BASIC INSIGHTS

Living the Commands
Session 4—Stand Above

The following information is to help you get students thinking about the question: **How can I live right in an ungodly world?** and to drive home this one truth: **Pursue Christ, not the world.**

INTRODUCE THE TOPIC

Our family occasionally has the opportunity to snow ski. While I enjoy slowly gliding through the quiet beauty of the snowy mountains, the men in my family love the thrill of the rapid descent. On one of our earlier skiing adventures, I spotted a sign from the lift that resonated with my cautious nature. It simply stated, “Dangers exist that are not marked.” How true that statement is on the ski slopes. There are icy patches and out-of-control skiers for which one must constantly be on the lookout. There are people who ignore the rules for safely mounting or dismounting the lift or for yielding the right-of-way to the person in front of them. Then, there are skiers who choose to stop in the middle of the trail instead of safely to the side. For the unobservant, the ski slope is indeed a minefield of danger. Even in full awareness of these threats, I still choose to ski because I love to do so. Because of my awareness of these threats, however, I ski with caution.

The world in which Christians live is much like the ski slope—dangers exist that are not marked. Temptations to sin and to take alternate paths abound. People live for pleasure and ignore the boundaries that God has set in place. On every front, the world markets the message that life is all about us. We must be fully aware of these dangers and live with care. Is it possible to live right in an ungodly world? It is if we pursue righteousness, keep the future in mind, and remember Who we are living for. In trying to live right, our path is well-marked if we pursue Christ and not the world.

POINTS TO FOCUS ON

A. Pursue righteousness.

*But you, man of God, run from these things, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance, and gentleness.* (1 Tim. 6:11)

In addressing Timothy, Paul used the title “man of God,” which means one who belongs to God. He wanted to remind Timothy of the responsibilities of living the life of faith. This phrase is used many times in the Old Testament to describe such men of faith as Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Elisha, and David. By addressing Timothy as “man of God,” Paul reminded Timothy of the spiritual heritage that he had as one who belongs to God and who, like his predecessors, proclaims God’s Word. Timothy’s job of sharing truth in Ephesus was difficult, but the men of God before him had also had challenging assignments, and God had proved faithful in their lives. Paul wanted Timothy to be assured that God could be depended on to see him through his current task (MacArthur, 1995). Not only does this phrase speak of the past, but it also speaks of the future. Timothy could be confident that God saw his potential and was calling forth the very best in him. Timothy was a young man, but that was not a limiting factor in God’s eyes (Barclay, 1975). God had a plan for him, just as He has a plan for all young men and women of God.

In his preparation to live for God and be used by him, Timothy was to follow two actions—he was to run, and he was to pursue. *Pheugô*, the word for “run” from which our word for *fugitive* derives,
emphasizes the purposefulness with which we must separate ourselves from sin (MacArthur, 1995). We must intentionally reject the consuming materialism and the sinful desires that our world has deemed acceptable. Like Joseph fled temptation from Potiphar’s wife (Gen. 39:12) and David fled the danger of death from Saul (1 Sam. 19:10), we must recognize the danger of sin and separate ourselves from ungodliness (Wiersbe, 1981). A man who was describing his life of sin before he turned to Christ once told me that he had been “running 100 miles an hour in the wrong direction.” Verse 11 challenges us to recognize the wrong direction and then to run hard the other way.

As Timothy ran away from sin, Paul wanted him to be just as focused on what he was running toward. We need to be known not only for what we reject, but also for what we embrace. Paul first admonished Timothy to pursue righteousness. Righteousness is a quality that covers the spectrum of our activity. In obedience to God, the righteous person fulfills his or her calling to serve and to honor both God and others. The next three qualities that Paul listed (godliness, faith, and love) focus on our response to God. Godliness is the continual awareness that our life is unfolding in the very presence of God. This is a worshipful awareness that impacts our conduct. It is important for students to grasp that God is with them; He will help them live a life that honors Him. He is always near, and they can turn to Him in faith, which is the next quality that Paul named. Faith can be described as loyalty to God even in difficult times. Young people of faith can count on God to help in the highs and lows of life. We respond to God in godliness and faith and also in love. Love keeps us aware of God’s work in saving and sustaining us. We are mindful of all that He has done for us, and we respond in love toward Him. This love spills over into loving others. Many students struggle in feeling accepted by their peers, but Christians can find comfort in being completely accepted and loved by God. In turn, they can respond to God in love, which will lead them to sharing His love with others.

The final two emphasized qualities are endurance and gentleness. Endurance describes a victorious strength that allows us to overcome. Regardless of our trials, our faith and devotion are unwavering. This bearing-up was important to Timothy as he worked in Ephesus. It is also important as we stand for Christ in an increasingly hostile, self-centered culture. Teenagers need to know that God will give them strength to stand for Him and to endure persecution. Gentleness, the final quality mentioned here, is a balance of humility toward oneself and thankfulness for what God has done. This right view of ourselves will keep us unperturbed by personal injustices, but vigilant in defending others who are wronged (Barclay, 1975).

