



Class 10 - Titus, 2 Timothy

New Testament Seminar - Immanuel Church

Titus: Characteristics of a Gospel-centered church

If you're going to solve problems today, what do you need? Many say the answer is innovation. What does our economy need? Innovation! Our educational system? Innovation! Politics and government? Innovation! Stuck in the quagmire of decades-old disagreements, we need new ways of thinking; a new perspective, a new way of doing things. So when we approach the topic of the church, innovation should seem to be important as well. Right?

Well, not exactly. In some ways, innovation in the church is fine – email newsletters, photographs in the membership directory, a women's tea – Those are great "innovations." But when it comes to theology and the church, "innovation" is generally not something we want to shoot for. In fact, more often than not, "innovations" in the church have turned out to be heresy. Why's that? Because innovation is good if things need to be improved. But if Jesus gave us a perfect message, then any change to that gospel is absolutely horrific. That kind of innovation is to be shunned.

Now, how do we do that? How do we protect this perfect good news that we've received? That's what the book of Titus is all about. And I think Paul's answer might surprise you. Because although he does say that our pastors must preach the gospel — he also says that the way we structure our churches, the way we relate to one another, and the way we live in the world all help to preserve this precious message.

Let's begin with some background to the book. Last week we considered Paul's first letter to Timothy, which was also the first of what are called the Pastoral Epistles. Today, we will consider the second of these Pastoral Epistles, Paul's letter to Titus. There are many similarities between I Timothy and Titus. Both books are written by Paul to men with pastoral leadership responsibilities, so it is natural that Paul would include similar instructions to both men. In Titus, as in I Timothy, we see instruction about establishing elders, we see the need to oppose false teachers, and we see instruction about what it means to live as a Christian in the church and in the world. So, with all these similarities, what's distinctive about Titus? There's a different context here, and so we will have some distinct areas of focus.

Structure of Titus

Turn with me to 1:4-5. Paul says, “To Titus, my true son in our common faith. Grace and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Savior. The reason I left you in Crete was to set right what was left undone and, as I directed you, to appoint elders in every town.” Paul had previously spent time on the island of Crete establishing the church, and now he has sent Titus to continue that work. That’s the purpose of the letter: to bring spiritual health to the churches in Crete. So, how does Paul go about equipping Titus to do that? *Take a moment to scan the outline of Titus in your handout.* You’ll see that Paul equips Titus first by listing the qualifications of elders (1:6-9), just as he had done previously for Timothy.

Why does he begin with a description of biblical leadership? Well, as you move down the outline you see in verses 10-16 of chapter 1, because — as is so often the case — the absence of good leadership didn’t leave a leadership vacuum; it left bad leadership: false teachers. These teachers were wreaking havoc and needed to be opposed.

Then, with this most fundamental element of church order in place, Paul continues on in Chapters 2 and 3, encouraging Titus what to teach so that proper order could be achieved in other relationships as well. He says in 2:1, “But you are to proclaim things consistent with sound teaching.” This “sound teaching” was to fuel Gospel-driven living among various groups of people who would be in the church: older men, older women, younger women, younger men, slaves, citizens.

What’s important to notice on that outline, though, is how after each strand of practical teaching, Paul returns to the gospel - the good news of Jesus. He does this in chapter 3 – Paul Summarizes the message of forgiveness of sins through the death and resurrection of Jesus, and then Paul says in verse 8: “This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works.” (3:8). The Gospel would transform the lives of the Christians in Crete, and it would transform the churches in Crete as well. That’s why we can sum up the book well with a phrase from 1:1: “The knowledge of the truth that leads to godliness.”

So, with this goal of a Gospel-centered church in place, we’ll walk through this book theme by theme. First a look at good leadership, (2) then at bad leadership, (3) then we’ll examine the gospel message that motivates Paul’s instructions on orderly relationships in chapters 2 and 3, and (4) then finally those practical instructions themselves. Let’s dive in.

Theme 1, Gospel Shaped Leaders (1:5-9)

We see first, as we saw clearly in I Timothy, that good leadership is essential to a healthy church. While churches can go on functioning for periods of time without the type of men described in Titus and I Timothy, a church quickly loses its pure Gospel witness without such men leading. So, what do these Gospel shaped leaders look like? Look at 1:6-9. Paul tells Titus, “An elder must be blameless: the husband of one wife, with faithful children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion. As an overseer of God’s household, he must be blameless: not arrogant, not hot-tempered, not an excessive drinker, not a bully, not greedy for money, but hospitable, loving what is good, sensible, righteous, holy, self-controlled, holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.”

Let’s take a few moments to look more closely at these qualifications. First and foremost, Paul describes the elder as someone who is blameless. No Christian is perfect; but the elder is one whose life does not bring the Gospel into reproach.

Toward that end, we see that these Gospel-shaped leaders won’t just be leaders at church, they will first be leaders in their own homes. An elder should be the husband of one wife. That doesn’t mean an elder must be married; that would have excluded Paul, not to mention Jesus himself. Paul is referring to faithfulness in marriage. An elder must be a man who faithfully keeps to one woman and does not wander in any way.

