

1-2 Timothy – 1 Timothy 3:14-4:11

Review

Last time, we examined Paul’s listing of the qualifications for nomination as a deacon, noting that these characteristics are desirable for all members of the church, and also for people in general. We saw that deacons are servants who minister to the needs of the fellowship and the community rather than holding a leadership role. While admittedly the particular label we assign to a given church office such as “pastor” is not vitally important, their misuse can cause confusion when we examine Bible passages like Paul’s listings of qualifications for these church offices.

We finished our discussion with a general review of Paul’s instructions to Timothy in 1 Timothy 2:8 – 3:13, noting that they immediately raise the questions whether these instructions to Timothy remain applicable to the church today, and to what extent churches should be required to follow them. We also asked what churches should do if they are unable to find men willing and qualified to fulfill the positions of overseer and deacon in the church, noting some Biblical counterexamples of women fulfilling these roles. We concluded that churches should err on the side of grace, obeying the Holy Spirit’s calling upon the fellowship and those individuals that are called to serve.

1 Timothy 3:14-4:11

Let’s continue now in our study of the text of 1 Timothy.

***14I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that,
15if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household [οἶκος
oikos] of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of
the truth. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 (ESV)***

After the challenge of trying to comprehend and apply Paul’s instructions regarding overseers and deacons, it is a relief to come to this short interlude. We can well imagine that Timothy was as challenged by those instructions as we are. Paul also seems to have realized that Timothy might have been wondering why Paul chose to send these harsh instructions, and decided to give Timothy (and us) some reassurance. As we have previously noted, Paul had some deep concerns about the state and direction of the churches he had worked to establish, so he wrote letters to them reinforcing the teaching he had previously provided. Paul confirms that explicitly here in these two verses.

Paul notes here that the local church provides a rallying point for those seeking God’s Truth in our broken and confused world. This crucial function of the Church is even more essential today than it was in Paul’s day. Paul recognized the trend even then, as we shall soon see. The Greek word **οἶκος oikos** (translated here as “household”) that Paul uses for the Church is significant. It refers to both a dwelling place and to the people who dwell within it. The local church – the place and the family of believers that establish it – provides the refuge and the mutual support Christ followers need as we await the return of our LORD Jesus to claim His bride. Paul (whom I believe is the author of the book of Hebrews) wrote in somewhat more detail about the **οἶκος oikos** of God and its functions among the community of believers in his letter to the Hebrews.

***19Therefore, brothers, [ἀδελφός adelphos] since we have confidence to enter the
holy places by the blood of Jesus, 20by the new and living way that he
opened for us through the curtain, that is, through his flesh, 21and since we
have a great priest over the house [οἶκος oikos] of God, 22let us draw near with a
true heart in full assurance of faith, with our hearts sprinkled clean from***

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an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³*Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for he who promised is faithful.* ²⁴*And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works,* ²⁵*not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.* Hebrews 10:19-25 (ESV)

BTW – The word **ἀδελφός** **adelphos** translated in Hebrews 10:14 as “brothers” can refer to literal brothers born to the same mother or to all Christ followers – including sisters in Christ. In this case of course, it addresses the members of the Christian Hebrew congregation(s) to whom Paul was writing.

¹⁶Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated [δικαιῶω dikaiōō] by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on [πιστεύω pisteuō] in the world, taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16 (ESV)

It is intriguing that this brief Gospel encapsulation has been placed here in the middle of a pastoral letter from the elder evangelical minister to his beloved protégé. Recall that by the time this letter was written, Timothy had traveled with Paul through thick and thin for over a decade. They no doubt exchanged thousands of words about their Gospel ministry together over those years. In that time, they traveled on foot many hours each day for many days on end. Surely by this time, Timothy didn't need to be reminded of the facts of Jesus' incarnation, His earthly ministry, and His ascension back to His Father who sent Him. Yet Paul chose to place this succinct Gospel summary into the letter by way of encouragement to Timothy, and indeed to encourage us who read it two thousand years later.

