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Editor, Keith Sharp

Designer, William Stewart



- unless otherwise noted, answers to questions by Keith Sharp -

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Finally, brethren  
**WHATEVER THINGS** are true  
 are noble  
 are just  
 are pure  
 are lovely  
 are of good report  
 IF THERE IS ANY VIRTUE AND IF THERE IS ANYTHING PRAISEWORTHY –  
**meditate on these things.**

PHILIPPIANS  
**4:8**

You can download this month's Meditate On These Things as a PDF file by clicking [here](#). Also, an archive of past MOTT issues is available at [christistheway.com](http://christistheway.com).

## Are Expletives Justified?

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

A few years ago our local newspaper's "Spirituality" column treated us to a defense of a "cluster bomb of expletives" and a blasphemous claim that Jesus "went on a tirade" when He cleansed the Temple. Just the sort of "spirituality" needed in a society where verbal filth fills the air and airwaves and where faith in the divinity of Christ is regularly mocked and attacked.

What does the Master really teach about filthy language?

*"Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers"* (Ephesians 4:29).

Is this important?

*"But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned"* (Matthew 12:36-37).

Does a bad situation make it right to do wrong?

*"And why not do evil that good may come?--as some people slanderously charge us with saying. Their condemnation is just"* (Romans 3:8, **English Standard Version**).

Did Christ go "on a tirade"? "He committed no sin, neither was deceit found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). We ought to be able to expect better from one who claims to be teaching our citizens "spirituality."

# Burned Up In The Fire

Jefferson David Tant | Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA

There's a sad story recorded in Leviticus 10:1-3:

*"Now Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, took their respective firepans, and after putting fire in them, placed incense on it and offered strange fire before the LORD, which He had not commanded them. And fire came out from the presence of the LORD and consumed them, and they died before the LORD. Then Moses said to Aaron, 'It is what the LORD spoke, saying, "By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, And before all the people I will be honored."' So Aaron, therefore, kept silent."*

Wow! What happened? These two were consumed in a fire! Why? Because they "offered strange fire." And what was so strange about it? Because God had not commanded or authorized it. Now, what do you suppose these two men were thinking? We might suppose that as they were preparing to offer a burnt offering to the Lord, they might have reasoned, "Well, fire is fire, and one fire is as good as another." They may have thought that the wood they used for the fire was easier to ignite than the one God mentioned, so they used it. Who knows what they thought?

Now suppose I go to the Ford dealer to buy a convertible. I select my car, make a down payment, and then go the next day to pick up my car. The salesman goes to the car lot and brings out a 4-door sedan for me. I protest, and he explains that they have more sedans than convertibles, and it's more convenient to sell the sedan. Both cars have four wheels and an engine, but I reject the offer. Why? Because the salesman did not respect my order, and instead gave me a "strange car."

Dear Reader, do you see the point, the connection? In both cases, the one who gave the authority was not respected. With respect to Nadab and Abihu, God was not honored when they decided to do what they wanted rather than what God wanted. There are lessons to be learned from this in the "Christian" world today, and we want to make note of some of them.

## Women Preachers

*"A woman must quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness. But I do not allow a woman to teach or exercise authority over a man, but to remain quiet. For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression" (I Timothy 2:11-14).*

Many denominations today are ordaining women as church leaders, but this is a clear violation of what God has said in His Word. I guess some reason that a woman can have as much Bible knowledge as a man, and can speak as well as a man. Therefore, she can have a leadership position in the church. Just as Nadab and Abihu thought one fire was as good as another.

## Ordaining Homosexuals

*"Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived; neither fornicators,.. nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor homosexuals, nor thieves, nor the covetous (etc.) will inherit the kingdom of God" (I Timothy 6:9-10).*

Can you imagine a church ordaining an idol worshiper as a leader? Or one who is known to solicit prostitutes? I don't think so. But among denominations accepting homosexuals are the Episcopal Church, the Methodist Church, the Unitarian Universalist Church, the United Church of Christ, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, the Presbyterian Church, The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), etc., etc. There are countless denominations around the world that claim they are "Christian," but who openly contradict the Bible, the Word that God has given us to guide us on the route to heaven. They can "inherit the pulpit," but not heaven.

### **Refusing to Observe the Lord's Supper**

*"And when He had taken some bread and given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, 'This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.' And in the same way He took the cup after they had eaten, saying, 'This cup which is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood'" (Luke 22:19-20).*

*"In the same way He took the cup also after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me'" (1 Corinthians 11:25)*

Luke gives an account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, which Christians observe on the 1st day of the week, which Christ gave as a memorial of His death for our sins. All the disciples present at the "Last Supper" partook of both the bread and the fruit of the vine (grape juice). But now we have denominations that refuse to follow Christ's instruction, as they do not observe the Lord's Supper. Among those would be the Salvation Army and the Christian Science Church.

*"Christian Science has eliminated the Lord's supper from their worship. They hold 'communion services' in the branch services twice a year, but on these occasions, neither bread nor wine is used. It is basically a type of meditation."*

We know that the Roman Catholic Church allows only the priests to partake of the fruit of the vine, while the common people partake only of the bread. But we note that the Bible in various passages says that "all" are to partake of both elements. "And when He had taken a cup and given thanks, He gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you'" (Matthew 26:27).

### **Baptism**

Some of Christ's last words while He was on the earth are recorded in Mark 16:16: "He who has believed and has been baptized shall be saved; but he who has disbelieved shall be condemned." And at the close of the first "gospel sermon" preached on the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, when the people were convinced that they had crucified the Son of God and asked what they must do, "Peter said to them, 'Repent, and each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:38).

Now, all Greek (the original New Testament language) and Bible scholars agree that the word "baptize" is from the Greek "baptizo," and that it means to "dip, plunge, immerse." That being true, why is it that so many denominations practice baptism by sprinkling or pouring water, or sprinkling rose petals, as one denomination is reported doing?

