

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 17 September 2018

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the command of God our Savior and of Christ Jesus our hope, To Timothy my true son in the faith: Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord. 1 Timothy 1:1-2 (NIV).

I'm no Apostle Paul; perhaps neither are you. Yet our purpose here is the same: we're proclaiming the grace of God. We're in good company, my friend, hanging out with Paul, Peter, St Augustine, Luther, Billy Graham and every other pastor or evangelist in history.

We're here again to proclaim Christ Jesus, our hope. As my Concordia reference Bible says, that's a declaration, not just a throwaway phrase. Paul refers to his mission as commanded by God Himself and his mission was to proclaim the hope – the promise and the guarantee – of Christ Jesus.

When you say "I believe," you're concurring. You're putting your dearly held beliefs in line with Jesus, saying "I believe in You." "I trust You." "I submit to You." "I believe everything You said."

That's tough.

It was tough for Paul to do, I'm sure. Jesus called him to turn from persecuting the church and to follow the path of an apostle. He gave Saul the mission to proclaim Him in a world hostile to Him. He took Saul's livelihood, his background, his career, and He even changed his name to Paul. Even though Paul had been personally visited and changed by Jesus Himself, it still must have been tough. He had to learn to live out his life as Jesus wanted him to after being turned completely upside down.

Then he found a protégé, an apprentice. Timothy was a young man who Paul met during one of his missionary journeys (to what is now Turkey). Timothy had a unique background, training and talents that Jesus could use to reach out to other believers in Macedonia. So Paul took the young man under his wing and instructed him on ways to better proclaim the risen Christ. 1 and 2 Timothy are Paul's letters of instruction to his apprentice, who went on to proclaim Jesus long after Paul was martyred in Rome (before he, too, was murdered for the faith). They're the basis of today's seminaries.

Because part of the promise and hope of proclaiming Jesus is accepting the call in to His service whatever it takes, whatever it involves.

Paul knew this. Timothy knew this. Augustine, Luther, and Billy Graham knew it, and so do we. Jesus is all love and His burden of love is both light and deep. Paul wrote two letters to encourage his apprentice and they're here for us to read. And following that encouragement can be awfully tough.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 1:1, Titus 1:3, Luke 1:47, Colossians 1:27, Acts 16:1, 1 Corinthians 2:11, 2 Timothy 1:2, 1 Timothy 1:3

Lord, praise to You for the word You gave to Paul to share with Timothy and us. Thank You for their words and experience.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 18 September 2018

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. 1 Timothy 1:3-4 (NIV).

We love pedigrees, credentials. We love having people go 'into the family business' as if that somehow confers special blessing or knowledge on them. How many politicians, general officers, pastors, celebrities, CEOs, and high-ranking officials in society are children of the same? You could drive yourself to frustrated distraction simply naming all of them.

That's the point, you know: frustrated distraction.

Frustrated distraction and false doctrine: WE KNOW BEST. The Baptists say that (and mean it) but so do the Catholics, and the Lutherans, and the dozen or so other reformed denominations, and the atheists think we're all messed up. But we're each guilty of it. "I know better than you." Throw "because the Bible says" and you'll either look educated or immensely stupid (maybe even like a total jerk). Some folks thrive on doctrine, on insisting they know better than anyone else. More than once I've been accused of being a know-it-all and, to be fair, the accusers sometimes have good points. I'm sure I'm not the only one. In fact, turn on any of the political talk commentary shows on cable TV and you'll see a ton of people convinced they're all correct.

More than a few are false doctrines there, at least as far as I understand them. And all of them are frustrating distractions.

The ancient Jews believed in citing genealogies and pedigrees. God had proclaimed that the Levites would be His priesthood, and the Jews of Bible times took that seriously. The Gnostics of the first century took this further, believing in a New Age system that mashed Judaism, philosophy and nascent Christianity together into a self-focused belief based on who you were rather than God. Paul saw that and cautioned his pastoral apprentice to steer clear of these things. Further, he advised Timothy to teach others to do the same.

Yet what has changed? Aren't we still tangled up in the knot of "who are your people" over "who does God say you are?" A Harvard degree carries bigger vocational clout than one from the University of Phoenix yet graduates of either may have the exact same degree. It's nice if your dad, grandfather and great-grandfather were all in the same ministry business but, to be frank, so what? Oscars mean more than simply great movies. Nothing new here.

What matters is what God says about us, not what we say about each other. Credentials and pedigrees can be great things but they can also lead to frustrated distraction.

For further reading: Acts 16:9, Titus 1:14, Titus 3:9, 1 Timothy 1:5

Lord, help me to focus ONLY on what You say to me and about me.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 19 September 2018

As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. 1 Timothy 1:3-5 (NIV).

Last night I found myself in an online discussion with some other believers about this subject: love. We discussed it in the context of gay marriage and the church. As you can imagine, the discussion got passionate. Good points were made, and to be honest, a few bad ones as well. Yet I'm hopeful that we ended the long diatribes with the essence of verse 5 at work.

"The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith." The Apostle Paul just summed up the whole point of debating anything, especially really contentious issues that we face here on the Third Rock. If we can't do it in love, then we shouldn't do it. The goal of every conversation, of every debate, of every argument, of everything we do should be love. Jesus' love, which is pure and gives rise to pure hearts, good conscience, and sincere faith. To summarize 1 Corinthians 13, without love, we're not much. Without love, the words are empty and meaningless. Without love, there is no point.

And Jesus is love. ALL love. Pure love, which is more than just the emotion of it. It's joy, peace, justice, happiness, purity and a thousand other qualities. It isn't the free-wheeling hippy love, and it isn't peace, love and dope. The essence of God is love that He gives us as Himself in Jesus. Sure, a world of frustrated distraction constantly wars with this fact, but the world can't overpower it. Paul knew this because Paul had experienced Jesus. It's impossible to come away from experiencing Jesus without realizing the depth and power of His love. That depth is indeed daunting but the task of living it out is light. Yet we can only do it through Jesus. There is no other way.

Experiencing that love should be our goal; Paul says as much. We are to do all we to better share and experience the love of Jesus. In this way, we submit to Him and let Him work through us as He will.

Last night's discussion was long; to be honest, I bowed out of it about half way through, before the fireworks started in earnest. I'm glad for that, because sharing the words of Scripture without submitting to the love of Christ is counterproductive.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 2:22, Acts 23:1, Galatians 5:6, 1 Timothy 1:6

Lord, motivate me to always do and say what I do and say only out of love for You

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 20 September 2018

Some have departed from these and have turned to meaningless talk. 1 Timothy 1:6 (NIV).

It's a risky thing to take Bible verses out of context and dissect them on their own without considering the context around them...so we won't do that. Yet this verse is also like its own proverb. It is advice on its own.

Years ago, I started this blog to meditate on the book of Proverbs while I was going through a time of repentance and healing. Eight years (and ten books) of exegesis and hermeneutics later, my tiny attempts to analyze the practical meaning of these Bible verses does, sometimes, turn to meaningless talk. In fact, it concerns me. More and more, I strive to avoid having this happen, trying to keep the focus only on Jesus. Sometimes I fail.

It happens.

Yet when it happens, the thing to do is to turn back to God, ask for help, and jump back in. Why did Paul say this? What was the context for saying it? What does it mean to us now?

For this particular verse, we can't lose sight of the fact that Paul was ministering to Timothy and telling him to be careful. To not get 'wrapped around the axle' with things that pull away from God (things like meaningless pedigrees and focusing on other than Jesus' love). In this verse, he's warning Timothy that there are good people who have turned away from that love (including pure hearts, good conscience, and sincere faith) and decided to cling to other things.

You know it still happens to us now. We get wrapped around things that distract us and pull us away. Anything can become our idol and try to pull us away from Jesus. Job, spouse/significant other, kids, sports, tasks, even the Bible itself: anything can supplant Jesus' rightful role as the primary focus of our lives. It happens.

The way back always leads first to the Cross. "Lord, I've been wrong. Forgive me & help me." Starting there helps us to identify our own meaningless talk & meaningless idols, then to turn from them. It helps us to see again that "He's got this." We are able to test what we think and do against God's Word and adjust accordingly. Sometimes God speaks to our hearts through those distractions, and we shouldn't be too quick to turn from change, or even things that can distract us, without checking in with Him first. Yet when we stray away from the straight and narrow, there's always an exit ramp we can take that reminds us Jesus is actually there beside us, beckoning & guiding us back to His better Way. We get to be careful because we get to filter what we think & do through the filter of Jesus Christ.

That happens too.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:7

Lord, keep me between "Your lines." Help me to avoid meaningless things and meaningless talk and act only as You would have me.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 25 September 2018

They want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about or what they so confidently affirm. 1 Timothy 1:7 (NIV).

I love to teach; I love to share. It's the reason for this blog. Yet the minute it becomes about me, I've failed you.

I'm a trained teacher. College degree (graduate degree in education, even). Years of instructional design and development training. Managed training shops. Written dozens of training manuals. Taught hundreds of people across multiple disciplines and areas. Published author. Followed and shared by (yes) thousands of people in person and online.

Big flippin deal. It's not about me.

Truth is I don't know much. More and more I find I have to reach out to friends or other sources for advice on what is said here. I want to get things right, for God and for you. Yet I make mistakes and sometimes I get it wrong.

I'd love to be a teacher of the law but, too often, I don't know what I'm talking about or what I so confidently affirm.

Training is good but not a big deal; it's not about me. College is a lot of fun; I enjoyed the classes and met some great people but big deal: it's not about me. Years of experience, a story for every situation, researched answers and a desire to want to teach others are all great and wonderful things. But they aren't everything, and if they aren't done in love then they aren't helpful. It's. Not. About. Me.

Over the last week or so I've been convicted by some online discussions with people who argue that, above all else, Jesus is pure love. They argue to the point of flat-out denying the other aspects of Jesus' character like holiness, justice, and perfection in the law. Love literally does conquer all, and above every aspect of Jesus Christ is (as the song says) the "overwhelming, never-ending reckless love of God." Some of what they say isn't said in love, some of it was condescending and arrogant, and some of it was crazy wrong. Yet at the end of some very deep and sometimes confusing points, I found I agreed. It is all about love: Jesus' love. That crowds out every other true and valid point from the Scriptures.

And it's what Paul was hinting at in this verse. The folks, like me, who want to be teachers of the law have it all wrong if that law doesn't point to the love of Jesus. God's law IS holy, yet if we make it about power, or getting the last word, or just being right, then it's time for a gut-check. Going forward, I pray for Jesus' help to be a better witness for Him, to share His love better. Because it's not about me.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 13:14, Ephesians 4:11, Job 38:2, 1 Timothy 1:8

Lord, teach me to better witness for You, in love

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 26 September 2018

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. 1 Timothy 1:8 (NIV).

What is the law? God's law is the set of boundaries He gave to us, through the Old Testament, to help steer us back to Him in all things. More than just the Ten Commandments, God's law is a complex set of rules He gave to the Jews of old to live by. It's not just a bunch of "no's." The law, given to us by a holy God, points us to our need for the forgiveness that only He (God) can give. We don't live by the law now, but if we reject God, we may die by it. To quote Paul in Romans 6, the wages of sin is death and we all die. Yet we can live.

In Romans 7, Paul illustrates that the law is holy in that it identifies our transgressions. It does so in order for us to understand the consequences of sin (death). When we are bound by the law, we're buried in our sins, and through the law the only sure destination for us is death. Sin – the defiance of God – works against us, using our knowledge of the law, given by a holy God, to mire us in the despair of our wrongdoings.

So many churches (and so many followers of Jesus) get so wrapped up worrying about what not to do that they forget a crucial thing about the law.

It's holy. It's loving.

The law of God is holy, given to us by a God of loving justice, purity, and righteousness. The motivation for the law isn't punishment: it's love. Jesus Himself said so: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments."

God didn't give us the law to hurt us: He gave it to us because of love. Because He wants to see us turn to Him whenever the threat of anything wrong approaches us. God's character throughout all of history hasn't changed. The same God who flooded the world to destroy every sin-soaked creature on it (except those kept alive in His ark) is the same Jesus of Nazareth who prayed from the cross "forgive them for they don't know what they're doing."

He gave us a code to live by because He means business, namely to join your soul to His in perfect love. So that you and I might shy away from things that could try to tear us away. So that we know the way home when we stray. So that we would trust Him when He gives us tools like the law to properly guide our hearts.

For further reading: Romans 6:29, Romans 7:4-12, Matthew 22:37-40, 1 Timothy 1:9

Lord Jesus, thank You for Your holy law.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 27 September 2018

We know that the law is good if one uses it properly. We also know that the law is made not for the righteous but for lawbreakers and rebels, the ungodly and sinful, the unholy and irreligious, for those who kill their fathers or mothers, for murderers, for the sexually immoral, for those practicing homosexuality, for slave traders and liars and perjurers—and for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God, which he entrusted to me. 1 Timothy 1:8-11 (NIV).

Yesterday's verse talked about using the law properly? How is that done? How is it that the later verses talk about how law is about sin, about those mired in sin instead of love? Let's key in on the last verse: "for whatever else is contrary to the sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel concerning the glory of the blessed God." If we forget this part, then it's too easy to simply use God's law as a hammer.

Think about God's law like civil law. If I abide by the speed limit on the road then the police have no reason to pull me over. If I don't murder, steal, or commit arson then I won't be charged with murder, theft, or arson. Our civil laws are guidelines, boundaries that state what behaviors are not allowed in society. They're written codes with consequences, so that we might live as a society in peace. They're written so that we might know what kinds of things threaten our liberty.

Yet that's only half of it. The law wasn't given so that we would focus on what we shouldn't do. It was given to us so that we would focus on He who is love, who is the loving end of all justice.

God's law is sound doctrine given out of His love. Jesus, who Himself perfectly kept all of God's law without a single transgression, said He had come to fulfill the law, not to abolish it. Should we doubt Him? Would the God of all love say something like that if He didn't mean it, if the law was only given to hammer our sins? Absolutely not. We of the New Covenant aren't governed by the punishments and penalties of the Mosaic laws yet we are still subject to the boundaries they established if only as means to identify when we are in danger of sin. Helping each other through that is the mark of a heart renewed in love. It's why God gave us the law while we live in this fallen world. So that we would know how we need to draw closer to Him.

For further reading: Romans 6:29, Romans 7:4-12, Matthew 22:37-40, Galatians 5:23, 2 Timothy 1:13, Titus 1:9, 1 Timothy 1:12

Lord, help me understand how Your ancient law affects and applies to me now so that I may know You better.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 2 October 2018

I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who has given me strength that he considered me faithful, appointing me to his service. 1 Timothy 1:12 (NIV).

Imagine if God called an atheist to preach the Gospel. Or if He called Louis Farrakhan (or an Iranian mullah) to preach reconciliation with the Jews. Imagine if a Alec Baldwin went on the Tonight Show to preach for reconciliation in the name of Jesus.

That's Paul. Think of the worst possible persecutor, the very harshest, the meanest guy you could meet and it was Paul. He relished what he did for a living: killing followers of "the Way." He was a zealous follower of the one true God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and lived in His temple in Jerusalem. That is, until a roadside meeting with that one true God shut, then opened, Paul's eyes. The persecutor became the persecuted, and every time that happened, he doubled down on it. He gave thanks to Jesus for picking him, the most unworthy of servants, to become zealous for His message and carry it to places unknown.

Today's verse changes direction from the last few. Keep in mind that this change of direction happens right after Paul warns Timothy to avoid false teachers and properly invoke God's law. Paul has used the first part of his letter to remind Timothy that not everyone is for him...or Him. Now he begins a section of different instruction, outlining God's grace and how it is a unique gift from the King to preach the faith to people who need to hear it.

Not everyone is called to that calling. I've never really felt it, other than the daily urge to write these word. I can't do much but I can do this. Some pastors tell me that they innately knew they should become pastors. One told me it was like God slamming shut every other door in his life until he walked through the ministry one. Another seemed to relish being a pastor instead of "just a pig farmer's son" (as if that's something to be ashamed of...it isn't).

No matter, to minister to others in the name of Jesus is a calling that I think each of us gets in our own ways. Some get it to be a full time job. Jesus molds our lives in unique ways. Have you ever thought that there are 7.2 billion ministers for Jesus alive right now? It's true. Yet not all know it, or Him. So it's up to us to use the gifts He gives us and the good fruits of His Spirit that are kindness, understanding, and love to help others along their way to Him. Imagine if God called an atheist to preach. Better yet, imagine how He's calling you.

For further reading: Philippians 4:13, Acts 9:15, 1 Timothy 1:13

Lord Jesus, all my praise to You for putting Your love on my heart to follow and preach You in my own way.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 3 October 2018

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. 1 Timothy 1:13 (NIV).

Paul's story is my story; maybe it's yours as well. I was once a blasphemer and persecutor and even a violent man. Even today, after so much, evil still tears at me and struggles to get me to return to my old ways.

Sound familiar?

It's the walk of everyone who follows Jesus. Here's the good news: it doesn't get any easier. And that's just fine. The longer I walk with Jesus the more I start to see how much of my life I have lived in ignorance and unbelief. I've been judgmental; I've been adulterous; I've been untrustworthy; I've been callous. It's all out of not knowing what I was missing. Yet even knowing I'm redeemed, I constantly pull myself away from Him in all these ways and more.

Sound familiar again?

So here's a better familiarity. God knows it, and He sent Jesus to offer a way back. He doesn't push it: He offers it. At a Bible study last night, we talked about grace. You know grace: getting something for free that you don't deserve. It's how God operates; it's how He moves in our lives; it's a bomb that explodes in our hearts and heads and remakes into something better. Mercy comes through grace; grace comes first from God.

Not long ago someone said, again, "I find it hard to believe that a God of love would damn people who never heard of Him." To be honest, I find that hard to believe, too. It's not what I want to believe about our God, that this God of supreme love would condemn for eternity someone who didn't know Him through His Word. I'll be frank: I just don't know how to answer a statement like that.

Except for this: it is by God's grace that we are saved. God makes Himself known through nature, through people, through our feelings, through intelligence. There are still parts of the world that haven't been reached, and there are still people on the Third Rock who haven't heard of Jesus. By God's grace, it is you and I who are given the task of reaching them. How will we do it, especially when we ourselves sometimes slip back into unbelief?

We'll do it first by stopping at the cross, remembering who we once were and then re-focusing on who, through grace and mercy, God made us into being. The story of Saul, who became Paul, is your story and mine. The continuing saga of Paul, who was remade by Jesus' love, is still being gracefully written in how we live our lives.

For further reading: Acts 8:3, Acts 26:9, Ephesians 2:8-9, 1 Timothy 1:14

Lord Jesus, remake my heart and help me to unlearn old habits, to repent and turn, and to live celebrating in the love of You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 4 October 2018

Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief. The grace of our Lord was poured out on me abundantly, along with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 1:13-14 (NIV).

Reiterating verse 13 helps to better understand the impact of verse 14. Even though we were once despicable, God, through His Son Jesus, gave us everything out of the love in His heart so that we might live. Even though we spend so much of our lives thinking, saying, doing things that are against God, God still unceasingly pours love into us through our faith in His Son, Jesus.

