



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 3:1-7 You Can Take That to the Bank

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter two, verse fifteen through chapter three verse seven. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 991...1st Timothy 2:15-3:1-7.

This is what God's Word says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:15**...Yet she will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control. ^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:1**...The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. ² Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, ³ not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. ⁴ He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, ⁵ for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? ⁶ He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Let's pray.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

To say 1st Timothy 2:15 is a notoriously hard passage is quite an understatement. Add to that the fact that the verse comes at the end of a very controversial paragraph and you wind up with a bit of a mystery rolled up in a conundrum and packed away in an enigma.

I promised last week that I would tend to the passage this morning, but I thought that rather than spend a whole hour on the passage I might simply go over the various possibilities as to what the text might mean and allow you to do some study on your own. I will give my own personal opinion in the end, but have to admit up front that I am open to other views.

Basically there are three different interpretations of the passage.

Still before we get to those three interpretations, I probably ought to take a moment to tell you plainly what the passage cannot mean. It cannot mean that women are eternally saved from their sin simply by bearing children. That is so contrary to the clear teaching of Scripture in so many other passages that it cannot possibly be right. It would flatly contradict the overall necessity of Christ's redemptive work on our behalf and would mean a woman's salvation would be based on her inherent ability to bear children. Calvin argues that

holding such a view would in the end constitute a sort of works-righteousness.¹ He is quite right. The passage cannot be referring to a woman gaining her salvation simply by having children. But if it doesn't mean that what does it mean?

As I mentioned earlier, there are three basic interpretations regarding the passage.

The first interpretation argues that when the text refers to women being saved through childbirth is arguing that all Christian women will come **“safely through the physical dangers of childbirth.”** The idea seems to be alluding to the danger in which Eve placed women when she violated the command in the Garden. I am thinking of the curse God placed on Eve in the Garden.

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:16**...To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

Those that hold this first view argue that 1 Timothy 3:15 is making the point that somehow God will automatically protect all believing women to the extent that they will be protected in childbirth and be saved physically...that is, they won't die in childbirth. The problem with such a view, of course, is that many godly women have died in childbirth. Statistically, the numbers for Christian women seems to be just about the same as for unbelieving women. The facts are that many Christian women have not been protected through childbirth which means, I think, that the passage cannot mean that. If it were making that kind of assertion, it would be flat out wrong. I suppose a person could argue that the idea is proverbial. That is, I suppose it could be saying that usually Christian

women won't die in child birth but that seems quite a stretch in view of the mortality rates associated with childbirth in the ancient world.

John Stott puts the issue plainly: **“Besides, such a promise is not true, since many godly women have died in childbirth.”**²

Obviously, Stott understands that whatever the passage is saying...it is saying in terms of universal truth not simply in terms of being proverbial.

Philip Ryken points to another difficulty with the view. He writes this: **“Obviously this verse does not mean that a woman must give birth to be saved, for not all women give birth.”**³

Both Stott and Ryken are right and because they are I think there is very good reason for not thinking that the passage is referring to any sort of physical deliverance from the dangers associated with childbirth.

So if it doesn't mean women will be saved physically from death in the difficult process of childbirth what else could it mean?

A second view is that the word for childbirth is a really shorthand for the whole process of motherhood. The principal idea here is not that a woman is saved simply by bearing children, but rather that she is saved through the whole process of bearing and raising children combined. Now the idea of being saved here again is not actually related to being saved from sin but rather to the overall significance of a woman's life. The idea is that her life's worth or value is saved in the combined process of mothering and nurturing children.

Philip Ryken writes this concerning this view, *"It is arguing that the place where a woman will find her true sanctification is not in the authoritative teaching office of the church but in the domestic sphere."*⁴

I think it might be better to put it like this, **"The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world."**⁵ That is, individual women may have a tremendous impact on the church and the culture, but they may not have it in the authoritative positions of ecclesiastical life. Rather they will gain their significance in the formative years of those that men and boys that will be ultimately be called on to take up those authoritative roles. Think...Augustine's mother Monica or Susannah Wesley.

