

# CASTAWAY – 1 TIMOTHY 4

## I. CASTAWAY ISLAND (1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5)

In Timothy 4:1-5, Paul describes a place I like to call Castaway Island – an isolated and lonely place where false teaching will always lead us. Far from an exotic getaway, Castaway Island is home to two threats that will shipwreck us: dangerous waters and damning anchors.



### DANGEROUS WATERS

*“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> speaking lies in hypocrisy,” having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, <sup>3</sup> forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” 1 Tim. 4:1-5*

To get to Castaway Island you must first depart from the faith by giving heed to false doctrines, or as Paul describes them, the doctrines of demons (4:1). Drifting away from the truth that accords to godliness will always steer you into dangerous waters (Titus 1:1).

The false teachings described in 1 Tim. 4 centered on rules on abstaining from marriage and certain foods (4:3). It was a false asceticism: the promise of favor or salvation based on one’s ability to abstain from a material aspect of life. But in elevating their own works, the false teachers were stealing authority from God. They sought to determine what was “good” apart from the King’s provision (i.e.: it’s not good to eat that food. It’s not good that you marry). The false teachers were encouraging the church to make themselves the master of their own fate and the captain of their soul.

Instead of holding to rules that govern the external or physical, Paul urges Timothy to look to the heart’s motivations for doing so. Instead, Christ’s work in our lives gives us the freedom to receive things in thanksgiving. The very act of thanksgiving includes an acknowledgment of authority in our lives. Thanksgiving acknowledges that there is a Good Creator who made it possible for us to have and enjoy true goodness. Because God is the Creator, he alone holds authority over creation; he knows the purpose for

which he created it and how it is best enjoyed. It's why Paul says in 4:4-5: "*and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*"

False theology will always trick us into thinking we are the true authority - the masters of our own souls – steering our destiny with our own wisdom and fortitude. Such thinking will lead us into dangerous waters and away from our Good Creator and Sovereign King. This is the great apostasy, and it brings the illusion of being in control of our own vessel when we are, in reality, truly castaways. Drifting into dangerous waters is no mere mistake, as if we didn't know any better. False doctrine is not simply a knowledge problem; it is above all a worship problem. In charting our own course, we are worshipping ourselves.

## **DAMNING ANCHORS**

The real danger of false teaching is not only that it leads us to dangerous waters, but it also leads us to tie ourselves to damning anchors. In 4:2, Paul tells us why these anchors are damning. Paul says the false teachers have "*...their own conscience seared with a hot iron...*"

The conscience, remember, is the human faculty God gave us to aid us in distinguishing between right and wrong (1 Tim. 1:5,19; 3:9; 2 Tim. 1:3; Titus 1:5). Our conscience is designed to convict us when we do something we perceive to be wrong and produce guilt. These negative emotions are meant to be flags, like smoke signals, to get our attention so we can respond in repentance and align ourselves with God's Word with the help of God's Spirit. It is unhealthy to ignore the guilt of a condemning conscience because sincere faith is marked by a pure heart and a clean conscience (1 Tim. 1:5).

But the farther the false teachers got from God, the more impure their conscience became. The phrase "*seared with a hot iron*" is one word in the Greek (*kausteriazō*), meaning to brand (4:2). We derive our English word cauterize from this term.

### **A PURE CONSCIENCE WILL:**

- Convict you of sin (John 8:9; 1 Tim. 1:9)
- Bear witness to right and wrong because God's Law is written in your heart (Rom. 2:15; 13:5)
- Grow in ability (1 Cor. 8:12)
- Testify to your heart's true worship as revealed in your walk (2 Cor. 1:12)
- Seek to honor and serve God in obedience (1 Pet. 3:21)

The false teachers had hearts branded with the marks of their sin. Figuratively, they carried their sins around with them wherever they went, possessing a perpetual consciousness of sin. And far from feeling bad about it, they were rendered completely insensitive to it. Their heart was so seared that it could not feel the pain of sin, knowing neither guilt nor shame.

