

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through The Pastoral Epistles



Michael D. Morrison



GRACE COMMUNION
INTERNATIONAL

Living and Sharing the Gospel

**Exploring the Word of God:
Reading Through the Pastoral Epistles**

By Michael D. Morrison

Copyright 2014 Grace Communion International

Cover art by Ken Tunell. Copyright Grace Communion International.

Scripture quotations in 1 Timothy 1 and 2 are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Scripture quotations in 1 Timothy 3 are taken from the Contemporary English Version. Copyright © 1991, 1992, 1995 by American Bible Society. Used by permission.

Scripture quotations in 1 Timothy 5 are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Scripture quotations from 2 Timothy 1 and Titus 1 are taken from New Revised Standard Version Bible, copyright 1989, Division of Christian Education of the National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Scripture quotations in the other chapters, unless noted, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide. www.zondervan.com The “NIV” and “New International Version” are trademarks registered in the United States Patent and Trademark Office by Biblica, Inc.™

Table of Contents

[The Law Properly Used: 1 Timothy 1:3-11](#)

[God Wants All to be Saved: 1 Timothy 2:1-7](#)

[Paul's Policy on Women in 1 Timothy 2:12: Three Key Questions](#)

[Good People Needed: 1 Timothy 3](#)

[The Strange List of Widows: 1 Timothy 5](#)

[Paul's Farewell Letter: 2 Timothy 1](#)

[Word Hard for the Lord: 2 Timothy 2](#)

[Staying on Track When Others Are Not: 2 Timothy 3](#)

[The Time Has Come for My Departure: 2 Timothy 4](#)

[Leaders in Truth: Titus 1](#)

[Making Grace Look Good: Titus 2](#)

[Saved by God's Mercy: Titus 3](#)

[About the Author](#)

[About the Publisher](#)

[Grace Communion Seminary](#)

[Ambassador College of Christian Ministry](#)

Introduction: This project began in the mid 1990s. The first volume of *Exploring the Word of God* was published in 1995. We were not able to print any more volumes, but we continued to study and write articles about Scripture. We have gathered these articles and are publishing them as e-books. We hope you find these studies useful and encouraging.

As you may note, the work in 1 Timothy is not yet complete.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

The Law Used Properly:

1 Timothy 1:3–11

The early church had doctrinal disagreements and behavioral problems. Paul asked Timothy to take care of several problems in Ephesus. Just as Roman emperors sometimes used “open letters” to publicly proclaim the instructions that a new governor was given, so also Paul used a letter to explain to the congregation what Timothy was authorized to do.

Confident speculations (verses 3-7)

After a brief introduction, Paul explains Timothy’s commission: “As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer.” Some people had added new teachings to the gospel. Paul’s letter does not tell us exactly what the false teachings were, but it does give us some clues. Some of the same ideas were in second-century Gnosticism, which taught salvation by learning various mysteries (the Greek word *gnosis* means “knowledge”).

Paul gives hints about heresy when he adds, “or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God’s work—which is by faith.” Gnostics said that there were numerous layers of authority in the heavens, and we must learn the names of those spiritual powers in order to ascend toward God. Paul may be referring to similar ideas with the word “genealogies.”

People were spending their time on speculations for which there was no proof. The modern equivalent might be prophecy, which at first may seem to attract people to the gospel, but ends up distracting people from what’s most important. The real focus of God’s message is faith—trusting in God, not in trying to learn things that everyone else has missed.

Apparently, some people liked these speculations, so why did Paul tell

Timothy to put a stop to them? “The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” Paul wanted people to focus their faith on Christ.

But some people no longer had good motives and were trying to get followers for themselves. “Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm.” Some people like to be known as teachers who bring new facts and new conclusions, and they can attract a following by speaking with confidence. They state (or imply), “You need what I am teaching and you can’t get it anywhere else.”

Laws made for sinners (verses 8-11)

In Ephesus, the false teachers had their own slant on the law. Paul begins to address that issue with a truism: “We know that the law is good if one uses it properly.” But what is the proper use of the law? Paul explains that in the next few verses: “We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers...”

As some Greek philosophers noted, good people do not need laws to tell them not to steal and kill. Virtuous people don’t want to do those things anyway. But bad people are tempted to do such things, and so the law gives them a minimum standard of conduct. In contrast, the Christian standard is the maximum—we want to let Christ live in us, bear the fruit of the Spirit and do the will of the Father.

Paul continues his list of ungodly behavior: “...for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers.” Greek society had few sexual restrictions, but the New Testament has many. Paul’s first word, *pornos*, covers a wide range of sexual practices, and is given the appropriately general translation “sexual immorality.”

Paul's second word, *arsenokoitēs*, comes from roots meaning "male" and "bed." These words were in the Greek version of Leviticus 18:22, which prohibits male-with-male sexual activity. Paul apparently agreed with the traditional Jewish restrictions on sexual activities.

Paul summarizes: the law is made "for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me." Paul's doctrines, always given in conformity with the gospel of grace, include some demands on our behavior. If an activity does not conform to the gospel, then it is right to prohibit it.

Things to think about

What confident speculations affect Christianity today? Why do people follow them? How can we avoid being misled by them?

If the law is not made for righteous people, is it possible for them to use it properly? Did Paul use it?

[back to table of contents](#)

God Wants All to Be Saved:

1 Timothy 2:1-7

Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus to correct a few doctrinal problems in the church. He also sent Timothy a letter outlining his mission—a letter that was designed to be read to the entire congregation so that everyone would know that Timothy was acting with Paul’s authority.

Prayer for public peace (verses 1-3)

Paul included some instructions for what should be done in the church meetings: “I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people.” The meetings would include prayer, and these prayers were to be positive, unlike the curses that became part of some synagogue liturgies.

But this was not just intercession for church members—the prayers were to be for all, including “kings and all those in authority.” Paul did not want the church to be elitist, nor become identified with an underground resistance movement. A parallel may be seen in the way that Judaism dealt with the Roman Empire. Although Jews could not worship the Emperor, they could offer worship to God on behalf of the emperor; they made prayers and sacrifices *for* him (see Ezra 6:10).

Similarly, Paul wants church members to pray for government leaders. The purpose is “that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness.” The early Christians were persecuted for the gospel, and for proclaiming allegiance to another Lord. They did not need to provoke officials even more by being anti-government agitators.

This approach has the approval of God himself: “This is good, and pleases God our Savior.” Although the word “Savior” usually refers to Jesus, in this case it seems to refer to the Father.

A message of salvation for all (verses 4-7)

Paul then includes an important digression about what God wants: “who wants all people to be saved...” Our prayers should not curse or condemn the rulers, because God does not want the worst for them. His desire for them is salvation—but this begins with an acceptance of the gospel message: “...and to come to a knowledge of the truth.”

Does God always get what he wants? Will *everyone* be saved? Paul does not address that question, but it is obvious that God does not always get his wishes, at least not right away. Even now, almost 2000 years later, “all people” have not yet come to a knowledge of the gospel, much less accepted it and experienced salvation. God *wants* his children to love each other, but it doesn’t always happen. His will is that humans have wills of their own.

Paul supports his claim by giving reasons: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus.” There is only one God, who created everything and everyone. His purpose for every person is the same: all were created in God’s image, to be a reflection and a representation of God on earth (Genesis 1:27). The oneness of God means that there is unity in his purpose for his creation. All humans are included.

Further, there is one mediator. We all have a relationship with God through Christ Jesus, who became a human, and can still be called a human, because he did not abandon his humanity to the grave. Rather, he was resurrected as a glorified human, and he rose to heaven in human form, for he has incorporated humanity as part of who he is. Since humanity was made in God’s image, essential aspects of humanity were in God’s mind from the beginning; it is no surprise that humanity can be given expression within the Godhead by Jesus.

As our mediator, Jesus “gave himself as a ransom for all people.” Some theologians object to the plain meaning of this verse, but it fits well with

verse 7, and with what Paul wrote a little later: God “is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe” (1 Timothy 4:10). He died for the sins of all people, even for those who do not yet know it. He died only once; he did not wait for us to believe before he acted to save us. To use a financial analogy, he paid the debt, even for people who don’t yet realize it.

Now that Jesus has done this, what remains to be done? Now is the time for people to come to the knowledge of what Jesus has done for them, and that is what Paul is trying to do. “This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles.” That is what he wants Timothy to be, too.

Things to think about

When we pray for our rulers, is it for their salvation, or for our own peace?

When we realize that Jesus died for our cantankerous neighbors, does it change our attitudes toward them?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Paul's Policy on Women:

Three Key Questions

In 1 Timothy 2:12, Paul writes: "I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent." Primarily because of this verse, many churches do not ordain women as elders. Many other churches do ordain women. No matter who is right, many people have misunderstood what the verse means.

This article does not pretend to give a thorough analysis, but to briefly identify three key questions that can help us clarify what this verse means. For more details, see our study paper: <http://www.gci.org/church/ministry/women10>.

1. Was this Paul's permanent policy, or was it a temporary policy?

Answer: It was apparently a temporary policy, needed for the situation that Timothy was in. This can be seen by looking at 1 Corinthians 11, verses 3 to 16. In this passage, Paul said that women should have something covering their head whenever they prayed or prophesied. Scholars do not agree on precisely what this head covering was, and for our purposes it does not matter. What is important is that Paul was allowing women to speak.

Where were the women speaking? Paul would not need to give instructions about how women appeared when they were in private. This was some sort of public setting in which male and female believers gathered, prayed, and spoke to one another. This sounds like church.

What were the women speaking about? We know what prayer is, but what were the women doing when they prophesied? Paul tells us what prophecy is in chapter 14, verse 3: a message spoken to strengthen, encourage, and comfort other people. It might concern the future, but need not. It might be

like modern preaching, or might not. The important thing is simply that the women were speaking in a church meeting. Verse 5 says that these messages edify or build up the church.

So the women in Corinth were being inspired by God to give messages that helped men and women in the church. Paul allowed some sort of speaking in Corinth, but in 1 Timothy 2:12, he said that the women should be silent. So to avoid contradiction, at least one of these verses must be seen as temporary. If silence was a permanent policy, then Paul violated his own policy when he allowed women to speak in Corinth. But if permission was the normal policy, it would still be possible for Paul to issue a temporary restriction due to some need in Timothy's situation.

