

# THROUGH THE BIBLE STUDY

## 1 TIMOTHY 3-4

I'll never forget when my daughter, Natalie, brought a young boy home that she said she wanted to marry. As a child she had brought home several stray cats, and in my mind this was similar - *yet far more serious...*

This boy was fresh out of college. His most significant job had been delivering pizzas. *Yet now he was going to become the provider of my daughter and future grandkids?* He needed to be properly vetted.

So I spent the next year examining my prospective son-in-law. I left no stone unturned. *I had a check-list longer than the Jiffy Lube... a 40 point inspection...* I wasn't going to entrust the leadership and care of my daughter to just anybody. The man had to pass muster!

And this is how God feels about His Church. The Church is *the darling of heaven - the envy of the angels - the bride of Christ* - and God isn't going to turn the leadership of His daughter over to just anyone.

He expects pastors and church leaders to possess exemplary character. They need to pass muster. And in 1 Timothy 3 Paul gives Timothy and us a Jiffy Lube-like inspection, for church leaders - *a character checklist...*

Verse 1, <sup>1 Timothy 3:1</sup> **"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work."**

The NT uses three titles for church leaders: "bishop," "elder," "pastor." In Acts 20 and 1 Peter 5 you'll find all three titles used interchangeably of the same person...

<sup>1 Peter 5:1</sup> "Elder" refers to the man himself - his **maturity**. <sup>Acts 20:28</sup> "Pastor" or "shepherd" describes his **methods**. And <sup>1 Timothy 3:1</sup> "**bishop**" is the Greek word "episkopos." "**Epi**" means "**over**." "**Skopos**" is "**to scope out, to see, to look closely**." Thus, an "**episkopos**" over-sees. This speaks of what a leader does - his **ministry**. He views the big picture. He **oversees** the spiritual health of the Church.

Three ingredients factor into the qualifications for church leaders - **gender, giftedness, and character**. And as with the person who married my daughter, **gender and character** are the most vital of the three. In a long checklist only <sup>1 Timothy 3:2</sup> "**apt to teach**" refers to giftedness. Yet sadly **today's Church stresses only giftedness, while it compromises on both gender and character**.

Rather than grow godly men, in the modern church women usurp roles that are biblically reserved for men. And men of *suspect scruples* are tolerated because they can draw a crowd. *Gender gets ignored. Character gets short-changed.* And God is appalled with our disregard for the beautiful portrait He's painting through gender of Christ and His Church.

Paul's check-list indicates he's targeting godly men. It's **1 Timothy 3:1** "**a faithful saying,**" he tells us, for a man to desire leadership. The church's future depends on godly men stepping up. Chapter 3 outlines their required caliber.

Verse 2, **1 Timothy 3:2** "**A bishop then must be blameless...**" Just because a pastor preaches well - *he can't be a crook, or cuss out the umpire at the church softball game, or hide from his creditors, or cheat on his income tax, or neglect his wife and kids...* He has to live in such a way that earns the respect of the people around him.

Once, a pastor embezzled \$25,000 from the church. One of the elders commented, "**We need to find him, and get him back here, so he can work off the money he owes us.**" I'm afraid the elder had missed the point.

**3:2** "**A bishop... must be blameless...**" not sinless, *but blameless.* We all slip up and sin at times, but we should repent immediately, and address the damage done. The Greek word translated **3:2** "**blameless**" means "**nothing to take hold of.**" No one is perfect, but there should be no glaring issue that an outsider can point to, and accuse him or the message he preaches.

Obviously, there was much in Paul's past to incriminate him - but his past had been dealt with by the blood of Jesus. Now his life was a testimony to God's amazing grace. For a pastor, the question becomes, "**Are there current issues in my life that will discredit the message I preach, or the Savior I serve, or the church I represent? Is my life blameless?**"

One day as Saint Francis walked down the street a young boy reached out from the bushes and tugged on his coat. He pleaded, "**Please Sir, be as good as we think you are?**" We need leaders who are blameless.

The next qualification is **3:2** "**the husband of one wife...**" And this is a debated phrase. Some take it as a ban on polygamy among elders. Having multiple wives was common among first century pagans, and it lingers in some cultures today... Others insist the prohibition speaks to men who've been divorced and remarried, eliminating a divorced person from serving as an elder.

But I don't think either interpretation really gets at the heart of what Paul is communicating. A literal translation would be rendered, "**a one woman man.**"

Paul's concern isn't as much a man's marital status as it is his attitude toward women and sexual purity.