In Titus 1:15, Paul describes this kind of conscience as defiled. How do you know if you have a defiled conscience? Here are some flags:

- If you don't feel any negative emotions – guilt, shame, regret sorrow.
- If you find it easier to lie than tell the truth.
- If you're caught in sin, you focus on changing behavior or actions.
- If you feel entitled to sin – no thankfulness toward God.
- If you listen to other voices as your only authority (1 Cor. 8:10).
- If you desire or need something or someone other than God for happiness (1 Cor. 8:7).

Much of the confusion around how to treat our conscience comes from a confusion of guilt. When Jesus died on the cross for us, he paid the penalty of our sin – that includes bearing all in his body our guilt and shame. Because his blood covers our guilt and shame, we are now declared right before God (Gal. 2:15-21). We bear no guilt for past wrongs if Christ has covered them.

### HOW TO *guard* YOUR CLEANSED CONSCIENCE

1. Repent of sin (1 John 1:9)
2. Dwell in God's Word (1 Tim. 1:5)
3. Walk in faith (1 Tim. 1:18-19)
4. Learn to listen and obey your conscience (Rom. 14)

Adapted from John MacArthur's  
*The Vanishing Conscience*

Many women have trouble reconciling Christ's work with present, lingering guilt over our past misdeeds, particularly if we came to Christ out of an unchurched background. But even those who grew up in church, may have sinned in a major way in the past and try to return to a 'past' sin, picking up its guilt, and carrying it around with us wherever we go. We carry it into our church service, friendships, marriages, until it seems to become part of us – like an extra arm or leg.

In ministering to women from unchurched backgrounds, I hear many stories like this – women who chose to have an abortion, women who gave their bodies away, and more. It is often very hard to decipher where the guilt and shame is legitimate and where it has become an undue burden on our soul.

As women ministering to women, we must be ready to offer the balm of the gospel to these wounded souls. We must push these women to Christ and teach them what the cross says for their past. If the eternal, omniscient God does not hold our sin over our head, having put our sin as far as the east is from the west, how much more should we, who have finite memories, learn to set our sin aside refusing to return to it (Ps. 103:11-12).

And while there may be earthly consequences that must still play out in our lives, we can rejoice knowing that the eternal punishment and shame for our sins is no more. So, if you struggle with guilt from your past, there are a few steps to take.<sup>1</sup>

First, **return to the cross** to remind yourself of what Christ did for you. Even when we do not feel forgiven, we must remind ourselves that the work of Christ is ‘justify’ us – or wipe our record clean and declare us innocent before God.

Paul says it more fully in Rom. 8:33-35: *“Who shall bring a charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died, and furthermore is also risen, who is even at the right hand of God, who also makes intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?”*

Because of Christ’s work in us and for us, we do not need to make up our sin to God or “try better” next time. Such efforts are an attempt to return to the law and the anchor of goodness (1 Tim. 2).

Second, **re-educate your conscience with God’s Word**, so that you may align it with biblical truth. Our conscience is not infallible and emotions are not always trustworthy truth-tellers. God is the true “Lord of our Conscience” and the more we grow in the knowledge of his Word, the greater we will grow to live like him and look like him.<sup>2</sup>

After Christ radically cleanses us from sin, however, we are tasked with keeping our conscience clean from recurrent sin through the hard work of repentance and killing our sin (Rom. 8:12-13). The more we intentionally seek him in his Word, the greater our ability to rightly hear and rightly respond to the guilt our conscience produces.

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<sup>1</sup> This is a very simple discussion on the very complicated discussion of guilt, and therefore, inadequate for those excessively burdened by it. I cannot underscore how important investing in good, biblical Christian counseling is (not just the hurting, but everyone!) If you are incapacitated by guilt, please seek out a counselor who will guide you to Christ and help you navigate God’s heart on this issue in his Word. Navigating past guilt is not a weekend trip, but a long venture in the wilderness of the soul, yet God never leaves us alone in this hard journey. Seek help!

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Naselli and J.D. Crowley, *Conscience: What It Is, How To Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ* (Crossway, 2016), pg. 30.

Without a healthy, functioning conscience we will not be able to strive for godliness and we will not persevere in sincere faith. We truly will be shooting ourselves in the foot because godliness starts in our hearts.

