

PILGRIM BIBLE NOTES

God's holy Word simply explained and applied



September 2018

Bible readings from Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48
1 Timothy and Psalm 142

All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Ezekiel chapters 40 to 48

The last nine chapters of Ezekiel contain a detailed description of the prophet's vision of the new temple. Great attention is paid to the measurements of the temple and we have omitted 40:5 to 42:20; 43:13–27 and 47:13 to 48:29 from our readings. We are again faced with problems in interpreting these chapters. Matthew Henry writes, 'Many commentators, both ancient and modern, have owned themselves at a loss what to make of it, and what use to make of it ... and when we despair of satisfaction in every difficulty we meet with, bless God that our salvation does not depend upon it, but that things necessary are plain enough.'

Some Christians believe that this temple has yet to be built in Jerusalem at the second coming of Christ with every detail being literally fulfilled. This view is misguided because:

- These chapters speak of the Levitical priesthood and of animal sacrifices in the temple. This could not happen at the return of Christ because his priesthood has superseded the Levitical priesthood and his sacrifice has put an end to animal sacrifices for ever (eg. Hebrews 7:1 to 8:13, especially 7:26–27).
- The church is the new Israel and she includes both Jews and Gentiles (Matthew 21:43; Ephesians 2:11–18; 1 Peter 2:9–10).
- The apostle John uses the language of these chapters to describe the church (40:2; cp. Revelation 21:9 to 22:5).

These considerations must govern our understanding of the last chapters of Ezekiel.

E.J. Young describes these chapters of Ezekiel as 'The vision of the Church of God upon earth symbolized by the description of the Temple' (INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT), Tyndale Press 1956, page 241).

Fix your mind on everything I show you

Ezekiel was in his twenty-fifth year of captivity (572 BC) when the Lord transported him in a vision to the land of Israel and set him on a very high mountain. By this time Judah was in the fourteenth year of exile in Babylon. He looked south and saw the city of Jerusalem (1–2). The Lord took the prophet to the city where he was met by a man (an angel? – cp. Revelation 21:9, 15–17) who guided him through the new temple.

The man said to Ezekiel, *‘Look with your eyes and hear with your ears, and fix your mind on everything I show you’* (4). He was to pay close attention to the things that he saw and heard so that he could give hope and encouragement to his fellow-captives. They had lost their beloved land, city and temple, but God had not finished with them. He would bring them back to Israel and the temple would be rebuilt and the worship of God restored. We must bear in mind, however, that the vision points beyond the return of the captives from exile to Jerusalem. It speaks of the new Jerusalem, the church, described in Revelation 21:9 to 22:5.

‘Fix your mind on everything I show you.’ We must also take care to give ourselves wholeheartedly to hearing the preaching of God’s Word. We must not ‘switch off’ and let our thoughts wander when God’s Word is preached, but pay close attention if we are to profit from it. We will also obtain greater blessing from our reading of the Bible if we take our time and read it thoughtfully. We lose so much when we rush our devotions. We need to know God’s Word and to be able to apply it to our own lives. **Let us fix our minds on Scripture and meditate upon it and we too will be able to encourage others.**

*Take time to be holy, the world rushes on;
Spend much time in secret with Jesus alone.*

(W. D. Longstaff)

That they may be ashamed of their iniquities

Ezekiel was reminded of the vision that he had received almost twenty years earlier in 592 BC. He had then seen the glory of God depart from the temple and from Jerusalem in an easterly direction (3–4; cp. 8:1–3; 10:18; 11:23). ‘*When I came to destroy the city*’ (3) is better translated, ‘*When he (the Lord) came to destroy the city*’ as in the ESV. In this vision, Ezekiel saw the glory of God returning to fill the new temple. He had withdrawn his holy presence because of the wickedness of the people. His message to the captives was that they must turn from their sin if they were to enjoy his presence among them (6–9).

The prophet was to describe his vision of the new temple to the house of Israel, ‘*that they may be ashamed of their iniquities*’ (10–11). When the Holy Spirit brings a man or woman to repentance, there is a sense of shame, unworthiness and sorrow on account of sin. There are many who profess conversion to Christ who know little of godly sorrow and shame because of their sin. Their ‘Christianity’ lacks real love and devotion to the Lord Jesus. The wicked woman who wept at the feet of Jesus was greatly ashamed of her sin. She was aware of the great love of the Lord in receiving her and in forgiving her sin and she loved him much (Luke 7:37–38, 47–48). **Have you ever felt ashamed because of your sin?**

*Before thee, God, who knowest all,
With grief and shame I prostrate fall.
I see my sins against thee, Lord,
The sins of thought, of deed and word.
They press me sore; I cry to thee:
O God, be merciful to me!*

*O Jesus, let thy precious blood
Be to my soul a cleansing flood,
Turn not, O Lord, thy guest away,
But grant that justified I may
Go to my house at peace with thee:
O God, be merciful to me!*

(Magnus B. Landstad)

They shall teach my people to discern

The vision given to Ezekiel (40:2) continues. *The glory of the LORD* came into the temple through the gate which faced towards the east (43:4). Now the gate is shut showing that the Lord will not depart again from the temple because of Israel's sin. The remainder of the chapter concerns those who were to serve God in the temple. Worship in the first temple had degenerated to such an extent that foreigners were used for work in the sanctuary (6–9). The Lord had clearly laid down that the service in the sanctuary was to be restricted to the Levites (Numbers chapters 3 and 4). They were strictly forbidden to use '*the outsider*' in such work (Numbers 3:10).

The Levites had a sacred duty to act as doorkeepers, guarding access to the temple. They also killed the animals brought as sacrifices to God and they served the worshippers (11). In the past they had been unfaithful to God and to their calling, allowing the temple of God to be defiled by idol worship (12). Such people would not be allowed to serve in this temple (13). Only the descendants of Zadok would be allowed as priests in the temple seen by Ezekiel (15). Zadok had supported Solomon from the beginning of his reign when Adonijah rebelled (1 Kings 1:8). His descendants served God when the Jews returned from their exile in Babylon (2 Chronicles 31:10).

The priests were to teach the people *to discern ... between the unclean and the clean* (23). This a timely warning for us here. The 'world' has entered into much of the worship of the church and sacred things have become soiled with the profane. Derek Thomas observes, 'Worship ... must be strictly controlled by the requirement to place God at the head of all. There was no such thing as "informal worship" in Israel' (GOD STRENGTHENS, page 284). When worship services become like an entertainment event, rather than the reverent adoration and praise of the living and eternal God, something has to be wrong! **May God give each one of us discernment, that we may distinguish between truth and error, that we may recognise what is sacred and what is profane, what is acceptable to God and what is not.**

A holy portion

Chapter 44, verse 3 of Ezekiel mentioned *‘the prince’* and he is also spoken of in chapters 45 and 46. The identity of *‘the prince’* puzzles Bible commentators. Matthew Henry suggests in his notes on chapter 44, verse 3 that he may be the High Priest. Others see him as the promised Messiah, but this can hardly be right. This prince prepares a sin offering for himself and the people of the land (22) but Christ is the sinless Son of God. The prince also has children (46:16). Derek Thomas writes, ‘A Messianic interpretation seems, on the face of it, untenable. It seems that the ‘prince’ was meant to convey in the minds of Ezekiel’s listeners the idea of a future leader who would lead them in worshipping God. Unlike past leaders who had led the people astray ... the future ‘leader’ would be trustworthy and loyal. No one person is meant by this depiction of a future king. He is an ideal figure’ (GOD STRENGTHENS, page, 287).

