

 **Main Street**  
UNITED METHODIST CHURCH



**I Timothy 3:14-4:16**  
**“True Faith Breeds Holy Toughness”**  
(4<sup>th</sup> in a series on unlikely Christmas texts)

December 20, 2015  
(4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Advent)

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**“Following Christ From City Center!”**

I TIMOTHY 3:14-4:16 "TRUE FAITH BREEDS HOLY TOUGHNESS"

A. 3:14-16 PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS, INTERIM INSTRUCTIONS, FAITH CONFESSED.

14 I hope to come to you soon, (1:3, 4:13) Substitute For Paul's Presence  
 but I am writing these instructions to you so that, (15) if I am delayed, Significant Task For Timothy  
 you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, High View Of Church, Manners/Etiquette  
 which is the church (assembly) of the living God, Num. 16:3, Dt. 23:1-3, 8, Micah 2:5, 2 Cor. 6:16, 1 Thess. 1:9  
 the pillar and bulwark of the truth. Temple Imagery, Rev. 3:12, Bold Claim To Corporate Truth  
 Truth Of Revelation In Christ is Summarized, Confessed, Sung?

16 Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of our religion: Early Hymn/Creed, Phil. 2:6-11, Col. 1:15-20, Acts 19:28  
*The Faith* = Mini-Creed, Clear Content  
 (Incarnation) Who = Christ  
 "Who was manifested in the flesh,  
 vindicated (justified) in the Spirit, seen by angels,/  
preached among the nations,  
 believed on in the world, taken up in glory. (Mission Begun: 40-Days Appears)  
 (Mission Ended/Vindication)

B. 4:1-6 INSTRUCTIONS TO TIMOTHY FOR THE CHURCH (WARNINGS + FOR).

1 Now the Spirit expressly says Predictable Christian Defections, Mk. 13:5-6, 13, 19-22, Acts 20:29-30  
 Through Prophecy? Distant Early Warning System!  
 that in later times some will depart from the faith Content, 3:9 (1:5, 19), Apostasy  
 by giving heed to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, Source Of Doctrinal Error & Attack  
 through the pretensions of liars whose consciences are seared, Polemical Denigration, Unfeeling  
 2 who forbid marriage 2 Charges, (Greek) Negative View Of Body/Creation, Sounds So Spiritual  
 3 and enjoin abstinence from foods False Asceticism, Jewish Food Laws  
 which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. Gratitude  
 Strong Affirmation Of Creation

4 *For* everything created by God is good, *For* = Reason, Gen. 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31  
 and nothing is to be rejected Assertion (v.4b) + Qualification (v.4c)  
 if it is received with thanksgiving; (1:12), Piety  
 5 *for* then it is consecrated by the Word of God and prayer. In Intention And In Reception

6 If you put these instructions before the brethren (and sisteren!), *Brethren* = Whole Church Family  
 you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, Must Refute Current Error, Be Intolerant Of Lives  
 nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine which you have followed. Content, (1:3, 11)  
 Discipleship Is Also About Classic Christian Teaching

B' 4:7-10 INSTRUCTIONS TO TIMOTHY FOR HIMSELF (4 COMMANDS + 2 FOR'S)

7 1 Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths. Gnostic Speculation About The Aeons, (1:4, 7-9)  
 2 Train yourself in godliness; Spiritual Disciplines/Fitness, Athletic Image, 1 Cor. 9:24-25

8 *for* while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, (1:4)  
 as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. Eternal Value  
 9 The saying is sure and worthy of full acceptance. (1:15a), Emphatic Formula

10 *For* to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, Effort Required  
 who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. Potential & Actual (1:1), 2:4-6

11 3 Command and teach these things. Authoritative Instruction  
 12 4a Let no one despise your youth, Timothy Was A Young Man In A Culture That Valued Tenure  
 b but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 4/5 Virtues (1:5)  
 No Private/Public Split = Integrity

A' 4:13-16 PAUL'S TRAVEL PLANS, 4 INTERIM COMMANDS, FAITH TAUGHT.