And the elder’s relationship with his children matters as well. As a side note, it does not seem that Paul is arguing that an elder’s children must be Christians, as that is outside of the control of the parents. In both the NIV and ESV, we see the use of the word “believer” (as in, “children who believe” or “children are believers”), however, in most other versions (KJV, CSB, etc.) the idea is rather “trustworthy” or “faithful” and we see here, in the CSB, “children who are not accused of wildness or rebellion”. The passage appears to be contrasting a reputation for wild and disobedient behavior with a reputation for being faithful and trustworthy.

But more than just manage his own family well, the elder’s relationship with other people should be exemplary too: He should be “blameless,” not determining to get his way whatever the cost to others. He’s not be “hot-tempered;” elders will be put in situations where they will be tempted to lose patience, so a man who makes a habit of losing his cool is not fit to lead the church. The elder is not to be “an excessive drinker,” but instead demonstrates moderation and self-control. The elder is “not [to be] a bully”, showing us that *Biblical* masculinity is not tied to any sort of macho aggression, power, domination. Instead, the Bible’s teaching on masculinity

focuses on protecting and providing — using strength for the benefit of others. The elder should not be “greedy for money” it is not wrong for an elder to have wealth, but he should never make his living through less than reputable means.

Now, with these more negative restrictions in place, Paul goes on to provide positive descriptions of how the elder should relate to other people. So the elder is called to be “hospitable” — literally, a “lover of strangers” — he reaches out to those who are different from him. The elder also “loves what is good.” This idea of “loving what is good,” “teaching what is good” and “doing what is good” comes up again and again in the book of Titus. How do you know if a church is healthy? According to Paul, it’s committed to what is good. And that commitment begins with its leaders. Therefore, the elder is also someone who is “sensible, righteous, holy and self-controlled.” An elder is not one who is carelessly walking through life, giving little thought to his own growth in Godliness. No, if the elder is going to lead others to follow Christ, well, he must first be able to control and discipline himself. He must be pursuing holiness himself if he is going to call others to repent of their sins and put their trust in Christ.

Now, as we’ve gone through this list so far, you’ve probably noticed something. All of these qualities are things that the Bible commends for all Christian men, and most of them are applicable to Christian women as well. So we shouldn’t use this list just as a portrait of a godly elder — we can use it as a way to examine ourselves, and to encourage others. We can take this list of qualities even this week, and, as appropriate, pray that God would grow these sorts of fruit in our lives.

But the last quality Paul gives to Titus is the most unique for elders and also one of the most important, in 1:9: “holding to the faithful message as taught, so that he will be able both to encourage with sound teaching and to refute those who contradict it.” The elder must be able to teach. He can’t be wishy-washy on doctrine — especially on the “faithful message”, namely the Gospel. He may never abuse alcohol, never act in a violent way, and have an orderly family — but if he denies the Gospel or, if he fails to speak up when others begin to deny the Gospel, he is not only unfit to lead the church, he is helping the wolves who would come into the church. So when we are evaluating an elder candidate, we can ask ourselves: does this person seem to be used by God to bring clarity to the Scriptures? Is he the type of person who can talk with a confused and wandering Christian and call them to the truth? And is he willing to firmly disagree with those who would teach what is contrary to the gospel?

In summary, if our message — the Gospel we proclaim — is central to the church’s existence and our existence as Christians, then the elders who lead must be faithful in knowing and holding the truth of the gospel. They must also have the kind of lives which back up that truth. Paul is

telling Titus that if you get these sorts of men in place leading your church, you are on the path to a faithful witness in the world – and you’re glorifying God by obeying his instructions on how to order the church. So we should pray that God would make our church rich in these sorts of elders. Pray that he would keep our elders faithful. And pray that as it says in verse 9, we would be encouraged by the sound doctrine they teach.

QUESTIONS?

Theme 2, Resistance of Gospel Deniers (1:10-16, 3:9-11)

So... those are the good leaders. But what about the bad? Before getting onto the teaching of sound doctrine, we see that there is first a need to refute false teachers. Let’s look at 1:10-14. Paul tells Titus: “For there are many rebellious people, full of empty talk and deception, especially those from the circumcision party. It is necessary to silence them; they are ruining entire households by teaching what they shouldn’t in order to get money dishonestly. One of their very own prophets said, “Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” This testimony is true. For this reason, rebuke them sharply, so that they may be sound in the faith and may not pay attention to Jewish myths and the commands of people who reject the truth.” What is going on in Crete doesn’t seem to be the mere presence of false teachers in the surrounding community, “somewhere *out there*.” No, it appears that these false teachers had actually gained a strong hearing in the church – it says they’re “ruining entire households!”