The Lord said that when the land was divided between the people, *a holy portion* must be set aside for the temple and for the Levites (1–5). The remainder of the chapter deals with crown property (6–8), laws for a just society (9–10) and offerings and feasts (11–25).

The people were never to forget that God had given them the land and that they had an obligation to set aside *‘a holy portion’* for him (1). This principle must also be behind our giving to the work of God. The Bible says, *‘Honour the LORD with your possessions, and with the first-fruits of all your increase’* (Proverbs 3:9). The Old Testament saints tithed their income (gave a tenth, cp. Genesis 28:22) as well as making other offerings to God. We know more than they knew of the marvel of God’s grace in giving his Son to die on the cross to save us from sin. **Dare we give less if we truly love the Lord who has done so much for us?** *God loves a cheerful giver* (2 Corinthians 9:7) but it is possible for us to rob him in tithes and offerings (Malachi 3:8).

*Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all!*

(Isaac Watts)

He shall worship at the threshold of the gate

We are now given details of Sabbath, New Moon and daily offerings, the privileges and responsibilities of the prince (1–15), inheritance laws for the prince (16–18) and finally, a description of kitchens used to prepare the offerings in the new temple (19–24).

The prince was to be a worshipper of God. The Lord said, '*He shall worship at the threshold of the gate*' (2). Matthew Henry comments, 'Even princes themselves, when they draw near to God, must worship with reverence and godly fear; owning that even they are unworthy to approach to him.' The prince had his own inheritance (land and property) which was to be kept within his family. Property bequeathed to servants was to be returned to the royal family in the year of liberty (probably the fiftieth year, the year of Jubilee, Leviticus 25:13–15). The prince was also to be just in ruling the people. He was forbidden to seize the land or property of his people (16–18; wicked Ahab had been guilty of such a sin, 2 Kings chapter 21).

The detailed regulations relating to worship show just how important it is that attention is paid to the way in which we approach God. Derek Thomas writes, 'We have been given a glimpse of a future temple and its workings. It is not meant to be anything more than a picture given in terms which Ezekiel's companions would appreciate. Everything serves one end: the worship of God in an orderly, reverent fashion (GOD STRENGTHENS, page, 289).

We tend to be far too casual in our attitude to worship and hardly prepare ourselves before going to services. Do we go to the Lord's house expecting to meet with him and for him to speak to us through his Word? Do we pray that the Lord will be among us and that he will be glorified in our services? Worship becomes sin if we do not conduct ourselves properly in the house of God (cp. 1 Timothy 3:15). *Let us have grace, by which we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear. For our God is a consuming fire* (Hebrews 12:28–29).

Because their water flows from the sanctuary

In his vision Ezekiel saw a river flowing eastwards from under the threshold of the temple (1). His guide took him along the bank, following the river, and then into its waters. The further he went the deeper the river became and soon after it became too deep and wide to cross (2–5). This was no ordinary river! Wherever it went, it brought abundant life and healing (7–9). The significance of the abundance of fish would not have been lost on Jewish minds. Any fish in the River Jordan would perish if they were carried into the extremely salty waters of the Dead Sea. The river seen by Ezekiel would heal even the water of the sea (but not the swamps and marshes, 10–11).

The importance of rivers is seen throughout the Bible, beginning with the river in Eden (Genesis 2:10–14; cp. Psalm 46:4; Joel 3:18; Zechariah 14:8). In the last chapter of Scripture, the apostle John had a vision of *‘a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb’* (Revelation 22:1–2).

Ezekiel’s vision speaks of the blessing of God’s people under the new covenant. God said, *‘They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary’* (12). The trees by the river are a picture of the godly person who bears the precious fruit of the Holy Spirit (Psalm 1:1–3; Galatians 5:22–23). The Lord Jesus said, *‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me ... out of his heart will flow rivers of living water. But this he spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in him would receive’* (John 7:37–39).

God has given us his Holy Spirit so that our lives should bring blessing to others. We should bring healing and life where there is pollution and death. **Do our hearts overflow with blessing to those around us?**

*O fill me with thy fulness, Lord,
Until my very heart o’erflow
In kindling thought and glowing word,
Thy love to tell, thy praise to show!*

(Frances Ridley Havergal)

The LORD is there

The borders of the land and the division of it among the tribes of Israel are described in Ezekiel 47:13 to 48:29. The last six verses of the book describe the gates of the new Jerusalem which are given the name, '*The LORD is there*' (35). This is full of significance because the absence of God is a sign of judgement (1 Samuel 4:21; Hosea 5:15; 9:12). God is omnipresent (everywhere) but sin creates such a great barrier between man and God that his presence cannot be known or enjoyed. Israel had previously enjoyed his presence, but the nation had drifted into wicked ways and was unfaithful to him. In his visions Ezekiel had seen God withdraw his presence and the warning of the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple. God now gives a message of hope for the captives.

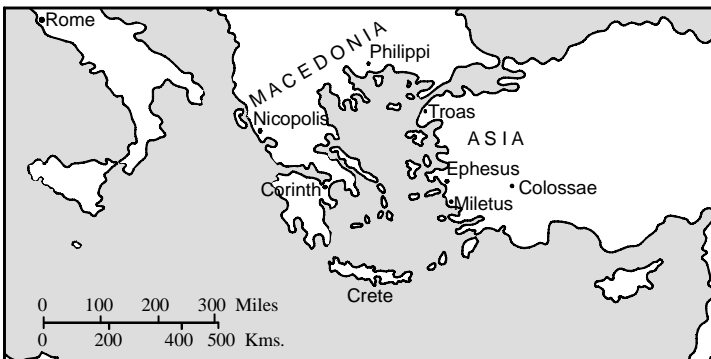
The church is *the Jerusalem above* (Galatians 4:26) and these verses also look beyond the return of the exiles to Jerusalem to Christ's return for his church. John's vision of the new Jerusalem is similar in language to that of Ezekiel (cp. Revelation 21:9–16). *Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God* (Revelation 21:3). In that day *there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying, and there shall be no more pain, for the former things are passed away ... and there shall be no more curse ... they shall see his face* (Revelation 21:3–5; 22:3–4).

