1 Timothy

Lesson 4

**Introduction**

So far, Paul has given the falling instructions to Timothy:

* Confront people teaching false doctrine/hold on to apostolic gospel (1 Tim. 1:3-20)
* Pray for all types of people, including kings and authorities (1 Tim. 2:2-7)
* Observe order in church services and structure
  + Men should pray in holiness without anger or contention (1 Tim. 2:8)
  + Women should focus on pleasing God with good deeds rather than seeking improper human attention through extravagant or immodest dress (1 Tim. 2:9-10)
  + Women should learn in church services while recognizing male authority in the church (1 Tim. 2:11-15)
  + Local churches should be overseen by groups of elders who should be appointed based on qualifications emphasizing spiritual maturity;
  + If churches have deacons that handle administrative tasks and report to the elders, the deacons should also be chosen based on spiritual qualifications;
* Confront false teachers concerning legalism (not marrying or prohibiting certain foods), myths, and superstitions;

**1 Timothy 4:1-16 Advice for a church leader/pastor continued**

Paul says that, if Timothy teaches Paul’s instructions to the brothers, he will be a good “deacon” or “servant” of Christ Jesus, “nourished” on the “words of the faith” and “good teaching,” which “you have followed.” The imagery is that a good minister grows strong in the faith by holding onto the good doctrine, and thus is in position to identify false teaching and provide accurate teaching, thereby fulfilling the role of a good minister. But that process requires effort. Timothy must reject false ideas, here described as myths and godless superstitions. And he must “train” himself in godliness. The word for training came from athletics. The comparison to athletic training conveys the hard effort required.

Paul adds that physical training has “some value” but godliness has more value because it has benefits in this lifetime and the life to come. Paul describes this principle as a faithful or trustworthy saying (The NIV makes it sounds like verses 4:9-10 are the saying, but most commentators agree that 4:8 is the saying.). The source of the saying is unknown, although one can find analogous thoughts in the gospels, where Jesus emphasizes benefits in the age or life to come. (Luke 18:29-30.) The great value of godliness now and in the future is why Paul “toils” or “labors” and “struggles mightily.” These terms include the root word for “agony” and convey extreme effort. The good news, however, is that Paul is not asking Timothy to put extreme effort toward an uncertain venture, but rather to set his hope on the “living God” who is the savior of all types of people, either “especially believers” or “that is, believers.” If Paul meant “especially believers” one common rationalization is to see this as a reference to the distinction between unlimited and limited atonement, i.e., Jesus is savior of all types of people by providing a ransom payment sufficient for all, but that atonement is only applied to those who believe. If Paul meant, “that is, believers,” the phrase is saying that believers come from all types of people groups. This suggests that church leaders should work so hard at godliness because (1) because investing in the living God has a certain and great return, and (2) because the task, bring the good news about Jesus to all types of people, is so huge.

Paul urges Timothy to “command” and “teach” “these things,” likely meaning the content of the epistle, but since the epistle includes references to the gospel and summaries of the gospel, Paul does not mean Timothy should ignore what he has learned from Paul in the past. Paul exhorts Timothy not to let anyone look down on him due to his youth. Scholars think in first century Rome, men were considered young as late as their mid-40s and age was entitled to deference. The method for making sure his youth did not become an obstacle was to be an exemplary believer in speech and conduct, and in love, faith, and purity. Paul again mentions his hope to arrive in Ephesus, and implies that may change Timothy’s role. Until then, Paul exhorts Timothy to devote himself to the public reading of scripture, to exhortation (i.e., urge people to behave consistently with scripture), and to teaching (which would include explaining the meaning or application of scripture). Paul urges Timothy not to neglect the spiritual gift that he received when a group of elders laid hands on him and prophecies were spoken. When that occurred is not specified, but it sounds like an ordination or commissioning ceremony that may have occurred when Timothy decided to accompany Paul’s team many years earlier. Paul exhorts Timothy to “practice” these things in the sense of diligently working at them (the way a doctor practices medicine), and to be “devoted to” or “absorbed by” them. The goal is so that Timothy’s spiritual growth will be plain to see. Note that this indicates even a church leader like Timothy, who was always described positively, can continue growing. Last, Paul urges Timothy to “pay attention” to himself and his teaching and to “persevere.” The reason is that, by doing so, he will “save” himself and his hearers. This line is shocking to evangelicals. We do not like to use language suggesting that implying that a human can save himself, much less anyone else. But Jesus and other NT writers are not afraid to use similar language. (Luke 9:24; James 5:20; Jude 23.) They do not mean that Timothy can provide the means of justification before God. The NT makes it abundantly clear that the righteousness Jesus provides through faith is the only thing that provide that type of justification. But they have no trouble using language indicating that human effort—such as Timothy paying attention to how he lives and what he teaches—can be a vital part of the process of having and maintaining genuine faith.

