

“Keeping A Close Watch,” 1/3/10

Kids love to ask how things were in the olden days. Just last week, we were watching an old movie together, and my son asked me if I was around when Teddy Roosevelt was president.

Things *were*, of course, different, years ago. Until a few years ago, there were no laws about child safety seats and seat belts. Many young children who were just sitting in back seats of cars died in car accidents.

Today we have laws that prohibit children from riding in a car without special seating facing the right direction and properly installed. New parents must have the seat in place before taking a child home from the hospital.

When you tell kids things like that, they ask, "Didn't the parents love their children?" And you find yourself explaining that a parent's love for a child is beautiful – it always has been. But when it comes to a child's safety while driving, people have found over time that a parent's love is *not* enough. Parents needed a seat belt law to ensure the safety of their children.

The same is true in the church and of our love and devotion for God and other people. **Feelings are not enough.** We need doctrine and teaching in the form of commands to help us to love God and others. Paul explains exactly this in these verses in 1 Timothy 4. Let's read:

1 Timothy 4:11-16

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. (ESV)

As we continue our series in this letter, let's again get reoriented. 1st Timothy is in large part a warning. It is a warning against false teachers. And if you remember, the defining characteristic of their teaching was **holiness through abstention**. And what was so offensive to Paul about these teachers is that they taught a *false gospel*. They taught a Christ-less Christianity, because they taught that you could be right with God, on your own, and without Christ as savior. And that, Paul said, was a lie because no one can be saved without Christ as savior.

And it's into this messed-up church with a messed-up message that Paul sends Timothy. And it's in this passage that Paul gets very practical.

You know that we've spoken about how the bible always has gospel indicatives and gospel imperatives. Remember that Paul always begins with the indicatives – declarations of what God has already done for us in Christ. Then, in the latter parts of his letters, Paul moves toward the imperatives – what we should now do having come to an understanding of what God has done.

Sinclair Ferguson says that "Understanding what the gospel is and how it works hinges on grasping that relationship between the indicative and imperative" in Paul's teaching. Your faithfulness is based on God's grace.

So it's now that we come to the imperatives. The to-dos. And when I say imperatives, I mean literally. There are 9 imperatives in these 6 verses, and it breaks down very easily with about 3 imperatives every 2 verses. This morning we want to look at:

- Timothy's orders
- Timothy's authority
- Timothy's goal

My wife and I, at the recommendation of Pastor Matt and some others, have been watching the series *Friday Night Lights*, which is about a small town in Texas, and their love – really, their idolatry – of their high school football team. And at one point in the series, after the team goes through a period of losses, the coach decides to replace his starting quarterback with a young freshman with a big arm. And the young man who is replaced becomes angry and frustrated. He is *this close* to quitting the team entirely. He goes from being a young star in the town to thinking that he isn't a football player at all. And his character begins to change, too.

The coach sees all of this. He sits the dejected player down and says, "You don't think you are a football player any more, but I do. And at some point we're going to need you, and every other young man in that huddle is going to have to believe you're a football player. So you better get it together. The way to know you're a football player is to play. So fight your way back onto that field. A quarterback has to lead, and never be in doubt. If you are ever going to lead this team again, you must never be seen as someone who quit on them. They expect you to be ready to lead."

Now, if I as a pastor said "I'm moving on. The Lord is calling me elsewhere. I am not the pastor here anymore," well, this church would go on. Pastors are always saying things like that because God is always bringing the right leader to his church at the right time, and for his purposes. But one thing that I could say that would kill this church faster than a quitter kills a team is, "I don't believe." When a pastor as leader of a church, says, "I don't believe," where does that leave you? If he doesn't lead us all in belief... then how can you have trust that trusting in Christ is the powerful thing that it is!? And as you lead your household, if you don't lead in trusting in Jesus in times of trial – and lead in praising him in times of blessing – well how will your children know what to do in trial or blessing? Or when you guide your own heart... when you don't believe, that is when you – body and soul – are in big trouble.

Paul wrote this letter to his leader of the church in Ephesus – Timothy – because Timothy wanted to quit. He was this close to tossing the job and the church, and moving on. People complained about him. They thought he was too young. They were divisive and took shots at him. And Paul said, "I urge you to remain." And it's here in chapter 4 that Paul, if you will, grabs Timothy by the face mask and says, **This is how you show you are still a believer in the**

gospel – that you continue to command and teach the gospel. These are the first set of orders Paul gives Timothy, and they are in Greek, very strong imperatives.

