

Lessons on Timothy, Titus and Philemon

John Hendershot

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Artist Anonymous (Byzantine Empire)

Title The Martyrdom of Saint Timothy

Description English: The manuscript is known as a menologion, from the Greek for "month". It was written and illuminated in the imperial scriptorium in Constantinople, and is one of the few editions to be so richly illustrated. It is a collection of the lives of the saints honored in January and is arranged by the days of the liturgical year on which each saint is venerated.

Date between circa 1025 and circa 1050

Medium ink, paint, and gold on parchment

Dedication

To our friends from the Becoming Closer class, for their constant encouragement and support.

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First Timothy

Neat, Plausible and Wrong - 1 Timothy 1:1-11

From the earliest days of the church there have been those for whom the mysteries of the faith are not nearly as attractive as the fancies of their own minds. Paul, in this letter, helps Timothy face just such a situation.

Paul and Timothy

We shall begin by looking at the relationship between Paul and Timothy, summed up neatly in the introduction to this letter:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus according to the commandment of God our Savior, and of Christ Jesus, *who is* our hope, To Timothy, *my* true child in *the* faith: Grace, mercy *and* peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

(1Ti 1:1-2 NASB)

Paul, the Apostle

There is one immediate point: Paul is an Apostle by the commandment of God. No one chooses to be an Apostle; they were all drafted into the job. Paul phrases his call as being from God and from Christ – thus showing their innate equality – but he calls Christ Jesus his hope. A necessary thing, too: the life of an Apostle was a tough one. All but John were martyred, and his life was no picnic either. No wonder God selects them; who would volunteer?

Note also (as we will explore next week) that God's selection of his messengers tends strongly to the "least likely to succeed" category. For example:

- ✚ Moses – so tongue-tied that he was sure God wanted his brother Aaron instead.
- ✚ David – so well thought of by his father that David was the one left with the sheep when the other seven boys were put before Samuel as choices for the kingship.
- ✚ Elijah – a man who called down fire from heaven – ran when the queen threatened him.
- ✚ Paul – the apostle to the Gentiles – was a devout Pharisee. Of all people least likely to talk to a Gentile, this is the man.

Why? So that no one will boast that God really needed them for the job. God needs no one – which is why he so often chooses a nobody. It's a tough life, made all the more so in that it is so important. But through all this Paul clings to one thing: Jesus Christ, our hope. He lived in the power of the Resurrection.

Timothy

As best we know, Timothy would have been in his early twenties at this point. That's not particularly an advantage at this time; his elders would have been likely to have told him to sit down and shut up. Paul knows this, and he encourages him:

- ✚ He calls him his *true* son – thus reassuring him that Paul has every confidence in his knowledge and abilities.

- ✚ More than that, he is his true *son* – one who is carrying on the same work that Paul did. Whatever power and grace there was for Paul’s ministry, it is there for Timothy too.
- ✚ He is his son *in the faith*. The use of the phrase “the faith” has declined greatly in our time. But this makes clear to Timothy that he is on the right track – he is defending “the” faith.
Grace, mercy, peace

What do you wish for a man in such a position? As we shall see, Timothy has his work cut out for him. Paul calls for three things:

- ✚ Grace – the very gift of God – so that all good things in him might abound.
- ✚ Mercy – for all of us need it, but even more so that Timothy will know the God he serves – the merciful God.
- ✚ Peace – Timothy must deal with false teaching. He must deal with it while keeping harmony in the church. For this, he will need the peace of God.

False Teachers

To that point, let us see how Paul tells him to deal with the problem:

As I urged you upon my departure for Macedonia, remain on at Ephesus so that you may instruct certain men not to teach strange doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than *furthering* the administration of God which is by faith. But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. For some men, straying from these things, have turned aside to fruitless discussion, wanting to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions.

(1Ti 1:3-7 NASB)

The nature of false teachers

It would be exceedingly convenient if false teachers wore a sign to that effect. They don’t. Indeed, it is difficult (at first) to discover them. Why? See their characteristics:

- ✚ They are completely *confident*. Sure of themselves, sure of their teaching, they seem to be those who could not be wrong – or at least are seldom in doubt. The true teacher knows that there is much he does not know.
- ✚ They engage in “fruitless discussions.”¹ By their fruits – or lack – you will know them.
- ✚ They *want* to teach. Why? Being a teacher brings honor and respect, not to mention a great deal of self-satisfaction. If this is your motive, watch out!

Instruction

Note what Timothy is told to do: “instruct” them. This is a bit more difficult than it seems:

- ✚ The false teacher is perfectly willing to “discuss” or “debate” – we both have good theories about this, let us enlighten each other. But false and true are not equals, and we should not use them that way.

¹ The King James has “vain jangling”; The Message has “cul-de-sacs of gossip.”

- ✚ He is not to hesitate in doing so. The fact that he is much younger than they should not be a barrier. Politeness should never blockade truth.
- ✚ In one thing we may have confidence: there is a right answer. From it, we can identify the wrong ones.

Objective

Teachers in the classroom are required to have a lesson plan – several, in fact, many days ahead of need. Even this poor teacher needs his notes! One key to that lesson planning is simply this: just what is it that you want your teaching to accomplish? A great lesson in multiplying fractions is of no use in geography class. The key to this is simple: just what is the objective of the lesson? What is it that we're trying to teach here? This is the outline Paul gives Timothy:

- ✚ His teaching must result in love from a pure heart. The devotion to God expected of a Christian should not be oriented towards monetary gain or release from service – rather, it should come from pure hearted love of God. Such love will soon spill over into love for God's children as well.
- ✚ It also results in a good conscience – one that is informed about right and wrong. Such a conscience is strengthened in prayer so that sin troubles the conscience greatly – and is therefore not committed.
- ✚ All this must be done in sincere faith – God is not at all found of the hypocrite. Without faith, it is impossible to please God.

Discourse on the Law

Paul now brings up a sore subject to us: the uses and misuses of the Law.

But we know that the Law is good, if one uses it lawfully, realizing the fact that law is not made for a righteous person, but for those who are lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers and immoral men and homosexuals and kidnappers and liars and perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted.

(1Ti 1:8-11 NASB)

Right and wrong use of the Law

I submit to you that you already agree with Paul's point. Let me rephrase it in terms of the law of our time:

- ✚ Our civil law should correct the misdeeds of those who break their contractual agreements – but should not be used to harass someone with frivolous lawsuits.
- ✚ Our criminal law should be used to render justice – punishing the malefactor, even reforming him. It should not be used to let a rich athlete get away with murder.²

There is a similar distinction in the use of God's law. It is not to be a rigid rulebook, particularly used to put everyone else in line. No, it is to be a guide to life – an encouragement to righteousness.

² Yeah, I know, it's been a long time since O.J.'s trial. So sue me.

Law for the unrighteous

We understand this in a way. When you are going about your business and a police officer catches you in some minor violation of the vehicle code, you might feel that this is unjust; shouldn't he be out catching real criminals? The cop will simply say, "tell it to the judge." But underneath there is a real point: the law has a purpose:

- ✦ It is to protect us from the wicked. Lock the thief up and he'll have no chance to steal from me.
- ✦ It is to correct (reform) them if possible. Prison can be a great place to consider the errors of your ways.
- ✦ It is also to be used as a deterrent to others. Most of us would never dream of robbing someone – if for no other reason that the fact that we'd be the ones who got caught at it.

Tests

If there is an educational objective, there must be a test to see if it is met. Here are the tests of a false teacher. Look carefully!

- ✦ They are lawless – they may impose a strict code on others (no drinking, dancing or smiling on Sundays) but they live the lawless life. It's usually no drinking for you – but anger for me.
- ✦ They are rebellious – no one can tell me what to do. (Which is absurd; we pay the preacher to do just that).
- ✦ They are, in a curious way, ungodly. They give him lip service, but when a tough decision is to be made, God matters not at all.
- ✦ They are unholy – there is no sense that they are dedicated to God, and they certainly don't want to be seen by the world as "different."

It is not easy dealing with the false teacher, for it must be done in gentle love, wrapped around the truth of God.

The Advantages of Humility - 1 Timothy 1:12-20

The advantages arising from humility are generally acknowledged, and yet it is a thing not easily to be met with. – Chrysostom.

We consider now the apostle's position – that of chief sinner.

The blessings of humility

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has strengthened me, because He considered me faithful, putting me into service, even though I was formerly a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent aggressor. Yet I was shown mercy because I acted ignorantly in unbelief; and the grace of our Lord was more than abundant, with the faith and love which are *found* in Christ Jesus.

(1Ti 1:12-14 NASB)

What Christ has done for me

In this short passage we see Paul's testimony first about what Christ has done for him. Consider well, and see if you recognize something in your own life.

- ✚ Christ has *strengthened* him – which of course carries with it the implication that his own strength was not sufficient. Most of us are willing to tackle something within our own strength, but it takes real humility to start by saying, "I can't do it" – and then receive strength from God.
- ✚ Christ has *considered him faithful*. Do you not see that this means that Paul's faith, alone, was not sufficient for the task? We know that if you ask God for faith He will give it; here, God gives him credit for it in advance. Humility says, "I don't have the faith to do it." God responds by crediting that faith to you – as you will certainly grow into it.
- ✚ Finally, Christ has *put him into service*. Despite what he has done, God has put him on the team – and not just to warm the bench. The high calling of God is placed on those who deserve it least – so that all will see God's doing, not man's.

All this we may sum up thusly: God had mercy on Paul – not just for forgiveness, but to turn him into a warrior for the faith.

What Paul did to Christ

We sometimes gloss over this, at two thousand years away – but it should not be so. Paul has some very good reasons to be humble, if you consider how this relationship with Christ started.

- ✚ He was a *blasphemer*. To us this means nothing but casual obscenity, but to the Jew – especially to the Pharisee – this was one of the worst things you could say about a man. It made him look like Snidely Whiplash.
- ✚ More than that, he was a *persecutor of the church*. Paul got to do that literally, but the concept has not vanished. One of the reasons my children went to Christian schools was so that their faith would not be hounded by the careless cruelty of "good" children. The bitterness of such a life is long remembered, and hard to forgive. Think now what it must be like to be the person doing the hounding.
- ✚ He was a *violent aggressor*. To be a violent man is to pick up the weapons of Satan; to pick up the weapons of Satan is to join his side. To do so against the Gospel of peace is the worst of all violence. To realize that's what you are – is deeply humiliating.

The message is ... grace

We often forget that the word translated “grace” can also be translated “gift”. The grace of Christ is the gift of Christ. Does that mean “gift from Christ” or “gift of Christ?” The answer, it seems, is yes.

- ✚ Like all that Christ gives us, it is given *abundantly*. Indeed Paul characterizes it as more than abundant – “hyper-abundant” would be the transliteration. That is how Christ gives his gifts; that is how He gives himself.
- ✚ And what grace, what gift did he receive? The faith found in Christ; the love found in Christ. Not the faith and love relating to his own efforts – no, these are gifts. Do you lack faith? Ask. Do you lack love? Beg.

Speaking as one so blessed

It is a trustworthy statement, deserving full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, among whom I am foremost *of all*. Yet for this reason I found mercy, so that in me as the foremost, Jesus Christ might demonstrate His perfect patience as an example for those who would believe in Him for eternal life. Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, *be* honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

(1Ti 1:15-17 NASB)

The thesis is rather simple: Jesus came to save sinners. We often forget that, but it is the purpose of his coming to us.

- ✚ Our translation calls this a “trustworthy statement.” But if you look behind the translation at the original Greek, you will see that “trustworthy” is from the same word as “faith”. “Statement” also hides a Greek word – *logos*, the Word. Jesus came to save sinners – a trustworthy statement of the faithful Word.
- ✚ There is a message hidden in the word “acceptance” as well. It has a technical meaning – that implies that the person doing the accepting at the same time acknowledges the terms thereof. If I rent you a house, and you pay the rent and I cash the check, I have accepted all the terms of the lease agreement. Acceptance means more than intellectual head-nodding; it means commitment.

Just to make the point clear, Paul points to the one sinner he’s most familiar with: himself. As with each of us, Paul is the leading expert on his own relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul knows what Christ has done for him; the nature of this testimony is personal.

The foremost

Why would Paul refer to himself as the foremost of sinners?

- ✚ For one reason, he deserved it.
- ✚ For another, it brings up the subject not of Paul’s sin but Christ’s patience.

Indeed, the word for patience here does not mean the attitude of standing around, waiting for something to happen. It means longsuffering, endurance – and in this instance it is called perfect. The word means “complete” in the original. So we have a picture of the longsuffering Christ, whose patience is perfected and complete, waiting for the moment to turn Paul’s life upside down.

Why would Christ do this? So that Paul might be an example – to those who believe. The favor of God often is unbelievable, and the cynic will point to any possible explanation. But when you know the love of God, you often see how lavish He is in dealing with the sinners.

Benediction

The entire discourse is so high, so holy in these few verses that Paul feels compelled to end it with a benediction. For the moment he will stop talking about Paul and what God has done for him – and pass to the subject of what Timothy should do. But not without rounding off the words preceding. It is as if Paul has been awed by what he just wrote. It happens sometimes – when the object is High and the writer low.

- ✚ He begins with praise for the nature of God – the King, eternal, immortal, invisible – the complete “other-ness” of God.
- ✚ He then – as the Psalms do so often – commends and commands glory and honor, now and forever. Sometimes I wonder: does the casual nature of our worship (“casual attire is emphasized,” as it says on our church’s web site) keep us from the awe of God? And does that keep us from giving praise and honor to Him outside the church walls?

Entrusted to You

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

(1Ti 1:18-20 NASB)

Fight the good fight

May I vent just a little about this?

- ✚ First, please realize that it really is a *fight*. This is not a Sunday morning only activity; the assault of Satan will carry through the week. This is combat whether you want it to be or not.
- ✚ Second, it is the *good* fight. You are not permitted to fight dirty – that is, to pick up the weapons of Satan. They may slander you; you are not permitted to slander them. Rather, you are to use the weapons of Christ.
- ✚ Third, this is *the* good fight – you are struggling for God’s good purposes, not your own gain.

Personal Preparation

If you’re going to war, a little personal preparation is required. Paul gives Timothy a neat synopsis of this:

- ✚ He tells him to *keep* the faith. God’s has no “catch and release” program in mind. He is expecting his people to stay faithful to the end of their lives, no matter what is thrown at them. Indeed, as their trials rise above what they can stand God will provide strength and faith to rise with them.
- ✚ He is also to keep *a good conscience*. We seldom hear that word these days, conscience. Modern life sears the conscience so that it no longer bothers us. Is it wise for us to become, like the modern world, too cynical and worldly to have so old-fashioned a thing as a conscience?

✚ All this is according to prophecy concerning Timothy. It sometimes comes as a surprise to know that God has a plan for your life. For some, he reveals that plan, for they need to know to carry such burdens. For others, He does not reveal it.

But occasionally he offers us a hint. When my wife and I were at our prior church, I received an offer from my employer for relocation. That was odd, in my view, as the job was in the same area. But it met the criteria for relocation, and so the offer was made. I thought and prayed about it, and – over my wife’s objections – I decided to say no. I thought this was a test to see if I would throw away a good ministry for the comforts of the suburbs. Before I could send in my rejection, I was scheduled to go to a conference in Nashville. The hotel was right across the street from the Baptist Sunday School Board bookstore – a teacher’s heaven! I bought some books, and some tapes.

One such tape was in the player when I heard God say, clearly, “Listen. This song is for you.”

“Beyond the open door lies a new and fresh anointing; hear the Spirit calling you to go. Walk on through the door, for the Lord will go before you, into a greater power than you’ve ever known before.”

We moved. Despite all objections from the staff here, I began to teach. What God has planned I do not know; but I know He knows, and that should be sufficient.

The grim alternative

We cannot leave this topic without a word of warning. If you will not follow the charts of Scripture, shipwreck will soon occur. Indeed, the word used for shipwreck is the root word for our word, “navigate.” If you will not keep the faith in good conscience, the shipwreck will occur.

What does that mean? It means that you have ignored His warning signs, his lights, and have gone off on your own road.

God’s way of dealing with this is different than ours. He lets you go off course – in the hopes that what you get from your own way is sufficient to convince you to come back. It is a matter of church discipline. You start with a one on one conversation; then bring a couple of friends – and then the whole congregation. It is a serious thing to throw someone out of the church. It is also a serious thing to defile the conscience.

Our best hope is in this: The Light of the World can be clearly seen – but sometimes we need the light that is closer to us. The lower lights, which so clearly outline the channel at night. We cannot be the Light, but we can and should reflect it for all to see. Let us have the grace and humility to keep that mirror clean.

A Question of Authority - 1 Timothy 2

A note of warning: it is the pattern of this teacher to take the Scriptures as they come. This passage does not give us a complete picture of the concept of authority in general, nor does it give us the complete picture of a man's authority over (and responsibility to) his wife. The concept is one which deserves some detail, and a single lesson will not deal with it. So please understand that the general framework of authority in Christian thought is NOT what is spoken of here – a point which we hope to make clear shortly.

First of all

First of all, then, I urge that entreaties *and* prayers, petitions *and* thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior,

(1Ti 2:1-3 NASB)

Note the word “then.” This refers back to the last chapter, in which Paul has given his charge to Timothy. This, then, is the beginning of the specific instructions which Paul has for Timothy. In other words, the details.

For those in authority

Paul takes four words to describe prayer for those in authority. They have varying meanings, but in combination it is clear that Paul wanted every type and style of prayer to be made for those in authority.

