

Lesson Four

GUARD AGAINST FALSE DOCTRINE
I Timothy 3:14 — 4:16

THE GLORY OF GOD'S CHURCH

SECTION ONE 3:14-16

14 I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these instructions to you so that, 15 if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth. 16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion:

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.

The final two verses of chapter three better fit the context of chapter four, so we have grouped them with this section. Verse sixteen appears to be a first century hymn or proverb capsulating the fundamentals of Christ's ministry.

V. 14 **come shortly** — Paul, realizing that plans do not always turn

out as expected, writes needful information to Timothy. This certainly applies to what has already been written, and perhaps to this which follows.

V. 15 **one** — The Greek has no pronoun so the “one” might refer to “men” (ASV) or to Timothy (KJV). Either way, the result is the same as Timothy is to be a pattern for others.

household — (Lit., “house.”) This does not refer to a church building as Christians were forbidden to erect buildings until the second century and had to meet in homes, fields, or catacombs. But the people of God are compared to a building or family. Other metaphors of the church include body (I Cor. 12:18); temple (I Cor. 3:16); bride (Eph. 5:31); light and salt (Mt. 5:13, 14). Each suggests a different function or aspect of the church. Here, Paul is emphasizing the unity and communal spirit existing in a family. What do the others suggest?

pillar and bulwark — Pillars or columns support; foundations or bulwarks undergird them. Paul pictures the church (believers) as a beautiful building that proclaims and protects the truth. God has always worked through people and still works through His people, the church, today. Paul visualized the church as a glorious manifestation of God (read Ephesians!) and not as an institutionalized appendage that strangles truth as some critics today claim.

V. 16 This sixfold refrain summarizes the ministry of Christ. He became Man and endured temptation (Jn. 1; Heb. 4:15). Seemingly discredited by a criminal’s death, God vindicated His message by resurrecting Him by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:11). His resurrection was witnessed by angels (Mt. 27:2-7) and witnesses (“angel” means messenger and could apply to the human witnesses) who proclaimed it to all nations who believed it (Mt. 28:19, 20; Col. 1:23). The conclusion of Christ’s earthly ministry which began in dishonor in a cow stall in Bethlehem climaxes in a glorious heavenly coronation (Acts 2:33-35). When one discards the deity of Christ as revealed by His incarnation, resurrection, and glorification, he has destroyed the heart of the Gospel. Thus, chapter four warns against those who apostate and deny this statement of faith.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Some scientists and philosophers claim that the church promotes superstition and stifles truth. Do you agree? Why do they say this?
2. Examine all the terms, metaphors, and figures used in the N.T. for the church and see what implications they contain about the function of the church.

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3. What was the purpose of Jesus' ministry? What is the purpose of our ministry?
4. Discuss the statement, "I like Jesus, but I don't like the church."

WATCH FOR APOSTATES WHO PERVERT GOD'S CHURCH

SECTION TWO 4:1-5

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will **depart** from the faith by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, 3 who forbid marriage and enjoin abstinence from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; 5 for then it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

V. 1 spirit — Note Paul's contrast as God's Holy Spirit warns against the devil's unholy spirits. The **later times** literally mean "any time after the present." (Mt. 4:2, "after" forty days is the same word.)

Note Paul's use of present tense throughout this section showing that it was being fulfilled in Timothy's time and grows in intensity as the end time approaches (cf. II, 3:1-6 for a similar description.)

depart from faith — (Lit., "apostate") Some untrue teaching is done by those who are mistaken as was Apollos in Acts 18:24-26, but who yet love God and remain in the faith. These teachers are apostates, those who willingly and willfully cast the faith aside. Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that some of them would leave the faith and perhaps these are they (Acts 20:29, 30). No Christian is so strong that he is immune from this fall from faith. Some apostates appear godly and seem to perform great wonders (II Thess. 2:3, 4, 9, 10; II Cor. 11:13, 14; II Tim. 3:1-5; 4:1-4). We must be on guard and judge them not by their appearance nor by our feelings but by the Word of God (I Jn. 4:1; Gal. 1:8). Paul says the source of their doctrine is from the demonic world. The tenor of a godly man controlled by His Spirit is always in direct contrast to the devilish man controlled by the spirit of the world and of Satan (Gal. 5:16-26; James 3:13-17; I Jn. 3:8-16; 4:1-8).