So this line of analysis tells us that 1 Timothy 2:12 should be seen as a temporary policy. Indeed, that is the way that Paul himself describes it: "I do not *permit*..." This was his policy at the time he wrote.

2. This was Paul's policy at the time; was it also God's policy?

In question 1, we focused on the *silence* that Paul commanded, and saw that Paul did not always require women to be silent in meetings of believers. Now we can look at the issue of *authority*. When Paul wrote 1 Timothy, he did not allow women to have authority over men. So we must ask, are we today supposed to have the same policy as Paul did? Or we can ask it another way: Does God have this policy? Does he ever allow women to have authority over men?

Yes, he does. Judges 4:4-6 gives a clear example. Deborah was a prophetess God used to lead the nation of Israel. She "held court under the Palm of Deborah," which was a public place that people could come to. God spoke to her, gave her commands, and she gave those commands to Barak, the military leader of Israel (verse 6). God gave her authority over Barak and the other Israelites.

This was not a worship service, but it is a clear case in which God allowed a woman to have authority over men. However, when Paul wrote 1 Timothy, he did not allow women to have authority over men—and he made no distinction about civil and religious authority. (Deborah made no distinction in the two types of authority, either, since in her case they were combined.) In question 1, we saw that Paul’s policy about women speaking in church was apparently a temporary policy. Here, we see that his policy about authority is also temporary, since God does not make that sort of restriction permanently.

3. Is 1 Timothy a manual for how churches ought to operate today?

Sometimes people assume that if Paul had a particular policy, then we ought to, too, because he was inspired by God. But if we take a careful look at his letter, we will see that parts of it don’t apply to us today. It was, after all, written to Timothy in first-century Ephesus, not directly to all of us. The letter has a lot of good material in it we *can* apply today, but is also has some things in it that we don’t.

The best example is in chapter 5, verses 3-16. Paul is telling Timothy to put widows on some sort of list (apparently a list for financial support) only if they were over age 60. He says that younger widows are probably going to want to get married and will end up breaking “their first pledge” (apparently some sort of vow they took in order to be on the list for financial support).

Nowadays, we do not maintain this sort of list, and we do not put age restrictions on which widows we will help. Our social and economic circumstances are quite different, and almost all church leaders and biblical scholars recognize this. Nevertheless, Paul gives several commands in this passage that we ignore—even *commands* can be limited to the culture they were given in. How much more so the *policy* that Paul states in 1 Timothy

2:12?

Paul also commands in verse 8 that men should lift their hands when they pray. We do not enforce this as a command today, nor do we greet one another with a holy kiss, as several letters command (for example, 1 Thessalonians 5:26). The principle of friendly greeting is good in today's church, but Paul went beyond generalities and commanded a specific *form* of greeting that is not appropriate in our culture today.

Clearly, there are some things in Paul's epistles that do not apply in our culture. The question that we should ask is, Is 1 Timothy 2:12 one of those temporary instructions? From our analysis above, apparently so. This does not mean that it is less inspired, or that we are choosing to ignore the Word of God—no more so than when we decide not to command kissing in church, or commanding women to wear head coverings, or when we decide that men do *not* have to raise their hands when they pray. We are not ignoring the Word of God when we recognize that some of it was written for ancient Israel, or for the ancient church, and it does not necessarily apply today in all its details.

Not all Christians agree on this matter. Some people believe that the church should restrict women from having leadership roles in the church. We believed that way ourselves for a long time, but we believe that we have now come to a better understanding of the scriptures—more like what Paul really meant, and what God really meant, and what the epistle really is. We believe that when God gives pastoral gifts to women—the ability to teach, to encourage, and to inspire people to follow Christ—then those women may be recognized as elders or leaders within the church.

For a much more detailed study of this passage, see <https://www.gci.org/church/ministry/women10>.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Good People Needed:

1 Timothy 3

Paul gives Timothy instructions about how the church should function and how to address some problems in first-century Ephesus. In chapter 3, Paul describes the kind of people Timothy should appoint as leaders for the churches.

A virtuous person (verses 1-3)

Paul says, “Anyone who desires to be a church official wants to be something worthwhile” (Contemporary English Version used in this chapter). The Greek word translated as “church official” comes from root words meaning to “look over”; it refers to someone who looks after others. Paul does not say whether it is good or bad to desire this role; he simply says that the role is good.

Then he gives some personal qualities needed for this position: “That’s why officials must have a good reputation and be faithful in marriage.¹ They must be self-controlled, sensible, well-behaved, friendly to strangers, and able to teach....”

Paul is focusing on the *person*, not the duties. Being “able to teach” suggests that leaders are supposed to teach, but Paul doesn’t say much about the details. The character of the person is more important than the specific duties. If you have good people, they will be good for the church.

Paul continues the virtues needed: “They must not be heavy drinkers or troublemakers. Instead, they must be kind and gentle and not love money.” They should not be in it for the money (see also 1 Peter 5:2).

Good management (verses 4-7)

“Church officials must be in control of their own families, and they must see that their children are obedient and always respectful. If they don’t know

how to control their own families, how can they look after God's people?" The church is like a family – we are children of God, and Jesus is our brother – but a church is not exactly like a family. A person might “control” the family, but leaders “look after” the church.

Families and churches are different today from what they were in the first century. In ancient times, a “family” could include dozens of people: children and their spouses, grandchildren and servants, all living together. Culture gave the head of household (usually the oldest male) nearly absolute power over the family. First-century churches were usually small, and met in houses; they found it natural to interact as a household.

People now have different expectations of family and church leadership. The biblical culture was not perfect, and neither is ours, but we all need to work where God has placed us. Paul's point is that leaders in the church should care for the church in a similar way as they care for their own family, and that their success in their own family is some indication of how well they will do in the church.

Paul is describing the *ideal* candidate – he is not creating a list in which every item must be perfectly met. We see an example of that when he writes, “They must not be new followers of the Lord. If they are, they might become proud and be doomed along with the devil.” Paul did not include that requirement for the church leaders in Crete (Titus 1), because all the believers there were new. Titus just had to pick the best he could.

Paul is not saying that all church leaders must be heads of household; a single person might be an effective leader in some cases. Similarly, personal failures 20 years ago need not disqualify a person who has more recently been a good example. Paul expects Timothy to use common sense and good judgment in the way he applies this list. If no one meets *all* the qualifications, then Timothy should just pick the best person he can find.

Last, Paul says, “they must be well-respected by people who are not followers. Then they won’t be trapped and disgraced by the devil.” Paul himself wouldn’t meet this qualification very well. He was frequently in trouble with religious leaders and government officials. This again shows that Paul is presenting a list of “things to look for” rather than absolute requirements.

Good assistants (verses 8-13)

Paul next describes the personal characteristics needed for another leadership role in the church – the Greek word is *diakonos*; the traditional translation is “deacon.” In many respects, they should be like people in the first group. These are qualities needed not just in church leaders, but in all mature Christians:

“Church officers should be serious. They must not be liars, heavy drinkers, or greedy for money. And they must have a clear conscience and hold firmly to what God has shown us about our faith.” Paul does *not* say that they should be able to teach; this indicates that deacons did not have a teaching role.

Paul suggests a probationary period: “They must first prove themselves. Then if no one has anything against them, they can serve as officers.” In one sense, all church leaders need to “prove themselves” through good personal conduct ahead of time. They need to be “doing the job” before they are formally appointed. Paul also seems to suggest here that the congregation has a role in approving such appointments.

Paul next mentions qualities needed by another group: “Women² must also be serious. They must not gossip or be heavy drinkers, and they must be faithful in everything they do.” Paul will say more about the proper behavior of women in chapter 5. Here, he continues his description of a good deacon:

“Church officers must be faithful in marriage. They must be in full

control of their children and everyone else in their home.” A person whose home life is chaotic would probably be unreliable in the church as well. Paul summarizes: “Those who serve well as officers will earn a good reputation and will be highly respected for their faith in Christ Jesus.”

Summary of our religion (verses 14-16)

“I hope to visit you soon,” Paul writes. “But I am writing these instructions, so that if I am delayed, you will know how everyone who belongs to God’s family ought to behave.” Most likely, Paul was never able to visit Timothy in person, but his letter could address a few urgent needs. Due to the way that the Gentile churches were developing, he saw a need to say more about Christian behavior.

Timothy knew well that grace was the basis of our salvation. But perhaps he needed to be encouraged to say more about the way that people should respond to God’s grace. The gospel of grace teaches that we should have good behavior (Titus 2:11-12). God is sharing his life with us; we are to let him live in us and change us. God gives us life, yes, but if we are going to *enjoy* that life, then it matters a great deal about how we choose to live.

Paul connects our behavior with the message about Christ: “After all, the church of the living God is the strong foundation of truth.” We are to reflect truth in our actions as well as in our words.

“Here is the great mystery of our religion: Christ came as a human.” Although he was divine, he was also human. “The Spirit proved that he pleased God.” As led by the Spirit, Jesus was fully obedient. “And he was seen by angels.” This is not part of the normal apostolic message; it seems to refer to angelic approval while Jesus was living on earth.

“Christ was preached to the nations. People in this world put their faith in him.” This describes the spread of the church in response to what Jesus did. “And he was taken up to glory.” This seems out of chronological sequence,

but it suggests that the growth and response of the church continues to give glory to Christ.

The Greeks had a word for it: ἐπίσκοπος

The word *episkopos* comes from the Greek roots *epi* and *skopos*, meaning “over” and “one who looks.” It refers to someone who looks after other people. The word *supervisor* is similar, because it comes from Latin words for looking over. “Overseer” is the English-root equivalent. *Episkopos* was eventually shortened to *piskop*, and then became *bishop*, and that is the traditional translation.

The New Testament uses several words for church leaders – overseer (or bishop), elder (presbyter) and shepherd (pastor). The terms seem to be interchangeable. Peter wrote to the elders and told them to be shepherds (pastors) watching over (like a bishop) the believers (1 Peter 5:1-2). Paul gave Timothy qualities of an *episkopos* (1 Tim. 3:2) but not for an elder, even though Ephesus had elders (1 Tim. 5:17). In Titus, the description of elders blends right into that of bishops (Titus 1:6-9).

The Bible does not describe exactly what these leaders were to do – that may depend on local circumstances.

