

1 Timothy - Practise being Godly ::

Are we sharing God's passion for people to be saved and grow in their knowledge of the truth? CRAIG TUCKER shows us how, as a church, we should be growing in godliness and sharing God's great passion ...

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These days not just corporations but individuals are encouraged to develop personal mission statements. Your personal trainer will spend hours with you to develop a simple sentence that sums up who you are and you'll use that to develop your life goals and evaluate your lifestyle. It should never be a copy of somebody else's but something that authentically expresses the real you. It sounds like the latest trend that will disappear as quickly as it arrived. However, when we read 1 Timothy, it's interesting to see that God has a personal mission statement. And, even more surprisingly, he calls you and I to share it with him and adopt it as our own personal mission statement.

Against a backdrop of "law keeping to get right with God" the big theme of 1 Timothy is neatly expressed in 1 Timothy 2:2-3: "This is good, and pleases God our Saviour, who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth." Timothy is to share God's passion for people to become Christians and grow as they gain knowledge and understanding of the truth about God. This was a helpful handle in preaching the book. Each week I pushed the idea that godliness is not simply a set of external behaviours. Instead godliness, being like God, must include sharing God's great desire: for people to be saved and to grow in their knowledge of Christ. It makes a great mission statement for church.

The letter can be understood in terms of "sharing God's great passion".

- If we share God's passion, for all people to be saved, it will show in how we pray, praying for "all people everywhere" (2:1-4).
- If we share God's passion, for people to come to a knowledge of the truth, it will show in the kind of leaders we appoint (being able to teach the truth and live the truth – 1 Timothy 3), and in what we expect leaders to do (5:17).
- Sharing God's passion is Timothy's job description (4:13).

The False Teaching

A lot of ink gets spilt on what exactly the false teachers are saying and doing at Ephesus. I found the preoccupation of the commentaries with the false teaching frustrating. They tend to read the text in the light of their particular tenuous theories. The false teaching is often identified as some early form of Gnosticism. People think they can see strains of early asceticism in references to abstaining from food and marriage (4:3). This view is popular with people who have a late date for 1 Timothy.

The other source of wild speculation is the view that Ephesus is a hot bed of sorcery. While it is true that Ephesus, as presented in the book of Acts, is a centre for pagan magicians it is a long bow to read this into 1 Timothy. Like the letter to the Ephesians, there seems little "magic" background behind a plain reading of 1 Timothy. Some commentaries on Ephesians become quite eccentric in

their reading of magic power and spiritual power into the letter. It would be easy to make the same mistake with 1 Timothy.

On a plain reading of the letter, it would seem that Paul's opponents are Judaizers. This seems an obvious suggestion but is uncommon in the commentaries. Paul's key accusation against the false teachers is that they misuse the law and do not understand grace. They do not see that the purpose of the law is to convict us of our sinfulness. Given the key theme of the letter (see below) it would also be reasonable to conclude the false teachers were exclusivists, hostile to the Gentile mission. It fits with what we know of the conflicts in the Asia Minor churches from the book of Acts, as well as the controversies in Galatia and Philippi addressed in Paul's letters. An early date for 1 Timothy fits well with this idea.

I think the view that 1 Timothy was written late has meant that commentators have discarded this option. The consensus for a late date is waning (see box on page 13), in favour of a very early date, maybe earlier than many of Paul's letters to churches. An early date for 1 Timothy all but rules out a proto-Gnostic heresy.

Dating 1 Timothy

A second century date is often assumed for the pastorals because:

1. Paul didn't write them, the vocabulary of these letters is quite different from Paul's earlier letters;
2. Likewise, Paul would never have written what is said here about women in 1 Timothy 2; and
3. The picture of church presented in the pastorals is unlike what we know of New Testament church life in Acts and is like what we know of second century church life. Things such as the structure of overseers and deacons and the suggestion that leaders be paid. The fluidity of the Acts church is being replaced by rigid hierarchical structures and a professional clergy.

However, even some of the strongest advocates of this position (e.g. Robert Banks) have now changed their mind. The similarity with second century trends have been overplayed and the differences between Acts and 1 Timothy have been exaggerated. There are elders/overseers at Ephesus in Acts 20, presumably set up by Paul. Deacons appear in Acts 6. Paul accepted support from churches (Phil 4). Paul's teaching on women in 1 Timothy 2 is consistent with 1 Corinthians 11 and 14.

Nothing in 1 Timothy dates the letter other than Paul and Timothy no longer being together. He does not yet seem to be in prison (as in 2 Tim). It could have been penned in Jerusalem awaiting his transport to Rome. Given the way Paul's opponents have followed him to Galatia and Phillipi, it is quite reasonable to read 1 Timothy as one of Paul's earliest letters.

1 Timothy 2:3-7

The way that 1 Timothy 2:3-7 appears to meet the false teachers head-on supports the idea that it is a key passage.

- Jesus is the only means of being right with God (2:5). No other form of priestly mediation or law keeping can make you right with God.
- Jesus as the Mediator is the fulfilment that has arrived "in its proper time". What the Judaizers need to hear is that everything beforehand (priest, temple, law) was in preparation for the Mediator who would come.

- In this context Paul emphasises his divine appointment as an apostle to the Gentiles.

1 Timothy 3:14-16

It is often argued that proto-Gnosticism is being addressed in the hymn that emphasises the bodily incarnation (ejn sarkiv) of Jesus in 3:14-16. But a closer examination of the hymn shows that its stress is on Jesus being a Saviour for the nations, believed on in all the world. This is just the thing to sing at someone unhappy about Paul's Gentile mission. Likewise the vindication of the Spirit emphasises Jesus' credentials as the genuine Davidic Messiah (note the way the Spirit has this authenticating role in Luke-Acts).

