

Notes on 1 Timothy

Commentary and Application

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DEDICATION

To all those who have put their hand to the plow to labor in
pastoral ministry — and to the churches which care for them
— grace and peace.

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AUTHOR'S NOTE

This book is meant to be read with your Bible! Each chapter deals with a portion of Scripture from 1 Timothy and the best way to navigate these pages is using the Bible as your guide. It is my prayer that in doing so your affection for God's Word will grow and you will find yourself in good company with the Berean saints who, "received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11)

CHAPTER 1 | 1 TIMOTHY 1:1-4

1 Timothy is part of what is collectively referred to as the Pastoral Epistles. The Pastoral Epistles are a subset of Paul's writings (having authored 13 total letters that are included in the 27 books of the Protestant canon).

The Pastorals represent some of Paul's last writings and are unique in their scope and function.

While Paul's other letters (with the exception of Philemon) were written to whole churches or groups of churches, the Pastorals were written specifically to individuals (Timothy and Titus, respectively) to address unique aspects of developing church life.

While the Pastorals are authored to individuals, they still deal with doctrine (as in Paul's other letters). They have a corrective or instructional tone to them and give us unique insights into the development and challenges of the first-century church.

While scholars have endeavored to place these letters and the places that Paul refers to in concordance with the history of the book of Acts (such as Macedonia in 1 Tim 1:3; cf.

Acts 19-20), they have not reached a universal consensus on these matters.¹

While the specific details of this portion of Paul's ministry elude us, we can infer from the material at hand that Paul conducted ministry activities in Ephesus and Macedonia.

Furthermore, if we agree with a late date for the authorship of these letters (which is nearly universally accepted), there appears to be a period of time following the close of the book of Acts, following Paul's first Roman imprisonment, near the final years of Paul's ministry which included him re-visiting these areas for one purpose or another (Acts 20:25 notwithstanding).

As has been stated, 1 Timothy is addressed to a singular individual well-known to Bible students, Paul's trusted companion, Timothy (see Acts 16:1-3). And it is believed, by examining the content of this letter, that Timothy was in the midst of some very challenging ministry at Ephesus.

Now, Paul's letter to the Ephesians pre-dates 1 Timothy by a couple of years (Ephesians being one of the "Prison Epistles"). What we know of Paul's own ministry among the Ephesians can be found in Acts 19, where we learn of his instruction to them regarding the Holy Spirit, followed by more than two years of personal disciple-making and evangelism in the city of Ephesus, a regional capital well-known for its temple to the Greek goddess Diana. This certainly would have made for difficult ministry conditions. Its society was steeped in idolatry, sexual perversion, and commercialism.

We also know that it was common for Paul to dispatch

¹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 71.

Timothy to churches that needed special attention and pastoral care since Timothy was regarded by Paul as uniquely like-minded and a man who cared deeply for God's people (1 Cor 4:17; Phil 2:19-20; 1 Thess 3:1-3).

It stands to reason then that Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus (or perhaps left him there) to deal with the most pressing issues facing the Ephesian church and its local congregations. And 1 Timothy introduces us to some of the most controversial issues handled by the Scriptures, informing us of the vulnerability and need for right doctrine among all churches.

Some of these issues are issues that we still struggle with today, such as false doctrine versus orthodox doctrine, how to deal with false teachers, the roles of men and women in church leadership, the qualifications of church leaders, how the church is to relate to worldly governments, how to care for widows, church discipline, supporting pastors, and more.

Do you see the picture being painted? Just think about it – how old and how mature was the first-century church?

Often, we view the first church through rose-colored glasses. We look to their early successes, their faith, their non-negotiables (Acts 2:42), and their impact on society (Acts 17:6), but we dismiss their struggles.

But, what was happening was a great movement of God among society based primarily on oral accounts of the person and work of Jesus Christ. The New Testament Scriptures were in their infancy and just beginning to circulate. The church's Bible at that time would have been some form of the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the OT. Through much prayer and reliance on the Holy Spirit, churches were learning how to organize, what doctrines were essential, and how to keep the faith and endure over the long term – looking to the

expected return of Christ.

And Jesus Christ preserved His church in His grace by the power of the Holy Spirit and the faithful work of the Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors, and Teachers He appointed to shepherd them (Eph 4:11-14).

But in this context, much confusion was propagated both intentionally and unintentionally. Good, God-fearing, born-again believers erred in doctrine and practice and needed to be corrected (see all of Paul's other letters!).

And bad actors were exploiting the vulnerability of this new entity born by the Holy Spirit (the church) for their own benefit.

The organization of the churches and “what right looked like” was far from being established or normative.

In this context, the Pastoral Epistles were penned to address the most pressing issues and reinforce the integrity, duty, and holiness of Christ's church, administered by imperfect humans. Paul writes to Timothy with explicit and detailed instructions (framed in the grace, mercy, and peace of God) on how to care for God's flock and be their shepherd.

Now, these instructions to Timothy are equally binding upon the flock. The sheep and the shepherd are mutually interdependent, existing in relationship with one another. As George Knight writes, “In effect the church is written to through Timothy.”²

Just as Timothy was charged with ensuring that these instructions were acted upon in love, faithfulness, and obedience to Christ, so also the Body shared in the divine responsibility of ensuring that these instructions were indeed

² Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 59.

carried out. As we will see, the church bears the primary responsibility of living out these doctrines in real time, caring for one another, maintaining accountability, stewardship, etc.

We give thanks to God for such clear instructions – even though we may resist them at specific points (especially with regard to human sexuality, gender roles, and ministerial qualifications within Christ’s kingdom).

Certainly, much critical scholarship has sought to diminish the force of the Pastoral Epistles (and the rest of the Scriptures) to evade the plain meaning of the text.

But we who believe endeavor to place ourselves **under** the Scriptures rather than over the Scriptures as the arbiters of truth.

God’s Word is true, and we would do well to abide by it and have our consciences and our Spirits formed by it, to be shaped into God’s image by it, and to be made new by God’s Word, rather than seeking to shape God’s Word into our image. And this we shall do with God’s help.

Having said all of that, it is good to reflect upon the opening lines of Paul’s first letter to Timothy.

V. 1 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope,³

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

Paul is the self-identified author of this letter.⁴ While some have made it their business to cast aspersions on this generally accepted fact, we have no reason to challenge the authenticity of this letter. The theology and tone fit nicely within the Pauline corpus (acknowledging that there are those who take umbrage with the vocabulary and style).⁵

Furthermore, this introduction matches the introductions that Paul used in his other writings introducing himself as an Apostle and basing his apostolic authority upon God's command, calling, election, and will.⁶

⁴ "Scholarly opinion is divided on whether the Pastoral Letters were written by the apostle Paul or by someone else, perhaps a disciple of the apostle who wanted to write with Paul's authority. Most commentaries devote adequate space to the discussion of this matter. Whichever position is taken, the letters themselves state clearly that it was the apostle Paul who was speaking in these letters." Daniel C. Arichea and Howard Hatton, *A Handbook on Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, UBS Handbook Series (New York: United Bible Societies, 1995), 1.

⁵ "Doubt about Paul's authorship stems primarily from differences in vocabulary and grammatical style that appear when the Pastorals are compared with other Pauline letters. Comparisons consist of statistical tables, sometimes drawn up with the aid of computers. But this scientific-sounding objection to Pauline authorship does not take sufficient account of differences in vocabulary and style as caused by differences in subject matter and addressees and by changes in a person's writing style because of environment, age, experience, and the sheer passage of time. Perhaps even more significant is the possibility that stylistic differences stem from different amanuenses and from Paul's giving greater freedom to his amanuenses in the exact wording of his thoughts at some times than at other times. An appeal to amanuenses is sometimes scorned as too easy and scientifically uncontrollable. But it is historically realistic." Robert H. Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012), 483.

⁶ On occasion, Paul instead introduces himself as a servant or prisoner of the Lord (cf. Rom 1:1; Phil 1:1; Tit 1:1; Phm 1:1).

We must endeavor to consider these introductory lines each time we come across them and resist the urge to skim over them because we are so used to hearing them. After all, we believe that **all** Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim 3:16).

What we learn from these verses or what can be reinforced from them is that God alone chooses who will enter into His service.

Ideally, it is by God's authority alone that those who are called enter into ministry. And it is to God's authority that we appeal when we put our hand to the plow-share and labor in His field (1 Cor 3:9).

No man who approaches the pulpit or who shares in the task of shepherding God's flock can rightly do so based upon his own merit or authority.

We who are called to the work appeal to the authority of the Scriptures as revealed by God, and we rely upon the Spirit of God to illuminate the Scriptures for both the speaker and the hearer.

This thought is sometimes in contradiction to the contemporary professionalization of the clergy.

Across the globe, we have become very good at creating efficient (and expensive) systems that produce "ministers." **But** first things first, it is God who calls and equips!

No amount of seminary education (though certainly beneficial and for which I am personally an advocate) can **call** somebody into God's service.

And what's truly remarkable is that no lack of seminary education can keep somebody who is truly called or commanded into God's service by God Himself out of it (1 Cor 1:26-29)!

Now, before we cheer on an anti-intellectual ministry position, we must acknowledge that the Apostle Paul himself

did have formal training and education in the Scriptures. The church benefited tremendously from his understanding of the Scripture, even though what he had been taught was only a shadow or incomplete picture of the gospel, being focused on the Law and Pharisaism.

In addition, we also see Paul command Timothy to, “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” (2 Tim 2:15 ESV).

So, there is a balance that we must strike here.

It is God alone who calls people and qualifies them for His service. **And** we can be sure that those who are truly called and have embraced their calling and election understand their own limitations and weaknesses. They know that they need to learn and grow! Those who are called *are teachable* and *will* labor diligently in God’s Word as an act of worship unto the Lord to properly care for those whom the Lord has committed to their care.

Paul certainly understood this in his own life: “But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1Cor 15:10).

This is to be our heart as well, giving all for the glory of the Lord, though it will cost us some effort along the way.

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

Paul writes to his protege and trusted companion Timothy. Notice the paternal language that Paul uses here, calling

Timothy a “true child in the faith.” This is a term of endearment and not meant to give any indication of Timothy’s spiritual maturity.

We understand that Timothy’s maturity was advanced enough for Paul to send him on the most challenging ministry assignments.

We see that Paul loved Timothy like a son and had Timothy’s best interests in mind, understanding that Timothy was certainly “in the thick of it.”

Notably too, Paul commends God’s grace, mercy, and peace to his beloved child in the faith.

As we dig into the details of this letter, we will see that Timothy certainly had his hands full and had to deal with topics that make pastors squeamish today. So then, it is good to remember the basics of the faith and the gifts God has given us through Jesus Christ – grace, mercy, and peace.

These attributes are to categorize our own ministries, especially when we have to deal with sensitive topics that can cause division in the church.

It is good and right – and always timely – to remember that we are favored by God irrespective of any of our own merit, that God has passed over us in judgment because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that we have peace with the Father through the cross (Col 1:20).

Oh, how much steadier our ministries would be if we truly framed all of our activities, all of our preaching, all of our worship, all of our outreach in these – grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is my prayer that we will do so intentionally and thoughtfully.

Vv. 3-4 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, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.

Arichea and Hatton offer us some assistance in understanding the force of Paul's "urging," writing, "As I urged you' will be expressed in some languages as, 'I asked you very strongly,' or even idiomatically in others; for example, 'As I pressed your heart to.'"⁷

It was a big deal, a matter of first importance, for Timothy, as Paul's representative in Ephesus, to confront, correct, and instruct people who were abandoning the straightforward truth of the gospel, the foundational doctrines of the faith for cheap substitutes.

Now, what could these things have been? The text does give us a partial idea of the message of these false teachers. As we review these, let us consider what these things could be in our own time.

First, the main category of what Paul is urging Timothy to stand against is "any different doctrine."

Timothy is to compel people who consider themselves church members to stop teaching doctrines different from what should be taught: those plain foundational truths upon which the church is founded.

In the first century, the church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ himself being the chief cornerstone (Eph 2:20). What does that

⁷ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 13.

mean? It means that the teachings of the apostles and prophets, namely those concerning the gospel of Jesus Christ, were the bedrock of the first church!

What do we have that speaks to that same foundation today? God's Word! The Bible!

So, anything that contradicts the testimony of the Biblical apostles and prophets, the Bible, is a different doctrine that ought not to be taught within Christ's holy church!

Furthermore, we see that Timothy was instructed to correct those people who were devoting themselves to things that were not beneficial to their spiritual well-being and, again, were in contradiction or at least outside the bounds of God's Word.

Please take careful note of the term "devote," as Paul uses it. This verb, προσέχω // *proseko*, holds within its range of meaning the idea that Christians within the church of Ephesus were paying more attention to, spending more time on, questionable doctrines and debatable topics over and above the truth of God's Word. What a shame!

Nevertheless, if we're being honest, we know that many struggle with this same thing today. The message is clear. Don't do it!

These people were spending their effort, time, and resources and devoting themselves to myths and endless genealogies.

Now we all know what myths are; they are still taught today. We understand that they are not true but are meant to convey some sort of moral principle. We study them to understand how ancient humans viewed creation, society, morality, etc.

However, in this context, Christians were giving more

time and energy to myths than their own true faith!⁸ This was a great cause for alarm and correction. Bear in mind that the Ephesian Christians lived at the epicenter of the cult of Diana, a prominent Greek goddess. So the temptation to participate in this kind of thing and to mash that mythology (Greek **or** Jewish mythology and mysticism – Tit 1:14) into their new faith was certainly present.

Some Christians like to do the same thing today. They take the truth of the gospel and mix and match different world religions, worldviews, political views, and more into one gross amalgamation of beliefs.⁹ This is unhealthy, unbiblical, and ultimately unfruitful for the Jesus follower. We follow Christ alone, being filled with His Spirit alone, having our worldview and understanding shaped by Him.

Furthermore, these Christians were going down the rabbit-hole of what Paul calls “endless genealogies.” Knight notes, “Exactly what the terms refer to remains uncertain.”¹⁰ And we would do well to leave it at that, rather than jumping down the rabbit hole ourselves in pursuit of speculation.

What is certain is that the pursuit of these things doesn't

⁸ “μῦθος [mythos//myth] is uniformly used in the NT to refer to a tale, legend, myth, or fable regarded as untrue. Here the myths (and genealogies) are said to give rise to mere speculation and to be contrary to the οἰκονομίαν θεοῦ [household of God]; in 4:7 they are qualified by the designations ‘worldly’...and ‘for old women’.Tit. 1:14 designates them as ‘Jewish,’ 2 Tim. 4:4 as that which people turn to when they turn away from the truth (see also 2 Pet. 1:16). Hence, ‘myth’ for Paul (and Peter) is an unreal tale that only the gullible believe and follow, which produces nothing of value.” Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 73.

⁹ This is a practice known as syncretism and was one of the primary sins of Israel in the OT.

¹⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 74.

appear to produce any benefit or good fruit in the life of the believer. Instead, they bring some sort of neurotic speculation that obsesses over the unknowables or probables rather than embracing the key truths of the Scriptures that are plain to us.

In fact, what these Christians are supposed to be directed toward is “the stewardship from God that is by faith.”

Focusing on these other doctrines, myths (even Christian myths in our age), and talk of spiritual pedigrees and family trees does not add to the work of God’s people done in faith for His kingdom. Instead, they are an ugly distraction, and, at worst, can be harmful to ourselves and others.

Rather, we are to remain firmly anchored in the certainty of God’s Word and resist those who would sway us to the left or the right or obscure the truth and distract God’s people from doing God’s work.

Our heart’s desire is to be about our Father’s business as revealed to us in His Word and to remain firmly anchored in grace, mercy, and peace.

May the grace, mercy, and peace of God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

CHAPTER 2 | 1 TIMOTHY 1:5-11

V. 5 The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith.

Paul gave a command to Timothy in the preceding verses: “[R]emain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (1 Tim 1:3-4).

Here Paul states the goal of having Timothy stay in Ephesus and challenge false teachers who were serving as agents of instability within the church. This is super important!

We see here the idea of “speaking the truth in love” (Eph 4:15).

Timothy’s ministry was not simply to be the loudest voice in the room as he went about correcting those who were teaching bad doctrine, promoting speculative issues, myths, and the study of family trees.

Sometimes we can erringly equate volume with virtue.

If we don’t exercise the proper amount of discernment, we can be convinced that perhaps the loudest, most brash, most offensive person in the room is right. Not so!

While Timothy was charged with correcting these errors, we learn that the entire goal wasn’t just to be right or win an intellectual argument.

In fact, Paul writes that the purpose of addressing these issues is love! This should not come as any surprise to the authentic Jesus follower. Love is the goal.

As Jesus Himself taught, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets” (Matt 22:37-40).

It is love that we are concerned with. Love is our primary motivation and means for standing in the truth, with big hearts and open arms, teaching the truth of God’s Word.

Now, with so much world-view confusion and the notion that an abstract idea like love can be re-defined at the discretion of almost anyone, we must discover exactly what the source of this Biblical love is.

Paul gives us the sense. Love comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

Let’s spend some time briefly examining these. Since we are in the realm of the abstract, we want to be sure that we understand what the author meant as inspired by the Holy Spirit and not simply what is convenient for us in the moment.

So if our main goal is love and true love is derived from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith, we want to make sure that we are all speaking about the same thing and that our terms of reference are uniform.

First and foremost, a pure heart doesn’t simply mean that we feel good about our moral decisions, so we are able to

fabricate love.

The word “pure” (καθαρός // *katharos*) may also be rendered as “clean.”

Now we’re really in a quandary. What does having a clean heart mean? We could theologize about this for quite some time, but we shall appeal to a basic meaning.

The standard in academia for the Greek language of the NT, known as BDAG (after its author and editors), proposes that Paul’s usage of the term καθαρός in this particular instance communicates the sense of “pert[aining] to being free from moral guilt, pure, free fr[om] sin.”¹¹

So we have to possess the right heart before we can make assertions about false teachings, before we can love people truly.

Sure, we can be the loudest person in the room; that doesn’t take much. But to love with a pure heart takes the work of Jesus Christ and the regeneration of our cold, dead hearts by His Spirit.

This ideal love also comes from a good conscience, a conscience and an understanding shaped by Christ through His Spirit and what He has revealed to us by His word.

Any unbeliever may claim to have a “good conscience” regarding the sin they indulge in or permit. The false teacher may claim to have a “good conscience” in their deception, being deceived themselves. **But** we must have a good conscience formed by Christ Himself if we desire to exercise

¹¹ William Arndt et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 489.

this true love.

Finally, the last conjoined element that may produce true love for God and others is a sincere faith. The object of that deeply rooted faith is Christ alone. It is not in world systems, or clever arguments, or speculative theology, or mythical Christianity, or any other form of syncretistic worship. Our faith is *by* Christ and *in* Christ. And it is Christ who turns our hearts toward others in love.

V. 6 Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion.

Now Paul makes his point clear that there is a delineation of sorts between those who hold these characteristics and are grounded in love speaking truth and those who have forsaken the way of Jesus for something else.

William Mounce writes: “[Timothy’s] opponents did not choose to follow the heresy because it was intellectually more acceptable; they chose to abandon love. In other words, the root of the heresy was not an intellectual but a moral problem.”¹²

They had abandoned or thrown away love and all the markers that show it to be true – a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith. And what did they trade those things for? Vain discussion! What a shame! They left the very real, powerful, impactful love of Christ for nothing except perhaps a few moments of stroking their own ego as they

¹² William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, Word Biblical Commentary 46 (Dallas: Word, 2000), 26.

pretended to know more than they actually did.

In fact, the text reads that these heretics in Ephesus actually departed from these elements, which produce love by “swerving” from them.

Various Bible translations present that term (ἀστοχέω // *abstokeoh*) differently, but the sense is, “[To] ‘miss the mark,’ ... of the inner life to go astray by departing from moral or spiritual standards, miss, fail, deviate, depart.”¹³

What is vain discussion? Fruitless or worthless talk. While we can imagine a thousand forms of fruitless talk that have invaded pulpits across the land, we learn more of this meaningless discussion in the next few verses.

V. 7 desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

These people were turning from what was certain and had made an impact in their community toward something else because they desired to be religious teachers without knowing what they were actually talking about!

That is the danger of teaching about spiritual matters. Everybody has an opinion, and everybody desires for their opinion to be valid, but not many have a strong desire to do the interpretive work in a systematic, committed, disciplined way to come to a carefully reasoned conclusion.

This type of vain-glorious pontification by spiritual posers would never fly in any of the hard sciences. These types of

¹³ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 146.

charlatans would immediately be discovered as frauds because of a lack of command of the subject matter.

Somebody posing as an engineer or mathematician would be instantly revealed as a fraud if they offered up their gut feeling or emotional instinct regarding an engineering problem while not understanding the math!

But, oddly enough, we don't hold Bible teachers, the quasi-spiritual, or cultists to the same standards. We brush off their ignorance as an "interpretive difference."

Now, to be sure, there are points of disagreement among Bible scholars on certain issues that we would often characterize as ancillary or peripheral issues.

And still, there are generally accepted interpretive principles (hermeneutics) founded upon contextual analysis, language skills, authorial intent, and foundational theological principles that the vast majority of Christians hold to!¹⁴

And what's more – faithful Jesus followers all hold to the key tenets of the faith. Those who do not hold to the primary doctrines of the faith (such as the virgin birth, the doctrine of the Trinity, the divinity of Christ, substitutionary atonement, the cross, the physical resurrection, the imminent return of Christ, heaven and hell, and the authority and inerrancy of Scripture,) have been judged as mishandling Scriptures (or perhaps not paying any attention to them at all) and violating the basic principles of interpretation from the very beginning. That is part of what Paul is saying to Timothy

¹⁴ It is important to note here that the very basics of a faithful hermeneutic demand that we do not allow our theology to shape our interpretation but that we allow the faithful interpretation of Scripture to guide our theology.

here.

While these people desire to be teachers, for one reason or another, they don't know what they're talking about! And we would do well to take note of those who have claimed the name teacher today while abusing the Scriptures for their own ends.

Remember what James wrote: "Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness" (James 3:1).

V. 8 Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully.

It appears that the specific heresy that Timothy was facing in Ephesus was some form of Jewish mystic legalism.

More often than not, when Paul uses the term "the law" in his writings, he is referring to the OT religious-legal requirements, which include the Decalogue (the Ten Commandments) and the rest of the Jewish covenantal requirements.

But look at what Paul says about the law – the law is good if one uses it lawfully. That is quite a clever wordplay on Paul's part.

And we agree! The law is good, if it's used lawfully! Now that phrase may make some Christians uncomfortable, especially those who have been wounded by legalists or those in the Hebrew Roots cult, but let us examine what the Bible has to say about the law.

In Romans 7, Paul addresses the idea that since the law

and all of its requirements were so heavy and by the law people came to know sin, the law was in fact an agent for sin!

Paul expounds upon this very matter: “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ But sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, produced in me all kinds of covetousness. For apart from the law, sin lies dead. I was once alive apart from the law, but when the commandment came, sin came alive and I died. The very commandment that promised life proved to be death to me. For sin, seizing an opportunity through the commandment, deceived me and through it killed me. So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good” (Rom 7:7-12).

So, the relationship between sin and the law and the flesh and the spirit displayed here in Romans 7 leads us to our next question. Since the law is not simply a matter of following a bunch of rules and being made righteous by those rules, what is the point?

Paul addresses the issue similarly in Galatians: “For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, ‘Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.’ Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for ‘The righteous shall live by faith.’ ... Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin,

so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe. Now before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith” (Gal 3:10-11, 21-26).

So then, the purpose of the law is to confine all under sin, informing us along the way of our incompleteness, our sin, our imperfections.

The law serves, as it were, like a spiritual mirror to us, revealing our true condition, our rage or indifference toward a holy God, and our injustice toward our fellow man. In short, the law shows us how short we are of the first goal that Paul set forward, that we are, in fact, incapable of love in our own strength. We have no strength to love God and others as we ought! We must be redeemed and made new.

Paul elaborates on this in the following verses.

V. 9a understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just, but for the lawless and disobedient,

Now before we mount a high horse, we must admit that we all were once soldiers under the banner of lawlessness and disobedience, slaves to sin, and slaves of the basic principles of worldliness (Gal 4:3).

But by the grace of God we have been redeemed!

Furthermore, there may be a double meaning in the

statement that the law is not laid down for the righteous. For just as the purpose of the law was not to make any righteous, we also know that those who have been made righteous by faith in Christ are no longer under the requirement of the law. It has been fulfilled once and for all by Christ! (Matt 5:17; Col 2:13-14)

Vv. 9b-11 for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted.

Some commentaries suggest that as Paul describes for whom the law is especially designed, he offers this list of sins to reflect the Ten Commandments.¹⁵ As we go through the following list, which Paul sets forth to encapsulate the principles of God's law over mankind, we must admit that, before Christ, we may find ourselves in any or many of these categories.

We could examine each of these sins separately (and that would certainly be fruitful to help us understand exactly what Paul is referring to), but it is sufficient to say that the entire point is that the law confines all under sin!

¹⁵ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 378.

And, from a strictly moral standpoint, most people are inclined to agree that most of these named sins are abhorrent to anybody's sensibilities.

When it comes to people who are admittedly godless, or profane, or who physically abuse their parents, or who commit murder, or commit adultery, or participate in human trafficking, or are pathological liars, or who violate their oaths, we intuitively know that those things are damaging to the person who does them and others (there is always collateral damage), and these acts are opposed to God's holiness and His heart. **And** they are blatant violations of God's law.

As far as I can tell, the only sin in this list that we have a hard time calling sin in our current culture is homosexuality.

There are Christians today doing theological gymnastics to get around the plain meaning of the text, literally swerving into vain discussions and semantic arguments to evade the force of the Scripture.

In this context, the Apostle places the one who indulges in homosexuality on the same plane with all of these other actions that are indisputably violations of God's law. So it stands to reason that homosexuality is, in fact, a violation of God's law.

Now, what does this mean for us?

Well, first and foremost, this list of sins is not exhaustive. Notice that Paul concludes his list of examples with the phrase, "whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine."

So, these aren't the only ways we violate God's holiness, wounding ourselves and others. As humans in a fallen

creation, we are experts at inventing evil (Rom 1:30). This proves our need for a redeemer!

Furthermore, let me be exceedingly clear; those characterized by these sins are not beyond God's reach or love.

It is common for Christians to be truly ugly towards those living a homosexual lifestyle. **But** how does that square with Paul's earlier statement: "The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith"?

And, if we're being honest, some Christians are intentionally ugly toward any number of people whom they feel violate their sensibilities.

However, it is not primarily our sensibilities we should be concerned about! It is God's holiness and the ever-present danger that those living a life in violation of God's holiness find themselves in! The ones who have not received Christ by faith are in imminent peril, incomplete, and mortally wounded. And they may not even know it!

May the Lord help us to approach such people with the care and earnestness of the Lord Jesus rather than an executioner!

Finally, a word of hope. Do not despair, Christian, and do not rage against the Lord concerning those who are presently apart from Him. They are not outside of His reach.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul addressed a church that was facing all kinds of problems. At first glance, what he writes seems really rough, like an indictment. But Paul ends with such a hopeful message that we ought to hear: "Or do you not know

that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. ***And such were some of you. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God***" (1 Cor 6:9-11, emphasis added).

The message is clear – the message of the gospel is not closed to sinners. Jesus Christ came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

It has been said, and it bears repeating, that Jesus loves us just as we are, but He loves us too much to let us stay that way.