Not only every type of prayer, but Paul asks prayer for every type of authority – at all levels. He asks prayer for all men – the Greek is *anthropos*, which means people in general. Then, having covered everybody, he asks us to pay particular attention to kings. In Paul's time these would have been the Roman Emperors – who were in general not the most moral and friendly of men. Then, in case he missed anyone – it's all in authority.

So, with all types of prayer, for all mankind in authority, we are to pray. What is the object of this prayer? We should not be like the rabbi in *Fiddler on the Roof*, who said the proper blessing for the Czar was, “God bless and keep the Czar – far away from us.” No, we have these objectives as we pray for those in authority:

- ✚ So that we might lead a quiet and tranquil life. Think about that; what does it say to those around us? Not rabble rousers, not revolutionaries, not those constantly in conflict –but the salt of the earth.
- ✚ It is a life of godliness, or piety. Those about us should see this; they should know who the Christians are.
- ✚ It is a life of dignity – not pompous stuffiness, but the seriousness of one who knows himself to be an ambassador of Christ.

We are told that this is “good and acceptable” – a phrase often used of sacrifices. The pleasures of sin for a season are to be given up; we are to live as godly people – and pray that we may do so unhindered.

Why?

Why? What difference does it make?

who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, *and* one mediator also between God and men, *the* man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself as a ransom for all, the testimony *given* at the proper time. For this I was appointed a preacher and an apostle (I am telling the truth, I am not lying) as a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth. Therefore I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension.

(1Ti 2:4-8 NASB)

To build the church

We see it clearly here: this is to build the church. Look at it this way – the church is built two ways:

- ✚ First, in evangelism. God desires all men to be saved.
- ✚ But that is not the end of the matter: we must make disciples, not just emotional converts. They must come to the knowledge of the truth.
See it now? This is Timothy's charge: build the church.

Because of who He is

One thing I know about prayer: it is not my good works or holiness that causes God to hear this poor sinner. It is nothing less than the atonement of Christ that gives me both standing and courage to go boldly before the throne of grace. Our petitions stand on the rock of Calvary. We can pray, because He is who He is.

- ✚ God is one – and he wants us to be one also. He wants us to be one with Him in Christ.
- ✚ There is only one mediator; only Christ is the way. His one-ness is shown, for there is no other.
- ✚ There is one Ransom. The world needs to know that he gave himself. Gave – voluntarily. Gave Himself – all that He had, including life itself.
- ✚ He is the testimony at the right time. Like the Ark of the Covenant, his sacrifice is evidence that we are sinners – else why the sacrifice? Like the ark as well, his atonement covers our sins.

The man with the mission

Let's get down to brass tacks, Timothy. All this high and holy writing comes down to the fact that someone has to do the work. Paul tells us his work – so that we might understand that he is serving the cause of God which he has just so well outlined.

- ✚ He is a preacher – the word means herald – one who proclaims the Good News of Jesus Christ. He is an evangelist.
- ✚ He is an apostle – the word can mean ambassador – the one who is given the task of putting the authority of God and the church on papyrus.
- ✚ He is a teacher – so that once converted disciples will grow strong in the faith.

And therefore

Having proclaimed God's purpose for these prayers and his authority in the matter, Paul gives his command:

- ✦ First, that men pray for those in authority.
- ✦ Then, that they do so without wrath or dissension.

In other words, all the men of the church are to agree in Christ, praying for those in authority over us.

It must be pointed out: the word used for men is not the one used for mankind. It is the one for adult males. Prayer is a man's work.

So what are the women supposed to be doing?

Women's work

Likewise, *I want* women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness. A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, *and* then Eve. And *it was* not Adam *who* was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. But *women* will be preserved through the bearing of children if they continue in faith and love and sanctity with self-restraint.

(1Ti 2:9-15 NASB)

Likewise. What does he mean by "likewise?" Obviously, he means that for the same high and noble objectives which he has laid out for men, women have duties for the same reasons. That those duties are different is no surprise; the Bible is clear that our modern idea that men and women are interchangeable parts, that sex means nothing in authority – these things are absurd. So let's look at what he has to say about women.³

What women should be

Let us begin with what women should not be – which is a very good description of what most Christian women accept as being obviously true. You think not? Look around; do you see women in fine clothes? Perfect make up? These women accept the idea that *women are what they look like*. This is a great curse for women; it condemns them to become less and less valued as they grow older. Women, please: you are not just a body or play toy. You are a child of God. Your clothing should not be in the style of the world, for a child of the world. Your appearance should be clear: it's not my short skirts but the kindness and charity which I give. These should be apparent to one and all. It matters how you dress.

Do you see the parallel? The men are to be grave and dignified, praying for those in authority, salt of the earth types. The women are to be known for their good works. Why? So that those around you may see the truth of Christ lived out in your lives, and be given salvation as well. Does that make it important to you? I hope so.

³ It is necessary to give my standard disclaimer. If I knew *all* about women, I would be one very rich Bible teacher. I'm not; therefore I don't. Or is it I don't, therefore I'm not?

A curious passage

So what's this business about Adam and Eve, and child-bearing, and so on? Well, there is a bit of translational difficulty here. Do you see that last verse, where it says "*women* shall be saved" (NASB)? Note the italics. The word is supplied, but it's not in the original. That is an interpretation. The King James has "she shall be saved" – note there are no italics. But who is "she?" Parse the sentences and you will see that this refers not to women in general but "Eve".

Eve? Now it makes even less sense. But if you refer to the original passage in Genesis, you will see that God tells Eve that she will bear the one who will crush Satan. Eve – in this instance – represents womankind. Which is different than women in general. For it is from woman – Mary, the theotokos – that the Holy One came – who defeated Satan at Calvary.

This is one interpretation. Another, perhaps still as common, is that this has to do with pain in childbirth. Pick as you please.

A question of authority

Though this passage is often cited in the debate over the place of women in church and society, Paul's point here is somewhat limited. He has begun with the idea that honor, in the form of prayer, be rendered to all to whom it is due – those in authority over us. Roman Law would have forbidden a woman to teach or speak at a public meeting. It was considered disgraceful. As Paul's purpose is to spread the Gospel, it is not surprising that he tells the women to behave this way.

What is surprising to modern feminists is the argument for it. Having no use for Adam and Eve, we feel that Paul's a fossil who should be ignored. Isn't he the guy who has been oppressing us all this long? Paul would reply, simply, that indeed throughout the history of the church, women have played a greater role there than in any other part of society until the 20th century. But he would also insist upon the authority of men over women, particularly of husbands over wives.

This should not distract us from the main point. Women are being told to behave so that the pagans will know a good thing when they see it. Christianity should look as God intended it, not as bad as we can make it.

Our attitudes have changed. Matthew Henry, in the 17th century, commented upon these verses thusly: "**Women must learn the principles of their religion, learn Christ, learn the scriptures; they must not think that their sex excuses them from that learning which is necessary to salvation.**" You see the point, of course. His argument on this same passage is that it prevents women from shirking their duty to study the Scriptures just because that was a man's job.

It is not possible to lay out the general argument of authority of a man over his wife. It might be sufficient to point out that the Scripture describes the church as the bride of Christ. Women no longer promise to obey their husbands. Is it not also the case that the church, by and large, has ceased to obey the Christ revealed in the Scriptures and rather follows its own imaginings? Perhaps it is not St. Paul who is so misled.

Bishops and Deacons - 1 Timothy 3:1-13

In this section, Paul is still concerned for the reputation of the church. He understands that the pagan will not consider the Gospel if the church seems to him composed of either radicals foaming at the mouth or pious sounding hypocrites. In the last chapter he approached this for the church in general; in this section he approaches this concern for those in authority over the church. He knows quite well that the church is known by its leaders as well as its followers. Even in our day the character of a president is often taken to be the character of the nation.

This is the point of this section. Therefore, Paul omits some things that might otherwise be logical points. Would you appoint an elder (or bishop, or episcopate, or overseer – your choice of word) who did not have an active prayer life? Of course not. But Paul doesn't mention it here. He is focusing on that which can be observed by those outside the church.

But note, please, that such things can also be observed by those inside the church. Those under the authority of the elders expect those elders to behave themselves in exemplary fashion.

Both points can be seen in contemporary newspaper practice. If a criminal story has a culprit who is a church member, that fact is mentioned prominently in the news article. The world expects better of us. But if that culprit is a deacon or elder (or minister, or ...) in the church, it makes the headline. Why? Because the world expects the church to model the standards it teaches. Which, it seems to me, is a reasonable expectation.

Bishops

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

(1Ti 3:1-7 NASB)

A fine work

Whether you call them bishops, elders, overseers, episcopates or whatever, they are the spiritual leaders of the church. Spiritual leadership has a temporal dimension to it:

- ✚ First, let us kindly understand that it is work. It is not a title of a prince but of a laborer.
- ✚ As such, it is a title worthy of honor. With authority comes responsibility. With responsibility comes work. When done as our Lord commands, such work is worthy of honor.

Attributes of all Christians

Most of what Paul lists as the attributes of a bishop can also be said to be attributes of any good Christian. This is not surprising; he is talking about the external, visible habits. Here's a short summary of same:

- ✦ *Above reproach.* It's a generic term, but its technical meaning is that there are no warrants out for his arrest.
- ✦ *Husband of one wife.* In our terms, someone not given to serial monogamy and a string of trophy wives.
- ✦ *Temperate.* The word can be translated "sober" or "vigilant." This is a man who is on the alert.
- ✦ *Prudent.* This must be a man who is discreet, and a man who is careful in his handling of the things of this world.
- ✦ *Respectable.* It comes from the root word which means "orderly." This is a man who does things in such way as to command respect. His business deals are open and honest.
- ✦ *Hospitable.* This is a man whose home welcomes strangers and travelers in the name of Christ.
- ✦ *Able to teach.* Sometimes misinterpreted to require an elder to teach, it simply means one who has the knowledge necessary to be a teacher of the Scriptures.
- ✦ *Not addicted to wine.* Would you respect an alcoholic bishop?
- ✦ *Not pugnacious.* This should not be a man who's ready to settle any point of dispute by stepping into the back alley.
- ✦ *Gentle.* A harsh man stirs up anger, but a gentle man who speaks with dignity commands respect.
- ✦ *Peaceable.* The opposite of pugnacious, it means a man who prefers to speak peace at all times. It is surprising how the world recognizes such so quickly.
- ✦ *Free from the love of money.* To chase money is to chase that which will be of no importance when you are dead. The question is not whether or not you are rich; the question is whether or not "more" is your goal.

Attributes of the elder

Likewise, there are some things which seem to be requirements for being an elder which we might not insist upon for the average Christian:

- ✦ *Manages his own household well.* As Paul points out, if he can't manage one household, how would you expect him to manage a church?
- ✦ *A good reputation outside.* You may have come to Christ from a very disreputable background. So that the church will not gain a reputation for such (even if undeserved) the elder must have a good reputation.
- ✦ *Not a novice.* The word is the one from which we get "neophyte." Note that this does not prohibit young men from the position – but those who beginning the Christian life. The reason is fairly clear; such a person might get conceited and proud – and pride is the Devil's grip on your throat. Do not give Satan the handle to twist you about.

Deacons

Deacons likewise *must be* men of dignity, not double-tongued, or addicted to much wine or fond of sordid gain, *but* holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. These men must also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons if they are beyond reproach. Women *must likewise be* dignified, not malicious gossips, but temperate, faithful in all things. Deacons must be husbands of *only* one wife, *and* good managers of *their* children and their own

households. For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a high standing and great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

(1Ti 3:8-13 NASB)

Deacons were first used for the purpose of distributing food to widows in a fair manner. They are traditionally charged with the handling of things temporal in the church.

Paul lists many of the same qualifications, but adds a couple of items which are of interest:

- ✚ *Not double-tongued.* The word in the Greek is *dilogos*, meaning one who has two *logos* – the word they used for the Word. In short, your story on Monday should match your story on Sunday.
- ✚ *Not fond of sordid gain.* We spoke of money before, but this tends more to the way in which you make money. Do you lie, cheat and steal to earn your daily bread?
Unique to Deacons

There are two characteristics which are unique to the deacon. The first is that they must be tested before becoming a deacon – in other words, will they be able to handle the chores given to them? I would make a very poor deacon indeed were I charged with the church's carpentry. One eyed men have much difficulty with this hammer and nails thing.

The most surprising thing is that deacons can be female. The Bible is plain in telling us that there were deaconesses. So it would seem that the temporal authority of the deacon is exempt from the rule which disallows women to have authority over men. But in matters spiritual, the man is intended to rule.⁴

General Principles

There are some general principles which this passage highlights to us.

Remember who is watching

Christians do not live in a vacuum. They are in the world but not of the world. So we need to pay heed to who is watching our conduct:

- ✚ First, the world outside is examining us. They are quick to spot hypocrisy. It takes a little longer to recognize something as genuine. Have you given those around you a reason to believe that Christians are different?
- ✚ Then, there are those in the church who are watching too. Your students are particularly good at this – whether they are adults or three year old children.
- ✚ If that were not sufficient, remember that our Lord Himself is examining your conduct.

⁴ We might point out, ladies, that this might well be one of those cases where God has chosen out a group for a particular distinction not because of their innate qualifications, but merely to indicate that no one is good enough to hold the job – therefore God uses some other, arbitrary criterion. An example is the Old Testament priest. He had to be a male descendant of the tribe of Levi. Why Levi? Why not? It was God's way of saying that no one is good enough in themselves to be a priest.

Christian liberty and voluntary restraint

There are many things which it is lawful for me to do; some of that many are those things which might bring the church into disrepute in the worlds eye. Others might cause my brother to stumble. If I might suggest:

- ✚ Paul said he was all things to all men so that by all means he might win some to Jesus Christ. Are we willing to lay aside our freedom so that others might know salvation?
- ✚ Even aside from evangelism, there is this: you are the model of Christ. It is therefore necessary for you to be an accurate model of Christ, lest the world be misled about Him.

Sadly, it is often true that the church does not behave this way. Chrysostom lived in a time very much like ours:

.../ (T)hose who are taught, look to the virtue of their teachers: and when they see us manifesting the same desires, pursuing the same objects, power and honor, how can they admire Christianity? They see our lives open to reproach, our souls worldly. We admire wealth equally with them, and even more. We have the same horror of death, the same dread of poverty, the same impatience of disease, we are equally fond of glory and of rule. We harass ourselves to death from our love of money, and serve the time. How then can they believe? From miracles? But these are no longer wrought. From our conversation? It has become corrupt. From charity? Not a trace of it is anywhere to be seen. Therefore we shall have to give an account not only of our own sins, but of the injury done by them to others.

Live so that God is not blasphemed

There must be a balance struck.

- ✚ Don't concern yourself with your reputation among human beings; we are all but dust. You cannot stop the slanderers; but your conduct can shame them.
- ✚ In balance, live your life so that the slanderers have no opportunity to slander the church by what you do.

Remember, please: You are the light of the world. You are meant to be seen by others in this world. This is commanded, and our Lord will hold you responsible for your sins – and the injury your sins have done to others.

Mystery and Discipline - 1 Timothy 3:14 – 4:11

Paul has been concerned greatly with the appearance of the church to the outside world. In this section of the Scripture he outlines the last three items:

- ✚ The nature of the Church and Christ, and thus to beware of
- ✚ Those who would lead the Christians astray, which is why
- ✚ We must labor and strive for the truth.

The Nature of the Church and Christ

I am writing these things to you, hoping to come to you before long; but in case I am delayed, *I write* so that you will know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth. By common confession, great is the mystery of godliness: He who was revealed in the flesh, Was vindicated in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Proclaimed among the nations, Believed on in the world, Taken up in glory.

(1Ti 3:14-16 NASB)

Paul's encouragement

Timothy is in a difficult spot. He's a young man full of faith, but in his world the elderly were not despised as they are today. Being young was a handicap in leading the church. So Paul offers his encouragement: he tells Timothy that he hopes to return to him. However, he might be delayed – and therefore he has written. But it is not just to give him miscellaneous instruction; Paul lays out before Timothy the “why” of his letter. His words so far have been concerned with external behavior – but now he explains the mystery of the church.

The nature of the church

Paul gives us two descriptions of the church.

- ✚ First, the church is the family of God. It is not uncommon for Christians to call each other brother and sister. For we are God's household, his family. We are the brotherhood of men under the Fatherhood of God. This gives us great privilege – and great responsibility.
- ✚ The church is also the pillar and support of the truth. The phrase is revealing. For some aspects of the truth – the spiritual, for example – the church is that pillar. Remove that pillar, and that truth collapses. That part of the truth would not be upheld if we did not do it. In other areas of the truth, we are its support. There are many aspects of Christianity which are shared with other religions. Without confirming them, we uphold those shared aspects. The prohibition against murder is (rather, was, in these days of abortion on demand) something shared, and something we uphold.

The Mystery of Godliness

It is fascinating that Paul does not refer to this as the mystery of Christ (as elsewhere.) Rather, he is talking about how the church should behave; at the core of that behavior is the answer to the only important question: who do you say He is? Here is as close to a creed as Paul gets:

- ✚ Godliness was revealed in the flesh. It is the explicit teaching of the church, since its earliest days, that Jesus of Nazareth is indeed the Christ, God in the flesh, Godliness we can see. It is the reason for Christmas.

