

Trustworthy Sayings

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

We live in a world where trust is scarce. We have been lied to, cheated, mistreated so much, we begin to think we simply can't take anyone at their word. Many of us would like to find something or someone we can rely on. We would like to find something or someone that we can stake our lives on. No doubt, that something or someone can be found in God. As **Hebrews 6:18** says, "It is impossible for God to lie." When God says something, we can rest assured it is so. We understand that all the Bible is God's word (cf. **II Peter 1:20-21**). Therefore, we can rely on all of it. Yet, I can't help but think that when within that reliable revelation, one of God's prophets goes out of His way to say, "This is a trustworthy statement" it is something we can rely mold our lives around. This week, in our "Give Attention to Reading" trek through the New Testament, we have read Paul's letters to the younger evangelists Timothy and Titus. Five times within these three short letters, the apostle and prophet Paul, speaking by the Spirit's revelation called attention to his words by saying, "This is a trustworthy statement." We need to examine these statements. We need to learn them, not only are they in God's prophetic scriptures, but God especially directs our attention to them specifically declaring how trustworthy they are. We can rely on these. If we follow them, we will have life and have it abundantly. If we follow them, we will glorify God. If we follow them, we will be walking in His will, surrendering to Him in righteousness. Examine these trustworthy statements and may we learn to follow them trustworthily.

Discussion:

- I. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners (**I Timothy 1:15**).
 - A. **Luke 19:10** says Jesus came into the world to seek and save the lost. When rebuked for spending time with tax collectors and sinners, Jesus responded, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick" (**Matthew 9:12**, ESV).
 - B. I don't know about you, but this comforts me. Jesus didn't come into the world to collect all the perfect people. He didn't come into the world to condemn sinners. He didn't come into the world to merely show us how it ought to be done. He didn't come into the world to seek vengeance and judgment. He came into the world to save sinners like you and me.
 - C. Paul found comfort in this. He said he was the foremost of sinners (**I Timothy 1:12-16**). He had been a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent of God. He held the coats when Stephen was stoned. He cast his vote against Christians. He threw them in jail and led persecution against them. But Jesus came into the world to save even Paul. No wonder Paul wrote: "But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**, ESV). Jesus did not wait until Paul quit being a blasphemer, persecutor and insolent opponent to die for him. Jesus came into the world to save Paul while he was still a sinner. Jesus did not wait for us to quit our lusting, lying, stealing, cheating, immorality, greed, covetousness, etc. to die for us. He came into the world to save us while we were still sinners.
 - D. Don't misunderstand, this doesn't mean we just get to keep on being sinners. Rather, Jesus came into the world to save us and give us strength (cf. **I Timothy 1:12**). That strength helps us overcome our sins. We'll talk more about this in our last point. However, let us take comfort that it is a trustworthy statement, Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. That means Christ Jesus came into the world to save you.
- II. Those who aspire to the office of overseer desire a noble task (**I Timothy 3:1**).
 - A. There are two aspects of this statement we need to recognize as trustworthy. Notice first the need to aspire to the role of elder. Notice second that it is a noble task.
 - B. Aspire to the office.
 1. Regrettably, due to the translation, this part of the passage has come to mean nothing more than to be qualified for the eldership, a man has to desire it. That was not Paul's point at all.
 2. The word translated "aspire" in the ESV and "desire" in the KJV actually means "to stretch one's self out in order to touch or to grasp something, to reach after or desire something."¹

¹ Blue Letter Bible. "Dictionary and Word Search for orego (Strong's 3713)". Blue Letter Bible. 1996-2008. 20 May 2008. <<http://cf.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong's=G3713&t=kjv>>

Thus, the point is that the eldership is something to pursue. It is something to be reached for and grasped.

