



1 Timothy - Chapter Four

Summary of Chapter Four

Having just proclaimed the triumphant mystery of the faith by citing a beautiful hymn that praised the glory and majesty of Christ, Paul returned to earth with a bump, finding that he now had to unravel the mystery of human iniquity.

In this Chapter he revisits the key issue of the false teachers and this time the asceticism they were demanding of those who have chosen to follow them. This was no surprise to Paul for the Spirit had previously informed him of this falling away from the faith. Once again, Paul was easily able to refute the claims of the false teachers by declaring that everything given by God is good, providing it is accepted as such a gift, and done so with a thankful heart.

The remaining part of the chapter is given over to instructing Timothy how he personally was to be grounded in the truth of the Gospel and then to boldly take the message to those in Ephesus, demonstrating its authenticity through his own abilities as a man called by God to fulfil this ministry. Despite his comparative youth, Timothy was to put himself forward as a role model for others to imitate in the Gospel truth.

V. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 - False Asceticism

The Christian life was never intended to be free from trials, tests, pain and tensions. After his triumphant celebration of the advance of the Gospel, given at the end of the previous chapter, Paul returned to the challenge of false teaching that he had first addressed in Chapter One. Some struggles are clearly going to continue until the end, at which time: *<<he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away>>* (Revelation 21:4). However, these are struggles that are lived out in hope, for the promises have been made. Here, Paul reminded Timothy that apostasy and a misrepresenting of the faith was predictable and that ultimately Satan often stands behind it when it does occur.

Throughout the centuries, heresy and apostasy have come and gone, sometimes like a plague, sometimes like a flu virus, but always with damaging results for God's people. If this danger cannot be wiped out before the return of Christ, its patterns and nature can at least be understood, anticipated and thus controlled.

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will renounce the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,

1 Timothy 4:1

The means by which the Spirit expressly says is not made clear. It may have been something the Holy Spirit revealed directly to Paul, as appeared to be the case with: *<<I know that after I have gone, savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Some even from your own group will come distorting the truth in order to entice the disciples to follow them>>* (Acts 20:29-30), or a prophecy that came through others, including Paul's understanding of OT prophecies.

That the Spirit would guide and teach was promised by Jesus: *<<When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth; for he will not speak on his own, but will speak whatever he hears, and he will declare to you the things that are to come>>* (John 16:13), giving clear instructions to individuals: *<<Then the Spirit said to Philip, 'Go over to this chariot and join it'>>* (Acts 8:29), or through general revelation, which seems to be the case here: *<<But, as it is written, 'What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him' – these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit; for the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God>>* (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Expressly here means explicitly or clearly. When something emanates from the Holy Spirit it is spoken in truth, with a full understanding and knowledge of what is to come, for only God knows all things. Anything less than certain is not of the Spirit of truth and is therefore of man at best.

The later times, Greek *hysterois kairois*, in view here clearly includes Timothy's day, and it is a similar phrase to: *<<You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come>>* (2 Timothy 3:1). As is typical in the NT, later times referred to the time that began with the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, which came shortly after the conclusion of the work of Christ. It will continue until Christ returns to claim his Kingdom. In the meantime, people who profess the faith will still wander away from the truth and for them the consequences will be dire. Those who remain faithful are to reach out to others who will then share in the promises of everlasting salvation in a much more fruitful life to come.

Those who hold to the false teaching renounce the faith, which shows that this teaching is outside the bounds of true Christianity. Furthermore, the source of the error is demonic, for these teachers were paying attention to and following deceitful spirits. The false teaching and resultant apostasy are no surprise. God said this would happen, so his church should not panic but should carry on in faithfulness: *<<Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenæus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place. They are upsetting the faith of some. But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his', and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness'>>* (2 Timothy 2:16-19).

That there were people in the church who were paying attention to deceitful spirits brings to the fore the real adversary that was at work in Ephesus and continues to do all he can to disrupt the life of the global church - Satan. Although no one should give the devil too much credit, for most of the problems are those caused by mankind, his influence is in strong evidence in the 21st Century and the believing church cannot afford to be ignorant of the evil nature of this last age, even though it may continue on for a further two thousand years: <<***But do not ignore this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like one day***>> (2 Peter 3:8).

