

# Bank on It: A Survey of Paul’s “Trustworthy Sayings”

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## Introduction

### Pithy Sayings

- An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.
- A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
- A stitch in time saves nine.
- Spare the rod, spoil the child.
- Hell hath no fury like a woman scorned.
- The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.
- A man convinced against his will is of the same opinion still.
- It’s not the size of the dog in the fight, it’s the size of the fight in the dog.

### Paul’s Trustworthy Sayings

- Five times the Apostle Paul used a specific Greek phrase, *pistos ho logos*, that could literally be translated “faithful the word.”
- English versions translate this phrase in various ways, such as “this is a faithful saying,” “the saying is trustworthy,” or “here is a trustworthy saying.” See table below for a comparison of how selected English versions handle the verbiage.

	<b>1 Tim. 1:15</b>	<b>1 Tim. 3:1</b>	<b>1 Tim. 4:9</b>	<b>2 Tim. 2:11</b>	<b>Titus 3:8</b>
<b>ESV</b>	The saying is trustworthy				
<b>KJV</b>	This is a faithful saying	This is a true saying	This is a faithful saying	It is a faithful saying	This is a faithful saying
<b>NKJV</b>	This is a faithful saying				
<b>NASB</b>	It is a trustworthy statement	This is a trustworthy statement			
<b>NIV</b>	Here is a trustworthy saying	Here is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying	Here is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying

<b>NET</b>	This saying is trustworthy	This saying is trustworthy	This saying is trustworthy	This saying is trustworthy	This saying is trustworthy
<b>NLT</b>	This is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying	This is a trustworthy saying
<b>CEV</b>	This saying is true	It is true	As the saying goes	Here is a true message	This message is certainly true
<b>MSG</b>	Here's a word you can take to heart	good!	You can count on this. Take it to heart.	This is a sure thing	You can count on this

- All five occurrences of this phrase are found in the Pastoral Epistles (1 Tim. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11; Titus 3:8). In two cases the phrase is extended to indicate that the saying is worthy of full acceptance (1 Tim. 1:15; 4:9).
- Elsewhere in the New Testament, the closest parallels to this phrase are found in Revelation 21:5 and 22:6, both of which use the phrase “these words are trustworthy and true.” Additionally, Titus 1:9 states that an overseer (i.e., a pastor) “must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught [*didachen pistou logou*].”
- In labeling the five statements as “trustworthy sayings,” Paul is saying, to borrow from modern lingo, that these are truths that we can *take to the bank*.
- Interestingly, when we look at the five texts that refer use the trustworthy saying formula, it is not always easy to identify which saying is in view. Campbell has made a convincing argument that the formula consistently *precedes* the saying, though other verbiage sometimes intervenes.
- Paul seems to weave the faithful saying into the flow of his reasoning. While the content of the saying does not always match the major emphasis of the overall passage, it always supports it in some way.
- The apostle’s use of the sayings is probably akin to a pastor or teacher quoting briefly from a hymn or creed in a message today. Consider the following examples:
  - When Zacchaeus came down from the tree that day, you might say that he experienced an “Amazing Grace” moment.
  - God has not merely called us to experience salvation through faith and repentance. He has called us to lay our lives down on the altar continually, every day saying, “I Surrender All.”
  - So many people struggle to find purpose in life. But for the Christian this shouldn’t be an issue. Simply put, “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.”

- In this lesson we'll explore the five passages where the trustworthy sayings appear. That doesn't mean that we'll study the five sayings themselves, because they're not necessarily the main theme of the passages where they appear.
- The sources that I examined when preparing this lesson imply that many who study the Pastoral Epistles get bogged down by supposed evidence that Paul didn't actually write them (Bond; MacDonald). Unfortunately, these interpreters seem to miss the spiritual value contained in the passages where the trustworthy sayings appear. By contrast, in this lesson we'll find that these passages convey a remarkably balanced summary of the gospel and its practical implications.

## Passage #1: Jesus Saves Sinners

1 Timothy 1:12-17

<sup>12</sup> I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, <sup>13</sup> though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent. But I received mercy because I had acted ignorantly in unbelief, <sup>14</sup> and the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus. <sup>15</sup> **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. <sup>16</sup> But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. <sup>17</sup> To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.

