The Pastoral Letters Revisited
Behavior and Belief

A Thematic Study

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About the Author

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It was December 1967 at InterVarsity’s Urbana Conference. The late, great expositor, John R. W. Stott, was speaking from Paul’s second letter to young Timothy. He invited the several thousand students in the auditorium on the campus of the University of Illinois to open their Bibles to 2 Timothy. His four lectures on 2 Timothy were met with hushed reverence as he unpacked the theology and implications of this letter to us as young college students.

At the end of the series, as Stott finished with 2 Timothy 4, I recall him leaving the platform and the audience sitting quietly and still as we took in the palpable presence of God in the room, something that A.W. Tozer would have called the “manifest presence of God.” A full fifteen minutes passed before anyone moved or walked away from the room. Thus was I introduced to the Pastoral Epistles.

The three New Testament letters, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, are what we call the Pastoral Epistles. Timothy and Titus were young, energetic, trustworthy and effective as Christian workers and leaders. They were both called to difficult and challenging situations. Timothy was more shy than Titus, but both needed encouragement and instruction as how to handle false teachers and difficult questions of pastoral conduct and leadership.

I have taught from each of these letters extensively and carefully over the years. Mostly, I have learned from them that theology and life go together. You cannot have one without the other, as some have attempted. In Christian life and ministry, the task is not merely to teach sound doctrine but to encourage a high level of moral and social conduct.
by those who claim to follow Jesus Christ.

This book is not an exhaustive commentary or study on the Pastoral Epistles. It is rather a close look at some of the major themes of these letters. Understanding, for instance, the five “faithful sayings” recorded in these letters helps us understand godly leadership and life. Knowing how to deal with false and disruptive teachers and leaders helps us order our priorities God’s way. Learning the qualities of Christian leadership protects the Church and world from those who would blindly lead us astray. Finally, learning how to finish well sets our life on a course pleasing to God and helpful to others who follow.

Carl Shank
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Notes
1. Begun in 1946 in Toronto, Canada, Urbana is InterVarsity’s Student Missions Conference, co-hosted by InterVarsity/US, Inter-Varsity Christian Fellowship of Canada and Groupes Bibliques Universitaires et Collégiens du Canada. Since then, over 300,000 students, pastors and missionaries have been trained, encouraged and sent out into all the world with the transforming gospel of Jesus Christ. “Through Urbana, movements have been born, lives saved, and unreached peoples touched by Christ’s hands and feet. To God be the glory!” (https://urbana.org/about-urbana)

2. I am assuming Paul’s authorship of the Pastoral Epistles. For an overview of possible problems with Pauline authorship, see Donald Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles (Tyndale New Testament Commentaries)*, IVP Academic, 2009. As William Mounce says in *Word Biblical Commentary*, “The issue of authorship deals more with one’s methodology than with the text itself. There are differences between the PE and the rest of Paul’s writings, just as there are differences among the other Pauline writings. The questions are, how different are they and what is the significance of those differences? The Amanuensis Hypothesis best explains the internal and external evidence. It accounts for the differences between the PE and the other Pauline letters and does not introduce its own set of problems. The Fiction and Fragment Hypotheses dismiss the external evidence for authenticity and misrepresent the text in a way that creates an unnecessary division between Paul and the PE, offering a theory of composition that is implausible to me. They do not answer some of the most basic questions, such as why the pseudopigrapher wrote three letters, or why there is so little of the second century (Ignatius, Gnosticism, etc.) reflected in the corpus, or on what basis these hypotheses can pronounce judgment on what Paul could and could not have said.” (William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles, Volume 46 (Word Biblical Commentary)*, Zondervan, 2016)
Believe In Yourself!

Biblical Self-Confidence

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.”

“For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined.”

(2 Timothy 1:5–7; Titus 1:7, 8 ESV)

A five-year old boy was intently working with his crayons at the kitchen table, when his mother walked in and asked him what he was doing. “I’m drawing a picture of God!” her son replied. “But honey,” she responded, “no one knows what God looks like.” With great confidence the boy boldly stated, “They will when I’m done!”

Believe in yourself! No phrase has such popular and widespread appeal as this one. Heralded in national magazines and TV talk shows, repeated in hundreds of books and articles, and even sounded from church pulpits in this land especially, this little three-word phrase has become the touchstone for getting ahead in this world—and even the next!

Can a Christian properly say, “Believe in yourself?!” Does the Bible have anything good to say about self-confidence? Many Christians and churches have severe problems with self-confidence. We have been taught, from little up, that humility, servanthood, self-denial and selflessness are the keys to a Christlike life — “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:3–5)
I was a seminary student. It was my senior year. My family and I were attending a Baptist church south of Philadelphia. The senior pastor gave those of us who were seminarians a “special” opportunity to preach to the congregation once during our last year in seminary. The topic chosen for me was the “love of Christ” from 1 Corinthians 13. God anointed the message in a special way. People were moved; ladies wept, and men prayed. It was glorious! The very first thing the pastor said to me, attempting to help me, no doubt, was, “Now, Carl, that was a fine sermon. But remember that pride goes before a fall.” There was one young seminarian shattered. To this very day, I struggle with sermons that people respond to in good and life changing ways because of comments like that.

We find it too hard to complement someone in church. We find it so hard to build self-esteem because we believe, either through teaching or background, that to do so is to foster and promote pride, rebellion and sinful behaviors, to take glory away from God himself. The result has been hundreds and even thousands of Christian people living in fear, guilt and never using their God-given talents and spiritual gifts for fear that doing so will be interpreted as proud and sinful behavior.

Paul sees it differently in his words to young Timothy — “For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:6, 7)

Biblical self-confidence is not the same thing as pride. We cannot somehow “earn” points with God or work our way to heaven by doing good or even great things. Salvation is “not of works, lest any man should boast” — “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9) Pride is confidence in oneself apart from God and his grace. Biblical self-confidence springs from God and his grace. Pride is earthly, dependent on natural talents alone and unspiritual. Self-confidence is spiritual, heavenly minded, and assurance I am all that God wants me to be. Pride refuses dependence on God and subjection to Jesus Christ as Lord of my life. Biblical self-confidence finds its strength and power from dependence on God and subjection to the lordship...
of Jesus Christ over my life. Pride says, “I did it — my way, by my own strength and cunning and skill.” Christlike confidence says, “I did it — God’s way, by his enabling.”

The problem is not so much in the phrase, “Believe in yourself!” as in who says it and what lies behind it. If the modern secularist says it, he or she is telling you that you can do anything apart from any divine help or power. If the Bible says, as it does in Hebrews 10:35 — “Do not throw away your confidence which has great reward” — God is telling us that through Him we can persevere to the end, that we can fulfill his mandate of the Great Commission, that we can glorify him by living in his power, love and self-control.

You must have confidence to be a healthy Christ-follower. This is what Paul is telling young Timothy. Confidence is contentment with self, knowing you have all you need for present and future circumstances. Timothy was “timid,” fearful, temperamentally shy, and who shrank from difficult tasks, even though he had been with Paul for over fifteen years (cf. 2 Timothy 1:4). He was, as Patrick Fairbairn says, “disposed to lean, rather than to lead.” He was unlike Titus, who was skillful in dealing with difficult situations, possessing the rare combination of firmness and tact. But Timothy was a genuine Christian man. He had special and distinctive gifting bestowed by God and acknowledged by Paul and the apostles.

He had something else, however. He had the living, powerful, active, Christlike Spirit of God residing in his very person. Paul was saying, “Timothy, you do not have to apologize for the gospel. You have a powerful Spirit who enables you to proclaim with effectiveness the Good News of Jesus. You do not have to worry about over-asserting yourself because you have the controlling Spirit of love who will make you think of others first. You do not have to give in to the sexually laced success desires of your age. You possess the Holy Spirit of self-control, purifying you daily.” And Paul says the same things to every Christian living in the power and self-control of the Spirit today.

Paul uses the word “confidence” in three distinct but related ways. Six times Paul refers to confidence in his relationship with Christ, six times to his confidence in himself, and six times his confidence in
relationships with other people. There must be a balance in all three areas of life. Without confidence in Christ, we become egocentric and cocky. Without confidence in ourselves, we are defeated and powerless. Without confidence in others, we become suspicious and untrusting.

Growing in biblical self-confidence requires four actions. First, repent of your natural pride and trust in yourself. Apart from God and his grace, such pride really does go before a fall. Second, establish your worth according to God’s value system. Everyone has infinite value to God. Everyone is worth making sacrifices for. Everyone can make decisions that can change their lives and the lives of others around them. That’s right—everyone, from the prostitute that was dragged before Jesus in John 8, to the self-righteous, outwardly respectable Jew named Saul of Tarsus, who became, by God’s grace, the Paul who wrote this letter to Timothy.

Then, believe that God expects you to affect this world for good. Tony Campolo has said, “unless we believe we can affect the world, we are bound to become its victims. In the end it is undoubtedly the belief that our actions and decisions matter and can change things that give our lives meaning and purpose. Armed with that belief, people can face the most overwhelming situation with hope, knowing that, win or lose, they have the potential to act instead of simply being acted upon. Without it, even people in the midst of great blessings cannot feel secure because they are always at the mercy of the people and circumstances that surround them.”

Finally, fan into flame God’s Spirit within yourself. In speaking of the Spirit of Pentecostal blessings, the Bible says, “May he be like rain that falls on the mown grass, like showers that water the earth!” (Psalm 72:6) Ask today God the Holy Spirit to anoint you, to inflame you, to fill and overwhelm you. As one Puritan writer has said, “Christian, set out afresh for God and heaven, as though you had never started in the way before. Commence at the beginning; go as a sinner to Jesus; seek the quickening, healing, sanctifying influence of the Spirit; and let this be your prayer, presented and urged until answered, ‘O Lord, revive thy work! Quicken me, O Lord! Restore to me the joy of thy salvation!’”

Today is the beginning of the rest of your life!
Self Reflection & Discussion
1. Do you have a problem in saying, “Believe in yourself!” Why?
2. Are you more like Timothy, shy, retiring, overly sensitive, or more like Titus, firm and tactful?
3. How can you improve your biblical self-confidence?

Notes
Facing False Teaching
Dealing With Threats To Truth

“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.”

“For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party. They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach. One of the Cretans, a prophet of their own, said, ‘Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.’ This testimony is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith, not devoting themselves to Jewish myths and the commands of people who turn away from the truth.”

(1 Timothy 1:3–7; Titus 1:10–14 ESV)

Timothy is in Ephesus and Titus is in Crete. They are both facing false teaching and threats of heresy infiltrating the church through self-proclaimed teachers.

Heresy is a strong and blunt word, not often used in our sensitized tolerant society or churches. But it is a right word, and a necessary word to describe what was going on even in the days of the apostles in the early churches. The Ephesian heresy speculated about the Mosaic Law and Hebrew history (1 Timothy 1:1–4). These teachers engaged in “unholy chatter” (1 Tim. 6:20), endless, foolish and useless talk (1 Tim. 1:4; 6:2; 2 Tim. 2:14), senseless babble and empty words (1 Tim. 1:6; 6:4) and speculations (1 Tim. 6:4; 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:9). They saw matter as impure and promoted a form of asceticism (cf. 1 Tim. 4:3; Tit. 1:15;
1 Corinthians 7:1–7). They associated themselves with magic practices (1 Tim. 5:13; 2 Tim. 3:8). They taught Jewish exclusiveness, and denied the physical resurrection of Christ and the coming, literal resurrection of believers (1 Tim. 1:4; 2 Tim. 2:18; 1 Cor. 15:12). They were ignorant of true godliness, immoral in conduct, and consequently, irrelevant to the life and witness of the Church.

Ninety-nine miles south of Greece on the island of Crete were alarming numbers of false teachers (Titus 1:10). They were characterized as insubordinate to the gospel, senseless babblers, deceivers, “disturbing whole households,” profiteers, corrupt in their morals, hypocrites, people possessing a thoroughly evil nature (Tit. 1:9, 10, 11, 15, 16). They had adopted the customs of many of the irreligious Cretans, who were known as persistent liars, having terrible moral values, and who Epimenes, one of their own philosophers, described as untruthful, selfish and pleasure seekers. The key to their false teaching was a dichotomy between what a person believes and how a person behaves — “They profess to know God, but they deny him by their works. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work.” (Titus 1:16)

**Confronting false teachers**

Timothy and Titus had the unenviable task of confronting these false teachers and their destructive heresies. In our tolerant society such evil and heretical teaching and living is overlooked or ignored, even by solid Christian people and leaders. We have adopted a secular attitude of “live and let live,” and have reaped the whirlwind of sexual looseness, cults, and a desolation of the only way to God, and that is through the Lord Jesus Christ. Even in our own church circles, we meet people who do not practice what they teach and preach, and who offer variant views of the Bible and its dictates. How were Timothy and Titus to respond to such false teachers and their false opinions?