I think this position works particularly well in view of Paul's concern about the false teachers in Ephesus...and their strange connection with the women in the church.⁶ You can just imagine the false teachers telling the more significant women in the church that they need to lay aside their domestic responsibilities and their natural inclination to bear children and take up leadership in the church as a way of earning their salvation. If that was what was happening, Paul would then be saying something like this, **"No, that's not the way you fulfill your God-ordained destiny. You don't do it by usurping the role of men in the church. You do through the whole process of motherhood and nurturing as you take up the responsibility of raising your children in the fear of the Lord. You have your own role to play; it is simply not quite as direct as you would like it to be."**

Finally, there is a third interpretation of the passage. This last interpretation states that the birth in mind here is a very specific birth...not just the birth of any child but rather the birth of one specific child...the Lord Jesus Christ. Those that

hold this view point out the fact the word for “**childbearing**” in Greek has a definite article in front of it...a “**the.**” *It is not a birth; it is the birth.* The point, they argue, is that woman is not saved by bearing children in general but that woman was saved by the birth of one particular child...the child that fulfilled the promise of Genesis 3.

Do you remember what the Lord said to the serpent in the Garden after before he pronounced judgment on Eve?

^{ESV} **Genesis 3:15**...I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Scholars that hold this last view argue that the birth of Jesus fulfilled the prophecy given in Genesis 3:15 and resulted in the salvation of all women who come to faith in Christ the one mediator between mankind and God.

John Stott for example says this:

So then, even if certain roles are not open to women, and even if they are tempted to resent their position, we (*meaning men I think*) must never forget what we owe to women. If Mary had not given birth to the Christ-child, there would have been no salvation for anybody. No greater honor has ever been given to woman than in the calling of Mary to be the mother of the Savior of the world.⁷

There is a part of me that wants to agree with Stott. I think his view 1st Timothy 2:15 seems to have the advantage of being able to tie the Genesis passage which makes reference to the difficulty of childbirth to Paul's overall argument.⁸ Still,

the view is not without its problems. The main problem comes with what to do with the last part of verse fifteen.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:15**...Yet she will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

Does the **“they”** refer to the woman, to all women, to a woman and her husband, or to the children that the woman has? If it refers to women in general, it would mean that women in general are saved through the birth of Jesus...if they continue in the faith with love and holiness and self-control. The self-control point would be made, I think, to counter the ambitious women in Ephesus who want more than anything else to teach and rule in the church.

If the **“they”** refers to them and their husbands the idea would be exactly the same.

If however the **“they”** refers to the woman’s children, then we still have a real mess on our hands because the text would be saying that a woman’s salvation would be contingent on her children continuing in the faith with love and holiness. Of course, even that might possibly be true if we are only referring to a woman’s significance in life and not to her salvation from sin.

So those are the three views...there are a number of spin-offs from those three but those are the three basic views.

Now I promised I would give my own view, and I want to keep my promise.

I hold to the second view unless it makes people angry and then I switch to the third view unless that makes people angry and then I switch back to the second view.

No seriously, I think the second view...the view that says a woman's significance is not bound up in the public ministry of teaching or ruling in the church but is bound up rather in a ministry of nurture is the easier view to defend. Now in the practical outworking of the view a woman might focus on her own children or she might focus on other women in the church, or on younger women in the church, or even on other children in the church. It could be that a woman might focus on one those groups early on and then turn to a different group as her own children come to maturity. I think the point being made is that it is the calling of every woman to nurture others. I think that is where women in the end actually get their significance.

I think the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.

When I think back on the impact of my own parents on my own life, I find I have that I have often spoken much more about my dad than I have my mom. My dad was a passionate man...sometimes almost explosive. He was there hip deep in most of the more important moments in my life. On the other hand, my mom was much steadier...much more down to earth...a lot more apt to nurture. She was the one that first made the decision to take me to church. She was the one that taught me the Bible. She was the one that gave me a heart for ministry. She was the one that taught me how to minister without worrying too much about being the center of attention.

Now which one of them had the greatest impact on my life? I don't know. I'm glad it wasn't a contest. I tend to think of the great mountaintops of my life in terms of my dad's influence...on the other hand, I tend to think I learned a lot more about coping with the long, days of faithful drudgery from my mother. I do think had I not learned that from her, I would have quit the difficult work of the ministry many times over.