Normally we think of godliness as "a list of things you do" but by introducing the hymn with the words "the mystery of godliness" Paul seems to be suggesting that godliness has more to do with God's desire to save people through Jesus. The hymn celebrates God's desire to save people by sending his Son, and grow in their knowledge of the truth in the way the hymn focuses on Jesus being "made known" in his incarnation and "believed" through Gospel preaching.

Timeless Polity Handbook or Occasional Letter?

Traditionally we misread 1 Timothy as a kind of polity handbook on how to do church. It is tempting to preach it that way. However:

- It is a personal letter. It has buckets of emotion and intimacy that gives us lots of insights into the ministry of discipleship that Paul has with Timothy. I think there are lots of observations to make along the way in preaching about discipling and encouraging each other that gets illustrated in the dynamic of their relationship.
- It addresses an urgent situation. People are shipwrecking their faith. The church at Ephesus is in crisis: they're about to let the Gospel slip through their fingers. 1 Timothy needs to be read against the context of Acts 20 and Paul's prediction of wolves and his intimate love for the Ephesian leaders.

However, when it is rightly understood, 1 Timothy does set the agenda for church. It doesn't set the agenda by outlining a leadership structure of elders and deacons but by outlining a mission statement with which to test everything we do at church: "Are we sharing God's passion for people to be saved and grow in their knowledge of the truth?"

A tangential issue: it is interesting to compare Ephesians and 1 Timothy. Although 1 Timothy is a letter addressed to an individual rather than a group, it is interesting to notice the differences. It adds weight to the view that Ephesians is a cyclic letter, but more on that another time.

Resources

One book I found most exciting in the last 12 months is the collection of essays titled *The Gospels for All Christians* (ed. Richard Baukham, Eerdmans, 1998). Peter Bolt thinks that this collection will turn New Testament scholarship on its head! Written by some heavy weight evangelicals, it challenges the idea that the Gospels and New Testament letters were written for tightly defined "communities" quite isolated from each other sociologically and theology and that the distinctives of each "community" can be read from the text (e.g. Matthew is written to Jewish believers, with a high view of church, and who play golf on Wednesday afternoons!). Variations on the emphasis of different Gospels can be explained in many other ways. It suggests that New Testament churches

across the Roman Empire were probably in fairly regular contact and that the New Testament documents circulated widely in very quick time.

I dipped into Gordon Fee (NIBC). It was helpful in some ways but overly influenced by his theory on the false teaching. It was also disappointing on 1 Timothy 2 especially. There remains to be written a really good commentary on the Pastorals.

Why I Did What I Did

As a new congregation with people coming from disparate background, 1 Timothy worked well for setting a Gospel-focused agenda for church. I wanted to talk early on about some hot potatoes such as women in ministry, leadership (as we were looking at appointing elders), the centrality of the Gospel and the Scriptures to what we are on about, money, and some other issues. I could have done a topical series but that would have meant underlining “problem issues”. Doing 1 Timothy meant they could “come up in conversation” as we worked our way through the book. We spent most of our time talking about the need to be a church with a focus on the Gospel –“hot” issues were assessed in that light which was helpful.

We did 1 Timothy in six bites:

1. 1 Tim 1 Knowing God’s Grace
2. 1 Tim 2 Sharing God’s Passion
3. 1 Tim 3 Being Led into God’s Truth
4. 1 Tim 4:1-5:2 Training in Godliness
5. 1 Tim 5:3-22 Honouring God’s Family
6. 1 Tim 6:3-21 Knowing God’s Contentment

Talk 1—A People of Grace (1 Tim 1)

I started off with an illustration about getting lost on holidays. Church can be like that: we keep going, but we’re not really sure where we are supposed to be going, where we’re headed, we’re just hoping it’s the right direction. 1 Timothy is a deeply personal letter but a letter with lots to say about what it means for us to be God’s people and where we need to be going.

There is a Crisis at Ephesus

In Acts 20 we see that Paul leaves Ephesus with an emotional farewell and a chilling warning (Acts 20:29). As we fast forward from Paul’s farewell we see that everything’s happened just as Paul said. The exact disaster that Paul warned of in Acts has happened. In 1 Timothy 1:3 we see what this crisis is. The crisis at Ephesus is about the truth: leaders have arisen, from their own number, and are leading the people away from the truth.

In 1:20 we get a feel for the seriousness of this problem. “Some have already...shipwrecked their faith”. The conflict at Ephesus is not some obscure nit picking debate about some irrelevant miniscule theological distinction. It’s about how you get right with God. How you become a Christian. The things you need to believe to be saved. Life and death is at stake.

The experiences of the congregation at Ephesus are a chilling warning for us. The congregation was established by Paul himself and, for three years, he taught them the Christian message. You couldn’t

get a better start, could you? But now the congregation is headed for shipwreck. The truth of the Gospel is being distorted. The message to us: be on your guard.

The Place of the Law

But how exactly is the Christian message been distorted? In verse 7 we see that it's about the law, the commandments of the Old Testament. Or more precisely: misunderstanding the purpose of the law.

On holidays last year, our family went on a bushwalk. We took all the stuff for making sandwiches in a rucksack, went off into the bush, found this great place for lunch and sat down. We had everything we need for our sandwiches ... everything except a knife. (We're good at leaving things behind on holidays!) Have you ever tried spreading peanut butter with a car key? I can tell you, it works a little bit better than gum leaves and a whole lot better than twigs that just tend to break off and get stuck in the peanut butter. Sticks are good for starting fires and car keys are good for opening cars. For their intended purpose they work perfectly but for spreading sandwiches they're useless.