Jesus himself had warned that false teachers would arise: <<***False messiahs and false prophets will appear and produce signs and omens, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. But be alert; I have already told you everything***>> (Mark 13:22-23), giving further warning: <<***And he said, 'Beware that you are not led astray; for many will come in my name and say, "I am he!" and, "The time is near!" Do not go after them***>> (Luke 21:8), with others writing about those in the church who would try to lead people away from the truth, such as: <<***These are blemishes on your love-feasts, while they feast with you without fear, feeding themselves. They are waterless clouds carried along by the winds; autumn trees without fruit, twice dead, uprooted; wild waves of the sea, casting up the foam of their own shame; wandering stars, for whom the deepest darkness has been reserved for ever***>> (Jude 12-13).

Paul's statement lends authority to the explanation of heresy and implies that the conditions in Ephesus were not to be considered as a surprising development or as evidence that the church would ultimately fail in its task: <<***But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his', and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness.' In a large house there are utensils not only of gold and silver but also of wood and clay, some for special use, some for ordinary. All who cleanse themselves of the things I have mentioned will become special utensils, dedicated and useful to the owner of the house, ready for every good work***>> (2 Timothy 2:19-21). Since the some that are mentioned had evidently professed the faith, and in the Ephesian situation may have been leaders, one of Paul's concerns here was almost certainly to arrest any doubts about the permanence of God's church.

Disciples are warned against paying attention to deceitful spirits: <<***Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world***>> (1 John 4:1), and: <<***We are from God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and whoever is not from God does not listen to us. From this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error***>> (1 John 4:6).

² through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.

1 Timothy 4:2

The hypocrisy of liars. Hypocrisy is one of the biggest failings in the church and a big turn-off for non-believers who might otherwise seek God through the faith. It is important for all genuine believers to be well-grounded in the Word of God and to live a Gospel-shaped life. Those who profess the faith falsely are liars, deceiving

others and indeed themselves. Paul's language clearly indicates that he saw this as a personal choice that the false teachers made and therefore they, and those that followed them, must accept responsibility for their own choices and the subsequent outcome, i.e. their blood will be on their own heads: <<*David said to him, 'Your blood be on your head; for your own mouth has testified against you, saying, "I have killed the Lord's anointed"'*>> (2 Samuel 1:16).

Consciences are seared. Paul and others like him always sought to keep their consciences clear, even though that did not make them innocent of the iniquities of man: <<*I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me*>> (1 Corinthians 4:4). However, it does display their sincerity toward serving God and is something to be emulated by the church: <<*I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit*>> (Romans 9:1), <<*Indeed, this is our boast, the testimony of our conscience: we have behaved in the world with frankness and godly sincerity, not by earthly wisdom but by the grace of God – and all the more towards you*>> (2 Corinthians 1:12), <<*But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:5), <<*I am grateful to God – whom I worship with a clear conscience, as my ancestors did – when I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day*>> (2 Timothy 1:3), and: <<*Always be ready to make your defence to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence. Keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are maligned, those who abuse you for your good conduct in Christ may be put to shame. For it is better to suffer for doing good, if suffering should be God's will, than to suffer for doing evil*>> (1 Peter 3:15b-17).

Seared with a hot iron produces the imagery of branding slaves, for that is what happens to people who turn away from the Gospel truth to become enslaved to sin all over again, with all that entails for them in this life and the one to come.

The consciences of the false teachers have been seared, that is, desensitised and rendered ineffective, by their rebellion against the Gospel. This is the opposite of those who have maintained a good conscience as taught by Paul earlier in the letter: <<*But the aim of such instruction is love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith*>> (1 Timothy 1:5). This was recently stated but worth repeating.

³ They forbid marriage and demand 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, provided it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

1 Timothy 4:3-5

Paul reveals some of the content of the false teaching, although he does not explain the overall view that led to these prohibitions. Questions of propriety in regard to foods and marriage were significant issues elsewhere in Paul's letters, refer to Romans Chapter 14, 1 Corinthians 7:25-35, 1 Corinthians 8:1-10:33, and Colossians 2:16-23. This doctrine seems to have come about because the false

teachers believed that the end had already come and that resurrection was there for all in that current time. The paradox they faced in that the world around them remained unchanged, led them to try to enforce an Eden-like, pre-Fall mentality that led them into asceticism.