Now I want to spend whatever time we have left, looking at 1st Timothy chapter 3:1-7. But instead of taking it straight on,

I want to take it on from a bit of an angle. That is, I want to digress a bit.

For as long as I can remember, I have been drawn to and fascinated by five particular verses of Scripture in the New Testament. Now these five particular verses are not simply a random collection of verses. I haven't been especially drawn to these five verses because they cover five really important topics. They do cover really important topics, but that is not the principal reason I am drawn to them. Rather, I am drawn to these five particular verses because all five of these verses start with the exact same phrase. This is the phrase, **"Here is a trustworthy saying."**

There is something about that phrase I really like, but I am not sure what it is.

Perhaps, it is the fact that the phrase implies a measure of certainty. I like certainty. There doesn't seem to be much of it going around these days.

I suppose that is related to the rise of postmodernism. Still, I like certainty.

In fact, just thinking about certainty caused me to remember a line in an old Robert Redford movie entitled *Three Days of the Condor* where a wonderful actor named John Houseman lamented the dreadful ambiguity related to trying to fight the cold war. In the movie, one of his underlings asked him something like this, **“So you regret no longer be able to kill Nazis?”** I loved Houseman’s response in the movie, **“No, what I regret is a lack of clarity.”**

His point in the movie was not that his agency didn’t recognize the fact that they needed to kill the enemy. His point was that in World War 2, it was much easier to know exactly who the enemy was. What he longed for was clarity...certitude. So do I.

I think maybe that is why I like these five particular verses so much.

They seem to be saying, **“Here is something you can always count on. Here is something you can truly believe in without wasting time trying nuance things. Here is something,”** my dear old dad would say, **“you can take to the bank.”**

I like that. I like that a lot.

In New Testament Greek, the phrase **“Here is a trustworthy saying”** is just three words not five. The phrase in Greek is *“πιστὸς ὁ λόγος.”* If you were trying to translate it literally, you could make it **“faithful is the word”** or **“trustworthy is the saying.”** If you wanted to make it more modern or paraphrase it , you could change it to **“you can count on this”** or even **“you can take this to the bank.”**

Now almost all modern translations (NIV, NASB, ESV) translate the phrase using the English word **“trustworthy.”** The old King James Version, on the other hand, uses the word **“faithful”** instead of **“trustworthy”** but still the idea is exactly the same. Now I mentioned earlier that there is something about the certainty of the phrase that I like very much...that it appeals to me. I think it might be fair to add that I also really like the fact that the phrase is repeated as well. You see the phrase, **“Here is a trustworthy saying”** is used five times in the New Testament. And here’s the thing; here’s the point of my digression...the five the times the phrase is used all occur in the Pastoral Epistles. That is, all five times the phrase is used it is used in 1st and 2nd Timothy and Titus.

Paul uses the phrase four times in writing to Timothy and once in writing to Titus.

On the one hand, that seems a bit strange...strange that it is only used in the pastorals,

On the other hand, it’s not strange at all. It’s not strange because Paul uses the phrase to encourage two young ministers that he has thrown into the midst of lions...now, of course, I don’t mean that literally. Neither Timothy nor Titus were worried, I think, about eaten alive. Still, it seems quite clear that they were quite worried about the enormous difficulty of actually doing what Paul was calling them to do. And they had every right to worry. They were both outgunned in terms of numbers, and these false teachers were quite entrenched in their respective churches. Still, Paul wanted Timothy and Titus to go in and root out the enemy, and then get them up and get them running. He wanted them to do that because he had been entrusted with the gospel by the Lord Jesus

himself. Paul wanted them to take up his fight and to guard the gospel that he was entrusting to them. You can imagine how overwhelming their task must have seemed.

You can see then, I think, why Paul wanted to give them a sense of certitude.

Now the five verses where Paul uses this phrase, "**Here is a trustworthy statement**" occur in:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:15**...The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

Of course, we've already covered this passage. I hope you remember that Paul's point was that the gospel ought to have a humbling effect upon Christ's servants. Christ's servants ought not to be puffed up and self-promoting. I think implicit in Paul's statement is the idea that Timothy ought not to be puffed up and arrogant like the false teachers in Ephesus.

