

Preserving God's People [Slide 1] 1 Timothy 4:11-16

Last week Jason talked about the danger of being deceived by false doctrines of demons and focused on how each of us can stay spiritually fit so that we are not deceived. Paul continues in chapter 4 talking about the danger of false doctrine, but in verses 11-16 he talks not about what the individual believer should or should not do, but rather focuses on what the church as a corporate body needs to do to save the people from being deceived.

I invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Timothy 4:11-16. 1 Timothy is about three fourths of the way through the New Testament right before you get to the big book of Hebrews. 1 Timothy 4:11-16. Let's read that passage. Read.

On your outline I wrote out what I believe is the main idea of this passage. Paul instructs Timothy how to save the church from demonic deception by having the leaders teach from Scripture, grow in godly character, and be approved as leaders.

I want to show you first how I derived that main idea. Chapter 4 begins in verse 1 with a warning that in later times some will fall away from the faith by paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. In verses 1-10 Jason talked about how each one of us individually can escape being deceived by demonically inspired false doctrines. So that is the main problem addressed in chapter 4: avoiding being deceived by doctrines of demons.

Look down at verse 16 where Paul tells Timothy if he pays close attention to what Paul has written and perseveres in Paul's counsel Timothy will insure salvation for himself and those who hear him. What kind of salvation or deliverance or preservation is Paul describing? I would suggest to you that Paul is referring to salvation from or deliverance from demonic deception. That is what chapter 4 is about.

Now flip back to chapter 2 verse 15. Read. Those of you who were here about a month ago will hopefully remember that I said this salvation or preservation in chapter 2 verse 15 was salvation from demonic deception which is mentioned in verse 14. In other words I am suggesting that Paul is using the word, salvation, in both chapter 2 and chapter 4 to refer to being saved from demonic deception.

So, if we read chapter 4 verse 16 as referring to being saved from demonic deception then Paul is telling Timothy that if he perseveres in these things that Paul has written, Timothy will insure salvation from demonic deception both for himself and those who hear him. Verse 16 summarizes the main idea of this passage. So, what I need to do is go into detail the things Paul tells Timothy to do to save his people from deception.

[Slide 2] Paul's instructions to Timothy are not unique to Timothy. These same instructions apply to anyone who leads in the church and has any kind of oversight of the teaching ministry. I see three key things Paul tell us we must do to safeguard the teaching ministry from false doctrine. The first thing Paul tells Timothy to do is to choose teachers who teach and exhort from the Scriptures. In verse 11 Paul exhorts Timothy to prescribe and teach these things. These things refers to what Paul has written Timothy in this letter, but by extension it can refer to all the Word of God.

In verse 13 Paul tells Timothy to give attention to or to devote himself to the public reading of the Scriptures. The word for "read" occurs in two other places in the New Testament. It occurs in Luke 4:16-17 where Jesus publicly reads from Isaiah in the synagogue and it is used in Acts 13:15 to refer to the reading of the Law and the Prophets in the synagogue. Paul tells Timothy to

devote himself to exhortation and to teaching. Teaching is explaining to people what the Bible means. Exhortation is challenging people to live the truth of the Bible.

You need a healthy balance of both teaching and exhortation. Preaching that is all teaching with no application and no call to action encourages people to be hearers of the Bible only and not doers. Exhortation with little teaching easily ends up in manipulation, or legalism, or false application because you haven't understood clearly what the text means. Preaching needs to be properly balanced between teaching and exhortation.

In verse 16 Paul tells Timothy to pay close attention to himself and to his teaching and to persevere in these things.

There is apparently a strong temptation among those who preach to depart from proclaiming the Bible. I personally have not had much time to observe this tendency since I became a pastor because I don't get to visit many churches or listen to many sermons. In the church I grew up in I rarely heard any kind of exposition of a passage of Scripture. Almost all the sermons I heard growing up were what I call springboard messages. A springboard sermon is where you might start with a verse or 2 of Scripture and you jump from that verse into the water of your own thinking to talk about whatever you want to talk about without any reference to the Bible. The opening verse or two supposedly gives your message legitimacy suggesting that what you are saying comes from the Bible, when in fact it mainly comes from the fertile imagination of the preacher.

It is very easy for heresy and other false doctrines to creep in when a preacher is not basing his message on the Word of God, because the Word sets boundaries and limits on what he can and cannot say. Topical sermons are also susceptible to this problem. A topical sermon is where you preach on a topic like prayer or fasting and you look at many different passages or verses of Scripture. I'm not against topical sermons. I do them myself, but it is a lot easier to mistakenly add error to the message in a topical sermon because the preacher's outline is not based on a Bible passage, but rather is organized out of his own thinking. The more anyone has to rely on their own logic and thinking, apart from the structure being supplied by the text, the more room for error and mistakes.

