

## The Pillar: Chapter 6 (Part 5 of 5)

Guard the Truth that Leads to Life

1 Timothy 6:20-21

Mark Vroegop

---

*20 O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you. Avoid the irreverent babble and contradictions of what is falsely called "knowledge," 21 for by professing it some have swerved from the faith. Grace be with you (1 Timothy 6:20-21).*

What comes to mind when I say the word "church"? What image, feelings, ideas, or thoughts run through your heart when you hear this word? Which season of your life is that word in? Does the word "church" create positive or negative emotions and feelings for you?

Those were the questions that I asked you when we began our series on 1 Timothy. In October of last year, just after we moved into our present sanctuary, we began this series. I felt like this was a good time to study one of the Pastoral Epistles for a few reasons:

1. After studying Colossians, Job, and Matthew, it seemed like a good time to look at the life of Jesus as practically lived out in his bride, the church.
2. Since we had just moved into a new facility, especially a new sanctuary, I thought it would be good to remind ourselves about key Biblical truths that define us as a body of believers, truths that remain constant regardless of what kind of space that you worship in.
3. I sense that the doctrine of the church (ecclesiology) is often a neglected area of ministry. I believed that how we do ministry is very important, and it was good to talk about it.

You see, what a person experiences in a church is life-shaping. Some of you are still recovering from a really bad church experience. There may have been doctrinal issues, but that is usually just the tip of the iceberg. There is the potential for personal conflict, procedural politics, theological drift, and deep personal pain. You may have found yourself saying, "I can't believe this is a happening in my church!" On the other hand, church can be glorious and like nothing else on the earth. When godly living, biblical truth, life together, and real life change combine together – there is nothing like it! And it really impacts you.

For instance, last Sunday night we had the privilege of restoring a man to our church family who had been previously disciplined. It was a glorious moment as we rejoiced over God's apparent work in his life, and the love of a congregation who said, "Welcome home." Church in those moments is absolutely beautiful. In fact, you might find yourself saying, "Now that's church!"

Your experience of church is life-shaping. During my senior year of college I served as an intern in a great church called Clearcreek Chapel, pastored by John Street, who now teaches at the Masters

College. It was a church that exemplified real life change. The preaching was deep, the praying was heart-felt, the worship was vibrant, and the change in people's lives was obvious. It was a great church, and it marked me and shaped me forever. This is what a church experience does; this is what is happening to you – whether you realize it or not. It marks you. Forever.

This is the 24<sup>th</sup> and final message in this wonderfully helpful book, and my aim today is to walk us through the last two verses while rehearsing a few of the major lessons that we've learned together over the last seven months.

My thesis for this series was that the church is vital to God's mission, the gospel message, and our spiritual maturity. And through six chapters we've observed some great and timeless truths about the church.

## **A Final Charge**

Our text today is a final word from the apostle Paul to this young man and his congregation as he concludes this helpful and insightful letter about the church. What do we see here? Let me highlight four things:

### **1. This is personal**

Verse 20 begins with a very personal, emotional-sounding address to Timothy. It reads "O Timothy." Interestingly, the NIV and NRSV omit the "O," even though it is clearly in the original language, and I think that to simply say "Timothy" misses the point here. It would seem that Paul wants to add some emotional and personal punch to what he is saying, as he does in other places:

- *But as for you, O man of God, flee these things (1 Tim. 6:11)*
- *O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you? (Gal.3:1)*
- *Therefore you have no excuse, O man, every one of you who judges (Rom. 2:1)*
- *But who are you, O man, to answer back to God? (Rom.9:20)*

In each case Paul uses the addition of "O" to add an emotional element to his appeal. He aims to say something significant, and adding the "O" increases the poignancy of his comments. Whether he's talking about doctrinal compromise, spiritual pride, pastoral calling, or the emotional struggle with God's sovereignty, the "O" makes what he says have more weight.

Now this will lead him toward a specific charge, but I just want you to savor the fact that Paul speaks to Timothy this way. Why? I think he speaks this way because he is trying to press this into Timothy's heart. He wants these words to land deep within his soul. This is Paul's final charge to Timothy, and he wants it to hit him deeply.

Paul apparently wanted Timothy to personally feel the weight of this. So while this letter is about the church, Paul knew very well that it was Timothy, on a personal level, who would have to carry this mantle. This is part of the beauty and the pain of ministry. It is personal, and it should be.