It's the same with the Old Testament law. When used for the right purpose the law is good but in the wrong hands, when someone uses it for a purpose it was never intended for, it just makes a big mess.

What's the law good for? In verse 9 Paul explains that "the law is not for the righteous". The law isn't for good people, but for "lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for adulterers and perverts, for slave traders and liars and perjurers". These are the people who benefit from the Old Testament law. The purpose of the law is to show us how desperately unrighteous we all are. How much every one of us, try as we may to keep God's commandments, fails and falls short.

If your reaction as you read through this list of sinners is to think: "Hey, wait a minute, I might've done a few things wrong, told the odd little lie. I might be a liar sometimes but I'm not in the same category as murderers. Why does he mention liars in the same breath as adulterers and perverts, slave traders?"

Well you see, the law says you are in the same category, in God's eyes. The law isn't there so that I can take pride in the fact I've not murdered anyone. No, it forces me to see that we're all sinners who need God's forgiveness. We can't earn our way into heaven. This can only happen if God gives it to us, accepts us, as a completely undeserved gift.

To clinch the argument, Paul gives us an example. He presents himself as "Exhibit A". Concrete evidence: God forgives the undeserving who have not kept his commands (v 12). In Acts 26 he describes himself as a persecutor, blasphemer and a violent man. Opposing the name of Jesus and destroying God's people. If ever there were anyone God could be justifiably angry with it would be Paul.

Paul misunderstood the law. He thought law keeping was the way to please God but, in his desperation to please God, he was doing the very thing God hates. Paul is the greatest example of misusing the law. He's also the greatest example of an unworthy person finding God's forgiveness. In verse 16, God deliberately made Paul an example. Forgiving sinners is what God's all about.

The big issue at Ephesus is grace. Freely forgiven, or keeping the law? People are being told: keep the law and God will accept you. This message is not just wrong but dreadfully destructive. To lose grace is to shipwreck your faith.

A Trustworthy Saying: Never Forget Grace (1 Tim 1:15)

In the letter of 1 Timothy we'll meet the phrase "here is a trustworthy saying" three times. Here is a saying, something of such importance, a principle, something that, as God's people, we must never forget: "Christ Jesus came into the world...to save sinners."

The ground of our fellowship, the purpose we are here is clear: we're here as a demonstration of God's grace, to tell others of God's grace. Everyone's greatest need is to be right with God, to find his grace.

There's a well-known story about a surf club on the northern beaches of Sydney, very close to where I grew up. It was founded in the first half of the 20th century. The beach was notorious for rips and when a local boy disappeared swimming one day the local people got together. They formed a group, to organise a surf club, patrol the beach on weekends...rescue people drowning in the surf. The surf club became very successful. Everyone saw the need. Numbers grew. They built a clubhouse for their meetings. The club took on a social life, they had dances on Saturday nights, and eventually a bigger clubhouse was needed. To fund it they ran sausage sizzles and Bingo on Wednesday night. And in a short amount of time the new clubhouse was built. It was a magnificent building. But a funny thing happened. While there was no shortage of willing helpers with the Bingo, the beer and prawn nights and the dances were growing in popularity, they began to struggle to fill the roster for the beach patrols. Lots of people wanted to be part of the club but not the rescuing part. In fact, eventually, they cancelled the beach patrols, for lack of interest, even though the social life of the club was booming. They realised the problem when a man drowned on the now un-patrolled beach the next summer. They forget who they were. They forgot they were there to see people saved, to train up more lifesavers and to support the beach patrols.

Do you reckon that could ever happen to a church? That we could forget who we are: a people of grace, undeserving sinners, rescued by God, a people of grace to one another and a people holding out God's grace to a lost, lost, world in desperate need of rescue?

Talk 2—A People of Godliness (1 Tim 2)

For Christians at the end of the 20th century, 1 Timothy 2 is probably one of the most controversial chapters in the Bible, which is really quite strange when you think about it. The whole letter of 1 Timothy, was penned, not to stir up trouble, but to resolve it. Not to start controversy but show Timothy how to handle those creating controversy at Ephesus. Especially here in chapter 2, Paul writes, not to stir up trouble, but with a great desire to unite people around the truth.

Godliness in What We Pray

God tells us to pray for all people, because of what he's like. God's great longing is for "all people to be saved, and to come to a knowledge of the truth". That's God's great desire for everyone in this room, everyone in your work place, everyone in your family. It's why he sent Jesus to die on a cross.

If our prayers are godly prayers, they'll reflect God's concern. We'll want everyone to be saved and, once saved, to grow in their knowledge of the truth. It will shape not just our prayers, our requests, our intercessions, our thanksgiving, but all of our life. It will be the great test of everything we do as a church. We can tell if what we're doing is pleasing to God. Will it help people become Christians, and once they are Christians, to grow in their knowledge of the truth?

This is the key to understanding verse 2. Why pray for kings and rulers in authority? We're to pray for our leaders, not that they'll escape scrutiny on their Travel Allowances, that the leaked memos about them won't be too damaging, that the rotting of electoral roles by their staff will remain undetected, or simply that your preferred brand of politician win the election, but so we can live "peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness". At first that might seem like the great middle-class suburban prayer: "Lord gives us a peaceful neighbourhood... a house in a quiet cul-de-sac, no barking dogs or noisy teenagers and please, please may we not be under the flight path." That's not it at all. It's really to pray for peace: so we can get on with being godly and holy. It's a prayer that there may be no obstacles for the Gospel, for our work of seeing people become Christians and grow in their knowledge of the truth.