Whatever our vices are, Christ's desire is to rid us of them by His Spirit so that we might be made into His image and be made holy. He desires that we know His love and, in turn, be people of His love in accordance with the glorious gospel (John 13:35).

CHAPTER 3 | 1 TIMOTHY 1:12-17

In these verses, we see Paul turn introspective for a moment as he reflects upon and writes about his own former conduct apart from Christ. He acknowledges his past sin and the mercy and grace of God demonstrated toward him while he was in his past condition.

Previously in this letter, Paul focused on the solemn charge that he gave to Timothy to refute false teachers who did not understand God's law or its purpose. Paul gave instructions on who exactly the law was meant to rule over, namely those who are lawless and disobedient (vv. 9-10).

Upon examining that list of conditions that separate humans from a holy God, which confine all under sin (Gal 3:22), we find that the law truly does reveal our sinful nature.

Now, as we continue in this letter, we see that Paul doesn't place himself over those who would be convicted by this language. This is super important!

Unfortunately, Christians have gotten a reputation for speaking down to others or having an attitude of self-righteousness.

Sometimes we forget where we came from. We forget that we, too, were sinners, and occasionally we still are. We forget that God extended His mercy and grace to us exactly in the middle of our sin. And if we forget these things, we can feel like we don't need mercy or grace anymore. **And** we can fail to apply the mercy and grace of God toward others.

So even as Paul is plain in his speech about the sinfulness

of man, which is in opposition to God's moral law, he is also careful to note that he himself is a beggar for God's grace.

That is how we ought to approach the issue too!

We can and should speak plainly about the truth of God's Word.

We can and should be forthright about sin. We can and should teach plainly and humbly about the dangers of violating God's law and how living in opposition to God's law, or making allowance for sin, deeply wounds us and others.

And we can do that while acknowledging that we are not the lawgiver; we are not the moral police. We are ambassadors for Christ, passing on that which we have received.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God" (2 Cor 5:20).

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

Upon some self-reflection, Paul is moved to give thanks for the work that Jesus has done in his life. This is interesting when we consider what is going on as Paul writes (or dictates) this letter. As he reflects upon his previous life and

experiences, he is moved enough to capture his giving of thanks in writing and not merely silently in his head as we often do. He records his gratitude for all time.

The specific thing that Paul thanks Jesus for is strength or empowerment. We must ask ourselves, in what sense was Paul empowered, strengthened, and enabled by the Lord Jesus?¹⁶ The answer is forthcoming: “He judged me faithful, appointing me to his service.”

Notice that Paul is speaking of a past event in his life. He is not using present tense verbs.

He is reflecting upon that transformative moment in his life when the Lord appointed him to his apostolic office, empowering Paul by His will and judging him faithful to serve, even though Paul had not preached the gospel even one time at that point in his life.

Paul records for us here a remarkable fact; the Lord Jesus judged him as faithful and strengthened him to carry out his apostolic work while Paul was uniquely unqualified for that work!

By his own admission, Paul was a blasphemer. That is to say that he slandered Jesus’ name and Jesus’ people. He was a persecutor. This term “comes from the verb ‘to pursue,’ or ‘to treat badly.’ There are various references in the New Testament that tell how Paul was indeed a persecutor of the church (Acts 8:1–3; [Acts 9:1–2]).”¹⁷

¹⁶ “Ἐνδυναμῶ [endynamahoh] ... to cause one to be able to function or do someth., strengthen.” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 333.

¹⁷ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 30.

Furthermore, it is well documented in Acts and claimed here by Paul himself that he was a violent (insolent) person.¹⁸ His key target was the bride of Christ, the burgeoning church of the first century. Since the church and Christ are unified in Christ's personhood, Paul was attacking Christ Himself!

That is how Jesus viewed Paul's behavior: "Now as he [Paul formerly called Saul] went on his way, he approached Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven shone around him. And falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him, 'Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?' And he said, 'Who are you, Lord?' And he said, 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting'" (Act 9:3-5).

So, how would we consider such a person in our own age who persecuted the church and ensured that Jesus followers were imprisoned and put to death for their faith? Disqualified from ministry! Unable to serve! Perhaps we might even stir up any number of campaigns to disparage such a person on social media and to show how they are the tool of the devil.

But Jesus Christ Himself intervened and, in His foreknowledge, knew that Paul, being confronted with the truth of the resurrection (Acts 9) and his own sin, would arguably be the most impactful apostle of the first century.

That is amazing! The Lord knew what Paul would be, irrespective of his current circumstances. There is certainly an application here to be considered.

Jesus could have taken Paul's life as righteous retribution

¹⁸ "[T]ranslates a Greek word used to describe a person who is aggressive, rude, insolent, and as a result treats others cruelly and with violence." Arichea and Hatton, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 30.

on that road to Damascus. But rather than delivering judgment on Paul, prescribing the death penalty for his sins, Jesus instead snatched Paul into the kingdom and His service.

Paul received mercy, and this mercy proved to be part of what fueled Paul's ministry endeavors. He looked back on this moment that had taken place nearly 30 years earlier – and it still moved him.

How many Christians today forget their conversion moment? We forget the mercy that Jesus extended to us. We harden in some way. We forget mercy and grace. We forget how ignorant and unbelieving we were. And in some ways in our hardening, in our cooling to a lukewarm state, over the years we become more ignorant and unbelieving than we were at the first. We become stuffy, harsh, and unteachable. Having learned a little, we forget how far we have to go.

After 30 years, Paul still looked on his conversion moment affectionately, though it had cost him dearly by way of comfort and worldly success. Do you remember what Paul's call to ministry included? The promise of suffering.

“But Ananias answered, ‘Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints at Jerusalem. And here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who call on your name.’ But the Lord said to him, ‘Go, for he is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel. For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name’” (Act 9:13-16).

Amazingly the mercy of the Lord Jesus continued to stir Paul up and keep him going. And we need the same in our

lives. It is good and right to remember where we came from, remember the mercy of the Lord Jesus, allow that to shape how we interact with others, **and** allow that to fuel us over the long-haul. We forget after three years or five. We become pew potatoes. May the Lord forgive us!

Be stirred up, loved one, by the mercy, grace, faith, and love that are found in Christ Jesus!

If need be, be conquered by it! Be conformed to the image of Christ! (Rom 8:29)

He has known us from the beginning, and He knows us still. There is nothing hidden from his sight! Those things that disqualify us or that we believe keep us from serving Him are not too big for Jesus! He desires to remove those things from our lives, and He is ever faithful to do it! Yes, we are sinners! But He is greater (1 John 3:20).

Jesus calls us out of our sin, out of all of these wicked labels that are opposed to God's law found in verses 9-10. Then He transforms the broken, incomplete, lukewarm, violent, and blasphemers into trophies of grace and ambassadors of redemption.

Paul presents this truth in a more succinct manner in verse 15.

V. 15 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.

Paul continues to demonstrate the purpose of Christ by way of personal example. Having been dead in his sin, he had

experienced this very thing, salvation at the hands of Jesus Christ.

And Paul reckoned his own sin as “foremost” or the “chief” of sinners (NKJV).

This personal appraisal of sin and a personal need for mercy and grace, met by the faithfulness of Christ, is so needed in our age!

We have come to a place where we idolize celebrity pastors and then are devastated when they fall. The clergy have come to a place (or perhaps it has always been this way) where we seek to promote our own theological genius through faux humility rather than admitting we are wretched self-promoters! Talking about the reality and pervasiveness of sin makes us uncomfortable. But the Bible never skirts the issue! The outstanding heroes of the faith are all gruesomely marred by sin, all except one, Jesus Christ.

Why would we expect our own selves to be exempt from this condition? We can't! What we can do is be real about where we are, who we are, and where we came from!

We are not the saviors of the church; Jesus is! We are not the unspotted lamb; Jesus is! We are sinners stained by corruption, as John Foreman once sang, “Crooked souls trying to stand up straight.”

The thing about Paul's past was that it was uniquely public! Everybody knew he was the “least of the apostles who persecuted the church of God” (1 Cor 15:9).¹⁹

With this in mind, remember that the Apostles proper had

¹⁹ Perhaps this is why Paul was constantly defending his own apostolic credentials.

quite high standards for who they would allow to be an Apostle.

This is outlined for us in Acts: “So one of the men who have accompanied us during all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John until the day when he was taken up from us—one of these men must become with us a witness to his resurrection” (Act 1:21-22).

What Peter and the gang required of Judas’ replacement was not Paul’s background! And yet, Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, and Paul was changed by that act and committed his life to helping others be changed likewise.

Notice that Paul’s focus in this particular instance is on the saving work of Jesus in the world. This is the good news. Jesus came into the world to save sinners!

So many times, we get the message twisted. So many times, the gospel has been presented as everything except this plain truth.

It may sound like this. Jesus came into the world to: establish universal morality; free humans from disease and suffering; provide for worldly success and riches; redistribute wealth to the less fortunate; establish a theocracy; so on and so forth. Pick your poison, if you will.

While those messages have been used and abused across the ages, the immutable gospel of Jesus Christ stands. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through

him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (John 3:16-18).

Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners. Know that, embrace it, say it out loud, and let it shape how we demonstrate the grace, mercy, love, and faith of our Lord Jesus Christ.

V. 16 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.

Paul understood that the Lord Jesus poured out mercy upon him so others would look upon this example and know that they, too, can be saved. Nobody is too far gone!

If the Lord Jesus is so merciful and patient with a man who attacked His people, then certainly the grace of Jesus extends to us and certainly to others through us.

Charles Spurgeon once preached:

If you meet a sinner, do not turn your back on him, as a Pharisee might, but help him all you can, for Christ helped you all he could. If it should cost you a great deal of trouble to win that soul for Christ, gladly put yourself to that trouble, because Christ took so much trouble to save you.... He or she who is a son or daughter of Adam has a corrupt origin. As we all came from that source, we are all corrupt. Do not ever say of anybody, “That person is too bad for me to do

anything with him.” It is the genius of Christianity to select the worst first, and we should never regard any man as utterly hopeless until he is dead. As long as ... breath is in his body, even if all the devils from hell were also in him, there is enough power in the Lord Jesus Christ to make the whole troop of them fly ... having saved us, the salvation of other sinners must be possible.²⁰

V. 17 To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Verse 17 presents us with the result of Paul’s reflecting upon the mercy of Jesus Christ, the faithfulness of the gospel, and the promise that Christ came into the world to save sinners.

The result is that Paul is moved to praise and does so by presenting this beautiful doxology.

Based on what Paul has considered and written about in his own personal experience with the Lord Jesus and how it so moves him, he gets quite poetic.

This praise not only demonstrates the overflow of Paul’s gratitude, something we desire to do in our own personal and corporate worship, but we also learn about God’s character from this doxology.

We learn that the God of the Bible is the King of the ages, the King of all time, and that He is immortal, “incapable of perishing.”

²⁰ Charles Spurgeon, *300 Sermon Illustrations from Charles Spurgeon*, ed. Elliot Ritzema and Lynnea Smoyer (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2017).

We learn here that He is Invisible (John 1:18; Col 1:15; 1 John 4:12). This “was a standing attribute of God, especially among the Jews in opposition to pagan idolatry which conceived of the gods as being present in images.”²¹

He is the only God in a world teeming with little “g” gods and goddesses, impish, mischievous, and easily manipulated as they were. Paul declares there is only one God, and there only ever has been (1 Cor 10:19-20; Gal 4:8).

He is worthy of and to Him belongs all honor and glory forever and ever. A literal reading of “forever and ever” in the Greek would be “into the ages of the ages,” which is an idiom meaning for all time. The King of all the ages is worthy of all honor and glory into the ages of the ages.

Paul fittingly ends his praise with the term we are all familiar with, “Amen.” This, “is the appropriate response to a doxology ... probably intended to be uttered by the congregation listening to the reading. In accordance with OT and Jewish usage, the term is a way of agreeing that what is said is true and joining in affirming it.”²²

And we do affirm that what Paul has written is true! And we praise the Lord with him, all these ages later, and into the ages the church shall praise the Lord for His goodness and faithfulness and that He is still saving sinners. Amen.

²¹ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 405.

²² Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 406.

CHAPTER 4 | 1 TIMOTHY 1:18-20

Vv. 18-19a 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, holding faith and a good conscience.

As we conclude chapter 1, the Apostle Paul reiterates his initial point to Timothy. Paul had entrusted Timothy with a job to do, a sacred responsibility first issued in vv. 3-7.

“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, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim 1:3-7).

So here in our text, we see that Paul writes to Timothy to encourage him to continue in this task, knowing the challenges and resistance that awaited him.

Remember that Timothy was often sent to troublesome churches as Paul’s personal representative and a faithful pastor himself, to correct and build up where needed, anchored in the love of Christ (Acts 19:22; 1 Cor 4:17, 16:10;

Phil 2:19-23; 1 Thess 3:2).

Much of Timothy's ministry was characterized by going, at the discretion of his beloved mentor Paul, to churches in the midst of tremendous turmoil. Not many of us would volunteer for such work, but Timothy was obedient and faithful, **and** he cared.

Paul described Timothy's heart like this:

"I hope in the Lord Jesus to send Timothy to you soon, so that I too may be cheered by news of you. For I have no one like him, who will be genuinely concerned for your welfare. For they all seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ. But you know Timothy's proven worth, how as a son with a father he has served with me in the gospel" (Phil 2:19-22).

So how do Timothy's care and the apostolic charge entrusted to him bear out in Timothy's life? What does that look like?

First and foremost, as the primary overseer of the churches in Ephesus (at least during this time),²³ Timothy held the sacred responsibility to correct those within the church who were blasphemers and were engaged in teaching distorted doctrines, myths, and speculations (1 Tim 1:3-7).

Clearly, that was necessary in first-century Ephesus.

As a matter of fact, it was so important that the Holy Spirit inspired the Apostle Paul to inscripturate this charge for all ages of the church to read.

This serves for us as an example to follow. The necessary

²³ It is widely believed that the Apostle John, author of the Gospel of John, resided at Ephesus following his release from exile on Patmos.

application that Timothy was pressed to holds true for all pastors at all times.

As Matthew Henry wrote: “Ministers must war this good warfare, must execute their office diligently and courageously, notwithstanding oppositions and discouragements.”²⁴

Now, even as Timothy is charged to carry out this challenging task, please note the intimate language that Paul uses to refer to Timothy as a child. This type of language is common in Paul’s writings as he often relates to his ministry companions and churches, using family terms (1 Cor 4:15; 2 Tim 2:1; Phm 1:10).

This reminds us that we too are part of a family established by Christ. We have, or ought to have, beloved saints that we count as family members (without getting weird or cultish about it). There are men and women older than us who have trod this ground ahead of us whom we should look to as mentors, and we should value their wisdom and experience (1 Tim 5:1-2).

This is sometimes missing in our lives. Our church relationships are often found to be meticulously insulated (or worse, isolated). We don’t like to be vulnerable with others (for valid reasons). This is the seed of hypocrisy. We can’t truly be a family in Christ because everybody is so jaded and wounded that nobody can open up and be family or be their most authentic self.

But when we **do** allow Jesus to shape our relationships with other believers, allow Him to build His body, and submit

²⁴ Matthew Henry, *Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible: Complete and Unabridged in One Volume* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 2352.

to His method of church building, then we can do the hard things together. He is building up for Himself a holy habitation comprised of His saints – brothers, sisters, mothers, fathers, one with another, related by blood, which is not our own but the blood of Christ. We can encourage, equip, support, and suffer with one another, knowing that come what may, the family of God will remain intact!

We can and will wage the good war and fight the good fight. **And** as you all with family know, you'll never fight as hard as when it's for your family.

Acquaintances – meh. Strangers – shoulder shrug (except for Jesus – Rom 5:7-8).

Family? We will lay down our lives! This is where we find that fulfilling the apostolic charge, fighting the good fight and contending earnestly for the faith (Jude v. 3) in love from a pure heart, is worth our best effort.

Notice too that part of Paul's encouragement is reminding Timothy of "the prophecies previously made about you."

There is no explicit portion of Scripture that records for us precisely what prophecies were spoken to or about

Timothy's ministry, though our curiosity is certainly piqued.²⁵

Suffice it to say that whether these prophecies were predictive (foretelling) or didactic (forth-telling), they served to anchor Timothy in his calling and election. Paul found it helpful to remind Timothy of the truth of these past statements that Timothy had certainly hidden away in his heart.

The effect of God's Word (prophecies = thus saith the Lord) on Timothy's life was that Timothy was equipped to fight the good fight by them and to hold fast to his faith, keeping a good conscience. And so it is for us. God's Word, prophetic as it is in its undiluted form, equips us to fight the fight, keep our faith, and do so with a clean conscience.

Many commentaries spend much time exploring the necessity of these two elements (faith and good conscience) and how by neglecting God's Word (as they were doing by teaching heretical doctrine), these opponents of Timothy in Ephesus had abandoned the faith. That bore out in their practical lives. By defiling their consciences, they were found

²⁵ There are portions of Scripture that support the idea that Timothy's life and ministry were shaped by prophetic utterance, such as 1 Tim 4:14. The UBS Handbook on Paul's First Letter to Timothy includes several interpretive options for "prophecies" which all merit further exploration. "1. These are predictions of certain Christian prophets about Timothy, and these prophetic statements led Paul to choose Timothy as his companion in the work. 2. These are utterances of Christian prophets at the time of Timothy's ordination (see 4:14). 3. These are the actual words of ordination that are uttered by the ordaining person, who in this case is most probably Paul. 4. These are orders and words of encouragement that Timothy continues to receive in the course of his ministry." *Arichea and Hatton, Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 40.

to be steeped in sin, or as Paul writes, shipwrecked.²⁶

V. 19b **By rejecting this, some have made shipwreck of their faith,**

“‘[R]ejecting,’ indicates a conscious, deliberate rejection, an ‘active spurning’ ... and not a passive, careless slipping away from faith (cf. Acts 7:27, 39; Rom 11:1, 2). Paul’s opponents made a deliberate decision to abandon their faith and to sear their consciences.”²⁷

They knew better and had been taught the truth but chose to turn away from the truth to speculative theology, myths, and uncertain doctrines. What a shame! May the Lord keep us from such a fall.

Part of guarding against becoming exactly the people who are being addressed here is to remain teachable, humble, and open to the direction of the Holy Spirit as He teaches us His Holy Scriptures. As long as we hold fast to the Lord and His Word, we will be kept safe by Him.

Paul encouraged the Corinthians in this manner: “I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another” (1 Cor 4:6).

People may recoil at this verse, considering it to advocate for being closed-minded, myopic, or narrow. **But** that’s not

²⁶ Paul would not have used this term lightly, having suffered shipwreck himself and understanding the terrible tragedy of it (2 Cor 11:25).

²⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 67.

what's going on here. Rather, Paul is anchoring the Corinthians in objective and knowable truth.

Here's why. Going beyond what the Scriptures teach us authoritatively and entering into the realm of speculative theology, myths, and bogus doctrine has a way of creating arrogant hearts within us.

When we enter into those realms (where there is no standard for truth, and it's all a bunch of guessing and postulating), then we can, unfortunately, convince ourselves that we have received some hidden knowledge. Then, believing that we have uncovered such hidden knowledge (gnosticism), we begin to think we're smarter than everybody else and that we have graduated beyond the Bible, beyond what is written. Consequently, we let go of faith in Christ and begin to live out an ethic that aligns with our "hidden knowledge" and not the heart of Christ.

It is in that space that we are in grave danger of suffering shipwreck. An illustration serves to demonstrate the point.

The coast of Maine has a thousand harbors but also a thousand dangerous reefs. Near Portland, just off Cape Elizabeth, there lies a rocky reef that is just inside the harbor. It bears the name of Trumbie's Reef, after an old sea captain who was brought up as a boy on Cape Elizabeth, joined the crew of a ship at an early age, and put out to sea. He sailed around the world and became the captain of a large ship. His skill as a world sailor became famous.

He piloted his ship through many a stormy voyage and into many a dangerous harbor. Rich and famous, he sailed back to his home port in Maine. Here he felt at perfect ease.

He was familiar with the outline of the shore and with every rock and reef. Yet as he sailed into the harbor, his ship grounded on this small reef and suffered shipwreck. Ever after it was known as Trumbie's Reef. He could sail the seven seas safely, but he piled up on rocks inside the harbor close to home. — Benjamin P. Browne²⁸

V. 20 among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

In v. 20, Paul names these culprits personally. He isn't overly diplomatic in his pronouncement. He knows that he must name these men, in an attempt to “cleanse out the old leaven” (1 Cor 5:7-8).

Sin in all its forms within the early church was a big deal to the Apostles. They labored diligently to root it out and ensure that those false members (false brothers, cf. 2 Cor 11:26 and Gal 2:4) were identified and dealt with. They understood that the spiritual well-being, the very eternal disposition, of many saints was at stake, and to leave these blasphemers and wolves in place was a danger too great to leave to chance.

Paul would not endanger the spiritual lives of the many to preserve the “feelings” or “reputations” of those who were propagating lies about the gospel, damaging relatively new

²⁸ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 1309–1310.

first-century believers beyond repair,²⁹ and infecting the body of Christ with poison.

Some of these early heretical ideas included legalism (the need to adhere to the OT legal-religious requirements, such as circumcision, eating certain foods, etc.), bad eschatology (that Jesus had already returned and the church had missed out), antinomianism (a reaction against legalism that suggested Christians could do as they pleased and continue to live in sin because grace was big enough to pay for us to continue to live as Christ's enemy), misunderstanding and misapplying the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and identity politics in the body (Acts 6:1).

All of these were rejected by the Apostles as they sought to bring the early church into doctrinal alignment under the headship of Jesus Christ.

Much of the theological argument of the NT is designed to demonstrate to early Christians (and our era) that right behavior follows right belief. And conversely, unethical behavior follows wrong belief. How we live is the evidence of our theological understanding!

The language that Paul uses about these two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, is quite strong.

This presents to us the doctrine of excommunication, something that perhaps, as Protestants, we believe that only Roman Catholics do.

A basic understanding assumes that to be excommunicated means to be kicked out of the church.

²⁹ Acknowledging that nothing is beyond Christ's restorative power, but we should not test this by intentionally damaging others.

And that is certainly true, but see here Paul's words.

These men were kicked out of the church because they abandoned the faith and failed morally (not having a clean conscience). They are kicked **into** the realm of Satan with the express purpose of learning not to participate in what they have been participating in, namely blasphemy, which is defaming the Lord God and misrepresenting His character, slandering God and the truth of His word.³⁰

There are other places in the NT that speak to this type of correction and exclusion from the Body (1 Cor 5; 2 Thess 3:6, 14-15; 2 John 10-11).

Typically the sense we get is that the offending believer has gone so far beyond pastoral correction in their sin and rebellion and so far beyond congregational correction that the only choice to limit collateral damage and attempt to bring reconciliation is to let them back into the world from which they came.

It's almost like saying, "Okay, you want to live in the world and act like an enemy of Christ and an enemy of the church? Then go back into the world."

³⁰ "When Jesus gives these directions about church discipline, he reminds the church that his own presence and his own power are behind the decisions made by the church ... (Matt. 18:19–20). Jesus promises to be present in church gatherings generally, but specifically here with respect to the church being gathered for discipline of an offending member. And Paul similarly tells the Corinthians to discipline the erring member when they are assembled '*with the power of our Lord Jesus*' (1 Cor. 5:4). This is not an activity to be taken lightly, but is carried out in the presence of the Lord, the spiritual component of it actually being carried out by the Lord himself." Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Leicester, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2004), 898.

See also Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 415.

And who is the ruler of the world in its fallen state? Satan, the accuser of the brethren (John 7:7; 8:23; 12:31; 15:19; Eph 2:2; 6:12; Jam 4:4; 1 John 2:16; 5:19).³¹ That is a fearful prospect. but keep in mind, “The primary design of the highest censure in the primitive church was to prevent further sin and to reclaim the sinner.”³²

The first goal of church discipline is reconciliation and realignment with truth. And you know what? That hurts sometimes.

To our shame, the church, throughout history, has been so ready to hand out harsh discipline that we have overreached in many cases. We have not done so with a heart for reconciliation but rather for retribution, which is not ours to enforce. Vengeance belongs to the Lord.

Even more unfortunate is that since the church has wounded so many over the ages and taken church discipline to disgusting extremes, now the very idea of pastoral correction or church discipline is a joke!

There is a scriptural example to follow and very clear imperatives designed to protect the integrity of the Body and the innocent against abuses of power, heresy, and manipulation. God cares for His people, so, of course, He would design a mechanism to protect them; part of being a shepherd means fighting off the wolves! The Biblical execution of church discipline with the primary goal of restoration is exceedingly rare.

In the case of Alexander and Hymenaeus, Paul’s goal is for

³¹ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 414.

³² Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2352.

these two men to get an education. The outcome is uncertain (this is in the subjunctive mood), but that is clearly Paul's desire.

A parallel example speaks to what can happen when proper church discipline is carried out. Yes, it may hurt for a minute, but the hope is that the long-term effect will be reconciliation, restoration, and renewed life, all founded upon the love and grace of Christ.

Two examples follow.

“If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother” (2 Thes 3:14-15).

The second demonstrates the emotional significance of carrying out this type of action. It is not easy, but it's not meant to be easy! Kicking people out of fellowship shouldn't be easy! It should come with much rending of the heart and prayer and repentance and a call to repentance. Let us not too easily cast off those whom the Lord loves. And if we must, let us do it with a heart that calls them back to the cross!

“For I wrote to you out of much affliction and anguish of heart and with many tears, not to cause you pain but to let you know the abundant love that I have for you. Now if anyone has caused pain, he has caused it not to me, but in some measure—not to put it too severely—to all of you. For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. For this is why I wrote, that I might test

you and know whether you are obedient in everything. Anyone whom you forgive, I also forgive. Indeed, what I have forgiven, if I have forgiven anything, has been for your sake in the presence of Christ, so that we would not be outwitted by Satan; for we are not ignorant of his designs” (2 Cor 2:4-11).

At its very worst, when we are not anchored in the truth of God’s Word and moved by the love of Christ, Satan can use our worst attempts at church discipline for his own ends. God forbid that we should be a part of that!

Let us then hold on to our faith and, as the family of God, encourage one another to grasp the faith firmly and live in a manner that commends to us a good conscience. Let us follow after Jesus and wage the good warfare in accordance with His Word. And with the Lord’s help, we shall be kept by His grace. Amen.

CHAPTER 5 | 1 TIMOTHY 2:1-7

As chapter 2 begins, Paul shifts momentarily from his overarching concern and charge to Timothy to correct those within the Ephesian church who are promoting various forms of heterodoxy (bad teaching and non-biblical concerns) to specific practical instructions for Timothy and the church.

Paul's attention turns to addressing the primary importance of prayer and the still contentious issue of gender roles within the ministry.

As we will see, Paul skillfully frames these issues within their vital theological contexts **because** the character and nature of God and the revealed Word of God serve as the basis for a right understanding of these topics, no matter how challenged we may be by them.

It is upon the first point, prayer, that we now focus our efforts.

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

Paul's first exhortation to be acted upon by the entire church is to pray for all people. This seems intuitive to us but

perhaps only because the church has adopted this practice (to various degrees of commitment) since the earliest days of the church.

But it bears mentioning that Paul certainly felt compelled to state this plainly – that we are to pray for ALL people not just those considered part of our “in-group.”