- ✚ Christ's Godliness was "vindicated" by the Holy Spirit. To vindicate means to declare righteous. The Holy Spirit did this in the Resurrection, for the wages of sin is death; but He who knew no sin could not be held by death. Those who seek such Godliness will be raised as He was.
- ✚ Godliness was seen by the angels – telling us the importance of the One who died for us. Even the angels wanted to look; He is superior to them and accredited by them.
- ✚ Godliness is proclaimed in this world to this day, two thousand years later. Despite the very best efforts by the powers of this world, it is not only proclaimed but believed.
- ✚ Finally, as witnessed by man, He ascended into heaven – from whence He will return, to judge the living and the dead.

That is the mystery of Godliness. It has been revealed to us, and now we should do something about it. But before Paul presses into that subject, he warns Timothy of the wiles of our Enemy.

Heresy

But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, *men* who forbid marriage *and* *advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

(1Ti 4:1-6 NASB)

See how this will come – not all at once, but step by devious step.

- ✚ First, there will be those who fall away from the faith, making themselves easy prey for the deceiver. They will want the power of Godliness without its discipline and truth. They are seekers of magic, not truth.
- ✚ They will pay attention to deceitful spirit and their doctrines. Bill Walton, of basketball fame, once told Coach Wooden that his method was to empty his mind and then chant his mantra. Wooden told him that if he emptied it, Satan would be sure to fill it.
- ✚ The leaders of this schism will be hypocrites – men who have seared their own conscience to the point of non-existence.

For example?

Paul has been concerned with the externals of the church – so he shows Timothy the externals that such people will promote. He tells him of the external things which will be a sign for the internal hypocrisy and seared conscience:

- ✚ Marriage will be one such. Honored by God, some will be commanded not to marry. This is not just a function of the Roman Catholic Church; many times in the early days of the church this same command was given by the heretics. Manicheans, Marcionites and Encratites are mentioned by Chrysostom in the early 5th century, for example.
- ✚ Another is abstaining from certain foods (like red meat on Friday, remember?) Paul knew this in his own time from the debate over unclean meat maintained by the Jewish Christians. No one is quite so much holier than thou than a true vegetarian.

This is my Father's world

At the root of the second point above is the Greek philosophy which proclaimed that things material are inherently evil. Paul reminds us that God created – and pronounced it good.

Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with grateful thanks to God.⁵ By prayer – and the word of God – that for which we give thanks is sanctified, or made holy. How so? Well, if you are saying thanks over your meal, you have proclaimed it to be food for the kingdom of priests. In the Old Testament, any food set aside for the priests (by law) was considered holy. It could not be eaten by anyone except a priest or his family. Has this really changed at all?

Labor and Strife

But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. Prescribe and teach these things.

(1Ti 4:7-11 NASB)

Despite the recent prescription in our women's newsletter, bodily exercise is of little profit – for it deals only with the things of this world.⁶ Rather, we should seek that discipline which leads to spiritual growth. What kinds of discipline? Let me give you some examples:

- ✚ Fasting is one – the denial of food to the body so that you will be able to concentrate on prayer, reading of the Scripture and praise to God.
- ✚ Set times of prayer. If your prayer life is haphazard, what does that say with regard to how much you value your time with God? If you are always prompt to watch a TV show, how much more should you be prompt to pray?
- ✚ A plan of reading the Scripture. There are many programs which will have you read through the Scripture in a year, for example.

Body and soul

If there is profit in disciplining the body, how much there is in disciplining the soul! Exercise helps you in this world only; spiritual discipline both here and life eternal. Satan therefore encourages us to bodily discipline – only.

You might argue as thus: “I can see how spiritual discipline benefits me in eternity – but how could it benefit me here? It's largely giving up something I like to gain something of spiritual (hence, eternal) value.” Let me give you two reasons:

⁵ It must be honestly confessed that the author holds that cooked spinach just might be the exception to this.

⁶ This is a disturbing point. There are apparently those on our staff who are of the “church of what's happening now” persuasion. When I hear a minister of the church proclaim that “any woman who doesn't keep her figure in shape is begging for a divorce” I feel obligated to reply. When those around us (on the staff) confirm that minister's opinion, I begin to wonder how the Holy Spirit will fix this.

- ✚ Because God explicitly promises to bless, in this world, those who follow His way.
- ✚ Because spiritual discipline resets your expectations – so you don't go around wanting what's not good for you. Much less turmoil.

Paul tells us here that this is a "trustworthy saying." It's so important, he emphasizes it.

A Good Example

It must be remembered that spiritual discipline is not easy. You may have to start several times before it sticks. Count on it: Satan will do his best to distract you. Paul makes it clear thus:

- ✚ We *labor* at it. The word in the Greek can also be translated as "hard work." This is not supposed to be easy.
- ✚ We *strive* for it. In other words, we will have strife in the doing – conflict. The King James translates this word as "suffer reproach." Expect it.
- ✚ Why? Because of our hope in Christ. We know who will reward and uphold us.
And finally – now that you know what it is you should be doing – go and tell the rest of the church. Preach, teach (and may I add model) the truth.

Pastoral Advice - 1 Timothy 4:11-5:4

There is little hope of that man's being useful to save others, that minds not his own salvation; and therefore the apostle puts them in this order, "thysself," and then, "them that hear thee." - Robert Traill, 1642-1716

The matter is a difficult one: a young man, appointed in authority over those much older. How does the Christian conduct himself in such circumstance? Paul takes pains to reveal that to Timothy, in advice which has remained pertinent ever since.

Let no one look down...

Prescribe and teach these things. Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.

(1Ti 4:11-13 NASB)

Command and teach

(Most translations have the 11th verse read "Command and Teach.") Let us begin by recognizing an important fact: "command" and "teach" are simply examples of the use of authority. To command is to use the moral authority of God; the wise minister does not use his own opinions for command; rather, he uses the Word of God as his basis. As such, when it is necessary to command, the glory goes to God – and so should the words of complaint. Therefore it is necessary that the one in command be thoroughly prepared to show that what the Scripture commands is what he is repeating.

Teaching, on the other hand, involves the use of true knowledge as authority. We take our doctor's prescriptions seriously because we presume he knows which medication to prescribe. But there is one thing we may notice about teaching the Word – if you don't practice what you preach, no one listens. Physician, heal thyself.

So it is that Paul now tells Timothy to both know the word and be known for walking in it.

The Devotional Life

The interior of the matter is simply this. If you live the devotional life – the life of prayer, reading the Scriptures and meditating upon them – you will find it to be thus:

- ✚ It is exemplary – you become the example of what you want your followers to be.
- ✚ It is profitable – for the Lord rewards those who take him seriously.
- ✚ It is also necessary, as you will not fool many for very long.

Let's take a look at the "for instance" items given us here:

- ✚ There is your speech. Nothing is so telling as what a man says when he is upset. People listen very carefully to a preacher's temper. The word Paul uses here is *logos*.
- ✚ Conduct, or behavior – people will watch a preacher's actions. Often this is to the point of being on public display. How many eyes would be interested in where Billy Graham is right now?
- ✚ Love – the word is *agape* – is expected of the leaders of the church.
- ✚ Faith: if the preacher isn't sure, how can he expect his listeners to be?

- ✚ Purity: this word is often translated “chastity” as well. Any preacher who has a sweet young thing on the side (and that is easy to do, these days) is not going to be effective in pronouncing right and wrong.

These are the internal signs of a practicing Christian. But there are external ones as well.

External signs

All this will lead to the external signs of one who carries the authority of God.

- ✚ Scripture reading. Most translators make this public Scripture reading, given the context. It certainly would not be meant to deny private reading as well. Public reading makes sense; if your authority is based upon what God says, you should honor His Word in public.
- ✚ If you’re going to read it, you should preach and teach it too. The verb used here for this is *paraklesis*, meaning to come along side, as is spoken of the Holy Spirit.
- ✚ And there is teaching – we are to command and teach.

The Spiritual Gift

Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery. Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

(1Ti 4:14-16 NASB)

Much commentary has been written about this passage, most of which depends upon your view of spiritual gifts. In what follows, we attempt to give the most general of meaning to it. This should not be interpreted as affirming or denying any particular view. The Spirit goes where He wills, and seeks no permission from me.

Spiritual Gifts

First, let us begin by acknowledging what such gifts are: they are gifts from God. As such, they carry with them the responsibility of using them; otherwise, they will be considered rejected and then withdrawn. These gifts are given by the Holy Spirit, which often (as here) involves the miraculous – in Paul’s case, prophecy. We are not sure what this particular gift was, but do recall that teaching is one such.

One other thing: this gift was transmitted by the laying on of hands. The Spirit works through the church. It is a symbolic confirmation that the church and the Spirit agree in giving this gift. (This is the source of the idea of Apostolic Succession). The use of such a method is very old; we remember that the High Priest laid his hands on the scapegoat so as to lay the sins of the people upon it.

Be devoted – and it will show.

It is a fact: if you are devoted to the Lord, it will show in every aspect of your life. But what does it mean to be “devoted?” We might suggest these three items:

- ✚ “Take pains” – go the extra mile. As one co-worker put it to me once, “Ah, now this is your “10” subject.” Devotion is seen in the extra mile.

- ✚ “Be absorbed” – let the world know that your first priority is Jesus Christ. (And the only way to let them know that is to make sure that He *is* your first priority).
- ✚ Don’t show off about this. You don’t need to. It will show.

Ensuring salvation

To everyone but a Baptist, this passage is quite clear. Doing such things ensures your own salvation and that of those who follow you. The Baptist interpretation you must seek elsewhere.

The matter is relatively simple. Do you remember the parable of the sower and the soils? The seed that fell on rocky grounds died for lack of persistence. So – don’t rest on your laurels; keep at it. Pay close attention to what you are doing; don’t put it on autopilot. Persevere – keep up the good work you’ve started. If you do, Satan cannot shake you, for you will be about your Father’s business. And those who are your listeners will know what a blessing you are. Leadership is best done from in front.

Dealing with Young and Old

Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but *rather* appeal to *him* as a father, *to* the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, *and* the younger women as sisters, in all purity. Honor widows who are widows indeed; but if any widow has children or grandchildren, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.

(1Ti 5:1-4 NASB)

The art of rebuke

The object of rebuke is a change in the rebuked. Therefore, consider the wisdom of the approach Paul gives Timothy:

- ✚ It is done *in accordance with the customs of the times*. Older men were greatly honored then; therefore the rebuke continued that honor, treating him as a father.
- ✚ It is done *in the authority of Christ*. There are three people in that conversation.
- ✚ It is done with *absolute purity*. That way, no one second guesses your reason for speaking – nor fears abuse of your authority.

Man to Man

We might suspect that rebuke delivered “man to man” would be handled in a macho style. There is no trace of that. We are to rebuke the aged with respect (the word “appeal” in the Greek is *paraklesis* again).

And for the younger men? We are to treat them as if they were our brothers. Make it clear that your concern is for the salvation and welfare of the one being rebuked. Which, by the way, carries with it the idea that you may have to pay a price to do this. The world may be crying for blood while you are speaking in the love of God.

Man to woman is similar, with one addition: it must be absolutely clear that you have no hidden, romantic agenda.

Pass it on

If the preacher is a man of devotion it is to be expected that the congregation will follow that leadership. We have here an example of such leadership. It concerns the matter of widows (of which we will have more to say in the next lesson).

We begin with a couple of observations which are more relevant to their time than to ours.

- ✚ This is an era where the church provides what we today would categorize as welfare. When Julian the Apostate took power, he complained bitterly that the Christians not only took care of their own poor – but the rest of society as well. Taking care of widows was a high duty of the church.
- ✚ As a result, there were those who would take advantage of this duty. There were women whose families should be taking care of them, so that the church might focus on those who were really in need.

Now, think of the problem this gives to Timothy. These widows, and their families, are going to be older than Timothy. Timothy needs to exhort their families to care for them – and that is going to cost them money. That is a delicate task, given that the family could always argue that old Mrs. So-and-So is in the church's care; why not our Aunt Priscilla? But see how Paul would have Timothy handle it:

- ✚ This exhortation comes from one who is known to be deeply knowledgeable in the Scriptures, a man of deep and frequent prayer. You might get an argument from a lesser man. Timothy needs only speak the truth to be believed. They know he speaks what God commands.
- ✚ This exhortation comes from one who speaks in meekness and gentleness. Fire and brimstone have no use here; it is the quiet counsel out of site of the world. This makes it much easier to accept.
- ✚ This exhortation concerns what God has determined to be acceptable. Those who are slack in this will have no problem dealing with Timothy – they will have a problem dealing with the Living God.

The man who brings God's exhortation, in God's method, will achieve God's results.

Widows - 1 Timothy 5:5-16

In the modern church there is an active debate over the usefulness and importance of the care and feeding of the destitute. The problem is not, as is usually phrased today, such a new one. It existed in the early church, as we shall see here. The main difference is in the class of people who were to be the beneficiaries of the church's care. In their day, this was almost exclusively the elderly widow.

Things have changed:

- ✚ We now live in a credit and banking society – wealth can be accumulated much more easily now. For the middle class giver, it would seem that the poor are largely in other countries.
- ✚ Our government has taken over many of the functions that the church could do better – for example, the elegant Ponzi scheme called Social Security.
- ✚ And despite this, we have many more homeless now than in prior years.

I leave as an exercise to the reader the problem of bringing Paul's wisdom and counsel up to date. Here's what he said about the problem they had then:

Principles

Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day. But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives. Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach. But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

(1Ti 5:5-8 NASB)

The widow indeed

Paul, it will be seen, lays down strict requirements for the widow who would be supported by the church. This may seem harsh to us today, but the principle is the same: if you claim the support of the church, then you must do the work of God. So what does it take to qualify?

- ✚ She must be one who is left alone – a woman with no family to care for her.
- ✚ She must be one who now places her hope in God, and God alone.
- ✚ She must be a woman of prayer – one who lives the devotional life.

This, then, is a woman devoted to God – and God will see to her supply.

The Merry Widow is also here.

- ✚ She is a woman who gives herself to pleasure while calling on the church to support her in that. In this time, this could even mean a woman who was a prostitute.
- ✚ As such, she is dead. You must profess the faith; you must also practice it.

In this we see the opposite – the woman who is not devoted to God. The church should not provide sustenance to one who wants to live the wanton life.

The other general principle is this: the Christian must provide for his own family. This is particularly true for those who are actually living under your roof. You can see the public reproach that will come if somebody (for example) threw his own mother out on the streets, justifying it with the happy thought that the church would provide for her.

Paul says that such a Christian has denied the faith, and is worse than a heathen. How so? If you won't care for your own household and family, what chance is there that you will care for strangers? Indeed, what chance is there that you will show love to anyone? Even the heathen take care of their own.

The matter may seem difficult until you realize Paul's objective: he is concerned for the reputation of the church. That's been his theme so far, and he continues it here. So what he says is designed to keep the church above reproach in the times in which he lived.

Details

A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old, *having been* the wife of one man, having a reputation for good works; *and* if she has brought up children, if she has shown hospitality to strangers, if she has washed the saints' feet, if she has assisted those in distress, *and* if she has devoted herself to every good work.

(1Ti 5:9-10 NASB)

Here is Paul's checklist for eligibility.

- ✚ She must be sixty or older. Why? Because (in that time) a woman of that age would be highly unlikely to attract another husband. It's also likely that she would not have the physical strength to work at a trade – especially as an apprentice.
- ✚ She must be the wife of one husband. This does not exclude (in my opinion) those widowed twice or more; rather, it excludes the woman who works her way through multiple husbands with a clear eye and grasp on the husband's wallet.
- ✚ She must have a reputation for good works. Again, this is Paul concerned with the reputation of the church.
- ✚ She must have raised children – recall in those days that a woman without children was considered cursed. Children were your social security in those days. So for a woman to have deliberately refused to have children would not at all carry the appearance of righteousness.
- ✚ She must show hospitality to strangers (those who receive His ambassadors receive Christ). This was of greater importance then.
- ✚ She must have “washed the saint's feet.” A service no longer so necessary, it does tell us of the humility of the true Christian – in imitation of her Lord.
- ✚ She must have assisted those in distress – the sign of a woman who cares for those whom Christ loves.

Paul ends with the requirement that she be devoted to every good work. Notice there is no thought of prayer, or reading the Scripture – nothing of the devotional life (though that is obviously behind this). He is concerned that the church is seen not as a woolly headed welfare agency nor as a cold, parsimonious bunch of holier than thou.

You can see it: this is a description of one who is devoted to Christ. If she's on the list, she is someone who is doing God's work, and accepting God's provision. Abased or abounding – it makes no difference. The requirements may sound strict to us – but they ensure that the widows on the list are those who are genuinely doing God's work. And for God's work there is always God's supply.

The Younger Widow

But refuse *to put* younger widows *on the list*, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, *thus* incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge. At the same time they also learn *to be* idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper *to mention*. Therefore, I want younger *widows* to get married, bear children, keep house, *and* give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.

(1Ti 5:11-15 NASB)

The argument here is somewhat difficult for modern minds to follow, for we have abandoned the concept of submission so familiar to the ancient church. Here's how they might have seen it:

- ✚ Every woman is in submission to a man. First to her father, then to her husband, authority over her passed from father to husband. When she becomes a widow, that authority passes from husband to Christ, for all Christians are in submission to Christ.
- ✚ But this change in authority was not her choice (unless she poisoned her husband, which raises additional complications). She therefore is not going to feel as committed to this choice as she did to her husband. But in their time, neither father nor husband was her choice.

So with such a weak commitment, Paul advises that the younger widow face the fact that she's going to want a husband. When Prince Charming calls, it is no sin to marry. And rather than have oscillating loyalties, she should marry.

One way to see this is to take the opposite view. Suppose we said to the young widow that she would be supported by the church as long as she stayed single. We would be creating a group of women who had no employment, but no need for it either. They would do what they would find at hand. That, unfortunately, includes both gossip and being a busybody. As one comic put it, "She lives for others. You can always tell the others by their hunted look."