**1 Timothy 5:1-6:2 How a church leader should deal with different types of people**

1. **Treat believers like family members**

Paul exhorts Timothy not to “sharply rebuke” an older man. The term means a harsh or severe rebuke. Instead, even though Timothy was a church leader with spiritual authority, he should confront an older man as a son would approach his father. In that culture, even when a son knew his father needed to be corrected, he would probably raise the topic carefully and respectfully because fathers had no obligation to listen to sons, and fathers had the ability to make life miserable for their sons.

In the same vein, Timothy should think of younger adult male believers as brothers. He should view older women as mothers and younger women as sisters, “with all purity.” Treating members of the congregation as family will help Timothy minister to them properly, i.e., not as a tyrant. One common sin amond leaders of secular and religious groups is sexual abuse of their followers. Paul specifically prohibits this type of abuse among Christian leaders.

1. **Ministering to widows**

Paul devotes special attention to widows. The patriarchal structure of Roman society left widows in a vulnerable position. There was little law enforcement or government welfare, so the male head of a family was expected to provide financial and physical protection for his wife and female relatives. Without a male partner, first-century widows had few career opportunities and no one to protect them from predatory males. Paul tells Timothy to “honor” widows who are “indeed widows” or “widows in the full sense of that term.” The following verses show this proposition requires careful and nuanced application. “Honor” calls to mind the Sixth Commandment (Ex. 20:12), and the obligation to honor one’s parents never seems to inform Paul’s thoughts in this passage.

If a widow has children or grandchildren or other relatives, however, those relatives should first learn to live piously, or practice their faith, toward their own family, and give back to their parents, for this is acceptable or pleasing in God’s sight. Paul cites two different reasons descendants should be the first level of help and protection for widows even in the Christian community: (1) practicing the Christian virtue of serving people in need, whether they deserve it or not (such as the Good Samaritan); and (2) repaying parents for the care they provided when the descendants were young and unable to protect themselves. The persuasiveness of the second rationale can vary depending on the quality of one’s parents, so both principles are important.

In contrast, there are widows who “abide alone” or “remain by herself.” Paul says such a widow has placed her hope on God, as shown by appeals or entreaties to God in prayer night and day. In contrast, a widow who lives “for pleasure” or “for indulgence” is “dead while alive.” One could translate it “dead woman walking.” Many widows would not have this option, but it would be possible for a woman who inherited significant wealth. Paul then tells Timothy to command these instructions so that “they” may be without approach. Some commentators think “they” just refers to the descendants. Others think “they” refers to widows and their descendants. But if Timothy was just supposed to exhort the descendants, Paul’s mention of the widow who lives for herself—and clearly needs some exhortation—seems unnecessary. In my opinion, the broader view, which assumes that Paul wanted Timothy to instruct widows to focus on God and not live for themselves, and to instruct the widows’ descendants to provide for the widows in their family, fits the context better.

That being said, Paul does spend more time exhorting the descendants and does so in very strong language. Paul says that if anyone does not provide for his own family, he “has denied the faith” and is “worse than an unbeliever.” Paul does not explain why. One possibility for the first comment is that God has commanded families to look after each other. (Gen. 2:24; Ex. 20:22; Deut 25:5-10; Eph. 6:4.) So a person who refuses to help a truly needy relative is effectively denying God’s ability to enable what Commentators think the second comment assumes that many unbelievers offer sacrificial help for family members. In Paul’s view, a professing Christian who has heard God’s promises and commands should not demonstrate less faith than a typical unbeliever.

Paul recognizes, however, that some widows will not have family members who can support them, and thus churches will likely have a list of widows that the church supports financially. Paul says a widow may be “enrolled” if she is not less than 60 years old. Scholars say 60 was the age when someone entered the category of “old” and remarriage became unlikely. She must be “the wife of one man.” This obviously does not mean currently married; it means the widow was faithful before her husband died. She must be “well attested in good deeds,” including “caring for children,” “showing hospitality,” “washing the feet of the saints” (commentators think it is not referring just to foot washing but to humble acts of service for other believers in general), “helped others in distress,” and “devoted herself to all types of good works.” It is a strict or high standard. The qualifications are intended to identify those widows who truly can’t provide for themselves, have no family to provide for them, are unlikely to remarry, and have a strong testimony of genuine faith evidenced by good deeds. Paul does state the rationale for the spiritual requirements, but the following verses indicates that enrolled widows were viewed almost as employees of the church dedicated to serve the Christian community in exchange for financial support. If so, people would view them as representatives of the church.

