

INTRODUCTION

We are currently in a study on “The Pursuit of Holiness.”

In our last three messages, we have talked about how holiness is not only our standing in Jesus Christ, but also how we are to live everyday.

In our time together this morning, I want us to consider a phrase that Paul says in 1 Timothy 4:7.

If you have your Bibles, and I trust that you do, turn with me to 1 Timothy chapter 4.

Paul is writing to his son in the faith, Timothy, instructing him on matters of church life.

In chapter 1 he begins by instructing Timothy to “instruct certain men not to teach strange

doctrines, nor to pay attention to myths and endless genealogies, which give rise to mere speculation rather than furthering the administration of God which is by faith” (v.4)

Later in verses 18-19, he challenges him to “fight the good fight of faith, keeping faith and a good conscience.”

In chapter 2, he urges that “entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men” (v.1) and that “the men in every place...pray, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and dissension” (v.8).

Then in verses 9 and 10 he says he wants the women to “adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good works, as

is proper for women making a claim for godliness” (vv.9-10).

They are also to “quietly receive instruction with entire submissiveness” (v.11) when the church assembles nor are they allowed “to teach or exercise authority over a man” (v.12) since Eve was created after Adam (v.13) and she “fell into transgression” (v.14) leading the entire human race into sin.

In chapter 3, he says those who serve as elders and deacons are to be qualified before they serve.

The purpose of this instruction was so that everyone would “know how...to conduct [themselves] in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth” (v.15).

Now as we approach chapter 4, Paul gives Timothy further instruction.

This instruction which began in verses 3 and 4 of chapter 1 is now resumed in verses 1-10.

These false teachers would arise and cause “some [to] fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the

faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

So Timothy is to “have nothing to do with their worldly fables fit only for old women.”

What does that mean?

Simply, he is to avoid all false teaching.

To “have nothing to do with” (*paraiteomai*) means he is “*to refuse, decline, shun, reject, beg off, get excused, avoid.*”¹

In short, it is a strong word, meaning “reject,” or “put away” (cf. 2 Tim. 2:23; Titus 3:10).²

The next word, “Worldly” (*bebelous*) can also be translated “profane.” This is a word that describes what is radically separate from what is holy. It could be translated “unhallowed,” and refers to anything that contradicts the Word of God.³

“Fables” (*mutheous*). Hiebert uses the adjective to picture the “myths” as “nothing but silly

¹ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). 1 Ti 4:7.

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

² John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995). 1 Ti 4:7.

³ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995). 1 Ti 4:7.

fictions, fit only for senile, childish old crones to chatter about.”⁹⁷⁴

Timothy is directed to order those who promulgate these myths to cease this and to put their minds on the gospel.

Not for one moment is [Timothy] to treat them seriously, discuss them, [or] argue against them.⁵

Paul states this again in chapter 6, verse 20 when he says, “O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called “knowledge.”

⁹⁷ Hiebert, *First Timothy*, 81.

⁴ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 134.

⁵ R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Paul's Epistles to the Colossians, to the Thessalonians, to Timothy, to Titus and to Philemon* (Columbus, O.: Lutheran Book Concern, 1937). 630.

He states it two more times in his 2 letter to him.

2 Timothy 2:16, which says, “But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness.”

And verse 23, “But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels.”

Some false teaching is best ignored rather than discussed. ⁶

We have to be very careful what we expose ourselves to in terms of teaching.

John MacArthur writes in his commentary on this verse, saying, “The mind is a precious thing, and God expects those in leadership to

⁶ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 134.

have a pure mind, one saturated with His Word. There is no place for foolish, silly myths that are in reality the doctrines of demons. The excellent minister maintains his conviction and his clarity of mind by exposing himself to the Word of God (cf. Phil. 4:8; 2 Tim. 2:16), not to demonic lies that assault the Bible.”⁷

He doesn't meditate on error but on truth!

Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things."

cf. *confer* (Lat.), compare

⁷ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995). 1 Ti 4:7.

2 Timothy 2:16 says, "But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness."

Paul says later in 1 Timothy 6:11, that Timothy is to "flee from these things."

What things?

In this context, the love of money but the chapter includes unhealthy teaching.

In fleeing from these things, he is to "pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness."

This, as we have been stating for the past three weeks, is a "pursuit."

We are to pursue holiness or more specifically as 1 Timothy 6:11 states, "righteousness,

godliness, faith, love, perseverance and gentleness.”

This is no different than what Peter tells his readers in 2 Peter 1:5-7 when he says, "Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, 6and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, 7and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love."

So in avoiding one thing, timothy is to pursue another.

Going back to 1 Timothy 4:7, not only is he to reject false teaching, he is on the other hand to “discipline [himself] for the purpose of godliness; for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things,

since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (vv.7b-8).

So in contrast to following the vapid vagaries of the false teachers, Timothy was to seek after God.⁸

Timothy is not to occupy his time and attention with them, "but rather cultivate piety, and seek to become more holy" (Barnes).

Notice the last part of verse 7:

Timothy is to “discipline [himself] for the purpose of godliness” (v.7b).