Paul uses the word “confess” here in the sense that he is proclaiming rather than admitting the mystery of Christ's coming. Jesus' advent into human flesh and His atoning sacrifice on behalf of His beloved human creatures is indeed a completely unexplainable mystery – a Gospel we can believe but never fully comprehend.

The ESV rendering of the Greek **δικαιῶω dikaiōō** as “vindicated” may perhaps be a little confusing. Other English translations render the word as “justified,” which may be a little closer to the mark. The word means – to declare or pronounce one to be just, righteous, and such as he ought to be (holy and divine in Jesus' case). Jesus is shown to be just, righteous, holy, and divine by the indwelling of His Spirit in the hearts of His followers as the seal of our salvation in Him.

Paul's statement that Jesus is *seen by angels* is also quite intriguing. Perhaps Paul is referring to the angels encountered by Jesus' disciples at the empty tomb on the first day of the week following Jesus' resurrection. Recall also that Paul himself had apparently received a vision of the Heavenly throne.

²I know a man [presumably Paul himself] in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows. ³And I know that this man was caught up into

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paradise—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows— **4***and he heard things that cannot be told, which man may not utter.* **2** Corinthians 12:2-4 (ESV)

Maybe Paul is writing here in 1 Timothy 3:16 about angels he saw along with our glorified LORD in that vision. Paul may also be referring to the fallen angels (demons) – including Lucifer himself – whose doctrines and human puppets Paul is about to denounce in 1 Timothy 4. Or perhaps Paul’s reference to Jesus being *seen by angels* is a combination of all of these.

Paul’s use of the word *πιστεύω pisteuō* translated in the ESV as “believed on” is significant. It means more than just acknowledgement of the facts of Jesus’ coming and His mission. It means to credit as true, to be persuaded of, or to place confidence in something. Similarly, when Jesus proclaimed the Gospel to the Jewish leader Nicodemus who came to Him by night with questions, He said...

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in [εἰς εἰς] **him should not perish but have eternal life.** John 3:16 (ESV)

But the nearly universal English rendering in this verse of the Greek *εἰς εἰς* as “in” fails to capture an essential aspect of saving faith in the Gospel. To be effective for salvation, our faith must be not merely be in the historical facts about Jesus. The word *εἰς εἰς* carries the connotation that we must believe “into” or “towards” the Gospel. A saving faith must be more than mere acknowledgement of the facts. It must be a full commitment to their implications for our lives. Only then may we have the hope of partaking in the Heavenly glory to which Jesus has shown us the way.

¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, **¹**

Timothy 4:1-2 (ESV)

Having succinctly reminded Timothy of the simple, straightforward Gospel, Paul now gives a warning about those who might lead us away from that Truth into perilous error – ***deceitful spirits and teachings of demons***. Paul proclaims here that this warning is a prophetic word from God’s Spirit Himself. Surely, these lies have already been at work in the world since Paul’s day with ever-increasing intensity. Perhaps the most dangerous of these is the Universalist contention that “there are many paths to God – none more correct than any other.” This of course flies in the face of Jesus’ own words to His disciples – ... **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”** John 14:6b (ESV)

1 Timothy 4:2 also contains an ominous warning for those who spread the lies of the evil one. In short, having fallen into the lying trap, they will no longer be able to have remorse for continuing to spread the lies because their consciences will be deadened as if by a hot iron. The KJV and NKJV render this verse a little more starkly...

²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, **¹** Timothy 4:2 (NKJV)

These pitiable souls will therefore no longer be able to discern the truth from the lie themselves.

Paul goes on to give some examples of such lying doctrines.

3who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. 4For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. ¹ Timothy 4:3-5 (ESV)

It is interesting that Paul would use the example of forbidding Christians to marry. Recall that Paul himself recommended against marriage although he didn't go so far as to forbid it outright.

8To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is good for them to remain single, as I am. 9But if they cannot exercise self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹ Corinthians 7:8-9 (ESV)

Early in the history of the church, there was a widespread belief that the return of Jesus was imminent. Thus, some had stopped partaking in ordinary life activities like marrying and having children. Apparently, some false teachers had taken that idea one step further – even forbidding their listeners to marry. Paul calls them out for this “doctrine of demons” here in 1 Timothy 4:3.

