

A Good Minister of Jesus Christ

Call to Worship: Psalm 47

1st Scripture: Acts 20:17-38

2nd Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:6-11

Hymn #700- *Trust and Obey*

Hymn #79- *Though Troubles Assail Us*

Hymn #493- *Who is On the Lord's Side?*

Introduction

Recognizing the great damage that false teachings can do to the church, especially those that erode the gospel, Paul has sent this letter to Timothy to compel him to take a strong stand against those who have embraced and have begun to disseminate such false teachings at the church in Ephesus. Timothy was in a unique and privileged position, instructed by Paul to set things in order, in a church that was in need of good biblical leadership, and he needed to be reminded that this gathered body of believers, composed a local representation of God's house, the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of divine, life saving, truth.

Last time, Paul had exposed one of the subtle, and yet, critical dangerous teachings, which threatened to compromise and ultimately destroy the gospel witness there at Ephesus. Deceived brethren, who had let their guard down, had begun to teach that the path to holiness could only be achieved by those who learned to deny the natural desires and yearnings of our human nature, such as marriage and marital sexual relations, and the enjoyment of various foods that pleased the appetite. In doing this, these lying hypocrites were offending the God, who has designed us to enjoy such wonderful pleasures for His glory, and they were compromising the very gospel itself, which presents Christ as the sole means of obtaining true holiness, in the denying of sinful lusts that truly offend God.

This morning then, we will find Paul, doubling up on his charge to Timothy, to properly address these false teachings, compelling him to drive the church, instead, to pursue the path to true godliness.

I. A Good Minister of Jesus Christ

What you will find then, as you look carefully at verses 6-10, is what I might call a "compilation capsule." And what I mean by this, is that Paul wants to further compel Timothy to

carefully follow his instructions, and he does so, by stating so directly, at the beginning and end of his argument (the top and bottom of the capsule), while compiling a grouping of thoughts in the middle of the capsule, which would hopefully compel Timothy to obey these instructions.

The general structure of this capsule might look like this: "Timothy, you need to do such and such things....," followed by a compilation of thoughts that would affirm this need for Timothy to do such and such things, ultimately spilling into a conclusory statement that reiterates the opening remark..."Therefore Timothy, do such and such things."

Before we examine this "compilation capsule" then, notice the two end portions of the capsule of Paul's argument. In verse 6, he states, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ..." This is one end of the capsule. And then, at the very end of his argument, in verse 11, Paul concludes, "These things command and teach," closing up the other end of the capsule, encasing the information given in verses 6-10, between each end of the capsule. All of that said, let us then work through the whole capsule now.

1) Paul begins with one end of the capsule, stating, "If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ...". If Timothy teaches what Paul has commanded him to teach in this letter as a whole, and especially concerning the truth about God's approval of marriage and of eating any desirable foods, in the face of false teachings that compromise the gospel (proclaiming false paths to holiness), then he would be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

Clearly, any Christian's main and ultimate goal in life is to be a faithful minister/servant of Christ. We covet more than anything else, to hear our Lord state the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant," while directing His attention toward us. And yet, those who hear such words have arrived at that place, not without much grace, and not without much suffering and self-sacrifice. The Christian life is a life beyond all imaginable blessing, but that blessing, often comes in the form of painful suffering; suffering which shapes us more and more into the image of Christ, and suffering that involves taking risks for Christ. And especially for church leaders, that includes, standing up to any affronts upon the gospel that arise within the church. And so, Paul motivates Timothy here, by saying, as it were, "Timothy, if you want to *not* merely be a man pleaser or an ear tickler; if you want to be a good servant of Christ, then you must be willing to

take a stand on these grounds, contradicting the false teachers there at Ephesus, by instructing the brethren concerning these matters. To be sure, it will bring conflict, but conflict is always preferable, when the plight of the gospel is at stake. And so, teach these things and be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

And with that said, Paul works into a compilation of compelling thoughts, before reiterating this command.