The second time the phrase is used it is used in 1st Timothy 3:1...our principal text for the morning. We'll come back to it in a few minutes.

The third time the phrase occurs is in 1st Timothy 4:9.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:9**...The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

Only here it is less clear as to whether the actual **“trustworthy statement”** comes before or after verse 9. If it comes before the actual trustworthy statement is verse 8 where it says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:8**...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.

If the **“trustworthy statement”** comes after, it would be found in verse 10 where it says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:10**...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.

I think it points back to verse 8, but I'll wait until we actually get to chapter four to argue my point.

The fourth time the phrase **“trustworthy statement”** is used is in 2nd Timothy 2:11.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 2:11**...The saying is trustworthy, for: If we have died with him, we will also live with him;

There the **“trustworthy statement”** is clear enough. The statement is, **“If we died with him, we shall also live with him.”** The idea is pretty simple. Our fortunes are inseparably linked to those of Jesus. If we are connected to him in his atoning death, then we will, of course, be connected to him in his resurrection life.

Finally, the fifth and final time the phrase **“trustworthy statement”** is used occurs in Titus 3:8.

^{ESV} **Titus 3:8**...The saying is trustworthy, and I want you to insist on these things, so that those who have believed in God may be careful to devote themselves to good works. These things are excellent and profitable for people.

You obviously don't have to be a Greek major to see that the actually trustworthy statement must occur before the phrase itself especially since Paul's wants Titus to insist on these things. So then what is the **“trustworthy statement”** in Titus 3? To find you have go all the way back to verse four.

^{ESV} **Titus 3:4**...But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, ⁵ he saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to his own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, ⁶ whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, ⁷ so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

You can see Paul's point to Titus is that the **“trustworthy statement”** is the whole of the gospel. And you see why Paul is insistent that Titus preach these things, insist on these things, He wants him to do so in order that God's people will live out lives of gratitude reflecting a proper understanding of what Christ has done for them in the gospel.

Now I wanted to give you a sense of these five uses of this particular phrase both because I love the way the phrase is used and because our passage for the morning starts with the phrase. But I also wanted to take the time to show you that sometimes that phrase **“Here is a trustworthy saying”** comes before the actual trustworthy saying itself and sometimes it comes after the saying itself.

Now why does that matter?

It matters because if the trustworthy saying referred in 1st Timothy 3:1 comes before the phrase **“Here is a trustworthy saying”** it is referring back to the really difficult verse at the end of chapter two...1st Timothy 2:15.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:15**...Yet she will be saved through childbearing-- if they continue in faith and love and holiness, with self-control.

That is, if it points backwards it is referring to the idea of childbearing as being the thing that Paul says is so trustworthy. There are actually a number of commentators that try to argue that that is what Paul intended.

I do not that is what Paul is doing.

I think rather that Paul is pointing forward to the second part of 1st Timothy 3:1.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:1**...The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task.

Now you might be tempted to say, **“Well of course that is what he is referring to Tom. I mean look at the verse...both phrases are a part of verse one.”** That is true, of course. But you have to remember that when the New Testament was written there were no verse numbers. Actually, there was no or at least very little punctuation in the earlier manuscripts. Spaces between the words and punctuation and verse notations are all modern conveniences connected principally to the Bible being put into print. In fact, the first Bible in English to

employ chapter and verse notations was the Geneva Bible printed around 1560. Up until that point, there were no chapter or verse markings in the text.

My point is that we must let the context determine whether or not the actual **“trustworthy statement”** comes before or after the phrase **“This is a trustworthy statement.”** I think here in 1st Timothy 3:1 that it does come after and I think that is true because of the little word **“if.”** The word **“if”** starts off the statement contained in the last half of verse one and it sounds like something of a proverb or proverbial statement.

I think what Paul is arguing is this, **“If a man desires to take on the ‘office of overseer’ he desires a noble calling.”** I think Paul is arguing that that statement itself is something a person can take to the bank. Now what he is going to do in the rest of the passage is to take a snapshot of just an overseer should look like. That is, he is going to tell us what an overseer should be like. He is going to pose a list of attributes. And the remarkable thing about his list is that it is not actually all that remarkable at all. Almost every single attribute of an **“ideal overseer”** is commanded of believers in general elsewhere.