13 Till I come, attend to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, to teaching. (1:3, 3:14)  
 Read, Preach, Teach Scripture

14 Do not neglect the gift you have, Spiritual Gift, Charisma, (1:18-20)  
 which was given you by prophetic utterance when the council of elders laid their hands upon you. Imparted  
 15 Practice these duties, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. Disciplines

16 Take heed to yourself and to your teaching; hold to that, Self-Awareness, Doctrine, Lifestyle  
 for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Individual And Group Benefit

## TRUE FAITH BREEDS HOLY TOUGHNESS

*“Train yourself in godliness....”*

The toughest and most productive regimen ever.

### I T I M O T H Y 4 : 7

**T**here is a jingle from my childhood that stuck. I associate it with a bowl of tomato soup and a grilled cheese sandwich which we were allowed to eat once a week in the den just before Disney came on. It's from the Campbell's soup people:

“Soup and sandwich, soup and sandwich,  
go together like a horse and carriage.  
Any time or weather,  
soup and sandwich go together.”

Well, *Jesus and his church go together; you can't have one without the other because he has not designed it so.*

Our Lord came not to save individuals as isolated units but to create a community around himself, a band of followers, a new Israel, a new *institution* - to use a much maligned word- that would preserve his story across the generations and serve as a showcase of his work and a meeting point with his person.<sup>1</sup> To have a bond of trust with Jesus Christ is to be glued into his imperfect people as we make our way through history. And if you don't get the connection, your faith and life will be distorted, bent out of shape; because the truth is this: *Jesus and his people go together*; or- as one of the early church fathers put it memorably in Latin- *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*: “outside the church there is no salvation.”<sup>2</sup> The risen Jesus is even now reigning over, working through, and eventually returning for a people.

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<sup>1</sup> Jesus' first public act- after his baptism and desert trial- was to form a band of disciples as witnesses and apprentices (e.g. Mark 1:16-20, 2:13-14, 3:13-19), then to reconstituted after Judas' defection (Acts 1:12-26).

<sup>2</sup> Bishop Cyprian of Carthage, 3<sup>rd</sup> century.

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 4**

Now what I say is only a restatement of something we recite most Sundays by rote. You know it: *I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth... and in Jesus Christ, his only Son our Lord*, then thirdly, *I believe in the Holy Spirit...* Then come words where we leap from the perfections of God deep into the human mess: *the holy catholic church* and *the communion of saints*. The primary work of the Holy Spirit- the first thing listed under his proper work in the Apostles' Creed- is that those who are joined to Christ in faith are also glued to one another- *the communion of the saints*, in a visible institution- *the church*. Trinity and church go together in the same confession; God and his people go together; Jesus and his disciples are a package, not the same, not to be confused, but never separated.

Over the years I've heard it all, and along the way I've developed an array of snappy one-liners to respond whenever people say utterly stupid things about the church. So when they say, "My mother made me go to church as a child," I reply, "You need to listen to your momma; she was a wise woman, and it's time to grow up a bit! It would be terrible to miss God because you're still working on issues of adolescent independence twenty years after that work should have been finished."

And when they say, "Sunday is the only day I have to sleep in," I say, "Then go to bed earlier on Saturday night, and don't drink so much!"

And when they say, "If I came back to church the ceiling might fall in," I say, "The ushers have a few football helmets for just that purpose."

And when they say, "I don't like everything the United Methodist Church is doing," I say, "Neither do I. Join the club, and work for her renewal."

And when they say, "All the church wants is your money," I say, "No, nothing so puny as that. We want all you are and all you have for Christ!"

And when they say, "I have my own private religion," I say, "Yea, so private it doesn't exist, except for you and the devil who strokes your ego and says, 'You are soooo special to me, and soooo superior to that scruffy bunch down at the church!'"

And when they say, "You don't have to go to church to be a good Christian," I look them in the eye, "OK, show me in the book," or else I say, "How does it feel to live with constantly declining standards for what the word *good* means?" because that is just what happens over time. A vision of the goodness of Jesus Christ is whittled down to the self-serving conviction that *I am not so bad as other people*.