As Paul says in 1 Tim. 1:5, *“Now the purpose of the commandment is love from a pure heart, from a good conscience, and from sincere faith...”*



We must not take the easy road by ignoring or repressing our conscience without doing the hard and brave work of identifying sin in our lives, rooting it out at its source in our hearts, and repenting of it at the foot of the cross. To take the easier road results in a seared conscience rendered completely insensitive to sin and the insensitive to the Spirit’s voice. To take the easier route, will shipwreck our souls.

The world tells us, however, there is another way to mitigate the negative emotions of guilt and shame – we simply need to appease our conscience. The world says we are not sinners, but victims. So, when we feel the jabs of a condemning conscience, we simply need to make ourselves feel better about ourselves.

This type of thinking was partially spawned by the rise of modern psychology which said that there are no *bad* people, only people who *feel badly* about themselves.<sup>3</sup> As victims, we are no longer responsible for our sins; any guilt and shame we feel in life are essentially groundless and unnecessary emotions.

This is the cult of self-esteem, and it’s the fourth false anchor that can destroy us by searing our conscience and ultimately, shipwrecking our faith.

This anchor is enticing to women because, like all false anchors, often mirrors biblical truth regarding an individual’s self-worth. Yet, as John MacArthur outlines in his book, *The Vanishing Conscience*, self-esteem theology is rooted, not in the Bible, but in secular humanism – “a non-religious system of thought that places human beings...above the glory of God.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *The Vanishing Conscience*, pg. 80.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

In order for this anchor to float, sin must be redefined. The anchor of self-esteem no longer views sin as *an offense against God*, but an *offense against self* that robs an individual of her sense of self-worth or dignity.

Terms like self-forgiveness and self-love are often dead giveaways that the false anchor of self-esteem is floating nearby. Phrases like *"I'm worthy"* or *"Believe in yourself"* are subtle spin-offs of self-esteem theology that litter the pages of books and material marketed to Christian women. The anchor of self-esteem reigns supreme on Facebook and Instagram, where memes mix Scriptural-sounding truths with motivational affirmations.

While noble-sounding, the notion of self-love is really the "sanctification of human pride."<sup>5</sup> Scripture says that our problem isn't that we don't love ourselves *enough*, but that we love ourselves *too much*. In 2 Tim. 3:1-2, Paul lists self-love as one of the markers of an ungodly servant along with arrogance, abuse, and ungodliness.

Christian counselor Ed Welch uses the picture of a love cup to illustrate how the anchor of self-esteem is at best, a surface patch to a deeper problem. Self-esteem theology views a person as a cup needing to be filled with love and positive affirmations in order to feel fulfilled or to satisfy the conscience. The problem is, our love cups have leaks, and so, when we cling to this anchor, we will be in a constant state of filling and refilling our love tanks. Only Christ can satisfy our hearts and make us whole again. Our hearts were created to be filled by Him, so that we could pour ourselves out for others.<sup>6</sup>

The anchor of self-esteem is dangerous not only because it is wrong, not only because it is a temporary fix, but also because it is damning. Very often, a woman who clings to the anchor of self-esteem as a means for appeasing her conscience will discover that she has only intensified her guilty feelings. How so? When we do not deal with our conscience in repentance, we give our consciences even more charges against us such as dishonesty and pride.<sup>7</sup>

Now, I'm not suggesting that Christian bookstores should stock books for women with mottos like, *"Yes, you're unworthy! You know it. We know it. Get over it already!"* or *"Don't ever believe anything good about yourself. Ever. Period."* That is not the message of the gospel, in fact, far from it.

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Check out the leaky love cup metaphor in Ed Welch's book, *When People are Big and God is Small*.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 91.

The gospel says we have incalculable worth, glory, and beauty, but only by the grace of Christ.

- The gospel says our healthy sense of **glory** is rooted in Christ, our Captain, and his work of salvation in us.
- The gospel says our healthy **self-image** comes from bearing Christ’s image, renewed by him in salvation.
- The gospel says our healthy sense of **self-worth** comes from his worth as beloved of the Father, a family into which we are now adopted.
- The gospel says our healthy sense of **purpose** comes from his purpose as a servant of his Father, a purpose he both works in us and shares with us.

