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We begin with [1 Timothy 4:1-5](#), and specifically deal with what it means when Paul mentions those that will “depart” or “fall away” from the faith.

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The key question that we have to ask relative to this passage is whether or not it is speaking of someone who is saved and they leave, but do not lose their salvation, or is it speaking of someone who is not saved, but has given the appearance within the church that they were saved, but ultimately depart from the faith that they appeared to have. It boils down to the question as to whether or not a genuine believer can lose, or permanently leave, their salvation.

Now, one of Paul’s primary objectives of this chapter is provide for Timothy certain things which he was constantly to remind the church. One of the things was that Timothy was to constantly put the church in remembrance of the great apostasy which was to occur, and to guard them against the doctrines that would be taught under that apostasy. So, in this passage Paul writes to Timothy about those who “**will depart from the faith**”. The word for “**will depart from**” is the word “*apostesnotai*”, and comes from the word “*aphistemi*” from where we get the word “apostasy”. The rest of the verses are simply a description of some of the elements of apostasy. The word “*aphistemi*” comes from “*apo*” and “*histemi*”. “*Apo*” means off or away. I.e., to get away from something that is near to you. It means to depart, to desist, to refrain, to withdraw from. “*Histemi*” means to abide, to stand by something, to continue in something. So, when you put the two words together, it means to get away from something that you have been continuing in, to leave something that you have embraced. If we properly define the word within its context, it means that there will be some who will depart from “**the faith**”. It does not mean just their personal faith, but also the fundamental doctrines of Christianity. It is a “willful” turning away from the Christian faith. It is not talking specifically about someone who may be struggling with doubt, or who is just weak and falls away. This is much more of a deliberate departing. It is talking about someone who deliberately determines to abandon the truth he once held and to depart for another teaching. [Luke 8:13](#) uses this word for “depart” and it is translated “fall away”.

¹³But the ones on the rock are those who, when they hear, receive the word with joy; and these have no root, who believe for a while and in time of temptation fall away.

An apostate is not someone who is just struggling to believe, but someone who willfully abandons the biblical faith and truth that he had once professed. It is important to accurately define what Paul means when he speaks in v1 of departing “**from the faith**”. “**The faith**” refers to the content of divine revelation that constitutes what Christians believe, and in the context of this verse, Paul is talking



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specifically about someone who is in the church, and then they depart from the church and what it believes. In fact, we know that he is also talking about the effect that false teachers have within the church. This has always been a spiritual battleground. God calls men to faithfully respond to His Word and Satan tries to lure them to follow lies. And sadly enough, some who profess to be believers turn away from the truth they say they once believed. Such deviations to the truth are not new. Scripture is full of examples of men who abandoned their faith. So, the question is whether or not they were really saved to begin with.

In this context, to “**depart**” means that they will renounce their Christian faith by bringing in doctrines which render its essential truths null and void, or denying and renouncing the fundamental doctrines that are essential to Christianity, and especially those related to salvation. It does not mean that as an individual they would have been true Christians; but that there would be a departure from the great doctrines which constitute the Christian faith. [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#) says,

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

That is what Paul is saying to Timothy will happen in the last days.

The “**latter times**” began with Christ’s resurrection and will continue until His return, when He will set up His Kingdom and judge all humanity. So, we have been in the last times for a long time. [1 John 2:18](#) says,

¹⁸Little children, it is the last hour; and as you have heard that the Antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come, by which we know that it is the last hour.

[Hebrews 1:1-2](#) says,

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets ²has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds

Jesus and the apostles forewarned that during that interim between the first and second coming of Christ, that false teachers would abound - men who love money and attention, men who distort the truth, who divide believers, and men who cause many to go astray. [2 Thessalonians 2:3-4](#) says,

³Let no one deceive you by any means; for that Day will not come unless the falling away comes first, and the man of sin is revealed, the son of perdition, ⁴who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God.

It appears from these two verses that the “**falling away**” (same Greek word as “**depart from the faith**”) will be extensive in length.

This idea of departing from the faith is certainly not something that is new to the church. It was happening at the church here in Ephesus, it was the story of Israel from beginning to end. It is



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important to appreciate that apostates are not people who have biblical faith. They have superficial faith, and the evidence of that is their ultimate falling away and denial of the faith. [1 John 2:19](#) says,

¹⁹They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us; but they went out that they might be made manifest, that none of them were of us.

We have to appreciate that within the church, there will always be people who have an outward, external faith, but who do not have an inward and internal faith. So, an apostate is someone who has become very familiar to the faith, and someone who has externally embraced the faith – but he is not someone who has actually been saved. And when the siren voices of false teachers come along, they are allured away into false teaching. Their heart has never really been attached to the truth. It is similar to what God said about Israel – that not all Israel was true Israel. [Romans 9:6](#) says,

⁶...For they are not all Israel who are of Israel,

In reformed theology, the P in TULIP is called the perseverance of the saints, or may better be called the preservation of the saints. The Westminster Confession of Faith states the following about this doctrine.

I. They whom God hath accepted in his Beloved, effectually called and sanctified by his Spirit, can neither totally nor finally fall away from the state of grace; but shall certainly persevere therein to the end, and be eternally saved.

II. This perseverance of the saints depends, not upon their own free-will, but upon the immutability of the decree of election, flowing from the free and unchangeable love of God the Father; upon the efficacy of the merit and intercession of Jesus Christ; the abiding of the Spirit and of the seed of God within them; and the nature of the covenant of grace; from all which arises also the certainty and infallibility thereof.

III. Nevertheless they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their perseverance, fall into grievous sins; and for a time continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve his Holy Spirit; come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts; have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and prevalence others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

A more condensed version of the doctrine is from Wayne Grudem's [Bible Doctrine](#), and says,

“The perseverance of the saints means that all who are truly born again will be kept by God's power and persevere as Christians until the end of their lives, and that only those who persevere until the end have been truly born again.”

Thiessen's [Lectures in Systematic Theology](#) states,

“All who are by faith united to Christ, who have been justified by God's grace and regenerated by His Spirit, will never totally or finally fall away from the state of grace, but certainly persevere



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therein to the end.” He further states that that is “*not equivalent to saying that they shall never backslide, never fall into sin, and never fail to show forth the praises of Him who called them out of darkness into His marvelous light.*”

This passage in Timothy speaks to this theological issue of falling away from the faith. We know that this is going to occur. [1 Timothy 4:1](#) says,

¹Now, the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith....

[Hebrews 3:12-14](#) warns,

¹²Beware, **brethren**, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in **departing** (same Greek word as in 1 Timothy 4:1) **from the living God;** ¹³but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partakers of Christ **if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end,**

In v12, the writer of Hebrews calls them “**brethren**”. I.e., he considers them to be saved, but he acknowledges the possibility of their departing or falling away from the living God. If that happens, he states the result can be a hardening of the heart through the deceitfulness of sin – which is tragic if they in fact are not actually Christians. This hardening is a very real experience and most likely happens much more than we might be aware.

Now, what we really want to understand is what does “apostasy” mean and what does it mean to “**depart**” or to “**fall away**” from the faith – and specifically is it talking about a believer or a non-believer. It needs to be clarified at the beginning that it is very possible for a genuine believer to fall into sin, but it is not possible for a true believer to live in that sin permanently. So, in essence, a believer may actually depart from his faith temporarily, but he will return to it eventually. However, it is not easy to discern the true reality of one’s faith under those conditions.

In this passage in [1 Timothy 4](#), we need to appreciate that within the church, within the local church as we know it, some will eventually abandon the faith. In fact, if I had to personally account for people who have been in my church and left the faith vs. those who have been in the church and remained faithful, I would say that the first group is actually greater. The number of authentic, genuine, God-fearing, committed Christians seems to be dwindling at an enormous rate. At the same time, a cultural and superficial Christianity seems to be growing exponentially.

Now, in order to put the Doctrine of Perseverance in perspective, we need to know what it is not. It does not mean that everyone who outwardly professes faith in Christ and is accepted into the church is actually a believer and secure for eternity. Jesus gave assurance to believers in [John 8:31](#),

³¹Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, “**If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.**”

I.e., Jesus was giving His disciples the criterion and the standard by which true disciples could be distinguished. The standard was that they would continue in Jesus’ words. [Matthew 10:22](#) says,



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²²And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved.

Hebrews 3:14 says,

¹⁴For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.

John 15:6 says,

⁶If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned.

The emphasis of Scripture should clearly teach us something. It provides the meaning of falling away, of departing, and of apostatizing. It is more than possible to give all of the outward evidence of faith in Christ, and obedience to Him, and to even show a measure of zeal for Christ and His kingdom, but then lose all interest and become indifferent, even hostile to the things of God. This is very prevalent in a man-centered theological culture. **2 Peter 2:20-22** says,

²⁰For if, after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and overcome, the latter end is worse for them than the beginning. ²¹For it would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered to them. ²²But it has happened to them according to the true proverb: "A dog returns to his own vomit," and, "a sow, having washed, to her wallowing in the mire."

It cannot be doubted that Peter had in mind here people who had the knowledge of Christ, people who had known the way of righteousness, and who because of those two things had actually escaped the pollutions and corruptions in the world. However, something happened, and they became entangled in those pollutions at a later date. Just like a dog, they returned to their vomit. So, it is more than possible for an individual to have an outwardly meaningful experience related to the power and truth of the gospel, and to actually come into close contact with the supernatural forces operating in the world on God's behalf, yet not be actual partakers of Christ and of eternal life. Often times this seems to be the norm and not the exception within many churches.

We have to acknowledge without any reservation that a believer can fall into grievous sins and backslide for periods of time. However, it is also true that he cannot just permanently abandon himself to that sin. He cannot come under what Paul describes in **Romans 6 and 7** as the "**dominion of sin**" and the "**reign of sin**". The truth is that faith in Christ is always linked to a life of holiness and fidelity, and to a life of faithfulness and commitment. It is never proper to think of a believer as divorced from faith and holiness. To say that someone is secure in their salvation when there is nothing in their life to indicate it, is a travesty of the greatest kind. It takes faith in Christ and subtracts it from its very definition. Ultimately it turns the grace of God into lasciviousness and into lewdness. **Jude 1:4** says,



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⁴For certain men have crept in unnoticed, who long ago were marked out for this condemnation, ungodly men, who turn the grace of our God into lewdness and deny the only Lord God and our Lord Jesus Christ.

The Doctrine of Perseverance is that true believers persevere and/or preserved unto the end. Anyone who has been effectually called, regenerated, justified, and adopted into God's family will persevere until the end. Why? It is because salvation is God's work in their life, and He will bring it to full and final completion. I.e., we cannot separate perseverance from genuine salvation and faith. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints reminds us very forcefully that ONLY those who persevere to the end are truly saints.

One of the saving purposes of God for which He called and adopted us is that we may have an intense and concentrated devotion to Him. Will a true believer persevere to the end? Absolutely, emphatically yes.

[Galatians 5:4](#) talks about someone who has "fallen from grace".

⁴You have become estranged from Christ, you who attempt to be justified by law; you have fallen from grace.

What is Paul saying? If you study the book of Galatians carefully, it is more than obvious that he is dealing with the believer's relationship to the law, and how that obedience to the law cannot produce righteousness in the believer. He is not dealing with whether a believer can fall out of the grace of God and perish eternally, but with a theological defection from the pure doctrine of justification by faith as opposed to justification by works of the law. There can be no mixture of grace and works in the doctrine of justification – none. So, if we somehow interject works to any degree into the salvation process, then we have given up grace and become debtors to keep the whole law.

Anyone who is a genuine believer has been called, regenerated, justified, and adopted by God. And all of that leads to glorification. You cannot define a Christian in any lower terms. This must happen in his life because it is all ordained by God from eternity past in election. And so, anyone who has been called and justified cannot fall away and come short of eternal salvation. In fact, [Romans 8](#) states that those who have been predestined will be conformed to image of Jesus Christ. You cannot defeat God's predestination and God's election. It is humanly impossible.

So, the question that has been raised in this passage is whether or not a genuine believer can lose, or permanently leave, their salvation. We saw that the word for "depart" is "*aphistemi*" and means to depart from, or to remove oneself from the position originally occupied to another position or place. In the spiritual sense, it refers to those who come very close to the truth that saves, only to leave. An apostate is not someone who is just struggling to believe, but someone who willfully abandons the biblical faith and truth that he had once professed, but did not possess. Now, all of those things can happen in various degrees in any Christian's life. We fully acknowledge that the enemy is at work in all of our lives and can at times gain the upper hand, but thank goodness not the final hand. Our life is ultimately hidden with God in Christ Jesus. [Colossians 3:3-4](#) says,



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³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

The enemy may win a battle against us, but he will not win the war. That has already been won in eternity past and at the cross. It is also important to re-iterate that there are genuine, born-again believers on both sides of all of the issues and doctrines that we are studying. No one person, or no one denomination has a corner on all of the truth, and even though we may be genuinely born again, we still remain sinners and have not yet been redeemed. So, any of us can be in error – as an individual or as a denomination. No one is right about everything. Take someone like John Wesley for instance. He did not believe in eternal security. He was a great Christian and greatly used by God. However, on one of the most important doctrines of Scripture, he was simply wrong. Charles Finney, a great evangelist that was used mightily by God, was a Wesleyan and Armenian. Was he born again? Absolutely. However, large parts of his doctrine were gravely in error.

The real issue that we are dealing with in all of this is the sovereignty of God. That is the ultimate issue. However, the one doctrine that sparks all of the controversy is the doctrine of “free will” – does man have a free will. We will not even touch that issue, but that is why reformed theology deals with the Doctrine of Total Depravity which ultimately addresses the issue of free will vs. depraved will (or dead in sins and trespasses, the natural man cannot receive the things of God, etc.). Suffice it to say that all of these doctrines are inter-related and cannot be disconnected or isolated from one another.

Let me provide a simple problem that exists with this issue of losing your salvation – which is really an insult to the work of Christ and to the Atonement. Let us say that someone believes that they can lose their salvation. What constitutes their losing it? Is it a certain sin, a certain kind of sin, or is it just simple sin? Is it any sin, or do they have to commit a certain number of sins? What is it? They have no answer to that question. So, people can go for a lifetime thinking that they may encounter the possibility of losing their salvation, but never doing so. In essence, they do not think that they have sinned enough or sinned the specific sins that would merit losing their salvation. They not only do not understand salvation, they obviously do not understand sin. Sin is sin. And if they can lose their salvation, what happens to the Holy Spirit in their lives? Does He have to move out until they can get their spiritual act together? With their doctrine – YES. I.e., the Holy Spirit can continually be moving in and out of a person’s life. Do they need to get re-baptized each time they get saved again? Sure. If they are a deacon or an elder in their church, do they have to resign? They should. What if it is the pastor? Should he resign? I would think so. However, NONE OF THAT REALLY HAPPENS!!! In essence, what their conditional salvation is really demanding from an individual is perfection, not perseverance, and if someone thinks they can meet that standard, good luck.

Now I want to provide a clarification that I hope will help. We certainly acknowledge without any reservation that a believer can fall into grievous sins and backslide for periods of time – even long periods of time. We acknowledge that without any reservation. [1 John 1:8](#) says,

⁸If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.



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But it is also true that a believer cannot just permanently abandon himself to that sin. [1 John 3:9](#), which is a great verse of assurance for every believer, states this,

⁹Whoever has been born of God does not sin (does not permanently continue in sin as a habit of life, as a lifestyle), **for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin** (cannot permanently as a lifestyle life in sin), **because he has been born of God.**

The Doctrine of Perseverance is that true believers persevere unto the end. We call it **eternal life**. Culver's Systematic Theology states that "*those who truly believe are saved with an everlasting salvation which can never be lost*". The Doctrine of Perseverance is often referred to as the Doctrine of Preservation just to indicate that just like with all of the other aspects of salvation, enduring to the end is still a preserving work of God in the believer. [1 John 5:13](#), which should be a great encouragement to every believer, says,

¹³These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God.