So what's the right answer?

- ✚ Get married.
- ✚ Have children (yes, you.)
- ✚ Manage the household.⁷

In all this, the major purpose is to make sure that the conduct of the Christians is above reproach.

Single moms

Of course, Paul is talking about widows. But one must ask: does this also apply to divorced, single mothers of children?

- ✚ Just what aid should the church provide a single mother of children?

⁷ The phrase in the NASB is misleading. The KJV has "guide the house." The NIV says, "Manage their homes." Contrary to modern thought, it means a stay at home wife (realizing, of course, that home was also often the family business.) It does not mean simply cleaning and dusting.

- ✚ Should we counsel her to remarriage (assuming the divorce is morally sound) ?
- ✚ Does the obligation of the church vary with the reputation of the divorcee?
- ✚ Indeed, what is the role of the church post-divorce?

Role of Christian Women

If any woman who is a believer has *dependent* widows, she must assist them and the church must not be burdened, so that it may assist those who are widows indeed.

(1Ti 5:16 NASB)

In this short passage Paul gives us an example of the principles of Christian care:

- ✚ We must show caring kindness to our family members before we can do so for those who are not.
- ✚ Therefore, for most such cases, the family, not the church, is to care for those in need. This is just – and also good stewardship.

Those are the principles; do we live by them today?

Admonitions - 1 Timothy 5:17 – 6:2

Paul occasionally writes in the rabbinical “string of pearls” style. This is to deal with a topic in one or two sentences, then move on to the next. The student was expected to understand that this was so, and fill in the missing thoughts himself. In this section, Paul deals with a number of admonitions this way. His primary thought, however, remains how the church should be led in such way as to keep her reputation high in the world – so that some might be saved, and none deflected from the way of truth.

Treatment of Elders

The elders who rule well are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. For the Scripture says, "YOU SHALL NOT MUZZLE THE OX WHILE HE IS THRESHING," and "The laborer is worthy of his wages." Do not receive an accusation against an elder except on the basis of two or three witnesses. Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful *of sinning*. I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus and of *His* chosen angels, to maintain these *principles* without bias, doing nothing in a *spirit of partiality*.

(1Ti 5:17-21 NASB)

Those who do well

The phrasing here conceals some important points. In particular, “worthy of double honor” can also be interpreted as “worthy of double payment.” Given the context, this would not be correct translation into English, but to the Greek ear the two would sound in the one sentence. In doing this, Paul reaffirms that those who labor full time for the work of the church are entitled to a reasonable wage. It is still true: God’s supply for God’s work.

These are said to “rule.” We must remember that in the kingdom of God leadership authority comes only with its matching responsibility. Despite robe and ceremony, authority or rule simply means you have a job to do, and have been given the authority to match. In the kingdom, this means servant leadership. This is both a substance and a style; substance, in that the task is real and needs certain authority to do it, and style – which should never be pompous or stuffy, but rather workmanlike.

The labor in question is given here as “preaching and teaching.” The first of these is the mystic word *logos*, which brings up the opening of John’s Gospel, “In the beginning was the Word”. The second is the Greek word for practical instruction – classroom, teacher, students and dunce cap. So we see that such authority must reside in one who is in communion with Christ – but also can handle a classroom.

Accusation

It might seem, at first, that the requirement for two or more witnesses is in some way allowing the elder to get away with things an ordinary Christian could not. But this matter is a practical one:

- ✚ It saves the church from the atmosphere of perpetual witch hunt. These people are, after all, sinners. If you allow it, this would bring constant disruption to the work of the church.
- ✚ It is also simple justice. You don’t allow one witness and twenty gossips to bring charges against a man.
- ✚ It conforms to the Old Testament Law, and therefore shows itself well to the Jews in the area.

The intent here is that justice will be served – but fishing expeditions will not.

Rebuke

What happens if there is justice in the charge? Then you are to go to the man and rebuke him privately, first. That's why Paul says, "continue in sin." If he repents (and I would add reconciles) then the matter is finished. Even if the matter is a criminal one (child abuse, anyone?) the act of acknowledging what you have done to the magistrate, especially when it is considered that with one witness a conviction would be very difficult, leaves the judge with the impression that the man has repented, and therefore mercy is in order.

But suppose the man doesn't repent. Then you need at least two witnesses. If you have them, you are to rebuke the man in public. If necessary, throw him out of the church. We need to show the world that we have the truth in our hands, and we will not cover up the sins exposed. The church should have a well deserved reputation for honest conduct.

No bias

The church should also have a well deserved reputation for fairness – with no bias seen. How often have we seen a church that is run by a clique of just a few families – who have the church of their own making, and will not part with it for Christ's sake? Sometimes bias just creeps in; we need to make it a point that we work hard at being fair.

Precautions

Do not lay hands upon anyone *too* hastily and thereby share *responsibility* for the sins of others; keep yourself free from sin. No longer drink water *exclusively*, but use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments. The sins of some men are quite evident, going before them to judgment; for others, their *sins* follow after. Likewise also, deeds that are good are quite evident, and those which are otherwise cannot be concealed.

(1Ti 5:22-25 NASB)

Don't be hasty

It is my opinion that true civilization did not exist before the invention of the microwave oven. This gave the techno-geek the ability to cook, after a fashion. At about the same time, the crock pot came out – something into which the hurried housewife would toss ingredients in the hope that cooking things slow and long would produce the desired flavor. Sometimes the microwave is superior, but I'm told that there are certain dishes which need a certain amount of time to simmer. Sometimes a man's reputation needs the same.

You see the point. Suppose you appoint Joe to be an elder, with full ceremony and laying on of hands. Two years later you discover that he's wanted for bigamy in nine states. The rest of the church is now saying, "Who recommended that guy for elder?" The fact that you didn't know is no excuse; your failure is that you didn't wait patiently.

This was all the more important when an Apostle did it: then it involved miraculous gifts from the Holy Spirit. How much more embarrassing to find out later!

Don't be pretentious

The verse concerning wine has been used and abused a great deal. It is one of the prime examples of the misunderstanding of the Scripture, using the cut and paste method. Remember that Paul gives this admonition in a letter *which is primarily concerned with the church's reputation in the world*. Considered as such, the conclusions we may draw are quite different:

- ✚ Paul is encouraging Timothy not to be “drier than thou.” You can imagine that wine caused its problems then as now. It's likely Timothy avoided wine for the sake of the reputation of the church. Paul tells him to cease this practice, and use it sensibly (“a *little* wine”.)
- ✚ Paul could, of course, have miraculously cured Timothy of this ailment. But he didn't. He didn't mention any plans to. From this we may reason that this stomach ailment was given to Timothy much like Paul's “thorn in the flesh” – so that he would remain humble.
- ✚ So it is that Timothy, by acknowledging this infirmity, shows us that (like all leaders) he is merely human – and thus gives us all hope to achieve as he did.

By their fruits

It is a sad fact: some of the men who are nominated for the eldership are simply a bad choice. But not all such men are an *obvious* bad choice. Some people's reputation precedes them. These are the easy ones to weed out of leadership positions. Weeded they should be; let's not be stupid about it.

But there are others whose sins take a while to catch up with them – for they are crafty in concealing them. But for a while they can fool us, not forever. Wait.

We need to take a realistic view: each man is a sinner; each will be found out, eventually. We cannot appoint perfect people – but we can take reasonable precautions against an out of control life.

Slaves & Masters

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

(1Ti 6:1-2 NASB)

Masters in general

It seems odd to Americans, whose experience with slavery is such a deep root in America, that honoring your slave master could possibly be expected of anyone. We forget that slavery at this time was an economic condition, or possibly the result of losing in battle. So the people of this time would have a different attitude. For example, they would see the slave master as the one who provides food and clothing for the slave – which a slave from economic reasons would see as a blessing.

Again, Paul's concern is the reputation of the church in the eyes of the world. Put yourself in the position of a master who is not a Christian. He is looking at the Christian slave to, by his actions, demonstrate what Christ does for a man. If the faith produces insubordination, how likely is he to consider hearing the Gospel?

We forget that, like an employee today, a slave then was delivering on-the-job testimony. We are the witness of Christ every where we go.

Christian masters

Ah, but suppose both master and slave are Christians, what then? Is it not obvious that both of them are now witnesses for Christ? If you would render respect and good service to a slave master who is not a Christian, how much greater is your obligation to him if he is?

This comes not only in service – getting the job done – but also in conversation. You can be a hard worker, quick to the job – and poison things by your speech. Honor and respect must come in both words and deed.

Finally, if your master is a Christian, how should this affect your life of prayer? Can you ask God to strike down Simon Legree if he becomes a brother in the faith?

The Christian's Master

If this is the case for earthly masters, how much more should it be so with regard to Christ, our Lord? Consider well:

- ✚ On this earth a slave master would part with one of his slaves, even by death, for the sake of saving his child's life. But our God gave up His Son for the sake of His slaves. Does this not make Him worthy of greater honor than anyone on earth?
- ✚ More than that, the Son pronounced that we are more than servants; we are his friends⁸. This came by the Atonement; what honor, then, do we owe the Son for that?
- ✚ Finally, God sent His Son so that we might become the children of God. From slaves to friends, from friends to children, brothers and sisters with Christ. No earthly master could do that; only our Heavenly Father. What honor, then, should we bring in return?

⁸ John 15:13-14

Monetary Directions - 1 Timothy 6:3-21

Paul has several threads in this last section of his letter. They are woven together, but we shall take the strands apart to test the strength of each.

If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited *and* understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction between men of depraved mind and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness *actually* is a means of great gain when accompanied by contentment. For we have brought nothing into the world, so we cannot take anything out of it either. If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content. But those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. But flee from these things, you man of God, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance *and* gentleness. Fight the good fight of faith; take hold of the eternal life to which you were called, and you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses. I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which He will bring about at the proper time--He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him *be* honor and eternal dominion! Amen. Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. *Instruct them* to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed. O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly *and* empty chatter *and* the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"-- which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

(1Ti 6:3-21 NASB)

The Problem

Paul now gives a description of one who is very familiar to almost any preacher or teacher of the Gospel: Mr. Argument. Often this person has a good reputation in the church, at least on Sundays. He appears to be knowledgeable; and frequently can amaze you with a diversion into the various fine points of Greek translation. Before we can deal with this, we must first identify the problem. If every teacher who pores over the Scripture were cast in this bucket there would be no good ones left. We shall therefore examine the problem in two ways: how it is, and how it appears.

How the problem appears.

The first evidence of the problem comes in a difference of doctrine. The difference is usually not trivial, but it is argued on trivial points. The defining test of the difference is that this man's doctrine

does not agree with the clear teaching of Christ. You might ask how such a position could be maintained. If you have sufficient ego that you can never be wrong, little things like facts don't disturb your argument.

There is a style difference here. This is a man who loves to argue. He is much more concerned with winning the argument than he is in learning the truth. Often, it appears as if he is having difficulty understanding the truth. It's not difficulty; it's lack of interest. He likes controversy, and the more trivial the better. Controversy inflates your ego; and if you lose, you want it to be on something trivial.

The result is constant friction. Paul gives us some of the symptoms:

- ✚ There is envy. This is a man who knows that he's smarter/wiser/better educated/more in tune – and he's green with envy of those who are appointed his teachers.
- ✚ There is strife – the feud isn't just this Sunday. Things begin to take on a personal nature.
- ✚ There is also abusive language. This is the giveaway; the tongue that knows how to sneer and righteously condemn.
- ✚ And – a bit of self-projection: this is a man who sees evil where no one else does. He's sure that the teacher/preacher is up to something.

Why? Because he's up to something. This is a man whose godliness is not driven by love but by the desire for gain – whether an inflated ego or an inflated wallet. He thinks God's path the best route to it.

The real problem

That's the problem, then. It's a love of self, usually found in a love for money. "More money" is always the target. This has an unexpected result. It gives Satan a convenient handle to grab you – and manipulate you. If there is something you love more than God and his righteousness it is easy to tempt you to fraudulent dealing, particularly of the "it won't hurt anyone" variety.

The result? Much grief. The dangers of greed teach lessons – but those lessons are never learned.

What to do about money?

Well, then, is it wrong to have money? Not if you know what to do with it. Is it a sign of God's displeasure if you don't? Not if you know what to do with that. So it boils down to two questions.

What should I do if I have money?

The answer in this instance is rather simple: you recognize it as being grace from God – and you use it in accord with his will. Paul gives the rich four instructions here:

- ✚ Do good. Do not think that just because you have been blessed from God with much money that you are exempt for the ordinary duties of a Christian. The teaching and commandment apply to you too.
- ✚ Be rich in good works. Your money enables you to do good deeds in a way that others cannot. If so, you should act like you're rich – towards God.
- ✚ Be generous. Always give just a little bit more than asked; look for opportunities to give and brighten someone's day.
- ✚ Be prepared to share. Have a little fast food scrip in your wallet for the beggar you pass. Carry a few dollars so that when the need suddenly arises, you're prepared to give. (This one can produce surprising results).

What should I do if I don't?

This would seem to be a more common problem – until you consider how wealthy this nation is. The American middle class lives in a luxury that is the envy of the world. But let's take this complain seriously for a few moments and see what the apostle would have us do:

- ✚ Have a sense of proportion. You came into this world naked, broke and screaming. You will leave it and when you do you'll take nothing with you. So just how important is money – compared to eternity?
- ✚ Be content with food and shelter. Be honest: is it really true that you could not get along without your Mercedes? Couldn't ride the bus? Have to have that showcase house?
- ✚ Indeed, contentment is great gain. A man is poor when his wants exceed his possessions; he is rich when vice versa. The road to riches is in the control of "I want", not in gaining "more, always more."

Direction

Paul gives three verbs for the Christian: pursue, fight and guard.

Pursue

- ✚ Righteousness. It's not just something that happens to you, nor does it pursue you. You have to go out looking for it. It takes work.
- ✚ Godliness. You are the child of God; so act like it.
- ✚ Faith. Righteousness and godliness cannot be sustained by will alone; you will need the faith Christ gives if you are to pursue this.
- ✚ Love. What's your driving motive? Older whiskey, younger women, faster cars and more money? Or the love that God puts in your heart?
- ✚ Perseverance. Did you think this was a short term action? Or are you prepared to do this the rest of your life.
- ✚ Gentleness. If faith, hope and love have a style, that style is gentleness. Remember, you are the child of the King of Kings; what need do you have of strife and violence?

Fight

We must never forget that we are engaged in spiritual warfare – whether we want to be or not.

- ✚ Take hold of the eternal life. Have you ever had a puzzle which you couldn't solve until some sudden discovery? You might say you "grasped" the solution. When you commit yourself to God, you grasp the eternal life in similar manner. Things make much more sense.
- ✚ Make the good confession. Be ready to tell people what you believe and why.
- ✚ Do this in happy anticipation of His return. The troubles of this world will be insignificant on that day.

Guard

When you have been given something precious, you take care not to lose it.

- ✚ That which has been entrusted to you is not of your own invention. It is not a belief system you carved out; rather, it was given to you. Treat it, then, as a precious gift. Be on the alert.
- ✚ Avoid "worldly chatter." So many Christians are so verbose on things for which they have neither control nor contribution.
- ✚ Finally, avoid "knowledge." Remember that you start with what God gave you, not the latest craze at the book store.

There's a road that leads up; there's a road that leads down. Choose wisely and well.

Second Timothy

Not Ashamed of the Chains - 2 Timothy 1

This short letter is the source of a number of familiar quotations, but the letter as a whole is somewhat out of favor amongst Bible teachers. The reason is the rise of the “quarterly” – the neat, canned series of lessons which last one quarter – usually either twelve or thirteen weeks. This letter is too short for that.

That does not, however, remove its usefulness in the preparation of the Christian. We shall examine its stern ways, seeing if even the modern church can incorporate them.

Relationship Renewed

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, according to the promise of life in Christ Jesus, To Timothy, my beloved son: Grace, mercy *and* peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. I thank God, whom I serve with a clear conscience the way my forefathers did, as I constantly remember you in my prayers night and day, longing to see you, even as I recall your tears, so that I may be filled with joy. For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that *it is* in you as well. For this reason I remind you to kindle afresh the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

(2Ti 1:1-7 NASB)

The letter starts with the traditional (for the time) greeting. In this era it might be months before a letter could be written and delivered, so Paul is careful to renew their relationship first by outlining who he is, and who Timothy is.

Paul says he is an apostle. The word in English has suffered lately, as virtually all charismatic Christians have an “apostle” for what we would call a minister. Paul’s experience is different. He is not an apostle by his desires; he is an apostle because he was called to it. He was drafted, if you will, on the road to Damascus. This is God’s doing, not man’s.

But Paul adds a qualification: it is according to the promise of life. From the earliest days of the Old Testament, culminating in Christ Himself, the word has been clear: God will provide eternal life for those who please Him. It is, and always has been, plan A. God’s purpose from the beginning could not be thwarted.

Timothy is called his beloved son. It is a reflection of the fact that Paul brought him to Christ; more than that, Paul was his mentor in the faith, his encourager. In renewing this old friendship from afar, Paul pronounces three great blessings upon Timothy:

- ✚ Grace – the word in the Greek means “a gift.” Either the gift of salvation, or the many gifts of God which uphold and empower salvation, is intended.
- ✚ Mercy – often translated “compassion.” Each of us will face the judgment; those who love God will see his compassion.

✚ Peace. One of the great gifts of God is the peace that surpasses understanding. Those who live in the eye of the hurricane know such peace.