*"This change in England and other Protestant countries from immersion to pouring, and from pouring to sprinkling, was encouraged by the authority of Calvin, who declared the mode to be a matter of no importance; and by the Westminster Assembly of Divines (1643-1652), which decided that pouring and sprinkling are 'not only lawful, but also sufficient.'"*

Question: By what authority did Calvin say that one of God's commands was "a matter of no importance"? We remember Christ's words to Satan: "But He answered and said, 'It is written, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4).

Now consider what **Hiscox Standard Manual for Baptist Churches** says about baptism. "It is most likely that in the Apostolic...the baptism of a convert by that very act, constituted him a member of the church... In that sense, baptism was the door into the church. Now, it is different...The churches have candidates come before them, make their statement, give their 'experience,' and then their reception is decided by a vote of the members" (page 16).

Question: By what authority does the Baptist Church say “it is different?” There are only two spiritual beings that have influence on us who live on the earth. They are God and Satan. So, which one do you suppose has said that this spiritual matter is now “different?”

Then there are the various denominations that do not practice baptism in any form, such as the Salvation Army and Christian Science Church, as mentioned previously.

### Church Leaders

God has given specific instructions about those who are to be chosen to be shepherds over local churches. Among the qualifications for those who serve in leadership, we look to Titus 1:5-6:

*“For this reason I left you in Crete, that you would set in order what remains and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, namely, if any man is above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion.”*

Similar instructions are given in I Timothy 3:1-8, where these men are called “overseers.” Different translations use the word “bishop” in various verses. So, why must a man be married and have good children? To show their ability to lead. If a man’s children are out of order, that shows he doesn’t have the ability to lead. This qualification does not apply to those who are just preachers, for there are Bible examples of those who were preachers and who were not married.

Now note I Timothy 4:3 where Paul writes about those who have gone astray, including “men who forbid marriage,,” Can you think of a church that forbids its leaders to be married? How about the Catholic Church, which clearly disobeys what God’s Word teaches.

### Church Doctrines and Creeds

By some estimates, there are some 42,000 different denominations or sects claiming to be Christian in the world today. And they all have something in common. They all have their differing creeds, catechisms or doctrinal books. Now, consider this – they all differ from one another and disagree with one another. But more importantly, they all differ from, and disagree with the Bible. If they all said the same thing as the Bible, we wouldn’t need them.

In the foregoing points we have seen how the various church creeds differ from what the Bible says. Note what Christ said about such in Matthew 15:9: **“But in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.”**

Now, consider. Are the Methodist Discipline and the Baptist Manual a Doctrine of God? And is the Catholic Catechism a Doctrine of God? If so, why do they disagree on Biblical matters? Every denominational creed was written centuries after the church was established and the apostles and prophets had completed God’s revelation to mankind. Note what Jude wrote about this:

*“Beloved, while I was making every effort to write you about our common salvation, I felt the necessity to write to you appealing that you contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all handed down to the saints” (Jude 3).*

Note that Jude wrote that “the faith” was “once for all handed down to the saints.” Therefore, there have been no new revelations since the New Testament was completed in the First Century. Then note the apostle John’s words as he closes the New Testament writings:

*“I testify to everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: if anyone adds to them, God will add to him the plagues which are written in this book; and if anyone takes away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God will take away his part from the tree of life and from the holy city, which are written in this book” (Revelation 22:18-19).*

Does the Baptist Manual or the Catholic Catechism or other church creeds “add to” or “take away from the

words of the book of this prophecy”? If so, there is a penalty to be paid! “Anyone who goes too far and does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9).

We could go on for page after page showing how the denominations of men contradict the Word of God, but I hope what has been cited will cause you to give some thought to a serious matter. There is a group that seeks to follow only God’s word, and has no book of doctrine, catechism or creed except what God has given us through the inspired writers—the New Testament. Churches of Christ (Romans 16:16) seek to follow only what has been given to us without adding to, subtracting, or changing. And even caution must be exercised there. Just because the “name” is found on a church’s sign does not mean that the church “follows” the Bible in every respect. One searching for the truth must do as the Bereans did after hearing the apostle Paul preach. “Now these were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, for they received the word with great eagerness, examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so.” (Acts 17:11)

And in closing, note that we are encouraged in our spiritual pursuits to follow the apostle Paul’s admonition in Colossians 3:17: “Whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father.” “Do all in the name of...” means to do it “by the authority of” and not by our own authority, or the authority of some church official doctrine. We understand when a policeman says “Stop, in the name of the Law,” Why can’t people understand this with respect to God’s eternal Law?

Note some of Christ’s last words as he spoke to the apostles in Matthew 28:18: “And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.’”

Finally, concerning the enduring force of God’s revelation, we note Christ’s words in Matthew 5:18-19:

*“For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. Whoever then annuls one of the least of these commandments, and teaches others to do the same, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever keeps and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.”*

We dare not follow the example of Nadab and Abihu who were consumed by fire. The prospect of the eternal fires of hell are not pleasant. They were doing what God had not authorized.

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## **Joined ≠ Bound ≠ Married**

Patrick Donahue | Harvest, Alabama, USA

In discussing the coming together of husband and wife, Jesus made the following statement in Matthew 19:6 - “What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.” Although a lot of writing has been done on the meaning and application of the words “married,” and “bound,” perhaps not as much writing has centered on what is involved in the word “joined” in this text. That is the main purpose of this article.