3. A man should not “accidentally” become an elder. It is not the process of just looking for someone who is good in business and therefore gets to be an elder. Rather, the office of elder is for those who have pursued it, planned for it, grown into it.
 4. Men, it is a trustworthy statement that if you want to serve the Lord as an elder some day, you have to work for it. What are you doing right now so you can serve the congregation in this way? What steps are you taking to learn how to shepherd, oversee, lead? Are you spending any time with those who are already shepherds to learn from them? Are you studying and working so you can fill the qualifications listed?
 5. Finally, understand, this statement is not a free pass on mature spiritual responsibility if you just don’t want to be an elder. That was not Paul’s point. He wasn’t making desire a qualification. We all have the spiritual responsibility to reach our potential in God’s kingdom. We must learn to desire greater opportunity to serve. Therefore we must aspire and pursue this work. We must stretch out for and reach for it. Right now, we may not be qualified. Some of us may never be, but we will grow for the reaching.
- C. It is a noble task.
1. The KJV says it is a “good work.” I think it is important to understand that the eldership is a good thing. It is a valuable and noble work that is done. It is a necessary work. We need men to step up to the plate and shepherd the souls. We need men who will step up to the plate and take accountability for the brethren (**Hebrews 13:17**). We don’t need men who will avoid their mature responsibility and act like the eldership is something to be avoided unless the only way to have elders is if they will do it. This is a good work, brethren, pursue it.
 2. But more importantly, notice it is work. It is not merely a position or an office. It is a work. It takes commitment. No one will do the job of an elder properly if they are not given to it. It takes sacrifice. If you are working as a shepherd, that means there are other things you aren’t doing. It takes effort. The word Paul employed for overseer in **I Timothy 3:2** literally means a watchman upon.² That makes an interesting tie to **Hebrews 13:17** about our leaders who keep watch over our souls. The word translated “keeping watch” literally means “without sleep.”³ Being a shepherd is more than making a few decisions now and then. It is more than having some kind of power over the congregation. It is not about rights but about responsibilities. It is about watching the souls in the congregation. It is about shepherding, feeding and caring for the flock around us. That takes effort. That takes time. That takes work. If you want to be an elder, you have to get over laziness, procrastination and distraction. This is a job. It takes focus, effort and time—lots of it.
- D. It is a trustworthy statement, if you aspire to the office of overseer, you desire a noble task.

III. Godliness is of value in every way (**I Timothy 4:8-9**).

- A. There are many good things in this world. It is good to work on your physical health. It is even good to do so in relation to spiritual things. It is good because better health can provide longer life, more stamina and greater strength to be able to do the work you need to do as a Christian. I’m sure we could list many other good things that provide benefits all along the way throughout this life. However, godliness is beneficial in every way.
- B. In the past, I had a tendency to shorthand the definition of this term and say, “Godliness means god-likeness or being like God.” While the definition eventually gets around to that, that is not really the definition of this word. Rather, the word means “devotion, piety toward God.”⁴ It refers not only to the attitude of heart but also the actions of the life. Those who are godly, not only have an emotional feeling in their heart for God, but they demonstrate it by pursuing obedience (cf. **I Timothy 6:11**).
- C. It is possible to have a fake form of godliness according to **II Timothy 3:5**. But we must pursue the true godliness. How devoted are you to God? How reverent are you? Do you acknowledge

² Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, AMG Publishers, Chattanooga, 1993, p 635.

³ Ibid. p. 76.

⁴ Ibid. pp. 682-683

Him in all your ways? Do you sacrifice of yourself to show Him honor? Or do you just put on a good show some of the time?

- D. Understand that godliness is beneficial in every way because it helps out in this life. When we surrender our lives to God, accomplishing His will, there are numerous things we avoid. We will be more healthy; we will be better stewards of our money; we will have better relationships. However, the greatest good accomplished by godliness is the reward in the next life. Even if we are one of those Christians who pursued godliness and only ever received persecution, trial and tribulation in this life, we will receive heaven. As **II Peter 1:5-11** says, godliness is part of the fruitful and useful life that assures us a part in the eternal kingdom of our Lord.
- E. It is a trustworthy saying that godliness is beneficial, in fact, necessary, in every way.

IV. God remains faithful, He cannot deny Himself (**II Timothy 2:11-13**).

- A. Paul explains that if we die with Jesus, we will live with Him. If we endure, we will reign with Him. If, however, we deny Him, He will deny us. Why? Because whether or not we are faithful or faith less. He is faithful. He cannot deny Himself. This is very important. What we recognize from this is that the promises of Jesus are not pie in the sky wishes that He has though once or twice about providing for us. His promises emanate from His very nature. This is what He is. He is a rewarder of those who seek Him (cf. **Hebrews 11:6**). That is not just something He does. It is something He is. But He is also a jealous God who will punish those who rebel against Him despite all the kindness He has offered (**Deuteronomy 4:24**). As **Hebrews 6:18** says, it is impossible for God to lie. If He has promised a reward, He will give it. If He has promised a curse, He will give that. It doesn't matter what we do, what we say, who we are or where we have been, God will do what God has said. He cannot deny who and what He is.
- B. This is important for us to recognize because so often we have dealt with people who are not what they seem. We have dealt with people who have promised the moon and delivered dirt. We have dealt with those who made commitments and never followed through. At times, we might begin to think there is nothing and no one out there who can be counted on to keep their word. But our God can. He is faithful, no matter what we are. He can't deny Himself.
- C. However, recognize there are two sides to this. There is the side of the reward. But there is also the side of punishment. Don't lose sight of either one. Some folks have this idea that God could not possibly save them. They have been so bad God could never possibly forgive them. Not true, if we die with Him (cf. **Romans 6:1-4; 8:13; Colossians 3:5**), we will live with Him. If we endure, standing by God no matter what we suffer (**James 5:11; I Peter 2:20**), we will reign with Him. It is not about having been perfect all our lives. It is about surrendering to Him today. And then doing it again tomorrow. You haven't been so bad that God won't forgive you if you die with Jesus Christ. On the other hand, some folks forget the other side. They have this idea that God won't punish anyone. They think that they can live how they want, giving themselves over to their sins, turning their back on God's will and that God will somehow look the other way (**Acts 17:30-31**). It would be just as much a denial of Himself for Him to simply forgive the impenitent rebel as it would be for Him to ignore the penitent submitter.
- D. Let me make one very practical point on this. Today, I hear even from Christians that there might be some possibility for some who are pretty good people that God might save them even if they have not been baptized for the remission of their sins. Who are we, we are told, to tell God how to save people. He can save people however He wants. That is true. We cannot tell God how to save people or which people to save. However, God has said in **John 3:3, 5**, unless we are born again of water and spirit, we cannot enter the kingdom. God cannot deny Himself. If we die with Him in baptism, as we have already read, we will live with Him. But you can try to good works your way into heaven all day long. God cannot deny Himself. He cannot go against His word. He will not. Please, do not think you can be an exception to what He has commanded. God's is true and every man who tries to make exception to it is the liar (**Romans 3:4**).
- E. It is a trustworthy statement, God will be faithful to His word. He cannot deny Himself.