Sorry, friends, God is not do-it-yourself faith; God wants a people who do this thing together. Ours is a team sport. It's never just *me and Jesus* but always *we and Jesus*. We are *born again* into a large family that extends around the world and across the ages; it's set-apart (thus the word *holy*); it's multi-cultural (thus the world

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*catholic* or *universal*), and it's trans-generational (thus *the communion of the saints*). We are embraced, carried along, corrected and protected by the community. It's deeply personal, never merely private. Christ and his church are a package.

**A High View Of The Church (3:14-15)**

Why say such things when they go against the popular way of thinking? Why not just preaching on something like *How To Be A Better Me*, or *How To Use Prayer To Get What You Want To Live The Good Life*. Why? Because I've read First Timothy, and here I find a high view of the church:

“I hope to come to you soon,” writes Paul, “but I am writing these instructions, so that, if I am delayed, you may know how one ought to behave in *the household of God*, which is *the assembly of the living God, the pillar and bulwark of the truth*.”

Three interrelated titles are given here; the church is: 1) God's household, 2) the assembly of the Living God, and 3) the pillar and bulwark of the truth.

God has a household— an extended family, and to us are given the truths about who God is and where God is to be found. The truths of divine revelation are given to God's people. They are previewed in the Jews, revealed personally in Jesus, written in Scripture, summarized and confessed in creeds, preached by pastors, guarded by bishops and church councils, refined in doctrinal statements, sung in hymns and liturgy, celebrated in sacraments, interpreted in art and painting, sculpture and literature and poetry, acted out in mission and service, sealed by the martyrs, and passed across the synapse from belief to unbelief by all the saints.<sup>3</sup>

To the church is given the truths about this life and the life to come, and to cut yourself off from the living tradition of the church is to cut yourself off from these truths.<sup>4</sup> You may look alive for a little while- like a cut flower, but you will soon

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<sup>3</sup> On the multiple canons of the church and their mutual necessity in sustaining and protecting a full ecology of grace, see William J. Abraham, et. al., *Canonical Theism: A Proposal for Theology & The Church* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2008).

<sup>4</sup> For a Christian theory of knowledge, see Dallas Willard, *Knowing Christ Today: Why We Can Trust Spiritual Knowledge* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009)

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 6**

wither and show signs of death because you are removed from the flow of divine life that is in the fellowship of the church.<sup>5</sup> This conviction that God has entrusted true revelation to the church is not a cause for arrogance; it is- rather- the ground of our confidence and the motive of our service. Come week by week and your life will be shaped in these truths; neglect us and your life will inevitably be misshapen by one or more of the lies that are served up in the toxic soup of our culture: life as maximum pleasure, life as accumulation, life as my country or my family alone, life as escape into intoxicants, life as the pursuit of leisure and entertainment, life as a search for the new, life as a small circle of me and mine.<sup>6</sup> Each Sunday we are detoxified by a fresh infusion of the bracing truth of God. What dialysis does for kidney patients, the church does every Sunday: cleanse, strengthen, then sent you back out.

The story is told of a pastor who was experiencing trouble with a few of his more prosperous members who were negligent in attendance and not giving as they once had. One of the new converts approached the pastor and offered to take any role in the church that might be needed. A light came on, and he gave the new believer a list of those who were no longer faithful and suggested they be written a letter of encouragement and gave permission to use his name. A week later the pastor received a note from one who received such a letter. The man promised to attend more often and repented for his negligence. He also enclosed a check for \$10,000. At the bottom of the note this P.S. was scribbled, “Pastor, I suggest you use spell-check next time. There’s only one *t* in *dirty* and no *k* in *scumbag*.”<sup>7</sup>

God thinks a lot of the church, enough to sustain in, discipline it, correct it, and eventually perfect it as bride of Christ. It’s his household, his people, the place where the deposit of truth is kept- those who have said Yes to his Son. *Jesus and his church go together, and you really can’t have one without the other.* Faithful Christians have a high view of the church- not a naive view, not a superficial view- but a high view.

**A High View Of Christ (3:16)**

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<sup>5</sup> This is the core metaphor of the vine and branches in John 15.

<sup>6</sup> For an excellent treatment of world views and their cultural narratives, see Steve Wilkens & Mark Sanford, *Hidden Worldviews: Eight Stories That Shape Our Lives* (Downer’s Grove, ILL: IVP, 2009).