So, who are these false teachers? In 1:10, Paul refers to the “circumcision party.” Based on what we can piece together from Paul’s other letters, these are people who accept Jesus as the Messiah yet require the Jewish laws to be observed, including the law of circumcision. Paul knows that any addition to the gospel is a false gospel. And so he tells Titus in no uncertain terms that it is his duty to oppose such teachers and their teachings. And don’t just tell them they are wrong; explain to them how they are wrong. He says in verse 13, “rebuke them sharply, *so that* they may be sound in the faith.” His goal here is not to stifle freedom of expression but to halt the spread of spiritual disease and to heal sick souls – even the souls of these false teachers.

Paul picks up this theme again in 3:9-11: “But avoid foolish debates, genealogies, quarrels, and disputes about the law, because they are unprofitable and worthless. Reject a divisive person after a first and second warning. For you know that such a person has gone astray and is sinning; he is self-condemned.” In thinking about this, you know, one of the most important things any pastor or elder will do for us is something we may never notice. It is not visiting hospitals, successfully leading a church to expand its budget, or ensuring that his sermons have clear outlines

— all of which are good things. It is this: working hard to know Scripture in order to protect us from false teaching. False teaching is a bit like asbestos: if it gets in the air of a church, everyone is at risk of being harmed – they breathe it in, but they may not even know it. We need our leaders to be watching out for us.

And, all of us should seek the Spirit's help in our discernment of good teaching from bad. We should be like the Bereans in Acts, searching the scriptures to verify what we hear.

But, of course, it is not enough to simply oppose false teaching. It's great, for example, if you have a church that opposes universalism – the idea that all religions lead to God. That's untrue, and unhealthy for the church. But you've got to go further. A church must have elders that also teach sound doctrine. Solid, consistent teaching of the truth is the best way to prevent falsehood from taking hold in the church. And what is that truth? That leads us to our third theme,

Theme 3, Gospel Saturated Doctrine (2:1,11-15 and 3:3-8)

In 2:1, Paul says to Titus, in contrast to the false teachers, “proclaim things consistent with sound teaching [or doctrine].” And at the core of this sound doctrine that Titus and every other Christian pastor has been called to preach is the gospel. Chapter 2, verse 11-14: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age, while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ. He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.” This is the heart of everything Paul is trying to get across in this letter to Titus. It is the antidote to false teaching. It is the fuel that produces godly elders, and that drives the godly living we will consider further in just a few minutes.

We should cherish what is at the heart of this message, there in verse 14: Jesus Christ gave himself for us, to redeem us. This message is not about anything we have done, it is about what God has done for us already through Christ. A hallmark of sound doctrine is grace. Because of our sinful nature, we can never achieve our own salvation. In our sin, we are the enemies of a holy God. Our only hope is that God would rescue us from his own good justice. And that is exactly what he does – in love, sending his son Jesus to live a perfect life and die the death we deserved to die on the cross, and rise again on the 3rd day – so that whoever would turn from his sin and believe in Jesus will receive life instead of death, glory instead of judgment, forgiveness instead of wrath. That's grace: totally undeserved favor.

Look with me at 3:3-8, where Paul again reveals the riches of this grace: “For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another. But when the kindness of God our Savior and his love for mankind appeared, he saved us—not by works of righteousness that we had done, but according to his mercy—through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit. He poured out his Spirit on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Savior so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs with the hope of eternal life. This saying is trustworthy. I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed God might be careful to devote themselves to good works. These are good and profitable for everyone.” Titus was to stress this Gospel. And so we too must hear it, and believe it, and value it, and thank God for it, because only then will we be able to devote ourselves to what is good.

And an important part of valuing the Gospel is remembering what we have been saved from. Look at verse 3 again. All of us, including Paul himself, have been foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by passions and pleasures. Now, interestingly, these adjectives sound similar to what Paul said about the false teachers that are in Crete. Is it possible... that we were just like them? This is central to the message of Titus. Yes, Paul’s given instruction about elders and resisting false teaching and holy living. But all that instruction must be grounded in the truth that we were no better off than the false teachers on Crete. We are broken. We are sinful. We are unworthy of God’s love. A Gospel-centered church is not a church where people come because they were the most respectable and upstanding of people in society or because they have the most to offer to God. No, the heart of sound doctrine is that we were all once foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved. Paul and Titus, you and me have all been at one point more like these slimy false teachers than like Christ, and that is precisely why we need this Gospel message.

Now, let’s say we get that. We mentally understand the Gospel. Our brain assents to this sound doctrine that should be taught in the church. Is that all? Is the Christian life just signing your name on a list of truths?

