

1 Timothy

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As some of you may have noticed, I've been preaching a lot of expository, text-based sermons recently. However, I haven't been preaching them the same way. At times, I've zeroed in on a single chapter; at others, I preached on several in a single sermon. A few weeks ago, we spent most of our time looking at only five verses in 1 Timothy 3. This morning, we'll zoom way, way out, by looking at the entire book in which this single passage is found. Let's open our Bibles, then, and attend to the book of 1 Timothy.

1 Timothy 1-2

1 Timothy opens with Paul's explanation of **TIMOTHY'S PURPOSE**. We find this laid out in 1 Timothy 1:1-11. Paul wants Timothy to emphasize that there's a right way and a wrong way to be a Christian. On the one hand, we can pursue things like love, faith, and a pure conscience. There's nothing hard to understand about these things. They're hard to do, but they're conceptually simple.

On the other hand, we can be led astray by a thousand and one intellectual seductions. In this particular case, some men in Ephesus had become fascinated by the Law of Moses, but it doesn't have to be the Law that gets us off track. Anytime our faith becomes about figuring things out and especially about showing how we're smarter than everybody else, we are in danger. When we fall into this trap, it's easy for us to get loud and self-righteous about things we don't really understand. It's easy for us to start quarrels with brethren. It's easy for us to adopt a manner of life that is nominally righteous but really misses the point.

The only way for us to avoid this disaster is by constantly evaluating ourselves against the standard. The goal of our spiritual lives must be to glorify and imitate Jesus. If not, we have missed the mark.

Next, we see Paul's **CALL TO SERVICE**. It appears in 1 Timothy 1:12-20. In this, there are two main points for us to understand. The first is that through God's grace, anybody can serve Him. Paul was a blasphemer, a murderer, and a persecutor of the church, but God is great enough that even Paul could work to glorify Him. This is no less true today. God can use all of us, and He will use all of us if only we will let Him. This is true regardless of who we are, regardless of what we've done. There's a place in His service for single moms and convicted felons and recovering alcoholics, because it isn't about us. It's about Him.

The flip side of the coin is that anybody can fail in God's service. Timothy had a choice in front of him. He could be like Paul, or he could be like Hymenaeus and Alexander. If he didn't stay true to God, he would make shipwreck of his faith too. Likewise for us. It doesn't matter what we've done, and that cuts both ways. The sinner can repent and please God, but the raised-in-the-church-and-never-left kind of Christian can fall away. Our relationship with God depends entirely on our choice today to serve Him.

Paul addresses the next context to **MEN AND WOMEN**. Let's consider 1 Timothy 2:1-15. I see two layers to this text. The first is Paul's reminder that some events in human history have an enduring effect, even on us today. Sometimes, the effects are bad. Women today are still limited in their roles in the church because of the sin of Eve. Sometimes, the effects are very good indeed. When Jesus gave His life as a ransom for the sin of mankind, that single righteous act will echo down through the ages.

If we are to be spiritual men and spiritual women, we have to understand our lives in the context of these great events. This is especially true of the sacrifice of Jesus. We have to think differently. Once we appreciate the greatness of Jesus, we will understand that there is nothing more important than honoring Him, so much so that we should make a point of praying that the government will allow us to do so.

Similarly, we should live according to values that are very different than those of the world around us. Rather than glorifying self, we must glorify Jesus. Before the Lord's Supper, then, let's reflect on these things. Let's remember our mediator, Jesus Christ, who at the proper time offered Himself for us. Let's also remember our responsibility, which is to live lives that honor Him.

1 Timothy 3-4

Next, Paul addresses the subject of **CHURCH LEADERS**. Let's read together from 1 Timothy 3:1-13. This is a text that we commonly go through with a fine-toothed comb, as we did with part of it a few weeks ago. Today, though, let's look at the big picture. I think there are several main points we can take

from Paul's words here without being drawn into an analysis God's expectations for the marital status of elders. First, it tells us that God expects His church to have leaders. Just like the church is supposed to assemble on the first day of the week, sing praises, celebrate the Lord's Supper, and give of its means, so too the church is supposed to have elders and deacons. It should bother us here that we don't have them.

