

Monday Week 47 Instructions to the Church

Bible Reading: 1 Tim. 1:1-5

Q 185 What was Paul's assignment to Timothy at Ephesus?

A. Timothy was to be sure that the church taught sound doctrine.

A missionary came upon a village in the South American jungle. As he was visiting in one of the homes, he found various gods placed on a shelf. Among the gods was a picture of Jesus. "Where did you get this?" he asked. They told him that years before someone had come to the village and told them about Jesus. They put his picture among the other gods. No one stayed in the village to help them understand the truth that there is only one God. They needed more teaching.

Paul wanted to make sure that the church in Ephesus understood the truth about God. He told Timothy to stay there and teach right doctrine. They needed to know what was true. They also needed to know what was false. It is very important that churches teach the truth and keep false teachings out. Be sure you follow the truth.

Thinking Deeper

There is a church denomination that professes to be Christian that openly celebrates homosexuality. It is their identification. Another so called Christian church has ministers who proclaim their worship to "Mother God," instead of Father God. Some who claim to be Christian openly support Marxist rebel forces in South America which take credit for killing people to promote their agenda. The religious landscape is littered by almost every conceivable belief. In every case, the leaders of these churches have, in the words of Peter, "wrested the scriptures."

By contrast, there are churches which are valiant for truth. Some have been forced out of their denominations to maintain their integrity. Others are under fierce attack by radical Hindus, Buddhists, and Muslims. Multiplied thousands of Christians each year are regularly attacked, displaced, harassed, or otherwise persecuted because they have stood for Biblical Christianity. Their leaders have been careful to teach sound doctrine. Paul assigned Timothy to stay at Ephesus so that the church would be strong in sound doctrine. Every minister of Christ has the same task. Those who allow false doctrine unchallenged in the church are miserable failures as ministers of the Gospel.

Tuesday Week 47 Instructions to the Church

Bible Reading: 1 Timothy 2:1-10

Q 186 What is very important for people who are part of the church to do?

A. They are to pray and live holy lives.

Somebody told a joke about a not very smart girl. She went to the library and in a loud voice said, "I'd like a hamburger, coke and fries." The librarian answered, "Shhh. This is a library." "Oh, I'm sorry," whispered the girl, and in a very quiet voice said, "I'd like a hamburger, coke and fries." The story is funny because we don't expect to order food from a librarian. The library is a place to find books.

The church is for prayer and being holy. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he wanted him to help the church be what it is supposed to be. The church is not a building but is made up of people. Men who are part of the church are to pray everywhere and live holy lives. Women who are part of the church are to be modest in appearance and show godliness in all they do. It is very important that those who are part of the church pray and live holy lives. Otherwise the church is not what it is supposed to be. Take care to pray and take time to be holy.

Thinking Deeper

John Calvin was a leader in the Reformation. His Institutes of the Christian Religion were important in formulating the Calvinist, or Reformed, doctrines. A significant element in the Calvinist system is the doctrine of limited atonement. That is, Christ's atonement was only for those who were elected to be saved. And the elect were chosen by God with no preconditions. In very basic language, God only willed to save the ones He elected, and when Christ died, his death was only for the elect.

Part of Paul's exhortation to pray for all men tells us that prayer is a good thing in God's eyes. There is a connection between men's praying for people and God's desire to save people. Two truths stand out here. One, it is important to pray for people. The Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write "first of all" about this kind of prayer. Second, God really desires to save all men. Calvin's "limited atonement" must be rejected because the Holy Spirit's inspired message is that God "will have all men to be saved." Despite the twists and turns Calvin's defenders take to hold on to their scheme, there are too many "alls" that relate to God's salvation to limit it. Look at it again: "God our Savior...will have all men to be saved." Thank the Lord, "all" means that no one is left out. God wants you to be saved.

Wednesday Week 47 Instructions to the Church

Bible Reading: 1 Timothy 3:1-10

Q 187 What is required of those who are church leaders?

A. Church leaders are to live blameless lives.

Benedict Arnold was an American General during the Revolutionary War. He was a good general and a hero at the battle of Saratoga, where he was wounded. But as the war went on, he thought the Americans would lose. He decided to help the British. He planned to surrender the fort of West Point to the British. But a British spy carrying a secret message with the plans was caught by the Americans. When Benedict Arnold heard that the spy had been caught, he escaped to the British side. After the war ended, he had to live in England. He was not welcome in America. Monuments that were made to remember his efforts in battle on the American side don't mention his name. He was a traitor.

Some leaders of churches do not live like a Christian should live. They are like traitors because they really help the enemies of God. True church leaders follow Jesus as closely as they can. They want to please God, not the world. Church leaders are to be blameless.