“I thank God”

Paul is renewing a relationship, and so he returns to repetition of things he said in the first letter. Have you ever told your wife you love her – I mean, more than once? Paul is doing the same thing. He is praying for Timothy, and wants to see him again.

Why? Because Timothy has shared the same trials, fought for the same faith and suffered in like manner as Paul. He has, in other words, sincere faith – which is the common experience of the true Christian.

“Kindle afresh”

Paul reminds Timothy of his spiritual gift. It’s an important lesson. We don’t know specifically what this was – but by the lack of evidence we may conclude that it was not something miraculous. It is therefore like the gifts of the Spirit today – meant to build up the church, not dazzle the observer.

The fact that Paul encourages Timothy to “kindle afresh” means that such a gift can be allowed to die out. How? Simply by not using it. That’s the natural way such things decline. But why would we treat the gift of God so poorly?

Fear. We are afraid of what others will think. Fear turns us into quiet little mice, where God gave us the gift of being a lion.

What to do about this? We need to remember that it is His gift, and He will sustain it. We must make the deliberate decision: nurture this gift in an environment which will cause it to grow:

- ✚ Power – remember, this is God’s doing. He will supply all the power you need for it, if you will but ask.
- ✚ Love – which includes suffering for and with this gift. Perfect love drives out fear.
- ✚ Discipline – God is not the author of chaos but of order.

Testimony (Martyrdom)

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord or of me His prisoner, but join with *me* in suffering for the gospel according to the power of God, who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was granted us in Christ Jesus from all eternity, but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel, for which I was appointed a preacher and an apostle and a teacher.

(2Ti 1:8-11 NASB)

Have you ever visited a prisoner? There is a certain sense of “shared shame” you have the first few times – as if the criminal’s crimes were somehow rubbing off on you. There is something about the prison atmosphere that says, “This is a place of disgrace.” So we may feel queasy in doing it. We should not.

- ✦ If you are ashamed of the place of punishment, then you are ashamed of Christ – for He went through that punishment in your place. Crucifixion is a shameful death.
- ✦ Rather, we should be willing to join in the witness of suffering. If one you know is in prison for the cause of Christ (and there are more in America than you might think), what should you do for them? Most of these objected to abortion. And the American church has turned her back on them.
- ✦ In such suffering you discover the power of God. It is moral judo; the world sees you suffering, but God uses that obedience and magnifies it.

May I give you an example of that last? Rosa Parks. Her refusal to go to the back of the bus caused her arrest – and sparked much of the civil rights movement.

How we obtained this

We did not attain either this martyrdom (or testimony, the words are the same) not by our own wonderful doings. It is Christ's doing. He did this in accord with God's eternal purpose (remember Plan A?), by his grace - and it lasts for all eternity.

But that is not the end of the matter. You're saved, now what? He also called you to a holy calling. Or He will, shortly – when you are ready. Let's understand how this works:

- ✦ Under the Old Testament Law (and Mormonism, and Islam, and Jehovah's Witnesses, and who knows how many others) you became righteous by what you did. In the New Testament, it's different.
- ✦ Now, we are under grace. Man is made righteous by the Holy Spirit – and out of that righteousness flows the work of the righteous man.
- ✦ This all comes in God's way, in His time, for His purposes and by His Spirit – we choose none of these.

“To God be the glory”

The one who abolished death by His own death, who brought us immortality – He is the one who appoints us to our posts. I am a teacher because the King of Kings made it so; it is my glad service. If you don't think that I'm a small cog in a very big work, consider the nature of Christ again.

Dealing with shame in this world.

For this reason I also suffer these things, but I am not ashamed; for I know whom I have believed and I am convinced that He is able to guard what I have entrusted to Him until that day. Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*. You are aware of the fact that all who are in Asia turned away from me, among whom are Phygelus and Hermogenes. The Lord grant mercy to the house of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chains; but when he was in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me-- the Lord grant to him to find mercy from the Lord on that day--and you know very well what services he rendered at Ephesus.

(2Ti 1:12-18 NASB)

In this world you will need to deal with “the shame of the chains” – the fact that the church is not politically correct, condemned as a collection of wild-eyed right wing fundamentalists. How do we do that?

Mental Attitude

Paul's response to that is rather simple: get your attitude straight. Let's remember who is who here.

- ✚ I know who He is. His opponents are rather insignificant compared to the Ruler of the universe.
- ✚ I know what He can do – and also what He promised to do. He promised me reward if I will be faithful to Him. I know He can deliver.
- ✚ I know how He will see me through the my suffering and my tasks. He holds the future; we win.

Keep the faith

It's a simple phrase, but Paul gives us four ideas on just how to do it:

- ✚ Stick with "sound words." In other words, keep your intellectual picture of the faith, who Jesus is and what you are supposed to do. Sound thinking is a prerequisite for right living.⁹
- ✚ Hold fast to the faith. Stubbornly cling to the sound words you were given. You may not be an intellectual giant – but you should know to hang on to the good words, and throw out the bad.
- ✚ Practice love at all opportunities. This is exercise which keeps the Faith.
- ✚ And, recognize what your spiritual gift is – then guard it. Use it regularly, and with the help of the Spirit, see that it never needs be rekindled.

The unknown example

Onesiphorus is mentioned only in the letters to Timothy. But I would have you consider him an example for those of us who are never going to be world famous Christians.

- ✚ The man is a dynamic Christian – his entire household follows him in this belief.
- ✚ He has enthusiasm in the faith – see how he "eagerly searched."
- ✚ He practiced the practical side of Christian charity.
- ✚ He did this, unashamed, even though Paul was in prison.

For this, Paul commends him and pronounces a blessing upon him – that the Lord will be merciful to him on the Last Day – the Day of Judgment. Will we find similar favor with God? If not, why not?

⁹ Which, of course, conflicts with the contemporary attitude of, "Check your brain at the door because God wants your heart."

Strong in the Grace - 2 Timothy 2:1-19

It is important to have a grasp on the difference between substance and delivery. You get your water from a faucet. But you would not be such a fool as to carry a faucet into the desert instead of a canteen.

Strong in the grace

You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. Suffer hardship with *me*, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless he competes according to the rules. The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to receive his share of the crops. Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus *and* with *it* eternal glory.

(2Ti 2:1-10 NASB)

In preparing this lesson I was struck with the power of the phrase, “strong in the grace.” I understand grace as forgiveness; I understand grace as a gift. But I never understood grace as a source of strength. After some thought, my mind was drawn to the illustration of Christ as the vine, his followers as the branches. Permit me an illustration of how His metaphor might teach us more. I have a vine in my backyard, the kind that clings to vertical surfaces, such as my block wall. Consider that vine:

- ✚ Even though it has grown over most of my block wall over the last twenty years or so, the leaves at the farthest end are the same as those at its tap root. So it is with us: the grace that makes us strong does so that we may produce the same fruit at our end as He does at the tap root of the Father.
- ✚ The vine and the root alike share whatever hardships come along. If it rains, both get wet. The leaf at the end has no reason to expect sunshine if the root is rained on. But – if the root is watered, the leaf also prospers. As Christ pours His grace through us (we are but a channel where His grace is poured) we take in his gift; it is fitting, therefore, that we suffer like Him as well.
- ✚ If the leaf is trimmed off, it no longer grows, nor can it render any benefit. It is fit only to be thrown away. If you wish to be strong in the Faith, remain in grace.

Grace is more than forgiveness; as Christ told Paul, “My grace is sufficient for you.”

The Christian Apart

There is a myth in the church today: the Christian is just like everyone else in this world. In some ways this is true; we are but flesh and blood. But in a very real sense we *must* be different. Paul puts it this way to us:

- ✚ You’re a soldier? Others may pick and choose their orders; you can not. So it is with us. Others may pick and choose the idol of the moment; we must remain *devoted* to Christ. We’re different.

- ✚ You're an athlete? Then you know that each sport has rules, and you must play by the rules to win. Christians too are to be obedient to the Law of Christ. We're different.
- ✚ You're a farmer? Your sweat and blood entitle you to the first share of the crops. Our Lord promises reward for what we do for Him; therefore there is no life of ease for the Christian. We're different.

The power of example

One trained in physics looks at things differently some time. Permit me a story. I was 24 years old when I went through basic training – with a group of kids, most of whom were barely 18. I felt like the chaperone.

One day we were given an exercise to strengthen our self-confidence. A large log had been raised up over a sawdust pit. The top of the log had been shaved level – about 30 feet above the ground. We were to walk over this. The drill sergeant called for a volunteer to be first.

Everyone else saw the 30 feet high – I saw how wide the log was, at least eighteen inches on the flat. Such a walk would be a trivial task. So I volunteered. The platoon watched as the “old man” walked the log in rather casual style. It instantly cracked the spell; if the old man could do it, so could they.

The power of example: consider the example of Christ, who suffered in innocence as if He were a criminal. Consider the example of Paul, in chains for the Faith. God teaches us much by example:

- ✚ The example inspires confidence; if he can do it, I can do it.
- ✚ The example teaches method. He does it, now I know how too.
- ✚ The example invites commitment. Commitment implies trust, and you cannot please God without it.

Know the truth

It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. Remind *them* of these things, and solemnly charge *them* in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless *and leads to the ruin of the hearers.*

(2Ti 2:11-14 NASB)

If you stay with Christ

You may face death as He did. Millions of Christians have died for the faith. Indeed, it was so common in the 4th century that Athanasius used that ever present fact as an argument for the truth of the Resurrection. Even if you don't face martyrdom, you will face death, unless He returns first (which will divert your attention from such problems). Face death with Christ; make Him your constant companion. If you die with Him you will rise again, as He did.

Perhaps your suffering will not be martyrdom, but suffering in this world. Remember your example: He suffered, and was rewarded with the Name above all names. As He was rewarded, so shall you be. “Well done, good and faithful servant.”

If you leave him

Much of our emphasis today is on believing so that you might be saved. But the Scriptures also emphasize that we are to *keep* the Faith. This command is a reflection of the basic nature of God Himself – who is eternal, unchanging.

I AM does not change, but some of us do. Some chase the things of the world, some are distracted by care and worry, some never really believed in the first place. It does not matter: He remains the same. He rewards those who seek Him; He condemns those who depart from Him. But that is part of His eternal nature; His reward is also eternal.

Don't sweat the small stuff

This passage is here for a reason. There is the ever-present temptation to legalize the faith, to turn it into a set of rules. We are here to win souls, not debates. The Pharisees delighted in hard work to win over a convert to their system. Pride prevailed there, but in the kingdom of God humility is required. Don't sweat the small stuff.

A Workman not Ashamed

Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. But avoid worldly *and* empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, *men* who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness."

(2Ti 2:15-19 NASB)

Paul opened this section talking about shame, and when to despise it. There is true shame in this passage; it is for those who preach a false gospel. There are many such in our time. There are those who preach the "prosperity gospel", the idea that God wants to make you rich; if you give to the church He will do so, and we're the right church for you to give to. Of course, their extravagant lifestyle is proof that their theory works – right? (P. T. Barnum might have had another explanation for this.) Add to these all the legalists, cults and sects today and the opportunity for going astray is really great. And really shameful.

What should we do about it? No surprise here, God's answer calls us to do things His way. He asks two things of the poor teacher:

- ✚ First, that he will be a workman. Which is to say, the lessons (live and taught both) require work. There is a reason I put in the hours.
- ✚ He also requires that the workman "rightly divide" (accurately handle) the Word. If I seem precise at times, perhaps this is why.

Empty chatter

He tells us that empty chatter leads to ungodliness. How can this be?

- ✦ False doctrine spreads like gangrene. Those who want the easy way to heaven are always ready for such things. Even if the false doctrine is one of works.
- ✦ Sometimes we get the opposite effect. We trivialize the Gospel for the sake of “niceness.” That way visitors will not be offended by the Stone of Stumbling, the Rock of Offense.
- ✦ Of course, we can also distort the truth of the Gospel in the search for harmony in the church. There is a difference between “everyone agrees” and “no one disagrees.” When the Gospel is put forward as “nice people should do nice things” it is no great wonder that it attracts only nice people. Where are the sinners called to repentance?

The firm foundation

Remember: the Lord knows who are His own. Your witness and His knowledge should coincide – and that means that you do not lead the life of ungodliness. If you name the Name, abstain. When He knows you, and you show it, then harmony replaces hypocrisy. Which is as it should be in the kingdom of heaven.

Last Days - 2 Timothy 2:20 – 3:13

Since the earliest days of the church there has been dispute over the basic nature of the church. Is the church basically a health club for saints, a place for the good to get better? Or is the church basically a hospital for sinners, a place for the bad to become the good? The discussion very much follows a similar problem: is man basically good, or evil? My answer to that question is simple: Both – because he is fallen. So the church at any time contains both the righteous and the unrighteous – and sometimes it's difficult to tell which is which. This lesson shows us one approach to that problem.

The church as hospital

Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these *things*, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love *and* peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses *and escape* from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

(2Ti 2:20-26 NASB)

Honor and Dishonor

In words particularly cherished by Americans, “all men are created equal.” This can hardly be described as fact; but it is a fine ideal. In fact, we know that all within the church are hardly equal. Some were raised in Christian homes; some raised in a bar room. Some had loving Christian parents (or grandparents); others found Christ in a coach or youth leader. So we are not equal. But we can change.

How does one grow in the church? It's very much like any other organization. You need to make yourself useful. If you are not fit to do anything, you're not likely to stay, are you?¹⁰ But how do you “make yourself useful?” If you want the world's answer, it's found in any number of services. These are no doubt needed in the church, and should be done willingly. But the first step is this: you must cleanse yourself. The church is the bride of Christ; he will have her spotless. You must take the first steps; you renounce your wrongs, ask forgiveness and then you will be useful – not to the board of elders, nor the planning committee but to God Himself. That makes you fit for honorable service.

Good, bad and ugly

Paul counsels Timothy to flee the most common temptation of a young man – lust. The point is more general than that. For any given age, time and place, there are common temptations. Look around, see what they are, and avoid them.

¹⁰ One must remember that this is not specifically referring to physical service. The Carpenter needs carpenters and plumbers, teachers and preachers, even those whose only service is prayer.

There is one in particular that we all must avoid. Sometimes we must choose between right and righteousness. It feels very good to win an argument (I am personally quite fond of being on the winning end), but we must not put that pleasure above being righteous. In winning the argument about the correct interpretation of 2nd Hezekiah we may alienate the loser – who may see the church not as hospital for sinners but debating society.

As always, for every “thou shalt not” there is a “thou shalt.” We are to pursue righteousness, love, peace and faith. Please note something: “pursue.” You do not obtain these things by sitting back and relaxing, waiting for the righteousness truck to drop off another load. Ask, seek and knock! This is where the pure heart of the cleansed sinner enters; only the pure in heart see God – which explains why the rest are in the dark.

Dealing with others

The character of the man of God is seen here. He is not a championship debater; he is a shepherd. He must be a man who is kind, patient and gentle, with sufficient knowledge of the faith that those whom he rebukes will know that he is speaking the truth. Keep your eye on the prize: it is not their humiliation we want, it is their repentance. Pray that they will come to the knowledge of the truth. As Paul puts it here, that they will come to their senses. Just like the Prodigal Son.

The Last Days

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

(2Ti 3:1-5 NASB)

Pause; take a deep breath; exhale slowly. Yes, we are talking about the end times. Just what are the end times? It is clear that the Apostles themselves did not know, as Christ Himself was not permitted to know. The Scripture tends to give us two meanings to this phrase:

Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have appeared; from this we know that it is the last hour.

(1Jo 2:18 NASB)

That seems to say that “end times” means now. But:

Let no one in any way deceive you, for *it will not come* unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

(2Th 2:3 NASB)

That seems to tell us that we are still waiting for the appearance of the “Man of Lawlessness.”¹¹ Who can say?

Signs of the Times

Paul gives us several characteristics of the men of the end times. Please note that he is writing within the context of *those who are in the church*. One of the difficulties of chapter and verse is that it is easy to miss the context, and that is often done here. Many conclude that this is what the world will look like, but it won't happen inside the church. It *is* what will happen in the world, but we will also see it in the church. Let's take a look and see what these people might look like:

- ✚ Lovers of self? The church is a convenient place for weddings and funerals, but other than that, look out for number one.
- ✚ Lovers of money? Is this seriously at question in the most materialistic church in the world?¹²
- ✚ Boastful? Arrogant? Just mention the word “golf.”
- ✚ Disobedient to parents? We've made teenage rebellion into billions of dollars worth of business.
- ✚ The “un-s” – ungrateful, unholy, unloving. We come to “get something” out of worship; our ancestors came to give thanks for what they had.
- ✚ Irreconcilable – the kind that just can't come to an agreement. (Sometimes I have my suspicions about this, Troy).
- ✚ Malicious gossips, without self control – in short, people who can't keep their mouths shut.
- ✚ Without self control, brutal, haters of good – consider this one well: the church (as a whole) now accepts homosexuals. Men with passions run amuck who can't stand anyone who tells them the plain sense of the Scripture.
- ✚ Treacherous – anybody you know fit in this category?
We could go on. And on and on. But this gives you the idea.

Apostasy

The real danger in this is apostasy. This you know of. These are people who practice the forms of Christianity – they worship on Sunday, appearing humble in public prayer. Their theology, however, is laced with delicate exceptions – most of which add up to the idea that they may do as they please. How so? God (take your pick) doesn't care, changed his mind, has been misinterpreted – the list goes on.