The inference we can make here is that there were some resisters among the Ephesian church, who probably held prominent positions and were given over to bad doctrine and speculative theology but were actually advocating for a limited scope of prayer. They only prayed for those whom they counted “worthy” of prayer. And, of course, when we follow that line of thinking, we see how arbitrary that can be. Nevertheless, there are perhaps more Christians who participate in this type of prayer than we would like to admit.

Bill Mounce comments, “The Ephesian church’s habit of not praying for all people was symptomatic of the more significant issue of the leaders’ selective theology.”³³

Note, too, that the types of prayer that Paul lays out are specifically beneficial and favorable in nature. They are not what we call imprecatory prayers that call for God’s judgment or destruction of somebody else.

The Psalter contains many imprecatory psalms that deal with this kind of language. For example, “O God, break the teeth in their mouths; tear out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD!” (Psa 58:6)

The Psalms consistently present to us the actual human condition, one that desires revenge and to see our enemies

³³ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 78.

conquered. But it also presents to us laments, grieving, self-doubt, and a whole host of other things that God is making new and whole.

So here we see that the ideal prayers of the congregation for all people are to be prayers of favor in all of its variegated hues.

Paul does not include in his list of prayers generic exhortation but rather specific modes of prayer: supplications (prayers to meet needs), intercessions (praying on behalf of somebody else), and thanksgivings (thanking God for what he has done or provided in the life of others), as the context dictates the object of our prayer to be for all people.³⁴

Then Paul addresses a specific “sub-group” of “all people,” namely kings, rulers, and people in positions of authority.³⁵

This is important because, in our current era, calcified believers are more likely to pray favorably for those political and secular leaders with whom they align themselves ideologically while praying for the downfall or disgrace of those leaders they see as anti-Christian or outside of the realm of believers.

Paul purposefully includes this class of people within the

³⁴ “To emphasize that prayers should be made for all people, Paul adds four types of prayers one after another. It is a Semitic literary device that groups synonyms to add luster to the basic concept (see the description of wisdom in Prov 1–6). Although each of these words can describe slightly different types of prayers ... that is not the point here... The point is that all prayers, of all types, should be for all people.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 79.

³⁵ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 420.

broader framework of “all people.”

While Christians have often been suppressed or opposed by governments and secular leaders, Paul exemplifies the heart of Christ. **And** what’s more, Paul’s declaration here that the church ought to pray for these leaders is contextually significant because at this time during Paul’s life and the life of the first-century church, an infamous Roman Emperor ruled the land, Caesar Nero.³⁶

Nero is regarded as, “One of the most brutal dictators of all time (Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 6.8.1). [He] instituted the beginning of Rome’s official persecution of the Christian Church.”³⁷

Now, the reign of Nero wasn’t all bad. The beginning of his rule was marked by quite a few positive things from a socio-political standpoint. However, in the following years, his reign became one of terror and affliction until, when the city of Rome burned during his reign (some argue by Nero’s command), he strategically blamed Christians for the act.

Tacitus³⁸ records, “Nero substituted as culprits, and punished with the utmost refinements of cruelty, a class of men, loathed for their vices, whom the crowd styled Christians.... Vast numbers were convicted, not so much on the count of arson as for hatred of the human race. And derision accompanied their end: They were covered with wild

³⁶ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 81.

³⁷ William Simmons, “Nero, Emperor, History of in the Primary Sources,” ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

³⁸ Late first, early second century Roman historian.

beasts' skins and torn to death by dogs; or they were fastened on crosses, and when daylight failed were burned to serve as lamps by night" (Annals 15.44; compare also Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars* 6.16.2).³⁹

So it is against this backdrop, as persecution began to spread throughout the Empire, that Paul echoed the teachings of Christ, urging these Timothy to pray for all people, even those who persecute you.

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.'⁴⁰ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" Matt 5:43-45).

Why, though? Why was Paul so committed to instructing the churches to pray for political leaders who hated them and had them publicly humiliated, tortured, and killed?⁴¹

The answer is found in this: *that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.*

The aim of our prayers for our political leaders and rulers is peace and quiet, godliness, and dignity, as opposed to

³⁹ Simmons, "Nero, Emperor, History of in the Primary Sources."

⁴⁰ There is no command in the OT to "hate your enemy." Rather this is what the teachers propagated as a "reciprocity ethic," common in Greco-Roman society at the time and probably only wrongly inferred from OT materials to boost Jewish nationalism and a sense of "demarcation" from Gentiles. John Nolland, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2005), 265.

⁴¹ Paul himself was executed under Caesar Nero.

contentions, squabbling, and debasement. So, then, we should bear this in mind as we pray for our leaders, too! We are not to be agents of chaos but, as God's elect, demonstrate the peace, order, godliness, and dignity of the gospel, even in a world that rages against us.

We are not to make ourselves like the world, prone to outbursts of wrath, seeking to burn down the Empire (word-play intended). But knowing that Christ has inaugurated and is establishing His eternal Kingdom, we may, with good conscience, pray for the favor of God upon all. Although those who oppose us may count themselves as our enemies, we will pray for God's grace to be extended to them and for their salvation.⁴²

The Apostle Peter reinforces this idea: "Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good. For this is the will of God, that by doing good you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people. Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but living as servants of God. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor" (1 Pet 2:13-17).

The question we must ask ourselves individually and collectively as **the** church is, Do we desire good for all people? Do we desire it enough to pray for their good and to represent Christ in peace, godliness, and dignity? Are our

⁴² God uses uncouth governments for His own purposes; cf. Hab 1, Jer 27:5-8, Rom 13:1-7, and Tit 3:1. For a further in-depth study, research the concept of *Theodicy*.

judgments about the right way to pray for others in alignment with what God views as right and good?

Now we turn our attention to understanding the basis of this sometimes difficult command, especially in a world that is so polarized and chaotic.

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

The basis for our prayers is that there is one God alone.

Pay special attention to Paul's words here. Knowing that the first church often contended with Judaizers and those who were politically opposed to the Empire, Paul calls them back to the ancient wisdom of the Shema, "the central affirmation of Judaism."⁴³ "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deut 6:4). This is affirmed by Jesus in Mark 12:29.

The Apostle then builds upon this foundational and remarkable truth. Living in a polytheistic society, which also exalted the emperor as a god, in no way distorted the truth for Paul. He knew the truth. There is one God over all humanity, over all creation, only one God to whom we can effectively direct our prayers, and only one name by which all must be saved (Acts 4:12). It is the same God who makes His sun rise on the evil and the good and sends rain on the just and the unjust. So then, there is one God whom we must

⁴³ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 87.

petition for the good of all, praying for their salvation and sanctification.

Furthermore, that one God, incarnate in the person of Jesus Christ, stands as the sole mediator between Himself and all of humanity.

The role of a mediator is to stand between two parties, “to remove a disagreement or reach a common goal.”⁴⁴ That is what Jesus does for us; He bridges the gap between imperfect humans and a holy God.

Where we were once unable to approach God (Exo 33:20; 1 Tim 6:16), in Christ, we have a mediator who makes a way for us to come near, to be instructed in the way of righteousness, to have our sins forgiven, to speak with the Author of all creation, and be heard by Him.

As the author of Hebrew affirms: “Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the holy places by the blood of Jesus, by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water” (Heb 10:19-22).

Christ our mediator is the perfect fulfillment of all other mediators who came before Him, who served to typify what God would one day accomplish through the person and work of Jesus Christ.

In the OT, God used prophets, priests, and kings to mediate between Himself and His covenant people. Moses

⁴⁴ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 634.

was the first to stand between God and His covenant people at Sinai (Exodus 19). Then there was the divine appointment of Aaron to serve as the High Priest, the keeper of the Tabernacle (Exodus 27). Then there was a long line of judges, kings, and prophets who served God's people with varying degrees of success and failure as guardians, stewards, and heralds of the Covenant.

All of these serve to provoke a question from God's people. Will there ever be a mediator, one to stand between sinful man and a holy God, who can satisfy God's requirements for holiness, one who can truly bring us near to God?

Paul says, "Yes!" At the perfect time, God the Father revealed His Son, the Messiah, Christ, who established a new and better covenant by giving His life as a ransom for all humanity. He is the perfect mediator, the perfect prophet, priest, and king whose kingdom will never end.

The author of Hebrews declares: "This makes Jesus the guarantor of a better covenant. The former priests were many in number, because they were prevented by death from continuing in office, but he holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" (Heb 7:22-25).

We make no appeal to any other saint or spiritual being, living or dead. We look to Jesus as the mediator of our covenant who has brought us not to the edge of God's mountain, as Moses did with the elders in Israel – who

trembled and said, “We shall surely die.” Instead, Jesus brings us to the Father and says to us, “I have died for your sakes, that you may live; and I live forevermore that you may never die.”

This is the gospel, the sole basis of Paul’s exhortation to prayer and the foundation of his apostolic calling.

V. 7 For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying), a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

It was for this message and to this message of one God and one mediator for all that Paul was called into service for the Almighty God.

Knowing the apostolic call on Paul’s life, we are here confronted with a somewhat awkward parenthetical comment. The phrase “I am telling the truth and not lying” is placed right in the middle of Paul’s claim to apostolic authority and his appointment to be a teacher of the Gentiles, that is, non-Jews.

We are left asking – why would Paul have to write such a thing? Didn’t everybody believe what he was writing? The answer is, No.

Paul’s apostleship was challenged in Corinth and Galatia, and it appears that it was also challenged in Ephesus.⁴⁵

Based on the preceding information, Paul may have been trying to convince his audience of the truthfulness of the message he was trying to convey. Since there is one God, one

⁴⁵ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 126.

mediator over all humanity, and one price paid for the sins of the world, then this message is available to all people, even Gentiles. Therefore, Christians ought to pray for all people, not just a select group of preferred people.

Paul's message, the message of one God, one mediator, and the testimony of Christ revealed at the exact right moment in history, changed the entire course of his life. He was changed from a straight-laced Pharisee who would have considered it the height of uncleanness to break bread with Gentiles to a man who made it his life's goal to teach as many Gentiles as possible about the hope of their mediator Jesus Christ.

Inasmuch as that message communicated God's faithfulness and truth, Paul was deeply affected by those attributes of God, and he, himself, went about teaching **all men** in a manner characterized by faith and truth.

This is huge for us to grasp. The content of the message, the faith and truth of God extended to all people and nations, ought to shape our character, our teaching, and our praying. Faith and truth will compel us to be concerned with others, all people, even those who oppose the gospel. We want to see that miracle with our own eyes; God can and does change His enemies into His sons and daughters. This we will pray for.

CHAPTER 6 | 1 TIMOTHY 2:8-15

We begin this portion of Scripture with a verse that fits nicely with the preceding material but nevertheless helps shape the discussion of gender roles in ministry.

V. 8 I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling;

In the previous material (vv. 1-7), Paul adamantly urged prayers to be made for all people, including political leaders who may have opposed the church.

Paul gave that exhortation because of the theological foundation that there is one God who desires all people to be saved and only one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people (1 Tim 2:3-6).

Now, in v. 8, Paul uses a verb that is inspired by the Spirit and right and good but somewhat ambiguous. The verb Paul uses is “I desire” (Βούλομαι).

This creates a pressing question. Does this mean that it’s not a command (since it’s not in the imperative mood)? Is a desire as strong as a command?

Some people, who desire to play linguistic games with the text, certainly hang their hat on this argument that a desire is not a command. So everything in this section of Scripture is discounted as optional.

However, the evidence suggests that this verb holds within

its meaning, “to plan on a course of action, [to] intend ... [to] will.”⁴⁶

Another source reads, “‘I desire’ seems to denote the apostolic authority of Paul.... It may be necessary in translation to insure [sic] that this component of command is understood, without ... violating the standards of politeness ... for example, ‘I earnestly request that,’ or ‘I ask that,’ or even ‘I humbly entreat you.’”⁴⁷

So then, Paul’s “desire” was something that Timothy and the Ephesians *ought* to do.

To be sure, there are times in his writings when Paul gives his opinions, which are not binding, but as far as I can tell, he explicitly notes when he is doing so. For example: “Now as a concession, not a command, I say this.... To the rest I say (I, not the Lord) ... Now concerning the betrothed, I have no command from the Lord, but I give my judgment” (1 Cor 7:6, 12, 25). “I say this not as a command” (2 Cor 8:8).

I am convinced that the instruction for the men of the church to lift their hands in congregational prayer is based upon the theological principle that Paul has set forth. It is not simply a recommendation but right and proper conduct in obedience to the Scriptures.

Too often, though, rather than obeying the Scriptures, we spend our energy and efforts explaining why we don’t have to obey, because, after all, that would be legalistic! What a joke!

The heart of legalism isn’t that we willingly, as an act of worship, submit to the teachings of Scripture and do what it

⁴⁶ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 182.

⁴⁷ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 54.

says. Instead, legalism results from inventing other rules that are not explicitly spoken to within the Scriptures and building a rag-tag counterfeit version of the Law that Christ has fulfilled in His flesh!

But we, the people of the book, have been given express commands that we ought to obey rather than spending our lives seeking to circumvent them!

What's more, when we examine the text, please notice that along with these raised hands, our congregational prayer is to be without anger or fighting with one another!

So, men, inasmuch as women have to be confronted with a difficult truth regarding obedience and acceptance of Scriptural commands, so do we.

First and foremost, men ought to set the tone of the church as it gathers together: prayer for all people, lifting our hands as an act of obedience, and casting aside all anger or disputing as we do so.

Don't you think this is important as we venture into verse 9!?

As we enter into the remaining verses about women in ministry, we know that men and women of various persuasions have used this issue as an opportunity for anger and quarreling. However, it ought not to be so. Let our conversations on these matters be marked by much prayer for one another and little strife.

Vv. 9-10 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, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works.

So, just as men have specific roles and responsibilities within congregational worship, Paul says “likewise” or “in the same manner” (ὁσαύτως⁴⁸), women have some significant visible, observable responsibilities within congregational worship.

Inasmuch as the conduct of men at prayer within the church is visible and meant to communicate a grand theological truth (that of one God and one mediator), women have a similar function.

And, as we will see, the grand theological truth that women are to communicate in their personal acts of devotion and worship truth from the very beginning of the Bible, the history of creation.

We find in these verses that the character and conduct of women within the Body of Christ ought to be marked by Christ’s character and not gaudy accessories.

Much has been written and taught about the cultural nuance of these statements, and that is certainly an interesting study.

However, the universal application of this statement remains true for all Christian women throughout all time.

When we come together to worship, we are not to be consumed with vanity and ostentation. After all, people aren’t coming to worship us. So we ought not make ourselves the

⁴⁸ “[A] marker of similarity that approximates identity.” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1106.

center of attention.

One of Paul's chief concerns here isn't so much that these women were going to look like the world (many suggest they would have resemble the pagan prostitutes belonging to the temple of Diana in Ephesus), but that they were adorning themselves with gold, and pearls, and *costly* attire.

Loved one, the early church was certainly diverse in its membership, with rich and poor alike coming to worship Jesus.

And we should not use the church as a platform to put on a show like some sort of diva strutting around in our most expensive accessories in front of the poorest among us! Have some sense! Have some discretion!

When the church comes together, it is not to be a fashion show and not a platform to show off our wealth! James addresses this attitude: "For if a man wearing a gold ring and fine clothing comes into your assembly, and a poor man in shabby clothing also comes in, and if you pay attention to the one who wears the fine clothing and say, 'You sit here in a good place,' while you say to the poor man, 'You stand over there,' or, 'Sit down at my feet,' have you not then made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?" (James 2:2-4)

This is a lesson some Americans learn the hard way on the mission field.

Paul addresses this instruction specifically to women, by which we infer that the women in Ephesus had a problem with this type of behavior.

So then Paul implores them to demonstrate their

faithfulness and worship by being clothed in Christian virtue: modesty, self-control, godliness, and good works (1 Peter 3:3-6).

Vv. 11-12 Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet.

We see in these verses that the role of women within the context of ministry is expressly limited, at least as far as the plain meaning of the text is concerned.

William Mounce observes, “[M]ore has been written on vv 11–12 than on any other passage in the P[astoral] E[pistles]. Interpretations are so varied that one wonders how much of the exegesis is based on the text and how much on presuppositions and varying methodologies. The most that I can do is deal with the text.... The historical reading of the text sees Paul limiting the scope of women’s ministry.”⁴⁹

As you are well aware, this topic has been hotly debated over recent decades. Christians and critics alike continually seek the best way to evade the most straightforward meaning of the text in favor of linguistic and theological somersaults.

Two main views have formed in modern Protestantism regarding women in ministry – Complementarianism and Egalitarianism.

Those who hold an Egalitarian view believe “that all functions and roles in the church are open to men and

⁴⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 117.

women alike.”⁵⁰

Those who hold a Complementarian view believe that “men and women are equal in value before God but that some governing and teaching roles in the church are reserved for men.”⁵¹

We hold a complementarian view, and I would suggest to you that God has specifically designed His church in such a way that the things we do together, in a complementary fashion, demonstrate huge theological truths and the great mystery of God to the world.

The main argument that proponents of an egalitarian view use to bolster their argument is Gal 3:28: “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

However, to suggest that this speaks to women exercising spiritual authority within the church as pastors and overseers willfully ignores the internal context of Paul’s writing to the Galatians. Paul presents this statement as part of salvation history in which there is no difference between any human with regards to salvation in Jesus Christ and becoming sons and daughters of faith.

Regarding Paul’s writing in 1 Tim 2, the context clearly indicates that women within the churches of Ephesus were to take the role of a learner and not a teacher.

Paul instructs them to stop self-promoting through their gaudy dress and to humbly take their place as congregants within the Body.

⁵⁰ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1240.

⁵¹ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 1238.

This is the sense we get when we think about these women in Ephesus showing up to church dressed to the nines and claiming authority to teach the church over and above the duly appointed leadership of the church, which included Timothy, and by extension Paul!

And two thousand years later, this issue has still not been resolved by relying on the text alone.

I would suggest that this debate continues so vehemently exactly because of our modern cultural urgencies that strain against the face-value meaning of the text and seek to overturn historic, normative Christian practice in order to appease the cry of the culture.⁵²

Insofar as we can gain valuable insight from modern Biblical scholarship, we must also look at what the church has viewed as normative over these past two millennia.

For example, while some argue for the ordination of women pastors and women elders, there are no examples of women pastors or elders found in the NT.

However, there are certainly examples of women deacons, faithful servants, co-laborers, and even teachers in other capacities apart from what could be viewed here in 1 Tim 2 as a pastoral role (Rom 16:1; Acts 18:26; Titus 2:3-5).

So, while appointing women to roles of spiritual authority might scratch our itch to be praised by unbelievers for being

⁵² James Greenbury, "The Contribution of 1 Timothy 2:8-15 and 1 Corinthians 11:5 to the Discussion Concerning Women Speaking in Church," *Presbyterian* 44, no. 2 (2018): 55, <https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=shib&db=33h&AN=425519&site=ehost-live&scope=site> (accessed November 15, 2021).

so forward-thinking, it willfully ignores Scripture and does so at great cost to the more profound theological object lesson that God is trying to display through the divine order of His church.

One of the roles of women within the church is to learn (v. 11). She is not to be a distraction or seek to high-jack the sermon (neither are men permitted to do those things), but she is to be a learner, a disciple, a Jesus follower, in all willing submission, which again we are all required to participate in.

Let us remind ourselves of Philippians 2:5-8. “Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.”

Phil 2 presents the idea of *Functional Subordination*; Jesus (equal in power, glory, and authority with the Father and the Spirit) willingly subordinated Himself for our sakes. Moreover, He serves as an example for us to follow, irrespective of gender.

Now, Paul’s instructions here are not intended to be an assault against women because they are not smart or capable enough.

Rather, in this passage of Scripture, Paul exhorts women to humble themselves practically and spiritually as an act of worship unto the Lord Jesus Christ. In doing so, women are asked to willingly subordinate themselves, to embrace and

exemplify the humility of Jesus Christ, and to learn what it means to defer their own interests for the sake of others in obedience to Scripture, not culture (Matt 18:1-4; Rom 12:3; Gal 6:3; Phil 2:3-4).

Now we come to Paul's theological foundation for giving these instructions.

Vv. 13-14 For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor.

At the beginning of 1 Tim 2, Paul anchored his instruction on prayer in profound Biblical truth – One God and One Mediator!

Paul anchors his instruction on gender roles within ministry in the history of Creation and the Fall!

Women in the church are asked to do this because their behavior, obedience, and functional subordination is bound up in the history of creation and demonstrates the mystery of God's divine order to a world that may never crack open a Bible (Eph 5:22-33).

And that is why this issue matters!

Some people today approach this topic with a great deal of fear or bitterness or even sadness. Some accuse Paul of being a misogynist and those who hold a complementarian view of this issue of being radicalized fundamentalists.

But please understand the heart of the matter. The gospel of Jesus Christ changed everything for women!

Never before were women so liberated! And, as co-

laborers in the gospel, women have been assigned, by God, the enormous responsibility of presenting an ancient truth to the church and the world in their personhood – that of God’s creation, the Fall, and God’s divine order.

Perhaps the greatest danger for women concerning these instructions is to ignore them.

What I know for sure is that I can’t do this for women! This text speaks directly to women. Women must decide how they will respond to it.

Finally, we set our minds to decipher the following somewhat cryptic verse.

V. 15 Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

There are several prominent views and important grammatical discussions that deserve your attention regarding this verse, but time and space prohibit us from treating these matters exhaustively.

The major views, being many, varied, and nuanced, fall along two main lines.

The first promotes a spiritual application, seeing the promise of salvation through child-bearing as pointing to *the ultimate act* of child-bearing, the birth of Christ. “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given” (Isa 9:6).

The second view advocates for strict adherence to traditional domestic roles as the primary responsibility of women, which serves as a protective agent with regards to

following in the sin of Eve, who by her own initiative led her husband into sin, through whom sin entered the world (Rom 5:12-21).

The two need not be at odds with one another. Please understand that God's spiritual truths always carry a practical application, **and** when we live out the practical application in our everyday lives, we communicate God's big spiritual truths. This is what we've been driving at this whole time!

Verse 15 is not about a works-based salvation. While the wording is difficult, we know that having children is not a prerequisite or means of salvation.

Perhaps we can gain some context from Genesis.

Following Eve's deception she became a participant in the fall of humanity, and subject to the subsequent fallout, the curse: "To the woman he said, 'I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you'" (Gen 3:16).

Nevertheless, miraculously, God uses child-bearing, which has been deeply affected by the fall, to bring about salvation. At which point we may ask, "How so?"

Back to Genesis, back to the curse.

God spoke to the serpent who deceived the woman. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Gen 3:15).

So now we find from creation history by what manner of child-bearing we are saved – through the holy offspring, Jesus Christ, who will in time crush the head of Satan, the deceiver,

and put an end to the curse once and for all.⁵³

All people, men and women alike, are saved through Christ alone. Salvation belongs to the Lord; He is the one who has saved us for His glory.

And the proper response to our salvation, to that profound truth rooted in creation, is to fulfill faithfully the individual roles He has given us as an act of worship in all faith, love, and holiness, with self-control. Let the world see the picture that God is painting by our acts!

⁵³ “Because Paul is creating an analogy/typology between Eve and the women in Ephesus, it is evidently important that he not leave the discussion on this note. Therefore v 15 shows that what Eve did, although it had consequences, has been dealt with, and both Eve and all women can be saved.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 143.

CHAPTER 7 | 1 TIMOTHY 3:1-3

Paul now turns his attention to specific instructions regarding church governance, specifically concerning the leaders of the churches and their qualifications.

Historic context is important to shape our understanding of this material.

Paul had established a relationship with the church in Ephesus during his third missionary journey in Acts chapter 19.

We find there that Paul taught them about the baptism of the Holy Spirit and stayed with them for a little over two years, teaching them and proclaiming the gospel throughout the region until he was forced to leave that city under great duress (Acts 19).

Following these events, Paul spent some time ministering in Macedonia, eventually arriving at the town of Miletus just south of Ephesus, from where he called for the Ephesian elders to join him so that he might address them one last time.⁵⁴

During this meeting, Paul warned them with these words: “Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in

⁵⁴ M. G. Easton, *Illustrated Bible Dictionary and Treasury of Biblical History, Biography, Geography, Doctrine, and Literature* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1893), 464.

among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Act 20:28-30).

A year or so following that meeting, during his first Roman imprisonment, Paul wrote Ephesians. A year or so after that, Paul wrote the letter at hand to his trusted co-laborer and spiritual son, Timothy, who was sent to Ephesus to set the churches in order.

The sense we get is that Paul’s prophetic words from Acts 20 began to take shape in Ephesus, and he found it needful to instruct (or perhaps re-instruct) the elders of the church in proper conduct, proper worship, and proper spiritual authority.

While Paul’s instructions certainly hold a universal, timeless application for all churches, we must keep in mind that he was intentionally addressing particularly troublesome issues that had arisen at Ephesus. This includes the qualifications and characteristics of those who shepherd the flock of God.⁵⁵

V. 1 The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to

⁵⁵ While we may be tempted to think that everything in Ephesus got straightened out since they were given such strong apostolic instruction, we know differently and ought to pay attention to their example. The church of Ephesus resurfaces in Revelation as Jesus speaks directly to the Ephesians, saying, “I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name’s sake, and you have not grown weary. But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent” (Rev 2:3-5).

the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

First we must understand what Paul is referring to when using the term “overseer” (“bishop” in some versions).

This term refers to Christian leaders who are engaged in the oversight and supervision of a Christian community, a church.⁵⁶

It is from the underlying Greek term ἐπισκοπή// ἐπίσκοπος⁵⁷ that we derive the term “episcopal,” referring to a form of church government, but not to be confused with the denomination of the same name (which adheres to an episcopal form of ecclesiastic polity).

An episcopal form of church government is characterized “by a distinct category of church officers known as a priesthood, and final authority for decision-making is found outside the local church.”⁵⁸

A prime example of this type of church government is the Roman Catholic church. It is a hierarchical form of government with defined powers and authorities at each level and each member of the hierarchy answering to the one

⁵⁶ Arndt *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 379.

⁵⁷ “ἐπισκοπή, ‘office of overseer,’ occurs four other places in the NT. It can mean ‘visit’ (Luke 19:44; 1 Pet 2:12) or ‘office’ (Acts 1:20, a modified citation of Ps 108:8 LXX...cf. Num 4:16). While ἐπίσκοπος, ‘overseer’ (v 2), can refer to the office as well as the person holding the office...the use of the different form ἐπισκοπή suggests that Paul is differentiating the two and in v 1 is thinking specifically of the office. This would help explain the use of the singular form when elsewhere church leadership is spoken of in the plural.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 168.

⁵⁸ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 923.

above him.

Two other major forms of modern church governance also argue for a Scriptural basis to adhere to their preferred model – *presbyterian* and *congregational*.

And there have been and continue to be many more hybrid forms of these that have developed over the ages, each with its own benefits and drawbacks.

A presbyterian form of government is marked by a plurality of “elders” (πρεσβυτερος//presbuteros) who are charged with the duty to care for their own local church. The lead pastor is “first among equals,” part of a group of many elders who are seen as equal in authority but different in gifting. These elders may also serve other churches within a more specific or broader regional context.

A congregational form of church government is, generally speaking, marked by vesting the members of the congregation (who are formal, documented members) with specific authority usually exercised by voting. The deacons, elders, and pastors oversee the administration of the church.

Now within this context, and given this brief introduction to various modern forms of church government, we have to take a quick look at the terms employed in the NT to discern what Paul is referring to when he writes about the “overseer” in this passage.

