

### Christian Leadership in View of the Dangers of False Teaching

#### 1 Timothy 4:10-16

1 Timothy 4:10-16: *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. <sup>11</sup> These things command and teach. <sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup> Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. <sup>15</sup> Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. <sup>16</sup> Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

#### Background Notes

Remember, Timothy was at Ephesus when the apostle Paul wrote this letter to his son in the faith. Paul had left Timothy at Ephesus to help lead the young church there. This was no easy job for a number of reasons:

1. *Being a leader at any church at any time is never an easy job.* Some of you have probably had experience with this!
2. *Refuting false teaching is not an easy job.* There was dangerous false teaching in and around Ephesus, and some of these false teachings were already penetrating the church. It was not easy for Timothy to refute this false teaching and keep the church's doctrine pure and orthodox.

However, we know that Timothy (and others) did a good job, because about 35 years later, the apostle John referred to the church at Ephesus in the book of Revelation. This message was the word of the Lord Himself to the church at Ephesus in about 100AD: *“I know your works, your labor, your patience, and that you cannot bear those who are evil. And you have tested those who say they are apostles and are not, and have found them liars; and you have persevered and have patience, and have labored for My name's sake and have not become weary”* (Revelation 2:2-3).

So the church at Ephesus remained pure in doctrine during the 1<sup>st</sup> century. However, they did “lose their first love” - their deep devotion to Christ, and for that they were rebuked. But at least they remained pure in doctrine and faithful in service, showing that Timothy was successful in carrying out Paul's instructions given in 1 Timothy.

3. *Timothy was still a young man.* Verse 12: *“Let no one despise your youth.”* It was not easy for Timothy to be a church leader at Ephesus was because he was still a young man. He was probably 30 to 35 years old. Older people in the Ephesian church may have tended to look down on the younger, and therefore somewhat less experienced, Timothy.

For these three reasons, it was not easy for Timothy to follow Paul's instructions on being a good church leader. The instructions in 1 Timothy were not just good for the 1<sup>st</sup> century churches - they're good for all believers today, especially church leaders.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Church leaders must labor for godliness.

Verse 10: *"For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach."* To what end? **Godliness!** *"Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come"* (v8). Church leaders must labor for godliness. In verse 10, the word "suffer reproach" or "strive" is the Greek word from which we get "agonize" - like an athlete giving every last ounce of energy to reach the goal. But the striving is well worthwhile, because our hope and trust is in the living God.

The end of verse 10 says, *"God who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe."* What is the Bible teaching here? Is the Bible teaching "universalism" - that all people are saved because God is the Savior of all men? No, the thought here is essentially the same as 1 Timothy 2:6. Jesus Christ gave Himself a ransom for all. In other words, God is potentially the Savior of all mankind because the work of Christ on the cross was **sufficient for all**. Jesus died for the sins of the world, and His saving work was sufficient to cover all the sins of the world. But the saving work of Christ is only **effective for those who believe** - specifically for those who believe.

The job of church leaders is to labor and strive to bring people to the living God, and to see them live godly lives. Church leaders must labor for godliness.

### 2. Church leaders must be a good example.

Verse 12: *"Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity."* In essence, Paul was saying to Timothy, "Don't give anyone an opportunity to look down on you or criticize you because of your age. Remember, be such a good example that they will have no opportunity at all to criticize you just because of your young age!"

Let me ask you, particularly those of you who are thirty-five years of age or younger: where would your church be today if they followed your example *in word, in conduct, in love, in purity*? That's a convicting question for all of us. Even though Timothy was still a young man, he was called to be a leader, and he was to be a good example of Christ-like behavior. Church leaders must be a good example.

### 3. Church leaders must set the right agenda.

Verse 13, *“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”* At first glance you might think that Paul was saying, “Timothy, be sure to have your personal quiet time of Bible reading and prayer. And be sure to get to church regularly so you’re exposed to exhortation and sound doctrine.” That’s good advice, but that’s really not Paul’s point here.

Remember that the context and the theme of the book is “Church Order.” Here Paul was instructing Timothy to make sure that the Scriptures were read *publicly in the church* at Ephesus. Remember, the printing press had not yet been invented, and people didn’t have their own personal Bibles, so it was very important that the Scripture be read aloud when the believers were gathered together. It was part of “church order.”

In addition, Timothy was to make sure that sound doctrine and exhortation were presented in the church at Ephesus, especially in view of the dangers of false teaching. Timothy as a church leader is to “guard the pulpit.” No committee (music committee, or drama committee, or any other committee) was to set the agenda for the teaching in the church. The spiritual leaders of the church are to set the right agenda for the church.

This instruction is still important today. All of those areas are aspects of the ministry and have their proper place, but the structure for the church services must center on the public reading of Scripture and the public preaching and teaching of sound doctrine and exhortation. Church leaders must set the right agenda.

### 4. Church leaders must exercise their spiritual gifts.

Verse 14: *“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”* Timothy, like all Christians, had a spiritual gift. Most likely his spiritual gift was teaching or pastoring (shepherding the flock).

Timothy’s spiritual gift was given to him in association with prophecy. The Holy Spirit, through a New Testament prophet (or prophets) had designated Timothy as the recipient of his spiritual gift. Remember what we read back in 1 Timothy 1:8? *“This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare.”* Timothy’s spiritual gift was publicly recognized when the elders laid their hands on him and commended him to the Lord’s work.

The important point here was that Timothy was not to neglect his spiritual gift. He was to use it and exercise it. In 2 Timothy 1:6, Timothy was told to **stir up the gift** that was in him. And this is still true today. Our spiritual gifts won’t work unless we use them! Just as an athlete must use his or her athletic ability through exercise and discipline, so believers must use their spiritual gifts. Are you exercising and using your spiritual gift?

How can you know what your spiritual gift is? Just get involved in serving the Lord, and you will discover your spiritual gift (or gifts). The rest of the body of Christ will recognize your spiritual gift, and they will tell you what your spiritual gift is (or is not!). So church leaders must exercise their spiritual gifts.

## 5. Church leaders must be fully committed.

Verse 15, *“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.”* Are you fully committed to the service of the Lord? Notice - I didn't say committed to the Lord for salvation, but for **service** to the Lord. That's really the point of verse 15. Give yourself entirely to the study and service for the Lord.

This doesn't mean that you have to be at church all the time, and you can't go to the beach with your family, or go skiing, or have a secular job! However, if you are fully committed and giving yourself entirely to the service of the Lord, even your beach breaks and your ski weekends and your secular jobs can be a means to serve the Lord. (Did you realize, by the way, that when you ride a double chair ski lift, you have a captive audience for at least five minutes? You can give your testimony, including the gospel, in five minutes!)

Like Timothy, we should be fully committed so that our spiritual progress will be evident to all - as a model and an example. What a challenge it is to our own lives to see a fully committed Christian! Church leaders must be fully committed.

## Practical Application

### Keep an eye on yourself!

Verse 16, *“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”* Parents of my students will sometimes ask me to keep an eye on their son or daughter, asking me to make sure that their son or daughter studies well and doesn't get into trouble!

Paul told Timothy to keep an eye on himself – and we should do the same. If your conduct does not live up to your doctrine, you can do great damage to yourself and to your fellow believers. But if you “keep an eye on yourself” to make sure your conduct lives up to your doctrine, then *“you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

In the context, the main idea here is probably that you (and others who follow you) will be preserved from false teaching and the unbalanced lifestyle that is the result of false teaching. Thus you will be “saved” to serve the Lord with your whole life.

So if you want your life to count forever, keep your eye on yourself now!