They were to forcefully and visibly confront such false teachers and their practices — “They must be silenced, since they are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach,” (Titus 1:11), and “rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the
faith.” (1:13) Timothy was to “have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths,” (1 Tim. 4:7) and to “command and teach” godly living according to the Scriptures (1 Tim. 4:11ff).

One of my early mentors in the faith gave me an instance of such confrontation. One Sunday morning, two Jehovah Witnesses came into the lobby of his church and were engaging in conversation with some of his people. Once he was informed of who they were and what they were doing, he ordered them out of the building, threatening them never to return again. Titus was to “muzzle” the false teachers of his day, sharply rebuking them in no uncertain terms (Tit. 1:11, 13). Timothy was to confront their untruth with gospel, Christ-centered truth for living. Tolerating such false doctrines and lifestyles in their midst was not an option for these men of God. Even Paul dealt decisively with two false teachers he had run up against — “among whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.” (1 Tim. 1:20) Allowing such heretical teaching in our churches is giving Satan a “foothold” (Ephesians 4:27), an “entrypoint” where he can continually stir up dissension and ungodliness. Biblical and godly confrontation are the first keys in dealing with false teachers and their doctrines and lifestyles.

How exactly are we to confront such evil teaching and behavior? Titus 3:10, 11 and Matthew 18:15–18 give explicit instructions — “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned,” and, “If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector. Truly, I say to you, whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven.”

We are to shun divisive people, using a God-given procedure or method
(Tit. 3:9–11). That procedure involves avoiding certain discussions and topics which are harmful or useless (cf. Acts 14:15; 1 Cor. 3:20; James 1:26; 1 Peter 1:18). Two warnings precede shunning. Shunning means lack of contact (cf. Rom. 16:17; 1 Cor. 5:11). This may not be full-orbed church discipline, which may come later. God’s judgment is the self-condemnation of the person who steadfastly chooses not to repent (cf. Psalm 5:10; 6:10; 7:14–16).

Confrontation is first of all personal and private. False teachers are to be vetted by the truth of Scripture. If you are an appointed leader, teacher or supervisor of a church or Christian ministry or group, you are to personally warn such a person about his or her false teaching. They are to stop such teaching. If this personal confrontation does not produce the desired results, you are to take a few other trusted brothers or sisters with you and confront that person. If they still persist in their false ways, they are to be disciplined by the entire church, counted as “self-condemned” by God. The goal is always restoration, but it is also protection of the people of God and upholding the truth of God.

It is unfortunate and can be disastrous to a church or fellowship who does not exercise such caution and confrontation. Part of the modern problem we have in church life is the uneven distribution of biblical discipline, and the lack of agreement and cooperation of true churches in a region over the practice of such discipline. We need to work together much more cooperatively and biblically for the message of Timothy and Titus to take root in our society.

**Reclaiming the truth of God’s Word**

The second means of dealing with false teachers and their influence is to reclaim the biblical meaning of the Law of God and the gospel of God. In 1 Timothy 1:8–11, Paul outlines for Timothy that the Law of God, that is the Old Testament Law of Moses (note the article “the” law), is good — “What then shall we say? That the law is sin? By no means! Yet if it had not been for the law, I would not have known sin. For I would not have known what it is to covet if the law had not said, ‘You shall not covet.’ So the law is holy, and the commandment is holy and righteous and good. For we
know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good.” (Romans 7:7, 12, 14, 16; cf. 2 Timothy 3:15–17)

The law reflects the will of a good God and is beneficial to people made in the image of God. The law is good in terms of behavior or proper conduct. Thus, we are to fight the “good” fight (1 Tim. 6:12), be a “good” soldier (2 Tim. 2:3), and select leaders who manage their families “well.” (1 Tim. 3:4, 12) We must consequently use the law of God lawfully. What does this mean? It means using God’s law within its specified functions and limits, as it was intended by God to be used. The law of God reveals sin and condemns those who oppose it, either through ignorance (“lawbreakers”) or active lifestyle (“rebels”) (cf. Romans 3:19, 20; 5:13; 7:7–12; Galatians 3:19). In verse 10, Paul lists specific examples of those generally described in verse 9, referring back to the Law of Moses in Exodus 20 — “ungodly and sinful” / “unholy and irreligious”, breakers of the first four commandments in Exodus 20; “kill fathers or mothers,” breakers of the fifth commandment (Ex. 20:12); “murderers,” breakers of the sixth commandment (Ex. 20:13); “fornicators and homosexuals,” breakers of the seventh commandment (Ex. 20:14); “kidnappers” or “slave traders,” breakers of the eighth commandment (Ex. 20:15); and “liars and perjurers,” breakers of the ninth commandment (Ex. 20:16).

The law is not the guide for the “righteous” because being justified by faith in Christ through the gospel, they have the law written “in their hearts” (Hebrews 8:10). They possess the “mind of Christ” (1 Cor. 2:16). They are not under the law of God for their salvation (Rom. 6:14f).

This does not mean Christians can dispense with God’s Law or ignore it. Sound doctrine or teaching produces healthy and holy living. Paul is no antinominian here. The errors of these heretics produced spiritual sickness creating unhealthy lifestyles. The commandments of God are summed up in the command to love God and our neighbors — “For the commandments, ‘You shall not commit adultery, You shall not murder, You shall not steal, You shall not covet,’ and any other commandment, are summed up in this word: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.”
Healthy teaching conforms to the gospel of God, which Paul will more fully note in 1 Timothy 1:12–17 and in his “faithful sayings” in the Pastoral Epistles. The next chapter will elaborate on them more fully. This gospel tells of the glory of God, of which Paul is a grateful steward and herald. The gospel proclaims the grace of God and the love and faith that comes through Jesus Christ — “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.” (1 Tim. 1:15)

**Guarding the gospel** (2 Timothy 1:7–14)

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you.” (2 Timothy 1:13, 14) “O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge.’” (1 Tim. 6:20) False teachers and their influence are to be thwarted and halted by faithfully guarding, protecting and proclaiming the glorious gospel of Jesus Christ. The gospel is the “power of God for salvation” (Rom. 1:16) because in and through that declaration, Jesus Christ, the power and wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:24), is set forth in all his glory.

The gospel heralds a Savior — “Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior.” (Titus 1:4) The apostle Paul is both teacher and herald, or preacher, of this glorious gospel (2 Tim. 1:11). Timothy, and by extension those of us who preach and teach God’s truth, are to keep firm and protect this grand “deposit” of truth and salvation. God is concerned not only with *how* we believe, but also with *what* we believe. We must communicate it, suffer bravely for it, and hold it fast against all comers.

We need the gospel of God for at least four reasons — (1) We deserve to die as the penalty of sin; (2) we deserve to bear God’s wrath against sin; (3) we are separated from God by our sins; and, (4) we are in bondage to sin and to the kingdom of Satan. Paul gives a summary statement of life before salvation in Titus 3:3 — “For we ourselves were once foolish,
disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” “We too” means that every Christian must personally own the fact of his or her separation from Christ at one time and the need for salvation.

We were “foolish,” morally obtuse, having the inability to see and believe in Jesus (Rom. 1:14). We were “disobedient,” following a system of unbelief resulting in disobedience to God (John 3:16; 1 Peter 4:7). We were also “deceived,” like sheep going astray, misled, tricked and beguiled by Satan himself (2 Tim. 3:13; 1 Peter 2:24; Revelation 12:9). We were “enslaved” — “I am speaking in human terms, because of your natural limitations. For just as you once presented your members as slaves to impurity and to lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves to righteousness leading to sanctification. For when you were slaves of sin, you were free in regard to righteousness.” (Rom. 6:19, 20) And we were “hateful,” offensive, disgusting, repulsive, living in envy and hatred of others.

These needs are fully met by Christ’s death and resurrection. He is our sacrifice. To pay the penalty of death that we deserved, Christ died as a sacrifice for us. “He has appeared once for all at the end of the age to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.” (Hebrews 9:26)

He is our propitiation. To remove us from the wrath (just anger) of God that we deserved, Christ died as a sin offering for our sins. “In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.” (1 John 4:10)

He is our reconciliation. To overcome our separation from God, we needed someone to bring us back into fellowship with God. God “through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, in Christ, God was reconciling the world to himself.” (2 Cor. 5:18, 19) He is our redemption. To “buy us” out of our bondage to sin and Satan, we needed someone to provide redemption, to pay the price for our spiritual release — “For the Son of Man also came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:45)

Called the penal substitutionary view of the atonement, this is the gospel that Paul delineates and would have Timothy and Titus and us to
guard against all the false theories and heresies that pop up from time to time.³

**Wedding behavior with belief**

The most effective defense of the gospel and its truths against false teachers is that our belief must inform our behavior. “What is true of all doctrine of the New Testament is that theology is unfailingly wedded to practice. Theology and life go together. Christian doctrine which is presented to the mind and will, and is received by faith, is proved by experience.”⁴ Note Paul’s choice of words in Titus 2:1 – “But as for you . . .” (not in the NIV translation). Titus is to behave radically differently than the false teachers around him (cf. 1:10–16). What he “speaks” must be “proper” to sound doctrine, or teaching. That is, doctrine and life must harmonize.

He gives instructions to five groups of people in the church at Crete — older men, older women, younger men, young women and slaves. Several qualities are the same for all these groups. They are to be “self-controlled” (vv. 2, 5, 6), practicing mature judgment with proper restraint. They are to be “healthy,” with “healthy” teaching (2:1), “healthy in the faith” (v. 2), and keeping the healthy word above reproach (v. 8). All of this so that three things are true and visible — The word of God is not maligned (v. 5); opponents are ashamed (v. 8); and, teaching about the Savior is attractive (v. 10).

Older men (2:2) are to be temperate, or “sober,” moderate in tastes and habits (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 11). They are to be serious, respectable, “that which lifts the mind from the cheap and tawdry to the noble, good, and of moral worth.” They are to exercise self-control, practice mature judgment, and have sensible, proper restraint (Tit. 1:8; 1 Tim. 3:2). They are to be healthy and sound in faith, love and endurance (1 Tim. 1:10; Tit. 2:1), in personal trust, love and endurance in Christ. They are to be “health-imparting,” spreading moral and spiritual health in every direction.

Older women (2:3,4) are to be reverent, practicing behavior appropriate to the Temple, godly and servants of God. They must not practice slander, which always refers to Satanic behavior in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 3:6, 7; 2 Tim. 2:26). They are not to engage in heavy
drinking, against the common Cretan tendency for alcoholism. Rather, they are to be teachers of good, God-honoring habits, and trainers of younger women in godly living at home.

Younger men are to be “self-controlled,” a fruit of the Spirit exercised by those who are free in Christ — “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.” (Galatians 5:22, 23) Rather than engaging in passionate desires and wanton lustful feelings and acts, they are to practice restraint by “crucifying” such passions to the law of Christ — “And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.” (Gal. 5:24) And then Paul zeros in on young Titus. He is to model “good works,” proving to be an example of not merely godly teaching but also godly living. He is to “show integrity, dignity, and sound speech that cannot be condemned” (Tit. 2:7, 8) so that these false teachers cannot cite blameworthy behavior — “so that an opponent may be put to shame, having nothing evil to say about us.” (2:8) During World War II, the saying was, “loose lips sink ships,” citing the need for careful and measured speech in a world full of spies and enemies. The admonition here is that loose living and talking robs the gospel of its glory, beauty and power, and gives its enemies fodder to use against God.

Younger women are to “love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.” (Tit. 2:4, 5) This is obviously written to women who are domestics, living and working at home and not out in society in general. Again, note the admonition to be “self-controlled” and “pure.” Timothy is reminded by Paul of those silly women who are “captured” or captivated by “those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” (2 Tim. 3:6, 7). One preacher has applied this to the afternoon soap opera women viewers who spend their times and days watching and maybe covertly desiring the sleazy relationships shown in the soaps. Paul follows the rigors of the order of relationships between men and women outlined in creation and Ephesians 5. Women teachers
and leaders in the church will be considered later in chapter four, “Roles and Behaviors.”