As Australians, we have no appreciation of how good we have it. In Malaysia, it's illegal to talk to Muslims about Jesus and you'll go to jail if a Muslim you speak with becomes a Christian. We should pray for peace in Indonesia, Gospel work has been greatly disrupted in recent months. We need to pray for peace so that local churches can get on with the job of building up their people. God's desire is for everyone in Indonesia to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. If we share his passion, it will show in how we pray..

Godliness in How We Pray

At verse 8, Paul turns from what things we pray for to thinking about how we pray.

Men

Paul's great concern, when men pray, is what we do with our hands. One of our great problems as Christians is if the person leading us in prayer or singing does it with their hands uplifted. It won't be too many weeks before people in the congregation start doing it and those who don't want to lift up their hands leave. Eventually, almost inevitably, it starts to be seen as more spiritual, as more worshipful. Likewise, if the leader keeps their hands safely and firmly glued by their sides that becomes the norm and newcomers who raise their hands are viewed with great suspicion. I think we need to keep saying, and here in verse 8, that the point Paul makes is that it doesn't matter if our hands lifted or lowered. This is not the real issue. What counts is whether our hands are holy.

In the Old Testament, holy hands or clean hands, is in contrast to violence and bloodshed ("blood on your hands"). Psalm 7 provides an example of this. Paul especially speaks to men. With our hands we can reach out in friendship, in forgiveness and to embrace; with our hands we can express tenderness or we can strike, hurt and inflict pain.

An all too common scenario in Australian homes: She is quick with her words, sharp with her tongue. He can never match her verbally when they fight but he can always finish it with his fist. He can do something about feeling powerless and belittled and he can do it with his hands.

Here is something that God hates: the man who comes to church, and prays impressive prayers, with unclean hands.

Women

Well, as with men, Paul addresses the problem, of outward appearance as a desperate attempt to hide what's really happening on the inside. With women too, in verse 9, Paul addresses outward appearance as opposed to the things of the heart. Have the temptations for men and women changed all that much in 2000 years? Sure, men can be vain about their appearance and women can be violent but what are the problems in our community right now that we're not really sure how to deal with?

There were two ads on the bus I was driving behind yesterday. One was an ad for domestic violence. The other had images of women, impossibly thin, airbrushed and doctored plugging makeup, clothes, stockings, diets, all telling women the same message: what counts, all that matters, is body shape and looking beautiful, on the outside.

Men and Women

Verse 11 is not just controversial but also difficult to understand. When Paul says women are to be silent in church, he can't mean: that women are to be silent in church. Look at 1 Corinthians 11 as an example. Whatever exactly prophesy is, one thing for sure, it wasn't silent. 1 Timothy 2 is not a command for silence in general. There's really only one specific activity in view here: the activity of women teaching in authority over men.

It sometimes suggested that maybe there was some very specific problem at Ephesus. One group are being too noisy and they just happened to be women. But, from verse 13, the reason for this command, it couldn't be more all encompassing: Paul takes us back to Genesis 2 and 3, to the very way God's made us, our design as men and women, that ought to be reflected in our relationships at church.

In Genesis 2:13 we see that Adam and Eve have been created equal but different. Adam being first doesn't mean that he is better than Eve, but it does give him a special responsibility as leader. In the garden, Adam alone is given the command to not eat from the tree of good and evil.

In Genesis 2:14 we see that when sin entered the world, it turned everything in God's good creation upside down. A creature takes God's place, declaring what's right and wrong, what's true and false, and good. And even within the Adam-Eve relationship the serpent commands Eve, who then mediates his words to Adam. Paul's point is not that Eve sinned and Adam didn't. It's about the order things were done in. (In fact, when God confronts them in Genesis 3, he holds Adam especially responsible. In Romans 5, Paul makes the same point: the original sinner is Adam.) It's not that Eve's dumber than Adam, more gullible or undiscerning in spiritual things. Satan, with all his cunning, has deceived her. Adam needs no persuading. He just eats what he's given.

And, finally, we see that in Genesis 2:15 women have been saved through childbirth.

The application from Genesis is that men and women are equal but different.

In Ephesus where are the men? As the letter of 1 Timothy goes on, Timothy's task is to raise up men for leadership; godly men who know the truth. That's what is desperately needed.

1 Timothy 2 presents us with a great challenge: do we see this passage as a bitter pill? As something we have to do 'cause God says it but we really wish he hadn't? Or is it God's good gift? Something that's been written, not to deprive us, or divide us, or downtrend any of us, but as part of his loving word which leads us into life in its fullness, the equality and diversity of how he's made us, and, just as in marriage, men and women compliment each other to bring out the best in each other?

Let's not miss the big picture of what this chapter is about. Paul writes to the congregation at Ephesus, God's word to us this morning, not to stir up controversy, not to distract us, but to focus us on the work of the kingdom: that people be saved and grow in a knowledge of the truth. He calls us to right relationships as God intended. For modest dress, for holy hands, for servant leadership.

Talk 3—A People of Godliness (1 Tim 3)

A trustworthy saying?

This passage begins with a puzzle in 3:1. Three times in 1 Timothy, we get this important sounding statement: "Here is a trustworthy saying." These sayings give us three key truths, three pillars to build church on.

First: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. Third: we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men. Both say something about the centrality of Jesus. Central truths we're to believe and hold dear; truths at the heart of being a Christian.