Everything you want to know about Christianity is there. If you're satisfied, here endeth the lesson. Go have a great day. Naturally I'll keep talking...

"Amazing Grace;" you know the song. The man who wrote it, John Newton, was a slaver. He carried slaves from Africa to Europe and the Americas. In fact, according to Wikipedia, Newton was a terrible man, the most profane man one of his ship captains had ever met. Newton blasphemed God, mocked other men for displaying faith in God, and even denounced his own faith in Jesus at one point...

...until a terrible storm off the Irish coast brought him to his knees and Newton cried out to God for help. That was the start of a conversion that took most of a decade. Newton turned from slavery and the sea and became an evangelical minister. And a songwriter. Paul and John Newton might have found commonality in their past; they weren't so very different in character.

Sort of like you and me.

When we were still very much obsessed with our sins and mired in the dysfunction that results, God reached to us through His Spirit and touched our hearts. We can come to know Jesus as the opposite of sin, as the antidote for what ails us. Sin isn't love and love overcomes sin. When we learn the love of Jesus that He gives us through His Spirit, we can be remade, reborn, renewed, and refreshed to undertake something better.

That happened to Paul. It happened to John Newton. It's happened to me, and I hope it has happened to you, too. If it hasn't, open up and let Him in.

Everything you need to know about Christianity, about following Jesus, is summed up in the concept of grace. God loves us through grace and we get to love others this same way. Paraphrasing Newton, it's an amazing, sweet sound to hear God speak to your heart and impart that He loves you. That He loves you just the way you are through His grace.

For further reading: 2 Corinthians 4:15, 2 Timothy 1:13, 1 Thessalonians 1:3, 1 Timothy 1:16

Lord above, come to me here below and touch me with Your grace. Grow my faith and help me to better share You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 5 October 2018

Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst. 1 Timothy 1:15(NIV).

There are two recurring themes through Paul's eleven letters (that became books of the New Testament). One is "I am a damn dirty sinner" and the other is "here is a trustworthy saying."

Here is a trustworthy saying: we are sinners in need of Jesus. When we focus on sin, sin takes over and becomes our center. It weeds up the garden; it crowds out the love. We weren't made for sin: we were made to be in communion with love, with God. So, the cure for the common sin is always Jesus. If you want to change your center, start by changing your focus. Re-train your brain, your behavior, your words to focus on someone better, on what Jesus says in every moment. He's there in every moment and beckoning you to be led forward in His loving ways. If you aren't doing it, start now.

Yet here is another trustworthy saying: it's not about you. It isn't about you doing things. Let Jesus do the work. Give up the control. Faith in Jesus isn't about doing a bunch of stuff that some blogger, pastor, or televangelist tells you to do. Faith in Jesus isn't the nagging angel on your shoulder prodding you that you're a slug if you do something wrong. And faith in Jesus isn't spending all your time worrying about what you shouldn't do or whether you're close to the white lines.

Faith in Jesus is about living. Faith in Jesus is following, learning to listen in love, then learning to share that love by how we react in the world. It's channeling His wisdom, His patience and understanding, His advice to our hearts in what we think, say and do every day. We do that because it isn't about us. It's about what God wants to do through us.

But perhaps the most trustworthy saying is how Paul uses that turn of a phrase to make an important point: what he's saying is important because it focuses on Jesus Christ. When Paul uses that phrase (and he does five times in his letters) he's indicating that this is something reliable, that we can count on it to be true. We can count on it because it points to a fact about Jesus. And Jesus is always reliable, true, and trustworthy.

We are sinners and we are in constant danger of always falling back on our old ways. But thanks be to God that His Son came in amazing grace to turn us away from all that. That's the most trustworthy thing of all.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 3:1, 1 Timothy 4:9, 2 Timothy 2:11, Titus 3:8, 1 Timothy 1:16

Lord Jesus, You are trustworthy and true. Forgive my sins today and help me to follow You closer

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 8 October 2018

But for that very reason I was shown mercy so that in me, the worst of sinners, Christ Jesus might display his immense patience as an example for those who would believe in him and receive eternal life. 1 Timothy 1:16 (NIV).

Last time we talked about how Paul uses the phrase “here is a trustworthy saying” and that he was a sinner; these are recurring themes in his writing.

Tell me: are you a sinner?

I was raised Lutheran, confirmed Presbyterian, and have been to most every Christian denomination (and non-denomination) around. I've practiced my faith with Baptists, Catholics, Jews, Hindus, Muslims, and atheists. One thing we have in common: we're all sinners. We weren't made for sin: we were made to share God's vast love. Yet our ancestors – and we – muck up the good plan by embracing sins.

Paul talks about his sins in two tenses. First he talks about how he “was” shown mercy because he ‘was’ a sinner. The things he’s talking about are the actions he took against “the Way” (as early Christianity was called before believers were labeled “Christians” at Antioch). Yet Paul then talks about how “I am the worst” of sinners. He recognizes that his sinful nature is a present affliction, not just something in the past.

How can this be? There are many, many people who are confused by it; yours truly is often one of them.

Jesus is the cure for the common sin. Jesus came because of sin, because we had chosen sin, yesterday and tomorrow. Jesus offers forgiveness of sins: all sins, no matter how heinous or embarrassing or long-standing. Holding a grudge? Jesus can forgive that. Murdered Christians in Jerusalem? Jesus can forgive that. Abortion, adultery, burning anger, cheating on your taxes, withholding forgiveness: Jesus forgives all of them. He did it, once for all, so that we wouldn't bear the eternal consequences of them.

Jesus came so that you could tell Him what you've done, let Him take the guilt and hurt and pain, and then remake you in a way that helps you turn from it. In this world, that means you're made righteous, even when you mess up again. Past atoned for, future atoned for even as you are who you are.

There are some who believe this isn't true. That, once forgiven by Jesus, it's impossible for people to sin. I'd submit they misunderstand the relationship in Christ between love and justice. Even after being “saved” we still mess up. And every time, Jesus then beckons us back to receive His forgiveness again. We all die: if we weren't sinners, we wouldn't die. It's how things are, so what say you about that? I have a good guess what Paul would say.

For further reading: Romans 2:4, John 3:15, Matthew 25:46 1 Timothy 1:17

Lord, forgive my many sins, even the ones I've forgotten. Teach me to turn away from them and better follow You.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 9 October 2018

Now to the King, eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Timothy 1:17 (NIV).

Most folks don't usually end a letter in the middle, but Paul did. I suppose he wasn't like most folks, especially since he devoted half of his life to radically enforcing strict Judaism before (being shifted) 180 degrees and becoming history's greatest evangelist for Christ.

Paul knew who to thank, who had earned the glory. It wasn't the man in the mirror. Look in the mirror now (or as soon as you can). You're pretty special; God made you to be "very good" and someone in whom He could personally delight. But you don't deserve honor and glory forever and ever (amen). You just don't. None of us do.

I started teaching Sunday School again for the first time in over a decade. This season, I volunteered to help teach our church's 'tweeners' (grades 3-5). I believe that's an important age for us to mentor kids because it's the time when they start feeling their way into the world. They become interested in music and movies and the world around them; they develop wider-ranging friendships; they start to make connections.

On Sunday I said this to the kids: the same Jesus who loves us and holds us and died on the cross is the same God who created everything by speaking, and who kept Noah and his family alive on an ark while everything else around them was destroyed. It's true. The same God who spoke in Genesis 1:1 and in every word, chapter and book of the Bible is the same God who promised "Yes, I am coming soon" as the Bible closes out.

The only thing you can say to such a God is "to You be all honor and glory forever and ever, amen."

That's an exploding grace bomb in your mind. You and I (and Paul and Noah and everyone else) are sinners. We were born to live in communion with God yet we messed it up. Yet God sent His Son, Himself, to make right what we couldn't. He came to us in love to bring justice by declaring "it is finished" when He completed our salvation. He is magnificent in every way, and every time you feel your heartbeat, or view a sunset, or contemplate the simple, complex beauty of a tree leaf, or simply wonder how you made it through today alive, you and I get to remind ourselves – and praise Him – that he is King, eternal, immortal, invisible and worthy of honor and glory forever.

That's the perfect thought with which to conclude every action, every day, every letter, every moment.

For further reading: Revelation 15:3, 1 Timothy 6:16, Colossians 1:15, Jude 25, Romans 11:36, 1 Timothy 1:18

Lord God, I praise You as my King, as eternal, immortal, invisible and worthy of all honor and glory forever.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 10 October 2018

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well. 1 Timothy 1:18 (NIV).

Suit up, fellow warrior. You're in a fight. You believe in Jesus, so you're in the fight for Him. You need to be prepared for it, both in your armor and in letting go of your control. Be ready to pick up your sword, but then stand back and watch Jesus do the hard work. God has always done this: fought for His people. Yet He asks us to be ready to stand with Him.

It's not that Jesus can't (or doesn't) do the heavy lifting for us. We don't HAVE TO do anything to earn His love, or earn Him fighting off evil for us. We don't do anything to contribute to our salvation by standing up for Jesus, or for our sisters & brothers, or even just by standing up for those who can't. We can't do anything to become more powerful than God; it's not possible. Whom God intends to stand against, He will, and they will be defeated.

But...there's always a but. But Jesus asks us to do it anyway. It's not because we have to: it's because we get to. Because He sent His Spirit to reshape us and give us the heart of a spiritual warrior. Because He prepares us over time to accept His love, inculcate His teachings, and ready ourselves to face down the evil one. All that happens to us is to prepare us for this moment, for now, to serve Jesus and stand for Him.

You may not realize it but you fight evil every day. Hold the door for a stranger: you're fighting back evil. Listen to your kids (or your mom and dad): you're thwarting Satan. Do your best at work: fighting for God. Forgive someone who hurt you: fighting for God and bringing a tear to Jesus' eye. "Here's what the Bible says" when someone asks you why you believe what you do: suit up, get up, and stand beside Jesus in the unending line of warriors on the front line. You're fighting in the battle of the ages: one kind word at a time.

Paul was always ready to stand up for God. After giving praise to God, he then coached Timothy, who himself was in training as a soldier-of-God. Paul consistently used his words to give Timothy tools he could use. The lesson for is the same: give praise and get ready. In World War II, there was a popular song, "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition." That's good advice; Paul might have said it himself. Get up, soldier. The fight is now.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 1:30, Joshua 23:10, Nehemiah 4:20, Ephesians 6:10-20, 1 Timothy 1:19

Lord, I praise You for Your mighty hand. Uphold me as I stand for You. Help me to always be on Your side.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 11 October 2018

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NIV).

How do we fight a spiritual war, and what happens when we give up?

An acquaintance of mine is suffering from Satan. He and his brother are mired in the consequences of dabbling in Satan's arts and humanism in general. I've written about them before, but it's still happening. Just a few days ago, he sent a social media message asking 'how to hold back the darkness.' We don't talk much, and that makes me sad. But my wife and I pray for him daily, and we reach out as best we can, and we offer up that there are indeed ways to beat back the darkness. They all start with going to God...and that's precisely what these young men refuse to do. Thus, the spiritual darkness is still happening all around them because they aren't fighting the right way. They're shipwrecked.

It's still happening because the spiritual war is ongoing. It has been going on since Adam and Eve. It has caused every war in human history, and it's dividing America even today. Got skin, got sin. Our problem is a sin problem (Si Robertson said that), not a Democrat vs Republican problem. Sin is why Jesus came, and died, and rose, and saved mankind. If only my friends would embrace that simple, liberating truth.

But that's tough to do. It requires putting our trust in Jesus. It requires letting down our guard.. More than that, it requires saying "you know better, Lord", then letting Him take control of our lives. We don't "do" anything to cause, earn, or deserve our salvation; even Paul reminds us that salvation is a gift of love through God's grace. The only things we bring into the 'salvation equation' are our sins, the ways we've realized we need Jesus. If you don't sin, you don't need Jesus. But, as said earlier, got skin, got sin. You may not like it, but you're a sinner. You aren't making it out of here alive because death is the penalty for sin, and you will die. The way to set things right is through Jesus.

I wish my friends could see that. Instead, they've shipwrecked their hearts on the foolishness of insisting they know better. That simple assertion has caused more pain than anything else in history. It gives Satan a foothold in our lives. It's time to end the shipwreck disaster. It's time to fight the war.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 2:1

Lord, suit me up then fight for me in this war against the evil one.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 15 October 2018

Timothy, my son, I am giving you this command in keeping with the prophecies once made about you, so that by recalling them you may fight the battle well, holding on to faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and so have suffered shipwreck with regard to the faith. Among them are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan to be taught not to blaspheme. 1 Timothy 1:18-20 (NIV).

If you aren't familiar with it, to excommunicate someone is to cut them off from communing with the body of believers. It's a harsh action, one designed to excise someone whose talk or actions are corrosive and threatening to the health of the church. But it wasn't designed to be punishing. Instead, it was designed to instruct, to give someone over to the sins they seem to be choosing over communion with the saints. Some churches today still practice this kind of church discipline, and it's supposed to be done in love, as a way to show the person the drastic and destructive nature of the things they are saying and doing.

Paul is talking about excommunicating Hymenaeus and Alexander. In the first days of the growing Christian faith, to be excommunicated was a desperate action. There was a world of physical persecution and very real threat of death at the 'righteous' hands of ecclesiastical authorities (Jewish, Roman or Greek). To be consigned to that was a desperate thing. Paul did this because these men had crossed a line, saying or doing things that were blasphemous and intolerable. If they were allowed to continue unaddressed, it could have threatened the nascent church; some things are intolerable for a reason. Most important, Paul did it to teach the offenders so that they might turn and re-embrace the Lord.

Is that so different from firing a wayward employee? Or telling a friend "if you keep doing it, we can't be friends." It would be an awful thing to be 'handed over to Satan' to be taught a lesson, yet sometimes that's what God may just call us to do. Just make sure it's for the right reasons. Many years ago I watched a pastor excommunicate a member. I was a member of the church council and the pastor, the church leader, wanted a member excommunicated because the member was saying terrible things about the church, even demonic things. The thing about it was that the poor guy was schizophrenic and off his meds, yet the pastor insisted he was sensible and had his wits about him. We voted to excommunicate him (I voted no). That seemed like an abuse of excommunication. For this and other reasons, my family and I left the church a few months later.

I wonder if the man or that pastor ever turned to Jesus.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 2:17, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 2:1

Lord, teach us to be wise with the powers of instruction that You give us.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 16 October 2018

I urge, then, first of all, that petitions, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for all people— for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. 1 Timothy 2:1-2 (NIV).

After talking about excommunicating wayward members, Paul then shifts to urging Timothy (and us) to pray for authorities. The church leaders of then (and now) are authorities in our lives. So are police, governments, the UN, bosses, corporate CEOs of companies whose products we use, pastors and leaders, and senior family members (in fact, all senior citizens).

Tell me, progressives: when was the last time you prayed for President Trump? Or my conservative friends, how often did you (or do you) pray for President Obama, or Ms. Pelosi, or George Soros? If you're like me, in this regard, you've failed. You and I don't usually pray for those with whom we disagree (or just don't like). If you don't like President Trump or his policies, you may not be praying in thanksgiving for him. If you didn't like President Obama or his policies, chances are you didn't pray in thanksgiving for him, either.

That's a shame. We're losing great opportunities here because Paul recognized that prayer and thanksgiving (especially) are active, vital ways to participate in peoples' lives, even those of far-off, remote leaders. They are pure "get to" activities. We get to pray for the president, our employees in Congress, and others we elect to do things for us that we can't do ourselves. We get to pray for our bosses, managers, and executives that they would make good use of the time we entrust to them. We get to pray for our parents, and for seniors who have lived long, useful lives that can teach us many things.

We should take every opportunity to pray in thanks for those who are above us in any way. Sure, it's altruistic but even Ayn Rand (who rejected religion) would have supported the idea of supporting leaders who are working for the betterment of all. I don't know Donald Trump, but I get to be actively involved in his life when I pray for him. I don't know Barack Obama, but I'm actively involved in his life when I pray for him. Bill Gates, Benjamin Netanyahu, the Dalai Lama, the owner of your company, your pastor, that stranger who flipped you off on the road, and starving kids in India: you may not know any of them, but Jesus gives you the opportunity to be part of them by actively praying for them.

We spend so much of our time excommunicating other people from our lives. How about we re-communicate with them by first praying to our Lord for their benefit?

For further reading: 2 Timothy 2:17, 1 Corinthians 5:5, 1 Timothy 2:1

Lord, today, help me to pray for leaders, and show me today just one person for whom I can pray.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 17 October 2018

This is good, and pleases God our Savior, who wants all people to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NIV).

Do you think churches who excommunicate members want them to be saved in the same way Jesus wants ALL people to be saved? Call me skeptical but I'm betting most congregations practicing excommunication do so with an emotional mix of sadness and anger. In the middle of that mix it is difficult to remember that the purpose of dis-engaging someone from Christian fellowship is to do something to help heal a breach in their faith. Congregations don't enter into this practice lightly, but I'm pretty sure there is un-righteous anger involved in most cases.

And what is Jesus wanting us to be saved from? If you believe that we are sinners, the answer "sin" comes easily. Yet there are so many people who posit that, once saved by Christ, we aren't able to sin again. Last night, during a Bible study, this subject came up. We are saved once for all and walk forever in a state of grace no matter what we do, even when we sin. We are foolish to think that once-saved believers also can't harden their hearts or disavow the faith they embrace. Or to choose sin instead of that grace. Thank the Lord for His Way back.

What good is the knowledge of the truth? Pontius Pilate is famously quoted as saying "veritas?" to Jesus when Jesus tells him that He is the truth. It isn't just the foundation of honesty to which Jesus is referring: it is Himself. Paul re-iterates this when he says that our Savior wants all people to have a knowledge of the truth. In other words, Jesus wants all people to know Him.

Finally, does pleasing God (by praying, or doing other things) earn us points with Him? To be frank, I can't answer that; neither can you. When something pleases God it's up to Him what He does with it. We don't earn salvation; it is freely given by Christ to us because of who He is and not anything we've done. We don't have to pray for our leaders, but we should as a way to support them and to exercise our faith. We don't have to do good works, but we should because this pleases God and demonstrates our faith. We don't have to go to church but we should to worship, to build up others, and to be fueled ourselves. I don't know if this earns points with God, but I do believe living our fruits of His Spirit pleases Him and spreads His Gospel. It means we choose Him, choose life.

Choose life; choose Jesus. That's the answer.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 5:4, Luke 1:47, Ezekiel 18:23, Titus 2:11, 2 Peter 3:9, 1 Timothy 2:5

Lord, there are so many questions that I have. Help me through them and thank You for my life of grace.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 18 October 2018

For there is one God and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all people. This has now been witnessed to at the proper time. 1 Timothy 2:5-6 (NIV).

I've been in a week-long discussion with people who dearly love the traditional Lutheran liturgy and worship service. That's the kind of environment in which I was raised; I love it, too. These days, I worship in a place that is pretty non-traditional but still within the Missouri Synod structure. Our services contain all the same elements of doctrine used in more traditional settings. Yet our church focuses on Jesus' mission in our lives, on being 'disciples who make disciples who make disciples.' On being in mission and worship every day, not just for an hour on Sunday.