His attention is to be on his soul.

⁸ Thomas D. Lea and Hayne P. Griffin, *1, 2 Timothy, Titus*, electronic ed., Logos Library System; The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2001). 134.

That is not to say he is not to take care of his physical body.

Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit.

But his attention should be on the discipline of his soul “for the purpose of godliness.”

Timothy is told that as an athlete trains his body, so the Christian must train his soul.⁹

Notice...

WHAT IT MEANS TO TRAIN

The word “discipline” at the end of verse 7 could also mean “train” and might even be a better translation considering the meaning of the word.

⁹ *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*, ed. William Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 2000).

This is the word *gumnos* which means “naked” and is the word from which we derive our English word *gymnasium*.

In traditional Greek athletic contests, the participants competed without clothing, so as not to be encumbered. Therefore, the word “train” originally carried the literal meaning, “to exercise naked.”⁸

By New Testament times it referred to exercise and training in general. But even then it was, and is, a word with the smell of the gym in it — the sweat of a good workout.

“Gymnasticize (exercise, work out, train) yourself for the purpose of godliness” conveys the feel of what Paul is saying.¹⁰

⁸ Gerhard Kittle, ed., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1968), p. 775.

¹⁰ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed. (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway Books, 2001). 14.

There is no such thing as drifting into godliness; the ‘stream of tendency’ is against us.” There must be **exercise** and effort.¹¹

And Paul’s use of the present tense verb indicates that was to be Timothy’s constant pursuit. Timothy was to train his inner man for godliness.¹²

APPLYING THIS TO GODLINESS

Paul says this “exercise” or “workout” is not that of the physical body but that of one’s mind, emotions, will, the spiritual part of man.

George Knight, says this word is also used figuratively “of mental and spiritual powers” in extrabiblical literature, as here and consistently

¹¹ William MacDonald and Arthur Farstad, *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1997). 1 Ti 4:7.

¹² John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995). 1 Ti 4:8.

in the NT (The Pastoral Epistles: a commentary on the Greek text). 197.

When he says “for the purpose of” that means “with a view to.”

Just as a Greek athlete would exercise with a view to winning in the athletic contests, so Timothy is exhorted to exercise with a view to excelling in godliness.¹³

You might already be asking, “What is godliness?”

Godliness (eusebeia) is a right attitude and response toward the true Creator God...[It is] a preoccupation from the heart with holy and

¹³ Kenneth S. Wuest, *Wuest's Word Studies from the Greek New Testament : For the English Reader* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997). 1 Ti 4:7.

sacred realities. It is respect for what is due to God.¹⁴

John Calvin says, "By the word godliness, he means the spiritual worship of God which consists in purity of conscience."

We'll say more about this later but let's suffice it to say that when Paul says to Timothy to train himself in godliness, this spiritual self-discipline is the path to godly living¹⁵ and the pursuit of the highest virtue a Christian can pursue.

So how does that flesh out in our daily walk?

Let's answer that question and see what the Scripture says about...

¹⁴ John MacArthur, *1 Timothy* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995). 1 Ti 4:8.

¹⁵ John Jr MacArthur, *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville: Word Pub., 1997). 1 Ti 4:7.

LIVING IT EACH DAY

First, it means we have the right belief and obedient action.

We do not subscribe to “worldly fables” (1 Tim. 4:7) or “strange doctrines” (1 Tim.1:3) and “endless genealogies” (1 Tim.1:3) but to “sound doctrine” (Tit.2:1).

That is, healthy teaching about God, Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, salvation, hell, heaven, godly living and so forth.

When Paul wrote to Titus about “sound doctrine,” he told him to “speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine.”

And what was he to “speak”?

The rest of Titus chapter 2.

Listen to what it says:

Titus 2:1-15: “But as for you, speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine. Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance. Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored. Likewise urge the young men to be sensible; in all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach, so that the opponent will be put to shame, having nothing bad to say about us. Urge bondslaves to be subject to their own masters in everything, to be well-pleasing, not

argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith so that they will adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in every respect. For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, instructing us to deny ungodliness and worldly desires and to live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age, looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession, zealous for good deeds. These things speak and exhort and reprove with all authority. Let no one disregard you.”

The phrase “sound teaching” appears in both the Old and New Testament.

In Proverbs 4:2, Solomon tells his son, “For I give you *sound teaching*; Do not abandon my instruction.”

What did “sound teaching” refer to in this passage?

Obeying your parents, getting wisdom, not following after wicked people, watching over your heart!

You could include everything before chapter 4, which would include fearing the Lord, not being enticed by sinners, following after wisdom, trusting God.

You could also include his instruction in chapters 5 & 6: avoiding the sensual woman, and hating the things God hates.

Back in 1 Timothy, when Paul mentions “sound doctrine,” he says that it is anything contrary to the gospel, like lawlessness, rebellion, ungodliness, unholiness, murder, immorality, homosexuality, kidnapping, lying, perjury” and

“whatever else is contrary to sound teaching, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, with which I have been entrusted” (1:9-10).