Although Jesus had alluded to all foods being clean, Peter was the first apostle to fully grasp this following a vision he had in Joppa: *<<About noon the next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He became hungry and wanted something to eat; and while it was being prepared, he fell into a trance. He saw the heaven opened and something like a large sheet coming down, being lowered to the ground by its four corners. In it were all kinds of four-footed creatures and reptiles and birds of the air. Then he heard a voice saying, 'Get up, Peter; kill and eat.' But Peter said, 'By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is profane or unclean.' The voice said to him again, a second time, 'What God has made clean, you must not call profane.' This happened three times, and the thing was suddenly taken up to heaven>>* (Acts 10:9-16). This not only referred to all foods but all peoples as well; in fact, to everything that God had created. This was something that was acknowledged long before by King David: *<<The earth is the Lord's and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it>>* (Psalm 24:1), to which the Psalmist gave further insight: *<<For every wild animal of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. I know all the birds of the air, and all that moves in the field is mine>>* (Psalm 50:10-11).

However, true food is not that which sustains the body: *<<He humbled you by letting you hunger, then by feeding you with manna, with which neither you nor your ancestors were acquainted, in order to make you understand that one does not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord>>* (Deuteronomy 8:3), although it would be Christ that supplied true food by the giving of his life as a sacrifice for all mankind: *<<Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day; for my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink>>* (John 6:54-55).

Believe and know the truth. If genuine Christian conduct flows from a vital relationship with Christ, then an imitation that is fanatically forced on others is at best human in origin, at worst demonic. Observable conduct may not be the litmus test of orthodoxy or salvation, but negative results here ought to raise questions, whether one is examining one's own faith: *<<Examine yourselves to see whether you are living in the faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realise that Jesus Christ is in you? – unless, indeed, you fail to pass the test!>>* (2 Corinthians 13:5), or the claims of a so-called 'Christian' movement: *<<For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love>>* (Galatians 5:6).

The false teaching seems to gauge holiness by what is denied or given up. In response, Paul affirms the goodness of everything created by God and the propriety of enjoying it as a gift from him: *<<Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of*

your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun>> (Ecclesiastes 9:7-9).

Nothing is to be rejected. Paul had already made his views known on marriage, so here he appeared to mainly be replying to the abstinence of foods, that was a particularly divisive topic for Jewish converts to faith. However, it was apparent that Jesus had declared all food to be clean specifically, and by association, all other things generally. Therefore Paul taught this, for Jesus had said: <<*You fools! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? So give for alms those things that are within; and see, everything will be clean for you>> (Luke 11:40-41).*

Received with thanksgiving. A key point for everyone is to continuously recognise the benevolence of God and the goodness he brings into every situation, even those that may appear to be bad. A thankful heart is the mark of a believer, especially in times of testing and hardship. Jesus frequently gave thanks to his Father, even for the things that he provided for others: <<*Taking the five loaves and the two fish, he looked up to heaven, and blessed and broke the loaves, and gave them to his disciples to set before the people; and he divided the two fish among them all>> (Mark 6:41).*

Sanctified by God or made holy translates the Greek word *hagiazō*, which means sanctify, make holy, or consecrate. Ordinary food should be considered sanctified by God, and Christians have the privilege of eating such holy food every day.

God's word is probably a reference to: <<*And God saw that it was good>> (Genesis 1:12, 1:21, 1:25, and 1:31). It is also known that in Judaism, the saying of grace before meals was based on Scripture, something that has continued in some Christian circles but not all.*

The main aim of giving thanks in these situations is to strengthen the relationship between the believer and their heavenly Father. There are undoubtedly implications here that go beyond the dinner table to include the Christian's appreciation of the environment in general, but the starting point for developing this kind of understanding is the recognition through prayers of thanksgiving of God's gracious provisions. Neither the true Gospel nor the life of salvation in this present age calls for ascetic denial. Rather, they encourage responsible use and enjoyment of God's creation.

