

STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

SETTING A GODLY EXAMPLE II

Read 1 Timothy 4:7-16

Introduction.

Verse 6 commanded Timothy to prepare himself, and his church, to defend the truth against false teachings. Here, Paul continues to offer practical advice on how to do this most effectively. Paul has previously referred to "myths," as in 1 Timothy 1:4. These superstitions also include the Gnostic heresies mentioned in verses 1 through 5. There, Paul discussed those who condemned certain foods and marriage. These falsehoods are "irreverent," from the Greek term "*bebēlous*", literally meaning "unholy or profane."

Not only are these errors spiritually false, but they are also ignorant. Paul calls them "*graōdeis*", which literally means "old woman-ish." In the culture of that day, superstition and gossip were rampant. Today, we refer to a superstitious myth as an "old wives' tale," and this is a similar sense of what Paul is saying here. The claims about God which Timothy needs to avoid are "silly unreliable hearsay which does not honour God".

Train Yourself in Godliness

"But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come." (vv7-8)

Reject profane and old wives' fables: The priority must be on God's Word, not on the words of man. Paul cautioned Timothy to keep focused on the Word, not on things that come from man. The greatest effort must be put into God's Word, not man's word.

Reject profane and old wives' fables: This is the negative aspect of the command. In the positive aspect, the priority must be kept on eternal things, not temporal things.

Exercise yourself toward godliness: Ancient Greek and Roman culture put a high value on physical exercise. Paul tells Timothy that the same work and commitment that others put towards physical exercise should be put toward the pursuit of godliness.

The word godliness comes from the old English word Godlikeness; it means to have the character and attitude of God. This was a worthy goal, much more worthy than the potential attainments of physical exercise. Bodily exercise profits a little in that it has some value. Or the idea can be translated bodily exercise is good for a while, while exercising unto godliness is good for all eternity. Spiritual development and physical development share some similarities. With each, growth only comes with exertion and proper feeding.

Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is: Paul here explains the value of godliness, both in the present sense and its eternal sense. Godliness makes the life that now is better, and we should not hesitate to believe it and to tell people this. Though godliness does not make this life the most comfortable, or richest, or most pleasurable, or easiest in the life that now is, it undeniably makes it the best, the most contented, and the most fulfilling life one can live in this world.

And of that which is to come: At the same time, godliness is the only guarantee of a profitable life which is to come. There are many pleasures or achievements in this world that do not even pretend to offer anything for the life which is to come. Only godliness is the path to eternal life and happiness.

- Sin and vice offer nothing for the life to come.
- Genealogies and pedigrees offer nothing for the life to come.
- Worldly success and wealth offer nothing for the life to come.
- Personal fame or beauty offer nothing for the life to come.
- Achievements in learning or the arts offer nothing for the life to come.

The Savior of All Who Believe

“This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For to this end, we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. These things command and teach.” (vv9-11)

This is to be the great motto of the Christian life – trusting in the living God. Even as David challenged Goliath in the name of the living God (1 Samuel 17:26 and 36), so our trust in the living God empowers us to accomplish great things for His glory.

“The Savior of all men” emphasizes the idea that the priority must be kept on the message of Jesus Christ. It isn’t that all men are saved in a Universalist sense; but that there is only one Savior for all men. It isn’t as if Christians have one Savior and others might have another saviour. But notice Paul’s point: especially of those who believe. Jesus’ work is adequate to save all, but only effective in saving those who come to Him by faith.

These things command...

This has the note of authority. Timothy was not to enter the pulpit with speculations and opinions and theories of men. He was to fearlessly proclaim God’s Word as a command and not give into the fear of man.

Pursue Godliness

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.” (vv12-16)

Because Timothy was young, he was vulnerable to the errors of youth which bring the often-justified criticism of those older. To address this, Paul called him to live a life that was so godly that no one could despise his youth. The word youth in the ancient Greek was “Used of grown-up military age, extending to the 40th year”. It seems that Timothy was about 30 years old at this time; but Paul was around 70, and youth is a relative thing.

Be an example to the believers: The King James Version has “*be thou an example of the believers*”. Some believe this is a more accurate translation, with the idea being that Timothy was to be the best representation possible of the Christian community.

This meant that Timothy, and every godly servant of God, should be an example:

- In what they say (word).
- In what they do (conduct).
- In their love.
- In their attitude (spirit).
- In their faith (in the sense of faithfulness).
- In their purity.

These are the criteria by which to assess a pastor. If he is smart, if he is funny, if he is cool, if he dresses well, if he is popular, or if he is any number of other things matter little. You must look for a pastor who is an example in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Reading... exhortation... doctrine: These are the things that Timothy must give attention to. Each of these things are centred on God's Word. He must give attention to these things in both his private life and in his public ministry.

Do not neglect the gift that is in you: Timothy was warned to not neglect the gift that God has given. This shows that there was definitely the possibility that gifts and abilities in him could be wasted for eternity. As with the parable of the talents, we should not bury what abilities God has given.

Gift is *charismatos* in the ancient Greek of the New Testament, and it refers to the varying spiritual gifts given to Timothy and to all believers. Do not neglect the gift has the idea that God gave Timothy supernatural gifts, and he should trust that God will do great things through him — learning to flow with the moving and leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul may have in mind Timothy's ordination service, when church leaders laid hands on him and recognized God's call on his life to ministry. This was an event apparently accompanied by prophecy.

Meditate on these things: Paul called Timothy to meditation on God's Word and the work of God in his life. This is not emptying our minds (the goal of Eastern meditation) but filling our minds with God's Word and truth. Timothy was encouraged to give it his all, to put forth a maximum effort, and by doing so, his progress would be evident to all. Often, progress is not evident because we do not give ourselves entirely to the pursuit of God and His will.

Often, we fall short of all we can be for God because we are passive in our Christian life; we simply do not give ourselves entirely. Jesus warned against this passive attitude in the parable of the talents, where the servant who did nothing was severely rebuked.

Paul could say, in 1 Corinthians 15:10: *"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me."* Paul knew spiritual growth didn't just happen; it is the gift of God but bestowed on those who actively pursue it.

At the same time, we are careful to remember that giving our entire effort never earns the blessing or favour of God. Our hard work and heart work never puts God in the place where He owes us something. We give our entire effort out of gratitude and in honour to the God who has already done so much for us. Timothy, and every pastor, must examine constantly the two great areas of concern — one's life and one's doctrine. Failing to do this would mean danger for both Timothy himself and for those in his congregation.

Without giving heed to his life, Timothy might suffer shipwreck (as in 1 Timothy 1:19). Without giving heed to his doctrine, Timothy might lead others astray or leave them short of God's salvation. Those who hear

Timothy as a pastor should be hearing doctrine. Timothy's primary call was not to entertain, amuse, or even help with practical things — it was to present Biblical doctrine, and to give heed to that doctrine.

The benefit from taking heed to one's life and doctrine is remarkable. It is an assurance to the servant of God that they will also be saved, and many of those who hear them. Taken in the opposite, we see that the cost of failing to take heed to one's life and doctrine is high. The one who fails to take heed should feel no great assurance for either their own life or the lives of those who hear them.