V. 2 conscience seared — (Lit., "cauterized") When a hot iron presses against flesh, it scars it and deadens it. These men have so frequently and so flagrantly violated their consciences that they no longer function

(Eph. 4:19). See on 1:19 for use of conscience in these epistles. Lying and misrepresentation comes easy to those who no longer discern right from wrong.

V. 3 Why are these two areas prohibited? Perhaps this is a reference to the gnostic philosophy which condemned matter, including the body, as being evil. Many gnostics practiced celibacy and ascetic restriction of food. Food and sex frequently become the focal points of false religions (I Cor. 10:6-8, 14-38; 8:1ff; 5:1ff; 7:1ff; Rom. 14:1ff). The N.T. emphasizes that both food (Mk. 7:19) and marriage (Heb. 13:4) are good gifts from God. Let us be careful not to add nor subtract to what God has revealed. If fasting or celibacy helps us to serve God, then practice them but do not bind these on others as a principle of faith.

Vs. 4, 5 Created things are good. God so created them good, a reminder of the sevenfold "it is good" of Genesis 1 and 2. If we receive God's creation in the spirit of thanksgiving, then it remains good. Most sins are perversion of basically good things (sex), or of excesses of these good things (food), or of selfish uses of these good things (Jas. 4:3). Augustine once noted, "The cross of the Lord can become the mouse-trap of the devil." Let us be careful about complaining about God's creation. Everything serves a useful purpose if we but look for it.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Should we react differently to apostate false teachers and those who ignorantly teach mistruth?
2. How does one sear his conscience? What are some safeguards?
3. What good things have you seen become sin because of improper use?
4. Is there spiritual danger in grumping about the weather, the landscape, etc.?
5. Most of us pray before we eat. When are other good times to thank God for His blessings?

WARN THE CHURCH BY WORD AND EXAMPLE

SECTION THREE · I Timothy 4:6-10

6 If you put these instructions before the brethren, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed. 7 Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Train yourself in godliness; 8 for

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while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. 9 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. 10 For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe.

V. 6 **put before** — Timothy was to “charge” false teachers (1:3), but brethren need only to be “reminded” of God’s will. A good servant will not withhold any needful teaching from God’s people even though it may be painful to proclaim (Acts 20:20, 26). Some think an evangelist should only work with non-Christians. Even though Timothy was an evangelist (II, 4:5), Paul urged him to instruct believers as well.

nourished — Someone has noted that “impression without expression leads to depression.” We don’t wait until we become scholars before we teach, but we become “scholars” as we teach. Personal growth comes when we teach others, for we first teach the lesson to ourselves.

V. 7 **avoid silly myths** — (cf. 1:4 comments) The true Gospel may be perverted, as by the apostates in verses 2 and 3, or it may be pre-empted by substituting another teaching in place of it. Let us guard lest our teaching, even though true, be of silly myth-material or of passing fancies rather than an eternal Gospel.

train thyself — Paul often uses athletic contests to urge steadfast effort (I Cor. 9:24; II, 2:5; 4:7). The present tense meaning here emphasizes, “keep on exercising yourself.” Godliness does not come easy and, like muscle tone, can fade away when we cease to work at it.

V. 8 Physical exercise brings a limited benefit which ends at death. Spiritual effort brings both temporal and eternal blessing. What a shame that an athlete will radically change his diet, habits, and life-style to win a contest while most Christians begrudge even small efforts that affect eternal life.

V. 9 **saying** — This third of five faithful sayings (see 1:15) may apply to verse 8 or 10. Verse 8 seems to be more of a proverbial capsulization of truth while verse 10 appears to be more of a conclusion to that proverb.

V. 10 **toil, strive** — The first word indicates to “labor to the point of exhaustion.” The second (lit., “agonize”) denotes extreme effort applied by an athlete, perhaps a runner, as he drives himself to win. (Same word used in Jude 1:3, “earnestly contend,” KJV.) Even as the runner keeps his eye on the finish line and presses toward it, so our present effort is motivated by God standing at life’s finish line cheering us on (cf. Heb. 12:1, 2).

