Word from God, the Holy Bible, and about the only way of salvation, about sin and grace, church and sacraments, law and gospel, about the Trinity and about regeneration and conversion, about faith and repentance, about justification, sanctification and about the Christian church and true worship, about the sacraments and the return of Christ, about godliness and evangelism, about family and heaven and hell, yes, all that and so much more is involved in "the doctrine". It includes all and everything the Bible has to teach us.....and says Paul to Timothy long ago, and now also to us all today still, "*take heed to yourself and to the doctrine*". That is, watch yourself always, and ever pay attention to and be observant about and holding on to the unchanging truth of God's holy Word, that one and only gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Is this what you are doing in your life? We can be so thankful that in and with the Reformed confessions from the 16th century Protestant Reformation, we have a record of the church's teaching and response to heresies and false teachings of the past. If we will walk and live carefully today, holding on to the truth we need to study these summary statements of Christian truth, seeing their Scriptural basis and beauty and applying them to the heresies and false teachings all around us today. Always we need to take heed to the Christian doctrine in all its details and fullness also because the devil is constantly seeking in new ways to bring back old heresies. Therefore the better you grasp and the more you hold on to the faith once delivered to the saints, the Christian truth as summarized also in the great church creeds and reformed confessions, the more you will be able to detect error and combat what is false, and stand up and promote what is right and true.

This is the charge Paul gives here. "*Take heed to thyself and to the doctrine.*" No one should ignore this charge for in a real way it is a test of true Christianity. As a man thinks in his heart, so is he. What you believe determines how you live. Wrong belief will result in wrong behavior. Taking heed to yourself but not to the doctrine is not the way of true Christianity, even as taking heed to the doctrine but not to yourself is not the way of true Christianity. Are you one who knows the doctrines of grace and shows the grace of the doctrines, by God's saving power in Christ Jesus. How important that it be so! Amen.

Hans Overduin, Radio Pastor   *February 18, 2007*

TAKING HEED [1]

The evangelist preacher, George Whitefield, in ministering the gospel to someone asked, "Sir, what do you believe?" The man replied respectfully, "I believe what my church believes." "And what does your church believe?" asked Whitefield. "The same thing I believe," said the man. "And what do both of you believe then?" the preacher further asked...and you know how the man responded? "We both believe the same thing" he said. That is as far as Whitefield could get with this man. How would that question of this evangelist go with you and me? Are you a person well grounded in the gospel truth and one who can say what you believe and why you believe what you believe, able to give testimony to the Christian faith and its key points?

How interested are you in truth and in knowing it and preserving it and passing it on? Do you know someone in church history who said the following and would you say this too still today? This person, and those with him, said "that they would 'offer their backs to stripes, their tongues to knives, their mouths to gags, and their whole bodies to the fire, well knowing that those who follow Christ must take His cross and deny themselves' rather than deny the truth[s of the Christian religion as taught in the Holy Bible]." The person who said this was Guido de Bres, the main author of the Reformation document, the Belgic Confession of Faith. Guido and those with him were so convicted and convinced of the great truths of the gospel and they would express them and defend them and spread them by all means, realizing their great importance and knowing the danger of all other teachings contrary to it. How right these people were in so upholding and defending the truth of the Christian gospel in their day. And, my friend, in the year 2007 A.D. we need to do the same today, very much so.

Being persuaded of this, the need to be lovers of the truth and custodians and conveyors of it also in our time, in the next two weeks we will study the words of Paul to Timothy in I Timothy 4:16. There Paul writes to Timothy saying: "*Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this, thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.*" As we work our way through this text, may God the Holy Spirit press it home to each one of us, giving it saving and sanctifying impact in each of our lives.

Paul begins by saying *"Take heed"* or be watchful, careful, on the alert, on guard! This is a fact in the Christian life for all who serve in it, in whatever position. We are constantly under terrorist attack, spiritually speaking. Indeed, the whole of the Christian life here on earth is a time of crisis, a time of ongoing battle, and unending challenges. The devil is going about as a roaring lion always seeking whom he may devour as we read in I Peter 5. The sinful flesh is always battling against the Spirit and the ways of the Spirit in our lives, and every honest Christian will know and admit this. Besides that, the world is so attractive for us. How luring are its pleasures and treasures, and the more prosperous and free times are, the more dangerous it becomes. So we need to take heed, be on the alert mode all the time. It is like with my computer at home...my Norton antivirus is on always, my Norton security is always enabled, and if you go to change it, a little box appears recommending always to keep it on. So it is in the Christian life, always. You must be on the alert, taking heed for the enemy coming in and making inroads in one way or another.