Anyone who has been effectually called, regenerated, justified, and adopted into God's family will persevere and continue until the end. Why? It is because salvation is God's work in their life, and He will bring it to full and final completion, He will preserve their faith in Him. [Philippians 1:6](#) declares,

⁶being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ

I.e., you cannot separate perseverance from genuine salvation and faith. They are part and parcel of the same thing. They come from the same root. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints reminds us very convincingly that **ONLY** those who persevere to the end are truly saints. It is not the perseverance in the faith that saves them, but the perseverance is what testifies to and gives evidence of their salvation. If everything in salvation was dependent on us and our abilities, we would all fall away, we would all depart, and we would all give up. However, it is God who began the work in us, who is sustaining the work in us, and who will complete the work in us.

I want you to appreciate a subtle distinction of the non-reformed view of salvation, and ultimately the eternal security of the believer. The Armenian view, simply stated, is that a believer can lose their salvation. In their theology, it is referred to as a "the conditional character of salvation". In fact, that is one of the reasons that the "U" in TULIP is called "unconditional election", because the Reformers wanted to clearly state that God did not call us into salvation dependent on our continually meeting certain conditions – i.e., a works based salvation. For instance, to support the concept of the conditional character of salvation, those that believe that you can lose your salvation would quote verses such as [Colossians 1:21-23](#),

²¹And you, who once were alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now He has reconciled ²²in the body of His flesh through death, to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—²³if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and



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steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister.

I.e., they take the word “if” to mean that there are conditions attached to eternal security, and if you violate those conditions then you will lose your salvation. There are a number of other seemingly “conditional” verses in Scripture that they will use as a proof text. They would say that Jesus Himself issued warnings relative to falling away – which He did. Why would He want a believer to fall away, or to depart from the faith? We do this all of the time. If we do not want our kids to do something, we generally say, “*Do not disobey, do not drive fast, do not take drugs*”. The non-reformed theologians would quote [Hebrews 3:12-14](#) to support their position,

¹²Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God; ¹³but exhort one another daily, while it is called “Today,” lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. ¹⁴For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end....

The reformed theologians, those of us who clearly believe in the eternal security of the believer, would definitely agree that each of those kinds of verses are indeed verses spoken to Christians. However, the difference for the reformed position is that what the Scriptures are identifying is the genuine nature of true, biblical salvation – that a true believer does endure to the end, that they do hold the beginning of their confidence steadfast to the end. These are in fact some of the identifying characteristics of the believer. I.e., these so-called “conditional statements” are not conditions, but statements that identify the outward evidence of salvation, the proving ground of that which is true and that which is false – not the ground of salvation and not the basis of salvation. The ground of salvation is entirely the work of Christ as applied by the Holy Spirit. The reformed theologian would not agree that these types of verses are conditions of maintaining salvation, but conditions that identify biblical salvation. This is the conservative and reformed theological position.

Now in the [1 Timothy 4:1-5](#) passage which is talking about apostates, it is identifying individuals who have a form of godliness, but who deny its power. They do not have God given faith, but human faith – which by its very nature is destined to fail. There is much more in this passage, especially related to false teachers, and we will cover that as we dissect this passage. However, for the time being, just appreciate that apostates are not people who have biblical faith. They have superficial faith, and the evidence of that is their ultimate falling away and denial of the faith. We know from Scripture that false professions of faith will be made. We know that short-term enthusiasts will fall away ([Matthew 13:20-22](#)).

²⁰But he who received the seed on stony places, this is he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy; ²¹yet he has no root in himself, but endures only for a while. For when tribulation or persecution arises because of the word, immediately he stumbles. ²²Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.



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And we clearly know from Matthew 7:21-23 that many who call Jesus Lord will not be allowed to enter His kingdom.

²¹“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. ²²Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ ²³And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

Their profession and their life did not match up – and that was the evidence that they were not really born again.

Relative to the Westminster Confession to try and better understand how it came about, in 1644 at Westminster Abbey, the famous church in London, in a room called the Jerusalem Room, there met about 100 men. They were the best theological minds of their day, the greatest biblical scholars in England. The Puritans were the dominating force in the meeting. They were called lovers of God, lovers of the Bible, lovers of Christ, and lovers of the truth. They began a 5 year intensive study – 100+ men. It was 5 years of intense study, of intense dialogue, of an intense scholastic effort to do one thing – to produce a statement of doctrine. Today it is known as the Westminster Confession of Faith, and is probably the most important theological creed ever produced by man.

However, what is interesting about that confession is that when talking about eternal security, they did not call it eternal security. They called it perseverance. Obviously, they did not have to look long for Scriptures related to eternal security. For instance, [John 3:16](#) and [John 3:18](#).

¹⁶For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

¹⁸“He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

[John 5:24](#) says,

²⁴“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life.

These are words of eternal security. [1 Corinthians 1:8](#) says,

⁸who will also confirm you to the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 Thessalonians 5:23-24](#),

²³Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. ²⁴He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.



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I.e., God was faithful to call you into salvation, and He will be faithful to preserve you in that salvation. It is not your work of preserving, but His work. Jesus made this statement in [John 8:31](#) related to those who are truly His disciples when He said,

“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.

The Doctrine of Perseverance is a very important doctrine. It does not mean that a Christian cannot fall away for a period of time, for we certainly can. However, what it does mean is that the true believer does not completely fail. Fail, yes. Fail severely at times, yes. Fail repeatedly, yes. Fail completely and finally, NO. What makes this so important to understand is that if salvation were not permanent, if salvation was not something that was eternally secure, if we could lose our salvation – then all of the other doctrines of Scripture would have no real meaning. What good would it do you to be justified now, but not justified later? What good would it do you to be saved now, but not saved later? In fact, the work of God the Father, of Jesus Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit would be meaningless if we could lose our salvation. What makes salvation so meaningful is that it is eternal and everlasting. So, just because we persevere does not mean that we are perfect. To the contrary, we are very imperfect and have much to learn – and that is one of the beauties of this doctrine in that it clearly has to be a work of God to be completed – in spite of us.

Let me read you the balancing statement within the Westminster Confession on the doctrine of the perseverance of the saints that is related to this idea of “failing”, of whether or not a true believer can fail.

III. Nevertheless, they may, through the temptations of Satan and of the world, the prevalence of corruption remaining in them, and the neglect of the means of their preservation, fall into grievous sins; and, for a time, continue therein: whereby they incur God's displeasure, and grieve His Holy Spirit, come to be deprived of some measure of their graces and comforts, have their hearts hardened, and their consciences wounded; hurt and scandalize others, and bring temporal judgments upon themselves.

Without any argument, we know that any of us, no matter how committed we may think ourselves to be, can very easily neglect the grace of God that He has for our lives. Scripture says that we – Christians - can “**grieve the Holy Spirit**”, and we are enjoined in Scripture not to do so. [Ephesians 4:30](#) says,

³⁰**And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption.**

We can surely stumble, we can fall, and we can fall away for a period of time. We can fall into grievous sins to God and do so for extended periods of time. We are not perfect and we will fail. The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints means that ultimately the believer will persevere in the faith, but it may often be accompanied by failure. In fact, one of the most defining characteristics of a genuine believer versus a superficial believer is found in [Hebrews 12:8](#) which says,



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⁸But if you are without chastening, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate and not sons.

Perseverance does not mean that someone who says that they have accepted Christ can just live anyway that they want. That is a contradiction of the doctrine. There are many, many people who have a superficial faith in Christ, who have a superficial interest in Christ, and who have a superficial commitment to Christ. A superficial faith, a superficial interest, and a superficial commitment do not have a great deal of spiritual value – and certainly do not accurately represent salvation. It is a superficial salvation and will not gain anyone an entrance into God’s kingdom. Ultimately, true believers do not live like non-believers, nor do they want to live like non-believers. I am not a Communist, so why would I want to live like a Communist? I am not a Muslim, so why would I want to live like a Muslim? Why would a true believer ever want to live like a lost person? The point is simple – they would not.

Someone who lives in sin, someone who is constantly disobeying God, someone who has no interest in spiritual things, someone who abandons the faith – that person can have no assurance of salvation – NONE! It does not matter what church they are a member of, what kind of “decision” they made for Christ in the past, or what kind of prayer they may have prayed. Security is a reality because of perseverance. A true believer will never ultimately abandon themselves to sin completely. They will not lose their faith in Christ. No true believer can just shun holiness and abandon righteousness. **1 John 3:10** says,

¹⁰In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

The doctrine of the perseverance of the saints means that at salvation that we were given a supernatural faith from God to believe the gospel. The faith to just believe was a supernatural gift given to every believer by God – **Ephesians 2:8-9**. Now, the main point is that continuing in faith and obedience is not something that we can accomplish by our own strength. The reason that the believer perseveres in their faith is because of the gracious work of God on their behalf. If it were left up to our own strength, none of us would persevere. Salvation begins with a supernatural faith from God to even believe the gospel. The Holy Spirit provides the testimony of Christ to our heart, and then supernaturally gives us the faith to believe. He calls us to salvation. The grace is from God and the faith is from God. God gives saving faith, and it is not a temporary faith, but a permanent saving faith - and the only kind of faith that God gives is a faith that endures.

Personally, you cannot muster up enough faith to be saved, and you could never muster up enough faith to stay saved. The moment that life did not treat you the way that you thought it should treat you, the moment that God’s ways disappointed you, your own human faith would grow weaker and weaker and eventually you would falter in your faith. If your salvation was left up to you, you would never be saved. If keeping your salvation was left up to you, you would lose it tomorrow. That is why the faith that we were given by God is a supernatural faith, and because it is supernatural, it will endure to the end. It is the gift of God’s supernatural faith that endures so that you endure when everything does not



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go the way you think that it should. This is faith that takes martyrs to the stake. You cannot have salvation without security, or eternal life that is not eternal.

So,, where does all of this lead? Within the Wesleyan/Armenian tradition, the non-reformed tradition (Pentecostal, Holiness, Catholicism, Methodists), they have held and believe that it is possible for someone who is truly born again to lose their salvation. So, if you lose your salvation, then you have to develop a doctrine that allows you to find a way to get it back – which traditionally is earning it back by repentance and false regeneration again. In the final analysis, it is a works based salvation – and does not rest on the finished work of Christ. Catholicism, for instance, has developed doctrines related to penance, contrition, and purgatory so that it is possible for someone to work their way back to salvation if it is lost.

The fundamental roots of the doctrine of perseverance and eternal security is that God Himself is the One sustaining the believer in his faith. God is giving grace not only to believe initially, but also to believe and endure continually. The gift of God's grace is a sustaining grace, a continuing grace, and therefore a believer cannot lose their salvation. There are a lot of things, however, that they can lose – peace, hope, faith, endurance, patience, commitment, desire, and rewards, but they will never lose their salvation. It is the beginning that determines the ending. So the ultimate reason that we will persevere is because from beginning to end, salvation is a work of God. The following are some Scriptures related to this doctrine. [John 6:37-40](#) says,

³⁷All that the Father gives Me will come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out. ³⁸For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. ³⁹This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. ⁴⁰And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

No one is lost, no one is cut off, and no one loses salvation. The gift of eternal life remains eternal, and not temporal. Every true believer survives and is raised up on the last day.

[John 10:26-30](#) says,

²⁶But you do not believe, because you are not of My sheep (election), as I said to you. ²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them (foreknowledge), and they follow Me (sanctification). ²⁸And I give them eternal life (regeneration), and they shall never perish (aorist subjunctive – certainly not perish); neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand. ³⁰I and My Father are one."

[Jude 24](#) says,

²⁴Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you faultless before the presence of His glory with exceeding joy,



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If we were not secure in our salvation, if eternal security was really eternal insecurity, then the doctrines of salvation, justification, regeneration, adoption, redemption, conversion, reconciliation, propitiation, ransom, sanctification, and glorification are greatly diminished and devalued. It cheapens their value. Rather than being eternally important, in the end they can virtually mean nothing to the believer if he loses his salvation and suffers eternal punishment. What good is justification and glorification at that point? So, if you do not get eternal security right, why even study the other doctrines? You see, it is not that God gives us a supernatural faith and grace to believe His Word concerning Jesus Christ and salvation, and then turns around and says, but it cannot keep you to the end. It is like Him saying,

“Okay, I’ll start the whole thing for you, I’ll give you the initial faith to believe, but now you are on your own and you have to come up with a sustaining faith. I hope you can make it to the end.”

I.e., God does not give us faith to believe and then abandon us to our own human efforts. [Hebrews 7:25](#) says that Christ Himself is right now making intercession for us, and [John 11:42](#) says that the Father always hears and answers His prayers. So, we know that His prayers of intercession for us are effectual. [Romans 8:26](#), to make it even better, states that the Holy Spirit is praying for us as well.

You as a Christian may very well have moments of doubt, but as a believer, you can rest in the grace of God that even your doubts will not turn to total unbelief and rejection and denial of Christ. We are secured by the same supernatural faith that was given to us by God to believe, and by the same token, we are sustained by that same supernatural faith given to us by God.

The practical implication of our understanding of the perseverance of the saints is that we can rest in the assurance that we have a permanent, eternal salvation. We do not have to be anxious that some failure on our part will remove us from this salvation. However, by the same token, our understanding does not provide a license to sin. The fact that you are a Christian and secure in your salvation does not mean that you can just live as you please. In fact, to the contrary, for someone to believe that actually calls into question the reality and validity of their profession of faith. Why? Because biblical salvation - salvation initiated, sustained, and completed by God - is a salvation that implants the Holy Spirit within the believer and produces the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, and that work of the Holy Spirit is a work that results in biblical convictions based on the word of God.

Now, I want to speak specifically regarding why the people defined in [1 Timothy 4](#) actually “depart”. It is simply because they are drawn away by “**deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons**” (v1). [2 Corinthians 11:13-15](#) says,

¹³For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. ¹⁴And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. ¹⁵Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.

False religions and false idols are demon energized from the very beginning. Many translate the first phrase as “**spirits of deceit**” which is much more emphatic. Deception has her spirits, emissaries of every kind, which she employs to darken and destroy the hearts and souls of men. The “**spirits**”



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referred to here are any that cause someone to err, and the most obvious and natural interpretation is to refer it to the agency of fallen spirits, demonic beings. Obviously, it may apply to false teachers. However, if it does, we are to understand it as the teachers being under the direct influence of evil, demonic spirits. This may be applied, so far as the phraseology is concerned, to any false teaching. [1 Corinthians 10:18-21](#) says,

¹⁸Observe Israel after the flesh: Are not those who eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? ¹⁹What am I saying then? That an idol is anything, or what is offered to idols is anything? ²⁰Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons. ²¹You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.

I.e., whatever idols they were sacrificing to, behind the idol was a demon, a seducing spirit that had led them astray. All false religions and all of the different types of idols in the world are simply focal points for demon activity, focal points for lying, deceiving, and seducing spirits that are intent on carrying men into hell and perdition.

You cannot be unsophisticated in understanding and comprehending what we are talking about. An idol, a false religion is NOT what it appears to be on the surface. It is not that the false religion is just a collection of false ideas. What we must understand is that it is the energizing dynamic of fallen angels, of a satanic system of spirits who are seducing men and women and young people into hell. All false teachers are demon agents. This is the battleground for the truth that has always been there. We are forever in a spiritual battle for the truth. That is why [1 Timothy 3](#) claims that we as the church are the “**pillar and ground of the truth**”. We are constantly calling and exhorting people to the truth, and demonic spirits in the world are calling them into hellish lies. [1 John 2:26](#) says,

²⁶These things I have written to you concerning those who try to deceive you.

The word for “**deceive**” is “*planonton*” and means to lead astray, to seduce, to deceive, to be mistaken. It comes from a word that means to cause to roam, cause to stray from the truth.

A false teacher is one who attempts to lead people away from Jesus Christ and from the glorious truth that He is the Son of God who came to earth to die for our sins. The false teacher deceives people; he teaches that man can become acceptable to God by some other way than Jesus Christ. He teaches that there are other ways to God, other approaches, other religions, other truths. He seduces and leads people astray; he deceives people into following some other teaching. The tense of the verb is a continuous action verb in the Greek. That is, false teachers are continually teaching false doctrine. They are always teaching a false doctrine and always trying to seduce people.

