

V. How Timothy is to relate to different groups in the church (5:1–6:2a)

VI. Final instructions (6:2b–21).¹⁷⁴

On the whole, this outline is sound, especially in drawing a line of demarcation between 1:20 and 2:1¹⁷⁵ and in identifying 5:1–6:2a as a separate literary unit. However, it seems preferable to view 3:16 as concluding Paul's instructions that began in 2:1 and to regard 4:1 as starting a new major unit with reference to the last days.¹⁷⁶ If so, the discussion of the literary plan of 1 Timothy may proceed as follows:¹⁷⁷

I. Opening (1:1–2)

II. Personal Charge (1:3–20)

A. The Challenge of the False Teachers (1:3–11)

B. Paul's Testimony (1:12–17)

C. Exhortation to Timothy (1:18–20)

III. Congregational Matters: Promoting Unity and Order in God's Household, Qualifications for Church Officers (2:1–3:16)

A. On Prayer (2:1–8)

B. Regarding Women (2:9–15)

C. Qualifications for Leaders (3:1–13)

1. Overseers (3:1–7)

2. Deacons (3:8–13)

D. Purpose of Paul's Letter and Concluding Confession (3:14–16)

IV. Further Charges (4:1–6:2a)

A. Latter-day Apostasy (4:1–5)

B. Being a Good Servant of Jesus Christ (4:6–16)

C. Further Congregational Matters: Dealing with Different Age Groups, Widows, Elders, and Slaves (5:1–6:2a)

1. Relating to Older and Younger Men, Older and Younger Women (5:1–2)

2. Ministering to Widows (5:3–16)

3. Dealing with Elders (5:17–25)

4. Instructions for Slaves (6:1–2a)

V. Extended Final Exhortation (6:2b–19)

VI. Closing (6:20–21)¹⁷⁸

Paul's first letter to Timothy immediately turns to the subject at hand: the need for Timothy to "instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine" in the church at Ephesus (1:3–4). The customary thanksgiving follows after initial comments regarding these false teachers, which is in fact a thanksgiving to God for Paul's own conversion since he himself at one point persecuted the church of God (1:12–17). At the end of the first chapter, Paul mentions two of these false teachers by name, Hymenaeus and Alexander (1:20).

Paul then transitions ("First of all, then," 2:1) to a section where he sets forth instructions for the church, in keeping with his purpose: "I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon. But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth" (3:14–15). As mentioned, this suggests that 2:1–3:16 constitutes a separate unit devoted to positive instructions for Timothy on how to govern the church, including directions on prayer (2:1–8), women's roles (2:9–15), and qualifications for church leaders (3:1–13). The unit concludes with the "mystery of godliness," possibly drawing on a liturgical piece (3:16).

Chapter 4 opens with the dramatic phrase, "Now the Spirit explicitly says" (4:1), setting the work of the false teachers in an end-time context during which matters will move from bad to worse. In this context Timothy must set himself apart by giving close attention to his personal life and doctrine, preserving both himself and his hearers (4:11–16).¹⁷⁹ Additional instructions are given regarding the care of widows (5:3–16), dealing with elders, including those who sinned (5:17–25), the proper conduct of Christian slaves (6:1–2), and the rich (6:3–10, 17–19). Timothy, for his part, must guard what has been entrusted to him, as Paul's final charge makes clear (6:11–16, 20–21).¹⁸⁰

Commentary

I. Opening (1:1–2)

¹ Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope:

² To Timothy, my true son in the faith.

Grace, mercy, and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.

1:1 The letter opening follows the standard pattern for first-century salutations: sender-recipient-greeting. Paul's self-reference, "an apostle of Christ Jesus by the *command* of God our Savior" (cf. Titus 1:3), slightly modifies his customary "by the *will* of God" (see 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 2 Timothy). He may use "command" rather than "will" to allude to the fact

⁹ Also, the women are to dress themselves in modest clothing, with decency and good sense, not with elaborate hairstyles, gold, pearls, or expensive apparel, ¹⁰ but with good works, as is proper for women who profess to worship God. ¹¹ A woman is to learn quietly with full submission. ¹² I do not allow a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; instead, she is to remain quiet. ¹³ For Adam was formed first, then Eve. ¹⁴ And Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and transgressed. ¹⁵ But she will be saved through childbearing, if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with good sense.

Relation to Surrounding Context

In the context of his instructions for proper conduct in God's household which span 2:1–3:16, Paul moves from believing prayer for the governing authorities to proper leadership in the congregation. Verse 8 has already highlighted the apostle's concern that the church be free from contention. This concern continues to be in view as he now addresses the proper role of women in the church. The following unit (3:1–7) will then address proper qualifications for (male) church leaders, followed by a section on (male and female) deacons (3:8–13) and a concluding section (3:14–16).

Structure

The opening "Also" connects this section with the previous injunction regarding men engaging in unified prayer. This is now the equivalent injunction regarding women, suggesting that unity and freedom from contention is again the overriding concern. At first the focus is on modest dress, accompanied by good works, revealing a godly inner disposition (vv. 9–10). This same disposition is then urged with regard to women learning in the gathered assembly. As in vv. 9–10, so also in vv. 11–12 proper conduct is contrasted with improper conduct. Paul's command is supported with reference to creation order (v. 13) and the fall (v. 14). The unit closes with a reference to women's devotion to their God-given calling and continuance in faith, love, and holiness (v. 15).

2:9–10 Paul now moves on to address women's proper decorum with regard to attire and activities in the local church.³¹¹ With regard to the former (2:9–10), women are to dress modestly; with regard to the latter (2:11–15), they must not teach or exercise authority over men. The striking parallel in 1 Pet 3:1–6 (esp. vv. 2–4) makes clear that the injunction in vv. 9–10 isn't unique to Paul but represents standard apostolic teaching.³¹² Paul uses the term ("also") elsewhere in the LTT to mark the transition between addressing different groups of people (3:8, 11; Titus 2:3, 6). In all likelihood the phrase "in every place" is implied from the previous verse, indicating the universal applicability of Paul's commands (cf. 3:15). The predicate "are to" is implied from the previous verse as well (, v. 8).

What do Paul's directives concerning men in v. 8 and his instructions concerning women in vv. 9–10 share in common? The common element is most likely the idea of holiness. Men are to pray in a holy manner, that is, in a contention-free spirit. Women, likewise, are to exhibit holiness, not only at prayer (, "to pray," like the other terms mentioned in the previous paragraph, may be implied from the preceding verse),³¹³ but in their entire lives. Their "dress," as it were, ought to be good works. "Dress . . . in modest clothing" translates the more literal "adorn themselves with modest deportment" (, only here in the NT; cf. Isa 61:3 LXX; Josephus, *J.W.* 2.126), which, while primarily referring to dress, also includes modest attitude (cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 2.10.15). "Modest" () occurs with reference to male overseers in 3:2 ("respectable"; occurs in 1 Pet 3:5; used figuratively in Titus 2:10).

The term "decency" () is unique in the NT (Josephus, *Ant.* 2.50–52, refers to Joseph challenging Potiphar's wife to chastity); "good sense" () recurs in v. 15 (cf. Acts 26:25). "Good sense," in the sense of self-control, was one of the four Greek primary virtues, conveying self-mastery with regard to bodily passions.³¹⁴ Modesty in dress and conduct was commonly viewed as an important virtue for Christian women (1 Pet 3:1–6), as were good works (5:10; Acts 9:36; Rom 16:6, 12). In all likelihood Paul's remarks are hyperbolic and thus shouldn't be interpreted as absolute prohibition of braids, jewelry, or nice clothes. Paul's primary purpose was to promote a focus on women's inner beauty and godly character rather than on their external appearance. The dual principle is that Paul "is prohibiting not only extravagant and ostentatious adornment but also clothing that is seductive and enticing."³¹⁵

Modesty with regard to a woman's external appearance and a focus on her inward character stands in contrast with the pagan practice of dressing up for public festivals in a woman's finest garments. The decadent, extravagant styles of fashion in Rome, with the empress serving as the prime role model, quickly spread to the rest of the Greco-Roman world and found eager followers among women everywhere who copied the elaborate hairstyles and fashion trends promulgated in the empire's capital.³¹⁶ According to Paul, however, Christian women ought to take a different approach. They should express their spirituality in modest attire that doesn't betray a preoccupation with their physical appearance or indulge in self-centered vanity but expresses devotion toward God and humility toward others.

"Worship God" renders the noun , a NT *hapax* and virtual synonym of .³¹⁷ The expression is also found in the LXX in the sense of "fear of God" or "godliness" (Gen 20:11; Job 28:28; cf. Bar 5:4; Sir 1:24; 4 Macc. 7:6, 22) and the church fathers, where it is variously rendered "piety," "religion," or "reverence" (2 Clem. 20.4; Diogn. 1; 3.3; 4.5). Women's focus in expressing their Christian religion should be on good works (2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 3:1; cf. Matt 5:16 and v. 15 below).³¹⁸ Rather than being unduly preoccupied with what women may *not* do (vv. 11–12), churches ought rather to focus on what they *should* do in practicing their Christian faith (vv. 9–10, 15).³¹⁹ This is in keeping with the importance of proving one's faith by one's deeds (Jas 2:14–17). Examples of such women in the book of Acts include Dorcas (Acts 9:36), Lydia (Acts 16:14), and Priscilla (Acts 18:1–3, 26).³²⁰

2:11–12 In this important passage, Paul prohibits women from teaching, understood as "the authoritative and public transmission

more, it does so here in an introductory way, in conjunction with none other than the apostle Paul himself, in contradistinction to the false teachers (vv. 3–11, 18–20). Thus the apostolic mission and salvation in Christ are asserted as the foundational and central affirmations underlying the theology of the LTT.

Bridge

Paul's testimony presents him as a paradigmatic sinner saved by grace and put into God's service of preaching the gospel. The only thing that separates him from the unsaved is that by God's grace he was responsive to God's mercy and patience. This is an important reminder for all believers not to exalt themselves above others who are not (yet) saved and to keep a humble disposition that turns reception of God's grace into an opportunity for grateful service and gospel proclamation in word and deed. What's more, if Paul, the "worst of sinners" who blasphemed God by denying Christ and persecuted the church in arrogance, was not beyond the pale of God's salvation, there is hope for any sinner because God is a gracious, loving, and forgiving God.

C. Exhortation to Timothy (1:18–20)

¹⁸ Timothy, my son, I am giving you this instruction in keeping with the prophecies previously made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the good fight, ¹⁹ having faith and a good conscience. Some have rejected these and have shipwrecked their faith. ²⁰ Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme.

Relation to Surrounding Context

After a series of asides, Paul now resumes his instruction of Timothy from vv. 3–7. While at the outset the apostle referred vaguely to "certain people" who perpetrated false teaching, he now proceeds to identify two of these individuals by name: Hymenaeus and Alexander (v. 20). He encourages Timothy by mentioning him, too, by name; by calling him his "son"; and by reminding him of "the prophecies previously made about" him (v. 18), contrasting him with the false teachers (v. 19).

Structure

Following the benediction concluding with an emphatic "amen" in the preceding unit, the present section opens with a direct address to Timothy, similar to v. 3 above (though here Timothy is addressed by name, just as the false teachers are named in v. 20). In this way Timothy is presented as a model follower of Paul and the gospel, while the false teachers by way of typology represent those who oppose the gospel and are ultimately inspired by Satan himself (v. 20).

1:18–20 Following the digression of vv. 8–17, the opening section concludes with an exhortation to Timothy and an identification of two false teachers by name, Hymenaeus and Alexander. With this Paul resumes the argument of vv. 3–7; "this instruction" probably refers to in v. 5, which in turn refers to vv. 3–4.²⁵⁶ "Timothy, my son" recalls the opening greeting in v. 2. Turning to a somber and serious subject, Paul reassures Timothy of his filial relationship and continues to write in a tone conveying fatherly affection. The exhortation concludes Paul's personal charge to Timothy that began with a unit on the false teachers and the apostle's personal testimony. In the preceding verses Paul contrasted the gospel of God's grace in Christ with the speculative teachings of the self-appointed teachers of the law who threatened the spiritual health of the congregation Timothy served.

Before moving on to specific instructions on how to order the life of the church (2:1–3:16), Paul reminds Timothy of "the prophecies previously made about you,"²⁵⁷ a reference to the recognition of Timothy's gifts for ministry and God's appointment and its prophetic announcement to the congregation in the public laying on of hands (see at 4:14; 2 Tim 1:6; cf. Acts 13:1–3). Paul exhorts Timothy to "fight the good fight" of faith (cf. 6:12; 2 Tim 2:3–4; of Paul: 2 Cor 10:3–4; cf. 2 Tim 4:7; 1 Cor 9:7), challenging him to maintain faith and a good conscience (cf. v. 5).²⁵⁸

While Timothy is cast in the role of soldier (, v. 18; cf. 2 Tim 2:4; the phrase "by recalling them" refers to the just-mentioned prophecies), "some" () have willfully rejected (; cf. Acts 7:27, 39; 13:46; Rom 11:1–2) a good conscience (cf. vv. 5–6; the relative pronoun is feminine singular and refers to the immediate antecedent,).²⁵⁹ In so doing, they have "shipwrecked" () the faith (perhaps more likely than the CSB's "their faith")²⁶⁰—a potent metaphor in Ephesus, one of the major seaports in Asia Minor (cf. 2 Cor 11:25; Acts 27:27–44).²⁶¹

After several instances of the vague indefinite pronoun "some" (; cf. vv. 3, 19), the explicit identification of two teachers by name ("Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander") in v. 20 comes as somewhat of a surprise, even shock.²⁶² Similar to the (perhaps jarring) identification of Euodia and Syntyche in Phil 4:2–3, Paul doesn't hesitate to single out individuals who pose a threat to the unity of the congregation by name (though Euodia and Syntyche's argument was probably much less severe than the threat posed by Hymenaeus and Alexander). Hymenaeus is paired with Philetus in 2 Tim 2:18 as saying the resurrection has already taken place; Alexander may be "the coppersmith" mentioned in 2 Tim 4:14–15.²⁶³

"Delivering" a person to Satan may constitute a semitechnical term for removing a person from the church—the sphere of the Spirit—and placing them back into the world—the sphere of Satan's operation.²⁶⁴ The purpose of such a procedure is that of correction (, cf. 2 Tim 2:25; Titus 2:12). Paul's resolve to purge the congregation from false teaching underscores the need for church leaders to be committed to exercising proper church discipline (cf. 1 Cor 5:3–5; 2 Thess 3:14–15; Titus 3:10–11). Perhaps Paul here subtly urges Timothy to move ahead with excommunicating the false teachers. In any case he wants to send an unequivocal message.

Paul has handed these men over to Satan (v. 20; cf. 5:15) to "be taught not to blaspheme."²⁶⁵ Earlier, the apostle had handed over

words; (3) only v. 8, but not v. 10, speaks of an action for which v. 9 seems to call; (4) v. 8a can be better explained as part of a saying. Most likely, it is directed against the false teachers.³⁹⁶

If so, Paul's affirmation in v. 10 further supports () his contention that godliness holds promise for the life to come. This is the point of reference of "for this reason" in v. 10, further explicated in v. 10 as the grounds for the "labor" (; see 5:17; 2 Tim 2:6; cf. 1 Cor 15:10; Phil 2:16; Col 1:29) and "striving" (; see esp. Col 1:29; see also 1 Cor 9:25; Col 4:12; 1 Tim 6:12; 2 Tim 4:7) of Paul and his coworkers: "because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people." On the designation "the living God" (cf. Rom 9:26; 2 Cor 3:3; 1 Thess 1:9: "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God"), see on 3:15 above.³⁹⁷

God (the Father) is called "Savior" at the beginning of the letter (1:1) and again in 2:3 (cf. Titus 1:3; 2:10; 3:4). In the sense that God has provided salvation through Jesus's substitutionary atonement, he is the Savior of all. In another sense, however, God is more specifically the Savior of those who believe and accept his offer of salvation in Christ (on , "especially," see 5:8, 17; cf. 2 Tim 4:13; Titus 1:10).³⁹⁸ In contrast to Greco-Roman culture, where "savior" referred to human benefactors (such as the Roman emperor), Paul maintains that God alone is the true benefactor of all people, including those in the pagan world with its false gods and rampant superstition.³⁹⁹

What's more, God the Father is "the Great Architect of the redemptive arrangement, the plan the opponents are attempting to redesign (1 Tim 1:4)."⁴⁰⁰ The Father wants all people to be saved (1 Tim 2:3–4).⁴⁰¹ The Father also provides salvation for all people, especially those who believe (1 Tim 4:10).⁴⁰² And the Father saves the church and pours out his Holy Spirit through the Son (Titus 3:4–6). In fact, the entire plan of salvation originates with God the Father (1 Tim 3:16).⁴⁰³

4:11–12 "These things" most likely harks back to v. 6, which refers to Paul's instruction in response to the asceticism advocated by the false teachers. From his position of delegated apostolic authority, Timothy must not only teach but even command () acceptance of Paul's teaching (cf. 1:3; see also 5:7; 6:13, 17), although some apparently disparaged () Timothy's teaching on account of his relative youth (; cf. Mark 10:20 par. Luke 18:21; Acts 26:4; he may have been in his late thirties at the time of writing).⁴⁰⁴ While people normally wouldn't consider this too young for pastors in our culture, leaders in the ancient world were typically older people who commanded respect in the community and possessed extensive life experience.⁴⁰⁵ In the context of a culture that tends to prize the energy and enthusiasm of youth over the wisdom and experience of age, today's churches should learn from first-century practice and avoid putting young men in charge of congregations before they're ready (cf. "not . . . a new convert" in 3:6).⁴⁰⁶ Nevertheless, as D. Pao rightly notes, "Without denying the need to respect the elders, Paul denies that the youthful should be ignored as being insignificant and irrelevant in the gospel ministry simply because of their age."⁴⁰⁷

Paul counsels Timothy, his trusted apostolic delegate who has been nurtured in the faith from his youth, to counter his age liability by setting an example (; cf. Titus 2:7; Phil 3:17; 1 Thess 1:7; 1 Pet 5:3; Acts 20:18–21, 33–34). Specifically, Paul singles out five areas in which Timothy should strive to conduct himself in an exemplary manner: speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity (cf. 6:11; 2 Tim 2:22). "Speech" translates the word , which is rendered "preaching" in its closest parallel in the present letter (5:17). The connection is made explicit in 2 Tim 4:2: "Preach the word" (; cf. 2 Tim 4:15; 2:17).

Unlike the case of the false teachers, Timothy's life must not be divorced from his teaching. Rather, he should watch his life and teaching closely (v. 16; cf. 1 Cor 9:22). In this way he will be a great blessing to his congregation and help preserve it from all harm (v. 16). As mentioned, the qualifications for church leaders in chapter 3 likewise focus primarily on character and conduct (, cf. Gal 1:13). The vital connection between a leader's life and teaching is often insufficiently appreciated today. Another vital ingredient is love, the cardinal Christian virtue (1 Corinthians 13). Too often leaders who ought to set a godly example are competitive, opinionated, and selfish. Yet love is concerned with the well-being of others and instructs opponents with gentleness (2 Tim 2:24–25).

Timothy is to excel in two more areas: faith and purity. First, he should excel in faith. As Paul has stated at the outset, God's plan operates by faith that is sincere and issues from a pure heart (1:5; cf. 2 Tim 1:5), not empty speculations. Like love, faith is ultimately the gift of God (cf. Eph 2:8–9).⁴⁰⁸ In contrast to the opponents who have "shipwrecked" whatever "faith" was theirs, Timothy must hold firmly to his faith (1:19; cf. 6:10, 21). Faith is also linked with a good conscience (1:5, 19). Second, Timothy should excel in purity. Purity of heart is essential for a church leader (as it is for every believer; cf. 2 Tim 2:22; and on 5:2 below). Only a pure heart can be the source of true love (cf. 1:5). Again, this purity of motive contrasts with the false teachers whose motives are anything but pure (cf. 5:9–10).⁴⁰⁹

The virtues held up in v. 12 comprise the sort of godliness Timothy should pursue. Like physical exercise, these virtues don't appear instantaneously. They must be cultivated by diligent practice over time. In Timothy's day as well as in ours, leaders in the church must lead by example (; cf. Titus 2:7; 1 Pet 5:3; 1 Cor 10:6).

4:13 "Until I come" refers to Paul's envisioned visit (cf. 3:14–15). In the interim the present letter contains the needed instructions for Timothy. Paul urges particular devotion to three matters in proper sequence.⁴¹⁰ First, parallel to synagogue practice, Timothy should be careful to observe the public reading of Scripture (; cf. Acts 13:15; see also Luke 4:16–20; 2 Cor 3:14).⁴¹¹ Though some had access to written materials in the first century (cf. 2 Tim 4:13), book production was costly and literacy limited. Thus the public reading and exposition of Scripture were particularly important.⁴¹² While this would have certainly included the OT writings, it may

Jesus Christ” (6:13–14); (2) the reference to “the coming age” (6:19); and (3) the repeated reference to eternal life (6:12, 19). In this way the letter provides closure by ending as it began and by tying together the ecclesiological issues at stake in the apostolic mission within an overall end-time compass that serves the purpose of conveying a sense of urgency. While the threat of the false teachers is serious, the final outcome is not in doubt: God is on the throne; he is the judge; and Paul and Timothy are on the right side of history while the false teachers are not.

Bridge

On the whole the letter displays the apostle’s deep concern for a local church and his apostolic delegate in the context of his mission to propagate the gospel of God’s salvation in Christ. Like a mother hen Paul is jealously protective of the church and instructs Timothy to put the false teachers in their place, even to remove sinning elders if necessary, in order to preserve the church from falling into error. In this regard Paul’s primary concern is with establishing and/or restoring proper leadership in the church, that is, a plurality of qualified, mature men who aspire to leadership in order to serve others rather than pursuing selfish gain, as is characteristic of the false teachers. The LTT make a unique contribution to the NT canon by highlighting the importance of the purity of the church as overseen by properly constituted and authorized leadership.

VI. Closing (6:20–21)

²⁰ Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding irreverent and empty speech and contradictions from what is falsely called knowledge. ²¹ By professing it, some people have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all.

6:20–21 Paul concludes this letter with one last exhortation to Timothy, calling on him to oppose what is falsely called “knowledge” (see further below). The CSB doesn’t translate the initial Greek word : “O Timothy.” In some of its seventeen NT instances, this appellation has the potential of indicating intensity and depth of emotion (e.g., Gal 3:1: “You foolish Galatians”; cf. Matt 15:28 par.; Luke 24:25). It may also function as a literary address (Acts 1:1; v. 11). In the present instance the expression underscores the solemnity of Paul’s appeal to his foremost disciple; this is the second time in this letter Timothy is called by name (cf. 1:18).