And notice both the positive and the negative of this first imperative: there is a difference between commanding and teaching. In my house, I don't issue a command unless something has gone horribly wrong. I make a command so that something never happens again. But when I teach, I'm laying out a direction for something positive.

So when Timothy is to command, it is to point out to the false teachers or those that are following the false teachers exactly what has gone wrong. "Command them to stop speculating." "Command them to stop their false teaching." "Command them to stop their moralism." "Command them to turn back to Jesus." Timothy, *command them*.

On the other hand, teach them what is right. Teach them to believe what is right and true – **Teach the gospel.** Keep on teaching them that Jesus Christ came to save sinners, "of whom I am the worst." Remember that Paul had made that point – "If Jesus would save me, a persecutor and murderer, a murderer of God's people – then surely Jesus Christ who died for sinners to deliver their souls, is their only hope."

The command, you see, is to not round off all of the edges to win over the church, but that teaching the truth is important right *at the place* of all the rough edges.

For instance, look at what Paul doing in this letter. Ask yourself, will we hear this same thing in this church? Paul not only says to Timothy or to the church at Ephesus, "here is what we believe," but he rejects those things that are patently untrue that these false teachers are spreading. And he does it with the same force. As evangelicals, we are constantly taking the teachings – the positive teachings that we read in the bible – and stapling them to ideas and concepts from media gurus and self-help sages, and arriving at ideas that the bible clearly says are wrong.

Friends, we are like little children. Sometimes we need to hear the command that says "no." "Stop." "Turn." "Repent." The bible is not a loose-leaf binder. You can't just add things that you like, because when you do, you will come into conflict with other things, and you'll find yourself wanting to remove the stuff that disagrees with the stuff you've added! No, you have to be able to hear the command that says, "If this is what you now believe, then those things over there that contradict it... they now have to be revised."

Have you ever been in a bible study where the focus was largely consensus building? Where you simply pooled together people's ideas about what this passage means to them, and where we all say, "That's nice, I never thought about it that way..." but where all the rough edges are filed off and rounded, and when all is said and done, there is a lot of consensus... but no claim to truth or what is right is left. Paul says to Timothy, and he says to us, "Don't do it. **Command and teach** these things. Leave the hard edges where they are because there will have to be divisions between blessing and curse, right and wrong, good and evil, what is beautiful and what is not.

Now the orders don't stop there. Paul orders Timothy with the next imperative, which is "Let no one despise you for your youth."

Now look, we could limit this command to a simple fact of age. Timothy, let no one look down on you because you are younger than your typical synagogue leader and teacher. But I don't think so. We all have weaknesses whenever we lead something. In fact – and this is a bit of inside-baseball, so if you're not a Christian, just hang tight for a second – but these days folks look down on you if you're old! The elderly are not honored like they were in Timothy's day. You have to remember that Timothy was probably in his early 40's, but late thirties at the very least. Today, that's old even in the church. You know, you look today at the Christian Book magazines, and 15 years ago you'd see photos of folks like John MacArthur and Elizabeth Eliot and Billy Graham... Now, you have to be under 35 and have a soul patch and a shell necklace to have your photo in there with your new book. So should we say, "Hey, youth IS now taken seriously in the church! Glad we got over that sin!"

No! Youth is "in" because we have followed the culture! Now we despise or look down on older folks.

You see what Paul is saying is, there will always be some externals that people will use to dismiss you. Don't judge your brother or sister – or yes, your pastor – by his externals, but (and here is the next imperative) "set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." And you see, that is how we must lead. God brought Timothy to this church not because he was the most holy person he could find. God raised up Paul not because he was the most pious person there ever was. No God raises up people who are sinners so that they can be an example of his mercy.

I am standing in front of you not because I have the shortest list of sins of anyone here. No, I am probably standing here because my long list has been so graciously forgiven, and I long to look into how God could do something as repugnant as to go to places I would want no one to go. But you see, God sending Christ to deal with that sin produces good conduct, and love, and faith, and purity.

Put your name in here, but this is how it works: "Timothy your conduct was sometimes okay, but frequently self-centered and sinful. So I sent the one whose conduct was perfect to live the life you should have led." "Timothy, your love was focused on yourself. You were interested only in self-love. But I sent the one whose love was self-less." "Timothy, you had no faith in God, until I sent the one who showed you what faith looked like when he went to the cross to save you." "You were impure, and then I sent the pure and holy and perfect sacrifice to die for your sins."