<sup>7</sup> *Great Stories*, Volume 8, Issue 30, Spring 2001, 5.

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 7**

Faithful Christians also have a high view of Jesus Christ. Some churches reject creeds and confessions and doctrinal statements as secondary and therefore unnecessary. They say things like, “We just believe the Bible.” But if you follow up by asking for a summary, they will tell you what *they believe*, not knowing it’s a personal creed and not one sanctioned or tested by the church at large. The earliest Christians summarized the faith in pithy summaries that could be easily memorized. It’s what we have in verse 16. First a solemn introduction or drum roll to create awe, “Great we confess is the mystery of our religion...” then a four line summary on Jesus’ incarnation, resurrection, mission and ascension. It takes work to cover so much good theology in so few words and make it so children can sing it:

“Who was manifested in the flesh,  
vindicated in the Spirit,  
seen by angels,  
preached among the nations,  
believed on in the world,  
taken up in glory.”

It’s a little creed; it’s all about the life of the One whose arrival celebrate at Christmas, as the lead line says, “Who was manifested in the flesh.” Here we are dealing with God the Son who became fully human, like us in every way except one- no rebellion against God, no sin, a perfect life lived out in an unlikely place.

It was October 17, 1944 and a young chaplain- Tom Torrance- was acting as a stretcher bearer following British troops in a night attack on the town of San Martino, Italy:

“When daylight filtered through, I came across Private Philips, scarcely twenty years old, mortally wounded. As I knelt, he said, ‘Padre, is God really like Jesus?’ I assured him he was the only god there is, the god who had come to us in Jesus, has shown his face to us, and poured out his love to us as our Saviour. As I prayed and commended him to the Lord Jesus, he passed away.”

Torrance the theologian later wrote, “There is no hidden God... no god behind the back of the Lord Jesus, but only the one Lord God who became incarnate in

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him.”<sup>8</sup> As Paul started, “He (meaning Jesus, God the Son) was manifested in the flesh,” and the passive voice *was manifested* indicates divine action.

But let me bring it even closer home in a story from Pastor David Slagle:

“Being from the South,” he writes, “I love ribs. Sauce gets on your face, fingers, and clothes; dirty napkins pile up next to half-eaten bowls of baked beans and slaw. When our crew had eaten all we could eat, we paid and waddled out to the car. I then reached in my pocket for my keys and came up with nothing but lint. I looked through the window; the ignition was empty. Only seconds earlier, those precious keys had slid right off my tray and followed a half-eaten corn cob and several bones to the bottom of a trash can. It was a long walk home, and my friends certainly weren't going to do the dirty work for me. So in I dove. I fished through bones, beans, barbecue, corn, cake, cole slaw, and a host of saliva-soaked napkins. A shiny layer of slime coated my arms before I finally grasped hold of those precious keys.”

“As I meditate on the Incarnation this Christmas,” he writes, “I consider our *dumpster-diving God*. I mean no disrespect. I have a soaring adoration for the infinite God who left a pristine heaven to search through the filth and rubbish of this fallen world for something precious to himself,” which was us.<sup>9</sup>

Jesus does not exhaust God, but in Jesus the Son we are shown the heart of God, that the one God lives in a triune relationship of love and has come to invite us back into that life, now in part, later in fullness. To the dying and the living we say that God is just like Jesus and can be fully trusted. When we killed him, God vindicated him before the world by the power of the Spirit in resurrection so that he was indeed *seen alive by angels*— meaning Jesus returned to God’s space in heaven— but not before the truth of his resurrection could be given to the church so that this news might be *preached*— as Paul says— *among the nations and believed on in the world*. Then, in his ascension, to quote the last line, he was *taken up in glory*.

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<sup>8</sup> Alister E. McGrath, *T.F. Torrance: An Intellectual Biography* (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1999), 74.

<sup>9</sup> PreachingToday.com search under *Christmas*.