Second, it tells us what those leaders are supposed to look like. We wouldn't allow a drunk behind the wheel of a Ferrari, and we cannot allow unqualified men to rise to leadership in the Lord's church. As big a problem as it is for us to be leaderless, it's an even bigger problem to have the wrong leaders.

Third, these lists of qualifications represent a mark that every Christian man, and to a lesser extent every Christian, period, are supposed to aim at. We often set goals for our finances, our businesses, and our careers. These things represent goals for our spiritual development. They represent goals for which we must strive, and if we don't keep them in mind and strive for them, we shall never reach them.

Paul then reveals that church leaders are part of God's larger plan for **CONDUCT IN THE CHURCH**. He explains in 1 Timothy 3:14-4:16. This text is founded on the assumption that there is such a thing as "the faith". There is a pattern for the way that God wants His people to behave, both individually and when they come together. Sadly, adherence to this pattern is not a given. Apostasy is always a danger, and Paul grimly prophesies that Timothy would have to deal with it.

The only way to deal with the danger of falling away, Paul points out, is for Timothy to devote himself to sound doctrine. In our day, "doctrine" has become something of a pejorative term. It's taken on almost a Pharisaical connotation. Real Christians, the thinking goes, don't concern themselves with doctrinal minutiae. Instead, they focus on love and on being disciples of Jesus.

The problem is, friends, that once we stop being concerned with sound doctrine, departure from God's pattern is just around the corner. Like the false teachers of Timothy's day, in our quest for what's "truly important", we will cease to support the truth. Our doctrine instead must be founded on the word of God. We must read that word, both privately and publicly. We must proclaim that word and nothing else. We must live the word, so that even people who have never opened a Bible in their lives can see the Scriptural pattern in the way we behave. Finally, we must do all of these things to the limit of our abilities. They don't happen by accident. Instead, we have to discipline ourselves for this purpose and strive for truth.

1 Timothy 5-6

Next, Paul embarks on a period of **PRACTICAL INSTRUCTION**, primarily concerned with the way that Timothy should handle various members of the body. Look at 1 Timothy 5:1-6:2. I see two main applications in this. The first is that we must remember that Christians are different. We have different responsibilities and roles derived from our earthly situation. We also must recognize the different positions of others and change the way that we treat them accordingly. A young man like Timothy must handle an elder of the church in a very different way than he treats a young sister in Christ. Our society is egalitarian in many ways, but we can't allow that egalitarianism to lead us to deal unwisely with our brethren.

Second, as the qualifications for church leaders provide a set of spiritual goals for Christian men, Paul's analysis of righteous and unrighteous widows provides Christian women with their spiritual goals. The woman of God cannot be given to sensuality or gossip. Instead, she must give her life over to the practice of good works in caring for her family, for other Christians, and even for strangers. This manner of living will make her blameless in the same sense that the elder of the church is blameless.

Finally, Paul warns about **THE LOVE OF MONEY** and what disciples should do to avoid the problems that it causes. Let's read 1 Timothy 6:3-21. Paul begins this section by describing a wide range of spiritual problems, but he attributes them all to greed. Even today, brethren, we must be wary of those who view godliness as a means of gain. Be suspicious of the minister on TV who has a private helicopter. Be suspicious of the religious author who has a million-dollar book deal. Men like that face tremendous pressure to teach what is popular and pleasant to hear rather than what is right. Often, they succumb. Satan takes them up on a high mountain, shows them the kingdoms of the world, and they reply, "Where do I sign?"

If we want to avoid all of the problems caused by love of money in our own lives, we must begin first of all with the pursuit not of wealth, but of godliness. It won't be popular, but it will be right. Second, we must use the resources that we have to do good, willing to surrender what we have to bless others. There can be no clearer statement that our lives are free from the love of money than that!