Come to our church and you'll find most people in jeans. You won't find hymnals but you'll find both new and traditional praise music. You'll say the same creeds (though not as often) and hear the same Bible. And you'll be introduced to the living Christ. Yet the focus isn't on Lutheranism but on Jesus. The letters "LCMS" are on the door but they aren't where the emphasis is. The folks with whom I was debating would be aghast at this.

Paul affirmed what others in the early church already knew: there is one God and one Savior, one mediator between God and man. That mediator is Jesus Christ and only Jesus Christ. He Himself is God and man, Savior and one representing those who need to be saved, fully man while being fully God at all times, and the Son in the triune Godhead of Father, Son, and Spirit. THAT is the message of the faith.

How we proclaim that message is somewhat up to us. Lutherans (and others) call anything not commanded by Scripture "adiophora:" neither God-commanded nor forbidden. In many settings, traditional, liturgical worship works. It faithfully proclaims Christ while encouraging believers. Yet in other settings (such as where I live), a different approach works. My church's non-traditional methods still faithfully proclaim Christ while encouraging believers. As long as the focus is on proclaiming Christ, we're arguing about window dressings. One isn't better than another. They're simply different ways of accomplishing the same goal, that is proclaiming the one God and one mediator.

If your church uses a generations-old liturgy, traditional hymnals, pastoral robes, and clings to worshipping the same way that generations have, then God bless you! Keep doing it; God is pleased with that. And if your church uses other methods like hymns on the screen, contemporary music, non-traditional schedules, and blue jeans, then God bless you, too. Keep doing those things because they please God, too. Something borrowed, something blue: it's contemporary tradition.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 6:4, Romans 3:29-30, Galatians 3:20, Matthew 20:28, 1 Corinthians 1:6, 1 Timothy 2:7

Lord, bless our worship of You, the one and only God and one and only mediator.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 22 October 2018

And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle—I am telling the truth, I am not lying—and a true and faithful teacher of the Gentiles. 1 Timothy 2:7 (NIV).

Do you have a resume? Do you keep yours up to date? In the last few years, I've been out of work 3 times. And I learned things have changed since 2001: the last time I earnestly sought a new job. Monster and Dice are still around, but now most tech employers use Indeed and LinkedIn. I found that looking for a job was less about who I was as a person and more about the raw skills I possess.

As a tech worker, I've learned to keep my resume up to date. Most times I use a 2-page format, and no more than 2-3 bullets per employer. Some head hunters say to only go back a decade, but I keep all my skills on it, going back to 1986; some of my most important work was back then. And my resume shows only what I consider most important, only the things that talk about what I can do AND who I am.

Today's verse is Paul's resume. It testifies to his bona fides. After talking about Christ being the one and only mediator, and after spending the first part of this letter talking about Christ's grace, Paul goes to the subject of his qualifications to teach the 'un-churched.' In several of his letters, Paul discusses his calling as an apostle, that it came from Jesus Himself. That mattered to the first-century church because that group was being pulled in many directions. The original 11 apostles had known and walked with Jesus. He established their resumes. Now came this man Paul, who had been a famous Pharisee known for persecuting these new followers of "The Way" (as the church was then called).

What's more, this Paul wasn't teaching only the Jews, as most of the Apostles and Jewish rabbis did. No, Paul was speaking about this Jesus to non-Jews: to non-Jewish people all over the Roman empire. Everywhere he went, Paul testified that Jesus was the authority to whom Paul gave all credit and from whom Paul had received his calling.

Paul kept up his resume. You can read it in the twelve books he wrote in the New Testament. You and I have similar credentials. God gives us skills to work and talents to advertise, both for His advancement and ours. He places us in situations to do or prepare us for work He has in mind. The next time you update your resume, consider your skills and how God would use them – and you – at an employer. I wonder what that would look like on LinkedIn.

For further reading: Romans 9:1, 2 Timothy 1:11, Acts 9:15, 1 Timothy 2:8

Lord, thank You for establishing Paul's resume. And for giving me the skills you want me to have for You in the world today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 23 October 2018

Therefore I want men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. 1 Timothy 2:8 (NIV).

I think God is telling me to pray. Yesterday, my daily book devotion was about praying. Then I went to an online devotion I read and it was about praying. My wife and I talked about praying. And then, in preparation for today's Proverbial, I saw the subject is about praying. Sometimes God nudges you; sometimes He whacks you with a hammer. The whack today felt like a velvet head bump.

Paul has spent the first part of this letter teaching Timothy some basics about ministry: about calling, order, training. Now he talks about prayer. After establishing his bona fides, Paul tells Timothy that believers should pray. The verse says "men" yet the original wording infers "mankind" meaning everyone of either sex. We should pray to God in reverence and without negativity.

In fact, praying may just be the most practical weapon a Christian warrior has in their arsenal. The armor of God is necessary, but it is prayer – imploring for Christ's assistance through praise or invocation – that is the sword of the Word of God. It is through prayer that we talk with God, that we praise Him, that we weep to Him, that we most frequently can commune with Him. Thus, it is through prayer that God arms us to repel the evil one's attacks with the words of Jesus.

Paul says we should raise up holy hands to God. To be honest, I'm not always comfortable doing that in public. I might occasionally do it in private, where I prefer to do my earnest praying. That's just a personal choice. Others feel more comfortable doing such things; God bless them for it. Because God prepares us for what He wants us to do, and because of where He has us each in our lives, Paul exhorts all people to pray. We get to do it to stand with Jesus in the daily war between God and the evil one. Pray to Him for everything: for strength, for wisdom, for help making it through long meetings, for safety, for healing, for peace....especially for His peace in everything we think, say, and do.

My challenge to you today is pray for someone. In your own way, praise God for them, and speak with God over someone else's predicament. Pray on your knees, or in your car, or in the shower, or alone in a room, or standing on the subway platform, or at McDonald's, or with your hands in the air. Pray everywhere for them. However or wherever you do it, pray to God and watch how He begins to move in your life. This reminder may be God's way of whacking you in the head to do just that.

For further reading: Ephesians 6:17, 1 Timothy 2:8

Lord, I praise You and thank You for this opportunity to talk with You. Watch over and guide my friends today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 24 October 2018

Therefore I want the men everywhere to pray, lifting up holy hands without anger or disputing. I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning themselves, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. 1 Timothy 2:8-10 (NIV).

My mom died four years ago today. She was born in 1929 and lived to age 85. My Mom was feminist long before Gloria Steinem learned how to burn her bra, and Mom was a feminist in ways that Gloria still doesn't understand. My Mom insisted on being taken at face value, appreciated for her knowledge and talents, and treated as an equal because God had given her the knowledge and drive to do just that. She didn't need little Gloria to tell her what she already knew better.

The most important things I learned from my Mom intersected things taught from the Bible. Worship. Have faith. Do your best, strive to excel, and don't do things that are dishonorable. Love; just love. That's how she lived her life because that's what her parents, family and friends in Depression-era Princeton, Minnesota taught her. Mom tried to teach my sister and I that same lesson with varying degrees of success; my sis is far more decent & proper than I am. The good lesson both my sister and I learned from Mom (actually both of our parents) was putting that best foot forward. It was a way to honor God.

Read ahead a few verses and you'll find a section of scripture where the Apostle Paul talks about the decorum of women in worship. These verses say what they say and aren't politically correct. We'll talk more about them tomorrow, yet between now and then, when you read them, consider that Paul is talking about BOTH men and women being decorous and submissive through worship. Yes, the verses talk specifically about women, but just as Paul alluded to mankind praying in verse 8, here he's teaching both sexes to revere God before revering our sexes. Don't get wrapped around the gender. Look for the universal lesson and be better.

Grace Terry understood that. She bristled at Paul's verses that talked about the roles of men and women in the church but she understood the larger implications. Mom was a professional at a time when women who were strong-minded professionals were challenged by establishment men. God gave her a sharp mind and sharper wits to earn her way in that world and she succeeded, winning respect and honor. She was a Proverbs 31 woman of noble character. It's been four years since she went to heaven and I miss her. But I'm thankful to be her son.

For further reading: Psalm 24:4, Luke 24:50, 1 Peter 3:3, Proverbs 31:10-13, 1 Timothy 2:11

Lord Jesus, thanks for my Mom. Say hi to her for me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 25 October 2018

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (NIV).

These verses are hard to understand, hard to accept, in the PC world we inhabit today. Yesterday I mentioned that my mom, a modern woman before most other women were modern, always bristled at Paul's exhortations on the roles of men and women in worship. Nobody except Jesus, not even Jesus' Apostle Paul, would tell her to be quiet or submissive. Yet here's a point she missed: in worship. Paul was talking about worship, about worshipping God in all ways.

It's undeniable that Eve gave Adam the fruit of sin after she had first eaten it. And it's undeniable that God held Adam (and all men after him) spiritually accountable for the things that happened in their families. This is still the case today. Whether we like it or not, men and women do have distinct roles in God's eyes. Where Paul talks about "saved through childbearing," he's indirectly pointing to the Gospel because God's response to the excruciating pain of childbirth was to remind women that he would redeem that inner pain through the Savior. And He did. This site, <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/how-are-women-saved-through-childbearing>, does a great job of explaining this nuance.

We are to honor God in all we do. Paul believed everything we do should be an act of worship. Modesty, humility, propriety, decency: these are words of good advice for all situations, not just in the formal church and not just for women. God will hold men responsible for the spiritual acts of the people in their families, yet God redeemed them through Jesus. God holds women responsible through spiritual acts of the people they bear through childbirth and the pains associated with it, yet God redeemed them through Jesus. The common theme is "redeemed through Jesus." It's not about sexes.

Don't get too wrapped around the gender roles without considering the larger context in which those Biblical roles should still apply in our 'modern' world. They do apply, and in many ways. Paul wrote what God put on his heart to teach us how we should worship God in the bigger picture, including our roles as men and women. We shouldn't be quick to dismiss them.

For further reading: 1 Peter 3:3, Ephesians 5:22, Genesis 2:7, 1 Corinthians 11:8, 1 Timothy 2:11

Lord, help me to better understand these hard to understand roles you established for the sexes.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 29 October 2018

I also want the women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, adorning, not with elaborate hairstyles or gold or pearls or expensive clothes, but with good deeds, appropriate for women who profess to worship God. A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or to assume authority over a man; she must be quiet. For Adam was formed first, then Eve. And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner. But women will be saved through childbearing—if they continue in faith, love and holiness with propriety. 1 Timothy 2:11-15 (NIV).

Before we move on, let's address a few other things about these verses (even though they're uncomfortable).

Paul was a first-century Jew discussing first century traditions. While he was writing what God had inspired in his heart, he was also discussing what was contemporary. Today, there are still many churches where the roles of men and women are strictly defined. In some churches, women cannot be ordained as ministers; in others this doesn't matter. Are they wrong? We can't apply these ancient dictums today without considering the world in which they were written.

Some online research tells how Paul, in both 1 Timothy and 1 Corinthians, may have been addressing local customs in the Corinthian church as well as churches where Timothy was familiar. In the letters to the Corinthians, Paul was addressing factions that had arisen in the church there, factions that included women. Some people think that Paul's seemingly chauvinist remarks are a reaction to that and a way to re-institute order and discipline. In truth, we're speculating.

And yet, in the early church, men and women were equals in most ways. Women served as deaconesses, with Paul's blessing even. The people who went to tend to Jesus on Easter Sunday were women; the first people to whom He revealed His resurrected Self were women. In Paul's other letters, he sends greetings to both men and women without indicating any female subservience. Indeed, trumping even Paul's seemingly chauvinistic verses is Galatians 3:28 which says, "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." That equality is the bottom line.

I was confirmed by a woman. Indeed, I learned more from Pastor Ann than I have from most other men. A local church with which I'm familiar has a woman as its congregational president. In most churches, women wholly manage Christian education. In all these cases, submission to Christ is the only concern. Male or female, leaders must first submit to Jesus in all ways for in Him we are one. Any other concerns are secondary. We should do the same.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 14:33-35, 1 Corinthians 11:3-9, Ephesians 5:22-30, Galatians 3:28, 1 Timothy 3:1

Lord, in all we do, may we submit to You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 30 October 2018

Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. 1 Timothy 3:1 (NIV).

Paul switches gears from talking about the roles of women in worship to the roles of elders. When the NIV uses the term “overseer” it’s referring to a church elder. If you aren’t familiar with what elders do, they are a group of senior lay members, usually but not always men, who help oversee the spiritual life of the church. In most churches, the lead pastor is the spiritual shepherd of the congregation, and he (or she) may have a staff of other pastors who work together in shepherding the faith-life of the church. Yet almost all churches have some kind of group, or council, of elders (or overseers) who help manage the tasks of the church. Efforts to reach lagging members, leading worship functions, managing large tasks or efforts: all these in addition to assisting the pastor in performing tasks of senior spiritual leadership.

When I think of church elders, I think of the elders in the church where I grew up in Oklahoma. They were older men – truly elder – and they were kind, grandfatherly, worthy of respect. Yet they were also pious, a bit aloof. I remember sitting in church when elders were installed and they were always serious. They were men – and women – I could look up to. Or I think of the elders in my church in Colorado, where the council of elders was always separate from the church council, and was usually comprised of older men who had years of experience.

My current church is comprised (mostly) of younger people, folks under middle age. The elders in this church are usually younger as well, many in their thirties or early forties. Some of the churches we have helped to plant have even younger elders. Yet one common thing runs through all age groups: overseers are given the noble task of helping to shepherd the Christian faith of the members of their church.

To be frank, the men and women who are church elders are doing the best they can. Though they’re usually people of upright character and patient temperament, in truth, they’re also just folks. Sometimes they mess up; sometimes they say and do stupid things like anyone else. I know of more than a few people who have been church elders who make me scratch my head; I’m sure they might say the same about me. Yet they still make the best decisions they can, still do the best they can with what they know at the time. That’s the reason they’re selected: because they’re doing a noble job and it’s their lot to do the best they can for the church they serve.

For further reading: Acts 20:28, Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:7, 1 Timothy 3:2

Lord, bless the men and women who lead churches as elders and overseers.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 31 October 2018

Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?). He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. 1 Timothy 3:2-6 (NIV).

Today is Reformation Day. In our culture, Halloween long ago eclipsed the day Martin Luther nailed his theses to the church door, but I would submit that what Dr. Luther did was far more important than trick or treating. Luther's action made the Renaissance real, made the Enlightenment inevitable, and made the American Revolution possible. A stretch? Perhaps, yet those things revolutionized Western civilization and made the life we live possible. And it all started because God put it on the heart of a German monk to question the authority of the Catholic church: 501 years ago today.

I don't know all of Luther's history so here's a condensed version. Luther was a monk, a highly educated Roman Catholic who, over the course of his life, began to question practices and doctrines of that Roman Catholic church he served. In 1517, his angst over how the church interpreted Scripture (and how they were using it for fundraising) caused him to nail 95 theses – questions – to a church door in Germany, asking for someone in authority to debate. For the rest of his life, Luther lived in persecution. His questioning became the basis for the Protestant Reformation that permanently changed the Christian church forever. Indeed, all of modern western thought changed, including the subjects of man's relationship with God and man's relationship with government. While living in fear for his life, Luther translated the New Testament into German so that his countrymen could more easily read it themselves (without the assistance of a priest).

Read the verses again. You might just see that Luther called the church on the carpet for not exhibiting the qualities of an overseer that Paul outlined in verses 2-6.

Take your kids trick or treating, or stay home and hand out some candy. Dress up a kid as Martin Luther. I reject the Satanist and evil intentions of some; Halloween can be good clean fun after all. Yet take a few minutes today and say a prayer of thanks for a monk 500 years ago who stood up to authority and helped create the world in which you live.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 3:7

Lord, bless Martin Luther and all those who crusade for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 1 November 2018

He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. 1 Timothy 3:7(NIV).

Let's talk about reputation. Paul is talking about an overseer, an elder. He's saying that the people selected as elders must be people of good repute. They must be upstanding citizens in the church of God, believers who are respected both in and out of the church...especially outside the church. They must be this kind of people because, if they aren't, they risk disgrace and falling under the influence of Satan.

Tell me: do you have that kind of reputation? I'll easily confess it: I don't. Too many times in the past, by things I have done and said, I've disqualified myself from being someone like an elder. I'll confess again: I didn't set out to do that. I didn't set out to become the kind of person you wouldn't want to be. It happened because of choices I made, of choosing sin over choosing God. I fell into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

So I'll ask again: do you have that kind of reputation? Are you the kind of person who praises Jesus one minute and looks in lust at that good looking woman or man the next? Do you lie? Are you envious? Worse than these, are these the kinds of things that people think or say about you? Bad news, my friend: you might not be elder material either. Maybe we're both due for a reputation gut-check.

Now let's turn that bad news upside down. You and I weren't made for disgrace, bad reputations, or that old devil's trap. We were made to be very good sons and daughters of the Most High, the Triune God who Luther celebrated with his 95 statements five centuries ago. When we believe in Jesus, God sees through our disgrace and poor reputations and sees Jesus living in us. He sees His Spirit remaking us in His image, replacing our evil ways with His fruits like love, kindness, peace, patience, and self-control. When God looks at us through Jesus, He sees an elder-kind of person, someone whose bad reputation was remade for a good one. What the church or outsiders think matters little.

Mind you, the devil is still setting his traps. He has since Eden and will until the end. Sin will still hunt us, trying to pull us away from Jesus, trying to tar our reputations once again. Don't fall for it. Love defeats Satan. The love of Jesus is more powerful than what others think, or what Satan attempts. Besides, it's what God thinks of me that matters. True, we want elders (and all leaders) to be people of good character and better reputation. But what God thinks of us is far more important.

For further reading: Mark 4:11, 2 Timothy 2:26, Galatians 5:22-25, 1 Timothy 3:8-13

Lord, all praise to You that You see Your beautiful Son in me. Thank You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 5 November 2018

In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus. 1 Timothy 3:8-13 (NIV).

Here we go again. It's more of Paul's ancient, woman-hating, busy-body commands on how we are to be judgy and overbearing and set up a bunch of rules to follow. I mean, it's almost like he's that "television preacher with bad hair and dimples" (as Jimmy Buffett would say) telling us that we are DAMNED, DAMNED I TELL YOU if we don't toe the line just the way he says.

Whatever.

Keep a few things in mind. One, Paul is giving direction and advice to a student minister who is dealing with a contentious congregation. Many scholars think that, in Paul's pastoral letters (like 1 Timothy) he was writing to Timothy about how to manage difficult people. That Timothy was in a situation where the congregation with whom he was working was, in fact, fractured and struggling. Paul advises order and how to restore it.

Another thing to remember is that Paul has a point. Deacons – church leaders a step below elders – should indeed be upright citizens within the church. They should be the kind of people we mentor and shape into elder roles. They should be the kind of people we want to work with to get things done. Yes, that goes for the women in the deacon role as well. We want church members to be the kind of people who are upstanding in the community in any capacity. Their good behavior reflects well on the faith.