### **Bound Is Not The Same As Married**

How do we know “bound” and “married” are two different things? First because the woman of Romans 7:2-3 is “married” to a second man while still “bound” to her original husband – so she is married to the second but bound to the first. Second we know it because of the definition of the word “adultery” (“unlawful intercourse with the spouse of another” – Vine’s Bible Dictionary) as it relates to texts like Mark 10:11. If a man divorces his wife and marries another, how can it be called adultery (according to that text) if he is married to this second woman? It must be because there is still a tie back to the original wife – he is still “bound” (by God) to her. Again, married to the second but bound to the first. This is further verified by the fact that the described adultery is said to be “against” his former wife. He is still bound/obligated to her; that is why the adultery with the second wife is “against” the first wife. And this I think is the sense in which Herodias was still Philip’s “wife” in Mark 6:17, not in the sense they were still married (secular

history says they were divorced), but in the sense Herodias was still bound/obligated to Philip – as First Corinthians 7:39 says, “as long as her husband liveth.”

### **Joined Is Not The Same As Bound**

Just as it can be proven from Romans 7:2-3 that “married” and “bound” (obligated), though related, are not the same, it can also be proven from Romans 7:2-3 and Matthew 19:6 that “joined” and “bound” are not the same. Romans 7:2-3 shows being “bound” (obligated) to someone means having sexual relations with someone else (even in a civil legalized marriage) is adultery. The only two exceptions to this are marriages contracted after the death of the original spouse (Romans 7:2-3), or after the putting away of the original spouse for fornication (Matthew 19:9). God only “unbonds” (looses) a person from his or her spouse based upon one of those two scriptural events. It is impossible for a person to loose (“unbind”) himself from his spouse unscripturally. However, Matthew 19:6 implies a man can “disjoin” (put asunder) himself from his spouse unscripturally. The fact that God says not to do it, the fact that He teaches it is a sin to do it, implies it is possible for a man to do it. Since it is impossible for a man to loose God’s marriage “bound” (obligation) in an unscriptural way, but it is certainly possible for a man to “put asunder” what God has “joined” in an unscriptural way, then “joined” and “bound,” though related, cannot refer to the same thing exactly.

### **Joined Is Not The Same As Married**

We find this same English word “joined” in First Corinthians 6:16 which reads, “What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh.” Under consideration in both passages (Matthew 19:6 and I Corinthians 6:16) is the joining together of “two” people into “one body,” or “one flesh.” Both passages quote Genesis 2:24 to make this point, so they are talking about the same thing. The context of I Corinthians 6:16 involves fornication, and does not necessarily involve marriage at all. According to this passage, two single people who commit fornication are “joined” together (but not by God) into the “one flesh” relationship. Since they can be joined without being married, “joined” and “married” do not refer to the same thing. And since they are joined in First Corinthians 6:16 without being bound, “joined” and “bound” do not refer to the same thing either.

### **Joined Is The Sexual Union**

First Corinthians 6:16 makes it obvious that “joined” refers to the physical (sexual) union between two people. Similarly then, the word “joined” in Matthew 19:6 also refers to the physical union between man and woman. Both passages speak of the joining of two people into the “one flesh” relationship, that is, the sexual union. The only difference between the passages is that, while in First Corinthians 6:16 a man and woman join themselves sexually without God’s approval (they are joined but not bound), in Matthew 19:6, God joins a man and wife sexually by legalizing, authorizing, approving of (First Corinthians 7:1-2), actually requiring (First Corinthians 7:3-5) the sexual relationship inside scriptural marriage (Hebrews 13:4).

### **How Can One Put Asunder What God Has Joined?**

Seeing then that the joining of man and wife in Matthew 19:6 is the legalizing, authorizing, approving of, and requiring of the sexual relationship, how can man violate God’s instruction, “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder”? One way he can violate this verse is by separating from his spouse, thereby not complying with God’s commandment regarding sexual relations between husband and wife as given in I Corinthians 7:3-5. Some Christians teach it is permissible to maritally separate as long as there is no divorce. But separation is condemned by many Biblical requirements (passages), one being the requirement of the man and wife to maintain the sexual union as taught by First Corinthians 7:3-5 and Matthew 19:6. Other Christians even allow divorce as long as remarriage does not follow. But again, divorce (and the physical separation that accompanies it) is condemned by God’s requirement that man and woman remain “joined” physically (sexually) since they are married/bound.

### **Summary**

The “one flesh” (“joined”) relationship is the sexual relationship - authorized (Matthew 19:6) or not (I Corinthians 6:16). Marriage is the agreed upon partnership (done legally in most countries) - Matthew 19:9.

And “bound” is the obligation God places upon a couple who are scripturally married - Romans 7:2-3. So the “joining” of man and woman upon scriptural marriage is not the same as what the word “bound” entails. Neither is it the same as what the word “married” entails. Instead, “joined” refers to the sexual (“one flesh”) union that should be maintained between husband and wife. Anything that violates this sexual union is sin; it is a transgression of God’s instruction, “What God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”

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## Why People Reject The Bible

Jim Mickells | Lewisburg, Tennessee, USA

You and I are well aware of the fact many will not accept the truth taught in God's word. The world is filled with people who put forth little or no effort to know, understand, and obey what the Lord says. Even many who have some knowledge of the Bible reject much of it, refusing to submit to many of the things taught there simply because they don't agree with it. The apostle Paul speaks of what some men think of the Lord's revealed will, “ For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God” (1 Corinthians 1:18). In this verse he tells us one of the reasons why so many reject the truth, they consider it foolishness.