We should always remember that the Lord Jesus is present in the local church when we meet in his name (Matthew 18:20). Wherever you find a Christian, *the LORD is there*. He indwells us by the Holy Spirit and he is with us (John 14:23; 1 Corinthians 6:19–20; Hebrews 13:5). There are times when God seems far from us, maybe through perplexing trials, but we are never alone in this sad and troubled world. How wonderful! If we entertain sin and backslide, God will not allow us the comfort of his presence until we repent. The Lord Jesus will then graciously hear us and come to us (Revelation 3:20). ***The LORD is there; let us rejoice in him!***

THE PASTORAL EPISTLES

Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are known as 'the Pastoral Epistles'. Paul was released from imprisonment in Rome as he had anticipated (Acts 28:30; Philippians 1:25; 2:24; Philemon 22). He was not in prison when he wrote his first letter to Timothy and the letter to Titus. After his release from prison, Paul was able to continue his missionary work for a year or two before being rearrested. William Hendriksen suggests that after this release:

1. Paul journeyed to Asia, leaving Titus in Crete (Titus 1:5).
2. He went to Ephesus and on to Colosse as planned (Philemon 22). He then returned to Ephesus where he was joined by Timothy who had been at Philippi (Philippians 2:19–23).
3. Paul left Timothy at Ephesus, while he went to Philippi as previously planned (Philippians 2:24). From Philippi, he wrote his first letter to Timothy and to Titus (approximately AD 63). He was hoping to return to Ephesus from Macedonia (1 Timothy 3:14–15).
4. He went from Philippi to Nicapolis to spend the winter and was joined there by Titus (Titus 3:12).
5. Paul may have gone to Spain (Romans 15:24). He probably revisited Asia (cp. 2 Timothy 4:13) before he was again imprisoned. He wrote his second letter to Timothy from prison, shortly before his execution (2 Timothy 1:8; 2:9; 4:6–8).



1 TIMOTHY

Timothy was probably converted during Paul's first visit to Lystra (Acts 14:6–7, 21) and is described as his *'true son in the faith'* (1:2). He joined the apostle on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–3) and became a very close and trusted friend (Philippians 2:19–23; 1 Thessalonians 3:2). Timothy was a reserved and timid man (1 Corinthians 16:10; 2 Timothy 1:6–7); it appears that he did not enjoy good health (5:23).

Timothy was overseeing the church at Ephesus when he received this first letter from Paul (1:3). Some in the church were teaching false doctrine (1:3–4; cp. Acts 20:29–31) and Paul encouraged him to deal with this problem and gave him directions for ordering the life of the church. He impressed upon Timothy the need for personal discipline and godliness (3:12–16; 6:6–14).

Key Word: *'Godliness'* (2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; 6:3,5,11).

Outline of 1 Timothy

- | | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 1. Opening greetings | – | 1:1–2 |
| 2. Paul's charge to Timothy | – | 1:3–20 |
| 3. Exhortation to prayer | – | 2:1–8 |
| 4. Women in the church | – | 2:9–15 |
| 5. Qualifications of elders and deacons | – | 3:1–16 |
| 6. Warning against false teachers | – | 4:1–5 |
| 7. A good minister of Jesus Christ | – | 4:6–16 |
| 8. Pastoring various groups within the church | – | 5:1 to 6:2 |
| 9. Further warnings | – | 6:3–10 |
| 10. Personal exhortation to Timothy | – | 6:11–21 |

For further reading I recommend the Commentary by William Hendriksen on 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus published by Banner of Truth; Geoffrey B. Wilson, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Banner of Truth) and Warren Wiersbe's commentary, *'Be Faithful'* published by David C. Cook.

Remain in Ephesus

Paul had warned the Ephesian elders that ‘*savage wolves*’ would come into their church not sparing the flock (Acts 20:29). Those fears were realised, and six or seven years later when he wrote to Timothy, false teaching had crept into the church. Paul addressed Timothy, his ‘*true son in the faith*’ not only as his dear friend but also as an apostle (1–2). This was a token of apostolic support and encouragement for Timothy in dealing with the problems in the church. Notice the title ‘*God our Saviour*’ (1; cp. 2:3; 4:10). The Lord Jesus is also described as ‘*our Saviour*’ (2 Timothy 1:10; Titus 1:4; 2:13; 3:6). The Bible clearly teaches that Jesus is God! The Lord Jesus is also ‘*our hope*’ (1). We have no hope or confidence for the future apart from the Lord Jesus (cp. Colossians 1:27).

Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus while he had travelled to Macedonia (see introduction to the Pastoral Epistles on page 11 of these notes). The apostle had then urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus to deal with false teachers and now he again urges him, ‘*Remain in Ephesus that you may charge some that they teach no other doctrine*’ (3). Doctrine (teaching) is very important. The apostles’ doctrine is spoken of in Acts 2:42. The Greek verb translated ‘*charge*’ is a military term for an order given by a superior officer (translated ‘*command*’ (6:17; Acts 1:4; 4:18, 5:28) **Timothy was not to run away from the problems facing him, but to remain and deal with those who were spreading error in the church.**

Are you in a difficult or discouraging situation? Are you tempted to give up your work in the church because there appears to be little progress or blessing? Persevere, many have done so and seen unexpected blessings. Take heart from 1 Corinthians 15:58. – Is God saying to you, ‘*Remain*’? Are you having problems at your place of work because of your Christian witness? Well, what do you expect as a follower of Christ? Pray that the Lord will give you the strength and courage to be faithful to him whatever the outcome.

Love from a pure heart, from a good conscience

Churches are often troubled by unwholesome influences which bring in false teaching. Paul had urged Timothy to remain in Ephesus in order to charge certain individuals to teach only sound doctrine. The false teachers at Ephesus had forsaken the simplicity of the gospel in their desire *to be teachers of the law* (7). They had become obsessed with myths centred around Old Testament family trees and were wasting their time in vain speculation and argument. This idle talk brought no edification to the church (3–6). Never waste your time on any teaching which cannot be established from Scripture. Satan is always looking for opportunities to turn you aside to follow error. You must learn to recognise his wiles and craftiness.

We all need sound teaching which leads to *godly edification which is in faith* (4). The purpose of the ‘*commandment*’ (5; this word is taken from the same root in the Greek verb ‘*charge*’ in verse 3) given by Timothy to the church at Ephesus was love. This wonderful love in our lives comes *from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith* (5). This is the goal of gospel ministry — to see lives transformed through the mighty working of the Holy Spirit. William Hendriksen describes this love ‘as a personal delight in God, a grateful outgoing of the entire personality to him, a deep yearning for the prosperity of his redeemed, and an earnest desire for the temporal and spiritual welfare of his creatures’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS, page 61). Is this kind of love seen in your life?

The Greek words translated ‘*sincere faith*’ (5) mean ‘faith without hypocrisy’. This kind of faith honours God and brings glory to his name. **Godliness of life is the fruit of wholesome Biblical teaching which is taken to heart and applied in our lives.**

*How blest is life if lived for thee
My loving Saviour and my Lord;
No pleasures that the world can give
Such perfect gladness can afford.*

(Prust’s Supplementary Hymn book 1869)

We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully

Some of the individuals causing problems in the church at Ephesus wanted to be *‘teachers of the law’* (the Old Testament and especially the law of Moses) but they were out of their depth and lacking in spiritual understanding (7). The confusion of those who misuse God’s law does not mean that the law is bad. Paul states, *‘We know that the law is good if one uses it lawfully’* (8). The Lord Jesus condemned the scribes and the Pharisees because they did not use the law of God lawfully. They had undermined God’s law by their man-made tradition with all of its petty rules which obscured the commandments of God (see Matthew 15:1–9). There was confusion among some at Ephesus concerning the use of the law just as there is in many 21st century churches.