Our self-esteem is tied to Christ and taken to glorious heights that we could never attempt to reach on our own. In contrast, the heart of self-esteem theology is an affront, not simply to our conscience, but to the gospel itself. Where we minimize our sin, we minimize our need for a Savior.

Casting off from Christ and anchoring our souls to the false anchor of self-esteem will shipwreck our faith. And because the false anchor of self-esteem only intensifies our soul’s condemnation against us, we will find ourselves a true castaway – alone and isolated in shame and grief. Anchor yourself to Christ instead and he will guide you out of dangerous waters and away from damning anchors.

In the next section, Paul will outline some practice ways we can begin to untie ourselves from this enticing anchor of self-control.



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## II. ANCHORED TO CHRIST (1 TIMOTHY 4:6-11)

*<sup>6</sup> If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. <sup>7</sup> But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. <sup>8</sup> For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. <sup>9</sup> This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. <sup>11</sup> These things command and teach." 1 Tim. 4:6-11*

In 1 Timothy 4:6-11, Paul outlines what a good servant or a godly servant looks like. A "good minister" or a godly servant is one who is effective, valuable, and genuine. It does not refer to external qualities: how godly we appear, how lovely we seem, or even our special gifts and ability. Good servants are those who have anchored themselves to Christ.

### GOOD SERVANTS ARE ANCHORED TO CHRIST

**First, godly servants check their teachings.** They reject false doctrine and nourish themselves on Scripture or "words of faith" and the "good doctrine" (true and approved teaching it contains) (4:6). The word "nourish" means to educate or form the mind as a consistent practice (4:6).

Paul says that Timothy "carefully followed" these teachings, implying that Timothy maintained a close proximity to the truth so that he might follow it and conform his life to it. In 1 Tim. 1, Paul paints a similar picture of the false teachers who drew near to lies like a ship drawing near to land. Timothy, and good servants like him, will draw near to the truth by intentionally following Christ.

Often, we allow our circumstances or obligations to shape our time spent in God's Word, rather than our love for Christ. Instead of feasting on God's Word and viewing it as sweeter than honey, we use it as a means to an end (Ps. 19). Need to feel some peace or encouragement? Try chewing on a Psalm! But treating God's Word like a granola bar we can grab on-the-go will not result in godly servants, but malnourished servants. Godly servants saturate themselves with God's Word, feeding on it consistently because our heart truly craves it - even when it brings hardship such as suffering and reproach (vs. 10).

**Second, godly servants check their motivations.** Ultimately, it is the state of a person's heart toward God that disqualifies her from service; does she have a heart for self or a

heart for God? Worship of the Living God is to be our sole motivation. Paul says in verse 10: *“For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men...”* (emphasis mine).

If we do not love God’s Word, if it doesn’t taste sweet to us, then we must check our heart to ensure that we have not drawn near to false teachings or a substitute anchor that we have made the object of our heart’s true affections. Godly servants wholeheartedly worship God by trusting in his Word and his promise of life (both real life now and eternal life to come) by rejecting false teachings that tempt us to serve ourselves.

And when we check our teachings and check our motivations, we will “exercise ourselves toward godliness.” To exercise ourselves toward godliness is to vigorously train ourselves, to strive earnestly and consistently to become godly (1 Tim. 4:7). In this passage, it is a command!

When we strive toward godliness, we are not running through a checklist of behaviors (although it might include that!) Rather, exercising ourselves toward godliness is a process that begins by training the heart and mind to revere and desire God above all other things and people. It is a training that begins in the heart and spills out onto our daily lives.

As the false teachers discovered, it is much easier to focus on the externals – good deeds, rule following – rather than the hard work of evaluating our heart and the even harder work of realigning our heart’s worship and conscience with the Word of God. Following rules, Paul says, is akin to working out our bodies just so we can enjoy the immediate sense of change that come from our own accomplishments (1 Tim. 4:8).

