

1 Timothy 4:6-16
The Discipline and Duty of God's Shepherd

Introduction

1. Last week we talked about the Who, What, Where, When, Why and How of apostasy:
 - a. It's something the Holy Spirit warned about
 - b. It was present in Paul's day and has continued to this day
 - c. And, according to the Bible, it will continue to infect the Church until Christ returns
2. One of the things God has done to counter the false teaching that leads to apostasy is to place into the body of Christ pastors (or shepherds) and teachers (Acts 20; 1 Corinthians 12:28; Ephesians 4:11)
3. This is one of the reasons why Paul and Silas appointed elders at the churches they planted, and it was the primary reason Paul left Timothy at Ephesus and Titus at Crete
4. As we come to our passage today, Paul is going to remind Timothy of three disciplines and three duties of a good shepherd:
 - a. I'm using disciplines here as a reference to the principles a good shepherd practices in his personal life and these are found in 4:6-10
 - b. I'm using duties to refer to those things for which a good shepherd is responsible and these are found in 4:11-16

A. The Disciplines of a Good Shepherd (4:6-10)

1. The first discipline of a good shepherd is that he nourishes himself on sound doctrine (READ 4:6):
 - a. Paul began by reminding Timothy that by **"pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Jesus Christ"**
 - 1) **"these things"** refers to everything Paul has written in this letter, including what comes later in chapters 5-6; essentially, sound doctrine
 - 2) By teaching these things to the church, Timothy would be a good servant of Jesus
 - b. But, it wasn't simply teaching these things that would make Timothy a good shepherd; it was the fact that by doing so he himself would be nourished by them (6b): **"...being constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following"**:
 - 1) The word translated **"nourish"** here refers to the process of educating and training someone, especially from childhood
 - 2) You might notice there the two different tenses Paul uses:
 - a) The NASB supplies the word **"constantly"** because Paul used a present participle when he referred to Timothy being educated and trained on the words of the faith and sound doctrine; Paul was stressing the ongoing benefit Timothy would PERSONALLY receive by focusing on sound doctrine
 - b) Paul then used the perfect tense when he wrote **"which you have been following"** which stresses Timothy's faithfulness to sound doctrine; he had already been following sound doctrine in the past and right up through the present

One of the perks of having to prepare a sermon every week is that I am forced to spend HOURS in God's Word every week, especially since I normally preach book-by-book, verse-by-verse; I often wonder where I would be spiritually without this

- c. So the first discipline of a good shepherd is that he nourishes—educates and trains—himself on sound doctrine (essentially, God's Word)
2. A second discipline of a good shepherd is that he avoids false teaching (READ 4:7a):
 - a. In the opening of this letter, Paul charged Timothy with preventing certain men from teaching false doctrine
 - b. However, here it's more personal as he is warning Timothy against getting caught up himself in such things
 - c. Paul warned Timothy to **"have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women."**
 - 1) This warning is one that Paul issued repeatedly in the Pastoral Epistles (READ 1 Timothy 1:3-4; 6:20; 2 Timothy 2:14-23; Titus 1:13-14)
 - 2) All of these things—**"strange doctrines"**, **"worldly and empty chatter"**, **"worldly fables"**, **"myths"** and **"commandments of men"**—refer to false teaching
 - 3) And Paul warns Timothy to **"have nothing to do with"** such things: this phrase is often translated as **"refuse"** or **"reject"** in the NT, and that's the way many English translations render it here
 - 4) A good shepherd will reject anything and everything that contradicts the Word of God, but he needs to KNOW the Word of God before he can do that
 - d. One of the main responsibilities of a shepherd is to protect the flock, and he can't do that if he's enamored with false teaching
 - e. Unfortunately, most false teaching originates at the top—among pastors, teachers, and authors—and is then taught to the flock
 - 1) It doesn't generally originate from within the flock
 - 2) Paul warned about this explicitly in Acts 20:28-30 (READ):
 - a) He told them to **"guard yourselves"**
 - b) He said **"savage wolves will come in among you"** (the elders)
 - c) He even said **"from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them"**
3. A third and final discipline of a good shepherd is that he trains himself for the purpose of godliness (READ 4:7b-9):
 - a. Paul contrasts the value of bodily discipline (lit. training) with spiritual discipline (e.g. godliness):
 - 1) Bodily discipline has limited value or benefit (as most English versions translate) because it's temporal and earthly; there's nothing eternal about it

Morning workout routine: keeps me in shape, helps with blood sugar and cholesterol, but it only benefits me in this life

- 2) However, **"godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come"** (8); in other words, there are both earthly rewards as well as eternal rewards:

- a) Godliness refers to one's devotion to religious convictions and practices (we sometimes refer to this as piety)
 - b) And, there are both earthly rewards and eternal rewards for godliness; Peter points this out in 2 Peter 1:11 (READ)
- b. So, what Paul is referring to here is disciplining or training oneself so that we can walk, talk and behave in a godly manner; in other words, **"walk in a manner worthy of our calling"** as Paul wrote to the Ephesians:
- 1) This is not easy! It takes hard work!
 - 2) Notice in verse 10 that Paul says **"we labor and strive for, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers."**
- c. While there is merit in this for every Christian, it is especially important of God's shepherds:
- 1) In chapter 6 Paul warned Timothy of the kind of false teachers who try to use a form of false godliness for financial gain
 - 2) He warns that such men **"want to get rich"** and **"fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge [them] into ruin and destruction"** (6:9)
 - 3) Unfortunately, we see this quite often in the Church, especially among certain popular Christian leaders, pastors, teachers and authors