Believers must be on constant guard against false teaching. We will abandon the faith if we listen to deception. We must continue to follow Christ; we must let the gospel abide and take up a permanent residence in our lives. However, behind all of the false teaching, these men are being energized by demon spirits. False teachers have always been around. Paul told the Ephesians elders in [Acts 20:27-31](#),



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²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God. ²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

The term “**doctrine of demons**” is not referring to specific teaching about demons, but is referring to actual teachings of demons, actual teachings that have been propagated by demon spirits, doctrines that they have suggested. It refers to teachings that proceed directly from or are directly inspired by demons. The term “**deceiving spirits**” refers to the source of all false doctrines and heresies. It is supernatural demon spirits. They seduce, they allure, they deceive, and they are very, very powerful. Anything that contradicts the Word of God is a teaching from demons. They are behind it all. False teaching does not come from clever men. It comes from demons, AND THAT IS EXACTLY WHY YOU CANNOT EXPOSE YOURSELF TO IT.

The working of these evil spirits is here especially concerned with striking at the true teaching which underlies godliness. It is impossible to say what particular form of false teaching is actually being alluded to here. In fact, Paul actually began this letter in [1 Timothy 1:3-7](#) speaking of false teachers within the church.

³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith. ⁵Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith, ⁶from which some, having strayed, have turned aside to idle talk, ⁷desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the things which they affirm.

No wonder sandwiched in between chapter 1 and chapter 4 is chapter 3 and Paul’s teaching on godly leaders. Unfortunately, not all demonic teaching on the surface looks demonic. Why would it? What would be the spiritual advantage of that? The closer that you get to false demonic teaching, the better it begins to look. It offers you a way out of godliness and commitment and diligence. It makes all of it secondary to what you want in life.

This is the only place where demons are mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles, and just as there is a “**mystery of godliness**” concerning Christ ([1 Tim. 3:16](#)), so there is also a “**mystery of iniquity**” (or “**lawlessness**”) that surrounds Satan and his work. [2 Thessalonians 2:7](#) says,

⁷For the mystery of lawlessness is already at work; only He who now restrains will do so until He is taken out of the way.

Satan has his own ministers and doctrines, and constantly seeks to deceive God’s people and lead them, or at best to make them lethargic and indifferent to spiritual truth and ineffective in their Christian life.



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The first test of any religious doctrine is what it says about Jesus Christ. [1 John 4:1-6](#) says,

¹Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. ²By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, ³and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. ⁴You are of God, little children, and have overcome them, because He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. ⁵They are of the world. Therefore they speak as of the world, and the world hears them. ⁶We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.

The goal of these demons is simply to seduce people and get them to depart from the faith. That is their goal. They go out into the world, into the church, and they wrestle souls away from the faith – from the doctrines of the faith. Unfortunately, there are many people in churches who are like the seed that fell on rocky ground. I.e., they do not really have genuine faith in Christ. It is superficial, they have no root, no real spiritual life to speak of, and no real union with God – and so they die out. There are those whose lives are just choked by the cares of this life and the love of riches. They hang around for a while, but as soon as some seducing spirit comes along, they are led away.

It is very interesting that in [1 Timothy 3](#) Paul closes the chapter talking about the church being the “**pillar and ground of the truth**” and of Christ being the “**mystery of godliness**”, and then immediately goes into a teaching in [1 Timothy 4](#) on the demonic forces that come against that truth. The source of all false teaching is demonic, supernatural. Men’s hearts are desperately wicked and desperately deceitful. Men are not grounded in the Word of God, and so as soon as some demon spirit comes along with some new false teaching, men follow it quickly. The reason is simply because their hearts were not born of God. They were living under the illusion that they were saved, but as soon as this demonic spirit comes along and woos them away with its siren voice, they rush to it.

The words “**giving heed**” are very interesting. It is a very strong Greek word that does not just mean that someone listens to something. It means not that you just heard something, but rather that you attached yourself to what you heard. You give it your full approval, your full consent. It has the idea of becoming devoted to something, and because it is a present tense verb, it means that it is a continual clinging to these doctrines of demons. It is like it is just what the person wanted to hear.

I cannot say enough about someone who is intellectually familiar with the truth, about someone who understands the gospel message and who actually affirms it outwardly. However, deep down, they really do not like it that much and their heart really is not into it at all. It is my personal belief, and only that, that this thing of “Sunday Christians” is a good indicator of someone who could easily fall into this category. Their heart just is not into the things of God. They see it as religion, as duty, as something that has a level of value – but their heart just is not in it. It is just not worth making a commitment to, and so along comes the seducing spirits, and before you know it, they are gone. They are busy doing other things, they have other priorities, other interests – and they simply depart from the



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fundamentals of the faith. If someone does not personally consider attending church as a fundamental of the faith, then they may be one of those persons in heart.

People are led away by demonic spirits that they have allowed to have a place in their heart and mind. It is an indication of the simple fact that they never were saved. I want to encourage you to be immensely cautious in who you listen to, in what you read. I deeply believe that there is much more false teaching than correct teaching. It is subtle.

The following is an illustration from Deuteronomy 13 to simply drive this point home for us. (READ Deuteronomy 13 in its entirety.)

Do you really think that God is not serious about listening to seducing spirits? Burn the city after you have killed everyone in it. Burn everything that is in the city. Kill all the animals and burn all the spoils, and pile it into a heap and never allow it to ever again be rebuilt! If someone wants to talk about an object lesson of false teaching – well this is it. This is how God feels about doctrines of demons and deceiving spirits.

We have spent a great deal of time talking about this issue of “**deceiving spirits**” and “**doctrines ‘about’ demons**”. It is not something that you can just gloss over and act as if it has no effect on you personally. In my mind, these are the pervading activities underlying our church age – and they have created a superficial church that is lukewarm, putrid, and nauseating to God Himself.

Satan has his own ministers and doctrines, and constantly seeks to deceive God's people and mislead them, or at best to make them lethargic and indifferent to spiritual truth and ineffective in their Christian life. Once the truth has been diluted, once the truth has been compromised, once a falsehood has been accepted, then faith is totally destroyed. We need to clearly understand that Scripture portrays the devil as a horrible, horrible creature. There is much more demonic activity going on than we are conscious of. The devil is not only seen as a tempter that is constantly trying to entice us into sin, but he is seen also as a deceiver and as someone who is constantly trying to seduce us into doctrinal and spiritual error. We ultimately become what we believe, and so if he can get us to believe error and to believe lies, then ultimately that is what we will become. Scripture says that he is a spirit that is able to create falsehood in your mind, one who is able to delude and bewitch you in your mind, and even blind people spiritually. It is as if they have been drugged.

In order to be true to the text and the context of the 1 Timothy 4 passage, we know first of all that Paul is writing to the pastor of the church at Ephesus, and he is giving Timothy instruction to help him in his pastoral duties. We also know that he is greatly concerned about false teaching. The point, however, is that the focus of these first five verses is not on the false teachers – but specifically on those who will **depart from the faith**. It is a certainty, it is going to happen. The emphasis is not on the false teachers, but on those within the church that are willing to listen to false teachers. In our culture they abound. In some theological arenas they are the majority.

Now, in 1 Timothy 4:2 we have the phrases that indicate the character of an apostate – they are hypocrites and their conscience has been seared, or deadened.



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²**speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,**

When Paul speaks of their conscience, he is speaking of their sensitivity to what is right or wrong, their sensitivity to truthfulness and integrity. Our conscience always sends us a signal that something that we are doing is wrong. In this case, the conscience has been scarred to such a degree that it is no longer functional.

Paul is not telling Timothy that the false teachers simply misunderstood the gospel or that they simply taught in error. Not at all. Rather, they were hypocrites and liars, individuals with no conscience, and their teaching coming from the very kingdom of darkness itself. In fact, the Greek word for seared is the word “*kautēriazō*” from where we get the English word “cauterize”. When you cauterize something, what happens is that the skin and the nerves are destroyed by burning, and so they become insensitive. The same is true of us if we constantly stifle the warnings that come from our conscience. Eventually the conscience will be smothered, silenced, and deadened.

The imagery is that of a “branding iron” that was especially used on livestock; therefore, the “searing” may mean that the consciences of these apostates have actually become the property of evil spirits. These men actually know that they are teaching false doctrine. They know what they are teaching is wrong and unbiblical, but it does not bother them. You can take someone like Joel Osteen. He is a false teacher, someone under the influence of demonizing spirits. He knows that what he is saying is diluted and is only a half-truth. He knows that what he is preaching is not really the gospel. He knows that doctrinally he is unsound. However, he continues forward as brazen in his false teaching as is possible. Why? Money, prestige, and men’s applause.

An apostate is not just wrong doctrinally; he is wrong morally. There are moral issues in his life. Just this verse alone tells us that he is a liar and he is a hypocrite, and that he has a dead conscience. His personal life became wrong way before his doctrines were changed. In fact, it is likely that he changed his teachings and changed his doctrine so that he could continue his sinful living. What you believe and how you behave always go together. You cannot divorce the two. If you are willing to live in sin and just outwardly disobey God when you know that what you are doing is wrong, then you have already reached a place where your conscience has been seared, where it is been branded with a hot iron – and for the most part, the Holy Spirit may already have stopped trying to reach you.

The issue in v2 deals with how the individuals within the church were seduced to apostasy. The passage is not really about the false teachers, but those who “**depart from the faith**”. How were they seduced? It was through the “**hypocrisy**” of men that were willing to speak lies, and men who had their consciences numbed, cauterized and “**seared with a hot iron**”. Such persons are the ones who generally seduce others to false doctrine. If a man’s life does not measure up to the teachings of Scripture, then do not listen to his messages, do not read his books, and do not buy his CD’s.

Now, beginning in [1 Timothy 4:3](#) Paul gives Timothy what these false teachers were teaching that caused people to depart from the faith.

³**forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.** ⁴**For every creature of**



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God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

The two restrictions that Paul cites are just a sample of the kind of erroneous doctrines that were being taught. Some false teachers taught that if you wanted to be spiritual you should not get married and you had to abstain from certain kinds of food. The apostates Paul mentions in [1 Timothy 4](#) were requiring ascetic self-denial to attain spirituality. Salvation for them was based on what they denied themselves. All false religions devise human means by which you become saved, either by things you do or do not do.

They were forbidding to marry and telling people to abstain from food. I.e., they became adept at convincing people that in order to be saved that there were a number of ascetic or abstinence things that you had to do, a number of areas in which you needed to exercise a great deal of personal self-sacrifice. Now, I am not saying that our lives should not be sacrificial. To the contrary, they should be. However, that is not the issue. The issue was that by being sacrificial, the individual could attain salvation, could be holy, and could be spiritual. There were certain things you were to do and certain things that you were not to do, and these became the basis of salvation and sanctification. It is a salvation by works and a salvation by human achievement. In [Colossians 2:16-23](#) Paul says,

¹⁶So let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, ¹⁷which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ. ¹⁸Let no one cheat you of your reward, taking delight in false humility and worship of angels, intruding into those things which he has not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind, ¹⁹and not holding fast to the Head, from whom all the body, nourished and knit together by joints and ligaments, grows with the increase that is from God. ²⁰Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—²¹“Do not touch, do not taste, do not handle,” ²²which all concern things which perish with the using—according to the commandments and doctrines of men? ²³These things indeed have an appearance of wisdom in self-imposed religion, false humility, and neglect of the body, but are of no value against the indulgence of the flesh.

Every false religion in the world has developed “things” that you do or do not do to merit salvation. They have a whole list of things that you deny yourself, or things that you indulge yourselves in. You do not eat meat on Friday, or you bow down three times a day toward Mecca, or women cannot wear pants to church. I.e., you achieve spirituality by your own efforts. External self-denial is a severe error that is typical of false religions. The error of apostates is thinking they please God by following and teaching such ascetic practices. Instead they actually are displeasing God and following the lies of demons.

Apparently these people forgot that God created marriage and that God created foods to enjoy. God could have just made squash to eat, and that was it – but He did not. It is really unfortunate for someone to come along and deny marriage and certain foods and then make it sound like that is the way to be holy. V4 says that every creature of God is good, every animal that God has provided for food is good. I would not eat a buzzard. Why? It was not created for food. It was created to be a



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scavenger, and a scavenger it is. I would not eat mice. Why? It is because they were not created for food. However, every creature which God has made for our nourishment is good for that purpose, and should be received with thanksgiving. In fact, when you receive it and eat it and thank God for it, then you have fulfilled its purpose. Eat it and give God thanks. In the new covenant of the New Testament, God has abolished all of the food laws, all of the dietary laws, and all of the dietary restrictions. In the Old Testament they were given to help Israel understand the truth of separation. However, once Christ came, they were set aside. As a Christian you are already complete in Christ. [Colossians 2:9-10](#) says,

⁹For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; ¹⁰and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

True religion acknowledges that the Lord alone has accomplished our salvation. False religion says we have got to do it ourselves by self- denial and human achievement.

I have to clearly state that anyone who introduces a “contrived” holiness, an artificial piety, and/or a manufactured spirituality and devotion, that person is acting at the devil’s bidding. We know from [John 4:24](#) that God can never be properly worshipped through just doing external things. [John 4:24](#) says,

²⁴God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.”

Now, I know that someone sitting in my church could say, “*But Pastor Gary, you are always telling us that we need to come to church, and be faithful in attending church. Aren’t you just imposing the same kind of rules on us as these false teachers did? Is not that really the same thing?*” Absolutely not. The church is God’s only ordained institution in the New Testament. Most of the books of the New Testament are written either to churches or to pastors of churches. Acts is a book written about the development of the early church. We read in [1 Timothy 3:15](#) that the church is the “**pillar and ground of the truth**”. In [1 Corinthians 11:22](#), speaking of taking the Lord’s Supper, Paul wrote these sharp words to those who were indifferent about God’s church,

do you despise the church of God....

In [1 Corinthians 12](#), God appointed gifts for the church. [Ephesians 1:22-23](#) says,

²²And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, ²³which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

[Ephesians 3:10](#) says,

¹⁰to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places

[Ephesians 3:21](#) says,

²¹to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

That verse alone is one of the greatest indictments in all of Scripture. What it says is that if we do not fully appreciate and love and support God’s church, then in essence what we are doing is denying God the glory that He rightfully wants to receive from His church. By not being faithful in attendance, by



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not being willing to commit ourselves to God's local church, in essence we are saying that God's glory is not really that important and it is no big deal to us. I have other priorities in my life, other things that I want to accomplish, other places that I want to go. I do not have time for all of this, and besides, it does not seem to have a whole lot of value for me personally. So, in reality we place our personal preferences over and above God's glory. Why? It is because God receives glory **in His church**.

The last place that the word "church" is used in Scripture is [Revelation 3:14-16](#), and it is not good.

¹⁴**“And to the angel of the church (last place that word is used in Scripture) of the Laodiceans write, ‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: ¹⁵“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. ¹⁶So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.**

It is just my opinion, but if a person says they love God and do not faithfully attend His church, I believe that individual is grossly deceived. [Hebrews 10:25](#) says,

²⁵**not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner (HABIT) of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.**

The Greek word for "forsake" is "*enkataleipō*" and literally means to abandon. The word "*kataleipo*" means to leave behind, to desert, to forsake, or to leave. The significance of this verse is somewhat frightening. In fact, just to show the strength of this particular word for "forsake", it is the same exact word that Jesus used on the cross when He cried out, "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" Why have you abandoned and deserted me? In these verses, what the writer is addressing is the simple fact that many within the church have disdained, have disrespected and belittled God's church by abandoning the regular attendance of the local church. That is what the writer is addressing. God is not interested in some superficial, glib, indifferent attendance of His local church. If we treated our employers the way we treat God, we would be fired immediately. If a person takes the things of God lightly, if they scorn God's ordained purpose of regularly assembling together with other believers, they are placing themselves in a grave position where they become more and more vulnerable to the attacks of the enemy on both them and the members of their families.

So, if you want to know if someone really loves God, just look first at their commitment to the church of God. Coming to church is not a form of asceticism or some kind of sacrificial act on our part. To the contrary, it is one of the greatest privileges that God has ever given to us.

As Paul arrives at [1 Timothy 4:6-16](#), it is obvious that he is talking to Timothy about what are the qualifications for being an excellent and effective pastor. V6 is really the theme of all of this passage and is preoccupied with the various qualities of what Paul calls "a good minister of Jesus Christ".