Finally, it's good advice in and out of church. Paul is giving good advice on how to organize our faith lives in ways that impact how we organize our entire lives. When I staff a project, I look for elder kind of people as leaders and deacon kind of people as individual contributors. I want women and men working with me who are upright and reliable, because you can count on upright and reliable people in a fight. There will be problems; there will be issues. People of good standing are the kind of people you can usually count on to help work a problem instead of running from it.

For further reading: Timothy 3:14

Lord, help me to better become someone in good standing in Your eyes and in the eyes of my brothers & sisters. Help me to live and act in upright ways.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 6 November 2018

Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. 1 Timothy 3:14-15 (NIV).

One of the verses that helps to amplify Paul's meaning today is listed below (referenced from my Concordia). 1 Corinthians 10:32 says "Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Greeks or the church of God." This is Paul's goal in meting out advice to his protégé. "Whatever you do, Timothy, keep these things in mind so that the members of our church of God don't cause others to struggle in their faith."

Simply brilliant. Whatever we do as 'the church' should be upright, consistent, caring, and loving so that God is increased and we are decreased. We should do these things, as followers of Jesus, to encourage, build, and strengthen the faith of others, especially the faith of those who are weak in it or new to it.

That's been on my heart a lot lately, even more so during the last days of this political season. I'm guilty of arguing online about my political views, and I have to confess that I don't think I've changed anyone's mind for the better. There's great value in standing up for what you believe, both to take that stand and to encourage friends with similar beliefs. Yet in doing that, I confess I'm guilty of saying things that don't glorify God and sometimes cause other people to stumble (both in their spiritual beliefs and their political ones).

On this election day, I therefore take great comfort in Paul's advice, his urging to Timothy (and to you and I) to conduct ourselves in ways that show even strangers that we believe in Jesus. The church of the living God acts out of love, even when it, too, takes hard and political incorrect stands. The church of the living God conducts itself in ways that show what we believe about the love of Jesus. We don't give up our temporal political beliefs because we follow Jesus: we learn ways to do them better.

I haven't done that very well; have you? I bet I know your answer.

And if that's true, then Paul is advising us, too, to remember how we should conduct ourselves, especially today. Our political choices, for now, conclude in the ballot box. Our lives as Jesus' church go on regardless of politics, pop culture, or what the pundits and celebrities think. We're the church of God walking around in a world hostile to Him. Let's remember to act like it.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 10:32, Matthew 16:16, Timothy 3:15

Lord, forgive me for failing You in my words and actions. Encourage me to do better, to be a more faithful follower in Your church. Help me to help others.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 7 November 2018

Beyond all question, the mystery from which true godliness springs is great: He appeared in the flesh, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. 1 Timothy 3:16 (NIV).

In Jesus' day, people no different than us believed in Him. People who were ridiculed, threatened, persecuted, confused believed in Jesus. Sometimes we read these stories from the Bible and we seem to think that they were unusual people, 'super-human' people. Jesus was. All the rest of them? Not so much. The people who lived and heard and believed Jesus in His time were people just like us. They looked, they listened, they let go, and they believed. Why is it so tough for us?

You and I have the same information available to us that was available to popes all through history, to Billy Graham and Mother Theresa, to all the billions who have believed in Jesus since He returned to heaven. Something about Him opened a window into our hearts and we believed. Not because we're special or even have special insight but because He is who He said He was.

And it's beyond all reasonable doubt. The words of the Bible are plain and they're available for anyone who wants to read them. As Paul says, Jesus is proven to be the Son of God beyond all question, not because Paul said so but because Jesus did so. The mystery of the trinity and of Immanuel incarnate isn't much of a mystery at all. It was plainly proven over thousands of years. Hundreds of Old Testament prophecies were fulfilled only in Jesus Christ; if you don't believe me, consult this site, then read the verses for yourself: <http://www.accordingtothescriptures.org/prophecy/353prophecies.html>. Nobody else is possible; mathematically, it is 1 in 10,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 and there isn't even a named number for that (see <http://www.goodnewsdispatch.org/math.html>).

When you put your faith in Jesus, you're putting your faith in the only truly known or possible Savior in all of human history. He's fully God and fully man at the same time. With only a thought He could compel you or I to follow Him. But He doesn't do that.

Instead, the Christ, proven beyond all reason and doubt, calls to us in love and asks us to follow Him. He doesn't demand it, command it, or force it. Instead, Jesus introduces Himself and says "Be loved and forgiven, then share it." We don't have to do that: we get to do that. Because of Him. The people of His day weren't any different than us. They simply saw and believed.

For further reading: Romans 16:25, John 1:14, Psalm 9:11, Colossians 1:23, Mark 16:19, Timothy 4:1

Lord, thank You for proving Yourself. I believe in You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 8 November 2018

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demon. 1 Timothy 4:1 (NIV).

We are a divided world; the division goes far beyond just the United States. Muslims against everyone else. Rich against poor (or at least 'not rich'). Protestants against Catholics. Conservatives against progressives. You get the picture. We line up against each other over imaginary lines of offense. Perhaps every generation thinks it has seen things 'worse than they have ever been.' I and others of my middle-aged generation seem to be saying that now.

Many of us line up and, in doing so, put our faith in things that aren't Jesus (or aren't of Jesus). It isn't just new age religions (many of which are actually rooted in ancient pagan religions), and it isn't just embracing sensuality, materialism, atheism, or even apathy. Many people just ignore the voice of Jesus' Spirit talking to them. He speaks through our conscience, through our knowledge of right and wrong, through nature, through others, through the Bible. God has a myriad of ways that His Spirit can talk to us and convince us that He is talking. Yet many people turn off that voice, chill it and drown it out. Some people don't even realize it's Jesus' Spirit talking to them or moving them in a direction. Many don't even think to ask.

How can we tell if something is of Jesus or from Jesus or about Jesus? You know the answer. Compare it against what is said in the Bible, especially in the New Testament. And if you doubt that Jesus is who He said He is, then the first place to stop is your own heart. Open it and pray. Talk with God about exactly what you're feeling, what you think, what you do or don't believe. He can take it and you're worthy.

Start by asking God. If you don't feel or sense an answer from Him, go to the Bible. Find a concordance or go to Biblegateway.com. Any search engine can give you instant answers to most any question about Scripture you have. Finally, if your head is wondering, remember those links I shared yesterday: the first is about how Jesus fulfilled 300+ prophecies about the Messiah (<http://www.accordingtothescriptures.org/prophecy/353prophecies.html>) and the second talks about the logical odds that Jesus is who He said He is based on those prophecies (<http://www.goodnewsdispatch.org/math.html>). His words are always true, even when we don't know.

We may or may not be witnessing the 'later times,' but we are witnessing people abandoning faith for whatever scratches their itches. In the face of that, test what you believe against what Jesus said and did. If those things line up, it may just be Him talking with you.

For further reading: John 16:13, Acts 8:29, 1 Corinthians 2:10, 2 Peter 3:3, Mark 13:5, Timothy 4:2

Lord Jesus, I open my heart and ask Your Spirit to talk to me. I'm listening.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 12 November 2018

Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 1 Timothy 4:2 (NIV).

Does your conscience bother you? Sweet Home Alabama; love me some Skynyrd.

Paul called out hypocrites in the church who didn't fully put their faith in Jesus. He called out people who said they believed but acted differently. Or people who said they believed but also practiced other things (like pagan beliefs, or holding onto the traditions of the Jews). He was calling out people who tried to infuse "the Way" with practices and ideas that weren't given by Jesus. And, worst of all, Paul was calling out people who were following false teachings, teachings of "work righteousness (earning your salvation)" and the apostasy of saying there was no resurrection.

Paul was calling out people in Timothy's flock who were following dangerous ways. Do you think he could have been talking with us?

I mean, new age religions teach that we are our own gods, that we aren't sinful (and if we aren't sinful then we don't need a savior). We get wrapped up in things of this world so that we act as if we don't need Jesus, don't have time for Him, don't want His old-fashioned ways. How awful it is when things go south and we find out we need a Savior after all.

Are you bothered by things now? Are you into things that you shouldn't be, things that are sketchy or even outright dangerous? Could Lynyrd Skynyrd be singing: does your conscience bother you? Jesus gave each of us a conscience so that we would know Him better. He gave us a barometer of right and wrong so that we might learn to rely on Him more and live out our lives through Him. Usually we're steady, but we sometimes get into situations that are a risk to our spiritual, maybe even physical, health. To whom do you listen when the going gets rough?

The good news in all of this is the Good News. There's nothing you've done that could ever separate you from the love of Jesus. You can always listen to your heart and come back home. If your conscience bothers you about something, that may just be His Spirit prodding you; "let's have a talk. What's on your mind?" We have a learned but innate sense of right and wrong; only the most inured or depraved of us fully give ourselves over to all sensuality and lose ourselves in the process. Such folks have dull consciences. Yet even they aren't beyond the power or reach of Jesus. He's much bigger and stronger than anything that may plague us. He came to save ALL people, even those of us who have done terrible things. Sweet home Alabama ain't got nothing on Jesus.

For further reading: Romans 8:37-39, Ephesians 4:19, 1 Timothy 4:3

Lord, I've said and done terrible things. Forgive me when I let them bother me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 13 November 2018

They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:3-5 (NIV).

“Received with thanksgiving:” those are powerful words. They can make all the difference in the world.

Next week is Thanksgiving and that means we’re coming up on the time of the year when we’ll reflect on 2018 and talk about what we’ve done (and unconsciously avoid those not done). May I submit to you that an attitude of thanksgiving for all things, ESPECIALLY the bad things, makes everything ok? No, I’m not Pollyanna. This year, just in my own family circle, we’ve known death, terrible illness, separation, extreme financial difficulties, loneliness, encounters with Satan, and more. Let’s just assume you’re in a similar situation (because you probably are).

Give thanks. Thank God for them. Thank God for the bad things and the good things, too.

Winter is coming and I just detest cold weather. But I’m thankful for it. Yesterday was a REALLY EARLY morning, seeing me wake up at 3 to leave the house by 4 to catch a 6:30 flight at Love Field. I’m thankful for that because it means I have a good job. Every payday there always seems to be more in bills than there is in paycheck...you guessed it: I’m thankful because the life my wife and I lead is one of family and friends and faith and love.

God gives us EVERYTHING on this planet and more. He did it (and does it) out of love, out of wanting to provide for His children who He created to be “very good.” Who am I (or you) to put conditions on it? Who are we to put rules and regulations all over something that God gave to us freely?

In the book of Acts, the Apostle Peter learns in a dream that every food is “clean” and a gift from God. All through his life, Peter had observed Jewish laws about what to and not to eat. It makes sense that the early church, an offshoot of Judaism, would start to adopt some of the Jewish traditions. But God switched things up, telling Peter that all foods were clean. In an even larger sense, God was telling Peter that all PEOPLE were clean, all people were worthy of His blessing and should hear the Gospel of Christ. Give thanks for EVERYTHING, good and not good, clean and unclean. It’s all from God. Even the bad things He allows are used for His good purposes.

How could someone not be thankful for that?

Thanking Jesus as the start to all we are is the start of making things better.

For further reading: Acts 10, 1 Timothy 4:6

Lord, thank You. Just thank You.

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Practical Proverbial, 1 Timothy, 14 November 2018

They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:3-5 (NIV).

Before moving on from these verses, let's talk about consecration. Key in on that last verse: "because it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer." Do you get that God just exploded a bomb in your life? Jesus Christ, who loves you enough to die for you, just threw a grenade and you and watched it explode in your face, blowing you to bits...and He was smiling.

Huh?

Every now and then, the Bible drops these precious nuggets about salvation right into our laps using common language, words we often overlook. I say that because did you know that you consecrate your actions through the word of God and prayer? BOOM! There goes another explosion.

Huh (again)?

Get this: to consecrate something is make something sacred, to set it apart. You and I get invite consecration into our lives by praying. Through Jesus' power, our ordinary lives are dedicated to His higher service. Sure, some people have a purposeful calling to be pastors and teachers of Christ; maybe that's how you've been consecrated. Yet even the more pedestrian of us can be (and are) consecrated as hallowed, holy, righteous by God when we invite (as Carrie might sing) Jesus to take the wheel.

All that happens through prayer. Prayer: that conversation between God and you. Usually it feels one-sided but, if you look closely, it may just be that He's doing most of the work. Have you ever felt more at peace after praying? Perhaps God immediately answered your prayer by giving you that peace. We will never know how God may act on our prayers if we don't pray them.

And when we do pray, we are inviting the full power of King Jesus God Almighty into our situation. Hebrews 4:12 says that the word of God is a living thing, a sharp sword that cuts to the core of what we believe. It slices away things we don't need and leaves what we do, namely Jesus Christ. Prayer consecrates us, sets us aside for something hallowed, invokes His power. When it does that, it cuts away what isn't important or, like alcohol on a wound, begins to scour and heal. It isn't our words that do that: it's the Word of God.

Next time you pray, remember that you're holding a consecrating weapon in your words. Boom! It might be the most powerful thing you do all day.

For further reading: Hebrews 4:12, 1 Timothy 4:6

Lord Jesus, I pray thanks and praise that You consecrate us. Help me to use this powerful blessing for Your good purposes.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 15 November 2018

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. 1 Timothy 4:6 (NIV).

Yesterday I was in yet another online discussion, this time with a guy with whom I'm no longer on good terms. We went to high school together and were friends for awhile on Facebook. But we strongly disagree on many things. Our conversation this time started on disagreeing about a point of fact and quickly turned personal, both on his and my end. That's when I checked out of the conversation; I don't want to do that any more because it brings dishonor on Jesus. Yet I wasn't able to leave the conversation before my 'ex-friend' said something that stuck: "I don't like you Dave."

That one left a mark. None of us likes to be told we aren't liked but my former friend struck me (rhetorically) pretty hard. He said he thought I was an insecure jerk (yet he was the one doing the name calling), and to be honest, he had a point. I'm not perfect; I wasn't perfect yesterday but I didn't profess to be. Yet what he said also made me realize something:

I don't like him either. I really don't. We were more acquaintances than real friends. Sometimes we simply don't gel with others but this is a person I simply don't like. This is the point where a gut-check became not just necessary but critical. I reached out to several pastor friends and asked for some much-needed help. How can you follow Jesus and still harbor dislike for someone?

Thankfully, my friends gave some very solid advice. Pray for the other person. Keep quiet unless you have something positive or constructive to say. Ask if God is using this as a teachable moment about yourself. Be cautious when engaging antagonistic people (even Jesus was cautious when He needed to be). Avoid extended time with serious haters. And don't be surprised when some people hate you. I'm not Jesus but people hated Him too. As you can see, really great words, and they helped.

Jesus calls us to love God with all our heart and mind, and then He calls us to love our neighbors even more than we love ourselves. He tells us to forgive generously, to minister wisely but unabashedly, and to live out the fruits of His Spirit in kindness, patience, understanding, and that forgiveness. I'm thankful that my friends echoed Paul's advice to Timothy to be a good minister to me. I hope I can be to others. I still don't care for the company of my ex-friend, but in all honesty. I wish him well, health, and faith in Christ. Jesus loves him too.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 3:15, 1 Timothy 4:7

Lord, forgive my misuse of Your wonderful talents. I forgive my old friend. Bless and keep him.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 19 November 2018

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 1 Timothy 4:7 (NIV).

In the world online, if you read it on the Internet it's obviously true, right? Political conspiracies, celebrity gossip, re-written history, "hit like and share for Jesus to bless you:" if it happens online it's obviously true, isn't it? Paul never imagined anything like electronics or worldwide virtual media yet I'm betting he would have applied this same advice to the internet as he did to day to day real interactions between people.

Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.

Horoscopes. Superstitions. Rumors and gossip. Country platitudes. Even in Paul's time they happened, and even in Paul's time they were widespread, traditional, and everywhere. He saw these things could be destructive, could cause people to put their faith in chance and circumstance rather than the living Christ. So Paul cautioned believers to reject these things, to have nothing to do with them.

Don't forget that this verse is right after one where Paul exhorts Timothy to be a good minister, to be nourished and nourish others in the truths of Scripture. It is in a section full of general instructions on high-level concepts such as adhering to doctrine, minding gifts, and hope. Thus, it makes sense that Paul would here proffer general instructions on how to deal with myths and old wives' tales.

Yet in a larger sense, he's giving a specific piece of godly advice that is much-needed even today. There are things in Paul's world and ours that work to pull our focus away from Jesus. You could list them all day and never complete the list. Paul reminds us to reject them and keep our only focus on Jesus. That requires discipline and work; individual effort. He says "train yourself to be godly" and he's saying it to us as well as to his protégé. We are to shy away from superstitions. We are to reject gossip. We are to run away from conspiracies and ridiculousness because all these things work against the work of God's Kingdom.

Chicken soup cures a cold. Pregnancy heartburn indicates a hairy baby. Itchy palms mean you won money. Black cats are bad luck (ditto walking under a ladder). Pick up a penny for good luck (unless it's tails-up). These colloquialisms seem harmless and quaint. So does a poisonous spider. Paul says we should have nothing to do with them. That's good advice still. Anything that tries to change my focus away from Christ and onto myself is something to beware.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 2:16, 1 Timothy 4:8

Lord, constantly remind me to reject anything that threatens to pull my focus away from You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 20 November 2018

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. 1 Timothy 4:8-9 (NIV).

Did you see Alex Smith's horrific injury on Sunday? Believe it or not, these can be his finest hours.

If you haven't heard what happened, during a football game with the Houston Texans, Smith, the Washington Redskins' quarterback was trying to evade being sacked by two Texans defenders. He went down on his right leg and broke both the tibia and fibula bones. The quarterback was carted off the field wearing an air cast and is supposed to go in for surgery this week. This injury will likely end his football career, and that's an awful break (pardon the pun) because Smith is a talented player who had spurred his team into first place in the NFC East Division.

But don't forget: these might just be his finest hours.

You see, physical training is valuable. It takes YEARS to train a man to play at the level of a first-string quarterback in the National Football League. It takes training, exercise, diet, commitment and discipline to get into that kind of physical and mental shape in order to prevail in the toughest team sport on the planet.

Let's see how things play out for Mr. Smith. And if you haven't done so already, send up a prayer for him. For strength, physical and emotional healing, and gratitude to still be alive in Christ.

Huh? The man's lifelong desire is probably done for. He's worked all his life to become a top NFL quarterback, first with the San Francisco 49ers, then with the Kansas City Chiefs, and then with the Washington Redskins. To have that taken away by a freak, gruesome injury is enough to emotionally destroy most people.

Yet, not to make light of it, but it's just football. Perhaps Alex Smith's greatest achievements are yet to come. Perhaps God allowed this devastating injury into his life to put him on the road to serving in another capacity, one that hasn't yet even revealed itself. Now is a time of testing, and let's pray he's sustained through it to serve God's better purposes overall. His life's work may just lie beyond football.

Ditto you and me. What life-crisis are you enduring now? Don't lose sight of the fact that God may be preparing you for your best days yet to come. Yes, it matters that we train and prepare for them now, using our time, talents, and treasures to steward the days He gives us. But they are only shadows great things to come. Pray that God uses each of our days so that we may live our finest hours now in preparation for better ones tomorrow.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:15 1 Timothy 4:10

Lord, heal Alex Smith. And heal all who suffer. Prepare us now for Your service.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 21 November 2018

For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. 1 Timothy 4:8-10 (NIV).

