

# Christian spiritual leaders

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 06 November 2016

Preacher: Chris Fry

[0:00] Have you had the experience of picking up a pile of envelopes that have dropped onto your mat and opening them all and finding one of them was actually dressed to somebody else?

! Or more embarrassing is rushing into a room and finding two people in deep and very private conversation. And you know that you're not meant to be there, not meant to be involved in that. This isn't for you. You might feel this way about the passage of the Bible that we looked at just now. Because the section is headed in many Bibles, instructions to Timothy.

And in case we already doubt as to what the purpose or the intended receiver of the letter would be, we only have to look at the very beginning of the letter.

1 Timothy 1. Paul, the apostle of Christ Jesus. To Timothy, my true son in the faith.

[1:17] These two men had a very close relationship. They'd been together many years. Timothy was like a spiritual son to Paul.

And this is a very intimate letter. So intimate that at one particular point, in fact, in chapter 5, verse 23, Paul says to Timothy, Stop drinking only water and use a little wine because of your stomach and your frequent illnesses.

What's that got to do with us? And a great deal of the letter is about the particular work that Timothy has been called to do.

And Paul references this, reminds Timothy that something very important happened to him. Some years previously, chapter 4, verse 14, Do not neglect your gift which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Incidentally, you find exactly the same sort of thing in the second letter of Paul to Timothy. It's the same opening, the same personal closeness. So what has this got to do with any of us?

[2:34] First thing I'd like to say this morning about this, Is that this letter is one of the 66 different books that make up one book, the Bible.

Paul speaks more about the significance of this in his second letter to Timothy. So please look at 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 15. Paul says of Timothy, recalling Timothy's history, his biography, remembering that he had both a mother and a grandmother who loved the Lord.

He says to Timothy, You know how from infancy, from being a little child, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So when Timothy was a little boy, his mother and grandmother taught him from the Holy Scriptures, and at that time it would have been the Old Testament. Now the New Testament writings, including these letters to Timothy, have been added to the Old Testament, and together they form our Bible.

And here in 2 Timothy, chapter 3, verse 15, and you have it on the screen, we understand a key purpose of God in giving us his words in this way, which is to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[4:11] To make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

Salvation, the act and process of being saved, it's an old word, you don't hear it used very often, but it's a great word, and it's a Bible word, and it's one that, for those who are Christians, is extremely precious.

Every boy or girl, man or woman, needs salvation. Needs to be saved. And it's by knowing what the Bible says that we can understand what this idea of being saved means.

We can be made wise about this. We will not know what this word means unless we understand what the Bible says.

It's by the Bible that we have understanding of who God is, his character, and his ways. Now let me sketch this out a little bit for you before going any further, so that we should be clear of the outlines.

[5:48] It is just outlines. But the outlines of what this salvation word is about. The world is full of wrong ideas about God. Mainly our human ideas, our projections.

But in the Bible, God himself tells us about himself. And it's the Bible that gives us an accurate understanding about ourselves. Again, the world is full of wrong or distorted views about mankind. But in the Bible, God himself, the God who made us and cares for us and knows everything about us gives us a true picture. And continually, by the example of everyday lives spanning hundreds of years and constantly critiqued by God's perspective, the Bible shows us that there is a vast and awful gulf, a gap, a distance between God, the creator, and those he has made.

Made to know and love and worship him, but in daily reality, ignorant, rejecting and despising their creator. This bias and practice in all of us is what the Bible calls sin.

It's this sin bias that both separates us from God, from one another and causes personal disharmony. It has always been this way and it will continue to be this way until this world ends.

[7:29] We need to be saved from this. But if that itself was not bad enough, the Bible tells us of something more terrible and terrifying, that this sin bias places us directly under the spotlight of the anger or wrath of God.

Yes, the God who made and cares for us and that as our days go by and our rejection of God continues, God is given more and more reason for such anger culminating in punishing and eternal judgment at the end of our lives and on a day when God's right and personal judgment will be seen and experienced by everyone.

We need to be saved from this. We all need to be saved from this. this is the message of the Bible. You might have a vague sense of disquiet and upset and disappointment about your life this morning and about the world you live in. But it's the Bible that spells it all out, explains it all in a giant and unmistakable way.

But how can we be saved from all of this? Again, it's the Bible that spells out the only way for us to be saved. God's way of saving people.