⁶**If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.**

So, in reality, this portion of Scripture is for anyone who desires to effectively serve the Lord. It is an opportunity for a church to evaluate their pastor, a kind of spiritual checklist. It is really any pastor's



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spiritual responsibility to provide his congregation with a good example, a model of what a Christian should be, and of how they should live. That is not always an easy task. In reality, most churches have really lost sight of how to biblically assess someone in the ministry. Too often churches are in the “pastor stealing” business. I think that is a great spiritual travesty.

I believe that this passage before us, along with [1 Timothy 3](#), are two of the key places in Scripture that help us define in a biblical sense what are the criteria for evaluating a pastor. This passage is the spiritual plumb line to use to measure a pastor. Many pastors and church leaders have lost sight of what their real calling actually is. To many men the ministry is a career and not a calling, and so they just use churches as stepping stones to bigger things. I personally believe those kind of men who move around a good deal can be very dangerous to churches, and unfortunately, in many cases churches have simply become addicted to substitutes for the real thing. In fact, the word for “**minister**” is the Greek word “*diakonos*” from where we get the word “**deacon**”. This particular word has the idea of usefulness, and so all of the following attributes deal with the minister being excellent in his usefulness to the cause of Christ. [1 Corinthians 4:1-2](#) says,

¹Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. ²Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

Now, there are certain fundamental things that a pastor is supposed to do, and I just want to initially “introduce” this passage for us. I want to just briefly go over these various attributes, and then we will go over all of them in greater detail as we proceed. So, what are some of the characteristics of a good minister of Christ?

First a good minister is someone who warns and instructs his people – “**if you instruct the brethren in these things**”. Immediately in v6, we find that a good minister is to “**instruct**” the church with “**the words of faith and good doctrine**” – and notice, “**which you have carefully followed**”. You cannot teach something effectively if you are not personally committed to the truths that you are teaching. So, what are the “**these things**” in v6? It is what Paul has just talked about in v1-6 where he speaks of those who will “**depart from the faith**” – apostatize, renounce their faith, defect from the faith. They are men who only have a superficial faith and a superficial commitment to the things of God, and in reality, they only have a superficial salvation.

It is critical that a good minister be willing to point out error. One of my primary tasks is to guard the church against false doctrine, against human philosophies, and against false teachers. We are surrounded and inundated with strange doctrines – what [1 Timothy 4:1](#) describes as “**doctrines of demons**” which have been controlled by “**deceiving spirits**”. So, a good minister has to be able to think biblically and to think critically and theologically. There are times where I have to be negative. However, clearly, the thrust of the ministry is not in always denouncing things, but much more in upholding the Word of God.

Secondly, a good minister is a good student. He is someone who is “**nourished in the words of the faith**” v6). What awaits a good minister is a constant self-feeding on the Word of God and a constant studying of “**good doctrine**”. Many men are good preachers in the pulpit, but weak students in the



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study. It is easy to preach, but much harder to study. The more a man studies, the more of the Word of God will be embedded in his preaching. It is not that preachers are powerful, but that the word of God is powerful. [Hebrews 4:12](#) clarifies the point when it states that,

¹²For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

The more of the word of God that a preacher / teacher uses in his messages, the more powerful will be the message. Good doctrine, sound doctrine is only that when it is accurately interpreted. It is the responsibility of a good minister to find the precise interpretation as much as is possible before he teaches. A good minister must saturate his mind with the Word of God. There are no shortcuts to this. So, if someone wants to be a good minister, then they must make a radical commitment to the Scriptures and to the study of the Scripture. In church history, most of the great theologians have been pastors. Pastors are much more than just communicators. They are first and foremost students and theologians, and must saturate their life with Scripture, with reading, and with study.

Thirdly, a good minister avoids false doctrine. V7 says to “**reject profane and old wives’ fables**”. The word “**reject**” is a very strong word that means to refuse, to excuse yourself from, to shun – to just avoid. Many young men who have started out in the ministry have been ruined, not because they were studying error, but because they were listening to someone who was teaching error as truth. You cannot become a liberal by reading the Bible.

Fourthly, a good minister must have personal godliness in his life – “**exercise yourself toward godliness**” (v7). A good minister must be disciplined. It is always a discipline thing – always. The word for “**exercise**” is the word “*gumnadzo*” from where we get the word gymnasium and gymnastics. It refers to strenuous exercise. It is something that is a self-denying, a self-sacrificing discipline, and a rigorous discipline in your life. A good minister has to gird up the loins of his mind, and that can be very fatiguing. Paul stated in [1 Corinthians 9:27](#) that he actually disciplined his body so that he could bring it into subjection.

²⁷But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.

“**Godliness**” is not cheap, it is not something that anyone can just obtain overnight or without effort. “**Godliness**” is a word that expresses reverence and deep spiritual virtue. It means that the heart of a good minister will be constantly occupied with godly things, with seeking after God, and with doing what he knows God has called him to do. You cannot be godly without God. It takes great discipline and personal sacrifice to be so.

Fifthly, a good minister labors hard at his work. The word in v10 actually states it better in the NASB and NIV when it says that “**we both labor and strive**”. The Greek word for “**labor**” is “*kopiaio*” and literally means to feel fatigue, to be wearied by hard work, to work to the point of exhaustion. The word “**strive**” (“**suffer reproach**” in the NKJV) is “*agonizomai*” and means to struggle, literally to compete for a prize, and figuratively to contend with an adversary. The ministry is an agonizing



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struggle. It is something that is relentless. Until you have actually done it, you do not really know what it means to preach and teach every single week of your life. Sunday morning you teach and preach, often on Sunday evening you preach and teach, during the week you preach and teach. You do it over and over and over – and it becomes extremely exhausting, mentally fatiguing, physically tiring. You are here in Scripture, and you are here in Scripture, then you go there – and in all of it you have to be accurate and insightful and deliberate and precise and fresh. It is relentless. It goes on week after week, month after month, year after year for a lifetime. For over 40 years of my life I have taught an average of nearly 3-4 times per week. It will wear you out because it is nothing less than a labor. And those men who have made an impact throughout the history of the church have understood that. The ones that worked and labored and studied the hardest have left the greatest imprint of all. And to all of this you add the responsibility of your family, of other ministry responsibilities like counseling, the care of souls, physical illness, making a living.

The problem is that I do not always feel the same week after week. I am not as clear one week to the next. However, I have to show up. If you add to that disappointment, discouragement, a non-appreciative member or two, and the spiritual battles that you have to fight, then the spiritual and physical workload can be staggering at times. The men who are able to overcome all of this are the men who develop immense powers of spiritual concentration. However, if a good minister is personally willing to pay the price of laboring and striving, of agonizing over Scripture and its interpretation, of working to the point of exhaustion, then he will have God's blessing on his ministry. It is an exhausting work. In [2 Corinthians 4:1](#), Paul said that he “**did not lose heart**”. In v8-12 he said,

⁸We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; ⁹persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed—¹⁰always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body. ¹¹For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. ¹²So then death is working in us, but life in you.

In essence, what he is saying to these Corinthians is that the ministry is killing him, but it is producing life in them. He repeats again in v16-17,

¹⁶Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. ¹⁷For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory,

A man has to make a decision in the ministry as to how much effort he is willing to invest – and that decision will be one of the primary determining factors as to whether or not his ministry will be mediocre or excellent. Unfortunately, many pastors are very busy, but busy doing the wrong things. They are more of a visitation pastor than a teaching pastor, more of a church administrator than a preaching pastor – and eventually it kills the church. The ultimate food of the church is the Word of God. The Bible must become the sole content of a pastor's ministry, the sole theme of his preaching, and it must saturate his mind and his soul. He must make a radical commitment to the Bible and to Bible study.



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Sixthly, a good minister teaches with authority and conviction. Paul told Timothy in v11 – “**These things command and teach**”. The verb is an imperative present active verb which means that it could be translated as **command and keep on commanding, teach and keep on teaching**. However, what are “**these things**” that Paul is referring to? He is referring to all of the things that are related to God’s divine truth and virtue. Truth without virtue in the life is deadly, and especially in the life of a pastor. It makes him cold, indifferent, detached. He fails to have the proper respect for people.

I was in an ordination council once and one of the questions that came up was a very difficult one. It was about how the man being interviewed would handle a situation where a transvestite had gotten saved and wanted to be a part of a local church. Well, you can just imagine some of the problems that would create – what bathroom do they use, can they be around your children, and so many others issues. However, ultimately, the answer given in the ordination council was that you simply have to take people where they are. We cannot expect lost people to act like mature Christians. So, the church has to simply learn how to deal with difficult situations that may arise. It is not easy. There is not always an obvious answer. We just have to take people where they are and move forward from there. Ultimately, it will take a lot of our time to do this.

In this day and age a good minister has to be very careful about becoming entertaining. A pastor can become interesting in his messages, but have an overall non-transforming effect. I am not here to be interesting. I am not looking for catchy little phrases and rhymes for you to remember what I am saying. I am not just “sharing” or making suggestions. I am called by God to be clear and definitive because I am communicating the most vital truths ever given to man. If a man is going to be an effective minister, then at times he must be assertive. Paul actually rebuked Timothy for his spirit of timidity. Apparently, he was afraid to speak confidently and boldly, and the effect of that kind of preaching is that sermonettes create Christianettes. I would not call this dictatorial authority (or lording over God’s people) for that is all very unscriptural. However, I would call it a practical authority – speaking accurately and clearly from the Word. God’s Word has demands within it. God is not just making suggestions. Men are commanded to repent and to believe the gospel and to bow their hearts before a holy God in obedience to the Lordship of Christ in their life. Spiritual authority comes from God, but it comes through the instrument of the Scriptures when they are clearly, understandably, and accurately taught. I keep reminding my students that Scripture that is not rightly divided is in reality a misrepresentation of God, and God is not present in His Word when He is misrepresented. Personally, I can misrepresent God by being inaccurate, or by my personal spirit and being spiritually arrogant or demanding in what and how I say something. I am more than confident that I have failed severely in both areas.

Number seven. A good minister is to be an example by his life. V12 says,

¹²Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

One of the greatest supports to excellent preaching is the life behind the preaching. A pastor’s life is what will make his preaching believable. One of the reasons that a pastor should stay at a church as long as he can is so that the people can see him over the long haul, and so that they can come to believe



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that what he preaches is really what he believes. Ultimately, a pastor's congregation will have a tendency to follow how he lives more than what he teaches. It is a man's life that makes what he teaches believable.

Number eight. A good minister builds his ministry on the Word of God. V13 says,

¹³Till I come, give attention to (the) reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

When Paul says to “**give attention**” to these three things, it means to be fully absorbed, and to be consumed by what you are called to do in preparing to teach and teaching the Word of God. The verb “**give attention to**” implies an agonizing preparation in private. It means to struggle, to wrestle with. You read the Scriptures and you wrestle with it to ensure that you come to a proper understanding of the text. To do that you have to labor in it, labor over it, work at it, study diligently, and study often. Then, and only then, are you really qualified to teach it and explain it to others. You clarify what it means, you use the Word to exhort. You hold people accountable to the Word. If a minister has a tendency to do a lot of other things during the week, then for the most part he cannot really preach well on Sunday. He can fake it, he can pretend that he has something to say. However, in reality he does not.

In my personal life, I read and read and read and read. I read the Word, I read commentaries, I read and read. In our services we read large portions of Scripture. However, there is a critical difference between reading the Word, yet not giving attention to it. Many men are just studying to get a message. Anyone can preach. Anyone can put together a message. All you have to do is find a Scripture and find a few ideas to fit with it, then just embellish them a little. However, in reality that is really the curse of the church – men so busy that they are just putting messages together without really studying. A good minister must give attention, pay close attention to what he is reading and what he is preaching on. It is not just for his people, but first of all it is for him. You cannot expect others to follow your leadership if you are asking them to do things that you are not willing to do in your own life.

My job is to exhort people, to encourage them to godliness. If someone were to ask me what was the key element to becoming an excellent preacher and teacher I would say it is becoming an excellent student of the Word of God. Most Christians are not students of God's word, but rather they are just receivers and recipients of someone else's work. A good minister should not get up from his chair until he has finished the work. It will cost him, and dearly at times. As stated earlier, the verb “**give attention to**” implies agonizing preparation in private. You can be assured that if a man has properly labored in the Word, that he will have something to say. **1 Timothy 5:17-18** says,

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine. ¹⁸For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox while it treads out the grain,”

The word for “**doctrine**” is “*didaskalia*” and means teaching. This is what we believe and what we teach – sound doctrine. There is no substitute for proper doctrine – none. You have to be able to systematically and accurately explain the Word of God – or you are not qualified to be in the ministry. That is my job and that is my calling.



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Number nine. A good minister does not neglect His God-given gifts (v14). Normally a pastor should have a deeper giftedness in some areas than his people. A good minister should have ministry gifts given to him by the Holy Spirit and it is His giftedness that will make the individual effective. In reality, this is referring to endurance – is a man willing to be faithful in using and applying the gifts that God has given to him. As a pastor, I believe that the Holy Spirit has given to me a certain giftedness to be a pastor. It is a spiritual calling, but it must be strengthened with certain spiritual gifts and abilities, and I cannot neglect those things. A man’s giftedness should grow and become more evident to others over the long haul.

Number ten. A good minister is willing to invest his entire life in God’s work. V15 says,

¹⁵**Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.**

The phrase to “**give yourself entirely to them**” means to take great pains with these spiritual things, to be fully absorbed in them. To me, the ministry is very consuming, very demanding. A pastor has to be very passionate about his calling, about the work that God has separated him to do. Being a pastor has to be the most important calling in the spiritual life. Why? It is because it really is the work that carries with it significant eternal consequences for those that hear.

This is our life, this is what we do, and this is our calling. In a very real sense, a good minister must maintain a single focus in his life - a devotion and love for the Word of God and the teaching of the Word of God that consumes him. Being a pastor is not a job to me. Being a pastor is what I am, it is what I do. It is my life, it is a divine calling – and I have to take that more seriously than anyone else. If I do not pastor, I do not have a Plan B for my life anymore. This is it until the end.

Number eleven. An excellent minister should always be growing spiritually in a way that is obvious to others. V15 says – “**that your progress may be evident to all**”. If you are fully absorbed in the matters of ministry, both in the knowledge of Scripture and its application in your own life, then a good minister’s progress should be evident to all. I should not ever try to fool anybody when I show up at the church. I just need to be growing personally in my walk with Christ. The word “**progress**” is a military term that means your advance, your going forward, your improving and growing spiritually. You are marching forward, you are moving ahead.

At a practical level, I do not ever want to say something stupid and then spend half of my life defending it. I just need to take my medicine and move on. I remember one Sunday when I got frustrated and irritated and just shut the service down about half-way through the message – just stopped preaching, said a prayer and went to the back door. Thank goodness that one of the elders came and reprimanded me right after the service. I have always said that you cannot minister to people from a position of frustration and irritation, and my elder, he remembered it word for word and he was right, more than right. Because he is such a servant to me and for me, he always has my attention and deepest respect, and so the next service I humbled myself to the church and asked the church to forgive me. It was a good lesson for me. I could have just been stubborn and dug my heels in and said, “*I am not budging*”, but I am glad that I did not because that would have been wrong.



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For some reason, I think that people can accept those kinds of failures. It is perfectly okay for our church to see our weaknesses and our failures. I am just like you – I am very much a work in progress – and I know that God still has a great deal of work to do.

Lastly, a good minister perseveres in the ministry. V16 says,

¹⁶Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

The word for “**continue**” is “*epimeno*” and it means to stay, to continue, to persevere, to remain, to tarry over. When you take the Greek verb “*meno*”, which means to stay, and add the prefix “*epi*” to it, it then becomes a much stronger verb. “*Epi*” means upon, in, or at. It makes the simple word “**stay**” to mean to stay at, to stay on something, to stay with something. It means to remain over something longer, to continue at doing something. It strengthens the verb, it intensifies it.

So, this particular word is not talking about a lifelong endurance, but rather to simply keep doing what you are doing, keep working at what you are doing. Keep on studying, keep on teaching, and keep on exhorting. Be diligent, persevere, be faithful, and teach the Word.