The law is good because it was given by almighty God *for the ungodly and for sinners* (9). Geoffrey Wilson comments on verse 10, ‘the perverted practice of sodomy always heralds the decline of civilisation and is a certain mark of the wrath of God (Romans 1:18, 27).’ – THE PASTORAL EPISTLES, page 26. How true this is of the western world today! Those who lead wicked lives hate, despise and oppose *‘sound doctrine’* (9–10)? William Hendriksen comments that a *‘profane’* person (9) ‘is one who does not refrain or hesitate to trample on that which is holy.’ Esau is described as a *‘profane person’* (Hebrews 12:16) and the adjective is also used with reference to false ideas to which Paul refers in his letters to Timothy (4:7; 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:16).

The glorious gospel of the blessed God which had been committed to Paul declares that *the law is good* (11). The law of God used rightly (8) will strike at the conscience of sinners. Unless men and women are shown that they are guilty sinners before God, they will never repent of their sin. True gospel preaching is always courteous and never rude, but it must make unbelievers feel uncomfortable because they are sinners against God. It points them to a great Saviour who can do them good through his death and resurrection. **What wonderful news we have! The blood of Jesus cleanses from all sin (1 John 1:7) and deals with guilt through justification (Romans 5:9).**

The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant

We saw in yesterday's Bible reading that the law was given for sinners, to show them their terrible plight without God. The law cannot save sinners, but the gospel points to the One who saves. Paul could never get over the fact that though he had been *a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent man*, God had been merciful to him. The English word 'hubris' comes from the Greek word which is translated '*insolent*'; it means 'violently arrogant'. Religious persecutors are often arrogant and totally unreasonable in their behaviour. Paul had once delighted in inflicting pain on Christians. He had sinned in ignorance because he had been blind to the truth and to the greatness and beauty of Christ (13). God had not only saved him from his sin, but had entrusted him with the gospel and had put him '*into the ministry*' ('service') and he was filled with thanksgiving (11–12).

Paul considered himself the chief of sinners, but he writes, '*The grace of our Lord was exceedingly abundant*' (14–15). The super-abundant grace of God is a glorious truth. Paul loved to speak of it and he describes his ministry as testifying to *the gospel of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24). Grace is undeserved favour bestowed on sinners who deserve judgment and hell. The very thought of the grace of God towards us should fill our hearts with joy and gratitude, and our mouths with praise and thanksgiving.

Verse 15 has the first of the 'faithful sayings' found in the Pastoral Epistles (see also 3:1; 4:8, 9; 2 Timothy 2:11–13; Titus 3:8). *Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners* (15). We need to get this vital message to those who are lost. Many know that Jesus came into the world, but they never stop to ask why he came into the world.

God has saved us from our sin and he has given us everlasting life (16). **Christian, feast your heart on the wonderful truths found in these verses and you will soon be praising God.** Like Paul, you will exclaim, '*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen*' (17).

Wage the good warfare

Paul reminded Timothy of the charge that he had committed to him (18; cp. verses 3 and 5). You will remember that he was to charge certain individuals to teach only apostolic doctrine and not to misuse the law by involving themselves with things they did not understand (3–8). He encourages his *son in the faith* (2) to *wage the good warfare* and reminds him of the prophecies that were uttered concerning him at his ordination to the service of God (18; cp 4:14).

We are involved in a warfare against the powers of darkness (Ephesians 6:11–12). Satan will attack us if we are faithful to God. He attacks through persecution, through discouragement, through doubts and fears, and by opposition from false teachers who are his agents. We must not despair, however. The Lord is for us and *we are more than conquerors through him who loved us* (Romans 8:37). Let us seek always to have that love in our lives which comes *from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith* so that we may be able to wage the good warfare (18–19; cp. verse 5).

Some in Ephesus had strayed from the teaching of God's Word and had rejected faith and a good conscience. Two of these false teachers, Hymenaeus and Alexander, had made shipwreck of their faith (19; cp. verse 5–6; 2 Timothy 2:17) and Paul had '*delivered*' them to Satan. What does it mean to be delivered to Satan? It means the removal of the protecting hand of God. This solemn action must always be with a view to the restoration of the offender (20). God uses Satan in his purposes and the flesh may be destroyed by sickness or death, though the spirit is saved (1 Corinthians 5:5).

When a church member refuses to repent of their sin, they must be put out of the fellowship of the church and treated as a heathen (Matthew 18:17). **If church discipline is not maintained, it is not a sign of love, but of a callous disregard for the sinning person and for the health of the church.**

There is one God and one Mediator between God and men

We are to pray for all kinds of men, especially those in authority, that they will govern us wisely so that we will be able to lead quiet, peaceable, godly and dignified lives (1–3). We are also to pray for the salvation of sinners, ‘*that they will come to the knowledge of the truth*’ (4). Four expressions are used to describe different aspects of prayer:

- *Supplications*. – These are ‘petitions for the fulfilment of certain definite needs which are keenly felt.’ (Hendriksen).
- *Prayers*. – Every form of reverent address to God.
- *Intercessions*. – Pleading with God on behalf of others.
- *Giving of thanks*. – Showing gratitude to God with thanksgiving for blessings and mercies received from the Lord and for answered prayer.

Many people believe that verses 4 and 6 put paid to the doctrine that Christ died only for his elect (known as ‘particular redemption’ or ‘limited atonement’). That is not so! William Hendriksen writes, ‘Does Titus 2:11 really teach that the saving grace of God has appeared to every member of the human race without exception? Of course not! ... Again, does Romans 5:18 really teach that every member of the human race is justified? Does 1 Corinthians 15:22 really intend to tell us that every member of the human race is made alive in Christ? ... The expression all men as here used means all men without distinction of race, nationality, or social position, not all men individually, one by one’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS, pages 93 and 94).

A mediator is someone who stands between two opposing parties. Our sin has alienated us from God. Christ took human flesh and gave his life a ransom to bridge the gulf between a holy God and sinful men. The notion that there are many mediators between God and ourselves is false. *There is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus* (5). Our salvation is based on the merit and the death of Christ alone! We must not look to the merits and prayers of Mary or certain saints to help save us. **The Lord Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and men (cp. Hebrews 7:25).**

Lifting up holy hands

Paul reminds Timothy that God had appointed him to be a *preacher and an apostle* — a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and truth (7). He now instructs us concerning men and women in the church. These instructions are ignored by many evangelicals.

The apostle has already made it clear that prayers must be made for all men (1) and he goes on to show that men are to lead the congregation in prayer in public worship (8). This needs to be emphasised today where increasingly in some evangelical churches, women are found leading the worship. They quote Galatians 3:28 (*there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus*) to support their practice. This verse has nothing to do with the role of women in public worship. Paul argues that there is no difference between Jew and Greek (Gentile), slave nor free, male nor female as far as salvation is concerned. *We are all one in Christ Jesus* whatever our race, class and gender. Others have argued that the word ‘men’ (8) embraces women as in ‘mankind’. The Greek noun ‘anthrōpos’ which is used to cover both genders is not used in this verse, but the noun ‘anēr’ which is never used for the female gender (see also verse 12).