Various terms are used within the NT to refer to those who lead, watch over, pastor, and administer the local churches: overseer (ἐπισκοπη/ἐπισκοπος), elder (πρεσβυτερος), and pastor (ποιμήν).

These terms are generally used synonymously within the

NT to refer to those who hold spiritual authority within the church and serve in a shepherding role.⁵⁹ Oddly enough, the least used term in the NT used to refer to the role of the pastor is “pastor,” though the shepherding function of the office is evident throughout.

Within the text, Paul is referring to those who, being elders, were entrusted with spiritual authority within the local church in order to carry out a pastoral, shepherding role – the care of souls.

It is on this point that we must admit that the wording is somewhat difficult because some people may see here that Paul is advocating for some form of human ambition for men to desire or pursue the pastoral role. But based upon Paul’s own experience and our understanding of how God gifts the church with various spiritual authorities, we know that the desire for the office and the calling to a life of service is only legitimately from God.

Paul previously wrote to these very same Ephesians that it is Jesus Christ who has placed various spiritual authorities among the members of His body, the church, for a specific purpose, namely to equip the saints for the work of ministry: “And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Eph 4:11-12).

Each man called to the pastoral role must be certain that his calling and election is from God, because that will be the

⁵⁹ The term “pastor” (ποιμην) is the least used term to describe this function but is not easily dismissed based on the shepherding function of the office (Matt 9:36, 26:31; John 10:2, 11; Eph 4:11; Heb 13:20; 1 Peter 2:25). See also Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 913-914.

only sustaining force in the face of discouragement, division, and the heavy events of life he is called to deal with. No man, counsel of men, or education can make a man a pastor. It must be God. The best we can do is ratify that calling and support them as they seek to follow Jesus faithfully and care for His flock.

How do we, as the church, ratify such a calling? Paul lays out the discernible qualifications that must be evident in the life of the called but first offers a word of encouragement. This pastoral work is a “noble task,” a “good work.” That is to say, “not the honor associated with it,” but that the work itself is good and noble.⁶⁰

JFB notes that this is, “A needful preface to what follows: for the office of ... [an] overseer in Paul’s day, attended as it was with hardship and often persecution, would not seem to the world generally a desirable and ‘good work.’”⁶¹

Still today, the work is fraught with many perils and much labor. Nevertheless, it is a good work, accompanied by much joy in those perils, pleasing and acceptable, instituted by Jesus Christ for the benefit of His church.

Insofar as these following qualities are discernible, they are not easily dismissed. So much hurt and spiritual suffering may be avoided if we would simply obey God’s Word in this matter of appointing pastors.

⁶⁰ Robert Jamieson, A. R. Fausset, and David Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible* (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997), 2:409.

⁶¹ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 2:409.

Sometimes we are inclined to look at this list, and seeing that it is quite exhaustive, we say, “Well, if a man has most of these qualities, then he will be okay.” That is simply not the case.

When we compromise on these matters, we are setting ourselves up for future strife. It is in our best interests to ensure that those who profess a call to the pastoral role are not deficient in these areas.

And it is important for the body at large to know these qualifications so that we can, with eyes wide open, discern those who are disqualified from such a role and run in the other direction when we encounter them!

Vv. 2-3 Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, 3 not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Here we come to the beginning of a quite detailed list of qualities that are to mark pastors of Jesus’ church.

The first characteristic is that he must be above reproach. This speaks to the personal character and integrity of the overseer because he must be unassailable in matters of personal conduct, the way he lives, the way he speaks, and the way he interacts with others.

The pastor’s conduct must exemplify Christian virtue and communicate through deeds and words the person and work of Jesus Christ.

The primacy of this virtue is certainly well placed at the head of this list. How many modern and historic examples could we give regarding how impropriety, extravagance, arrogance, and vice carried out by men claiming to be pastors has torn apart churches, wounded God's people, exploited the spiritually vulnerable, and given the world occasion to blaspheme the name of God (2 Sam 12:14).

When men in spiritual authority do not walk in a manner consistent with their calling, it has a way of staining the church in a way that is unique unto itself. The average Christian may fall into sin, and yes, they will undoubtedly face criticism and charges of hypocrisy, but this is amplified a hundred times when done by a church leader.

We also see that an overseer of God's church is to be "the husband of one wife." This further reinforces our understanding of Paul's limitation of women in authoritative spiritual leadership as Paul uses distinct language in this verse to speak of people not in the generic sense but specifically of one man with one wife.

A question some people ask about this verse is, Does this disqualify men who have been divorced?

There are varying opinions on this, but the context seems to indicate that Paul's concern is directed to the present active conduct of such leaders and not past wrongs or sins; otherwise, nobody would ever be qualified to fill these roles.⁶² Paul's point here is to emphasize "faithfulness in marriage" rather than dealing with past sins or those who are unmarried

⁶² Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 917.

altogether.⁶³

Certainly, infidelity in marriage on the part of the pastor has been the downfall of many churches and also demonstrates that if he is willing to compromise in that area of his life, faithfulness to his spouse, then he will certainly compromise in matters of spiritual importance as the marriage covenant carries significant theological weight (Eph 5:22-33).

The pastor is to be sober-minded, that is clear-headed, serious, not an overt goof-ball. People need to know that the pastor takes his role seriously and that caring for Jesus' people demands a clear head and the personality to take his calling seriously.

He must also be self-controlled, which is one of the fruits of the Spirit, and the pastor should bear those fruits and turn away from his more base desires or impulses.

He must be respectable. Intuitively we know what this means, but BDAG offers this definition in light of the context: "having characteristics or qualities that evoke admiration."⁶⁴¹²

The pastor then must live in a way that accords with Christ's virtue and allows people to see him as somebody who has something to say, somebody they can learn from. People listen to and learn from those whom they respect. If we don't respect somebody, we're not going to give them the time of day, much less entrust them with the deep spiritual matters in our lives.

⁶³ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 478.

⁶⁴ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 561.

A pastor must be hospitable, willing to open his home and heart to others, to live in real life with real people with a warm, approachable, welcoming disposition.

A pastor must also be able to teach. This is not a technicality but a core function of what pastors do – teaching God’s people in God’s ways and expounding upon the person and work of Jesus Christ for those under their care.

It is fashionable today to appoint various types of pastors within larger congregations to carry out various functions – administrative, personnel, organizational, etc.

Some positions come with respectable adjectives like “executive” or “outreach,” but regardless of title, all pastors must be able to teach well!

This isn’t simply a technicality that is easily fulfilled or dismissed. If a man’s Biblical teaching skills are not effective, then how could we suppose that God has called them to the work of a pastor? In fact, many scholars agree that the terminology found in Eph 4:11 concerning pastors and teachers refers to the single office, which may be rendered as “pastor-teacher.”⁶⁵

A corollary can be drawn from this. All pastors must be

⁶⁵ “The uniting of these two groups by one article sets them apart from the other gifted leaders. Absolute distinction, then, is probably not in view. In light of the fact that elders and pastors had similar functions in the NT, since elders were to be teachers, the pastors were also to be teachers. Further, presumably not all teachers were elders or pastors. This evidence seems to suggest that the [pastors] ποιμέναις were a part of the [teachers] διδασκάλους in Eph 4:11. ... Thus, Eph 4:11 seems to affirm that all pastors were to be teachers, though not all teachers were to be pastors.” Daniel B. Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1996), 284.

teachers, while all teachers may not be pastors. In fact, there are many gifted Bible teachers who may be called pastors but do not have the heart of a pastor.

Sadly, many churches are content with having seemingly lovely human beings as pastors who can't teach and technically skilled teachers in the pastoral role who can't or won't pastor. We must not compromise on this.

Along with certain attributes that define a qualified pastor for this role, we also see some prohibitions or things that pastors are expressly forbidden from.

The first is drunkenness. The pastor must not be a drunk! While the Bible doesn't issue a blanket prohibition against alcohol, it does offer several important warnings that are applicable to everybody.

We learn from Proverbs: "Wine is a mocker, strong drink a brawler, and whoever is led astray by it is not wise" (Pro 20:1).

And

"Do not look at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup and goes down smoothly. In the end it bites like a serpent and stings like an adder" (Pro 23:31-32).

Certainly, alcohol abuse has been the undoing of many families, and pastors in God's house should know that it can have the same effect on any church family (1 Cor 6:10; Gal 5:21; Eph 5:18).

Another key qualification for those seeking the pastoral office is that they must not be violent or quarrelsome but gentle. This is important because there are certainly pastors who have built their own personal brand of being a bully,

rough, provocative, or someone who wants to fight about non-essentials. And people turn out in droves just to watch the fireworks!

There is a time and place for Scriptural correction and rebuke, and we should always speak plainly about the truth. But here we see that overseers of Christ's church are to embody one of Jesus' most demonstrable characteristics – gentleness.

This upsets our paradigm of spiritual warfare. Sometimes we think we are supposed to be the Lord's cage fighter, battling it out with demonic forces, culture wars, and unbelievers.

But the spiritual war is fought and won in the Spirit of Jesus. We don't have to rage against our people or the culture because the battle has already been won. Most of the time, this kind of brash, quarrelsome, and violent rhetoric and behavior is directed toward God's people and not the enemies that these violent men claim to oppose. What a shame! It ought not to be so.

There is no need for friendly fire from the pulpit. We are to care gently for Jesus' people, even in correction and rebuke, being fully convinced of the truth and faithfulness of the words that we declare.

Additionally, and notably, a pastor is not to be a lover of money. Jesus taught, "No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money" (Matt 6:24).

And yet, there are innumerable examples of men who

have intentionally built their brand and ministry around getting more money!

This doesn't mean that the pastor and his family ought to starve but that his sole concern is not how to get a pay raise or live a life of luxury.

Are we serving Jesus or our bank accounts? The two cannot coincide. That much is clear from Jesus' teaching; you **cannot** serve God and money. So, any pastor who demonstrates a fixation on wealth is disqualified from this holy office. When our minds are fixated on building better, getting more, or growing the church's finances, then they are not where they should be – primarily concerned with the spiritual health of the flock!

We have examined the qualifications for those who serve in pastoral roles. There is still much to say, but it bears mentioning that while these are expressly qualifications for pastors, they are also marks of everyday Christians!

Christians, though they may not be called to the pastoral role (and very few are), ought to be marked by these same things.

Just because a pastor is primarily supposed to embody these qualities doesn't mean that non-pastors are granted licenses **not** to do these things.

We are all being conformed to the image of Christ by His Spirit and His Word. And these are the marks of Jesus: above reproach, faithful to His bride the church, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunk, not violent, not infatuated with money, but gentle and pastoral. He is the Chief Shepherd, the Good Shepherd (1

Pet 5:4; John 10:11). And we follow His example

CHAPTER 8 | 1 TIMOTHY 3:4-7

In the previous material, we examined a partial list of qualifications that must be evident in the life of one called to be an overseer, a pastor, in God's church.

These qualifications include: being above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not a drunk, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, and not a lover of money (1 Tim 3:2-3).

These qualifications are not to be compromised nor dismissed. Nor are they to be viewed as some report card where partial completion is good enough.

They must be part and parcel of the man of God, called to guard, watch over, shepherd, and teach God's people.

They must not be superficially present and used simply as props to convince others of one's goodness but ingrained in the very fabric of the man of God. They must be part of his substance even as they are found in Christ Himself.

Now we turn to the task of examining the remaining qualifications and prohibitions for those who are called to the pastoral office.

If we consider our modern era of "job-hunting" (for lack of a better term), we could see these as the prerequisites for those who desire this noble task.

With that in mind, it is incumbent on the one who desires the work of an overseer to carefully examine himself to determine whether or not he is in fact prepared to step into

the role as a shepherd among God's flock.

If we were looking at a job posting that contained a lengthy list of technical and experiential qualifications, we would not so easily dismiss them. Instead, hopefully, we would be wise enough to say to ourselves that we are unqualified for that work, discerning where we fall short.

We know that if we were foolish enough to proceed on false grounds, our scheme would certainly be discovered in due time by those we work with.

This is important not only for the pastor to understand but also for the congregation to understand because congregations and pastors go together like peanut butter and jelly.

There's no such thing as a lone-ranger pastor. The very nature of the pastoral office, while deriving spiritual authority through the Lord Jesus Christ, and standing upon the authority of God's Word, requires the assent of a body of believers to recognize his calling and election.

Paul alludes to this briefly in 1 Thess 5:12-13. "We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves."

Whoever heard of a shepherd without a flock? What good is one glove without the other?⁶⁶

Those men who claim the title of pastor while being disconnected from any form of congregation are standing on very thin ground.

⁶⁶ mewithoutYou, *Gentlemen*, Tooth and Nail Records, 2002.

Nowhere in the NT can we find reference to a legitimate overseer, elder, pastor (or apostle, evangelist, prophet) who is isolated from a local body of believers **because** God gifts these offices to **the church!** And the church, being universal, always manifests itself physically and locally under the Biblical headship of the Lord Jesus Christ and His appointed ministers (Rom 12:4-5; Eph 5:23, 4:11-12; Col 1:18).⁶⁷

As members of one Body, we are diverse in gifting, strengths, and weaknesses, and yet mutually interdependent upon one another. Each of us are individual members placed within the Body of Christ as the Lord sees fit for the benefit of the whole (1 Cor 12).⁶⁸

This mutual interdependence provides the accountability needed within the church to ensure that those called to be pastors are indeed qualified and prepared in their hearts for the work.

Notably, we find with the three remaining pastoral qualifications that Paul spends a little more time describing **why** they are important. And, as with the previous qualifications, even as they must be discerned within the heart of the called, they are also discernible from an outsider or congregational perspective. And the lack of these qualifications can greatly damage the pastoral office and the church, and this lack undermines the credibility of the one who stands at the pulpit.

The first has to deal with family life and holds tremendous

⁶⁷ Robert Saucy, *The Church in God's Program* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 1972), np.

⁶⁸ Saucy, *The Church in God's Program*, np.

spiritual and ecclesial significance.

Vv. 4-5 He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?

A pastor in God's church, who is married, and has a family, finds himself in the unique position of being tested for the work of God in his own home.

How one cares for his home and family is a good indicator of how he will care for God's household and family, the church.

In their translation notes, Arichea and Hatton write, "The word for *manage* includes the sense of ruling over, governing, caring for, being concerned about. Manage and care are synonymous, with the latter having the components of leadership and concern."⁶⁹

Now we must consider the **how** of managing, caring for, and leading one's own home.

Paul tells us that the father of the home must keep his children under control (submissive) that is born out of respect for their father. The children in the home are well-behaved, obedient, and well-cared for.

As westerners, we kind of bristle at the terms (and ideas) "submissive, submit, or submission." We have attached all kinds of baggage to that word that involves abuse, domination, or even being conquered. We think of causing

⁶⁹ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 68–69.

people to submit in terms of violence or force, but that is not the intention of the text here. **Because** remember that the qualifications for an overseer include that they are expressly not violent or quarrelsome but gentle.

Paul instructs the NT churches on the responsibilities of children and parents toward one another in both Ephesians and Colossians, writing: “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ (this is the first commandment with a promise), ‘that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land.’ Fathers, do not provoke your children to anger, but bring them up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord” (Eph 6:1-4).

And

“Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged” (Col 3:20-21).

If a man manages his home by fear, violence, provocation, and abuse and so claims to oversee his home well because his family are hollow shells of human beings who have been whipped into submission, he is disqualified from this work.

This is a protective measure for the church because if a man will do that to his own family, he will certainly do it to the church. And sadly, many churches and believers have had to endure abrasive, abusive, violent, and quarrelsome pastors who have conquered their families and churches. These men point to the results of their method as successful but ignore the way of Jesus’ gentleness.

We also see here that the one who desires the work of a pastor must lead his home in all *dignity* which precludes abuse,

coercion, and emotional and spiritual manipulation. He must lead his family in the way of Jesus, taking the high road and the path of dignity, viewing his children and spouse as image-bearers who are worthy of respect, care, and love.

This is the kind of person who will shepherd God's children well. Even though human beings are messy, we must view them as image-bearers who are to be led with all dignity.

V. 6 He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.

Another qualification for a pastor is that he must not be new! The Greek term used here, νεόφυτος (neophytos), is the forebear of our modern English term “neophyte,” which means somebody who is new to a subject or skill.⁷⁰

We have to think about this for a bit because all of the first-century churches were relatively new. There was not a vast pool of seasoned believers to take up the charge to shepherd God's people.

From a practical standpoint, it is easy to see the value of this warning not to allow a new Christian, somebody who is new to the faith, new to Scripture, new to the church, to hold spiritual authority.

We understand implicitly that we would like our overseers to have had some life experience and some foundational training in how to properly exegete the Scriptures and care for souls before we put them into the pulpit. We know all too

⁷⁰ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 669.

well the damage that can be wrought by an untrained, unseasoned, immature believer whose theology is framed in clichés and one-liners. Or worse, one who takes that sharp two-edged sword that is the Word of God and starts swinging it around haphazardly – decapitating the unwary. These are certainly issues to be concerned about.

However, Paul explicitly states why a recent convert is not qualified for the pastoral office, and it doesn't have anything to do with training, education, or life experiences. It has to do with pride.

The work of the pastor is accompanied by many traps and perils. One of them is pride or becoming conceited, which can lead to a whole host of character issues.

Charles Spurgeon preached this illustration which I find fitting, “If your child should have a rapid growth in its arms but not in its legs, or if its legs should lengthen but not its arms, what a strange being it would be! What a monster! It is the growth of each limb in proportion that brings the man to perfection. So when our heads grow faster than our hearts, it is an ill sign.”⁷¹

The issue with a new Christian seeking the pastoral office is that he is still a child in the faith. That isn't a bad thing – we are all to receive the gospel as little children (Mark 10:15). The issue is letting our heads grow faster and fatter than our hearts.

The man who is called to shepherd God's people must allow time for growth, for maturing in the faith, and for acquiring the requisite scar tissue to keep them grounded in

⁷¹ Spurgeon, *300 Sermon Illustrations from Charles Spurgeon*.

humility with the understanding that it is God who qualifies his people for ministry, not ourselves.

Pastors must come to the place in their own spiritual maturity where they carry the message, “Lord, have mercy on me a sinner” (Luke 18:13), around their neck and, trusting in the work of Jesus, get on with the work in meekness, faith, and all devotion.

Humility allows men called to the ministry to operate from a position of grace and be compassionate to other sinners in need of mercy and the gospel.

The alternative is terrifying – lest he fall into the same condemnation as the devil! Paul here indicates to the church that pride caused Satan’s condemnation. Satan desired to exalt himself above God, and the punishment for that is separation from God and eternal damnation (Isa 14:12-15; 2 Pet 2:4; Jude 1:6).

See how great a warning this is for those who are called to oversee God’s flock! Paul is concerned about the welfare of the flock **and** the welfare of the shepherd. It is not Paul’s desire that anyone would fall victim to that trap and exalt himself above God, so he carefully warns the new convert to keep away from the temptation.

When this happens in a church setting, when the pastor forgets that he works for God and not the other way around, when he begins to buy-in to all of the good press about his ministry, and when he holds on to the praise and congratulations from the congregation rather than turning it back to God, the results are disastrous and end in church splits and driving people from the faith altogether as the

prideful, conceited shepherd misrepresents God and wounds His people. Let it not be so!

The congregation has a role in this too! We must not push the immature into the pulpit simply because of gifting, charisma, or vision. We must let God's children, even those called to ministry, have time and space to mature in their hearts and learn the way of Jesus, the way of humility.

V. 7 Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

The final qualification for a pastor is that he must have a good reputation in the eyes of unbelievers! This is quite a challenging verse because we often draw very distinct lines between the world and the church.

Some Christians couldn't care less what the world thinks about them. And to be sure, there are times when that is good. We must not shrink back from what is plain in God's Word to appease the sensibilities of the society around us. Nor may we bring reproach upon the Bride of Christ because of sin, doing something unethical, illegal, or immoral, or just being plain ugly and hateful to others while blaming it on Jesus.

Peter writes: "Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable, so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation" (1 Pet 2:12).

The fact is that the church *will* be accused, criticized, and

assailed enough without our members (leaders and lay-people alike) giving the world a good reason to do it.

See here again that the work of the ministry is accompanied by many traps set by Satan himself. One of those traps is to invite disgrace upon the Bride of Christ, the church, by bad behavior.

So then, a man called to shepherd God's people will avoid this trap by being a man whose identity is shaped by the Holy Spirit. He will give no justifiable cause to be accused by unbelievers, who, in fact, will think well of him.

In this way, the church can be viewed as the holy host that it is, a bright shining city on a hill filled with God's sanctified people who desire the good of all. It will not be a circus for hacks and posers seeking to grasp power over others and beat them about the head and shoulders, all the while claiming a Biblical pretense.

Rather we are called to walk in the way of Jesus and represent Him to the church, which is composed of believers all along the spectrum of spiritual maturity, belief, and theology. *And* we are to represent Jesus well to those outside the church, who likewise hold equally diverse and incomplete theology and convictions.

The work of the pastor doesn't end when he leaves the pulpit. It doesn't end when he leaves the church building. He is responsible, as we all are, to carry the message of the gospel outside the walls of the church into the wild where the sheep roam.

Yes, there are wolves out there! There is a very real enemy! There are traps! However, there are also sheep out there who

are lost and need to be carried home. They need a shepherd to bring them to the Gate of the Chief Shepherd, Jesus Christ (John 10:7-9; 1 Pet 5:4).

By Jesus' own example He, the Good Shepherd, gave His life for the sheep, and any man called to this task must be willing to do likewise by Jesus' help, remaining committed to these things.

CHAPTER 9 | 1 TIMOTHY 3:8-13

Having addressed the Biblical qualifications for the pastoral office (which is variously referred to as overseer, elder, bishop, or pastor), Paul now turns his attention to laying out the Biblical qualifications for one who is called to serve as a deacon in God's church.

However, before examining these qualifications (which are just as important as those applied to the pastor), we must come to a biblical understanding of what a deacon is, what their role is, and why they are so important to the church.

The term "deacon" is no doubt familiar to many of us. However, based on our individual denominational framework, we may have differing views on their function and purpose.

Perhaps when we consider the term "deacon," we think of a person who is responsible for helping people to their seats.

Perhaps we think of deacons as men who simply represent or serve the church on Sunday and maybe wear a special name tag or something like that to denote their significance.

Perhaps in another denominational framework, we think of deacons as a group of people who serve on a "Deacon Board" and help write the by-laws of the church, run its administration, and help guide its governance.

It is important to note that there was a clear delineation between the offices of overseer (pastor) and deacon within the first churches.

Paul distinctly addresses these two separate groups along

with the congregation as a whole in his opening remarks to the Philippians: “Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, To all the saints in Christ Jesus who are at Philippi, with the overseers and deacons” (Phil 1:1).

As it turns out, the Bible gives us a pretty good idea of the role of a deacon.

First and foremost, let us acknowledge that the formal term comes from the Greek word δίακονος (*diakonos*), which is simply defined as “servant.”⁷²

But let’s go back to the beginning, to the inception of this office, to Acts chapter 6.

In this context, we see the burgeoning first church in Jerusalem growing rapidly in numbers and faced with the urgent need for reliable servants to assist in the daily work at hand. (Notice that what follows was a **big** work, more than just an hour or two on a Sunday morning.)

In fact, the need for deacons was actually born out of controversy and more work than the Apostles could handle themselves. “Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution. And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. But we will devote ourselves to prayer

⁷² For a more extensive treatment and additional nuance see Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 230.

and to the ministry of the word.’ And what they said pleased the whole gathering, and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolaus, a proselyte of Antioch. These they set before the apostles, and they prayed and laid their hands on them. And the word of God continued to increase, and the number of the disciples multiplied greatly in Jerusalem” (Act 6:1-7).

Notably, Wayne Grudem points out, “The noun *deacon* is not itself used in Acts 6:1–6, but a related verb (Gk. *Διακονέω* ... “to serve”) is found in verse 2: ‘It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to *serve* tables.’ ... It seems appropriate to think of these seven men as ‘deacons’ even though the name *deacon* had perhaps not yet come to be applied to them as they began this responsibility, for they seem to be given tasks which fit well with the responsibilities of deacons ... in 1 Timothy 3:8–12.”⁷³

We see then that a deacon’s role is uniquely service-focused in the practical realm. They were not selected or appointed to rule over the Apostles (or, in later times, the elders or overseers), nor is this just a title handed out to elevate certain members over others. Instead, they assisted with the practical functions of church life, which included caring for widows.

We learn from the context of Acts 6 that part of the role of the first deacons was to free up time for the teachers of the church to commit themselves to prayer and study of the

⁷³ Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 919.

Word.⁷⁴

What a mess the church would be if all of the Bible teacher's time were consumed with administrative tasks!

Certainly, there are necessary administrative tasks that need to be accomplished, but the declaration of God's Word to God's people is the primary purpose of the overseer or pastor. So it should not be pushed to the side for anything else!

The danger for pastors is to be so consumed in the day-to-day demands of administration that they neglect the responsibility to care for souls. This can have disastrous consequences.

So, it appears that the role of deacons in the church became well established early in the development of the church and has lasted into our current age.

And just like pastors/elders/overseers, the people called to this role are to be marked by certain characteristics which qualify them for this essential work.

But before we look at these qualifications, let us reflect upon Jesus' words regarding service.

These words are, of course, applicable and right and good for all believers, but it seems especially pertinent when we consider the noble task of deacons who must willingly subordinate themselves to the congregation as servants.

“And Jesus called them to him and said to them, ‘You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles

⁷⁴ “It is significant that nowhere in the New Testament do deacons have ruling authority over the church as the elders do, nor are deacons ever required to be able to teach Scripture or sound doctrine.” Grudem, *Systematic Theology*, 920.

lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your *servant*, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be *served* but to *serve*, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Mark 10:42-45, emphasis added).

Notably, the term used for “servant” in v. 43 is *διακονος*, along with its cognate verb *διακονεω* in v. 45.

V. 8 Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain.

As we begin examining the qualifications of a deacon, we see that by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (and perhaps a little bit of experience in church life), Paul adds a few more qualifications on top of those found in Acts 6 (good repute and full of the Spirit and wisdom) regarding who should be permitted to serve as a deacon in God’s church.

Notice, too, that there are some parallels between the qualifications of an overseer from the preceding material and what we now find for deacons.

Even as we have different roles (the Lord placing each member among the Body as He sees fit for the benefit of all, as in 1 Cor 12:18), we are supposed to share some common traits regarding holiness.

The first qualification is that a deacon must be dignified,

“worthy of respect/honor, noble, serious.”⁷⁵

Deacons must take their role seriously and demonstrate by their conduct that they are worthy of the respect of God’s people. This is an important trait for a representative of Christ’s church and one who is called to serve the body.

By way of being dignified, deacons must not be double-tongued. That is to say, they must not be prone to speak out of both sides of their mouth. They can’t say one thing and do another.

The church is counting on deacons to be forthright and to do what they say they will do. This may also carry the negative connotation of publicly affirming one position while privately holding another.

For example, one of the significant characteristics of Biblical church leadership is unity in the Spirit and oneness of mind among the leaders (Rom 15:5; Phil 2:2). This unity is undermined and damaged when servants and leaders are double-tongued, agreeing in one setting and then withdrawing their support in another to curry favor and jockey for power.

Deacons must let their yes be yes and their no be no. As Jesus taught: “Let what you say be simply ‘Yes’ or ‘No’; anything more than this comes from evil” (Matt 5:37).