In contrast, Paul tells Timothy to “refuse” to enroll “younger widows.” The rationale is that this group still feels the desire romance and marriage, and when they give in to this desire, it constitutes a breaking of a pledge that results in judgment. The reference to a pledge supports the idea that enrolled widows were expected to dedicate themselves to the church in exchange for its financial support. A second rationale is that this group of younger widows, when tasked with circulating among the community for service, does not serve diligently but instead learns to be idle and become gossips and busybodies. Paul does not have this concern regarding older women, so it is not a gender issue, but rather a youth issue. Paul’s advice to younger widows is to remarry, have children, and manage their households. Managing a household, including helping their husband with his business pursuits, was typically the only career available to a first-century Roman female. This would give no occasion for reproach from the “enemy” or “one opposing.” Translators and commentators are not sure what enemy Paul meant. It could be Satan or nonbelievers. In either case, the criticism would be that the church was subsidizing irresponsible behavior. Comparing 1 Corinthians 7:25-40 and this passage indicates Paul admired those young single men and women who could faithfully dedicate their lives to Christian ministry, but he viewed this as an exception and so financially incentivizing that choice would be unwise and lead to broken pledges. Paul contends that some have already strayed after Satan, suggesting that this policy was based on painful experiences.

Paul concludes by stating that, if any believing women have family members who are widows, they should “assist” the widows, so that the church should not be burdened financially and can help those who are widows in the full sense of the word. The responsibility to assist widowed family members thus is shared by women and men. Following this rule will enable churches to focus its limited resources on truly needy widows.

Note that Paul said nothing about helping widowed males, probably because males could generally find work, or at least be servants, and were less vulnerable to exploitation. Reading between the lines, the passage suggests that Christians should do what they can to support themselves; if they can’t, their family members should do what they can to help them; and the church provides financial assistance only when neither the individual nor their family is sufficient. When that occurs, the person receiving financial help should do what they can to be useful to the church.

1. **Dealing with Elders**

Paul says that elders who “rule” or “lead” well should be considered worthy of “double honor.” More specifically, Paul means those who “toil” or “work hard” at preaching and teaching. Paul cites Deut. 25:4, which says not to muzzle an ox while it is treading out grain, and Luke 10:7, the worker deserves his wages. Because this verse matches Luke 10:7 precisely, some view it as evidence that Paul had read Luke’s gospel. This is certainly possible, but it also seems possible that Luke and Paul had each heard this saying of Jesus. Either way, Paul’s use of Jesus’ remark indicates Paul viewed Jesus’s teaching as having the same authority as OT scripture. The quotations show that Paul believed elders who devoted significant time to serving the church deserved financial support from the church. A Christian community that benefits from an elder’s willingness to serve the church instead of pursuing secular business should give something in exchange for the elder’s service.

Paul tells Timothy not to “accept” or “acknowledge” an accusation against an elder unless there are two or three witnesses, i.e., at least two witnesses. The Mosaic code included this requirement for criminal convictions. (Deut. 19:15.) Jesus also cited this principle in the context of disputes among his followers. (Matt. 18:16-17.) This means that some valid charges against an elder would not be pursued if made by only one person. On the other hand, if it was established that an elder “had sinned,” the elder should be “rebuked” before “all” or “everyone” so “the rest may fear.” (See Deut. 13:11.) Paul does not specify what sins qualify for this type of treatment, but the requirement of multiple witnesses, and the punishment of a public rebuke before the entire local body of believer are consistent with serious issues. The requirement of multiple witnesses means that, when this type of public rebuke was involved, certainty of guilt was more important than rebuking every single valid charge. Last, this approach shows that elders are always examples—either positive models to be imitated, or negative examples that hopefully deter others from engaging in sin.

Paul solemnly charges Timothy to follow these principles concerning elder discipline. Paul reminds Timothy that God, Jesus, and angels witness his actions, and that he should apply these principles without “prejudgment” or “partiality.” Paul probably knew administering discipline to elders would not be easy, as Timothy would likely have a personal relationship with an elder subject to a charge, so Paul stressed the importance of this principle. Paul did not want the church to be a community that overlooked sin among its leaders.

Most commentators believe “laying on hands” refers to commissioning an elder or other church leader. (See 1 Tim. 4:14; 2 Tim. 1:6.) Paul advises Timothy not to be “hasty” “too quick” in taking this step. Given the context, the goal of this advice was probably to select elders who had a long track record and thus minimize the occurrences of serious sin among church leaders.