Not at all. [And personally, this has probably the most encouraging thing about Titus for me this past week, as I’ve been studying it:] God radically changes our lives through the gospel. Moralism, rules, effort and determination ultimately are not what bring about a changed life; – the gospel produces godliness in us. Look again at 2:11-12: “For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, instructing us to deny godlessness and worldly lusts and to live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age” Did you hear that? If you struggle with ungodliness and worldly passions like I do, hear and believe that it is God’s grace that teaches us to say no to sin and follow him. Notice – God’s grace doesn’t say “no” for us – we don’t just

sit on the couch; we're called to pursue holiness. But we can do so only as the gospel of God's mercy teaches us about God's love and about who we are as beloved children of God. We are saved because of his kindness! We've been washed! We've been reborn! We've had the Holy Spirit poured out on us! We've been justified by his grace! We're heirs of eternal life! (cf. 3:5-7.) As we meditate on the cross and savor these gospel realities, our gratitude soars. And then, not out of moral determination but out of immense gratefulness, we learn to obey God – for his glory and our good. His grace exposes our worldly desires as trivial, so that God would satisfy us supremely. We can only live supernaturally because we have been forgiven supernaturally.

And that leads us into our final point, where Paul will teach about what lives that have been transformed by the Gospel look like practically in the church. Before we cover that, Any QUESTIONS?

Theme 4, Gospel Centered Living (2:2-10 and 3:1-2)

For those who know the Gospel, how does God now call and equip them to live? Look at 2:2-6: Paul says to Titus, “Older men are to be self-controlled, worthy of respect, sensible, and sound in faith, love, and endurance. In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God's word will not be slandered. In the same way, encourage the young men to be self-controlled” (2:2-6).

Again, these lists of qualities are tremendously practical for us – depending where we fall in these categories, we can use them to examine our own hearts, and then use the other lists as a guide for what to pray for others. The point of it all is that those who have been transformed by the Gospel will live changed lives and they will encourage others to walk in paths of godliness.

We should notice that Paul assumes that there are folks of all ages in the churches on Crete. We live in a culture where youth and creativity are valued more than age and wisdom. It shouldn't be so in the church. If you are older, then you have a particular responsibility in Christ's church to be providing an example to the younger men and women of what it means to live as a Christian. Your physical health may not be what it used to be, but this is the time of life for your spiritual health to shine as an example. Those of us who are younger would do well to pray for our older brothers and sisters in the faith. Do we treasure the legacy and esteem the example of older Christians like Paul teaches us to here? Here at Immanuel, we are blessed to have an inter-generational membership. But we only have inter-generational fellowship if each of us takes

ownership of the picture of the Gospel-centered church that Paul commends here: older women training younger woman, older men setting an example for younger men – we've got to get into relationships with folks who aren't exactly like us. That's why we talk so much about a culture of discipling, where we intend to pour into one other's lives in deliberately edifying relationships with the goal being that the Gospel would be made visible among us.

Paul continues on to give instruction for slaves, "Slaves are to submit to their masters in everything, and to be well-pleasing, not talking back or stealing, but demonstrating utter faithfulness, so that they may adorn the teaching of God our Savior in everything." (2:9-10). Now, we should recognize that when the New Testament talks about slaves, it is not talking about the racial, discriminating slavery America practiced for nearly three centuries. It is talking about a kind of slavery that was a type of servitude, but which is probably closer to our idea of employment than to our idea of slavery. We'll go into more detail on the slavery issue later when we cover the book of Philemon. But for our purposes today, it is probably best to apply Paul's admonition to slaves to us as employees, recognizing that our system of employment is far better than what these slaves on Crete would have experienced.

What this means for us is that our work is important. It is one of the key ways the Gospel is adorned by our lives before non-Christians. So, if we are to live lives with the Gospel at the center, what will this mean for our lives at work, particularly in relation to our boss? Well, negatively, we shouldn't talk back to our employers, or steal from them in any way.

Positively, we should be subject to our bosses in everything, except if it would cause us to sin. We should try to please them, to show them we can be fully trusted... Have you ever thought about God caring for your employer? Have you ever considered God's desire for the good news to be attractive to them? And have you ever thought about God wanting to use you to reach them? The way we work may be one of the most powerful witnesses God uses – our goal, as it says in 2:10, is to "demonstrating utter faithfulness, so that they may adorn the teaching of God our Savior in everything." If you are known as a Christian and as an exceptional employee, that will commend the gospel.

A Gospel-centered church is going to be filled with people seeking to understand what it means to live holy lives, they are going to understand this more as they are taught "things consistent with sound teaching." As they do this, they will be able to stand against false teachers and make the Gospel known to non-Christians. That's what Paul wants to see in the churches in Crete, and that's what we should pray for our congregation here.

QUESTIONS?

Conclusion

Well, let me conclude with a series of questions for us, to help us think about applying this book of Titus to our lives.

First, do we take Gospel-driven elders for granted? Or do we pray that God would continue to raise up Titus 1-type men to lead his church here in Knoxville and for that matter that God would raise such men up in churches across the world?

Second, Do we assume that just because we haven't denied the gospel in today's class that false teaching could never occur in this place? Are we on guard against those who would teach any other Gospel than Christ crucified?

Third, Do we ever take the Gospel itself for granted? Do we forget that it was the kindness and love of God our savior that appeared to give us new life?