Timothy expands on this listing by speaking of widows — “Honor widows who are truly widows.” (1 Tim. 5:3–16) “At a time when there was no welfare state the alleviation of poverty was a real problem and Paul recognized that the Christians had a responsibility in this. But if a widow had a family to support her it would clearly have been wrong for the church to intervene. Indeed, family support is pleasing to God. Social responsibility is seen as a religious requirement. The teaching here is in line with the fifth commandment, requiring the honouring of parents.”5 Of course, those widows living a spiritually dead life (“dead even while she lives”) (1 Tim. 5:6) are not in mind here. Those younger widows who have “abandoned the faith” are to marry and act responsibly — “Besides that, they learn to be idlers, going about from house to house, and not only idlers, but also gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not. So I would have younger widows [less than sixty years of age – v. 9] marry, bear children, manage their households, and give the adversary no occasion for slander.” (1 Tim. 5:13, 14) Current women’s movements generally despise Paul and these kinds of restrictions and advice.

What about slaves? — “Bondservants are to be submissive to their own masters in everything; they are to be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith, so that in everything they may adorn the doctrine of God our Savior.” (Titus 2:9, 10; 1 Tim. 6:1, 2) The obvious question that comes up in these contexts is, Why doesn’t Paul just outrightly denounce and condemn slavery? There are actually several reasons for such neglect.

First, to denounce slavery might mean promotion of a slave revolt, while saying nothing would mean supporting the status quo. It would also mean or indicate that it would be permissible for Christian slaves to disobey their masters. This was evidently one of the problems in the Ephesian church (Eph. 6:5–9). Slavery in Paul’s day was not limited to racial inequality, but people became slaves due to being prisoners of war, condemned criminals, debtors, kidnapping, or those sold into slavery by their parents. Slavery was a complicated social ill of the times and not
easily resolved socially or politically, let alone theologically and practically. Moreover, Paul’s main concern in these letters is the cause of the gospel — “... so that the name of God and the teaching may not be reviled.” (1 Tim. 6:1b)

While all people under Christ are free in Christ — “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28) — one’s freedom in Christ cannot be used as a cloak for treating, in this case, one’s masters disrespectfully. Freedom in Christ does not permit disregarding one’s station in life, disobedience to lawful orders, or treating non-Christian authorities with disdain (cf. Mark 10:43–45; 1 Cor. 9:19; Gal. 5:13; Eph. 6:5–9; Col. 3:22–25). A more powerful and penetrating way to change and challenge inequality is to work from the grace of God from within outward. As Christian slaves gave their masters obedience and respect, and Christian masters gave fairness and kindness to their slaves, the institution could be changed from inside out. Paul’s lesson here is that exceptional privilege requires exceptional service. The application today would be how Christians are to treat unfair and overly demanding bosses, employers or institutions.

Christians inhabit the real world. They are not a distinct and separate group of people freed from the common and normal obligations of society and culture. Christians, therefore, need to be reminded of their social duties because of skepticism and cynicism (cf. the reference in Tit. 1:12, 13). Titus instructs us in 3:1, 2 to do several things in the political realm — “Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.” They are to submit (“to be subject”) to the orders of someone in authority, not mere compliance but true, heart-felt obedience (See the usage of the term in Luke 2:51; Eph. 5:22). We are to submit in our attitudes because real obedience is birthed in the heart and conscience. Such submission is voluntary, Christ-centered (“for the Lord’s sake”), and involves material support (cf. Rom. 13:6, 7).

What is important here is that Scripture, not conscience, is the rule
and standard. Obedience is not blind obedience. Direct violation of God’s laws by the state demand non-violent disobedience by Christians (cf. Exodus 1:22–2:4). Resistance is an exception to this rule (cf. Daniel), not a mandate by which to live.

Christians need to be ready to do “good” to civil servants. An example would be to hold civil servants in “high esteem” — “First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior.” (1 Tim. 2:1–3) We are to honor them for their office. This also limits Christian involvement and obedience since “doing good” also means opposing evil and wrong. The rationale for these exhortations is that God has ordained and proposed civil government (Rom. 13:1, 2; 1 Peter 2:13). Civil authorities are servants of God and ministers of God for the public good (Rom. 13:3, 4).

For all of our neighbors, we are to practice no slander, which really boils down to defiant irreverence, scornful or insolent language. We are to be peaceable neighbors, not contentious or quarrelsome — “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.” (Matthew 5:9) We are to be considerate, ready to yield personal advantage, eager to help when needed, and filled with the spirit of “sweet reasonableness.” The watchword of the Christian is humility, “all mildness to all people,” even to those who oppose Christianity and Christians. False teachers and corrupt teaching are finally overcome and replaced by Christian behavior that flows from the grace of God through the gospel of God.

Paul concludes the letter to Titus urging all people to be “devoted to good deeds, specifically urgent needs, lest they be fruitless.” (Tit. 3:14) Christianity must be practical and useful to be real. The theme of this letter is repeated again (cf. Tit. 1:16; 2:7; 3:8). The blessing of the grace of God concludes his remarks.

Self Reflection & Discussion
1. Have you ever had to deal with false teachers or false teaching? What
was it? How did you proceed?

2. Define the “gospel” as concisely and clearly as you can. Check out what you think with the description in this chapter.

3. Do you agree that the best way to defeat wrong thinking and behavior is by right thinking and behavior? Why or why not?


Notes
1. “Epimenides, (flourished 6th century BCE?), Cretan seer, reputed author of religious and poetical writings, including a Theogony, Cretica, and other mystical works. Religious theories of an Orphic character were attributed to him as well. He conducted purificatory rites at Athens about 500 BCE, according to Plato (about 600 according to Aristotle). Stories of his advanced age (157 or 299 years), his miraculous sleep of 57 years, his dealings with oracles, and his wanderings outside the body have led some scholars to regard him as a legendary figure of a shamanistic type. For his reputed claim—cited by St. Paul the Apostle (Titus 1:12)—that all Cretans are liars, Epimenides, a Cretan, is credited with invention of the paradox of the liar, in which a sentence says of itself that it is false, thus being true if it is false and false if it is true.” (https://www.britannica.com/biography/Epimenides)

2. The term “antinomianism” is derived from the Greek ἀντί (anti “against”) + νόμος (nomos “law”). “The term antinomianism was coined by Martin Luther during the Reformation to criticize extreme interpretations of the new Lutheran soteriology. In the 18th century, John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist tradition, severely attacked antinomianism. A general consensus has been historically reached as to which laws of the Old Testament Christians are still enjoined to keep. These moral laws, as opposed to civil or ceremonial laws, are [found in the ten commandments and their exposition from Exodus 20]. The classic Methodist commentator Adam Clarke held, “The Gospel proclaims liberty from the ceremonial law, but binds you still faster under the moral law. To be freed from the ceremonial law is the Gospel liberty; to pretend freedom from the moral law is Antinomianism.” (Adapted from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Antinomianism)

3. Other theories of the atonement include the moral influence theory, the example theory, and the governmental theory. The moral influence theory says Christ’s death was simply a way for God to show how much He loved us. In grateful response we love Him and are forgiven. This theory robs God of his glory and need of dealing with our guilt. It violates too many passages of Scripture to be correct. The example theory says that Christ’s death merely provided us with an example of how we should trust and obey God perfectly. This theory fails to account for the many Bible passages that focus on Christ’s death as a payment for sin. The governmental theory proposes that God as moral lawgiver of the universe paid a general penalty in Christ’s death for breaking His universal laws. It fails to deal with the Scriptures that speak of Christ bearing our own
sins on the cross and of Christ being the propitiation for our sins.


God Is Faithful

The Faithful Sayings

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.”

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.”

“For while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have 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.”

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.”

(1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 4:8, 9; 2 Timothy 2:11–13; Titus 3:4–8  ESV)

God is faithful. Faithfulness is the hallmark of our God. We can depend on God’s faithfulness, and we must act upon that faithfulness. God is faithful in his honesty with us, not only telling us good things, but giving us a close view of the sinfulness and misery of sin since the Fall. God is faithful in preserving his people through the ages — “God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.” (1 Corinthians 1:9) God is faithful in disciplining his people — “I know, O LORD, that your rules are righteous, and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.” (Psalm 119:75)
God is the everlasting, faithful God — “The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end; they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.” (Lamentations 3:22, 23)

The Pastoral Epistles, written in the latter stages of the Apostle Paul’s life against false teaching, highlight God’s faithfulness in what are called the “faithful sayings.” These are five significant statements of the Christian faith and life that help hold us against the tide of shallow thinking and aberrations from the truth of the gospel in any age. They remind us of what is really important, and what to hang on to, when everything else seems in a state of flux. They are also important to the world and society around us because they tell our world that God and his Word are faithful, lasting, secure, solid and can be trusted when very little can be trusted. Let’s consider these sayings and how they apply to us today.

**God is faithful to save** (1 Timothy 1:15)

“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost,” or in the original Greek, “faithful the saying and worthy of full acceptance.”

*God’s salvation is reliable.* The message that Jesus Christ came into this world to save sinners has two powerful characteristics.

First, it underscores the faithfulness of God to Christians everywhere and in every time. The term “faithful” comes from the Old Testament word for “amen” — “so be it, God!” Salvation points to the faithfulness of God as its anchor point. When God transforms a life, when God delivers a person from the sin and shame of the past, He stands faithful and ready to keep us in his love. Salvation is founded upon a rock more stable and lasting than Gibraltar.

The Good News of salvation can take it when times get tough. It has staying power. The phrase, “faithful is the saying,” points to the testimony of Christian experience. This truth has become an unshakeable conviction of the Christian community because it has withstood the test of time, the mockery of unbelief, the fire of experience, and the cruelty of individuals, nations and even the Devil himself.

30
My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus blood and righteousness;  
I dare not trust the world or fame,  
But wholly lean on Jesus Name.

His oath, his covenant, his blood  
Support me in the whelming flood;  
When all around my soul gives way  
He then is all my hope and stay.

On Christ, the solid rock I stand;  
All other ground is sinking sand,  
All other ground is sinking sand.”

_God’s salvation is astounding_. God delivers the very worst of sinners to show his mighty mercy and love — “though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief.” (1 Tim. 1:13) Paul himself was a blasphemer, who cursed the name and work of Jesus. He was a persecutor, standing with approval by the stoning of Stephen, the first Christian martyr (Acts 7). He was a violent man, that is, he took evil delight in seeing people suffer for their faith. His contempt and hatred of Christians was so intense he broke out in fits of rage and destruction against them — “But Saul was ravaging the church, and entering house after house, he dragged off men and women and committed them to prison.” (Acts 8:3)

What did God do with such a man? He loved him! The God of the universe reached down into his heart and transformed his very character. He delivered Saul, made him Paul the Apostle, and sent him as the messenger of grace to the Gentiles of the first century. Meditate upon the phrases here: “Christ Jesus” — the very Son of God, the Anointed Messiah of Old Testament prophecy, the One whose Name means salvation, “came into the world” — voluntarily chose to enter a sinful world, the Spotless, Holy Son of God sacrificing himself for the world in all of its misery, rebellion and deceit, “to save sinners” — to rescue them from
spiritual, emotional and mental bondage, people like you and me. People who have missed God’s mark of purity, people who are self-centered, self-consumed, self-deceived, rebellious and hell bound sinners, these people Jesus Christ saves.

*God’s salvation must become personal* — “of whom I am the worst.” Paul personally, really, truly experienced God’s love and mercy. He understood the hellishness and the depth of his own rebellion and pride against a loving Creator God. He personally came to know Jesus Christ, not as a curse word, but as his best Friend!

Major John André, convicted of treason during the Revolutionary War, penned the following in his cell before his execution:

Hail, Sovereign Love, which first began
The scheme to rescue fallen man!
Hail, matchless, free, eternal grace,
Which gave my soul a Hiding Place!

Against the God who built the sky
I fought with hands uplifted high —
Despite the mention of his grace —
Too proud to seek a Hiding Place.

Enrapt in thick Egyptian night
And fond of darkness more than light,
I madly ran the sinful race,
Secure, I thought, without God’s grace.

But the eternal counsel ran:
“Almighty Love, arrest that man!”

And John Newton, the converted slave trader, said it well:

Amazing grace! how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost, but now am found,
Was blind, but now I see.³

Whoever you are and whatever you need from God, there must come a point in time and space and history when you personally own Jesus Christ as your Savior, your Lord, your hope.

Such a faithful saying so moved Paul that he broke out in ecstatic praise in 1 Timothy 1:17 — “To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.” Surely, great is God’s faithfulness!

God is faithful in leadership choices (1 Timothy 3:1)

“The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.” The right choice of leaders for any church of Jesus Christ has been fraught with political gamemanship since the earliest of times. Leaders are chosen for many different reasons, but the dominating reason for healthy, Christian leadership must come from the God-ordained and God-given marks of oversight found in 1 Timothy 3.