I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands (8). Lifting up hands in prayer is common in Scripture (eg. Exodus 9:29; 17:11–12; 1 Kings 8:22; Nehemiah 8:6; Psalm 63:4). **Praying hands must be holy hands** (cp. Psalm 24:3–4)! God will not hear our prayers if we are entertaining sin in our lives, if our hearts are not right with him (Psalm 66:18). We must not come to God with *wrath and doubting* in our hearts. If we are angry with our Christian brother, the Lord will not accept our prayers (8; cp. Matthew 5:22–24). Our word ‘dialogue’ is derived from the Greek word translated ‘doubting’. It is translated ‘quarrelling’ in the English Standard Version and ‘disputing’ in Philippians 2:14 (NKJV). In verse 8, the word relates to sinful questioning going on in the mind. **Let us be sure that our prayers are not tainted with hypocrisy.**

I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man

A godly woman is more concerned with inner (spiritual) beauty than with outward show (9–10; cp. 1 Peter 3:1–6). Public worship must never be used as an opportunity to have a fashion parade! There is much controversy concerning the role of women in the life and ministry of the church but the Word of God is quite explicit. – *I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man* (11–12). The apostle is not suggesting for a moment that women are inferior to men; in relation to Christ, he stresses their equality (Galatians 3:28). What he does state here is that there is a difference in function. The failure to recognise this difference has led to much confusion in the realm of ‘women’s ministry’. Some tell us that we must ‘move with the times’ but we must never move away from the teaching of the Bible.

Every Christian mother has a vital teaching ministry to her children (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:15) and in Sunday schools and other children’s meetings. Some women teach other women in the church (Titus 2:3–5). The good works of women enhance the life and witness of the local church (10; Acts 9:36–39). **Paul recognised and respected godly women workers and so must we (Romans 16:1–2,6,12).**

Why must women be in submission to men in the church and in the home (Ephesians 5:22–24)?

- Man was created before woman (13). Eve was given to be Adam’s helper, not his head (Genesis 2:20).
- Eve was deceived by Satan (14). Adam allowed his wife to lead him into sin when he should have led her by rejecting temptation.

Verse 15 does not teach that a woman is able to find salvation from sin through childbearing. Women are saved in the same way as men, by grace alone. The curse which was pronounced upon Eve included pain in childbearing but there was also blessing (*Eve ... the mother of all living* – Genesis 3:20). The idea behind the word ‘saved’ in this verse is that the Christian woman who glorifies God in the calling of motherhood finds great fulfilment and blessing.

The position of a bishop

The second of the ‘faithful sayings’ in the pastoral epistles concerns those who desire *the position of a bishop*. The word ‘*bishop*’ (1–2) means ‘an overseer’ (as translated in the English Standard Version). There can be several ‘*bishops*’ in the same church (Philippians 1:1). The New Testament is quite clear in its teaching that the ‘*bishop*’ is the same office as that of an elder who shepherds (pastors) and oversees the church (Acts 20:17,28; 1 Peter 5:1–2).

It is good for a man to desire the good work of an overseer in the church. Motive is of great importance! Any man who is seeking personal standing or gain must be excluded (3,6). Selfish ambition has no place in God’s service. The Lord had a word for Jeremiah’s servant Baruch, which we do well to heed. – ‘*Do you seek great things for yourself? Do not seek them*’ (Jeremiah 45:5). The pastors lead the church as those who are servants of God and of his people. The elder is responsible to give an account to God for the spiritual well-being of the flock (Hebrews 13:17). This is an awesome responsibility which is not to be taken thoughtlessly or without prayer.

The Lord requires the highest standards in the lives of those who would shepherd his people. A man who aspires to eldership *must be blameless, the husband of one wife*. This does not exclude those who are single. Some apostles and leaders in the early church (eg. Paul) were single men. Elders must be *temperate* (self-controlled), *sober-minded, of good behaviour, hospitable, able to teach* (2–5; Titus 1:6–9). He must be *one who rules his own house well* (4). He must not be a recent convert (*‘not a novice’*) and *he must have a good testimony* among the ungodly (6–7). The vices listed in verse 3 must be absent from his life. The vital importance of godliness in elders is seen in the word ‘*must*’ (2,7). Many men have been appointed as elders who are seriously lacking in the necessary qualifications for that office. This has been disastrous and left churches weak and confused. Let us pray that the Lord will be pleased to raise up godly leaders among us, who will serve him and his people acceptably.

Those who have served well as deacons

The word translated ‘*deacon*’ (‘*diakonos*’) means ‘a servant’ or ‘one who serves at a table’ (cp. Acts 6:2); it is sometimes translated ‘*minister*’ (eg. Colossians 1:7). All Christians should be equipped for the work of ministry (Ephesians 4:12) but there is a distinct office of deacon in the local church (Philippians 1:1). Deacons are responsible to ensure that works of mercy and compassion are undertaken for needy Christians in the church locally and further afield (cp. Acts 6:2). **This is a spiritual work which requires spiritual men who have a pure conscience and a proven godly character (9–10; cp. 1:5,19).** They must be reverent, and not be *double-tongued*, saying one thing to one person and something entirely different to another. They are not to be given to much wine or be lovers of money. They must be doctrinally sound. The word ‘*mystery*’ (9) does not refer to something which is ‘mysterious’ in the usual sense of the word; it is a truth which was once hidden but is now revealed by God. This ‘*mystery*’ is described in verse 16.

Deacons, like elders, must maintain a high standard of family life. They would hardly be respected or efficient in the church if they were incapable of ruling over their own household (12). Some believe that verse 11 refers to an office of ‘*deaconess*’ in the church (‘*wives*’ can also be translated ‘*women*’). While it is true that godly women fulfilled a recognised ministry of service in the church (Romans 16:12), they are not allowed to function as leaders over men in the church (2:11–12). When the apostles sanctioned the appointment of those who would oversee the care of the needy widows in the Jerusalem church, they made it quite clear that seven men should be chosen and set aside to this ministry (Acts 6:2–3).

Whether verse 11 speaks of the wives of deacons or women helpers, it is quite clear that they must be godly and faithful women who are respected and loved in the church. Our work is seen by the Lord. The Lord is no man’s debtor and he rewards *those who have served well as deacons* (13).

The mystery of godliness

Paul was hoping to visit Ephesus very soon but he might be delayed (14–15). He wanted Timothy to ensure that the church had godly elders and deacons. In verse 15, he describes the church as:

- *‘The house of God’*. – The church is not a building designated for worship or just a gathering of people with a common interest; it is the gathered body of believers among whom God dwells.
- *‘The church of the living God’*. – We do not worship dumb idols but the living God (cp. 2 Corinthians 3:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:9).
- *‘The pillar and ground (or foundation) of the truth’* (14–15). A church which rejects the truths which are taught in the Bible is a false church! The church must teach the truths found in God’s Word and defend them against the attacks of false teachers. Those who teach error are the agents of *deceiving spirits* and they propagate *doctrines of demons* (cp. 4:1).

Most commentators believe that verse 16 is part of an early Christian hymn. *Great is the mystery of godliness*. Hendriksen translates it, ‘And confessedly great is the mystery of our devotion’. The Greek word for ‘great’ is ‘mega’. This revealed mystery is really great! It is all important because it focuses on the Lord Jesus.