Paul urges Timothy not to “participate” or “share” in the sins of others and instead to “keep himself pure.” The context suggests one way to participate in someone’s sin is to put that person in leadership without properly vetting them. But even with proper vetting, it is possible for there to be sin among believers, and when that occurs, it is important for church leaders not to join in the sin, but rather to stay pure and do what they can to keep the sin from spreading.

In 5:23, Paul advises Timothy to stop drinking “only water” and mix a little wine due to Timothy’s “stomach” and “frequent illnesses” or “ailments.” This indicates Paul did not preach that all Christians had to avoid wine entirely, but other passages concerning intoxication show that some Christians should do so. We know Paul believed in praying for healing, but this verse shows he also believed in taking practical measures, and thought that mixing a little wine with water might help Timothy avoid digestive illnesses. This comment might seem to come out of left field, but perhaps the exhortation for Timothy to stay pure brought this issue to mind, and Paul wanted to clarify that using a small amount of wine for medicinal purposes would not make Timothy unpure.

Paul closes the section on elders by stating that some men’s sins are “evident” or “obvious” and “precede them to the place of judgment.” Paul does not specify human or divine judgment, and it does not really matter. In context, the point is that there are some people who have struggles with sin that are obvious to anyone who knows them; one does not have to apply much scrutiny to spot them. In contrast, some men’s sin “follows after,” i.e., is not easy to spot. This issue supports the admonition not to be hasty or quick to put someone in leadership—some people’s character flaws take time and careful scrutiny to discover. Conversely, Paul says that some good deeds are obvious, but the ones that are not do not remain hidden, i.e., are discovered eventually. This principle also supports taking the time to get to know leadership candidates before commissioning them.

1. **Masters and slaves/servants**

Paul say that all under the “yoke as slaves” should nevertheless “regard” their masters as worthy of all honor. The term “yoke” implies a hard or burdensome type of service. And the word “regard” implies that the master may not actually be worthy of honor. Paul is therefore asking slaves to treat their master with honor whether or not the master deserves such honor. The reason is so that the “name of God and our doctrine may not be spoken against.” Paul is asking slaves to do something quite difficult in order to put the gospel in the best possible light. If Christian slaves treated unworthy masters as poorly as the slaves were being treated, the masters might blame Christianity/God for the slaves’ poor attitudes. Other passages make a similar point. (Titus 2:9-10; 1 Pet. 2:18-25.) With regard to slaves who served believers, the slaves are urged not to “despise” their masters “because they are brothers.” Instead, the slaves should “serve” “even better” or “all the more” because their master is “beloved,” i.e. sacrificially loved by the slave, and the recipient of the slave’s service is a believer. Paul rejects any argument that, because believing slaves and masters have equal status in Christ (Gal. 3:28), believing slaves may use that equality to disregard their master’s authority. In sum, whether slaves are serving unbelievers or believers, Paul asks slaves to focus on how their work serves a spiritual purpose rather than the injustice or unfairness of their situation.

Paul concludes this section with the idea, mentioned multiple times in the epistle, that Timothy should teach and instruct others to follow these things.

Family remains the most important social unit; church functions as an extended family, but believers continue to have obligations to their immediate family members; so for Christians, the order of people we count on for help is family, then church, and government is a distant third; this does not mean it is wrong to take advantage of government benefits, but it’s not something we count on;

**1 Timothy 6:3-5 More on false teachers**

Paul turns one more time to false teachers. He says that if anyone “teaches a different doctrine” and does “not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that “promotes godliness” . . . . The beginning of the sentence gives three ways to identify false teaching. It is (1) inconsistent with the words of believers’ ultimate leader, the Lord Jesus Christ; (2) not helpful in promoting godliness; or (3) is different that what Paul taught. The second half describes the type of people that try to teach things to believers that fail these tests. They are “conceited,” “understand nothing,” and “have an unhealthy craving for controversies and verbal disputes.” Their teaching gives rise to “envy,” “strife,” “abusive speech,” “evil suspicions,” and “constant friction” by people “corrupted in mind” and “deprived of truth.” They think “religion” is a “means of gain.” So, yeah, Paul doesn’t like false teachers. Paul’s motive is not pride or ego, however, but frustration that false teacher lead people into destruction.

