

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10

WHERE OUR HOPE LIES

“If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 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.”¹

Someone has said, quite accurately, I might add, that one can live about forty days without food, about four days without water, about four minutes without oxygen and about four seconds without hope. Hope is not merely important for us—it is essential. However, hope can be misplaced, creating serious problems for the one hoping; likewise, the object of one’s hope is critical. Whether one places hope in that which is worthy of hope or whether one rests in that which is certain to disappoint will determine whether that individual shall succeed in this Christian life or whether that one will fail.

For far too many of the professed saints of the True and Living God, hope is synonymous with wishing—a feeling that what is wanted will happen. Like the little boy walking past the graveyard in the evening, many professed Christians see hope as an act symbolised by whistling during the terrifying stroll. The Bible presents quite a different picture of “hope,” however. Hope, in biblical terms, speaks of expectation; it is grounded in faith, though it is distinct from faith. Faith is based on the presence of God in one’s life; whereas hope presents an element of desire. Faith has more of a grounding in facts and rational consideration growing out of God’s presence and promise; hope speaks of intensity as well as confidence. We hope for the transition into the likeness of Christ, and our hope is grounded in our faith in Him as Master of life. We hope for the rapture, and our hope is established on the promise of Christ to come for His own. Thus, hope is akin to anticipation built upon the promises of God.

Paul reminds us that Christians have set their hope on the Living God. Consequently, we are a hopeful people. We live in hope—hope of Christ’s return, hope of the resurrection, hope of the transformation of creation and hope in the grace that will be brought to us at the revelation of Christ Jesus. All that we hope for grows out of the knowledge of God and of His love for us. Knowing this to be true, it will prove valuable for Christians to consider Him in whom we have hoped. It will be to our benefit to look to the True and Living God, renewing our hope in Him.

MINISTERIAL RESPONSIBILITIES — Paul has been urging Timothy to excel in the service he presents before the Lord. In relating these truths, Paul reveals Christian characteristics that must be seen in the life and service of any minister who will qualify as the good servant of Christ.

THE GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS WARNS HIS PEOPLE AGAINST ERROR. “These things” refers back to all that has preceded the text. From the very beginning of the letter, Paul was warning Timothy to expose false teachers [1:3-11] and to warn his listeners of the progress of this present age [4:1-5]. To be certain, interspersed with these warnings is to be sound instruction.

¹ Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Let's look at the substance of Paul's admonition for the minister to warn against error. In **1 TIMOTHY 1:3-11**, Paul writes, "As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine, nor to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith. The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith. Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

"Now we know that the law is good, if one uses it lawfully, understanding this, that the law is not laid down for the just but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and sinners, for the unholy and profane, for those who strike their fathers and mothers, for murderers, the sexually immoral, men who practice homosexuality, enslavers, liars, perjurers, and whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine, in accordance with the gospel of the glory of the blessed God with which I have been entrusted."

In the opening verses of this present chapter, Paul wrote, "The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer" [**1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5**].

The minister who will gain the commendation of the Master will always bear in mind the awesome responsibility weighing on his soul. God warned Ezekiel, and through him all ministers, "Son of man, I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel. Whenever you hear a word from my mouth, you shall give them warning from me. If I say to the wicked, 'You shall surely die,' and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, in order to save his life, that wicked person shall die for his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, or from his wicked way, he shall die for his iniquity, but you will have delivered your soul. Again, if a righteous person turns from his righteousness and commits injustice, and I lay a stumbling block before him, he shall die. Because you have not warned him, he shall die for his sin, and his righteous deeds that he has done shall not be remembered, but his blood I will require at your hand. But if you warn the righteous person not to sin, and he does not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning, and you will have delivered your soul" [**EZEKIEL 3:17-21**].

I am always conscious of the responsibility to warn those who listen against error. I take very seriously my charge to "reprove, rebuke and exhort" [**2 TIMOTHY 4:2**]. I am very much aware, as is each conscientious minister of Christ, that "the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching" [**2 TIMOTHY 4:3**]. Knowing this, the wise minister will be watchful, fulfilling the charge delivered to the elders of Ephesus when the Apostle met them at Miletus. "Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be alert" [**ACTS 20:28-31**]. Dangerous times, deceitful people, desperate conditions will always face the churches of our Lord; and the minister of Christ must be prepared to stand firm against all such people and situations.