Certainly, there are other reasons why people reject the Scriptures. Some think the truth is much too narrow. If it does not allow for their sin or sinful lifestyle, then it is too narrow for them. A few years back a councilman in one of the large cities in Tennessee wrote an article condemning homosexuality. A writer said this in response, “We both find the article to be arrogant, narrowminded, intolerant, insulting and in extremely poor taste.” It matters not to many people such conduct is a sin and those who practice such will be eternally lost (Romans 1:24-32; 1 Corinthians 6:9-11). If you speak out against such blatant violation of the truth and of those who teach and practice such, you are some sort of narrow-minded religious fanatic. Jesus said:

*“Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it” (Matthew 7:13-14).*

There are some who reject the truth because it has a negative side, “Thou shall not.” As long as they are commended, told how great they are, or have their ego stroked, all is well. Yet when sin is exposed and condemned, error is refuted, and unpopular subjects are preached on, then the truth and those who preach it are no longer loved and appreciated. Often those who are willing to declare the whole counsel of God become the objects of their wrath. Eight of the ten commandments begin with the words “You shall not” (Exodus 20:1-17). Remember nine of these commandments are in the law of Christ. One of the problems which many have is they want heaven but on their terms. Yet the Lord only promised to save those who will obey Him. “And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him” (Hebrews 5:9). The Bible is filled with passages which tell of God's grace, mercy and love, but it also speaks of His wrath, vengeance, and justice which will come upon those who will not submit to His will (Hebrews 10:26 -31; Romans 1:18-19; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, etc.).

Others reject the truth because there are restraints or restrictions. One cannot change what has been said by the Lord. Some, if they don't like what the Scriptures teach, will look for some preacher, teacher, or group which will either agree with them or will permit what they practice. If one does not want to be immersed in water for the remission of sins, regardless of their reasoning, they can find comfort (false) in error among a great number of religious groups. Often one might turn to several passages which tell of salvation by faith and then conclude baptism is not necessary. One is saved by faith, but not faith only (James 2:24). The word also says baptism saves (1 Peter 3:21), yet many will simply refuse to accept what it says. Through the years I have crossed paths with many living in adultery who want to continue in this sin. When told they must repent, which involves severing such a relationship, they refused. The search began, looking for someone to tell them living in adultery was fine, etc.

There are a great number of reasons why men and women today reject the truth. Some simply deny it is

the word of God, reasoning within themselves it is the product of man. Though there is ample evidence given to prove it is the mind of Jehovah revealed to us (2 Peter 1:19-21). It is the wise man who understands he must fear the Lord, which involves keeping His commandments (Psalm 111:10). Solomon's conclusion in the book of Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 is:

*"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, whether good or evil."*

If you have rejected God's word in the past, reject it no longer. One day this Holy Book will be opened, and each will be judged by the things written on its pages. Regardless of what you have been told, what you may think or feel, or who taught you, judgment will be from the word of God John 12:48; Revelation 20:12-13). The only ones who will be blessed by our great God are those who keep His commandments. They get to enter through the gates into the Holy City and partake of the tree of life (Revelation 22:14).

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## Three Kinds of Christians

Greg Gwin | Columbia, Tennessee, USA

There are three kinds of Christians in any local congregation. Which kind are you?

1) There are those Christians you can always count on. When there is work to be done, when a volunteer is needed, when a need must be met, you can depend on these folks to step forward. They carry their own weight, and they help others carry theirs, too (Gal. 6:2,5). There is never a doubt about their commitment or dedication. Their obvious zeal serves as a positive source of encouragement to others. You just never are left to wonder where they stand - because they demonstrate their faith in every way. These Christians serve as the "core" of any faithful congregation. Without them, important work would never get done - crucial matters would be left unattended - the church simply would not do well. Thank God for all such brethren. May their tribe increase!

2) There are some other Christians in the church that are absolutely "out of it." They have little if any connection to the real work of the local congregation. They never are around if there is work to be done, and they simply DO NOT volunteer to help with the on-going efforts of the group. It is even impossible to count on these folks to attend the services regularly. Almost anything can serve as an excuse for them to miss the assemblies. And, observing their spotty attendance, others are left to wonder if they are really doing any profitable work in service to the Lord.

3) There is yet another group that is in evidence in the local church. These are the ones who are "riding the fence." They want to give the impression that they are faithful and involved, but in reality their lives are full of compromise. They vocally claim allegiance to Christ, but they can't be counted on to consistently put the kingdom first.

Our Lord described these three kinds of Christians as "hot," "cold," and "lukewarm" (Rev. 3:15,16). Which term describes YOU?

- by Greg Gwin

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## Jesus' Prayer Life

### PRAYING LIKE JESUS

William Stewart | Kingston, Ontario, Canada

One of the many blessings experienced by the apostles during the days of Jesus' earthly ministry was the opportunity to hear Him pray. In Luke 11:1, one of His disciples requested, "Lord, teach us to pray, as John also taught his disciples." In the immediate context, Jesus gave an example of prayer, what is typically dubbed "The Lord's Prayer." The request infers the disciple considered Jesus to be an expert,



proficient in prayer. Indeed, there is no one more qualified to teach someone how to pray. He was their perfect example of prayer – He is our perfect example of prayer.

In this series of articles, we will be looking at several topics surrounding Jesus' teachings and example of prayer. We'll discuss elements of His prayer life (frequency, privacy, longevity), prayer principles from the sermon on the mount, the power of prayer, what we should pray for, and examples of Jesus' prayers.

### **An Early Foundation**

Very little is revealed about Jesus' childhood, let alone about spiritual activity in His childhood. It is worth noting that both His parents were upright individuals who believed in God. Joseph is described as "...a just man..." (Matthew 1:19) who believed and acted upon the word of the angels who appeared to and instructed him (Matthew 1:20-25; 2:13-15, 19-23). Mary also believed the word of the angel sent to her (Luke 1:26-38) and submitted herself to the will of God. Mary praised God for His goodness and expressed her confidence in the faithfulness of God (Luke 1:46-55). It is certainly reasonable to assume Jesus grew up in a spiritually focused home with Joseph and Mary.