Endnotes

Some translations say “married only once,” but this is misleading, since the Greek word was used for behavior *within* a marriage, not the number of marriages. A single person can be a good leader for the church; so can a person who has remarried after death of a spouse or a divorce.

The Greek words literally mean “a one-woman man.” Rules were often put in the masculine even if they applied to women as well. For a lengthy study of whether women can have positions of leadership in the church, see <http://www.gci.org/church/women>.

² Grammatically, it is not clear whether Paul means female deacons, or

the wives of the male deacons. I think that he is referring to female deacons, because it would be odd to mention qualities needed for the wife of a deacon, when Paul has said nothing about the wife of an overseer. If Paul *is* referring to wives, then he is also implying that they had special functions within the church, and had a distinct role of their own.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

The Strange List of Widows:

1 Timothy 5

Most people read this chapter without thinking much about it. Almost no one has ever heard a sermon on it. But it is an important passage for helping us understand what the Bible is, and how we use it in the church today.

Various age groups (verses 1-2)

The church in Ephesus had a variety of problems, and Paul sent Timothy, one of his best assistants, to Ephesus to set matters back on track. Paul delegated his authority to Timothy, and he did not want Timothy to act arrogantly. So he advises: “Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather appeal to him as a father, to the younger men as brothers, the older women as mothers, and the younger women as sisters, in all purity” (NASB throughout).

This is good advice: treat people with respect, as if they are part of your own family. Even if you have authority over others, don’t just give orders. Instead, try to persuade people, and explain reasons for cooperation, instead of demanding it. Maintain purity in your relationships—not only with young women, but with all people. Don’t take advantage of people who are weaker than you are.

Widows with families, and those without (verses 3-8)

Paul then gives advice on dealing with widows. From what he writes, we can see that there had been some sort of problem with widows in the church. He begins by implying that some widows should be treated differently from other widows: “Honor widows who are widows indeed.”

Some widows are not really widows, he seems to be saying. And then he explains: “but if any widow has children or grandchildren¹, they must first learn to practice piety in regard to their own family and to make some return

to their parents; for this is acceptable in the sight of God.”

If the widow has family members who can take care of her, then they should be taking care of her. She is not a “real” widow, and the church does not need to treat her in the same way that the church deals with a widow who has no one to help her. The TNIV explains the idea in this way: “Give proper recognition to those widows *who are really in need*.”

What should Timothy do with widows who have no children to take care of them? “Now she who is a widow indeed and who has been left alone, has fixed her hope on God and continues in entreaties and prayers night and day.” The genuine widow is not only “alone”—without any family to support her—she is also pious, depending on God to take care of her, praying constantly.

But just as not all children are willing to take care of their familial responsibilities, not all widows are willing to dedicate their lives to God: “But she who gives herself to wanton pleasure is dead even while she lives.”

Some widows are more focused on worldly pleasures than on serving God. No matter whether they have children to support them or not, they are “dead”—they are not participating in the life that God has designed for them.

So what is Timothy supposed to do about it? “Prescribe these things as well, so that they may be above reproach.” But just what are “these things” that Timothy is to prescribe? Perhaps that a widow without children should look to God, rather than giving herself to wanton pleasures.

But Paul’s main concern here seems to be on widows who have children or grandchildren—Timothy is to “prescribe” to the children that they should take care of their widowed mother. This is made clear in the next verse:

“But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” This verse is often taken out of context to say that a man should provide for his wife and children. That is a valid application of the principle—but in *this*

context, it means that children should provide for their widowed mother.

The problem in Ephesus apparently involved widows whose children claimed to be believers, and yet wanted the church to take care of their widowed mother. But if adult children won't support their own mother, then they are acting worse than pagans, and presumably they should not be counted as believers; they are refusing to act in accordance with the faith.

The list of widows (verses 9-12)

Paul then refers to a “list”: “A widow is to be put on the list only if she is not less than sixty years old.” As we read further, we will see what sort of list this is.

Just as Paul gave qualifying characteristics of church leaders in chapter 3, now he describes the sort of person who can be “on the list”:

As already mentioned, she must be 60 or older,
“having been the wife of one man,
having a reputation for good works;
and if she has brought up children,²
if she has shown hospitality to strangers,
if she has washed the saints' feet,³
if she has assisted those in distress,
and if she has devoted herself to every good work.”

Perhaps it is not yet clear what this “list of widows” is. But if we skip ahead to verse 16, we will see that it involves financial assistance from the church. Widows with adult children should be supported by their children; widows without children may be supported by the church.

How strict should Timothy be in including widows on this roster of support? What if she had been widowed twice—does she therefore not meet the description of being “the wife of one man”? Literally, she does not—but the Greek word was not used in such a literal way. A widow who remarried

could still be considered “the wife of one man” if she was faithful to her second husband.⁴ (The TNIV captures the meaning by saying “faithful to her husband.”)

What if the woman was age 59, but handicapped in some way? What if she never had any children to bring up? What if she had been a slave, or was too poor to “show hospitality to strangers”?

In a list like this, Paul is not trying to cover every possible situation. Rather, he is giving a general description, and he assumes that Timothy is sensible enough to make exceptions based on the circumstances. Similarly, we need to *read* with some common sense, not just in this list but also in chapter 3, making allowance for the situations we find ourselves in.

Paul wants to ensure that the widows on the assistance roster really need to be there, and that people should not abuse the charity of the church. But something more than financial need is involved. Paul is also concerned about the behavior of the widows: “But refuse to put younger widows on the list, for when they feel sensual desires in disregard of Christ, they want to get married, thus incurring condemnation, because they have set aside their previous pledge.”

What is this “previous pledge”? It is apparently a vow to not marry again. Widows could not be on the support roster unless they had promised to remain widows for the rest of their lives. In return for support from the church, they were to spend their lives in prayer.

But Paul did not think that a woman of age 50 or 55 could be trusted to do this: she is likely to have “sensual desires” so strong that she will break her promise and remarry. She should not be on the roster of widows who received assistance from the church.⁵

Was Paul correct in his assumption about a woman’s sensual desires? Perhaps it was generally true in first-century Ephesus, perhaps not; we have

no way of knowing. But we cannot assume that the same is true today. It is not true that all women under age 60 are so prone to sensual desires that they are unable to keep a pledge of celibacy.

Paul lived in a particular culture, received some of his ideas about women from his culture, and he was writing to people who lived in that same culture. His advice may have been good in his cultural setting, but it would be wrong for us to insist that his assumptions hold true in our culture as well.

When we read Scripture, we need to be aware that it was written in a certain cultural context, and that culture affected the way it was written—not just in language (Greek) but also in the way beliefs are explained. We today live in a different culture, and our culture affects the way that we *read* Scripture. We bring our own assumptions to the text. Neither culture is “correct,” and our goal in reading is not that we re-create the ancient culture, but to learn from how God inspired the ancient writers to instruct people in the ways of God *in that situation*.

The instructions are usually good for us as well, but sometimes they address social circumstances that are so unlike our own that we would be wrong to follow the instructions to the letter. Just as Timothy needed to use some common sense in applying the description of a “widow indeed,” we need to think about how we apply his instructions to our day.

Does that mean that we let modern culture tell us what is right and wrong? No—but neither can we assume that what was “right” in first-century Ephesus is necessarily right for the church today. Despite what Paul commanded Timothy to do, we do not set up a roster of widows age 60 and over who vow to remain unmarried. What was appropriate then, is not now.

Most Christians have not thought much about *why* we ignore this passage of Scripture. Even in fundamentalist churches, there is no movement to “get back to the original church” in regard to widows. Why not? It is because

everyone reads with cultural assumptions, and people in the 19th and 20th centuries, for example, looked at this chapter with a filter that says “we don’t do this nowadays.”

And yet when they looked at 1 Timothy 2:12, they responded, “We ought to do this; this is inspired instruction from an apostle of Christ, and anyone who thinks otherwise is disobedient to the inspired Scriptures.” But they never gave much thought as to why they could ignore one passage, even though it contained several commands, and yet insist on the other, which simply stated Paul’s current policy. They were *selectively* literalist, because their own culture caused them to be more aware of some issues than others. They turned commands into suggestions, and suggestions into commands.

This is only to be expected. Writers and readers all live in a certain culture, and each culture affects which questions we address, the way in which we address them, and the way in which we read what others wrote in different settings. Our goal is not to do church and family in exactly the way it was done in Paul’s day, but to hear the Holy Spirit in applying the love of God in the situations *we* are in.

Advice for younger widows (verses 13-16)

As we continue reading this passage, we will see more about the situation Paul was addressing. He says this about the younger widows: “At the same time they also learn to be idle, as they go around from house to house; and not merely idle, but also gossips and busybodies, talking about things not proper to mention.”

The problem was not just that young widows were a financial drain on the church—there was also a behavioral problem: the women were spreading gossip instead of praying, and teaching things they should not.⁶ Paul concluded that this problem affected all women under age 60. His conclusion may have been true in first-century Ephesus, but we should not assume that it

is true in all cultures and all ages.

What should younger widows do instead? “Therefore, I want younger widows to get married, bear children, keep house, and give the enemy no occasion for reproach; for some have already turned aside to follow Satan.”

Paul states this as his preference (in this, it is similar to 1 Corinthians 7:7 and 7:26). God inspired Scripture to include opinions of the writer; not everything in Scripture is a command for all peoples in all situations.⁷

Paul’s desire is nearly impossible for a widow aged 55—she is not likely to “bear children” even if she does marry. Although Paul’s desire is in inspired Scripture, we cannot assume that his advice is always appropriate for the church today. Our circumstances are different.

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

His instructions here could apply quite well to a *man* who had dependent widows. So why did Paul specify a woman? I suspect it was because a specific woman was involved in the problem in Ephesus: a woman in the church did not want to support her own mother and/or grandmother, and expected the church to take care of them. Meanwhile, she and other women spent their time in spreading gossip and indulging in “wanton pleasures.”

So Paul gave a few rules that would prevent such a problem—but the advice he gave for first-century Ephesus is not designed to be a policy manual for all churches in all cultures and all centuries. We should not assume that all Scripture is inspired for this particular purpose, or that it must be applied “to the letter.”

The challenge for us today

All of Paul’s letters were written to specific churches, to address specific situations. Some of his teachings apply today; others need to be adapted for

our situations. This means that we need to read cautiously, and to read with *humility*.