A man may've been married for 50 years, yet not be "a one woman man." If he's had women on the side, or a fascination with pornography, or he's a flirt, or his eyes just wander toward other women - his thoughts and desires are obviously not focused on one woman.

Whereas, a divorcee who repents of any wrongdoing in his previous marriage, and actively renews his mind, and is deeply devoted to the woman he's remarried... This is a fellow who qualifies as a one-woman man.

Bible commentator Kenneth Wuest puts it like this, "We speak of the Airedale as a one-man dog. It is his nature to become attached to only one man. Since character is emphasized by the Greek construction, it's the bishop's nature to isolate and centralize his love."

This also has implications for a church leader who is single. Though he's unmarried he still needs to be a one-woman man. It's wrong for Pastor Casanova to play the field. He'll disrupt unity in the church. He should wait patiently on the wife God has for him.

Here's more on the check-list... 3:2 "temperate" means self-controlled. It's the opposite of having a temper. A temperate man is a leader with his emotions in check.

3:2 "Sober-minded" is a man who thinks clearly and keeps issues in perspective. We call him *level-headed*.

3:2 "Of good behavior..." He lives an orderly life.

3:2 "Hospitable..." the word literally means "to love a stranger." An elder should be friendly to newcomers.

And 3:2 "able to teach..." Maybe not in front of a crowd of 5000, but certainly in a small group of believers.

Then 3:3 "not given to wine..." Literally, he 1 Timothy 3:3 "doesn't stay at the wine." Some folks believe that leaves room for a pastor to drink in moderation. But when you survey the totality of Scripture, everywhere leadership and alcohol are in juxtaposition, it's a warning against the dangers of alcohol. That's enough for me to choose not to drink.

As a leader I occupy a decision-making post. I can be called on at a moment's notice. *Why let booze dull my senses or cloud my brain?* Leadership is all about foregoing personal liberties for the greater good. That's why the elders at CalvaryCSM abstain from alcohol...

In addition, 1 Timothy 3:3 “**not violent...**” A church leader doesn’t push people around. He’s no bully. He doesn’t use force or manipulation to get his way. He leads people with love and gentle persuasion. He’s a peacemaker.

3:3 “**Not greedy for money...**” A pastor needs to *feed the flock, not fleece the flock!* He shouldn’t love money.

Once a toddler was playing in the den and found a quarter in the carpet. Like toddlers do, he stuck it in his mouth, and swallowed the coin. The dad saw what had happened, and yelled to his wife, “*Quick, call the pastor!*” His wife replied, “*You mean 911?*” He said, “*No, the pastor - he can get money out of anybody!*”

In addition, an church overseer should be 3:3 “**gentle, not quarrelsome...**” It’s been said, “*A troublemaker is a guy who rocks the boat then convinces everyone else there's a storm at sea.*” A argumentative, combative personality disqualifies a man from spiritual leadership.

And 3:3 “**not covetous...**” or envious of other people... even of other pastors, and churches, and ministries.

Verse 4, 3:4 “**one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence...**” This is a key - *does the elder’s wife and kids respect him?* If a pastor or elder can’t win the respect of those who know him best, you have to question if he lives respectably.

And when it comes to a pastors’ kids, *remember they are kids.* I shielded my kids from unfair expectations.

It’s not whether a pastor’s kids will rebel, they’re sinners, all sinners rebel. It’s how a pastor responds in the wake of their rebellion. And coming down too hard can be just as foolish, as not coming down hard enough. A wise pastor/dad knows a balance is needed.

Here, Paul says that a pastor’s ability to manage his household is an indicator of how well he’ll manage the house of God. Verse 5, 3:5 “**(for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?)...**” Being both a pastor and a father, I’m often struck with the similarities of the two roles.

Both require the combination of *a strong hand* and *a sensitive heart*. Pastors and dads have *to rule* (or **take charge**), but they also have *to love* (or **take care**). *Family leadership* is good training for *spiritual leadership* - and *spiritual leadership* is good training for *family leadership*. A pastor should be good at both.

It’s interesting, you can neglect your kids and wife, and still be a good doctor - *but not a good pastor.* If you don’t lead your family well, you can’t lead God’s family.

Years ago it dawned on me, church members are fickle, and leave the church at the drop of a hat. Yet at the end of the day, when the smoke clears, I want my wife to still be my wife, and my children to still be proud of being my kids. A wise pastor prioritizes his family.