The Bible gives a record of a single occasion when Jesus was 12 years old which reveals the importance of spiritual things in His life from an early age. After being in Jerusalem for a feast, His family departed for Galilee, but Jesus lingered behind at the temple. He was listening to and asking questions of the teachers. Luke states, "...all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers" (Luke 2:47). Joseph and Mary returned to Jerusalem looking for Jesus, and when they found Him, His mother expressed their worry and concern. He asked her, "*Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?*" (v 49). We cannot be certain exactly how much Jesus knew about His role at that time, but He knew He needed to serve the Father in heaven. A few verses later, Luke would speak of our Lord's growth – He "...increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men." (Luke 2:52)

Spiritual growth and an aptitude for prayer are not dependent upon early spiritual influences in our lives. However, having parents or others who are focused on serving the Lord is a blessing in those formative years. Whether we had such or not, let us determine to affect the young people in our lives for good for the Lord's sake. May we lead our children, our grandchildren and other young people as we have opportunity to love the Lord and to be devout in prayer to Him.

### **In The Midst Of Trials**

Matthew 4 (cf. Luke 4) tells us about Jesus being tested in the wilderness. The text doesn't mention prayer – and yet surely it does! Prayer and fasting go hand-in-hand when facing trials.

- Daniel 9:3, "*Then I set my face toward the Lord God to make request by prayer and supplication, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes.*"
- Matthew 17:21, concerning a demon the disciples were unable to cast out, Jesus said, "*...this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting.*"
- 1 Corinthians 7:5, to married couples, Paul wrote, "*Do not deprive one another except with consent for a time, that you may give yourselves to fasting and prayer...*"

Not all prayer is accompanied by fasting, and not all fasting is accompanied by prayer (ie. fasting for bloodwork). However, when difficult times are upon us, it is profitable to devote ourselves to prayer and fasting. Jesus, faced with temptation and trial, gave Himself to prayer and fasting. He also found solace and comfort in prayer during time of sorrow and loss. Matthew 14 speaks about the death of John the Baptist, Jesus' cousin (v 10-12). Our Lord wanted to spend time alone to mourn John's death, and no doubt to be in prayer with the Father (v 13). When difficulties are upon us, we should go to God for comfort and help (2 Corinthians 1:3-4), we should cast our "...care upon Him, for He cares for you" (1 Peter 5:7).

### **Pray Without Ceasing**

The apostle Paul gave a series of short admonitions towards the close of his first epistle to the church at Thessalonica. In 1 Thessalonians 5:17, we read, *"Pray without ceasing."* Jesus is an example of such.

Luke 5:16 says of Jesus, *"He Himself often withdrew into the wilderness and prayed."* In the context, the Lord's popularity was growing. Many were coming to hear Him and to be healed by Him. He loved the crowds, He wanted to serve and teach the people, but He also understood the need for alone time with the Father.

What do we do to "get away from it all"? What does our going "into the wilderness" look like? Do we watch TV? Read a book? Listen to music? Play video games? I'm not suggesting it is wrong to do these things – but do we pray? If we want to pray like Jesus, we will seek to withdraw often, to find alone time, and devote that time to prayer.

How constant are we in prayer? Obviously, Paul's point is not that we must pray 24/7. But what is our habit when it comes to prayer? Do we pray before meals? Do we pray at church? Do we pray when we get up? Do we pray before we go to bed? Do we pray in the middle of the day?

The Scriptures tell us it was Daniel's custom from early days to pray three times each day (Daniel 6:10). I don't think that means three times maximum, but three scheduled times. How frequent was Jesus in prayer? Was it 3x? 4x? 5x? 6x? We're never told, but consider what both Luke and Mark tell us about His prayer habits:

*"...it came to pass in those days that He went out to the mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God."* (Luke 6:12)

*"...in the morning, having risen a long while before daylight, He went out and departed to a solitary place; and there He prayed."* (Mark 1:35)

Prayers do not have to be long. Some of the most needful and helpful prayers may be very short, momentary prayers. In fact, one of my favourite prayers in the Bible is Nehemiah 2:4. There are no words recorded, and there was but a moment to utter just a few words under his breath to the Lord (it is unlikely Nehemiah told King Artaxerxes to wait while he went away to pray). The Lord's prayer in Matthew 6:9-13, an example of prayer, is 5 verses long and takes about 20 seconds to read. There is a time and place for short prayers, but in Jesus we also see there is a time and place for longer prayers. According to Luke, Jesus was in prayer all night. Friend, it would do us good to spend a night in prayer.

Matthew 16:13ff speaks about Jesus' conversation with the apostles wherein He asked, *"who do men say that I am?"* and again, *"who do you say that I am?"* Luke 9:18 is a parallel text, but the good doctor reveals something Matthew did not. He wrote,

*"...it happened, as He was alone praying, that His disciples joined Him, and He asked them, saying, 'Who do the crowds say that I am?'"*

Eight days later, Matthew tells us about the transfiguration mount with Peter, James, and John. Again, Luke's account reveals something Matthew did not. Luke 9:28 reads:

*"...it came to pass, about eight days after these things, that He took Peter, John, and James and went up on the mountain to pray."*

Jesus was a constant example and reminder to His people of the importance of prayer. There were times when He went off to pray alone, but other times such as Luke 9:28 where He urged the apostles to pray with Him. May we be consistent in our personal prayer habits, but also seek occasions where we can encourage one another by praying together, whether in small groups or as a congregation.

We need to be people of prayer. The cure for a lack of prayer is to begin praying.

Corrie Ten Boom was a Dutch watchmaker and writer who helped many Jews escape the Holocaust during WWII. She was eventually caught and sent to a Nazi concentration camp herself. Among the many great quotes she is credited with is this:

*Don't pray when you feel like it. Have an appointment with the Lord and keep it.*

Another quote, from Adventist Matilda Erikson Andross:

*When prayer has become secondary, or incidental, it has lost its power. Those Who are conspicuously men of prayer are those who use prayer as they use Food, or air, or light, or money.*

Friend, may we develop good prayer habits. May we always seek the Lord and speak to the Lord.