And finally, do we ever try to cultivate a godly life on our own strength, apart from the grace of God? Thank God that we don't have to do that: his grace is what teaches us how to honor him. We will never live out these truths from Titus fully in this age. But by God's grace, the salvation that we have in Christ assures us – as it says in 2:13, “while we wait for the blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ.” So let's pray that God would bless us with godly elders, that he would protect us from false teaching, that he would make the Gospel real to us every day, and that as a result, we would in the words of Titus 3:14 “devote [ourselves] to good works” – to the glory of God.

II Timothy: The Continuation of the Kingdom

Some of the most memorable words a leader speaks are those given in a farewell address. A lifetime or career of achievements, setbacks, joy, and pain can give us perspectives we didn't have earlier in life. From farewell addresses we gain insight into the life of the person speaking. We sometimes learn interpretations of past events from their point of view. We learn what the person valued. And often we're left with inspirational words for the future. Consider some of these memorable words from farewell addresses:

General Douglas MacArthur,

“Old soldiers never die. They just fade away.”

Reagan,

“My friends: We did it. We weren’t just marking time. We made a difference.”

Nathan Hale said,

“I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country.”

And of course, Oscar Wilde:

“Either this wallpaper goes, or I do!”

In 2 Timothy, what is thought to be the last letter written by the Apostle Paul, we have these words from Paul’s farewell address, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.” These words by Paul are some of the most famous last words ever spoken, and along with the content of this final letter serve to tell us something not only about the man who spoke these words but about the Gospel purpose for which he lived. Through these last words of Paul we don’t just learn about him and what motivated him. Paul has another purpose in writing this letter that is more than just talking about his personal hope in the Gospel. Like in a last will and testament, Paul is wanting to ensure that his stewardship of the gospel would be passed on well to the next generation. So... let’s get into 2 Timothy. First some background.

Background:

Paul seems to know these are his last written words. Thus there is a clarity of expression as Paul has perhaps his last communication with his son in the faith, Timothy. It seems that Paul was re-arrested at Ephesus, perhaps at the instigation of Alexander the Metalworker. He says to Timothy, “When you come, bring the cloak I left in Troas with Carpus, as well as the scrolls, especially the parchments. Alexander the coppersmith did great harm to me. The Lord will repay him according to his works. Watch out for him yourself because he strongly opposed our words. At my first defense, no one stood by me, but everyone deserted me. May it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me and strengthened me, so that I might fully preach the word and all the Gentiles might hear it. So I was rescued from the lion’s mouth. The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.” (4:13-18)

So, Paul’s trial in Rome has begun. His confidence has shifted from the confidence he had on his previous imprisonment. There he had famously written, when musing over whether it was better to stay here for the sake of the church or depart and be with Christ:

Phil 1:24-26

But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain and continue with you all, for your progress and joy in the faith, so that in me you may have ample cause to glory in Christ Jesus, because of my coming to you again.

But now we see his hope is elsewhere:

2 Tim 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. There is reserved for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that day, and not only to me, but to all those who have loved his appearing.

Do you see where Paul's own personal hope is? He is focused on his eternal rest in Christ, and this drives his final message to Timothy.

Summary/Structure:

Well, before going in any deeper, let's take a look at an overview of that final message.

In chapter 1, we see Paul calling Timothy to protect the message which has been entrusted to him. The need to guard the Gospel message and ensure that its message was not altered or compromised was not something Paul assumed. Paul knew that the Gospel message, once assumed, was in danger of being quickly lost.

In chapters 2 and 3, we see Paul shifting his focus to the need to raise up faithful men who will continue to teach and preach the Gospel. Though this will not be without continued opposition from false teachers. Paul has already suffered for the sake of the Gospel and he continues to remind Timothy that faithfully preaching the Gospel message will invariably result in some form of suffering in this present age.

Towards the end of chapter 3 and into chapter 4, Paul gives his final charge to Timothy. He encourages him to "continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed" (3:14). The faithful minister, the faithful Christian, will continue on, enduring in the faith until his final

days. As we have already seen, Paul offers himself as an example in this, “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith” (4:7).

And so Paul finishes the letter with some final instructions, a few greetings, and a prayer. “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you all.” (4:22)

To Timothy and to us, Paul’s message can be summed up in three words, Protect, Preach, and Persevere. Protect the Message that has been entrusted to you, Preach the Word no matter the personal cost, and Persevere to the End. I’ll take those each in turn to give you a thematic run-through of the book. First, Protect the Message.

Protect the Message

Paul begins his letter to Timothy by giving this exhortation:

For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but one of power, love, and sound judgment. So don’t be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, or of me his prisoner. Instead, share in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God. He has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began. This has now been made evident through the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who has abolished death and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel. For this gospel I was appointed a herald, apostle, and teacher, and that is why I suffer these things. But I am not ashamed, because I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that he is able to guard what has been entrusted to me until that day. Hold on to the pattern of sound teaching that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us. (1:7-14)

God gave a spirit of power. We suffer for the gospel by the power of God. God appointed Paul as a herald of the gospel. And Timothy is now to guard that message with the help of the Holy Spirit. So the first thing we see is that the task of protecting the Gospel message doesn’t begin with us; it begins with the One who gave the message. Ultimately, the integrity of the message doesn’t rest in the amount of courage we possess, or the zeal and passion we have in proclaiming it. God gives us the good news. God saves us and sustains us. God calls us. Man did not invent this religion as a way to approach God. God brought this gospel to man. In the midst of the exhortation to protect the Gospel message, which is a serious stewardship, we must be reminded that the task

isn't ultimately contingent upon us. No, it is God who gives us the Gospel and it also God who gives us the ability to "guard the good deposit through the Holy Spirit who lives in us".