Deacons, like pastors, must not be alcoholics; we understand the seriousness of this warning. Alcohol abuse causes much damage, and those who serve within the church have a greater platform and opportunity to cause significant damage to God’s people.

⁷⁵ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 919.

They must not be greedy for money. This is quite a practical application! Of course, all Christians should understand that greed and chasing the almighty dollar are sinful and should be turned away from.

But deacons find themselves in the unique role of the hands-on stewardship of the church's resources. They help in the collection of tithes and offerings, banking, distribution, and purchasing. They also help care for the facilities.

So then, before they are put in such a position, their character must be tested to ensure that they are up to the task, not greedy or seeking to line their pockets.

They are to be faithful in their dealings and care of the church's resources. After all, every penny a church has comes from the faithfulness of God's people. That is a responsibility we should not take lightly.

V. 9 They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

One who serves as a deacon must have a firm grasp of the gospel. The "mystery of faith" is the gospel of Jesus Christ, which has been revealed to us.

The work of a deacon is a spiritual work born out of the truth of the gospel. The one who is qualified for the work must be firmly anchored in its truth, and their conduct must show that is the case. Remember that earlier in the letter, Paul spends much time addressing the errors of false teachers (1 Tim 1:3-11), so we expect our deacons to shun heresy and aberrant doctrine for the truth of the gospel and to be

defenders of it.⁷⁶

This verse lets us know that a deacon isn't selected solely on the basis of his utility or benefit to the church in practical service.

That is a dangerous trap that has been wandered into countless times throughout church history. We pick people for these roles based on what they can do for us. But that isn't enough; a deacon's service and benefit to the Body ought to be the fruit of a right grasp of the gospel and a life of faith.

V. 10 And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

The one who aspires to the work of the pastor must not be a new convert (1 Tim 3:6). So, too, a deacon must also be tested and prove their character and faithfulness before being appointed to this role.

BDAG defines the term “tested” as: “to make a critical examination of someth[ing] to determine genuineness, put to the test.”⁷⁷

This is something that we ought not disregard too eagerly.

Sometimes we get excited by new servants. I know I do. We want so badly for people to grasp hold of the work that the Lord is doing in our churches. So sometimes, we don't allow enough time and space to see whether or not that person is ready for the responsibility.

All too often, those people flame out or fail to persist in

⁷⁶ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 490.

⁷⁷ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 255.

their work over the long haul. Only time will tell if one is qualified for this work, or any ministerial work for that matter.

Later in this letter, Paul writes, “Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands” (1 Tim 5:22). This means don’t be too quick to put somebody in a ministry position. If they are truly qualified and committed to the Lord’s work, that will prove itself in time.

This is especially true for leadership/servanthood within the church. An old saying captures this sentiment nicely, “Everybody wants to be a servant until they are treated like one.” Only time will tell.

Vv. 11-12 Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things. Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well.

Verses 11 and 12 parallel the thought of a pastor being one who rules his home well (vv. 4-5). It turns out that we can know a good deal about somebody’s character by how their family life is, for one who is called to serve God’s people must have their own home in order first. They must see their families as their first ministry.

There is an interesting debate here that is yet unresolved on whether or not Paul intends to address women serving as deacons within the church or if he intends to define further

the characteristics of a deacon's family.⁷⁸

The church certainly had women serving as deacons, although the term “deaconess” didn't appear until about the 4th century or so.⁷⁹ Regardless, it reads much more naturally to see this text as continuing to define the family life of one called to serve as a deacon.

Notably, the character and conduct of a deacon's wife and children are addressed here. What we see is not some form of legalism but that the conduct of the deacon's family ought to be noticeably shaped by the gospel. They aren't prone to gossip or accusations but rather are dignified, stable, and faithful.

Also, please understand that serving the church is not a one-man show. Anybody who puts their hand to the plow is, by extension, involving their family.

If a deacon cares for his home in a way that cultivates these attributes, then that is a rather good indicator of how he will care for and serve God's people.

V. 13 For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

William Mounce writes: “Far from being a menial task as some might surmise, providing daily service to the church has

⁷⁸ Most exegetical/technical commentaries spend a fair amount of time detailing the positions on this topic with regards to Paul's subject being the wives of deacons or women as deacons.

⁷⁹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 202.

its rewards, and in summary Paul mentions two: deacons are building a good reputation within the community, and they are developing an even deeper confidence in their faith. All this is a far cry from Paul's opponents, whose reputation in the community is reprehensible and whose heretical behavior has shipwrecked the faith instead of increasing confidence in the church."⁸⁰

Our temptation is to view the work of deacons as lackluster, menial, or unimportant, but there could be nothing further from the truth. True, biblical deacons demonstrate that they have embraced the Spirit of the Lord Jesus by making themselves servants in all the ways we take for granted.

In our church, we are not big on titles, but we are big on service. This means picking up trash, making sure the bathrooms are clean, making sure the chairs are straight, and that the coffee is ready. They also help with the tithes and offerings, passing out communion, **and** much prayer for the Body.

Deacons willingly take on the role of servants, and in doing so, they present to us the shape of Jesus. They are indispensable in our churches. **And** what we see here is that by doing this, they also are built up in their own faith.

In the quiet moments of servitude, we have much time to reflect upon the heart and nature of Christ. In those moments, we wrestle with ideas of identity and self-worth. The deacon may wonder, Aren't I better than this? Don't I deserve to do something greater? And in those moments,

⁸⁰ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

Jesus reveals Himself as the servant of all who gave His life for others. In those moments, our faith is strengthened as we share in the work of Christ. In those moments, Jesus' words sound forth in our hearts, "If anyone would be first, he must be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). That is biblical greatness.

CHAPTER 10 | 1 TIMOTHY 3:14-16

V. 14-15a I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, 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.

Following his detailed instructions regarding the proper conduct of the church as a response to the gospel, the Apostle Paul gives another reason for writing that is connected to his overall purpose for writing this letter.

Remember that in 1 Tim 1:3-4, Paul expresses his main purpose to Timothy: “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, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith.”

Paul instructed Timothy in the strongest terms to refute false teachers within the church.

Having a gang of false teachers within the Body of Christ would have certainly corrupted the church’s views on proper worship and gathering. Because, as has been previously stated, what you believe dictates how you behave.

So then, in the preceding material, Paul devoted much time and effort to laying out exactly how believers are to conduct themselves in order to fulfill their divinely appointed

role as the Bride and Body of Christ.

That instruction ranged from identifying wrong doctrine, declaring sound doctrine, how men and women are to relate to one another, and the proper qualifications of pastors and deacons. And all of that is meant to equip the church to do things “decently and in order” (1 Cor 14:40).

But there are a few additional things that bear mentioning when we consider verses 14 and 15.

The first is Paul’s desire to be with them.

Notice that Paul hoped to come to them, to be with them. He earnestly desired to fellowship with the saints, which is an essential attribute of God’s people.

By the Holy Spirit that dwells within us, we desire to be with one another, to participate in this sacred gathering in order to worship the triune God, to encourage one another, to share life with one another, and to build each other up for Jesus’ sake and the betterment of the Body.

Fellowshipping with the churches was not a drudgery for Paul but a blessing and something he looked forward to. May we have this heart as well.

Also, notice how Paul describes the church as “the household of God.” This helps us understand the familial nature of the church. It is not some man-made institution, as some may suggest, but a holy, sanctified family under the headship of the Lord Jesus Christ (Eph 1:22-23).

We who gather together in His name are *sons and daughters of the Father*. “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might

receive adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, ‘Abba! Father!’ So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God” (Gal 4:3-7).

These verses also help inform our Ecclesiology, our understanding of the doctrine of the church.

Paul tells us in Ephesians that the church was and is established by and held together by the Lord Jesus Christ through the work of the Apostles and Prophets. “So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole structure, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord. In him you also are being built together into a dwelling place for God by the Spirit” (Eph 2:19-22).

In times past, the dwelling place of God’s Spirit was in the Temple. He now inhabits His people, and there is something special when we gather together in Jesus’ name.

Also, notice how Paul characterizes the church as a possession of the Living God.⁸¹

The church is far more than a man-made institution. It is a living organism that belongs to a living God. We do not worship at the altar of some long-dead martyr. We worship

⁸¹ I take this as a Genitive of Possession. For more information on the semantic force of the Genitive in relation to “the church of the living God,” see David L. Mathewson and Elodie Ballantine Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar: Syntax for Students of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2019), 13. See also Wallace, *Greek Grammar beyond the Basics*, 81.

the God who has been revealed to us perfectly in the person and work of Jesus Christ, who conquered death and lives forevermore (John 14:9; Col 1:15; Heb 1:3).

And since that is the church that we are a part of, we have an obligation to take it seriously and allow our conduct in God's house to be shaped by the reality of who He is. As we abide in Him individually and corporately, we shall bear fruit unto Him.

That church, the universal body of Christ that manifests itself locally, the church that Jesus declared will not be conquered even by Hell itself (Matt 16:18), His church stands for something. It stands for truth. It is a pillar and foundation of truth.

Truth is an exceedingly slippery term in our postmodern society. But don't be deceived. The tendency for humans to cast doubt on absolute truth has been around since Jesus' day, as exemplified by Pontius Pilate's question — "What is truth?" (John 18:38)

Let's reflect on that question. What is truth?

Jesus taught us, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6). The World needs this word!

Jesus Christ is *the* truth.

He is true, His words are true, and every word He has preserved for us and passed to us through the Apostles and Prophets, through the Holy Scriptures, is true and right and good.

This is what Jesus' church stands for.

We do not stand for special interests, political discourse,

societal debate, or anything else.

While some of those things may appear noble (and certainly some of those things may be right and good), we **must** stand on and lift up the truth of Jesus Christ.

And we **must** remain committed to allowing the truth of Christ to shape our understanding and application of truth in all other realms of existence.

V. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

In these verses, Paul employs what was probably a common first-century confessional hymn that was likely developed by early Christians to succinctly summarize the truth that the church has stood upon from the beginning and that we must be committed to in our time.⁸²

This truth does not include moralizing society for the sake of good behavior. It doesn't include performative social justice for the sake of assuaging our felt guilt. It doesn't include a dictate to panhandle for our preferred political party. It doesn't include country club discipleship.

What Paul affirms for us is the life-changing truth of the gospel embraced by the first Christians, who, under much duress, the threat of violence and even death, declared the truth – the gospel of Jesus Christ.

⁸² Most commentaries and scholars agree that Paul is quoting a well-known church hymn in this verse.

Paul lays out this truth beginning with the phrase, “Great indeed we confess,” which may be “literally rendered ‘confessedly,’ with the idea that what follows is affirmed by the community as true and undisputed.”⁸³

The idea Paul is trying to convey, and apparently one that the first church clung to, is that this truth is beyond all doubt or question.⁸⁴ While some may feel a rush of excitement over splitting doctrinal hairs, the main thing, the gospel, remains incontrovertible throughout the universal church.

God became a man in the person of Jesus Christ. He shares in our humanity. He knows how messy humans can be. He is intimately familiar with our fears, anxieties, temptations, hang-ups, and doubts. And He is sympathetic to that. “For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin” (Heb 4:15).

He was vindicated – proved to be right, justified, and righteous by the work of the Holy Spirit, Himself being one with the Spirit.

That is important because throughout the gospels and His ministry, Jesus Christ said and did things that are unfathomable to the human mind, and He was certainly rejected by many in His own time.

In the aftermath of Jesus’ teaching and healing ministry, having seen God come down to people and change their lives for the better, many accused Him of being insane or demon-possessed (John 7:20; 8:48,52; 10:20).

⁸³ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 81–82.

⁸⁴ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 182.

He was also accused of being an evildoer, evading taxes, and attempting to subvert Roman imperial rule (Luke 23:2; John 18:28-37).

His doctrine was questioned at every turn, and He was woefully misunderstood by the Biblical experts of His day. Yet the question remains, even as Jesus declared Himself to be the truth. Can we believe His teachings, His miracles, His words?

The answer is, Yes. It is the Holy Spirit who vindicates the person and work of Christ through the resurrection and the continuing ministry of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the sons and daughters of God's household (Heb 2:1-4).

We know that Jesus is true, and every word He uttered is true because He is alive today by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom 1:4; 8:11).

We know that Jesus is true, and every word He uttered is true because that same Spirit lives in us and has raised us, who were once dead in our trespasses, to life in Him (John 5:21; Rom 8:11; Phil 3:10).

This is more than blind faith. This is trusting in the work of the Spirit because we have experienced it and seen it in the lives of others.

The reality of Christ has also been made evident to all creation in that he has been seen by angels and proclaimed among the nations.⁸⁵

All of creation has seen His work!

George Knight comments on this: "Angels are referred to here apparently to emphasize the cosmic nature of Christ's

⁸⁵ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 527.

work and its significance.”⁸⁶

The person and work of Christ hold tremendous universal, cosmic significance.

Paul emphasizes this universal authority and glory when he writes to the Colossians: “He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross” (Col 1:15-20).

Sometimes we can unintentionally diminish the glory of Jesus by focusing solely on His humanity.

This early confessional remedies that error by stating simply that the glory and power of Christ are recognized in both the human and heavenly realms. Angels have seen the glory of the gospel and the glory of the redemptive work of God among men in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Angels were present at His miraculous birth. “And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, ‘Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace

⁸⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 185.

among those with whom he is pleased!” (Luke 2:12-14)

They were present in His earthly ministry. “And He was there in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan, and was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to Him” (Mark 1:13).

They were present for His resurrection. “And they found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they went in they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. While they were perplexed about this, behold, two men stood by them in dazzling apparel. And as they were frightened and bowed their faces to the ground, the men said to them, ‘Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but has risen. Remember how he told you, while he was still in Galilee, that the Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men and be crucified and on the third day rise’” (Luke 24:2-7).

They were present for His ascension into heaven. “And when he had said these things, as they were looking on, he was lifted up, and a cloud took him out of their sight. And while they were gazing into heaven as he went, behold, two men stood by them in white robes, and said, ‘Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into heaven? This Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven’” (Act 1:9-11).

God’s creation, visible and invisible, has witnessed the work of Christ!

And that work of Christ turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6), being proclaimed to the nations, all nations, and not just to God’s old covenant people. All people are invited

to enter into the new covenant of Jesus Christ, the covenant of life, forgiveness, and peace with God.

As that message goes forth, it has certainly been believed upon within the world. That is why we are here.

The church was formed at Christ's decree based upon the certainty of His work and righteousness applied to those who by faith believe in Him.

Part of the enduring evidence of the resurrection and the truth of the gospel is the church, which persists by the grace of God!

Finally, this moving confessional ends with the words, "He was taken up in glory."

This speaks to the present disposition of Christ and implies the church's present season of expectation as we wait for the return of Christ to take His bride to Himself.

It is good for Christians to be able to answer the question, "Where is Christ now?"

Many Christians would answer this by responding, "Christ lives in my heart." And that is certainly true, spiritually speaking. This is a big truth that we can spend quite a bit of time studying and thinking about it, especially when we ask the question, How does Christ live in our hearts practically?

However, it is important to understand that the man Jesus Christ in bodily form has ascended to heaven, where He is now interceding for us in the heavenly realm.

As Paul writes to the Romans: "Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us" (Rom 8:34).

The term “interceding” means that Christ is earnestly petitioning the Father on our behalf.⁸⁷

As the author of Hebrews writes: “For Christ has entered, not into holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true things, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God on our behalf” (Heb 9:24).

The man, Jesus of Nazareth, crucified for the sins of the world, justified by the Spirit, and raised from the dead by the power of the Holy Spirit, is enthroned in heaven at the right hand of the Father interceding and praying for His people. What majesty! What glory! What hope we have!

This is our foundation. This, we confess, is undeniable, true, and good. It is this message that we shall carry forward into eternity, knowing that it has the power to raise dead men to life.

All praise and honor and glory belong to Christ our King forever and ever. Amen.

⁸⁷ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 341.

CHAPTER 11 | 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

At the conclusion of Chapter 3, Paul presents to Timothy the undeniable truths of the gospel that had been arranged into a well-known confessional hymn.

Quoting that hymn, Paul writes: “Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory” (1 Tim 3:16).

These truths were uncontested in the first church long before the First Council of Nicea (c. 325 AD). And in as much as modern liberal theology has sought to cast aspersions on these truths, these are the very same truths that Christ’s church continues to stand upon today.

So now, in Chapter 4, Paul warns Timothy (and the church at Ephesus) of the coming storm of heresy.

Bear in mind that chapter and verse markings are not inspired, so sometimes we have to give careful thought to how all this fits together.

I would suggest that what is occurring between chapters 3 and 4 is a very natural flow of thought, moving from the certainties of our faith into a warning about the heresies that the church struggled against in the first century and still struggles against today.

Remember that in the very beginning of this letter, Paul addressed the bad teaching that the church in Ephesus had to contend with, and he exhorted Timothy in very strong terms

to oppose such teaching and to correct heresy when it arises (1 Tim 1:3-8).

The overall theme of this letter could be summed up by Paul's declaration in 1 Tim 3:14-15, "I am writing these things to you so that, 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."

The warning captured here in 1 Tim 4:1-5 reinforces that effort. What we believe dictates how we behave.

In academic circles, we would refer to this as "theology and praxis."

Theology, our understanding of God's character as revealed to us by Him, guides our *praxis* – how we live, how the church governs itself, teaches, ministers, serves, and more.⁸⁸

That is why holding on to orthodox, historic, Biblical Christian doctrine is so important, even when our modern sensibilities are challenged by it.

For God is making a people unto Himself by His Spirit and His Word. We are to be shaped by Him into His image, as we are moved by His character; and we are to refrain from the temptation to shape Him into our image or ideal.

Vv 1-3 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are

⁸⁸ "Parenesis" is another term used to refer to literature that focuses on belief influencing behavior in the moral/ethical realm. Parenesis is a common device in the Pauline Epistles.

seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

So now Paul offers the critical prophetic warning that in later times some believers will depart from the faith, advocating for the belief and practice (*theology* and *praxis*) of false doctrines, all while labeling these beliefs and practices as pious standards of spirituality and moral conviction.

We cannot pinpoint exactly any Scriptural reference that Paul may be calling to mind when he writes, “The Spirit expressly says...” Biblical scholars have presented several views on what exactly Paul may be referring to.⁸⁹

Perhaps he is referring to Christ’s teaching on apostasy found in Matt 24:10-11.⁹⁰

Perhaps Paul is referring to personal revelation given to Him by the Holy Spirit.

One interesting solution is to see these words as calling back to a former prophetic word that Paul delivered to the elders of this very church. In Acts 20:28-31 we see a similar warning that the Ephesians would have certainly carried with them:⁹¹ “I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert,

⁸⁹ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 537.

⁹⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 188.

⁹¹ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 234.

remembering that for three years I did not cease night or day to admonish every one with tears.”

What has been clear from the very beginning of the gospel is that the truth has never been unassailed.

Many people have sought to twist God’s Word in order to serve their own interests best. Our society is replete with such examples.

The church contended with these types of people very early in church history (Acts 15:24; 2 Cor 11:26; Gal 1:9-10, 2:4; 2 John 1:7-11).

Another exegetical puzzle to consider is: What does Paul mean when he writes that these things will happen in later times? The original language may communicate the idea of later, last, or future times.⁹²

We may be tempted to look to *the* last days because eschatology (literally the study of the last things) is one of those topics that interest people and gets them excited. There is no doubt that what Paul describes here will occur during *the* last times.

But here’s the thing. We know that Paul believed He was living in the later or last times himself (1 Cor 15:51; 1 Thess 4:15)! And, from a historic perspective, anything after the cross and the resurrection can be viewed as the later times.⁹³

Paul, the church, the saints, you, and I all exist in the intervening time of Christ’s inaugurated kingdom marked by His earthly ministry and the kingdom yet to come, which the

⁹² “[A] point of time that is subsequent to another point of time.” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1044.

⁹³ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 188–189.

church deeply longs for.

It is likely that Paul's earlier writing on apostasy in the churches (including Ephesus) and his plain language to reject such things indicate that Paul is actually talking about their present situation. And when we look at what specific heresies Paul is contending with, we can see that these same things show up in his other writings.

He addresses the debate over whether or not Christians should get married in 1 Corinthians. He expressly addresses food customs in Romans, 1 Corinthians, and Colossians. And Paul presents a grand polemic against Jewish legalism in the book of Galatians.

Here Paul tells us that certain unnamed people, heretics, will depart from the faith, that is to say, the true faith presented in the gospel of Jesus Christ. They will also devote themselves to what he calls demonic teachings.

This makes some of us exceedingly uncomfortable. We live in the information age. We like to believe that we have become supremely rational and well-reasoned, that we are "un-deceivable," as it were. In our pride, we believe that certainly, we are not as gullible as our forebears.

We don't like to think about spiritual beings; it seems childish and unintelligent to us. Yet God's Word is quite clear on the matter.

There is an accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). There are demonic forces seeking to undermine the truth of the gospel, and some of their most successful campaigns have been to co-opt one-time servants of the church in their efforts (2 Cor 4:4; Eph 2:2; 1 John 5:19).

We should take heed! Remember that Paul warned the elders of this very church that they themselves could fall away from the faith, they could very possibly become savage wolves among the flock of God, and even seek to bring others with them!

They were the pastors and teachers of the church! And yet, they could be deceived.

What did they turn to?

We see here that in their “insincerity” (ὑποκρισεῖ // *hypocrisei*), their very conscience, that thing that perhaps once turned them to Christ, has been cauterized or seared. They turned from the unquestionable tenets of the faith – Christ incarnate, justification by the Spirit, the resurrection – toward outward demonstrations of religious piety through forbidding marriage and commanding people to abstain from certain foods.

What Paul is confronting here is legalism.

It is no secret that Paul combated legalism at every turn; we get the sense from the NT that the draw to pursue some form of legalism was present in nearly every church.

Humans crave a way to demonstrate their faith or mark themselves as a sanctified people by how they live.

The Scriptures give ample evidence that those who are changed by the gospel and filled with the Spirit will, in fact, bear fruits attesting to their holiness (Psa 1:3; Matt 12:33; John 15:2; Rom 6:22; Gal 5:16, 22; Eph 4:28-32, 5:1; Col 1:10).

So the argument isn't whether or not Christians are to do good works; we should because you can tell a tree by the fruit

that it bears, and God has created good works for us to walk in!

In fact, Paul writes to *the Ephesians*: “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them” (Eph 2:10).

Legalism occurs when believers invent a new law, a new mark of holiness, or when we seek to complete in the flesh that which God has begun in the Spirit (Gal 3:3).

The legalistic argument may sound like this: “Sure you can be a Christian and be married and eat whatever you want. **But** if you want to be a **better** Christian, a **more holy** Christian, then you should probably follow these rules – it’s for your own good.”

It almost seems that the Ephesians knew how strongly Paul opposed Judaizers in the other churches, so they said, “Well, we know for sure that Paul is going to have a problem with circumcision and keeping the OT Law, so we are going to try a different approach.”

Paul says, “No way! People who teach that, while attempting to appear morally superior and religiously committed, are actually devoted to and peddling demonic teaching!”

We are saved by grace alone, through faith alone.

Paul’s warning here, while helping inform our understanding of legalism, also helps us identify false teachers.

What are they teaching? Is it in accord with the Scriptures without distorting or misrepresenting them? Does it add to or

take away from the Gospel? Does it require some extra physical activity to take or action to avoid outside of what we would expect through Biblical sanctification?

Now please know that this deception may even come packaged in a way that acknowledges a lack of Scriptural support by saying, “Well, it’s not that big of a deal, but ... if you really want to mature to the next level of faith, there are some things you should do.”

If those things include building our own righteousness and trying to “mature” by our own strength and willpower, then they are antithetical to the gospel and to be rejected.

The Roman Catholic church has dealt in this economy for ages and, in doing so, has created a tiered system of righteousness.

The warning for the modern church is that we see so clearly the errors of Roman Catholicism regarding legalism and works-based righteousness while being blind to the systems we are tempted to create ourselves!

The Gospel of Jesus Christ + anything else = nothing. Don’t be deceived.

The gospel is not wrapped up in what we eat and drink or whether or not we are married.

In fact, Paul writes very plainly about both of these topics.

On marriage – “But because of the temptation to sexual immorality, each man should have his own wife and each woman her own husband.... Now as a concession, not a command, I say this. I wish that all were as I myself am. But each has his own gift from God, one of one kind and one of another. To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is

good for them to remain single, as I am. But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion” (1 Cor 7:2, 6-9).

On food and drink – “For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17).

Vv. 4-5 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

There is freedom in Christ, as Paul wrote in Rom 14:17, “righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit.”

One of the biggest criticisms hurled at our faith is that it is a drudgery, a drag, a bummer; there are so many rules to follow.

That’s unfortunate because Jesus taught: “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light” (Matt 11:28-30).

What a shame when believers lose focus on the main thing, the gospel of Jesus Christ, and build again that which Christ has fulfilled on the cross through a new set of rules and regulations that we think are a better indicator of holiness than the fruit of the Spirit (Gal 2:18).

What a shame when we present the gospel to others as a set of rules to be followed. In an exhortation to the

Colossians, Paul wrote: “Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as [though] living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—‘Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,’ which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, [false] humility, and neglect of the body, [but are] of no value against the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:20-23).

Verse 4 answers the question on legalism quite poignantly – everything created by God is good.

Did you catch that? Everything created *by God* is good.

He is the creator of marriage; it is good. He is the creator and provider of our food; it is good.

Who are we to look upon what God has wrought and parse it out as good and bad, relevant or outdated? We, too, are created, subject to His will, and made for His glory (Rom 9:20-22).

Interestingly enough, Paul, a Pharisee and one who had subjected himself to the dietary restrictions of the OT Law, encourages these Christians to receive what they are given with thanksgiving, that is, thanking God in prayer for any food they were blessed to receive.

Certainly, Paul was sensitive to the cultural complexity of eating meat (or anything else) in the idolatrous city of Ephesus.

But do you see how this flips the script on legalists and false teachers? They say, “Well, you really need to watch what you eat, because you don’t want to defile yourself, and you

want to please God.”

Paul says (my paraphrase), "Thank God that you have food on your plate. Don't give in to spiritual manipulation. Rejoice in God's provision."⁹⁴

And, in a great mystery that seems so trivial to us, Paul tells them that what they receive is actually *sanctified* by the Word of God and their prayers.

Christians commonly mutter a prayer over our meals, thanking God for our sanctified chicken sandwiches from Chick-fil-a or whatever it is.

However, this would have been really important and spiritually significant to these Christians as they were navigating their own culture, where meat sold in the market was often sacrificed in pagan worship services.

Paul tells them that God can sanctify whatever is set before them, that which is created by Him, and to set it apart as holy.

Remember that in the OT, the food in the Temple was considered holy unto the Lord as opposed to the common bread not dedicated in the Temple (Ex 29:34; 1 Sam 21:4-6). It was a big deal for people to eat God's sanctified food! As a matter of fact, only the priests, the sons of Aaron, could eat God's sanctified food because it was holy.⁹⁵ It stood for something greater than just food. The showbread represented

⁹⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, The New American Commentary 34 (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1992), 130.

⁹⁵ With one significant and perhaps typological exception – King David in 1 Sam 21.

God's sanctified people ever before Him.⁹⁶

And here, as part of the New Covenant, Paul writes to them, Everything you eat is made holy.

This is about more than food, loved ones. This is about who is eating the food: a sanctified people, the priesthood of all believers, who are made holy by the Word of God and by prayer (1 Peter 2:9).