God's ministry is accomplished in the church by people, and these people are personally affected. Look at 2 Timothy 1:3-8, and notice the personal nature of Paul's words, including tears, suffering, and fear.

*<sup>3</sup>I thank God whom I serve, as did my ancestors, with a clear conscience, as I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day. <sup>4</sup>As I remember your tears, I long to see you, that I may be filled with joy. <sup>5</sup>I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well. <sup>6</sup>For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, <sup>7</sup>for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control. <sup>8</sup>Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God (2 Timothy 1:3-8).*

Ministry, at any level, involves life on life contact. It requires personally entering into the mess of people's lives. It requires one to lay down his or her life – to risk the possibility of pain, disappointment, sorrow, and even persecution. Church ministry involves the care of the souls of people with eternal destinies on the line. In the same way that Jesus entered our world at great personal cost, so too church ministry demands personal engagement. Don't get me wrong: there are great joys. But there are also deep valleys, lots of tears, and painful moments.

So if you find yourself involved in the church, and then discover that it is hard, painful, and personal, don't be alarmed. Don't panic. You are right where you should be. If you find yourself overwhelmed with the needs of people, grieving over the consequences of their sin, and weary deep in your soul – take heart. Welcome to church. You have lots of company. This is what caused Paul to say in 2 Corinthians 4:12 – “So death is at work in us, but life in you.”

Ministry is a personal death; yet it is not pointless. It is all a matter of perspective. Notice what Paul says prior to his “death at work in us . . . ” comment in 2 Corinthians 4.

*<sup>8</sup>We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; <sup>9</sup>persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; <sup>10</sup>always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be manifested in our bodies. <sup>11</sup>For we who live are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh (2 Cor. 4:8-11).*

Paul personally sent Timothy to Ephesus, and as he closes this letter, he gets personal with this young pastor because ministry is personal.

## **2. Guard the deposit**

The second thing we see here is yet another charge or command that Timothy is given. We've seen other charges before (e.g., 1:18-19, 6:13-16), but this is a special one because it really summarizes the essence of what Timothy's role is to be. In fact, Paul will open his second letter to Timothy with the same theme: “By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” (2 Tim. 1:14). At this point in 1 Timothy Paul simply says, “Guard the deposit entrusted to you.”

There are three English words that are important here:

- **Guard** – the word means to hold someone or something in close custody. It was used both of prisoners and possessions. It can also mean “to keep” in the sense of obedience or religious faithfulness (see Mark 10:20 and 1 Tim. 5:21). Here it seems to mean a personal attentiveness, passion and constant vigilance.
- **Deposit** – Paul uses a metaphor here of a person who was entrusted with keeping a possession safe while the owner is away.<sup>1</sup> The “deposit” is the truth of God’s word and the totality of how the church was living that out. Timothy was to guard the truth that leads to life in the context of the people and circumstances that God had given him.
- **Entrusted** – In the English it appears that this is a separate word, but it is implied in the word “deposit.” So these words carry two important nuances for ministry purposes: 1) We are talking about something sacred and special, and 2) It doesn’t belong to us. These two aspects of ministry are essential at any level – to remember this is sacred and it is not ours. Be on guard that ministry never become too casual and that it not become too much about us. Remind your soul often: “this is not a game and this is not about me.”

We’ve see this urgent appeal to guard to the truth that leads to life in every chapter of this book. It has been the recurring theme through the various issues that Paul was addressing. Let’s take a quick overview. Timothy is to guard the truth that leads to life by the following:

- **Chapter 1** – Teaching true **doctrine** and refuting false teaching. *“As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, 4 nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith” (1 Tim. 1:3-4).*
- **Chapter 2** – Promoting true **worship**, and helping people know how to conduct themselves in church. *“First of all, then, I urge that supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgivings be made for all people, 2 for kings and all who are in high positions, that we may lead a peaceful and quiet life, godly and dignified in every way” (1 Tim. 2:1-2).*
- **Chapter 3** – Choosing godly **leadership** of the church, which is vital to the church’s mission. *“I am writing these things to you so that, 15 if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of truth” (1 Tim. 3:14-15).*
- **Chapters 4-5** – Living out the truth through a global **mission** in practical and specific ways. *“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. 11 Command and teach these things” (1 Tim. 4:10-11).*
- **Chapter 6** – Pursuing personal **godliness**. *“But as for you, O man of God, flee these things. Pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness. 12 Fight the good fight of*

---

<sup>1</sup> Gordon Fee, The New International Biblical Commentary – 1-2 Timothy, Titus, (Peabody, Massachusetts: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 160.