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 9**

Jesus returned to God, taking with him a resurrected body as a permanent reminder that God will fulfill and not abandon the goodness of the created body or the whole creation that supports it. Presently there is only one resurrected body in the universe, that of the risen Lord, which was first formed in Mary’s virginal womb. Heaven, which ultimately implies a radically renewed creation, is sensual and exuberant in ways we cannot even imagine. Peak human experiences of beauty are only pale glimmers of the glory ahead when heaven finally comes down to usher in God’s forever kingdom. It’s all here in verse 16: Christmas, Easter, the Ascension, the Trinity, the world mission of the church, our future sharing in glory, a life of hope. Our faith is finally in a person. But that person places us in a community that lives with certain abiding convictions we call *doctrines*. They really matter, as the next six verses make clear.

**A High View Of The Faith (4:1-6)**

Let it be publicly known: I’ve been a card-carrying member and leader of two renewal organizations within the United Methodist Church. First The Mission Society because I believe our church has been neglecting the Great Commission for at least three generations, and secondly the Confessing Movement because I believe that we have ignored our own doctrinal teachings. It’s simple. I believe there is a faith with clear intellectual content which must be received, guarded, and then passed on in missions and evangelism. And when a church falls into neglect, someone has to act.

The revealed name of God is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, not Creator, Redeemer and Sustainer. God is a communion of persons, not a series of functions. Holy Scripture is authoritative for faith and practice. Jesus is not just one among many revealers. There is a personal focus of evil in the world, and we know its name— *Satan*. He had lots of little helpers who spread their lies to corrupt the people of God. Thus Paul refers straightforwardly in verses 1 and 6 to *deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons*. The creation design of God is for male and female in monogamous marriage. Spirituality embraces the whole of the good but spoiled creation and transforms all the appetites God has given us. It is the job of pastors to teach and model the faith and refute error, which is highly unfashionable in this age of hyper-tolerance. “And if- and only if- you put these instructions before the church will you be a good minister of Jesus Christ,” says Paul.

Faithful Christians have a high view of *the faith*, meaning the core doctrinal

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 10**

convictions we hold in common.<sup>10</sup> It does matter what we believe because the church is under constant, relentless and hidden attack from dark powers who inspire false teachers. They are liars, says Paul plainly, and their consciences are seared. They no longer are able to discern good from evil and truth from falsehood. A thick layer of scar tissue has formed over the sensitive surface of their soul.

The Greeks taught that human beings had two components, a soul which was a spark of the divine and a body which was of the earth and therefore less than fully good. The body was a tomb, and so salvation was the release of the higher soul from the lowly body to return to the realms of light from which it came. If we used the image of a diamond hidden in a pile of manure you have the basic idea. And if that's true, then one way to show contempt for the body as the lower self is through asceticism or extreme discipline. Marriage is forbidden, as are certain foods, which Paul notes in verse 3.

At first this sounds so spiritual, but it is not because it denies the fundamental goodness of creation. God made male and female bodies and designed them for mutual pleasure and procreation in marriage. God made us with bellies that get hungry and need to be fed. The true spiritual path is not to deny the appetites of the body in any absolute sense but through self-control and rightful use to fulfill them as God intended. Everything created by God is good, and we are to receive all God's good gifts with prayers of thanksgiving. Gluttony and lust are each indicators that a good desire is being fulfilled in an ungodly manner. Beneath every sin associated with the body and beneath every addiction is a good desire that needs to be brought under the influence of God's restraining and healing grace.

As Paul's understudy, Timothy was to teach the true stuff and refute the errors of the false teachers of his day within the church. We Methodists have been much too nice in this area. We embrace all, tolerate all, swallow all and let every new cultural fad work its way through the church with hardly a word of resistance. Because we have not tended to the hard work of promoting and defending the core claims of the faith, our people have lost all resistance to error; the church's immune system has been weakened, and we are wide open to all sorts of infections. We can no longer think *Christianly* at much depth. I'm tired of political correctness and vagueness of

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<sup>10</sup> For U.M's our standards are five: 1) Articles of Religion, 2) Confession of Faith, 3) Standard Sermons of Wesley, 4) Wesley's Notes on the New Testament, 5) The General Rules.