An attitude of “God said it. I believe it. That settles it” may sound good at first, but it is erroneous and arrogant. The error can be shown in that we could find commands in Scripture that such people ignore. The arrogance is that such people think that their *own* understanding of Scripture settles the matter. They think they know everything that needs to be known.

Almost anyone in modern society is able to read Scripture, and able to benefit from the reading. Scripture has long been a key component in spiritual formation and growth. But a person could memorize the entire Bible and still not understand how and when to apply it. Reading, in itself, does not make anyone an expert in the subject.

Parts of Scripture are hard to understand, and some parts are easy to *misunderstand*. We read them and *think* we know what they mean, when we have missed the point entirely. Some expertise is needed—an expertise that we cannot expect every believer to acquire.

Every believer should try to understand, but with the humility that is aware that some misunderstanding might be present as well. So we need to read Scripture in a community, and listen to what others in the Christian community say about Scripture—especially those who have studied it more than we have. Scripture is like most any other subject: people who spend more time generally learn more, and people who enroll in *formal* study generally learn much more.

Each of us does something for our own health every day: we eat, we get some exercise, we avoid certain dangers. But when things go wrong, we usually seek professional help, from people who have more experience in dealing with this particular type of problem and how it might be fixed.⁸ The existence of experts does not minimize the importance of our daily attempts

to take care of our health, but if we are willing to listen, the experts can help us make our daily routines more effective.

In the same way, the church has various levels of specialization in theology and Scripture. This does not mean that believers should roll over and play dead, passively absorbing whatever the “experts” teach. Rather, it means that believers should be willing to learn from people who have studied more, so that each believer might study Scripture more effectively, think about God more accurately, and live more fruitfully.

Although we do not maintain a list of widows in the way that Paul commanded for Ephesus, we can nevertheless learn much from this passage. Indeed, it is precisely because we do *not* maintain a list of widows, that we can learn from this passage about the nature of Scripture itself, what it was inspired to contain, and the care that we need as we read instructions written to other people in a different era and a different culture.

Endnotes

The “children or grandchildren” under discussion here are presumably members of the church, who are willing to “practice piety” by taking care of their own family. Paul does not say what Timothy should do if the children are unbelievers who shirk their duty toward their widowed mother.

² The requirement that she has raised children is surprising, since another requirement is that if she has children, they should be supporting her. If we are strict about the requirements, she would qualify for the list only if all her children have died.

³ Footwashing is a metaphor for serving others. If everyone in the church literally washed someone’s feet in an annual ceremony, everyone would meet this requirement and there would be no need to mention it.

⁴ Paul uses a similar word in the qualifications for church leaders: “husband of one wife” (3:2). But Paul is not concerned about whether the

person has been married before—the concern is for how the person is currently functioning in marriage. The TNIV says, “faithful to his wife.”

⁵ We might think that the problem was the pledge, but Paul does not seem to entertain that thought. He believes that the pledge is necessary, and the problem is that people might break it.

⁶ This is probably one of the reasons why Paul was not, at that time, allowing women to be teachers in the church (2:12). There was a problem in Ephesus specifically with women.

⁷ 1 Timothy 2:12 is another example—it is given as Paul’s policy, not as a command for all situations. But even when Paul states something as a command, it may be colored with his own cultural assumptions and preferences. When he says, Greet one another with a holy kiss, he is phrasing his command with terminology appropriate to his culture, but not appropriate for ours.

We see another example in 1 Timothy 5:23: “Use a little wine for the sake of your stomach and your frequent ailments.” This advice was intended for one specific person: Timothy. Nevertheless, it is part of inspired Scripture. We go wrong if we assume that everything in Scripture is designed directly for us.

⁸ Generally, we want our doctors to have legitimate degrees, to be recognized by other experts as having achieved a certain level of expertise. There is no need for every Christian to become an expert in the study of Scripture—just as there is no need for everyone to become an expert in electricity, even though we use it every day. When electrical problems arise, we often have to call upon someone who has more experience and training than we do. The electrician may use technical terms that are not part of our vocabulary, but that is only to be expected. Every field of study has its own specialized vocabulary, and we admit that we do not know everything there is

to know about electrical work.

The same is true in health and medicine. When medical problems arise, most people are quite willing to call on specialists who work full time learning more about the way the body works, and the way that problems can be fixed. And when we seek such help, we do not want someone who is self-taught, or who has purchased a certificate from the fictitious “University of Central Zanzibar.” No, we want some assurance that the person is legitimate, and actually knows something about our problem.

Some people do all their own electrical work, and some of them do a very good job at it—especially if they have previous experience. But others create a house full of hazards, a nightmare for the next person who owns the house. And some people insist on doing their own health care. Some do a good job; others create health hazards for everyone who listens to their quack ideas.

In the same way, some people insist on studying the Bible all by themselves. There is nothing wrong with studying the Bible—the problem arises when people insist on doing it alone, as if they alone have the inside track on what the Bible means. They may even be ordained by some odd group, but they are essentially self-taught, and usually proud of it. They are hazardous.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Paul's Farewell Letter:

2 Timothy 1

During the reign of Emperor Nero, the apostle Paul was placed on “death row” in a Roman prison. Although he had been released from prison several times before, Paul now senses that death will be his only escape. He writes his last letter to the man who had worked with him the longest. He encourages Timothy to continue his work.

Paul begins by explaining who he is: “Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, for the sake of the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus” (NRSV in this chapter).

Timothy already knows that Paul is an apostle, so why does Paul include it? He probably wants Timothy to see himself in similar terms: appointed by the will of God and promised life in Christ. Timothy should not view his work as optional, and even if officials threaten to kill him, he needs to remember that life is guaranteed in Christ, not in the Empire.

“To Timothy, my beloved child: Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.” By calling Timothy his “beloved child,” Paul sets a tone of affectionate advice.

Be bold with the gospel (verses 3-7)

Paul begins with indirect praise: “I am grateful to God—whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did—when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.” Paul gives God the credit for all the good that he sees in Timothy, and he assures Timothy that he is praying for him. He mentions his “clear conscience” — something he wants Timothy to have, too.

“Recalling your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy.” We do not know what the tears were about —perhaps Timothy’s sorrow at

leaving Paul, thinking that it might be the last time they would see each other.

Paul reminds Timothy of his roots: “I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you.” Paul wants Timothy to continue in this same path.

“For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands.” Since you have faith, Paul says, put it to use. 1 Timothy 4:13-14 implies that Timothy’s “gift” was preaching the gospel. And as we continue reading this letter, we see that this is what Paul wants him to do.

“For God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline.” Don’t shrink back, Paul says — be bold. God gives us what we need: strength, love for others, and self-discipline. When it comes to the gospel, many people have a spirit of timidity, but timidity is not from God. So we might need to pray for strength, or love, or self-discipline. All of these come from God.

Was Timothy timid? Paul’s words might simply be a rhetorical strategy. He had sent Timothy on several difficult missions; it seems that Paul was confident in Timothy’s ability and willingness. He wanted to encourage him to continue the good work he was already doing.

Don’t be ashamed of suffering (verses 8-12)

Since God gives us what we need, “do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner.” Most people *would* be ashamed: Paul was on death row for telling people that Jesus, not Nero, was Lord and King. Jesus had been executed as an enemy of the Empire, and Paul seemed headed for that, too. Timothy had helped Paul spread his message.

“But join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God ...” You will suffer for doing it, but God will give you the help you need.

And then Paul reminds Timothy of what the gospel is, and why he should preach it: God “saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace.” The word *holy* means “set apart for God.” God not only gives us eternal life, he tells us that our life has purpose — we are set apart for God’s use.

“This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” Even before God created us, he knew that we would need a Savior, and he forgave us ahead of time.

Although the plan for salvation was in place all along, people didn’t know about it until Christ came. He defeated our worst enemy, death, and gave us the good news of eternal life. “For this gospel I was appointed a herald and an apostle and a teacher.” Timothy already knows Paul’s commission, but Paul says it here because it applies to Timothy, too. He is passing the baton to someone who will continue the work. The job is larger than anyone can do, so part of the job is recruiting, training, and passing it along to others.

The message is good news, and yet it is not always accepted as good. “For this reason I suffer as I do. But I am not ashamed, for I know the one in whom I have put my trust, and I am sure that he is able to guard until that day what I have entrusted to him..”

Timothy has also been appointed as someone who should testify about Christ and the immortality Christ has revealed. Timothy need not be ashamed, nor afraid of prison and death, because he knows that Christ is faithful — we can trust our lives to him, and he’ll keep every promise he has made.

Keep the treasure safe (verses 13-18)

After explaining his own commission and commitment, Paul then

addresses Timothy more directly: “Hold to the standard of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus.” I did it — now you do it. Don’t change the message — repeat it.

“Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us.” The “good deposit” is the message of salvation, and it is preserved with the help of God’s Spirit. Paul is not explaining doctrine — he is creating a motivational message, mixing commands, personal testimony, and assurance to help Timothy carry on without him.

Paul then refers to his own situation in Rome: “You are aware that all who are in Asia have turned away from me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes.” These men didn’t necessarily desert Christ, but they were afraid to help Paul in his most recent troubles.

In contrast to them, Paul praises someone who was not afraid: “May the Lord grant mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, because he often refreshed me and was not ashamed of my chain.” Onesiphorus had helped Paul in prison, and now Paul asks God to help his family. Was he still alive? We do not know.

Instead, “when he arrived in Rome, he eagerly searched for me and found me.” This is an example that Timothy might need to copy when he comes to Paul (4:21).

“May the Lord grant that he will find mercy from the Lord on that day!” Did Paul think that he needed to ask God to show mercy to a loyal worker? No; Paul is playing on words: Just as Onesiphorus *found* Paul, Paul wants him to *find* mercy. Paul knows that the Lord *will* give him mercy, because the Lord is full of mercy, and it has already been granted, even before time began. Nothing can change that.

Things to think about

Is there someone for whom I frequently thank God? (verse 3)

Has God given me a gift that I should fan into flame? (verse 6)

Am I embarrassed by the gospel? (verse 8)

Am I willing to be embarrassed by the gospel?