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## Reward for Wrong Doing

Chizuru Lowell Odoemelam | Badagry, Nigeria

"But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done; and there is no respect of persons" (Colossians 3:25).

The context of this passage of the Scripture borders on the relationship between servants and masters or subordinates and superiors. Servants are taught to obey with the right heart attitude, as rendering service unto the Lord and not unto men. The servant/subordinate who thus performs his duty scripturally is promised a just reward from the Lord. However, those who do not obey the Lord's instructions will also be compensated accordingly. The Lord will have every professing believer treat his or her job, and relationship to his or her employer as unto the Lord (Colossians 3:23). "And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men."

We live in an era where Christian examples are messed up because most "Christian" employees are enticed to sway or move to the tune of the world. We should as a matter of integrity not steal our employer's time to do things for ourselves, or waste the time in idleness instead of applying ourselves diligently to our duties for which we draw a paycheck. God sees everyone and everything, and He will punish for acts of rebellion, regardless of who it is. "There is no respect of persons" with God (Romans 2:11). "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). Honoring God in whatever task we engage in should be paramount.

May we remind ourselves that as believers, we are to do everything as unto the Lord; bearing in mind that what is wrong is wrong, and we will reap the dividends of our wrong actions in due time.

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## Precious Wisdom And Understanding

Ethan Jennings | Olney, Illinois, USA

In Proverbs 3:13-15, Solomon states:

*"How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding. For her profit is better than the profit of silver and her gain better than fine gold. She is more precious than jewels and nothing you desire compares with her."*

The word "precious" means "costly." The Bible describes wisdom and understanding as costly things. What are wisdom and understanding? According to the original Hebrew, wisdom is "the knowledge and ability to make the right choices at the opportune time" (Strong's).

Understanding, on the other hand, means reasoning (Strong's). These are two types of wisdom as we understand it in our English language today. These types of wisdom are what all Christians are supposed to acquire.

How do you get wisdom? The Bible mentions two ways to do this.

First, we do so by fearing God and obeying Him. Psalm 111:10 states, "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all those who do His commandments; His praise endures forever." When we fear (i.e., revere) God and do His will, we'll grow in wisdom because we'll see how doing His will is best.

How do we know what His will is? We know His will by studying the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

We also gain wisdom through prayer. "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). Later in the letter, James wrote, "The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much" (James 5:16). If we pray to God for wisdom, we'll receive it.

Sometimes, we gain wisdom by experiencing what happens when we do wrong. We might gain wisdom through experiencing what happens when we do the right thing. Either way, we gain wisdom.

Dear reader, if you wish to increase in wisdom and understanding, why not obey what the Scripture says? Wisdom is gained by reverencing God, following God, and asking for wisdom.

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## Paul's Letters to Preachers

Keith Sharp | Mountain Home, Arkansas, USA

The apostle Paul's letters to Timothy and Titus are grouped together in denominational commentaries as "The Pastoral Epistles." The term "pastor" is found only once in the New Testament, in Ephesians 4:11 (**KJV, NKJ/V, ASV, NASV**).

The word is translated "shepherds" in the ESV. It is the noun form of the verb translated "shepherd" in Acts 20:28 in the NKJV and NASV and is a reference to the elders, bishops (overseers) of the local church (Acts 20:17, 28; 1 Peter 5:1-4).

There is no evidence Timothy and Titus were pastors (elders, overseers), but they certainly were preachers/evangelists (2 Timothy 4:2, 5; Titus 2:1, 15). Their work was to "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). Thus, these three letters may correctly be grouped together as "Paul's Letters to Preachers."

### Life of Paul

Our knowledge of the life of the apostle to the Gentiles is primarily from the book of Acts and from personal references in his letters. The book of Acts closes with Paul still in prison in Rome after two years there and with the outcome of his trial before Caesar unknown (Acts 28:16, 30-31). In Philippians, written toward the end of this time, Paul expressed confidence he would be released (Philippians 1:25-26). Timothy was with him (Philippians 2:19). By the time the apostle wrote to Philemon, he was still in chains but expecting to be released soon (Philemon 1, 10, 22-23).

*If Paul followed his expressed purpose (Phil. 2:19-23), as soon as he was acquitted, he sent Timothy to Philippi with news of his release. This acquittal, likely took place early in A.D. 63. The burning of Rome took place the following year (A.D. 64) which marked the beginning of Nero's intensified efforts in persecuting Christians.... Paul immediately left Rome for Asia Minor by way of the island of Crete where he left Titus (Tit. 1:5).... After arriving in Ephesus, Paul proceeded to Colosse, according to his expressed plan (Phile. 22), after which he returned to Ephesus.... At Ephesus, Paul was joined by Timothy with news*

*of Philippi.... As Paul departed for Macedonia, according to former plans (Phil. 2:24), he left Timothy at Ephesus (1 Tim. 1:3,4).... From somewhere in Macedonia, Paul wrote 1 Timothy and Titus to instruct further the young preachers left behind concerning their assignment (Patton. xiii).*

Paul spent that winter at Nicopolis (Titus 3:12). There is a Nicopolos in Western Greece and one on the border between Thrace and Macedonia. Either could be the Nicopolos in which Paul spent the winter of A.D. 63. "From Nicopolis Paul traveled to Spain, probably in the spring of A.D. 64, thus realizing a long anticipated dream (Rom. 15:23, 24, 28)..." (Ibid. xiv).