But notice that God entrusts the Gospel to us. God's children are the means God uses to guard the Good News. So how are we to guard it? In a sense, our call is to do nothing. And that is substantially more challenging than it might at first appear. *You and I are not called to give out another message; or to come up with something that has more surface appeal; or to craft a gospel better suited to modern needs, as we see them. We are called to give the gospel of Jesus Christ alone. If the gospel of Jesus Christ is altered, it is lost.*

What about at a personal level- have you ever been tempted to alter the Gospel? Perhaps it's in the moment of sinning. Wanting to give in to our sin, we forget the costliness of grace and deny the Gospel call that once we become God's children Jesus is our Savior and our Lord. Remember Paul's words in Romans 6:

What should we say then? Should we continue in sin so that grace may multiply? Absolutely not! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Or are you unaware that all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we were buried with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too may walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:1-4)

Or maybe we're tempted to alter the Gospel in the moments after we sin. Overcome with guilt, we feel we have to do something to make us right with God- fast, go to church, read a book of the Bible. All good things, but none of which can justify us before God. Remember, Christ's work on the cross is accomplished- all our sins are wiped away. So repent of your sin and trust in what Christ has done for us.

Finally, perhaps we're tempted when we evangelize. How sharp the corners of the Gospel are when we share with an unbeliever. The thought of Hell seems so harsh to their ears- "would God really do this to me?" And so, in an effort to be winsome, we round out the corners of the Gospel, downplaying man's utter depravity and God's righteous judgment. The consequence of course is that our message becomes so watered down that it becomes simply one of many nice things to believe in. There is no immediacy to it and there is no more need of a Savior. Be careful to stay true to the Gospel when we share with others.

Timothy would have faced many temptations to alter the Gospel in the face of false teachers. After all, the Christian Gospel was not exactly the fast track to popularity in ancient Ephesus. Both Jewish and Roman leaders had it out for these early church pioneers, Paul knew that the

Gospel is never more than a generation from being altered or denied. Paul's sure defense of the Gospel message did not guarantee that each of these churches would remain faithful for generations to come. While the Gospel will remain and continue to spread throughout the world, individual churches may become compromised if they do not guard this message.

There are two particular aspects of the gospel message we must take special care in guarding today, because they are so often challenged or changed. **First**, we must carefully guard how we present human need... Most fundamentally, our need is a spiritual need caused by the fact that we have all sinned against God. And those sins deserve his condemnation. Meeting people's physical needs, of course, is not bad thing. In fact, it is very important- but our physical needs are ephemeral- gone in a breath from the perspective of eternity. Christians care about suffering, but according to the gospel of Jesus Christ, humanity's main need is to be saved from eternal suffering.

Second, we must also guard how we present God's provision for our need. Christianity does not present Jesus as a moral teacher — someone who has garnered respect from people around the world because of his great teaching. Rather, Christianity presents Jesus as the rejected Messiah of Israel who died as an outlaw on the cross. And by dying on the cross, he bore the sins of everyone who would ever turn and trust in him.

At many points in the history of the church the gospel has undergone attacks from outsiders, those who believe the message to be harmful or offensive. However, some of the most insidious attacks upon the gospel have come from those who claim to be preachers and teachers of this message. When men entrusted with this gospel message begin changing or altering the message to make it more “user friendly” or more positive or more culturally-appropriate or less exclusive, they quickly begin traveling down a path that invariably leads to a denial of the true essence of this message.

An additional danger to avoid in the protection of this message—beyond denying or altering the message—is assuming the message. The plunge of many churches into theological liberalism in the early and mid-20th century didn't happen overnight; many churches that had once stood strongly for the gospel message, began assuming the gospel and stopped focusing exclusively on the implications of the gospel, figuring that there were additional things they should focus on. While we should be interested and concerned about the implications of the gospel, we must never confuse or substitute the implications for the message itself.

The call to protect the message is not an easy call. Paul knew that calling Timothy, and all those who would follow, to guard this message would invariably lead to suffering for the sake of this

message. *Would you want such a “gift” from God? The gift of power to suffer for the gospel? What message are you keeping? Is there any message for which you would be willing to suffer? I wonder, do we think of guarding the Gospel enough? Maybe we’re not suffering because we’re not sharing it. Are you willing to suffer for the Gospel?*

Of course, protecting the Gospel will often lead to suffering for the Gospel, which brings us to the next reason Paul writes this letter to Timothy.