Remember it was Jesus who prayed for us: "Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth" John 17:17.

⁹⁶ There is a NT antitype found in 1 Cor 10:17.

CHAPTER 12 | 1 TIMOTHY 4:6-11

After giving Timothy instructions about the coming heresy that the church will face, including abstaining from marriage and certain foods, Paul turns his attention to a personal exhortation to continue to build up Timothy in his ministry and work at Ephesus.

While this has a particular application meant for Timothy, there is much that can be applied to our lives as well – especially for those who desire to serve the Lord Jesus Christ.

We also see in the text what makes for a **good** servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. This stands as a compass check of sorts, not only for ourselves but for how we may discern the character and faithfulness of others who profess to serve the Lord in any type of pastoral capacity.

How do we know if the people we listen to are good, faithful servants of Jesus?

How do we even begin to judge our own selves discerning whether or not we are good, faithful servants of Jesus (1 Cor 11:31)?

After all, presumably, all who have taken up their cross to follow the way of Jesus and have set their hand to the plow have this goal in mind: to be a good servant of Jesus Christ.

As Paul writes to the Corinthians: “We make it our aim to please him” (2 Cor 5:9).

And later to Timothy: “No soldier gets entangled in civilian pursuits, since his aim is to please the one who enlisted him” (2 Tim 2:4).

Perhaps John Calvin said it best when he wrote on these verses: “Men frequently aim at something else than to approve themselves to Christ; and consequently many are desirous of being applauded for genius, eloquence, and profound knowledge. And that is the very reason why they pay less attention to necessary things.... But Paul enjoins Timothy to be satisfied with this alone, to be a faithful minister of Christ.”⁹⁷

V. 6 If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.

So then, one mark of being a good servant, pleasing the Lord Jesus, is to “provide instruction, make known, teach” *these things* to Christ’s people, the church.⁹⁸

This presents to us our first exegetical question. What is Paul referring to when he mentions “these things”?

There are two main thoughts.

The first is to recall that which immediately precedes this exhortation, Paul’s prophetic instruction from 1 Tim 4:1-5 that there will be and are people within the church who are peddling bad, legalistic doctrine. We are to refute that at every

⁹⁷ John Calvin and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 106–107.

⁹⁸ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 1042.

point, holding fast to the certainties of God's Word.⁹⁹

The second option is that since Paul has been dealing with right conduct within the church and right doctrine throughout this epistle, he is referring to the entire corpus up until now.¹⁰⁰

I find this second option to be most attractive as it makes allowance for all of what has been said, which is certainly necessary for sound doctrine, teaching, faith, and practice within the Body of Christ while not excluding the warning that precedes.

Good doctrine isn't **only** refuting bad doctrine, but it is the whole of the gospel. We must first be secure in what is good before we can refute what is bad.

So, a good servant of Jesus will be a person who exhibits a good grasp and demonstrable affection for all of what has been said. We must refute bad doctrine that corrupts the truth of the gospel; we must understand God's design for His church and be willing to submit ourselves to it without shaping His design into something we are more comfortable with; and we must stand upon that which is certain and never stray from the person and work of Jesus Christ.

This may seem so simple. And honestly, it is. But why is it so rare? Why are we so tempted, as John Calvin suggests, "to aim at something else"?

We very often are. There is any number of competing interests vying for the affection of Jesus' servants, many of which can actually be good and admirable. But some are

⁹⁹ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 548.

¹⁰⁰ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 248–249.

merely adorned in the facade of nobility, dignity, and care.

For example, church growth. That's good, right? Well, it can be. We desire for the gospel to go forth and for disciples to make disciples and thereby growing the church.

In the best sense, this is captured in Eph 4:15-16. "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love."

However, in the worst sense, we pursue church growth out of ego, pride, and a desire to get big for the sake of demonstrating worldly "success." We must never forget that it is the Lord who adds to the church based upon His divine prerogative (Acts 2:47).

Another temptation we may face is to pursue a non-challenging theological framework in an attempt to avoid the accusation of being insensitive. This looks like a church not taking a stand on anything but instead burying the brilliance and holiness of God's Word under shallow cliches and platitudes that are used more for positive affirmations than for the spiritual formation and sanctification of God's people.

Still another temptation is the draw to be hyper-relevant, allowing ourselves, our churches, and our doctrine to be overly influenced by the culture in an attempt to make church "easy." We have a strong desire for outsiders to "belong," **but** in the most cruel act of manipulation, our misplaced desire can be that outsiders "belong before they believe," which totally ignores the Biblical truth that the Body of Christ is

composed of the saints and to be a true member of the church means to be a saint, a believer, sanctified unto the Lord Jesus and separated from the world (James 4:4).

To find a healthy and godly balance in these things, we must, as Paul writes, be continually trained in the words of the faith and the good doctrine, literally “good teaching.”¹⁰¹ This means we have to be teachable!

This will commend us to Christ’s good pleasure and to being a good servant. This will allow us to see when we or those we are being shepherded by have begun to pursue something else.

Vv. 7-9 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

To add further definition to what being trained in good instruction means, Paul adds some things to avoid and explains the eternal benefit of remaining focused on living a life of sanctification and godliness.

George Knight writes, “The good minister must also refuse the untruthful... Timothy is to reject μύθοι [mythoi – myths] which are fables that are both unhistorical and

¹⁰¹ “διδασκαλία, ας, ἡ – the act of teaching, *teaching, instruction.*” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 240.

untruthful.”¹⁰²

Oh, how many Christians would benefit from this instruction!

There is a time for believers, being trained in the Scriptures, to simply reject silly “Christian adjacent” fables and stories and, in love, say, “That’s not true.”

The problem we encounter in our current era is that so much of what Christians consume today regarding Christian thought comes from questionable sources. There is apparently no longer a standard for intellectual rigor to test what we are fed to determine whether or not it falls into the category of “myth” or “pointless” argumentation.

Mark Sayers writes in his book *A Non-Anxious Presence*, “In the networked world, even the most committed believer will consume only a fraction of the information...from their church compared to what they consume via podcasts, YouTube, and Netflix. The digital network is now our primary formational environment. It shapes our opinions, values, and worldview. Today the average churchgoer will Google a problem before they approach their pastor. The digital network is the primary shaper of their theological, political, and cultural worldview... A congregation may be physically present within their church, but their primary influence comes from the digital networks to which they are connected.”¹⁰³

¹⁰² Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 195.

¹⁰³ Mark Sayers, *A Non-Anxious Presence: How a Changing and Complex World Will Create a Remnant of Renewed Christian Leaders* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2022), 95.

Certainly, we have much to contend with.

The alternative to spinning our wheels in doubtful, divisive theological rabbit holes or indulging in counterfactual religious-sounding garble is to train ourselves in godliness which Paul promises has an eternal benefit, not just a temporary benefit.

By way of example, Paul commends bodily exercise; it's good for us. It's hard and requires commitment and discipline (many of us struggle in these areas when it comes to physical training).

The same is true for training in godliness. It's good for us in this life and into eternity, yet many of us still contend with the same barriers to successful discipleship for the same reasons: time commitment, priorities, personal motivation, bad habits, and more.

But the promise remains. Build yourself up, loved one, in godliness, and shun those “get fit quick” scams that appeal to our more base desires of vanity and temporary success.

Choose the good diet, the good discipline, the good habits. Shun the junk food theology and speculative doctrines, and see that the Lord will make good on His promise to build you up.

We all have felt insufficient in our spiritual disciplines at times. We feel as if we don't pray enough, we don't study Scripture enough, we don't serve or love enough. And then, we feel ashamed or guilty (which is not from Jesus), and we give up. We are waiting for some kind of invisible miraculous transformative moment in our lives to occur and just transform us into “super-saints.”

And yet, Christ taught us the way: “Then Jesus told his disciples, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it’” (Matt 16:24-25).

At least this much is true in bodily exercise and perhaps holds a useful exhortation in spiritual exercise. We have to add weight to the bar to get stronger! We have to do more reps! We have to take up our cross daily.

When I was in the Army, a term we used a lot when it came to physical training was “muscle failure.” That is going past what your muscles, heart, and lungs can handle.

We knew that in order to have the ability to do more push-ups, we had to push ourselves to muscle failure. To run faster further, we have to run faster and further. (This is a simplification but serves the point.)

In some ways, this is true for our own spiritual disciplines. If we want to grow in godliness, we must move past what we are conditioned to! And this we shall do by the Lord’s help and the grace of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

V. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

One of the things that people commonly struggle with concerning bodily exercise is motivation. Sometimes we don’t have the intrinsic motivation to get up and do the thing even though we know it’s good for us.

Here Paul lays out the external motivation for pursuing godliness: committing to the good doctrine, which is hope in the living God, our Savior, and the Savior of all, especially of those who believe.

As a matter of fact, Paul uses language here that indicates the hard, committed work of toiling and striving.

The Greek term for “toil” means “to exert oneself physically, mentally, or spiritually.”¹⁰⁴ The term for “strive” means to struggle, or to use modern parlance, “to grind.”

“Some in fact suggest that the Greek word for strive reminds one of the athlete who strains every muscle in order to achieve his or her goal of victory in the athletic arena. But of course the focus here is not on physical struggle but on the activities through which spiritual fitness is achieved.”¹⁰⁵

It is here that we must take a moment to reconcile some theology. Why would Paul set himself forth as an example that it is right and good to strive, to grind, with his eyes fixed on the hope of our Living God, while Jesus taught that His yoke is easy and His burden is light (Matt 11:30)? Is Paul living outside of Jesus’ teaching? Certainly not!

A true encounter with the Living God, the Risen Christ, has the effect of realigning our priorities, refueling our hearts

¹⁰⁴ “κοπιᾶω” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 558.

¹⁰⁵ There is a textual variation here. Some manuscripts contain the word ἀγωνιζόμεθα [suffer reproach] while others contain the word ὀνειδίζομεθα [strive]. See **1 Timothy 4:10** in Barbara Aland et al., eds., *The Greek New Testament: Apparatus*, 5th rev. ed. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft; American Bible Society; United Bible Societies, 2014), 696–697. Arichea and Hatton suggest that the evidence favoring ὀνειδίζομεθα is preferable. Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 101.

to press on, strive for His glory, and take up our cross.

Here is how Paul described His conversion experience and the subsequent result in His life: “Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me. For I am the least of the apostles, unworthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace toward me was not in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (1 Cor 15:8-10).

Paul was deeply committed to presenting his entire being to the service of Jesus Christ doggedly and with great tenacity and commitment. How so? The grace of God with him. It was the grace of God that fueled Paul’s tireless efforts.

Here we see an important truth to be grasped and encouraged by as we pursue godliness. Following Jesus Christ isn’t effortless; it requires commitment, demands that we count the cost, and requires discipline. **But** when we are next to Jesus, yoked to Him, it is not burdensome!

This is what we find with people who love bodily exercise. They do it because they love it! Does it take hard work and physical exertion? Of course! Is it a burden? **No!** Because they love it!

People do what they love. They find great satisfaction in moving the weight, running the miles, and sweating because of the expectation of what is to come and what will be wrought in their mortal bodies.

So too, when we love pursuing godliness and have set our hope on the Living God who sees and knows and has gifted

us with His inexhaustible grace, we can strive and toil in hope for the gospel's sake, being sure of the result – sanctification, growing in holiness, being conformed into Christ's very likeness (Rom 8:29).

V. 11 Command and teach these things.

Paul plainly tells Timothy to command and teach these things. So also, we are committed to doing likewise. This isn't novel or flashy Bible teaching. This is the plain unencumbered declaration of God's Word – grow in godliness, by Jesus' help, push past the fatigue, and be strengthened.

Will it be effortless? Not necessarily. But will it be burdensome? Not if you love it. “Whoever has my commandments and keeps them, he it is who loves me. And he who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I will love him and manifest myself to him” (John 14:21).

By the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ working in us, we shall grow in godliness for His glory as we learn to love Him and are loved by Him (1 John 4:19). Amen.

CHAPTER 13 | 1 TIMOTHY 4:12-16

V. 12 Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Paul continues to exhort Timothy personally on the duties required of him as a minister of the gospel in Ephesus. He touches on a very personal note concerning Timothy's age.

This serves as a two-fold exhortation to Timothy first and to the Ephesian congregation second.

Much has been said about this verse. It is commonly employed in youth groups, conferences, and camps to encourage young people to live exemplary lives in the gospel and not limit themselves simply because of their age.

While that is true and important for young people to know, we should not assume that Timothy was a teenager at the time of this writing. Most scholars estimate that Timothy was between 30 and 35 years old, which in the first century was and even today is still considered young (depending on how old one is).

George Knight's research reveals to us that "Irenaeus [second century church father and Bishop of Lyons] ... explicitly says that one could be called 'young' up to forty.... Simpson points out that ... soldiers 'are reckoned [junior] up to forty-six.' Luke called Paul a 'young man' (Acts 7:58) when he was of the same age range as Timothy is now. Timothy's age, in his thirties (the estimate most would agree on), might

seem to be a handicap in the Ephesian community, where some of the other believers and other elders are older. The tendency is for νεότης [youths] ‘to be looked down on.’... The admonition of the apostle is that Timothy not let this become a factor, since the apostolic instruction and admonition are at stake.”¹⁰⁶

The trap is that as we age, we come to believe that we don’t have anything to learn from those who are younger than us. **But** that is simply not true. God doesn’t choose people to serve in His kingdom based on age.

For example, “Francis of Assisi was 25 when he founded the Franciscan order. John Calvin joined the Reformation at 21 and wrote the *Institutes* at 27 ... profoundly influencing the theological thought of later centuries.... Martin Luther was a triumphant reformer at 25, and started the Reformation at 30.... [George] Whitfield [one of the founders of Methodism] ... had made his influence felt throughout England before he was 24.... John Wesley [founder of Methodism] began his real life’s work at 35.... Billy Graham was 31 at the time of his now-famous Los Angeles Crusade.”¹⁰⁷

In like manner, as an exemplar for these spiritual descendants, Timothy must not let his youth impede him from living a life worthy of his calling. His relative youth (although he was not necessarily inexperienced by this time) must not cause him to pause in carrying out his ordained office in teaching those and pastoring those older than

¹⁰⁶ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 205.

¹⁰⁷ Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 1661-1662.

himself.

“Timothy has been told to give authoritative instruction to the church. But his position of comparative youth may make him reluctant to do so. The situation envisaged is one in which a younger person is to have authority in relation to older people, which would be against the custom of the time.”¹⁰⁸

This is something we must not gloss over.

Indeed, when we view this passage, we typically view it through the lens of young people being scorned by older people. That is clearly an element within the text. However, the responsibility falls squarely on Timothy’s shoulders! Paul employs the imperative mood in writing this to Timothy. **You** must not let anyone despise your youth.

While we can make an inference regarding the congregation’s responsibility, we don’t need to. There are other Scriptures that speak to the role of the congregation as it is related to their pastors.

“Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.... Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you” (Heb 13:7, 17).

And

“We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among

¹⁰⁸ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 559. See also Num 4:30.

you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves” (1 Thes 5:12-13).

So we don't need to build a doctrine from silence. **But** in this instance, Paul is specifically addressing Timothy. Timothy bears the responsibility for ensuring this imperative is acted upon and faithfully carried out.

Perhaps Timothy felt as we do when we say, “Well, I can't control the way others view me or respond.”

That may be true, but we must not give others cause to further close their ears and hearts based upon our own behavior. That's why Paul gives further instruction on how to accomplish this and be an example in Christian conduct: take care in how you speak, how you live, how you love, how you believe, and how you remain unspotted from the world.

This speaks to the transformative power of the gospel in Timothy's own life. As has been said, “Before a preacher can be effective in his ministry, the Word of God must first land on his own heart.” And we could add that it must also produce the fruits of righteousness promised.

We can appeal to another cliché for illustration purposes: We only get one chance to make a first impression.

So if the first impression that the Ephesians had of Timothy might have been, “Oh my, this guy is young... I don't know if he's ready for this... I'm more experienced than he is... I can't learn anything from this youngster.”

Well then, Timothy already had one significant barrier to overcome (and the Ephesians had as well). He best not erect additional barriers by way of foolish conduct and pursuing

“youthful lusts” (2 Tim 2:22).

We must be careful to avoid the inference that Timothy had, in fact, indulged in ungodly conduct. Rather, Paul is reinforcing the essentials of pastoral ministry, which are certainly beneficial in our own age as well.

What the Ephesians need to see in Timothy’s life is the person and work of Jesus Christ exemplified in his conduct so they may be convinced of his trustworthiness and heart.

Additionally, the congregation must confront and overcome their own biases and receive the apostolic instruction that Timothy presents to them. They must resist the prideful inclination to “chafe against it” because it is rooted in the truth of God’s Word, not Timothy’s age.¹⁰⁹

V. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

Along with setting a godly example by his own personal conduct, Timothy is instructed to remain committed to the primary pastoral task, the declaration of and instruction in the Scriptures.

Now, hopefully, this will spur you to your own personal study of the Scriptures. It’s quite a fruitful and interesting study.

And I would suggest that not all that you’ve heard or perhaps presupposed concerning the canonization of Scripture may have transpired the way you believe. In fact, I

¹⁰⁹ J. N. D. Kelly, *The Pastoral Epistles*, Black’s New Testament Commentary (London: Continuum, 1963), 104.

find that when people examine the evidence attesting to the veracity of the Scriptures, it can really build up our faith.¹¹⁰

A few basic facts will help us understand. The first church had as their primary Scriptures the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the already canonized Old Testament teachings.

Next, they had the oral Apostolic and prophetic teachings as the Holy Spirit personally ministered to the church through the spoken word (Eph 2:20).

Finally, very early in church history, during the first century, the gospels, Pauline letters, Catholic Epistles, and Revelation began to circulate in the churches, and they began to move toward what we would call the formalized canon.¹¹¹

Justin Martyr, one of the Apostolic Fathers (early to mid-2nd century AD), attests to some form of early canonization when he describes a typical Sunday gathering, which is remarkably similar to today's worship service. He writes, "[O]n the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles or the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has ceased, the

¹¹⁰ A few basic resources will help begin the process: *How We Got the Bible* by Neil R. Lightfoot; *Why I Trust the Bible* by William D. Mounce; and *A Survey of the New Testament* by Robert H. Gundry.

¹¹¹ While some propose that the canon of Scripture was not "finalized" until the fourth century, the truth is more complicated than that and requires additional study. Additionally, Christians can take great comfort in knowing that not everything labeled as Christian writing was allowed into the canon of Scripture because forgeries and dubious documents circulated simultaneously alongside legitimate Scriptural documents but were not adopted as authoritative based on later authorship, misalignment with orthodoxy, and false attribution.

president verbally instructs, and exhorts to the imitation of these good things.”¹¹²

In Paul’s absence, Timothy was responsible for faithfully declaring God’s Word. He was reminded not to deviate from that basic principle that has governed Christ’s church from the beginning.

There is no need to get cute with the program. As a matter of fact, we do a great disservice to God’s people when we substitute the public reading of Scripture and the teaching of Scripture with anything else. No matter what that other thing is, it will always be of lesser value and quality. Nothing can match the glory of God’s Word.

And how blessed it is that we should have this very plain command to declare, exhort, and instruct from the Scriptures!

God’s Word is our standard, our compass, as we navigate into eternity. It is the thing that shapes His people in conjunction with His Spirit, for the Spirit Himself inspired these words. “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work (2 Tim 3:16-17).

V. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

¹¹² Justin Martyr, “The First Apology of Justin,” in *The Apostolic Fathers with Justin Martyr and Irenaeus*, ed. Alexander Roberts, James Donaldson, and A. Cleveland Coxe, vol. 1, *The Ante-Nicene Fathers* (Buffalo, NY: Christian Literature Company, 1885), 186.

Arichea and Hatton have identified v. 14 as “the most problematic in this section” since it presents several interpretive difficulties.¹¹³

What is the gift that Timothy possesses? By what method has prophecy imparted this gift? Who or what was this council of elders, and what is the significance of their laying hands upon Timothy?

We know from what has been written thus far and by what follows that Paul’s purpose is to build up Timothy’s courage when it comes to teaching. Certainly, Paul would not have done so if this were not a gift that Timothy possessed. So perhaps the most likely case is that Timothy is gifted in teaching the Scriptures.

It is also likely that Timothy felt intimidated, unsure of himself in the pastoral office and needing to be encouraged to stay the course and keep the main thing, the main thing.

We can also say with great confidence that the Holy Spirit has a role in dispensing spiritual gifts to all whom the Lord is pleased to bestow them upon. “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit *for the common good*.... All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually *as he wills* (1 Cor 12:4-7, 11, emphasis added).

Finally, we can say with great confidence that a group of mature, spiritually gifted believers, known as elders, have been

¹¹³ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 105.

instrumental in affirming the gifting of God in the lives of others from the very beginning of church history.

No man is an island unto himself, and as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ” (1 Cor 12:12).

It is good and right for God’s people to recognize the gifting of others within the Body of Christ and to promote the effectual application of such gifts for the building up of the saints. Part of that process is the laying on of hands, which doesn’t necessarily hold any mystical value with regards to imparting any specific gift but, in the act, in the presence of the congregation, we formally recognize those who, by their conduct and devotion, have shown that they are prepared to enter into whatever ministerial office the Lord has called them to.

Paul calls to mind a specific experience that Timothy had to remind him that he is, in fact, called; he is, in fact gifted; he is, in fact, recognized by the church to execute the holy office that the Lord has called him into. And that he should not take such things lightly.

Something similar had happened in Paul’s own life as well, and this same occurrence continues to hold great significance in Christ’s church. “While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’ Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off” (Acts 13:2-3).

The act of self-ordaining or self-anointing is not seen in

the NT as a valid representation of ecclesiastic recognition. Rather, the church and the elders of the church recognize and affirm (we could add – with prayer and fasting) that which God has ordained through His Spirit in the life of the called (2 Tim 1:6).¹¹⁴

Vv. 15-16 Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

As we conclude chapter 4, we see Paul’s exhortation for Timothy to “practice, cultivate, take pains with”¹¹⁵ his own personal conduct and to remain committed to the declaration of Scripture. The text literally reads, “be in these things.”¹¹⁶

And that imperative is to be embraced by all who are called to the pastoral office today – be in these things! Be in holiness, be in the Scriptures! Be rooted so deeply in these things that the work of God in our lives is evident to all who bear witness.

This isn’t an endorsement of performative ministry but is the basic teaching that God’s Word will have its way in the lives of His people. The sanctifying work of God in His people is evident in the lives of the saints; it is actually visible,

¹¹⁴ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 209.

¹¹⁵ Μελετώ. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 627.

¹¹⁶ ἐν τοῦτοις ἴσθι // en toutois isthi “in these things be”

palpable, real and attests to the reality of God's power to transform.

Furthermore, Timothy is instructed to pay careful attention to his own self and to the teaching, which he has received and declares.

We must always pay close attention to the teaching that we engage in. So many Christians have been wounded by pastors who ignore this command. That is why discernment and Biblical literacy are so very important.

How important is it? Well, Paul says that these things relate to salvation itself.

The pastor himself **must** be numbered among the saved! **And** he must be concerned with the salvation of those under his care!

The prophet Jeremiah declares: "Cursed is the one who does the LORD'S work negligently" (Jer 48:10).

That isn't to say that Timothy is personally responsible for anybody's personal salvation but that he has a role to play in keeping watch on right doctrine, right teaching, and equipping the saints for ministry.

After all "[F]aith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ" (Rom 10:17).

John Calvin remarks on these verses, "Let men who are desirous of glory be fed by their ambition, let them applaud themselves for their ingenuity; to you, let it be enough to devote yourself to your own salvation and that of the people ...If thus a good pastor is the salvation of his hearers ... as the salvation of the flock is the crown of the pastor, so from

careless pastors all that perishes will be required.”¹¹⁷

This is serious business. There is no time to “mail it in” or give half-hearted sermons or positive affirmations to the saints. We deal in matters of eternity, the final disposition of the soul, holiness, and encountering a holy God.

We ought to take it seriously in our own lives, and we ought to take it seriously as it relates to feeding God’s sheep. “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock. And when the chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory” (1 Pet 5:1-4).

This ought to be the conviction of every single God-fearing, Christ-following pastor in our age – to see God’s sheep cross into eternity having been well-fed and well cared for and having known the love of Christ, the truth of the gospel, and the grace of God through the faithful declaration of God’s Word.

¹¹⁷ Calvin and Pringle, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 117-118.

CHAPTER 14 | 1 TIMOTHY 5:1-16

Paul continues the letter by giving more detailed instructions on how to properly behave and operate as a local expression of the church.

We see here a few brief lines regarding the manner in which the pastor is to relate to people within the congregation, followed by more detailed instructions on how the church ought to care for widows (particularly women) within the body.

The church has had a social responsibility towards its members (not to mention outsiders) from the very earliest times.

It should come as no surprise to Bible-believing Christians that we have a mandate to care for the poor and downtrodden (Deut 14:28-29, 26:12-13; Prov 14:31; Isa 58:7-8 Matt 19:21; Luke 14:12-14; Rom 12:13). But, as we will see in the text at hand, we have a special responsibility to care for our own.

Vv. 1-2 Do not rebuke an older man but encourage him as you would a father, younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, younger women as sisters, in all purity.

Timothy was in the not-so-unique position of pastoring a congregation made up of various people groups – older men, younger men, older women, and younger women. A good

mix of diverse people can be healthy for a church.

Timothy is to relate to each of these different groups in a way that demonstrates the familial nature of the church – as fathers, brothers, mothers, and sisters with godly love.

In the course of Timothy’s pastoral role and in sharing life together, it was inevitable that some difficult conversations would need to be had, including points of correction that almost nobody relishes.

After instructing Timothy (and the Ephesian congregation as well) on how his age must not become a barrier to his pastoral work, Paul now warns Timothy against a heavy hand, especially when it comes to correcting those who are more advanced in years than himself.

Paul issues Timothy the prohibitive imperative not to rebuke an older man.

But let’s make sure to strike the right balance by remembering that Paul also wrote to Timothy: “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: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching” (2 Tim 4:1-2).

JFB note, “As Timothy was admonished ... to conduct himself as to give no man reason to despise his youth (1 Ti 4:12); so here he is told to bear in mind his youth, and to behave with the modesty which becomes a young man in relation to his elders.”¹¹⁸

¹¹⁸ Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory*, 2:414.

Paul prohibits Timothy from “express[ing] strong disapproval as a type of punishment” but doesn’t prohibit Timothy from carrying out his pastoral duty to offer Biblical correction when necessary.¹¹⁹

When it comes to how Timothy ought to relate to the members of the church, Mounce comments, “In these verses Paul is not thinking about the opponents [in the church]. When dealing with them, Timothy is to be firm and commanding, a figure of authority (cf. 1 Tim 1:3). The gentle language of these verses and the qualification ‘do not rebuke but encourage’ indicate that these instructions apply not so much to the refutation of heresy and the opponents as to Timothy’s general conduct within the church.”¹²⁰

So, while there is a place for rebuke and correction, especially when it comes to heresy and those seeking to sow discord among the church, Timothy is instructed to encourage the faithful members under his care as beloved members of his own family.

Until the culmination of the Lord’s eternal Kingdom, we would be wise to expect that there will be opponents of the gospel, scoundrels, know-it-alls, busy-bodies, and wolves in sheep’s clothing who have infiltrated the church and need to be dealt with firmly. And this we shall do with all courage and the Lord’s help, seeking reconciliation, restoration, and faithful stewardship of the gospel.