Thinking Deeper

In September 2003 the Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Boston agreed to pay as much as \$85 million to victims of child sex abuse by priests. In June 2005 San Francisco's Archdiocese paid \$21 million, in 2006 the Kentucky Archdiocese of Covington paid \$85 million, and in 2007 the Archdiocese of Los Angeles announced it would pay \$660 million dollars for settlements of child abuse victims, some who were abused as long ago as 1946. A big part of the story of these abuse cases was that when the church leaders found out that a priest had abused someone, they would assign him to a different parish without telling the new parish about the former abuse. The church leaders were accused of covering up for the priests.

Catholics were not alone in their abuses. Several high profile televangelists were found to have been involved in immorality or financial corruption. In a major scandal, the head of the National Association of Evangelicals in 2006 was found out to have a homosexual relationship and also a drug problem.

The fallout from these ministers who harmed the name of Christ is continuing. Some people left the churches, others left their faith entirely. When King David sinned, the prophet told him he had given "A great occasion for the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme." It is important that we heed God's word which makes it very clear that church leaders are to be blameless.

Thursday Week 47 Instructions to the Church

Bible Reading: 1 Timothy 4:1-6, 16

Q 188 Why is teaching right doctrine so important?

A. Teaching right doctrine is important because living according to right doctrine has promise of salvation.

Many years ago on an “Unshackled” radio program was the true story of a preacher named Joe. He had a nice church with a nice congregation. He preached nice messages about living and getting along with others. But Preacher Joe did not preach the Gospel. One day he was called to visit a man who was dying. As the preacher stood beside the bedside, the dying man looked into his face. “Why didn’t you tell me, Joe? Why didn’t you tell me?” The man was not ready to die, and his preacher hadn’t told him the truth. That was a sad story. The good part of the story was that Preacher Joe later found the truth and was saved by putting his own faith in Jesus. Then he began to preach the Gospel.

Church leaders are to teach the truth. The Bible is the truth. That is what leaders are to teach. If they teach people to live according to the Bible, they will keep themselves and their people from destruction.

Thinking Deeper

John Wesley helped people to order their spiritual lives. He helped them put their faith into practice. He was methodical in his own application of Christianity and helped others to carefully apply Biblical principles. It is an understatement to say that not all of his contemporaries were favorably impressed. Wesley’s followers were called “Methodists” in derision. But Wesley was not deterred. He continued in his efforts at spiritual formation, and his efforts paid off. Wesley noted, after watching some of his elder saints pass from this life that “our people die well.” He saw the benefit of teaching Christians to “take heed to the doctrine.”

What good is religion that does not have a practical benefit? Not much. When religious instruction allows for “sin every day in word, thought and deed,” how is that a “doctrine according to godliness?” Instruction that gives more weight to the weakness of humanity than to the power of God’s enabling grace fails to encourage people to believe they can live a victorious Christian life. Paul’s instruction to Timothy was to promote the great doctrines that gave confidence in God’s transforming and keeping grace in this present world. It is a saving message.

Friday Week 47 Instructions to the Church

Review the Week's Questions

- Q 185 What was Paul's assignment to Timothy at Ephesus?
A. Timothy was to be sure that the church taught sound doctrine.
- Q 186 What is very important for people in the church to do?
A. They are to pray and live holy lives.
- Q 187 What is required of those who are church leaders?
A. Church leaders are to live blameless lives.
- Q 188 Why is teaching right doctrine so important?
A. Teaching right doctrine is important because living according to right doctrine has promise of salvation.

"Pastor," complained an elderly lady one Sunday, "Some young people are chewing gum in the church." The pastor answered, "Sister, the church is chewing the gum." The pastor did not mean that chewing gum is a good thing when God's people get together to worship. What he meant was that the church is not a building. The church is the people who are following God. On Sunday, the church is often gathered in a building. On Monday, though, the church is scattered throughout the community. In some countries where Christians are persecuted, the church must gather secretly. They are still the church even though they don't have a building.

The church is made up of the people of God. When Paul wrote to Timothy, he gave him instructions for the church. He did not write about a building. He wrote about the people who were saved from their sins and believed in Jesus as their Lord. If you are a believer in Jesus who follows him daily, you are part of the church.

Thinking Deeper

Firefighters were called to a church that was burning. The pastor found the fire chief. "Chief, this is the first time I've ever seen you at church and we've been here for 40 years." "Well, preacher," said the chief, "this is the first time I've ever seen this church on fire!"

It is true that some churches are rather lifeless and many people have no attraction to a dull church. Churches are to be places that are alive. The church, after all, is "the body of Christ" and Jesus said "I am come that they might have life." An alive church is a church that is living as God calls it to live.

"The Apostle Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, was concerned that the New Testament churches demonstrated what God had in mind for His people, the *ecclesia*, "the called out ones." He encouraged them to pray, to be faithful to the Word of God, to live holy lives, to reach the lost, and to "earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints." We are to be part of that church which through the centuries has lived as God's special people. The world needs to see the church be what it ought to be.