How does the Holy Spirit help me guard the gospel? (verse 14)

The Greeks had a word for it: συνείδησις

The Greek word *syneidēsis* first meant to be aware of something, to be conscious of something. 1 Peter 2:19 uses it in that sense, referring to a person who “is conscious of God”— aware of his existence.

But *syneidēsis* came to be used primarily for self-awareness, especially beliefs that one’s actions are right or wrong: the conscience. People can have a good conscience, thinking that they have done right (2 Tim. 1:3), or a bad conscience, believing that they have done wrong (Heb. 10:22). The conscience can lack sensitivity (1 Tim. 4:2) or be overactive (1 Cor. 8:10-12).

The conscience not only evaluates past actions, but also considers whether future actions are right.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Work Hard for the Lord:

2 Timothy 2

In this letter, Paul gives final exhortations to Timothy, encouraging him to be a faithful worker in the word of truth. The work will be difficult, but it will be worth it.

Strengthened by grace (verses 1-7)

Paul exhorts Timothy: “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.” Being “strong in grace” could have several meanings: 1) to be confident in God’s grace toward humanity, 2) to emphasize grace in preaching, or 3) emboldened by God’s grace, to be confident in all of life.

Paul knows that he is going to die, and Timothy will die, too. So Paul wants him to train some replacements, to create an expanding network of teachers: “And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” This is a good principle for ministry today.

Timothy will encounter problems, persecution, and sometimes even boredom. Timothy needs to be mentally prepared for the challenges. So Paul reminds him that he needs to be committed: “Endure hardship with us like a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” Timothy is not alone — he is enduring it “with us.” And he is not working for himself — he is working for Christ.

“No one serving as a soldier gets involved in civilian affairs — he wants to please his commanding officer.” It’s OK to be *involved* in secular affairs — Paul sometimes worked as a tentmaker — but Timothy should not be *entangled* in the secular world, looking there for his sense of self-worth. He is primarily a servant of Jesus, and he should seek to please Jesus, even if he has a secular job.

Paul moves to another metaphor: “Similarly, if anyone competes as an

athlete, he does not receive the victor's crown unless he competes according to the rules." Paul hints at a "victor's crown" for Timothy, when the work is done the way his commander wants it done.

A third metaphor: "The hardworking farmer should be the first to receive a share of the crops." Paul again hints that Timothy will receive something in return.

Paul was not the first to use soldiers, athletes and farmers as examples of diligence — various Greek writers used the same three metaphors. Paul uses this trio to point out that gospel work involves toughness, focus, obedience and hard work. He concludes by inviting Timothy to see himself in these metaphors: "Reflect on what I am saying, for the Lord will give you insight into all this."

The gospel (verses 8-13)

Paul now moves to another topic, and a different style. He begins with a pithy saying: "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel..." It's about Jesus, summarized here by his resurrection and his role as Messiah in the line of David.

Paul sometimes gave more prominence to the crucifixion, but as he sat on death row, the resurrection might well grow in importance. And Jesus' Davidic role may be what got Paul into the most legal trouble: he was proclaiming that Christ was king.

It is the gospel "for which I am suffering even to the point of being chained like a criminal." But ironically, "God's word is not chained." The work is still being done, because Paul gave the message to reliable workers who could teach many more.

"Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory." Why should Timothy work hard and risk persecution? Earlier, Paul hinted at a reward.

Here, he emphasizes the results it has for other people — he wants others to become aware of and grasp the salvation that is (already) in Christ. That is something he can feel good about forever: the reward is intrinsic to the work.

Paul includes another summary of the message — this one has rhythm to make it easier to remember. “Here is a trustworthy saying: If we died with him [and we did], we will also live with him; if we endure, we will also reign with him” [another hint of reward].

And what happens with the opposite extreme? “If we disown him, he will also disown us. If we are faithless, he will remain faithful, for he cannot disown himself.” In the first three pairs, we are like Christ. In the fourth, Paul breaks the parallelism: If there is any failure in the process, it is because *we* have rejected our Savior. If we follow him, we will get what we want: eternal glory. If we reject him, we will also get what we want: he will let us leave. His desire for us continues; the question is, whether we will continue to desire him.

Good work (verses 14-19)

In another change of style and topic, Paul begins to warn Timothy that some doctrinal discussions are a waste of time: “Keep reminding them of these things” — of the central truths of the gospel. “Warn them before God against quarreling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen.” What words were people arguing about? We do not know.

In contrast to fruitless arguments, Paul advises Timothy to “do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.” Timothy needs to work with the gospel correctly, with no regrets when he presents himself to God.

The context, in the verse before and the verse after, is not people who refuse to work, but people who use the truth in a crooked way. They distort it,

argue about irrelevant concepts, or go on and on without ever getting anywhere. So Paul advises, if you don't want to be embarrassed, then "avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly." Don't waste your time with pointless discussions.

If we give them a platform to speak from, "their teaching will spread like gangrene." And then Paul gives a specific example: "Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some."

We are not sure how those two men got that idea. Maybe they took Paul's idea that we are raised with Christ, to conclude that we already have *all* that God has to offer. That idea would not be very attractive to an apostle on death row! They probably thought their idea was the most important teaching in the church, but Paul says it was a waste of time, and it had caused some people reject Christianity.

Even though some people lead others astray, "nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his,' and, 'Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness.'"

The Greco-Roman world had many buildings with inscriptions. If God's church had a foundation stone, what would be inscribed on it? Paul says it would have a promise, and a warning. God will be faithful to his people, and his people need to stay away from sin. If we want the results of righteousness, we need to do what is righteous. We need to be faithful to our commanding officer.

A noble instrument (verses 20-26)

Paul turns from the building, to objects inside the building: "In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay;

some are for noble purposes and some for ignoble.” Some are fine dinnerware; others are good for scraping mud off your boots. Some are ornate decorations, and others are chamber pots.

But what is Paul’s point in this analogy? “If a man cleanses himself from the latter, he will be an instrument for noble purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.” There’s a good way to live, and a bad way. If we want the results of righteousness, then we need to put wrong ways out of our lives. So Paul advises Timothy to “flee the evil desires of youth, and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.” All of us who follow Christ should love these virtues.

And then Paul returns for a third blast against fruitless disagreements: “Don’t have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels.” Some people may try to divert your attention toward *their* favorite topic of disputation, but don’t take the bait.

“The Lord’s servant must not quarrel; instead, he must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful.” Just teach the truth; don’t get involved in personal attacks (which were common in the ancient world; there was intense competition for status and honor, often at the cost of insulting and tearing down possible competitors).

Paul explains how to deal with enemies: “Those who oppose him he must gently instruct, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” They have a distorted view of reality, and they unwittingly serve the devil’s purposes. But we do not condemn — we hope for the best, praying that God will eventually help them see the truth.

When personal resentment rises up within us, we need to respond not only

with prayer for our opponent, but also prayer for ourselves, that we too might escape the trap of the devil.

Things to think about

Is my pastor training the next generation of leaders? (verse 2) Is there anything I can do to make it easier for my pastor to do that?

Do I feel like a soldier or an athlete working for Christ? (verse 5)

What does it mean for Christ to be faithful even to the faithless? (verse 13)

What is the most recent fruitless argument I have seen? (verse 14)

What “ignoble” activities reduce my usefulness to the Master? (verse 21)

The Greeks had a word for it: ὀρθοτομέω

Orthotomeō comes from *orthos*, meaning straight, and *temnō*, meaning to cut. We see *ortho* in English words such as orthodontist and orthodoxy; we see the root *tom* in words such as appendectomy and atom (something that supposedly could not be cut).

Literally, *orthotomeō* means to cut straight, a skill needed in tentmaking and other crafts. Paul uses the word in 2 Timothy 2:14 as a metaphor for accurate work in the “word of truth.” The emphasis is accuracy, not surgery. Paul is not talking about dividing the truth, nor is he talking specifically about Scripture. Rather, he wants the gospel to be handled correctly, and that Timothy not be distracted away from its central truths.

The word is used in other Greek literature for cutting a road through a forest — the emphasis is on making a straight path, not on cutting the forest in two. In the context of 2 Timothy, Frederick Danker suggests that the word implies to “guide the word of truth along a straight path (like a road that goes straight to its goal), without being turned aside by wordy debates or impious talk” (*Greek-English Lexicon* [University of Chicago Press, 2000], 722).

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Staying on Track When Others Are Not:

2 Timothy 3

In Paul's last letter to his favorite assistant, he warns Timothy about the opposition that Timothy will face, and encourages him to continue what he already knows is true.

Living in terrible times (verses 1-5)

This chapter begins with a warning: "But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days." Many Jews speculated about what the future held, and many predicted that society would reach its worst point just before God intervened to straighten everything out. As verse 5 makes clear, Paul is saying that the "last days" are already under way (see also Acts 2:16-17 and Hebrews 1:2).

But that was almost 1,950 years ago. How could the first century be the "last days"? Either Paul was mistaken as to how soon Christ would return, or else we are mistaken in how Paul is using the language of prophecy. Or both.

It is a mistake for us to look at Paul's description, see it happening around us, and conclude that Christ will soon return. We live in the last days, yes, but so did Paul. If Christ's return could be 2,000 years away from Paul, it might be for us, too. It could be very soon, but it might not, and current events do not prove it one way or the other.

Let's look at Paul's description: "People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power."

Missing from this list is torture, murder and genocide; the list seems a bit

tame in comparison to atrocities that also existed in the ancient world. Paul is not describing the worst of all possible worlds — he is describing Timothy’s opponents: people who might look like they are godly, but who are actually rejecting the gospel.

Paul does not say here what his opponents taught, but other ancient writings help us make an educated guess. Many Greeks thought that spirit is good and matter is bad, so a good God did not create the physical world. Rather, he created a lesser god, who created a yet lesser god, who created another, who created another, etc., in a long series of gradually less-good gods, one of whom was finally so far removed from perfection that he created the physical world, and human souls somehow got trapped in physical bodies.

Salvation was seen as the process of escaping matter, and it required a person to learn the genealogy of the gods and the way to navigate up through these levels in order to reach the original perfection. There was no evidence for these speculations, but they were attractive to some Christians in the first and second centuries. Paul’s advice was simple: “Have nothing to do with them.”