Christian Post Article: "Hillsong Church operated lucrative honorarium scheme for celebrity preachers: report" (<https://www.christianpost.com/news/hillsong-church-operated-lucrative-honorarium-scheme-report.html>)

B. The Duties of a Good Shepherd (4:11-16)

- 1. One duty of a good shepherd is to feed the flock (READ 11-12):
 - a. In Jeremiah 3:15 the Lord said, **"...I will give you shepherds after My own heart, who will feed you on knowledge and understanding."**
 - 1) We often use the imagery of feeding the flock to refer to sound preaching and teaching
 - 2) Here, Paul calls on Timothy to **"prescribe and teach these things"** which refers passing along Paul's instructions to the Ephesians and teaching them to grow and mature in their faith (he repeats this two more times in this letter; 5:7; 6:2)
 - 3) The number one duty of a shepherd is to care for the health and well-being of his flock and this begins with proper feeding
 - 4) The same is doubly true when it comes to the Church of God which needs to be nourished and fed, and it's one of the primary responsibilities of a good pastor

Joanie's pastor's response when he was approached for not feeding them; something akin to "It's not my job; you have to feed yourself"

- b. It's not enough to simply preach and teach in word, however; a good shepherd teaches by being a faithful example of Christian virtue:
 - 1) One of the challenges Timothy faced was that he was young, probably not more than 40 years old
 - 2) So, Paul warns him not to let others look down upon him, but to set an example all could follow, young and old alike (RE-READ 4:12)

2. A second duty of a good shepherd is to be Scripture-focused (READ 13):
 - a. This is obviously related to the first duty, feeding the flock, but now Paul addresses how to do this; he was to **“give attention”** (lit. hold to, heed) to three things:
 - 1) **“the reading of Scripture”** (publicly is correctly assumed)—I don’t think it’s coincidence that Paul lists this first
 - 2) **“exhortation”**—this word generally has two uses in the NT, that of encouraging or comforting someone in their relationship with Jesus Christ
 - 3) **“teaching”**—while exhortation is often informal, teaching generally refers to formal instruction, and in this case it relates to the Word of God
 - b. Timothy was apparently a gifted teacher because Paul called on him to exercise that gift (READ 4:14-16):
 - 1) He encouraged him to not neglect the spiritual gift that had been given to him
 - 2) But even more, Paul called on him to **“take pains”** with his teaching and **“be absorbed in them”** (15)
 - 3) We see this same focus on Scripture in Paul’s second letter to Timothy (2 Timothy 4:1-2): **“I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: 2 preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction.”**
 - c. Unfortunately, many popular modern-day preachers and teachers have shifted away from a Scripture-focused, expository based model of preaching to crafting messages or sermons that focus on felt needs:
 - 1) I read an article recently titled, “Understanding the Contemporary Preaching Model” which described this popular trend (<https://www.preaching.com/articles/understanding-the-contemporary-preaching-model/>)
 - 2) One pastor of a large church in Washington was quoted in the article saying that sermons should begin by **“going straight to the self-help section of the local bookstore [because] sermon ideas will come from titles found in this section”**
 - 3) Modern preaching has become very narcissistic (me-centered): Rick Warren, one of the most well-known mega-church pastors, claimed that sermons should come from the response to three questions: What are people’s needs?, What are people’s hurts?, and What are people’s interests?
 - 4) This modern style of preaching prides itself on fancy titles and contemporary ideas: Bill Hybels has claimed that he often spent hours on just developing the title of his sermons; others rely on popular movie titles or TV shows, popular trends, etc. to come up with catchy titles
 - 5) Research by the most well-respected researchers reveals that we are living in one of the most Biblically illiterate generations in history which is a direct result of shepherd’s not remaining Scripture focused in their teaching
 - d. I know a lot of gifted preachers and teachers who are Scripture-focused, and I can say with absolutely certainty that none of them would say preaching and teaching every week is easy:
 - 1) They take pains it, diligently studying the Word of God and preparing
 - 2) They spend hours and hours every week absorbed in it
 - 3) They see it as one of their duties in being a good shepherd

3. A third duty of a good shepherd is to remain conscientious (READ 4:16):
 - a. I am referring to this as being conscientious because being conscientious means that one is aware of his own behavior and is governed by a good conscience
 - b. Paul called on Timothy to remain conscientious when it came to two things:
 - 1) One was “**himself**” or his own behavior:
 - a) Earlier, Paul called on him to be an example for the flock (4:12)
 - b) Keeping a clear conscience was critical for Paul himself and he references this multiple times in Acts and his letters
 - c) In fact, he wrote in 1 Corinthians 9:27: “**...I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified**”
 - d) Unfortunately, many leaders—including pastors and teacher—don’t practice what they preach

Politicians and government leaders, “Good for thee, but not for me” (esp. during Covid restrictions)

- 2) The second thing Paul called Timothy to remain conscientious about was his teaching: in the context of this letter, this was a call to doctrinal integrity and faithfulness to what he had learned from Paul
- 3) In doing these things, Timothy would “**ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you**”

Takeaway

1. For much of the history of the church, most believers were fed by local pastors and teachers who had a relationship with the flock; it was easy to see or evaluate the things we just talked about in their lives
2. However, a lot has changed and it’s a different world today
 - a. We still have pastors and teachers who shepherd the local church and are responsible for feeding us every week, and we can still see (or not see) these disciplines and duties in their lives
 - b. But, we also live in an age where technology has opened the flood gates to a host of other teaching and learning opportunities: TV, Radio, Podcasts, Internet, Books, Magazines, even Music
 - c. It’s not as easy to examine these in light of the disciples and duties we just talked about
 - d. It’s critical that we be careful not to just listen, watch or read blindly, but evaluate these individuals in light of these principles as well