THE GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS WILL BE AN EXPERT STUDENT OF THE WORD. Paul says the minister of Christ is to be “trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that [he] has followed.” Weak preaching produces weak churches; to produce strong churches it is necessary for the minister to excel at study of the Word. Note that I did not say “study *about* the Word,” but “study *of* the Word.” If the Word is reduced to nothing more than a sourcebook for sermonic material, I cannot build strong believers through the sermons delivered. If, however, I feed on the word, reading therein to strengthen my own heart, I will deliver messages born out of the overflow of the Word in my own heart. The excellent servant of Christ must be thoroughly familiar with the Word, reading it, meditating on it and mastering the contents of the Book. Years ago, I read the warning of a godly man who cautioned young ministers, “Woe to the minister who reads the Word and fails to hear the clarion voice of the Risen Son of God speaking to his own heart.” How true those words.

Paul specifically indicates that the good servant must be “trained in the words of the faith” and trained in “the good doctrine” that had marked the young minister’s path to that point. The pulpit is no place to be formulating one’s theology. Paul will remind Timothy, “All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” [2 TIMOTHY 3:16, 17]. The minister of Christ must know the Word, understanding what has been written. It is not the place of the minister to address the foibles of the flock, to ride a theological hobby horse or to chase after every contemporary fad arising within Christendom.

Timothy had imbibed from his mother’s womb the sincere milk of the Word; he had learned the good doctrine of the Faith as taught by his grandmother, Lois, and by his mother, Eunice. Paul acknowledged this when he wrote, “from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” [2 TIMOTHY 3:15]. But Timothy had learned those truths from Paul as well, honing doctrine through listening to what the Apostle taught. Listen to Paul as he reminds Timothy of this truth. “I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands, for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.

“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 1:6-8].

“Follow the pattern of the sound words that you have heard from me, in the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. By the Holy Spirit who dwells within us, guard the good deposit entrusted to you” [2 TIMOTHY 1:13, 14].

From earliest days of preaching the Word, I have endeavoured to build each message on what God has written. Some time ago, a man complained about my preaching. “You quote a lot of Scripture,” he began, “but it is as though you are flying at twenty thousand feet. You don’t dig deeply enough,” he complained. I took his criticism as a complement. I have often said, and I will say again, my purpose is not to be novel in the pulpit; rather, I am to be grounded in the Word, guiding you through the Word so that you will have an understanding of the will of God.

THE GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS AVOIDS UNHOLY TEACHING. Paul admonishes Timothy, “Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.” The good servant will neither imbibe from polluted wells, nor will he tolerate teaching that has its origins in the specious speculations of fallen mankind. Paul speaks quite pointedly when he says, “Have nothing to do with...” The idea is that the man of God is to reject such teaching. In fact, those who persist in such teaching are to themselves be rejected. “As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him” [TITUS 3:10].

Paul is especially scathing in dismissing teaching that is not rooted in God's revelation. He calls such teaching "irreverent [and] silly myths." Akin to this cautionary warning is that which Paul delivers in a later letter. "Avoid irreverent babble, for it will lead people into more and more ungodliness" [2 TIMOTHY 2:16]. If the minister of Christ will be excellent in the sight of Him who appoints to holy service, he will expose himself to the Word of God. In doing this, he will clarify his thoughts and enable himself to speak with power and clarity. Paul admonishes us, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things" [PHILIPPIANS 4:8].

THE GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS DISCIPLINES HIMSELF TO BE GODLY. The Apostle encourages Timothy not merely to reject errant teaching, but continues by stating, "Rather train yourself for godliness." Let me give you a little insight into the Greek text. The word translated "train" is the Greek word *gumnázō*; we derive our English words "gymnasium" and "gymnastics" from this Greek word. The first readers of Paul's missive would have understood that the training in view would be rigorous, strenuous, demanding, self-sacrificing. The one who trains aims to do whatever is necessary to equip himself to compete.

Greek athletes trained and competed naked. The purpose was not to expose their bodies just so they would be exposed; they stripped away all clothing to remove every hindrance so they could excel. We see echoes of this concept presented in the Letter to Hebrew Christians. The author writes, "Since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured from sinners such hostility against himself, so that you may not grow weary or fainthearted. In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood" [HEBREWS 12:1-4].