Paul wants Timothy to “guard” (; cf. 5:21) what has been entrusted to him () for careful preservation—the apostolic teaching (contrast the heterodox views promoted by the opponents).⁵⁰⁶ In his second letter Paul similarly urges Timothy to “guard the good deposit” entrusted to him with the help of the Holy Spirit (2 Tim 1:14). This faithfulness, in turn, is rooted in the faithfulness of God himself, who, Paul is convinced, is able to “guard” what “has been entrusted” to him until that final day (2 Tim 1:12).⁵⁰⁷

For Timothy, guarding what has been entrusted to him includes both faithful proclamation (4:12–14; 6:2b; etc.) and pure living (4:11–13; 5:22–23; 6:11–12). Unlike the false teachers, who have deviated from the faith (see on v. 21 below; cf. 1:5–6; 5:15), Timothy must continually avoid (, cf. 1:6; pres. ptc.) irreverent, empty speech and contradictions “from what is falsely called knowledge.” For Paul this large-scale apostasy is a mark of the end times, when people “will turn away from hearing the truth and will turn aside to myths” (2 Tim 4:4). In 2 Timothy, Paul reiterates his warning against “godless chatter” (; 2 Tim 2:16–17). “Godless” () is also used for the “ungodly” for whom the law is made (1:9) and for the “pointless myths” indulged in by Timothy’s opponents (4:7).

“Contradictions” translates , a term not found elsewhere in the NT (but see Plutarch, *Mor.* 953B; Philo, *Drunkenness* 187).⁵⁰⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian magicians, opposed Moses, so these false teachers oppose the truth (; 2 Tim 3:8). Similarly Timothy must be on guard against Alexander, who “strongly opposed our message” (; 2 Tim 4:15). The opponents erroneously (; cf. Plutarch, *Mor.* 953B; Philo, *Moses* 2.171) designate their deviant teaching as “knowledge” (). Yet while the false teachers claim special inside knowledge of spiritual things, in reality such teaching masks massive ignorance of what God truly requires (1:7).

Rather than identifying Gnosticism (which only developed in the second century AD) as the likely background, it is more promising to turn to passages such as 2 Tim 2:18, according to which the opponents claimed that the resurrection had already taken place.⁵⁰⁹ Perhaps the false teachers saw themselves as living already in the age to come and thus claimed special knowledge (cf., e.g., 2:15; 4:1, 3). Paul, however, sharply refutes such overrealized eschatology resulting in ignorant and harmful teachings, contending that only one body of teaching is entrusted to Timothy that corresponds to the “knowledge of the truth” and that all contrary teaching be rejected.⁵¹⁰

Interestingly, the letter concludes without any final greetings. Instead Paul closes rather abruptly with the words “grace be with you all” (CSB; there is no Greek equivalent to the English word “all” other than the plural of “you”). While not an uncommon parting greeting (cf. Col 4:18; 2 Tim 4:22), the expression was usually supplemented by more extensive qualifiers such as “with you *all*” (Titus 3:15; Heb 13:25), “the grace of the [or ‘our’] Lord Jesus [Christ]” (Rom 16:20; 1 Thess 5:28), or the like. The fact that “you” is in the plural indicates that the apostle intends to greet not only Timothy but the entire congregation to whom the letter was going to be read.⁵¹¹

also have included the public reading of Paul's letters (cf. Col 4:16) and possibly other apostolic writings. Second, Timothy should be diligent in preaching (; CSB and NASB, "exhortation"; cf. Acts 13:15; Heb 13:22; see also Rom 15:4; Heb 12:5) and, third, in teaching (; see on 1:10; cf. v. 16; 5:17). The former most likely refers to the oral delivery of messages (sermons or homilies) in the context of congregational worship while the latter pertains to teaching as the continual task of sound doctrinal instruction.⁴¹³ After the text had been read aloud, therefore, exhortation would follow as Timothy laid the moral weight of the text upon his listeners in urging them toward proper living. This, in turn, would take place in the context of the larger body of apostolic Christian doctrine (cf. Acts 2:42; Eph 2:20).

4:14 Once again Paul reminds Timothy of his appointment to the ministry (cf. 1:18), in the present instance with specific reference to his ordination service (cf. 2 Tim 1:6). Timothy shouldn't neglect his gift but exercise it diligently. In context "gift" may refer to Timothy's empowerment for ministry, which in turn is given by the Holy Spirit.⁴¹⁴ Beyond this the principle holds true in general as well: rather than neglecting (; cf. Matt 22:5; Heb 2:3; 8:9) their gift through complacency or worldliness, believers should put it to use in the church for the common good. Gifts that are buried soon become "rusty and degenerate."⁴¹⁵ The NASB's "spiritual gift" () is potentially misleading since spiritual gifts aren't given only when someone is specifically set apart for ministry.

The laying on of hands as a sign of a patriarchal blessing (Gen 48:18) or for the purpose of appointing someone to a particular task (Moses of Joshua; Num 27:18–23) was a common OT practice as a "symbolic social or cultic action."⁴¹⁶ In the early church the custom signified authorization and occurred in the context of the appointment of elders (1 Tim 5:22), deacons (Acts 6:6), missionaries (Acts 13:3), and particular ministry such as healing (Acts 28:8; cf. 9:12, 17) or the impartation of other God-given gifts (Acts 8:17, 19; 19:6).⁴¹⁷

Analogous to Joshua's succession of Moses, Paul looked to Timothy as his heir apparent (§7.1.3).⁴¹⁸ Paul is a link in the tradition, passing on what he received from others before him (1 Cor 15:3), and he wants Timothy to continue the chain of transmission (2 Tim 2:2). As Moses laid hands on "young" Joshua (Exod 33:11; Deut 34:9), Paul did on young Timothy (4:12, 14; cf. 5:22). And just as in Jewish life God's commandments were passed on from father to son, so Paul imparted the gospel to his spiritual son in the faith (1:2; 4:6–8; 2 Tim 1:2, 14). Also like Joshua, Timothy must therefore be strong and courageous as he "strongly engages in battle" for the sake of faith (1:18; 6:12; 2 Tim 2:1, 3–4).⁴¹⁹

"Council of elders" (better than the NASB's "presbytery") translates the Greek word , designating the board of elders, which is most likely the same group as that referred to in 5:17 as "the elders who direct the affairs of the church" (NIV; cf. Acts 20:17; see also Jas 5:14).⁴²⁰ In its two Lucan references, the expression refers to the Jewish Sanhedrin (or "council of elders"; cf. Luke 22:66; Acts 22:5). This suggests that the early church patterned its leadership structure after that found in Judaism.⁴²¹

4:15–16 Paul's comments bring this series of admonitions to a close. "Practice these things" (NIV, "be diligent"; NASB, "take pains") renders the rare term (cf. Ps 1:2 LXX). The underlying idea is that of a heartfelt concern, underscored by the phrase "be committed to them" (NIV, "give yourself wholly to them"; lit., "be in them," cf. NASB). Paul is concerned that Timothy's personal progress (; see esp. Phil 1:25; cf. Phil 1:12; 2 Pet 1:5–8) extends to both his life and teaching (; see on vv. 12–13 above), not only for Timothy's sake but also for the sake of his congregation. By contrast Paul's opponents "progress" in the wrong direction (2 Tim 2:16; 3:9;). The notion of moral progress () also featured prominently in Greek (esp. Stoic) philosophy.

The reference to Timothy's need to "pay close attention" to these matters (; cf. Phil 2:16; giving something one's undivided attention, see Acts 3:5) and to "persevere" in them (; see esp. Col 1:23) underscores the strength of commitment and depth of devotion Paul expects from his foremost disciple. Literally speaking, Timothy "will save" () neither himself nor his hearers. Rather, by paying close attention to his life and teaching (in contrast to the opponents; cf. 1:4; v. 12), he will help *preserve* both himself (cf. Ezek 33:8) and his congregation from evil influences (for a similar use of , see 2:15; NASB, "ensure salvation") and the false teaching of the opponents.

The biblical-theological contribution of chapter 4 consists primarily in its depiction of the false teachers and their activity as indicative of the arrival of the "last days" and their function in the letter as foil for Paul's exhortation to Timothy to help preserve believers and to pursue godly virtue. The apostolic mission, and the distinctive Christian teaching concerning God and Christ our Savior, are vitally at stake in a context where Satan and the false teachers are seeking to undermine the foundations of the mission and the gospel message. This is why Paul devotes great care to constructing a solid missiological, soteriological, theological, and ecclesiological foundation in this letter and in the LTT as a whole. In this way the church will be able to serve as a bulwark against the attacks of the false teachers.

Bridge

Casting Timothy as a model servant, the present passage provides an example for believers (and church leaders in particular) to follow in any age. By tying his relationship with Timothy to salvation-historical antecedents such as Moses and Joshua, Paul underscores the importance of mentoring, which he will develop further in his second letter to Timothy (see esp. 2 Tim 2:2; cf. 3:10–17). While often lacking in the contemporary church, such emphasis on mentoring the younger generation is vital and grounded in the precedent of Jesus's close mentoring of the Twelve as a main priority of his earthly ministry.

C. Further Congregational Matters: Dealing with Different Age Groups, Widows, Elders, and Slaves (5:1–6:2a)

church's help while at the same time seeking to be good stewards of the church's limited resources. The passage continues to affirm the regard for orphans and widows in OT times and by Jesus (see esp. Luke, e.g. 7:11–17; 18:1–8; 21:1–4) and the early church (Jas 1:27). As such, the passage provides the ethos, if not specific principles, for the church's benevolence ministry toward various needy groups in its midst today.

3. Dealing with Elders (5:17–25)

¹⁷ The elders who are good leaders are to be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching. ¹⁸ For the Scripture says: **Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain**, and the worker is worthy of his wages.

¹⁹ Don't accept an accusation against an elder unless it is supported by two or three witnesses. ²⁰ Publicly rebuke those who sin, so that the rest will be afraid. ²¹ I solemnly charge you before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels to observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing out of favoritism. ²² Don't be too quick to appoint anyone as an elder, and don't share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.

²³ Don't continue drinking only water, but use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. ²⁴ Some people's sins are obvious, preceding them to judgment, but the sins of others surface later. ²⁵ Likewise, good works are obvious, and those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden.

Relation to Surrounding Context

Paul has previously provided stipulations for candidates for overseer in 3:1–7. He now returns to the subject of elders, dealing with two specific issues that apparently arose with regard to existing elders: (1) financial remuneration; and (2) removal of sinning elders. This situation is different from that addressed in Titus, where Paul's apostolic delegate is charged with appointing first-time elders (Titus 1:5). The church in Ephesus is more established, and Timothy finds himself in the uncomfortable situation of having to deal with charges against elders who are currently serving, hence the need for Paul's instruction.

Structure

Paul first enunciates the principle that elders are worthy of honor, what is more, of "double honor," that is, both of respect and of financial remuneration (v. 17). In support, he cites two Scripture passages, one each from what we now designate as the Old Testament and the New Testament (the Gospel of Luke, the canon still being formed at that time; v. 18). In the remainder of the unit, Paul addresses the question of how to handle charges against existing elders (vv. 19–25) along the following lines: the customary two or three witnesses requirement (v. 19); public rebuke of sinning elders as a deterrent (v. 20); no partiality (v. 21); no premature appointment of elders (v. 22); taking care of illnesses (because of trouble with elders? v. 23); a final call to discernment (vv. 24–25).

5:17–18 Next Paul addresses various issues related to elders. He singles out three particular concerns: (1) elders' remuneration (vv. 17–18); (2) handling charges against elders (vv. 19–20); and (3) premature appointment (vv. 21–25).⁴⁵⁴ The elders () mentioned here comprise the same group as the overseers in chapter 3 (cf. the parallelism between and in Titus 1:5, 7).⁴⁵⁵ This can be seen by the references to the work (; cf. 4:10; 2 Tim 2:6; "work hard" in CSB, NASB may be preferable to the NIV's "work") they are doing: preaching (; cf. 3:2) and teaching (; both terms are also found in 4:6 and 12–13). "Direct the affairs . . . well" (NIV; ; NASB, "rule well"; the perf. ptc. denotes a present state) echoes 3:4 and 12 (cf. Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12).⁴⁵⁶

Paul already stated that those who have served well attain to a high standing and great assurance in their faith (3:13, with specific reference to deacons). In addition, Paul now says elders should receive material recognition: they are worthy (, cf. v. 18) of "double honor," that is, both respectful submission (1 Cor 16:16; 1 Pet 5:5; Heb 13:17) and financial remuneration. The fact that the apostle must make a case for this may suggest that this wasn't (yet) universally recognized. Perhaps Paul viewed the inadequate remuneration of elders as the cause of other problems in the church, though this is only a possibility.⁴⁵⁷

In support, Paul cites "the Scripture" (; cf. Rom 10:11; §2.7.1), a rare occurrence in the LTT: "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain" (Deut 25:4 LXX; also cited by Paul in 1 Cor 9:9).⁴⁵⁸ Strung together with this OT quotation is a second statement: "The worker is worthy of his wages" (Luke 10:7 par. Matt 10:10).⁴⁵⁹

Remarkably Jesus's words are juxtaposed with OT Scripture (though it's possible that only the first quotation is explicitly identified as such). The fact that the wording of Jesus's saying matches the version preserved in Luke's Gospel suggests that the latter may have been Paul's source (cf. 1 Cor 11:24–25; Luke 22:19–20).⁴⁶⁰ Those who may not understand the OT saying (oxen were allowed an occasional bite of grain as they treaded out the corn) will recognize the principle enunciated by Jesus in straightforward language. A worker ought to be paid, including those who labor in the church (the close parallel 1 Thess 5:12 likewise features and).

While Paul himself typically chose to waive his right of remuneration (1 Cor 9:12, 15; 1 Thess 2:6–9), he insisted that Christian workers should be compensated financially (1 Corinthians 9). Paul's focus here appears to be on elders who are involved in regular preaching and teaching ministry (thus implying that not all elders were, see above), which would correspond to senior/lead and associate pastors in most churches today (though it may extend to other members of the pastoral staff as well).

5:19–20 Having dealt with elders' remuneration, Paul now moves on to the second issue: accusations brought against elders. As Paul makes clear, such charges (; cf. Titus 1:6; John 18:29) are to be accepted () only if corroborated by a minimum of two or three witnesses. This conforms to OT teaching (Deut 19:15) as well as the teachings of Jesus (Matt 18:16) and Paul elsewhere (2 Cor 13:1; both with reference to Deut 19:15).⁴⁶¹ Those who sin (), that is, elders in whose case the charges turn out to be accurate (the NASB's

of tradition about Christ and the Scripture,” which is usually a function of the elders or overseers (§4.3.1).³²¹ “A woman” refers to women generically (cf. “women” in vv. 9–10 and v. 15 and the generic reference to “men” in v. 8).³²² “Learn quietly” contrasts with “teach,” while “full submission” corresponds to “have authority over a man”:

¹¹ A woman is to *learn quietly* with *full submission*.

¹² I do not allow a woman to *teach* or to *have authority* over a man.

Women should not be put in positions of ultimate leadership over the church and serve as elders or pastor-teachers.³²³ That they don’t aspire to roles God doesn’t intend for them to hold is part of women’s proper modesty (cf. vv. 9–10). In fact, the first woman yielded to the temptation of stepping outside her God-given role, which precipitated the fall (v. 14). It has at times been alleged that the prohibition is due to local or cultural factors, whether women’s lack of education, their assertiveness in aspiring to political and/or ecclesiastical offices, or various other factors. However, background research hasn’t confirmed this, and the explicit rationale for vv. 11–12 stated in vv. 13–14 strongly suggests otherwise.³²⁴

The context (vv. 9–10) requires that “a woman” here refers to women in general, not merely wives (after all, it’s not only *married* women who should observe propriety in dress and external appearance but *all* women). The present prohibition for women not to teach or have authority over men therefore applies to *all* women rather than merely to *wives* in relation to their husbands (in which case one would also expect a qualifier such as “their own,”).

The emphasis in the injunction “A woman is to learn” (, cf. 5:4; 2 Tim 3:14; Titus 3:14) is not on learning as such but on learning *in a certain manner*—“quietly with full submission” (cf. 1 Cor 14:35). This injunction, while sounding strange to modern ears, is entirely in keeping with the role of women in ancient Jewish and Greco-Roman culture. It stands in contrast with Paul’s description of sensual young widows who roam idly from house to house (5:13) and of weak-willed women who are “always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7). It’s also in line with his concern that people “not be unfruitful” (Titus 3:14). Also, the command to “learn” implies that Christian doctrine is taught in the congregation (see comments on in v. 12 below; see also 3:2; 5:17).

The term (variously translated “silence,” “quietly,” or “quietness”) probably doesn’t convey absolute silence here (as in Acts 22:2; cf. Luke 14:4) but rather corresponds to the “quiet,” peaceful life mentioned in v. 2 (; cf. 1 Thess 4:11; 2 Thess 3:12). The parallel 1 Pet 3:4, which commends a “gentle and quiet spirit,” hardly envisions women literally being silent at all times. “Quietly” here therefore conveys submissiveness to Christian teachers in contrast to rebellion against authority (note the parallel “with full submission”). Just as Paul elsewhere calls wives to submit to their husbands at home (e.g., Eph 5:22), he here extends the principle to the church, understood as God’s “household” (cf. 3:4–5, 12, 15), where women are called to submit to the teaching and ruling authority of the church’s male leadership (§4.3.2).

The verb “permit” (; cf. 1 Cor 14:34; 16:7) is roughly equivalent to (used in v. 8 and implied in v. 9) and may be used alternatively here for the sake of stylistic variation. The expression conveys Paul’s apostolic authority (1:1; v. 7; cf. 1 Cor 14:34) and is used elsewhere in the NT with regard to a person in authority granting permission for another person to speak (Acts 21:39–40; 26:1). The references to the divine order of creation and its violation at the fall in vv. 13–14 ground vv. 11–12 in universal rather than merely cultural norms.³²⁵

“Teaching” () is elsewhere in the LTT an integral part of the role assigned to Paul’s apostolic delegates and the overseers/elders of the church (3:2; 4:11; 5:17; cf. 1 Cor 12:28–29; Eph 4:11; Jas 3:1). The teaching in view in v. 12, therefore, is “the public transmission of authoritative material (cf. 1 Tim. 4:13, 16; 6:2; 2 Tim. 4:2; Titus 2:7).”³²⁶ Teaching also entails refuting false teaching (1:3, 10; 4:1; 6:3; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9, 11) and passing on apostolic teaching to successive generations (2 Tim 1:12, 14; 2:2). The directive that women not teach men pertains to situations where women would be teaching men by preaching to a congregation including both men and women.

“Exercise (or have) authority” () in the present context is tantamount to being in charge of and responsible for a church in its entirety by holding the office of overseer/elder (see 3:4–5; 5:17).³²⁷ The contrast with “full submission” (see v. 11 above) and the parallel structure with the term “teaching” make clear that the expression has no necessary negative connotation.³²⁸ Paul’s use of functional terminology (“teach,” “exercise authority”) makes reference to those in the church who exercise these functions by virtue of holding a certain office (i.e., overseer/elder/pastor-teacher; cf. 3:2, 4–5; 5:17; Acts 20:17, 28; Eph 4:11).

The phrase “over a man” (, like used generically) most likely qualifies “have authority over.” Women are not to occupy positions in the church that involve permanent ruling functions over men; these are reserved for males. At the same time, nothing said here keeps women from ministering to other women (Titus 2:3–5) or children (Eph 6:4; 2 Tim 1:5; 3:14–15; cf. Acts 16:1). Neither does the passage rule out the private instruction of men by women together with their husbands (Acts 18:25–26) or their participation in the church’s decision making on an informal or advisory basis.

Finally, the phrase “instead, she is to remain quiet” (set off by the strong contrastive term , untranslated in the NIV) reinforces Paul’s directive for women to accept their proper role (here, not to teach or exercise authority over men) without agitation or disruption. Women should refrain from exercising authoritative public teaching functions and be silent in this regard. Similarly, in

1:10.⁴⁷⁵ “Sound” (), which is part of the medical vocabulary found in the LTT,⁴⁷⁶ relates to both the nature of the instruction and its effect in the lives of those who take it to heart. As in the case of the human body, for the body of apostolic teaching to be sound and healthy means to be free from any sickness or contamination, unlike the teaching of the opponents, which is unhealthy and causes those who listen to become spiritually sick (note the reference to the opponents’ “unhealthy interest in disputes” in v. 4 below). “Of our Lord Jesus Christ” may mean “concerning our Lord Jesus Christ” (objective genitive) and/or designate teaching that has the Lord Jesus Christ as its *source*.⁴⁷⁷

“Teaching that promotes *godliness*” elaborates by focusing on the need for Timothy’s teaching to be characterized and undergirded by (v. 3; §5.1.3).⁴⁷⁸ In the NT is found only in the LTT (10x), the book of Acts (1x), and 2 Peter (4x).⁴⁷⁹ The term also occurs about sixty times in the LXX, most frequently in the apocryphal book 4 Maccabees (47x). While in Greek thought was a virtue tied to ritual acts, the term came to be used in a Hellenistic Jewish context to designate a disposition of reverence for God that is grounded theologically and expressed ethically.⁴⁸⁰ In this way sound doctrine and righteous living are kept together, and any departure from sound doctrine necessarily results in lack of righteous living and vice versa.

As noted above, a church leader’s teaching and personal life cannot be separated (4:7–8; cf. 4:15–16). In the following verses Paul elaborates on the contrast between true and false godliness. The false teachers surmise that godliness is a means to financial gain while in fact godliness must express itself in contentment and gratitude for God’s provision (6:5–6). This is why Timothy, the man of God, should pursue godliness along with other Christian virtues. So closely is godliness tied to the essence of the Christian message that the expression can serve as a shorthand for the gospel itself (3:16). For this reason Timothy must combat false teaching with a pattern of instruction that conforms to Paul’s own teaching and propagates sound doctrine in the context of a godly life.

As Paul makes clear, the opponents’ propagation of deviant doctrine at the root betrays pride and ignorance (summed up well in the NEB’s rendering “pompous ignoramus”). At the heart of the matter, therefore, is that the false teachers are conceited (, the perf. pass. indicating a settled condition).⁴⁸¹ In the two other NT instances of the term, Paul stipulates that overseers not be recent converts so that they not become conceited () and incur the same judgment as the devil (3:6) and presents conceit () as a mark of end-time apostasy (2 Tim 3:4).⁴⁸² This is highly -instructive as Satan himself challenged God’s authority and incurred divine judgment. It may also mean the opponents’ conceit resulted from premature appointment to the office of elder, though this is mere conjecture. In any case they are presented as latter-day instruments of Satan who strive unsuccessfully to subvert God’s plan.

The charge of ignorance (“understands nothing,” v. 4) is a regular part of polemic directed against false teachers (cf. Jude 10). Throughout the letter Paul asserts that, in truth, the false teachers “don’t understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on” (1:7). Most likely, this relates primarily to their misuse of the Mosaic law (cf. 1:8–11). Specifically, the apostle excoriates his opponents for having an unhealthy (NASB, “morbid”) interest (, contrast “sound” in v. 3 above) in “disputes” (; called “foolish” in both of its other instances in the LTT: 2 Tim 2:23; Titus 3:9) and “arguments over words” (lit., “word-fights,” , a NT hapax; but see the verb in 2 Tim 2:14). Paul’s primary concern is the devastating effect of such speculation on the practical outworking of people’s faith. God’s people must not be sidetracked by side issues but must focus on growing in Christian character as a natural outflow of having accepted the gospel. Church leaders must do the same, rebutting efforts to divert people’s attention from holy living and promoting spiritual growth by wholesome teaching.