¹¹⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 435.

¹²⁰ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 269.

However, the preponderance of our churches are made up of lovely people who love the Lord, love the church, love the pastor, and support the ministry.

We need to discern how to deal with these different people groups and not simply paint everybody with a broad brush when it comes to pastoral care.

The problem that many in the ministry face is that there is a well-documented tendency to become jaded, cynical, and skeptical. At some point along the way, pastors discover that sheep can be ornery. I recall one pastor saying, “The sheep have teeth!”

In these moments, the disheartened pastor may cry out like David as he fled from Saul: “My soul is in the midst of lions; I lie down amid fiery beasts— the children of man, whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords” (Psa 57:4).

No doubt a cynical pastor wrote the following lines to give voice to his own hardening: “The pastor teaches, though he must solicit his own classes. He heals, though without pills or knife. He is sometimes a lawyer, often a social worker, something of an editor, a bit of a philosopher ... a decorative piece for public functions, and he is supposed to be a scholar. He visits the sick, marries people, buries the dead, labors to console those who sorrow, and to admonish those who sin, and tries to stay sweet when chided.... He plans programs, appoints committees ... spends considerable time in keeping people out of each other’s hair; between times he prepares a sermon and preaches it on Sunday to those who don’t happen to have any other engagement. Then on Monday he smiles

when some jovial chap roars, ‘What a job—one day a week!’”¹²¹

Since we have dealt with, or at the very least witnessed, a fair bit of stubbornness, back-stabbing, conspiracy, subversion, criticism, armchair quarterbacking, power grabs, and just plain nastiness, sometimes we can tend to isolate ourselves and see everybody as a threat instead of seeing them as beloved sons and daughters of God who are beggars for grace, as we are ourselves.

Because of these experiences, because we are committed to preserving the ministry and protecting our own emotional well-being and that of our families, we can be sorely tempted to respond harshly to the Body – to beat the sheep.

But the Bible is clear. We must care for God’s sons and daughters, our holy family members, with the heart of Jesus and with love, compassion, grace, and, yes, even mercy as we encourage them in the way of Jesus, trusting that as we live in communion with one another that the Holy Spirit and the Word of God will smooth out our rough edges together as a faith community.

As we move to Paul’s next line of thought, we find that part of pastoral care is to make special provision for those who are unable to provide for themselves, all while carefully and thoughtfully stewarding the church’s resources.

The church is supposed to care about widows and the fatherless because God cares about them: “Father of the fatherless and protector of widows is God in his holy habitation” (Psa 68:5).

¹²¹ Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations*, 964.

And—

As James reminds us: “Religion that is pure and undefiled before God the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unstained from the world” (Jas 1:27).

Vv. 3-16 Honor widows who are truly widows. 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. She who is truly a widow, left all alone, has set her hope on God and continues in supplications and prayers night and day, but she who is self-indulgent is dead even while she lives. Command these things as well, so that they may be without reproach. 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. Let a widow be enrolled if she is not less than sixty years of age, having been the wife of one husband, and having a reputation for good works: if she has brought up children, has shown hospitality, has washed the feet of the saints, has cared for the afflicted, and has devoted herself to every good work. But refuse to enroll younger widows, for when their passions draw them away from Christ, they desire to marry and so incur condemnation for having abandoned their former faith. 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. So I would have younger widows marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander. For some have already strayed after Satan. 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.

Perhaps a good way to approach these verses is to start with the “bottom line.”

In verses 3-16, Paul has much to say about caring for a specific class of people within the church – widows. A widow is a woman whose husband has died and left her unable to provide for herself.

There are many details that are addressed in this section, but v. 16 – the bottom line – communicates the heart of the message. First and foremost, believers hold the primary responsibility to care for their widowed relatives so that the church can properly care for those who are left alone, with no support system at all. These two responsibilities work in conjunction with one another.

Now, we must examine what circumstances Paul is taking into consideration in a woman’s life when he instructs Timothy on how the church ought to most effectively use its limited resources to care for those who are “truly” widows. Remember that the first church in Jerusalem initially struggled with how to do this properly (Acts 6:1).

The characteristics of “true” or “real” widowhood fall along two main categories – holy conduct and lack of any

other family support. For a woman to be “enrolled” into the care of the church, she must meet both qualifications.¹²²

These requirements keep the church from being overburdened by spending its undoubtedly limited resources on those who don’t have a legitimate need. If the Ephesian church went down that route, then they would find themselves unable to support the poor within their church who relied on it to eat. This is a most unfortunate path – enriching those who don’t have a legitimate need while letting the poor starve.

The church then is to focus on **need**, the greatest **need**. We can’t do everything, but we can do some things. So then we must adhere to an honest, equitable way to meet the urgent needs of those whom God has entrusted to our care.

And Paul instructs Timothy that in the course of caring for widows, the greatest need must be accompanied by the greatest piety and devotion in the life of the supported.

We aren’t just throwing money at pagans in order to build social capital and attract visitors.

Timothy and the Ephesians had a special responsibility to care for their own saints who had given so much of themselves in the service of the gospel to others. They should not abandon them in their moment of need but seek to serve them just as they have faithfully served.

And please note that the conduct of these godly women is quite remarkable and reminds us that women do have an important and impactful role as laborers in God’s Kingdom.

The women whom Paul refers to as exemplary here are

¹²² Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 278.

prayerful, faithful in marriage, prone to good works, good mothers, hospitable, and humble servants to other saints (following in Jesus' example of washing feet). They diligently care for others and are devoted to Christ's work. That is a great example for us all! And much more so when we consider that the women Paul is referring to have faithfully done all of these things throughout their lives, even into their later years when they are confronted with deep loss, the loss of a spouse.

There is an unfortunate trend in modern churches where people age out of relevance in ministry. After the "machine of churchianity" has extracted as much juice out of them as possible in their limited earthly lives, then we are done with them.

After they no longer attract the attractive, we are done with them. May the Lord forgive us. We are guilty of great sin when we so easily discard those who have faithfully walked in the way of Jesus before us.

In these verses, we are reminded that, "[T]he terrible implications of not caring for one's own ... amounts to a denial of Christianity and an action and attitude worse than that of an unbeliever."¹²³

It is exactly because of our faith in Christ and desire to model His way that we have a sacred individual responsibility to honor our caregivers (mothers, fathers, grandparents); collectively, as a church, we have a sacred responsibility to care for those who have labored diligently in God's kingdom.

Let us not fall into the indictment of the Pharisees when

¹²³ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 220.

Jesus challenged them saying, “You have a fine way of rejecting the commandment of God in order to establish your tradition! For Moses said, ‘Honor your father and your mother’; and, ‘Whoever reviles father or mother must surely die.’ But you say, ‘If a man tells his father or his mother, “Whatever you would have gained from me is Corban”’ (that is, given to God)—then you no longer permit him to do anything for his father or mother, thus making void the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down” (Mark 7:9-13).

So Paul reminds the church of the proper care that should be afforded to members of the church in their time of need.

In the midst of this conversation, Paul has something to say to younger widows as well. The church was not to be their personal trust fund so they could live a life of wanton disruption among the Body.

Paul was no fool! He was acutely aware of human nature and the many temptations that we must deal with.

So he encourages those widows of a younger age to bear in mind that how they live matters and that they should not give occasion for “the adversary” to slander the church because of reckless behavior. Nor should they live in a way that stirs up controversy within the church through idleness, gossip, and meddling in the affairs of others. By doing so, Paul tells us that these women have “strayed after Satan!”

I am convinced that Paul is not dealing in generalities here but is addressing some particularly damaging failings in Ephesus (the details of which are unknown to us). These more than likely contributed to the need to address the

conduct of women within the church and the role of women in ministry earlier in the letter (1 Tim 2:9-15).

Rather, these younger women should remarry and commit to being shaped by Christ in such a way that prompts the same devotion to the gospel that he commends in the lives of older widows – godliness and service.¹²⁴

So, what conclusions can we draw from these things? First, Christ's church is to be shepherded with His heart; we should view God's children as just that, His children and fellow members in the household of God.

Second, Christ's church ought to be marked by compassion for those who need help. We should never shrink from our responsibility to care for our own who have faithfully cared for others in Jesus' name.

Third, Christ's church ought to be marked by discernment and order as we seek to best steward the resources we are given and use those resources to care for others.

Finally, holiness in our individual lives, irrespective of our season of life or marital status, matters to God. The holy household that we have been adopted into demands that we learn a new way of living and embrace new family traditions that were once foreign to us, like grace towards others, service, washing the feet of the saints, faithfulness, prayerfulness, and care. And this we shall do with the Lord's help.

¹²⁴ Cf. 1 Cor 7:8-9.

CHAPTER 15 | 1 TIMOTHY 5:17-25

Paul has instructed Timothy on how he is to care for the church in a way that represents the heavenly family embodied in the church.

Timothy and all of the pastors/elders had a responsibility to care for the church with the heart of Jesus. This care also extended to the oversight and care of widows who would have received financial support from the congregation.

Now we move into a portion of the letter where Paul outlines the responsibilities that the church, in conjunction with the pastors/elders, has toward the leadership of the congregation. This includes material support, church discipline, not being hasty in ordaining elders, a note of concern regarding Timothy's personal health, and just how evident our beliefs are made through our conduct.

As the church was beginning to mature and develop, it is apparent that Paul had much on his mind regarding how the church ought to conduct itself in the world.

We have much to celebrate in this matter because the Lord, in His infinite wisdom, has not left us to figure things out on our own.

When the Bible is explicit in how the church ought to conduct itself, we would be wise to take heed. Our conduct as the church is not to be governed by feelings, gut instinct, or societal norms but is to be based upon the authoritative word of God.

Vv. 17-18 Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”

Here we find that the elders and the church are responsible for caring for their pastors.¹²⁵

Remember that this letter is written to Timothy, so it is contextually significant to point out that Paul places the duty of caring for those who serve in a teaching and preaching capacity within his sphere of responsibility.

It is also important for us to understand that the church has a role in this as well. Much of the content of the pastoral epistles is contextually anchored in how Timothy (and Titus) are to set church conduct in order (1 Tim 1:3; Titus 1:5), so it is natural for us to see the lion’s share of the work falling on the pastor’s shoulders.

However, the Body of Christ is one body composed of many members, each working together for the common good (1 Cor 12:12-27).

We must never forget that those who pastor the church are also members of the church; we are mutually interdependent. By God’s design and sovereign will, He has so ordained that all the members of Christ’s Body are dependent upon one another.

Together these complementary groups (elders and

¹²⁵ In the NT, the terms elder, overseer, and pastor are generally used synonymously.

congregants) are to care for each other; and here, Paul specifically addresses how that is to be carried out in caring for the elders/pastors of the church. Those who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor.

The term “double honor” has been the subject of some scholarly discussion regarding what exactly it means practically, but the basic interpretation isn’t too difficult to grasp.

When Paul instructed the church through Timothy that they should “Honor widows” (1 Tim 5:3), we understand that Paul was teaching the church that a good way to do that is not simply through genuflecting and offering affirming pleasantries but by meeting their practical needs and supporting them materially so that they could eat.

And that is the interpretation that best suits the text here as well. Those elders who labor faithfully, especially in preaching and teaching, ought to be supported by the church.

Now we also have the conundrum of deciding what “*double* honor” means. Again, the interpretation is not too elusive. And we must be very plain in noting that “double honor” does not include the slightest hint at providing a life of extravagance for the church’s pastors.

Mounce notes, “The elders who were following [Paul’s] instructions and doing a good job not only were worthy of the peoples’ respect but should also be paid for their work (“double honor”).”¹²⁶ (Cf. 1 Thess 5:12; Heb 13:17)

This topic can be supremely uncomfortable for any pastor to teach on, but the Bible is quite clear on the matter, and we

¹²⁶ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 306.

avoid these verses at our own peril.

These verses have become uncomfortable for Christians because they have been abused by charlatans, posers, hacks, and soft men seeking an easy life off the backs of the faithful. They sell poison packaged as hope to those who really need a miracle and promise a financial return for great sacrifice that they themselves are too cowardly to make. God will judge them!

However, in light of this, we should never let the heretical teaching and behaviors of others suppress the exposition of the Scriptures simply because we are ashamed of how they have mishandled it. What God's Word has to say about church order, governance, and pastoral support matters, and it is good and holy. And apparently, it was necessary for the first church to hear!

Unfortunately, not all churches were on board with the scripturally-based teaching that those elders who ruled well (which is the critical qualifier) ought to be cared for by the church. And that is really sad.

All the members of the Body are to support and care for one another. It appears that, in certain instances, the NT churches failed to live up to that ideal and were unwilling to support their ministers.

The reason for this may have been rooted in the long-standing Jewish tradition that rabbis were prohibited from receiving payment for their services.¹²⁷

¹²⁷ William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, and Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2017), 79–80.

However, Paul had quite a bit to say to the Corinthian church on this matter, because it appears that the Corinthians had a problem with supporting Paul and Barnabas: “[I]s it only Barnabas and I who have no right to refrain from working for a living? Who serves as a soldier at his own expense? Who plants a vineyard without eating any of its fruit? Or who tends a flock without getting some of the milk? Do I say these things on human authority? Does not the Law say the same? For it is written in the Law of Moses, ‘You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain.’ Is it for oxen that God is concerned? Does he not certainly speak for our sake? It was written for our sake, because the plowman should plow in hope and the thresher thresh in hope of sharing in the crop. If we have sown spiritual things among you, is it too much if we reap material things from you? If others share this rightful claim on you, do not we even more? Nevertheless, we have not made use of this right, but we endure anything rather than put an obstacle in the way of the gospel of Christ. Do you not know that those who are employed in the temple service get their food from the temple, and those who serve at the altar share in the sacrificial offerings? In the same way, the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel” (1 Cor 9:6-14).

Nevertheless, Paul refrained from taking payment from the Corinthian church, most likely because of their miserly hearts.

He said he would rather die than take anything from them, a sentiment that we can empathize with. Even as God loves a

cheerful giver, we too identify with that sentiment (2 Cor 9:7). We abhor the idea of compelling somebody to charity! We would rather say, “Just keep your money!”

On the other hand, there was another NT church who exemplified shared ministry, care, and the understanding that even people who labor in the gospel need to eat – the Philippian church. Paul willingly accepted the loving support of the Philippian church, even while maintaining his work as a tent-maker: “Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble. And you Philippians yourselves know that in the beginning of the gospel, when I left Macedonia, no church entered into partnership with me in giving and receiving, except you only. Even in Thessalonica you sent me help for my needs once and again. Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that increases to your credit. I have received full payment, and more. I am well supplied, having received from Epaphroditus the gifts you sent, a fragrant offering, a sacrifice acceptable and pleasing to God” (Phil 4:14-18).

It is clear in the text at hand that Paul’s desire is that those who labor well in teaching and preaching be provided for.

Notice, too, that Paul isn’t simply giving his personal opinion or personal brand of ministry but supports this claim by appealing to Scripture. He quotes from the OT, Deut 25:4; and supplies a quote from the teaching of the Lord Jesus, Matt 10:10.

Matthew Henry comments on these verses: “Does God take care for oxen, and will he not take care of his own servants? The ox only treads out the corn of which they make the bread that perishes; but ministers break the bread

of life which endures forever... [I]t is God's appointment that those who preach the gospel should live of the gospel (1 Co. 9:14), so it is their just due, as much as the reward of the labourer; and those who would have ministers starved, or not ... provided for, God will require it of them another day."¹²⁸

It is right and good, and Biblical, for the church to honor those faithful pastors who meet the high-standards of shepherding Christ's church in this way, along with love and respect.

John Chrysostom (AD 347-407), one of the early church fathers and largely considered the greatest preacher of his day, preached on these verses, "If any one lives in sloth and luxury, he is unworthy of it. Unless he is as the ox treading out the corn, and bearing the yoke, in spite of heat and thorns, and ceases not till he has carried the corn into the granary, he is not worthy.... Let us not then think only of the double maintenance granted them, but of what is added, 'Those who rule well.' And what is it to rule well? Let us hear Christ, Who says, 'The good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.' (John 10:11.) Thus to rule well is ... never to spare ourselves."¹²⁹

Inasmuch as the church gets excited about financially

¹²⁸ Henry, *Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 2357.

¹²⁹ John Chrysostom, "Homilies of St. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, on the First Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to Timothy," in *Saint Chrysostom: Homilies on Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, Thessalonians, Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. Philip Schaff, trans. James Tweed and Philip Schaff, vol. 13, A Select Library of the Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church, First Series (New York: Christian Literature Company, 1889), 460.

supporting missionaries in some far-off place for the sake of the gospel, that work continues right here in our lives day by day.

The work of the ministry today is accompanied by much labor, study, burden sharing, counsel, discipleship, and shepherding.

It is a glorious work that we get to share in together. And it is our blessed joy to ensure that those who plow should plow in hope not simply for material support, being worthy of the wages that accompany any type of work, but being beneficiaries of the compassion and love of the saints who share in the labor.

Helping the pastor put food on the table and shoes on the kids' feet, is a very real way that the church demonstrates its care for another member of the body who cares for them with all his heart.

Vv. 19-20 Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses. As for those who persist in sin, rebuke them in the presence of all, so that the rest may stand in fear.

Another responsibility that the church has concerning its elders is not only in the realm of honor and material support but in the realm of accountability, protection, and, if need be, correction.

God's house is a house of order and decency knit together in Christ's love.

There are many reasons why somebody might have a

grievance with a pastor/elder, from the silly to the quite serious.

No matter the gravity of the criticisms, if left untreated, they can lead to division within the Body and even a church split.

So then the elders of the church have a responsibility to listen to accusations of wrong-doing that may be substantiated by two or three first-hand witnesses, which Paul again anchors within the Scriptures (Deut 19:15). This serves as a protection against baseless accusations and eliminates the possibility of hearsay or personal dislike derailing the ministry.

There is no clause here to allow for elders to be dismissed or reprimanded on the basis of one-off accusations offered by individuals who have a personality conflict with the pastor, who think they could do a better job, or that the church isn't going in the right direction. That's why it is so important to have a council of elders to hear these accusations and, if necessary, rebuff empty criticism or accusations and correct those who may be trying to sow discord in the church (Prov 6:16-19).

On the other hand, for those elders who were presumably deemed fit to oversee Christ's church at one time but are now found in unrepentant sin, the consequences are quite serious and public – correction in the presence of the church. It is here that we must note such correction is always intended to bring about repentance, reconciliation, and restoration

By following Christ's model for dealing with confrontation and being discerning regarding damaging accusations, the

church can have the proper accountability in place to protect the church from division and wickedness in the pulpit (Matt 18:15-18).

V. 21 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.

As Timothy carries out his pastoral duties in Ephesus accompanied as it was with much difficulty an opposition (likely from other elders), Paul issues the “solemn charge” that Timothy ought to view these things without prejudice, without his mind already made up, without partiality but in fairness and justice.¹³⁰

Whatever personal inclinations (good or bad) Timothy may have in these matters, he must set to the side in the pursuit of godly discernment and faithful care of the church.

V. 22 Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.

Paul here counsels young Timothy on the necessity of waiting to ordain elders. Having laid out the qualifications for overseers (pastors) in chapter 3, we now see the wisdom of prudence when it comes to “the laying on of hands,” a colloquialism for ordination.

Arichea and Hatton write that this term refers to, “The [act] of consecration into a particular office or function [in

¹³⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 237.

the church].”¹³¹

This is an important reminder for those in pastoral ministry. We ought to give time and space for those who seem fit for ministry to be tested (1 Tim 3:10). The work of serving as a deacon, elder, overseer, or pastor demands that one meet the aforementioned qualifications of the office and only time will tell if that is the case.

Knowing somebody for only a short amount of time only gives us a small sample of their heart and character.

Many dubious actors have conned their way into pastoral ministry by giving book answers to theological questions and serving the church with eye service or lip service to further their ulterior motives.

Timothy must be wise enough to give time and space when it comes to appointing elders in the church. And this is something that we ought to take seriously in our own time as well.

If a man will only serve when he is granted a title, he is unworthy of the title. If a man serves faithfully over an extended period of time, seeking to please the Lord and care for the church and does the work of a pastor/elder before he is appointed to the role, then that is a good indicator of where his heart is.

God makes pastors and elders; the church can do little more than recognize that work in a man’s life. That call will become apparent in time.

Furthermore, Timothy is instructed to avoid being entangled in the sins of others (perhaps other elders). This

¹³¹ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 132.

seems pretty straightforward, but the plainness of Paul's words lets us know that the draw to join in the sin of others is always before us, and we ought to avoid that at all costs.

Perhaps Timothy felt the need for approval. Perhaps he was being tempted to be a people-pleaser. This can have disastrous consequences in pastoral ministry.

V. 23 (No longer drink only water, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.)

While verses 24 and 25 logically connect with Paul's warning against sin and exhortation to purity in verse 22, we see a parenthetical note that gives us some insight into Timothy's personal life.

We also see here that Paul demonstrated the heart of a good pastor. He cared about Timothy's life and health, not only the ministry.

So Paul tells Timothy to take care of himself and take a little wine to help with whatever is going on with his stomach ailments and frequent illness.

Perhaps Timothy had abstained from alcohol for the sake of others, not feeling the freedom to partake. That's a good pastor! He placed his own personal health at risk for the sake of his sheep, but Paul reminds him to take care of himself too!

George Knight comments on this verse, "Paul carefully qualifies his recommendation of wine here by [the] word [little] so that neither Timothy, nor any one, may

misunderstand or misuse this statement ... three of the other four Pauline occurrences of οἶνος [wine] have the same spirit of caution, and the fourth, Rom. 14:21, says that not drinking wine is better than causing one's fellow Christian to stumble."¹³²

Vv. 24-25 The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later. So also good works are conspicuous, and even those that are not cannot remain hidden.

Appealing to Christ's teaching, we can tell a tree by the fruit that it bears (Matt 7:15-20). This is especially pertinent in pastoral ministry. Watch and see; discern the fruit that each one bears.

Whatever is going on in each individual's life will become apparent in time. Those who are rooted in the Word of God and filled with the Holy Spirit will certainly bear good fruit (Gal 5:22-23).

¹³² Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 240.

CHAPTER 16 | 1 TIMOTHY 6:1-5

Vv. 1-2 Let all who are under a yoke as bondservants regard their own masters as worthy of all honor, so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled. 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. Teach and urge these things.

Paul continues to give instruction on how Christians are to live and operate in light of the gospel, in community with one another, irrespective of their personal circumstances.

This is a common theme in Paul's letters. He often takes time to focus specifically on the practical application of the gospel within the lives of different people – husbands, wives, children, slaves, and masters.

The common theme tying those instructions together is that no matter what circumstances we find ourselves in, we are to regard others through the lens of the gospel and seek to conduct ourselves in a like manner.

We must take special care here to point out that the term the ESV renders as “bondservant” is a translation of the Greek word for slave (δουλος) and means, “[A] person who is the property of someone else. He or she has no rights and

must show complete obedience and loyalty to their owner.”¹³³

Clever (and perhaps well-meaning) preachers have taught that the word bondservant means something other than a slave; perhaps you’ve been taught this before too.

Some Bible teachers, failing to do the requisite research, have suggested that bondservant means “a willing slave.”

But as far as I can tell, the term *δουλος*, which is translated in our English texts as both “bondservant” and “slave,” doesn’t necessarily mean a willing slave. The only way we could assert that would be based on contextual evidence. And in this case, there is no indication that the bondservants Paul is addressing were slaves by choice.

In fact, the idea that has been promoted of slaves who willingly give themselves to their master and have their ear pieced to signify their commitment is not part of the first-century societal context but part of Hebrew Law.

Here’s where that teaching comes from:

“If your brother, a Hebrew man or a Hebrew woman, is sold to you, he shall serve you six years, and in the seventh year you shall let him go free from you. And when you let him go free from you, you shall not let him go empty-handed. You shall furnish him liberally out of your flock, out of your threshing floor, and out of your winepress. As the Lord your God has blessed you, you shall give to him. You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the Lord your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this today. But if he says to you, ‘I will not go out from you,’ because he loves you and your household, since he is well-off

¹³³ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 137.

with you, then you shall take an awl, and put it through his ear into the door, and he shall be your slave forever” (Deut 15:12-17).

It is safe to say that by the time Paul was dealing with the mish-mash of Greco-Roman-Jewish influence in the church, much had changed. The blight of slavery was quite common and mostly influenced by pagan culture.

Robert Gundry explains, “[I]n cities, slaves may have numbered nearly as many as free people. Slavery was not racially based. It had been common to condemn criminals, debtors, and prisoners of war to slavery; but by the first century most slaves were born as such.... To pay their debts or gain economic security, some people sold themselves into slavery, perhaps for a contractually limited period of time. Masters ranged from kind to cruel and considered their slaves, including young boys and girls, legitimate objects of sexual exploitation. Often they castrated their male slaves.”¹³⁴

Perhaps one of the reasons that we prefer to translate *δουλος* as bondservant rather than slave is to try to soften the blow, the harshness of the term, the difficulty of exactly what Paul is asking those in bondage to do.

But we must acknowledge that the Bible deals with humanity as it is – as it ever has been.

Some people errantly believe that the Bible endorses or even promotes slavery, and that is simply not true.

“[I]t was the work of the abolitionists to argue against slavery based on humanity being created in the image of God and love of neighbor—two biblical themes that run stronger

¹³⁴ Gundry, *A Survey of the New Testament*, 53–55.

and deeper throughout Scripture than its teaching on slaves and slave ownership.”¹³⁵

So then, let us not try to soften the blow because it offends our modern sensibilities. What Paul has to teach about Christians living under the yoke of others has great theological significance!

Those who were in legally sanctioned bondage to somebody else understood sovereignty better than any free person. They learned precisely what it means to live according to the will and direction of somebody else.

Certainly, they yearned for freedom, for the chance to live unencumbered by the moral whims of another flawed human being! In fact, the short book of Philemon is written about a runaway slave who came to know Christ and was sent back to his owner! The slave Paul wrote about was named Onesimus, and he was a Colossian whom Paul called his own child (Col 4:9; Phm 1:10). Is your head spinning yet!?

Did Paul not get it? Did he not understand human suffering? Did he perpetuate oppressive systems of rule? Why didn't he stand up and do something!?

He did. He set his eyes and heart to instruct those who lived in these broken systems that their lives mattered in God's eyes. That there is no hierarchical difference in God's kingdom between slave or free, Jew or Greek, man or woman (Gal 3:28).

And that the Lord Jesus Christ shares in the condition of

¹³⁵ Douglas Mangum, ed., *Lexham Context Commentary: New Testament*, Lexham Context Commentary (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2020), 1 Tim 6:1–2.

the slave just as much as the king (being king of all).

As a matter of fact, Paul wrote the Philippians that they ought to seek to follow Christ's example: "Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (Phil 2:5-8; compare John 13).

He also writes to the Corinthians: "Were you called as a slave? Do not let it concern you. But if you are also able to become free, take advantage of [that.] For the one who was called in the Lord as a slave, is the Lord's freed person; likewise the one who was called as free, is Christ's slave" (1 Cor 7:21-22).

So then, the charge that Paul issues to those who find themselves in the service of others (by birth, by compulsion, or otherwise) is a call to self-sacrifice; it is emblematic of the heart of Christ and keeps as its goal the exaltation of God's name and the good teaching.

God's name ought not be profaned because his people are obstinate, combative, and disrespectful. Yet that is exactly what we face in our own lifetimes.