Now, before we go into a more detailed exposition of this passage in Timothy, I wanted to just talk a little more in general about the work of a pastor. I am very fortunate in that I have the privilege of pastoring a precious church. My church is a place where I believe God supernaturally brought me to, and it is a place that is very special to me. I feel deeply loved and deeply appreciated. However, that is not the case for a lot of pastors, and my heart goes out to them. We live in a culture today that is an anti-authority culture, a destructive culture – and much of that cultural fallout has found its way into many local churches. “Church” has almost become a business, and a big business at that. There are a lot of people in churches that are like Diotrephes - people who want to have the pre-eminence. They want power and prestige. We live in culture that is constantly telling us to do our own thing, to be our own boss, to do what you have to do to get what you want. Many pastors that leave churches are forced out by disgruntled members who want to be in some kind of position of power within the church.

It is very easy for pastors to just get discouraged because they do not think that their church is growing, or they do not have a lot of people coming. And to make it all worse, we have all of these church seminars on how to grow your church, how to impact your community, how to have this great program, and how to revolutionize the culture. Honestly, all of that “stuff” is very boring to me personally. The reason that I think it is that way to me is because for me personally, it just misses the point of what I am to be and to be doing. I believe that I have one job – and one job only. My job is found here in [1 Timothy](#), in [2 Timothy](#), and in [Titus](#). However, its simplified definition is given in [1 Peter 5:1-4](#),

¹The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: 2Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; ³nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being



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examples to the flock; ⁴and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away.

That is it – “**shepherd the flock of God which is among you**”. I am not called to be some kind of cultural evangelist, or a spiritual business entrepreneur, or someone who penetrates the society, or a revolutionary. Those may be secondary effects, but I am called to one task – to shepherd the church, to feed the sheep, to build them up on sound doctrine and the words of the faith, to teach the Bible, and to spiritually protect them in their faith.

My focus is not to be on the people outside of the church, but those people inside the church. My focus is not on unbelievers who may come to church, but on the believers who are the church. I am not primarily called to the unconverted, but to the saints, to the church, to the redeemed. My responsibility is not to the community, not to the culture, not to the people down the street. I am not to be entertaining for them or try to be creative in reaching them. I am not supposed to redefine the church and what church is and does so that they will be comfortable and happy and content with it. My job is to be a sanctifying shepherd of the local church. This is really basic, and it is really God’s mandate to every pastor. In [Ephesians 4:11-16](#), Paul clearly outlines that the pastor is to be an equipper.

¹¹And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹²for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ—¹⁶from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.

We are not just trying to conduct a worship service on Sunday – you know, do the right thing for all of the right reasons. What we are doing is trying to produce a sanctifying life that conforms to the will of God.

Let me give you my job in other terms. My job as a pastor is to equip men and women so that they grow up into Christ-likeness. Even though I may get frustrated at times, I know that the real measure of my pastoral ministry is not the number of people in our congregation, but the Christ-likeness of the people in our congregation. It is never about how many we have, but how Christ-like we are. That is my calling and my ultimate job. In [Acts 20:26-27](#) Paul is giving his farewell speech to the elders at Ephesus where Timothy pastored, and he said these words,

²⁶Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God.

In essence, I have to be on guard for myself and for my flock. In v28, speaking to the elders, he says,



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²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

You have to take care of yourself so that you can properly take care of the flock. And if I ever have any kind of question about how important this is, he follows it up in v28 by saying that the church is something that Christ “**purchased with his own blood**”. What a job – to be responsible for nurturing people to Christ-likeness. Feed the flock, protect the flock. Shepherd the flock, guard the flock.

Now, the real question that we have to ask is how does this really take place? In [John 17:17](#), where Jesus is speaking, He give the answer as to how this takes place when He says,

¹⁷Sanctify them by Your truth. Your word is truth.

That is my job – to give the church as much of the Word of truth as I can so that the truth will sanctify them, and so that they will grow and mature and become more and more Christ-like. My job is not to entertain unbelievers so that they will like us and maybe like the church and then maybe like Christ. There is a warning in [Hebrews 13:7 and 17](#) that says,

⁷Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.

¹⁷Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.

The foundational ministry in the church is the equipping of the saints and the building up of the believers. I know that someone may say that if you are always just teaching doctrine, or just teaching to the believers, that the lost people just will not understand it. Well, they would be exactly right! [1 Corinthians 2:14](#) says that the natural man cannot understand the Word of God. In fact, to them it is actually “**foolishness**”, and Paul says that he cannot even know about the things of God.

¹⁴But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

I want you to appreciate that church services are not for the lost. Church is not for the lost – it is for the saved. I am not saying that lost people cannot come or listen. They certainly can. However, the emphasis of the church is the building up of the saved, not the evangelizing of the lost within its gates. Within the church, Scripture is for the saints, the teaching of the Word is for the saints, and the preaching of the Word is for the saints. Church is for the saints. The Bible was written for believers. You may say, “*Well, what about evangelism?*” Well, what about it? Believers are the testimony, they are the ones called to go and share the gospel to the ends of the earth. A German philosopher once said to someone, “*Show me your redeemed life and maybe I’ll believe in your Redeemer.*” The power of evangelism always comes through a transformed life. If we are not Christ-like, then we have nothing to offer anyone. We become just what [1 Corinthians 13](#) describes as “**sounding brass and clanging cymbals**”. So, the more Christ-like we become, the more of a message and witness we have.



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Now, I have to share with you that I have discovered one thing in teaching and preaching the Word. It is pretty easy to find out who are not the true believers. They resist the Word and ultimately they will leave. Jesus never begged the rich young ruler to come back and for them to kind of work through some things. Never! In [John 8:41-47](#), look at all the times that the Word **NOT** or **CANNOT** are used.

Then they said to Him, “We were not born of fornication; we have one Father—God.” ⁴²Jesus said to them, **“If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.** ⁴³**Why do you not understand My speech? Because you are not able to listen to My word.** ⁴⁴**You are of your father the devil, and the desires of your father you want to do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own resources, for he is a liar and the father of it.** ⁴⁵**But because I tell the truth, you do not believe Me.** ⁴⁶**Which of you convicts Me of sin? And if I tell the truth, why do you not believe Me?** ⁴⁷**He who is of God hears God’s words; therefore you do not hear, because you are not of God.”**

The only thing that will sanctify the church is the Word of God. Only true believers will receive, believe, and apply the Word of God. Unbelievers will reject, resent, and hate the Word of God. [1 Peter 2:2](#) says,

As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby.

You see, the Scriptures are the only thing that can sanctify a believer. So, that is why I am not surprised at all at these churches that have forsaken the real teaching of the Word and have turned themselves into evangelistic centers that are trying to draw in all of these unbelievers. The fallout of that approach (and I am certainly not against evangelism), but the fallout is that the teaching of the Word of God has less and less emphasis. I had a friend that goes to one of these churches locally, and he sent me a taped portion of one of their services and there was NO preaching and no teaching. I talked to a lady recently that went there and she said she just felt compelled to leave because she was not getting any spiritual food. We just have to realize that non-believers by their very nature are hostile to the truth. There is this simple and natural hostility to God’s Word innate within the Adamic nature. The truth will always be resisted by the lost, and very often even by the saved. We have to appreciate that this resistance to Scripture is not an academic resistance, but is sinfully motivated. That is the whole problem with the Emergent Church movement. It tells its people that the Word of God is not really inspired, that it is not really clear, and that it is hard to understand. They just continually denigrate the Word of God. All resistance to the truth of God is sinfully motivated.

This is true for believers. We can resist the truth, resist the commands of Scripture, resist obeying God, but that is why we keep teaching and keep preaching. If we are ever going to be sanctified, it will be through the Word of God. Does doctrine matter? You bet it does. In some way, every wrong doctrine hinders genuine sanctification and growth. Sanctification is not the result of some emotional experience a believer may have. We can sing praise songs until we grow purple and raise our hands and sway back and forth until midnight. However, growth and sanctification comes from the Word of



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truth. We have to think biblically and scripturally. We have to have deep convictions that are based on the Word of God – not music, not emotional experiences, not unique church services. You cannot become Christ-like without having the mind of Christ, and that is not something that is mystical, but is something that is based on actual knowledge. Paul said to the Corinthian church in [2 Corinthians 11:2](#),

²For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy. For I have betrothed you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

Paul was jealous for these believers. He wanted to present them to Christ as a chaste virgin. [Galatians 4:19](#) says,

¹⁹My little children, for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you....

The word for “**labor**” there is the word used for giving birth, for birth pains.

Now, I want you to know some of the things that we understand about all of this. First, we understand about the power of the flesh. We understand that every believer has to deal daily with very strong fleshly impulses. We understand the power of the world and the influence that it has on us. We understand the spiritual battle that we all have with sin, and because of the power of sin we understand how difficult it seems at times to truly lead a holy life, and how difficult to maintain pure thoughts, holy thoughts, and God-exalting thoughts. We understand how difficult it is to tame the tongue and not say things that are inappropriate, hurtful, or sarcastic.

We have all lost all of these battles through the years, and so we understand how difficult it is to be godly in an ungodly world. We understand how easy it is to disappoint the Lord in our Christian walk, and then to have to live with those failures. We understand what it means to live in [Romans 7](#) – the things we do not want to do, we do, and the things we want to do, we do not do. We all understand the spiritual battle because we have all had to live it and to live through it. It is a long and arduous battle that we face, and yet in the midst of all of those battles, it really is a wonderful thing to live for Christ, to walk with Him, and to see His hand at work in our life. What’s the goal? It is Christ-likeness, the Christ-likeness of our flocks, of our churches, and of our personal lives.

[1 Timothy 4:6](#) says,

⁶If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.

I want to begin a more detailed analysis of the defining characteristics of a good minister. Much of the teaching material in this portion is taken from the course textbook on [1 Timothy](#) by John MacArthur.

There are a lot of different criteria that churches and pastor search committees utilize when looking for a pastor. It may be items like his educational level, the current size of his church, his reputation, has he ever been involved in a building program, or the number of baptisms he performed last year. It could be any number of things. However, in reality, none of those kinds of things are valid Scriptural criteria. If you used those types of criteria, then obviously Jesus would not have been qualified –



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right? No education, no reputation, no large church, and never involved in a building program. The same would have applied to his disciples as well.

The first criteria is that a good minister has to be able to instruct the brethren in valid Scriptural issues – (v6) **“If you instruct the brethren in these things...”** The word **“instruct”** is the word *“hypotithēmi”*, but it actually means to suggest, literally to place under. *“Hupo”* means under, and *“tithēmi”* means to place – so, to place under. Strong’s Dictionary says that it carries the idea of putting someone in remembrance of something. The Amplified Bible says,

6 If you lay all these instructions before the brethren,

It means to point out certain things (NASB, NIV), to explain things, to put them in remembrance (KJV), to simply lay things out before your people. It does not imply dwelling on them to any degree – just pointing things out, and it is a continual present participle, which means that it has the idea of continually laying these things before the people. I.e., just keep putting before them the reality that there is error. Error will always surround us – always. There has always been false teaching and there always will be. For instance, I am constantly pointing things out about the Emergent Church Movement to my congregation. However,, hopefully, I do not dwell on those things to any degree – just mention them and warn them, just lay things out for them, and point out certain things about the movement that are spiritually dangerous and unhealthy. In my understanding what we are dealing with is **“another gospel”** – and that is not a small issue.

If we carefully follow what Paul was saying in v1-5, then we know that in the context of v6 that Paul was talking specifically about false teaching – what he called **“doctrines of demons”** that were spawned by what he called **“seducing”** or **“deceiving spirits”**. However, I think there is something very important in v6 that is found in the specific word that Paul uses. This verb for **“instruct”** is what is often referred to as a “soft” verb, or a “mild” verb. I.e., Paul is not referring to what we might call hard core preaching or teaching against these false doctrines. Surely, there is a legitimate place for that. However, this word refers more to a gentle, humble persuasion – just putting the people in remembrance and reminding them of the dangers. For me personally, I think that I use to preach “harder” against certain things than I do now. I was more negative. Hopefully, I have more of a positive and reinforcing ministry than I use to have and one that focuses on the more enduring truths of Scripture rather than spiritually negative issues. The more that I pastor, the more that I understand that God is the One who builds my people up, and He does it through His Word. So the more of a foundation that you have in God’s Word, the more that you will begin to recognize and discern error. Truth is always the foundation from which we can deal with error.

What every church needs is strong doctrine, a very clear exposition of Scripture, and strong preaching and teaching from the pulpit. Just think for a moment of all of the various things that are currently invading the church. We have charismatic confusion to the hilt, we have psychology replacing doctrine, we have success oriented motives for ministry (church is a big business to many), we have prosperity doctrines (the health and wealth false teaching), we have positive confessions, and the list just goes on and on. With the Emergent Church Movement and the seeker sensitive movement, we have become so liberal and so diluted of the Word of God that it is surely an abomination to God.



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What the seeker sensitive movement has created is a Scripture-anemic, therapeutic, man-centered, God-at-your-service, consumer driven church - and it is a death knoll on the church.

Let me read you what Rick Warren wrote in his #1 best seller The Purpose Driven Church. This is what he said, and this is what has spawned the seeker sensitive movement:

“Adapt your style to fit your audience. The ground we have in common with unbelievers is not the Bible, but our common hurts, needs, and interests as human beings. You cannot start with a text, expecting the unchurched to be fascinated with it. You must first capture their attention, and then move them to the truth of God’s Word. By starting with a topic that interests the unchurched, and then showing what the Bible says about it, you can grab their attention, disarm prejudices, and create an interest in the Bible that was not there before.”

In reality, this is tragic. It is a recipe that allows what he calls the “unchurched” to dictate what and how the church actually teaches. Do we really think that Jesus would ever have allowed the lost to dictate what He taught? Once again, church is not for the lost. It is for the saved. This approach basically says that God’s Word is not relevant and makes human ingenuity the key to interesting sinners in the gospel. I am called to be a faithful steward of the great truths of Scripture, not some kind of cultural evangelist that is willing to soften the impact of God’s Word on the lost. I am not here to try and make truth appealing to lost people. I am here to declare, “**Thus says the Lord**”. I choose to preach His Word faithfully, and beyond that to depend on Him for any results. It is His Word that is taught, it is His Spirit that is working, and it is His power that both convicts and transforms the sinner – not my ingenuity with the message. God has not called me to be creative, but faithful.

One of the responsibilities that God has clearly given to pastors is the responsibility of warning people, of holding both them and themselves accountable in all things to the Word of God. If we have strong doctrine in our churches, but at the same time we are not willing to be accountable to it, then in reality, we will come under a greater judgment. The more light we are given, the more accountable we become. Church is a very dangerous place simply because if you are in a Bible preaching church and you hear the Word of God properly taught week after week, then you become highly accountable to God for how you implement what you have heard into your life. There is no escaping that reality.

In these verses, Paul seems to be saying the way that Timothy should face these false teachings is not by always refuting these things, but rather by constantly reaffirming what is true to the people, and then living out that truth in his life. One of the things that pastors should want to do is to make virtue and truth to be far more attractive and desirable than heresy and lies. They should want their people to come to a place in their life where they become caught up in the very glory of God, where they see what God wants for their life, and then follow that direction.

Now, that may sound on the surface like a very noble thing, but we know that the closer we get to the coming of Christ, that the more people are going to turn away their ears from the truth. [2 Timothy 4:3-4](#) says,



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³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

That verse aptly describes the dilemma that a good pastor faces. Too often sin looks more attractive than truth. I personally believe that the best way that I can help people from falling into error is not to spend all of my time refuting false teaching, but to be constantly building them up on the words of the faith. [Acts 20:32](#) puts it this way,

³²“So now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

The more that you are built up on God’s Word, the more you will understand the principles that God has provided for living out the Christian life. The more spiritual nourishment we receive, the more it will promote our spiritual growth.

If a teacher is committed to the truth, then there are definitely times when he has to be negative, or speak out against certain teachings, even certain teachers. However, I do not want to always be dwelling on those things, rather just point them out to my people, put them in remembrance of them, and bring them to their attention. Why? It is so they can become discerning. It is simply giving counsel and advice on these issues. A good pastor should always be reminding his people to be aware of error, and identify and point it out to them. However, most of the time, error and false teaching are very subtle and very convincing – and that is exactly what makes false teachers so very dangerous. So, we have to become strong in the Word of God – we have to. [1 John 2:14](#) puts it,

¹⁴I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one.

We have to be able to think biblically, and to draw the line between truth and error, and the only way that I can do that as a pastor is to constantly be building people up on the sound doctrine of God’s Word.