And he shouldn't be <sup>3:6</sup> **"a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil."** Often a new believer wins a few early victories, and it goes straight to the frontal lobe. He mistakenly thinks the power is his... *he's wrong!* And if the prideful novice is a leader, he can drag down his followers. Thus, before he leads he needs time to mature.

<sup>3:7</sup> **"Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil."** The snare of the devil is a progression - *puff him up, set him up for failure, knock him off his pedestal, then bury him in condemnation.*

A new believer shouldn't be rushed into leadership, so that all the world knows of him is his *before Christ* days. He needs time to earn a godly reputation.

The point is, the church needs seasoned men with *character*, not just clever *characters*. I'm reminded of a scene from the movie **"Eight Men Out."** It's about the 1919 Black Sox Scandal. Eight Chicago White Sox throw the World Series. The great player, Shoeless Joe Jackson, is leaving the courthouse and is swarmed by reporters shouting, **"What did you do Joe? Were you in on the fix?"**... Suddenly, everyone goes quiet, while the voice of a little boy, maybe ten years old, rises above the din of the crowd. He looks at his hero and says, **"Say it ain't so, Joe, say it ain't so."** Joe says nothing. He hangs his head, and walks away in shame.

I don't ever want a boy in our church to look at me, and say, **"Say it ain't so, Pastor Sandy, say it ain't so."**

Verse 8, <sup>3:8</sup> **"Likewise deacons..."** Once a pastor and a deacon went deer hunting. When they arrived at their usual spot they found a **"No Trespassing"** sign. The pastor recalled that old man Jones had a farm just down the road. The deacon balked. **"Yea, but Jones is a mean, ornery cuss."** The pastor told him not to worry.

When they rolled into his yard the deacon sat in the truck, while the pastor went to get permission to hunt. When the door opened, there was Jones, **"Pastor, nice to see you! You're our favorite pastor. When we go to town we attend your church - what can I do for you?"** Obviously, permission to hunt was granted, but as the pastor walked away, the farmer asked him, **"Pastor, I've got a crippled old horse by the barn that**

needs to be put down. I'm rather fond of him, and can't bring myself to pull the trigger. Will you shoot him for me?"

As the pastor walked back to the truck he thought he'd have a little fun with the deacon. He jerked his rifle off the rack, and snarled, "*Nobody's going to talk to me like that...*" He aimed his gun at the horse and *blam...* the horse dropped. Suddenly, he heard, "*blam, blam...*"

The pastor spun around and there was the deacon with smoke pouring out of the barrel of his shotgun. The deacon yelled, "Come on pastor - you got his horse, and I got two of his cows, let's get out of here!"

Elders and deacons make an interesting team. Elders look after the spiritual needs of the church. Deacons handle the physical needs. The Greek word translated <sup>3:8</sup> "*deacon*" means "*servant*." Elder is a role of authority and oversight. Deacon is a post of service. I call the deacons of our church, **the designated doers**.

In the book of Acts the elders were chosen by Paul and the existing elders - whereas in Acts 6 the deacons were chosen by fellow members of the congregation.

And Paul tells us that the deacons, <sup>3:8</sup> "**must be reverent**" - that is, serious about the things of God.

<sup>3:8</sup> "**Not double-tongued,**" or loosed lipped. A gossip has no place as a deacon in the leadership of the church.

<sup>3:8</sup> "**Not given to much wine, not greedy for money,** <sup>3:9</sup> **holding the mystery of the faith with a pure conscience.** <sup>3:10</sup> **But let these also first be tested; then let them serve as deacons, being found blameless.**" All leaders need to be proven before they're appointed! The golden rule on selecting church leaders is this - **it's much easier to hire than it is to fire**. Thus, we need to test them first.

Verse 11, <sup>3:11</sup> "**Likewise their wives...**" Here's an example of how Bible versions can mix up interpretation with translation. The Greek text reads simply, <sup>1 Timothy 3:11</sup> "*Likewise the women.*" The KJV assumed Paul was addressing a deacon's wife. *Maybe... but there's another possibility.*

Other NT passages suggest there was a female order of deacons in the church. Romans 16:1 calls Phoebe <sup>Romans 16:1</sup> "*servant of the church*" - it's the word **deacon**.

Deaconesses are *sisters who serve* the needs of other women. Often in church life, situations arise that need a feminine touch. And it's nice to have a group of deaconesses available to meet those special needs.