### Practical Applications

- Accept the gift!
- Praise God for his saving grace.
- Recognize that salvation is the key to the world's problems.
- Share your testimony of salvation with someone who is lost.
- Support those who make evangelism their life's work.

### Supporting Texts

- Matthew 9:12; Mark 2:17; Luke 5:31
- Luke 19:10

## Passage #2: We Are Saved *for*—not *by*—Good Works

Titus 3:1-8

<sup>1</sup> Remind them to be submissive to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready for every good work, <sup>2</sup> to speak evil of no one, to avoid quarreling, to be gentle, and to show

perfect courtesy toward all people. <sup>3</sup> For we ourselves were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy, hated by others and hating one another. <sup>4</sup> But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, <sup>5</sup> 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, <sup>6</sup> whom he poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior, <sup>7</sup> so that being justified by his grace we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. <sup>8</sup> **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.

### Practical Applications

- Abandon confidence in your good works as a means of earning God's favor.
- Don't merely avoid evil works, but actively seek to practice good works.
- Continually prove the reality of your relationship with Christ by your behavior.
- Realize that the world evaluates you by your works.
- Don't be offended when spiritual leaders call on you to do good works; they're commanded to do it (v. 1).

### Supporting Texts

- Isaiah 64:6
- Matthew 7:15-20
- Ephesians 2:8-10
- Philippians 2:12
- Hebrews 4:9-11
- James 2:17-18, 26

### Passage #3: Godliness Yields Dividends Now and Later

1 Timothy 4:6-10

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> **The saying is trustworthy** and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> 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.

## Practical Applications

- Engage in conversations that deepen your relationship with Christ, not in meaningless chatter.
- Be more committed to spiritual fitness than physical fitness.
- Recognize that achieving godliness takes discipline, and persevere in the pursuit.
- Believe that godliness produces both short- and long-term rewards.
- Encourage others to pursue godliness.

## Supporting Texts

- 1 Corinthians 9:24-27
- 1 Timothy 1:5-7
- 1 Timothy 6:3-7

## Passage #4: Genuine Salvation Leads to Gracious Suffering

2 Timothy 2:8-13

<sup>8</sup> Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, the offspring of David, as preached in my gospel, <sup>9</sup> for which I am suffering, bound with chains as a criminal. But the word of God is not bound! <sup>10</sup> Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory. <sup>11</sup> **The saying is trustworthy**, for:

**If we have died with him, we will also live with him;**

<sup>12</sup> **if we endure, we will also reign with him;**

**if we deny him, he also will deny us;**

<sup>13</sup> **if we are faithless, he remains faithful—**

for he cannot deny himself.

## Practical Applications

- Recognize that living for Christ will bring times of adversity.
- Believe that your circumstances can't hinder the impact of the gospel.
- Be willing to sacrifice to win the lost.
- Look forward to eternal rewards for faithful endurance.

## Supporting Texts

- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7
- 2 Corinthians 4:7-12, 16-18
- James 1:1-12

## Passage #5: It's a Privilege to Be a Pastor

1 Timothy 3:1-7

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

### Practical Applications

- Don't pity or look down on the minister.
- Honor church leaders.
- Don't discourage emerging church workers.
- Be open to the ministry calling for yourself and your children.

### Supporting Texts

- 1 Timothy 4:12
- 1 Timothy 5:17-18
- Hebrews 13:7, 17

In this phrase, "it is a faithful saying," "it is a true saying," which, as I have said, is quite peculiar—and in the Apostle's habit of introducing weighty sentences here by this remarkable formula—we see an indication of that change of style, which, if what I have said above is correct in reasoning, is in truth a confirmation of the authenticity of these Epistles, not an objection against it. This language is part of the sententiousness of an old man, who quotes proverbs, who accepts what has stood the test of experience, who is not disposed to recede from positions already won. St. Paul, indeed, in his earlier writings and speeches, quotes proverbial sayings very readily, even from Heathen sources; but now the habit is more fully formed, and the quotations are given with a more deliberate emphasis. (Howson 71)

## Works Cited

- Bond, L. Susan. "Between Text & Sermon: 1 Timothy 1:3-17." *Interpretation* 60 (July 2006): 314-17.
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