[9:14] Yes, even people who he is deeply angry with can be so loved that God sent his son into this sin-filled world to carry our sin and take God's judgment on our sin upon himself so that we might be released set free and be changed into people who do exactly what we have been intended to be.

People who know God, who love and worship him. the Bible urges us to accept God's verdict of judgment on us and to receive the forgiveness that he offers us in Jesus Christ.

this morning, are you interested in knowing God, escaping or being saved from his judgment, having your sins forgiven, becoming a Christian?

Read the Bible. This morning, do you want to grow as a Christian? You must read the Bible.

this morning, even if you are not interested in any of this, you need to face up to the truth. Read the Bible.

[10:42] With God's help, you will understand God's way of salvation. So here is Paul's first letter to Timothy in the Bible and providing for all of us to learn and be wise for salvation.

here Paul speaking in 1 Timothy chapter 1 and verse 15. He says, here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

He's saying, you can bank your life on this. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners.

Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. He goes on to say, whom I'm the worst.

I think we all qualify. We all qualify. No distinction in God's eyes between the little sinners, the big sinners, the very worst of sinners.

[12:06] We're all sinners. sinners. And Christ Jesus came into this world to save sinners. We read this in our Bible.

But there's more. To have a Bible and to read it is a great blessing. But there's more to be said. And I'd like you to look at verse 16 of this chapter, which we have already read.

where Paul says, watch your life and doctrine closely, persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

I'd like you to look at that verse again. Very clear what it's saying. And what it's not saying. there are lots of things that Timothy might be about.

But Paul is saying that if he does his job well, he will be responsible for saving both himself and the hearers.

[13:20] save and save word. Here's what's happening.

Paul is instructing Timothy about being a Christian spiritual leader. And he tells Timothy what this looks like both in terms of his life and his teaching. And he offers this amazing encouragement that if Timothy puts all this into practice, he will not only personally experience being saved, but he will also be used by God in the saving of those who hear him.

Now this is God's method. This is God's method. He saves people not just by their reading the Bible, but by having it read and taught to them by men of God who have themselves experienced God's salvation and shown it by transformed lives.

Now, let me be clear, we cannot save ourselves. And no man can save another man. The Bible is totally clear on that point.

But God uses means to save people. And it is by the means of the life and teaching of such men that God is pleased to save others.

[14:54] This is God's method. It's always been God's method. It will always be God's method. So if you are personally interested in knowing God's salvation, it's important to find out the character and the job description of the men who God calls and uses as Christian spiritual leaders.

Because your salvation experience is intimately connected with what you are taught and the sort of people you hear it from.

This is God's method. I'd just like to repeat that because it's absolutely crucial. Your salvation experience is intimately connected with what you are taught and the people that you hear it from.

That's the plain meaning of this verse 16. Watch your life and doctrine closely, persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearing.

the implication is if you do not watch your doctrine, if you don't watch your life clearly, there's going to be some big damage to your salvation experience and some very big damage to the salvation experience of those who hear you.

[16:31] You might say, well, God will overrule all that. That's his business. that's what he does. Praise God he does do things like that. But we have no encouragement in Scripture to believe that he will do that if we are disobeying his instructions on this matter.

Do you begin to sense the enormous responsibility that lies upon those who are Christian spiritual leaders? And the responsibility that lies upon those who listen to Christian spiritual leaders?

This is God's method. Now, of course, God can bypass his usual methods and do the most remarkable things in anyone's life.

And so we hear, for instance, of people in Arab countries who have experienced God's salvation by means of dreams. dreams. They have had a dream and sometimes multiple dreams and Jesus has appeared to them and called them and they've responded to him just by dream.

them. Well, how amazing our sovereign God is. But I point out that in these Arab lands, it is often the case that people have no access to a Bible and it is totally forbidden and practically impossible for a Christian spiritual leader to be living and explaining the Bible to other people in those places.

[18:09] So God in his sovereignty has a wonderful way of bypassing his usual methods.

But what we read about in 1 Timothy is God's primary method and wherever there is opportunity, it is our great God given privilege and God given solemn responsibility to have the sort of men described in 1 Timothy leading our churches and for us to carefully watch the lives and listen to the teaching of such men.

This also means that lots of other qualities and behaviors that you might think appropriate or necessary of Christian spiritual leaders need to be tested against that fundamental criteria and outcome.