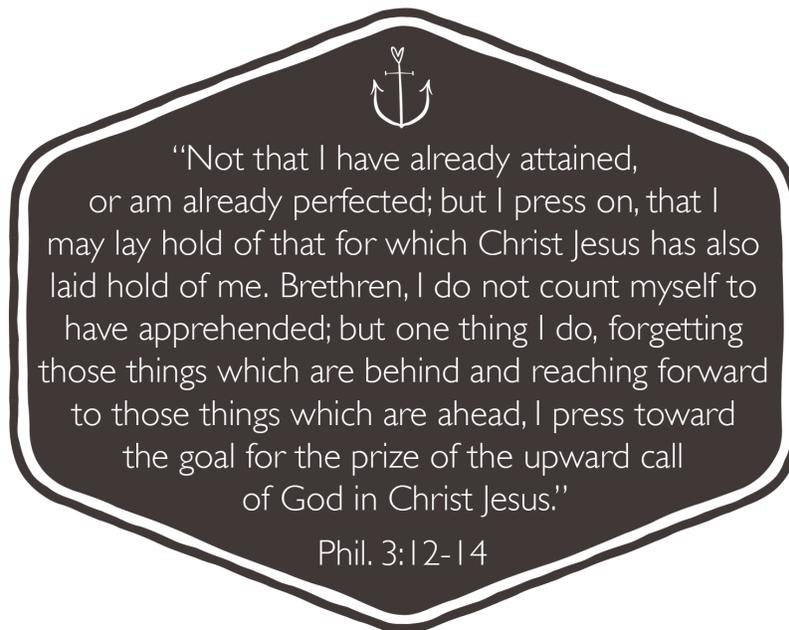
Striving for godliness is as hard as it sounds. Our “labor” will bring fatigue and agony similar to the struggle of those who train for a competition or contend with an adversary. There are dangers involved and even “reproach” (unjust reviling) (4:10).

In 2 Tim. 2, Paul goes so far as to tell Timothy that: *“all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.”*

We often think godly living will yield blessing, and so it often does. But when we strive for godliness as a means for gain, we find that it is not true godliness that is directing our hearts, but some other goal or motivation we desire more than Christ. Paul is clear about the difficulty striving for godliness entails, but he is equally clear about what the process looks like.

Striving for godliness does not look like striving for perfection; striving for godliness looks like the slow and steady process of spiritual maturity – growing in Christlikeness. It is not something that can be achieved in our own power.

The agony of this process can seem overwhelming and discouraging as we learn to align our conscience with truth. But a godly servant who seeks progress in godliness will find that she is never truly alone. She is emboldened, encouraged, and guided by the Holy Spirit, who illuminates the truth of God’s Word to her and knits her together with the church for a common purpose (2 Tim. 3:16-17).



Sin turns us into castaways, but Christ transforms us into a community, family, and body for his glory! And our hope is in the Living God, who has given us the “*promise of life*” in his Son (1 Tim. 4:10).

### **BAD SERVANTS ARE ANCHORED TO IDOLS**

So, what does a bad servant look like? The same yardstick that measures godly servants in 1 Tim. 4, also identifies bad servants.

- They are deceived by lies and “*profane and old wives’ fables*” - demonic and worldly influences (1 Tim. 4:7).
- They reject God’s Word and the Apostle’s doctrines.
- They focus on earthly gain and temporal success such as favor and blessing (1 Tim. 4:8).



### III. SWIM LIKE YOU MEAN IT (1 TIMOTHY 4:12-16)

*“<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. <sup>13</sup> Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. <sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. <sup>15</sup> Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. <sup>16</sup> Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” 1 Tim. 4:12-16*

Knowing that dangerous waters and damning anchors were a constant threat to the church (not just Timothy’s personal walk), Paul spells out some practical ways in which Timothy was to guard his ministry and intentionally exercise himself to godliness. Each of these steps are written as commands.