The events in 2 Timothy suggest the following itinerary subsequent to Paul's work in Spain:

- 1. He revisits Asia Minor and leaves Trophimus sick at Miletus (2 Tim. 4:20).*
- 2. He experiences an emotional reunion with Timothy at Ephesus (2 Tim. 1:4).*
- 3. He visits Troas at which time he leaves the cloak and parchments with Carpus (2 Tim. 4:13).*
- 4. He goes to Rome. Whether he was arrested before or after his arrival in Rome, we do not know. We do know that Titus was with Paul in Rome and from there went to Dalmatia (2 Tim. 4:10).*
- 5. From his prison cell Paul writes urging Timothy to come to him before winter (2 Tim. 4:21). This was likely the winter of A.D. 65.... Paul was probably executed in the spring of A.D. 66 (Ibid. xv).*

Thus we date Philemon in A.D. 62, First Timothy and Titus in A.D. 63, and Second Timothy, the last of Paul's letters and his farewell to his son in the faith, in A.D. 65.

## **Introduction to First Timothy**

### **Author**

The apostle Paul wrote First Timothy (1:1). It is one of four letters Paul wrote to individuals (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon) and one of three he wrote to younger preachers to instruct them in their work (1 & 2 Timothy, Titus). Thus, these three books constitute the fullest inspired teaching on the work of an evangelist.

### **To Whom Written**

Paul wrote the letter to the evangelist Timothy, whom he calls "my true son in the faith" (1:2,18; cf. 2 Timothy 4:5). Timothy was from Lystra and had a Greek father and Jewish mother (Acts 16:1). His name is Greek and means "honored of God."

Apparently Paul had converted him on his first preaching trip to Asia Minor (Acts 14:6-23), for when Paul returned to Lystra on his second journey, Timothy was already "well spoken of by the brethren who were at Lystra and Iconium" (Acts 16:2). Thus, as a babe in Christ, Timothy had seen first hand the persecution he might be called upon to endure, as he must have seen in Lystra when Paul was there stoned (Acts 16:19-22). Since Timothy was still a young man when Paul wrote First Timothy (4:12), he must have been a teenager or barely older the approximately seventeen years earlier when he was baptized and thirteen years before when he began traveling with the apostle. Young people can and should be active in the service of the Lord.

From that time on Timothy became Paul's companion. Since Timothy had a Jewish mother, Paul had him circumcised, so he could go with him into the synagogues to preach (Acts 16:3). As a child Timothy had been taught the Old Testament and nurtured in faith by his godly grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5; 3:14-15). Paul had imparted to the young preacher a spiritual gift, apparently prophecy, and the elders of the church had approved him in his work (2 Timothy 1:6; 1 Timothy 4:14).

Timothy journeyed with Paul, joining in the work of preaching, and was sent on important trips to help the

apostle both on Paul's second and third journeys (Acts 17:14; 18:5; 19:22; 20:4; 1 Corinthians 4:17; 16:10; 2 Corinthians 1:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2,6). He even joined with Paul in greeting the church in Rome (Romans 16:21) and in addressing letters to other churches (2 Corinthians 1:1; 1 Thessalonians 1:1; 2 Thessalonians 1:1). Timothy labored for the Lord despite recurring health problems (1 Timothy 5:23).

The young evangelist did not abandon his aged mentor when he was imprisoned but joined the beloved apostle in addressing letters while in Roman chains (Philippians 1:1; Colossians 1:1; Philemon 1). Paul had no other companion who so completely partook of his spirit of humble, self-sacrificial service (Philippians 2:19-21). He shared with the great apostle the closeness and love of a son (Philippians 2:22; 2 Timothy 2:2). Paul's afflictions brought tears to Timothy's eyes, and Paul prayed for him without ceasing and longed to see him (2 Timothy 1:3-4).

As Paul drew near death in his final Roman imprisonment, with most earthly companions gone or afraid to be seen with him, he sent for Timothy to come attend to his personal needs (2 Timothy 4:9-21). What a comfort it must have been to the old soldier of the cross, as he prepared to lay his armor down, to be able to hand the banner of truth to his "beloved son" Timothy (2 Timothy 4:1-8).

### **When and Where Written**

When Paul wrote to the Philippians and to Philemon, he expected to be released from Roman prison shortly (Philippians 1:24-26; 2:24; Philemon 22). He was jailed in Rome at least two years (Acts 28:30-31). The apostle apparently was released from prison and traveled back to the East, leaving Timothy to preach at Ephesus and writing to him from Macedonia (1 Timothy 1:3). This would date First Timothy after Paul's release from his first Roman imprisonment and before a second arrest (2 Timothy 4:16), probably around AD 63.

### **Occasion and Purpose**

About a decade earlier, as Paul bid the elders at Ephesus farewell, he warned them of coming apostasy (Acts 20:28-31). Apparently that apostasy had at this time begun in the Ephesian congregation. Some were turning from the faith to fables and binding the precepts of the law on Christians (1:3-7). Hymenaeus and Alexander had made shipwreck of the faith (1:19-20). The false doctrines of celibacy and asceticism were being taught (4:1-5). The heresy later known as Gnosticism, which introduced many doctrines and practices now central to Roman Catholicism, had begun (6:20; The word "knowledge," **[New King James Version]** or "science" **[King James Version]**, is from the Greek word "gnosis," hence, "Gnostics," those who claimed to have a higher knowledge of mystical truth).

Central to Gnosticism was the denial that Jesus was at once both human and divine, and Paul emphatically stated the true nature of Christ (3:16) and strongly urged Timothy to defend the faith (6:11-16). In the face of this paramount danger, Timothy needed to be edified and encouraged to do the work of an evangelist in a local church.

### **Theme**

The theme of First Timothy is stated in 3:14-15:

*These things I write to you, though I hope to come to you shortly; but if I am delayed, I write so that you may know how you ought to conduct yourself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.*

The theme of the letter is the preacher's conduct in the church. Paul instructed Timothy about how to deal with the faith and departures from it (1:3-20), the proper behavior of men and women (chapter 2), the organization of the church (chapter 3), his work and life as a preacher (chapter 4), his relationship to various groups (5:1 - 6:2), how to treat false teachers (6:3-5), and his attitude toward wealth (6:6-10) and the wealthy (6:17-19). Above all, the preacher must guard the faith (1:3-4, 18-20; 4:6; 6:12, 20-21).