When he uses the word with Titus, it includes “older men” being “temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance” (v.1), “older women” being “reverent in behavior, not malicious gossips, not enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good” (2:1), “young women” loving “their husbands...their children...[being] sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands” (vv.3-4), “young men” being “sensible” (v.6), Titus, “showing [himself] to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified, sound in speech which is beyond reproach” (v.8), “bondslaves” being “subject to their own masters in everything, to

be well-pleasing, not argumentative, not pilfering, but showing all good faith” (vv.9-10).

So living it each day means we have the right belief and obedient action.

Next, we could say it means you “do [your] best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men” (Acts 24:16).

That’s what Paul said as he stood before Felix answering the charges the Jews brought against him in his preaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

In 1 Timothy 1:5, Paul said to Timothy that “the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

In verse 19, he told him to keep “the faith and a good conscience.”

You might be asking, “What does Paul mean when he speaks about the conscience?”

Is it the voice of God or the Holy Spirit?

No, it is that human faculty that “entreats us to do what we believe is right and restrains us from doing what we believe is wrong.”

The conscience “judges our actions and thoughts by the light of the highest standard we perceive.

When we violate our conscience, it condemns us, triggering feelings of shame, anguish, regret, consternation, anxiety, disgrace, and even fear.

When we follow our conscience, it commends us, bringing joy, serenity, self-respect, well-being, and gladness.”¹⁶

Having a “good conscience” or a “blameless conscience” means having a “tender heart” (2 Chron.34:27) or being “upright in heart” (Ps. 7:10).

When David prayed, “Create in me a clean heart, O God” (Ps.51:10), he was seeking to have his life and his conscience cleansed.

He wasn’t trying to suppress, overrule, or silence his conscience.

He wasn’t trying to say the real blame for his wrong behavior lies in some childhood trauma, the way his parents raised him, societal

¹⁶ John MacArthur, F., Jr, *The Vanishing Conscience*, Electronic ed., Logos Library Systems (Dallas: Word Pub., 1994).

pressures, or some other cause beyond his control.

Nor was he trying to convince himself that his sin was a clinical problem, not a moral one.

He didn't call his sin of murdering Uriah a disease or his adultery a disorder.

No, he called it what it was---sin, sin against God!

So we need to train ourselves to be godly.

That means we have the right belief and obedient action.

We have a good and blameless conscience before God and men.

It means, we “live godly” (2 Tim.3:12).

It means, we “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and...live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age” (Tit.2:12).

It means we not “love the world [or] the things in the world” (1 Jn.2:15).

Or as John Gill says, "And exercise thyself rather unto godliness; either to the doctrines which are according to godliness, and tend to godly edification, which the above fables did not, study these, meditate on them, digest them, and deliver them to others; or to a godly life and conversation, exercise thyself, to have a conscience void of offense to God and men; or to internal religion, inward godliness, the exercise of the graces of faith, hope, love, fear, reverence, humility."

CONCLUSION

Before we close, I want to direct your attention to 2 Timothy chapter 2.

This is a parallel to what Paul is saying here in 1 Timothy 4:7.

2 Timothy 2 says, "You therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. 2 The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also. 3 Suffer hardship with me, as a good soldier of Christ Jesus. 4 No soldier in active service entangles himself in the affairs of everyday life, so that he may please the one who enlisted him as a soldier. 5 Also if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not win the prize unless[+] he competes according to the rules. 6 The hard-working farmer ought to be the first to

receive his share of the crops. 7 Consider what I say, for the Lord will give you understanding in everything. 8 Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead, descendant of David, according to my gospel, 9 for which I suffer hardship even to imprisonment as a criminal; but the word of God is not imprisoned. 10 For this reason I endure all things for the sake of those who are chosen, so that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus and with it eternal glory. 11 It is a trustworthy statement: For if we died with Him, we will also live with Him; 12 If we endure, we will also reign with Him; If we deny Him, He also will deny us; 13 If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself. 14 Remind them of these things, and solemnly charge them in the presence of God not to wrangle about words, which is useless and leads to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not

need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth. 16 But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, 17 and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, 18 men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and they upset the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless, the firm foundation of God stands, having this seal, "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Everyone who names the name of the Lord is to abstain from wickedness." 20 Now in a large house there are not only gold and silver vessels, but also vessels of wood and of earthenware, and some to honor and some to dishonor. 21 Therefore, if anyone cleanses himself from these things, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the

Lord from a pure heart. 23 But refuse foolish and ignorant speculations, knowing that they produce quarrels. 24 The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, 25 with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, 26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will."

Can you honestly say this describes your life?

Are you training yourself to be godly?

Are you putting off everything that would hinder your walk with Christ?

That is not only referring to things that are sinful but also things that are unprofitable.

I'll close with Paul's words to the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27:

He says, "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things. They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

Run that you may receive the prize!

Discipline your body and make it your slave!

Train yourself to be godly! Let's pray.

LIFE APPLICATION

What are you doing to train yourself to be godly?

How are you discipling your body to be your slave rather than you being a slave to your body?