Do you need an example? There are actually church communions that ordain practicing homosexuals as bishops. You wouldn't stand for an elder who made his money by bank robbery; but those who object to homosexual bishops are denigrated for their “tired” view of right and wrong.

¹¹ My point is not that the Apostles didn't know when Christ would return (they didn't) but rather that the term “end times” seems to have more than one use in Scripture.

¹² That our congregation *must* spend several months on the topic of stewardship is a sign of this.

The Peril to the Church

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these *men* also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also. Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

(2Ti 3:6-12 NASB)

The way of the apostate

It is a rather grim description: the apostate worms his way into the hearts and lives of those who are weak. Paul singles out women here for the simple reason that they were most likely to be the victims. You think this is past tense? The assisted living home in which my mother lived was strict about allowing entrance. If someone showed up saying he had an appointment, the staff would call the person and ask if they really were expecting a visitor. Otherwise, the con men would find this place easy pickings.

But this has a disadvantage: the church has been taught that by their fruits you will know them. They appear learned; dignified – but inside they are snakes. Eventually, their actions will portray their real character.

Those who are of the way

So how do you tell the real from the fake?

- ✚ The real follow the teachings of the Scripture; the fake mouth them but do not do them.
- ✚ The real follow an example – human, but none the less an example. The fake do too – P. T. Barnum.
- ✚ The real know their purpose: their first concern is for God.
- ✚ And – perhaps most recognizable of all – the real face persecution.

Predictions

May we end with some predictions about the end times?

- ✚ Those who love Christ to the end will suffer and be persecuted for the faith.
- ✚ Those who don't (we are speaking of those in the church, now) will grow worse and worse.
- ✚ But – at the end of the end times – the Lord returns. See here His description of how He will deal with the apostates:

"But when the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. "All the nations will be gathered before Him; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats; and He will put the sheep on His right, and the goats on the left. "Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 'For I was hungry, and you gave Me *something* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me *something* to drink; I was a stranger, and you invited Me in; naked, and you

clothed Me; I was sick, and you visited Me; I was in prison, and you came to Me.' "Then the righteous will answer Him, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, and feed You, or thirsty, and give You *something* to drink? 'And when did we see You a stranger, and invite You in, or naked, and clothe You? 'When did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?' "The King will answer and say to them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did it to one of these brothers of Mine, *even the least of them*, you did it to Me.' "Then He will also say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, accursed ones, into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels; for I was hungry, and you gave Me *nothing* to eat; I was thirsty, and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger, and you did not invite Me in; naked, and you did not clothe Me; sick, and in prison, and you did not visit Me.' "Then they themselves also will answer, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry, or thirsty, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not take care of You?' "Then He will answer them, 'Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' "These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

(Mat 25:31-46 NASB)

Take the high, hard road. Face the suffering and persecution; maintain love, patience and gentleness in the faith. Remember: we know the end of this story.

Inspiration of the Scriptures - 2 Timothy 3:14-17

Your method of interpreting the Scriptures very much depends upon your view of the inspiration of the Scriptures. Let's look at the innocent little passage that has caused modern Christianity so much trouble:

You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

(2Ti 3:14-17 NASB)

The authenticity of the Scriptures

(This section is taken from an earlier lesson, for which I make no apologies. Haven't changed my mind, and I still like the look of it).

The myth goes something like this: "well, the Bible was never written down until several centuries after the time of Christ. He probably did some cool things—but how can we know which parts are authentic and which aren't?"

Great sounding statement; only one problem—it's false. Let's take this problem in three easy steps:

- ✚ How do I know the original documents of the Bible are trustworthy? In particular, how do I know they're old enough that the eyewitnesses to Jesus read them?
- ✚ Given that I have a good original, how do I know that all those monks didn't mess up the copies?
- ✚ And given those two, how do I know I have a good translation?

Let's consider the original documents first. If the original documents date from the time of the Apostles, you know that they're likely to be correct. If they don't, then who knows what errors might have crept in, right? So what about those documents? A few facts:

- ✚ The time we are concerned about runs up to about AD 70—when Jerusalem was sacked by the Romans. St. Paul died in AD 64, so we would be looking for indications that the originals existed in Jerusalem before AD 70. Is there any such indication?
- ✚ The myth says there's nothing there. But—by way of example—there is an almost complete copy of the Gospel of John (one of the later books—which has been carbon dated to AD 120. It was found in a monastery in Egypt. That means that it's not the original, and that the original must have been copied several times before this copy was made.
- ✚ There is also the internal evidence of the book itself. Look at the book of Acts, for example. There are dozens of place names and ruler names—minor rulers whose names would have been forgotten after a few years (can you tell me who was mayor of Los Angeles in 1933?). That book ends with Paul still living. We know from history that he died in AD 64. Acts is either an extremely well researched hoax—or it's genuine.

- ✚ There are other witnesses, too. The enemies of Christianity—mostly Roman—quoted the Gospels extensively during the second century AD. Their quotations track quite nicely with the Gospels. This evidence tells us that the Gospels were well known by about AD 100.
- ✚ Other evidence is found in the fact that complete translations of the New Testament into other languages show up starting about AD 120.
- ✚ Irenaeus—a Christian writer—gives us a summary of the Gospels. The undisputed date for this is AD 170.

With all this evidence, why is there such a myth? Simple. Until the 4th century AD, the New Testament was available only in pieces—book by book. When Constantine—the first Roman emperor who was a Christian—took over, he commissioned an Imperial set of copies of the New Testament. This was about AD 325. One of those copies is still in existence. But making official copies is very different from writing down the legends.

Now, let's take up the "Xerox problem" - how do we know we have good copies? There are two answers to that:

- ✚ First, there are something like 15,000 manuscripts of the New Testament (or parts thereof) which date before AD 1000. Just in sheer numbers alone this dwarfs the copies of any other ancient book. (The Odyssey of Homer is second—with less than two hundred).
- ✚ More to the point, have you every considered how people know there are thousands of mistakes in the Bible? It's because scholars have been able to trace the origins of these mistakes from copier to copier. If you know how many mistakes there are, you must have a pretty good idea of the correct answer.

One other thing: most of the earliest copies were not made by monks, but by professional copiers. You went down to the local scriptorium and asked for a copy to be made. The slaves who did it checked their work by adding all the letters in the rows, and in the columns—and checking those totals against the originals. Some of those tallies can still be seen in manuscripts today.

One last: how do I know I have a good translation? Since the time of the King James we've known how to do that. James (the king, not the apostle) had a problem—all the existing English translations were riddled with someone's bias. He had a kingdom to unite. So he commissioned two groups of scholars to work on the translation. A scholar would translate the work to start with; his work would be reviewed by a small group; their work would be reviewed by the entire company. When finished, the two companies got together to hash out the differences.

The result was the King James Bible—the standard of the English speaking peoples for almost 300 years. The method was so successful that it is still used for modern translations.

Theories of Inspiration

Let us dispense with one thing first. Entire denominations who call themselves Christians do not believe in the inspiration of the Scriptures. The most notorious example of this is the "Jesus Seminar," much beloved by the press. I believe they are now down to one authentic verse in the Gospels; the rest being hand me down and myth. That's why we started with the authenticity.

Those who believe in the inspiration generally fall into two camps:

- ✚ There are those who believe that inspiration comes by a filling or gift of the Holy Spirit. This view is quite compatible with the statements in the Scriptures.¹³ The difficulty with this view is that anyone who is (or thinks they are) filled with the Spirit can now, in theory, write Scripture. Despite the warning at the end of Revelation, this remains a temptation.
- ✚ The other view is what is called “autonomic writing.” In this, the author is supposed to go into a trance while God moves the pen. This has some real difficulties in the stylistic differences of the New Testament. We therefore hear of “God moving the mind that moves the pen.”
The difficulty in picking between these views is simply that the Apostles left us very little to go on. Perhaps that was intentional.

The differences over inspiration are, however, trivial compared to the differences of interpretation.

Just what do you mean, inspired?

There are four primary views of inspiration, each with its own virtues and drawbacks:

- ✚ *Inspiration.* “I believe what the Bible says about the Bible,” as one professor¹⁴ put it. It means just what the word in the English language means. This interpretation allows for a great deal of room in viewing various parts of the Bible. It is the easiest position to defend, and the hardest to use as a basis for agreement. Its most popular exponent is C. S. Lewis.¹⁵
- ✚ *Inerrancy.* This version assumes that God has (providentially) preserved the Scriptures for (which is unsupported in Scripture). If you ask for proof text for this, you get 2 Timothy 3:16. This is a mild form of the remaining two, but it evidences one of the problems of going beyond inspiration: there is only one possible right answer. This tends to lead to the idea that we need only the Bible, and we can and should throw away the thinking of anyone earlier than us.
- ✚ *Infallibility.* To the phrase, “without error” we now add, “without contradiction.”¹⁶ (This is the official position of Eastside Christian Church). It is a position which has its good points (the Bible is now a rule book) and bad (suppose Paul did tell Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach?) It tends to be accompanied by a “proof text” methodology.
- ✚ *Literal Infallibility.* Usually found among those who are vigorously opposed to evolution, it is also associated with 6-day creationists and King James only churches. It tends to develop a very legalistic structure, and has some obvious difficulties in interpreting metaphoric parts of the Scripture.

My personal view

Filling versus autonomic

In this matter it is my personal view that filling is greatly superior (as a working hypothesis) to autonomic writing. Here’s why:

- ✚ A variety of texts tell us of the different ways of how the Scripture was created. Clearly, the Ten Commandments given by the finger of God represent a different method. There is no text I can find which supports the autonomic writing theory.¹⁷

¹³ See, for example, Revelation 1:10-11, Luke 12:11-12, Exodus 19:6

¹⁴ At Pacific Christian College, whose name I have forgotten.

¹⁵ See his *Mere Christianity*, especially the chapter “Myth Become Fact.”

¹⁶ But do read Proverbs 26:4-5 on this (and there are several more like this).

¹⁷ Which is why autonomic writing is much in favor by those who believe in literal infallibility.

- ✦ The autonomic writing theory is a late invention; the early church never thought of it.
- ✦ It is very difficult to explain the differences in writing style with autonomic writing.

Inspiration vs. inerrancy and infallibility

We must first unveil here a major difficulty in translating this verse:

(ALT) All Scripture *[is]* God-breathed and *[is]* beneficial for teaching *[or, doctrine]*, for verification *[or, reproof]*, for correcting faults, for instruction in righteousness *[or, the behavior that God requires]*,

(ASV) Every scripture inspired of God *is* also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness.

(BBE) Every holy Writing which comes from God is of profit for teaching, for training, for guiding, for education in righteousness:

(CEV) Everything in the Scriptures is God's Word. All of it is useful for teaching and helping people and for correcting them and showing them how to live.

(Darby) Every scripture *is* divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness;

(DRB) All scripture, inspired of God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice:

(EMTV) All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

(ESV) All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

(GNB) All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching the truth, rebuking error, correcting faults, and giving instruction for right living,

(GW) Every Scripture passage is inspired by God. All of them are useful for teaching, pointing out errors, correcting people, and training them for a life that has God's approval.

(HCSB) All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness,

(HNV) Every writing inspired by God is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction which is in righteousness,

(ISV) All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

(KJV) All scripture *is* given by inspiration of God, and *is* profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness:

(LITV) All Scripture *is* God-breathed and profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

(MKJV) All Scripture *is* God-breathed, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness,

(MSG) Every part of Scripture is God-breathed and useful one way or another--showing us truth, exposing our rebellion, correcting our mistakes, training us to live God's way.

(NASB) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;

(TS98) All Scripture is breathed by Elohim and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for setting straight, for instruction in righteousness,

(WEB) Every Scripture is God-breathed and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness,

As you can see, there is a great deal of variety in the translation. The primary difficulty, which is unsolved in the Greek, is that the first half the verse can be translated with equal accuracy in two ways:

- ✚ Every Scripture is inspired by God, or
- ✚ Every Scripture which is inspired by God.

So, it may be that Paul is trying to tell Timothy to watch out for things which are false Scripture. When the question of the canon of the New Testament arose, Athanasius turned the verse around and asked if the candidate for Scripture met the tests in the second half the verse. We may not have infallibility here so much as the test for knowing what's Scripture and what's not.

To this question I add some additional difficulties:

- ✚ Can anything touched by human beings truly be inerrant, let alone infallible? (This question is the primary reason behind the autonomic writing theory).
- ✚ There is a difference between translation and transliteration. When you see "Every Scripture is God-breathed" that is NOT a translation; it's a transliteration. It is poor scholarship to do so.
- ✚ Finally, inerrancy itself adds to the difficulties of evangelizing the serious, thinking person.

How so that last? Take a look at Mark 2:26. Mark names the High Priest who was killed after aiding David in his flight from Saul. Mark says it's Abiathar; the Old Testament says it was his father, Abimilech. To those who believe in infallibility, the solution is simple – the father had two names. To those who hold to inspiration, we think it likely that Mark got his High Priests mixed up – as Abiathar is the High Priest most associated with David. It's the kind of mistake someone might make when relying on his memory from school days; it's a normal slip up. Which tells me that this is not a carefully constructed fraud – they would have caught that – but the eyewitness who was standing there listening to Jesus.

How important is all this?

I give you the test: what would you do differently if you were shown to be wrong? If you hold to inspiration only, it causes you to search the Scripture more, not less. If you hold to filling of the Spirit,

you know that what you are reading came through men whose differences in style did not affect the truth contained therein – and that means that its meaning is open to all. To hold to inspiration only is more work; but the results are the same in general.

The test is this: does the Scripture do what Paul says it does? If it is NOT **“profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;”**

you are doing it wrong.

The weight of the Scriptures is far greater than the arguments about inspiration. They are not just instructional, they lead to salvation (read verse 15 again).

May I have one last thought for you? The word translated “inspired” does not actually transliterate into “God breathed.” It correctly transliterates into “God breathed into.” That phrase is one you’ve heard before. I submit that as God breathed the breath of life into Adam, He has breathed the Scriptures into the church, and they are as the breath of life to us.

Last Words - 2 Timothy 4

If you knew you were about to die, would you not put your house in order? You'd issue your final instructions; update your will; perhaps even seek forgiveness. This chapter is similar to that; Paul sends his final words to Timothy, knowing that he is about to meet the martyr's death.

I solemnly 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, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.

(2Ti 4:1-5 NASB)

Solemn Charge

There is an air of formality about this passage, and it is instructive to ask why Paul would now choose this tone of voice. Paul is dying; the hope of the Christian is in the Lord's return. This is the reason.

- ✚ First, Paul knows that he is in the presence of God – and soon will be even more so. It is as if he cautions that young man to remember who is watching him.
- ✚ Christ will one day return – and then the judgment. Some will rise to be blessed – and those who do will receive the reward due them. That reward will go to Paul; it will also go to Timothy if he keeps the faith.
- ✚ Perhaps most urgent, we know that when He returns it's too late to achieve such reward. Don't miss the bus.

Instructions

Paul is not one to remind you of how important something is – and then leave you without instructions. We may conveniently group his instructions into three categories:

- ✚ *Public*: Timothy is to preach the Word. Preaching itself is not enough; it must be telling the story of the Word made flesh.
- ✚ *Personal*: He is to “reprove, rebuke and exhort” – which covers just about all situations that a church leader might encounter person to person. Note the qualifiers: He is to do so with great patience and with instruction. Patience is fairly obvious, but instruction? So that he won't have to do it again.
- ✚ *Private*: Here Paul addresses the inner man. It's easy to be enthusiastic at the outset. It's the long haul that counts. So he tells him to be ready – when it seems like a good time for it. And when it doesn't.

Apostasy

Paul is not one to minimize the boy's difficulties. He comes right out and tells him that he will encounter a very frustrating condition. Timothy will preach his heart out – only to find that the congregation just wasn't interested in that. They'll soon find somebody who suits them better. See the steps:

- ✚ First, they will complain about sound doctrine. (I well remember the day when our preacher said, “Sex outside of marriage is wrong.” And the gasp from the congregation when he said it.)
- ✚ The real key comes when the congregation chooses a new minister (or selects from amongst the Bible classes) – they will seek out someone who tells them what they want to hear. (Think it can’t happen here? Try submission in marriage for a topic.)
- ✚ Eventually they will believe anything but the truth (see Jesus Seminar for examples).

Remember that this section comes directly after the admonition about all Scripture being inspired. This is more rejection than choice.

Personal Notes

If you’re going to attempt this, you need to be personally fit for it:

- ✚ Be sober. We speak of someone being “sober minded”, and that is the sense it is used here. (Remember Paul telling Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach?)
- ✚ Endure. You should know by now that suffering is coming.
- ✚ Do your job. Yes, it really is that simple.

Reflections

Paul now looks back over his own life – and likes what he sees.

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing.

(2Ti 4:6-8 NASB)

The Christian’s life OF sacrifice

Paul’s one thought at the end of his life concerns how well he has done over it. In short words he sets for us the things which may be used in God’s judgment:

- ✚ He fought the good fight. Please notice that this is combat. It is spiritual combat, which is the most difficult. And it is no use just picking some cause or other (Christianity and Physical Fitness!); it must be the good fight, the struggle between Christ and the world.
- ✚ He finished the course. What God set for him to do, he did. He didn’t do it half way, or make a good attempt at it; he finished it. There is no sense of retirement after a good try at this.
- ✚ Most important: he kept the faith. Like your teacher says, it was here when I got here, I taught it and it will be here when I’m gone. My object is to teach the faith, unmodified, unvarnished and unstoppable.

The Christian’s life AS sacrifice

We are told to present our bodies as a living sacrifice to God. Do you not see that your entire life should be seen as a sacrifice, an offering to God?