**1 Timothy 6:6-10 The proper attitude toward wealth**

The mention of improper gain leads to a discussion concerning wealth. Paul says that religion combined with contentment is very profitable. He is not thinking of a monetary profit, as the next verse makes clear. Paul says that humans do not bring anything into the world and cannot take anything with them when they leave/die. Consequently, believers should be content if they have “sustenance and coverings,” i.e. the necessities of life. In contrast, those who “desire to be rich” fall into “temptation,” a “trap,” and “cravings” for many senseless and harmful desires that “plunge” people into “ruin and destruction.” Paul then quotes a proverbial saying: “the love of money is the root of all evil.” Some translations say “a root of all kinds of evil” because comparison with the various lists of evil practices written by Paul shows Paul knows that greed is not literally the root of all evil in the world. The proverb is an example of hyperbole for effect. Paul warns that even some professing believers have, by “striving for money,” wandered away from the faith and pierced or wounded themselves with many pains.

Paul’s point is that the pursuit of wealth is addictive, and like any addiction, a person trapped in that addiction will ignore other responsibilities and duties in the futile pursuit of satisfaction through more wealth. The cure is to remember that all worldly wealth is temporary and so be content with the wealth one has and can gain without compromising one’s faith and other responsibilities.

**1 Timothy 6:11-16 Solemn charge to Timothy to carry out his mission faithfully**

Paul gives a series of final exhortations to Timothy, addressing him as “man of God.” The first is to “flee” from “these things,” presumably meaning the love of money Paul has just discussed. Instead, Timothy should “pursue” 6 virtues: (1) righteousness, (2) godliness, (3) faith, (4) love, (5) steadfastness or patience, and (6) gentleness. Next, Paul exhorts Timothy to “compete in the good competition of the faith,” often translated as “fight the good fight.” Paul is borrowing language from athletic competitions like wrestling or boxing that require exhausting effort, but Paul is urging Timothy to put his effort into the “good competition” of practicing faith. Paul exhorts Timothy to “lay hold of” or “claim” the eternal life that Timothy was “called to” and confessed in the presence of witness. This exhortation weaves together the doctrine of election and Timothy’s responsibility to actively pursue, and persevere in, his faith.

Last, Paul “charges” Timothy in the presence of God who gives life to all things (and thus to whom we are accountable as his creations) and Jesus Christ who made a “good confession” before Pontius Pilate. Most commentators believe Paul is referring to Jesus’ affirmative acknowledgment that he was king of the Jews even though he knew it would lead to his crucifixion, thereby setting an example of faithfulness despite intimidation and threats. With that solemn introduction, Paul charges Timothy to keep the commandment “without stain or reproach” until the “appearing” of our Lord Jesus Christ, which will be “made manifest” at the proper time by: “the blessed and only sovereign,” “the king of kings,” “the Lord of lords,” “He who alone possess immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light,” and “whom know person has seen or can see.” This is the OT idea that sinful humans cannot see God’s full presence and survive, and thus post-fall humans who encounter God are seeing either a representation or something less than God’s face or full presence. (See Ex. 33:20.) Paul adds a doxology: “to him be honor and eternal dominion, amen.”

The charge is extremely intimidating, but it should remind Timothy of the incredible significance of his work, and that the one he serves is more powerful than any obstacles or enemies Timothy faced.

**1 Timothy 6:17-19 Instructions to the wealthy**

Paul tells Timothy to command those “who are rich in this age” or “world” not to be “haughty” or unduly proud and not to place their hope on uncertain wealth but instead on God who “richly supplies us all things to enjoy.” In other words, the rich should focus their faith on the giver and not be distracted by the gifts they have been given. They should also “do good,” “be rich in good works,” “be willing to share,” and “be generous.” The purpose is so that they will store up for themselves a good foundation for the future so that they may take hold of, or claim, the life which is “real life” or “life in its fullest sense.”

The rich are thus reminded that they begin life with no more eternal or heavenly wealth than anyone else. They should not let their worldly wealth distract them from their need for a savior and the need to “store up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal” by living out their faith. (Matt. 6:20.)

**1 Timothy 6:20-21 Final exhortation to Timothy and closing**

Paul ends with a final charge to Timothy by name to “guard” the “deposit” or “what has been entrusted to you.” “Deposit” means something valuable given to Timothy for him to keep safe. 2 Tim. 1:13-14 and 2:1 indicate that the “deposit” is the apostolic teaching concerning Jesus Christ. Conversely, Timothy is reminded to avoid false teaching that Paul describes as godless “chatter” or “empty talk” and “opposing” arguments, i.e., ideas that are inconsistent or contrary to the deposit. Paul warns Timothy that the promoters of these false doctrines falsely claim to have knowledge and have lead some professing believers away from the faith.

Paul ends with a final blessing wishing that grace be with “you.” The you is plural, indicating that Paul expected Timothy to share the letter with the church he was helping to lead.