We have just concluded a series of messages preparing the assembly for the selection of deacons. One of the truths we learned is that those appointed to serve as deacons as to be "full of the Spirit" [ACTS 6:3]. If we expect that those who will serve as ministers of mercy must be spiritual, should we expect any less of those who preach and teach the Word of God? Oswald Sanders has written, "Spiritual goals can be achieved only by spiritual people who use spiritual methods. How our churches and mission agencies would change if leaders were Spirit-filled! The secular mind and heart, however, gifted and personally charming, has no place in the leadership of the church."²

What a terrible thing should a minister attempt to instruct the congregation in godliness while himself lacking that necessary preparation. Spurgeon wrote of precisely such an individual when he wrote, "'What a dreadful thing it will be *for me* if I should be ignorant of the power of the truth which I am preparing to proclaim!' Unconverted ministry involves the most unnatural relationships. A graceless pastor is a blind man elected to a professorship of optics, philosophising upon light and vision, discoursing upon and distinguishing to others the nice shades and delicate blendings of the prismatic colours, while he himself is absolutely in the dark! He is a dumb man elevated to the chair of music; a deaf man fluent upon symphonies and harmonies! He is a mole professing to educate eaglets; a limpet elected to preside over angels."³

² J. Oswald Sanders, **Spiritual Leadership** (Moody Press, Chicago, IL 1967, 1980, 1994) 32

³ C. H. Spurgeon, **Lectures to My Students: a Selection from Addresses Delivered to the Students of the Pastors' College, Metropolitan Tabernacle, vol. 1** (Passmore and Alabaster, London 1875) 4

Godliness does not just happen—it is given by God and it must be cultivated in the life of the individual. Especially is the need for cultivation apparent in the life of the minister of Christ! Godliness—reverence for God, a right attitude and response toward the True and Living God—is the legitimate expectation of those who bear the title of minister. Paul says that godliness is at the heart of truth [1 TIMOTHY 6:3] and Peter says godliness comes from Christ [2 PETER 1:3]. Nevertheless, true godliness must be pursued [1 TIMOTHY 6:11]. Understand that godliness is associated with power [ACTS 3:12], though even the desire for godliness brings trouble and opposition [2 TIMOTHY 3:12]. Godliness does bring great and eternal blessing [1 TIMOTHY 6:6], though there is no promise of blessing in this life resulting from godliness. Godliness lies at the heart of Christian character; and it is the aim of Christian living [1 TIMOTHY 2:2; 2 PETER 3:11].

THE GOOD SERVANT OF CHRIST JESUS IS COMMITTED TO HARD WORK. Paul's testimony to Timothy was, "To this end we toil and strive." The ministry of excellence committed to the good servant of Christ Jesus is assuredly a spiritual pursuit, as we have witnessed. However, the ministry of excellence is also an earthly task, demanding diligence and hard labour. When Paul writes, "To this end," he is trying what is written in verse ten back to what he has written in verse eight. The words chosen by the Apostle are highly descriptive. The word "toil" translates the Greek term *kopiāō*, conveying the idea of working "to the point of exhaustion. "Strive" is translated by the Greek term *agonízomai*, a word from which we derive our English term "agony." The concept conveyed is to struggle.

There are two reasons for such toil and struggle—we must give an account of our service, and we know the terror of the Lord. All Christians must appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ. This is the testimony of the Apostle Paul written in the Second Corinthian Letter. "Whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil" [2 CORINTHIANS 5:9, 10]. This is true for each believer.

For the good servant of Christ Jesus, the charge is more awesome still. The Word teaches, "Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you" [HEBREWS 13:17]. The minister of Christ must give an account for the conduct of their service and for the outcome of his labour. In great measure this accounts for the reason that the minister of Christ would want to toil and strive. This teaching accords with what Paul has written elsewhere. "Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me" [COLOSSIANS 1:28, 29].

The good servant fears for the lost. He knows that outsiders are now under sentence of eternal death. Moved with compassion, he seeks God's glory and their good by warning them to flee from the wrath to come. The Baptist's message warned of the coming wrath [LUKE 3:7]. Likewise, Jesus warned that the lost were under sentence of death [JOHN 3:18, 36]. As Christians, we seek the eternal welfare of those outside the Faith. Paul's testimony was, "Knowing the fear of the Lord, we persuade others" [2 CORINTHIANS 5: 11]. Thus, the good servant of Christ Jesus longs to see the lost turned to righteousness that they may be spared eternal condemnation.