Why do we labor and strive here? Why is physical (and spiritual, educational, vocational, personal, etc) training of some value but godliness of more value?

Ah the questions of the ages. To be human is to wrestle with them at some point in our lives, to grapple with the meaning of our existence. Yet for the believer this life is more than mere existence. It is purpose, mission, satisfaction, adventure. We strive all our lives to better ourselves in service to Him who saved us from ourselves. That gives life reason and meaning. It's not just about getting by: it's about serving Him in new and adventurous ways.

It's true. We can have a pretty good life if the best we do is to live as peaceful people with each other. We can learn, study, train ourselves, even work to live in physical peace. Pretty darn good lives, actually: just ask any atheist, any non-believer and they'll tell you this very thing (before they tell you that you're a fool for believing in this Jesus). Yet what they won't tell you – because they can't – is that such a life has no inner peace, has no inner-driven purpose other than to be a better man. That it's meaningless. In the end, all they can look forward to is an eternity in the dirt, started in nothingness and returning to it after a life lived in meaningless existence.

C'mon, people: there's better than that. We weren't made for godlessness. We were made for much, much more. Godliness is following Jesus. Godliness is letting the Galatians 5 fruits of His Spirit remake us. Godliness is living in awareness that He loves us, that He forgives us, that He asks us to do more with what He gives us. Godliness is submitting our lives to Him even when it means taking up our cross and denying the alluring things of this world. Godliness is Christ.

When we labor and strive under His understanding, we see the reason for our hope, both now in how He reshapes us into better people, and at the end-beginning when we see Him face to face. When we live in that hope, every day is Thanksgiving Day. Every day becomes a reason to express godly gratitude for all the ways He blesses us.

For further reading: Galatians 5, 1 Timothy 4:11

Lord Jesus, every day is a day of thanksgiving in service to You. Keep remolding me into Your servant that I might better live this life for You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 27 November 2018

Command and teach these things. 1 Timothy 4:11 (NIV).

Paul doesn't mess around. He says "command and teach." Not "go get some proper seminary training first and then wear nice robes and sing boring music." And he doesn't say "you need a college degree for this." And Paul doesn't say "think it over and, if you're feeling up to it, speak up when you get the chance."

Command and teach already. Very Captain Kirk: boldly go where no man has gone before (or where many have gone but their love has grown cold). Speak up and speak out.

These words come in the chapter where Paul has given out some broad instructions to his protégé. The goal is to minister to others as Christ ministered. The aim is to build up the body of believers into more closely following our Savior in how we think, speak, and act. It isn't about a bunch of rules: it's about Jesus.

And to better follow Jesus, when one is called to speak up for the faith, COMMAND and teach. Don't mess around with it. Don't walk around thinking "I can't do this" because you can; because His Spirit will do the talking and teaching for you. Stand up and be counted and speak the truth plainly, boldly, convincingly. Even people of timid nature can be forceful in their convictions. Command and teach. Do it confidently because the power you have to do it isn't your own. It is the power of Him who sends you: the living God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

Yet remember a few things. The position and ability to command is given by God but respected by men. Here on the third rock, we earn respect. If you command and teach in God's name by humbly submitting to His authority, you'll be shocked at what He does through you. When people recognize that, they'll listen in respect.

And teach wisely. There's no shame in not knowing how to do something, but there is shame in knowing you need to know and then doing nothing about it. Do it in your own way, using your talents and your personality. Learn to teach and teach to learn. Do both in submission to Christ.

Finally, before commanding or teaching, go first to Jesus and seek His counsel. He is the King of the World and knows what He's doing. Pray. Immerse yourself in the Word. Open your heart to Him and wait on Him to act; go Psalm 46. He will, in His own good time, and everyone will see it.

When He does, get up and get going. Command and teach. Don't be a jerk about it; Jesus was never a jerk. We shouldn't be either. But stand firm and speak up.

For further reading: Psalm 46:10-11, 1 Timothy 5:7, 1 Timothy 4:12

Lord, put Your words in my mind and mouth, and help me to command and teach in Your name. Help me to do it humbly, wisely, and confidently.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 3 December 2018

Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. 1 Timothy 4:12 (NIV).

I regret not being a responsible and moral leader when I was younger. I was an awful shift supervisor to my first watch crew. I didn't understand that commanding and teaching my crew were responsibilities to do so humbly, in my own way according to the rules, and wisely. I didn't do a very good job. Later, as a young father, I was short-fused, hot-tempered, and hypocritical. My words didn't always match my conduct, and I didn't usually demonstrate a good example for my kids or others around me. Others felt the consequences of my sins.

Know what? That doesn't matter. Death comes to all of us; we're sinners and because of that we die. Yet on our winding roads through life we're given the opportunity to meet other people and share with them. We share life; we share stories; we share fellowship; we share Jesus. That last one is our primary mission. It isn't to lead, or parent, or be a friend, or to acquire the most stuff. It's to share Jesus. In doing that, we lead.

A few years ago, a fellow believer shared online that his grandson was terminally ill. That boy died yesterday, went home to heaven to be with Jesus. I never met him; his name was Andrew. But I cheered for him as he bravely lived in dignity and hope while leukemia ravaged him. It never defeated him. When death came for Andrew, hero that he was, he faced it and walked through into the open arms of the Savior, who, I'm thinking, gave Andrew a huge bear hug. "Welcome home, Andrew. I love you SO MUCH!" Satan thought he'd won again but he's too foolish to realize he never wins. Jesus already won.

I learned a lot from following Andrew's journey. I learned that such a fine young man was a leader in all he did. An inspiration in a dirty world full of our regrets. Those regrets never matter in the long run. What matters is how we live our lives in pursuing Jesus, in growing closer to Him. When death arrives, the regrets and possessions and sins won't matter. Living forever in peace with Him: THAT is what will matter most.

I'm going to be away from here for awhile. Tomorrow I'm having surgery that'll keep me away from these words for a few weeks. If it goes well, I'll see you later. And if it goes south, I'll see you later in heaven. No matter, live today in peace and dignity and hope, and live it fully. Love and lead and share Jesus. We'll meet again.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 4:13.

Lord, watch over my friends and help us each to lead through You. And bless Andrew there in Heaven and those he left behind.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 7 January 2019

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 1 Timothy 4:13 (NIV).

Do you remember the day were born?

That's a line I borrowed from a funeral last week. The man who died was 102 years old, and he used that line for most of his life as an entre into conversation about the Gospel. The man, Clem McGregor, died just before Christmas, was a D-Day/Battle of the Bulge vet, and spent his post-war life as a minister, especially in the San Antonio jails. The people who eulogized this good man said that, over the course of his life, he ministered to over 10,000 people in jails alone (not even counting churches or simply one-on-one). (As mentioned) His favorite conversation-starter: do you remember the day you were born?

I believe in that line. In fact, I used it with the Sunday School class I taught just yesterday. If you think about it, it's a great way to get somebody both thinking and listening to you; after all, why would you ask such a 'ridiculous' question? How can you possibly remember your very first moments as an infant? Rev McGregor's point was to steer the conversation towards a discussion about baptism and the need for Jesus, for salvation. The line worked for him; as mentioned, it worked in talking with a great many people! And if you think about it, it's a perfect Segway into what Paul was reminding Timothy to do in today's verse.

Paul exhorted his protégé, Timothy, to devote himself to reading Scripture in public. That included all the old books of (what we call) the Old Testament, as well as various letters written by Paul and his apostolic contemporaries. He did it so that Timothy and his congregation would be reminded of the faith they were following. So they would be encouraged regularly, even in the most improbable of times and places, that they were saved by Jesus Christ, that Jesus was the fulfillment of all those Hebrew accounts and prophecies. That they needed Jesus who abided with them day by day. No matter what we have done, how ashamed or regretful we feel, or what is going on in our lives now, nothing can separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus. It was true for Timothy's people. It's true for us.

I didn't know Clem McGregor well, but I'm thankful our lives intersected. That he used so much of his own life to introduce others to Jesus. That he did the great deeds he did in the war, in his family, and in serving Christ. Do you remember the day you were born? If not, let's talk about what that means.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 4:14, 1 Timothy 3:14, Acts 13:14-16, Colossians 4:16, Romans 8:39.

Lord Jesus, grant rest to our departed friend, comfort to his wife and family, and give us opportunities to grow in our faith in You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 8 January 2019

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. 1 Timothy 4:14 (NIV).

What are your gifts? What are the gifts you have that are unique to you, that set you apart? And what are you doing with them? Have you considered that God gave them to you, just for you, just for what He intends for your life? Have you considered that He gave you these gifts so that your words and actions would serve His Kingdom in ways that only you can?

There are over 7 billion people here on the Third Rock, and that means God made over 7 billion unique people, each having unique talents, abilities, interests, and thoughts. I can't do what you do; you can't do what I do. That's the case with all of us. It's how God made us, and it serves His purposes. My son is a great welder, but I don't know how to do that. One of my daughters is great at interior design; the other is a great bartender. I don't know how to do those things. I can write well but perhaps you don't. Baking cookies, organizing your garage, chopping wood, leading strangers, speaking in public, video gaming: are you interested in these things? You have at least one gift, probably more. God gave them to you so that you might serve the Kingdom by using them. What are you doing about that?

Even more, we like to validate those who have gifts. Ever received an award, or even applause? That's validation. In the church, we lay hands on people to affirm them, to demonstrate that we want to help channel God's love into them to bless them. We officiate at ceremonies that designate people as specially blessed; we call these "weddings" and "baptisms" and "funerals."

Paul's advice to Timothy is to not neglect his gifts. To use them well in service to the church and to remember that this church – this underground group of persecuted religious rebels, at that time under threat of death by both the religious and political powers – believed those gifts were valuable. Indeed, people foretold that "this young man will" whatever. I don't know about you but nobody that I know of has ever prophesied about me. If they had, it would have made me think about what was foretold!

This isn't to guilt you into doing more. I'm betting your doing a lot now, and that you are doing the best you can. Yet if there is something on your heart to do, something about which you're passionate and isn't in conflict with the Scriptures but you haven't acted on it, what are you waiting for? Maybe God is trying to tell you something.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 1:18, Acts 11:30, Acts 6:6, 1 Timothy 4:15

Lord God, thank You for the gifts You give to us. Help us to use them well in service to You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 9 January 2019

Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 1 Timothy 4:15-16 (NIV).

“God alone saves but Christians can be the instruments God uses to bring about the salvation of others. Salvation is both an event and a process.” That’s a quote from my Concordia study bible, the one to which I most often refer when writing these blog posts. The process I use to write here is fairly simple. I pray, then I research which verses (the Concordia says) are similar to the one for today. After that, I read those verses, sometimes in several bible versions. Usually that brings out some thoughts about the topic, so I begin to write. I try to refer to previous posts so that the new one builds off the old one because the verses in of the Bible are part of a larger picture as well. I read draft post aloud several times to make sure it sounds ok; I keep it to 500 words or less. Then the end product is posted to WordPress, then to social media, and finally to email. At the end, I copy my work for next time.

Why go to all this trouble? You. You’ve entrusted some of your valuable 24/7 to reading these words, so I want to give you my best. And I want it to be doctrinally sound. It’s not about me; it’s not for me. It’s for you, so that you might be encouraged, strengthened in some small way in your walk with Jesus because we all walk with Him.

He’s walking in life with each of us, providing for all of us, loving all of us even when we don’t love Him. Our foremost job here on Earth is to worship Him, and one of the ways we do that is by using our myriad gifts from writing to welding to talking on the phone. Everything we do can be an act of worship if we do it with reverence for God. The more we do this, the more we see that it’s not about me. It’s Him, for you. It’s serving Him and that strengthens us. As we learn that life is about Him and eternity, we see how His salvation really is both a thing He did for us and then a lifelong process of following Him.

You’ll do that in your own way because you have your own gifts and walk. God has saved you through His Son, Jesus, yet He wants to use you to live your life, use your talents, to serve His kingdom as only you can. It’s because of others, because this is also a living, life-long thing. How will you do your part today?

For further reading: Romans 11:14, 1 Timothy 5:1

Lord Jesus, help me to do my part for You today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 10 January 2019

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity. 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV).

Be fair and square with people. Maybe that's another way of saying these verses. Or perhaps it's the Golden Rule: do for others as we'd have them do for us. Treat others like family, and treat them with dignity and respect. Respect your elders; mentor those younger; treat with dignity and kindness.

My Tuesday online bible group; my wife, kids, their spouses, and our grandkids; my sister and in-laws (father, mother, sister, brother); my work team; strangers at Kroger (or friends); the phone-reading guy hanging out in the left lane; the hundreds of people in an airport this weekend. What do all these folks have in common?

Paul reminds me that I'm to treat them like family, with dignity and respect. Go and do thou likewise.

Treat EVERYONE with respect, but especially those older than us. Years ago my family visited the World War II memorial in Washington DC. My girls were young teenagers, pretty and vivacious. A bunch of World War II veterans wanted to have their pictures taken with these two girls, who seemed understandably wary of the funny old men. My daughters came to me and I told them "go back and do it. These men are why this memorial is here. They fought so you wouldn't have to, and in a few years, they'll all be gone because they're very old now." So the girls went back and the pictures were snapped. In the process, they talked and they learned. Now, years later, the youngest of those veterans would be in their nineties; most are probably gone.

Memorials are wonderful but we don't need them to pay respect. We should pay our respects to those who came before us simply by listening to them, by befriending them, by spending time with them. This is what God commands us to do as far back as Leviticus 19. I recently read that, when an old person dies, a library of priceless information dies with them. God gave us the gift of each other and these geriatric treasures we call "grandparents" so that we could learn from them and learn how to age ourselves. More than that, He gave us our elders and forebearers so that we might learn to honor and better know Him: the eternal Ancient of Days who was and is and is to come.

When you meet a senior citizen today, thank them. And when you see that guy in the left lane, no matter how old he is, be nice.

For further reading: Matthew 7:12, Luke 10:37, Titus 2:2, Leviticus 19:32, Titus 2:6, Revelation 1:8, 1 Timothy 5:3.

Lord, thank You for old people. Help me to treat them – and all people – with dignity and respect so that I can honor you in doing so.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 15 January 2019

Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. 1 Timothy 5:3 (NIV).

This section of 1 Timothy talks about how to live with elders, slaves and widows. Let's extrapolate a little. How about we pay attention to all people in need? Yep: going there. As always, if this makes you feel guilty, stop reading. Go talk with Jesus and get it off your heart. Drill down as to specifically why you feel guilty. After that, come back and start where you left off because Jesus is telling us here, through Paul, that we are supposed to look out for each other.

Especially widows. When you consider that women in ancient Israel (and all over the Mediterranean actually) were treated as chattel, the exhortation to recognize and help widows in need is understandable. A married woman would share much of the status of her husband, who would provide for her and care for her. Yet when he died, especially if she had no other family, a widow could quickly become destitute. She could find herself on the streets, selling herself or worse just to get by. Starvation was (and is) real and a real possibility; it was a savage time.

Kind of like today, especially overseas. But let's not kid ourselves. The need is real and acute here in the good old US of A.

My mom was a widow for 17 years. When Dad died, he left her with enough income to live a good life. Her home was paid off; her bills were small; her transportation was reliable. Yet I still found myself feeling that I needed to provide for her because she was my mom and, well, because she was a widow. I hadn't even really absorbed verses like this one: I simply knew it was something that I should do.

Flash forward to now. Is your mom or sister or friend a widow? Jesus tells us to help them, to recognize their predicament and, to preserve their dignity, help them. If it means opening our homes, do it; if it means opening our wallets, do it. If it's praying, bringing food, listening, helping with work, anything: do it. Then let's apply the lesson to the bigger picture. Homeless on the street? Help them. Someone in prison who is despondent? Visit and listen. Neighbor loading a moving truck? Pitch in. Paul's advice to help widows in Asia has much larger applications in our lives than just helping women whose husbands have died. Remember Jesus' command: love the Lord God with all your heart, then love your neighbor as yourself. What better way to live this out than to give help when & where it's needed.

For further reading: Mark 12:30-31, 1 Timothy 5:4.

Father God, show me widows and others in my path today who I can help.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 16 January 2019

The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 1 Timothy 5:4-5 (NIV).

In our world, even one slip-up can be devastating. It only takes a single one-night-stand to get a disease. It only takes one rejection to have your hopes and dreams dashed during a vulnerable time. The world is a tough place and jumping out into it is even tougher. Keep our eyes on God and not the world around us. Is this blog-post going to be full of platitudes and bland aphorisms? No; I don't like those either beyond them being reminders of truths we need to hear. Yet there are things in those platitudes that matter because people are in real need all around us.

Losing someone you love is the most devastating thing on earth. We can deal with almost anything but when the person on whom we rely most is gone, our entire foundation is destroyed. "I can't imagine losing your spouse and not having faith." My mom said those words to me about a year after my Dad died. Mom had faith and was still the most independent-minded person I've ever known. And while I don't think she spent night and day praying and asking God for help, in her own way and time she did those things. She told me that she prayed and talked with God when she was alone until, one day, she had the thought "Grace, you can do this." That was after about six months in the fog of grief. And, for her, that was the start of getting better, of knowing that God had given her all she needed to keep moving forward in life. She did for another 16 years.

In Ephesians, Paul reminds us to honor our parents. That can be extended to assume he's telling us to honor both our parents and our other forbears and elders. Then, in Romans, he reminds us to be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that we may know the will of God. I've never been completely alone, even during the times when it felt that way. And I have dived deep into living for pleasure and gotten out of it worse. In all these cases, it's because I didn't extend honor, either to God or to anyone involved. I strayed from working to let God renew my heart and mind, and I'm not even a widow.

Imagine how much worse off things could have been if I had just lost my spouse. In that light, Paul's exhortations are common-sense Godly advice.

For further reading: Ephesians 6:1-2, Romans 12:2, 1 Peter 3:5, 1 Timothy 5:6.

Lord, help me to give honor to my elders, to live for You in all I do today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 17 January 2019

Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever. 1 Timothy 5:7-8 (NIV).

Paul continues his advice to Timothy concerning widows; this actually continues through verse 16. Yet here is his most plainspoken advice on how said advice also applies to how we interact with others (in addition to those widowed).

I grew up in a family of four. My parents were good, middle-class parents, themselves from modest backgrounds (his in the family of a Philadelphia civil servant with four children, hers in a small, Minnesota farm-town family of five). My sister and I were the only kids, and while we didn't live extravagantly, we did live well. We always had a house, even if it was hopelessly cluttered (my parents loved collectibles). We always had food on the table, the bills paid (though sometimes barely so), reliable transportation, and church. We took vacations to see the sights, traveling more of the country than most of my peers. And we were supported in school; my parents cared deeply about education. Most importantly, my sister and I can say that we were loved. Sometimes it was chilly love and sometimes we struggled just to hold together as a family, but we always knew we were loved.

In fact, that could be put on my parents' gravestone up in Oklahoma: Mom and Dad did the best they could. They did what they could with the talents and resources God gave them. They provided for us everything they could, even when it seemed out of step. I look around at so many broken families today and I sometimes forget to say "thank you" again to God that mine never ended up that way. It wasn't easy; there were times Mom and Dad could have cashed it in, but they didn't. They believed in each other; they believed in us; they believed in God (at least on Sundays, or when the music was particularly good. Mom and Dad both loved good choral and church music).