Great is the mystery of godliness. The living God, the Word took human flesh (cp. John 1:14). He who created the world and made man, took human nature! Notice the contrast between *flesh and Spirit – angels and the Gentiles – the world and glory*. Christ was *justified* (vindicated) *in the Spirit*. Angels gasped with wonder and amazement as he gave himself to be humiliated, tortured and crucified by wicked men (cp. 1 Peter 1:12). They saw him burst open the prison-house of death and received up into glory. He is preached among the nations and many believe (trust) in him.

We have wonderful good news! **Let us praise our glorious God and make known the gospel to those around us. *Great is the mystery of godliness.***

Deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons

The Holy Spirit states quite clearly that *in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons* (1). The church is *the pillar and ground of the truth* (3:15). Satan works tirelessly to infiltrate it with false teachers because he wants to destroy us. We must not tolerate false teaching because error is demonic, coming from deceiving spirits.

Slaves and animals were branded with the seal of their owner. False teachers have their conscience *seared* (branded) so that they cannot tolerate truth (2); this indicates Satan's ownership. Many errors have entered some sections of the evangelical church and there are others (eg. Jehovah's Witnesses) who cannot see the obvious meaning of Scripture which they *twist to their own destruction* (2 Peter 3:16). The deceiving spirits have done a thorough job but we must not despair. The Holy Spirit is well able to release those who are deceived from the grip of Satan and to bring them to believe in the truth of the gospel.

Paul gives us some examples of the man-made rules imposed by false teachers on those who follow them (3). Some forbid marriage and others the eating of certain types of food (eg. meat). Voluntary celibacy or vegetarianism by personal choice is fine but must never be imposed on others. The enforced celibacy of clergy has driven many of them into sexual immorality. Some cults insist that their adherents abstain from eating meat. *God gives us richly all things to enjoy* (6:17) and this includes marriage and meat! Let us receive our food with thanksgiving (3–5; grace before meals is important).

We must beware of those who impose unbiblical commands upon us, such as those mentioned above. They often proclaim salvation by works and deny the grace of God. They are servants of Satan who would bring us into bondage.

Exercise yourself rather to godliness

Many of the Greeks exercised to keep themselves physically fit and spent hours in exercise. Those who were young cherished ambitions to win some event at the original Olympic Games. A healthy body requires wholesome food and exercise and so does a healthy soul! How can you be a strong and healthy Christian? – You must nourish yourself on the Word of God and on good doctrine (6).

False teachers, such as those at Ephesus, claimed that to be saved, you had to follow their practices. Beware of such people! You must reject error (*old wives' fables*) such as described in verse 3 *and exercise yourself rather to godliness* (7). Self-discipline is necessary if you are to exercise yourself to godliness. This means setting time aside for personal prayer, Bible reading and meditating on God's Word. Discipline your thought life and feed your mind with good Christian books. Avoid things which are harmful to your soul and put to death sin in your life. **Make no mistake about it, exercise to godliness is hard work!**

Another '*faithful saying*' is that *bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things ...* (8–9). There is some profit in physical fitness but godliness brings far greater profit! It brings the promise of life. What is this spiritual life? – It is the enjoyment of fellowship with God in Christ; it is the love of God *poured out in our hearts by the Holy Spirit*; it is *the peace of God which surpasses all understanding* (John 14:23; 1 John 1:3; Romans 5:5; Philippians 4:7) as well as glory to come in heaven!

Verse 10 does not teach universalism (that all will be saved). The Bible overwhelmingly rejects such a notion. This verse clearly demonstrates that the gospel is for all people whatever their race or standing, but only those who believe (trust) in Christ enjoy the benefits of salvation. **Have you trusted in the Lord Jesus? Are you exercising yourself to godliness?** I warmly commend the book, THE PRACTICE OF GODLINESS by Jerry Bridges, published by NavPress.

A good minister of Jesus Christ

The word '*minister*' is translated from the Greek word 'diakonos' ('servant') but it is not restricted to the office of deacon. In verse 6, it refers to Timothy, an apostolic delegate and teacher in the church. What is expected of the man who serves the Lord as a leader or teacher in the church if he is to be *a good minister of Jesus Christ* (6)?

- He must proclaim the truth and warn against error, warning against false doctrine (6). Paul gave some examples of error earlier (1–3).
- He must be *nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine* taught by the apostles.
- He exercises himself in godliness and rejects superstitious fables because there is no place for such notions in the Bible (7).
- He teaches the necessity of godly living and this will be seen in his own life as he proves to be *an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity* (7–8, 11–12).
- He will give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and to teaching in the meetings of the church (13). William Hendriksen comments, 'If there is no pulpit-reading, exhorting, and teaching, divine worship is a misnomer'. Sound doctrine is essential in promoting godliness (COMMENTARY ON 1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS, page 159).
- He will not neglect the gift given to him by God (14; cp. 2 Timothy 1:6).
- The *good minister* will give himself entirely to the Lord's work and will take heed to his own spiritual life and doctrine (16). It is very easy to neglect one's own soul while caring for the souls of others (cp. Song of Solomon 1:6; 1 Corinthians 9:27).

Ministers have great responsibilities. Pray that the Lord will keep them faithful and true to their charge. Pray for your pastor, that he will always be a good minister.

Exhort him as a father, the younger men as brothers

Paul had urged Timothy, ‘*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example ... give attention to ... exhortation*’ (4:12–13). He now shows Timothy how he should exhort people in the church. The word translated ‘*exhort*’ (5:1) means to encourage or to admonish. As a pastor and leader in the church, he had to care for people from all age groups. A minister’s relationship to the people in the church is most important. How was Timothy to behave towards others in the church? The apostle uses healthy, loving, and caring family relationships as the pattern. **Love and respect is essential in pastoral work but Paul’s words in verses 1 and 2 are a pattern for all of us**

- *Do not rebuke an older man, but exhort him as a father.* The Greek verb, ‘*epiplēssō*’ translated ‘*rebuke*’ carries the idea of striking a blow. It is not used anywhere else in Scripture. William Hendriksen translates it ‘*rebuke harshly*’. Older men can be very stubborn. They are not prone to listen to admonition, especially from a younger man. Deal with these men as you would deal with your own father. Love them, be patient with them, show respect even when you know that they are wrong!
- *Exhort ... the younger men as brothers.* Deal with young men as you would deal with your young brother. In any healthy family, the older brothers will protect their younger siblings. They will show patience and loving concern towards them.
- *Exhort ... the older women as mothers.* Respect them as you would respect your mother. Listen to them and be kind to them.
- *Exhort ... the younger women as sisters, with all purity.* We must be very careful in our relationship with the opposite sex and never take advantage of those who are vulnerable. All the men in the church must be pure and beyond reproach in their behaviour towards younger women. We must treat them as we would treat our own sisters.

How do you relate to others in the church? Do you show love, care and respect for them? Are your thoughts pure regarding them?

A reputation for good works

Most of this chapter deals with the honouring of widows (3–16) and elders (17–25). Widows are very vulnerable and God is specially concerned for them. He *is a father of the fatherless, a defender of widows* (Psalm 68:5; cp. Exodus 22:22–24; Deuteronomy 24:19; Ezekiel 22:7). The early church undertook to provide for its widows but there were limits to this support. The focus here is on provision for those who were destitute and had no family to support them. This is the implication of verse 3. – *Honour widows who are really widows.*

Widows with children or grandchildren were to receive their support from them and not from the church (4,16). A Christian who shows no concern to provide for his own parents or grandparents *has denied the faith* (8). Many widows are neglected by their families. They may or may not need financial help but they need help with jobs which they are unable to do for themselves; they need frequent visits and encouragement.