- ✚ At the very least, you can show the world how a Christian faces death. You will face it; so prepare now to face it calmly.
- ✚ Millions of Christians have gone beyond that: they embraced martyrdom. To live is Christ, to die is gain. Their testimony was in the way they endured horrible death rather than deny their Lord.

- ✚ Remember this: your sacrifice today may bring someone to Christ. They may want what you had; be sure you have it.

Crown of righteousness

We may see this in three ways:

- ✚ There is the victor's crown – the symbol of one who has triumphed. Those who finish the course deserve this.
- ✚ There is the crown which reigns – as we will reign with Christ at His return.
- ✚ There is the crown of thorns – which shows that we suffered as our Lord suffered.

Practical Instructions

OK, closed Bible quiz time. Remember the “still, small voice” which spoke to Elijah? Of course you do. What did it say?¹⁸ Whatever it was, it isn't very grand or eloquent, is it?

In fact, it's God's to-do list. Here's another one.

Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens *has gone* to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that through me the proclamation might be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was rescued out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him *be* the glory forever and ever. Amen. Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.

(2Ti 4:9-22 NASB)

A call for help

Paul begins with a call for help. He is now an old man – late 50's, early 60's, old by the standards of the time – and he needs some assistance. He asks for three things:

- ✚ Foremost, he asks for people to come to him. It's lonely being in jail. He can't see too well. So he asks for those he loves to come to him.
- ✚ He asks for a practical item: his cloak. It's cold in winter.
- ✚ Finally, there are the tools of the intellectual, spiritual life – his books.¹⁹ People, things and the life intellectual – a well rounded lot.

¹⁸ 1 Kings 19:15-18

¹⁹ Many will pray, few will study – and grow.

Warning

The passage about Alexander is rather enlightening. He warns Timothy about the man – it's always best to know where the snakes are hiding. But notice that he does not condemn the man, nor does he ask that action be taken against him. Rather, he turns him over to the Lord – for vengeance belongs to the Lord. If you take vengeance, you steal from the Almighty God.

Left alone

Paul relates his experience of being alone and unaided. It is true: sometimes God removes your support system from around you. It may be that He wants to see what you will do, or it may be that He wants you to know what you can do. But it's not pleasant at the time.

Sometimes it's worse. There are times during which you will feel that God has left you entirely alone. Do not fear, little heart. He is but strengthening you for the next test. He will rescue you and, someday, take you home.

Letter to Titus

Who Am I? - Titus 1

It is an interesting difference between men and women. If you ask a woman, “what do you do?”, you will get quite a variety of answers. Men, however, usually will tell you by whom they are employed. Both answers reflect the truth that “what you do” is really “who you are.”

It is good at times to ask yourself the question: “Who am I?” Such self-examination is good for the soul. We shall see some answers in this short passage in which Paul tells us who he really is.

Paul, a bond-servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the faith of those chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth which is according to godliness, in the hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ages ago, but at the proper time manifested, *even* His word, in the proclamation with which I was entrusted according to the commandment of God our Savior, To Titus, my true child in a common faith: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.

(Tit 1:1-4 NASB)

Who am I?

Let's take Paul's answers and see if they could apply to us:

A bond-servant of Christ

- ✚ Just how exalted a position do you hold in the kingdom of God? Is your humility sufficient to serve, and thus to rise in the kingdom?
- ✚ Or, to the contrary, is there something you won't do for Christ? You may know that you're humble enough to clean the bathrooms, but what about forgiveness? The servant of the most high God can be commanded to forgive, can he not?
- ✚ Is it simply that we wish to be a ruler, not a servant? Our pride will not let us take the title “servant.” Sometimes our pride masquerades as spiritual dignity.

An apostle of Christ

The word means an ambassador – a messenger of the faith. Let us examine ourselves as ambassadors:

- ✚ When others see us, do they see Christ? We are called as ambassadors, not secret agents.
- ✚ We are to be the ambassadors of reconciliation – reconciliation between God and man. Do we pray for those who are lost? Do we ask God to bless them so that they may come near to Him?
- ✚ Do we conduct ourselves with grace and dignity? Not the pompous attitude of some, but the natural spiritual dignity that comes with being truly humble; the flowing grace that marks us as men of peace?

Why?

Why indeed. Those outside the faith should see that as a genuine question; it certainly isn't for the money in it.

Paul gives us his answer: for the sake of the faith – of others. It is not allegiance to some abstract system of rules, but allegiance to Christ, and therefore service to Christ’s chosen ones. Let us examine the character of this faith:

- ✦ The faith is *given*, not dreamed up or imagined, nor constructed in any way. This faith comes from the heart – the heart of Christ – not the foolishness of men. How much of what we believe is our own addition?
- ✦ The faith is *entrusted* to us – and is therefore a great responsibility. Do we see it solely as a blessing, or is it something to be carried with care? Do we pass this faith along, or hope that no one notices?
- ✦ It is also for the *knowledge of the truth*. But this knowledge is given with godliness, so that it might not be “head knowledge” only. Do we act upon what we know?
- ✦ Do we show that truth in our godliness? Does the truth so permeate our lives that godliness is its natural result?
- ✦ Do we seek to increase our knowledge of the truth? Do we study the word, both in itself and as other minds have known it? Do we meditate on it, pray through it?

Hope

What is this hope? It is the hope of eternal life – life in the body in the presence of our Lord. Is this your hope, or just something added on to a “be good and God will reward you” faith?

- ✦ What is your attitude towards death? Does it frighten you so much that you don’t want to go to the doctor, for fear of what he might find?
- ✦ Do you live in the expectation of our Lord’s return? Or are you hoping He delays a little longer, so that you can finally kick the habit you hope he doesn’t know about?

Promised by the one who cannot lie

- ✦ Are you “standing on the promises?” When a question of ethics arises, do you count on Him, or your own cleverness?
- ✦ Indeed, when the world threatens you with its disasters, do you remember the one who taught you to ask for your daily bread – from Him?
- ✦ Do you believe the prophecies, or do you think your Lord unable to control the events of this world?

At the proper time

- ✦ Do you believe in coincidence, or providence?
- ✦ Do you think God is in control – even in American politics?

The Word appears

Let there be no mistake: what this teacher is about – and all others who would be true to the Word – is retailing. Or better put, *retelling*. The Word became flesh; that is my story. Why do I teach it? So that I may ask you, “Have you met the risen Christ?” Nothing else really matters.

Blessing

Paul now conveys his blessing to his protégé: grace and peace.

Grace

Grace: the unmerited favor of God Almighty. The very word itself²⁰ means a gift. Something that God has bestowed upon you out of His love, not your merit.

- ✚ Do you see it as a true blessing, or something you are owed? Examine yourself; do you conceive that God is rather lucky to have such a nice person like you in the kingdom? Is grace just the sugar coating of your own goodness, or is it the balm of the sinful heart? Have you thanked him for it, or praised him for giving it to you?
- ✚ Do you see it as a blessing so great that it must be kept alive and fresh? Do you daily go to him in prayer and repentance? If you do, you will find that his mercies are indeed new every morning.

Peace

The word in the original means “to be at one with.” It is not the peace of anesthesia, but the peace of reconciliation. We are to be one. There is oneness in God; the Father, the Son and the Spirit are one.

- ✚ Are you and the Father as one? Is your walk with Jesus so close that you are always considered together? Is the Spirit living within you, or do you reject the still small voice that calls you to repentance?
- ✚ Are you one with his people, the church? Do you see them as brothers and sisters, or just as other people who happen to arrive at the same building on Sunday morning?

We may now proceed to a more detailed description of who we ought to be.

Elders

For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, *namely*, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. For the overseer must be above reproach as God's steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, just, devout, self-controlled, holding fast the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to exhort in sound doctrine and to refute those who contradict. For there are many rebellious men, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision, who must be silenced because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not *teach* for the sake of sordid gain. One of themselves, a prophet of their own, said, "Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons." This testimony is true. For this reason reprove them severely so that they may be sound in the faith, not paying attention to Jewish myths and commandments of men who turn away from the truth. To the pure, all things are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled. They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed.

(Tit 1:5-16 NASB)

²⁰ *Charis*, from which we get “charisma” and “charismatic”.

It is a fact that we are always encouraged to follow the examples of the leaders of the church. We go from inner thought to outer view; here's what a real Christian looks like. The key: "Above reproach." Here are some good tests for us:

Test #1 – The Family

We must begin by asserting what the liberal world now denies: the family is the building block of society and civilization. It is not good for man to dwell alone, says Genesis. The accomplished Christian, therefore, needs to have a family life which passes the "don't" tests:

- ✚ The husband of one wife. As a qualification for eldership this has sometimes been taken too literally, as if the death of a man's wife suddenly disqualifies him. The intent here is simply this: the family is the basic unit of the church. That basic unit is destroyed by adultery; it is hard to build on a foundation of fornication. A one-woman man.
- ✚ Children who believe. Nothing slips by the active minds of your children. They hear your words and see your deeds. If words and deeds are in harmony with Christ, you children will be also. In this day and age you
- ✚ Not given to dissipation or rebellion. Wild parties and telling off the cop are not signs of Christian maturity.

Test #2 – Self Control

Verse 7 gives us the key to self control: we are the stewards of what God has given us. Is your wife a gift from God? Then do you cherish her as such? Let's look at the don'ts first:

- ✚ Not "self-willed" – not given to pride and arrogant, me-first behavior.
- ✚ Not easily angered. I'm pleased to note that he did not require "never gets angry" – but the slower the fuse, the better the Christian.
- ✚ Not addicted to wine. Enough said.
- ✚ Not "pugnacious." Did you ever know someone who enjoyed a good fight, especially when he is in it?
- ✚ Especially this: there should be no fondness for money obtained in shady dealing.
Equally, there are some do's:

- ✚ Hospitality – a word not much used these days; it means one who will open his home to those in need. Note that this is required of a man; the keeping of the home may be her concern, but its use for the Gospel should be his.
- ✚ Loving what is good – never having too much sex and violence on your VCR.
- ✚ Sensible – not the kind to go off chasing wild theories (excludes flying saucer maniacs.)
- ✚ Self controlled, holding fast – one who knows who he is in Christ Jesus, standing upon that Rock, never to be moved.

Test #3 – able to exhort and refute

If ever there were a justification for Bible study, this is it. The able, mature Christian should be practiced at two things:

- ✚ He (or she) must practice the art of exhortation – not in the pulpit sense, usually, but in the sense of one who comes along side to encourage, comfort – and guide.

✚ The time will come, however, when the defense of sound doctrine is necessary. We may think this to be only the preacher's problem; it is not. If you don't know what you stand for, you'll fall for anything.

At the last, there is the parting of the ways. The word "pure" has not much figured in this lesson – but it is the background of all of it. If you purify yourself in repentance, prayer and study of the Scripture, things look different. That person in your family who seems so wrong might just appear now to be one in so much need. The eyes of the pure see the pure in all things, and rejoice.

Something is pure when it is all it is supposed to be – and nothing else. The mind of the mature Christian sees with pure eyes, and is seen with a clear conscience. So we come full circle: just who are you?

Another Time - Titus 2

In the reading of the Scripture one is often struck with the sense of being a visitor to another time. The feeling is very strong in this book of the Bible; much of what it says seems to be exactly opposite that which is taught in most American churches. So, if you are willing, through the time warp we go.

Practical Leadership

But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored.

(Tit 2:1-5 NASB)

Older men

The role of older men is well established in most societies of the world. The thought is simple: they've been around longer, they're much more likely to have the experience to know the right answer to social problems. The village elders must be consulted.

In our society the older man is scorned and ignored. In my business there is an open, unwritten rule: never hire anyone over 35. My company is proud of the fact that it continually attracts new talent this way. But see what we are missing; tell me if there is any use for a man like this:

- ✚ *Temperate.* The word is used in its old sense, meaning one who does things in moderation. This is a man living a balanced life.
- ✚ *Dignified.* Dignity is not pomposity; but you'd never know it now. But a man who carries himself as deserving the respect he's earned is often the island of stability in a sea of panic.
- ✚ *Sensible.* One not given to the idea of the moment, but one who weighs the facts, the hearts and the minds before decision.
- ✚ *Sound in faith, love and perseverance.* A man whose practice of these three virtues is such that they are now an integral part of his character.

Older women

The description given of older women here stretches the modern mind a great deal. The first adjective moves such women almost out of sight:

- ✚ *Reverent.* In the original it means the attitude that becomes holiness. The title "Reverend" carries with it the idea of holiness, a man set apart. Here the older women are to conduct themselves as becomes holiness.
- ✚ *Not malicious.* The word for "malicious" in the Greek is also translated "Devil" in other places. And why not? Is it not Satan who is our accuser? Do you think he needs your help?
- ✚ *Not enslaved to wine.* The point would have been more telling at this time, for the use of wine was frequently recommended for the conditions of old age. It helped with the pain of arthritis, and perhaps more important was its function of encouraging blood circulation. How many older women are consistently beset with cold feet? The point is a very practical one, for its time.

✚ *Teacher.* More literally, a teacher of “right things.” One who shows others the right way.

That last seems contradictory. Paul tells us that women are not permitted to teach. If you will examine them closely, they are not contradictory. As we will see, one of the concerns for such teaching is that the Gospel would not be condemned as being contrary to building a home. In this day, a woman taught by example to all, and by instruction to younger women. This seems amazing to us today; what sensible young woman would ever think to ask her mother for advice?

Why?

This strange behavior had best have a cause! Here Paul gives us such a cause: the effect of such an example upon young women. In particular, it is so that older women would be those who would *encourage* the younger women. When someone of sixty years looks at someone of twenty, the appearance of the younger women seems to be idyllic. To be twenty again, with no problems! But ask the twenty year old; they don’t want to be sixty – but they could use a little encouragement, wisdom and help. Our society makes this difficult; but not impossible.

Practical Followership

so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, *to be* sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, *with* purity in doctrine, dignified, sound *in* speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. *Urge* bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect.

(Tit 2:4-10 NASB)

Young Women

Our modern view of love is that it’s like the flu: you catch it at random; you’re just not yourself while you have it; and when it’s over, it’s over. Love is something about which you have neither choice nor control.

So how is it, then, that Paul commands the older women to teach the younger women to *love* – both their husbands and their children? It would seem, by our view, that such love would come naturally.

Consider the effects of such a view. If love is like the flu, when it’s over, it’s over. If you’re tired of last year’s Mr. Right, and your kids remind you of him, well then – get liberated and dump the lot of them.

I assert that the truth is completely different. First, remember that love (erotic) can be an emotion – but one which can be controlled. It is also a skill, which can be taught. (My wife greatly benefited from my mother’s wisdom). It is the Christian duty of the older woman to teach this to the younger ones. It is the Christian duty of the younger woman to learn.

There is more. Consider these virtues as if they were ornaments on a young woman's neck; see how beautiful they make her:

- ✦ Sensibility. Not one who confronts her husband with her demands, but one who works with her husband to do that which is right.
- ✦ Purity. Not just in sexual matters, but in all things – for this is the basis of a man's trust in his wife.
- ✦ Working at home. We utterly deny this – and look at the mess that results.
- ✦ Submission to her husband. I have not paper enough to deal with this as it deserves. One woman in our class told me that she bristled (as any modern feminist should) at the mere mention of the word – until she understood it. Then it worked in her marriage for the blessing it brings.

Paul then tells us the purpose of such behavior: so that the Gospel would stand in good reputation. Many a woman complains that her husband will not come to church. But there is a worse case: when your conduct makes him think that Christ's church is a collection of frauds and hypocrites. At the least you can silence the sneer by living the Christian life with him.

Young men

We know that the older men are to set an example; here Paul makes it clear that the young men are to be an example too. They are, after all, head of household – “as for me and my house...” See how:

- ✦ First, there is the example in the mind. Young man, do you set your heart on the Gospel, on sensible things – or does the leer of your eyes tell the world all that you are thinking?
- ✦ Likewise, the young man's speech is to be exemplary also – beyond reproach. This particularly applies when speaking of sound doctrine.
- ✦ All this would be useless with actions to match.

Why? So that the enemy will be deprived of ammunition in attacking even the youngest of men.

Slaves

It might seem that this section would be totally obsolete. But, if you will, think of the problems a slave might have had in being obedient to God's command. If his master was a reprobate heathen, the presence of the slave would be most embarrassing at times. It is more difficult to keep moral conduct if you are a slave.

But is that so far-fetched today? Those who live from paycheck to paycheck know the burden of the wage slave. And if your boss decides that you should be the one to falsify an expense report, what then?

The cure is in prevention; slave or not, Christian character can be shown. Once it is, it usually serves as a deterrent to such things. “There's no sense sending so and so; those Christians don't do stuff like that.” How is this done?

- ✦ In the mind – with quiet obedience and an attitude that regards such service as being for Christ. If for the sake of Christ I suffer on the job, will he not reward me as well as comfort me?
- ✦ In speech. When all else around are convinced that obscenity is necessary, the effect of one who is not is often completely out of proportion – for it is the effect of a guilty conscience looking at an innocent one. One who is not argumentative magnifies this effect.
- ✦ In actions. Pilfering is petty revenge against the boss; but vengeance belongs to God.

Why?

For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.

(Tit 2:11-15 NASB)

Is this behavior important? We've had several lists of do's and don'ts in this lesson; why is it that we think such things important?