My childhood wasn't glamorous or thrilling but it was good. I always knew what "home" felt like, and I knew how to build a home when I built a family of my own. I feel sorry for those who don't, those whose parents didn't provide, or didn't care to. I hope they know that there's still a chance for them. God counsels all of us that, even when our earthly families fail us, He never does. Today's verse reminds us that we need to care for each other, especially in our families. Aside from loving God, it's our primary mission on Earth.

For further reading: 2 Peter 2:1, Jude 4, 1 Timothy 5:9.

My Lord, thank You for my parents and my childhood family. Thank You for inspiring them to do the best they could and to know You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 18 January 2019

No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good deeds. As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense, saying things they ought not to. So I counsel younger widows to marry, to have children, to manage their homes and to give the enemy no opportunity for slander. Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan. 1 Timothy 5:9-15 (NIV).

This was obviously quite a problem for the early church: how to care for widows. Life expectancy in first century Judea was little better than it had ever been. A man or woman in decent health could reasonably expect to live into their late TWENTIES. Yes, you read that right. If you lived beyond that age, you had access to sanitation, decent food, shelter, and you were the clear exception. In Rome, people reasonably lived into their thirties or forties (mainly because many Romans had those basic needs satisfied). Imagine how people would have viewed you if you were old, like in your seventies or eighties. In a patriarchal society like Judea (like all societies of that time actually) it would make sense that caring for widows of all ages would, then, have been of paramount concern. Due to that short life expectancy, there would have been many.

Cue in on that last verse, though, because it matters for all of us today. "Give the enemy no opportunity for slander." Satan is a coward who doesn't attack us in our strong places. That's how he operated in Jesus' time; it's how he works now. Satan slanders us, weakens us, angers us, uses our emotions against us. Folks who lose loved ones are especially vulnerable to falling away from the faith. The enemy attacks us in our weak spots at such opportune times, so it's especially important that we support those who have suffered loss.

It's our mission in life to love God with all our hearts and to love our neighbors as ourselves. One way to do that is to care for each other when we're in need, when we're vulnerable. People die around us every day. Let's each work today to do what we can to help our neighbors and loved ones when that happens.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 5:16.

Lord, show me someone today who I can help in Your good name.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 21 January 2019

The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 1 Timothy 5:17 (NIV).

Respect your elders: we've all learned this maxim. It's Biblically based; this you can see for yourself. Yet it's probably the best common sense advice we could learn apart from "Love the Lord your God."

I'm in my early fifties now, so the realization that I have probably lived most of my life has finally hit my radar. Statistically speaking, I won't be here fifty-two years from now. That realization is making me take stock of what older people have to offer. Not long ago I read that, when an old person dies, a library of priceless information dies with them; I believe I may have shared that not long ago.

Previously shared or not, it's true. Just in life experiences, our world's most valuable resource may just be those who have lived in it for a long time. Doesn't it make sense, then, that we should respect them? Sure, there are many older folks who say and do things that aren't worthy of respect; see "US government." Yet the vast majority of older people have lived honorable lives, learned valuable lessons, seen and done things that the younger generations would be wise to learn while they still have these rugged senior citizens available.

Consider this: most churches are staffed by folks who have been around the block. The church councils, session boards, or committees are, in most cases, staffed by people with experience. More often than not, those people are senior citizens, mainly because they have the time and commitment to serve. Those are things many younger families usually don't have in abundance. This is also true for election workers, members of the VFW and American Legion, the Ladies' Auxilliary, the Rotary and Lions and Kiwanis and Knights of Columbus organizations.

If the (largely) elder people who staff these civic organizations that keep our communities running do so successfully, shouldn't that mean that we should give them the respect they are due? That's what Paul is saying. The people who step up to keep the church running by performing vital organization tasks are worthy of double respect, double honor. The people who work to keep civic organizations operating are worthy of respect, honor, and deference. Your grandparents, the old guy who won't get out of the left lane, that woman with a walker: God asks us to respect them because gray hair is a crown of glory.

In a world focused on worshipping the ideas and actions of the young (especially in pop culture and politics), it's good to remember Paul's reminder that young people don't grow older without usually becoming wiser.

For further reading: Proverbs 16:31, 1 Timothy 5:18.

Lord Jesus, thank You for older people, for people who have lived to become wiser. Show me ways today that I can honor them and their knowledge and experience.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 22 January 2019

For Scripture says, "Do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." 1 Timothy 5:18 (NIV).

It's important to note that Paul says these words in the context of honoring elders, especially church workers; let's not lose sight of that as we look at other ways to apply this. Paul was quoting Jesus when he said "the worker deserves his wages." In the context of talking about elders and people who serve others, what do you think that means?

Perhaps it means that the 'payment' due to those who serve the others is respect. Jesus earned that payment for us. The concept of "dissing" someone comes from the 90s hip-hop culture in urban America. "Don't disrespect me, or my posse." Yet the mavens of pop culture don't recognize that they are simply observing the same advice Paul gave here, namely to respect those who are older and wiser because Jesus made it so their lives of service merit respect. Even more, Paul is really extending the concept of the Fifth Commandment to honor our parents. Respect isn't something you earn because of the bling, the Mercedes, or the fancy clothes. It's earned by exhibiting God's wisdom.

Years ago, one of my old bosses used to say that we should 'listen to the graybeards.' In fact, all throughout the military, the enlisted ranks culture of learning from the senior NCOs goes back generations. It's one of the things that sets the military apart from civilian ventures: an institutionalized system of formal respect for those who have advanced before and over your ranks. Most times, those senior NCOs earned their positions through merit and hard work. In my experience, a young guy could learn a lot from watching what a master sergeant did. Those old guys were wise to the ways of the world.

So it is with our church elders. They (usually) volunteer to serve because years of experience have taught them the value of serving Jesus in serving others. Shouldn't we respect that?

Last, what did Paul mean by saying "do not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain?" That's taken directly from Moses' reiterated commands of the law in Deuteronomy. In Paul's context, he's talking about ministers who 'farm' a field of believers. Some bear bountiful crops; others not so much. Yet we should do what we can to make sure they aren't held back. Most church staff members aren't paid (or aren't paid much). So, when they're enthusiastic (as most are), we should feed that enthusiasm by encouragement, prayer, and support.

Next time you see someone serving in your church – or even in any group – thank them for what they do.

For further reading: Deuteronomy 25:4, Luke 10:7, 1 Corinthians 9:7-9, Exodus 20:12, 1 Timothy 5:19.

My Lord, thank You for elders who you put in my path today. Help me to learn from them, and to respect them.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 23 January 2019

Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. But those elders who are sinning you are to reprove before everyone, so that the others may take warning. 1 Timothy 5:19-20 (NIV).

God keeps it real. There's a real temptation to think of the Bible as a bunch of quaint and helpful ancient stories but not applicable in our time. Check that temptation at the door, my friend. Your God, your Savior Jesus, is real. He's in your face and heart. He deals with contemporary problems in our day and time the same as He did in His own day and time in 1st Century Judea (indeed, all the way back to Eden). It's impossible to think that Jesus' Spirit lives and works through us and not accept that He's dealing with the issues we're dealing with as we deal with them.

One of those is that some of our church leaders – indeed, our leaders in any group – are sinners like me and you. Some of them (us) have done some pretty awful things.

There's the teacher who's having an affair. There's the treasurer who occasionally dips into the till because bills are tight in their home. There's the pious elder who's a model of propriety but gives the single-finger salute to that guy in the left lane. There's the leader who teaches Sunday School but is also known for some pretty colorful language with their 'posse' or online. Could be you, could be me; could also be the people we've entrusted to run our churches, projects, and other endeavors. Sometimes truly destructive behavior intersects with our lives.

How does Paul remind us to deal with that? Matthew 18: go to them privately and confront them with what's on your heart. If they won't listen, then gradually escalate, yet do so with the heart of wanting to be Jesus' representative. In all this, we are to act in love, in respect. We can despise what someone does without disrespecting them. There's usually a side or story we don't fully know.

For these times, God gives us those instructions (from Jesus Himself) in Matthew 18. Speak privately, take a witness, and if there's no repentance (or worse), go public. Again, do it all with caring, no other motivation.

Allah wouldn't do that. Buddha would have you ignore it. Many churches would say it isn't enough. But God gives us practical ways to deal with delicate situations while doing so through the love of His Son in His Spirit. Got skin? Got sin; we sinners do some wicked things. Jesus loves us anyway, then moves our hearts so we may change. How real is it, too, that He doesn't simply smite us but offers us a path home instead?

For further reading: Matthew 18:15-17, 2 Timothy 4:2, Acts 11:30, Titus 1:13, Deuteronomy 13:11, 1 Timothy 5:21.

My Lord, You are worthy of praise for giving us ways to deal with each other!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 24 January 2019

I charge you, in the sight of God and Christ Jesus and the elect angels, to keep these instructions without partiality, and to do nothing out of favoritism. 1 Timothy 5:22 (NIV).

I don't believe anyone has ever given me a charge to do something quite the way Paul does in this verse. Perhaps that it's because the phrase is antiquated. Or perhaps it simply hasn't ever happened to me.

Never the less, Paul uses his words carefully to give emphasis that this is important. Remember, he's been giving instructions on how to deal with elders, even wayward ones. Here, he emphasizes impartiality, being fair and square in how we do that. That matters, especially in our world today. How many times do we hear about whether/not something is fair? That's usually when it affects us: we think it's supremely important. Imagine the importance when you're 'the other guy' under the microscope.

Think about it. You're an elder, a person respected for what you know, what you've done, your wisdom. You know in your heart that these things for which you're praised are really from Jesus, that it's He, not you, who's worthy of that praise. You're at a point where you're achieving through Him. And then something happens. You do something, something happens to you, something is said; whatever it is. All of a sudden, in the eyes of those around you, you aren't who you used to be. To others, you're someone different because something has changed. You're off your pedestal.

That is a time of shock and disillusionment. Paul reminds us that, especially in those times, we should be impartial and fair, that we shouldn't play favorites or do anything with pre-conceived notions. That's a time to listen, to consider, to be still and know Jesus is God. It isn't up to us to judge anyone except for how we'll act upon it. Paul knew that, so his God-inspired advice was to administer justice. That requires impartiality and no favoritism.

Brother (or sister), that's a long row to hoe, especially since our natural inclination is to judge, to be partial, to play favorites. Yet if we are to act as instruments of God's justice, then we must train ourselves – more appropriately, we must let Him train us – to do what's contrary to our human (and sinful) nature. I'm not saying we need to be sympathetic when people transgress, only that we need to listen for understanding, then be patient and fair.

After all, God Himself once was tried in a kangaroo court where a stacked jury of theologians were partial to the status quo and were willing to kill to maintain it. Knowing that, we should strive to be much fairer than any Pharisee.

For further reading: Psalm 46:1, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Timothy 5:21.

Lord Almighty, all praise to You for fairness. Inspire it in us today, especially when we must deal with superiors who let us down.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 28 January 2019

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not share in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure.
1 Timothy 5:22 (NIV).

It's important to remember that Paul says this verse in the context of talking about dealing with elders. Here, he's advising Timothy to not be too quick to appoint them. After all, these are the people who will manage the affairs of the church proper (in service to the church eternal). Such people should be upright and able to prove their merit for such a position. When Paul talks about the laying on of hands, that's the thing to which he's referring. Laying on of hands is an ancient custom signifying God's blessing being laid upon the recipient. It's a gesture representing the infusion of the Holy Spirit into a person and the commission of that person for their task in the church. If you attend a pastoral ordination or installation, or the installation of new church officers, in many (maybe most) churches you'll see laying on of hands.

But there's a caution here as well. Ephesians 5:11 warns us to "have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." Those of us in Christ's church are to be His light in this dark world. We shouldn't be quick to empower those who aren't ready for power, but we also shouldn't be blind as to the effects of darkness in our churches. One way to combat that darkness is personal responsibility. If you think about it, teachers, elders, and ministers can't do their proper jobs if you and I don't accept the mantle of personal responsibility. Being Jesus' light starts with us, me and you, regardless of elders or pastors (who are human like anyone else). Carrying that light means both shining it into the darkness as well as responsible use of it. Sometimes we're called to help others in dire need; sometimes it's best to keep away and pray. Both can be ways of shining His light. That's advice I wish I had heeded so many years ago.

This isn't one of those "rules full of things Christians can't do." It's a hard truth. It's a tough piece of keeping it real. There really are things that are bad for us physically and spiritually. We do well to steer clear of them and, where need be, expose them as dangerous so that others can do the same. That isn't to say we're supposed to be tattletales or judgmental Pharisees who look down their noses at others. But we are to be judicious, cautious, and mindful when we encounter things that are sinful or even skirt the limits of propriety.

You know, like an elder.

For further reading: Acts 6:6, Ephesians 5:11, Psalm 18:26, 1 Timothy 5:23.

Lord God, I praise You for Your good instructions. I sometimes fail at following them. Thank You for a chance to do better today, and I ask for Your help.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 29 January 2019

Stop drinking only water, and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses. 1 Timothy 5:23 (NIV).

Paul now moves from advice on dealing with elders to a bit of homeopathic medical advice. It should be noted that the Bible doesn't condemn drinking alcohol; Verse 23 gives support to that. What the Bible does condemn is overuse and drunkenness, and it should. Nothing good comes out of being drunk. Yes, I've done it many times, and I agree with that statement. Scripture repeatedly condemns drunkenness; it gives examples of bad things that result from drunkenness. Think Noah and his sons, Lot's daughters, and repeated exhortations throughout both Testaments as to the negative effects of drinking too much.

Here endeth the 'preachiness' of the sermon. I'd rather focus on the positive aspect of this verse because, once again, it talks about personal responsibility. It's as if Paul is saying "you're a grown man. Be responsible about this."

In most parts of the world in the first century, good sanitation didn't exist. As long as a well wasn't tainted, it was generally safe to use, and people knew how to boil water, even how to filter it to make it clean. Yet modern water filtration didn't exist for another two thousand years. You could get sick and die from bad water; you still can. Alcohol was safer. It's simply history, not advocacy.

Mind you, if someone prefers to avoid alcohol because of the negative connotations associated with it, they're doing a Godly thing. If churches prefer grape juice to alcohol for Holy Communion, they're doing a Godly thing. They're removing an obstacle to the Lord's Supper for people who can't or won't drink wine. And if someone insists that they simply don't like wine, well, there's nothing wrong with that.

About communion: it's significant that Jesus used wine at the first Lord's Supper. There's good debate about whether that was true wine or simply strong grape juice. Yet most versions of the Bible say "wine" so I take it that it was wine He used to give His blood to us. It matters that the Son of God used wine constructively. So should we.

Finally, wine can have good effects on the body. A small amount of alcohol does calm nerves, settle a stomach, and builds immunity against the common cold. Periodic small drinks of alcohol can lower one's risk for both diabetes and heart disease. But to be honest, so do many other things that don't involve booze.

Whatever your position, live it out responsibly and to the glory of God.

For further reading: Genesis 9:18-29, Genesis 19:31-32, Proverbs 20:1, Isaiah 28:7, Romans 13:13, Mark 14:23, Proverbs 31:7, 1 Timothy 5:24.

Lord, praise to You for wine and Spirits. Forgive our misuse of them, thank You for giving them, and help us to always use them to Your benefit.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 30 January 2019

The sins of some are obvious, reaching the place of judgment ahead of them; the sins of others trail behind them. In the same way, good deeds are obvious, and even those that are not obvious cannot remain hidden forever. 1 Timothy 5:24-25 (NIV).

There are sinful things you did years ago that only later became known. In verse 24, Paul (obviously) refers to sin, and his message that 'the wheel in the sky keeps on turning' is true; thank you Journey. God does indeed see what we do, and if we reject Him, eventually the sins of our past will come back to haunt us. Yet that need not always have negative connotations. Sometimes (actually, most times) God uses the outcomes of our sins to shape a better future.

I know a health information system called "XCelys." It was called "Diamond" before that. Diamond, like a few other systems, is used by health insurance companies to process health information and medical claims. The last time I worked with it was 2005, when I unwillingly left a health plan in Montana (I was let go). After that, I learned other systems like MetaVance, Facets, QNXT, EasyCap, and a few others. Yet in 2016 I found myself working in a call center in Paris, Texas, far from any health insurance company, using Xcelys, the old Diamond, and teaching long-forgotten aspects of it to strangers so they could better perform their jobs.

The job from which I was let go had come to me as the outcome of a chain of events that started with things I did in New England. Families were devastated, friends alienated, and vocations affected just to name a few. I worked to put those sins in the past and "move on;" don't we all? Yet Jesus had other plans in mind. Good things resulted, including where I am today. I have a second career (maybe third) working for a company called HealthEdge, and my family is thriving. For this I'm thankful. It's all God.

We catch on the 'hidden sins' message in verse 24, yet it's just as important to remember the verse 25 message that our Savior uses our hidden good works as well. Perhaps those good works came as a result of our sins. In my own life, God has woven my long road through the sins I embraced and on to better ways of living; I bet you could say something similar. No matter what we do, God sees it and is using it for His work and our benefit. Our lives journey along paths that are connected to both sin and good times, yet wherever we find ourselves, God has us there for His good purpose.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 3:8, 1 Timothy 6:1.

Lord Jesus, all praise to You for Your plans in our lives. I'm sorry for my past sins, thank You that You used them to do better, and ask You to guide me today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 31 January 2019

All who are under the yoke of slavery should consider their masters worthy of full respect, so that God's name and our teaching may not be slandered. 1 Timothy 6:1 (NIV).

Slavery was officially outlawed in the United States on Dec 6, 1865 when Georgia ratified the 13th Amendment to the US Constitution. That amendment was ratified in less than a year; 309 days, and only 240 days after Lee surrendered to Grant at Appomattox. Yet 154 years later, slavery is still a sore subject in America for many reasons.

Did you know that, even under slavery, black culture was the most devout, Christian culture in the nation? As a matter of fact, all through out the history of America, it is the African American community that has held closest to the core values of Christianity. That's an amazing fact, and an amazing testament to both the power of Jesus Christ and the strength of character of good people who were subjugated but followed Jesus anyway. Today, much time in our society, especially in our popular culture, is devoted to doing what we can to make amends for the national sin of slavery, even though it ended so many generations ago. Why is that?

Perhaps the answer to that is found in re-reading verse 1. How could any people not feel the guilt of history on them when they see that those subjugated as slaves often kept Paul's hard advice better than the advantaged population that subjugated them? Indeed, it's a tough thing to do, considering your 'masters', often regarded as adversaries, worthy of respect. Yet that's what Paul asks us to do.

Indeed, slavery was commonplace in Paul's time. The Romans and Greeks conquered vast reaches of territory and enslaved those they conquered (if they even let them live). Every nation in history, up to that point, had practiced and known slavery. To break the cycle of hatred, Jesus commanded us to respect our masters, giving them honor as God's representatives. A slave master God's representative? Yes.