*the faith. Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called and about which you made the good confession in the presence of many witnesses" (1 Tim. 6:11-12).*

Timothy has been given a sacred duty. He is leading the church, and he has to take this divinely given deposit and guard it, preserve it, and pass it on to others without dilution or distortion.<sup>2</sup> At every level, and in every situation, and in every season of ministry, Timothy must guard the truth that leads to life.

### **3. Avoid what is worthless**

The third aspect of this final charge involves things Timothy is told to avoid. I have always found it interesting that ministry involves intentionally doing some things, while also intentionally avoiding other things. Some things need to be addressed, fought for and pursued. But there are other things that simply should be ignored.

You may have heard or even said something like this: "I'm not even going to validate that comment by responding." Some issues grow and get traction by people responding and reacting to them. Controversy creates interest. In fact Paul says this outright in 2 Timothy 2:23 – "*Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies; you know that they breed quarrels.*" One of the most important and most challenging decisions to make is deciding which issues to address and which ones you should just ignore.

To "avoid" means to turn away or to not become involved in. 2 Timothy 2:16 warns about avoiding irreverent and empty speech, and Titus 3:9 warns about foolish debates. In other words, there are some things that are just not helpful and that are even inappropriate to talk about. Timothy needs to avoid the kinds of things that are a worthless distraction.

The first thing Timothy is to avoid is "**irreverent babble.**" What is this? The Greek word here means talk that lacks significant content. It is foolish talk, worthless talk, and pointless talk. By saying that it is irreverent it means that anyone can do it. It is the things that people say which are as worthless as they are common. It is the kind of talk that never stops. You know what I mean by this, don't you? You have a friend to whom you'd just like to say "Shhhh!" This friend's constant talking about everything and everyone is not only exhausting, but it is also spiritually draining. Irreverent babble is pointless talking, and every church has people like this. They always have an opinion, they are usually riding some hobby horse, and they seem to be constantly in the middle of conflict and controversy. Timothy is to be careful to not be drawn down a path where he is chasing everything that is said – especially if it is about him.

Charles Spurgeon, in his book Lectures to My Students, says that every pastor needs to have one blind eye and one deaf ear. And part of the key of successful pastoring is knowing which ear and which eye to give certain people. It is a great kindness to everyone if certain people are given a blind eye or a deaf ear. A pastor should listen, but he should know with which ear!

---

<sup>2</sup> John R. W. Stott, The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus, (Downers Grove, Illinois: IVP, 1996), 163.

Second, he is to avoid “**contradictions of what is falsely called ‘knowledge.’**” Remember that there were false teachers in Ephesus who were teaching that there was some form of high knowledge that people could attain. There was a sense of spiritual elitism connected to some kind of special knowledge. The opening verses of 1 Timothy talk about myths, genealogies and speculations. There was some level of defection from the gospel by advocating for a special classification of people – true Christians. This issue blossomed even further in Colossae when Paul wrote:

*<sup>6</sup>Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, <sup>7</sup>rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in thanksgiving. <sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ (Col. 2:6-8).*

It was this departure from Christ, in the name of their self-made religion, that caused some to “**serve from the faith.**” The phrase means that they had missed the mark, like an arrow that flies wide of its target. There were people who were that way spiritually. They were so passionate, but about the wrong things, so that they missed the main thing – Jesus.

So this final charge is a reminder that there are some things that we just have to avoid. Not every solution is helpful, and not every problem is worth dealing with.

#### **4. Rely on God’s grace**

The final thing to note here is the last exhortation from Paul to Timothy. Verse 21 simply says “Grace to you.” This is classic way for Paul to begin his letters to the churches. Romans, 1 and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, and 1 and 2 Thessalonians all start this way. 1 Timothy did as well. In 1:2 Paul said, “Grace, mercy, and peace . . .”

But it is also a familiar way for Paul to end his letters. When we read the New Testament, we read the following:

- “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you” (1 Cor. 16:23)
- “The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit, brothers” (Gal. 6:18)
- “Grace be with all who love our Lord Jesus Christ with love incorruptible” (Eph.6:24)

All of that to say that it is fairly common for Paul to begin and end his letters with a focus on grace. Why? The standard “good-bye” in ancient letters was “be strong,” and it seems that Paul Christianizes this ending with the source by which spiritual strength comes: God’s grace.<sup>3</sup> In other words, the strength to do anything Paul has talked about is a by-product of God’s grace. Everything we have, everything we are, and everything we do is only by God’s grace. It is his power that is our hope. So it would make sense that Paul would pray for God’s empowering grace in Timothy’s life.