Preach the Word, No Matter the Cost

Timothy is not only called to protect the Gospel himself, he is called to preach the Word to others. Part of this calling includes entrusting this message to other faithful men. Paul says to Timothy, “You, therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. What you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2:1-2).

It is not enough to merely teach others what the gospel is. It is the responsibility of those who have preaching/teaching ministries within the local church also to be raising up, training and qualifying others to have such teaching ministries for the next generation.

That is why it is a good thing that Immanuel Church is willing to spend time and resources in equipping men who will not necessarily pastor in this local church, but who will be able to proclaim the gospel to the next generation, and geographically to new locations.

And part of what we must communicate to that next generation of those who preach the gospel is that sometimes that will involve suffering.

We already saw in 1:8 that Paul has called Timothy to join him in suffering for the Gospel; in chapter 2 he continues this encouragement saying, “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2:3). Paul goes on to speak from experience, “according to my gospel, for which I suffer to the point of being bound like a criminal. But the word of God is not bound.” (2:8b-9).

We Christians must be willing to endure suffering and opposition to the truth. When opposition to the gospel comes, we have a choice: we can endure it, or we can avoid it by disowning the gospel. Often in life, we can hold the gospel with one hand and our comfort with the other... Circumstances permit us to carry both, so who’s to question our sincerity? But comfort has a slow, creeping way of taking over our hearts. It starts with genuinely and earnestly seeking to provide for our families, then turns into buying into what everyone else says is normal, and

ends up on the throne of our hearts. Suppose, then, a difficult trial hits you... You then have a choice. You can be faithful to the gospel or you can hold on to your comfort. Which one are you going to hold on to? Are you going to let go of the gospel in order to keep comfort? Or are you going to let go of your comfort in order to keep the gospel? Paul tells Timothy he may need to make this choice one day. He tells us the same thing. Remember, Christians are characterized by inconvenient love.

Whether Timothy was called to face suffering sooner or later, Paul encourages him to remain steadfast in preaching the Word. Paul gives very direct guidance to Timothy on what this looks like, “Remind them of these things, and charge them before God not to fight about words. This is useless and leads to the ruin of those who listen. Be diligent to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who doesn’t need to be ashamed, correctly teaching the word of truth.” (2:14-15). The preaching that Paul is calling Timothy to do should act as a corrective and counterweight to the false teachers. Paul goes on to describe the nature of this preacher and his preaching saying, “The Lord’s servant must not quarrel, but must be gentle to everyone, able to teach, and patient, instructing his opponents with gentleness. Perhaps God will grant them repentance leading them to the knowledge of the truth. Then they may come to their senses and escape the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.” (2:24-26) *This is a daunting list for anyone who wants to be a public teacher of Scripture. Consider what it requires: tenacity without meanness; firmness without harshness; and the ability to both articulately speak and wisely remain silent. This is what a teacher should be like. Actually, this is what all Christians should be like — utterly resolved to sacrifice themselves for the good of others and the glory of God.*

As we just saw in Titus, a pastor must be able to refute error as well as teach the truth. Paul knows that false teaching can spread like a cancer throughout the church. So he goes on to warn Timothy, “But know this: Hard times will come in the last days. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, demeaning, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people.” (3:1-5)

Similar to first century Ephesus, we live today in a pluralistic world. People can hold to several contradictory things at once. So a pastor must be able to say what the gospel denies as well as what it affirms. This means that a pastor will need to be someone who is capable of rebuking and correcting as well as training in righteousness. And often his greatest suffering will come at the hands of those inside the church. Pray that the Lord will continue to raise up such men for His church. Pray that we would support such men as they lead. Pray that we would be such

Christians.

Persevere to the End

After encouraging Timothy to be faithful in preaching the word, entrusting the Gospel to faithful men, resisting false teachers, and doing all this regardless of the cost, we get to a final theme of this letter. Paul has remained faithful to Christ through joy and difficulty and now he concludes his exhortation to Timothy by encouraging him to also persevere to the end. Maybe Paul felt the need to tell Timothy, “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed” (3:14), because he had witnessed others not continue on in the faith. He tells Timothy, “Make every effort to come to me soon, because Demas has deserted me, since he loved this present world, and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia.” (4:9-10). Not all who claim to be followers of Christ, persevere in following Christ. Do you remember Demas? He was with Paul when he wrote the letters of Colossians and Philemon. Paul sent his greetings to the church at Colosse. And yet in the end he deserted Paul. Never assume based on your prominence in the church or the company you keep that you are somehow immune from such action. Not all who claim the name of Christ will persevere to the end.

But Paul’s hope is that Timothy will persevere. And it’s interesting how Paul suggested he do that. In his encouragement to that end, he tells Timothy: “and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” (3:15-17). *If you wish to continue to the end, you cannot neglect the Scriptures. This is one of the main ways God has given us to endure to the end. As Thomas Cranmer said, we should read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God’s Word. Our Bible reading should be regular. Our study should be diligent. Our meditation should be thoughtful. Our references to the Bible should be frequent. If we are Christians, this is what we are called to do — feed upon God’s Word.* Do you feed on God’s Word? It would be speculative to guess why Demas fell away; all we know is that Paul says he loved this present world. I wonder what Demas was doing to cultivate a love for the Word in the weeks and months leading up to his falling away. Scripture is authoritative, it is true, it is without error, it is instructive, it is sufficient for telling us everything we need to know about living in this world in such a way that we are prepared for the next!