While some commentators note that this statement fails to give expression to a paramount essential of the Christian faith, and that the Bible everywhere condemns prideful aspiration as sinful, many others point to the noble and grand task Christian ministry undertakes as worthy of a “faithful saying.” The “desiring” of a church leadership role signals and affirms God’s importance of such a role. Willingness to serve God in a ministry role usually means sacrifice, so that such willingness is commendable. There is a right kind of aspiration, and this faithful saying points to such.

Why is leadership in Christian ministry such a noble task and is worthy of aspiration? Overseers are called stewards of the mysteries of God — “This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found faithful.” (1 Corinthians 4:1, 2)⁴ They are “ambassadors for Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:20), and God’s appointed messengers to his churches (cf. Revelation 2:1). The calling of a minister of the gospel is a
high and holy calling, requiring the utmost faithfulness to God.

Such a view of the Christian ministry has been eroded over time by sexual scandals, overbearing pride, and unqualified men and women seeking the office and perks of that office. This has made many in our day and age skeptical and critical of the people and the process. Added to this is the stress on “every-member” ministry, that every Christian has spiritual gifts and talents which must be used in the body of Christ. This has robbed the ministry office of its leading importance in Christ’s Church.

I have spent many years working in such a consensus-driven ministry, and it has been hard to affirm this faithful saying in such a context. We want “good” people, it is said, but that is usually less important than the general health of the church body and its ministries. Or, the attitude has been that ministers come and go, so we will wait for the next one to see if he or she is better than the one we have! This attitude is disparaging of the Apostle’s consideration of the office of overseer.

Seeking such an office of oversight is a “good” work, a noble, excellent, eminent, useful and commendable work for God. We want to sow seed on “good” ground, Jesus tells us, in Matthew 13, ground that produces good fruit. Jesus is the “good” shepherd that appoints under-shepherds to work this good ground — “So I exhort the elders among you, as a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, as well as a partaker in the glory that is going to be revealed: shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly; not domineering over those in your charge, but being examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5:1–3)

The overseer or leader who rightly desires such an office reflects God’s faithfulness by demonstrating faithfulness to God in the public eye — “Therefore an overseer must be above reproach . . . Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:2, 7) This does not mean the overseer is sinless or perfect, but rather is not able to be publicly charged with wrongdoing.

He images God’s faithfulness by being faithful at home to his marriage
partner and children — “the husband of one wife . . . He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God’s church?” (1 Tim. 3:2, 4, 5) The Apostle Paul makes a similar point in the kinds of elders Titus is to choose for the churches — “This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you—if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. For an overseer, as God’s steward, must be above reproach.” (Titus 1:5–7)

Such an overseer demonstrates faithfulness over the long haul and for the long term — “He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil.” (1 Tim. 3:6). This applies to all church offices, including deacons — “And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.” (3:10) It is not age that matters as much as maturity and constancy in the faith.

I like the summary of faithful leadership that one major church leader has given. A God-appointed leader must pray for:

David’s optimism
Joseph’s integrity
Joshua’s decisiveness
Esther’s courage
Solomon’s wisdom
Peter’s initiative
Paul’s intensity

Such a leader fulfills the “faithful saying” of 1 Timothy 3.

**God is faithful in godliness training** (1 Timothy 4:7–10)

“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living
God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” While God stresses his personal faithfulness as God toward us, we are act upon these “faithful sayings.” We are to live them out in our daily walk with God.

This third “faithful saying” deals with two common problems that are often seen in the lifestyles of Christians of every age. The first is an “anti-godliness syndrome,” which is a condition where being a consistently devoted and godly Christian is not “in” or “cool” or needed. It is seen when in a business office setting or on the job a filthy joke is told, or when business practices cut corners, Christian get sweaty palms, dry mouths, and a gut feeling that something should be said. But in order to not stand out as an oddity, we say and do nothing.

The second condition is what I call the Christian “lethargy syndrome,” where an intense Christ-centered devotion is dismissed. Earnest, compassionate, full-throttle, all-out, absolute commitment Christianity is simply not done or needed. After all, I believe in Jesus and that should be enough. The Apostle Paul instructs young Timothy, prone to fall into these two syndromes, that godliness, real, earnest, committed godliness, is okay and expected for those who claim allegiance to Jesus Christ. “Godliness” is simply reverencing God aright. It is being God’s man or God’s woman in the midst of a darkened and lost society or generation. “Godliness with contentment is great gain,” says the Apostle in 1 Timothy 6:6.

Paul contrasts godliness with two natural substitutes, the substitute of health fanaticism (1 Tim. 4:8) and the substitute of false piety (4:1–7). Paul is not berating bodily exercise in these verses, nor recommending a passive, ascetic lifestyle. It has “some value,” he admits. However, in the overall perspective of eternity, jogging ten miles everyday will not forgo death. Your heart will still stop beating some day, no matter the physical regimen you set up. Paul, of course, is thinking of the Greek games, where “exercise” was “gymnasticize” where the best of Greek youths would devote their bodies to days and months and years of perfecting them for the olympic games. Hundreds of thousands of people, including Christians, are on health and diet regimens today, where running two miles per day is substituted for reading two verses from the Bible. Mormons and Seventh Day Adventists have been prone to this substitute.
In the context of this faithful saying, Paul deals with teachers who could be compared to Zen religionists or spiritists. Yoga, for instance, for the uninitiated is a form of Far Eastern religion. False piety is a religion of “don’t’s” — Don’t marry; don’t eat meat. It is a faith resting on “old wives tales” and “common, unholy talk” — “Stay clear of silly stories that get dressed up as religion.” (1 Tim. 4:7a The Message) “For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of his majesty.” (2 Peter 1:16) No Christian ever has to apologize or excuse himself or herself from practicing godliness.

Godliness gives real life — “... godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Tim. 4:8) Healthy, Christ-centered piety holds forth the promise of enjoyment of Christ and his benefits now, and the certainty of eternal life with Christ to come. The “good life” from Paul’s perspective is a life lived without fear or regret, a life daily blessed with a sense of fellowship with God through Christ. It is a life of freedom to experience the amazing love of God, living with the peace of God that transcends all of our understanding (Romans 5:5; Philippians 4:9). It is that tremendously positive, uplifting sense or perspective that “for me to live is Christ, and to die is gain!” (Phil. 1:21) It is not a life lived on what a Christian can’t do, but rather a life lived with the perspective of what I can do for my Lord this day!

Such godly living demands intensity. Godliness must be lived out daily. Notice the intensity of the verbs used in this faithful saying — “train” (gymnasticize), strive vigorously, shed off anything that might hold you back or encumber; “toil and strive,” terms that signify hard, manual labor, fighting all kinds of adversities. And so Paul will instruct Timothy to “fight the good fight of faith,” (1 Tim. 6:12), and to seal that exhortation with the example and model of his own life — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” (2 Tim. 4:7) The truth here is that it is in the doing of the Christian faith that joy, peace and fulfillment come. Labor for God is itself a reward and an honor.

It has been said that the “grace” which Christians talk so much about is merely “cheap grace.” Where is that intensity of commitment and lifestyle
that turned the world upside down in the first century? Where is that prayer life that brought major revivals of religion across England and America? Where are those Christians that will stand up for God when the going gets tough, and keep on keeping on? Who will be faithful for God in our day?

**God is faithful in our expectations of him** (2 Timothy 2:11–13)

“The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have 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.” Expectations are fragile things. We live much of our lives, however, based on certain expectations. If I drive my car over a board with a three inch nail sticking up, I expect a flat tire. Some expectations are, on the other hand, simply hopes or strong wishes or desires. If I am courteous to people around me, I might expect them to be courteous to me in return. If I vote for a particular President, I place a certain amount of expected trust in him for my safety and the welfare of those around me. However, these expectations are not guaranteed conclusions, are they?

People expect certain things from God and from following Jesus. We pin our hopes, even our lives, on these expectations. God never fails; God never changes; God never lies; God never deceives me; God always loves, always cares, always hears prayer, always forgives. I expect God to do what is positive, kind and loving, because, after all, He is God and He understands.

Paul deals with our expectations of God in this fourth “faithful saying.” He tells us what Christians can certainly expect from the Lord of heaven and earth. What is important to understand is that this aged Apostle is not writing out of an emotional high or that things are always looking well. He is in his second and final Roman imprisonment, bound in chains, treated as a criminal of the Roman empire under Nero. However, Paul is not depressed, not suicidal, not shriveled up by frustration and despair. He is not angry at Rome or his captors. He is indeed not angry with God for his particular sufferings and imprisonment.

He writes this faithful saying out of a sense of eternal reliability in Jesus Christ — “You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions
and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra— which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.” (2 Tim. 3:10, 11)

He writes in plain, understandable language in this fourth saying. There are two solemn challenges to our expectations here. The first is that there is no crown without a cross! These verses actually make up an early Christian hymn, with two major stanzas, v. 11b–12a and 12b–13. Notice the parallel structure. In the first two stanzas, Paul simply reminds Timothy and us of the great gospel truth that there are no gains for Christ without pains for Christ. This is what Jesus himself plainly taught — “And he said to all, ‘If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.” (Luke 9:23, 24) Paul reiterates this truth in Acts 14:22 — “strengthening the souls of the disciples, encouraging them to continue in the faith, and saying that through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.” He has said to young Timothy — “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” (2 Tim. 2:3), and “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (3:12)

Our problem with such passages is that they fail to meet our expectations. Paul is not writing these words as a crusty old man with negative, depressive thoughts about life and death. No, he is writing against people who “have a form of godliness” but deny the reality thereof (2 Tim. 3:5). These are people in our day who tell us that life in Christ is about wealth and power and success, that believers should be always happy, always rejoicing, always beaming. But that is not the norm God says in his infallible Word.

Even in our daily work routines, we know that God has so providentially ordered it that nothing that is worthwhile comes easily. We teach this truth to our children and those we love, hoping they will take it to heart. Yet, so often we do the same thing with God that our kids do with our well-intentioned, loving instruction. We ignore it, fight against it, toss it aside, hoping for something better from someone else.

The reference to “dying” in 2 Timothy 2:11 means to give yourself over to a life that involves pain, reproach and hardship for Christ’s sake.
It involves death to self and safety, as we take up our appointed crosses to follow Jesus daily — “always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies.” (2 Cor. 4:10) Paul talks about Christianity in metaphors of an obedient soldier, a disciplined athlete, a hard working farmer (cf. 2 Tim. 2:1–10). These descriptors are not very glamorous, and somewhat boring to an emotion-laden society, but they are solid, stable, true-hearted, old-fashioned commitment characteristics of one who is loyal, one who, when the going gets tough, does not give up and run away.

The second part of this ancient hymn, this faithful saying, tells us there is no assurance without perseverance. A superficial reading of these verses goes something like this: “If we commit terrible, horrible apostasy and denial, then and only then will Christ deny us. However, if we stumble and fall (since we are all imperfect and stumbling is normal and natural in the Christian life), then God will be ‘faithful’ to us, and keep us safe and secure for all eternity.” However, that is not what these verses are saying! The issue is not an interpretation issue, but an issue of reading these verses in context, with the parallelism that is clearly here. What God is really saying is this: “If we absolutely desert and disown him in this life, He will also disown us before the Father in heaven. If we prove unfaithful, uncommitted to him, because He is a faithful God, He will carry out his truth, which include holy threats as well as loving promises.”

“So everyone who acknowledges me before men, I also will acknowledge before my Father who is in heaven, but whoever denies me before men, I also will deny before my Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 10:32, 33) Because God cannot lie, “the LORD is the true God; he is the living God and the everlasting King. At his wrath the earth quakes, and the nations cannot endure his indignation.” (Jeremiah 10:10) God's love is a holy love. God's kindness is never weakness. God's patience is tempered by his justice, and there is a judgment time coming for all men, all nations, all the earth.

The point of Titus and much of the Pastoral Epistles is that behavior must follow belief, that godliness must be the result of claiming Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. The biblical truth is that God preserves those who persevere! The popular idea of what is called “eternal security” means that
God will care for us and eternally deliver us, no matter how badly we have acted or fallen away from him in this life. The popular idea of assurance is that once we say we believe, then God is somehow “obligated” to keep us in his love and care and eternal protection. This is just bad theology. God does pick us up when we stumble and fall, but he always expects us to grow in his grace and knowledge and repent when and where that is needed. Obedience does not merely follow or flow from faith. It is part of what faith and faithfulness is all about. This is why Paul talks about the “obedience of faith” to the Roman believers in Romans 1:5 — “through whom [Jesus Christ the Lord] we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations.” He then uses Abraham as a model and example of such faith/obedience.