The salvation word covers and dictates and drives anything to do with the life and ministry of the Christian spiritual leader.

is this man demonstrating what it is to be saved? Are his listeners being saved because of him?  
[19:44] Please don't lower the bar on this. It is not the main job of Christian spiritual leader to entertain or excite or soothe or please or even inspire you.

There are plenty of people out there in the world who get paid lots of money for doing that. And you can go and do that if you want to and if you really need to. There are psychologists and there are psychiatrists and there are therapists and there are life coaches and there are motivational speakers and you can have all of that and probably pay a vast sum of money and big businesses blindly go down these routes and bring all these people on board and so forth.

But that is not the main focus and need and requirement and God given responsibility for the man of God. Amen. this person's responsibility is to ensure that as far as it lies in him and with the presence of God about his ministry you get saved.

You journey through life in an increasingly Christ-like way and enjoy an abundant welcome of heaven. I'm reminded at this point of something that's said in the book of Hebrews and we find it. Yes, Hebrews chapter 13 verse 17. Obey your leaders and submit to their authority.

[21:47] They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so their work will be a joy not a burden. That will be of no advantage to you. Give an account an account that the man of God has to give.

It's got nothing to do with the superficial reactions of people to the things that he said. It's got everything to do with whether or not they have experienced the salvation that's in Jesus Christ. We know pleasure for the man of God on the day of judgment to notice many, many hearers but to recognize that they haven't actually experienced the salvation that's in Jesus.

Jesus. This is what delighted Paul as he thought about it when he talked about those who had responded to the message. He says, you're my delight, you're my crown.

Looking forward to that day when he should be with them, together with them, in glory, bringing people to Jesus Christ, trophies for Jesus Christ. be safe.

[23:19] Paul says to such a man, 1 Timothy 4 verse 6, that he is a good minister of Christ Jesus. And in so many ways, that's exactly the way that Christian spiritual leaders need to think of themselves and how the people they are spiritually responsible for should regard them.

They are first and foremost ministers of Christ Jesus. Their allegiance is to Jesus Christ. They serve Jesus Christ. How important that is.

If their focus begins to be one of serving the people, of course they serve the people, but they need to have their orders to Jesus Christ.

and to do what he tells them to do. And to say what he tells them to say. Jesus Christ is the great shepherd of the sheep and Christian spiritual leaders are under shepherds.

Responsible for displaying by life and words their wonderful great shepherd master. Christian spiritual leader up to now.

[24:42] But the actual Bible word is elder, sometimes translated in Bibles as bishop or overseer. Strictly speaking, Timothy is slightly different to these because he's often acting as the deputy of the apostle Paul.

But the kind of person that Timothy is required to be and the sort of teacher that Timothy is called to be is exactly the sort of person teacher that every Christian church needs.

Now for various good reasons we call such people elders and I'll use that word from now on. Just to note that the word elder has nothing to do with age but of responsibility and authority connected with those who God has called and equipped to do this work.

Incidentally, Timothy was probably about 35 to 40 and Paul says of him, don't let people look down on you because of your age.

Some people think 35 to 40 is middle age. can't. Wasn't so in that day. You were still a young person. But age has not got anything to do with this.

[26:02] It's to do with responsibility and authority. Now at this point I want to say something especially to students. To students. Glad to see a number of students in this congregation.

Whether you're a language student or a university student. I want to pick up on what I've just said about salvation and say to you, your primary purpose in life is to know God's salvation and be a follower of Jesus Christ.

There's nothing more important. You might think that's surprising, even shocking. Surely the most important thing is to get a good grasp of English or to flourish in your university course or to take every opportunity of enjoying the culture and new friendships of this city of Brighton home.

I don't underestimate any of those things. But I will say that the very best use of your time here, whether a few weeks or months or years, is to get saved and know more and more of what it means to be saved.

So please notice God's method. Get and read a Bible and hear the Bible taught in the way that God wants it to be taught. If you get this right, you will find that the rest of your life will work out because God is wonderfully able to look after everything that concerns us when we put him first.

[27:36] Please do that. I want to say something to the members of this church, and those who may be thinking of joining the church as members, and I would encourage everyone who is a Christian to make the joining of a church their priority, as well as to those Christians who consider Calvary to be their spiritual home and family.