The second attribute of a good minister is that he is “**nourished in the words of faith and of good doctrine**” (v6). The Amplified Bible translates this as,

...ever nourishing your own self on the truths of the faith and of the good [Christian] instruction which you have closely followed.

In my mind, this could easily be the most important single attribute of a good minister, namely that he is constantly nourishing himself on the Word of God – self feeders. In fact, the word for “**nourishing**” is a present participle in the Greek which means that it is something that Timothy is to be constantly doing. You could actually translate it as “**constantly nourishing yourself**”. In fact, to highlight the significance of this, it is a term that indicates the very means by which Timothy can become a good minister. I.e., you cannot be a good minister if you are not constantly self-feeding yourself on the Word of God.



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Behind any good ministry of public teaching there lies the discipline of private study. The best teachers have always remained as good students. They teach well because they learn well. Unfortunately, a lot of people who teach and preach have a very minimal understanding, as well as a minimal commitment, to the study of the Word of God. Too much contemporary preaching is very weak doctrinally and very minimal in its presentation of doctrine. What that reflects is a fundamental lack of overall Bible knowledge. One of the grave concerns that I carry for my students is that they can go through four years of seminary training and still not know how to study or how to preach. Many pastors maintain a very minimal commitment to the study of Scripture. They are too busy administrating the church and taking care of secondary matters. Without any question, the Word of God is the primary business of the church. Any good pastor must think deeply about divine truth. The idea that God has called me to teach and handle HIS Word frightens me as nothing else can. It literally scares me at times. The last thing that I want to do is to NOT labor hard at studying and preaching. Unfortunately, in many places, the modern church is characterized by impotent preaching that falls on hard hearts and has little to no eternal impact whatsoever. It is really a spiritual curse.

If you go back to the Reformation from which we gained the heart and soul of much of our theological understanding of the great doctrines of Scripture, most of those men were pastors – and especially in what was known as the Puritan era. John MacArthur points out in his commentary on 1 Timothy that great Bible teachers like John Owen, Richard Baxter, Thomas Goodwin, and Thomas Brooks were pastors. These men were constantly writing great theological treatises and books on doctrine and theology. However, they were all pastors, and that is just what they did. They devoted their entire life to understanding Scripture, to understanding doctrine, and to understanding theology. They worked hard to handle Scripture with clarity, accuracy, precision, and understanding. A good minister must become a faithful conduit of the truth to his flock. My greatest fear is that I might present the Word of God inaccurately to those listening. Nothing burdens me more than that one thing – that I mishandle God’s Word, and ultimately mislead someone.

Paul says that Timothy is to be nourished on **“the words of faith and of good doctrine”**. Before I share with you what those phrases mean, it is important to understand that we live in a generation of church goers and in an environment of churches where people are much more interested in being entertained than being taught. People just do not like to sit and think. So, from the word “go”, we are at a disadvantage at my church simply because we are not and will not become entertainers, and in contrast, we will think through the biblical doctrines. So, the spiritual drift of this age, and it is very dangerous, is to entertain people rather than teach people. It is so prevalent and so accepted today that it is hard to even recognize sometimes.

Now there are two distinct words/phrases that Paul uses to describe what Timothy is to be nourished on - **“the words of faith”** and **“good doctrine”**. Obviously, both refer to Scripture, but specifically to certain portions of Scripture. The **“words of faith”** simply refer to the body of truth that is found in the Scriptures.

The second term is the phrase **“good doctrine”**. This phrase refers to that teaching which comes from the proper interpretation of Scripture, and ultimately that which is taught. We are talking about all of



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the objective truths found in Scripture. There simply is no place in the teaching of Scripture for biblical ignorance. The issue is not how good of a communicator I may be, but much more importantly how well I know the Word of God. There is no substitute for a comprehensive knowledge of the Word of God in the pulpit. Why? It is because it is the Word of God that judges and appraises all of life's critical issues and then addresses them with the divine will of God. The only way that I can fulfill my calling as a pastor is through a knowledge of God's Word that leads people to Christlikeness.

Thirdly, we see in v7 that a good minister is someone who avoids inappropriate and unholy teaching.

⁷But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.

The word for “**reject**” means to put something away, to refuse to have anything to do with it, to shun it, to stay away from it at all cost. So, a good minister is to have nothing to do with false teaching. It is almost like Paul is making a contrast here that as much as a good minister should desire to spend time in the Word of God, on the flip side he should have a devout disinterest in those things that are actually profane and unholy in content. I genuinely believe that there is more false teaching in the church than there is true teaching. False doctrine just abounds. [Ephesians 4:14](#) says,

¹⁴that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting

[1 Timothy 5:17](#) says that a good minister labors in doctrine,

¹⁷Let the elders who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine

[2 Timothy 4:3](#) says,

³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers

[2 John 1:9](#) declares,

⁹Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son

The word “**profane**” in [1 Timothy 4:7](#) is “*bebelos*” and means unholy, radically different from what is holy. It is anything that contradicts the Word of God, and is suggestive of anything that has no connection to or relation to God whatsoever.

Next, he refers to “**old wives fables**”. In the culture in which Paul was writing, women were normally not allowed the same educational opportunities that were given to men. So the phrase here is really a term of disdain and sarcasm for any viewpoint that lacked credibility. It is the kind of viewpoint that in philosophical circles would only be appealing to those who were uneducated, unsophisticated. It is like an old senile woman telling a young child about some fairy tale as if it were true. They are the kind of ideas that would turn an individual away from the truth and unto “**fables**” (“*muthos*”, from where we get our English word “myth”).



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The point, however, is very clear – do not even fool around with those things that are radically opposed to what is holy. In the teaching of the Word of God, there is absolutely no place and no ground for silly false teachings or for shallow and ignorant speculations about the veracity of Scripture. I do not want my mind to be a battleground. However, the more that I saturate my mind with those things that are not Scriptural, with all of the false doctrines out there, then that is exactly what happens – those things begin to war in my mind. [1 Timothy 1:4](#) says,

nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith

I just do not want my mind to be saturated with ungodly things so that it becomes a battleground for the truth. There is so much false teaching that goes under the guise of intellectual scholarship that it is frightening. A man who is a good minister of Jesus Christ is someone who simply saturates His mind with the Word of God, and it is that saturation that provides the foundation for conviction and clarity in his teaching.

Next, Paul says that a good minister is disciplined in personal godliness. V7 says that he is to “**exercise himself towards godliness**”. Oswald Sanders once wrote a book on Spiritual Leadership, and he said this in the book – “*Spiritual ends can only be achieved by spiritual men using spiritual methods.*” The ultimate goal for a pastor is to have the kind of ministry that simply overflows from a godly life – and that takes a great deal of discipline. In the ministry, the issue is always godliness – always. It is not how clever a man may be, or how articulate or how good of a communicator he may be. Rather, it is always an issue of godliness. Godly ministry is always an overflow out of a man’s godly life.

Many of the translations actually use the word “**train**” rather than the word “**exercise**”. “Training” emphasizes the point that spiritual development does not happen by chance. An athlete is focused and committed, constantly training, refusing to let up, always striving, working hard. The word for “**exercise**” is that word “*gumnazo*”, from which we get our word gymnasium. It is a word that implies a certain level of rigor and strenuous activity. It normally requires a high level of personal sacrifice to become the best at what you do. The word exercise is in the present tense which means that it was to be Timothy’s constant pursuit, an everyday endeavor. It is always a discipline thing, always. There has to be a high level of discipline in the ministry to ensure that you do not get distracted with the minor things and neglect the major things. I listened to a man who was giving the chapel message at school and he said that the one thing he regretted more than anything else over the last 45 years of ministry was that he got too distracted with doing those things that other people could have done. He wound up majoring on the minors.

The phrase in the Greek text reads to “**exercise yourself UNTO godliness**”. The NKJV says “**towards godliness**”. It is the Greek preposition “*pros*”, and means with a view to. In the same way that the Greek athlete would discipline himself and exercise constantly, it was always with a view to winning in the athletic contests. However, for Timothy, his goal was winning in the area of godliness. You could actually translate it as “**keep training yourself for godliness**”, or “**keep disciplining yourself unto holiness**”, unto godliness. [2 Corinthians 7:1](#) says,



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¹Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We all have to be constantly building ourselves up in our inner man to be strong spiritually. You have to train yourself to know God's will, to know clearly what it is and what God desires of your life – and what He does not desire. We just have to stay within God's rules and within godly boundaries. You have to confine yourself to God's standards. You are a soldier, so you have to make sacrifices and endure hardship and discomfort. It is always a discipline thing. [1 Timothy 4:8](#) says,

⁸For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.

To balance this out, I would say that in whatever way we treat the body, the physical exercise should have as its aim the maintenance of our mind and body so that we can place them at God's disposal and for His use. "Godliness", Paul says, "is profitable for all things". A man's life begins to be filled with Christ and the things of Christ, and Christ is magnified in his body and in his life. As he says here, it "has promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come".

In v9, Paul says,

⁹This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

This is a little formula that Paul uses five times in the Pastoral Epistles – "this is a faithful saying". It is a truism, a trustworthy statement. It is really a spiritual travesty for Christians to be over-occupied with their bodies. It shows an inability to gain perception of the reality of the spiritual and eternal dimensions of life – which really have much greater significance than the physical. God wants the heart to be occupied with those things that are holy and sacred realities.

Beginning in v10 Paul gives the next quality of an excellent minister.

¹⁰For 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.

When I read this verse, it sort of brings us back down to earth from all of the talk about godliness, and being heavenly minded. In fact, if you read it properly, it says that being a good minister is just hard work. It says, "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach...." To what "end" is Paul speaking about? The end of v8 – "the life that now is and of that which is to come". We understand that what we do has eternal implications. We function with eternity in view, we "labor", and we strive. [2 Corinthians 5:9-10](#),

⁹Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. ¹⁰For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.

We are going to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and give an account. What we do or do not do matters. V11 says,

¹¹Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men....



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We know that all men and women stand in view of eternal judgment – so we do our part to persuade them with the gospel. The reason that we work hard is because we know that it has eternal consequences. An excellent minister is committed to working hard at what he does simply because he holds eternity and its consequences in view. The more I preach and teach, the more real heaven and hell become to me. I know they are real, I know they exist, and I know that people go to both. In light of the reality of both, how could anyone who handles the Word of God be indifferent and mediocre in handling the things of God? We are not just coming to church. What we do has eternal consequences, and the souls of men is at stake.

The word for “**labor**” is the word “*kopiaō*” and means to work to the point of exhaustion and to work to the point of sweating and becoming weary. The second word translated in the NKJV is “**suffer reproach**”, but that is not really a good translation at all. The word is “*agonizomai*” from which we get our word agony and agonize. It has the idea of being involved in a great struggle and agonizing over it – and once again to the point of exhaustion. There are just things that you have to work through, and they can be very agonizing and very exhausting as you do. J. Oswald Sanders once wrote, and I agree, “*If the minister is not willing to pay the price of fatigue for his leadership, it will always be mediocre.*” He said that the more effective the leadership, the higher the price that had to be paid. There are times when the ministry can be a very lonely business. You work hard, you labor, you struggle, you make sacrifices – and yet there seems to be no results. To me, it is just part and parcel with the territory and with the calling.

In v10, Paul says that he does all of these things – he struggles and agonizes and works to the point of exhaustion – “**because we trust in the living God....**” When Paul says that he “**trusts**”, it is in the Greek perfect tense, which means that he did it in the past and he is continuing to do it in the present. He continually sets his hope in the living God. When things are hard, when he has been beaten, when he has suffered shipwreck, when he has been falsely accused, when he has escaped by being let down a wall, when he has been thrown into jail, when he has been stoned – whatever circumstances he finds himself in, he still keeps putting his trust in the living God. What a lesson, what a truth to grasp, what a testimony. Paul simply could not indulge his life in temporal things. He was always keeping eternity in view.

Now, at the end of v10, he has a very interesting phrase – “**who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe**”. What does he mean there? Some people think that this means that everyone is going to be saved – universalism. One day everything will be eternally resolved in Christ, everything will be reconciled, and all men will finally be saved. However, clearly, that is not what the Bible teaches. Scripture never contradicts itself. We know that there is a hell where “**the worm never dies and the fire is never quenched**”. All of the unsaved are sent there when they die. We know that. Scripture is crystal clear on that matter. It is a horrible place, a place of weeping and wailing, of the gnashing of teeth. It is a place of indescribable torment, a place of utter abandonment. It is a place where loneliness and despair will never end, where hopelessness always prevails. The pain and torment cannot be described. It is a real place with real people eternally existing there. There are no



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second chances, no purgatory, no escape hatch or “Get Out of Jail” card. So, we know this phrase “**the Savior of all men**” does not mean that all men will be saved. That should be perfectly clear.

Another prevalent view of this phrase is that it is talking about a potential salvation over an actual salvation. I.e., Jesus is potentially the Savior of all men. We know that His death was powerful enough for that to happen. If God had so chosen, everyone could be saved simply because the death of Christ is sufficient for that to happen. However, that is not what this passage means. The word “**especially**” is vital to understand. It means that all men – all men, saved or lost – all men enjoy some degree of salvation, some degree of God’s saving grace. If God had chosen to just exercise immediate justice for men’s sins, then no one would live – no one. So, what kind of salvation are men enjoying? Well, in a very general sense, they are experiencing God’s protection and saving power in a temporal sense. They get to live, they get to enjoy things in life, they get to have a family and jobs and get an education. They get to eat well and enjoy God’s creation. That is available to some degree to all men.

Now, we have to be careful that we define the word “**Savior**” properly. For some reason, some people seem to think that every time they see the word “**Savior**” that it is talking about salvation and salvation from sin – which simply is not true. For instance, Othniel, a judge, was called savior because he delivered Israel from the Mesopotamians. In many places in the Old Testament, men were called saviors because they acted as deliverers. Gideon was called a savior. David was seen as a savior. In [Acts 17:25](#) Paul talked about God on Mars Hill.

²⁵Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things.

So, in a general sense, God sustains and keeps all men. Lost people get sick, near the point of death, and God allows for them to be healed. He sustains all with food, and He provides for other needs and sustenance. We breathe air, we eat food, and we enjoy life. Even in a place like [James 5:15](#) where it talks about the “**prayer of faith**”, it says,

¹⁵And the prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

In that verse, it is not talking about spiritual salvation when it uses the word “**save**”, but a deliverance from disease and sickness. It could be a deliverance from trouble. God simply sustains life by His providence, and in that sense He is the Savior of all men – but “**especially to those who believe**”. God has built physical healing into every body, and all men can enjoy it. God has given grace to all men simply because He is withholding His ultimate wrath against them. It is only the mercy of God that even allows a lost man to live. No wonder Paul is willing to work hard, to labor, to strive, and to work to the point of exhaustion. He understands that God is a sustaining God and a providing God to all men. In that sense, He is the “**Savior of all men**”, but especially to those who believe.

In [1 Timothy 4:11](#) Paul says,

¹¹These things command and teach.



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A good minister is someone who teaches with practical authority. The word “**teach**” carries with it the idea of teaching doctrine, of instructing, but doing so with practical authority. Preaching and teaching is not supposed to be “interesting” or “entertaining”. It is supposed to be instructive. There is nothing about teaching or preaching that is suggestive in nature. The Word of God does not make suggestions for living. At times delivering the Word of God can be somewhat confrontational in that it must address areas of sin and spiritual non-compliance. Disobedience and indifference have eternal consequences. Now, none of this means that the minister is abusive in his speech, and it does not mean that he is ungracious or over-assertive. To the contrary, he must be gentle, compassionate, and tender. However, he cannot in any way mitigate God’s commands to be obedient.

One of the things that I believe that the Lord has been teaching and reinforcing is the difference in approach to the saved and to the lost. As previously stated, church is not for the lost – they simply cannot understand the things of God. That certainly does not mean that we do not want lost people in our churches, for we do. However, we want to minister to them properly and with respect and dignity. No matter what we may think of them or their lifestyle or their beliefs, they have been made in the image of God and have great value. Many of them really do not have the same frame of reference that we as Christians do. We have a certain fundamental understanding of God’s Word, we believe certain foundational truths, and we have been indwelt by the Holy Spirit. So, how God deals with us is going to be distinctly different than how He may deal with a lost person – and we need to understand that.