In short, the person who wants to live right in an ungodly world must pursue righteousness. This will lead to a focused life of obedience to God and service to others. That man or woman of God may very well be misunderstood by our world, but he or she will be sustained and used by God.

B. Keep the future in mind.

Paul was very aware of the battle in which he was engaged. In his second letter to Timothy, he used battle imagery to describe the fight. He invited Timothy to “share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus” (2 Tim. 2:3), and later wrote that he had “fought the good fight” (2 Tim. 4:7). We see another occurrence of battle language in our focal verse:

_Fight the good fight for the faith; take hold of eternal life that you were called to and have made a good confession about in the presence of many witnesses._ (1 Tim. 6:12)

_Agonizomai_, the word used here for “fight” is from where we get our word _agonize_. This concept describes the mental energy and focus needed to win. The verb tense is also important as Paul was instructing Timothy, as well as us, to keep fighting. Ours is a battle that is worth winning. It is, as Paul described it, “the good fight.” We have a noble calling to defend the faith—the very truth of the gospel (MacArthur, 1995). The image of the workmen under Nehemiah—those who were rebuilding the wall around Jerusalem—is one that we need to keep in mind. They held a trowel for building in one hand and a sword for defending in the other. It was important to build the wall, but it was also important to
protect the work against the enemy. We too need the balance of building up the Kingdom while battling the enemy (Wiersbe, 1981).

Paul further admonished Timothy to “take hold of eternal life that you were called to.” Timothy needed to grasp the reality of eternal life so that he could see the eternal value of his work. Like all of us who are in the battle, Timothy was living and working not only in time, but also in eternity. This eternal outlook gives value to our work and to our relationships, enabling us to understand that what we do in this life matters for eternity. The kind word that we speak to someone, the loving service that we render to a neighbor, or the testimony of God’s faithfulness that we share with a friend may be the doorway through which that person walks to find Christ.

The words that Paul wrote to the church in Colossae are applicable here: “Set your minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth” (Col. 3:2). The man and woman of God remember that eternal matters are at stake, and that reminder keeps their spiritual focus sharp. They are not engaged in worldly pursuits or arguments, but with the right focus they spend their time and energy on things that are eternal—the Word of God and souls of people (MacArthur, 1995).

Finally, Paul reminds Timothy of his public profession of faith among many witnesses. This thought was to call to Timothy's mind the community of faith with which he was encircled. Neither Timothy nor we are alone in the fight (Wiersbe, 1981).

C. Remember Who you are living for.

*In the presence of God, who gives life to all, and of Christ Jesus, who gave a good confession before Pontius Pilate, I charge you to keep the command without fault or failure until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* God will bring this about in His own time. He is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings, and the Lord of lords, the only One who has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light; no one has seen or can see Him, to Him be honor and eternal might. Amen. (1 Tim. 6:13-16)

To exhort Timothy to be steadfast, Paul pointed out his accountability to both God and Christ. Timothy's life, like ours, was being played out before the presence of God “who gives life to all.” His focus, like ours, was to be on pleasing God, not men. God is the One who gave Timothy life, and He would sustain Timothy's life until his work was completed. His life was in God’s hands, and God could be trusted with it. Paul also wanted Timothy to be motivated by the example of Christ whose witness held firm under pressure. While suffering for us, Christ “entrusted Himself to the One who judges justly” (1 Pet. 2:23). In light of God’s power to sustain, Timothy was to live right and uphold God’s Word “without fault or failure” (MacArthur, 1995).

Paul ends this section with a hymn of praise, reminding us of God’s character. Paul was assured of God’s worthiness, and indeed his faith in God influenced his willingness to stand firm for Christ in difficult circumstances. Paul reminds us that God is blessed—He is not unhappy or anxious. Our Sovereign God is in control. Those of us who are in a relationship with Him have entered into His peace, joy, and contentment (MacArthur, 1995).

In response to the emperor worship that was present in the culture, Paul highlighted the fact that our God is the King of kings and the Lord of lords. Timothy lived in the ungodly city of Ephesus, as we live in an ungodly culture, but God lives in “unapproachable light” (Wiersbe, 1981). As Martin Luther described Him, God is *Deus absconditus*, the hidden God who chose to reveal Himself to us (MacArthur, 1995). He is the only One worthy of our allegiance. Because of His trustworthy character, we can fully engage in the battle of living right. Our loyalty is based on Him, not our circumstances. Even if others around us pursue the world, we can confidently pursue Christ. He was the ultimate
example of standing firm. We can remember “that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is going to be revealed to us” (Rom. 8:18).

At what times can you be strengthened by the example of Christ before Pontius Pilate? Does your belief about God influence your behavior? Do students see the link between believing in God and living for Him?

How can we live in a way that honors God? In pursuing righteousness, keeping the future in mind, and remembering Whom we are living for, we can live right in an ungodly world.

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