I am reminded of the words of the resurrected Lord of Glory to the church in Thyatira in Revelation 2 — “Only hold fast what you have until I come. The one who conquers and who keeps my works until the end, to him I will give authority over the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron, as when earthen pots are broken in pieces, even as I myself have received authority from my Father. And I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.” (Rev. 2:25–29) To overcome for God is the normal way to live for God.

The promise of God in this ancient hymn is that those who persevere, who overcome, will one day rule and reign with Jesus. Johann Franck, 1618-1677, said it well —

Hence—with earthly treasure!
Thou art all my pleasure,
   Jesus, all my choice.
Hence—thou empty glory!
Naught to me thy story,
   Told with tempting voice.
Pain or loss or shame or cross
Shall not from my Savior move me,
Since he deigns to love me.
Hence—all fear and sadness!
For the Lord of gladness,
Jesus enters in.
Those who love the Father,
Though the storms may gather,
Still have peace within.
Yea, whate’er I here must bear,
Thou art still my purest pleasure,
Jesus, priceless treasure!

A faithful God has faithful children (Titus 3:1–8)

“But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.”

The rich theological terminology of this fifth “faithful saying” must not be lost on us. “Saved” means to rescue, to deliver us from our sinful “enslaved” condition — “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another.” (3:3) “Mercy” is the freely given, uncoerced pity of a sovereign God who condescended to our level in and through Jesus Christ. “Washing of rebirth,” elsewhere called the “new birth” is that spiritual cleansing symbolized in baptism (cf. John 3:3, 5–8; 1 Peter 1:23; 1 John 2:29; 3:9; Ephesians 4:24; Colossians 2:13).

“Renewal by the Holy Spirit” references a radical, internal spiritual change or transformation which reorients our feelings, our perspectives, our wills and our thoughts toward God (cf. Romans 12:1, 2). “Poured on us” is often used in the Bible as the gift of the Holy Spirit given to us, indicating its profusion and richness of blessing (cf. Proverbs 1:23; Isaiah 44:3). “Justified by his grace” means that we are declared righteous before God by God’s action, because of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for our sins,
and his righteousness given to us so that we can stand clean before a Holy God. “Grace” emphasizes this is the free act of God, not as a result of what we have done or can do — “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God’s righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins.” (Romans 3:23–25; cf. 2 Corinthians 5:21)

Important as these terms are, the central theme of Titus is that those so transformed by God must “spend their time doing good” — “Show yourself in all respects to be a model of good works, and in your teaching show integrity, dignity . . . who gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works. . . . Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work . . . The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.” (Titus 2:7, 14; 3:1, 8) The insistence on good deeds are a necessary part of Christian life and experience.

The issue that surfaces in speaking of “good deeds” is why should we do such good things? Does the doing of good deeds, for instance, reward a person with heaven? Does the absence of good deeds matter at all to a person’s salvation and standing before God? Does God somehow reward the good deeds we do as a motivation to do more of them?

“Good deeds” are genuinely Christian acts done for others. Three observations are in order here. First, good deeds are the result of God’s action in us, not a way to gain his favor or love. Notice how carefully Titus separates good deeds from our status of salvation — “he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit.” (Titus 3:5) Paul makes this point elsewhere — “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.” (Ephesians 2:8, 9)
God does not “balance off” the “bad” with the “good” done in our lives. We may not like what Titus 3:3 says — “For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another” — but in our most honest moments, without Jesus in our lives, we must admit these words describe who we really are.

These kinds of good deeds are impossible to accomplish all by ourselves — “To speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show perfect courtesy toward all people.” (Tit. 3:2) Have you ever gossiped about someone? When provoked, have you always refused to fight? Have you been gentle and conciliatory, willing to yield your legal rights when unjustly treated, all the time? Good deeds can never earn God’s favor or merit heaven, because they are never perfect, never complete, never without selfish motives and desires.

The second observation is that good deeds demonstrate or prove the reality of God’s work in us. They show that our belief, our faith, is genuine and lasting. Obedience is not just an “add on” to the Christian life. Discipleship, or following Jesus, is not anywhere optional for the believer. Commitment to Jesus Christ as my master and Lord and my King is not just something we sing about. It is God’s demand and expectation for the person claiming faith in Jesus. Faith without such obedience is useless, defective and dishonoring to God Almighty. Read James 1:22–27.

Because of God’s love, because of God’s mercy and favor freely given and freely received, because of having a new life and a right standing before God, because of the gift of eternal life and promise of heaven, because of all this and more, doing good deeds must be a passion, a devotion, a diligent caring for, in our lives. “The gospel message of free forgiveness for sinners on the sole basis of faith must find expression in a life characterized as taking a lead in the performance of excellent deeds.”8 What good things are you doing to back up your words of faith and love?

Third, good deeds benefit everyone as we live as good citizens and good neighbors. Such good deeds are “excellent and profitable for everyone” (Titus 3:8c) “Excellent” means giving wholeness, completeness, harmony to replace disharmony, balance to unbalance in lives around us, adding
beauty to a world made ugly by sin. How do I make a difference for God and goodness to complaining fellow workers, to sexually permissive friends, to power hungry, career-driven executives? By imparting excellent good deeds to and for them. “In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven.” (Matthew 5:16) “Repay no one evil for evil, but give thought to do what is honorable [excellent] in the sight of all.” (Romans 12:17) “And let us not grow weary of doing good, for in due season we will reap, if we do not give up. So then, as we have opportunity, let us do good to everyone, and especially to those who are of the household of faith.” (Galatians 6:9, 10)

Being “profitable” means giving value to something or someone, providing usefulness — “for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value [is profitable] in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” (1 Timothy 4:8) The decision is not whether or not to choose life. It is always how to live life. A vital Christian unites the beautiful and the useful and makes his or her world a better place in which to live and work and play.

One remaining objection is this — Suppose I do all these good things and nothing happens and nothing changes? What then? The answer is surprisingly the same — do them anyway! Irrespective of what another person does or does not do, whether or not they respond or don’t respond, I still have a God-given delegated duty to perform. As long as I live in this world God has made and cares for, I am not answerable to others. I am answerable to God alone. And when I reach heaven finally, I want to hear, “Well done, good and faithful servant!”

These five faithful sayings are at the heart of the Christian faith and practice. They need to be in our hearts and practices as well.

Self Reflection & Discussion
1. What elements of the gospel do you especially cherish and why?
2. Of these five “faithful sayings,” which one applies to you in the most profound way? Maybe there is more than one.
3. Have you found that behavior follows belief in your Christian contacts?
4. What is the exact relationship between faith and obedience in your understanding of Scripture?

Notes
1. Lyrics by Edward Mote in 1834 (1797-1874), and music by William Batchelder Bradbury (1816-1868).
2. This poem was found in John André’s pocket after he was executed and has frequently been attributed to him. See the Wikipedia article on André at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_André.
3. “In 1767 William Cowper, the poet, moved to Olney. He worshipped in Newton’s church, and collaborated with the priest on a volume of hymns; it was published as Olney Hymns in 1779. This work had a great influence on English hymnology. The volume included Newton’s well-known hymns: “Glorious Things of Thee Are Spoken,” “How Sweet the Name of Jesus Sounds!,” “Let Us Love, and Sing, and Wonder,” “Come, My Soul, Thy Suit Prepare,” “Approach, My Soul, the Mercy-seat”, and “Faith’s Review and Expectation,” which has come to be known by its opening phrase, “Amazing Grace”. (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Newton)
4. One denomination, the Orthodox Presbyterian Church, in which I served took this “steward of the mysteries of God” very seriously. Consequently, only “teaching elders” could read the Scriptures and serve Communion in the church during a stated worship service. They were especially entrusted with the “mysteries of God;” it was said. Other leaders and lay people were barred from such activities, not because they were less important or not able to read, but because of the high view of the office of minister in that group.
5. The phrase “husband of one wife” is usually interpreted as “having one wife at a time,” not that a minister cannot remarry after the death or biblical dissolution of a former marriage.
The Gospel For All

Salvation Corrections

“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way. This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.”

(1 Timothy 2:1–6 ESV)

The Ephesian heresy that Timothy was fighting was a particularly narrow Jewish exclusiveness that emphasized the Law of God and keeping that law for salvation. “This emphasis on the law is accompanied by a minimizing of faith (1 Tim 1:5; 2:1–7), grace, and mercy in God’s salvific work (1 Tim 1:12–17), possibly also depreciating the role of Christ (1 Tim 1:15–17; 2 Tim 1:8–10); this explains Paul’s emphasis on God’s salvation apart from works (Titus 3:4–7; 2 Tim 1:9–10). . . The heresy appears to be sectarian and exclusive, or anti-Gentile (1 Tim 2:1–7), warranting Paul’s emphasis on the universal offer of salvation to all people (1 Tim 2:6; 4:10; cf. 1:15), including Gentiles (1 Tim 2:7; cf. Foerster, TDNT 7:1016–17).”¹

What is particularly apparent is the emphasis on the “all” of salvation and its benefits. Prayers are to be made for “all people,” notably those in authority (1 Timothy 2:1). God desires “all people to be saved” (v. 4). Jesus Christ was given as a “ransom for all” (v. 6). This early conflict in the Church of the place of Gentiles made church history in the first general assembly of the leadership in the Church in Acts 15 — “But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, ‘Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.’
And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question. . . . The apostles and the elders were gathered together to consider this matter.” (Acts 15:1, 2, 6) To the Jews, and even many Jewish believers in Christ, the Gentiles were enemies and “dogs.” How could they dare enjoy the benefits of salvation? That question of the inclusion of the Gentiles to salvation through Christ was officially settled then and there, but Jewish remnants kept the discussion and contention active in some quarters. Paul, consequently, writes to Timothy to quell this ongoing problem in the Ephesian Church.

**Pray for all those in authority**

Christians of notable repute have disagreed on the role of the Christian in politics. John MacArthur, noted pastor, teacher and author, has said, “God does not call the church to influence the culture by promoting legislation.”

However, Chuck Colson once said, “The state is ordained by God; it is not a necessary evil but a good part of God’s creation. Therefore, participation in political life is a moral obligation.” And John R. W. Stott declared, “God’s concerns are all-embracing—not only the ‘sacred’ but the ‘secular’ . . . not only justification but social justice in every community, not only his gospel but his law.” Even the Anabaptist, Martin Schrag, a former professor at Messiah College and has been part of the Brethren in Christ Church, agreed that “motivation for political involvement is Christ’s compassion—the same basis as that for all Christian activity, here applied to the political arena.”

Romans 13, with similar declarations in 1 Peter 2:13–17, Titus 3:1–3, 8, and 1 Timothy 2:1–3, deals with the Christian and his or her role with respect to the government and political activity. Particularly important to the Apostle Paul was the biblical view of governmental authority in the early church. In Romans 13, the thesis Paul works from is that God Almighty has ordained, established and proposed civil government, and it is due our submission and respect for its laws. God has instituted civil
government with delegated authority (13:1, 3, 4, 6). Civil authority is a “servant” of God and a “minister” for the good. To disobey civil authority is to disobey God — “Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment.” (Romans 13:2; cf. Psalm 62:11; Proverbs 8:15 and 21:1; Daniel 4; Matthew 28:18)

Such authority is never absolute, but delegated. All rightful governments are from God and answerable to God. The state's justice is not dependent on personal convictions but on God's law — “for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer.” (Rom. 13:4) “For your good” means what is in accord with the commandments of God (SEE Matthew 19:16ff for use of the term). The magistrate's “sword” is to be a sword of justice, promoting righteousness or good behavior among the people of the state (Rom. 13:3, 4). Lawbreakers are to be justly judged so that innocent people could be protected and cared for. Jesus himself did not ask soldiers to resign from the Roman army (Luke 3:14), or refused to heal a centurion's servant when asked (Luke 7:6–10).

Our role, therefore, is willing, voluntary, Christ-centered obedience to civil authorities, which includes paying taxes (Rom. 13:6, 7) and rendering appropriate respect or honor (13:7, 8). Paul elaborates on this in his instructions to Timothy — “that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way.” (1 Tim. 2:2) “Quiet” lives are free from external disturbances, while “peaceful” lives are free from internal stress, so that all can lead blameless lives before God and others. And, the most startling note is that these instructions were written during the reign of Nero and the Neronian persecutions! A man took his little girl to see the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor. They had a great day, and, when they arrived home, she was tired. She could not, however, go to sleep, and she was so restless that her mother finally went to see if she could not quiet her. “Why can't you go to sleep, dear?” the mother asked. The daughter replied, “I keep thinking of the lady with the lamp. Don't you think somebody ought to help her hold it up?”