Those who are called Christians, and perhaps even claim that name for themselves, fail to take on the mind of Christ or the heart of a bond-servant for the sake of God's own name and not their own. That is a shame, and it is in direct contradiction to the Scriptures.

We have the blessed opportunity to represent the glory of God in our mortal bodies, no matter our circumstances. And this we shall do with the Lord's help.

Vv. 3-5 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, 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, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain.

As Paul continues his letter, he returns to the topic of “healthy”¹³⁶ teaching and good doctrine. He has instructed Timothy to “teach these things” and now describes the state of those who teach differently.

This is far more than a matter of interpretive difference, as we will see, and the evidence of who is right and who is wrong is born out in adherence to the teachings of Christ and godly conduct in the life of the hearer.¹³⁷

Sadly, the measure for orthodoxy presented here is considered novel in our day and age.

We have found it necessary to test orthodoxy by various denominational creeds and catechisms (and to be sure creeds and catechisms are valuable tools). However, the danger is

¹³⁶ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul's Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 141.

¹³⁷ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 336.

that if we are not careful, we can define orthodoxy and right belief as only that which fits neatly in our denominational frameworks rather than that which adheres with the teachings of Christ and godliness.

Paul further describes the people who promote this kind of discord, saying that those who teach a different doctrine contrary to the gospel are not actually enlightened or virtuous, which is certainly the tendency for these types of people to view themselves as, but that they are “so arrogant as to be practically demented.”¹³⁸

Their arrogance keeps them from seeing reality. While they profess to be teachers who have found a new way of looking at things or have a new revelation, they are just ignoring the truth and living in delusion.

Remember that Paul previously described these people, whom the bulk of scholarly materials refers to as “heretics” or “opponents,” by writing, “Certain persons ... have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim 1:6-7).

John Calvin wrote about these types, “For the blindness under which they labor is almost always mixed with proud vanity and obstinacy. Indeed, vanity joined with pride can be detected in the fact that, in seeking God, miserable men do not rise above themselves as they should, but measure him by the yardstick of their own carnal stupidity, and neglect sound investigation; thus out of curiosity they fly off into empty

¹³⁸ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 764.

speculations. They do not therefore apprehend God as he offers himself, but imagine him as they have fashioned him in their own presumption.”¹³⁹

Paul goes on to give us some warning signs of bad actors. They crave controversy, which the Bible tells us is unhealthy!

God’s people are to be people of peace, not people of self-devised theological controversy! “If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all” (Rom 12:18).

Now that isn’t to say that Christians are completely free from controversy.

Certainly, Jesus’ own ministry sparked some controversy among various people groups: religious, social, and political. That controversy sprang to life simply by virtue of His presence. The spirit and the flesh war against one another and the sinful nature of man certainly made war against the ministry of Christ, marked as it was by compassion and grace and not because Jesus was nitpicking over semantics or getting into “verbal quibbles” with others.¹⁴⁰ Jesus was about substance, Spirit, and truth, not semantic arguments and majoring in the minors.

That type of skewed theological focus produces a certain kind of diseased fruit. This comes as no surprise to us as we have been reminded countless times that what we believe impacts how we behave.

So, when spiritually unhealthy, arrogant, unlearned,

¹³⁹ John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 2nd ed., John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles, vol. 1, The Library of Christian Classics (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2011), 47.

¹⁴⁰ Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 251.

unteachable, unloving, false teachers specialize in arguments over words and minor doctrinal controversies rather than the person and work of Jesus Christ, they are cultivating a work that produces bad fruit – ungodly conduct!

Sadly their efforts tend to lead to more conceit and self-affirmations of spiritual knowledge that fall short of the gospel. Those kinds of people live in an echo chamber and reject sound teaching and basic interpretive principles.

It is exceedingly difficult to reason with somebody who thinks they are smarter than everybody else and has set their heart on bad teaching, bad interpretation, and obfuscating the gospel of Christ.

While Timothy and all pastors have a Biblical mandate to stand against this type of heresy so that we are not affirming bad doctrine by our silence, I am convinced that no measure of berating or conflict can resolve this issue. It must be the personal intervention of the Holy Spirit in the life of the one who is in error to bring about repentance, reconciliation, and restoration, to help them see with new eyes and a new heart (John 16:7-8).

The most common fruit found on these crooked branches is envy. To our embarrassment, the church has been a place (and in some places continues to be a place) of competition spurred by envy and the desire to be bigger, more powerful, or more popular.

Dissension is another fruit of this type of wayward ministry. This means to fight or “to express differences of opinion, with at least some measure of antagonism or

hostility.”¹⁴¹

As we live together as the Body of Christ, we will have disagreements, and the Lord has given us ways to resolve those disagreements: “Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony” (Col 3:12-14).

But some people who have a sick craving for controversy and rejection of the Scriptures seem to be unable to keep from being a dissenter, playing devil’s advocate, or voicing disagreement over every little thing.

Slander is also present, speaking in a defamatory, disrespectful, and ugly way about others.¹⁴² There are evil suspicions, because there’s no trust! Constant friction means there’s no peace!

And all of this occurs among people whom Paul calls sick in the head and robbed¹⁴³ of the truth.

This is some strong language. It is clear that Paul was very concerned about the church in Ephesus. It is also clear that Timothy had a challenging job ahead of him sorting all of

¹⁴¹ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 437.

¹⁴² “βλασφημία ... speech that denigrates or defames, *reviling, denigration, disrespect, slander.*” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 178.

¹⁴³ “ἀποστερέω ... to cause another to suffer loss by taking away through illicit means, *rob, steal, despoil, defraud.*” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 121.

this out!

The final mark that Paul addresses when it comes to bad teachers, heretics, or opponents within the church is that they think that they can get rich through ministry.

This disease still plagues the church today. And these verses are carefully placed following Paul's instruction on how the church ought to support their elders who rule well and labor in preaching and teaching (1 Tim 5:17-18).

In case we are unsure of what "rule well" means, we get a study in contrasts in our text on what it means to rule wickedly or to infect the Body of Christ with vanity, conceit, and an unhealthy addiction to controversy, all predicated on making money!

The foul heart that Paul describes in these verses is antithetical to the heart of Jesus; the people who deal in these methods will answer for their fraud at the judgment seat of Christ.

But take heart. Jesus' church is still His church, and He shall keep it. If the gates of hell shall not prevail against it, then certainly some half-brained poser seeking to stir up controversy and rip off the saints will be equally unsuccessful (Matt 16:18).

It is Jesus who is sanctifying His bride, the church, by His Word so that He might present her to Himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she may be holy and without blemish (Eph 5:25-27). So then we do not lose heart; we press on with our eyes and hearts fixed on the Lord.

CHAPTER 17 | 1 TIMOTHY 6:6-12

As we continue our study through 1 Timothy, we find that the Apostle Paul commends to Timothy the virtues of godliness and contentment, warns of the dangers of being consumed by an unhealthy fixation on wealth, and commands Timothy to flee such things and pursue the character of Christ.

Vv. 6-8 But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.

As we read these verses, we must be careful to note that they are not meant as a standalone treatise on Christian conduct and contentment. On the contrary, godliness with contentment is being contrasted against the wicked conduct of greedy ministers within the Body of Christ, likely elders in the Ephesian church.

The Ephesian elders had a problem on their hands. Paul had warned them about it ahead of time (Acts 20:17-28).

In Paul's final meeting with these men (prior to the authorship of this letter), we see that he sensed or perhaps was given revelation by the Holy Spirit that some of the elders among the Ephesians had an ungodly fixation on money.

Paul admonishes them to take heed of this temptation and

reminds them of how he conducted himself while serving them. He reminded them of the Christ-like pastoral example he lived out in their midst.

He says to them: “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me. In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive’” (Acts 20:34-35).

The precedent that Paul set was that those who serve in the church ought to do so by godliness and contentment, seeking to care for Christ’s people and not to broaden their bank accounts.

Even though Paul was abundantly clear on this point by way of personal example and by way of written imperative, some among the leaders of the Ephesian congregations failed to take heed.

Perhaps they had even sought their ministerial positions exactly for the purpose of getting a paycheck; that certainly isn’t beyond the realm of possibility. The witness of history provides innumerable examples of this type of money-driven motivation by those who view ministry as a cushy vocation rather than an undeniable calling fraught with many perils.

This, of course, would have compounded the difficulty of Timothy’s work in Ephesus. He was sent there to oppose heretics and re-establish sound doctrine and concurrently found himself contending with greedy ministers. The two (heresy and greed) tend to go hand in hand!

Sadly the seed of materialism, sown in God’s field ages

ago by wicked men (1 Cor 3:9), continues to spread in the church today. While our hearts long for that eternal kingdom where Christ's church shall be free of corruption, we know that for the time being, the wheat and the tares shall grow up together (Matt 13:24-30). And we shall pray that the Lord's grace and mercy abound in His church, keep her spotless, and inspire repentance in churches mired in the sin of thinking that godliness is a means of material gain.

Remarkably, even though greed and materialism were commonplace and had occurred since the very earliest days of the church in Jerusalem (Acts 5:1-11), Paul expressed a sense of contentment in his own life, marked as it was by peril.

Please understand that contentment doesn't mean being so defeated that we fall into a catatonic state of learned helplessness where we sullenly weather any disaster because our lives are a perpetual train-wreck. Instead, contentment means being settled in the sovereignty and provision of the Lord God, who cares for us and will provide exactly what we need, when we need it.

Remember Jesus teaching from the Sermon on the Mount. "Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? And why are you anxious about clothing?

Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble” (Matt 6:25-34).

In Philippians, Paul describes applying this principle in his own life when he writes, “I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. I can do all things through him who strengthens me. Yet it was kind of you to share my trouble” (Phil 4:11-14).

Paul believed in the Lord’s provision, and his encouragement to the Ephesians through Timothy is to trust in the Lord’s provision and reject the message that had slithered into their church that godliness is a means of gain.

That kind of “material gain” message common to churches today is sometimes called “the prosperity gospel.” This heretical “other gospel” (Gal 1:6-10) focuses on the material gratification of the flesh and is in direct opposition

to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ!

Paul says here that if we have food and clothing, with these, we shall be content. The food and clothing Paul is referring to is that which the Lord provides for the basic needs of His people to live, not the maximum that some people might seek in order to affirm their unbiblical expectations of vast wealth.

King Solomon, who was exceedingly wealthy, penned these wise words that we would do well to take to heart.

“Better is a little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble with it. Better is a dinner of herbs where love is than a fattened ox and hatred with it” (Prov 15:16-17).

So, here in 1 Timothy, the beloved Apostle Paul commends to us the good way, the ideal relationship that God’s people are to have with this world’s goods.

There is much more that the Bible says about stewardship, shrewd investing, and caring for others (Luke 16:9-13; Prov 3:27-28), but the point here is contentment.

All that we have comes from the Lord’s hand, and with this, we shall be content and thank Him for His kindness towards us.

A man named Agur wrote these words, which give voice to the cry of our heart. “Two things I ask of you; deny them not to me before I die: Remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God” (Pro 30:7-9).

In His perfect wisdom and loving-kindness, the Lord will provide for each of us as needed to keep our hearts dependent upon Him and to keep us walking in His ways.

Vv. 9-10 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. 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.

Following the commendation of godliness (that is, living a life emblematic of God's character) and contentment (resting in the certainty of God's character), Paul issues a warning against those who may be tempted to fall down at the "golden calf" of wealth.

An unbiblical love of money can incubate all sorts of different evil and all sorts of ungodly fixations.

The idolatry of wealth breeds more idolatry, more anxiety, and more distraction, ultimately choking out any healthy spiritual growth that perhaps was once springing to life.

So severe and dangerous is the temptation of materialism that Jesus made sure to instruct His disciples on it in what we call the parable of the soils: "And others are the ones sown among thorns. They are those who hear the word, but the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things enter in and choke the word, and it proves unfruitful" (Mark 4:18-19).

Lest we think we are exempt from such temptation, let us remember that Judas, one of the twelve who lived and walked with the Lord Jesus, was apparently infected by the sin of greed.

While time and space prohibit us from examining the fullness of Judas' betrayal of Christ, we know for sure that one question he asked the chief priests was, "What will you give me if I deliver Him over to you" (Matt 26:15)?

We are all familiar with the paltry sum of 30 pieces of silver, but the greater emphasis is to be laid upon Judas' heart, darkened as it was by "the deceitfulness of riches and the desires for other things" (see John 12:4-6).

This was not exclusive to Judas either. Many have fallen to this temptation.

One of Paul's fellow companions for the advancement of the gospel, a man named Demas, was commended in both Colossians and Philemon (Col 4:14; Phm 24), but finally, in Paul's last letter, he writes in devastating simplicity, "Demas, in love with this present world, has deserted me" (2 Tim 4:10).

This condition is not only personal and individual but applies to whole churches too!

Jesus rebuked the church in Laodicea with these words, "[Y]ou say, 'I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing,' not realizing that you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev 3:17).

The Laodiceans had a form of material wealth but were spiritually destitute. Their eyes and their hearts were fixed on the wrong thing, and this danger should not be overlooked.

Jesus instructed the entire Laodicean church, I will spit you out of my mouth, unless you repent (Rev. 3:16, 19).

Truly the greatest treasure we have been entrusted with on this earth is our soul. Since we are in the pastoral epistles, we might also add for those who serve the church the souls of those that God has placed in our care.

“For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?” (Matt 16:26)

Remember the Parable of the Rich Fool! He had saved so much and done so well in his business dealings. As a matter of fact, before we cast a jaundiced eye upon his moral character, perhaps assuming some deceitful business practices to amass such wealth, we must note that there is no indication in Jesus’ teaching (figurative as it is) that he became wealthy by treachery.

In fact, the language that Jesus uses in this parable indicates that the land he farmed “produced plentifully.” And he saved up, he built bigger, he did more. He did what we all desire to do! He put himself in a good position to retire, eventually speaking thus to his soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God” (Luke 12:19-21).

The treasure that God desires is the soul of His people! And that is a costly treasure we often overlook for other things that perish in time.

Psalms records for us this truth:

“Truly no man can ransom another,
or give to God the price of his life,
for the ransom of their life is costly
and can never suffice” (Ps 49:7-8).

That is why it is essential to understand God’s economy! People spend on the things that they think are important. They spend on the things that they love. “Where your treasure is there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:19-21)!

So then, loved one, what does it mean that our soul is the thing God requires apart from our earthly storehouses of shiny garbage?! What does it mean that you were bought at a price (1 Cor 6:20)!?

God spends on the things that He loves (Matt 13:44-45)! And His desire is for us to gain a heavenly perspective and a heart for eternity so that we would resist the temptation of this present age through the enablement of the Holy Spirit, bear fruit not choked out by the cares of the world, and that fruit would remain.

Vv. 11-12 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 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.

Here we come to the practical application. Flee these things! Run away from materialism and toward righteousness,

godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness. In other words, we might say, Run to the person and work of Jesus Christ. There is a better way!

Proverbs tells us that there is a way that seems right to a man, but its way is the path to death (Prov 16:25).

That is the tension we are caught in. The world says, “Get money! Chase that paper! What’s your soul worth anyway?! You can’t see it or hold it in your hands.”

The Bible says, Chase after Christ, seek His kingdom, invest in the eternal, for your soul is of immeasurable worth. Its value is so dear that Christ gave His life to purchase it and keep it from the clutches of sin and death.

This isn’t promised to be easy. It is a fight, but not a fight in the flesh. It is a fight of faith, and a fight that is good.

Given everything he was facing in Ephesus, heretics, greed, bad church governance, unqualified elders, power struggles, slander, and semantic arguments, Timothy had a fight on his hands. But it was good because it was for the gospel, for the glory of God, and for the good of God’s people.

Notice, too, that this good fight Timothy is commanded to engage in is a fight of faith.

We don’t mean that in the modern sense of blind faith. What we mean here, and Paul reminds Timothy of, is the certainty of his calling, his own confession of belief, and the certainty of the gospel. That is what allows Timothy to stand and fight.

In like manner, by way of application, we too can take part in the blessed imperative to square up and fight the good

fight of faith!

Most of this fight will take place in our minds, hearts, and souls as we resist the deceptive temptations of the world.

And in those moments, remember your faith. Remember eternal life and how it has been purchased by the blood of Christ. Take hold of it; grasp it and be grasped by it. Remember the good confession that you made when you came to Christ, when you were brought into the kingdom and family and confessed in the presence of other saints your faith in the risen Lord.

There are many other places in Scripture that instruct us on how to fight (2 Cor 6:3-7; 10:3-6; Eph 6:10-20), but here Paul gives Timothy the simple command: do the thing — fight on. And I pray that as we meditate upon these things, we might find the heart required to fight the good fight of faith.

CHAPTER 18 | 1 TIMOTHY 6:13-21

Vv. 13-15a 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, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—

As we come to the close of this letter, the Apostle Paul adds some additional solemnity to his writing.

Within the contested spiritual space where Timothy is serving, he **must** “keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach” until the very end.

The language Paul uses is quite strong. It is in the imperative mood and carries the weight of a critical command. Timothy **must** diligently ensure that this is carried out.

Notice that the foundation for this command is not based upon human will, desire, or because it’s a good idea but upon the sovereignty of God and the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Jesus Christ first modeled the way of faithfulness; now Timothy must walk the path before him, seeking to exemplify the way of Jesus before a congregation that has displayed pockets of ungodly resistance and contention.

While the specific command that Timothy is to carry out is not apparent from the immediate context, we can view “the

command” as encapsulating all of what Paul has set forth in this letter – a great task indeed.¹⁴⁴

Timothy has thus far been instructed on the necessity of correcting errant doctrine, church governance, and practical care for the church, all of which are founded upon the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It is not human sentiment, opinion, or cultural norms that are to shape Christ’s church and His people. Rather it is Christ Himself who first made the good confession, and He is the one we look to in order to shape our sentiments, opinions, cultural conduct, and personal behavior.

It is to Christ that Paul appeals in order to motivate Timothy in his pastoral work, appealing to Christ’s earthly ministry and the expectation of His soon return.

The first century church was convinced that Christ’s return was imminent (though not necessarily immediate) while simultaneously embracing the truth that God the Father dictates the terms and time in which Christ shall return for His own.

It was this truth that imbued the early church with a sense of urgency coupled with a sense of propriety that kept the gospel as the focus of their efforts.

And this is a timely reminder for ministers of our own age. No matter what we are engaged in and what other things compete for our interests and ministerial efforts (right, wrong, or indifferent), we have a responsibility to keep *the* commandment as set forth in the gospel “pure, [and] without

¹⁴⁴ Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 156.

fault,”¹⁴⁵ “above criticism, [and] beyond reproach,”¹⁴⁶ in our present age.

On this point many have erred, sadly giving great cause for the enemies of the Lord to bring reproach upon the gospel and upon the Body of Christ.

Paul’s words stand as a sign-post to anyone who has put their hand to the plow in the service of Christ’s kingdom, reminding us to remain faithful to the gospel.

Pastors and church leaders need to hear these words and internalize them as we seek to advance the kingdom and shepherd God’s people. We must keep the main thing, the main thing!

And congregations need to hear these words, internalize them and hold their leaders accountable for deviating from the good path laid down for us by Christ.

This admonition is so profound for Paul that he seems to break his thought mid-sentence¹⁴⁷ and pens a moving doxology¹⁴⁸ in the following lines that many believe to be a

¹⁴⁵ “ἄσπιλος ... pert[aining] to being of untainted character, pure, without fault of inward condition.” Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 144.

¹⁴⁶ Louw and Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 435.

¹⁴⁷ Verses 13-16 are one long sentence in the Greek text, typical of Pauline writing. Arichea and Hatton, *Paul’s Letters to Timothy and to Titus*, 155.

¹⁴⁸ Doxology literally means “word of praise [and] generally contain[s] two elements, an ascription of praise to God ... and an expression of His infinite nature.” David W. Music, “Doxology,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 441.

portion of an early hymn.

Notably, what seems pretty straightforward to us in a Christian context would have been in complete contradiction to the Greco-Roman society that the Ephesian church existed in.¹⁴⁹

Ephesian society was marked by both Emperor worship¹⁵⁰ (wherein it was commonly believed that the Emperor was immortal) and was the epicenter for the worship of the female deity known to the Romans as Diana and to the Greeks as Artemis.

In this cultural milieu, Paul makes the stunning claim in His theologically rich declaration of praise that there is only one God worthy of such praise.

This would have been particularly important for the Ephesian congregation to be reminded of since it is likely that the majority of them had grown up worshipping a pantheon of deities, which at that time was viewed as being spiritually enlightened.

Simultaneously it was common for people to worship the Roman emperor, which was seen as politically expedient while having its own unique trappings of spiritual devotion.

Here are Paul's words, contra to the cultural norm.

Vv. 15b-16 he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and

¹⁴⁹ Marshall and Towner, *Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, 666.

¹⁵⁰ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 362.

eternal dominion. Amen.

Paul declares in this moving bit of poetic worship that there is only one God who is over all things, including kings, lords, and all creation. He is completely separate and distinct from the deities fabricated by human custom, political might, and humanity itself.

The point of this doxology, expressed in Paul's personal praise, is to elevate the minds of the reader to consider the very nature of God, and this doxology conveys deep theological truth.

God alone possesses immortality intrinsically in Himself. While he awards immortality to others, He is the source and possessor of immortality, being the ever-existing one outside of time and space.

Recall God's revelation of His name to Moses in Exodus 3 at the Burning Bush, "Then Moses said to God, 'If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, "The God of your fathers has sent me to you," and they ask me, "What is his name?" what shall I say to them?' God said to Moses, 'I am who I am'" (Ex 3:13-14).

The term that God revealed to Moses as His personal name is familiar to many Christians – Yahweh.

One source notes that God's divine name "expresses God's quality of absolute being as the eternal, unchanging, dynamic presence ... the divine name should be understood as 'I am the Existing One.'"¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Martin A. Shields and Ralph K. Hawkins, "YHWH," ed. John D. Barry et al., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016).

It is the Existing One to whom Paul appeals and whom he praises.

John Calvin helps us understand the idea of intrinsic immortality possessed by God by commenting on these verses (which dovetail nicely with v. 13): “we and all ... creatures do not, strictly speaking, live, but only borrow life from Him.”¹⁵²

As Jesus taught, “Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life” (John 5:24). Even as He has shared in humanity through Christ, God, who gives eternal life to those who believe, is altogether separate from mankind by virtue of His unique holiness.

And it is in this doxology that Paul gives voice to God’s holiness by using common figurative language employed to describe God’s holiness – light (Jas 1:17).

This is one instance, in my opinion, where the ESV falls short in curtailing a translation by omitting some key information in their translational decision.

A functional translation communicating this thought could be, “God, who dwells in unapproachable light, which no one from among humans can see,” more plainly presents what Paul is driving at.¹⁵³

¹⁵² Calvin and Pringle, *Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, 167.

¹⁵³ The language included in the original text is – ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἄνθρωπων. “ἄνθρωπων, “of people,” is a partitive genitive meaning that no one among humans, no person, can see God.” Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 362.

The qualifying statement Paul issues here is that none among *humans* can see God in the flesh. The reason is **because** of God’s uniquely separate holiness described as “light” (2 Tim 1:10).

Our present sinful condition prohibits us from seeing the fullness of God’s glory. Even though we are being made holy (sanctification) through the work of the Holy Spirit, we are not yet completely holy.

To borrow from Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, “For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face” (1 Cor 13:12).

Nevertheless, we trust in the faithfulness of God to complete that work of holiness which He has begun in us (Phil 1:6).

Paul’s words remind us that while we are home in this body, in the present,¹⁵⁴ we cannot **see** God face to face; yet we shall see Him in eternity. This is a promise that Jesus made in the Sermon on the Mount: “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God” (Matt 5:8).¹⁵⁵

This drives home the point Paul is making. God is sovereign over all, He is holy, and He alone is worthy of honor and dominion over His creation.

The magnitude of God’s glory, holiness, and power is enough to stir the hearts of the saints to have a healthy awe for Him and to prompt theologically rich worship to spring from the hearts of His people, just as it did with Paul in these lines.

¹⁵⁴ These words are in the present tense in the Greek text.

¹⁵⁵ Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 362.

The nature of God is so unfathomable and His glory so bright that it anchors our hearts in who He is as a person. We do not simply concern ourselves with right worship, right doctrine, and right service because it is the right thing to do but because the glory of the Lord God is at hand in the expression of Christ's body here on earth, which is the church.

It has been mentioned countless times throughout this study that what we believe determines how we behave.

And in these worshipful lines detailing the glory and majesty of God, we see exactly why Paul contended so earnestly for right belief among the churches and among those who shepherd God's people. It is for God's glory!

Now, since this doxology ends with that familiar word, "Amen," it sure feels like this would be the proper end of 1 Timothy, but it's not.

Paul still has something on his mind.

Vv. 17-19 As 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. They are to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, thus storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is truly life.

This brief section deals with those who are materially wealthy (presumably within the Ephesian church based upon

how Timothy is to relate to them) and seems out of place, but it is not a new thought.

We can see this as a continuation of a previous thought that Paul first set forth in vv. 5-11, wherein he described a contingent of greedy ministers who viewed serving God's people as a means to get rich. Paul warned Timothy and the church to "flee such things."

It was in that portion of Paul's instruction that he penned the famous words, "godliness with contentment is great gain," and "the love of money is a root of all sorts of evils" (vv. 6, 10).

Here we see that Paul acknowledges that the church is, in fact, composed of diverse people, some of whom would have certainly been considered wealthy. This is not a treatise against the rich nor a universal call to poverty but a call to good stewardship, to use what we have to care for others.

We are not to be ruled by money (Matt 6:24), but we are to rule over it and use it wisely **and**, as Paul suggests, compassionately.

Jesus instructed the disciples in this principle when He presented to them the rhetorical question, "If then you have not been faithful in the unrighteous wealth, who will entrust to you the true riches?"

That is a question we must all consider as we seek to use whatever we are blessed with wisely, generously, and for the good of others.

Quite cleverly, Paul then finishes this letter with a play on words.

Vv. 20-21 O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called “knowledge,” for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you.

While the rich within the church are to steward their resources wisely in accordance with the gospel, Timothy has been entrusted with “true riches” of the spiritual variety. He has been entrusted with stewarding the gospel itself and ensuring that it remains uncorrupted and is wisely applied to the lives of those under his care (Matt 25:14-30).

Paul also encourages Timothy to keep himself from becoming entangled in “pointless and empty talk,”¹⁵⁶ which has so often been employed to distort the simplicity and truth of the gospel by those who, in their arrogance, believe they have found some sort of special knowledge regarding the gospel.

These very people who profess such knowledge have, in fact, departed from the faith, a tragic but not unfamiliar story.

Finally, Paul finishes this letter the same way he began, with grace.

In 1 Tim 1:2, Paul writes, “To Timothy, my true child in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Paul was acutely aware of the tremendously difficult task that Timothy faced at Ephesus. It is good in those moments to remember grace, that we are favored by God irrespective of our shortcomings and circumstances.

¹⁵⁶ Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*, 173.

We are deeply loved by the King of all Kings and Lord of all Lords, the Existing One, the Holy One, and His grace extends to us at all times. We must never forget that.

And inasmuch as we can take an example from Paul's letters when it comes to discussing the hard things of life and the deep theological treasures that sometimes confound us, let us remember that all of those things are framed in the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ.

It is grace at the beginning and grace at the end that will see us into eternity for God's glory.

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