Those are Timothy's orders – to command and teach the gospel, a message that does not work at the level of externals. **No, you command and teach the gospel by showing that you are a believer in the gospel because it has changed you from the inside out. It is, as they say, an inside job, that will then show on the outside. It will be an example in your home and your workplace and your church.**

And that takes us to our next point: Just living out the gospel doesn't mean that people won't still attack you. Living a life of purity and love doesn't mean there won't be some who point out your externals. Look closely at all of the portraits of George Whitefield. The closer you get, the stranger the pictures. Why? Whitfield, this great preacher who led so many people to Jesus in the

great awakening of the 1700's, had a wandering eye that would just not keep still. D.L. Moody had a speech impediment where his speech was slurred. People could have dismissed them just as people could have dismissed Timothy for his youth. But they didn't? Why?

Because of where their authority came from. Look at the next two verses – 13 and 14 – and the imperatives there: ¹³ Until I come, **devote yourself** to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ **Do not neglect** the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

Timothy's authority comes from two places, and these are surprisingly rare these days. And that is the bible and ordination. (That's what "the council of elders" means – it's the word "presbytery").

Now some of us don't like this idea. It's not just the bible or ordination, but the fact that we have to yield authority to someone or something else. Most of us think that when we yield authority, whether it's to Jesus or anything else – that we will lose or give up our freedom.

But is that really true. I mean it just sounds so true. But is it? Question authority, right! Just for a moment, question the authority of the statement that says yielding to authority is always bad and always takes away your freedom.

Try this. The great symbol of American freedom is the automobile. The promise of the open road and going wherever you want. So envision yourself in your favorite model and year car, racing down the open road. Now, imagine if I took away all of the authority that manages that road. I took away all the lines that determine where the lanes are. I took away the authority of the speed limits. I took away the authoritative rules about who can drive which direction. Okay you say, it just sounds like Italy! But now I take away stop signs. They're oppressive and authoritarian. And traffic lights. In fact the rule that says you can only drive on the road is authoritarian, so let's allow people to really go wherever they want to go whenever and as fast as they want...

Now does that look like freedom? It's chaos, right? Let me ask you this: Turned over to yourself and only yourself, are you really free? Are you free from your guilt? Are you free from bitterness? Will you be free from evil? Are you really free?

I don't think you would be.

And you know, look at the people who have rejected authority. They are almost always lonely. If any of you know a police officer – my brother-in-law is a retired cop – ask them about those people who reject authority. Every community has someone in it who just won't follow the rules. Who is constantly breaking the laws and ordinances of the town. We call them what...? Anti-social. They are lonely. They don't want to fit in. They want to be free... and yet they aren't free at all. They're lonely. The church has this, too. People who long to be known, but too afraid to be known. Some of us need to be confronted with who we are, but we're so afraid of being confronted that we stay away or hide from others to avoid it... and then blame everyone for never taking the time to get to know us!

Someone or something has to have authority in your life. The bible says your life won't work without it. When Adam and Eve decided to reject God's authority and to act as gods themselves, God gave them that autonomous freedom and sent them out of the garden that was ruled by his authority, and into a world where they could rule themselves. And chaos broke in.

I'm not only speaking to single people here, though I am. But some of us have isolated ourselves in our marriages or on the job. We're hiders. We want to be left alone. And every time someone wants to reach out to you, you pull back in fear. You think that the more people know you, the less they will like and respect you.

So what do you do?

The church's answer, I know, hasn't made sense, but it is to give authority in your life over to Jesus Christ and his gospel. Because you see, it is his good news that at the cross he took away what makes you unlikable – namely your sin – and that he gives you his righteousness... THAT is what gives you the freedom to be who you are in a relationship. You can't have a good relationship until you know that you are a sinner. You can't be a good husband until you know you're a bad one, or a good wife until you know you're awful at it... because it's when you give God the authority to say who you really are, that Christ becomes the only way to be saved from that sentence. The gospel is, you have to go down, to go up. You have to be a miserable sinner, before you can become a great human being. You NEED that authority, and it is the same for you as it was for Timothy. You need God's word and his church to be in a community where you hear this truth about yourself over and over again.

The gospel is a bitterness killer and a loneliness remover. Because Jesus takes into himself all that makes you separate and isolated and unattractive – he graciously removes sin.

That's it, you know: the irony of the gospel is that His authority is grace. "**Do not neglect** the gift you have been given." Now of course, Paul means the gift of proclaiming the gospel. But it's also the gift of the gospel itself. Timothy would have nothing to teach if the good news had not first been given to him. And that message which gives Timothy this authority to command and teach is a gift of grace. "Come to me all you are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest." Your calling, you see, is the same as Timothy's: you give him your burden of guilt and lawlessness and your burden of self, and he gives you this easy burden of grace, and mercy and forgiveness and him.