Truth will prevail (verses 6-9)

Paul describes the result such people were having in the early church: “They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”

These smooth-talking salesmen were able to convince some women (sections of 1 Timothy seem to address the same problem), and even though the women learned all sorts of secret “knowledge,” they never really learned anything useful. Their anxiety about their sins and desires made them easy prey for a philosophy that offered a way for them to work their way out of the

problem. The real truth is much simpler: Christ has done it for us; we do not need to be burdened with guilt or enslaved to our own desires.

Paul compares them to Egyptian magicians: “Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth — men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected.” “Rejected” is too strong of a translation; the Greek word *adokimos* may also mean “incorrect” or “unapproved.” God has not totally rejected them, but we should reject them *as far as the faith is concerned*, that is, we reject what they teach.

“But they will not get very far,” Paul concludes, “because, as in the case of those men [i.e., Jannes and Jambres], their folly will be clear to everyone.” Paul does not tell us when or how (indeed, he says in verse 13 that the deceivers will soon get worse). His purpose is not to make a specific prediction, but to encourage Timothy to stick to the truth because eventually everyone will see that Timothy’s opponents are wrong.

Staying on track (verses 10-14)

Paul reminds Timothy that he has a firm foundation: “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love...” Timothy has heard the arguments, but Paul does not point him there. Rather, he points to the way in which Paul lived out the truth of the gospel. Paul’s own steadfastness is an important testimony to the validity of the message.

Not only did Paul have desirable qualities, he also had some undesirable experiences. Timothy knew about these, too: “endurance, persecutions, sufferings — what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured [see Acts 13-14]. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.” Paul writes this from prison, and expects death, so he knows that the Lord does not rescue his people from *all* situations. The point is that he *can*, and often has, so Timothy can be confident that the Lord will

take care of him.

Timothy will experience some trouble, too: “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Indeed, it will sometimes look like the bad guys are winning: “while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.” Paul’s purpose here is not to make specific predictions — the purpose of this “battle rhetoric” is to steel Timothy for the hardships that will come. If he expects the worst, nothing will catch him off guard.

“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it.” Elsewhere, Paul tells Timothy to keep the faith because it is true — but here he tells him to persevere because he knows the people who taught him. Some of the strongest evidence for the gospel is the example set by people who taught Timothy, especially Paul. If Paul can be faithful through persecutions and problems, Timothy can be, too.

The written word (verses 15-17)

Timothy has another reason to be faithful: “from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures” — which for Timothy would be the Old Testament — “which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Paul does not say *how* the Old Testament informs people about Jesus, but the book of Acts and several of Paul’s letters provide more than a hundred examples of how Paul used Scripture. The Old Testament describes our need for a Savior, predicts salvation through a suffering Servant, and teaches that God is completely trustworthy.

“All Scripture is God-breathed,” Paul says. He does not say which books are in Scripture; nor does he specify how God breathed these writings. In context, Paul is talking about the Old Testament rather than the New, but the early church said the New Testament writings are inspired Scripture, just as

the older writings are.

The important thing about inspiration is not the precise method used, but the purpose: It “is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Scripture is not designed to teach us grammar, geography, math or science. It has a more practical purpose: telling us about salvation through Christ, and after that, how we should live. We focus on those, rather than on speculations about the future.

Things to think about

Is humanity more sinful today than it was a century ago?

Why did the ancient deceivers target women in particular?

Am I loyal to the people from whom I learned the truth?

Does the Old Testament teach me about salvation through Christ?

The Greeks had a word for it: θεόπνευστος

Theopneustos is a combination of *theos*, meaning God, and *pneō*, meaning “to breathe or blow.” Ancient Greek writers used this word to describe wisdom, dreams or speech that came from the gods. In the New Testament, it is used only in 2 Timothy 3:16, where the focus is on the usefulness of the inspired writings, and not on the precise means by which God caused his message to be written.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

The Time Has Come for My Departure:

2 Timothy 4

We now reach the last chapter in Paul's last letter. He is in prison, waiting for his last trial. He knows that he will probably lose and then be executed for preaching the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. He is ready for death, and he encourages Timothy to continue the work in the coming years.

A commission (verses 1-5)

This chapter begins with a solemn and formal declaration of duties: "In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge..." Paul is reminding Timothy that his primary allegiance is to Christ, and that Christ will evaluate Timothy's work.

His assignment is to "preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage — with great patience and careful instruction." That is, deliver the message, all the time, and in doing that, you will sometimes have to correct problems and rebuke heresies. You will need to teach again and again, so be patient. People's enthusiasm will wane, so you'll need to encourage them.

Why? "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths." Timothy should teach diligently because heresies will come — indeed, they have already come. But Paul's logic implies that Timothy can prevent some of the heresy by teaching faithfully. Every teaching, whether good or bad, is desired by someone or another, but it must all be judged by the word of the gospel.

"But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work

of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.” In doctrinal controversies, Timothy needs to keep his cool and accept some discomforts. In everything, he needs to preach the gospel, and in doing so he will fulfill his assignment.

For the immediate future, Paul wants Timothy to visit him in prison (verse 9). But Paul’s commission here will provide a focus for Timothy after Paul is dead.

My time has come (verses 6-8)

Paul explains why he gives Timothy this commission: because Paul will soon die. He sees it as the culmination of a life well lived, in service to his King: “For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.” He is in the final season of his life, and he looks back with some satisfaction:

“I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” These metaphors are different ways to say the same thing, and all convey a sense of completion.

“Now there is in store 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 longed for his appearing.” Paul again refers to the Day of Judgment, and the rewards Christ will give.

A “crown” (*stephanos*) may refer to the laurel wreath given to people who won a race. The point is not that we will literally have something on our heads, but that we will be rewarded with the gift of being accepted by God. The righteous status we now have will then be ours permanently and in its fullness. We need to keep our eyes on the future reward.

Personal requests (verses 9-13)

In the last part of his letter, Paul refers to a number of people and circumstances. In most cases we can only speculate about the details. “Do

your best to come to me quickly, for Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me and has gone to Thessalonica.” We do not know the nature of his desertion, or why he went to Thessalonica.

“Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus to Dalmatia.” Perhaps Paul sent these men, or they simply decided to get out of Rome.

“Only Luke is with me.” Verse 21 shows that other people are with Paul, too; what Paul probably means here is that Luke is the only one remaining from Timothy’s generation of co-workers.

“Get Mark and bring him with you, because he is helpful to me in my ministry.” Many years earlier, Mark had deserted Paul, but he later helped Paul in prison (Acts 13:13; Col. 4:10). How he helped is not known.

“I sent Tychicus to Ephesus.” He may have carried the letter to Timothy — and by staying in Ephesus, he would make it easier for Timothy to leave.

“When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, and my scrolls, especially the parchments.” As winter approached, he needed that cloak. What was written on his parchments? Perhaps books of the Old Testament; perhaps copies of his own letters.

Resisting the enemy (verses 14-18)

“Alexander the metalworker did me a great deal of harm.” We do not know if this is the man mentioned in 1 Tim. 1:20. He must have done something either to get Paul thrown in prison, or to lose a trial.

No matter what, Paul did not retaliate: “The Lord will repay him for what he has done.” However, Paul does not want Timothy to forget the danger of a repeat performance: “You too should be on your guard against him, because he strongly opposed our message.” We do not know whether Alexander’s objections were political, pagan, Jewish, or Gnostic.

“At my first defense, no one came to my support, but everyone deserted me. May it not be held against them.” Paul implies that he will have a second

defense, although due to imperial policy in Rome, condemnation was probably inevitable.

But good came out of his trial anyway: “But the Lord stood at my side and gave me strength, so that through me the message might be fully proclaimed and all the Gentiles might hear it.” Paul was not put in prison for any criminal action — the only accusation against him was his message, so it would be natural for him to present that message in court.

“And I was delivered from the lion’s mouth.” He escaped immediate punishment, but his case was forwarded to another judge, perhaps Nero himself, who was almost certain to order an execution.

Paul believes his time is up, but he says with confidence, “The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and will bring me safely to his heavenly kingdom.” In context of this chapter, this seems to mean that the Lord will keep him faithful, and although his enemies can kill the body, they cannot kill the soul (cf. Matt. 10:28). Paul’s salvation is secure in Christ. “To him be glory for ever and ever. Amen.”

Final greetings (verses 19-22)

Paul takes his last opportunity to greet some old and dear friends: “Greet Priscilla and Aquila and the household of Onesiphorus.” Onesiphorus himself may have died.

“Erastus” — possibly the man mentioned in Rom. 16:23 — “stayed in Corinth, and I left Trophimus sick in Miletus.” Even Paul couldn’t heal everyone.

“Do your best to get here before winter.” Not only does it get cold in winter, it is difficult to travel, so if Timothy procrastinates, he might have to wait three more months, and that may be too late.

“Eubulus greets you, and so do Pudens, Linus, Claudia and all the brothers. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you.”

Things to think about

What would it take for me to be at peace with my own death? Do I have a sense of completion?

In what way could I encourage someone in the next generation to continue the work of Jesus Christ?

Is it possible for the Lord “to rescue Paul from every evil attack” by letting him be killed? Can I trust a God who lets evil get its way?

The Greeks had a word for it: **καιρός**

Greek had two main words for time. Sometimes they meant essentially the same thing, but sometimes they had different connotations. *Chronos* referred to a quantity of time, time that could be measured by a clock.

Kairos, the other word, could refer to a time that was significant in quality, a significance that went beyond the number of minutes or days. It was a season of opportunity, an occasion for a special event. In 2 Tim. 4:6, Paul said that the *kairos* had come for his departure. It was not just a date on the calendar, but a tremendously significant milestone in his life and ministry.

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Leaders in Truth:

Titus 1

In the first chapter of his letter to Titus, Paul describes the qualities of a good church leader. He warns that some people try to lead believers away from the truth. Even in the 21st century, Paul's advice is still needed.

Introduction

Paul begins by announcing his role and his purpose: “Paul, a servant of God and an apostle of Jesus Christ, for the sake of the faith of God’s elect and the knowledge of the truth that is in accordance with godliness...” (Titus 1:1, NRSV in this chapter).

In the Roman world, a slave in charge of the emperor’s business had a higher social status than many free people did. Paul, as slave to the ruler of the universe, had tremendous importance and status. He was sent by Christ as an apostle or official messenger with two major purposes: 1) to bring God’s people to faith and 2) to teach them truth to help them live godly lives.