I like what commentator, J. Vernon McGee, said about this verse. He believed the reason women today clamor for roles in the church that are reserved for men, is because they've been denied their *rightful* role.

I believe here Paul is laying out the character of a deaconess... She <sup>1 Timothy 3:11</sup> **"must be reverent, not slanderers."** In the Greek it reads, **"not she-devils."** The word **"devil"** means **"slanderer."** I heard of a lady who had a great way to combat gossip. When told a juicy tidbit, she'd insist that she and the gossip go directly to the subject of the gossip to see if the accusation was true. I doubt anyone approached her twice with a maligning word.

Before you say *anything* about *anyone* make it pass through three gates: **Is it true? Is it needful? Is it kind?**

The deaconess should be <sup>3:11</sup> **"temperate, faithful in all things."** Women representing the church should be self-controlled. Once a man said of his wife, **"My wife should be in Congress, she keeps bringing bills to the house."** A temperate woman controls her spending.

In verse 12 Paul reverts back to the male deacons, <sup>3:12</sup> **"Let deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their children and their own houses well. <sup>3:13</sup> For those who have served well as deacons obtain for themselves a good standing and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus."** A deacon who serves faithfully earns people's respect, and gains influence. A good example was Stephen. In Acts 6 he's waiting on tables. In the very next chapter he's preaching and working miracles. Deacon is a role where folks can prove themselves.

Verse 14, <sup>3:14</sup> **"These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; <sup>3:15</sup> but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God..."** This is the theme of 1 Timothy... <sup>3:15</sup> **"how... to conduct ourselves in the house of God."**

<sup>3:15</sup> **"Which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth."** *Where else can a person go today to find truth?* Not the government, not media, not the public universities. Rather than advocate for God, they oppose Him. The only place people can go these days to find God's truth is <sup>3:15</sup> **"the Church of the living God!"**

We are <sup>3:15</sup> **"the pillar and ground of the truth."** If the Gospel is an explosion of grace and truth, then think of the Church of our Lord Jesus as the Ground Zero.

Verse 16, <sup>3:16</sup> **"And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness."** Godliness is like an enchanting and mysterious woman. She has a mystique. The more you know

her, the more you realize you can't figure her out... Things of God also have a mystique that draw us in. As Pascal put it, "I love God because I know Him. I adore Him because I cannot comprehend Him."

Philosopher Mortimer Adler became a Christian at age 82. He explains why... "I believe Christianity is the only logical, consistent faith in the world. But there are elements in it that can only be described as mystery. My chief reason for choosing Christianity was that the mysteries were incomprehensible. What's the point of revelation if we can figure God out ourselves?"

And Paul summarizes **the Gospel's mystique**. <sup>3:16</sup> "God was manifested in the flesh..." The *Ancient of Days* became a *Child of Time*. The *Infinite* became an *infant*. The Gospel begins with amazement and wonder!

Jesus was <sup>3:16</sup> "justified in the Spirit..." He worked miracles, but not of His own hand. His power came from God's Spirit. He operated as we should - *by faith!*

He was <sup>3:16</sup> "seen by angels..." Jesus often received angelic assistance. But what's more amazing is that for the 30-plus years God walked the Earth every angel in the cosmos stopped in their tracks, and marveled...

He was <sup>3:16</sup> "preached among the Gentiles..." This was an unexpected twist. The Bible was written by Jews, for Jews, about Jews, to save Jews... yet immediately, the King of the Jews was preached among Gentiles.

And <sup>3:16</sup> "believed on in the world..." A man, who never traveled more than 100 miles from His own hometown, became Lord and Savior in every corner of the planet.

And He was <sup>3:16</sup> "received up in glory." What began so inconspicuously... with peasant as parents - in a backwoods village called Nazareth - in a Bethlehem stable - in the womb of a young maiden - *crescendoes in the clouds!* The risen Lord ascended to glory! The Son of God **shows up** in the womb of a virgin. He **goes up** to heaven from a hill outside Jerusalem. From *arrival* to *ascension*, <sup>3:16</sup> *great is the mystery of godliness!*

Chapter 4, <sup>1 Timothy 4:1</sup> "Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>4:2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy..." So far, Paul has told Timothy to use the Bible biblically - stand up for sound doctrine - fight the fight of faith. A pastor should be <sup>1 Timothy 3:2</sup> "apt to teach." The church is <sup>1 Timothy 3:15</sup> "the pillar and ground of the truth." *But why the emphasis on right doctrine?* Because the closer we get to the last days, false teaching will abound. It's a shock to a new Christian to realize not every so-called "Bible teacher" teaches the Bible. Some speak <sup>1 Timothy 4:2</sup> "lies."