When the minister of Christ toils and strives, he has nothing of which to boast. As the Apostle has said of his own service, so we are compelled to say of our service before the Master. "If I preach the gospel, that gives me no ground for boasting. For necessity is laid upon me. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! For if I do this of my own will, I have a reward, but if not of my own will, I am still entrusted with a stewardship" [1 CORINTHIANS 9:16, 17].

Writing of his service to the saints, comparing it to the discipline required of an athlete, the Apostle revealed his spiritual heartbeat. “I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” [1 CORINTHIANS 9:26, 27].

Paul wrote an extended passage detailing life as an Apostle. I’ve read that passage on numerous occasions. It could easily be applied to the life of any minister of Christ Jesus at almost any point of service. I have now started or restarted nine churches in western Canada. None have been without struggles; all have experience surprising opposition. I’ve faced opposition from other churches in the community, and opposition from fellow Christians acting as if we were in competition with one another. However, let the Apostle speak.

“I wish that you would be patient with me in a little foolishness, but indeed you are being patient with me! For I am jealous for you with godly jealousy, because I promised you in marriage to one husband, to present you as a pure virgin to Christ. But I am afraid that just as the serpent deceived Eve by his treachery, your minds may be led astray from a sincere and pure devotion to Christ. For if someone comes and proclaims another Jesus different from the one we proclaimed, or if you receive a different spirit than the one you received, or a different gospel than the one you accepted, you put up with it well enough! For I consider myself not at all inferior to those ‘super-apostles.’ And even if I am unskilled in speaking, yet I am certainly not so in knowledge. Indeed, we have made this plain to you in everything in every way.”

In a few short sentences, Paul waxed personal as he recounted his service to the saints. “Whatever anyone else dares to boast about (I am speaking foolishly), I also dare to boast about the same thing. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they servants of Christ? (I am talking like I am out of my mind!) I am even more so: with much greater labors, with far more imprisonments, with more severe beatings, facing death many times. Five times I received from the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with a rod. Once I received a stoning. Three times I suffered shipwreck. A night and a day I spent adrift in the open sea. I have been on journeys many times, in dangers from rivers, in dangers from robbers, in dangers from my own countrymen, in dangers from Gentiles, in dangers in the city, in dangers in the wilderness, in dangers at sea, in dangers from false brothers, in hard work and toil, through many sleepless nights, in hunger and thirst, many times without food, in cold and without enough clothing. Apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxious concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not burn with indignation? If I must boast, I will boast about the things that show my weakness. The God and Father of the Lord Jesus, who is blessed forever, knows I am not lying. In Damascus, the governor under King Aretas was guarding the city of Damascus in order to arrest me, but I was let down in a rope-basket through a window in the city wall, and escaped his hands” [2 CORINTHIANS 11:1-6, 21-33 NET BIBLE].

If a man serves in the pulpit for what he imagines he can get, he will be sorely disappointed. If money, or notoriety, or popularity, or any other thing motivates the one who would serve as a minister, he will never become a good servant of Christ. Regardless of how popular a minister may be, ultimately he must give an account to the Master. I am no prophet, but it does seem evident that opposition from the culture in which we serve will intensify as the age lumbers toward a conclusion; the cost of serving Christ will surely escalate. Tragically, as opposition and even persecution intensifies, many who profess to follow Christ will align with the world in opposition to the message presented by the good servant of Christ Jesus. Opposition to the good servant who will honour the Master will only intensify in coming days.

“I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:1-5].

The assessment and the command Paul wrote to Timothy is in agreement with the words of the Master. “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you: ‘A servant is not greater than his master.’ If they persecuted me, they will also persecute you. If they kept my word, they will also keep yours.”

Jesus ripped away the façade of those who stand in opposition to the servant of God. “All these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me. If I had not come and spoken to them, they would not have been guilty of sin, but now they have no excuse for their sin. Whoever hates me hates my Father also. If I had not done among them the works that no one else did, they would not be guilty of sin, but now they have seen and hated both me and my Father” [JOHN 15:18-24]. Of course, when the good servant of Christ exposes who it is that those opposing the message have aligned, they will grow even angrier, more enraged, more determined to silence the messenger. When this happens, and as surely as smoke rises from the fire it will happen, the good servant of Christ must obey the apostolic injunction, “As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” [2 TIMOTHY 4:5].