V. God is good; we ought to be good (**Titus 3:4-8**).

- A. As Paul wrote, this was the longest of his trustworthy statements. However, we can distill it down to a very powerful point. It is trustworthy statement to say that God is good. His goodness

has been displayed not by saving us through our own good works. He didn't save us because we measured up to some standard that He set. He saved us by His mercy. He loved us and sent His Son to die for us because of that love, not because we deserved it. **I John 4:9-10** makes this love abundantly clear. Through that justification, we have become heirs of God looking forward to an inheritance of eternal life. Peter talked about the good inheritance God has reserved for us in heaven (**I Peter 1:3-5**).

- B. Paul, however, had another side of this trustworthy statement. Though God did not save us because we earned it through works of our own righteousness. He did save us so we could pursue good works. Because God is good, we ought to be good. He even told Titus to "insist on these things" (**Titus 3:8**, ESV). We must be a people who are careful to devote ourselves to good works. In **Titus 2:14**, Paul said God redeemed us to be a people for His own possession so we could be zealous for good works.
- C. Understand what Paul is saying within this verse. We aren't attempting to be good because that is what will save us. The fact is, we have blown it on that score. None of us can be good enough to be saved because of our good works. However, it is true, if we do not allow God's grace to work in our lives so that we pursue good works, God's grace will be removed from our lives. Rather, we are to be good because God is good. We are to pursue good deeds because that is just what we were supposed to be doing all along. God's forgiveness removes the uncleanness that allows us to be good again. Because of our overwhelming joy for God's love, we should pursue the goodness He has outlined for us. Because of His love for us, we ought to return that love. Yes, it is true that if we do not do good, but rather give ourselves back over to sin, we will be lost. **Romans 6:23** was written to Christians. However, our motivation for doing good must not be trying to do enough good works to get into heaven. Our motivation should be that we are so taken aback with God's love and goodness for us that we want to become what He wants for us. We want to be what He wants us to be. That must now be our life's work.
- D. It is a trustworthy statement, God is good; we also ought to be good.

Conclusion:

I hope these trustworthy statements have helped focus you on God's will. As we conclude, I would like us to note another use of the word that has been translated trustworthy in each case. Paul repeatedly wanted us to see that the words of God were trustworthy. However, in **I Timothy 1:12**, Paul used the word, but pointed to something else. He pointed to himself. Despite the fact that he had been a blasphemer, a persecutor and an insolent opponent (**I Timothy 1:13**), Jesus Christ appointed Paul to His service. Why? Because He saw that Paul was faithful, that is, trustworthy. He could see that Paul was a man He could rely on. No doubt, at the time God called Paul, Paul was on the wrong side. But God knew that Paul was a man if converted would devote His life to God. God could trust Him to serve and pass on the word. What comfort it is to us to be able to look at God's words and rely on them as trustworthy. Let us now return that comfort. Let us grow to follow these principles in a trustworthy fashion. Let us be people God can rely on. Let us be people who take His grace not as freedom to live how we want, but as freedom to live in righteousness. Let us be trustworthy. Perhaps you think living up to that for the rest of your life is a hard task. Don't try to do that. Just be God's trustworthy servant today. Today is all you have. If you need to seek God's grace so that you can be free to be a trustworthy servant, whether by becoming His child through submission in baptism or by simply confessing your sins to Him and turning from them, don't wait until tomorrow to take care of that. Become trustworthy today, right now.