More than respect is needed in our relationships with authorities. We
need to consistently and diligently pray “for kings and all who are in high positions.” Notice the kinds of prayers we are to utter. “Supplications” are intense, petitionary prayers — “In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and supplications, with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverence.” (Hebrews 5:7) And note Paul’s passionate plea for Israel — “Brothers, my heart’s desire and prayer [supplication] to God for them is that they may be saved.” (Romans 10:1)

“Intercessions” means to pray on behalf of someone, to intervene on someone’s behalf. When was the last time you really “interceded” for a government official? “Thanksgivings” are prayers to God that come from a genuine spirit of praise and thanks — “Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.” (Ephesians 5:4) “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.” (Philippians 4:6) “Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.” (Colossians 4:2) When was the last time you gave heartfelt thanks, instead of words of incrimination for your government leaders? If we indeed would put 1 Timothy 2:1, 2 into practice, what a difference it could make in our government, not to say in our personal and social lives as citizens!

During the early days of our nation, in the sweltering summer of 1787, the states were bickering about how the new national government should be organized. It seemed the entire congress was in danger of breaking up when an appeal to divine guidance came from one of the most unexpected sources, Benjamin Franklin, a rationalist and Deist of the period —

How has it happened sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understanding? In the beginning of the contest with Britain, when we were sensible of danger, we had daily prayers in this room for divine protection. Our prayers, sir, were heard and they were graciously answered. All of us who were engaged in the struggle must have observed frequent instances of a superintending Providence in our favor . . . And now have we
forgotten this powerful friend? Or do we imagine we no longer need His assistance? And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without His notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without His aid? We have been assured, sir, in the sacred writings that except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain that build it. I firmly believe this.7

**Salvation for all without distinction**

Against the false idea of Jewish exclusivism and Gnostic spiritual elitism, Paul writes — “... God our Savior, who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.” (1 Timothy 2:4-6) There is only One Mediator, One Savior, One God for all people, both Jews and Gentiles. Gentiles are not saved by any other means or way. Paul insists upon this truth in these verses.

My understanding of 1 Timothy 2:6 bears powerful witness to the fact that Christ gave Himself as a substitute-ransom in the place of all those now living in the Church Age of the Kingdom of Jesus Christ. I utilize the systematic category “without distinction” as a convenient label to distinguish myself from the universalist.8 The predominant consideration is the fact that these “all” refer to Kingdom-citizens now living, or have lived, or will live, in the Church Age of the declared Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is the Pauline development of the ransom-saying of Jesus as we have it recorded in Mark 10:45 — “For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” (cf. Matt. 20:28), which itself reaches back into prophetic history in the Servant sayings of Isaiah 52–53.

Paul introduces us to what I call “heavy” theology here. The Greek word for “ransom” (ἀντίλυτρον) means “substitute-ransom.” Leon Morris states it well — “From the very nature of the imagery this involves a substitutionary idea; instead of our death there is His, instead of our slavery there is His blood. All our verbal juggling cannot remove this from the New Testament.”9
“Gave” (δοὺς) indicates a free-will offering. It is used by Paul as a sovereign, voluntary giving of Christ for sinners (cf. Gal. 1:4; Tit. 2:14). Yet, it has its roots firmly implanted in the sovereign, loving free-will giving of the Messianic Suffering Servant (cf. Jn.10:17,18), the Son of Man who came to fulfill the task of ebed Yahweh (cf. Mk.10:45 with Isa. 53:5).10

“For” (ὑπὲρ) can mean no other than “in the place of” or “in the stead of” in 1 Timothy 2:6a. The syntactical resemblance between Mark 10:45 and 1 Timothy 2:5,6 makes the ὑπὲρ of the former very much identical in significance or meaning with the ἀντί of the latter.11 Further, the idea of substitution being denoted by ὑπὲρ is not foreign to Pauline soteriological thought, as is attested to in such places as Galatians 3:13; 2 Corinthians 5:14; Titus 2:14.

Paul is writing to Timothy to help him properly instruct the local church at Ephesus. As J. N. D. Kelly suggests, Paul was most likely taking issue with either Jewish particularism or the Gnostic belief that “salvation belonged to the ‘spiritual elite’ alone.”12 In either case, in chapter two, Paul urges that prayers be made for all kinds of men (vs.1, 2). Of course, at issue is whether we are to conceive of “all” in verses 1–7 as all men, that is all sorts of men individually thought of, or “men at large” as some would say.

For Paul, Christ had come to give his life a ransom for all—all those now living in the kingdom age for whom He had died. In other words, Christ’s vicarious, sacrificial work on the Cross for his kingdom-citizens of all ages had been fulfilled at his death and resurrection. The “proper time” (καιρός) of which the Apostle speaks had been inaugurated by the finished work of Christ, the substitute-ransom for his people. Further, this accomplished work of Christ awaits future consummation for Paul in that it was not yet subjectively applied to all of Christ’s kingdom-citizens (cf. use of καιρός in 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Thes. 2:6).

This outlook, then, controls the Apostle’s statement in 6a. Applying this to our question of “all men,” the traditional formulation of “all men” (πάντων) as “all without distinction” takes on a tremendous significance, for it refers to the fact that Christ has accomplished redemption for all his
kingdom-citizens, past, present, and future, no matter their genetics or ethnicity or race.

By way of summary then, Paul’s main concern as an Apostle of the Church Age is to preach Christ and Him crucified (cf. 1 Cor.1:6) to both Jews and Gentiles (cf. summary statement in Acts 28:30f). His ransom-statement is an explication in the history of redemption of that given in near-fulfillment form by our Lord in Mark 10:45 (Mat.20:28), which refers back to that given in specific prophetic form in Isaiah 52-53, seen in seed-form elsewhere in the Old Testament. Christ had laid the foundation of the Church Age by his once-for-all offering up of Himself as the One for the many, in fulfillment of Isaiah’s prophecy in Isaiah 53:11,12. Paul now interprets that fulfillment in 1 Timothy 2:6 in an eschatological fashion.\(^\text{13}\)

Paul realized that the finished work of Christ was uniquely joined to his commissioning as an Apostle to the Gentiles (note purposive εἰς in vs. 7).\(^\text{14}\) Theologically, the statement in verse 6 refers back through Jesus’s ransom-saying to those passages which represent the “Messiah as obtaining from the Father the heritage of all families or nations of the earth; not the preserved of Israel alone, nor a few scattered members besides of other nations, but also the fulness of the Gentiles (cf. Ps. 2:8; 22:27; Is. 49:6; Lk.21:24).”\(^\text{15}\) Consequently, Paul could now speak of a substitute-ransom in the place of all for he knew that the obedience of the Suffering Servant formed the only unifying principle whereby his atoning work could be accomplished and applied in the context of Church Age kingdom-citizens at Ephesus, namely Jew and Gentile together (cf. Rom. 9-11).

There are at least two reasons for this “heavy” exegetical and theological dive into 1 Timothy 2:5, 6. First, the seemingly simple answer to the question of who are the “all men,” as “everybody” can lead to the incorrect and unbiblical conclusion that everybody will be redeemed by Christ and saved in the end.\(^\text{16}\) This is simply not true. The supposed “safeguards” placed around such a conclusion do not spring directly from the text at hand. The second reason is that we must pay attention to the words, grammar, immediate and distant context, as well as guidance by the Holy Spirit, to understand any portion of God’s Word. Failure to do
so is plain laziness and could be an affront to the God who “breathed out” this Word for all time.

    With what boldness we can say with Paul, “There is no distinction between Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and freeman but Christ is all and in all.” (Colossians 3: 11)

**Self Reflection & Discussion**

1. What role does the individual Christian and church have with respect to those governing us?
2. How often do you pray for our national, state and local leaders? What kinds of prayers do you give for them — intercessions, supplications, or thanksgivings, or all three?
3. How have you always read 1 Timothy 2:6 (“who gave himself as a ransom for all”)? Do you find the author’s understanding helpful?

**Notes**

8. This label is to distinguish me from the traditional Barthian universalist who feels that the conservative question of the extent of the atonement which this passage brings up is trivial and foolish. Since, according to his theology, the whole world is already “in Christ,” there is no need for “fundamentalist” discussions concerning such a “scholastic” issue as the “extent” of the atonement. (H. Carl Shank, “The Bearing of 1 Timothy 2:6 On The Question of the Extent of The Atonement,” in partial fulfillment of the course requirements of systematic theology, Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, PA, 1972. Available from the author at [carl@carlshankconsulting.com](mailto:carl@carlshankconsulting.com))

11. A syntactical comparison of Mark 10:45 with 1 Timothy 2:5,6 yields the following:

οὗτος τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἦλθεν . . . δοῦναι τὴν ψυχὴν αὐτοῦ λύτρον ἀντὶ πολλῶν ἀνθρώπων X. Ἰησοῦς ὁ δοῦσ ἑαυτὸν ἀντίλυτρον ὑπὲρ πάντων


14. Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:22, Colossians 3:10; Romans 5:18 for similar usage.


16. This ends up being the thesis of Rob Bell, *Love Wins: A Book About Heaven Hell and the Fate of Every Person Who Ever Lived*, Harper Collins, 2011. “First, while Bell claims to avoid the theological pitfalls of universalism he fails to distinguish himself sufficiently from that point of view. The God of love ‘wins’ in the end by loving all without exception or discrimination. All will finally end up being reconciled by a loving God. The only caveat is that people can choose their own ‘hell’ by consistently rejecting this love. There is no final condemnation to an actual place and state called hell. Claiming that one is not a universalist does not mean it is actually so. And maintaining that one falls within the perspectives of orthodoxy does not make one orthodox.

In the second place, Bell selectively uses, and many say misuses, historical theology to buttress a point of view denied by the majority of orthodox writers through the centuries. He claims the likes of Origen, Basil, Augustine and even Martin Luther, yet miserably fails to place their comments within their own historical and theological milieu. This is careless theology.

In the third place, Bell breaks all the canons of systematic theology by using word studies to somehow “prove” his viewpoints, as if selective word studies can win the day. He fails contextually and theologically, though he professes the opposite. He bypasses the holiness and justice of God in favor of the love of God and does not give a thorough rendering of what this love is and how it fits in the other characteristics or attributes of God. Additionally, his soteriology proves flawed at numerous points.

Roles And Behaviors

Men And Women In Leadership

“I desire then that in every place the men should pray, lifting holy hands without anger or quarreling; likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire, but with what is proper for women who profess godliness—with good works. Let a woman learn quietly with all submissiveness. I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor. Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.”

(1 Timothy 2:8–15 ESV)

Out of touch! “Paul is a sexist!” “This is an instance where the Bible is wrong and shows how outdated and culturally conditioned it really is.” While these are some of the more radical opinions on 1 Timothy 2:8–15, they demonstrate how inflammatory the discussion can become on such Bible passages.

The Apostle Paul in this passage deals with three problem issues of his day, and ours as well — disruptive men (v. 8), disruptive women (vv. 9–10) and leadership principles (vv. 11–15). It is to be noted that these verses are a unity in Paul’s thinking and writing. “Everywhere” or “in every place” (v. 8) indicates a universal application of these verses to our own reality. Some would say that Paul’s thinking here is culturally limited, or limited only to cases of stated public worship. Just because Paul is addressing a specific problem does not mean his teaching is necessarily limited to that setting. This hermeneutical principle must be maintained as we interpret this section of Scripture. The context suggests false teachers have invaded the venue of public worship in Ephesus (cf. 1:3–7; 4:1–3). But they have
also unduly influenced women believers (2 Tim. 3:6, 7) to act in shameful
and ungodly ways. Paul seeks to right the wrongs.

His message to disruptive men is stop fighting! When you publicly
pray (“lifting up holy hands in prayer” – 1 Kings 8:22, 54; Matt 6:5; Psalm
63 and so forth) do so without outright anger (Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8) or
sinful, internal negative thinking about another person (“disputing”).
Rather, lift up “holy” hands, indicating a right inner attitude — “Who
shall ascend the hill of the LORD? And who shall stand in his holy place?
He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not lift up his soul
to what is false and does not swear deceitfully.” (Psalm 24:3, 4) Behavior
must follow belief in worship and prayer.