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## I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 11

belief; for the rest of my life I want to live into, understand and defend *the classic Christian faith*, not my faith, not your faith, not the faith of Joel Osteen or whoever the latest pop-Christian self-help guru is, but *the faith*, found in the Bible, in the Creeds, and in the living faith of the church over the ages.<sup>11</sup> Paul taught a high view of the Church, a high view of Christ, a high view of the faith, and fourthly- in verses 7 through 10, a high view of holy living and the disciplines required to maintain it.

### A High View Of Holy Living (4:7-10)

The seminary I attended was a first class academic experience, and for that I am grateful. What I hungered for and missed were men and women of God who would go beyond their academic expertise to talk about how to live this stuff out in daily life in a way that was whole and healthy, but it was largely absent. The focus was on academic aptitude and psychological awareness, not spiritual formation. And so it was really only after seminary that my ministerial spiritual formation began, and since that time I've collected for myself a number of teachers and mentors and practices to help fill the gaps. And what I learn, I teach others.

Paul warned Timothy about the attraction of useless speculations. "Have nothing to do with godless and silly myths," he warns. Instead, "train yourself in godliness," and the word *train* means athletic exertion. We are to work out in the habits and practices of faith with the same intensity as an athlete. The Christian life requires exertion, effort and a plan that says No to some things in order to say Yes to others. In this case No to silly intellectual speculation and Yes to training in godliness. Prayer, fasting, worship, solitude, Scripture study, service of the poor and journaling are all training methods to keep us open us to the deeper reaches of grace.<sup>12</sup>

In verse 10 Paul makes an interesting statement, "For to this end we *toil and strive* (again athletic words), because we have set our hope on the Living God, who is the Savior of all, especially of those who believe." When you examine Paul's life you see a spiritual athlete. His goal was the Living God, not God *the great idea*, not

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<sup>11</sup> For a workout, read Thomas Oden's *Classic Christianity: A Systematic Theology* (San Francisco, CA: HarperOne, 2009), a summary of his full three volumes.

<sup>12</sup> See Jeffrey Greenman, George Kalantzis, *Life in the Spirit: Spiritual Formation in Theological Perspective* (Downer's Grove, ILL: IVP, 2010). A good starting point is Richard Foster, *Celebration of Discipline* (San Francisco, CA: Harper, 1998).

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 12**

God *the distant deity*, not *the passionless god* of the philosophers, but the *Living God*, the fascinating God, the One who is unutterably and endlessly alive and vital, and whose grace is an energizing power.

At the end of this journey called the Christian life we will be engulfed by the life of the Triune God and- after a temporary stay in heaven- be ushered back into a healed creation. This is a dizzying thought. And it changes the way we view every person we ever meet; they are pilgrims with us either towards or away from this living God. Christ died for all, and therefore all have the potential to know this God because all are made in God's image and carry a God-shaped void in the heart. We are made for God, but for that circuit to be closed and life to flow there has to be trust, which is why Paul veers away from universalism with the phrase, *especially of those who believe*. All could be saved in the theoretical sense; there is no block on God's side; Christ came for all, but only those who respond to God's offer with trust will be saved. Which is why we must recover a passion for sharing our faith. People need access, and God has chosen to wrap up his message in persons like you and me.

Paul knew people needed more than words; they needed living examples- someone to copy. Which is why he instructed Timothy- even though he was young- not only to teach but to model these things, verse 12: "...but set the believers an *example* in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity." Give them a model worth following, not perfect, but at least credible. It is in walking with several models that the picture of Christ is filled out, which is why we need each other.

In recent years- and I think for convenience sake- we've grown to accept a credibility gap between the public and private lives of leaders. It's OK if a political leader has an affair or is an addict as long as they maintain credibility in the public arena and high approval ratings. Lack of integrity, and the word literally means *oneness*- to be the same person in public and in private, is rampant, and even taken as a sign of sophistication. But what is hidden in the dark basement will soon find its way into the light of day; you cannot finally hide who you are. What the world tolerates, namely the public and private gap, God never has. People will finally rate a pastor not on their professional competence but on the coherence and congruence of what they teach and how they live.

In some of my darker moments I accuse myself of being a fraud and an imposter as a minister, then I hear the Lord say once again, "Phil, whatever you fear, bring it to the light so that we can both look at it together." And once again I am

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**I Timothy 3:14-4:16 ..... 13**

encouraged to go on and step up to this sacred desk and have another go at pointing to realities far beyond my experience. Faithful Christians have a high view of holy living and the disciplines necessary to maintain a life of spiritual integrity.