So perseverance involves God’s word. But it also involves how Timothy teaches, Paul says, “Preach the Word; be ready in season and out of season; rebuke, correct, and exhort, with great

patience and teaching.” (4:2). *Great patience is required by the very nature of teaching. If you have ever taught Sunday school or your own children, you know what it is like to repeat yourself. You have to be willing to explain something a second time, a third time, a fourth time without remonstrating the students or making them feel bad for needing to ask questions. This is how God is patient with us... A teacher of the Word must instruct carefully and with great patience.* But perseverance is not just about me as an individual. We persevere together. And so teaching with patience — from the pulpit or over lunch — is a key way in which we can do this together.

And in that vein, we see that for Paul, persevering to the end involves more than just any of our fates individually. In Paul’s final charge, “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time for my departure is close.” (4:6ff), we see an additional reason Timothy must persevere to the end. Paul was soon going to be off the scene. It is not enough for one generation of Christians to persevere; as the Gospel is passed from one generation of believers to the next it is imperative that men and women continue on, persevering in that Gospel that was once for all delivered to the saints! Being able to persevere means equipping the next generation to persevere, so they can do so with the one that follows, and so forth — all the way to Jesus.

Did you see how Paul’s calls to perseverance go so far beyond what we normally think of? When we think of a call to persevere, we so often think of the need to grit our teeth, hunker down, and wait for the storm to blow over. But in Paul’s mind, this isn’t about our own staying power at all. It’s about God’s word. That’s how we persevere. And beyond that, we don’t just think of this as individuals. No: persevering as an individual is tied up with the ability of the Christian community around me to persevere. So as I patiently teach and instruct others, I am not only doing them a great service but myself as well. And then, beyond that, the goal isn’t ever about just one generation. We are to persevere in the gospel so that the next generation may do the same. And so persevering also means protecting. And preaching. All for the glory of Christ in this world.

Conclusion

Paul serves as an example of one who Protected the Message, Preached the Word regardless of the Cost, and Persevered to the End. So, how did that turn out for him? How do we expect that to turn out for us? I’d like to close our time with a section from a biography of Paul, based on the New Testament, that was written by John Pollock.

The ancient tradition of Paul’s execution site is almost certainly authentic but the details cannot be fixed. Whereas Christ’s Via Dolorosa may be followed step by step,

Paul's remains vague. He would have it so. And because Christ had walked that earlier road, Paul's was no Via Dolorosa, for they were walking it together: "Thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumph." "For me to live is Christ and to die is gain."

They marched him out through the walls past the pyramid of Cestius which still stands, on to the Ostian Way toward the sea. Crowds journeying to or from Ostia would recognize an execution squad by the lectors with their fasces of rods and ax, and the executioner carrying a sword, which in Nero's reign had replaced the ax; by the escort, and by the manacled criminal, walking stiffly and bandy-legged, ragged and filthy from his prison: but not ashamed or degraded. He was going to a feast, to a triumph, to the crowning day to which he had pressed forward. He who had talked often of God's promise of eternal life in Jesus could not fear; he believed as he had spoken: "All God's promises find their 'yes' in Him." No executioner was going to lose him the conscious presence of Jesus; he was not changing his company, only the place where he enjoyed it. Better still, he would see Jesus. Those glimpses – on the Damascus Road, in Jerusalem, at Corinth, on that sinking ship; now he was going to see Him face to face, to know even as he had been known.

They marched Paul to the third milestone on the Ostian Way, to a little pinewood in a glade, probably a place of tombs, known then as *Aquae Salviae* or Healing Waters, and now as *Tre Fontane* where an abbey stands in his honor. He is believed to have been put overnight in a tiny cell, for this was a common place of execution. If Luke was allowed to stay by his window, if Timothy or Mark had reached Rome in time, the sounds of the night vigil would not be of weeping but singing: "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing; as dying and, behold, we live."

At first light, the soldiers took Paul to the pillar. The executioner stood ready, stark naked. Soldiers stripped Paul to the waist and tied him, kneeling upright, to the low pillar which left his neck free. Some accounts say the lectors beat him with rods; a beating had been the usual prelude to beheading but in recent years not always inflicted.

If they must administer this last, senseless dose of pain to a body so soon to die, "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation... or sword?"

"I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with" – the flash of a sword – "the glory."

This material is adapted from a course with the same name developed by Capitol Hill Baptist Church. It has been modified for our purposes and has been condensed to fit our time schedule. The original version is available on their website at <https://www.capitolhillbaptist.org/resources/core-seminars/series/new-testament-overview/>.

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