But the middle one: "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task." At first glance it just doesn't seem to be in the same league – why is this as important as being clear about God's grace to us as sinners, and our certainty about heaven?

If I asked you, to think of the three key truths about Christianity – to write down three things most important for us to remember as a congregation – would you've come up with "If anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, he desires a noble task"?

God keeps surprising me when I read the Bible. I think I've got it all worked out, and then a verse like this ambushes me. God sees things differently to me and my thinking needs to change. Who the leaders are, what they do, the issue of leadership is much more essential, of much more crucial importance, than I tend to think it is.

But there's something even harder to swallow: it's not just that leadership is important, but that it's a good thing to want to be a leader. As Australians, we're deeply suspicious of people who "aspire" to leadership, who long to be in charge. We prefer reluctant leaders, pushed forward, while protesting their unworthiness. But God says exactly the opposite. All this underlines the question: why is leadership so important? Let's see if we become clearer about that as we look at what God has to say in our passage today.

What is an Overseer?

We don't know what overseers are and, in the end, it doesn't actually matter. On the topic of church government the Bible doesn't give structures, but principles. (How we structure things is a matter of wisdom to work out in different contexts.) God is much less interested in whether we have single leaders, team leadership, or even bishops than he is in the qualities those leaders are to have.

This makes 1 Timothy 3 enormously important. While it is unclear on structure, it is painstakingly clear on the qualities required of leaders. It spells out the kind of things we need in leaders at every level of leadership in our church family: pastors, elders, small group leaders, kids church teachers, those leading us musically, etc.

Teaching the Truth

A leader must teach the truth and live the truth. And you must have both: to just live a godly life, to live the truth without teaching the truth, is not leadership. God's great desire, that he "wants all people to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth", is reflected in the kind of leaders he wants. Leading their people into knowing God better. Opening the Bible, teaching the truth and modelling it in their godly lives. Both must go together.

The only place that God wants his people to be led is into a richer and greater knowledge of his word. If you're not leading them there then you're not leading them the way God wants you to.

Again, it's interesting with deacons from verse 8. Much like our Committee of Management – you need people good at managing, organising and bookkeeping, well it's surprising. Those things might be good but they're not on God's list. He wants godliness, not practical skills! Most importantly, they must have a deep grasp of the truth. At every level of serving in our church family, we need people shaped by God and his word who share his priorities and passions.

Doing the Truth

It's the same with leaders. It's not asking, do they have the management skills for the job, but rather are they godly?

This is a radical thing. In secular job interviews all that matters are skills. If you go for a job interview as an architect, they don't ask you about your private life, your personal relationships or your sexual purity. There are laws against it. All that matters is can you get the job done? It's the same idea in the requirement of managing your own household well. Not asking: what are they like in front of the congregation, can they tell a good joke and give people an appealing smile or can they put on a good show? What matters is what they're like at home, in their closest relationships, with those who know them most intimately.

But leaders "must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so as not to fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap." Whether it's unfaithfulness in their marriage, with money, or dishonesty, things like these break the hearts of believers and confirms to unbelievers that Christianity is nothing special and it makes no difference in how people live.

What is the thing the devil puts great energy into? He targets Christian leaders to ensnare them in sin. Why? Because he knows the trustworthy saying at the beginning of this chapter: Nothing is more important than leaders who love the truth and live the truth. Good leaders are a great blessing for God's people. And Satan knows that, if he can stop that, when a leader falls they almost always takes many others with him. The only Christian leaders who won't be assaulted by the devil are those so disgraceful already he doesn't need to bother.

If you are a leader, whether of kids church, a home group or on the Committee of Management, you need to work through this list regularly and ask yourself how you're going as a model of godliness, as someone growing in their knowledge of the truth and growing in the way you live it out. How are you doing at being self-controlled? How are you going at being gentle and patient? Do you need to work on your love of money? If this passage doesn't shake you, something's very wrong.

An Identikit of Christian Maturity

If you step back this morning for a moment to think about this list of qualities, has it occurred to you that there's nothing here that every Christian shouldn't aspire to? If you think about it, things like self-control, gentleness, and even hospitality are things that the New Testament urges for every

believer. You see this list of characteristics, when you paste them all together, is an identikit picture of the mature Christian person.

As leaders encourage others, they model what we all ought to be doing. Leaders are not a different species that has different characteristics. They model what everyone needs to be growing into. When I played rugby in the under 8s the coach told us that forwards and backs are completely different. Forwards did not pass the ball. Instead you ran and got tackled. Backs did not pack in the scrum. They are two groups, who were supposed to do different things. That's not true in church. Church is more like a family. My goal for my boy and my girl is that one-day they will become a man and a woman. We parent them, we nurture them, to one day become what we are now.

That's why the trustworthy saying. Why is it good to aspire to be a leader? Well, if you're not aspiring to the things on this list you're not aspiring to Christian maturity, you're not aspiring to be a model of godliness for others. Don't look at this list and say, "Boy I'm glad I'm not a leader, I'm glad I don't have to worry about things like gentleness, patience, etc."

Even being able to teach, though it may not be up the front on Sunday morning, every Christian has a role to play in teaching and encouraging others. In Hebrews 4, the writer addresses the church there by saying that "by now you all ought to be teachers". He's frustrated because something's gone wrong with their progress to Christian maturity. They've been Christians for a while but have not made the progression to become teachers or disciplers of others.

When I first became a Christian I had no background of church at all, no Christians in my family and I was followed up by a bloke at church named Timothy. I knew nothing about the Bible, being a Christian was very new, church was a very strange experience and he was great at opening the Bible with me. We'd meet for lunch once a week and he delighted to give his time, as we talked about God's Word and talked about our lives.