GOD, OUR HOPE — Paul testifies, “We have our hope set on the Living God.” Why does the good servant of Christ Jesus toil and strive? Why should he burn the midnight oil to deliver a message that is increasingly ignored? Why should he preach despite threats against himself and against the message he brings? Why should this be? The answer is that his hope is set on the Living God.

I appreciate the term used, “The Living God”; it is a source of greatest comfort to me. The title occurs twenty-seven times in my translation of the Bible. Fifteen of those occurrences are in the Old Testament, and the title occurs twice in the Gospels. Once do we witness an angel with the seal of “the Living God” in the Apocalypse. The remainder of the occurrences of this title are found either in the Letters written by Paul or in the Book of Hebrews. Why should I say that the title is comforting?

We do not worship a god known only in the abstract; our God is a reality, not a rumour. We worship and serve the One True God—God who lives. When Elijah presented himself before Ahab to announce God’s judgement on the land, he prefaced his startling pronouncement with these words, “As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, before whom I stand” [1 KINGS 17:1]. The statement in Hebrew is very forceful: “Living is the LORD God of Israel before whose face I stand.” To speak of the Living God is to confess that He lives; all other gods so-called are at best a speculative venture. Paul confesses, “Although there may be so-called gods in heaven or on earth—as indeed there are many ‘gods’ and many ‘lords’—yet for us there is one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist, and one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things and through whom we exist” [1 CORINTHIANS 8:5, 6].

Throughout the Word the emphasis is on the God who knows His servant and who is known by His servant. Before Ahab, Elijah's statement presented the God who stood in contradistinction to Baal, whom Ahab worshipped. Unlike adherents of Islam, the Christian worships the God who created the heavens and the earth. This God whom we serve is not a distant, unconnected entity who occasionally enters into the sphere of man's consciousness. The Lord God of heaven and earth knows His people and He is known by His people. Unlike the Hindu worshipper who is prepared to worship cows and rats and snakes and mosquitoes, we worship the Creator who gives life to these creatures.

Again, the emphasis is on the God who lives. God is alive! When we pray, we do not merely speak into the ether; we petition the Living God who receives us as we pray. As we read in the Letter to Hebrew Christians, "Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" [HEBREWS 4:14-16].

Another of those passages that comforts the weary soul is found only a short time after the former is written. The writer pens these words, "[Jesus] holds his priesthood permanently, because he continues forever. Consequently, he is able to save to the uttermost those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them" [HEBREWS 7:24, 25].

Jesus, the Living Saviour, intercedes for His own. God, the ever living God, receives the petitions and prayers of His people. As Paul concludes this First Letter to Timothy, he is positively exultant. This is the charge and this is what he reveals about the Lord our God. "I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who in his testimony before Pontius Pilate made the good confession, to keep the commandment unstained and free from reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, which he will display at the proper time—he who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see. To him be honor and eternal dominion. Amen" [1 TIMOTHY 6:13-16].

Because God is alive, all His promise will be fulfilled. The religions of this dying world offer vague hopes to pitiful adherents who attempt to compel God to accept them through strenuous efforts; but we who worship the True and Living God have received great and glorious promises—cheques drawn on the bank of Heaven for us our use.

- We are promised life in the Beloved Son.
- We are promised freedom from guilt and condemnation.
- We are promised access to His throne at all times.
- We are promised peace in the midst of a world run by the inmates of the asylum.
- We are promised grace and mercy.
- We are promised that He will never leave us nor forsake us.
- We are promised that because He lives, we also shall live.
- We are promised that He will provide all that is necessary for us to serve Him.
- We are promised that He will provide us with our daily needs.

Finally, the emphasis of the title, "The Living God," is on the God who is worthy of our service. Before the throne of God, the assembled saints of all the ages will fall before Him. Casting our crowns before Him, we shall worship, saying:

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God,
to receive glory and honor and power,
for you created all things,
and by your will they existed and were created.”

[REVELATION 4:11]

And when the Lamb of God receives the title deed to Creation, we shall then sing a new song:

“Worthy are you to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
for you were slain, and by your blood you ransomed people for God
from every tribe and language and people and nation,
and you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God,
and they shall reign on the earth.”