VI. 1 Timothy 4:6-16 - A Good Minister of Jesus Christ

This section is a very much 'back to basics' approach by Paul to encourage Timothy specifically; through him the church in Ephesus; and now, through the Scripture of this letter, every single believer, to establish a solid foundation on which to build their lives, and to ensure they adhere strongly to the Gospel truth of apostolic teaching.

The protection of the church from dangers such as heresy, as well as its return to order, has much to do with the soundness of its leaders. Paul advises his readers to concentrate on the basics: steady nourishment from the Word of God, pursuit of the godly life in the Spirit, and the priority of mission. The false teachers in Ephesus had established different priorities as they pushed the church to the brink of destruction, something that may occur locally but can never happen globally.

Both paragraphs in this section, vv.6-10 and vv.11-16, open with a call for Timothy to speak certain truths to the congregation. The focus is on how Timothy, by his teaching and lifestyle, can help the church persevere in the face of the false teaching that appears to be causing so much division.

⁶ If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.

1 Timothy 4:6

The referent of these instructions, here and in v.11, is debated. It refers each time at least to the preceding paragraph, and it may refer more broadly to the entire letter.

To be called a good servant of Christ Jesus is all that any disciple could ever ask for in this life and would probably illicit the response: <<*His master said to him, "Well done, good and trustworthy slave; you have been trustworthy in a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master"*>> (Matthew 25:21), when the appropriate time comes.

Nourished on the words of the faith refers to receiving sound instruction on the Word of God, which can also be achieved by simply reading the bible attentively, although is far more productive when taught by someone gifted and called to do so.

The way Paul has worded this passage shows that it was a case that Timothy, and by implication this passage applies to all believers today, have had a solid grounding in the Word of God, which they have followed, in order to be a good servant of Christ, a result that will follow from the faith that the true teaching will give. The image is that of taking nourishment, and the present tense emphasises continual action or lifestyle change. However, this lifestyle is rooted in firm decisions made in the past, for the good disciple has followed the teaching of the faith, received in the past, into the present.

⁷ Have nothing to do with profane myths and old wives' tales. Train yourself in godliness, ⁸ for, while physical training is of some value, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:7-8

Profane myths and old wives' tales were clearly being passed round the early church and continue to be heard in the modern church too. People often prefer to live by their own guiding fictions, things they either believe to be truth, or at least choose to believe to be true, in order to justify their lifestyle choices. Having stated the need to spend time reading the Word and in prayer, it is also clear that a disciple must be careful as to which truth they are feeding on. The only true way for a disciple to live is by abiding in the accepted Word of God.

Train yourself in godliness. Paul is saying that this is something that believers have to work on in the same way they would develop the various gifts and skills they have. Godliness is not just as state they comes upon someone when they

make their commitment to serve God through Christ Jesus. The prophet gives a good indication as to how a believer should undertake such training: *<<Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean; remove the evil of your doings from before my eyes; cease to do evil, learn to do good; seek justice, rescue the oppressed, defend the orphan, plead for the widow>>* (Isaiah 1:16-17).

Godliness is valuable in every way. While physical training may promote good health and increase stamina, it does not necessarily help in all areas of life, especially a person's spiritual life. Living life according to the Gospel will provide an excellent framework for the present life, and an enduring faith in Christ will guarantee a place in his presence in the life to come. This is a promise from Scripture: *<<For the wicked shall be cut off, but those who wait for the Lord shall inherit the land>>* (Psalm 37:9), *<<The reward for humility and fear of the Lord is riches and honour and life>>* (Proverbs 22:4), *<<Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved>>* (Joel 2:32a), and: *<<Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth>>* (Matthew 5:5).

By physical training Paul may also have been referring to avoiding the human desires of the flesh that are unhelpful to a good spiritual life. Paul wrote about this to the churches in Galatia: *<<Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law. Now the works of the flesh are obvious: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, anger, quarrels, dissensions, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these. I am warning you, as I warned you before: those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against such things. And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires>>* (Galatians 5:16-24). Through such training the physical passions and propensity to sin can be brought under control and the reality of the Holy Spirit's operation in the life of the believer becomes evident.

⁹ The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance.

1 Timothy 4:9

The saying probably refers specifically to the value of godliness (v.8). This is the third sure saying of this letter. Refer also to 1 Timothy 1:15 and 3:1.