The first verses of the chapter brings out the urgency of this matter also as we draw closer and closer to the end of the world when Christ will one day return finally and triumphantly on the clouds of heaven for His eternal kingdom. What does Paul say there in I Timothy 4:1? *"Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy..."* So the fact of approaching the end of the age, living in the time as Paul says in II Timothy 3:1 *"in the last days"* when *"perilous times shall come"* gives all the more reason for being watchful and so careful in life. There is also the fact of the subtlety of the enemies around us, never mind their ongoing hostility against the truth and anyone walking in the truth.

Do you see the need for taking heed, being on guard and alert all the time? Notice here further exactly what Paul says to Timothy, *"Take heed to thyself* [yourself]". If Timothy would serve well in the Christian church in his time and be of benefit for the generations following, he must take heed to himself, that is, he must take care personally to be a child of the light and walking in the light. A great danger for us can be focusing more on others and so much else, while being unmindful of ourselves. Personal faith and a godly life, living in humble integrity and pursing holiness in all our life is something always urgent in the Christian life. Not to take heed to yourself in God's ways will mean in different ways not living consistently as we ought to. The more a person understands he must take heed to himself to be living uprightly and blamelessly before God and others, the more you will know every reason for constant humility in your life and ongoing diligence in the means of grace in your life. We can't afford a holiday from taking heed to ourselves. Or do you, dear friend, think you can afford a break from that? Are you maybe even now taking a break from taking heed to yourself, and

does that explain you again falling prey to sin and to worldly ways in your life, perhaps? How many have fallen shamefully because of not taking seriously the apostolic charge to 'take heed to yourself'?

If you haven't been taking heed, especially not to yourself personally to walk in God's ways in truth, will this word from God now stir you up in repentance and renewal before God, seeking again and afresh, or even for a first time, His mercy and grace?

Here let us go further into what Paul says, for he goes on saying, *"take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine."* What does he mean with *"and unto the doctrine"*? Paul is referring here to the instruction of the Christian faith as founded on the Old Testament and further given in the teaching of Christ Jesus and the apostles. In Ephesians 2:20 Paul speaks of the household or church of God being *"built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone."* We must take heed to ourselves and to the whole of Christian truth, ever seeking to understand the latter and always keeping to it. You can't be a healthy or a growing and fruitful Christian if you will be unmindful and careless of Christian truth and the doctrines of the Bible. Disregard for doctrine always will result in mindless and spineless superficial Christianity that will be prone to error and falsehood in different ways, not just in belief, but in practice too. As a certain theologian put it, "Those who are averse to doctrine easily become prey of every wind of doctrine which blows."

What we need to see from Paul's word here is you can't live the Christian life and genuinely be taking heed to yourself in God's ways and be ignoring Christian truth and teaching at the same time! No, the two go together. Truly taking heed to yourself can't be done without taking heed to the doctrine, the whole of Christian truth. This is something that we need to be persuaded of in our times. Increasingly people say, as long as a person is sincere, it doesn't matter what a person believes, or it is of less importance than just living the Christian life. But the Christian life is based on and interlinked with and flowing out of the Christian truth that it is built on. Someone put it this dramatic way to make this point that truth matters, not just sincerity. "A man hears noises in the house one night and decides a burglar is at work. He gets his gun and shoots the burglar who turns out to be his daughter! Unable to sleep, she had gotten up for a bite to eat. She ends up victim of her father's 'sincerity'."

The point is, it takes more than sincerity to make something true. We need to hold to what is true essentially and eternally, and that is all that God reveals to us in His holy Word, law and gospel. Many people sincerely believe in what is not true and they are simply wrong in their thinking and way of life. The Christian faith is based on truth, absolute truth as made known in the Bible and in the person and work of Jesus Christ. All the Bible teaches about the only true God, and the only real Saviour, the only actual