Savior of all — (1) God is potentially the Savior of all men, and presently the actual Savior of those who do believe (I Jn. 2:2; I Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11). Or, (2) God is the sustainer or preserver of all men as he provides food, air, etc. (Job 7:20; Psa. 107:28; Acts 17:28). Savior does not necessarily mean redemption from sin. The ancients applied it to princes, kings, or men who had brought special benefits to their country. Either interpretation is possible but I prefer the second with the idea that God physically preserves all men now, but ultimately He preserves only the believer.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. Is it possible to grow without ministering to others? (4:6, 15, 16)
2. What should be the content of our teaching? Do we sometimes advertise false teaching while in the act of condemning it? (4:7)
3. How does one "exercise himself in godliness"? Be practical.
4. Does the hope of heaven motivate us? Is this selfish?
5. Does the Christian receive God's blessings now, or must he wait until Heaven?

GIVE YOURSELF TO YOUR MINISTRY

SECTION FOUR I Timothy 4:11-16

11 Command and teach these things. 12 Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophetic utterance when the elders laid their hands upon you. 15 Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

V. 11 **these things** refer to what has been discussed beginning with verse 6.

V. 12 **despise your youth** — "Youth" was applied to one up to age

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forty. Timothy was in his early or mid-thirties at this time, but considering that Paul was in his sixties and the "elders" in their fifties or older, Timothy was thought of as a youth. Hebrew priests did not begin ministry until age thirty. Jesus waited until He was thirty to begin His public ministry. Thirty would correspond to our twenty-one, the time when a youth becomes an adult.

example — Respect must be earned. Young people of good behavior often have to live down an unfair image produced by a few reprobates. Paul names some areas of life in which Timothy needs to excell if he wishes respect.

(1) In daily life, his *speech, conduct, love, faith* and *purity* (II, 2:22) should reflect Christ. (2) In public service, Timothy should show diligence (4:13). Not everyone had a Bible so the Word needed to be read aloud. The exhortation and explanation of the passage would apply it to those assembled. The early church may have followed the worship order of the synagogue with Scripture reading, application to daily life, and then consideration of the finer points of the passage. (3) In his special ministry, Timothy was to exalt God and not self (4:14). Natural abilities given by God at birth are called "gifts" (Rom. 12:3, 6ff). If that is the case here, perhaps his gift was one of preaching. To me, it appears Timothy's gift came from miraculous circumstance as it came by means of Paul's laying hands on the young man (II, 1:6; cf. Acts 8:14-25). He was assisted by the elders who also laid on hands to set him apart for his work (Acts 16:1-4) at which time a prophecy was spoken concerning Timothy (I, 1:18). The Greek preposition here concerning the prophecy means "in the company of" or "together with," but it does not mean "by means of." Whatever his gift, Timothy was urged to use it for God's glory. Even today, many who have gifts from God use them for money-making, or self-glory or simply ignore them. What a waste! The truism, "He who can read and doesn't, is no better off than he who cannot read," applies here. A humble talent given to God is of far greater value than a great ability unused.

V. 15 Timothy is urged to "study" or "attend to" his work and God's Word. He was to *practice* them and *devote* himself to them. This latter word suggests an immersion in them. God's work must not be a thing apart from our daily life; instead, it must permeate every second and minute of it!

V. 16 Paul consistently emphasizes that true doctrine comes from pure lives, and that when morality leaves, sound doctrine is sure to follow (cf. Acts 20:28). If we feed ourselves on God's Word, then we shall be able to nourish others with the end result that both they and we will be saved. Noah's ark saved both that godly preacher and those seven who believed his message. A selfish Christianity is impossible for

it is in the act of saving others that we save ourselves. Jesus was mocked, "He saved others but cannot save Himself," but it was in this act of saving others that He saved Himself and declared for all time His function as Savior and Master. To be great, we too must "lose ourselves" in service.

DISCUSSION STARTERS:

1. When young Christians or young people are looked down upon, how do they react? Is there a better way to encourage good behavior?
2. What practical ways can a young person manifest his love, faith, etc.?
3. Does everyone have a gift? How can he find it?
4. Why does Paul put such strong emphasis upon the public use of the Bible? (4:13)
5. Is it possible to save others and be lost ourselves? Or to save ourselves and not save others?