I realise now the really big impact he made on me. It wasn't so much in what he said as what he did. It was more the thousand little things I picked up by just being around him: his godliness, how he put himself out with the blokes he flatted with, his willingness to drop whatever he was doing to talk, his passion that people come to know Christ, his patience with difficult people, his graciousness with people who took him for granted and his willingness to say hard things to me when I needed to hear them. He wasn't "a leader" at church in any official sense. But in his growing in godliness, the way he taught the truth and lived it had a profound impact on me. What are you aspiring to be?

Talk 4—Growing in Godliness (1 Tim 3:14-4:16)

What is Godliness? Being Like ...?

What do we mean when we talk about being godly? It's a word that comes up a lot in 1 Timothy. What do we mean, when we say that someone's a godly person? If I was to ask you to write down a definition of the word "godliness" what would you write? The Bible tells us we should strive for godliness. Train ourselves to be godly. That godliness is what we're to pray for one another. Only have leaders who are godly. But what exactly is "godliness"?

By definition, being godly, means being like God. But, what is it about God that we're to imitate? How he's everywhere, all over the world, all the time? Do I need to be trying to be like that? Life

seems hectic enough at the moment! What about the way God knows everything about everyone? I know a few people who carry on like they know everything about everything. Is that really what we mean when we say that Christians should try to be godly?

The clue I think is 1 Timothy 2:3 where we see one thing about what God's like: God wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. Right through 1 Timothy, the way we're to be like God, is in sharing his passion, sharing his desire that people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. His great love is that people become Christians; accept God's offer of forgiveness. But more than that: that they then grow in that relationship, knowing God better and better.

Please see with that: knowing God better, does change how you live. God's desire is not that we grow in knowledge in some purely academic sense. But grow in knowing him as a person and the more you know God, the more you'll love him, the more you'll want to live a life that pleases him.

We've seen this idea put into practise right through 1 Timothy. In chapter 2, if we are godly, if we share God's passion, it will show in how we pray. We'll pray for all peoples; we'll pray that they will be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. In chapter 3 we see the same idea put into practise in the area of leadership. If we are godly, if we share God's passion, we'll want leaders who lead us into the truth; who teach the truth with their mouths and model it in their lives.

In this talk we see that God's great desire for you, in your life, for each of us, is to grow in godliness; knowing the truth and living it out.

When I think about godliness I tend to think that godliness is about saying "no" to particular sins in my life: avoiding sexual sin, keeping my temper, not telling lies. Godliness as a list of things I do. But I put it you, godliness (being like God) is not so much of a list of good deeds, but a matter of the heart, a deep desire to share his passion for people to know him and to know him ourselves.

The Mystery of Godliness: 1 Timothy 3:16

You see this in the way our reading begins. In chapter 3:16 we have this piece of poetry about "the mystery of godliness". What is godliness? It's not a list of things you do. Instead, it's the story of God sending his Son into the world. It's the story about Jesus being made known to the nations so that we could know him and enter into a relationship with him.

When I think about my heart – my great passion, for people to be saved and come to know God better and for me to know God better – it runs pretty hot and cold. I'm often just preoccupied with my own little world. If you ever struggle with this then this passage is extremely important. This passage contains Paul's instructions to Timothy about growing in godliness, about developing a passion to know the truth and to know God and live for him.

There are three things that are inevitable in life: taxes, cockroaches, and ... false teachers. Until Jesus returns, Paul says that false teachers will be with us. The warning that Paul gives in 1 Timothy 4:1, says that we shouldn't be surprised that false teachers come and that people give up the truth to follow them. The Spirit clearly says that, in later times (from the death of Jesus until he returns), some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

"The Spirit clearly says", is the way the New Testament often introduces the Old Testament: God's Word, inspired by the Holy Spirit. We should be prepared for false teachers, because God's warned

us time and time again about them in his word. Right back since Genesis 3, Satan's been busy spreading lies about God. He's been hard at work deceiving God's people.

The world around us is full of voices telling us not to live God's way, even within the church community. Verses 2 to 5, talk in detail about the kind of false teaching that's risen from within at Ephesus. It seems to be some kind of legalism, in other words, you don't get right with God by being forgiven but by keeping rules. Rules about eating some foods and not others. Rules about not getting married. All things that are God's gifts given for us to enjoy. The details of this particular false teaching here aren't important. The point is that false teachers will come and keep coming in every generation. Because of this we need to be people who know the truth, who are clear about what the Bible says.

Growing in Godliness: As we Grow in the Truth

Growing in the truth is the solution that Paul gives Timothy from verse 6 onwards. This is the response to false teaching. God's people need to be clear about what's true. As their leader, Timothy is to expose wrong ideas and replace them by teaching the truth about God. Right through the passage it talks about "teaching", "good teaching", "command and teach", and "instruct". In verse 13 Timothy must devote himself (a strong word for the giving of your whole self, all your energy, your heart) to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and teaching. Paul says nothing about singing here or other aspects of our time together. These are all good things but what's really important, the big thing central to church, is opening the word of God together and growing in our knowledge of the truth.

Likewise in verse 12, Timothy must model the things he talks about. (Like the picture of leadership in chapter 3.) Timothy must not only know the truth but also live out that truth. Teaching it in his words and his example. Visibly making progress himself in godliness, for the sake of his hearers.

Paul uses two pictures here to illustrate the importance of growing in the truth. Firstly, in verse 6 he uses the idea of a child growing up on good food. "Brought up", is literally the expression for a child being fed at its mother's breast. The Good News Bible actually says "continue to nourish yourself spiritually".