The grace of God has appeared

Let's put this into perspective. The behavior we have been exhorting you to follow is not, of itself, of cosmic importance. But the grace of God – in the person of Jesus, the Christ – is of such importance. Your thoughts, words and actions tell the truth of the Good News:

- ✚ He came to bring salvation from sin to all who will accept it.
- ✚ He is coming again; the dead in Christ will rise and his glory be revealed. We are to live in this hope.
- ✚ By the authority of the one who has all authority, we have been given the Word of God; it is our responsibility to spread this good news.

Your example sends not only the message of righteousness and holiness, but the great message of salvation and hope. If you live the life of the Resurrection, the world cannot help but know.

Instructions

If you were expecting some wild and new idea to pop out from this discourse on Christian living, forget it. He did not come to replace the Law but to fulfill it. The moral principles have not changed a bit. Thus, it is not surprising when we see such a list of characteristics. Men need much more to be reminded than taught.

What is new is this: you are called to deny yourself, deny the world and accept Jesus Christ. When you do, such behavior is fruitful – often, beyond your dreams.

For His Purposes

But why? Well you may ask. Why did God Almighty send his Son? Why are the Scriptures written? I submit two answers:

- ✚ First, He came to redeem us from sin. Only his sacrifice could do this; only his love for us would cause this.
- ✚ Once saved, it is his desire that we be purified, becoming “a people of His own possession.” He longs for the works of his hands.

This is the life we are to lead. That life should be plain and evident, in the way we think, in the way we speak, in the way we act.

Teapots and Tommy Guns - Titus 3

The Thompson submachine gun is a favorite of gun collectors. It seems strange to some that one would desire to collect firearms; it seems strange to others that one would like to collect teapots. But it does not seem strange at all that our government requires a license to own a Tommy Gun. We would want assurance that the owner had no plans to use such a powerful weapon on others. Some years ago I worked with a man who collected such weapons – until the government decided to raise the license fee to \$55,000 a year (and this was some years ago). The hobby was too expensive.

Curiously enough, there seems to be no license fee involved with collecting teapots. This too we consider to be a reasonable thing; it is difficult to see how collecting teapots could harm others – save for the possibility your wife might start throwing them at you. So while the teapots may cost more than the Thompsons, the owner may collect them as extravagantly as the budget affords. Tommy Guns shoot people; the worst most teapots do is brew.

Why do I bring this to your mind? We, the Christians, must deal with things which are far beyond either teapots or Tommy Guns. We are entrusted with the reconciliation of the world to God; ours are the mysteries of the Lord's Supper; it is ours to baptize and bring others to eternal life. The Scriptures teach us that we are to do so while being as harmless as doves. We shall examine such a passage of Scripture; in so doing we will discover the center of service. First, then, the Scripture:

Remind them to be subject to rulers, to authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good deed, to malign no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing every consideration for all men. For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and envy, hateful, hating one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and *His* love for mankind appeared, He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out upon us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by His grace we would be made heirs according to *the* hope of eternal life. This is a trustworthy statement; and concerning these things I want you to speak confidently, so that those who have believed God will be careful to engage in good deeds. These things are good and profitable for men. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a factious man after a first and second warning, knowing that such a man is perverted and is sinning, being self-condemned. When I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, make every effort to come to me at Nicopolis, for I have decided to spend the winter there. Diligently help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way so that nothing is lacking for them. Our people must also learn to engage in good deeds to meet pressing needs, so that they will not be unfruitful. All who are with me greet you. Greet those who love us in *the* faith. Grace be with you all.

(Tit 3:1-15 NASB)

The Outer Layer: our relationship with the world

It is often noted that the Christian is supposed to be different from those of the world. It is well, therefore, that we examine this passage and ask, "Different – how?"

With regard to those in authority

It sometimes comes as a surprise to Christians raised in America that Paul would proclaim it necessary to be in submission to authority. But here it is again:

- ✚ We are to be *subject* to them – showing them our outward allegiance. When they play the national anthem, you stand.
- ✚ We are to be *obedient* to the authorities. Pay your taxes, observe the traffic laws – the ordinary diligence of a good citizen.
- ✚ Most of all, we are to be *ready to do good*. In this context, we might say civic minded; one who is always willing to help in doing something for the good of his community.

With regard to those who are not Christians

Most conservative Christians are willing to submit to lawful authority. But sometimes our conduct in society does not match our Savior's call. See these four characteristics and ask, am I missing that one?

- ✚ The most commonly missed is this: *malice to no one*. You may not think this a problem, but it is. We become accuser and judge of those who do not know Christ. In so doing, we usurp the judgment and vengeance due the Lord. "Who am I to judge those outside the church?" says Paul.²¹ If we are wrong in accusing them, we sin. If we are right in accusing them, we judge. Do neither.
- ✚ We are to be *peaceable*. The word refers to brawling; no matter the temptations, we are not to be the ones swinging the fist. Interestingly, the Greek word here can be transliterated: *a* (not) *makhos* (macho).
- ✚ We are to be *gentle* – the word is often translated "humble" as well. The Christian triumphs through suffering to bring a gentle answer.
- ✚ We are to be *considerate*. Good manners make good company.

Why?

This at first seems strange, but consider the reasoning behind it:

- ✚ For those who came to Christ as adults, we were just like the people around us first. We certainly have no right to judge them. Even those raised in the church should know that we are sinners, which removes the right of judgment from us.
- ✚ But – we were saved by grace. We didn't work our way into it; it is God's free gift. Again, we have nothing to brag about and no basis for judging others.
- ✚ Moreover, what he has given us – the hope of eternal life – sets this world in perspective. If this life is it, then the world is right: drink all the gusto you can. But if we are designed to be eternal, then the quarrels of this world should seem small indeed.

The Core of the Faith

Let us review, then, the core of the faith as it applies to our interaction with others:

We are sinners

But for the grace of God, here's who we would be:

- ✚ We'd be foolish, fooled by the world. Standing for nothing, we fall for anything.

²¹ 1 Corinthians 5:12

- ✚ We would be enslaved to various lusts – some of us consumed with envy, spitting out malice. Others would become hateful, despised – and in their turn hating others.
- ✚ You think not? Consider the Democratic Party: based on envy. Consider the Republicans: based on greed.

We are saved by grace

- ✚ MOTIVE: the love and kindness of God. We are saved because the God who is love himself loves us.
- ✚ METHOD: his method is not to have us work hard at good deeds to earn enough brownie points to arrive at heaven's gate. Rather, God himself provided the sacrifice needed.
- ✚ MECHANISM: this is implemented in two ways: First, by baptism, the entrance ceremony of the kingdom, which displays cleansing. Second, by the renewing of the Holy Spirit day by day.

Result

This salvation should make a very noticeable difference in our lives. One very important difference for us is that we are “heirs to the hope” – of eternal life. We know that we are designed to live forever. Knowing this makes a difference in the way we behave. If there is only this life, then the world is right: go for the gusto, grab all you can along the way. But if we are eternal, the hope within us should make us live like our Hope. We should be like our Master: always ready to do good.

On the Inside

To the outside world we are to be seen as the gentle and kind, the humble of the earth. But to the inside? The same is to be seen, for we are not to be hypocrites in reverse either. But it does happen sometimes. See if you can recognize anyone in here:

Avoid Controversy

Some of us – if we're honest – know that we enjoy a good argument. But we are told here to avoid such things. Paul calls them “foolish controversies.” How do I know the foolish ones? Simply this: do they divide the church? You should be able to recognize some of the foolish ones from Paul's list:

- ✚ Have you ever seen it where controversy itself was the end of such an argument? Either (or both) of the combatants really did not desire a solution; neither could risk going for victory and losing; so one or both are content to be the leader of a faction.
- ✚ Paul tells us of those who fight over genealogies; we could extend that to those who require the small items before the large ones.²²
- ✚ There are those who are legalists and fight over every little point of the Scripture, piously telling us that they are intent only on preserving the integrity of the church.²³

Reject the heretic

Your translation probably does not have the word “heretic.” In our modern times it seems impossible that anyone could be a heretic – just someone with a different opinion. But the original word means one who makes a division in the church, and that is what a heretic does. What are we to do about it?

- ✚ Three strikes, you're out. Warn him, with all solemnity, that he is dividing the body of Christ.

²² See Matthew 7:3

²³ See Romans 14

- ✦ If he fails to repent, kick him out of the church. He may think the church cannot live without him; it's just possible he can't live without the church.
- ✦ By their fruits you will know them; they are self-condemned. Look where the anger and divisiveness are, and trace them to their root.

Good deeds, pressing needs

We know little of Apollos; he was a good speaker, we are told. Zenas the Lawyer is completely unknown but for his name. But Paul asked that they be given all the support they needed. God does not do things by halves. Nor should his people. It is a matter of style; God blesses abundantly, and so should we.

God desires us to be fruitful. The quiet life, the orderly life yields up the fruit of the kingdom of God. Good deeds for pressing needs – nothing flashy, just the way of the church in a sinful world.

Philemon

An Old Man's Appeal - Philemon

Not until the 19th century was the canonicity of this book challenged - and only on the grounds that it seems to be a personal letter, with no spiritual application to the church. The letter speaks better of itself:

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our beloved *brother* and fellow worker, and to Apphia our sister, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church in your house: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. I thank my God always, making mention of you in my prayers, because I hear of your love and of the faith which you have toward the Lord Jesus and toward all the saints; *and I pray* that the fellowship of your faith may become effective through the knowledge of every good thing which is in you for Christ's sake. For I have come to have much joy and comfort in your love, because the hearts of the saints have been refreshed through you, brother. Therefore, though I have enough confidence in Christ to order you *to do* what is proper, yet for love's sake I rather appeal *to you*--since I am such a person as Paul, the aged, and now also a prisoner of Christ Jesus-- I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my imprisonment, who formerly was useless to you, but now is useful both to you and to me. I have sent him back to you in person, that is, *sending* my very heart, whom I wished to keep with me, so that on your behalf he might minister to me in my imprisonment for the gospel; but without your consent I did not want to do anything, so that your goodness would not be, in effect, by compulsion but of your own free will. For perhaps he was for this reason separated *from you* for a while, that you would have him back forever, no longer as a slave, but more than a slave, a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. If then you regard me a partner, accept him as *you would* me. But if he has wronged you in any way or owes you anything, charge that to my account; I, Paul, am writing this with my own hand, I will repay it (not to mention to you that you owe to me even your own self as well). Yes, brother, let me benefit from you in the Lord; refresh my heart in Christ. Having confidence in your obedience, I write to you, since I know that you will do even more than what I say. At the same time also prepare me a lodging, for I hope that through your prayers I will be given to you. Epaphras, my fellow prisoner in Christ Jesus, greets you, *as do* Mark, Aristarchus, Demas, Luke, my fellow workers. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.
(Phm 1:1-25 NASB)

The letter is clearly from Paul, not just from the statements in it. The Greek is very characteristic of his other writings; it is his style of writing. The early church - both those who were orthodox and the heretics - universally listed it as sacred Scripture. By the internal evidence - the fact that Paul was in prison for Christ, and the list of those who were with him - we know that it was most likely written by Paul about A. D. 61-63, most probably while he was under house arrest in Rome.²⁴ It concerns itself with a runaway slave named Onesimus - the name means "profitable" or "helpful", and Paul makes a pun on it in the Greek - and his return to his master, Philemon. We must review the cast of characters to understand it.

²⁴ Probably the time referenced in Acts 28:30-31.

Dramatis Personae

What do we know about this list of characters? A fair amount is left to us in the records of the early church. Philemon lived in Colosse, a city in what is now Turkey. By traditional accounts he became the Bishop of Colosse. Appia, mentioned in the salutation, is most likely his wife. Archippus is believed to be his son, probably a grown one.

We also know that Onesimus eventually became the Bishop of Berea - a town noted for its Biblical scholarship²⁵. One other thing: all four of these people were martyred under Nero. Each one died for the faith - which tells us something about how strongly they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The character of Philemon

We know little of Philemon in this letter (except that he was likely enough to be wealthy), but some comments can be made about his character

- ✚ All of his household were Christians. From this we may conclude that he was a fine example of Christian character to all around him, and most likely he spoke frequently for the faith.
- ✚ He was generous to the saints; he therefore was a model of the Christian rich man.
- ✚ Paul asks him to prepare a lodging for him, hoping to be released and return to them. From this we can conclude that Philemon was a man given to hospitality.
- ✚ We can also conclude from that remark that Philemon was a man of prayer, for Paul was hoping he would be released in answer to their prayers.
- ✚ Paul pays him a great compliment: he calls Philemon his "fellow worker." The word in the Greek is *synergos*, from which we get our word "synergy."

The character of Onesimus

Onesimus is a character quite foreign to us, for we live in a time which does not really know slavery. The attitude of the Romans towards slavery was quite different from our own. We see slavery in terms of black slavery in America; we see Simon Legree chasing Little Liza. They did not view it that way.

- ✚ Onesimus is, by the common consent of the time (slave and free) a man who is of awful character. Their view would have been that he was a traitor to his master (who was responsible for his food, clothing and housing); a thief who had stolen from his benefactor.
- ✚ How serious the crime was can be seen from the punishment that would be inflicted upon a runaway slave who was returned to his master:
 - ✚ He would most certainly have been branded on the forehead with a mark that would tell all who saw him, for the rest of his life, that this man was a runaway, a thief and a traitor. Other slaves would despise him. (Remember Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter*?)
 - ✚ In almost all instances he would have been immediately castrated - to prevent him from having children of like rebellious attitude.
 - ✚ It is also likely that he would have been forced to fight a wild animal - a bear or lion, perhaps - to prove that he was still worthy to live.

²⁵ Acts 17:11

All this would have been seen as justice - by slave and free alike. This would have been emphasized by the character of Philemon; to run away and steal from such a noble man would have been a despicable act.

The reaction of Paul

All that evil surrounding the character of Onesimus and the nobility of Philemon might have weighed heavily upon most men. Paul saw Onesimus and Philemon in the light of the Gospel of Christ:

- ✚ The fact that Onesimus was by common consent a criminal scumbag mattered not at all to Paul (who had persecuted the church). Social status should be no barrier to the faith.
- ✚ Your current economic or social status is irrelevant to the faith. Paul in his other writings tells slaves to be content where they are and serve their masters wholeheartedly. The issue is not one of slavery; the issue is one of what you will do for Christ with what you have.
- ✚ There is another point in here: no human being is so low or evil that he or she is insignificant to God. Christ died for all.

Great Themes

This is a drama, and a dramatic work must have its themes. This one has three:

- ✚ Courtesy
- ✚ Christian love
- ✚ The Power of Conversion.

Courtesy

By any standard of the time, Paul had the right to command Philemon in this matter. He is, after all, the man who has brought Philemon to know Jesus Christ, the greatest gift that can be given. Philemon is under deep obligation to Paul. But Paul's appeal is not based upon that obligation. He does not command; he asks. Does he ask on the basis of this obligation? No; he raises three points for his request:

- ✚ Christian love between brothers
- ✚ Paul's age
- ✚ Paul's imprisonment.

You see the point? Instead of Philemon's obligation, Paul bases his appeal upon the love of Christ and *Paul's own needs*.

Remember too that Onesimus has become a different person after his conversion- and become very valuable to Paul. The temptation is to hang on to the man. Paul could, after all, have just sent the letter - but he didn't. He parted with someone he loved and needed so that his friend would not feel in any way forced to oblige him. He wanted his "whole-hearted" cooperation; thus he gave Philemon every chance to say no. He sent Onesimus back with the letter.

Even in the letter we see the tact of Paul. In verse 10, in the Greek, the word "Onesimus" is at the end of the sentence. Paul is writing in a very tactful style in the original, which does not come over very well into the English. But in the original the subject is brought up very gracefully and tactfully.

Christian Love

Christian love is, by definition, the love that Christ showed for us (at the Cross) as we exemplify it in our lives. Look at how Paul models that love for us:

- ✦ He asks Philemon to receive Onesimus back - not as slave, but as brother. Philemon has every right to be extremely angry and judgmental. Paul says, take him back as a brother.
- ✦ Does Onesimus owe Philemon anything? Certainly. He stole from him before he ran away. Can Onesimus pay? Probably not. So Paul says "Charge it to me." Just like Christ took upon himself the penalty for our sins, Paul models that behavior here and puts the debts of Onesimus on his own credit card. It is a very pragmatic display of Christian love.
- ✦ It is a particular display of what Paul has elsewhere commanded of the rich: to be generous. It is not for the poor to presume upon the generosity of the Christian rich; it is for the minister of God to admonish the rich to be generous, as God was generous and merciful to us at the Cross.

The Power of Conversion

The Gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives - radically. There is great evidence for this in the letter:

- ✦ First, Onesimus went back. My own reaction is that I'd take the letter and head for parts unknown rather than trust to Christian love. But Onesimus had met the Master, and now he understood. Whatever fate awaited him, he must do what is right - in obedience to his Lord. Stand still, Onesimus, and see the power of God.
- ✦ From the practical Roman's point of view, the power of conversion was greatly displayed. Onesimus - remember the meaning of his name? - is now indeed "profitable." God has taken an evil thing and turned it into good, by the power of the Cross.
- ✦ Consider too Paul's confidence in Philemon! Would you send a man back to branding and castration? But Paul knows this man, and knows that he is strong in the faith of Jesus Christ. He has seen this power of the Gospel at work in him, and he is confident of a good reply.

We see at work here the power of the reconciliation of God. Jesus Christ reconciled us to God at the Cross, at his own expense. Paul has reconciled Onesimus to Philemon, at his own expense - losing a dearly beloved helper and comfort while he is in chains. Reconciliation is always costly - to the reconciler. The challenge to us is this: are we willing to pay the price to reconcile others - to God and to each other?