Failure to do so will result in five undesirable consequences (the last three of which are couched in the plural):⁴⁸³ (1) envy (; Titus 3:3; frequently found in NT vice lists: Rom 1:29; Gal 5:21; 1 Pet 2:1); (2) quarreling (; Titus 3:9; cf. Rom 1:29; 13:13; Gal 5:20; the two terms are linked in Phil 1:15; strife was a particular problem in the Corinthian church: 1 Cor 1:11; 3:3; 2 Cor 12:20); (3) slander(s) (; NASB, “abusive language”; Matt 15:19; Mark 3:28; Jude 9; cf. 1 Tim 1:20); (4) evil suspicion or conjecture (; only here in the NT; cf. verb in Acts 13:25; 25:18; 27:27; Sir 3:24); and (5) constant disagreement (pl. ; only here in the NT).⁴⁸⁴ “Envy” and “quarreling” are closely related as cause and effect; “slander” refers to a person’s speech, “evil suspicions” to their inner disposition, and “constant disagreement” to interpersonal relationships. Taken together, the deadly combination of these vices will have a cancerous effect (2 Tim 2:17), slowly but surely eating away whatever spiritual life remains in the congregation.

Paul closes with a threefold description of the false teachers as (1) “people whose minds are depraved” (the perf. ptc. conveys the notion of a settled state; elsewhere in the NT the expression denotes decay or destruction; see Luke 12:33; 2 Cor 4:16; Rev 8:9; 11:18; cf. in 2 Tim 3:8); (2) as those who have been “deprived of the truth” (, another perf. ptc., translated “defraud,” “cheat,” “deprive,” or “failed [to pay]” in Mark 10:19; 1 Cor 6:7–8; 7:5; Jas 5:4); and (3) as those who imagine godliness as a means to material gain (; repeated in v. 6; not elsewhere in the NT).⁴⁸⁵ The passives “depraved” and “deprived” may be “diabolical” (implying Satan as the agent; cf. 2:14; 4:2). Earlier in the letter Paul stipulated that an elder not be “greedy” (3:3) and that a deacon not be “greedy for money” (3:8). The considerable number of references to wealth in this letter may suggest that this was a real issue in the Ephesian congregation.⁴⁸⁶

Cumulatively the three traits depict people whose thoughts and motives have been corrupted by the sinful ways of the world and who are driven by the desire to exploit others. As the repeated perfect participles indicate, this process of decay was the result of the opponents’ previous rejection of the gospel.⁴⁸⁷ On the whole, therefore, Paul paints a highly unflattering portrait of his opponents. Their doctrine is heterodox (v. 3), their attitude arrogant (v. 4a), and they thrive on controversy (v. 4b), with disastrous results (v. 4c). These negative effects are the result of spiritual blindness, which renders the false teachers devoid of truth (v. 5a). As a result, their

3:8–10 Deacons (cf. Phil 1:1; not mentioned in Titus), “likewise” (cf. 2:9; v. 11; Titus 2:3, 6), must meet certain requirements. Positively, they are to be worthy of respect (, cf. Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:11; Titus 2:2). Negatively, they should not be hypocritical (; lit., “double-tongued,” NASB); drink a lot of wine (cf. Titus 2:3); or be greedy (; cf. Titus 1:7; 1 Pet 5:2). Rather, they must hold the “mystery [NIV: “deep truths”] of the faith” (cf. v. 16) with a clear conscience (cf. 1:5, 19), in marked contrast to the opponents (cf. 1:5–6, 19–20).

Like the candidates for the office of overseer (, “also”; translated in the NASB and CSB but not NIV), those who desire to serve as deacons must first be tested. If they pass this test (, only here in the LTT but sixteen times elsewhere in Paul) and prove blameless (, a synonym of , v. 2, required of overseers in Titus 1:6–7 and elsewhere in the NT only in 1 Cor 1:8; Col 1:22), they may serve (; it’s unclear whether the testing should be understood as formal or informal examination).

3:11 “Wives, too” (CSB) translates , which can also mean “women [deacons]” or “deaconesses” (NIV, “the women”; NASB, “women”). The meanings “woman” (2:9, 10, 11, 12, 14) and “wife” (3:2, 12; 5:9; cf. Titus 1:6) are both found in this letter; context must decide. On the whole, “women deacons” is preferable, for the following reasons:

1. the absence of qualifications for overseers’ wives;
2. the adverb (“too”) indicating an office similar to that of male deacon;
3. the parallel sentence structure and characteristics in vv. 8 and 11;
4. the absence of a qualifier for such as “their.”³⁶⁵

The reason Paul didn’t call these women “deaconesses” is that in his day the word (plus the respective article to indicate gender) was still used for both males and females; the term *diakonissa* was coined only later (*Apos. Con.* 8.19, 20, 28).³⁶⁶ Phoebe is called a of the church at Cenchrea in Rom 16:1. Later (ca. AD 115), Pliny the Younger refers to two female deaconesses (*ministrae*) in Bithynia under Trajan’s rule (*Ep.* 10.96.8).

Paul’s reference to deaconesses coheres well with his earlier prohibition of women serving in teaching or ruling functions over men (2:12) and reference to male overseers in vv. 1–7. Since serving as a deacon doesn’t involve teaching or ruling, both men and women are eligible to function in this capacity. The requirements for deaconesses are therefore similar to those for male deacons.

Positively, they should be worthy of respect (; cf. v. 8; Titus 2:2). Negatively, they should not be slanderers (; cf. v. 8; 2 Tim 3:3; Titus 2:3) but self-controlled (; cf. vv. 2–3, 8; Titus 2:2) and faithful in everything (; cf. 3:9; 5:16; 2 Tim 2:2; Titus 1:6; etc.). Compared to overseers, certain requirements are omitted with regard to male and female deacons: hospitable, able to teach, good reputation with outsiders, not a new convert. While the omission of “able to teach” is almost certainly significant, the lack the reference to the other requirements may merely be incidental. Also, in the case of women, there’s no equivalent to “faithful husbands,” perhaps because female deacons, as mentioned, weren’t necessarily expected to be married.

3:12–13 The discussion of female deacons (or deacons’ wives) is followed by additional comments regarding male deacons. Paul adds that such deacons, like overseers, must be “husbands of one wife” (i.e., faithful husbands; see on v. 2 above) who manage their children and households competently (cf. vv. 4–5). Paul closes his discussion on an encouraging note, adding that those who have served well acquire a good standing (, only here in the NT)—that is, can expect to be recognized for their faithful service—and great boldness in the faith (cf. 2 Cor 3:12; 7:4; Phlm 8). These benefits, rather than financial gain, should be rewards for faithful service in the church.

Bridge

Discussions of deacons in the NT are comparatively rare; apart from the present passage we find references to deacons only in Phil 1:1 (“To all the saints . . . including the overseers and deacons”) and Rom 16:1 (“our sister Phoebe, who is a servant of the church”), not to mention the precursors of the deacon office, the Seven, in Acts 6:1–6. While elders oversee, teach, and shepherd God’s flock, deacons, both male and female, serve to meet a variety of practical needs in the church.

D. Purpose of Paul’s Letter and Concluding Confession (3:14–16)

¹⁴ I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon. ¹⁵ But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God’s household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. ¹⁶ And most certainly, the mystery of godliness is great:

He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated in the Spirit,
seen by angels,
preached among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.

Relation to Surrounding Context

The function of the present unit is to provide closure to the unit that began at 2:1. As at previous occasions (see esp. 2:5–6), Paul in v. 16 draws on a Christian confession or liturgical piece to authorize and supplement his teaching. The hymn, which Paul titles “the mystery of godliness,” marks the climax of the letter. Paul will continue to elaborate on the importance of godliness in the remainder of the letter (see esp. 4:7). Godliness also forms the subject of the next “trustworthy saying” (4:8–9).

In comparison with Paul's instructions regarding widows and elders, his comments regarding slaves are comparatively brief. In v. 1 he enunciates the principle of respect; v. 2 provides the rationale for obeying even believing masters.

6:1–2a These two verses complete the domestic code that commenced in 5:1. The brevity of Paul's remarks may indicate that he expected his audience to be familiar with his fuller treatment in Eph 6:5–9. Without clear transition (but note as in 5:3 and 17), Paul provides brief instructions regarding Christian slaves (§4.1.2.4).⁴⁶⁷ These were necessitated by the fact that slaves made up a large number of the first-century population of Ephesus. Unlike Paul's other writings, 1 Timothy has no corresponding section on masters (cf. Eph 6:5–9; Col 3:22–4:1; but see Titus 2:9–10; 1 Pet 2:18–20).

"Under the yoke as slaves" is literally "slaves under yoke" (; cf. Lev 26:13; Isa 9:4; Ezek 34:27; 1 Macc 8:18 LXX). The phrase "regard . . . as worthy of all respect" (; cf. Rom 13:7) is reminiscent of the earlier description of elders as "worthy of double honor" (5:17). Paul's exhortation is meaningful in a day when slaves were often disrespectful. To be sure, in Christ there's neither slave nor free (Gal 3:28), but this must not be used as an excuse for insubordination to earthly masters.

By urging slaves' submission, Paul sought to preserve the reputation of God's name (Isa 52:5; cf. Rom 2:24) and the effectiveness of Christian teaching, both of which would be hindered if slaves were unruly. God's honor and the preaching of the gospel are even more important than personal freedom. As any form of insubordination, lack of submission to one's master ultimately brought dishonor to the highest authority: God himself. Elsewhere, Paul observed that conversion transforms master-slave relationships into the family relationship of brothers (Phlm 16–17; v. 2).⁴⁶⁸ Rather than crusade for the abolition of slavery, Paul therefore opted for a more indirect approach, confident that over time the power of the gospel would transform society from within (Rom 1:16; Gal 3:28; Phlm 16). That said, he does counsel slaves to pursue freedom if the opportunity presents itself (1 Cor 7:21). Spiritually speaking, the Christian gospel of salvation in Christ had brought about a reversal already (1 Cor 7:22).

Even those who have believing masters (the term , unlike the English "despot," need not connote tyranny; it elsewhere refers to God or Christ; Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4; Rev 6:10) should not presume upon their Christian bond but rather than rebel or demand liberation show proper respect (lit., "not show contempt," ; cf. 4:12; Rom 2:4; 1 Cor 11:22). In fact, their service should be even more valuable because those who benefit (, cf. Acts 9:4) from it are believers and dear to them (; cf. 2 Tim 1:2). In a stunning reversal Paul therefore casts slaves—rather than their masters—as benefactors, indicating that their service should be rendered from a position of strength, nobility, and honor.⁴⁶⁹

Building on the foundational teaching on church leadership and the life of faith in chapters 3 and 4, 1 Tim 5:1–6:2a covered further important congregational matters. These included dealing with different age groups in God's household, the church (5:1–2), caring for worthy widows (5:3–16), dealing with issues related to elders (5:17–25), and proper conduct for slaves (6:1–2a). In this way Timothy and other apostolic delegates like him, as well as elders/overseers in general, are cast in the role of being set over God's household as God's stewards or household managers. The instructions on various groups in the church—old and young, male and female, as well as widows, elders, and slaves—are thus vitally important in God-honoring stewardship if the apostolic mission is to succeed.

Bridge

Slavery was an ancient institution that shows signs of being transformed by Christianity as early as Paul's letter to Philemon (plus see already Paul's advice to slaves in 1 Cor 7:21, "But if you can become free, by all means take the opportunity"). In the present passage Paul is primarily concerned with believers honoring Christ in their present circumstances, even if they were slaves, which was even more important than for them to try to secure their liberation. Today, of course, slavery has largely been abolished, though the principle of believers honoring Christ by respecting those in authority over them continues to be vital "so that God's name and his teaching will not be blasphemed" (v. 2).

V. Extended Final Exhortation (6:2b–19)

The first part of Paul's closing exhortation engages in a final indictment of the false teachers (6:2b–10) in which he contrasts the false teachers with Timothy, the "man of God," in terms of "godliness" () and "gain" (). Rather than being motivated by greed and using a form of godliness to exploit others, the true servant of God must couple godliness with contentment. Paul then draws on his considerable motivational skills to encourage Timothy. Calling him "man of God," the apostle evokes a long line of distinguished servants of God. Paul also refers to Timothy's "good confession" made in the presence of many witnesses (a possible reference to his ordination service), even linking it to the "good confession" made by Christ before Pilate (6:11–14). A reference to the hope of Christ's return is followed by a solemn doxology (6:15–16) and, almost as an afterthought, an exhortation to the rich (6:17–19).⁴⁷⁰

^{2b}Teach and encourage these things. ³ If anyone teaches false doctrine and does not agree with the sound teaching of our Lord Jesus Christ and with the teaching that promotes godliness, ⁴ he is conceited and understands nothing, but has an unhealthy interest in disputes and arguments over words. From these come envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, ⁵ and constant disagreement among people whose minds are depraved and deprived of the truth, who imagine that godliness is a way to material gain. ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. ⁸ If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these. ⁹ But those who want to be rich fall into temptation, a trap, and many foolish and harmful desires, which plunge people into ruin and destruction. ¹⁰ For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs.

1 Cor 14:26–35 women are told not to participate in the evaluation of prophecy, while it was earlier assumed that they would pray or prophesy during public worship (1 Cor 11:5).

2:13–14 Paul’s rationale (causal) for this prohibition is twofold, invoking both Genesis 2 and 3 (§7.1.4).³²⁹ Positively, the apostle points to the order of creation: Adam, the man, was created first, then Eve, the woman (v. 13; cf. 1 Cor 11:8–9).³³⁰ The term “formed” () confirms that the reference is to the Genesis account (cf. Gen 2:7, 15, 19 LXX). As commonly understood in Jewish thought, primogeniture (being the firstborn) entails certain privileges. This is true all the more with regard to “first creation.”³³¹ The principle Paul adduces is supported by a close reading of the Genesis fall narrative, where Adam, not Eve, is held responsible for the fall (Gen 3:9), an indication of his ultimate responsibility for the human couple (cf. Rom 5:12–19).

Negatively, Paul was concerned that people in the church avoid the scenario that had precipitated the fall where Satan deceived the woman.³³² The role reversal had been complete: rather than God being in authority over the man, who was in authority over the woman, who were in authority over the animal world (including the serpent), the pattern prevailing at the fall was the exact opposite: the serpent tempted and deceived the woman, who exerted leadership over the man, and both rebelled against God and transgressed his command. Both positively and negatively, therefore, Paul directs that the man, not the woman, function in roles of ultimate leadership and responsibility for the church.

In v. 14 the apostle in all likelihood observes that, according to the Genesis fall narrative, Eve was the first target of deception (cf. 2 Cor 11:3), with disastrous results, rather than suggesting that Eve was more gullible than Adam or that Adam was never deceived.³³³ Less likely, the term “first” from v. 13 is to be implied in v. 14 as well (“And Adam was not deceived *first*”). If so, Paul’s point would be that Adam wasn’t the *first* to be deceived, suggesting that the woman by herself, apart from her husband, was in a more vulnerable position in dealing with Satan’s temptation. That said, it’s more likely that Paul’s comment, “And Adam was *not* deceived” (v. 14), is to be taken at face value.

The fact that Paul is rooting his directive in the order of creation rather than providing a cultural rationale strongly suggests that vv. 11–12 are permanently applicable.³³⁴ The fact that Paul grounds his command in the order of creation, not only the fall, also contradicts the argument that female submission to male leadership in the church is solely a result of the fall.³³⁵ This is clearly not how Paul read the creation narrative (cf. 1 Cor 11:8–9). In applying and extending God’s order of creation to the church and in attempting to avoid the negative consequences of the fall, Paul places ultimate responsibility for teaching and exercising authority in the church on qualified men (see 3:1–7 below). For this reason, women are not to listen to the opponents whose false teaching subverted sound doctrine but instead are to learn from qualified and duly appointed teachers in the church.

2:15 The first woman didn’t adhere to her proper domain and consequently fell into sin. How will women in the church age avoid succumbing to the same fate? They’ll be preserved from Satan if they adhere to their God-given role focused on their family and home (with “childbearing” constituting a figure of speech called synecdoche, in which the part, “childbearing,” stands for the whole, “being devoted to a woman’s domestic sphere”; cf. 5:14: “to marry, have children, manage their households”).³³⁶ The word rendered “saved” () is here better rendered “preserved” in light of Paul’s concern that believers be kept safe from the devil and the false teachers (cf. 5:15). In this vein Timothy will help preserve his listeners if he pays close attention to his life and teaching (4:16). The false teachers, on the other hand, are a tool of Satan attempting to deceive those in the church at Ephesus.³³⁷

With regard to Paul’s instructions for men and women thus far (vv. 8–15), v. 15 brings a sense of closure. While the apostle doesn’t want women to teach or exercise authority over men (which would amount to overstepping their God-given boundaries), he urges them to devote themselves to their domestic role (which is how they’ll be preserved from the devil, unlike Eve who overstepped her God-given boundaries and consequently was deceived).³³⁸ This preservation, in turn, depends on women’s continuance in faith, love, and holiness, with “good sense” (, an *inclusio* with v. 9, “good sense”; see above). Paul’s teaching shouldn’t be misconstrued as *confining* women to the home; it aims at delineating women’s proper *focus*, not *exclusive* sphere of involvement. What’s more, if “childbearing” is an idiom for a woman’s focus on her family and home, v. 15 is more directly applicable to single women as well.

In biblical-theological terms, this section of the letter proceeds on the notion of the importance of unity and order in God’s household, the church (§4.1). Men are to be united in prayer (v. 8), and women are to excel in good works and modesty and submit to male teaching and leadership in the church, devoting themselves to their domestic and familial calling (vv. 9–15). Importantly, Paul grounds his teaching in this section in the foundational teaching on God’s design for man and woman in Genesis 1–2 and, negatively, in the scenario at the fall (Genesis 3). This underscores the unity of Scripture and the essential continuity between the God-ordained order in the natural household and the corresponding order in God’s household, the church (cf. 1 Tim 3:2, 4–5, and 15 below).

Bridge

Paul’s command in v. 12 that women not teach or exercise authority over men in the church runs counter to a strong egalitarian emphasis in Western culture. And yet it is of a timeless nature in that it is grounded in God’s design for man and woman at creation and supported by the scenario at the fall where the woman usurped the man’s leadership and the man abdicated his leadership role with disastrous results.³³⁹ Far from being an isolated passage, the present unit is part of a pervasive biblical pattern of male leadership and male-female partnership.³⁴⁰ God’s design for man and woman is one of dignity, respect, and partnership, and its application in our day calls for great wisdom and discernment.³⁴¹

with the description of the church as “the pillar and foundation of the truth” in 3:15. In this way Timothy is set off against the false teachers and reminded that he must fulfill his calling in the midst of a hostile world that, in form of the opponents, has even sought to infiltrate the church itself.

Structure

The opening two verses declare that “later times” will be marked by false teachings inspired by deceitful spirits and demons. Verse 3 specifically states the false teaching as prohibition of marriage and abstinence from certain kinds of food. That both prohibitions apparently flowed from a kind of matter-spirit dualism that disparaged God’s creation is made explicit in vv. 4–5 (“For”).

4:1–2 After issuing a series of positive instructions, and on the heels of a purpose statement and common confession (3:14–16), Paul now returns to the opponents, picking up where he left off at the end of chap. 1 (, “Now,” translated in the NASB and CSB [“But”] but left untranslated in the NIV). In keeping with Paul’s “inaugurated eschatology,” in which the “present age” and the “age to come” overlap (§6), he states that the final apostasy envisaged for the end times is already looming on the horizon (cf. 2 Tim 3:1; Jude 17–18; 2 Pet 3:3; 1 John 4:1).³⁷³ Returning to the challenge of the false teachers, Paul places them into the larger context of latter-day apostasy.

Discerning the Spirit’s “explicit” (, a NT *hapax*; cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 1.24; Justin, *I Apol.* 35.10; 54.7; 63.11) voice in the present (, “says”), Paul asserts that the false teachers fulfill end-time prophecy (Matt 24:11 and par.; cf. Acts 20:29–30; 2 Thess 2:3; 2 Pet 2:1);³⁷⁴ the proliferation of false teaching is a mark of “later times” (cf. 2 Tim 3:1: “last days”).³⁷⁵ The opponents are among those () who depart (; cf. Heb 3:12) from the faith (, regularly used in the LTT in an objective sense), paying attention to (+ dat.; cf. 1:4; 4:13) deceitful spirits and demonic teachings (see 1:20; 3:6–7; 5:15; cf. 1 Kgs 22:21–23; 1 Cor 10:21–22; 2 Cor 11:3, 13–15; 1 John 4:1).³⁷⁶ Strong words indeed.³⁷⁷

In fact, these false teachers are hypocritical liars engaging in pretense.³⁷⁸ Their actions *seem* spiritual, but they practice immorality (2 Tim 3:5), oblivious to the fact that “everyone who calls on the name of the Lord” must “turn away from wickedness” (2 Tim 2:19). Their consciences are seared as with a hot iron (, a “diabolical passive,” implying Satan as the agent; 1 Tim 4:2; cf. Titus 1:15), having been branded (i.e., cauterized) by the devil, resulting in a loss of sensitivity, a powerful image in a culture where people were sometimes branded as punishment for certain crimes.³⁷⁹ Rendered ineffective by a seared conscience, the opponents’ lives and teachings bear the mark of Satan.³⁸⁰

4:3–5 Paul goes on to specify two particular related items of false teaching: (1) forbidding marriage (and presumably sexual activity altogether)³⁸¹ and (2) demanding abstinence (middle of ; cf. Rom 14:21) from certain foods.³⁸² Paul himself at times emphasized the advantages of singleness, allowed for temporary sexual abstinence (1 Cor 7:5), and fasted for religious reasons, but he never *forbade* people to marry—which would have been considered odd by most people in the Jewish or Greco-Roman world of his day—or required them to abstain from food. Paul notes that what motivated the false teaching was a disparagement of the goodness of God’s creation (Gen 1:31 LXX). Already in the garden, the devil questioned God’s goodness (Gen 3:1). Earlier in the letter Paul invoked both God’s order of creation and humanity’s fall (1 Tim 2:13–14).

Some believe the inspiration for such doctrines may have been a Gnostic-style dualism that pitted spirit against matter and prized the former while denigrating the latter.³⁸³ Such Greek thought may have blended with Jewish-style legalism that took its cue from OT food laws (cf. Col 2:21–23). However, primary documents supporting this kind of teaching are rather late, and it may be precarious to extrapolate earlier manifestations of a given teaching from later, more fully developed expressions of thought.³⁸⁴ It may therefore be safer to surmise that what we find here is similar to what Paul encountered in the Corinthian context where overrealized eschatology led to disparagement of sexual activity for the sake of “higher” spiritual experience (1 Cor 15:12, 35; 2 Tim 2:18).³⁸⁵

Paul’s response to the opponents’ false teaching consists in a corrected interpretation of the Genesis account. According to Scripture, God created all there is and pronounced everything he made “good,” so the created universe shouldn’t be considered inferior or evil (Gen 1:20–21, 31; cf. Gen 1:29 LXX). Jesus himself declared all food clean (Mark 7:19; cf. Titus 1:15). The customary prayer of thanksgiving at meals commended the enjoyment of the Creator’s good gifts, which aren’t only good but “sanctified” by the Word of God and prayer (cf. Jas 1:17; , “consecrated,” is found with a similar sense in 1 Cor 7:14; contrast Rom 1:21).³⁸⁶ In this way Scripture strongly rejects denial of one’s human earthly, material existence in favor of a mere spiritual, otherworldly one.

