

March 12, 2017

# Guarding and Growing In Godliness

## Part 2

### 1 Timothy 4:1-10

**Spiritual disciplines are channels of grace by which the Holy Spirit grows us into the joyful likeness of Christ.**

LTS: Psa. 119:49-72

Read 1 Tim 4:1-16

This morning I want to talk to you about spiritual disciplines that lead toward godliness. The thrust of this message can be summed up as follows; namely, that Spiritual disciplines are channels of grace by which the Holy Spirit grows us into the joyful likeness of Christ.

I want to propose to you this morning that what Paul is addressing in 1 Timothy chapter 4 is the question of godliness. How should a young minister like Timothy teach the members of the church of Ephesus about godliness, and how do church people like you and me pursue Godliness? Paul offers a strong negative answer first followed by a positive.

In verses 1-3 he reminds us of what the Spirit of God has told the church many times in His word; namely, that in the last days many professing Christians will fall away from the faith because they listen to and believed doctrines of demons delivered by liars whose consciences are seared. The doctrine of false teachers is a little different in every age but in Ephesus they were teaching that godliness is achieved by abstaining from things like marriage and good food, which God created for our joy and temporal satisfaction. Theirs was a works-based system of achieving righteousness by which they hoped to recommend themselves to God. But Paul knew that this was NOT how God wants us to pursue godliness. Denying yourself the joy of marriage and abstaining from certain kinds of food is NOT going to result in your becoming like Jesus in the deepest recesses of your heart where it matters.

Last week we were introduced to three ways to guard and grow in godliness. I say, “guard AND grow” because if we are indeed to become like Christ we must defend ourselves against false teaching that would sabotage our progress toward that goal. The three ways we identified to grow in godliness were

- 1) Be defensive. Whenever we hear some new teaching we should be careful to

suit up in our spiritual armor to defend ourselves and our families against the prospects of false teaching.

- 2) Be discerning. In other words, be careful to measure what is being taught against what you already know about God. Paul reminds us that we know that the teaching at Ephesus was false because the Bible teaches that marriage and food were gifts that God created and freely given to man for his enjoyment from the beginning. Therefore, anyone who forbids them is teaching something that is contrary to the character of God whose only requirement for the enjoyment of such things is that we give thanks for His gracious blessings.
- 3) Be disciplined:

### III. Be Disciplined

Read. 7-9

1. Once again (7) Paul calls for a defensive position: *“Have nothing to do with irreverent silly myths.”*

- The NIV translates it “godless myths” and that is certainly what these false teachings offer.
- The NAS translates it “worldly fables fit only for old women.” It is translated that way because when the Greek philosophers wanted to mock a teaching they thought was ridiculous they would call an idea fit for old women.

2. Paul says “have nothing to do with such teaching.” In other words, don’t waste your time talking about such things. As Solomon said, “Don’t answer a fool according to his folly (Pro. 26:4). Don’t entertain their foolish ideas. Rather, *“discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness.”*

3. The word discipline means *training*. This is the language of a serious athlete. No one makes it to the Olympic games without serious training. And so it is with the pursuit of godliness. You won’t become spiritually fit and strong; you won’t grow to maturity in Christ by some kind of spiritual osmosis. Granted, your justification (salvation/regeneration) is something that God does all by himself. Theologians say salvation happens monergistically. That is, only one person is involved; namely, God Himself. But when it comes to growing in Christ, God has given us an active role to play. Theologians say that growth in Godliness happens synergistically. In other words, the Christian has the privilege and responsibility to actively participate in the work the H.S. is doing in one’s heart to make him or her like Christ. Paul is simply teaching that growth in godliness requires personal discipline.

4. It’s interesting to note here that the GK word discipline/training is *Gymnazo* from which we get our English word *Gymnasium*. It’s used twice in verses 7 & 8. The *gymnasium* is the place where athletes train. But Paul uses the verb form of this word in

order to tell us what to do. On the one hand, we are NOT to spend our time and energy on thinking about the latest silly, spiritual myths passing through the Christian culture (think – The Shack movie). Those things only cause spiritual confusion and keep people living in a perpetual state of immaturity. Rather we must actively engage in the kind of spiritual training and discipline that will result in godliness. Notice the comparison he makes (8).