Our beliefs and behavior are built on a solid foundation: They are built “in the hope of eternal life that God, who never lies, promised before the ages began” (verse 2). Our hope is more than a wishful thought — it is as secure as God himself. Our eternity is secure because God has power over time itself.

This promise of eternal life was announced in the gospel: “in due time he revealed his word through the proclamation with which I have been entrusted by the command of God our Savior” (verse 3). Paul here combines a term usually used for the Father with a term usually used for the Son, and it is not certain here which one he means.

After describing himself and his mission, Paul begins: “To Titus, my loyal child in the faith we share: Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior” (verse 4). Titus was a Gentile (Gal. 2:3), but Paul calls him a “true son,” who faithfully continued Paul’s work. Earlier, Titus had successfully dealt with a difficult problem in Corinth (2 Cor. 7:6-7).

Qualities of a good leader

Paul then announces the purpose of his letter: “The reason I left you in Crete was that you might straighten out what was left unfinished and appoint

elders in every town, as I directed you” (Titus 1:5).

Titus already knew what Paul had told him, and he already knew the points Paul made in verses 1-4. But Paul includes these things in his letter because the letter would be read out loud in the churches in which Titus worked — and in this way the members in Crete would accept what Titus was doing, and then Titus could move on.

For the benefit of the congregation, Paul lists the characteristics of a good elder: “An elder must be blameless, the husband of but one wife, a man whose children believe and are not open to the charge of being wild and disobedient” (verse 6).

If we take Paul too literally, we might think that elders must be married, or that they cannot be remarried even after death has released them from their vows (Rom. 7:1-3). If we read this as a list of legal requirements, then Paul himself could not be an elder! However, his purpose is more general — he is saying that elders, *if* married, should be faithful in marriage (in that society, mistresses were common).

Elders should also be responsible in their families, but we should not take this legalistically, either. One child who went astray 20 years ago would not automatically disqualify an otherwise well-respected leader.

“Since an overseer is entrusted with God’s work, he must be blameless — not overbearing, not quick-tempered, not given to drunkenness, not violent, not pursuing dishonest gain” (verse 7). An elder or overseer (Paul uses the words interchangeably) should not be bossy, irritable or selfish. “Rather he must be hospitable, one who loves what is good, who is self-controlled, upright, holy and disciplined” (verse 8).

After this list of personal virtues, Paul briefly addresses the doctrinal needs: A church leader “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute

those who oppose it” (verse 9). Elders must know the gospel and be able to pass it on accurately. They must teach the truth, and denounce the counterfeits.

False teachings

The believers in Crete needed good leaders because the truth was being distorted: “For there are many rebellious people, mere talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision group” (verse 10). Paul’s greatest adversaries were Judaizers who taught that Gentiles should be circumcised and keep the laws of Moses (Acts 15:5; Gal. 5:3).

“They must be silenced,” Paul writes. If they teach a false gospel, they should not be allowed to speak to the congregation — a good leader must be willing to exclude them (Rom. 16:17). Why be so strict? “Because they are ruining whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach — and that for the sake of dishonest gain” (Titus 1:11). Some false teachers want money; others want to bolster their ego. Either way, it is dishonest gain.

Paul then quotes “one of their own prophets” — Epimenides, who lived on Crete six centuries earlier: “Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons” (verse 12). This is a philosophical riddle: If Cretans are *always* liars, can Epimenides be telling the truth? Paul says, “This testimony is true.” Every culture has its own problems; the people of Crete had these.

Paul gives the solution: “Therefore, rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the commands of those who reject the truth” (verses 13-14). Titus is to rebuke the false teachers, so the *members* will be sound in the faith, so they will not be led away from the gospel of grace.

“To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure” (verse 15). This verse is a proverb that can apply to various situations. But in this context, it refers to Judaizers who declared

all sorts of things “unclean.”

Even today, some overly zealous people see a problem under every bush, paganism in every custom. The problem is in the eye of the beholder, Paul says: “Both their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him. They are detestable, disobedient and unfit for doing anything good” (verses 15-16).

Paul uses strong words, because he was passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who teach legalism, he says, have a tragically distorted concept of God. By their focus on works, they show that they do not trust him to be the author of love and grace — God our Savior.

Things to think about

If time had a beginning, will it ever end? (verse 2)

Why does Paul list personal virtues before doctrinal accuracy? (verse 9)

When churches today designate elders, what additional qualities do they consider? (verse 19)

In a culture that values freedom of speech, should anyone be silenced? (verse 11)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Making Grace Look Good:

Titus 2

In the second chapter of Titus, Paul tells us that people often judge the gospel by the way we live. Do we make the gospel look good, or do we give people a reason to complain? The gospel teaches grace, and grace teaches us something about the way we live.

Self-control: a good example

Paul tells Titus, “You must teach what is in accord with sound doctrine.” He then describes teachings that are reliable: “Teach the older men to be temperate, worthy of respect, self-controlled, and sound in faith, in love and in endurance” (Titus 2:1-2). Titus is working with believers who need some guidance about their behavior.

Paul begins with three virtues praised by Greek philosophers—not going to extremes, acting respectably and having self-control. He then gives three virtues important in Christianity: having right beliefs, showing love, and maintaining these qualities even when it is difficult.

For women, Paul gives slightly different advice: “Likewise, teach the older women to be reverent in the way they live, not to be slanderers or addicted to much wine, but to teach what is good” (verse 3). These vices are not typically associated with women today, and Paul could easily point these teachings at men—they are appropriate for all Christians.

Paul expects older women to be able to teach: “They can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands” (verses 4-5). Paul does not tell Titus to teach the young women directly, but he asks the older women to lead them.

Paul lists a number of roles that women had in first-century society and

then explains why Christian women should perform them: “so that no one will malign the word of God.” Christianity has several beliefs and practices that unbelievers do not like, and Christians cannot do everything that unbelievers want. But in many customs, Christians can conform, and this is what Paul wants.

If people are going to criticize, let it be for essential matters, not for unnecessary differences. If we break social customs, people will be more skeptical about everything we say, so we want to keep our differences to a minimum. Paul is concerned about how our behavior might affect the gospel.

“Similarly, encourage the young men to be self-controlled. In everything set them an example by doing what is good” (verses 6-7). Titus will teach not just by words, but also in what he does. Even his style of teaching is important: “In your teaching show integrity, seriousness and soundness of speech that cannot be condemned.” Why? Because our reputation as bearers of the gospel is important: “So that those who oppose you may be ashamed because they have nothing bad to say about us.” People will disagree with our beliefs, but we do not want to give any extra offense.

Paul then comments on one more social group: “Teach slaves to be subject to their masters in everything, to try to please them, not to talk back to them, and not to steal from them, but to show that they can be fully trusted, so that in every way they will make the teaching about God our Savior attractive” (verses 9-10).

Paul is advising believers to perform their social roles well—he is not necessarily saying that those social roles are good. But we can with some modification apply what Paul says to employment situations today. Believers should perform their jobs well, being cooperative, trustworthy, and respectful to everyone.

Why? To make the gospel attractive, so that people will be more likely to

listen to what we say about Jesus. The way we live, the way we work, the way we treat our families and neighbors, all make a difference in how receptive people will be to the message we share.

Grace-based behavior

Paul then gives a theological reason for teaching people to be well-behaved: “For the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men” (verse 11). Or the Greek could also be translated, “The grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all” (NRSV). Not everyone has seen it yet, but salvation is available to everyone on the basis of grace.

And what does this grace do? “It teaches us to say ‘No’ to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age” (verse 12). Grace—if we understand it correctly— teaches us to reject sin and to do good. As children of God, we want to be like the Son of God, but we cannot do this on our own strength. It is only by God’s grace that we are enabled to do what he wants.

This is a good way to live “in this present age,” but the rewards are not necessarily seen in this age. Therefore, “we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (verse 13). Here, Jesus is clearly called God, and Paul says that we await his return.

What did Jesus do? He “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (verse 14). He redeemed us from sin. But Christ has a purpose for us beyond that: He wants to purify us, to eliminate the sin, and to create in us a desire for good behavior.

So Paul summarizes his point: “These, then, are the things you should teach. Encourage and rebuke with all authority. Do not let anyone despise you” (verse 15). Jesus wants people who are eager to do good, so Titus, as a messenger of Christ, should encourage good behavior and speak out against

bad behavior. He should not do anything that would cause people to despise him, because they would then despise the Savior he represented.

As Titus reads this letter to his congregation, Paul is also speaking to them: “Titus is going to have to correct you on some of your behavior. But he is simply doing what I would have done, and doing what grace tells you, if you are willing to hear what it says.” In the same way today, we should not despise those who exhort us to resist sin and do good.

Things to think about

What virtues are most needed in our culture? (verse 2)

What behaviors today, although not sins, might cause people to despise the gospel? (verse 5)

Paul said that slaves should submit (verse 9). Was it therefore wrong for Christians to try to abolish slavery in the 19th century?

Grace means that we are not penalized for sin; how then does it teach us to avoid sin? (verse 12)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

Saved by God's Mercy:

Titus 3

Paul left Titus on the island of Crete to organize the newly planted churches there. But Titus was not a permanent pastor — he would soon have to move on. What was he supposed to teach on this temporary assignment? Paul gives some final advice in chapter 3.

Doing good is good — but not good enough

“Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good” (verse 1). As Paul explained in chapter 2, good behavior puts the gospel in a good light. Although the gospel says that our Lord is Jesus Christ (not Caesar), we do not want officials to think that the gospel tells people to disrupt society.

Christians should “slander no one,” Paul says. “Be peaceable and considerate, and...show true humility toward all” (verse 2). For many believers, Paul was asking for a big change in their behavior. He explains in verse 3: “At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”

In some ways this list is a mirror image of the good qualities Paul wants Titus to teach. Be obedient, even though you used to be disobedient. Be peaceable, even though you used to hate one another. We were once foolish and ill-tempered, Paul says — implying that we are not that way anymore.

What caused the change in our lives? It was Jesus.

“But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy” (verses 4-5). God's love appeared to us in the form of Jesus (Rom. 5:8), and he saved us not because we deserved it, but because of his mercy and grace.

We were not living a righteous life, but even if we were, those righteous things would not be good enough to save us. We are saved by God's mercy, not by anything we could ever do to earn it.