Widows under sixty years of age were not to be included among those who were given financial help (9). Those who were supported were to have a godly character. They were used in the caring ministry of the church and they had to have *a reputation for good works* (9–10). By way of contrast, great damage can be done by women who idle away their time (13,15). Widows supported by the church were expected to have a ministry of prayer (5). Such a hidden ministry is vital and many a servant of God is blessed and encouraged through the prayers and intercession of those who are elderly or housebound. Good works cannot save us but the Lord expects to see them in the lives of all Christians, not just widows (cp. 6:18). **Every Christian, young or old, rich or poor, should have ‘a reputation for good works’.**

In the 21st century, many women have been abandoned by their husbands and left to care for young children; they too have great needs. Let us take to heart the principles of care set out in these verses.

Elders who rule well

The apostle now gives some instruction concerning the honouring and ordaining of elders. He refers to *elders who rule well* (17). Such men are to be honoured:

- In their remuneration. – Elders who *labour in the word and doctrine* are singled out for *double honour*. This does not mean that the elder is to have a double stipend. Hendriksen comments: ‘An elder deserves to be honoured; particularly if his labour excels in quality.... A man who spends all his time and effort in kingdom-work certainly deserves a good salary’ (COMMENTARY ON 1 & 2 TIMOTHY AND TITUS, page 181). Paul quotes from the Old Testament to show that those set aside to full-time service must be adequately supported (17–18; cp. Deuteronomy 24:15; 25:4).
- In their reputation. – **Beware of listening to gossip about elders** (Satan wants to destroy their reputation and so ruin their ministry). Moses was a leader who faced rebellion (Numbers 12:1–10). An accusation against an elder must be substantiated by two or three witnesses. Those who have sinned must be publicly rebuked (18–20). Timothy is charged to be sure of his facts and to have witnesses to support any accusation against an elder. Paul urged solemnly urged him to observe the instructions in these verses *without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality* (21). This discipline is exercised in the sight of God the Father, of Jesus Christ and the elect angels. The discipline of sinning elders should lead to the fear of God among his people (21).

The New Bible Commentary observes, ‘Timothy will serve God and the churches well only if he keeps himself pure, and refuses to welcome the unworthy to partake in the leadership’ (1958 edition, published by Inter-Varsity Fellowship, page 1072).

Prayer for church leaders from hymn by Joseph Conder:

*Sound in the faith, in conscience clear,
Ever may they in conduct prove
Sober and just, devout, sincere,
Guided by wisdom from above.*

Use a little wine for your stomach's sake

Good elders are a priceless asset to any church. Let us thank God for them but **some elders do not rule well because they should have never been appointed in the first place.** They lack the spiritual qualities and abilities described in chapter 3. Timothy was cautioned not to be hasty in the ordination of elders (22). The sins of some men are clearly evident, but some do not immediately reveal their true colours (24). Some appointed to be elders are weak and ready to compromise truth and others are lacking in gentleness and love for the people entrusted to their care (cp. 1 Peter 5:3). They forget that they are servants of Christ and his church and they behave as lords. Warren Wiersbe observes, ‘The ruthless way some church leaders have pushed people around is a disgrace to the gospel (BE FAITHFUL, page 83).

Timothy did not enjoy good health, suffering with *frequent infirmities* (or illnesses). Paul did not support the notion that it is always God’s will to heal us of sickness. He urged Timothy, ‘*Use a little wine for your stomach's sake*’ (23). This was possibly to avoid drinking contaminated water; it is not an encouragement for us to indulge in taking much strong drink. **Notice that Timothy was only to use ‘a little wine’.** *

There is all the difference in the world between drinking wine because our water is unsafe to drink and taking intoxicating drink to excess. We are painfully aware of the dreadful effects caused by strong drink in Britain today. It fuels criminal activity and reduces many to poverty and misery. Elders and deacons must not be given to wine (1 Timothy 3:3,8; Titus 1:7. It is easy to fall into the sin of drunkenness (cp. (Genesis 9:20–21) or to become addicted to alcoholic drinks. It is better to keep strong drink out of the home so that our children or grandchildren are not encouraged to develop a taste for it.

* Joseph Lucas, founder of Lucas Industries was a strong temperance campaigner who signed a pledge never to take intoxicating drink. He died of typhoid fever in December 1902 while on a business trip to Naples, having refused advice to drink wine, to avoid drinking the local contaminated water.

The doctrine which is according to godliness

Some historians estimate that half of the population of the Roman Empire were slaves. Most wealthy people owned slaves, and those who were very rich owned hundreds of them. Some slaves toiled as domestic servants and farm labourers, others as clerks, craftsmen, teachers, soldiers and managers.

When slaves or their owners became Christians, questions were bound to be raised. What was the position of Christian slaves and Christian masters when in Christ there is neither slave nor free (Galatians 3:28)? Slave owners were to treat their slaves with dignity (Ephesians 6:9) and slaves were not to take advantage of their Christian masters (1–2). They were to be better workers than they were before their conversion, doing their work as to the Lord (Colossians 3:22–23). Where the gospel flourishes, slavery ultimately withers and dies. These verses do have implications for us today, however. Christians should excel and be conscientious in their work *so that the name of God and his doctrine are not blasphemed* (1).

False teachers reject the words of Christ and *the doctrine which is according to godliness* (3). They are blinded by their own pride being *obsessed with disputes and arguments over words from which come envy, strife, reviling, evil suspicions* (4). We are not to have any fellowship with false teachers (5). It is not unloving and harsh to refuse to have anything to do with those who teach error and deny the truths of God's Word. They are dangerous people whom the Lord Jesus describes as wolves in sheep's clothing (Matthew 7:15). They are clever in their arguments and will lead astray the weak and those who are unwary.

Paul stresses the need for godliness throughout this letter (2:2; 4:7–8; 6:3,6,11). We must maintain *the doctrine which is according to godliness* (3). **If our teaching does not encourage us to be godly, it has gone wrong!**

Godliness with contentment is great gain

Paul has written concerning *the doctrine which is according to godliness* (3) and he now links true contentment with godliness. Many who do not know the Lord seek contentment in earthly possessions and riches (hence the huge success of the gambling industry) and they chase after pleasures which do not last. There is a restlessness and unsatisfied longing within their hearts because they are alienated from their Maker. Some, however, are content without godliness. They are in a perilous condition as many a contented sinner has slipped into hell.

We have already been reminded that *godliness is profitable for all things* (4:8) and now we have this wonderful and challenging verse, *godliness with contentment is great gain* (6). Many Christians are not content. Why is this? There is a sense in which we will never be fully content until our pilgrimage on earth is over and we are with our blessed Saviour in heaven. Many are discontented, however, because they are not godly! They still hanker after the world (cp. 1 John 2:15–17). Over 350 years ago, the Puritan, Jeremiah Burroughs wrote a book which is still available, entitled, ‘The Rare Jewel of Christian Contentment’. What is Christian contentment? Jeremiah Burroughs writes, ‘Christian contentment is that sweet, inward, quiet, gracious frame of spirit, which fully submits to and delights in God’s wise and fatherly disposal in every condition’.