Bridge

The disparagement of marriage and certain foods is not a true mark of godliness. As Paul wrote elsewhere, such practices “have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh” (Col 2:23 ESV). In fact, these kinds of stipulations are demonically inspired. Likewise, today we must not be fooled by achievements of human self-effort, which may seem impressive on the outside but detract from the gospel of grace in Christ.

B. Being a Good Servant of Jesus Christ (4:6–16)

⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed. ⁷ But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths. Rather, train yourself in godliness. ⁸

8:3; 13:19), and other servants of God. Paul's use of this lofty expression indicates the solemn responsibility resting on Timothy and the venerable trajectory of men of God preceding him.

Paul's directive for Timothy to "flee" () from these vices and "pursue" () these virtues underscores the intensity with which his apostolic delegate is to fulfill his calling. Both "flee" and "pursue" are strong verbs, suggesting that Timothy must be deliberate in both directions—take flight from the vices of the false teachers and continue in hot pursuit of Christian virtues. The NT urges all people to flee from God's coming wrath (Matt 3:7; 23:33; 24:16), calling them to take seriously the destructive and eternal consequences of sin. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul urged them to flee sexual immorality and idolatry (1 Cor 6:18; 10:14) and to pursue love (14:1; cf. chap. 13). In his second and final letter to Timothy, Paul will plead with Timothy to "flee from youthful passions" and to "pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace" (2 Tim 2:22).

"These things" (; v. 11) refers to the vices mentioned in the previous section (vv. 3–10), especially those related to false doctrine and greed. In comparison to 2 Tim 2:22, Paul here includes references to godliness, endurance, and gentleness while omitting reference to peace; righteousness, faith, and love are shared in common by both lists. These six virtues contrast with the five vices associated with the false teachers in vv. 4–5. Where the opponents exhibit envy, quarreling, slander, evil suspicions, and constant disagreements, Timothy must pursue righteousness (; cf. 2 Tim 2:22; 3:16; 4:8), godliness (; 2:2; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5–6; 2 Tim 3:5), faith (; cf. 1:4–5, 14, 19; 4:12), love (; cf. 1:5, 14; 2:15; 4:12), endurance (; 2 Tim 3:10; Titus 2:2), and gentleness (; only here in the NT; cf. 2 Tim 2:25).

To summarize, Timothy, and with him every man and woman of God, is to be fueled by a strong desire to put as great a distance as possible between himself and evil, avoiding ungodly associations of any kind, and doing everything in his power to exemplify righteousness, faith, love, and other Christian virtues. Followers of Christ are to love and do what is right (or, as Jesus put it, "hunger and thirst for righteousness"; Matt 5:6). They are to cultivate godly character, trust God in all things, love friends and foes alike, and display endurance and gentleness, particularly in dealing with opponents inside and outside the church.

As though these charges were not solemn enough, Paul intensifies his pleas still further, exhorting Timothy to "fight the good fight of the faith" and to "take hold of eternal life" to which he was called when making his "good confession" in the "presence of many witnesses." The imperatives "fight" and "take hold" are juxtaposed without a connecting "and" (asyndeton).⁵⁰⁰ In "fighting the good fight" (), Timothy should follow the example of his teacher (1 Cor 9:25; Phil 1:30; Col 1:29; 2:1; 4:12; 1 Thess 2:2; 1 Tim 4:10; 2 Tim 4:7). Gospel ministry won't always be an easy calling; it involves struggle and hard work on behalf of others. Paul wants Timothy not to be soft or timid but realistic and tough-minded. Athletic metaphors and other illustrations depicting the struggle of Christian ministry are frequent in Paul (e.g., 1 Cor 9:24–27; 2 Tim 2:3–7).⁵⁰¹

Timothy also is to "take hold of eternal life" to which he was called when making his "good confession" in the "presence of many witnesses." "Called" (; cf. 2 Tim 1:9) is a "divine passive" implying God as agent. "Eternal life" in Paul tends to invoke the future (Titus 1:2; 3:7), though the lines aren't always sharply drawn (cf. 1:16; 2 Tim 1:10). Immediately following this passage, Jesus Christ is said to have made the ultimate "good confession" before Pontius Pilate (v. 13). In Timothy's case the public acknowledgment in view is probably that made at his ordination service (1:18; 4:14; cf. 2 Tim 1:6). The reference to the "many witnesses" once again adds solemnity to Paul's charge, as does the connection Paul establishes between Timothy's "good confession" and that of Jesus. Now that Timothy has made this confession, he must not turn back (cf. Luke 9:57–62). Rather, he should constantly reaffirm his commitment by courageous witness that is not afraid to suffer for the truth.

Paul's exhortation for Timothy to "take hold" () of eternal life is reminiscent of the apostle's own practice of pressing on to take hold of that which Christ Jesus took hold of for him (; Phil 3:12–14; 1 Cor 9:24). Toward that end Timothy must lay aside all fears, scruples, and encumbrances and fight for the faith regardless of any opposition, suffering, or other negative consequences. Whether convenient or not, Timothy must preach the gospel (2 Tim 4:2). What's more, not only should Timothy embrace this goal; so should everyone, even the wealthy (v. 19). Unlike other places where he stresses the "already" side of the end times, Paul here focuses on the "not yet" part of the Christian life. Only the coming age will witness believers' entrance into eternal life, "what is truly life" (v. 19).

6:13–16 "In the presence of God" is yet another solemn phrase underscoring the seriousness of Paul's charge. Apart from introducing two trustworthy sayings (2:3; 5:4), the expression occurs elsewhere in Paul's letters to Timothy always with (5:21; 2 Tim 2:14; 4:1); here Paul uses the roughly equivalent term (both translated "charge" in the CSB). In 5:21, Paul's charge is before God, Christ Jesus, and the elect angels; here it is before God, "who gives life to all" (; cf. Luke 17:33; Acts 7:19), and Christ Jesus, "who gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate."

The view of God as the giver of life is firmly anchored in the Jewish concept of God the Creator. Jesus's testimony before Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, is attested by all four Gospels (most of whom simply refer to "Pilate"; "Pontius" is found elsewhere only in Luke 3:1 and Acts 4:27) and forms part of early Christian witness and liturgy. Taken together, both descriptions add further weight to Paul's exhortation. "Good confession" provides the wider context for the reference to Timothy making the "good confession" in v. 12 (, "confession," occurs elsewhere in the NT only in 2 Cor 9:13; Heb 3:1; 4:14; 10:23).

What, then, is Paul's charge? It is for Timothy to keep "this command" (the only instance of the singular in the LTT; cf. Acts 17:15), which probably invokes Paul's threefold exhortation in vv. 11–12 to "flee and pursue," "fight the good fight," and "take hold of eternal life" in summary fashion, though a more general reference is possible as well.⁵⁰² "Without fault or failure" combines the rough synonyms (Jas 1:27; 1 Pet 1:19; 2 Pet 3:14) and (3:2; 5:7; the more common NT term is). In keeping with the requirements

¹¹ But you, man of God, flee from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness. ¹² Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of eternal life to which you were called and about which you have made a good confession in the presence of many witnesses. ¹³ In the presence of God, who gives life to all, and of Christ Jesus, who gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate, I charge you ¹⁴ to keep this command without fault or failure until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ. ¹⁵ God will bring this about in his own time. He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, ¹⁶ who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see, to him be honor and eternal power. Amen.

¹⁷ Instruct those who are rich in the present age not to be arrogant or to set their hope on the uncertainty of wealth, but on God, who richly provides us with all things to enjoy. ¹⁸ Instruct them to do what is good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and willing to share, ¹⁹ storing up treasure for themselves as a good foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of what is truly life.

Relation to Surrounding Context

The entire unit 6:2b–19 closely mirrors the opening section 1:3–20. The opening reference to “anyone [who] teaches false doctrine” by way of *inclusio* reiterates the rare word from 1:3, signaling Paul’s return to the primary occasion for the letter. He again identifies “godliness” as a distinguishing mark of the gospel and those who administer it (v. 3; cf. 3:16; 4:7–8; v. 6). Once again he elaborates on the characteristics of the false teachers (vv. 3–5). While earlier Paul focused on the false teachers’ misuse of the Jewish law (1:3–7), he here strikes at their root motivation: a desire to get rich (vv. 9–10). The Christian antidote is godly contentment (vv. 6–8).

Structure

The extended closing instructions in the letter include a final indictment of the false teachers (vv. 2b–10); an encouragement to Timothy (vv. 11–14); a concluding doxology (vv. 15–16); and a final exhortation to the rich (vv. 17–19; cf. vv. 9–10). The doxology forms an *inclusio* with the opening doxology in 1:17, similarly concluding with an emphatic “Amen.” In both cases eternal honor is ascribed to the King who is immortal and invisible, the only God, though the concluding doxology elaborates on some of these epithets in more detail.

1:17	6:15b–16
	He is the blessed and only Sovereign,
To the King of ages,	the King of kings,
	and the Lord of lords,
immortal ,	who alone is immortal
	and who lives in unapproachable light,
invisible ,	whom no one has seen or can see ,
the only God ,	
be honor and glory forever and ever .	to him be honor and eternal power.
Amen .	Amen .

6:2b The two imperatives, “Teach and encourage these things” (; cf. esp. 4:11:), conclude Paul’s instructions and transition into his extended final exhortation of Timothy. More narrowly, “these things” () probably refers to 5:22–6:2a (note the identical phrase in 5:21), though more broadly it may pertain to 5:1–6:2a,⁴⁷¹ if not ultimately the entire letter.⁴⁷² Paul customarily refers to “these things” before moving on to a new set of instructions (see 3:14; 4:6, 11, 15; 5:7, 21; 6:2, 11; Titus 2:15). In the present instance he may refer to the entirety of his instruction in the letter en route to concluding his missive to his apostolic delegate. Specifically Timothy is to teach and encourage adherence to the true gospel over against the opponents who propagate deviant doctrine (see v. 3 below).

6:3–5 As mentioned, vv. 3–5 refer all the way back to Paul’s opening remarks in 1:3–4 (note the rare term , “teach false doctrine,” in both 1:3 and 6:3). Despite the statement’s general nature (“If anyone”), the opponents are clearly in mind (see the reference to “people” in the plural in v. 5 below). Though the statement is couched in form of a first-class conditional clause (using indicatives and assuming the reality of the statement for sake of argument) of which v. 3 is the protasis and vv. 4–5 the apodosis, the specific mention of Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1:20 shows that Paul’s words are anything but hypothetical.⁴⁷³ The term (only here in the LTT and in fact in all of Paul’s writings) most likely denotes figurative (i.e., intellectual) movement (see the reference to “depraved minds” in v. 5 below), indicating that the false teachers’ thoughts have wandered off from the true gospel to their own speculations (cf. 1:4).⁴⁷⁴

The phrases “sound teaching” and “teaching that promotes godliness” call to mind the similar phrase rendered “sound teaching” in

requirements for church leaders.³⁴³ In the original context this meets Timothy's need for guidance in giving direction to the church at Ephesus. Beyond this, as the general nature of vv. 1 ("anyone") and 15 ("how people ought to [act]") makes clear, Paul's directions transcend the immediate occasion. At this critical juncture, the apostle sets forth qualifications for church leaders that possess continuing validity for the church.³⁴⁴

Paul transitions into the new subsection with another "trustworthy saying" (; cf. 1:15): "If anyone aspires to be [NASB "aspires to the office of"] an overseer, he desires a noble work."³⁴⁵ "Aspires" () recurs in 6:10 with reference to the false teachers' love of money (elsewhere in the NT only in Heb 11:16). Such an aspiration is a noble pursuit (lit., "a good work";).³⁴⁶ Interestingly, Paul does not mention a divine call to the ministry as a requirement here but instead speaks of an aspiration or desire (cf. 1 Pet 5:2).

The terms "overseer" () and "elder" () refer to one and the same office in the LTT and elsewhere in the NT (Titus 1:5, 7; cf. Acts 20:17, 28).³⁴⁷ In v. 1 the word (cf. Acts 1:20) is used to denote the "office of overseer" (cf. Luke 19:44; Acts 1:20; 1 Pet 2:12). In v. 2 refers to the person serving in such a role (cf. Acts 20:28; Phil 1:1; Titus 1:7; 1 Pet 2:25; regarding , see esp. 5:1–2, 17, 19; Titus 1:5; 1 Pet 5:1, 5; Jas 5:14). In the LXX the expression designates someone in charge of a given operation (Num 4:16). The Qumran equivalent was the *mebaqqer* (1QS 6:12, 20; CD 9:18–19, 22; 13:6–7). The term is Jewish in origin, generally signifying seniority, whereas is of Greek provenance, indicating a person's superintending role.³⁴⁸

In keeping with his customary pattern (Acts 14:23), Paul instructed Titus likewise to "appoint elders in every town" (Titus 1:5). The two-tiered leadership structure—overseers/elders and deacons—found in the present passage corresponds to the two offices attested in the church at Philippi (Phil 1:1). Presumably, overseers/elders made up the "council of elders" () mentioned in 1 Tim 4:14. The survey below lays out the basic framework for church leadership set forth in the LTT and Paul's other NT letters.

Two-Tiered Structure: 1 Timothy 3:1–12; Philippians 1:1

First Tier: Overseers/Elders/Shepherds (cf. Eph 4:11: pastor-teacher)

Composed of:

A plurality of men³⁴⁹

Plurality: 1 Tim 4:14: "council of elders"; plural in Phil 1:1; Titus 1:5; Acts 20:17, 29; 1 Pet 5:1–2

Men: 1 Tim 2:12: not a woman; 1 Tim 3:2 = Titus 1:6: faithful husband

Synonymous terms:

Titus 1:5–7: "appoint *elders* . . . an *overseer*" (same qualifications as those for *overseers* in 1 Tim 3:1–7)

Acts 20:17, 28: "the *elders* of the church . . . Be on guard . . . for all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has appointed you as *overseers*, to *shepherd* the church of God . . ."

1 Pet 5:1–3: "I exhort the *elders* among you as a fellow *elder* . . . *Shepherd* God's flock among you, not *overseeing* out of compulsion but willingly . . . being examples to the flock"

Terminology:

"Overseer" refers to the function of giving oversight to the church

"Elder" refers to life stage/experience and commensurate status in community

"Shepherd" (pastor) is a metaphor for personal care for members of the church

Function:

Ruling (all, jointly) and teaching (some)

1 Tim 3:2: "able to teach"

1 Tim 5:17: "elders who are good leaders . . . especially those who work hard at preaching and teaching"

Titus 1:9: "to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it"

1 Thess 5:12: "give recognition to those who labor among you and lead you (ESV: "are over you") in the Lord and admonish you"

Summary:

The biblical pattern is for a group of elders to give joint oversight to a local congregation, with one or several pastors being primarily devoted to teaching and providing pastoral care.

Second Tier: Deacons

Composed of:

Male (1 Tim 3:8–10, 12) and

Female deacons (1 Tim 3:11; Rom 16:1: Phoebe)

Function:

Term means "servant"

"Able to teach" not a requirement

Nonruling, nonteaching function

In each case Paul gives a rationale. In the first instance he establishes an analogy between a man's natural household and God's "household," the church (v. 5; cf. v. 15). The argument is from the lesser to the greater: if such a man cannot manage () his own family, how can he be expected to care for God's church? The implied answer is self-evident: he cannot. The requirement for church leaders to manage their own households competently excludes candidates who are capable leaders but whose private lives are in disarray. Also, as in the home, overseers must care for God's people gently rather than rule with an iron fist (in Luke 10:34–35, , "care for," denotes the tender care exercised by the good Samaritan). "God's church" underscores the sacredness and solemn responsibility of caring for God's people. "Having children in submission" (; with reference to women in 1 Tim 2:11) means that a man commands the respect (; elsewhere in the NT only in 2:2; Titus 2:7; cf. 1 Tim 3:12; Titus 1:6) of his children in the home and that he is able to institute God's order for the family in his home.

Second, Paul expresses concern that a candidate not be trapped by the devil, a concern that is part of the larger preservation theme in the LTT (vv. 6–7; cf. 2:14–15; 5:14–15; 2 Tim 2:26; §3.5.7). "New convert" (v. 6) comes from the Greek word for "newly planted" (; in a literal sense in Job 14:9; Pss 128:3; 144:2; Isa 5:7). If drafted into service prematurely, such an untested individual will likely "become conceited" (; cf. 6:4; 2 Tim 3:4) and fall into the same condemnation as the devil (v. 6). How much better it is to wait until his "airy ideas have been subdued."³⁶³

Third, Paul requires of a candidate for overseer not only spiritual maturity and healthy relationships but also a good reputation (, cf. Titus 1:13) with those outside the church. Otherwise, he will fall into disgrace ()—an offense that should be caused only by the reproach of Christ borne for the sake of the gospel (cf. Rom 15:3; Heb 10:33; 11:26; 13:13)—and the devil's "trap" (; cf. 6:9: greed; 2 Tim 2:26: deception). However, "there is no need to multiply its [the world's] opportunities by unnecessary scandal, in addition to the necessary offense of the cross."³⁶⁴

Bridge

Historically this was the time when the aging apostle sought to make provision for the continuing administration of the Christian church. Clearly Paul thought the character of church leaders to be of primary significance. Also, Paul primarily focused on a man's character rather than external characteristics, in particular his marriage and leadership of his family. In short, such a man must be mature, command the respect of others, and exhibit self-control. The strategic importance of church leadership cannot be overestimated. In any age, people neglect this issue at their own peril and will likely pay a price for doing so.

2. Deacons (3:8–13)

As in the case of overseers, some general observations will put this section into perspective:

1. Structurally, ("likewise") in vv. 8 and 11 suggests that qualifications are given for two other types of individuals in addition to candidates for overseer. The way v. 11 is placed between vv. 8–10 and vv. 12–13 suggests one larger category, the office of deacon, with qualifications for male and female officeholders and a closing general statement pertaining to both. The two offices of elder and deacon are also mentioned in Phil 1:1.
2. By comparison with the qualifications for overseers, one notes the absence of terms related to teaching or ruling (most notably, "able to teach," see v. 2; see also v. 5b). This suggests that, in keeping with the term , "servant," deacons don't bear ultimate responsibility for the church. At the same time they, too, occupy a formal office that has particular requirements.
3. While not part of the ruling body of the church, deacons occupy an important role. This is indicated by the similarity between the qualifications for overseers and deacons. While Paul doesn't spell out the precise realm of service, deacons most likely are to render all kinds of practical and administrative help required to run a church, including benevolence, finances, physical maintenance, and a wide variety of other services and ministries.
4. Overseers/elders are in charge of the entire congregation (e.g., 5:17), including deacons, so that deacons should submit to overseers/elders just as all church members are to do.

Relation to Surrounding Context

The transition "likewise" indicates that Paul now moves on to a second church office, that of deacon. Again Paul lists a number of qualifications. While Paul didn't permit women to serve as overseers (2:12; cf. 3:2), he here stipulates qualifications for women deacons (the most likely understanding of v. 11). This underscores the biblical pattern of male leadership and male-female partnership.

Structure

As mentioned, v. 8 signals a second church office. Verses 8–10 are devoted to male deacons; v. 11 turns to women (whether deaconesses or deacons' wives, the former being more likely); v. 12 then returns to male deacons; and v. 13 rounds out the discussion by stating the rewards that come from serving well as a deacon.

⁸ Deacons, likewise, should be worthy of respect, not hypocritical, not drinking a lot of wine, not greedy for money, ⁹ holding the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. ¹⁰ They must also be tested first; if they prove blameless, then they can serve as deacons. ¹¹ Wives, too, must be worthy of respect, not slanderers, self-controlled, faithful in everything. ¹² Deacons are to be husbands of one wife, managing their children and their own households competently. ¹³ For those who have served well as deacons acquire a good standing for themselves and great boldness in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

religion becomes a means of selfish gain (v. 5b). By contrast Paul never sought to profit personally from his preaching (Acts 20:33; 2 Cor 2:17; 1 Thess 2:5).

6:6–10 To drive these points home, the apostle strings together a chain of proverbial sayings:

“But godliness with contentment is great gain.” (v. 6)

“For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.” (v. 7)

“If we have food and clothing, we will be content with these.” (v. 8)

“For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil.” (Or, “of all evils”; v. 10)

Not all of these sayings are original with the apostle, however. As will be seen below, Paul frequently draws on commonly accepted truths attested in both biblical and extrabiblical literature to argue his case.⁴⁸⁸

In the first saying Paul asserts that true godliness (; see on 2:2) was accompanied by () contentment (; cf. 2 Cor 9:8; Phil 4:11; cf. Ps 34:10). Such contented godliness is truly profitable (note the wordplay involving “gain”; on , see the previous verse).⁴⁸⁹ Contentment, conceived as self-sufficiency, was considered a virtue in Greek (Cynic-Stoic) philosophy (e.g., Plato, *Resp.* 2.369B; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 10.130–131).⁴⁹⁰ Paul, for his part, didn’t advocate the Greek version of contentment but declared that true is satisfaction with Christ rather than self-reliance.⁴⁹¹ Such true contentment stands in contrast with greed and a desire for more, leading to the exploitation of others. At its essence, godliness is not a means of material gain; as a spiritual virtue it is gain in and of itself.⁴⁹² This message has strong countercultural implications in Western culture, which is increasingly materialistic. Even Christians are frequently drawn into a pattern of excessive debt, consumer spending, and defining status primarily based on material possessions.

The attitude Paul canvassed in the second and third sayings couldn’t be more different: “For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out. If we have food [] and clothing [], we will be content with these” (or, “let us be content with that”).⁴⁹³ The future may be a Hebraism with the force of a command.⁴⁹⁴ See the similar counsel by Jesus (Matt 6:24–34; Luke 12:16–32) and John the Baptist (Luke 3:14); see also the book of Hebrews (Heb 13:5); there are OT parallels as well (cf. Job 1:21; Eccl 5:14 LXX). While it’s entirely appropriate to enjoy one’s belongings, believers should cultivate an attitude of healthy detachment with regard to material possessions.