A mate of mine, an older man was born in mainland China. When he was nine, his family fled to Hong Kong because of a famine. Later they came to Australia. His only memory of China as a boy was never having enough to eat, always being hungry. His kids have been born and raised in Australia. And can you guess? They all tower over him. They're much taller than him.

Like children, as Christians, what you consume determines what you become. Are you stunting your growth? Or are you feeding yourself well? You see, reading the Bible, the public reading of Scripture, is never an end in itself but the way we feed ourselves spiritually, the way we grow in our love for God and grow towards what he longs for us to be.

The second picture that Paul uses is in verses 7 and 8. The idea of training, keeping fit and working out is used in verse 7. Like the kid growing up on the right food, physical training is about what you develop into over time. You won't see any difference if you go jogging once. But, if it becomes a regular habit, over the long term you'll look back and the change will be obvious. Like physical fitness there are no quick fixes when it comes to godliness. Just as there are lots of shonky people around who want to sell us ten-day miracle crash diets that might work in the short term but never in the long haul there are spiritual shonks who want to sell us overnight spiritual change. Quick and

easy. No hard work. Come to this meeting, have this experience. It might feel like it works in the short term but will it really make a lasting difference? Godliness comes through the sweat and grind and hard work of learning from God's word and putting it into practise in our lives.

Are you training yourself in godliness? Where are the flabby bits in your Christian life? Where do you need to be working at putting God's Word into practise? If you don't work hard at resisting sexual temptation in the little ways it comes every day – where you let your eyes wander in the newsagent – how do you think you're going to go when the big event comes? When you're placed in a situation of powerful temptation? It's like sitting in a Jacuzzi all year as preparation for a big swim meet. If you haven't been in training don't think it'll magically happen.

If you don't work at encouraging others in the little opportunities that might come your way each week, at church, at home group, wherever, when the time comes, when there's a really important moment to say something to a brother or sister, don't think it'll just pop into your head. That's like sitting on the lounge all year as your training to run a marathon. Are you training yourself in godliness?

Growing in Godliness: As we Grow in Hope

Imagine for a moment that you go and see the doctor this week for a check-up. Just the usual routine of blood pressure, cholesterol, the stuff you get checked every year without change. This time it's different. They give you the news that you're in pretty bad shape and something must be done. You need to make some lifestyle changes like finding time to exercise and changing your diet. Would you do it? If your health was at stake, if it meant adding years to your life, would you do it? Would you make those changes? There's a word for people who ignore that kind of warning: they're fools. You'd be an utter idiot if you weren't ready to make those drastic changes.

Would you change your lifestyle if it mattered for eternity? Training in godliness is not just about this life, but also about the life to come (v 8). In verses 9 and 10 we read: "This is a trustworthy saying, that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labour and strive, that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, and especially of those who believe". What is hope? The idea of our hope is the idea of what you're looking forward to. What is it in the future that shapes your decisions now? Is it the return of Jesus? To stand before him as a godly person, to be urgent before his return, labouring, striving, that people might hear of Jesus and be saved, and grow in their knowledge of the truth?

I'm playing soccer at the moment on Saturday afternoons. When I come home hobbling and groaning, with all my muscles aching and as I sit down on the lounge with the ice pack on my knee my kids always ask the same thing. They pat me on the shoulder and say, "Dad, aren't you too old to still be playing soccer?" It's like it's embarrassing for them watching this pathetic old person, still trying to run round the paddock when it's obvious to everyone that he should have quit years ago. I'm resisting their urges to give up, at least for now, but the day will come when they'll be right, when my body won't cope with that kind of physical effort anymore. Physical training is like that.

But, you know, you're never too old to be training in godliness because godliness is not just about this life; it's about the life to come.

A funny thing often happens to people when they get engaged. The thought of the wedding day spurs them into action, to go on an exercise campaign. They need to slim down to fit into those clothes and look good for the wedding photos, after all your wedding photos haunt you for the rest

of your life. They're sitting on top of the television and you see them every time you go to your mother-in-law's place. They're something that you want to look good for. People who wouldn't know how to spell gymnasium, suddenly begin spending a lot of time in one; people who haven't broken out of a walk for years all of a sudden find themselves jogging. They want to be ready for the big day. All of a sudden they're in training.

Are you giving much thought to the far bigger, more important day: the day when you will stand before the Lord Jesus? Are you in training? Are you getting ready for that big day?

Talk 5—Honouring God's Family (1 Tim 5)

God's Word often talks about our relationships as Christians, as a church-community, as being like a family. God's made you his child: chosen by him, adopted, treasured and loved. As Paul writes to Timothy, he addresses him as his treasured son. You can see it in how the chapter begins. Verse 1 addresses our attitudes in the church community: Older men, or mature Christian men, are to be honoured as fathers and, likewise, older women as mothers.

Paul has already told Timothy not to let anyone look down on him because he is young. But even so, Timothy, as he teaches God's word, must reflect these family attitudes. He's not to speak patronisingly to the older men but instead speak respectfully, honouring them as fathers. It's this idea of caring for one another like a family, of honouring one another that's the focus of this chapter.

Just to remind us: God's great passion, his longing, is for people to know him; that people be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. This is God's great desire, the reason he gave his Son. If we're godly people, we'll want leaders who lead us into knowing God, who teach the truth and who model the truth in their lives. Paul points out this priority in verse 17 where Paul says that "the elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honour, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching." Honouring is an attitude but 1 Timothy 5 spells out four concrete ways we honour leaders.