Firstly, we currently have two elders in the church, Philip and myself. It's our responsibility to align ourselves with the teaching of the Bible on what it means to be an elder, and it's your ongoing responsibility to support us in that because we're very needy and to hold us to it, but with mercy. We realise, and you need to realise, that the teaching of 1 and 2 Timothy provides a template for this. That's another important reason reading this and the next letter.

Secondly, we currently have two elders in the church, but praise God, we are a growing church, which gives us opportunity and responsibility to develop and increase our ministries and to look with God's help and guidance to the future that God has for us.

This means that it is right for us to pray that God will raise up as many elders as he wants us to have. At the FIC conference, I spoke to someone from a church, much larger than ours, I'm listening to add, that has eight elders.

[29:21] Seems a bit greedy. It seems that God has plans for them by giving them such a body of men, and indeed he has, because they just set up a church plant and appointed one of the elders of the church to look after that church plant.

What plans does God have for us? This isn't code language for any specific proposal, simply an encouragement to make this a matter of prayer, alongside all the other matters we pray about.

We also need to pray for this, because we need God's very clear working to raise up elders. In 1 Timothy 3, verse 1, we read of the attitude that some people have to this particular task.

Here is a trustworthy saying, if anyone sets his heart on being an overseer, remember that word, overseer, or bishop, or elder, we'll use the word elder, he desires a noble task.

This is a person who set their heart on it. But personally, I find it amazing for you, anyone should set their heart on doing this. But such it is. Although the job description is utterly daunting and humanly speaking completely overwhelming, and most of the people that God calls in the Bible seem to have been very conscious of their inadequacy.

[30:49] But if God puts his hand on a man and calls him to the task, although he will or should feel desperately weak, ill-equipped and unsuited, God will have his way.

We need to pray for this. But whoever God calls into this office will know that it is God's calling and they can do no other than to obey it.

This is not like a career choice. It's something that only God does.

He calls, he equips. And like Isaiah, a person needs to say, send me.

Thirdly, we currently have two elders in the church, but as we get older, we need to be preparing to pass responsibility on to others. That's the main burden of our looking to appoint an assistant pastor.

[31:56] In some ways, this process started about 12 months ago doesn't seem to have gone far, although we have had many applications. We don't have any candidate or candidates in focus at the moment.

But in another way, we have made progress because we have tried to take seriously the very things that Paul talks about to Timothy in this letter.

said, we're going to have to work hard on this, not just as elders, but as members of the church.

And I bring me back to that crucial thought in 1 Timothy 4.16, that the sort of elder that God calls to service and keeps in that service is one by whom their hearers are saved, with all that that means.

This is the bigness and the seriousness of the task. Why the calling, appointment, and sustaining of elders ministry needs to be flooded by prayer, mature Christian understanding and Holy Spirit given discernment.

So, what should we look for in God called and kept elders? 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy have plenty to say on this subject. We're going to scratch the surface this morning just on these points.

[33:18] But I will turn you to 1 Timothy 4, 15, 16, and ask you to notice this, what it says in verse 16, watch your life and 1 Timothy 4, 16, watch your life and doctrine closely.

The first thing to be said is this, an elder needs to have a godly and a guarded life. Godly and a guarded life.

Some other references there if you're taking notes on the screen. there is absolutely no doubt that a fundamental requirement of an elder is a godly life.

I could refer you to other passages in Timothy. 1 Timothy 3 verses 2 to 5, 4 verse 12, 5, 1 and 2, 6 verses 11 to 14. You can't fail to get the picture as you read these letters of how important this is.

Just in this chapter, chapter 4 verse 12, sets an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. What a weight.

[34:46] It's also a very visible life. It's a life which God intends should be on display. Unlike many people in public life, you consider that what they do when they are away from the office is a completely private matter, or even how they go about doing their job is a private matter, a Christian elder can't think in that way.

Because it's an essential part of the salvation work of God that people should be able to see God's saving work being demonstrated within, exemplified by an elder.

there to be a pattern, there to be an encouragement, so that people might say, in some way, I'd like to be like that.

Paul says amazingly, in Corinthians, follow me as I follow Christ. You see what it says, verse 12? Set an example to the believers. In speech, in life, I love your faith and impurity. Set an example.