By contrast, Paul observes that the desire to get rich (; cf. v. 18; Rom 10:12; 1 Cor 4:8; 2 Cor 8:9) amounts to falling (; cf. 3:6–7) into temptation (; only here in the LTT; cf. 1 Cor 10:13; Gal 4:14) and a trap (; cf. Luke 21:35; Rom 11:9; 1 Tim 3:7; 2 Tim 2:26). This tendency is bound to plunge (, elsewhere in the NT only in Luke 5:7 with reference to a sinking boat) people into many foolish (; Luke 24:25; Rom 1:14; Gal 3:1, 3; Titus 3:3) and harmful (; only here in the NT; cf. Prov 10:26 LXX) desires. The false teachers may have relied on the support of others while not working themselves. This stands in sharp contrast to Paul’s philosophy of ministry, work ethic, and pattern of teaching (Acts 18:3; 1 Corinthians 9; 1 Thess 1:5; 2:9; 4:11–12; 2 Thess 3:6–13). Similarly, the church today shouldn’t support people who use the ministry as an excuse for not working.

The false teachers, for their part, will end up in utter ruin (; 1 Cor 5:5; 1 Thess 5:3; 2 Thess 1:9) and destruction (; Rom 9:22; Phil 1:28; 3:19; Heb 10:39; 2 Pet 2:1, 3; 3:7, 16; Rev 17:8, 11), two close Semitic-style synonyms. Similar to Jesus (Matt 6:24; Luke 16:13),⁴⁹⁵ Paul traces such ruin back to a root evil (; cf. Heb 12:15): the love of money ().⁴⁹⁶ Centuries before Paul, Hippocrates (4th/5th c. BC) already wrote that the love of money is the cause of all kinds of things (*Epid.* 17.43); another individual, Bion, called “love of money the mother-city of all evils” (Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* 6.50).

Paul ominously adds, “By craving (; cf. 3:1; Heb 11:16) it (i.e., money) some (, another oblique reference to the false teachers; cf. 1:6, 19; 4:1; 5:15; 6:21) have wandered away from the faith (, cf. Mark 13:22; the passive may imply Satan as the agent of the false teachers’ demise) and pierced themselves (; only here in the NT; cf. Philo, *Flaccus* 1) with many griefs” (; cf. Rom 9:2).⁴⁹⁷ As Quinn and Wacker put it, “The riches . . . , so eagerly sought, leave those who have acquired them in desperate frustration and anguish, neither satisfying their greed nor healing their hearts.”⁴⁹⁸ Considering the ignominious outcome of the false teachers, believers in every age should consider the great harm caused by greed and make every effort to dig up this “root of all kinds of evil,” cultivating godly contentment.

6:11–12 Following his concluding denunciation of the false teachers, Paul turns to his final charge (the same pattern as in 1:3–7 and chap. 4). In short Timothy is to be everything the false teachers aren’t. Negatively Paul pleads with Timothy to flee from “these things” (i.e., the vices discussed in vv. 3–10, including unhealthy controversies and the love of money). Positively he should pursue the Christian virtues of righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.⁴⁹⁹

The direct address “But you” was used by Jesus in relation to his disciples (or would-be disciples; Matt 6:6, 17; Luke 9:60). Paul frequently employs the phrase in his other letters (Rom 2:17; 11:17; 14:10) including the LTT (2 Tim 3:10, 14; 4:5; Titus 2:1; the phrase is also found in Jas 4:12). That the expression occurs toward the end of this letter and three times in the closing chapters of 2 Timothy underscores Paul’s intensity and urgency in entreating Timothy.

The expression “man of God” (; cf. 2 Tim 3:17) is found in the OT with reference to Moses (Deut 33:1; Josh 14:6; Ps 89:1), Samuel (1 Sam 9:6–10), David (2 Chr 8:14; Neh 12:24, 36), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:18, 24; 2 Kgs 1:9–13; 4:9, 16, 22, 40), Elisha (2 Kgs

context of vv. 5–7 may refer to Christ’s own bearing of witness in giving himself (cf. 6:13; John 18:37; Rom 3:21–30; 5:8) and/or to Paul’s testifying by way of preaching (cf. 1 Cor 1:6; 2 Thess 1:10).³⁰² The exact same phrase “at the [or his] proper time” () is found at 6:15 (cf. Titus 1:3), underscoring God’s sovereign providence in human history (cf. Gal 4:4; 6:9).

2:7 Before returning to the subject of prayer (for a similar transitional statement see 1:11), Paul affirms that it is the proclamation of the gospel (as explained in vv. 5–6) that is his calling. He has already made clear that he was entrusted with the gospel (1:11) and appointed for service (1:12). Here he asserts that he was made a herald (, cf. 2 Tim 1:11; 2 Peter 2:5), an apostle (, Paul’s customary self-designation), and a teacher (, cf. 2 Tim 1:11; 4:3) of the Gentiles—the same threefold description as in 2 Tim 1:11—in faith and truth (cf. Acts 9:15; Romans 9–11; 2 Cor 5:18, 20; 6:1; Gal 2:7; Eph 3:7–9; Col 1:25–27).

“Herald” (NASB, “preacher”), “apostle,” and “teacher” describe distinct but partially overlapping roles. For example, “apostle” includes evangelistic proclamation (“herald”) and teaching. Paul may use all three terms here and in 2 Tim 1:11 to present himself as a model for Timothy (see 1:16, 18; cf. 2 Tim 4:7) who likewise is exhorted to “preach the word” (, 2 Tim 4:2) and to teach (, 1 Tim 4:11; 6:2; 2 Tim 2:2), though the term “apostle” is reserved for Paul.³⁰³

Heralds, proclaiming various kinds of messages and news, were a common feature in the ancient world; Paul’s message was the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ (§1.4).³⁰⁴ “Teacher of the Gentiles” again stresses the universal scope of the gospel message and shuts the door on Jewish exclusivism (cf. “everyone” in vv. 4 and 6). The phrase “I am telling the truth, I am not lying” (, virtually identical to Paul’s solemn affirmation in Rom 9:1: , ; cf. 2 Cor 11:31; Gal 1:20) adds further solemnity to Paul’s summary of his own calling. It is also possible that the apostle’s authority was challenged by some in Ephesus (cf. 2 Cor 10:10).

Concluding our discussion of 2:1–7, Paul’s first major instruction to Timothy in the body of this letter, we may register the following biblical-theological observations.

1. The passage attests to the foundational nature of the mission theme in the LTT (§1). Paul’s underlying concern here is to promote the kind of peaceful environment that lends itself to the expeditious and unhindered proclamation of the gospel.
2. Most likely in contrast to the false teachers, and in keeping with his mission calling to the Gentiles, Paul contends that the gospel should be proclaimed to all (i.e., by implication, not only to Jews). In this way he sets himself against any elitist or exclusivistic conception of Christianity that may have been propagated by the opponents.
3. Paul invokes the fact that God is one—the central Jewish confession—to advance his argument that there’s only one way of salvation for all. He goes on to argue that Jesus—assumed to be divine, but human as well, and thus able to act as a mediator—is the only mediator between God and humanity by virtue of the ransom he paid for human sin.
4. In this way Paul invokes theology, Christology, and soteriology to drive home a missiological point. Rather than being a theologian advocating mission, Paul, the missionary, engages in theological reasoning to refute defective theological, Christological, and soteriological views held by his opponents, first and foremost because he considered them to have a detrimental effect on the cause of his Gentile mission which extended to all.³⁰⁵

2:8 Paul now moves past his first main topic, the offering of various kinds of prayer (vv. 1–2), to the second related injunction (, “therefore,” here and in v. 1, there translated “then”). He wants the men in the congregation to unite in prayer (; cf. v. 1 and 5:5) without any hint of anger or argument. Just as Jews prized ritual purity, NT believers were to pray with their hands cleansed from any spiritual defilement or impurity (, “holy hands”).³⁰⁶ The plural (, “[the] men”) points to a plurality of men leading the congregation in prayer and worship (cf. v. 12; 3:2, 5; 4:11–16; 5:17).³⁰⁷

The immediate point of reference of “in every place” () is most likely the various house churches making up the Ephesian church, though ultimately the scope is universal (cf. 1 Cor 1:2; 2 Cor 2:14; 1 Thess 1:8; cf. Mal 1:11 LXX; §1).³⁰⁸ The lifting up of hands in prayer was practiced in OT times and is attested in Second Temple Jewish, Greco-Roman, and Christian literature.³⁰⁹ By this time “lifting up hands” in prayer may have become a figurative expression similar to “wash[ing] the saints’ feet” (5:10). In a congregation devoted to prayer, there must be neither anger (; cf. Eph 4:31; Col 3:8) nor argument (; cf. Phil 2:14). Paul’s teaching here echoes that of Jesus (Matt 5:22–24; cf. 6:14–15; 18:21–35; Mark 11:25).

Paul’s concern, similar to Jesus’s, is the removal of barriers for the purpose of effective prayer (1 Cor 7:5; Eph 4:26–27; cf. 1 Pet 3:7). His main emphasis is on the word “holy” (; cf. Titus 1:8; Heb 7:26). The picture Paul paints is that of a church submitted to authority and united in prayer for the salvation of all. If there’s unity (v. 8), and if there’s order (vv. 9–15), the church’s mission will be able to proceed without hindrance or disruption.

Bridge

While Christians aren’t normally in positions of government themselves, they’re not therefore to completely disengage from the political process. At a minimum they’re to pray for those in authority so that the environment will be stable and conducive for gospel propagation. If this was true in the days of Emperor Nero, who in a bout of madness set Rome on fire and blamed the Christians, resulting in untold suffering and martyrdom, it’s certainly true in our day. On the premise that there’s one God and Savior and one mediator between God and humans, the Lord Jesus Christ, men ought to lead the church in a spirit of unity and gospel centeredness. Paul will next elaborate on the role of women in the church.

B. Regarding Women (2:9–15)³¹⁰

For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.⁹ This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance.¹⁰ For this reason we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone despise your youth, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, give your attention to public reading, exhortation, and teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you; it was given to you through prophecy, with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. ¹⁵ Practice these things; be committed to them, so that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶ Pay close attention to your life and your teaching; persevere in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Relation to Surrounding Context

The present unit includes the third “trustworthy saying” in this letter, affirming the benefits of true godliness, which far surpass any such benefits arising from bodily exercise (v. 8). Again Timothy serves as a model “good servant of Christ Jesus” (v. 6). Earlier Timothy had been reminded of the prophecies previously made about him (1:18); here he is exhorted not to “neglect the gift” of ministry bestowed on him by the council of elders at his ordination service (v. 14). Just as women will be preserved from falling into error by adhering to their God-ordained role (2:15), so by his exemplary conduct Timothy will preserve both himself and his entire congregation (v. 16; note the use of in both passages as conveying divine preservation rather than spiritual salvation).

Structure

The unit shifts from the negative depiction of the “later times” in vv. 1–5 to a positive portrayal of Timothy as a “good servant of Christ Jesus” (v. 6). “These things” in v. 6 links the present unit to vv. 4–5 in the previous unit, while “these things” in v. 11 refers to v. 6. The present passage pivots on the “trustworthy saying” in v. 8. The remainder of the unit features a series of instructions for Timothy prior to Paul’s anticipated visit (v. 13). Just as the requirements for church leaders in chapter 3, Timothy’s actions are to flow from godly character and set the example for believers, despite his relative youth (v. 12).

4:6–8 After warning Timothy regarding the false teachers, Paul provides further instructions on how to be a good servant of Christ Jesus (; this is the only nontechnical use of the term in the LTT; the NIV translates “minister,” but the expression is probably generic: cf. Eph 6:21; Col 1:7; 4:7).³⁸⁷ The second-person singular commands (“have nothing to do”) and (“train”) in v. 7 are the first such imperatives in the letter, marking a shift from instructions concerning the church as a whole to those specifically for Timothy.³⁸⁸

Positively, Timothy is to “point out” (pres. ptc. , probably conveying means; in this sense only here in the NT) “these things” (in the immediate context, vv. 1–5, but ultimately the contents of the entire letter) to “the brothers and sisters” (, i.e., the members of his congregation; cf. 6:2; 2 Tim 4:21),³⁸⁹ nourishing himself (pres. ptc. , only here in the NT; cf. Epictetus, *Diatr.* 4.4.48) by the words of the faith and the good teaching he has followed (perf. ptc. probably has the intensified sense of “following closely”: cf. 2 Tim 3:10; Luke 1:3). Similarly, God’s servants of every age must continually nourish themselves spiritually so they can nurture the people in their congregation.³⁹⁰ Thus the order is (1) closely following good teaching (), (2) continually nurturing oneself in the faith (), and (3) instructing others accordingly ().

Negatively (; NASB and CSB, “but”; untranslated in the NIV), Timothy must have nothing to do with (; cf. 2 Tim 2:23; of persons, Titus 3:10) what Paul derogatorily calls “pointless and silly myths” (cf. on 1:4).³⁹¹ Rather, he must “train [himself] in godliness” (on , see on 2:2). The term “train,” referring to physical exercise, is also applied to spiritual exercise in Hebrews (5:14; 12:11) and 2 Peter (2:14; see also Josephus, *Ant.* 6.185). (athletic facilities) were an integral part of Hellenistic culture. Paul doesn’t disparage physical exercise altogether: it has “limited benefit” (; i.e., only for this life, see below; better than NASB: “only of little profit”; cf. Heb 12:10; Jas 4:14). Spiritual exercise, however, yields rewards (, NASB: “profitable,” cf. 2 Tim 3:16; Titus 3:8) and holds promise (; cf. 2 Tim 1:1) for both the present life and the life to come (see further on vv. 9–10 below).³⁹²

Most likely, the contrast between physical exercise and training in godliness in v. 8 is triggered by the opponents who, as Paul just mentioned, taught abstinence from marriage or sex and certain foods (v. 3). Not only is their teaching “worldly” (NASB, v. 7), their focus is “bodily,” pertaining merely to the physical realm. This sheds important light on the orientation of the false teachers. Most likely, they “advocated a *spiritual* experience that could be enjoyed presently in what they considered to be the *eternal* age” (cf. 2 Tim 2:18), yet Paul “underscores the fact that godliness is the true path of eschatological existence.”³⁹³ Paul’s words remain relevant today in a world where many indulge in self-centered hedonism and egregious (or not-so-egregious) materialism. Just as women should refrain from obsessive attention to their outward appearance, donning elaborate hairstyles and jewelry (2:9–10), men should avoid undue preoccupation with “body-sculpting” in modern-day fitness centers.³⁹⁴

4:9–10 At this juncture Paul refers to yet another “trustworthy saying” (the third in this letter; cf. 1:15; 3:1; §2.6). As in 1:15, he adds, “deserves full acceptance” (, only found in 1 Timothy in the NT) as well as the further comment, “For this reason we labor and strive.” There is some debate as to whether the saying is found in v. 8 or v. 10. While the latter is possible (v. 10 has greater theological weight), more likely the saying is found in v. 8: “The training of the body has a limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.”

Verse 8 is favored by the majority of interpreters (though not translations) as the “trustworthy saying” mentioned in v. 9.³⁹⁵ The following reasons have led many to believe the phrase refers to v. 8: (1) v. 8 has the form of a proverbial saying; (2) and are rare

Summary:

Deacons assist those who give oversight to the church by helping meet a variety of needs in the local church.

3:2 The overseer/elder/pastor bears ultimate responsibility for the church before God (cf. v. 15; 5:17). According to the instructions in the previous chapter on women's roles (esp. v. 12), the office is limited to men. This is confirmed by the "husband of one wife" requirement in the present verse.³⁵⁰ What are the qualifications for this honorable office?³⁵¹ First, an overseer must be "above reproach" (; cf. Titus 1:7;).³⁵² Just like Daniel in OT times (see Dan 6:4), this person must be a man of integrity against whom no legitimate charge can be brought. He must be a mature individual with solid, proven character. This, in fact, is Paul's desire for all believers (5:7), not just church leaders, and applies to Timothy as well (6:14). In addition, "above reproach" may serve as an umbrella term for all the following characteristics.

The requirement of being, literally, a "one-wife-type-of--husband" resembles that of the Roman *univira* (a "one-husband-type-of-wife").³⁵³ This term conveying marital fidelity initially applied to wives during their lifetime and later became an epithet husbands gave to their wives after they died, as is attested by numerous extant tombstone inscriptions. The understanding that this requirement was aimed at excluding polygamists is implausible because polygamy wasn't a widespread practice in the Greco-Roman world of the time. More likely Paul here excludes men with one or several concubines.³⁵⁴ This common practice conflicted with biblical morals since sexual union with a concubine constituted adultery and amounted to polygamy. Most likely, therefore, "husband of one wife" represents an idiom for marital faithfulness (e.g., NIV: "faithful to his wife").³⁵⁵

This is further suggested by the parallel wording in 5:9, where a widow must have been "the wife of one husband" in order to be eligible for church support and where the equivalent phrase is used (cf. 1 Cor 7:2–5). In that case the issue is not polyandry (simultaneous marriage to multiple husbands) because Paul addresses women bereft of their husbands. It's inconceivable that Paul would first have encouraged younger widows to remarry only to disqualify them later because they had been married more than once. The same requirement obtains also for deacons (v. 12). It is in keeping with the prohibition of adultery in the Decalogue (Exod 20:14; Deut 5:18). Marital fidelity was held in high regard in the Greco-Roman world; thus this quality would commend such men to people in their pagan surroundings.³⁵⁶

If this is correct, divorced (and remarried) men wouldn't necessarily be disqualified from serving as overseers or deacons, especially if the divorce was biblically legitimate (i.e., in cases of a wife's marital unfaithfulness, Matt 19:9; remarriage owing to the death of a spouse, Rom 7:2–3; or desertion by an unbelieving wife, 1 Cor 7:15–16). This might also be the case if the divorce occurred in the distant past (especially if the man wasn't a believer at the time) and if his present pattern and proven track record indicate marital faithfulness. Nevertheless, in conjunction with the requirement that overseers be "above reproach" (which includes community reputation), it may often be preferable not to appoint divorcees to the role of overseer, especially when other qualified candidates are available that have not been divorced.³⁵⁷

The requirement does also not apply to unmarried candidates, who would be required to practice sexual abstinence. In light of Paul's positive stance toward the gift of celibacy elsewhere in his writings, it's safe to assume that a man's singleness wouldn't have disqualified him from service as overseer/elder.³⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the "husband of one wife" requirement assumes that a candidate for church office will normally be married. This, incidentally, ran counter to the teaching propagated by the false teachers in Timothy's day who were known to "forbid marriage" (4:3). In light of these considerations, the present statement "does not mean that bishops had to be married; it just commends marriage as something that is not at all inconsistent with the episcopal [pastoral] office."³⁵⁹

The overseer/elder must be self-controlled (), which is required also of female deacons (v. 11; see below) and older women (Titus 2:2). He must also be sensible (NASB, "prudent"; ; cf. Titus 1:8), a quality likewise desired in older and younger men (Titus 2:2, 6), older and younger women (Titus 2:5; cf. 1 Tim 2:9, 15), and believers in general (Titus 2:12). He must be respectable (; cf. 1 Tim 2:9; vv. 4, 8), hospitable (; cf. Titus 1:8; 1 Pet 4:9),³⁶⁰ and able to teach (; 2 Tim 2:24; contrast 1 Tim 2:12). Notably, "able to teach" is not included among the qualifications for deacons, which indicates that teaching—and the commensurate authority—is a special prerogative and responsibility of overseers (cf. Titus 1:9; 2:1–10).

3:3 To the seven positive traits of maturity listed in the previous verse, Paul adds four negative ones: (1) not an excessive drinker (; cf. Titus 1:7; see also 1 Tim 3:8; Titus 2:3), a reference to moderation rather than total abstinence;³⁶¹ (2) not a bully (i.e., violent; ; cf. Titus 1:7) but gentle (; cf. Phil 4:5; Titus 3:2; Jas 3:17; 1 Pet 2:18); (3) not quarrelsome (; cf. Titus 3:2); (4) not greedy (lit., "a lover of money," ; cf. Heb 13:5; contrast 1 Tim 6:10; Luke 16:14; 2 Tim 3:2). By contrast the false teachers who are depicted by Paul as argumentative and motivated by financial gain exhibit at least some of these traits (6:4–5, 9–10). The compensation for overseers would have been modest, hence the need for contentment. Also, their position involves financial oversight, which requires integrity. For these reasons the possession of any of these negative characteristics—all of which apply to every believer, not just church leaders (cf., e.g., Eph 5:18; Titus 3:2; 1 Tim 6:10)—would disqualify someone from serving as overseer.

3:4–7 After listing these eleven traits in brief, Paul discusses three further qualifications in greater detail. The candidate for overseer must (1) manage his own household competently (v. 4; , "be in charge of, preside over"; cf. Rom 12:8; 1 Thess 5:12; 1 Tim 3:12; 5:17)³⁶² and have his children under control with all dignity (cf. Titus 1:6); (2) not be a new convert; and (3) have a good reputation with those outside the church.

likely, that in this section Paul is combating an elitism and exclusivism espoused by the false teachers.²⁸³ It's also possible that vv. 5–6 correspond to vv. 3–4 in the following manner:

³ It pleases God our Savior,	⁵ For there is one God
^{4a} who wants everyone to be saved	and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, ^{6a} who gave himself as a ransom for all,
^{4b} and to come to the knowledge of the truth.	^{6b} a testimony at the proper time*
*See J. D. Quinn, “Jesus as Savior and Only Mediator (1 Tim 2:3–6): Linguistic Paradigms of Acculturation,” in <i>Fede e cultura alla luce della Bibbia. Atti della Sessione plenaria 1979 della Pontificia Commissione Biblica</i> (Torino: Editricelle Di Ci, 1981), 253, who calls vv. 5–6 a “confession-acclamation” and asserts that the “acclamation form is already a signal that behind the previous, carefully framed theological principle on the unqualified universality of the divine offer of salvation, there stood Christian public worship, in which a believing community spontaneously responded in awe at and gratitude for the stupendous benefits that they had experienced from the regal, divine power at work in their midst” (ibid., with reference to Spicq and Murphy-O’Connor).	

First, Paul observes that praying for those in authority is good and pleases God.²⁸⁴ We can infer from v. 4 that such prayer includes requests for the salvation of these individuals, though in light of the purpose statement in v. 2, proper governance may be in view as well.²⁸⁵ This, in turn, is part of the overarching mission theme in the LTT.²⁸⁶ As in the opening verse, God is identified as “our Savior” (“our Savior-God”). In the following verses Paul elaborates on his rationale for praying for the governing authorities (assumed to be unbelievers).

2:4 “Everyone” (more literally, “all people,” , so the ESV, NIV), fronted in the original Greek for emphasis, suggests that the scope of God’s saving activity is universal, including pagans as well as Jews (cf. Acts 22:15; Rom 11:32; 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:28; Col 3:11).²⁸⁷ Salvation is here equated with coming to a full knowledge of the truth (, 2 Tim 2:25; 3:7; Titus 1:1; cf. Heb 10:26; John 10:9; 14:6; 17:3); elsewhere the church is called “the pillar and foundation of the truth” (3:15), and “truth” is contrasted with false teaching (4:3; 2 Tim 3:7–8; 4:3–4). Such salvation requires repentance (2 Tim 2:25). The false teachers and their followers, however, are “always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:7), while Paul’s calling centers on building up “the faith of God’s elect and their knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness” (Titus 1:1).