Read v 7-8

5. “Train yourself” is an active imperative verb. In other words it is a strong command. Paul is calling for a determined effort in sanctification. “Exercise yourself for godliness.” This is an especially important word in our day as so many have fallen prey to the error of the new antinomianism that says our justification is all that matters. The only thing you need to think about as a Christian is the glorious reality that Christ is your righteousness and God always accepts you NOT because of what you have done, but on the basis of what Christ has done. And beloved, that certainly IS a correct view of justification. And it is the very foundation and substance of our eternal hope. But the precious doctrine of justification (the fact that God has declared us Just or righteous in Christ) is not the only truth Paul teaches. He also calls us to actively participate in our growth in Christ.

6. The analogy of an athlete in the gymnasium is not one that conjures up the picture of a runner laying on his bed polishing the gold medal that someone else won for him. NO, the athlete metaphor is designed to communicate the very opposite. Godliness requires personal discipline. It requires lots of time and effort in the “spiritual gymnasium.” And this is not the only place Paul uses this analogy.

7. Turn with me to 1 Cor. 9:24-27.

Read 1 Cor. 9:24-27

Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one receives the prize? So run that you may obtain it [Win!]. <sup>25</sup> Every athlete exercises self-control in all things. They do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. <sup>26</sup> So I do not run aimlessly; I do not box as one beating the air. <sup>27</sup> But I discipline my body and keep it under control, lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified.

8. This beloved, is not the picture of passivity. It is the picture of one who is actively and purposefully engaged in the race. It is the picture of one who disciplines (exercises) himself for the purpose of godliness.

9. Now, someone will say, “Then what’s the difference between the kinds of self denial the false teachers espouse and the self-discipline Paul is calling for. The answer is that the kind of active self-discipline Paul is calling for is not arbitrary. It is not a list of man-made legalistic duties that one does HOPING to either earn merit with God or counterbalance some measure of past sin. In both cases these are acts of self-righteousness. They are a man-made means of making one’s self acceptable to God through asceticism. But that doesn’t work! And that is NOT what Paul is commanding of us here.

10. Paul is not calling us to discipline ourselves for salvation but for godliness (sanctification). This discipline doesn't save us, but it is the way we cooperate with the H.S. who enables us to learn Christ in order to Become like Christ, to the Glory of Christ. We do this but actively placing ourselves under the means of grace (as they are called). This is where bible-study, and meditation on Scripture, and prayer, service, and giving, and other disciplines come into the Christian life.

11. Notice Paul says (8) "*For while bodily training [exercise] is of some [little] value, godliness is of value in every way, as it hold promise for the present life and also for the life to come.*"

12. In other words, a commitment to exercise your body is good. He offer some [little] profit, but it is only beneficial to your physical well-being and only for a limited time. Spiritual disciple, however, is beneficial for now and for eternity! If you are growing in grace day after day, you will experience the rich blessing of knowing God in Christ and be better equipped to minister to others. You will know in increasing measure the joy that Christ promised His disciples. And when you get to heaven you will be so glad you did!

13. Then Paul says, "*This saying is trustworthy and deserving full acceptance. For to this end we toil and strive.*" The word "toil" is kopiao, and the word for strive is agonizomai from which we get the word *agonize*. Once again, this is simply the vocabulary of serious athletes.

Warren Weirsbe writes, "When I see high school football squads and baseball teams going through their calisthenics under the hot summer sun, I am reminded that there are spiritual exercises that I ought to be doing (Heb. 5:14). Prayer, meditation, self-examination, fellowship, service, sacrifice, submission to the will of others, witness—all of these can assist me, through the Spirit, to become a more godly person.<sup>1</sup>

14. It bears emphasizing at this point that no Self-Effort alone can accomplish the goal of godliness. Human Effort doesn't save anyone and Human Effort doesn't sanctify anyone. But regarding sanctification Paul says (Phil. 2:12-13), "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works IN you both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The Bible does not say, 'God is at work in you to bring about his good purposes, *therefore* stay in bed.' It says, "Work out your *salvation* because God is at work in you." As John Piper observes, "God's work doesn't make our work unnecessary; it makes it possible."<sup>2</sup> Without the HS's power and influence we would not even want to grow in godliness. But He gives us the will and enables us to work for His good pleasure. And that means at the end of the day, even our growth in Christ is a gift of grace.