When we teach or preach, there are really certain foundational truths that we must embrace. First of all, it is absolutely imperative that we know the Word of God, and am constantly learning from the Word of God. If we are not sure about what God’s Word actually says, then we will not teach with authority and conviction. We have to know what Scripture means, we have to divide it rightly, and we have to study it diligently. Anyone who waffles on the meaning of Scripture cannot teach it with authority, and anyone who is not committed to obeying the Word of God will waffle on it as well.

Secondly, we have to communicate it properly. There is a right way and a wrong way, a good way and a bad way of communicating. The truth is simply something that we need to hear, and something that we need to obey. So, excellent preaching and teaching must have embedded within it the commands of God on our life. I am not really interested in just giving my church some sentimental platitudes or sentimental pleadings about the Christian life. I am not interested in kind of “sneaking” up and giving then a subtle hint about what the Word is saying because I am afraid that they will not accept it. To the contrary, the truth must be clear and understandable. It must be direct and cannot skirt the issues. Having an understanding of God’s Word is really a very urgent matter. So, an excellent minister commands and teaches, commands and teaches. Here is the command and here is what it means.

1 Timothy 4:12 says,

¹²Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

What Paul is saying here in this verse is that the excellent minister has to be a model of the very thing that he is teaching. The word “**example**” is the Greek word “*topos*”. It means to be a pattern and a



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model for others to follow. Everytime that I study this word I think of how they teach the young kids in school to write their letters. They give them the letter in dashed lines and have them draw over the dashed lines with a solid line. It is like a painter using a still model to paint from. You put the model on a table or on the floor, and then you paint what you see. It is the same thing here in this verse. If the minister's life does not equate to what he is teaching, then nobody will listen. The correct truth and correct behavior cannot be separated. Paul simply says here that you have to be an example **"in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity"**. What Paul is clearly telling Timothy is that all the commanding and teaching that he may do is worthless if he does not live a virtuous life. If the messenger does not have credibility, then neither will the message. Every excellent minister is obligated to live out what he teaches. It is inexcusable for someone who teaches and preaches to not live out what they believe – inexcusable.

Now, Paul was constantly encouraging the people to follow the pattern of his life. The following are some of those verses. [1 Corinthians 4:15-16](#) says,

¹⁵For though you might have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet you do not have many fathers; for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. ¹⁶Therefore I urge you, imitate me.

The word "imitate" is "*mimetai*" from where we get the English word "mimic". In [Philippians 3:17](#), Paul says again,

¹⁷Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.

[Philippians 4:9](#) says,

⁹The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you.

[1 Thessalonians 4:1](#) says,

¹Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God;

[2 Thessalonians 3:7](#),

⁷For you yourselves know how you ought to follow us, for we were not disorderly among you;

[2 Timothy 1:13](#),

¹³Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.

[Hebrews 13:7](#),

⁷Remember those who rule over you, who have spoken the word of God to you, whose faith follow, considering the outcome of their conduct.



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An excellent minister's life has to match his message – and it has to match it in the six areas given in v12 – **“in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity”**.

First of all, an excellent minister must be a model of good speech. He has to be honest. There cannot be any falsehoods or any untruths that come from the excellent minister. He has to be able to be fully trusted. I believe that this particular attribute also includes not speaking angrily. I have certainly been frustrated in the past and virtually on every occasion I have been totally disappointed in my behavior. My words and their implications were ungracious and unnecessary. Our words have to be pure – nothing filthy, nothing dirty, and no off color jokes. There is just no place for that in the ministry. Whatever you say to people should build them up, encourage them, and strengthen their walk. Our speech should bring grace to those who hear it. There is a place for fun and laughter and humor and all of that. In fact, Scripture says that laughter is like a good medicine, so we need to laugh and enjoy each other.

Secondly, an excellent minister is excellent in his **“conduct”**. I like the word **“lifestyle”**. His behavior and his lifestyle have got to reflect a righteous life. He has to live out his convictions and live out the biblical principles that he teaches. The things you do, the places you go, the way you spend your life, how you live – they all matter. They are really the greatest sermon that the minister can preach. These TV preachers are just money stranglers and spiritual leeches on the church. These people are filthy rich. Paul said that he coveted no man's money, no man's gold, and no man's silver. A man is what he lives – and nothing more. [James 3:13](#) puts it this way,

¹³Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.

I.e., you cannot separate lifestyle from wisdom.

Thirdly, Paul urges Timothy to be an example **“in love”** and caring for people. This word is referring to a self-sacrificing service in the lives of other people. To me, that is the ministry – laying down your life for people that you really love. In reality, I am not sure that is a real sacrifice, but more of a privilege. In the world and in the church, there are givers and there are the takers. We should want to be one of the givers. Paul described his life in [1 Thessalonians 2:7-12](#),

⁷But we were gentle among you, just as a nursing mother cherishes her own children. ⁸So, affectionately longing for you, we were well pleased to impart to you not only the gospel of God, but also our own lives, because you had become dear to us. ⁹For you remember, brethren, our labor and toil; for laboring night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, we preached to you the gospel of God. ¹⁰You are witnesses, and God also, how devoutly and justly and blamelessly we behaved ourselves among you who believe; ¹¹as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹²that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Next, he says that Timothy is to be an example **“in faith”**. It could just as well be translated faithfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty and fidelity, or an unswerving commitment. A pastor has to be



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consistent to become believable. An excellent minister cannot be hit and miss, in and out, up and down, back and forth. You have to be solid, always committed to what's right and godly. That is the key – faithfulness and consistency in the things of God.

And then, Timothy was to be an example **“in purity”**. It is a word that means purity in the area of sexual chastity. Certainly we know well from history that sexual impurity just devastates the ministry. If sexual impurity occurs during someone's ministry, that person is immediately disqualified to be in a position of leadership in the church. It was their choice and they have to bear the consequences of that choice. Certainly the church can receive them into their fellowship, but not into a position of leadership.

So, anyone in the ministry must be a model of virtue in speech, in lifestyle, in love, in loyalty, and in moral purity. If a person cannot be a model in these things, then they simply do not need to be in the ministry. Why? It is because people in the ministry are responsible for setting the example.

Next, [1 Timothy 4:13](#) says,

¹³Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

For me as a pastor, v13 is probably the most important verse of all of the verses in this section. They are all equally important, but this particular verse is crucial to me and my understanding of the ministry. Once again, I want to give credit to Dr. John MacArthur for his rich and meaningful insight in the course textbook from where the vast majority of this information has been derived.

Paul says to Timothy, that until he returns, he wants Timothy to **“give attention to (the) reading, to exhortation, and to doctrine”** (or the teaching). The verb for **“give attention”** is *“prosecho”* and is a present active imperative verb. It is a continuing command, something to which Timothy is to continually be giving his attention. Every day, all the time, and as just a normal part of his life, Timothy is to give his attention, his full attention to these three things. It means that Timothy is to give his personal full attention to these things. He is not telling Timothy to just read, exhort, and teach. Rather, he is saying *“I want you to be fully absorbed in these things. I want your full and complete attention to be centered on these pastoral duties. This is what I want you to be doing until I return.”* So, the verb embodies everything needed to complete these things, all of the effort required to be excellent at these things. It is a very comprehensive command that Paul is giving to Timothy. It is dealing with all of the commitment and devotion, all of the preparation, and all of the attention and concentration needed to do these things. *“Timothy, this is your ministry. So, be fully absorbed in it.”*

So, what are these things? Well, the first one should read **“give attention to (the) reading....”** This is more than just a reference to simply reading Scripture – whether in private or in the worship services. In the early church, during every service, there was a time for the reading of Scripture, and the reading was a reading in which would follow a detailed exposition, explanation, and clarification of those verses that were read. So, when Paul talks about **“the reading”**, he is also talking about all of the preparation it would take to accurately and clearly explain those verses to the congregation. So, it is much more than just reading. There has to be a diligence in studying, understanding, and then teaching



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what you have read. So, the real emphasis is on the explanation of the Scriptures that you read. [Luke 4:16-22](#) gives some insight as to how this really worked in the early church.

¹⁶So He came to Nazareth, where He had been brought up. And as His custom was, He went into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read. ¹⁷And He was handed the book of the prophet Isaiah. And when He had opened the book, He found the place where it was written: ¹⁸“The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed; ¹⁹To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord.” ²⁰Then He closed the book, and gave it back to the attendant and sat down. And the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him. ²¹And He began to say to them, “Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” ²²So all bore witness to Him, and marveled at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth. And they said, “Is this not Joseph’s son?”

When someone was reading the Scripture, they always stood up. However, then they would sit down and give an explanation of what they had read. Why did He sit down? It was because that was the traditional teaching posture in the synagogues. The person would stand up to read, and then sit down to explain the Scripture he had just read. This went on Sabbath after Sabbath, and Jesus was considered a visitor and a guest. So when He sat down, it says that “**the eyes of all who were in the synagogue were fixed on Him**”. [Acts 15:21](#) says,

²¹For Moses has had throughout many generations those who preach him in every city, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath.”

This was the custom – read the Word, explain the Word. They would take the Books of Moses, open them up, read them, and then explain what had just been read. They read it, then they preached it, they explained it, they taught it. All of this comes from [Nehemiah 8:8](#),

⁸So they read distinctly from the book, in the Law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading.

There is the same phrase in Timothy – “**the reading**”. So, when you read this verse, you can see that the real emphasis is in helping the people to understand what is being read, of giving a proper explanation of the verse so that the people understand “**the reading**”. [Deuteronomy 31:11-13](#) says,

¹¹when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. ¹²Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, ¹³and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land which you cross the Jordan to possess.”

So, when we read [1 Timothy 4:13](#), we have a better understanding of what Paul was saying to Timothy. It is not just the reading, but the reading and then the subsequent exposition of the passage.



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You may ask, “*What do you mean by exposition?*” Well, it just clearly explaining the Scriptures. Now, I want you to appreciate that at the time of this writing, the people were much more familiar with the language, with the history, and with the culture in which it was written than we are. So, the further away we get from the passage culturally, linguistically, historically, and geographically, then the further away we get from the original text, and the more necessary it becomes to recreate the dynamics of what was being said, and just as importantly what was being understood by what was being said. As a pastor that is my every day challenge, and it takes a great deal of effort to be clear, understandable, and accurate. You have to kind of reconstruct things to make it understandable, and that is our primary job and most important ministry to the church.

Secondly, Paul tells Timothy to give attention “**to exhortation**”. So, in the first command, Timothy is to tell the people what the Scripture means, and then secondly he is to call the people to apply what they have learned to their lives. Explain and exhort. I am convinced that I cannot exhort until I have first taught. There has to be a foundation for exhortation, and that foundation is a proper understanding of Scripture. So, if I teach the Word properly, then my church has a responsibility to respond to it properly. [1 Thessalonians 4:1-2](#) says,

¹Finally then, brethren, we urge and exhort in the Lord Jesus that you should abound more and more, just as you received from us how you ought to walk and to please God; ²for you know what commandments we gave you through the Lord Jesus.

We have to make appeals and we have to encourage and exhort. Paul says in [2 Timothy 4:2](#),

²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching

The goal is always Christlikeness. [Colossians 1:28](#) says,

²⁸Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

For everything that we learn, there are both blessings and consequences associated with what we learn. If we obey and apply, we receive God’s blessings. If we ignore, we suffer the consequences of that disobedience. I always want to teach in such a way that it forces my congregation to make a decision, and hopefully the right decision. I am not giving pep talks or just making suggestions. I am just a spokesperson, but that person just happens to be God. So, as much as is humanly possible, we have to be correct and accurate in what we say. [1 Thessalonians 2:11-12](#) says,

¹¹as you know how we exhorted, and comforted, and charged every one of you, as a father does his own children, ¹²that you would walk worthy of God who calls you into His own kingdom and glory.

Anyone can be hard to understand. All you have to do is not to know what you are talking about or where you are going with what you are saying. It is easy to be hard to understand. The real effort is being easy to understand simply because we have to fully understand what we are talking about. However understanding what we say is not enough if people do not apply what they have understood.



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In a sense, we are trying to pin believers to the wall on the issues, so that they will say “*I’ll do that, I’ll begin to live that way, I’ll implement that principle in my life.*”

Thirdly, Paul commands Timothy to give attention “**to doctrine**”. The word for “**doctrine**” is the word “*didaskalia*” and is a very important NT word that primarily means teaching. The Amplified Bible states this verse and says to “**instill doctrine**”. In light of this, [2 John 9](#) is a very sobering verse,

⁹Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son.

We need to know, understand, and constantly be reminded of the great truths of the Christian faith. It is the idea of systematically teaching the Word of God, and it particularly embodies the idea of developing and teaching doctrine. For me, I am to give my whole life to this – to reading, explaining, and developing sound doctrine that is understandable and clear. This ought to be the very heart and soul of everything that we do in our churches. It is not to minimize the other things that a church is to do, but rather to simply emphasize the main thing.

In fact, this word for “**doctrine**” or “**teaching**” appears 15 times in the Pastoral Epistles alone. No wonder the elders are to be apt and “**able to teach**” (3:2). It seems that the modern day church is drifting further and further away from this kind of emphasis, and seems to be involved in so many things that really are a distraction. The result is that the Word of God seems to get lower and lower and lower on the scale. This is a tragedy when Christians no longer have an appetite for God’s Word and when they seem to want everything but the Word of God - entertainment, story-telling, praise bands, rock music that mimics the world, and creative skits. As a pastor, I am at a terrible disadvantage at my church because the average visitor has no interest in straight-forward biblical and doctrinal preaching and teaching that may last 90 minutes. It is just too much! [2 Timothy 4:1-4](#) says,

¹I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. ³For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; ⁴and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.

[Titus 1:9](#) gives some additional instruction,

⁹holding fast the faithful word as he has been taught, that he may be able, by sound doctrine, both to exhort and convict those who contradict.

If you go back and read about all of the great preachers of the Reformation and afterward, you will not find anything consistent with the modern church of today. Most of these men would preach 4 or 5 times each Sunday – with different messages! John Calvin would preach twice on Sunday, and then every other week he would teach every night. He spent his whole life in the exposition of the Scriptures. Dr. Martin Lloyd Jones preached on the book of Romans for over 12 years and only got to Romans 14. He spent years and years teaching the Sermon on the Mount.



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These are the kinds of men that have left a mark on the church – the great expositors of the Word of God – not story tellers and not entertainers. These men were involved in [1 Timothy 4:13](#) with very comprehensive and objective expositions of the Word of God. There is no mystery to the ministry. It is working hard at reading, understanding, explaining, applying, and building doctrine systematically from the Word of God. That is it. It is just something at which the pastor has to be relentless in his efforts.

Sin and Satan are constantly unraveling everything that we say or do relative to the Word. We may make an impression on someone during a Sunday morning message, and it is gone by 2:00pm – gone, vanished, out of sight. We are always fighting against this unraveling process, this spiritual deterioration of what we have said to our people. A lot of Sundays I may say the same kind of things I said the Sunday before, but just in a different way. Why? It is because the more I say it, the more I remind my church of it, the more they will remember it, and hopefully the more they will implement it in their life. If I say it the same way every week, they'll say, "*Oh, I have already heard him say this*", and just shut down mentally. I am at my best when I say the same thing to them in different words, and they do not know that I did. To be a good teacher, I have to repeat, repeat, repeat, and repeat the same thing in different ways.

Next, [1 Timothy 4:14](#) says,

¹⁴Do 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.

One of the difficult things for me personally is that I understand, and appreciate, that God's calling on my life to be a pastor carries with it certain responsibilities, certain privileges, and certain liabilities. In order to be a good minister, a pastor has to know what his spiritual gifts are. I have always differentiated between what might be called spiritual gifts and what we call ministry gifts. So, the pastoral problem is whether or not we are actually utilizing and developing the gifts that God has given to us.

One of the reasons that so many people leave the ministry is because they were not really called into the ministry to begin with. I once met with a man at school registration who was signing up for an Associate's Degree. He was an Engineer and appeared to be fairly intelligent. However, when I asked him why he was going into the ministry at his age (he was going to retire in 4 years), he said that he needed something to do when he retired and he thought it might be "kind of fun" to be able to minister in a church. Bad answer. In fact, I have had many students over the years that I never felt were called into the ministry at all.