- (1) **Be confident in your calling (4:12)**. Because Timothy was young, he had to work extra hard to earn the respect of those in the church.<sup>8</sup> And while he couldn’t control how others viewed him, he could strive diligently by following Paul’s advice in the following verses to set the example in godly living.
- (2) **Be an example for others to imitate (4:12)**. Paul isn’t speaking merely of outward living (conduct), but setting such an example for the natural outflow of true godliness – from our heart’s affections.
- (3) **Be devoted to Christ’s commands (4:13)**. In order for Timothy to be an example in holiness, he would need to draw near to Scripture by reading it publicly, exhortation or admonishing the church to properly apply Scripture, and through the systematic teaching of Scripture. Paul uses the image of a ship drawing near to land to dock to help Timothy understand how to rightly tether his life to trustworthy anchors. Elsewhere, he used this metaphor for false teachers inspecting and falling prey to false anchors (1 Tim. 1:4; 3:8; 4:1).
- (4) **Be faithful to your call (4:14)**. Paul didn’t want Timothy to neglect the gift of teaching he received at his salvation and confirmed by the elders. He didn’t want him to jump ship or set sail for smoother waters in the face of opposition, but remember his calling and confirmation as a minister of the gospel. In his second letter to Timothy, Paul urged him to “stir up” this gift of God of teaching with boldness (2 Tim. 2:6-7).

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<sup>8</sup> John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Timothy*, pg. 172.

- (5) **Be faithful to the Scriptures (4:15)**. Paul wanted Timothy to “be all in” or wholly devoted to the pursuit of godliness. In 2 Timothy, Paul uses three images for intentionally enduring hardship – a soldier, an athlete, and a farmer. Each of these roles required strategizing the best way to engage in warfare, finish a race, and work hard to produce fruit. Timothy’s faithfulness to the Scriptures includes meditating on them or carefully planning and strategize how to practice them. By being faithful to the Scriptures, Timothy would effectively guard his heart and personal ministry.
- (6) **Be circumspect in your heart (4:16)**. Because godliness involves our heart’s response to God, Paul warns Timothy to take heed to himself or his heart. He is to concentrate on his personal growth in holiness through the careful evaluation of his heart and his life as he seeks to apply himself to correct doctrine. To this end, the negative emotions of an impure conscience are God-given gifts (1 Tim. 4:1-5). Instead of repressing our conscience or seeking to appease it so we might minimize its warning signals, we must be willing to do the hard work of repentance and reconciliation.
- (7) **Be faithful to the church’s mission (4:16)**. Success in life and ministry, for Paul, looked like perseverance in the truth of the gospel in the face of adversity for the sake of the lost. The mission of the church in Ephesus (and today!) could only be accomplished when the church continued or persevered in correct doctrine.

From these seven commands, we glean several timeless principles.

**First, our pursuit of godliness is directly tied to our view of Scripture.** We are in desperate need of Word of God. By it we are transformed to look and live more like Christ (Ps. 19; 119:11, 105; John 17:17).

Paul said it best in 2 Tim. 3:16-17: *“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work”* (emphasis added).

If we neglect Scripture, disdain it, or view its principles as irrelevant and changeable based on culture, then we run the risk of being disqualified as a “good” or seaworthy servant. By drawing near to Christ through the Scriptures, continuing to teach it and uphold its trustworthiness on which to base our lives, Paul says Timothy *“will save both yourself and those who hear you.”* (4:16).

Paul says something similar in chapter 2 when he says “*Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control*” (1 Tim. 2:16). In both of these passages, context rules out the possibility of salvation by works. In fact, the reason Paul wrote these two letters to Timothy was to combat such false teachings.

When Paul says Timothy “*will save both [himself] and those who hear [him],*” Paul is saying Timothy’s obedience to the Lord, seen in his faithfulness to take the Word of the Lord to the lost, is proof of the authenticity of his salvation.

Obedience to the Word of the Lord always has been the mark of a genuine conversion experience (1 John 2:3-5). It matters how we live, not because we earn our salvation by our deeds, but because our lives are often the very best evidence for our heart’s true beliefs (1 Tim. 3:15).

Our faithfulness to obey the principles in God’s Word, and allow our conscience to be shaped by them, proves that our confession of faith in the Lord Jesus is genuine. Those who do not persevere, who abandon truth, who persist in a pattern of disobedience, will drift into dangerous waters, tether their hearts to damning anchors, and find themselves castaways.