Now before we stop, I want to consider for a moment the following question, **“Why bring that up?”**

I think Paul brings it up here because of the false teachers at Ephesus. He brings it up here not because he wants to minimize the role of overseer...the role of being an overseer is a good thing...a noble thing, but rather because the false teachers are terrible overseers and because he wants to contrast what a good overseer looks like as compared to what the false teachers look like.

Here's my point. We often treat 1st Timothy chapter 3 as Paul's instruction manual for choosing elders and deacons. You know what I mean. Here's a list of the attributes of a good elder or deacon. In our upcoming election, you need to choose men that display these characteristics. But when we do that, we fail to pay adequate attention to the overall thrust of Paul's argument. You see in the original context, Paul's point is as much about not picking a certain kind of man as it is about picking a certain kind of man. Look at verse three for a moment.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:3**...not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money.

Now look down to verse six for a moment.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 3:6**...He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. ⁷ Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

Implicit in his argument is the importance of avoiding the kind of men the false teachers were. It is implicit in his argument because at the end of chapter one, Paul made the point that he had already turned Hymaneus and Alexander over to the devil in order that they might be taught not to blaspheme. His point here in chapter three is that it is a good thing to be an overseer in God's church but that it is also a very dangerous thing and that it ought to be limited to certain kinds of men. Men that are set apart both by the gospel and by their behavior. We'll consider that in more detail next week.

Let me close with this.

In 1546 after a number of Scottish protestants killed Archbishop David Beaton in revenge for burning George Wishart at the stake, they took over Beaton's castle. Later, John Knox joined the men at the St. Andrews castle. He did so with the two young teenage boys he was tutoring. During their time in the castle at St. Andrews, one of the men in the castle heard Knox teaching his two students from the gospel of John. He was quite impressed with Knox's ability to teach and he and the other men called a meeting to discuss the matter. At the end of the meeting, they voted to ordain Knox as their preacher. They did so over Knox's adamant objection. When they went ahead and called him and appointed him to be their preacher, Knox burst into tears. That is pretty funny because Knox was not known for being much of a crier. He was known for being a man of steel...a man chiseled out of flint. Still, when he was first chosen Knox was terrified at the thought of taking up his responsibility. In the end, however, he took it as the voice of God and dove into his work. He believed in the authority of his calling to be a gospel preacher all of the days of his life.

It gave him an enormous sense of courage...a kind of courageous certitude and why not? Taking on the office of an overseer is a noble task...and you can take that to the bank.

¹ Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy*. Cf. 1st Timothy 2:15. He writes: "The Apostle does not argue here about the cause of salvation, and therefore we cannot and must not infer from these words what works deserve; but they only shew in what way God conducts us to salvation, to which he has appointed us through his grace.

² John R.W. Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus* (BST) (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 87.

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 103.

⁴ Ryken, 103.

⁵ William Ross Wallace (1819-1881)

THE HAND THAT ROCKS THE CRADLE IS
THE HAND THAT RULES THE WORLD.

BLESSINGS on the hand of women!
Angels guard its strength and grace.
In the palace, cottage, hovel,
Oh, no matter where the place;
Would that never storms assailed it,
Rainbows ever gently curled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Infancy's the tender fountain,
Power may with beauty flow,
Mothers first to guide the streamlets,
From them souls unresting grow —
Grow on for the good or evil,
Sunshine streamed or evil hurled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Woman, how divine your mission,
Here upon our natal sod;
Keep—oh, keep the young heart open
Always to the breath of God!
All true trophies of the ages
Are from mother-love impearled,
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

Blessings on the hand of women!
Fathers, sons, and daughters cry,
And the sacred song is mingled
With the worship in the sky—
Mingles where no tempest darkens,
Rainbows evermore are hurled;
For the hand that rocks the cradle
Is the hand that rules the world.

⁶ ESV **1 Timothy 5:15**...For some have already strayed after Satan. ¹⁶ If any believing woman has relatives who are widows, let her care for them. Let the church not be burdened, so that it may care for those who are truly widows.

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 3:6**...For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

⁷ Stott, 88.

⁸ I.H. Marshall, *Pastoral Epistles*. (ICC) (London: T&T Clark, 1999), 470.