The only reason that Paul would have told Timothy in this verse to not "**neglect**" the gift that was in him was probably because either he previously had, or Paul detected that maybe he was neglecting his ministry. In fact, the word "**neglect**" is in the present imperative tense which, when used in giving a prohibition, forbids the continuance of an act already going on. The word is "*ameleo*" and means to be careless with something. It is the same word that is used in [Matthew 22:1-5](#),



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¹And Jesus answered and spoke to them again by parables and said: ²“The kingdom of heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, ³and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. ⁴Again, he sent out other servants, saying, ‘Tell those who are invited, “See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.”’ ⁵But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business.

In [Hebrews 2:1-3](#) the writer uses the same word when he says,

¹Therefore we must give the more earnest heed to the things we have heard, lest we drift away. ²For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just reward, ³how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation, which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed to us by those who heard Him,

So, obviously Paul recognized that Timothy was in fact neglecting his spiritual calling and the special endowments that God had given to him for the ministry. No matter what it was, it was a very dangerous place for Timothy to be in. So, Paul’s concern was that Timothy may have been thinking about actually leaving the ministry. From what is known about the pressures that existed in Ephesus, it could have very easily been what we would consider to be a “high stress” job. Some people just cannot handle certain kinds of pressure, and so to get some relief, they simply bail out, give up, and quit. To make it worse, for someone who is struggling in the ministry, there are plenty of times when it can be very unfulfilling. That lack of fulfillment can cause someone to want to leave the ministry.

For Timothy, the Ephesian church was a church that struggled to maintain its doctrinal integrity. Whenever someone struggles doctrinally, they will also struggle morally. Wrong theology always leads to wrong living – always. So, the church had lost its moorings, lost its direction, and had become immoral. We know from [Revelation 2:4](#) that they had “**left their first love**”. They had not lost it, but left it. Ultimately the church of Ephesus became so corrupted that it simply went out of existence.

I have known men who were in churches where everything was difficult. I was told about a pastor who was just being torn down by the deacons of the church. One of my past students was literally systematically removed from his church by the people who “owned the money” in the church. They all just left and left the church in a very precarious place, and eventually this young man had to move and is no longer in the ministry. Some churches are just going to die. They have no vision of what they are to be about, and for the most part just do not care. So the church exists, but in reality it is just a spiritually lifeless church making no impact whatsoever anywhere on anybody. They just meet.

So, here is Timothy being set down right in the middle of this doctrinal buzz saw to make things right, and it was a formidable task to say the least. Well, making things right is usually much more easily said than done, and to make it even worse, we know that Timothy was a little timid, maybe easily intimidated by people. Here is a man that is still growing in his leadership and he is starting out with a pivotal church that intimidates him. If you study the Ephesian church carefully, it is easily recognized that they had left theology and taken up philosophy. I.e., they were placing their ideas above the Word



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of God. In fact, they had developed all of these high-powered and sophisticated theological concepts that were no more than man-centered false doctrine. For instance, [1 Timothy 1:3-4](#) says,

³As I urged you when I went into Macedonia—remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine, ⁴nor give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which cause disputes rather than godly edification which is in faith.

So, we know from this verse alone that there were false teachers who were teaching other doctrines, and the result was that it was causing division and disputes. [1 Timothy 1:18-20](#) reiterates this,

¹⁸This charge I commit to you, son Timothy, according to the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you may wage the good warfare, ¹⁹having faith and a good conscience, which some having rejected, concerning the faith have suffered shipwreck,²⁰ of whom are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I delivered to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme.

The issues had become so serious that Paul accused men of blasphemy and actually delivered them to Satan. [1 Timothy 6:20-21](#) says,

²⁰O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge—²¹by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

So, it easily could have been that Paul was sensing that Timothy was growing weary in the battle and was seriously thinking about leaving the ministry altogether. Paul had spent 3 years there – 3 years. That is a longer time than he stayed at any other church. So, Paul tells Timothy to stir up the gift that had been given to him and to not neglect what God had given to him. Paul's encouragement to Timothy in [2 Timothy 1:7-9](#) was as follows,

⁷For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. ⁸Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began,

Paul seems to be saying that Timothy was actually ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, and of Paul His prisoner. It seems that he was afraid to suffer for the gospel. When I read these kinds of verses, it appears that I am reading about a man who may have simply wanted out of the ministry. He had lost his courage, he had lost his stamina, his resolve – he was on the edge of losing it all. It seems he does not even want to be associated with Paul. Look at what Paul tells Timothy in [2 Timothy 1:12-14](#),

¹²For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. ¹³Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴That good thing which was committed to you, keep by the Holy Spirit who dwells in us.



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“Timothy, hold on to what God has given to you.” No wonder he was encouraging him in [2 Timothy 4:1-2, 7](#),

¹I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: ²Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.

⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.

What Paul is telling Timothy is to keep fighting, keep preaching, and keep teaching. Finish your race, keep the faith. You just have to get the picture here of what was really happening in Ephesus, and of the pressures that existed. Paul is simply trying to encourage Timothy – it is that simple. He is telling him not to quit, not to give up, and not to lay it all down. Now, with all of that as background, how should we understand v14 of our passage?

Paul is telling Timothy in no uncertain terms that the calling that God has placed on his life is just that – a calling from God. This is not something that Timothy just decided to do one evening while he was at home sipping on some chocolate mocha. This was something that God called him into, and if for no other reason, that is why he was to go on. He was gifted for this work by the Holy Spirit. He did not choose God, God chose him. I know that any personal gift or any ministry gift that pastors may have has absolutely nothing to do with the individual. If a pastor has any gift, it is only because God gave it to them. It is not because they are a naturally good speaker, or a naturally great student, or some kind of intellectual giant.

We have to understand what Paul is really talking about when he talks about “**the gift**”. The “**gift**” refers to that special ability that God gives a man so that God can work through him. It is a special God-given endowment for the work of the ministry. John Calvin defines the word in this context as “*the grace with which Timothy had been endowed for the upbuilding of the church.*” Alford says that it represents the gift of teaching and leading the church. Hendrickson says that it is “*that gift of discernment between the true and the false, and consequently of being able to exhort, teach, and guide.*”

What is important in this passage is understanding that when God gives a gift, that gift is not necessarily a permanent endowment. It has no real value until the recipient actually uses it and allows it to develop. So, everyone who has been called must allow God to develop and cultivate their gift over time. God has given the gift or gifts, and it is our personal responsibility to develop that gift. From the teaching that Jesus gave relative to the parable of the talents, the more someone develops and cultivates a gift, the more gifts God will give to them. In the parable of the talents, the ones who used what God gave them got more talents, and the one who buried his talent had it taken away. If God is going to be able to effectively use a person in the ministry, then that individual has to both use and develop the gift or gifts that God has given to him. Whatever gift God gave to Timothy, and we do not know exactly what it was, we do know, however, that it was a supernatural endowment. I.e., God gave Timothy something that he did not previously have.



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My primary gift within the church is the gift of teaching, and it is the one thing that God works through more than any other gift that I may have. A gift is a spiritual enabling that God gives to an individual that allows God to work through that person. It is a sovereign choice by God, and has NOTHING to do with the individual. The Holy Spirit simply separates and sovereignly gives specific gifts to specific people for specific purposes. It is His call, and His call alone. God just happened to call me to be a pastor. I have always had this gift. From the very beginning of my Christian life people have asked me to teach. Teach at coffee houses, teach home Bible studies, teach at prisons, teach Sunday School, teach and preach at church, teach overseas, teach at the seminary extension.

I think that the gift of teaching was Timothy's primary gift, and that is why Paul in [2 Timothy](#) keeps telling Timothy to teach, teach, teach. Preach the word, be instant in season and out of season.

It is important to understand what Paul means when he begins to talk about that "**which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership**". In this context, Paul does not mean that Timothy actually received his ministry gifts or calling by the Ephesian elders when they laid their hands on him. It was common to lay hands on someone when imparting a blessing, or in setting someone apart to a particular office. Today, we might call it a commissioning service. So, this particular laying on of hands was a public affirmation and a public recognition of the gift that Timothy had already received from God. The church was affirming those gifts and that calling. They were commending Timothy to do what God had called him to do.

However, we have to recognize that it had also included a prophecy spoken about Timothy. It was an utterance, probably given by Paul that identified and designated Timothy to a particular ministry. We do not know that it was Paul. However, because this took place during what was known as the "apostolic" era of the church, it was not unusual for the apostles to do exactly this. It could have been a prophet in a local church at that time who had been moved by God to announce that the Spirit of God had endowed Timothy with a special gift. We just do not know. Obviously, and for good biblical reasons, this is not common today. However, what we know is that there were three things involved – a prophetic message, a divine gift and calling, and the laying on of hands. From this passage alone, we cannot know exactly how they all fit. I remember when I was ordained. Anyone who was a deacon or a pastor, or who had been a deacon or a pastor, could come up and lay hands on me during that time. Most everyone prayed something over me and encouraged me. In doing so they were giving an affirmation that they believed from their observation that God had actually called me and gifted me to be a pastor. Most commentaries believe that in [Acts 16](#) where Paul and Timothy first met, that there was a direct prophecy that was given at that time indicating that Timothy was being set aside by God for a specific purpose. In [2 Timothy 1:6](#), Paul wrote this,

⁶Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands.

In [Acts 13](#) a similar thing happened with Saul and Barnabas being separated to a particular work. [Acts 13:1-4](#) says,



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¹Now in the church that was at Antioch there were certain prophets and teachers: Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. ²As they ministered to the Lord and fasted, the Holy Spirit said, “Now separate to Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” ³Then, having fasted and prayed, and laid hands on them, they sent them away. ⁴So, being sent out by the Holy Spirit, they went down to Seleucia, and from there they sailed to Cyprus.

The laying on of hands was the actual confirming by others as to what the Holy Spirit had actually done in the life of Saul and Barnabas. It appears that Timothy experienced something similar. You have to appreciate that in the early church, they did not have pastors and elders and deacons as we would know them today. Why? It was because none of the books of the New Testament had even been written at this time. So, within the early church there were “prophets” who were given a divine ability to speak, and to help clarify God’s direction for the church. It would be like going to church, but no one ever having had a New Testament. So, God raised up these special prophets who would go around from city to city and teach and minister. They had very unique gifts to teach and explain and help the churches endure until the various books of the Bible were completed and distributed to the churches accordingly. Once they had the completed books, they had what they needed and that particular office of “prophet” was no longer needed. Today we have all of these self-proclaimed so called “apostles” and “prophets” running around spewing out all of their false teaching. They simply have no understanding of the early church and how it functioned. They are ignorant of church history. That is why Paul wrote these words in [1 Corinthians 13:8-10](#).

⁸Love never fails. But whether there are prophecies, they will fail; whether there are tongues, they will cease; whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part. ¹⁰But when that which is perfect has come, then that which is in part will be done away.

What happened to Paul, Barnabas, and Timothy is not something that is normative for today. It was a very unique and extraordinary time, and because the church was being “birthed”, there were very special needs that had to be met. Today, God works much more through what we would call providence and circumstances – not direct revelation. There is certainly an inner confirmation of God’s calling within a person by the Holy Spirit, but God simply leads and directs and calls, and people go into the ministry. However, before they go into the ministry, they need to have the collective affirmation of a local church. It is not absolutely necessary, but it certainly adds credibility to what an individual wants to do. God calls, the individual senses that call, and the church affirms that call. The providence of God has been working and through various circumstances and it has become evident that God’s calling is on a particular individual.

Finally, we have [1 Timothy 4:15-16](#).

¹⁵Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.



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In these final verses I want to address two final qualities of an excellent minister. First, we see that an excellent minister is totally immersed in what God has called him to do. The word “**meditate**” is the Greek word “*meleta*” and it means to take care of something. The NASB says “**take pains with these things**”. The NIV says “**be diligent in these matters**”. The Amplified Bible says to “**practice and cultivate**”. Vine’s Dictionary of New Testament Words says that “*meleta*” signifies to care for, to attend to, to be diligent in. The reason that the word “**meditate**” was used was because *to exercise* or *practice* applied to the mind becomes *thinking* or *meditation*. So the word has the idea of considering deeply the nature and importance of the things of the ministry; it implies to get them deeply fastened in your heart, and let all of your conduct in the ministry flow from this inward feeling and conviction. It means to let the reasons and motives of the ministry to always be in view. It is an incredibly important work, and therefore the one who is involved in it must be serious about what he is doing. Be diligent, give very careful thought to what God has called you into.

The phrase “**give yourself entirely to them**” in the Greek New Testament is actually just the words “**to be**”. If you were reading it in the Greek you would simply read it as “**be in them**”. In the Greek Interlinear it reads “**in these things be**”. I.e., be wrapped up in them, be absorbed with these things. Just be in them. The NASB says “**be absorbed in them**”. The NIV says “**give yourself wholly to them**”. The Amplified says to “**throw yourself wholly into them**”. One of the reasons that a pastor is to do this if he has been truly called by God is simply because God has given him divine gifts that he wants to operate on behalf of the church. If you are going to be a good minister, then you have to first be a good steward of the things that God has given to you. The word to Timothy was something that he fully understood – he was to devote his whole life to the ministry. Albert Barnes in his commentary wrote these words,

“His time, attention, talents, were to be absorbed in the proper duties of the work. He was not to make that subordinate and tributary to any other purpose, nor was he to allow any other object to interfere with the appropriate duties of that office. He was not to live for money, fame, or pleasure; not to devote his time to the pursuits of literature or science for their own sakes; not to seek the reputation of an elegant or profound scholar; not to aim to be distinguished merely as an accomplished gentleman, or as a skilful farmer, teacher, or author. Whatever was done in any of these departments, was to be wholly consistent with the direction – be in these things.”

I.e., do the chief thing, do what God has called you to do. If a man is to warn his people of error, if he is to be a diligent student of God’s Word, if he is going to avoid unholy teaching, if he is going to cultivate a disciplined and holy life, if he is to be committed to working hard, if he is going to be able to teach with authority, if he is going to be a model of spiritual virtue, if he is going to be clear, understandable, and accurate in what he teaches, if he is going to fully utilize the gifts that God has given to him, then all of that, all of what we have studied in 1 Timothy 4, then he better understand the necessity of being totally immersed in what God has called him to do.

In v15 it says so “**that your progress may be evident to all**”. If a man is actually doing all of the things required for the ministry, and he is doing them earnestly and with a godly passion for God’s



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work, then it just seems apparent that he should be growing, and growing in a way that others can recognize.

Then in v16, Paul concludes the chapter by saying,

¹⁶Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

The word “**take heed**” means to “**pay attention**”. It is the Greek word “*epecho*” which means to hold on to, to keep your mind on something. In this context it means that Timothy is to simply take care of himself. It applies to everything in his life - to personal integrity, to his health, to his manners, to his habits, to his demeanor – everything. He has to make sure that he is advancing in his personal knowledge of God, in his love for God, in his love for the church. His speech should always be with grace so that it will minister to those who listen to him.

Paul also tells Timothy that he is to pay attention to “**the doctrine**” or to what he teaches. In some ways, the whole of ministry boils down to these two things – paying attention to our life, and taking care of the teaching. In fact, Paul said these same words to the Ephesians elders in [Acts 20:28](#) when he said this to them,

²⁸Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

The whole object of the ministry is to get as much truth as possible before the minds of the listeners, and to do it in such a way as to produce the deepest impression on them. The excellent minister is to be fully committed to his personal holiness and to accurate teaching. Why? Why do all of this? Why is this so important? Well, Paul says in the last part of v16 that “**in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.**” Amazing! We have to persevere in the faith. It is not so that we can be saved, but so that we can demonstrate that we are saved. The person who perseveres gives evidence that they are truly born again. The godlier we become, the more God can use us to bring others to Himself. He does not need us. He can work with us or without us. However, when He provides that privilege, when He gives us the opportunity to be godly and excellent in what we do, God has sovereignly chose to use that in the lives of other people. It is my personal opinion that the only reason that we are even here, the only reason that God leaves us here is so that we can be the agents through which He brings the grace of salvation to lost people. These two elements must be present – holiness in our personal lives, and a deep, deep commitment to the truth and to living out the truth. All of this is a very high calling, a holy calling for each one of us to be excellent and to excel in what we do and how we live as Christians. May God give us His grace to do exactly that.