2) In your teaching these things, you yourself will be "nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed." And here, Paul tells Timothy one of the wonderful God-ordained benefits of faithfully teaching the truth...your own soul will be nourished as well. Those who water well, will themselves be watered. And to the contrary, we can logically assume that those teachers who allow falsehood to go unchecked, will serve to starve their own souls in the process. You see, even in the course of protecting doctrine and standing up against falsehood, the preacher's soul finds additional nourishment, both, in the truth itself that is preserved, and in the grace that God administers by way of the very process of defending and guarding His truth. To be sure, there is great growth to be attained by the very means of contending for the faith. God meets His faithful people there, with His blessing, in spite of the hardships suffered (indeed, by way of those very hardships), because our God is a God who is glorified in paradoxes. Indeed, the enemies of Christ would crucify Him, with that being the very means, at the same time, of God accomplishing eternal salvation for His people, followed up by the resurrection and vindication of His Son.

And so, Paul encourages Timothy to stand firm, and to boldly teach the truth, such that Timothy himself would be nourished in the words of faith, and of the good doctrine, which he had carefully followed.

3) Paul commands Timothy to reject "profane and old wives' fables," and rather instead, to exercise himself toward true godliness (vs. 7). Denying one's body of fulfilling its biblically approved appetites does nothing whatsoever to make an individual more holy. To treat such acts of self-denial, as if they are a means unto holiness, is profane and contrary to the gospel, leading one away from pursuing true godliness, which strives to put to death the *authentic* sinful deeds of the body, in a pursuit of godliness. The gnostic philosophies of claiming that anything physical/

material is evil in itself, was an affront upon the Creator, who created the physical, as well as the spiritual for His glory. And so, these holiness claims were akin to wife's fables. And therefore, Timothy was to reject them himself, and to teach the same to others, so that, he might pursue (or exercise himself toward) true godliness, by denying the lusts of the flesh, which are contrary to God's original design for man.

This then leads Paul to make a general, definitive statement in verse 8, which in verse 9, he affirms as a saying that is faithful and worthy of all acceptance. "For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." And so, what is Paul's main point in this general statement? Denying the natural bodily appetites does little to profit anyone, in any way, at all. Exercising such restrictions for religious purposes has no value, whatsoever. However, godliness (pursuing those virtues that are in accord with godly living and putting to death those lusts and vices that are not) is supremely profitable, because it benefits one's life and spiritual health now, in the present, and later, in the life to come, in glory. Exercising the soul toward godliness actually achieves great spiritual good in the present (in one's own personal sanctification) and in glory (where we will attain the final fruits of such labors, having been wholly conformed into the image of Christ).

[III: If a child wants to become a Major League Baseball player when he grows up, learning how to ice skate and investing much time in mastering figure skating is not going to help him toward that end. It won't benefit him now, in his little league games, or later, when he attempts to impress major league scouts with his baseball skills. Denying the body certain foods or forbidding marriage for so-called religious purposes, will not ultimately make one fit for glory. However, pursuing true godliness and warring against the lusts of the flesh, will]

Directing ones attention toward true godliness then, will prove profitable for all things, present and future. This general principle is a faithful saying that is worthy of all acceptance. You can take it to the bank and cash it for a large sum, knowing that the check won't bounce when you do.

4) Finally, Paul adds one other compelling statement to his overall argument: "For to this end [that is, unto the end of striving after godliness in accordance with God's design, given in the

Scriptures] we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe" (vs. 10).

Here, Paul affirms that while the pursuit of godliness is indeed a difficult, laborious and painful pursuit (it is to take up a cross and follow Christ), and while it will incur the world's reproach; while it will be an exercise that presses forward against a powerful opposing tide of opposition (from within and without), we do so with confidence, because we know (and we trust) that we will prevail, not by our own efforts, but by the power of God, who is the Savior (the ultimate Deliverer) of all men, and especially those who believe. We invest the whole of our lives in a battle against the world, the flesh and the devil, in our pursuit of godliness, not because we think ourselves strong or our enemies weak, but rather, because we trust in God, who is omnipotent (all powerful), and who promises to finish the work that He has begun in us. We will be more than conquerors...*in Christ!* And that drives us to do what would otherwise be impossible...to conform this broken, naturally defiled heap of flesh, into the image of Christ, by the Holy Spirit, who has taken up residence in us. In other words, God's determination to carry out His will, which He has revealed to us, drives us to do the impossible, "to take up our beds and walk" as naturally paralyzed souls, knowing that He will meet our faith with His power; knowing that whatever we ask, toward this end (toward the end of pursuing godliness), believing, He will grant us our requests!