That is nether an acceptance nor toleration of slavery. It's simply a way of honoring God by honoring the people put over us. Not many people in America are enslaved today; that 13th Amendment outlawed it. Yet a dishonorable truth is that slavery – human trafficking, prostitution, drug runners, even people in common workplaces – still does indeed exist in the United States. In fact, it exists in many areas of the world. We who aren't enslaved should use our righteous position to work against slavery. And when we do encounter it, it's up to us to remind those afflicted to give God honor in all aspects of their lives so that they may draw nearer to Him in true freedom.

For further reading: Ephesians 6:5, Titus 2:5 & 8, Colossians 3:22-24, 1 Timothy 6:2.

Lord, Your example is for us to not enslave others. Help us to honor you by honoring those above us, even our 'masters.'

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 5 February 2019

Those who have believing masters should not show them disrespect just because they are fellow believers. Instead, they should serve them even better because their masters are dear to them as fellow believers and are devoted to the welfare of their slaves. 1 Timothy 6:2 (NIV).

Perhaps none of us in America can imagine this kind of predicament: being a slave who follows Jesus while serving a master who also follows Jesus. It's true. We can't truly imagine it because we aren't slaves. There is no American citizen alive today who was an American slave, is the child or grandchild of a slave, or has any personal experience with legal slavery in the United States. It was outlawed as a legal institution 154 years ago. Yet, back then, it was very real. There were real slaves and masters believing in the same Jesus while one lived in cruel servitude to the other. Yes, slavery still does exist as a criminal exercise on this planet, even within the United States. But that isn't what we're talking about (yet hold the thought).

Perhaps the closest parallel we of the 21st Century could draw is supporting a boss who you know believes in God. We aren't talking about supporting someone who says they believe yet says or does things to rebel against Him. I'm more talking about supporting a boss who is harsh, tough, demanding. Perhaps a leader or manager who insists that you always give your best, always hold to the highest standards, always demand more from you.

You know, like Jesus would. Jesus could be hard and demanding of people who were egregious offenders, people like the Pharisees. Yet He was also demanding of His closest friends, even as He usually interacted with a softer approach. You and I, we like to say that we'd give Jesus worship, faith and (at least) respect, right?

Perhaps He has given us hard taskmasters in our lives to serve purposes that we don't fully see. Perhaps He allows others in our lives to push us to do things that reveal the best in us; iron sharpening iron. Perhaps God works on us, collectively and individually, through authorities (as my pastor friend, Phil, recently reminded in a sermon). Perhaps we should respect the boss, the CEO, the leader, the US President, because God is working even through them. Perhaps God even still allows slavery in our world so that others might be reached by Him, through it.

Perhaps? Yes. Yes indeed, Jesus does all these things to us and for us and for our overall good in His Kingdom. Knowing that, shouldn't we do our best to render respect and honor to those above us even if they sometimes seem like slave masters? Perhaps. You know the answer.

For further reading: Philemon 16, Proverbs 27:17, 1 Timothy 6:3.

Wonderful Savior, we often fail You through things like slavery. Thanks for Your patience, and teach us today to respect authorities, bosses, and leaders over us.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 6 February 2019

These are the things you are to teach and insist on. If anyone teaches otherwise and does not agree to the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and to godly teaching, they are conceited and understand nothing. They have an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk, evil suspicions and constant friction between people of corrupt mind, who have been robbed of the truth and who think that godliness is a means to financial gain. 1 Timothy 6:2-5 (NIV).

True confession time: I fail at this. Paul could be talking about me. I like to debate, I like to discuss things. Mostly it's because I love to learn, even from those with whom I disagree. Yet that sometimes devolves into arguments, especially online. I sometimes don't know when to let up. I may be getting better at holding my tongue, but that isn't God's standard. His standard is "love your neighbor as yourself after you love Me first."

To be honest, arguing online about politics, religion, and other topics of similar small stature isn't godly teaching.

Paul reminds Timothy that the things he has said in this letter are godly teaching. It's not just from Paul: it's the teaching of the Lord Jesus Christ, revealed to Paul and shared here. He reminds Timothy that not everyone will heed this teaching. He reminds us of the same thing, and that seems even more apparent in the age of social media and world-wide internet. Finally, Paul reminds both Timothy and us that there is no such thing as the Gospel of Jesus that will make you rich. The so-called 'prosperity gospel' is no good news at all. And it isn't godly.

And that's where I come back to admit, again, that I fail at these things. My actions don't measure up well against Paul's admonitions, and my failings as a Christian are ungodly words and deeds that bring discredit on my Savior.

How about you? If Jesus came back today, could you (or I) stand before Him and say "yep, Lord, I followed You in everything I said and did?" I couldn't say that; I doubt you could either. We're broken. Paul's words convict us because they're true.

Yet we can't leave it there. When we confess these things to Jesus, He is always forgiving. He heals the broken us. He always reminds us "I paid for it. I did everything that was needed. You can let it go now; I've got this." Instead of constantly re-regretting the ungodly sins we confess, we are free to move forward. THAT godly teaching is the foundation of everything Paul says. That teaching turns our confessions of ungodly things into knowledge that will help us live forever.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 3:4&8, Titus 1:15, 1 Timothy 6:6.

Amazing Lord, You are holy. I'm not. Thank You for Your forgiveness, and help me to always remember it – and share it – today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 7 February 2019

But godliness with contentment is great gain. 1 Timothy 6:6 (NIV).

Contrast this with the admonition Paul shared in the previous 5 verses, especially verse 5. In those verses, Paul advises Timothy that we can be slaves to many things, but that we should respect our 'masters' while shying away from anything that causes controversy and strife. Including love of money.

We aren't going to obsess about the so called nobility of poverty. If you've ever been financially poor, it doesn't feel very noble. Yet there is a quality about not having something, about being in want, that is clarifying, constructive, even godly. You know it: contentment.

I'm going out on a limb and saying that we of the 21st century, and not just Americans, have a hard time with contentment. Go into any American town and you'll find people who, when they get satisfied, quickly then get un-satisfied. Yet that's the case in most other countries as well. We aren't content with what we have. We want more, and 'more' can have many meanings. Money, possessions, status, jobs, relationships; you get the picture. It's no stretch to say that we as the human race spend much of our lives discontented. We're dissatisfied because we want more; sometimes we're even in want, poor.

Paul tells us to hold the mirror in front of us and fix our eyes on Jesus. He has put His soul inside us to live through us and act through us whether we're poor or rich, satisfied or dissatisfied, content or not. He asks us to be content with who we are, where we are, what we are given (and what we achieve) because He then wants us to live godly lives in service to Him. He asks us to use our talents for His work and let Him take care of the rest. Part of "the rest" includes how we feel about it. If we let Him take control, it doesn't take long before we discover we're content. And that's when He really gets down to business. His work can take off when we realize we can be content with Him at all times because He'll never leave or forsake us (see Hebrews 13).

Are you content? Do you feel unsatisfied with where you are or what you have or even who you are? Have you taken your thoughts and feelings about this to God? Rich or poor, achiever or still a work in progress, there is great value in being content with whoever you are and wherever God has you. You're there for a reason: HIS reason. And that's always something with which to be content and satisfied.

For further reading: Philippians 4:11, Hebrews 13:5, 1 Timothy 6:7.

Wonderful Lord, I confess I'm not always content. I lose my focus and take it off you. Thank You for a new day to re-focus on you, to realize contentment because of You, and I ask You to help me help others with the same.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 11 February 2019

For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 1 Timothy 6:7 (NIV).

Donald Trump will die with nothing. Nancy Pelosi will die with nothing. Warren Buffet, George Soros, Carlos Slim, Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos and every other billionaire and millionaire on the planet (as well as every politician, factory worker, and blogger) will die with nothing. You will die with nothing; me too. When we die, we will return to God as He sent us: with nothing of this world in our hands or hearts.

Go ahead and have a happy Monday, now. Especially if the weather is gloomy and cold. Have fun with that.

No, really. Have a lot of fun with that. If you re-read Paul's statement, you'll find it's liberating, maybe the most freedom-loving thing you'll read all week.

If you love to have every surface in your house gilded in 24 carat gold, you're in for a surprise because heaven will be full of golden beauty. If you love being able to use every resource at your disposal for the betterment of society, you'll be thrilled with heaven because that'll be one of our primary jobs there. If you want to hobnob with real power, you're going to love heaven because you get one on one time with the ultimate power in the universe, God Almighty in His three persons.

All for being buck naked.

Yep. We are usually buried in some kind of clothing, and who knows if we wear those same outfits when we meet God in the hereafter. But we are each born naked, without knowledge or possessions or history, and we will each exit this world going back to God who made us without possessions. Our history will get us to that moment, but it won't matter when we're with Jesus. Our knowledge will culminate in our deaths, but it won't matter when we meet Jesus, the source of all knowledge. That's a good thing because there are things here – like sickness and anger and war and pain – that have no place in heaven. The things of this world, the stuff, won't matter either.

All we have here will be for nothing. Your prized bird's-eye maple furniture: can't take it. The books you've published, written or read: can take them. Land you pay for: it stays. The car in your garage, duds on your back, bling on your bod: they all stay here.

We take nothing with us to the afterlife just as we brought no possessions into this world. And that's a good thing because the only thing that will matter then is Jesus. Everything that comes after meeting Him will be extra, will be a blessing, just as it is here, will be a gift from Him. Thank God we go there with nothing. THAT is true freedom.

For further reading: Job 1:21, Psalm 49:17, Ecclesiastes 5:15, 1 Timothy 6:8.

Thank You Lord Jesus for taking me home without anything from here!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 12 February 2019

But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. 1 Timothy 6:8 (NIV).

That seems like a pretty low standard, doesn't it, just being content with food and clothing? Unless of course you're homeless or don't have a coat in the cold weather. Or if you're one of the 815 million people who are, according to the United Nations, starving or undernourished every day (<https://www.worldhunger.org/world-hunger-and-poverty-facts-and-statistics/>). If you live in Africa or much of India, you desperately need clean water. If you're in the former USSR or Africa or much of South America, you need reliable medical care. If you're in North Korea, you need everything.

The writer of Hebrews tells us to be content in all things because, in all things and at all times, God is with us. He promised to never leave or forsake us whether we're in plenty or deadly want. And the writer of Proverbs 30 (most like a man named Agur) tells us that the only thing he really needs is daily bread. Do the jump to what Jesus said about not living on bread alone but on every word from God and we can quickly see that we don't even need food.

Sure, you'll wither and eventually die without food. Each of us will die someday, yet even as we are dying, God is with us, Jesus is within us, feeling what we feel and dying again a little bit at a time. As long as we have Jesus, NOTHING else matters, not even food and clothing. I've spent enough time with homeless people to know that Jesus can be found there as well, even among those who desperately need clothing and shelter.

Yet let's not be irresponsible and not live thankfully for what He provides us. When we do have food, we have a gift from God and we should be cognizant of that, 24/7. Disaster can come on us quickly (from weather, a tempestuous planet, or the wiles of hostile government). When that happens, our needs become even more acute; duh. That means now is the time to be thankful and content for food and clothing and water and shelter and all the things we take for granted when disasters are far away.

And let's also keep it real by remembering that, for those suffering in the gulags of North Korea, Cuba, Russia and China, God must seem far away. Ditto the streets of our cities, the hell-hardship of being trafficked, and in places where people don't have enough money to pay for food. Pray for them. Pray for ways you and I can tangibly help and be used as Jesus' hands to feed them. To give them the hope to be thankful as well.

For further reading: Hebrews 13:5, Proverbs 30:8, Matthew 4:4, 1 Timothy 6:9.

Blessed Lord, I often fail to be thankful for all You provide. Thank You for everything because You give everything. Show me a way to share my thankfulness and bounties today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 13 February 2019

Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 1 Timothy 6:9 (NIV).

I prefer to stay on the positive side of this verse. Those who know me well will find this surprising. In fact, my wife calls me “Eeyore” because I usually look on the downside of things. For Everyday Dave, this verse would be a great place to stop. It’s a lighthouse, warning of rocks just up ahead near the shore. We’ll probably mess it up anyway.

But that’s an outlook I want to change. The verse IS a lighthouse, and it’s one that calls us safely home. Lately, I’ve been daily contemplating Galatians 5, specifically the verses about the fruits of the Spirit. I read the verses and then look for ways to put them into practice each day, one per month while compounding them. January was love month; February is love and joy; March will be love, joy, and peace. You get the idea. If you haven’t ever really contemplated them, check out Galatians 5:22-23.

Then put them into action because they are the opposite of what Paul describes in verse 9. And if you think about it, they are the things Paul could say ARE worthy of our attention instead of desire for money, or running into the traps and temptations that lead to ruin and destruction. How many of us could avoid pitfalls of sin if we would simply find better things on which to focus? Let’s keep our eyes on the ways Jesus acts, then watch how things begin to improve.

If we are always looking for ways to get ahead, we probably will miss some of the signs around us that point us to ways we can get involved in what Jesus is doing. Just prior to this verse, Paul had reminded Timothy to be content with only what God provides for our most basic needs. Anything more than contentment can run the risk of walking the proud walk down the yellow brick road of temptation.

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.” Man, those are things worth showing off to the world. They’re the antidote to swallowing too much desire to get rich. When we talk about focusing on Jesus, a great way to start doing that is by focusing on ways we can let His Spirit remake us around these behaviors He exhibits. If we do that, when temptations come, it becomes easier to turn from them. That’s a wealth worth having.

Eeyore might just agree.

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, Proverbs 15:27, Proverbs 28:20, 1 Timothy 6:10.

Magnificent Lord, I’m not always a good follower. I’ve turned my attention away from You. Thank You for not turning away from Me, and I ask You to remake me in the ways of Your Spirit today.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 14 February 2019

For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. 1 Timothy 6:10 (NIV).

This is a greatly mis-quoted verse. Money itself isn't the root of all kinds of evil; money is just a tool, even a blessing, that God gives to us. Loving the tool more than the God who gives it is what is the root of all kinds of evil. It's the starting point down paths that lead away from Him. I know plenty of wealthy people who struggle to keep it together; I know plenty of poor people who do the same yet seem more contented (or is it resigned) with their lot.

Thank God I'm poor, right? I mean, I've been working for over 30 years now and I don't seem to get ahead. Well-paying jobs pay me well and it all seems to go out the door. At this pace, I'll be working until noon on the day of my funeral. Perhaps "poor" isn't the best word since, by the standards of poverty, my family is no where near that. Perhaps the better description is "monetarily challenged."

So be it. It doesn't keep me up at night. I choose a different path.

Don't get me wrong: I like a buck as much as the next guy. And I plan on working until I'm 72-74 to make sure I have done all I can to enjoy retirement. Besides, I enjoy work. I look at it as a blessing, as a way to use the talents God gave me to better do His work for me in the world. That includes my career.

Perhaps I've learned to be content with how God provides. That's a lesson that didn't come easily after watching my parents financially struggle for decades. Then making irresponsible choices with my own money, spending too much and investing too little. Yet through it all, the antidote to loving money is remembering that, every day, God provides abundantly whether we're monetarily poor or rich. It seems cliché but if you wake up, God has provided. If you're breathing, rested, drinking water, God has provided. No matter what condition you're in, if you're above room temperature, then God has provided all you need to start the day and meet what's up ahead. Let's be content with that first and let the rest come as it will.

Love God and not the money He provides. When you do that, it becomes easy to become content and realize He's going to provide whatever we need in all circumstances. That, and start to tithe. But let's save that subject for a different discussion.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 6:11.

Provider Lord, forgive me when I focus more on money and earning than on You and the blessings You give. Thank You for giving me today, and help me to use today wisely.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 18 February 2019

But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. 1 Timothy 6:11 (NIV).

Has anyone ever called you “man of God” (or “woman of God”)? That hasn’t happened to me very often, and that’s ok. I’d much rather wait to hear God say it to me Himself. In the meantime, I hope I don’t dishonor Him with what I do going forward. There isn’t much that can be done about bad things I’ve said and done in the past except pray with God and attempt restoration where possible. But going forward is unwritten paper. You and I can fill it with Godly pursuits.

Paul reminds us that those pursuits should include righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. In fact, if I could impart just one good lesson to my kids and grandkids, except for “love God, then love your neighbor,” it would be verse 11. Flee from unwholesome things because they’re trouble that can bring you down. While fleeing from them, pursue other things that are wholesome, and do it in a way that has you pursuing righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness.

That’s a recipe for a happy life, probably a long one. Yet whether it’s long or short, it’s using our time and talents in living the way God intended for women and men to live.

Pursue righteousness. Pursue every task in life being Christ-like, just, rightful, honest, and true.

Pursue godliness. Follow Jesus. Act like Jesus would. Model thoughts and behaviors on Him.

Pursue faith. Faith always provides hope and enough to get through even the toughest days.

Pursue love because anything done without love is done in vain, without God (because God is all love).

Pursue endurance. Endurance requires honest courage, and honest courage is a gift from God.

Pursue gentleness because even a hard man should be able to relate to others in love, faith, and godliness. Indeed, perhaps gentleness is the best way to deal with other people because even when toeing a hard line, one can do so gently.

All these things are the opposite of the love of money, or other petty behaviors Paul describes earlier in the book. Just think of how peaceful our daily lives could be if we conducted our work, home lives, or social (media) interactions by adhering to Paul’s verse 11 advice! I fall short in measuring up to Paul’s standard; how about you? If we fall short, perhaps it’s time to admit that, seek forgiveness, then move forward in better ways...better ways described here today. Maybe if we did that, more of us could describe each other as “man” or “woman of God.”

For further reading: Galatians 5:22-23, 2 Timothy 3:17, 1 Timothy 2:2, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 Timothy 6:12.

Forgiving God, I have failed to exhibit these good behaviors. Forgive me, and thank You for an opportunity to do better. Guide me in doing this today.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 19 February 2019.

Fight the good fight of the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses. 1 Timothy 6:12 (NIV).

You're part of eternity now. Because of that, you're in the fight of your life.

This is part of the canon preached by several friends of mine who shepherd churches here in North Texas, but it isn't just them. Ministers worldwide preach this simple truth. We aren't eternal when we die. Because of Jesus, we are eternal now. The moment we receive what Jesus has already done, we are in relationship with Him. We are adopted as daughters and sons of He who created us. His Spirit can come to live in us. We are part of His family, part of His church, part of the communion of saints. The invitation to join in this brotherhood/sisterhood is open to all 7+ billion people here on the Third Rock, yet most people don't take Jesus up on His invitation.

That doesn't invalidate the invitation, though. To be a child of God means being a part of heaven now, part of eternity now, part of the church everlasting now. We answer the call He made to our hearts; we pick up the gauntlet our Savior knight laid down and acknowledge His redemption of us, protection of our souls. We come over to His side; we join His group of followers worldwide. We are family. Use whatever allegory you wish, we are eternal family.

And it means you take up your sword. The fallen world is set against the idea of salvation, against Him. When you accept His free gift of salvation, you are given your armor, you are issued His uniform. To be a believer in Jesus Christ today means that you will be called on to defend your belief. When you fight, you realize it isn't you fighting: it's Him. He does the work, yet He does it through your heart, through your words, through your stand. It isn't a call to violence though it is a call to war. Your weapons aren't based on fire: they are the Word of God Himself. And every time you say "I believe" you swing your sword of truth against the invisible legions of evil who daily war against you, against Him. At some point, your sword may become a physical one; be ready now for that time when evil may confront you face to face. Stand firm. You're forever.