Not everything labeled “*spiritual*” is **godly** or **biblical**. Walk into the “**Religion and Spirituality**” section at Barnes and Noble, and you’ll find books by Billy Graham and the Dalai Lama on the same shelf!

Today’s world is fascinated with all things “*spiritual*.” Paul tells Timothy there are <sup>4:1</sup> “**deceiving spirits**” in the world, and *demons spewing doctrine*. When Satan fell a third of the angels joined his revolt. These angels are spiritual, but they’re <sup>4:1</sup> “**deceiving spirits**” who inspire false doctrine. Their goal is for us to <sup>4:1</sup> “**depart from the faith**.”

And Satan has an advantage in this battle - **he lies shamelessly**. Demonically-inspired teachers tell people *what they want to hear*, or *what they’d like for you to hear*. Unlike God, Satan has no obligation to the truth.

This is why Paul says of these demonically-inspired teachers <sup>4:2</sup> “**having their own conscience seared with a hot iron...**” They’ve lost any integrity or fidelity to truth. Their conscience has been cauterized or desensitized.

These teachers are no longer governed by sacred Scripture, let alone God’s Holy Spirit. They’re governed by *politically correctness* not *theological accuracy*.

And in the next few verses Paul provides a rundown of what these false teachers emphasize... <sup>4:3</sup> “**forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth**.” From food to sex - the false teacher forbids what God allows and calls good.

*Mormons* don’t drink coffee, but God created coffee beans... *Seventh-day Adventists* are vegetarian, but God created meat - **steak, sausage, bacon!**... *Roman Catholicism* denies its priests the opportunity to marry and enjoy healthy sexual intimacy, and it puts an undue pressure on their clergy... When God created beans, and meat, and sex He said that it was all good!

*And He hasn’t changed His mind!* You please God not through abstinence, but by thanking God for His blessings; then enjoying and using them for His glory.

Holiness isn’t about what *I sacrifice for God*, it’s about what *He sacrificed to save me!* Biblical spirituality involves the work of Jesus on the cross, and the work of His Spirit in my heart, *not self-deprivation*.

In Colossians we studied a heretical doctrine known as “*Gnosticism*.” It taught strange forms of asceticism. **Asceticism is the attempt to please God and grow spiritually through self-denial**. Yet Paul couldn’t have disagreed more! We become more spiritual, not by denying God-given pleasures, but abiding in Jesus.

A quick survey of history and you'll discover how often these verses have been overlooked. Christians have try to grow spiritually through fleshy techniques.

In the fourth century AD monasticism was a popular means of spirituality. Monks retreated to monasteries. Some lived in the forest and ate only herbs and roots, and wore loincloths made of thorns... **A monk named Simeon Stylites set the standard for extremism: he lived atop a column for 37 years and bowed to God 1,244 times a day.** Simeon thought the more he suffered the more spiritual it made him. He was wrong!

And even today there're Christians with the mistaken idea that self-deprivation is the key to spiritual maturity. The more I do *without* the more spiritual I'll become.

It's the, "***If I don't smoke, drink, cuss, or chew - or run with women who do...***" kind of **attitude.**" But just keeping your nose clean doesn't alter your heart. A person can live in a cave, and eat nothing but communion wafers; yet still be full of lust, hate, pride.

What makes a person holy isn't *what we do without*, but *what we take in*. I grow in God by receiving His nature, His pardon, His peace, His love, His joy, His power. Jesus said in Matthew 15:11, it's **Matthew 15:11** "***not what goes into the mouth (that) defiles a man; but what comes out of the mouth, this defiles a man.***" Real righteousness is a matter of the heart. Christianity is not me cleaning up my act - its me trusting God to make me clean.

Religion ***conforms us from the outside in***. Whereas, the Holy Spirit ***transforms us from the inside out***.

In contrast to self-deprivation, verse 4 encourages us to enjoy what God created. **1 Timothy 4:4** "***For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; 4:5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.***" Once you've thanked God for it, eating a bowl of chocolate ice cream can be an act of worship!