The great enemy of Christian contentment is covetousness and the *desire to be rich* (9–10; cp. Hebrews 13:5). *Some have strayed from the faith because of the love of money and they have pierced themselves through with many sorrows.* Let us be warned never to seek satisfaction in material things; they do not bring lasting satisfaction. Some Christians seek contentment by chasing after blessings and sensational experiences but they too are pursuing the wrong things! Are you restless within, discontented with what God has given you? ***Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness (Matthew 6:33) and you will prove that godliness with contentment is great gain.***

The good confession

Paul's instructions to Timothy in these verses are relevant to every one who professes to belong to the Lord Jesus and to love him:

- *Flee* (11). We must flee the vices condemned by the apostle in verses 3 to 10. These are pride, false teaching, an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between men of corrupt minds. These things and *the love of money* which causes some to stray from the faith, bring sorrow and lead to ruin and destruction (9–10).
- *Pursue* (11). We are to run away from error and sinful attitudes and practices and run after *righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness*. The man or woman of God is concerned to please the Lord by leading a godly life.
- *Fight* (12). Paul had already encouraged Timothy to wage the good warfare (1:18) in his battle for truth against false teachers. He now urges his friend to *fight the good fight of faith* in the pursuit of holiness. We must remember that the Christian life is a struggle (our word 'agony' comes from the Greek word, translated '*fight*'; it was used to describe the athletics contests of that day).
- *Lay hold on eternal life* (12). God has called us to be pilgrims to heaven and has given us eternal life. We are to show this in our own lives by godliness and good works (cp. verse 19). The good confession which Timothy confessed before many witnesses probably refers to his confession when he was baptised as a believer (12). In baptism, we confess that we belong to Christ and that we have begun to *fight the good fight of faith* and to *lay hold on eternal life*. We are encouraged with the example of our blessed Saviour *who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate* (13).

Like Timothy, we too need to be reminded of our calling to lead godly lives, as those who are citizens of heaven. How are you doing?

He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings

The apostle gives Timothy a solemn charge (*‘in the sight of God’*). He is urged (the word *‘urge’* is translated *‘command’* in 1:3 and 6:17) to *keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ’s appearing*. The *‘commandment’* may refer to the good confession that he made at his baptism. We must persevere in the Christian life and seek always to lead a holy, blameless life until Jesus comes again (or until we die). The thought of Christ’s second coming caused the apostle to break forth into a great doxology (15–16) just as the topic of his first coming had done earlier in this letter (1:15–17).

Let us look at the description in this doxology of the God who has called us, who loves us and whom we serve:

- *The blessed and only Potentate* (*‘Sovereign’*). God possesses absolute bliss; he is the source of all happiness; he is *‘the blessed God’* (cp. 1:11). What immeasurable joy there is in knowing and belonging to the blessed God! He is absolutely sovereign over all things (*‘the only Potentate’*) and his purposes can never be frustrated or thwarted (cp. Isaiah 14:24,27; Ephesians 1:11).
- *The King of kings and Lord of lords*. He is the King over all those who reign and Lord over all those who rule. This title is twice applied to the Lord Jesus Christ, teaching that he is indeed God (Revelation 17:14; 19:16).
- *Who alone has immortality*. God alone is the fountain of life from whom the believer receives eternal life .
- *Dwelling in unapproachable light*. God has such dazzling radiance and glory that no mortal man can approach him (cp. Psalm 104:2). We come to him through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6).
- *Whom no man has seen or can see*. He is revealed by his beloved Son (John 1:18).
- *To whom be honour and everlasting power. Amen*. He alone is worthy of our worship. The *‘Amen’* is a solemn word of confirmation.

Think about this doxology and read the words of the hymn, ‘Immortal, invisible, God only wise’ and then worship the Lord!

The living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy

Paul had warned *those who desire to be rich* (9) and now he has words for those who are actually rich (17–19). Most of us in the western world are rich when measured against the standards of living for most Christians in Bible times. We must not be high-minded nor place our trust in *uncertain riches*. Our possessions are only for *this present age*; we cannot take them with us when we die. We must *lay hold on eternal life* by laying up treasure in heaven (12,19; cp. Matthew 6:19–21). Those who are rich have a great responsibility to honour God in the use their wealth. They have more opportunity than others to *do good* and to *be rich in good works, to give, willing to share*. This does not excuse the rest of us from doing these things. We must all seek to store up for ourselves *a good foundation* for the future. Salvation is by grace alone through faith (Ephesians 2:8), but God’s rewards are according to works (Daniel 12:3; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:12).

Let us always remember that it is *the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy*. We will never enjoy our possessions if we allow them to enslave us. Read and ponder the words of the hymn, ‘My God I thank thee, who hast made the earth so bright.’ **Are you trusting in the living God? Are you storing up a good foundation by showing the love of God in your life through good works?**

Paul closes his letter with an appeal: ‘*O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust*’ (the gospel – 20; cp. 1:11). False teachers appear so clever with their so-called knowledge but they lead people astray (21). Truth is under attack; let us be determined to guard and uphold the precious truths of the gospel!

*I thank thee more, that all our joy
Is touched with pain,
That shadows fall on brightest hours,
That thorns remain;
So that earth’s bliss may be our guide,
And not our chain.*

(Adelaide Anne Proctor)

Then you knew my path

This psalm is described in its title as a prayer of David when he was in the cave (cp. Psalm 57). The cave may have been David's hiding place at Adullam or at En Gedi (1 Samuel 22:1; 24:1–3). Spurgeon comments, 'Had David prayed as much in his palace as he did in his cave, he might never have fallen into the act which brought such misery upon his later days'. The psalm can be divided as follows:

1. David's plea (1–3a). – David cried out to the Lord; he was in trouble and his spirit was overwhelmed within him. He poured out his complaint before God.
2. His path (3b–4). – It was a dangerous path on which his enemies had set a snare for him. It was also a lonely path where no one acknowledged him or cared for his soul. Those of us who have travelled on a difficult or lonely path in obedience to God, when all seemed to be against us, have afterwards been able to say to the Lord, '*Then you knew my path.*' He knows, he cares and he is with us!
3. His portion and refuge (5). – He had been separated from loved ones, home and possessions but he had a most precious and priceless portion that could never be taken from him. Man's refuge had failed him (4) but the Lord was his refuge and his portion. Spurgeon comments, 'It is something to have God for our refuge, but it is everything to have him for our portion' (TREASURY OF DAVID).
4. His persecutors (6). – They were stronger than him and he called upon God to listen to his cry for he was in desperate need.
5. His prison (7). – The cave was his hiding place, but it was also like a prison to him. He called on God to deliver his soul from prison.
6. His praise (7) – When the Lord delivered him, he would praise the name of God, he would be surrounded by the righteous. He prayed with faith, expecting the Lord to deal bountifully with him.

Are you feeling troubled, rejected or lonely? Have you suffered heartbreak, grief, loss or disappointment? **Remember, the Lord knows your path and he will hear your prayer. Your cries of anguish will then be turned to songs of praise!**