2:5–6 Paul continues to elaborate on his command in vv. 1–2 by specifying the nature of the gospel that is to be proclaimed in terms of monotheism, unique sacrificial intercession, and mission.²⁸⁸ The following affirmation may draw on a Christian confession (“a testimony at the proper time”).²⁸⁹ The existence of one God (monotheism) was affirmed by Judaism (Deut 6:4),²⁹⁰ with important implications for Gentiles (cf. Acts 17:23–31; Rom 1:12; 3:30; 1 Cor 8:6; Gal 3:20).²⁹¹ However, first-century Jews frequently defined their salvation-historical privilege in narrow, nationalistic terms.²⁹² This ethnic presumption was strongly opposed by Jesus and the early church, including Peter (1 Pet 2:4–10, though not without initial struggles: cf. Acts 10:9–23; Gal 2:11–14), Paul (Romans, Galatians, Eph 2:11–22), and John (e.g., 10:16; 11:51–52; 12:32).²⁹³ Since there are other monotheistic religions besides Christianity, Paul goes on to emphasize that there is only one mediator between God and humanity, “the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all.”

Just as there’s only one God, there’s also only one mediator () between God and the human race, “the man Christ Jesus” (cf. John 14:6b).²⁹⁴ The letter to the Hebrews presents Jesus as the mediator of a new covenant that replaces the old covenant mediated by Moses (Heb 8:6; 9:15; 12:24; cf. Gal 3:19–20).²⁹⁵ Jesus supersedes all other intermediaries, whether angels (Col 2:18; Heb 2:2), Moses (Gal 3:19; Heb 3:1–6), Jewish high priests (Heb 8:6, 9, 15; 9:15; 12:24), or other religious figures.²⁹⁶ The “mediator” concept is further described as a “ransom” (, see in Rom 3:24; 8:23; 1 Cor 1:30; Col 1:14) paid through Jesus’s death (cf. Titus 2:14;).²⁹⁷ This presupposes universal human sinfulness (cf. Romans 1–3). The reference to Jesus’s humanity stresses both his identification with humankind and his status as the man/human *par excellence* who alone was able to provide redemption from sin (see Paul’s Adam/Christ theology in Rom 5:12–21; 1 Cor 15:21–22, 45–49).

The expression echoes Jesus’s statement that he would give his life as a ransom “for many” (Semitic style; cf. Matt 20:28 = Mark 10:45;).²⁹⁸ Here the ransom is said to be “for all” (; cf. 2 Cor 5:14–15; Titus 2:11; 1 John 2:2). Jesus gave his life in exchange for () and on behalf of others (; cf. vv. 1 and 2).²⁹⁹ “Ransom” involves payment and deliverance from bondage (cf. Titus 2:14).³⁰⁰ Jesus died so that others might live—including some of those who hold positions of authority. “A testimony *at the proper time*”³⁰¹ in the

for overseers/elders, Timothy must be “blameless” (cf. 3:2). Paul closes with a reference to the Second Coming, the “appearing” (; cf. 2 Thess 2:8; 2 Tim 4:1, 8; Titus 2:13; §6.6) of our Lord Jesus Christ (more common NT designations are and , neither of which occurs in the LTT), assuring Timothy that God will bring it about in his own time (as in 2:6 and 4:1, the Greek is plural, ; cf. Titus 1:3). The reference is to God’s sovereignty over all salvation history, including that still future.

In a great sevenfold closing doxology (cf. 1:17), Paul speaks of God (§3.1) as “the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.” To this God, Paul says in concluding the doxology, “be honor and eternal power. Amen.” It’s possible that Paul adapts this from Hellenistic synagogue worship. “Sovereign” renders the rare term , found elsewhere in the NT only in Luke’s writings where it refers to human rulers (Luke 1:52; Acts 8:27). Slightly more common is (Luke 2:29; Acts 4:24; 2 Pet 2:1; Jude 4; Rev 6:10; see esp. Jude 4, where Jesus Christ is called “our only Master and Lord”; see at 1 Tim 6:2a; much more frequent is , “Lord”). Paul calls that Sovereign both “blessed” () and the “only” Sovereign (), both common Jewish designations for God. “King of kings and Lord of lords” also has OT precedent (cf. esp. Deut 10:17: “God of gods and Lord of lords”; Ps 136:2–3), identifying God as the ultimate King and supreme Lord in characteristic Semitic style (similarly, Rev 19:16; cf. Rev 17:14).⁵⁰³ The combination of the terms “Sovereign,” “King,” and “Lord” emphatically affirms God’s sovereignty over human affairs (cf. Isa 40:12–31; Dan 4:35), adding -further weight and solemnity to Paul’s charge. God’s supreme authority dwarfs all competing claims by comparison.

In the second part of the doxology, Paul affirms that God alone is immortal (cf. 1 Cor 15:53–54) and lives in unapproachable light (cf. Ps 104:2: “He wraps himself in light as if it were a robe”). “Immortality” is a Greek concept corresponding to the notion of “eternal life” (see on v. 12 above). God alone is not subject to death (rather, death is subject to God). He is the giver of life (v. 13) and dwells in unapproachable (; only here in the NT) light, removed from human sight (cf. Exod 33:20; John 1:18), for he is too holy for sinful human beings to behold. This understanding of God as transcendent coheres with OT depictions of God (e.g., at Sinai). Paul fittingly closes the doxology with the words, “to him be honor [] and eternal power [; cf. 1 Pet 4:11; 5:11; Jude 25; Rev 1:6; 5:13]. Amen.”

6:17–19 Almost as an afterthought (note the preceding benediction), the apostle adds a closing word of advice (on , see v. 13 above) for “those who are rich in this present age” (cf. Titus 2:12; 2 Tim 4:10; §4.1.2.5).⁵⁰⁴ This may refer to people who don’t have to work for a living. Earlier in the chapter Paul spelled out the benefits of contentment in contrast to the opponents’ desire to get rich, warning against the “love of money” (vv. 6–10). Now Paul counsels Timothy directly on how to deal with wealthy individuals in the Ephesian church, of which there may have been quite a few (cf. 2:9; 5:13). At the same time, the congregation also included slaves (vv. 1–2), needy widows (5:3–16), and people from a variety of socioeconomic backgrounds.

Paul’s overriding concern is that such people not succumb to the sin of arrogance (; cf. Rom 11:20:) and place their ultimate confidence in material possessions. A person’s self-worth and identity don’t depend on external factors such as one’s wealth or lack thereof. In fact, wealth is a highly precarious object of trust (, “uncertainty,” occurs only here in the NT). As Paul wrote earlier: “We brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out” (v. 7). In the seven letters of Revelation, the risen Jesus excoriates the church of Laodicea for claiming to be rich while being in fact poor, spiritually speaking (Rev 3:17–18).

Positively, well-to-do believers should put their hope in God, who richly (, a wordplay) provides us (, the entire Christian community, cf. 2 Tim 1:7, 9, 14) with all things for our enjoyment (; with a negative connotation in Heb 11:25). Gratitude rather than conceit is the proper response to material blessing from the Lord. What’s more, people who have been blessed with material possessions should recognize their special obligation to share their wealth with the needy. They are to “do what is good” (; cf. Acts 14:17; the synonym occurs in Luke’s and Peter’s writings and in 3 John 11) and to be “rich in good works” (another wordplay), generous (), and willing to share (). For no one can ever outgive God (Titus 3:6).⁵⁰⁵

Rather than putting their confidence in the uncertainty of riches, the rich will thus store up treasure for themselves (, an intensification of ; only here in the NT) that will serve as a good foundation (; rare in ancient literature) for the age to come (contrasted with the present age in v. 17), so that they may take hold of “what is truly life” (cf. 5:3, 5, 16: “real widow”). This admonition mirrors Paul’s earlier exhortation to Timothy to “take hold of eternal life to which you were called” (v. 12). Once again Paul’s advice echoes that of Jesus, who told his followers to store up treasures in heaven rather than on earth (Matt 6:19–21; cf. Luke 6:35; 12:21, 33–34; 16:9). As Paul wrote to the well-off Corinthians, Jesus serves as the ultimate example: he was rich but became poor so that we might become rich through his poverty (2 Cor 8:9; cf. 4:8).

Paul, himself on occasion the beneficiary of wealthy patrons (e.g., Rom 16:1–2; Phlm 1–2, 5–7, 22) and no ascetic, doesn’t disparage wealth as such. Yet he’s concerned for the spiritual condition of the rich. Like Jesus he knows it’s more difficult for those who have an abundance of material possessions to place their trust fully in God. He therefore counsels rich believers to turn such a potential spiritual liability into an advantage by sharing some of what they have with those who are in need. Similar to needy widows, the rich should place their hope exclusively in God (5:5; 6:17).

In terms of biblical theology, the *inclusio* in 6:3 involving the use of the rare word (“teach false doctrine”; cf. 1:3) brings the letter back to the original concern, that of subversion of the apostolic message and mission. Accordingly, the false teaching of the opponents is contrasted with the “healthy teaching” () of Paul and Timothy. Against the backdrop of the false teachers, the virtue of godliness is held up as paramount (the term occurs three times in 6:3, 5, and 6). As in 4:1–5, the activity of the false teachers, and the sphere of the apostolic mission, is set in an eschatological framework (§6) in at least three ways: (1) the reference to the “appearing of our Lord

spiritually “dead” (, from , not elsewhere in the Pauline corpus) even while they were still alive physically (; cf. 2 Tim 4:1; contrast Rom 8:10; John 11:25).⁴³⁸

5:7–8 Timothy shouldn’t keep these instructions to himself but pass them on to others in the congregation. In v. 8 Paul reiterates, in escalated form, the principle already enunciated in v. 4: whoever doesn’t provide for (; cf. Rom 12:17; 2 Cor 8:21) those in his own household, especially his immediate family (, “especially,” also occurs in v. 17 and 4:10), has denied the faith (; cf. 2 Tim 2:12–13; 3:5; Titus 1:16; 2:12)⁴³⁹ and is worse than an unbeliever.⁴⁴⁰ Even unbelievers, having God’s requirements written on their hearts, take care of their own.⁴⁴¹ Claiming to be religious while failing to keep God’s commandments is the epitome of hypocrisy. Paul’s way of thinking here is similar to James’s: a person’s faith must show itself in concrete deeds, or it’s not real faith at all (Jas 2:14–26; cf. Matt 7:21–23; 1 John 3:16–18).

5:9–10 In addition to these requirements, Paul establishes an age limit: to be eligible for church support (; only here in the NT), widows must be at least sixty years old, presumably because at that age remarriage was unlikely and/or because women under sixty were capable of working.⁴⁴² This would have kept the list reasonably short, especially since life expectancy was lower than it is today.⁴⁴³ Younger widows should remarry (vv. 11–15; Roman legislation stipulated this for women under fifty).⁴⁴⁴

Not only must such widows live in prayerful dependence on God (v. 5); they must have been faithful to their deceased husbands (literally, a “one-man woman,” , the female equivalent of , “faithful husband”; see on 3:2 above).⁴⁴⁵ Also, they must be known (; cf. Heb 11:2, 4–5, 39) for their good deeds (v. 10; see on 2:10 above), five of which are singled out explicitly (by way of five conditional clauses increasing successively in length):

1. having brought up children (; see on 2:15);
2. having shown hospitality (, only here in the NT, from - “stranger” and “banquet”; the more common NT word is or [Rom 12:13; Heb 13:2; 1 Pet 4:9; 1 Tim 3:2; Titus 1:8]), presumably opening her home to traveling believers, particularly teachers (3 John 5–8);
3. having washed the saints’ feet (an idiom for humble service based on Jesus’s literal washing of his disciples’ feet: John 13; cf. Phil 2:1–11);
4. having helped (, cf. v. 16) the afflicted (, denoting various kinds of distress; e.g., 2 Cor 1:6; 4:8; 7:5–6);
5. having devoted herself (; cf. v. 24; 1 Pet 2:21) to every good work, a catch-all phrase frequently used in Paul’s writings (2 Cor 9:8; Col 1:10; 2 Thess 2:17) including the LTT (2:10; 6:18; 2 Tim 2:21; 3:17; Titus 1:16; 3:1).

These requirements for widows, most of which pertain to the domestic sphere, are high, and in some respects even reminiscent of those for church leaders in chapter 3. No wonder some in Chrysostom’s day cried out, “Heavens, what women there are among the Christians!”⁴⁴⁶ By following these instructions, Timothy will make sure the church only aids widows who are worthy of financial assistance so that available funds are used only for those who lack other means of support.⁴⁴⁷

5:11–15 Paul’s comments here give the reason for his instructions in vv. 9–10 that no widow under sixty be put on the list. Apparently, enrolled widows were expected to take a pledge (cf. 3:6) of singleness,⁴⁴⁸ and Paul signifies that younger widows should not be bound by such a pledge, which they may not be able to keep and thus incur judgment (; cf. 3:6) when overcome by sensual desire (, “overcome,” is found only here in the NT; but see cognates in Rev 18:3, 7, 9).⁴⁴⁹

As Paul states elsewhere, it’s better to marry than to burn (1 Cor 7:9). What’s more, unmarried young widows may get into the habit⁴⁵⁰ of being idle (; cf. Titus 1:12) and going from house to house (; cf. Acts 19:13; Heb 11:37; Job 1:6–7 LXX), turning into gossips (; cf. 3 John 10; 4 Macc. 5:11) and busybodies (; note the possible wordplay /; cf. 2 Thess 3:11),⁴⁵¹ saying things they shouldn’t (as the false teachers do; cf. Titus 1:11).

Paul’s advice to younger widows (, expressing his apostolic will; cf. 2:8) is therefore to remarry (, have children (, manage their households (—elaborating on what is referred to as “childbearing” in 2:15 (where the cognate is used)—and to give the enemy (, lit. “the one who opposes”; cf. 1:10; Luke 13:17; 21:15; 1 Cor 16:9; Phil 1:28; 2 Thess 2:4) no opportunity for slander (; cf. 2 Cor 5:12; Paul’s four pieces of advice are framed in phrases of increasing length; cf. vv. 9–10). Paul ominously hints that some have already turned away to follow Satan (, making explicit what is only intimated in 2:15; cf. 1:20), namely false teaching. Certainly the last thing the church would want to do is support indirectly the propagation of false teaching, as would be the case if they supported widows who spread the opponents’ heresy.⁴⁵²

In summary, rather than failing to do what they should do (good works, prayer) and being what they should not be (idle, gossips, busybodies), young widows should devote themselves to their family, their domestic duties, and their divine calling.

5:16 Paul concludes his instructions regarding widows with an exhortation to believing women (daughters, daughters-in-law) to care for widows in their family in order to relieve the church (cf. vv. 4, 7–8).⁴⁵³ In this way the church can help those widows who are “real widows,” that is, those who meet the qualifications set forth by the apostle. Paul’s discussion of this issue provides a helpful case study on how to deal with a practical matter in the church.

Bridge

The present passage provides a case study of the church’s exemplary diligence in caring for those in their midst who truly need the

this reason, so that in me, the worst of them, Christ Jesus might demonstrate his extraordinary patience as an example to those who would believe in him for eternal life. ¹⁷ Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

Relation to Surrounding Context

The thanksgiving that was omitted following the letter opening (vv. 1–2) now ensues following the statement and elaboration on the letter's purpose (vv. 3–11). In fact, vv. 12–17 represent an aside coming on the heels of the earlier aside in vv. 8–11, with vv. 18–20 then resuming the argument of vv. 3–7. Following the first aside on the false teachers' misuse of the law, this second aside contrasts Paul with the false teachers as a model of a sinner saved by grace. This exhibits Paul's humility in awareness that only God's grace separates him from his opponents.

Structure

Paul's testimony is framed in terms of a thanksgiving (v. 12). As indicated by em-dashes in the CSB, vv. 13–15 constitute a parenthesis containing a threefold confession of Paul's past as a blasphemer, persecutor, and arrogant man, as well as an acknowledgment of God's grace toward the apostle illustrated by a "trustworthy saying." "But I received mercy" at the beginning of v. 16 then resumes the identical assertion in v. 13, elaborating on the purpose of God's mercy toward Paul: the demonstration of his patience toward those who believe and are saved. Verse 17 fittingly concludes the thanksgiving/testimony with a benediction/"amen."

1:12–14 Paul's testimony makes clear that only God's grace set Paul apart from his opponents. In contrast to Paul's second letter to Timothy where the thanksgiving section centers on Timothy (2 Tim 1:3–7), the focus of Paul's thanksgiving in the present letter is on himself as a model of a sinner saved by grace. The reason for this may be that Paul's first letter to Timothy is of a more public nature while 2 Timothy is more personal. Here, therefore, Paul holds himself up as the prototypical forgiven sinner in contrast to the false teachers while in 2 Timothy he assures Timothy of his prayers and affection as his life draws to a close.

In turning from the topic of law in vv. 8–11 to his own experience,²³⁹ Paul maintains that what the law was unable to do, Christ did: through grace and by faith, Paul was not only shown mercy, patience, and forgiveness, but he was also put into service. The language of this intensely personal section bears an uncanny Pauline imprint. In the present case the apostle's testimony is framed by an epistolary thanksgiving, with (see also 2 Tim 1:3; Luke 17:9; Heb 12:28) taking the place of the more familiar (Rom 1:4; 1 Cor 1:4, 14; 14:18; Eph 1:16; Phil 1:3; Col 1:3, 12; 3:17).²⁴⁰

More commonly Paul directs his thanks to *God*; here the apostle gives thanks to *Christ*, "who has strengthened" him (, v. 12; cf. 2 Tim 2:1; 4:17; Eph 6:10; Phil 4:13:). The expression "faithful" or "trustworthy" is part of an extended wordplay in the Greek: Paul was *entrusted* () with the gospel (v. 11) and was considered *trustworthy* (; v. 12); even though he acted in *unbelief* (; v. 13), God's grace came to him with *faith* (; v. 14; see also vv. 15–16, 19; cf. 1 Cor 4:2; 7:25); and the saying that Jesus came into the world to save sinners is *trustworthy* (; v. 15). The term "appointing me to the ministry" () in v. 12 is the same as in 2 Cor 5:19.

As in Gal 1:13–16 and 1 Cor 15:9–10, Paul's perspective on his conversion and call to ministry as acts of divine grace elicits a vivid memory of the past. The reference to Paul's appointment to service—possibly in contrast with the false teachers who merely *want* to be teachers of the law—is reminiscent of his encounter with the risen Christ on the road to Damascus (Acts 9; 22; 26). There Jesus confronted Paul—who had zealously persecuted the church—with the question, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" (Acts 9:4). Later Paul frequently recalled the way in which the appearance of the risen Christ had changed the direction of his life.

Describing himself in triadic negative fashion, Paul states that he was formerly (1) a blasphemer (): he had denied that Jesus was the Messiah and thus rejected the salvation-historical purposes of God (Acts 6:11; cf. 1:20; 6:1; Titus 2:5); he was (2) a persecutor (; cf. 1 Cor 15:9; Gal 1:13, 23; Phil 3:6); and (3) an arrogant man (; cf. Rom 1:30).²⁴¹ Unlike his renowned and widely respected teacher, Gamaliel I, who had counseled moderation (cf. Acts 5:34–39), Paul (then Saul) mercilessly tracked down Christians as far as Damascus to the north (Acts 8:3; 9:1–2; though God showed him mercy; cf. 1 Cor 7:25; 2 Cor 4:1). This is why Paul regarded himself "the least of the apostles" (1 Cor 15:9) who was not even worthy of being called an apostle.

Nevertheless, God, in Jesus Christ, extended to Paul overflowing²⁴² grace (; NASB: "more than abundant"; cf. Rom 5:20; 6:1), faith(fulness?), and love.²⁴³ The triad "grace, faith, and love" in v. 14²⁴⁴ offsets the threefold description of Paul as a former blasphemer, persecutor, and arrogant man in v. 13. Not only was Paul forgiven; he was strengthened (v. 12; cf. Phil 4:13), considered faithful (cf. 1 Cor 7:25), and appointed to the ministry. It is difficult to imagine anyone forging this moving and genuine testimony (e.g. Gal 1:11–24; Phil 3:1–11), just as it is hard to see how a later "admirer" of Paul could have called him "the worst of [sinners]" (vv. 15–16).

When stating that he was shown mercy because he acted out of ignorance in unbelief, Paul draws on the OT distinction between unwitting and deliberate sin (Num 15:22–31; Lev 4:13; 5:18; 22:14; cf. Acts 3:17; 13:27; 17:30; Heb 9:7). In Romans the apostle described the Jewish rejection of Jesus in similar terms (3:3; 11:20, 23). The false teachers, by contrast, are said to have deliberately rejected the faith (v. 19; 2 Tim 2:17–18; cf. 1 Tim 1:5–6; 6:21), which places them in a category different from Paul (though, as mentioned, not beyond the pale of forgiveness).²⁴⁵

Moving on to 1:15–16, it's interesting to note the following broad parallelism between vv. 12–14 and vv. 15–16:²⁴⁶

set of biblical convictions: (1) love is at the heart of God's commands (Matt 22:37–40; Rom 13:8–10; Gal 5:14); (2) purity of heart is more important than external acts of obedience (Matt 5:8; Mark 7:15 par.; Rom 14:17; cf. 2 Tim 2:22; Pss 24:4; 51:10); and (3) heartfelt sincerity is essential for pleasing God (Mark 7:6–7).²⁰⁶ Thus, “Timothy cannot achieve the of his commission apart from the proclamation of the apostolic gospel, which includes a call for repentance and faith.”²⁰⁷ By contrast, the false teachers' motives were impure (1 Tim 6:9–10), their consciences defiled (v. 19; 4:2), their faith shipwrecked (v. 19; but see commentary below), and their work resulted in division, destruction, and doom (6:9–10).

1:6 Those (the plural indefinite marks a shift back to the opponents) who have “departed” (; cf. 2 Tim 2:18) from the faith and “turned aside” (, elsewhere only in 5:15; 6:20; 2 Tim 4:4; Heb 12:13)²⁰⁸ to “fruitless discussion”²⁰⁹ (, a NT *hapax legomenon*; cf. 1 Tim 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16; Titus 1:10) are people who engage in “contradictions from what is falsely called knowledge” (1 Tim 6:20). Like Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus, these individuals “have departed from the truth, saying that the resurrection has already taken place” (2 Tim 2:17–18; cf. 1 Tim 1:19–20).²¹⁰

The characterization of the false teachers as those who stray from the right, straight path is predicated upon the biblical understanding of the righteous man who conducts his life in integrity and honor without straying to the right or to the left (e.g., Prov 4:18, 25–27). Unlike Timothy, who is to pursue the goal of love (v. 5), these false teachers miss the mark. In the absence of true conversion, they're incapable of expressing love that arises out of genuine faith. Their rejection of the gospel (vv. 3–4) has rendered them incapable of compelling gospel proclamation and reduced them to empty speech entirely lacking in transformative power.²¹¹

1:7–11 Verse 7 describes the false teachers in some more detail. The verses that follow (vv. 8–11) represent an aside, followed by another aside (vv. 12–17), while vv. 18–20 resume the argument of vv. 3–7. The first aside elaborates on the false teachers' misuse of the law; it's not that they use the *wrong* text but that they *misuse* the *right* text.²¹² The second aside presents Paul as the model of a sinner saved by grace in contrast to the false teachers. This shows that Paul isn't exalting himself above his opponents because he's superior to them. It's solely his acceptance of God's gracious offer of salvation and forgiveness in Christ that sets him apart from the false teachers.