“He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit.” He did not save us through a physical washing, but by a spiritual washing and renewal. The word “washing” is an allusion to baptism, suggesting that our physical baptism symbolizes the rebirth that comes from the Holy Spirit.

God poured the Holy Spirit “on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life” (verses 6-7). We are saved by God the Father, working through the Son and Holy Spirit.

We are justified by grace — put right with God — as his gift to us (and as Paul explains elsewhere, we receive it by faith). The result is that we become inheritors of eternal life, which gives us tremendous hope and confidence about our future. But the Bible also says that we have eternal life now, in this age (John 6:47). We have it as a down payment of much more yet to come.

“This is a trustworthy saying,” Paul notes. We can be sure that God saves us by his mercy, not by our works. He then adds, “I want you to stress these things...” (verse 8). Titus should stress the Holy Spirit, grace and eternal life.

Why? “So that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good.” When we realize that God has saved us by his mercy, we should respond with changes in our behavior. Sin caused the death of our Savior, and we do not want to participate in behavior that caused his death.

So we trust in God alone, but we also strive to do good works. We have been saved for that purpose (Ephesians 2:10). Good works cannot save us, but they are still good, and they are characteristic of people who trust God.

God's people are *devoted* to doing good; they are *eager* to do what is good (Titus 2:14). Grace leads us to a better life. "These things are excellent and profitable for everyone."

Something to avoid

As part of his closing comments for Titus, Paul warns, "But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless" (verse 9). Many of us have experienced "quarrels about the law" — debates about whether this or that is required or forbidden. If we try to base our salvation on keeping laws, we will inevitably end up arguing about which laws apply, about definitions of what is restricted, and whether there are any exceptions.

Debates like that miss the point. They are useless, because salvation is not based on the law. We should not waste our time with arguments about things that don't really matter.

However, if people are convinced that laws are important, they are rarely willing to drop the argument. So Paul gives Titus some pastoral advice: "Warn a divisive person once, and then warn him a second time. After that, have nothing to do with him" (verse 10). If the person can't drop the subject, if he is stirring up trouble in the congregation by preaching salvation by works, then he should be avoided.

If someone says, You have to keep these laws in order to be saved, then that person is usually attempting to divide the congregation — he is saying that it's not enough to trust in Christ. If the person won't stop preaching this error, a division is unavoidable, and Titus can minimize the severity of that division by making it early. The person should not be allowed into the congregation to cause more trouble.

"You may be sure that such a man is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned" (verse 11). He preaches that people will be saved or condemned

by their works, and such a person *will* be judged by his works. By his own standard, he will be condemned. Divisive behavior is the opposite of what God wants.

Paul closes, as ancient letters often did, with some notes about personal contacts and travel plans: “As soon as I send Artemas or Tychicus to you, do your best to come to me at Nicopolis, because I have decided to winter there” (verse 12). Titus’s assignment as interim pastor would soon be up. Paul wanted to spend the winter with him in western Greece.

“Do everything you can to help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their way and see that they have everything they need” (verse 13). They were probably the ones who carried the letter to Titus, on their way to somewhere else.

Paul then repeats an important theme: “Our people must learn to devote themselves to doing what is good, in order that they may provide for daily necessities and not live unproductive lives” (verse 14). If people work for their food and stay out of trouble, that is good (1 Thess. 4:11).

“Everyone with me sends you greetings. Greet those who love us in the faith. Grace be with you all” (verse 15).

Things to think about

We should be law-abiding citizens who do good (verse 1). Is there ever a time when we should disobey the law?

People who are saved by grace should be eager to do good (verse 8). Why are some Christians not devoted to good works?

When can people have erroneous beliefs without being divisive? (verse 10)

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

About the Author...

Michael Morrison received a PhD from Fuller Theological Seminary in 2006 and is Dean of Faculty and Instructor in New Testament for Grace Communion Seminary. He is the author of:

Who Needs a New Covenant? The Rhetorical Function of the Covenant Motif in the Argument of Hebrews (print only)

Sabbath, Circumcision and Tithing: Which Old Testament Laws Apply to Christians?

E-books:

The Bible: A Guided Tour (co-author)

Discipleship 101: Basic Christian Teachings

Evangelism Without Guilt

Exploring the Word of God: Studies in Matthew

Exploring the Word of God: Studies in Luke

Exploring the Word of God: Acts of the Apostles (co-author of volumes 1 & 4)

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through Romans

Exploring the Word of God: The Corinthian Letters

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through Galatians

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through Philippians

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through Colossians and Philemon

Exploring the Word of God: Reading Through 1 & 2 Thessalonians

Exploring the Word of God: The Letter to the Hebrews

Inspiration, Authority, and Reliability of Scripture

Should Christians Keep the Annual Festivals God Gave Ancient Israel?

The Proverbs 31 Woman and Other Biblical Women (co-author)

The Purpose for Human Life: Learning to Be Like Jesus Christ

Using Microsoft Word for Academic Papers

What Does the Bible Say About Prophecy and the Millennium?

What Does the Bible Say About Speaking in Tongues?

What Does the Bible Say About the Kingdom of God?

What Does the Bible Say About the Old and New Covenants?

What Does the Bible Say About the Sabbath?

What Does the Bible Say About Women in Church Leadership?

Which Old Testament Laws Apply to Christians Today?

~ ~ ~ ~ ~

[back to table of contents](#)

About the Publisher...

Grace Communion International is a Christian denomination with about 50,000 members, worshiping in about 900 congregations in almost 100 nations and territories. We began in 1934 and our main office is in North Carolina. In the United States, we are members of the National Association of Evangelicals and similar organizations in other nations. We welcome you to visit our website at www.gci.org.

If you want to know more about the gospel of Jesus Christ, we offer help. First, we offer weekly worship services in hundreds of congregations worldwide. Perhaps you'd like to visit us. A typical worship service includes songs of praise, a message based on the Bible, and opportunity to meet people who have found Jesus Christ to be the answer to their spiritual quest. We try to be friendly, but without putting you on the spot. We do not expect visitors to give offerings—there's no obligation. You are a guest.

To find a congregation, write to one of our offices, phone us or visit our website. If we do not have a congregation near you, we encourage you to find another Christian church that teaches the gospel of grace.

We also offer personal counsel. If you have questions about the Bible, salvation or Christian living, we are happy to talk. If you want to discuss faith, baptism or other matters, a pastor near you can discuss these on the phone or set up an appointment for a longer discussion. We are convinced that Jesus offers what people need most, and we are happy to share the good news of what he has done for all humanity. We like to help people find new life in Christ, and to grow in that life. Come and see why we believe it's the best news there could be!

Our work is funded by members of the church who donate part of their income to support the gospel. Jesus told his disciples to share the good news,

and that is what we strive to do in our literature, in our worship services, and in our day-to-day lives.

If this e-book has helped you and you want to pay some expenses, all donations are gratefully welcomed, and in several nations, are tax-deductible. If you can't afford to give anything, don't worry about it. It is our gift to you. To make a donation online, go to www.gci.org/participate/donate.

Thank you for letting us share what we value most — Jesus Christ. The good news is too good to keep it to ourselves.

See our website for hundreds of articles, locations of our churches, addresses in various nations, audio and video messages, and much more.

Grace Communion International
3129 Whitehall Park Dr.
Charlotte, NC 28273-3335

1-800-423-4444
www.gci.org

You're Included...

We talk with leading Trinitarian theologians about the good news that God loves you, wants you, and includes you in Jesus Christ. Most programs are about 28 minutes long. Our guests have included:

Ray Anderson, Fuller Theological Seminary
Douglas A. Campbell, Duke Divinity School
Elmer Colyer, U. of Dubuque Theological Seminary
Gordon Fee, Regent College
Trevor Hart, University of St. Andrews
George Hunsinger, Princeton Theological Seminary
Jeff McSwain, Reality Ministries
Paul Louis Metzger, Multnomah University
Paul Molnar, St. John's University

Cherith Fee Nordling, Antioch Leadership Network
Andrew Root, Luther Seminary
Alan Torrance, University of St. Andrews
Robert T. Walker, Edinburgh University
N.T. Wright, University of St. Andrews
William P. Young, author of *The Shack*

Programs are available free for viewing and downloading at
www.youreincluded.org.

Speaking of Life...

Dr. Joseph Tkach, president of Grace Communion International, comments each week, giving a biblical perspective on how we live in the light of God's love. Most programs are about three minutes long – available in video, audio, and text. Go to www.speakingoflife.org.

[back to table of contents](#)



Grace Communion Seminary

Ministry based on the life and love of the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Grace Communion Seminary serves the needs of people engaged in Christian service who want to grow deeper in relationship with our Triune God and to be able to more effectively serve in the church.

Why study at Grace Communion Seminary?

Worship: to love God with all your mind.

Service: to help others apply truth to life.

Practical: a balanced range of useful topics for ministry.

Trinitarian theology: a survey of theology with the merits of a Trinitarian perspective. We begin with the question, "Who is God?" Then, "Who are we in relationship to God?" In this context, "How then do we serve?"

Part-time study: designed to help people who are already serving in local congregations. There is no need to leave your current ministry.

Full-time students are also welcome.

Flexibility: your choice of master's level continuing education courses or pursuit of a degree: Master of Pastoral Studies or Master of Theological Studies.

Affordable, accredited study: Everything can be done online.

For more information, go to www.gcs.edu. Grace Communion Seminary is accredited by the Distance Education Accrediting Commission, www.deac.org. The Accrediting Commission is listed by the U.S.

Department of Education as a nationally recognized accrediting agency.

[back to table of contents](#)

Ambassador College of Christian Ministry

Want to better understand God's Word? Want to know the Triune God more deeply? Want to share more joyously in the life of the Father, Son and Spirit? Want to be better equipped to serve others?

Among the many resources that Grace Communion International offers are the training and learning opportunities provided by ACCM. This quality, well-structured Christian Ministry curriculum has the advantage of being very practical and flexible. Students may study at their own pace, without having to leave home to undertake full-time study.

This denominationally recognized program is available for both credit and audit study. At minimum cost, this online Diploma program will help students gain important insights and training in effective ministry service. Students will also enjoy a rich resource for personal study that will enhance their understanding and relationship with the Triune God.

Visit: <http://www.smashwords.com/books/view/369752> to purchase this book to continue reading. Show the author you appreciate their work!