**A High View Of The Tasks Of Ministry (4:13-16)**

Finally, in verses 13 through 16, Paul calls his younger protégé to have a high view of the work of the ministry. Interestingly enough, Paul starts with the Bible and the various ways it gets up off the page and worked into people’s lives, verse 13: “Till I come, attend to the *public* reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” Read it in front of people, announce what it says, work it into your lives at ground level.

Have you noticed that attention has been shortened to the sound bite. A symptom is the folk who complain when asked to listen to longer narrative portions of Scripture. And when I offer a book, they often say, “Is it on video?” That says nothing about God’s Word and everything about us. We are in danger of substituting all sorts of things for the public reading of the Word of God because of people’s intolerance for listening. When Scripture is read, God is speaking, and a church that won’t tolerate hearing from God is in big trouble. The sermon is not the focus. It is the reading of God’s Book with the sermon as a footnote. After each reading we remind ourselves just who we’ve heard from: “This is the Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God!**” We do not say this after the sermon, only after the reading!

My primary task is not to manage and not to politic- though I must do some of both; it’s not to keep you happy and inspired; my primary task is to read and preach and teach the Word of God. It ‘s why I take time to prepare a Scripture sheet each week, so you may understand the Word with me and have your life and mind changed. Ministers who tell their people and endless string of cute stories and never deal seriously with Scripture ought to be charged with malpractice. The cultural demand is for spiritual cotton candy; what’s needed are meat and veggies of Scripture, and perhaps a little milk for infants. “Till I come,” Paul commanded, “attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.”<sup>13</sup>

It is no sin of pride to know what spiritual gifts the Lord has given you. In fact, it is required for effectiveness. Verse 14: “Do not neglect *the gift* you have, which was given you by prophetic inspiration when the counsel of elders laid their hands

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<sup>13</sup> Read Acts 6 for a case study in keeping priorities.

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upon you.” I have many duties at which I have to be a least competent, but when I give time to the areas of my gifting, good things happen. The challenge as I creep past sixty is to discipline myself to spend more time in those areas where I’m gifted by the Spirit and less in those areas where I am not. This too is a part of spiritual maturity. A minister who sticks close to Scripture and is honest about the gifts they have and don’t have is half way there. Paul commanded Timothy to know and use his spiritual gifts, which implies that Timothy would help others discover and release their gifts as well. That is the next step for Main Street Church, not for me to use my gifts, but for you to find and use yours.

And it’s all for a purpose, a grand and holy purpose. Verse 16, “Take heed to yourself and to your teaching;” Paul warns, “hold to that, for by so doing *you will save both yourself and your hearers.*” First your own life and walk with then Lord, then your public teaching as an overflow. It’s always from the inside out. And it really matters, “for by so doing you will save yourself and your hearers.” Ultimate matters are at stake. I end with a series of questions.

**CONCLUSION**

Do you have a high view of the church? Or are you a constant detractor?

Do you have a high view of Jesus Christ? Or are you looking for a better path and an easier way than actually following him?

Do you have a high view of the faith and its content? Or do you rebel against the notion of binding doctrines which keep us in the faith and set boundaries?

Do you have a high view of holy living and spiritual disciplines? Or are you un-formed and sliding away from a disciplined pursuit of God?

Do you have a high view of the work of ministry? Or do you see it as fluff?

These things make for a healthy church. I love the way Paul used a reference to Christmas at the beginning, “Who was manifested in the flesh,” to lead us into a large vision of why Christ came and what it means. So stop at the manger this Christmas. Ponder with Mary the moment of his coming. Sing with the angels and welcome the magi. But don’t stop there. Follow him all the way. From his birth to his baptism, from his baptism to his battle in the desert, then into his ministry, his travels to Jerusalem, the cross, the full-then-empty tomb, the risen Lord, the outpoured Spirit, and a world mission in and through the church which is the custodian of the treasures of divine revelation. Christmas- wondrous as it is- is only the doorway to the rest of the story. Don’t stop short.

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