Worthy of full acceptance because Paul had received spiritual insight for all his teaching; these were not just his words but those given to him by revelation.

¹⁰ For to this end we toil and struggle, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe.

1 Timothy 4:10

To this end. The goal of Paul's labours is that people attain godliness (v.8) and its eternal value: *<<For to this end Christ died and lived again, so that he might*

be Lord of both the dead and the living>> (Romans 14:9), and: <<*To this end we always pray for you, asking that our God will make you worthy of his call and will fulfil by his power every good resolve and work of faith*>> (2 Thessalonians 1:11).

Toil and struggle is typical of Paul's description of Gospel ministry: <<*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honour, especially those who labour in preaching and teaching*>> (1 Timothy 5:17), <<*Greet Mary, who has worked very hard among you*>> (Romans 16:6), <<*Greet those workers in the Lord, Tryphæna and Tryphosa. Greet the beloved Persis, who has worked hard in the Lord*>> (Romans 16:12), <<*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace towards me has not been in vain. On the contrary, I worked harder than any of them – though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me*>> (1 Corinthians 15:10), <<*I urge you to put yourselves at the service of such people, and of everyone who works and toils with them*>> (1 Corinthians 16:16), <<*I am afraid that my work for you may have been wasted*>> (Galatians 4:11), and: <<*Thieves must give up stealing; rather let them labour and work honestly with their own hands, so as to have something to share with the needy*>> (Ephesians 4:28).

We have our hope set on the living God is a good summary statement for the Christian faith. However, the word hope here is a strong use of the word, for it is based on the promises of a loving and faithful God. It doesn't matter that a disciple has to toil and struggle, for God will recompense them for any loss they incur in a life that is given in service to him: <<*I will repay you for the years that the swarming locust has eaten, the hopper, the destroyer, and the cutter, my great army, which I sent against you*>> (Joel 2:25), which is a promise from God and: <<*For in him every one of God's promises is a 'Yes.'* For this reason it is through him that we say the 'Amen', to the glory of God>> (2 Corinthians 1:20).

The statement that God is the Saviour of all people, especially of those who believe could seem to teach universalism, i.e. that every person will eventually go to heaven. However, the rest of Scripture clearly denies this idea; refer to comments made on 1 Timothy 2:4. There are several other possible explanations for this phrase:

1. It means that Christ died for all people, but only those who believe in him are saved.
2. It means he is offered to all people, although not all receive him.
3. It means the Saviour of all people, namely those who believe, using a different translation of Greek *malista*, based on extra-biblical examples.
4. It means 'the helper of all people', taking Greek *Sōtēr*, i.e. Saviour, to refer not to forgiveness of sins but to God's common grace by which God helps and protects all people in need.
5. It means the Saviour of all kinds of people, not Jews only but both Jews and Greeks.

In any case, the emphasis is on God's care for the unsaved world, and in the flow of the letter, Paul is stressing this once more, as in: <<*This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved*>>

and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God; there is also one mediator between God and humankind, Christ Jesus, himself human>> (1 Timothy 2:3-5), that God's will that people would be saved is the basis of the universal mission: <<Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age'>> (Matthew 28:19-20).

Paul frequently refers to both Jesus and God as the Saviour, as can be seen in: <<Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God, who saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works but according to his own purpose and grace. This grace was given to us in Christ Jesus before the ages began, but it has now been revealed through the appearing of our Saviour Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel>> (2 Timothy 1:8-10).

Epecially of those who believe. Through no work, effort or ability of their own, a believer has a special place in God's heart, which is an outpouring of his grace and mercy. However, it must never be forgotten that he is the Saviour of all people and therefore the church needs to continue to spread the Gospel message so that even more will come to believe and place their hope in him, for it is their only hope. This was something that was always at the forefront of Paul's mind: <<**But how are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'**>> (Romans 10:14-15).

¹¹ These are the things you must insist on and teach.

1 Timothy 4:11

These things is a similar comment to: <<*these instructions*>> in v.6, and marks the start of the second and final paragraph of this section.

You must insist on and teach. Paul is clear and unambiguous that Gospel teaching is not offering an optional lifestyle but is fundamental to living a godly life as commanded for those who wish to follow Christ.