When you listen to a sermon, whether it is here, on a podcast, or the radio, or whatever, first ask yourself if the preacher is speaking on a particular passage of Scripture and what is that passage? You want to turn to that passage in your Bible and note what surrounds the paragraph or chapter you are studying to make sure that what the preacher says makes sense in light of the larger context. Ask yourself: Does the Bible really say what he claims it says?

Most people make mistakes in interpreting the Bible because they go too fast and don't look closely at what the text says and doesn't say. They read quickly and jump to conclusions without taking the time to look carefully. The Bible is not that mysterious and unknowable. If you invest the time to carefully read and reflect on what you read, you will usually come up with a pretty sound interpretation.

In combating heresies and false religions it is important to identify false teaching, because people cannot always make the link between the truth and recognizing what is false. Pastor Ben Patterson tells the story of a retired pastor (read rest of story). In all of this it is important to show from Scripture why we believe something is true and why we believe something is false.

So, the first step in protecting people from false teaching is to put people in teaching positions who rely on the Bible as their chief source of truth.

[Slide 3] The second thing to do to protect a church from false doctrine is to choose leaders who grow in godly character. In verse 12 Paul tells Timothy, "Read." Timothy had a

disadvantage as a young man. He did not immediately gain trust or respect because he was young and did not have a lot of experience or years to gain wisdom. So, Paul told him to be an example in his behavior, in love, in faith, and in purity.

Here's the deal. Sin and false doctrine go hand in hand. This is true for a couple of reasons. If you're teaching false doctrine, you're disobeying God and if you disobey him in doctrine you will probably disobey him in morals as well. False doctrines are often the domain of demons. If you follow the leading of demons in doctrine, you are probably going to follow them in other areas. This is why one of the key ways to discern false doctrine is to look at the lives of those who propagate it. Listen to these words of warning about false prophets from Jesus in Matthew 7:15-20, "Read."

Most of the qualifications for elders and deacons that we looked at in chapter 3 covered character issues. If a person is filled with the Spirit, they will exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. So, choose leaders who grow in godly character.

[Slide 4] The third thing churches can do to protect from false doctrine is to gain corporate approval of its leaders. Paul says in verses 14-15, "Read." Timothy received a spiritual gift and was authorized to minister by the laying on of hands by the presbytery or council of elders. We don't know what kind of spiritual gift Timothy received when the elders laid hands on him. More significant is the fact that the elders of the Ephesian church recognized that Timothy was called by God to minister in the church and they publicly affirmed and authorized his position by the public laying on of hands.

The key take away from this example is that leaders should not be self-appointed. They should be recognized and appointed by the key leaders in the church. There needs to be some kind of formal system where the church, represented by its leaders, does due diligence before a person is placed in leadership or a teaching role in the church. The church also should have some means of holding its leaders accountable so that if they depart from the faith or become morally compromised, those leaders can be removed from their position of influence.

The way this process works at Hope Fellowship is that all the elder candidates, trustee candidates, or ministry team leader candidates are approved by the elders and presented to the congregation for a confirming vote. If both the elders and congregation agree, then a person is begins to serve in that leadership role. Within ministries such as the Life Group Ministry, the Adult Bible Fellowship Ministry, the Children's Ministry, etc. the Ministry Team Leader appoints those who lead within that ministry and they are accountable to the Ministry Team Leader.

Where you really get into trouble is when a David Koresh or a Jim Jones or some other false teacher appoints themselves as the leader of an organization and they have no one to whom they are accountable. That system is ripe for abuse and error. Usually when those people go bad, there is no way to remove them from their position of leadership.

In Article 2 of our By-Laws which you should have read if you are a member of this church, we spell out Church Discipline of Members and Church Leaders. That article presents the process we use to hold leaders and the staff accountable if they teach false doctrine or practice sin without repenting.

Every church needs a process to vet and authorize those who lead and teach as well as a system of organizational accountability to remove those who teach falsely or fall into sin. That way if someone fails to meet one of the first two requirements I have mentioned, they can either be prevented from taking leadership or they can be removed from leadership.

I believe we do well as a church in following these guidelines Paul has laid out in this passage. Truth is of the utmost importance. It determines whether a person is saved and gains eternal life. It determines whether a person is obeying or disobeying God. It determines whether you are relating to the true God or not. Truth leads you out of bondage to sin. It saves you from deception. It helps you to live life in all its fullness.

I take seriously, the elders take seriously, and the leaders of this church take seriously our responsibility to teach the truth and to protect you from false doctrine and all the pain and misery it can cause.

I close with a quote from Horace Mann: “Keep one thing forever in view—the truth; and if you do this, though it may seem to lead you away from the opinion of men, it will assuredly conduct you to the throne of God.” Let’s pray.