Paul then gives a second example of the false teachings of the Judaizers who were teaching a works-based salvation dependent not only upon faith in Jesus' Gospel, but also on conformance with the Law of Moses – including abstinence from certain foods. Recall that Paul himself had been sent out from Jerusalem along with Barnabas with a letter denying this teaching (Acts 15). In fact, the Jerusalem council had been called in part to decide a response to Peter's vision in Joppa...

9The next day, as they [the servants of Cornelius] were on their journey and approaching the city [Joppa], Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. 10And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance 11and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. 12In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. 13And there came a voice to him: “Rise, Peter; kill and eat.” 14But Peter said, “By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.” 15And the voice came to him again a second time, “What God has made clean, do not call common.” 16This happened three times, and the thing was taken up at once to heaven. Acts 10:9-16 (ESV)

Paul reiterates here in 1 Timothy 4:3-5 the words of God to Peter, ***“What God has made clean, do not call common.”*** Paul himself also made a similar declaration in response to a question from the church in Corinth about Christians eating meat offered to idols.

4Therefore, as to the eating of food offered to idols, we know that “an idol has no real existence,” and that “there is no God but one.” 5For although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many “gods” and many “lords”— 6yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist.

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7However, not all possess this knowledge. But some, through former association with idols, eat food as really offered to an idol, and their conscience, being weak, is defiled. ¹ Corinthians 8:4-7 (ESV)

There is a common thread of discernment in these two passages that we should note. In 1 Timothy 4:3, Paul writes of “***those who believe and know the truth.***” In his response to the Corinthians’ question, Paul uses the phrases “***...we know...***” and “***...for us...***” Law enforcement professionals charged with identifying counterfeit currency are trained first to be thoroughly familiar with legitimate currency so that they may identify the counterfeits by the manner and extent to which they differ from the legitimate currency.

So it is with us in discerning legitimate Gospel teaching from the false “***doctrines of demons.***” We are utterly helpless to discern the lies of our enemy if we are not intimately familiar with the Truth of our living God that we find in His Word.

6If you put these things before the brothers [ἀδελφός adelphos], you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. 7Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train [γυμνάζω gymnazō] yourself for godliness; 8for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ¹

Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)

Although Paul doesn’t explicitly say so, I believe he is warning Timothy here about the heresy of [Gnosticism](#) that was already rampant in the first century church. Gnosticism emphasizes a personal spiritual experience of God over careful study and teaching of God’s own written Word given by God to mankind through the Spirit-led writings of God’s chosen scribes like Paul.

The greatest problem with Gnosticism is of course its highly subjective nature. If Christians rely solely upon personal mystical experience in seeking to know God, we risk being led astray by our spiritual enemy into what Paul called ***doctrines of demons*** and away from the Truth taught by God’s Holy Spirit. This is why John warned that we must test the spirits to discern whether they are of God (1 John 4:1-3). Here in 1 Timothy 4:6-7 Paul reminds Timothy of the training he had been given by his mother and grandmother and by Paul himself in the ***words of the faith*** and ***good doctrine*** and advises Timothy to ***train yourself for godliness*** through the study of God’s Word rather than relying upon personal mystical experience to obtain better knowledge of God. Of course, this advice remains sound for us today, especially with the modern proliferation of so many “christian” churches that emphasize the “worship experience” and messages of “encouragement” over sound doctrinal teaching of the full counsel of the Word of God.

Having said that though, there is a risk that we may allow the pendulum to swing too far the other way and thereby quash the leading of God’s Spirit within our hearts through our fear of being misled. We must somehow find the correct balance in our personal relationship with God between seeking objective, communal knowledge of Him through the study of His Word and seeking the personal guidance and fellowship of His Spirit dwelling within our hearts through prayer and meditation upon Him and His Word. We must prayerfully seek His aid in discerning between the voice of His Spirit’s whisper to our souls and the lying whispers of our enemy’s spiritual attacks.