God, who is the only Savior, and the only deliver of all who have the breath of life in them, and who especially is the Savior of His people (His heart being covenantally inclined toward them), will advance the cause of those who pursue true godliness. That is a cause worth pursuing, because that is a cause that is in tune with the heart of God, and therefore, a cause which will obtain God's power for the help and success of it. [Note 1 Timothy 6:11, where Paul contrasts this worthy pursuit with the empty pursuit of investing one's life unto obtaining riches and wealth]

5) Having filled the inside of the capsule, Paul then concludes by putting the other side of the capsule on. In verse 11, he exhorts, "These things command and teach." Understanding these things Timothy, boldly and unashamedly command and teach them to the brethren there at

Ephesus. Stand against the tide of false teaching that has infiltrated the ranks, and, trusting in God and His power, proclaim the truth! In the worthy Name of Christ, take your stand!

II. Closing Thoughts and Applications

1) As a general principle, note that, we will find our own faith strengthened, and we will find ourselves growing in grace, as we seek to minister to the body of Christ. Even the body analogy, which Christ uses to describe His church, implies this, does it not? When one part of the body seeks to serve, nourish and improve the rest of the body, inevitably, that part itself, grows and finds nourishment with the rest of the body. And so, when we protect the body from dangerous teachings, when we encourage the downcast, when we rebuke the backslider or exhort one another onward, inevitably the benefit received by others, trickles into the rest of the body. And, in fact, in the very process of our seeking to minister to one another, God turns the blessing around, as well, ministering to our own souls, by the work of the Holy Spirit in us. We were never meant to grow alone, brethren. God has designed His church to grow together, as each part of the body does its share, causing the whole body to grow in love. Again, we think of Proverbs 11:25, which states, "The generous soul will be made rich, and he who waters will also be watered himself."

2) Consider again, the long term investment of obtaining the status of a "faithful minister/servant" of Christ. Brethren, there are a lot of short term goals that we pursue in life, but let none of them eclipse the blessed hope of hearing those words, "Well done, good and faithful servant" from our Lord Himself. Ask yourself, "In what specific ways, am I serving Christ's kingdom? How am I recognizing and meeting the needs of His church, right now in the present? Some of you are so busy with a lot of other things, that, in the long run, really don't matter. Invest in a lasting kingdom, where there are everlasting treasures, and where rust and moth do not destroy. There is always something else that can be done in this world, and so, you have to consciously pursue ways, in which, you can serve Christ's church. Remind yourself of the big picture. Unbusy yourself like Mary, and choose to do the better thing, sitting at the feet of Christ. You only live in this world once. Make it count.

3) Finally, remember that, while striving after godliness in this life will not come easy, God will bless our faithful endeavors to this end. He will meet you in your striving, with resurrection power. Fight the good fight and lay hold of eternal life. By the Spirit, by the word and prayer, with great diligence, put to death those sinful indulgences of the body, which were brought about by the fall of man, and pursue Christ likeness. Put to death lust and envy and hatred and covetousness and selfish ambition and fornication and self-righteousness and lying and stealing and gossip and pride and idolatry of every kind, and pursue holiness and love and gentleness and kindness and goodness and self-control and joy and peace and compassion and hope and generosity and self-sacrifice. Pray toward the success of these ends, and God will certainly meet you with His help and blessing, because such pursuits are most certainly in keeping with His will.

4) Finally, constantly remind yourself of your position in Christ, not as a motivation to slack in these pursuits, but all the more, as a motivation to press on in them. In Christ, God has set you within a sphere of grace, so that, you have everything you need, and all power and hope in your pursuit of godliness. In other words, we fight, not as a means of obtaining eternal life, but because we already have eternal life. We fight, because nothing whatsoever can ever separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus. We fight, because we cannot lose, even though we struggle. We fight a battle that, in reality, Christ has already won. Indeed, we are more than conquerors in Christ Jesus!

But, if you are not in Christ, this morning, then you are still in your sin. And if you are still in your sin; if the stain of your sin is still upon you, then you are presently under the wrath of God, and you are heading for certain destruction! Repent, and believe...

Amen!!!