His message to disruptive women is to dress and behave appropriately
(vv. 9, 10) They are to practice modesty (1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 2:3–6).
They are to use good sense and avoid extremes. They are to demonstrate
good deeds (1 Tim. 5:10). In Paul’s culture, they are to avoid braided hair
with extravagant gold jewelry. They are to be women whose beauty is on
the inside, fearing God above all else. (Titus 2:3, 4) (“women who profess
God-fearingness”).

His message to women in leadership is to have a submissive attitude
appropriate to your God-given role. What Paul is not saying here is as
important to understand as well as what he is saying. He is not saying
women cannot exercise their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Corinthians 11 and 14),
including the gift of teaching. He is not saying that women are unequal to
men in salvation — “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave
nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”
(Galatians 3:28).

He is not saying that worth is determined by role. “The equating of
worth and role is a nonbiblical, secular view of reality.”1 We who are men
often make this mistake as well. In teaching many classes, I often begin
by seeking to find out a bit about the people in the class. “Who are you?”
is often answered by the men in giving me where they work, what they
do for a living, what their profession is, and so forth. We all need to learn
consciously and unconsciously that our worth before God (and others) is
not determined by our role in society or in the workplace.

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He is not saying that all women must submit to all men. Only to men who have proper, God-ordained authority such as husbands to wives. And then only to husbands who revere and treat their wives as Christ reveres and treats the Church, his Bride — “Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself” (Ephesians 5:25–28) The Bible stands directly against all abusive, demeaning relationships, including husbands and wives.

Paul is not saying that Adam was sinless (v. 14) (cf. Rom. 5:12-21). The human problem of depravity or sinfulness is directly traced to Adam, not Eve. Adam failed in his leadership and care of Eve and paid the price for all humanity of falling into sin and corruption. In this regard, Paul is not saying that all godly women will go through childbirth safely (v. 15). One of the sad effects of the Fall are difficulties in childbirth — “To the woman he said, ‘I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children.” (Genesis 3:16a) Moreover, Paul is not saying that women through childbearing will be eternally rescued from everlasting damnation. Faith, love and holiness are necessary to anyone’s salvation — “Yet she will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.” (1 Tim. 2:15)

What the Apostle is saying is that men and women are equal before God but have separate roles to fulfill in God’s economy. The fact of creation and the entrance of sin affect the functions of women in church worship. Women are not to teach in a negative, domineering, coercive way (as well as men!) This was the problem at Ephesus. “Women should submit to the headship (caring responsibility) of men and not try to reverse sexual roles, but not necessarily refrain from teaching men. If certain roles are not open to women, and even if they are tempted to resent their position, they and we must never forget what we owe to a woman. If Mary had not given birth to the Christ-child, there would have been no salvation for anybody.”²
Interaction with “Women In Ministry” in Missing the Point

Two popular authors, Brian McLaren and Tony Campolo wrote a book, Adventures in Missing the Point: How The Culture-Controlled Church Neutered The Gospel. In that book, McLaren and Campolo take on the evangelical institutional church and seek to counter its alleged cultural influences. They, and we, should always be against what is called “cultural Christianity,” where the cultural morés and fashions of society color and affect the truth and application of Scripture.

However, there are many things I find objectionable in their reactions and over-reactions to the teachings of the Church through the ages. In mentoring a fellow pastor a few years ago, we discussed their chapter on women in ministry. Here is a record of some of the concepts and items we discussed.

**Question:** As I recall, Willow Creek Church required people to support women in ministry in order to become members. How comfortable are you with this strong of a statement regarding women in leadership?

**Answer:** The problem is with eldership authority or rule. If the women at Willow are under the authority of spiritually selected and gifted elders, 1 Timothy 2 would allow women to teach, prophesy, and exercise their spiritual gifts (cf. 1 Cor. 11 and 14). For instance, women can speak at leadership conferences and events as long as they (as well as everyone else!) are “approved” by the eldership of the church. The “authority” issue of 1 Timothy 2 is hereby kept intact as well as the recognition of giftings. I agree with Ronald Nash (Great Divides: Understanding the Controversies That Come Between Christians), that women can lead, but we need to “recognize the diversity of opinion and not make acceptance of women in leadership a test of fellowship or an absolute necessity.”

There are four possible viewpoints of women in ministry — dogmatic equalitarianism, non-dogmatic equalitarianism, tolerant traditionalism and intolerant traditionalism. I would say Scripture clearly supports women, and supports women in ministry by supporting their redemptive status and the proper and appropriate use of their God-given gifts, and supports married women in their creational roles. Bill Hybels and Willow Creek Church take the position of dogmatic equalitarianism. I
am somewhere between the non-dogmatic equalitarianism and tolerant traditionalism points of view.

**Question:** Consider the conservative groups who have been most reluctant to involve women in ministries of deacons, elders and pastors. Who has missed the point more, these groups or McLaren and Campolo?

**Answer:** I don’t have severe problems with Campolo or McLaren, but I disagree with their “cultural contextual” approach to the question of women in ministry. A careful study of the applicable texts (cf. *James Hurley, Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective*) indicates that yes, Paul was dealing with some culturally created abuses in Corinthians and Timothy, but his answers came from a careful understanding of the creational mandates, roles and restrictions of women. I think both the avid fundamentalists/traditionalists and culturists have “missed the point!”

**Question:** One hundred and two hundred years ago, church leaders could hardly imagine allowing women to take leadership roles in the church the way they do now. One hundred years in the future, Christians might be shocked that “most” Christian groups in our day and age did not allow practicing homosexuals to fulfill similar roles. How are these two issues similar? How are they different?

**Answer:** Very different, I believe. There are only apparent similarities in that the homosexual agenda trumps Scriptural statements by cultural arguments and values, while the biblical equalitarian viewpoint uses cultural notes in Paul’s day to “refine” Paul’s statements. I do think that there will probably come a day in the future when evangelical Christians do make a case for including practicing homosexuals in church leadership roles, if we allow the tenets of post-modernism and a declension of biblical propositionalism to rule the day. In other words, every truth will have to be mediated through cultural eyes. This will be disastrous to the gospel.

**Question:** Some take the perspective that Jesus was “pro-women” while Paul “ruined things” for women. How would you answer someone with this perspective?

**Answer:** Jesus never addressed hierarchical roles in church office or leadership. He accepted the Jewish patriarchal patterns of his day (with redemptive revisions), and went back to creational standards for roles and
relationships between men and women. Jesus did respect and herald the rights and ministry of women and accepted their help and support and gifts. So did Paul, but Paul “applied” the creational evidence to particular church leadership and structural problems that Jesus never faced.

**Question:** The A&E series “Christianity: The First Thousand Years” claims the early house churches were often led by women. Only later, as the church hierarchy developed, did female leadership become limited and/or nonexistent. What is your perspective on the “women’s movement” as it intersects with church history?

**Answer:** Yes, a lot has been written on this and the leadership roles of women throughout history, including the history of the church. The problem is again modifying our biblical viewpoints using culture as our sieve and guide and model rather than Scriptural argumentation and careful exegetical understanding.

Actually, I believe some denominational groups in evangelicalism have slipped into this cultural relativity on this issue. Their understanding and use of women in the church follows cultural guidelines and influences more so than a close examination and understanding of the Word of God. The problem is intensified in their hermeneutical principles (a preference for the New Testament rather than Old Testament; progressive revelation; a lack of preference for the written Word of God) and a misuse of the priesthood of all believers (“oneness in Christ” in Galatians) as a functional principle rather than just a redemptive principle.

**Question:** Considering how the changing view on women in the church mirror the changing view of women in the culture, what does this say (if anything) about the relationship between how the values of the culture shape the values of the church?

**Answer:** The values of culture are not carefully enough examined and subjected to the Word of God. They, therefore, heavily influence interpretation and application of Scripture. We already know that we have churches full of “cultural Christianity” rather than biblical Christianity. It will get worse before it gets better!

I would offer just a few personal closing comments on the subject of women in ministry leadership. In over forty years in ministry, I have
worked with a number of qualified, gifted and Christlike women in ministry. Most of them have exhibited biblical modesty and exemplary behavior in their assignments and roles. There are usually two extreme kinds of women ministry leaders, the ones who have a defiant attitude, a belligerent tone, and a “I-will-show-you” type of ministry. I have met a few of these types of women leaders. The other extreme are those women in church ministry who are always afraid of making difficult decisions, who always defer to a man in ministry, who portray a sheepishness that is not at all attractive or helpful. There have been a few of these types of women leaders as well. The majority, however, in evangelical ministry I know and have worked with are wonderful models of Christlike behavior and giftedness. I believe Paul would approve of such women in ministry roles and functions.

Self Reflection & Discussion

1. What problems, if any, do you have with Paul’s statements on women in leadership?
2. How would you say “cultural Christianity” has affected biblical Christianity?
3. How would you go about teaching or preaching this section of Scripture from 1 Timothy? Or would you just ignore it?
4. How would you interact with the proliferation of women’s rights movements in our day?

Notes

5. Ibid.
God’s Imperatives For Ministry

Secrets For Successful Ministry

“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already happened. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God’s firm foundation stands, bearing this seal: ‘The Lord knows those who are his,’ and, ‘Let everyone who names the name of the Lord depart from iniquity.’ Now in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for honorable use, some for dishonorable. Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work. So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.”

(2 Timothy 2:15–26   ESV)

What is the secret to a successful life? Success has many definitions in the marketplace. Some say success is the “art of making mistakes while no one is looking.” Others more seriously say, “success is getting up just one more time than you fall,” or “following the advice of others.” A sign on the Pittsburgh Steelers locker room reads, “whatever it takes!” Perhaps that is the way to succeed.

Eat sensibly. Avoid cavities and mark your ballot carefully. Avoid too much sun. Send packages overseas early. Love all creatures above and below. Insure your belongings and try to keep the ball low . . . ” Before he can get out another platitude, Lucy, in sheer frustration, interrupts, “Hold real still,” she says, “because I am going to give you a very sharp blow on your nose!”

Giving advice can come so easily, especially when we use platitudes. And at various points in the journey of life, we hear a lot of them. For you who are graduating from high school or college or graduate school of some sort, what you don’t need is another speech filled with platitudes and well-wishes. For those of us who are a bit older, we know that life’s mysteries and challenges will always be there. But the Good News of the Bible is that the same God who has given us the challenges of life gives us the strength, the ability and the grace to face those challenges victoriously.

The Bible has no easy catchy formula for a successful life. It has no hidden magic sayings that will lessen the impact of life. Rather in 2 Timothy chapter two, success in life can be defined as usefulness for Jesus the Master — “Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from what is dishonorable, he will be a vessel for honorable use, set apart as holy, useful to the master of the house, ready for every good work.” (2 Tim. 2:21) The theme is one of service. In this life of service, God directs you and me, whom he calls “articles” or “vessels” in a large house (v. 20), by giving us imperatives, directives that make life worthwhile and, in the end, successful.

There are three imperatives that I want to share with you who are graduating, and with those of us trying just to muddle through life. Two of them are negative, and one is positive.

Avoid and actively reject useless and senseless talk — “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to quarrel about words, which does no good, but only ruins the hearers. But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness. Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrel.” (2 Tim. 2:14, 16, 23) In Paul’s day, as well as ours, there were “teachers” or “leaders” who simply delighted in foolish and undisciplined debates and quarrels over fundamentals of faith and life. Then, as now, it
is not so much that God and Jesus and the Bible are denied, as they are subjected to endless, subjective speculation and debate. Whether it be a university professor, or a boss at work, or a fellow worker, these are people who destroy Christian certainties by senseless talk.

Paul names two of these kinds of people in his day (v. 17) who claimed that there was no physical resurrection day because what matters is our “spiritual” identification with Jesus. That might sound acceptable, but it is an ancient heresy called gnosticism, and what it sneakily teaches is that Jesus was not really a true man, and that Jesus was never really literally raised by God from the dead, and that all we need is a “spiritual experience” of Jesus. Whether it is first century gnosticism, or twentieth century New Age, or post-modernism, God through Paul calls it foolish, godless and eternally damning.

There are two dangers in this kind of babble. First, it leads to godless living — “But avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness.” (2 Tim. 2:16) In point of fact, many people who seem to be so “together” in a classroom or work setting and who have no faith in God and mock those who do, are a tragic mess in their homes and private lives. They basically just “get by,” and their lives are a whirlwind of school, work, parties, hangovers, more parties, affairs and so forth.