Make no mistake: this won't be easy, but you have your reward now and sealed forever. Like Obi-Wan Kenobi, if they strike you down, you will become far more powerful than they ever could have imagined. You're part of that eternity now.

For further reading: 1 Corinthians 9:25, Philippians 3:12, Matthew 25:46, Hebrews 3:1, 1 Timothy 6:13.

Saving warrior Lord Jesus, I am Your follower and soldier. Thank You for the pleasure of Your burden and Your eternity now.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 20 February 2019

In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen. 1 Timothy 6:13-16 (NIV).

People don't talk like this anymore. Outside of formal liturgical services, people just don't use this kind of language anymore, and that's a shame. There's something good to be said from hearing someone formally bless you with the power of God. Don't get me wrong: I like short sermons, and I like it when speakers get to the point. Yet there's also something grand, something spectacular, about hearing a speaker like Paul put a capstone on his work (this letter) by describing and invoking God's action in majestic language.

Granted, Paul's language in this closing doxology is "Pauly." He could be flowery. He could be formal, and He could be the king of commas and compound sentences. His rousing conclusion here is full of praise in ways that stand out from the rest of his fairly plainspoken letter to Timothy. It's almost as if he didn't want to end stop talking. These four verses are actually just two sentences and an 'amen.'

He's sending Timothy out into the world (into the ministry) to fight the good fight, to minister to the truly needy, and to stay true to the Lord. Paul is telling his protégé to stay true to his calling from Jesus. He focuses on Jesus in language that describes Him as the Savior King that He is, not just as a man or even a great man. This Jesus isn't the meek and mild: he's mighty. Paul focuses on Jesus as the true God, the phenomenal cosmic power God who rules over all.

"Stay true to Him, Timothy. He's everything and more."

People don't talk like that anymore. Indeed, my simple words seem insufficient compared to what Paul handed down to us. Yet, in the sight of God (because He is God), the same mighty Jesus speaks mildly to our individual hearts when He leads us as He will. He did it for Paul; he did it for Timothy; He's doing it for you and me today.

For further reading: John 8:33-37, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Corinthians 1:7, Titus 1:3, Deuteronomy 10:17, Psalm 136:3, Daniel 2:47, Revelation 1:5, Luke 10:7, 1 Timothy 6:13.

Magnificent Lord, all thanks and praise be to You. Thank You for making Yourself known to us in so many ways.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 26 February 2019

In the sight of God, who gives life to everything, and of Christ Jesus, who while testifying before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, I charge you... 1 Timothy 6:13 (NIV).

Lets's back up a few steps and break down the verses. Let's bask in God's brilliance.

God...in the sight of God...what does that mean? When we read Paul's words, we are in the blessing he spoke over Timothy. His words remind us of the fact that we are blessed under the watchful eye and love of God almighty, who made us and all things. When we pray to Him we are blessed. When we are doing our secret sins, we are in blessing. When we are ashamed and hurting, we are in the sight of God, receiving His blessing. His blessing and sight cover all of us all the time. His sight is the lighthouse beacon to lead us out of the fog of those secret sins. And His sight is shining, warm love, not harsh light.

In the sight of God, who gives life to everything: It is the God who sees us, He who breathed life into everything that lives. Us, animals, plants, even microbes: everything that lives is alive because God willed it so. He breathed life especially to man, His very good creation. Paul's words remind us that the God who sees us is the God who chose to give us life, to not just create us but to make us alive. It wasn't a random act of nature (itself not random but created) but was, instead, the deliberate choice of the great I AM who saw His magnificent universe as incomplete until He breathed life into you, me, and billions of other very good souls.

Most important, Paul mentions that we are in the sight of God the Father and God the Son, Christ Jesus. He news-reports the reminder that Jesus confessed His Kingship to Pilate, His earthly judge, the earthly authority to whom He would submit. The only person with whom Jesus conferred personally while He was being tried was the conflicted man who would give into temptation and condemn Him. Think of it: He who created everything by speaking, who as God and man together, who could read Pilate's mind and heart, this same Jesus reasoned with him, spoke with him as a peer instead of as a subject. Jesus testified, told Pilate the straight scoop, the news. And Pilate still condemned Him.

That Jesus, that God who gives all life to all creatures, who sees everything inside and out, is the One who sees, loves, and saves you and I today. He offered it to Pilate. He created the world in six days. He gave life to you and me. He is.

For further reading: John 18:33-37, 2 Timothy 4:1, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Magnificent living Jesus, thank You for seeing me, for blessing me, for all You do.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 27 February 2019

“... to keep this command without spot or blame until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.” 1 Timothy 6:14 (NIV).

That's the rub of it, isn't it? Keeping the command (to be made righteous in the sight of God by the love of Jesus) is a tough thing. We like our control. Me, I messed it up yesterday in more than a few ways. You did too. Let's not list all the ways we failed yesterday because it misses the point. Confess your sins to God in private; I'll do the same.

But remember this: Jesus saw it; God the Father saw it; God the Spirit saw it. He/They saw every time me and you did and said awful things yesterday. He knew them when we thought them. We repeatedly demonstrated it; He saw it every time.

And He loved us anyway. He loved us though we spit in His eye. He felt dirty when we felt dirty because He loves us enough to go through what we go through. He knew we wouldn't keep His command, not even the easy one to just love each other. He knew it, and He loved us anyway. He loved us enough to provide air, water, food, shelter, and anything you know of yesterday and today. He blesses us with provision, with His love that we get to share with each other.

He COMPLETELY forgives. Always and every time.

He loves us enough to come back again to rescue us because He doesn't want our eternity to be marred. He promised to come back and He kept all His words the first time around, so His promise is reliable. He loves us and said He's coming back, so we can believe it.

When is He coming back? Look up the details in Daniel, Revelation, 2 Thessalonians, and the other prophecies. You will won't find the date and time. Could be today; could be in a thousand years. Be ready now.

But also get ready to have your world rocked: He's already here. He came back to you already. Here, now, in the flesh...your flesh.

Yep: Jesus will physically come back in majesty the way He said He would. Yet His Spirit is in us now. It's Him, part of Him, part of the Trinity that He is. He lives and acts and thinks and loves through you. He's with us during the secret sins; He's there to walk us back away from them in repentance. And He's there in praise, speaking when we don't know how to. Jesus will come back in His body and all the world will see Him, but the world can see Him now through us.

Do they? Do we show Him in us? Yes, that's the rub of it.

For further reading: 1 Thessalonians 3:13, 1 Corinthians 1:7, 2 Timothy 1:10, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Mighty Jesus, I let You down yesterday; I'm a sinner. Forgive me and guide me to show You better today.

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Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 28 February 2019

"...until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords," 1 Timothy 6:14-15 (NIV).

It isn't up to you and me. Jesus, the Lord Jesus Christ, will appear at a time of God's own choosing. The Father already knows when it will happen; the Son doesn't; their Spirit doesn't. The Son, Jesus, will appear in the clouds and all the world will see Him, acknowledge Him, revere Him even as many won't believe it's actually Him. You and I (and our world), despite our knowledge and 'advanced humanity,' have no say in this in any way. It isn't up to us. It's up to Him.

It also isn't up to you and me that God is blessed. So many folks today spend much of their time hating God. That isn't anything new. It goes all the way back to Cain, even further if you consider the fall of Satan. Satan hated that God was God and he wasn't. So did Cain. So did every one of us whose sins, small and large, prove we choose anything other than God. Yet our rebellion from the fact of God Himself doesn't change the fact that He is blessed to be Himself. We bless Him with our worship, honor, and love, and He blesses us simply by being Himself, then sharing that with us. We don't deserve such goodness, yet He uses our lives to then revere and love others around us. It's not about us because it is about Him. The more we get in touch with that simple fact, the more we become less stressed by the realization that it isn't up to us that God is holy, blessed, magnificent, just and loving and, well, God.

And it isn't up to you and me that God is the ONLY ruler, the ultimate king, the Lord above all other earthly lords, the highest authority. He's God and we aren't. He allows earthly authorities to rule us, or rule over us. He uses their actions to boundary the lives in which we carry out His work here. Yet all rulers are subordinate to Him, even the despots. None is more powerful than the Lord God, and none has the power or dominion that He has. It's impossible for them to have those things because we are mere mortals and He isn't. God was God and sovereign before the first king, dictator or president, and He will be there when, one day, all bow down in deference to Him.

It's important to remember these things because we tend to fall away from God if we aren't frequently reminded. We fail to show that we know He is God and we aren't, and we substitute faith in Him with misguided faith in un-divine mankind.

For further reading: 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Sovereign Lord, You are God, the Only God. All praise to only You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 1 March 2019

"...who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen." 1 Timothy 6:16 (NIV).

No one can see God and no one ever has; Exodus 33:20 says so straight from God's own words. This side of eternity, no one can see God in all His glory and live. Our minds couldn't process Him. Our bodies couldn't withstand Him. Yet when we see Jesus, we are seeing God. We are seeing the part of Him that is human, fully God and fully man all at once. It's a mystery how He does that, but He does it all the same.

I think of this verse the way I think of going outside. My day job involves a lot of time staring at a laptop. I implement software and business improvements used in processing healthcare information for insurance companies. That involves a lot of online work in systems that are pretty basic to look at; white windows with black edges and writing, some grays and blues thrown in. My office at home is in a bedroom, and while there is a window in it, the sun doesn't shine directly in. When I'm on my (current) client's site, I work in an IT lab, in an enclosed conference room with no outside light.

All this makes going outside during the work-day a rich treat. Yet the older I get, the longer it takes for my eyes to adjust to the sun. If I don't wear sunglasses, my eyes squint, and it takes me awhile to be able to see without them watering. Occasionally things are even blurry but that passes quickly.

Imagine looking into God the Father's unapproachable light. Imagine the brightest light you can think of, then staring straight into it. You'd be blinded; you'd melt (sort of like that scene in Raiders of the Lost Ark when the Nazis opened the Ark of the Covenant). You'd die.

Now imagine being Peter, James, and John and standing before Jesus when He was transfigured. His clothes were the brightest white possible. They saw Him as He truly was, in the beautiful spiritual light of perfection while clearly recognizing their friend. Their eyes weren't burned; they lived through it. How can this be? You know the answer: because of Jesus. He made it possible for them to look on Him and live. In a flash it happened, then in a moment it was over.

One day each of us will indeed stare into God's full light and see Him face to face. In our final day, will we be dazzled by the brilliance of it or will we be destroyed? My friend, you know the better way.

For further reading: Exodus 33:20, Psalm 104:2, 1 John 1:7, John 1:18, Romans 11:36, Mark 9:3, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Lord of light, You are beautiful. Heal my eyes to let me see You more so that others see You through me.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 4 March 2019

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 1 Timothy 6:17 (NIV).

No doubt, Paul is talking here about material wealth. He says as much just a few words into the verse, then throughout it. May I submit there's more that makes us arrogant?

Politics make us arrogant. "Our hope" is a wide path to hell, if we let it be. Our differences of opinion put a wide gulf in-between us, so wide the perhaps only civil war can bring it together. Yet before we go to such a drastic end, let's consider that our politics – left, right, and indecisive – stem from where we put our hope. If we put our hope in ourselves, we're arrogant. Nothing can stop us because, well, us!

Knowledge makes us arrogant. This one is a stretch (from the verse) yet, if you think about it, is inherent to the verse. We can't put our hope into something of which we know nothing. To put our hope in money means knowing what the accumulation of wealth can do. It's the knowing, not the 'thing,' that makes us arrogant. The farther back you stretch it, the more you see that knowledge is at the heart of idolatry, of knowing (or think we are knowing) the difference between one thing and another. Or right and wrong. Take it to its academic extreme and knowledge breeds human arrogance.

The in-crowd makes us arrogant. Got the perfect house; got the perfect school for the kids; got the cool car; got the new clothes. The suburbanites have this in common with the urban hipsters: they're part of the in-crowd who have "it," whatever "it" is. If you don't, well, God bless you but you just aren't part of our party.

Ever met an arrogant preacher? You're a sinner who hasn't been educated at a seminary, given knowledge that members in your church haven't received. Years ago, I belonged to churches where that was the case, where the pastors were arrogant and condescending. One used to say he was just the son of a pig farmer, and he then usually expounded on seminary talking points to drown out whoever was challenging him. Not very loving. My friend, if I ever come off to you that way, please bring me up short.

What's the common denominator in all this? You know. It's you. Or me. The man (or woman) in the mirror who forgets that wealth, politics, knowledge, status and religion are fleeting. They aren't God, and there's nothing any one of them – or us – can do to provide the JOY of the soul (in "enjoyment") that God does. Everything else isn't God; everything else is arrogant.

For further reading: Psalm 62:10, Jeremiah 49:4, Luke 12:20-21, Acts 14:17, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Beautiful God, only You are God. Bless You.

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 5 March 2019

Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. 1 Timothy 6:18 (NIV).

As with yesterday's verse, here Paul is talking primarily about wealth, about Timothy instructing wealthy believers to share with others. As with yesterday's verse, let's construe how it goes deeper than that.

This past Sunday I taught the "tweeners" at our church, the kids in 3-6th grade. Our lesson was on building the Tabernacle in the Sinai desert, how God instructed the Israelites to give of what they had to complete His work, in this case building the tabernacle tent where God Himself could tabernacle with them (meaning He would abide and go with His people). God asked them to give in ways that hurt their pride, giving up the gold and wealth they had plundered from Egypt so that it could be dedicated to Him. He didn't do it out of vanity. He did it as a lesson for their hearts. "I'm your God. I love you. Your wealth isn't your god. It doesn't love anything. Provide these small things as I provide for you."

Boom. That's bigger than some bar of gold, or your 401K, or any of my possessions. It's not the economy: He's our God. That's the message Paul gives his protégé to teach. Our God provides for us in all ways, including the Savior to save us from ourselves. Those to whom He has given extra blessings should willingly share those with those blessed in less monetary ways as a gesture of love and respect for Jesus.

Jesus our God, whose whole ministry was about how He could give 100% of Himself to others, how He taught love and justice to the world through the example of serving, of giving completely even up to His own life. He who gave everything for people who would murder Him still gives Himself up for our sins. He calls us to a better way, beginning with our hearts. When so many things draw our hearts away from Him, He still searches for us and wants us to love our sisters and brothers that same way.

Those who have material wealth have worldly opportunities to do this in ways that those without it don't. If you have it, what will you do? If you won't, you can do other things. Will you?

Having wealth is a blessing from God, just like having health, having talent, having passion. They're gifts from Him; even elementary schoolers know that. My friend, let's each do something, for Him, with our gifts today.

For further reading: Romans 12:8, Ephesians 4:28, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Blessing Lord, You are holy and good. You save us, please forgive us today for the wrongs we do. Teach us to give and share the wealth, the talents, the everything You give to us for the good of Your Kingdom

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 6 March 2019

In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life. 1 Timothy 6:19 (NIV).

A spiritual savings account, storing up savings in the bank of Jesus. Or maybe like Monsters, Inc. I'm not sure those analogies completely work, but let's explore them for the moment. Paul is talking about commanding people to do good deeds for the Kingdom with the resources (usually money) that God gives them. Here he says one reason why.

You've heard it before: God doesn't need our good deeds. But He wants them. Our good deeds don't earn us a trip to heaven, but Jesus asks us to do them anyway. Our deeds don't make us righteous because only Jesus can do that, but He asks us to do them for each other anyway. God's accounting of our sins (and our good deeds) is declared "paid in full" by Jesus on Calvary, yet God requests that we use our time, talents, and treasures to serve His kingdom and each other.

When we do, we make Him smile. He stores them up. We make it so that He's excited for us to join Him in the afterlife. He sees His Spirit living out through our hearts and He is gladdened. That place Jesus prepares for us in the beyond looks even more inviting. Think of it as waxing your car, as a brand new shiny finish to reflect the beautiful Son. When we start (today) to live in ways that share our gifts with others, we are taking hold of that eternity now that awaits us in forever. He remembers our sins no more while celebrating the love behind our good deeds always. This He remembers...because of Jesus.

Sort of like Monsters, Inc. You know the Disney movie, where (near the end) the little girl, Boo, laughs and it stores up so much energy in the monsters' batteries that it can't be contained. Before that, only fear could produce power. After that, fear never could. We're storing up love energy in heaven while putting it to work here today.

All because of Jesus. It's like that spiritual savings account that pays some massive dividends.

Know what the best part is? This is why Jesus took hold of us. He loved, died, and rose for us so that He might store up His love justice treasure in our lives and put it to work here so that others would know more of Him, then that more of us would join Him in the hereafter. He chose you because of your unique gifts to do your part, and when you do, He recognizes it. The account is credited to you. The laugh batteries are filled.

For further reading: John 14:3, Matthew 6:20, Philippians 3:12, 1 Timothy 6:13-21.

Loving Savior, You are magnificent! Use me today to share Your love through my living. Thank You for this privilege!

Practical Proverbial, from 1 Timothy, 7 March 2019

Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge, which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith. Grace be with you all. 1 Timothy 6:20-21 (NIV).

And here we arrive, again, at the end of all things. That's a paraphrase from *The Lord of the Rings*, the *Return of the King*; one of my favorite movies, you know, and one I've written about before. When this line is spoken, Frodo and Sam have destroyed the Ring of power and are stranded on a rock as Mount Doom explodes around them. They think they are about to die, so Frodo tells Sam that he's thankful they completed their quest. And that he's glad to be with him there, friend with friend, at the end of all things.

(A few hours) Before that, Pippin (the hobbit) asks Gandalf (the wizard) about death. The battle of the ages is about to begin, and Pippin is frightened, saying "I didn't think it would end this way." A wiser Gandalf responds, "End? No, the journey doesn't end here. Death is just another path, one that we all must take. The grey rain-curtain of this world rolls back, and all turns to silver glass, and then you see it."

And then you see it indeed. You see heaven beyond, what you've lived all your life to see. In heaven is Jesus, waiting there to embrace you, welcome you home, cry happy tears of joy with you. That's what it's all about.

Paul has spent 6 chapters of this short book explaining these things to his protégé, Timothy. He has instructed Timothy on the ways a pastor of God's word can shepherd believers. On ways to stay true to the Word, to organize his group, on how to manage that group, and how to better love others. In these last verses, at the end of all things, Paul charges Timothy to guard this knowledge and stay true to it. The knowledge of God's Spirit trumps the fleeting knowledge of the academic and contradictory world. Disregard the temporary knowledge of this world in favor of the eternal truth of Jesus Christ. To do any other is to turn away from that truth, and that just wouldn't do.

Because at the end of all things, then you see it. Then you see Jesus. That's Timothy's ultimate goal, and ours as well. We're on our way in it and to it now. As Paul closed his letter, so let's close this entry today. Grace be with you all.

For further reading: 2 Timothy 1.

Beautiful Savior, You are the beginning and end of all things. Forgive me of my dullness and my sins. Thank you for today, for the blessings and opportunities You give in it. Show me how to better love my fellow man, as Paul and Timothy did.