---

<sup>3</sup> Fee, 162.

Yet there is more here. The word “you” is plural not singular. This means that Paul is speaking to Timothy, but he has the church as a whole in mind. Throughout our study I’ve told you that this book is not just for Timothy; it was for his church, and it is for us. Paul has Timothy in view, but he has the entire church in mind as well.

This final word is a great reminder about something really important: The church is pointless and powerless without God’s grace. After studying this book for many months, we have seen time and time again the beauty of what God had done for us, and we have seen the potential of what we need his grace to still do in our lives and in our church.

“Grace to you” is the essence of the message of salvation – that “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost” (1 Timothy 1:15). Grace means that God has made a way for sinners to be saved, to be treated in a way that they do not deserve. “Grace to you” is the message of church – that God is still in the business of rescuing sinners.

But it means even more. It means that any success, any spiritual growth, any life-changing moment, and any hope for any of that in the future is entirely dependent upon God’s grace. We come to be “in” the church by God’s grace, and the only hope for the church is God’s grace. On June 10, we will celebrate not only the completion of the Mission Expansion Project but also 27 years of God’s faithfulness to College Park Church. God birthed this church by grace, sustained it by grace, and grew it by grace. And as we look toward the future, God’s continued grace is our only hope. Therefore we ought to pray “Grace to all of you!”

We are called to guard the truth that leads to life by relying upon grace to all of us.

### **Takeaways from Timothy**

Ending a series is a mixed blessing. On the one hand it is thrilling to have walked through an entire book, and on the other hand, it feels like you are saying good-bye to a friend. I’m grateful for this book and how it has helped to ground us during this season in our church’s history.

As we close this series, let me give you a few takeaways from this book. These are not new thoughts, but I think they will serve as good markers of what God taught us in 1 Timothy:

#### **1. The gospel is the basis for everything**

I’m not sure how many times I’ve quoted 1 Timothy 1:15 – “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am foremost.” I may have cited it in nearly every sermon after chapter one. But I find that this simple verse is the reason why we gather every Sunday. I am the worst sinner I know, but I have a relationship with Jesus such that my sins are forgiven, I have a new identity, and I have new relationships with people in the body of Christ. In other words, the gospel changes everything. I am a gospel-man. And church, at its most basic level, is simply a gathering of people whose singular confession is “Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners of whom I am the foremost!”

This book has reminded us about the ground of the gospel underneath our church.

## **2. Doctrine matters**

Truth leads to life. Error leads to death. In a day and age when doctrine is often seen as secondary in importance when compared to relevance and applicability, this book reminds us that ideas – especially theological ideas – have consequences. What we believe, and what we encourage others to believe, has eternal ramifications.

This book reminds us that doctrine is serious and important.

## **3. People make the difference**

Positively and negatively, people make the church what she is. The facility and programs are just the forms. People are the church. Just think of the way that you've grown spiritually over the years, and I would imagine that the greatest seasons of growth came because of some person in your life. Church at its best is when people are godly; church at its worst is when people are not. The right people in the right positions making the right decisions makes all the difference in the world.

People make the difference.

## **4. Church is a beautiful mess**

I mean this with all the affection I can muster in my soul. I love the church. I love this church. I love the people in this church. But the reality is that we are seriously messed up. Even after Christ we are still "works-in-progress." And I often marvel at how it all holds together. Left to ourselves, and without the Word and the Spirit, every church would fail. But there is something really beautiful about looking at the church like a young bride coming down the aisle. She is not perfect, but man, is she pretty!

This book reminds us that the church is beautiful.

God has, for reasons that only He knows, chosen to accomplish his purposes on earth through the church. And this gathering of grace-impacted, Spirit-filled, Word-saturated, Jesus-centered people is the means by which truth that leads to life is guarded and proclaimed.

The world needs godly, healthy, vibrant churches because it is the church that possesses this truth that leads to life.

© College Park Church

**Permissions:** You are permitted and encouraged to reproduce this material in any format provided that you do not alter the content in any way and do not charge a fee beyond the cost of reproduction. Please include the following statement on any distributed copy: by Mark Vroegop. © College Park Church - Indianapolis, Indiana. [www.yourchurch.com](http://www.yourchurch.com)

**Scriptural Citations:** Unless otherwise noted, biblical quotations are from the English Standard Version.