In v. 7 Paul challenges the claims exerted by the would-be “teachers of the law” ().²¹³ (While the term “teachers of the law” and the use of the OT Scriptures may suggest the teachers were Jewish, this does not necessarily follow.²¹⁴) In any case, despite their confident demeanor (; cf. Titus 3:8), the opponents understand neither the law's true purpose (v. 8) nor its intended audience (vv. 9–10).²¹⁵ In fact, their use of the law as a standard for Christian living is incompatible with sound doctrine that conforms to the “gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God” (v. 11; cf. 6:3; 2 Tim 1:13; 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1).

The phrase introducing the assertion, “But we know” (, in v. 8 serves “to introduce a statement which the writer can assume will be generally acceptable to those whom he is addressing or whom he has in mind.”²¹⁶ Conversely, the false teachers are out of step with this broad Christian consensus.²¹⁷ With this Paul turns to the opponents' misuse of the law (, i.e., the Mosaic law; cf., e.g., Rom 5:20; Gal 3:19).²¹⁸ As Paul observes, the law () itself is good () if used properly (, “lawfully”; cf. 2 Tim 2:5: “according to the rules”), that is, in keeping with its God-intended purposes,²¹⁹ a wordplay in the original Greek.

What this means is that the law is not self-interpreting; rather, it needs to be rightly understood and applied. What is at issue, therefore, is not the intrinsic value of the law itself but its results in the lives of those to whom it is addressed (or not addressed). As Paul proceeds to clarify, then, contrary to what the opponents taught, the law isn't actually addressed to “the righteous” (i.e., “right-living” believers;²²⁰ cf. vv. 15–16) but rather aims to convict the unrighteous (to restrain sin?; cf. Gal 3:23–4:7). But if the law was given to restrain sin, and believers have been set free from sin, in their case the law's purpose has already been fulfilled.²²¹

What follows is a catalog of vices or sinners, listed here in six groups of two or three each (with groups four–six echoing commandments five–nine, see below), plus a final overall phrase:²²²

- lawless (; cf. Luke 22:37 = Isa 53:12; Acts 2:23) and rebellious (, “unsubdued”; Titus 1:6, 10; cf. Heb 2:8): people behaving as if there were no law,²²³ i.e., insubordinate people refusing to be subject to a higher authority (subordination is stressed in 2:11; 3:4; Titus 2:5, 9; 3:1);
- ungodly (; Rom 4:5; 5:6; 1 Pet 4:18; 2 Pet 2:5–6; 3:7; Jude 4, 15) and sinful (; Rom 5:8, 19; Heb 7:26; 12:3; Jas 4:8; 5:20; 1 Pet 4:18; Jude 15), i.e., unsaved and separated from God;
- unholy (; 2 Tim 3:2; cf. 2 Macc 7:34; 8:32; 3 Macc 2:2; 5:8; 4 Macc 12:11; Wis 12:4) and irreverent (; 4:7; 6:20; 2 Tim 2:16; Heb 12:16); profane as opposed to sacred, devoid of holiness (cf. Lev 10:10 LXX);²²⁴
- those who kill their fathers and mothers (,), murderers (): all three words are NT *hapax legomena*,²²⁵ echoing the **fifth and sixth commandments**;
- sexually immoral/adulterers (; 1 Cor 5:9–11; 6:9; Eph 5:5; Heb 12:16; 13:4; Rev 21:8; 22:15) and homosexuals (NASB, CSB; ; first time in Greek in 1 Cor 6:9; cf. Rom 1:27): echoing the **seventh commandment**;
- slave traders (CSB) or kidnappers (NASB;), liars (; John 8:44, 55; Rom 3:4; Titus 1:12; 1 John 1:10; 2:4, 22; 4:20; 5:10; cf. Lev 19:11 LXX), perjurers (; cf. Zech 5:3 LXX; a person swearing an oath and subsequently breaking it);²²⁶ echoing the **eighth and ninth commandments**; and, as an overall catchphrase,

• whatever else is contrary (, “to be opposed”) to the sound teaching (; 2 Tim 4:3; Titus 1:9; 2:1; for similar summary statements, see Rom 13:9; Gal 5:21), an unmistakable way of associating the opponents with the vices enumerated in this list.²²⁷

Within these pairs or expressions of three, the respective offenses are roughly the same. For example, both “sexually immoral/adulterers” and “homosexuals” refer to sexual sin. It appears that Paul’s list, after three initial general pairs (conveying the notion of godlessness, which may in some general sense be related to the first four commandments), follows the second half of the Ten Commandments (Exod 20:12–16; Deut 5:16–21), specifically numbers five to nine. Paul employs strong language, perhaps to highlight the degree of evil prevalent in the pagan world and the need for the law on the part of those who have not heard the gospel (see Rom 1:21–32). Most expressions are self-explanatory, but two call for special comment.

The first expression requiring discussion is “homosexuals” (; cf. 1 Cor 6:9). The meaning of the word is reflected in its etymology, which is literally “ones who lie or sleep with men,” that is, those who engage in homosexual acts.²²⁸ The term, a new coinage, probably echoes the prohibition of homosexuality in the Levitical code (Lev 18:22; 20:13 LXX).²²⁹ Some have argued that the term is restricted to male prostitution or pederasty²³⁰ or refers merely to homosexual acts, not to “celibate” homosexual relationships (i.e., refraining from sexual intercourse).²³¹ The NT teaching, they maintain, pertains only to the negative dehumanizing pattern of homosexuality prevalent in first-century Hellenistic culture and doesn’t apply to consensual nonexploitative homosexual relationships today.

However, is a broad term that is not limited to specific instances of homosexual activity such as male prostitution or pederasty.²³² The OT equivalent, likewise, “lying with a male,” is all encompassing and relates to “every kind of male-male intercourse.”²³³ In fact, the Hebrew Scriptures prohibit every type of homosexual intercourse (including consensual sex), not merely male prostitution or intercourse with youths. Also, while Paul focuses on homosexual acts, he would hardly have considered “celibate” homosexual relationships legitimate, since this would have exchanged a man’s “natural” function for an “unnatural” one (Rom 1:26–27; cf. 1 Cor 6:9–10).²³⁴

Second, the term “slave trader” or “kidnapper” (; cf. 2 Cor 11:26) presupposes the common first-century practice of slave trading. It’s possible that Paul uses the term in a derivative sense here, referring to the false teachers who “kidnapped” members of God’s household by deceiving them through an illegitimate use of the Mosaic law.²³⁵ In fact, the expression served as a stereotype for contempt of one’s opponents in the ancient world.²³⁶ There’s also evidence that Jewish rabbis interpreted the seventh commandment with reference to slave trading.²³⁷

The vice list in vv. 9–10 leads to Paul’s discussion of the “grace of our Lord” Christ Jesus who “came into the world to save sinners” (vv. 14–15). Paul himself had previously been among those whose actions were condemned by the law, but now he has been granted mercy. This holds out hope for the false teachers if they repent and stop their misuse of the Mosaic law. In v. 11, “gospel concerning the glory” renders the phrase “gospel of glory,” reflecting Semitic style (cf. Titus 2:13; Eph 1:17). The characterization of God as “blessed” in v. 11 recurs in 6:15.²³⁸ The phrase “was entrusted” is found in various other Pauline letters as well (Rom 3:2; Gal 2:7; 2 Thess 1:10) and echoes earlier references to his stewardship from God (cf. vv. 1, 14). In the face of errant teaching, the stewardship takes on added solemnity, significance, and urgency.

Against the backdrop of references to “God’s plan, which operates by faith” (v. 4) and the “gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me” (v. 11), this section (vv. 3–11) has introduced the occasion for the writing of the letter: the threat of the false teachers (see esp. v. 3). The reference to “faith” in v. 4 and the sustained discussion of the role of the law later in the passage (vv. 7–10) suggest that the bone of contention was the opponents’ misunderstanding and misrepresentation of the gospel message, similar to the way in which the Judaizers in Galatians drew Paul’s ire and dismay (cf. Gal 1:6). Later Paul will set the emergence of the false teachers within the purview of the last days (1 Tim 4:1–5) and use them as a foil for his exhortation of Timothy to pursue godly Christian virtues (1 Tim 4:6–16).

Bridge

In this passage, and in fact the entire letter, Paul exhibits great zeal for keeping the church free from error, and in particular legalism that threatens the purity of the Christian gospel of salvation by grace through faith apart from works. For the false teachers in his day, scrupulous attention to the minutiae of the Jewish law was essential and salvation apart from obligation to the observance of a plethora of rules unthinkable. But the Christian gospel is one of sheer grace because it is based on what Christ has done on the cross, unaided by any of us. For this reason grateful acceptance of Jesus’s substitutionary sacrifice, not self-effort, is the proper response. Even in our day where the gospel is subverted in perhaps more subtle ways, we must be vigilant to preserve the notion that salvation is by grace alone and firmly resist the intrusion of any contradictory message into the church.

B. Paul’s Testimony (1:12–17)

¹² I give thanks to Christ Jesus our Lord who has strengthened me, because he considered me faithful, appointing me to the ministry —
¹³ even though I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor, and an arrogant man. But I received mercy because I acted out of ignorance in unbelief, ¹⁴ and the grace of our Lord overflowed, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵ This saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance: “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners” — and I am the worst of them. ¹⁶ But I received mercy for

to Satan a man in the church at Corinth who had his father's wife (presumably his stepmother: 1 Cor 5:5; cf. Rom 1:24, 26, 28). Most likely this refers not to final condemnation but to the last resort of allowing people to experience Satan's wrath so they may be purged from their sin (cf. 2 Tim 2:25–26).²⁶⁶ The passage is reminiscent of the disciplinary procedure stipulated by Jesus, that if a person “doesn't pay attention even to the church, let him be like a Gentile and a tax collector to you” (Matt 18:15–17; cf. Titus 3:10–11).

The juxtaposition between Timothy and Paul in v. 18 and the false teachers and Satan in v. 20 presents the axis of good and evil pervading this letter and the LTT in their entirety. In this way the apostolic mission, including Paul's apostolic delegates, are shown to be opposed by none other than Satan—who uses the false teachers as his instruments—as a sign that the end times have already dawned. This casts the shadow of an eschatological framework on the remainder of the letter, including its ecclesiology, which will unfold in chapters 2–3 on the basis of the characterization of the “church of the living God” as God's household and as a pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15).

Bridge

Paul here invokes the strong bond Timothy shares with him as his spiritual “son” in the faith, urging him to “fight the good fight, having faith and a good conscience” (v. 19). In a potent metaphor in his own day, Paul contrasts Timothy with the false teachers who have “shipwrecked their faith” (v. 19). This is a form of spiritual bankruptcy; whatever faith there was has now vanished. We, too, should sustain a strong spiritual bond with our mentors in the faith and “fight the good fight” armed with faith and a good conscience.

III. Congregational Matters: Promoting Unity and Order in God's Household, Qualifications for Church Officers (2:1–3:16)

The main purpose for the present section is given in 3:14–15: “I write these things to you, hoping to come to you soon. But if I should be delayed, I have written so that you will know how people ought to act in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth.” The solemn descriptive terms used for the church in this passage speak decisively against the suggestion that these instructions are of value solely for first-century Ephesus. While the letter may be occasioned by the false teachers (1:3–4, 18–20), Paul's purpose for writing is broader; chapters 2 and 3 contain positive guidelines for church leadership, particularly a list of qualifications for church leaders, in an effort to promote unity and order in the church. Hermeneutical consistency demands that the injunctions regarding women in chapter 2 be awarded the same normative status as the stipulations in chapter 3.²⁶⁷

A. On Prayer (2:1–8)

¹ First of all, then, I urge that petitions, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for everyone, ² for kings and all those who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. ³ This is good, and it pleases God our Savior, ⁴ who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

⁵ For there is one God and one mediator between God and humanity, the man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave himself as a ransom for all, a testimony at the proper time.

⁷ For this I was appointed a herald, an apostle (I am telling the truth; I am not lying), and a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth.

⁸ Therefore, I want the men in every place to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or argument.

Relation to Surrounding Context

Paul's preceding remarks in chapter 1 state the occasion for writing and contain Paul's testimony as a sinner saved by grace called to proclaim the gospel. Both Paul and Timothy his protégé are set against the false teachers, self-styled teachers of the Jewish law who have shipwrecked the faith. In this new section, which extends all the way to 3:16, Paul instructs Timothy as to proper conduct in God's household of faith. This includes prayer for the governing authorities and careful selection and appointment of church leaders. The emphasis on the universality of salvation may respond polemically to a (Jewish?) exclusivism on the part of the false teachers in the Ephesian church.

Structure

“First of all, then, I urge” in v. 1 marks a shift in focus from a concern with the false teachers to a series of more positive instructions for proper conduct in God's household, the church (cf. 3:14–15). Verses 1–2a state Paul's command (prayer for the governing authorities); v. 2b enunciates the desired result (believers being able to live a tranquil and quiet life); vv. 3–4 affirm the rightness of Paul's command in light of the fact that God wants everyone to be saved; vv. 5–6 follow up with a Christian confession; v. 7 states Paul's threefold calling as herald, apostle, and teacher; and v. 8, by way of possible *inclusio*, urges men to be unified in prayer.

2:1 With the transition “First of all, then, I urge,” Paul turns to the business at hand—that is, congregational prayer (vv. 1–8) and church leadership (2:9–3:13).²⁶⁸ It makes sense that Paul starts with this particular command, as political stability is vital for providing a conducive environment for proclaiming the gospel. This, in turn, points to the foundational nature of the mission theme in the LTT.²⁶⁹ The command to pray for those in authority, while often neglected today, is hardly limited to first-century Ephesus.²⁷⁰ If prayer for political rulers could be urged when an emperor as cruel as Nero was on the throne, it's difficult to imagine a scenario in which believers are exempt from this responsibility. Similar to Christians in the second half of the first century, believers today should take positive action toward those in authority, such as engaging in intercessory prayer for them, rather than taking an adversarial or antagonistic stance.

“continue to sin” may read too much into the Greek present tense here), are to be rebuked (; see 2 Tim 4:2; Titus 1:9, 13; 2:15; cf. Matt 18:15) publicly (lit., “before all”), that is, before the entire church (cf. Rom 12:17), as a warning to the rest (lit., “so that the rest may have fear” []; cf. Deut 13:11; Acts 5:5, 11; Titus 3:11). “The rest” probably refers to the rest of the elders, though a public warning will also serve as a deterrent for the church as a whole. A public rebuke is in keeping with the public office held by these elders and by the fact that their sin has public as well as private consequences. Some sins may not be so obvious but in due course will be exposed (v. 24).

5:21 Paul then issues a solemn charge (occurs with reference to Paul in Acts 18:5; 20:21, 23–24; 23:11; 28:23; cf. 1 Thess 4:6) “before God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels” (cf. 3:16; 1 Cor 4:9).⁴⁶² Timothy is to observe (; cf. 6:20; 2 Tim 1:12, 14; 4:15; see also Rom 2:26; Gal 6:13) these instructions (lit., “these things”) without partiality () or favoritism (; both words—close synonyms—occur only here in the NT, but the language is similar in 2 Tim 4:1).⁴⁶³

Paul’s solemn appeal serves as a reminder that God is the witness and judge of people’s actions. The divine judgment will take place through Christ following his return, in plain view of and as witnessed by God’s elect, nonfallen angels (note the OT concept of the heavenly court; e.g., Ps 82:1). Once again (see on 4:14), one detects parallels between Paul’s charge and Moses’s solemn exhortation of the people of Israel in the wilderness (Deut 30:19; cf. 4:26; 8:19 LXX). It remains a challenge for pastors to refrain from partiality in the case of elders or candidates for elder, especially when their influence in the church is due to wealth or prestige. What matters is conformity to the requirements laid down for church leaders, particularly maturity of character, not status or money.

5:22 Moving on to his third and final concern related to elders, Paul urges Timothy not to be hasty (; cf. 2 Tim 4:9) in appointing anyone as elder (lit., “laying on of hands”).⁴⁶⁴ As Paul mentioned earlier, appointing a new convert may render him vulnerable to Satan (3:6–7). Too many promising young leaders have fallen prey to the sins of arrogance, pride, and sexual immorality, forfeiting their high calling and bringing dishonor on the name of Christ. Finding mature, humble, godly men who were able to lead the church was doubtless a major challenge in the early days of the church and continues to be today.

Timothy, for his part, must not fall into the same trap. He ought not share in the sins of others (; cf. Rom 14:4; 15:20; 2 Cor 10:15–16) and must keep himself pure (; cf. Titus 2:5; 2 Cor 7:11; 11:2; Phil 4:8; 1 Pet 1:22; 3:2; Jas 4:8; 1 John 3:3; see on 4:12 and 5:2 above). As Barrett comments, “Hastily to ordain an elder who later would bring reproach upon the Church and have to be publicly exposed (v. 20) would be an act of shocking irresponsibility, and it would involve Timothy in the sins of the unworthy ordinand.”⁴⁶⁵

5:23–25 Paul’s fatherly concern for his “son in the faith” (1:2) shines through when the apostle counsels his protégé to “use a little wine [along with water] because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses” (). This piece of conventional wisdom finds also expression in Jewish (b. Ber. 51a; b. B. Bat. 58b), Greek (Hippocrates, *Vet. med.* 13; Plutarch, *Advice about Keeping Well*), and Latin writings (Pliny the Elder, *Nat.* 2.19).⁴⁶⁶ Paul’s words confirm the impression that Timothy may have been of a rather weak constitution (e.g., 2 Tim 1:6–7). Perhaps Paul’s word of advice also indicates the apostle’s concern that dealing with the false teachers was causing Timothy additional stress.

In an apparent afterthought to vv. 19–22, Paul proceeds to add that some people’s sins are obvious while those of others surface later (; used in a positive sense in v. 10 for widows “following after” all kinds of good deeds). While in the former instance a candidate’s character can be assessed more straightforwardly, in the latter case shortcomings would be exposed only subsequent to a premature appointment. A more deliberate course of action will allow time to bring a person’s real character to light. This will also remove the need for discipline at a later time (vv. 19–20). Finally, Paul observes that just as some people’s sins are obvious, so are good works; and even those that aren’t obvious won’t remain hidden for long. Sooner or later people’s sins will be exposed, and so will their good works (cf. Dan 12:3; Matt 5:16; 13:43; Phil 2:15).

Bridge

Plurality of leadership is a vital NT principle pertaining to the church in that it alone provides for sufficient accountability among its leaders. The elders don’t stand above the church; they’re called out from among its members and remain accountable to it. If they sin, they must be held to account by the other elders and publicly reprimanded before the entire congregation. Too often today church leaders rule autocratically and are insufficiently accountable. In many cases this is a ticking time bomb that will explode in due course, leaving destruction in its wake. The wisdom principles enunciated by Paul in the present passage (such as not appointing untested men as church leaders) have stood the test of time and continue to be critically important (see also the principle for dealing with a divisive person in Titus 3:10–11; and cf. Matt 18:15–20).

4. Instructions for Slaves (6:1–2a)

¹ All who are under the yoke as slaves should regard their own masters as worthy of all respect, so that God’s name and his teaching will not be blasphemed. ² Let those who have believing masters not be disrespectful to them because they are brothers, but serve them even better, since those who benefit from their service are believers and dearly loved.

Relation to Surrounding Context

After widows (5:3–16) and elders (5:17–25), slaves are the third and final group singled out for specific comment by Paul. After this, Paul will return one final time to the subject of the false teachers.

Structure

As in 1:3, Paul opens his exhortation with the term (“I urge”), a verb Paul used regularly when transitioning to the “business portion” of a letter (1 Cor 1:10; 2 Cor 2:8; 6:1; Eph 4:8; Phil 4:1; 1 Thess 4:1; Phlm 10). The terms “then” () and “first of all” (, reversed in the CSB) indicate that Paul is now progressing past preliminaries and moving on to the main body of his letter. “Then” loosely connects the following section with the preceding remarks;²⁷¹ “first of all” could imply a series of exhortations but, more likely, conveys the sense “above all” or “especially,” since the phrase is never followed by “second,” etc. (cf. 5:4; Rom 1:8; 3:2; 1 Tim 5:4).

The apostle’s initial instruction relates to prayers offered for “all [kinds of] people” (cf. vv. 4, 6), particularly those in authority.²⁷² By urging intercession for these rulers, Paul affirms that they have ultimately been appointed under God’s sovereign providence.²⁷³ Submission to governing authorities represents standard NT teaching (e.g., Rom 13:1–7; 1 Pet 2:13–17; Titus 3:1–2).²⁷⁴ Where those in power engage in ungodly conduct, intercession for them is an instance of loving one’s enemies and of praying for those who persecute believers, in keeping with Jesus’s command (Matt 5:44 par. Luke 6:27–28).

In speaking of prayer, Paul employs a series of four expressions (of a total of seven found in the NT), describing the different elements of which prayer may consist (the order may be incidental): “petitions” () for God to meet specific needs; “prayers” in general (); “intercessions” (), that is, earnest, urgent, and bold appeals for divine action on others’ behalf (cf. in Rom 8:27, 34; 11:2); and “thanksgivings” (; cf. 1 Tim 4:3–4; see also Phil 4:6, on which see further below).

All four terms are plural, indicating the variety and frequency of prayers addressed to God. The term “thanksgiving” recurs in 4:3–4 (cf. “intercession” in v. 5). Paul himself regularly offers up “petitions” (2 Tim 1:3). The first two types of prayers, “petitions” and “prayers,” are uttered by godly widows in 5:5. The close parallel Phil 4:6 features three of the four terms (“intercession” is replaced by “requests,”). “For everyone” probably means “for all kinds of people” and is said in v. 2 (note the repeated , “for”) to include governmental authorities.

Thanksgiving () is commonly connected with petition in Paul:

- “Don’t worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer () and petition () with thanksgiving (), present your requests to God” (Phil 4:6).
- “Devote yourselves to prayer (), stay alert in it with thanksgiving ()” (Col 4:2).

The closest parallel in the present letter is 1 Tim 4:4–5, where Paul writes with regard to those who forbid marriage and urge abstinence from certain foods that “everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with *thanksgiving* (), since it is sanctified by the word of God and by *prayer*” (; emphasis added).