¹² Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

1 Timothy 4:12

Let no one despise your youth. Culturally, older men were respected and it was accepted that their age and experience generally gave them wisdom and knowledge, while younger men were expected to defer to them, but God's Word indicates otherwise: <<*Now Elihu had waited to speak to Job, because they were older than he. But when Elihu saw that there was no answer in the mouths of these three men, he became angry. Elihu son of Barachel the Buzite answered: 'I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you. I said, "Let days speak, and many years*

teach wisdom.” But truly it is the spirit in a mortal, the breath of the Almighty, that makes for understanding. It is not the old that are wise, nor the aged that understand what is right. Therefore I say, “Listen to me; let me also declare my opinion”>> (Job 32:4-10).

Your youth. From an analysis of other uses of this word, Greek *neotēs*, and the chronology of Timothy’s life to this point, starting when Timothy first joined Paul for his second ministry journey, circa AD49-50 <<*Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek*>> (Acts 16:1), commentators estimate Timothy’s age to be somewhere from his late 20s to mid-30s, with most favouring the mid-30s. This would mean that Timothy was about 15-20 years old when he joined Paul, which would have been normal for a disciple to join a Rabbi or teacher in that era.

If a younger man is called to set the believers an example, then it follows that all believers are to set a similar example, both to other believers and to those outside the church. They should display all the fine characteristics Paul wrote and many more besides. It also shows that believers can look to the younger generations as examples for them to follow. Age is no barrier to a Kingdom life. Nothing bridges the generation gap in the church like the spiritual maturity of those who are younger. At a more important level, nothing proves the veracity of the Gospel as well as evidence of its life-changing power, whether that be in individuals: <<*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us*>> (Philippians 3:17), which can find its way into the life of churches: <<*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, for in spite of persecution you received the word with joy inspired by the Holy Spirit, so that you became an example to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia*>> (1 Thessalonians 1:6-7).

Speech and conduct encompass most of observable life – the visible dimension of godliness. In fact, James places first importance on the control of the tongue, which will then provide for control of the rest of one’s behaviour: <<*For all of us make many mistakes. Anyone who makes no mistakes in speaking is perfect, able to keep the whole body in check with a bridle*>> (James 3:2). Through what a Christian says and does, the truth of the Christian faith will be either demonstrated or denied, for true spirituality, i.e. godliness, is the composite of faith or knowledge of God and its outworking in the believer’s life.

In love and in faith summarise the Christian life. Paul frequently aligns these two qualities, faith referring to the relationship with Christ and love to activity generated by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:6 states: <<*For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything; the only thing that counts is faith working through love*>>, which explains that genuine Christianity is ‘faith working through love’; a proper knowledge of and commitment to Christ which controls the life of the believer.

In purity alluded primarily to sexual conduct: <<*Do not speak harshly to an older man, but speak to him as to a father, to younger men as brothers, to older women as mothers, to younger women as sisters – with absolute purity*>> (1 Timothy 5:2). Paul singled out this concern undoubtedly because questionable conduct here will ruin the Christian leader’s reputation and ministry.

As the list suggests, effective ministry and godliness are inseparable. Remember, as Paul gives these instructions he warns the readers away from the heretics' one-sided, totally subjective concept of spirituality, and thereby encourages leaders to be models of the true life in the Spirit that involves the whole person.

¹³ Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching.

1 Timothy 4:13

Until I arrive indicates that Paul is giving Timothy his full apostolic authority in his absence. This should have carried significant weight for Timothy in his discussions both with church leaders and the congregations. It would have also been a great source of encouragement for Timothy to know that he commanded such a high level of trust and support from his mentor. It also provides an instruction not to delay in the work that he was called to do.

Public acts of worship would naturally include the public reading of Scripture that refers to reading to a gathering in the church, just as they did in the synagogues on each Sabbath Day. Jesus had announced the commencement of his Kingdom ministry at just such a gathering: *<<When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour'. And he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant, and sat down. The eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on him. Then he began to say to them, 'Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing'>>* (Luke 4:16-21). As a well known and respected Pharisee, Paul was invited to speak to those gathered in the synagogue in Pisidian Antioch: *<<After the reading of the law and the prophets, the officials of the synagogue sent them a message, saying, 'Brothers, if you have any word of exhortation for the people, give it'>>* (Acts 13:15). Paul then went on to explain and prove the message of the Gospel from the Scriptures. Paul refers to just such a gathering when he wrote to Corinth: *<<But their minds were hardened. Indeed, to this very day, when they hear the reading of the old covenant, that same veil is still there, since only in Christ is it set aside>>* (2 Corinthians 3:14).