So, we've looked at these imperatives – Timothy's **orders** are to command and teach the gospel. Then we looked at his **authority** to command and teach, which comes *from* the gospel, through God's word and his church. **Now finally, Timothy's goal.**

What is Timothy's goal? V. 15: Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, *so that all may see your progress*. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, *for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers*.

In other words, "Make progress in salvation." Now this sounds like legalism. It sounds like Paul is saying, "Timothy, you have to do it. You have to save both your hearers and yourself."

That's not what it says. "Save yourself" is not the imperative here! No, it's "practice these things." It's "immerse yourself" in the gospel. It's "keep a close watch on your teaching of the gospel and persisting in it." It's doing those things that will communicate salvation. I've seen people in this church progress and grow and fly past people who have been to bible college and seminary. How? They are persistent. They love God and they keep going. The church is not a union, you know. Seniority doesn't mean anything. If you have become lazy, hang out with the new Christians in this church. They will ask you what you've long forgotten, and you'll need to once again, "practice these things."

Look, if Ryan says, "I am a pianist," but he never plays, then he can say he is a pianist all he wants, but it is apparent to nobody. No, he has to practice the piano, immerse himself in it, persist in it, and then he will be a pianist and it will be apparent both to himself and his hearers.

And notice the lack of balance from Paul. Our culture is famous for saying that you need to find balance in life. That all work and no play make Jack a dull boy. But there is no such thing as balance when it comes to a life in Christ. It's an immersion in the gospel. It's persistence. The Christian life is about being poured out and absorbed in one thing.

Now this doesn't mean that you have to become a hermit and think about the bible and chant hymns all day long. But it does mean that if you are an accountant, then you don't leave the fact that Christ is your redeemer behind when you do your accounting. If you're a pianist, then you play for the glory of God. You make progress in the gospel by being a follower of Jesus in all things.

The best place to see this is with your money. It's amazing how many times Jesus brings up money – in direct teaching and in parables. If you come here on Sunday and you say you are a Christian and you are sold out for Christ... but during the rest of the week your attitude is that your money and what you do with it are your own... Or if you decide what to give to God only after every other bill is paid...

Money is one of those things that is so attached to our heart that it's practically apart of us. People don't commit adultery with their bodies and then just sort of look up surprised, and say, "Oh, you're not my wife...!" No, they KNOW! But you can be adulterous with your money and not know it or feel it.

In all my years as a pastor, I have had people come to me to repent of anger, and repent of lust, and repent of lying and adultery. No one has ever come to me and repented for greed. Doesn't happen.

You see, you have to keep watch. Money is a great place to really see whether you're making progress in giving your life to Christ. I'm not talking strictly about tithing, but I could be. I'm talking about what you spend your money on. If you want to know where your heart is, take a long look at your checkbook or your bank statement. You'll find out quick.

There is that place where Jesus says, "where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." But the very next verse in Matthew 6 is "The eye is the lamp of the body. So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light." Jesus is saying that money, like what you set your eyes or your vision on, will tell you where your heart is set.

It's why things are placed at certain places in a store, right? Marketers want your eyes, and your money and your focus.

Paul says, keep a close watch. Paul says keep a close watch on your life and doctrine. Make sure they are both properly imbalanced toward Christ.

Some of you are life people. You are always busy helping others and providing and serving and the church IS a powerful part of your world. But for some of you life people, if someone asked you what your favorite verse was, you wouldn't have one. The bible, the doctrine, just isn't there. Then there are the doctrine people. You know you're bible and you can tell me about the cause and pain of John Calvin's peptic ulcer when he was 37 years old. You need some life! You need to watch your life AND doctrine closely. You are a Christian, and Jesus loved in both word and deed. And when you immerse yourself in who he is, your life will have that great gospel imbalance – both life and doctrine will be Christ-centered and cross-focused.

It's that simple. If you are persevering to live the gospel in all aspects of your life – in your work, with your body, in your free time, and yes, with your money, then it will be evident to you that you are who you say you are – you are a Christian. And it will be evident to others that this is beautiful. Integrity is beautiful.

It's like we said in the beginning. Feelings are not enough. We have to make progress. Tell people when they are making progress in integrity. Tell your friend when they are making progress in holiness. Tell people when they are making progress in their life and doctrine. You don't have to be Billy Graham by next week, but you should be seeing progress. Some of us are moving backwards. Maybe we're doing just the life thing, and without gospel doctrine, we grow bitter. Maybe we're doing the doctrine and never putting it into practice in life. And you're faith is cold. Life and doctrine, poured out for Christ. That's what we need.

Let's pray