[36:23] And it needs to be a guarded life. The example of a godly life is profound for salvation purposes, and intentionally so. The example of a life where there is compromise, hidden sin, is disastrous for an elder, his family, the church of all who hear of it.

No wonder that Paul says to Timothy, watch your life. What is the devil's nuclear weapon for church destruction? Wreck an elder's testimony.

It's devastating, it's extensive, it's pervasive, and the cause of untold spiritual casualties. In this country, you might be sitting there and thinking, well, I'm glad I'm not involved in this.

I'm glad it's just down to the elders, they've got to worry about this particular set of injunctions.

That's two people here in the church I just carry on. You don't. You don't.

Our standing, our persevering, our carrying, on, and being godly examples of Jesus Christ is absolutely vital to the further progression and Christ likeness of Calvary Church.

[37:52] Never underestimate how fast, how devastatingly fast any church body can be destroyed by a fallen life of an elder.

People become disillusioned and terrible, isn't it? If you've been in the Christian life for any length of time, this happens.

And there are plenty of people who are not in church today because they have been damaged.

Their spiritual life has been devastated by the failure of someone they looked up to.

So what do you need to do? You need to pray for us because there are temptations that come to elders that come in no other way to other people.

And the devil will attack at this point. Let him who thinks he stand take heed lest he fall. Paul warns Timothy about this.

[38:59] He used Paul's own expression. Who is sufficient for these things? Brothers and sisters, please pray for us. Second, tenaciously held and expressed scriptural doctrine.

There is absolutely no doubt that a fundamental requirement for an elder is clear understanding of the Bible and the ability to express this in different contexts. The word here is doctrine, which means the content of what is taught.

The content of what is taught. It matters what the content is of what you are taught. Paul says to Timothy in another phrase, study to show yourself approved, a good workman of Jesus Christ. God, he gets fritzed with this Bible. You can read the words. Do you understand the content? Do you understand the way it links together? Do you understand the big picture? That's the job elders need to do. It's what you need for your selfish search. And it's a hard task.

[40:16] That's why Philip's going on a weak course next week. not a job. I'm sure it's pleasant enough.

But the point is the ministers need to get together. They need to hone their skills and abilities and understandings together. Paul said to the mother mournfully at the end of one of his letters, please bring the books.

I need the books. I need to study. Elders need to be released up for this task. Do you remember Acts chapter 7 where they got to a point in the church's life where they just found themselves too busy in administration.

And they said it's not right for us. We need to give ourselves to the word of God and prayer. It's not the job of five minutes. It's hard work.

Labouring work. Elders need to be released for this. Enabled to do it.

[41:30] Protected so they can do it. And we need to pray for that as we grow as a church. church. Because there are many, many things to be done in administrative sort of way. How are we going to ensure that those who have a responsibility of understanding, speaking the word of God, are kept free to do that, yeah?

Your spiritual life depends on it. God has given us one Bible and we need all of it, otherwise we will not enjoy the fullest, the richest, the most balanced picture of all that God wants us to know.

Notice please, life and doctrine. They should be the inseparable twins of an eldest testimony. If one is missing, the outcome is invariably sad. It is sufficient for these things.

Brothers and sisters, please pray for us. Thirdly, diligence in keeping going. Will we keep on going to the end? One of the lights of going to the FIC leaders conference was to see so many young men, almost all of them elders, whatever job title they have, giving themselves wholeheartedly to the work of the Lord.

But I think I found our reflection an equal or even greater delight in meeting elders who have clearly persevered in ministry over decades. They're now in their 70s and 80s.

[43:07] They're still going strong or even stronger. In some cases, people who have retired from their full-time elders' responsibility within the church, but they're still preaching the word.

One great gentleman who lives up in the north, he's out every Sunday preaching the word of God. It's what God called him to do.

He's found another spirit service for doing it. And he's carried on year after year after year after year. Godly life, clear doctrine.

Godly will be blessed. Godly be blessed. Hugely blessed. Most of us can look back to people who were our first pastors.

What it meant to us to be under their tutelage and their example. I'm hugely blessed when I look back in that way. I trust him I'd always be so coming.

[44:17] I trust him I'd be saying. May this land be filled with many, many churches, many, many churches that have these sorts of spiritual things.

Brothers and sisters, pray. May God raise up such men who by watching their life and doctrine closely save both themselves and their heroes. Amen.

Let's close with a song. Thank you.