### **Titus**

The beloved apostle addressed Titus as “a true son in our common faith” (1:4). Thus, he was converted by Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:15) and followed Paul’s example of faith. Titus was a Greek of pagan background (Galatians 2:3). We first read of him in Paul’s company when Paul and Barnabas went from Antioch of Syria to Jerusalem about the question of circumcision and the law (Galatians 2:1-5; cf. Acts 15:1-29). Titus accompanied Paul on his third journey to the Gentiles, and the apostle employed him as a messenger to the church in Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:13; 7:6,13-14; 8:16; 12:18). He was Paul’s “partner and fellow worker” (2 Corinthians 8:23), not as an apostle of Christ but as a preacher of the gospel (1 Timothy 2:7). Paul entrusted to Titus the work of encouraging the church at Corinth to participate in the collection for the needy saints in Jerusalem (2 Corinthians 8:6). Titus was with Paul during the apostle’s final imprisonment, and Paul once again trusted him to be his messenger (2 Timothy 2:10).

### **When and Where Written**

Paul wrote Titus after they had been together in Crete (1:5). Paul was still free at this time (3:12). There is no record of Paul preaching on the island of Crete in the book of Acts, although his ship touched there when he was being taken as a prisoner to Rome (Acts 27:7-13, 21). Thus, Paul must have written Titus around the same time he wrote First Timothy, during the interval between his first Roman imprisonment, recorded in Acts, and his second and final imprisonment, recorded in Second Timothy. Thus, Paul penned his letter to Titus around A.D. 63. At the time he wrote, he planned to travel to Nicopolos, perhaps the Nicopolos in Western Greece, to spend the winter (3:12).

### **Theme**

The great apostle left Titus in Crete that he might “set in order the things that are lacking” (1:5). The letter instructs Titus how to do this. Thus, the theme of Titus is **Setting the Church in Order**. This should be the goal of every preacher in his work with the local church.

The apostle instructed Titus to use two means to set the church in order. First, he was to “appoint elders in every city” (1:5). Every church needs the good leadership of properly qualified elders. Also, Titus was to “speak the things which are proper for sound doctrine” (2:1). The church grows strong on a steady diet of sound doctrine. The primary obligation of the preacher toward the church is to teach sound doctrine.

Every basic element of sound doctrine is found in two great doctrinal statements in Titus: 2:11-14 and 3:3-7. In them Paul states the person of God (2:11), the three Persons of the Godhead and their function in our salvation (3:4-6), the grace and mercy of God (2:11; 3:6), salvation from God (2:11; 3:4), Jesus Christ the Savior (2:13-14; 3:6), the work of the Holy Spirit (3:5-6), redemption by the blood sacrifice of Christ (2:13-14), the fact God’s grace is made known by teaching (2:11-12), the truth salvation in Christ is for all (2:11), the new birth (3:5), the obligation to lead pure lives (2:12), the responsibility to do good works (2:14), and the hope of eternal life at the second coming of Christ (2:13; 3:7).

### **Second Timothy**

Apparently, after writing First Timothy, Paul was in Nicopolis in Western Greece (Titus 3:12). Nero was then Emperor, and Christians, particularly around Rome, were being severely persecuted. Paul left Nicopolis for Troas, where Carpus was his host (4:13). It seems that he was arrested there and taken to Rome in such haste that he had to leave his cloak, books, and parchments behind (Ibid).

Now the conditions for the old soldier of the cross have changed dramatically worse. In his first imprisonment, he had his own hired house and received visitors at will (Acts 28:30-31). Now he is in prison with only Luke the beloved physician with him (4:11). No one dared stand with him when he appeared in court (4:16). Some have forsaken him; others are gone to duties elsewhere (4:10-12). He faces the miserable prospect of winter in a cold prison with no cloak (4:13, 21). Then he was accused by the Jews of being a troublemaker (Acts 24:5-6); now he is accused by Nero of being an enemy of the state. Then he confidently expected release (Philippians 1:25; Philemon 22); now he courageously, triumphantly awaits an imminent, violent, bloody death (4:6).

The aged apostle, knowing his own death is near, fearful for the future of the church (3:1-13), anxious for the faithfulness of his beloved Timothy (1:8; 2:1), is lonely for his companionship (1:4) and sends for him to come (4:9).

Since Nero died in the spring of A.D. 68, Second Timothy was written before then, perhaps in late 65.

### Theme

Although Second Timothy is intently personal, Paul summarizes the work of the evangelist more succinctly in this letter than in any other epistle. The little four chapter letter abounds in great passages of weighty import. But the theme of Second Timothy is found in Paul's solemn charge to Timothy, "Preach the word!" (4:2) When all has been said, those three words summarize and epitomize the duties of a preacher.

Consider the gravity of the command. Paul calls God and His Son, Christ Jesus, Who shall judge us on that last great day, as His witnesses. The work is God's work (2:24), the divine message has the power to save (3:14-17), and the purpose is the salvation of men (1:8-11).

The dying words of a great man are cherished and long remembered. Every gospel preacher should make these, the last words of perhaps the greatest servant of Christ, his theme of life. They should be so etched in his mind and soul that they constitute the sum of his life's work and the purpose of his daily tasks. Only by faithful fulfillment of this commission may he with clear conscience whisper in death Paul's magnificent summary of his own life: "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." (4:7) Only then may he, with the beloved apostle, lay claim to the victor's crown, the crown of life (4:8).

### Conclusion

You, O man of God:

*"I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (2 Timothy 4:1-5).*

Only thus, can you, when your race is run, repeat with beloved Paul with the fervor of honest conviction:

*"I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Timothy 4:7-8).*

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