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Paul goes on in the second half of 1 Timothy 4:7 to encourage Timothy (and all of us) to train for godliness. The Greek word here is **γυμνάζω gymnazō**. It is the same root word from which we derive the English word gymnasium. It is certainly important that we grow in the knowledge of God by studying His Word, and that we grow continually closer in our personal relationship with His Spirit within us through prayer and meditation upon Him. Yet none of these things has any value in establishing and growing God's kingdom here on Earth and in the life to come unless we exercise the spiritual gifts we have received from God.

Jesus also taught about this in His parable of the talents.

14“For it [the kingdom of Heaven] will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted to them his property. 15To one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one, to each according to his ability. Then he went away. 16He who had received the five talents went at once and traded with them, and he made five talents more. 17So also he who had the two talents made two talents more. 18But he who had received the one talent went and dug in the ground and hid his master's money. 19Now after a long time the master of those servants came and settled accounts with them. 20And he who had received the five talents came forward, bringing five talents more, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me five talents; here, I have made five talents more.' 21His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 22And he also who had the two talents came forward, saying, 'Master, you delivered to me two talents; here, I have made two talents more.' 23His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master.' 24He also who had received the one talent came forward, saying, 'Master, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow, and gathering where you scattered no seed, 25so I was afraid, and I went and hid your talent in the ground. Here, you have what is yours.' 26But his master answered him, 'You wicked and slothful servant! You knew that I reap where I have not sown and gather where I scattered no seed? 27Then you ought to have invested my money with the bankers, and at my coming I should have received what was my own with interest. 28So take the talent from him and give it to him who has the ten talents. 29For to everyone who has will more be given, and he will have an abundance. But from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. 30And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Matthew 25:14-30 (ESV)

The exercise of our spiritual gifts doesn't come naturally to us. We need to stretch ourselves and step out in faith enabled by the power of God's Spirit. But Paul assures us here in 1 Timothy 4:8 that doing so will reap for us great benefits both in this Earthly life and in our coming eternal life in Heaven.

ASIDE – The word “**talents**” found in this parable doesn't refer to our various individual gifts and abilities. The Greek **τάλαντον talanton** was a unit of weight – particularly an amount of some precious metal like silver or gold. The weight of a talent varied with the particular item being weighed

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and also differed in various places and times throughout history. The actual value is unimportant in understanding the meaning of the parable.

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

11Command and teach these things. 1 Timothy 4:10-11 (ESV)

Before continuing with his pastoral instructions to Timothy, Paul reminds us of the prize for which we all strive in our training for godliness – eternal life in the glorious presence of our Savior. Yet even here we find a source of controversy. Paul says that God is the Savior of all people, but then mentions that His salvation is especially for those who believe. In order to understand this, we first need to remind ourselves of the words of Peter.

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. 2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)

God – through the atoning sacrifice of Jesus on the cross – is the ***Savior of all people*** as Paul says here in 1 Timothy 4:10. But although Jesus laid down His life on the cross so that ***all*** people might be rescued out of sin, God will not and cannot force us to love, honor, and worship Him. Instead, He allows us to choose for ourselves whether to accept the salvation Jesus has purchased for us with His life. Therefore, God is the Savior ***especially of those who believe***.

The Calvinist teachings of irresistible grace and limited atonement are refuted by Paul's teaching here in 1 Timothy 4:10. All of us must first choose to humble ourselves under the lordship of Jesus before we may partake in the salvation offered by God. Jesus' teaching about the final judgment – the Parable of the Sheep and Goats in Matthew 25:31-46 affirms that not everyone will make this choice to receive His salvation.

NOTE – You can find a detailed comparison of Calvinist (predetermination) and Armenianist (free will) theologies [here](#).

Looking Ahead

Next time, God willing, we will continue our study of Paul's first pastoral epistle to Timothy with a look at some practical instructions pertaining to Timothy's management of the church in Ephesus he had been called to lead.