The second danger of babbling is that it spreads like a bad infection — “and their talk will spread like gangrene.” (2 Tim. 2:17a) Such false teaching produces more, and worse, false teaching and speculation. Jesus himself warned us that in these latter days, false teachers will proliferate and deceive many — “And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.” (Matthew 24:11) Their deceptive teaching will be so convincing that apart from God’s mercy and intervention, that if it were possible, they would deceive the very chosen ones of God — “For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.” (Matt. 24:24)

Does this mean that all debates about Christ and Christianity are bad and to be avoided? No. Even Paul in Acts “defended” the faith and spoke a number of times to Athenian philosophers. This negative imperative does not mean we cannot study and acquaint ourselves with wrong-
headed thinking and nonChristian speculation. However, such study and reflection must always be done with the one goal in mind of helping a person trapped by such thinking to come back to a clear sense of who God really is and what the gospel really says — “correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will.” (2 Tim. 2:25, 26) Speak and walk the truth. Avoid such mental, emotional and spiritual contamination and confusion.

The second imperative is flee or escape from evil passions and desires — “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22) The useful and successful Christian man or woman who is growing closer to God through Christ is a person who runs away from the jaws of three Ps — pleasure, possessions and power. Pleasure, or hedonism, is that sensuous lust that through whatever means, drugs, sex, recreation, so-called happiness is achieved. “If it feels good, do it” may be the slogan of the hedonist, but the resulting terror is burned out brains and bodies racked with death-dealing diseases.

Possessions, or materialism, promises a fulfilled life in the accumulation of things. It’s best defined in the bumper sticker, “He who dies with the most toys wins.” The problem is that such a lifestyle does not give lasting purpose and peace. He who dies with the most toys, according to the Bible, loses them and possibly himself — “And he told them a parable, saying, “The land of a rich man produced plentifully, and he thought to himself, ‘What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?’ And he said, ‘I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.” But God said to him, ‘Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God.” (Luke 12:16–21)

Power, or humanism, gives the delusive claim that man is the center
of the universe, and that through self-assertion and selfish ambition, we can have it all. The problem is that the outcome of all these lifestyles is the same — spiritual bondage and eventual spiritual death. They lack the capacity to impart genuine life. God says run away from them, escape from their delusive and destructive snares.

How then should I live? The third and positive imperative is relentlessly pursue Christlike life and thought — “So flee youthful passions and pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace, along with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” (2 Tim. 2:22) The term used in verse 22 is a strong one — “prosecute,” run after so as to win, to reach the goal (cf. Philippians 3:12, 14) — “So then let us pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding.” (Romans 14:19) and “Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own. I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12, 14)

Here in 2 Timothy 2 Paul defines this pursuit by using four terms — “righteousness,” which is right living and just dealing based on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ, the Righteous One; “faith,” which is trust and dependence and submission to Jesus as Lord of life and thought; “love,” which is true sacrifice and service to and for others; and, “peace,” which is a sense of God’s smile on my life and work, an inner wholeness and calmness about life’s challenges and mysteries.

Isn’t that what you really want today? When all is said and done, at the end of the day, and all the parties and busyness of the day is spent, and you are alone with God and yourself, aren’t these the qualities you want to spend a lifetime developing?! Albert Schweitzer said it this way — “Whatever you have received more than others, in health, in talents, in ability, in success, in a pleasant childhood, in harmonious conditions of home life, all this you must not take to yourself as a matter of course. In gratitude for your good fortune you must render in return some sacrifice of your own life for another life.”

Jesus said it this way — “Everyone to whom much was given, of him much will be required, and from him to whom they entrusted much, they will demand the more.” (Luke 12:48) “Great gifts mean great
responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!” (The Message) I ask you one simple and profound question today — How useful are you and will you be to Jesus as Lord?

Self Reflection & Discussion
Answer and wrestle with the questions at the close of this chapter.

Notes
1. H. Carl Shank, from a graduation speech, Carlisle Brethren in Christ Church (now The Meeting House), Carlisle, PA, May 17, 1992.
Know What Matters
Living In The Last Days

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared.”

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

(1 Timothy 4:1, 2; 2 Timothy 3:1–5 ESV)

Know this! (KJV) Mark this! (NIV) Realize this! (NASB) Understand this! (RSV) Don’t be naïve! (The Message) Pay attention! Pause, reflect, and study. The opening exhortation to young Timothy bristles with importance for him and for all of us living in the “last days.” Have a “discriminating apprehension of external impressions,” Paul is saying, “and possess a knowledge grounded in personal experience.”

Notice what Paul does not say — “Avoid this!” or “Know this for someone else, or someplace else, for some other time frame.” Know what follows is going to be your existence, your life context in these last days. This is especially crucial for younger leaders like Timothy, who was a bit resistant and withdrawn, temperamentally shy, sensitive, “disposed to lean rather than lead.” However, Paul was headed toward martyrdom and this was his last will and testament to the Church. Timothy was it! Such a warning has the quality of intenseness and definiteness about it (“the Spirit expressly says” in 1 Timothy 4:1). Paul wants us to know what life will be like and what to do in response in these last days.
“The Emperor Nero, bent on suppressing all secret societies, and misunderstanding the nature of the Christian Church, seemed determined to destroy it. Heretics appeared to be on the increase. There had recently been an almost total Asian apostasy from Paul’s teaching (indicated in 2 Tim. 1:15). Who would do battle for the truth when Paul laid down his life?”

These were going to be “terrible” days, a term that harkens back to the scene in Matthew 8:28 where Jesus confronted two demon-possessed men. They were “so exceedingly violent (same term) that no one could pass by that road.” In Paul’s last will and testament, “Christianity . . . trembled, humanly speaking, on the verge of annihilation.”

But, you may say, that was then! What do those days have to do with today? Paul registers a blanket statement description when he uses the words “in the last days,” which most everyone agrees is that time period from the death and resurrection of Jesus to his Second Coming. These are our days! Why tell us what many of us, including Timothy, already know? The Apostle wants to emphasize that opposition to God’s truth and God’s ways is not a passing situation, but rather a permanent characteristic of the last days! These will be times of great stress, possibly not uniformly evil, or continuously evil, but times pockmarked with physical and mental and spiritual anguish for the Christian believer. The hardness of the times is not due to war or famine or plague, but the wicked ways and habits of unbelievers.

The central problem of these stressful times is that people are hedonistically self-consumed — lovers of self, rather than lovers of God (2 Tim. 3:2) This phrase introduces the list of nineteen expressions of wickedness or wrong behavior in verses 2-8. It is an interesting picture of a hedgehog who rolls itself up into a ball so that its prickly side is facing outward to others and the soft, warm side is kept for itself.

Why do relationships break down in these days? People are lovers of self! Why do families break down in these days? Obedience, gratitude, respect, affection and reasonableness between kids and parents are gone! Religion and morality have been divorced (v. 5) Television and video segments lead the intellectually and morally weak astray. They prey on
the gullible people of society (vv. 6,7). Too many teachers and leaders are “always learning but never acknowledging the truth.” They fill our colleges and classrooms and podcasts and Facebook posts. It is an age when people will flock to hear popular religious speakers who tell them what they want to hear instead of God’s truth (4:3,4).

In this special outbreak of the power of evil several things will take place. There will be apostasy (“abandon the faith”) (1 Tim. 4:1). Evil spiritual forces will be at work (“deceiving spirits/”things taught by demons”). These forces will look for and use people who are hypocrites and habitually lie. These teachers will be beyond the influence of the Holy Spirit due to a “cauterization” (searing) of their consciences. However, their teaching will appear to be healthy and holy.

The “searing” of one’s conscience comes from grieving the Holy Spirit, which leads to resisting the Spirit and then finally quenching the Spirit — “And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.” “You stiff-necked people, uncircumcised in heart and ears, you always resist the Holy Spirit. As your fathers did, so do you. Now when they heard these things they were enraged, and they ground their teeth at him.” “Do not quench the Spirit.” (Ephesians 4:30; Acts 7:51, 54; 1 Thessalonians 5:19). Such searing is a specific judgment of God upon those who consistently refuse God’s truth — “and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing, because they refused to love the truth and so be saved. Therefore God sends them a strong delusion, so that they may believe what is false, in order that all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.” (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12; cf. Romans 1:24, 26, 28).

In Paul’s day, this evil and false teaching was ascetic Gnosticism, which taught that matter is inherently evil and that the human body and its passions must be conquered by either shunning it or overcoming it through indulgence. Today, such teaching might include special religious diets and exercise guaranteed to bring a person closer to God, the teaching that the Old Testament is a lower form of inspiration, the exaltation of human reason over faith, or the teaching that sin is simply lack of human potential and that humankind can save itself. Paul is talking
about precursors to the “man of sin (lawlessness)” spoken about in 2 Thessalonians 2 and the Beast in Revelation 13.

How does a faithful Christian deal with such “terrible” times? Paul gives sound advice. First, know the Word of God! Two characteristics of the Bible given and two applications are cited by Paul. All Scripture is God-breathed (2 Tim. 3:16). They are the God-breathed, inerrant, final and absolute authority for all of faith and life. Just as God has breathed life into his created order, so He has breathed life and truth by way of the written Word, the Bible. All Scripture is profitable (3:16), that is, useful and beneficial for both teaching and living.

With regard to knowing the Bible, stand firm and follow authentic teachers and examples — “But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it.” (2 Tim. 3:14) Knowing the Bible means being “thoroughly equipped” for every good work (3:17), that is, completed, finished, accomplished. Can it be said of you as a Christian that you are an “accomplished Christian?” (like an accomplished pianist, or an accomplished hunter, or an accomplished computer programmer) The Bible was not given just for us to make it to heaven but also to tell us how to effectively live for God on this earth. The Scriptures are for us 24/7!

All Christians are to finish well! (2 Tim. 4:1–8) We must never lose the sense of urgency (v. 2) (“be prepared, or ready; be on hand”) or the presence of God (v. 1) when speaking to the generations of people in the last days. We must get the gospel message out no matter when (“in season, out of season”) or how (“correct, rebuke, encourage”) (v. 2).

Mostly, don’t give up! (4:5) There can be no crown without a cross! Christians are to be self-aware, aware of the times and the people around them, and what they need to hear from God. They are to be self-controlled (“keep your head”), expecting and enduring hardship for the sake of God and the truth, fulfilling the call that God has placed on their lives (v. 4). We are to fight the good fight and win the crown! — “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who
have loved his appearing.” (2 Tim. 4:7, 8)

What can we apply from Paul’s intense message to Timothy in these verses? Understand the times without indulging in them. We need to be more and more people who understand and discern the times in which we live. Forget being cloistered with a bunch of Christians, trying to avoid contact with unbelievers in these last days. However, being with unbelievers does not mean we adopt their practices or copy their lifestyles.

Get beyond “grounding” to application of the Bible to all of life and thought. The problem with the Hebrew Christians was their lack of maturity in the faith — “About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. Therefore let us leave the elementary doctrine of Christ and go on to maturity, not laying again a foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God.” (Hebrews 5:11–6:1)

Expect persecution — “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (2 Tim. 3:12) Expect all kinds of persecution, from being denied common courtesies and expected treatment, to being charged with “hate crimes,” to being forbidden to name the Name of Jesus in public places and ceremonies, to outright fines and jail time for witnessing for God and standing for the truth of God’s Word.

Finally, live every moment under the watchful eye of an all-seeing God — “I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom.” (2 Tim. 4:1) We operate under the eye and gaze of the all-seeing, all-knowing God of the universe. Nothing we do escapes his gaze or his oversight. Not merely accept this as a theological or biblical truth, but live it joyfully and fully. One of my mentors in the younger days of my ministry impressed me with this fact of ministry. We minister always under the eye of the all-
seeing, ever-watchful God. Consequently, we are to hold back no truth that is necessary, or blunt no truth that is hard to accept and live, or water down the hard sayings of Scripture. Teach, preach, witness and live “in the presence of God!”

**Self Reflection & Discussion**

1. What evidences of these “last days” as described in Timothy do you see around you. Give specific examples or instances.

2. Do you see Scripture providing all that you need to address the challenges of these last days? If not, why not?

3. What does it mean to teach and live under the “presence of God?”

4. Have you experienced persecution because of your faith and your witness to this world? What has been your reaction?

**Notes**


Other Titles
by the Author
Francis Schaeffer once said and wrote that we live and minister before a “watching world.” The non-Christian world often wants us to stumble and falter and fail. They want committed believers in Jesus Christ to betray their Lord and Savior. They watch for it, wait for it and then report it when it happens as evidence of moral and institutional failure and sickness. The real question for those daring to enter into full-time professional ministerial service for the Lord Jesus Christ is how do I not fall and finally fail my Lord and Savior? How do I make sure that my ministry years will be biblically fruitful and that I will remain faithful to Christ? How can I leave a legacy of godliness and faithfulness that others can follow safely and surely? This book explores some of the answers to those questions.

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