In fact, when thanksgiving is enjoined in conjunction with prayer (Phil 4:6; Col 4:2; 1 Tim 2:1; 4:4–5), it pertains not merely to the person or item prayed about but is offered in recognition of God’s role as the Creator and in anticipation of his answers to prayers uttered in keeping with his good design. As Pao notes,

When petition is grounded in thanksgiving, God and not self-interest becomes the focus. On the other hand, thanksgiving without petition proclaims God to be the Creator without trusting that he indeed is one who is able to provide for his people. In the Pauline epistles, petitions are often found precisely in the thanksgiving paragraphs that introduce the epistles. The two cannot be separated in the Pauline model of prayer.²⁷⁵

2:2 “Kings” () in the original context refers to the Roman emperor (most likely Nero). Beyond this, “all those who are in authority” () are included, such as provincial governors or other local government officials (i.e., the city clerk; Acts 19:35; cf. 1 Pet 2:13–17; Titus 3:1).²⁷⁶ The primary purpose of prayer adduced by Paul is “so that we may lead²⁷⁷ a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity,” which “pleases God our Savior, who wants everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (vv. 2–4; see further below).²⁷⁸ What Paul seeks to promote, then, is favorable conditions for continued gospel proclamation.²⁷⁹ Again, this is standard Pauline teaching (cf. 1 Thess 4:11–12; 2 Thess 3:10–12).²⁸⁰

The term (“tranquil”) occurs only here in the NT; can mean either “quiet” or “silent” depending on context (it means “quiet” here; see esp. 2 Thess 3:12; 1 Pet 3:4). As Paul’s ministry illustrates, this doesn’t mean freedom from affliction (see, e.g., the attacks on Paul in Corinth, Acts 18:12–18, or the Ephesian riots, Acts 19:23–41; cf. 2 Tim 1:8; 3:12), but a life lived under the overall protection of the civil authorities, which provided a measure of tranquility that allowed Paul to engage in continued, even extensive, gospel ministry (e.g., Phil 1:12–14; cf. Jer 29:7).

Over half of the occurrences of “godliness” () in the NT are found in 1 Timothy (§5.1.3).²⁸¹ Paul uses this expression in contrast to the conduct exhibited by his opponents. For example, the “mystery of godliness” consists in the apostolic confession of Christ (3:16). Rather than engage in ascetic practices like the false teachers, Timothy must train himself to be godly (4:7–8), being content rather than motivated by greed (6:3, 5–6, 11). Knowledge of the truth leads to godliness (Titus 1:1). The opponents, for their part, have a “form of godliness” while “denying its power.” “Dignity” () recurs in 3:4 with regard to overseers and in Titus 2:7 with regard to Titus (the adjective is found in Phil 4:8; 1 Tim 3:8, 11; Titus 2:2).²⁸²

2:3 After directing Timothy to encourage prayer for the governing authorities for the purpose of gospel proclamation in vv. 1–2, Paul elaborates on elements of this injunction in vv. 3–7 before briefly returning to his original exhortation in v. 8. It is possible, if not

opening to the occasion without further delay and without the customary opening pleasantries, thanksgiving, and/or prayer conveys a sense of considerable urgency on the part of the apostle. Certain men are teaching false doctrine (v. 3); the goal of Paul's instruction is in jeopardy (v. 5); some alleged teachers of the law have veered from the heart of the saving gospel message and turned to fruitless discussions about the minutiae of the Mosaic law (vv. 6–7; cf. v. 11). Paul thus gets straight to the point: these people who are at cross--purposes with Paul's gospel must be told to stop.

Structure

Verses 3–4 plainly state the occasion for the letter. Verses 5–7 enunciate the purpose of Paul's instruction and how the opponents, self-styled “teachers of the law,” fall short. Verses 8–11 then contain an aside elaborating on the false teachers' improper use of the law in contrast to “sound teaching” in keeping with the “gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God” with which Paul had been entrusted.

1:3 The occasion for writing is stated at the outset: the challenge of the false teachers.¹⁹⁰ Rather than engage in opening pleasantries, Paul is “all business” (cf. Titus 1:5), conveying a sense of urgency in addressing the problem (note the term “urged,” ; cf. 2:1; 5:1; 6:2). He recalls the time when Timothy and he parted ways, Paul moving on to Macedonia and Timothy remaining in Ephesus, at which time the task of purging the church from false teachers fell to Timothy.¹⁹¹ The rendering “instruct” () is a bit weak; the term is better understood as “command” by virtue of Paul's delegated apostolic authority.¹⁹²

“Certain people” is Paul's customary way of referring to the opponents in this letter (cf. vv. 6, 19; 4:1; 5:15, 24; 6:3, 10, 21).¹⁹³ The effect of this designation is to establish a clear distinction between the false teachers and the propagators of the true gospel (Paul and Timothy).¹⁹⁴ While the reference is generic, the named teachers in 1–2 Timothy are all men (1 Tim 1:20; 2 Tim 2:17). Paul likely didn't know the name of every single individual who perpetrated false doctrine in Ephesus; in any case, he was less concerned with the specific *individuals* than with preserving the purity of the Christian *message*.

The term “teach false doctrine” (one word in the original, ; lit. “other-teach,” i.e., teach a message other than the apostolic gospel) forms an *inclusio* with 6:3 (the term's only other NT use) and may have been coined by Paul.¹⁹⁵ Together with “teachers of the law” () in v. 7, the designation identifies the opponents as *teachers* (cf. the contrast with “sound teaching” in v. 10 and “the gospel” in v. 11). Similar to his earlier charge that the Judaizers preached a “different gospel” (Gal 1:6; cf. 2 Cor 11:4), the apostle is concerned that the gospel be preserved from anything that detracts from its truth or dilutes its saving power (cf. Rom 1:16–17).¹⁹⁶

1:4 The false teachers didn't merely dabble in alternatives to the apostolic gospel; they were strongly devoted () to their teaching.¹⁹⁷ The reference to “myths and endless genealogies” most likely alludes to the teachers' use of the law.¹⁹⁸ Later, “pointless and silly myths”—in context, asceticism such as the prohibition of marriage and abstinence from certain foods—are contrasted with “the faith and the good teaching” (1 Tim 4:6–7). In 2 Tim 4:4 “myths” are contrasted with “the truth,” suggesting that these “myths” were dangerous first and foremost because they deviated from the gospel. In 2 Pet 1:16 the contrast is between “cleverly contrived myths” and apostolic eyewitness testimony. “Myths,” therefore, most likely understood as speculative interpretations of the Mosaic law—note the presence of genealogies in the book of Genesis—are the antithesis of the truth of the gospel and stunt growth in true godliness.

The genealogies aren't only mythical; they're “endless” (). This means most likely not so much that they're literally infinite (Job 36:26 LXX; 3 Macc. 2:9) as that they're of a highly conjectural and irrelevant nature: they're both pointless and fruitless.¹⁹⁹ The result is empty speculations (; cf. 6:4; 2 Tim 2:23) rather than believers growing in their faith. The only other NT occurrence of “genealogy” (), Titus 3:9, references “foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes *about the law*,” connoting the teaching's likely Jewish background.²⁰⁰ That said, the false teachers may have been individuals who approached the Hebrew Scriptures from a philosophical and allegorical, rather than proper historical, vantage point.

“God's plan (), which operates by faith” is reminiscent of the reference to the “stewardship” with which Paul was entrusted by God, especially in some of Paul's later letters (1 Cor 9:17; Eph 1:10; 3:2, 9; Col 1:25; cf. 2 Tim 1:9–10). Thus, stewardship of what has been entrusted to Paul by God in keeping with God's redemptive arrangement stands in marked contrast to empty speculations about supposed myths.²⁰¹ “Faith” () here most likely refers to the believer's ongoing trust relationship with God, in contrast to pointless human speculation. The term is used differently in this verse than in v. 2, where, as mentioned, it most likely conveys the notion of the Christian faith and the body of teaching it encompasses. The term is one of the central concepts in this letter and in Paul's correspondence with Timothy and Titus as a whole.²⁰² There is a close relationship between “the faith” and the gospel Paul preaches, which highlights God's grace in Jesus Christ apart from any human contribution.

1:5 Rather than promote endless genealogies and empty speculations, Paul's instruction has a more practical purpose: “Now the goal of our instruction is love.”²⁰³ The word “goal” () indicates the desired end toward which his proclamation of the gospel is directed (Rom 6:22; 10:4; 1 Pet 1:9); the controversies engendered by the false teachers have the opposite effect: fruitless discussion (v. 6) and never-ending controversy. “Instruction” () refers to the general charge or commission assigned to Timothy (cf. vv. 3, 18).²⁰⁴ “Love” (), regularly in the LTT coupled with “faith” (; see below), is conceived as the practical outworking of faith in Christ. The preacher's goal is not merely faith but faith's expression in acts of love.²⁰⁵

The triad of “pure heart” (2 Tim 2:22; cf. 1 Pet 1:22), “clear conscience” (1 Tim 3:9), and “sincere faith” (2 Tim 1:5) enunciates a

same token, an order of widows in 1 Timothy 5 is used as support for pseudonymous authorship and a late date for the LTT, due to perceived similarity between such an order and similar groups in the post-apostolic church, but some who argue for an order of widows embrace Pauline authorship.⁴²⁹ In sum, accepting the notion of an order of widows in 1 Timothy 5 is not incompatible with a conservative stance on the LTT.

Two lines of reasoning may be set forth as underlying the “order of widows” hypothesis. The first involves various positively presented features of the text that are suggestive of such an order.⁴³⁰ (1) The command to “honor” true widows in 5:3, which compared to the subsequent section’s assertion that elders who rule well are worthy of “double honor,” suggests the possibility of remuneration, or “payment corresponding to an office.” (2) A limitation is set forth as to which widows may be “enrolled” in 5:9, and the term suggests to some a formal induction into office. (3) There’s some similarity between some qualifications given for widows in 1 Timothy 5 and certain requirements set forth for overseers and deacons in 1 Timothy 3. (4) The first/previous that young widows might set aside in 5:12 is often considered to be a vow of celibacy required for entrance into an order of widows, given that its setting aside stems from a desire to marry (5:11).

A second line of reasoning finds certain points in 1 Tim 5:9–10 difficult to reconcile with the view that the entire passage addresses widows in need of benevolence.⁴³¹ Wagener notes, for instance, that the restrictive nature of the text (here she must especially be referring to 5:9–10) has led some to question whether Scripture would really exclude from support certain widows just because they didn’t meet certain external or moral criteria.⁴³² Some suggest that some of the characteristics of 5:9–10, specifically showing hospitality and assisting those in distress (and perhaps “bringing up children” in the sense of caring for orphans), speak of a level of prosperity that is incompatible with needing the church’s benevolence.⁴³³ Others note that while the description of a “true widow” in 5:5 coheres with one who requires benevolence, the qualifications in 5:9–10 sound more like requirements for church office similar to those given for the overseer and deacon in 1 Tim 3.11.⁴³⁴

For these reasons it’s best not to place too much weight on the “order of widows” hypothesis in interpreting Paul’s instructions in 1 Tim 5:3–16. While there are some surface similarities between widows and elders, this may pertain merely to the need to honor both, each in their own, appropriate way, and to deal with them as called for in the context of a given local congregation. In the present situation, the church may have cared for widows who had other sources of support, thus rendering it difficult to come alongside those widows who did not.⁴³⁵ This may have been due to confusion as to who should support widows and/or the influence of the false teachers.⁴³⁶

In the ancient world widows were particularly vulnerable to those who preyed on them and sought to exploit their precarious state for financial gain. Jesus denounced the religious leaders in his day for “devour[ing] widows’ houses” (Mark 12:40 par. Luke 20:47). He watched one poor widow cast her offering into the temple treasury and praised her devotion (Mark 12:41–43 par. Luke 21:1–4). Luke tells the story of Anna, a widow who prophesied regarding Jesus (2:37); preserves Jesus’s reference to the widow in Zarephath in Elijah’s day (4:25–26); records the raising of a widow’s son (7:12); and includes the parable of the persistent widow (18:1–8). Jesus cared for widows, and so should his followers.

Paul’s burden here isn’t just to urge care for widows but to provide Timothy with specific guidelines for doing so. He first tells him to honor certain kinds of widows, whereby “honor” () reflects the fifth commandment (cited in Eph 6:2, the only other Pauline instance of the term). Such “honor” entails not merely respect but has a material dimension as well: “The real issue for Paul . . . is the maintenance of culturally appropriate norms of reciprocity.”⁴³⁷ The widows Timothy is instructed to honor, then, are “widows who are genuinely in need” (v. 3, ; cf. vv. 5, 16), that is, those who meet the following qualifications.

First, they have no relatives to care for them, whether their own children (; cf. 3:4, 12), grandchildren, or other descendants (; cf. Gen 48:6 LXX). If they do, these relatives should support them. This is how they should learn (; positively, 2:11; 2 Tim 3:14; Titus 3:14; negatively, 1 Tim 5:13; 2 Tim 3:7) to put their religion into practice (lit., “to practice godliness,” ; translated “worship” in the term’s only other NT occurrence, Acts 17:23). In so doing they will (literally) “return payments” (; the only NT occurrence of) to their parents and grandparents (; cf. 2 Tim 1:3; the word may mean “parents” or “ancestors”).

Caring for one’s family pleases () God as a practical outworking of the fifth commandment to honor one’s father and mother, as does living a peaceful and quiet life in all godliness and holiness (2:3, the term’s only other NT occurrence). It’s all too easy to relinquish the responsibility of caring for one’s family members to the church. Yet church funds ought to be reserved for the neediest lacking other means of financial support.

Paul proceeds to provide a description of a “widow who is truly in need and left all alone”—without relatives to care for her (, a classical verb found only here in the NT)—and who has put her hope in God (, the perfect tense denotes a settled state as in 4:10; 6:17), continuing (; lit. in 1:3) in petitions and prayers (. . . —the same phrase as in 2:1) “night and day.” This mirrors Paul’s self-description as praying night and day in 2 Tim 1:3 (cf. Eph 6:18; Phil 1:4) and recalls his exhortation in 1 Thess 5:17 (the reverse order “day and night” is found in Luke 18:7; Acts 9:24; Rev 4:8; etc.). For a NT example, see Anna the prophetess, who, “having lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and was a widow for 84 years [or, perhaps more likely, was a widow until she was 84; so the NIV]. She did not leave the temple, serving God night and day, with fasting and prayers” (Luke 2:36–37).

Such a “widow who is truly in need” is not self-indulgent, living in pursuit of sensual pleasure (; elsewhere in the NT only in Jas 5:5; cf. Ezek 16:49 LXX on Sodom), as some of the younger widows in Paul’s day seem to have done (v. 13). Those widows were

that Timothy, too, is under orders (v. 18). Paul's apostolic consciousness (cf. 1 Cor 15:8–10) led him to view his ministry as grounded in the will and command of God rather than in mere human appointment (Acts 9:1–31; Gal 1:1). Consequently, Timothy and the readers of the letter should receive it as an authoritative apostolic missive.¹⁸¹ Paul's apostolic calling involves the worldwide proclamation of the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ (Rom 16:26).

The phrase "God our Savior" brings together the Jewish and Hellenistic contexts interfacing in the present letter (cf. 2:3; §3.3).¹⁸² The OT frequently speaks of God as Savior.¹⁸³ In the first century "Savior" was a title regularly attributed to rulers, including Roman emperors such as Nero (AD 54–68).¹⁸⁴ Paul, by contrast, maintains that the Christian God, and he alone, is "our Savior" (including himself within the purview of salvation), rejecting competing claims by contemporaneous savior figures. "God our Savior" is linked with "Christ Jesus our hope."¹⁸⁵ In NT terms hope is much more than a vague wish; it is a confident expectation of the fulfillment of God's promises.¹⁸⁶ In the present passage Paul may refer to the expectation of Christ's second coming (Titus 2:13), eternal life (Titus 1:2; 3:7), or both.

1:2 This is the first of only four instances in the letters to Timothy where Timothy is mentioned by name (cf. v. 18; 6:20; 2 Tim 1:2).¹⁸⁷ Paul tenderly refers to Timothy as his "true () son in the faith" (Titus 1:4; Phil 4:3; 2 Cor 8:8; cf. 1 Cor 4:17). The cognate adverb is used in Phil 2:20, where Paul announces his intention to send Timothy to the Philippians and writes, "For I have no one else like-minded who will *genuinely* () care about your interests." The expression "true son" could, but need not necessarily, imply that Paul led Timothy to faith in Christ (cf. 2 Tim 1:5; 3:15). In Acts 16:1–2, upon his initial encounter with Paul (AD 49–50), Timothy is already referred to as "a disciple" (), though it's possible that Timothy had contact with Paul at an earlier occasion, such as Paul's first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:8–20). Most likely, "true son in the faith" means Timothy genuinely reproduces Paul's own spiritual characteristics as a natural son would reflect the natural characteristics of his father.

Paul's first letter to Timothy was written about fifteen years after Paul's initial encounter with Timothy. If Timothy was a young man in his mid-twenties when he first met the apostle, he would have been about forty years of age at the time of writing (cf. the reference to Timothy's "youth" in 1 Tim 4:12). The apostle would have been in his late fifties or early sixties. The respective designations "apostle . . . son" therefore indicate both the different degrees of authority (nowhere is Timothy called "brother") and the affectionate relationship between these two men of God. As his life and ministry draw to a close, Paul seeks to preserve his legacy through his adoptive son in the faith. The phrase "true son" thus legitimizes Timothy as Paul's rightful successor in the church (cf. Titus 1:4) without imposing on their relationship a tight formal doctrine of apostolic succession as later became characteristic of Roman Catholic dogma (§1.3). "The faith," a common expression in the LTT, refers to the Christian faith and the body of teaching it encompasses.¹⁸⁸

The blessing "grace, mercy, and peace" (cf. 2 Tim 1:2; 2 John 1:3) takes the place of the more common "grace and peace." "Grace" () corresponds to the Greek word for "greeting" (), yet Paul uses it in the distinctly Christian sense of "God's unmerited favor." "Mercy" (, which may echo the Hebrew *hesed*, "loving-kindness") is added here as well as in 2 Timothy, possibly reflecting the difficult nature of Timothy's assignment. Note that later in the letter it's implied that Timothy wasn't awarded the respect due him owing to his relative youth (1 Tim 4:12) and that in the second letter Paul seems to intimate that Timothy is timid and needs encouragement (2 Tim 1:7). Mercy also features prominently later in the chapter when Paul recites his own testimony (vv. 13, 16). "Peace" () corresponds to the Hebrew *shalôm*, expressing the notion of a wholesome relationship with God and others. The final phrase "from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord" points to the source of all blessings (cf. 2 Tim 1:2; Titus 1:4). The threefold reference to Christ Jesus in the opening greeting attests to the strong Christological focus of the letter.¹⁸⁹

In biblical-theological terms, the letter opening sounds the foundational theme of Paul's apostleship (v. 1) and his vital connection with Timothy, his apostolic delegate and "son in the faith" (v. 2). It also starts out with the central affirmation that God is "our Savior" and Jesus Christ "our hope" (v. 1). "God the Father" and "Christ Jesus our Lord" are also featured in parallel fashion in the following verse (v. 2). In this way the themes of mission, salvation, and theology/Christology are inextricably intertwined, as they will continue to be in the remainder of the letter and the LTT.

II. Personal Charge (1:3–20)

A. The Challenge of the False Teachers (1:3–11)

³ As I urged you when I went to Macedonia, remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach false doctrine ⁴ or to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies. These promote empty speculations rather than God's plan, which operates by faith. ⁵ Now the goal of our instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. ⁶ Some have departed from these and turned aside to fruitless discussion. ⁷ They want to be teachers of the law, although they don't understand what they are saying or what they are insisting on. ⁸ But we know that the law is good, provided one uses it legitimately. ⁹ We know that the law is not meant for a righteous person, but for the lawless and rebellious, for the ungodly and sinful, for the unholy and irreverent, for those who kill their fathers and mothers, for murderers, ¹⁰ for the sexually immoral and homosexuals, for slave traders, liars, perjurers, and for whatever else is contrary to the sound teaching ¹¹ that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which was entrusted to me.

Relation to Surrounding Context

Immediately after the opening in vv. 1–2, Paul gets to the occasion for writing. The fact that he progresses straight from the

EXPOSITION OF 2 TIMOTHY

Occasion and Purpose

Second Timothy marks the final chapter in Paul's story;⁵¹² Bengel asserts, "This letter is Paul's testament and swan song."⁵¹³ A few years have likely passed since Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy. It's unknown whether Paul's visit (announced in 1 Tim 3:14–15 and assumed in 4:13) ever materialized. While Timothy is still on assignment in Ephesus, Paul is no longer in Macedonia (1 Tim 1:3) but once again in prison, most likely in Rome (2 Tim 1:8). Unlike his first imprisonment, when he stayed in his own rented house and received all who came to see him (cf. Acts 28:30), Paul is now suffering "to the point of being bound like a criminal" (2:9). As a result, he anticipates shortly "being poured out as a drink offering" (4:6), a reference to his imminent martyrdom (Eusebius, *Hist. eccl.* 2.22).

For these reasons Paul's second letter to Timothy is much more personal in nature than the first, which included specific instructions on how to deal with problems in the Ephesian church. Paul is in a reminiscent mood (1:3–6), and his second letter to Timothy assumes the character of a last testament in which Paul writes to his foremost disciple for the last time, appealing to him to "preach the word" of the Christian gospel (2 Tim 4:1–2) as he passes on the mantle to Timothy. While urging Timothy to come to him "soon . . . before winter" (4:9, 21), Paul may or may not actually have seen him one last time.

Timothy's role is all the more critical as many of Paul's associates have abandoned him when Paul writes his second and final letter to Timothy. Paul's ministry is rapidly drawing to a close; after his demise Paul's legacy and the continuation of the apostolic ministry will rest on Timothy's shoulders. In salvation history this book marks the transition from the apostolic to the post-apostolic period, during which believers are charged to build on the foundation of the apostles and to guard the "good deposit" made by them (2 Tim 1:12, 14). But the apostle touches on many topics of perennial significance in this letter that are not limited to the original circumstance to which they are addressed.⁵¹⁴

The Opponents

Little overt attention is given to Timothy's and Paul's opponents in 2 Timothy. Nevertheless, there is reason to believe that the false teachers don't merely serve as a foil for Paul's exhortation of Timothy (though they do that) but in addition represent real opponents who misunderstand and mischaracterize the Christian teaching on the resurrection (see esp. 2 Tim 2:18). While the primary purpose of 2 Timothy is hortatory rather than aiming to repudiate the false teachers directly, the writer does confront teaching that reflects an overrealized eschatology.⁵¹⁵

Structure

P. H. Towner outlines 2 Timothy as follows:

- I. Opening Greeting (1:1–2)
- II. Body of the Letter (1:3–4:8)
 - A. Call to Personal Commitment (1:3–18)
 - B. Call to Dedication and Faithfulness (2:1–13)
 - C. The Challenge of Opposition (2:14–26)
 - D. Prophecy, Commitment, and Call (3:1–4:8)
- III. Final Instructions (4:9–18)
- IV. Closing Greetings (4:19–22).⁵¹⁶

An alternative outline is provided by C. Westfall:

- I. Epistolary Opening and Thanksgiving (1:1–5)
- II. Body of the Letter: Paul's moral exhortation to Timothy (1:6–4:8)
 - A. Body Opening: Paul is Timothy's spiritual father and model (1:6–18)
 - B. Body Middle (2:1–3:17)
 - 1. Timothy is entrusted with a gospel of suffering (2:1–13)
 - 2. Timothy's conduct in teaching and speech (2:14–21)
 - 3. Timothy's conduct in conflict with his opponents (2:22–26)
 - 4. Paul is Timothy's ultimate model (3:1–17)
 - C. Body Closing: Paul's charge and Timothy's commission (4:1–8)