Public reading refers to other documents as well, such as Paul's own letters: *<<And when this letter has been read among you, have it read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and see that you read also the letter from Laodicea>>* (Colossians 4:16), for public reading in the churches points to the authority of Paul's letters and also assumes that they were written to be understood by ordinary believers.

The reading of Scripture in a gathering of believers serves two key purposes:

1. It helps them to focus their attention on God, thus continuing to build the relationship.
2. It prepares the people for the exposition and application of Scripture.

However, it is not just the reading of the Scripture that is important, for it needs to be applied and therefore it should be delivered in a way that exhorts, encourages, comforts and appeals to a believer to make changes to their lives. If the speaker is truly anointed and called to the work then the message will be Spirit-led: <<*To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit*>> (1 Corinthians 12:8).

To exhorting, to teaching. These two are given here as two distinct activities in the worship service, where exhorting, Greek *paraklesis*, is often translated preaching. It is often difficult to distinguish between these two. Some would say that exhorting is to challenge people to respond, whereas teaching is the passing on of knowledge about God and theological aspects of Scripture. It seems difficult to believe that one would exhort the people without reference to the Scriptures and their interpretation. Likewise, to teach someone about the bible without some expectation of a response is also unlikely in a public gathering at least. Therefore, it is better not to be too dogmatic about terminology and leave room for overlap between the two.

¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

1 Timothy 4:14

Gift, Greek *charisma*, refers to something related to Timothy's calling to and gifting for ministry, as indicated by God, through prophecy, and recognised by the church when the council of elders laid their hands on Timothy, although the exact nature of the gift that Timothy received is not specified. This occasion appears to have been the ordination of Timothy into the service of the church that he served primarily as an evangelist, as part of his supporting role to Paul. Refer also to comments made on 1 Timothy 1:18.

¹⁵ Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress.

1 Timothy 4:15

These things that Timothy is to put into practice and devote himself to are the things commanded in vv.12-13, encompassing his behaviour and teaching: <<*to yourself and to your teaching*>> (v.16). Those who continue to engage in the ministries they are gifted for, will see fruit as they make forward progress under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Paul had exhorted the Philippians in similar fashion: <<*Since I am convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with all of you for your progress and joy in faith*>> (Philippians 1:25).

¹⁶ Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

1 Timothy 4:16

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching. It is important for church leaders to ensure their own personal wellbeing and also to ensure they are

spiritually sound for their work. This can be achieved by having an accountability partner and ensuring that they too are fed by other leaders of good repute. In the modern age, it is relatively easy to gain access to good teaching or to attend conferences to hear good speakers and mix with other leaders, in order to help each other grow in the faith. Sadly, many leaders in particular, under the burden of their church duties, are spending insufficient time developing their relationship with God, whether that is time in the Word or in prayer, or however it works best for an individual. For just as quality time is needed for friends and family, it is just as true with the most important relationship of all! This also applies to all disciples with busy lifestyles and work or family commitments.

Timothy's perseverance in sound doctrine and practice will save him, i.e. it will lead him to persevere in the faith, confirming his salvation. This type of ministry will be effective in preserving his hearers as well, probably of more importance to men like Timothy and certainly Paul than even their own salvation, for Paul had offered to forego his own salvation in return for that of his countrymen: <<***I am speaking the truth in Christ – I am not lying; my conscience confirms it by the Holy Spirit – I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed and cut off from Christ for the sake of my own people, my kindred according to the flesh***>> (Romans 9:1-3); a truly outstanding offer of love from a man who knew the fullness of God's grace.

Salvation is always the goal but there is a journey to undertake first. It starts with having saving faith in Christ Jesus, accepting him as a personal Lord and Saviour, which is conversion; this is then extended by the promise of a new life in the Spirit, i.e. regeneration, which will end in glorification at the return of Christ at the end of the age.