I've heard it put, "***The world says, 'I live to pleasure as I die to God.'*** The ascetic says, "***I live to God as I die to pleasure.***" But the Christian says, "***I live to pleasure as I live to God.***" Christians are free to enjoy the pleasures God created... *a good cup of coffee, a juicy slice of bacon, a glass of wine in moderation, sexual intimacy with my spouse.* As long I don't get intoxicated or cause my brother to stumble in their faith, *have at it.*

And when it does make sense to abstain, as in the example of an elder and alcohol, realize abstinence alone doesn't make you more pleasing to God. Paul says God gave us meat and drink to enjoy in the proper context. Abstinence doesn't make you more righteous, *not in God's eyes*. God authored life's pleasures and we're free to participate in them if doing so enhances our *gratitude for and dedication to God.*

In verse 6 Paul tells Timothy, <sup>4:6</sup> “If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.” Folks need instruction in the Bible. Christianity is a teaching enterprise. <sup>4:6</sup> “A good minister” teaches <sup>4:6</sup> “good doctrine.”

<sup>4:7</sup> “But reject profane and old wives’ fables...” in other words, **superstitions**. Amazingly, even in a high-tech society like ours, 20 million Americans carry a rabbit’s foot or some other good luck charm - *though it wasn’t lucky for the rabbit!* Paul encourages Timothy not to trust his destiny to silly superstitions, but to godliness.

<sup>4:7</sup> “Exercise yourself toward godliness. <sup>4:8</sup> For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things...” Physical exercise you can firm up your thighs. But through spiritual exercise - *prayer, Bible study, service* - you can firm up your faith (*which profits a lot*).

Realize, health Clubs work off a business model where they sell far more memberships than their facility can accommodate, because they know after a few weeks most people no longer visit. *Exercise is hard work! And godly exercise is still exercise...* It’s been said, “You don’t stop exercising because you grow old. You grow old because you stop exercising.” And if your Christian life has grown old and lost its vigor; then you’ve probably stopped exercising yourself spiritually.

And here’s why spiritual exercise is so vital... <sup>4:8</sup> “having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. <sup>4:9</sup> This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.” I’m going to live forever spiritually, thus I’d rather have a sculpted, in-shape spirit, and bulging faith that’ll last for eternity - than a well-toned corpse.

In verse 10 Paul sums it up, <sup>4:10</sup> “For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. <sup>4:11</sup> These things command and teach.”

Then he tells Timothy, verse 12, <sup>4:12</sup> “Let no one despise your youth.” At the time, he was probably mid 20s, and it was an issue. Jewish priests didn’t start ministry until they were thirty. Too many folks, Timothy was still a kid.

When I was younger I ran into the same resistance. Some folks refused to attend CC because they wanted an older pastor. I’ll never forget Mrs. Aleman. On my thirtieth birthday she was so excited, “Pastor, Pastor, I’m so glad you’ve turned 30. Now we no longer have a young pastor!” I didn’t know whether to smile or cry...

Paul tells Timothy not to be intimidated by those who frown on his youth. Spiritual maturity has little to do with natural age. You can be young and possess great spiritual

depth, or you can be old and a spiritual baby. What matters is time spent with God and in His Word.

Paul says Timothy needs to forget what people think and get on with leading those who want to be led.

He tells him, <sup>4:12</sup> **but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.** All spiritual leaders should be first and foremost an example to other believers in attitude and in action.

<sup>4:13</sup> **“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”** Timothy needs to read and study his Bible, for the old adage is true, **“leaders are readers.”**

Verse 14, <sup>4:14</sup> **“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”** God gave Timothy a spiritual gift when the elders laid hands on him, praying and prophesying over him. But as in the Parable of the Talents, Jesus said the man with the one talent had it taken away because he buried and hid it. With spiritual gifts Paul reminds Timothy it's **use them or lose them!**

Verse 15, <sup>4:15</sup> **“Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.”** Notice, Paul expects Timothy to <sup>4:15</sup> **“progress.”** It's a sin when a pastor stops trying to get better at his craft. Imparting God's Word is a vital task that deserves my best effort. I need to be growing from year to year.

And finally verse 16, <sup>4:16</sup> **“Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”** A pastor juggles a lot of balls: *hospital visits, counseling, church administration, staff, etc.* - but the one ball a pastor can't afford to drop is the teaching of sound doctrine.

*The salvation of souls and the spiritual growth of the Church* depends on his faithful parsing of the Scripture. The Bible needs to be every pastor's pressing priority.

*And why not yours as well!* Faith comes by hearing...God's Word. Let's build our lives on the Word of God.