[REVELATION 5:9, 10]

I point out a further truth that must not be overlooked. When Paul says “we have our hope set on the Living God,” he uses the present tense. In the Greek language, the construction means that we initiated the action at a point in time and the results continue to this moment. Because our hope is set on God who lives, when we have believed the implication is that the impact of our faith continues. Because He lives, we also live and serve.

THE SAVIOUR OF ALL PEOPLE — Focus on the final clause of the text: “We have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.” For many people, these words present a conundrum. If God is the Saviour of all people, how is it that some are under sentence of eternal death? Make no mistake—all who reject the Saviour are condemned. Those who never trusted Christ the Lord do not have hope. Therefore, the passage cannot be teaching universalism. Those who die without Christ shall be removed from the presence of God throughout all eternity.

Paul does not discriminate between speaking of God as Saviour and in speaking of Christ as Saviour. On at least six occasions in these Pastoral Letters, he refers to “God our Saviour.”⁴ Paul writes of Jesus as our Saviour five times in these same letters.⁵ On only two other occasions in his letters does Paul write of a Saviour, and he refers to Christ in those instances.⁶

Salvation is provided for all mankind. In this, God is the Saviour of all people, emphasising the universal sufficiency of the Father’s saving plan through Jesus the Son of God. This is consistent with John’s statement that “the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world” [1 JOHN 4:14]. We cannot escape the thought that Jesus “is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world” [1 JOHN 2:2]. In this present Letter to Timothy, the Apostle has already taught us that Christ Jesus “gave Himself as a ransom for all” [1 TIMOTHY 2:6], and this is because the Father “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of truth” [1 TIMOTHY 2:4]. No individual can ever say that he was not saved because God made no provision for his or for her salvation.

⁴ 1 TIMOTHY 1:1; 2:3; 4:10; TITUS 1:3; 2:10; 3:4

⁵ 2 TIMOTHY 2:10; TITUS 1:4; 2:13; 3:6

⁶ EPHESIANS 5:23; PHILIPPIANS 3:20

After the Samaritan woman had met the Saviour and called the entire town, the people came to Jesus as He sat at the well. They met Him; they heard His gracious message. After meeting Him, their testimony to the woman was, “It is no longer because of what you said that we believe, for we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world” [JOHN 4:42].

Potentially, God’s plan provides salvation for all mankind; practically, it is effective for those who believe. Paul clarifies this truth when he adds that God is Saviour “especially of those who believe.” The salvation God has provided is sufficient for all mankind; however the efficiency is for those who believe. Only believers experience the saving grace of God, as is taught throughout Scripture. Salvation comes “to everyone who believes” [ROMANS 1:16]. The righteousness of God comes “through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe” [ROMANS 3:22]. Nevertheless, we must “believe in Him for eternal life” [1 TIMOTHY 1:16].

Perhaps the best known verse in the entirety of the Word must assuredly be JOHN 3:16: “God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.” While God’s love is extended to the entire world and while Christ’s sacrifice is sufficient for all, it should be evident that both the love of God and the sacrifice of Christ is efficient only for those who believe. You must not imagine that because you perform a religious rite, or because you attend a service of worship, or because you formally joined a church or religious organisation, or because you recited a prayer that you are saved. If you do not have faith in the Risen Son of God, you are still in your sins and estranged from God.

Faith in the Person of Christ Jesus is essential for salvation. This is the reason for the message of life that we who believe bring to all who are willing to receive it. Christ the Lord presented His life as a sacrifice for sinful people. He was attested as dead and then buried. However, He conquered death, rising from the dead. The stone was rolled back to provide assurance that He did come out of the tomb. He was seen by those to whom He presented Himself and then He ascended into the heavens where He is now seated at the right hand of the Father. The message we bring calls all people to faith in Him, the Risen, Reigning Lord of Glory.

This is the message of life we declare. If you willingly accept Him as Master over your life, believing in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be set free. It is with the heart that one believes and is made right with the Father, and by openly agreeing to receive Him as Master one is set free. The Apostle emphasises this truth by citing the Prophet Joel, “Everyone who calls on the Name of the Lord will be set free” [see ROMANS 10:9-13].

I pray this includes you; and it does if you believe in the Living Son of God. Amen.