Honour (Teaching) Leaders

1. By Financial Support

Verses 17 and 18 show that we'll honour leaders by supporting them financially. Paul uses two quotes in verse 18 to illustrate this. Firstly, "The worker is worthy of his wages" is straight from the lips of Jesus, in Luke 10:7, as he sends his first disciples throughout Israel with the message of the kingdom. Jesus tells them to expect financial support from those who receive the message. Often the last part of us to be touched and changed when we become Christians is our hip pocket. But Jesus paints a picture here showing that when people become Christians, the sign God's kingdom has arrived in their lives, the great miracle of people opening their wallets keen to financially support the kingdom's message, keen for others to hear and find the good news happens.

The second is a quote from the Old Testament. The point of the Old Testament quote is that if you want oxen to do their job well you have to feed them. It's in the farmer's best interest to feed his ox. If a congregation think being taught the Bible is important, if they see it as essential for their own spiritual growth, they'll be keen to feed Bible teachers, to free them from having to go to work so that they can devote their time to doing that job well. In fact, if we want the kingdom to grow, and

for more and more people to hear, we'll want more smelly old oxen working in the field to free up others wherever we can, for the work of spreading God's message.

2. By Being Careful with Criticism

A second way that we can honour leaders is by being careful with our criticism. It's easy to start rumours about leaders, to criticise, to take pot shots, to be part of the circle of gossip. And I know a number of congregations where, because of unsubstantiated allegations, good leaders, paid leaders, unpaid leaders have been undermined and God's work greatly hindered because of this. Anyone can be the victim of gossip and in God's family it's inappropriate to gossip about anyone but it's interesting that God in his Word here especially cautions us when it comes to leaders. It's the opposite of our culture: We often think it's especially okay to bag leaders because leaders are fair game. The Bible puts it the other way round.

3. By Treating the Sin of Leaders Seriously

This leads to the next thing: we honour our leaders by not entertaining unsubstantiated allegations but also by rebuking publicly those who do sin. Far from leaders being immune from accusation. Their sin needs to be taken especially seriously. The public nature of leadership means that their failure needs to be exposed publicly so others will be reminded of the seriousness of sin. Do you see how verses 19 and 20 go together as honouring leadership? Sin in leaders' lives is never a little thing so don't make accusations lightly but equally accusations proved cannot be brushed aside.

4. By Not Hastily Appointing Leaders

Finally in verse 21 you honour leadership by being cautious in whom you appoint. When I was a young Christian, I was approached to be a Sunday School teacher, to be the leader, to teach the Bible to a group of primary school boys. And I was told, "Oh you can do it. You just follow the book. You don't really need to prepare. This is not an important job." The people asking me barely knew me. The same church had a huge fight later that year about whether to concrete the church car park or leave it gravel. That was a big issue but the person who taught the Bible to their children was unimportant.

Widows – A Welfare List?

Is the widow's list maybe some sort of welfare system? Although it doesn't actually say that, older widows who have a family can be taken care of by their family and younger widows have the opportunity to remarry but those who have nowhere else to turn should be cared for by God's family.

But is that what the widow's list really is? The problem with the widow's list as a welfare list may have struck you as we read it earlier. The problem is that only certain widows qualify: those outstanding in serving the church community, those who are godly. This seems funny. Should we just be generous to those who have served us? Should we only give to those who make the grade in their godliness? Is charity something people must earn?

I think charity should begin at home. As God's people here at Drummoyne we need to care first and foremost for one another. But here it's a kind of limited, narrow compassion. It's not the way Jesus did things. He offered his compassion to notorious sinners not just those with a track record for godliness.

A Leadership List?

It may well be that the church family at Ephesus physically cared for all sorts of people. But that's not what this list is about. Rather than this list being a welfare thing: is the widow's list, some kind of leadership thing within the congregation, a list of women set apart to serve in a particular way? Please notice how the qualities to go on this list, bear a remarkable similarity to the overseers in chapter 3:

- Widows Overseers & Deacons
- Faithful in marriage 5:9 3:2, 3:12
- Hospitality 5:10 3:2
- Manage kids well 5:10 3:4, 3:12
- A track record in serving 5:10 5:17
- A good reputation with outsiders 5:7-8 3:7

Think about this letter. 1 Timothy is all about leadership. Chapter 3 lists the qualities for those to be made leaders and then right away a list of qualities for those to be deacons and then we get this list of qualifications.

How does this apply to us today?

Well, if that's what the widow's list is about, then it reinforces some things that keep coming up in 1 Timothy, doesn't it? It paints a picture of church, not with one person running the whole shop but with many people serving in different ways: some voluntarily, others financially supported to do kingdom work, both men and women. We shouldn't necessarily have a widow's list at Drummoyne Presbyterian Church, but it's the challenge. Let's think flexibly and creatively about how people serve in our church community.

If our passion is God's passion to see people saved and come to a knowledge of the truth, if our passion is for his kingdom to grow we'll honour and encourage those who give of themselves and serve in whatever way, we'll rejoice that people at church are making those kinds of decisions.

Bible Study—Knowing God's Contentment (1 Tim 6)

- What is contentment?
- What kind of things stop you from feeling content?
- Is money evil? Explain.
- What kinds of harmful desires and evils flow from a love of money?
- What are some examples of the kind of "many griefs" that people can pierce themselves for people who are eager for money?
- How would you tell if you had started to become a lover of money?
- What reasons does the passage give for turning away from a love of money?
- How will focusing on heaven help us not to be lovers of money?
- In what ways can we practically encourage each other to have money in perspective?

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