from giving us an excuse to do whatever we want, grace teaches us to completely renounce ungodly lifestyles and passions, and replaces them with a desire to live for God. One of the key ways in which the Spirit will enable us to do this is by giving us the self-control we will need to resist the temptation to revert into the world’s way of thinking and living.

### Our Blessed Hope

Fourth, *grace gives us a new hope*. The people in this world hope for success, better health, more money, to be liked and praised. None of these things last, and none of them bring ultimate satisfaction. God’s grace gives us something greater to look forward to, the return of Christ when we will finally get to live life as it was always intended to be in a recreated world justly and perfectly ruled by Jesus. This is the second of two “appearings” or “epiphanies” mentioned in these verses. The incarnation, the first coming of Christ, was the appearing of *grace*. His second coming is the appearing of *glory*.

Fifth, *grace brings us under new ownership*. We’ve not just been rescued from the old “lawless” way of life, but we are now God’s own possession. We belong to him, and that means our lives are dedicated to fulfilling his purpose. This is something we need to get

excited about. God has “good works” for us to be doing, and we should be chomping at the bit to get on with them.

This message of grace really matters. And this is why Paul tells Titus that he needs to preach it forcefully and authoritatively. As an overseer of the house churches in Crete, he has a responsibility to see that everyone understands the gospel of grace, and its implications for not just how we are saved, but how we are to live. This is not a take it or leave it doctrine. It is the heart of the Christian faith.



## Titus 3:1-7

*<sup>1</sup>Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup>to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarrelling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people. <sup>3</sup>For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup>But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Saviour appeared, <sup>5</sup>he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, <sup>6</sup>whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Saviour, <sup>7</sup>so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.*

### The Good Life

As we have seen, the gospel of grace doesn't just save us, it also changes us and makes us "zealous for good works". So now Paul explains how this applies to wider relationships within society. Yes, we are under the lordship of Christ, but that doesn't mean we can ignore the law of the land. We ought to be exemplary citizens, paying our taxes and obeying the law. The good work that we are called to do also goes beyond the bounds of the church. We are called to bring blessing to our communities.

Christians are also to avoid getting into quarrels or fights. This requires us to cultivate gentleness and courtesy and to refuse the temptation to speak evil of others, even when they have hurt or upset us. We should be known for the gracious and civil way we interact with even those who are hostile towards us.

### The Old Life

Becoming a Christian involves a radical turnaround, where we leave behind our old way of life. This old life is characterised by foolishness, disobedience, conflict and hatred towards other people. It is a life in pursuit of passions and pleasures, which on the surface of things sounds like a life of freedom. But it is in fact a life of slavery. The pursuit of happiness through sinful self-indulgence will never bring the satisfaction we desire.

### The New Life

Verses 4-7 contain a beautiful summary of our salvation. It reveals the character of our Saviour God to us – his goodness and loving kindness. It reminds us of the grounds of our salvation – not because of righteous works we have done, but on the basis of God's mercy alone. It explains how we are saved – by being washed clean, by being made new, and being justified by grace. It lists the present blessings of our salvation – we've had the Holy Spirit richly poured out on us, and the future benefits – we are now "heirs" who will one day fully inherit our future hope of eternal life.

Whether or not our old life was quite as chaotic as some of these Cretan believers, the turnaround is just as dramatic when we are saved. God completely remakes us, fills us with his Spirit, makes us his own children, and gives us a new hope. We are now called to live in the light of this new reality, leaving behind the old life, and living in a new way that reflects the goodness and loving kindness of God.

## Titus 3:8-10

*<sup>8</sup>The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people. <sup>9</sup>But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup>As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, <sup>11</sup>knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.*

### Devoted to Good Works

A prominent recurring theme throughout the book of Titus is the importance doing “good works”<sup>31</sup>. Paul is very clear that these works do not save us – our salvation is entirely based on the grace and mercy of God<sup>32</sup>. So it is about time we stopped imagining that these two themes are in any sort of conflict. We are both saved by grace and called to devote ourselves to good works. Ignoring either truth produces a seriously distorted Christianity.

To be devoted to good works means intentionality. Those who say “if I see a need and I happen to have the spare time, expertise and resources to meet that need, *then* I will do something about it”, are essentially planning to do nothing. Those who are devoted to good works think and pray about exactly how they can use their unique talents and resources in order to serve others. Then they deliberately make time in their schedules to do so. Too many of us are merely devoted to the *idea* of doing good works, which different from actually doing good works.

### Divisiveness

The good works are a good alternative to another way of spending your time, and that is being argumentative and divisive. There seems little doubt that Paul loved theology and enjoyed spending time discussing it and debating it. But he was also aware that it can quickly turn into an unprofitable and divisive exercise as people get sidetracked into all kinds of strange ideas. In focusing in on these obscure details and arguing about them, they had lost sight of the gospel, and their focus was on being right about everything, rather than doing what is right in every situation.

Titus is given instructions to utilise church discipline in this situation. The first step is a warning, probably given in private, assuming Paul has Jesus’ teaching in Matt 18:15-17 in mind. This gives them a chance to repent without being unnecessarily shamed by a more public rebuke. However, a second warning is sometimes necessary. This may need to involve other elders in the church, to show a united front that the church cannot accept this divisiveness. The third step, and last resort is excommunication. Their divisive influence cannot be allowed to continue disrupting the church. Administering this sort of discipline is not pleasant, but it is vital for the health of the church, and it requires elders with wisdom, courage and grace to apply it properly.

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<sup>31</sup> See also Titus 2:7,14; 3:1,14

<sup>32</sup> See Titus 3:4, 2 Tim 1:9

## Titus 3:12-15

*<sup>12</sup>When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. <sup>13</sup>Do your best to speed Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way; see that they lack nothing. <sup>14</sup>And let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful.*

*<sup>15</sup>All who are with me send greetings to you. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all.*

### Final Instructions

These final instructions about travel arrangements may mean little to us since we don't know much about the characters involved. What they do tell us is that Paul was still committed working as part of a team, taking various young men with him as he trained them up, before sending them off on mission assignments of their own as apostolic delegates. Artemas or Tychicus will probably bring this letter to Crete, and may well take over from Titus' role temporarily to allow him to return to Paul.

Titus is to see that Apollos and Zenas "lack nothing", indicating that Paul intends the churches on Crete to take responsibility for funding the pioneer apostolic mission work that these two men were involved in. Every local church ought to have the same willingness to use its resources to see God's kingdom advance throughout the world.

Yet again, Paul stresses the importance of good works. Helping with urgent needs is exactly the sort of good work that Christians should be eager to get involved with. Although we cannot meet every need that presents itself, whenever there is an urgent need that is in our capability to help with, then we should be eager to volunteer. Sacrificial self-giving is essential for a life of fruitfulness.

### Final Greetings

The closing greetings reveal the depth of love that ought to exist between believers in different churches. It can be too easy for us to focus so narrowly on our own church that we forget that we are part of a worldwide family of the people of God. We should do what we can to cultivate a genuine affection for our brothers and sisters in other local congregations.

As always, Paul's primary prayer is for grace. There is false teaching to be confronted, there are issues of lifestyle to be addressed, there are good works to be getting on with. But none of this is to be done in our own strength, or in an attempt to earn God's love. Our salvation is by grace, and yet more grace is freely available to us in order that we may accomplish all that God desires of us.