

1 Timothy-by Rick Stark

Chapter 1

What is to happen to the church as God's people in the world? How is the church to be "*the household of God... the pillar and buttress of truth*"? This is the apostle Paul's overriding preoccupation and theme in writing to his protégé Timothy (3:14-15), and where then should he begin? Spiritual leadership: What does true spiritual leadership look like in the life of the local church? Paul says it's about one's stand and one's story. First, true spiritual leadership is to courageously stand rather than "*swerve*" ("*guard the truth*," 6:20): stewardship of truth revealed in the scriptures over against arrogant speculation (vv.3-7); and over against perverted uses of the Law (vv.8-11; first use of the Law is to mirror God's holiness and thus drive one to Christ). Truth matters, then and now; cracks in the foundation allow for disaster down the road, but the proof is in the "*aim*" (fruit; v.5). Second, true spiritual leadership is about one's story: authentic ("*faith and love*") gospel experience in the gracious and powerful rescue of Jesus Christ. (vv.12-17) Note the humble transparency (sin); the gratitude and dependence (a Savior); and the willingness to be an instrument in the Redeemer's hand (an example). Exactly – this is true spiritual leadership over against the shipwrecked – and so is and so goes the church.

Chapter 2

If chapter one was about the pastors of the church (true spiritual leadership), now the focus turns to the other side of the pulpit – the people in the pew. What is the priority of the Christian? It is prayer: corporate and personal (note the rich wording: present tense, plural, and the different nuances of the meaning of prayer). First, Paul urges praying with the Great Commandment in mind (v.1, "*all people*"). We are to be a people always praying, and this out of a love for God and our neighbor. Second, Paul urges praying with the Cultural Mandate in mind (v.2, "*kings and authorities*"). Why? Because these can influence so many others for good or for evil. We pray for their conversions, for moral conscience, and for administrative righteousness and justice. This is community-minded praying for the common good, which often leads to a greater promotion of Christ and His church. Third, Paul urges praying with the Great Commission in mind (vv.3-7, "*all people to be saved...*"). This is mission-minded praying – in line with both the sufficiency of the gospel to all and the efficiency of the gospel for all who will believe. There's only One who can save and upon Him alone we are dependent. In vv.8-15 (quite controversial these days), the focus is upon "*holy hands and modest bodies*"... godliness and mutual respect in the complementary roles and relationships of men and women in the church.

Chapter 3

"*This saying is trustworthy*" (1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2 Tim.2:11; Titus 3:8) is Paul's way of underscoring what is a core value of the church. By way of contrast (i.e. disastrous leadership, 1:3-7, 19-20), Paul's second *saying*, a second core value of the church, is *the plurality of godly officers (elders, vv.1-7; deacons, vv.8-13)*. Why is it a "*noble task*"? Just look at the qualifications, for there you discover, in character and conduct, the reflection Christ (albeit imperfectly) in all three of His divine offices: prophet, priest, and king. It is beautiful and good and wise to want to follow in the steps of the Savior: feeding as a shepherd, leading as a servant, interceding in justice and mercy. Who wouldn't want this kind of infrastructure, this kind of wisdom and direction and protection in the church? And it all starts, Paul says, in the man himself; his marriage, his family, his money and his reputation offer only but evidence of the maturity growing inside. Two additional thoughts: first, one should not undervalue the importance of women

serving alongside the officers (*behind every good man is a better woman*); and second, why does Paul conclude with a hymn or creed? Our song, our hope, our confession... no one can fill such a tall order nor can the pillars of the church stand apart from the solid foundation of Christ – the *mystery of godliness*, vv.15-16.

Chapter 4

Maybe we should title this section, “How to Choose A Good Church?” The apostle, by the prophetic revelation of the Spirit, saw dark days, confusing days coming for the Christian (2 Tim.4:3-4; Matt.24:9-13) – “*apostasy*,” to depart, desert, fall away from the faith. The cause (vv.1-5)?: *diabolical corruption* (Satan is the deceiver armed with a different gospel); *hypocritical corruption* (duplicity of life, 2 Tim.3:5-9); and *ethical corruption* (the deceived become deceivers in pseudo-morality, whether in legalism or licentiousness). Sound familiar (creation – fall)? What then is the correction for corruption in the church (vv.6-10)? It’s found in another “*trustworthy saying*” – hit the gym (“*gymnasia*” is translated “*train*” and where we get our English word gymnasium). Paul says the Christian, for both pulpit and pew, is to put in the hard work, training in two dimensions: *doctrine* (v.6) and *devotion* (v.7). Using an athletic metaphor, the pastor is our coach (vv.11-12); the routine for our workout is clear (vv.13-16); and the reason (goal) is a godliness that holds out hope and a promise that points (vv.8, 10, 16). Here lies a third gospel-focused core value (“*saying*”) of the church: *doctrine leading to life and godliness*. Find a church like this and plant yourself!

Chapter 5

The “*golden days*” of the early church? Not! A kaleidoscope of challenging issues had left young pastor Tim faint of heart, so Paul goes on to instruct Timothy (and all of us) on relating to people (vv.1-2, even while saying hard things), and dealing with the care of widows (vv.3-16), and then issues involving church elders (vv.17-25). First, note the wisdom of a tamed-tongue and posture toward each (vv.1-2). Second, and consistent with the heart of God (Old Testament, Jesus’ teachings), Paul offers wisdom and discernment of the widows in need (vv.3-8; don’t miss the provocative familial responsibility, v.8). Whether Paul is continuing the qualifications of widows in need of the church’s assistance (vv.9-16) or shifted gears, suggesting a list (“*enrollment*”) of widows capable of offering service, the amount of ink on the subject alerts us to the needs and opportunities of the gospel. Third, Paul’s instructions include what is rightfully owed to the elders: remuneration and respect (“*double honor*”) to those who serve well; and accountability and protection to those who are questionable. Over time, wisdom says the quality of fruit becomes conspicuous in the man and in the church (vv.24-25).

Chapter 6

Church health is not about the condition of its buildings but its people; and in Timothy’s case at Ephesus, three important groups, each with particular issues: widows, elders, and slaves. But what unites them? “*Honor*” (5:3, 17; 6:1) – to give preference, deference, honor as more important than self (Phil.2:3). Now the Apostle comes to a fourth group – apostates. Paul notes their false teaching (3), their character (3,4), and their corruption (4,5). A response? First, Paul describes what is true godliness (6-10). Second, in juxtaposition (“*But you...*” 11), he charges the true teacher – Timothy – pushing and motivating Timothy in a pastor’s calling and character (11-16): to *flee* and *follow* (11), to *fight* and *fasten onto* (12), and to *stand* in his calling after Jesus Christ (13-14). Don’t miss Paul’s awesome ‘benediction’, lifting up Timothy’s eyes and heart to that which is “*larger than life, greater than self, lasting forever*” – the sovereignty of our great God and King, to whom is owed honor and allegiance forevermore. Almost as postscript, whether riches or positions of influence, leaders in the church are to *give, guard, and stay* the course. Grace, however, is not a postscript but always the prescript!

-Reflecting on 1 Timothy-

Before moving on to our next book of the Bible, take some time today to reflect on what we've read in 1 Timothy. Perhaps re-visit a favorite chapter or an especially meaningful passage. Or read the beginning chapter(s) again, now that you've read the whole. Or go back to a part of the book that struck you as curious and see if it makes more sense now. Or speed-read the whole thing again, seeking to reinforce its main themes. Or... perhaps you need a catch-up day to finish 1 Timothy before we move forward?

"In the way of your testimonies I delight as much as in all riches." Psalm 119.14