15. So Paul is not merely calling us to self-discipline, but spirit-empowered self-discipline. But what kind of disciple are we talking about? Practically speaking, what kinds of discipline enable me to grow into greater Christ-likeness? That's a good question. Let me mention three spiritual disciplines (spiritual exercises) that God has

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<sup>1</sup> Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). *The Bible exposition commentary* (Vol. 2, p. 226). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

<sup>2</sup> David Mathis, *Habits of Grace* (Wheaton, Crossway, 2016), 13

ordained for your growth. We see them being employed in Acts 2 where Luke tells us that the early Christians devoted themselves to three things; namely, 1) the apostles teaching (Scripture), 2) Fellowship (including the breaking of bread), 3) prayer.

16. The practical application here is FIRST, that if you have a Bible, you should read it regularly and meditate on parts that speak most powerfully to you. Second, If you are able to go to church on Sunday you should go in order to fellowship with other believers by listen to the Scriptures preached and taught. Third, as the Bible is the means by which God speaks to us, so prayer is the way we talk to God. And Prayer is not easy to do! To reign in your mind for half an hour to talk, to worship God, confess sin, and pour out your petitions is perhaps the most difficult discipline of all. But devoting ourselves to prayer enables us to grow in Christ in ways that can only be attributed to the work of the Spirit.

17. The natural question then is this: If discipline in these three areas are God's means of causing us to grow in godliness, how disciplined are you in reading and meditating on Scripture? How committed are you to fellowshiping with your spiritual family. And how devoted are you to prayer? Are we pursuing these disciplines (spiritual exercises) like a serious athlete, or have we let our spiritual muscles become flabby and weak. That may account for why we tend to be so ineffective at battling temptation, sharing the gospel, or truly enjoying our relationship with Christ.

18. It may be helpful to think of the spiritual disciplines the way the puritans did. They referred to them as God's means of grace. There is kind of grace that brought us to saving faith, and there is a kind of grace that floods our hearts and minds in such a way that instructs, empowers, and emboldens us to live like Christ for the glory of Christ. How do we access this instructing, empowering, emboldening grace? Well, truth be told, we cannot control when are to what degree God's grace will come. But we can put ourselves in the normal channels of His grace.

19. In other words we know (do we not) that God usually pours out His grace when a Christian reads and thinks deeply about His word. We know that God has often poured out his grace upon people when they gather for worship, listening to biblical preaching, and mutual edification. We know that often God pours out his grace when we pray from the heart – whether they be prayers of worship, repentance, or petition for others.

20. These are not the only Spiritual disciplines we could talk about, but this is a good place to start. The question is, do you really want to grow in Christ? Do you want to learn Christ the like a serious athlete wants to win the prize? Are you disciplining yourself for the purpose of Godliness.

21. Now, before we close I think it is so important to reflect briefly on the gospel once again. Coming to Jesus Christ for salvation does NOT begin with disciplining yourself. Salvation is NOT about your spiritual activity. It is totally and completely about what Jesus has done on your behalf. Our only hope is the blood and righteousness of Jesus. He lived the perfect life in our place and he died as a sacrificial lamb in our place, and He

rose again from the dead proving that His saving work was complete. You see, God doesn't want your spiritual discipline. He wants you fall down before Christ and say, "Jesus, the only thing I have to offer you is my sin. I believe you are the Son of God. I believe that you came to die on my behalf. I confess that I am a helpless sinner in need of your grace. Would you be gracious to me? Would you forgive me? Would you accept me? And as you approach Him in such humble faith you come to him under the promise that none who come to him will be cast out. So I plead with your to give up any pretense of saving yourself or earning your salvation. Fly to Jesus! He will save you without any help.

22. Second, if you are a child of God by grace and through faith, the gospel also has a message for you. Your spiritual discipline or lack thereof will never effect your standing in the eyes of God. He loved you before you ever did one thing to honor him. He loves you when you walk in the Spirit and He loves you NO less when you fall on your face. In the eyes of God you will NEVER see condemnation. When He gave you to Jesus He became your Father and will never ever become your judge. Engaging in the spiritual disciplines is not about satisfying the law, but pleasing your Father who, by the way, is easily pleased.

**Spiritual disciplines are channels of grace by which the Holy Spirit grows us into the joyful likeness of Christ.**