**Second, our pursuit of godliness is directly tied to the godliness of the church.** When Paul says that Timothy’s ability to continue in teaching the Scriptures will result in the salvation of “*those who hear you,*” he is calling Timothy’s attention to the reason he is strive toward godliness - so that others may follow in his example come to know Christ (4:16).

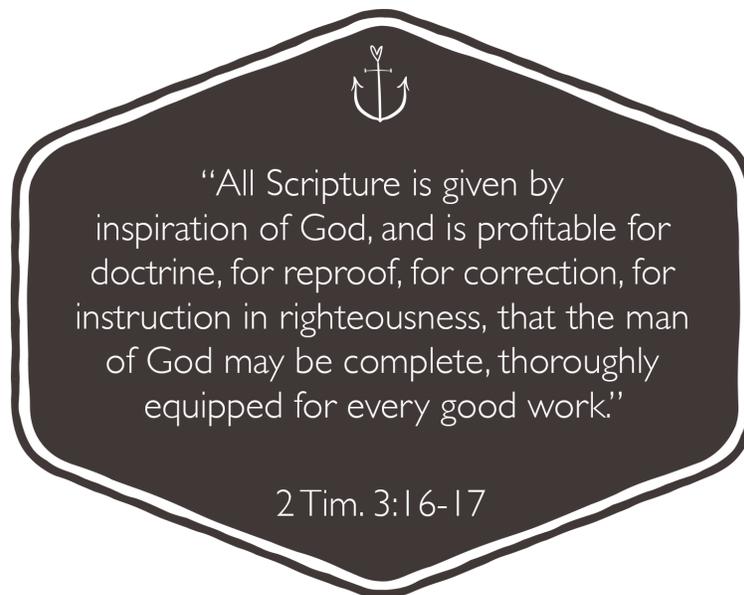
Again, Timothy is not the *source* of salvation, here, but rather, the *messenger* of it. And his effectiveness to deliver the good news of such a message depends on how faithful he is to live out that message.

Ultimately, this is why what we believe matters. What we believe will determine the way we live. When the church is comprised of individuals who are tethered to false beliefs, it will lead to ungodliness. Wrong beliefs lead to wrong living, and wrong living leads to a wrong purpose. We cannot faithfully serve the mission of the church because we will be busy serving ourselves. We will become a “bad servant” (1 Tim. 4:6-11).

Like Timothy and the church at Ephesus, we, too, are called to the pursuit of godliness by being faithful to the Scriptures and faithful to the mission of the church. Yet, this is where so many of us get stuck.

You might believe that because of your youth or inexperience that you are inadequately equipped to partner with the church in service. If you have ever felt that way, you are in good company. It is likely that Timothy, too, had similar feelings. Perhaps this is why Paul spent so much time encouraging his young protégé to find his source of strength and boldness in Christ's work in him, and not his own.

I talk to many women who mistakenly believe that their past experiences or sins disqualify them from service. But when Paul laid out these practical steps to guide Timothy toward godliness, Paul wasn't expecting Timothy to be perfect! Rather, Paul wanted Timothy to run like he meant it! To run whole-heartedly in his pursuit of Christ. When Timothy ran like he meant it, his growth toward holiness would be a mark of authenticity as a leader and the authenticity of God's Word in his life. When we pursue perfection, we are no longer pursers of Christ, but of idols. Timothy's ability to pursue godliness and live as an example to others is a gospel issue. It requires, above all, that Timothy be firmly anchored to Christ through the teachings of Scripture.



Like Timothy, we are not to seek perfection, but progress. Exercising ourselves toward godliness is an intentional activity by nature. Holiness doesn't just happen by accident, but by the slow untangling of our heart from anchors and idols to which we have tied our hearts.

Like Timothy, we are to safeguard our hearts from worldly philosophies or belief systems that are contrary to Scripture. Such systems of belief will always impact the way we live our lives. And the way we live matters – not just as proof of our own faith, but for the integrity of the church.

