

1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10

INTRODUCTION

When we started looking at this chapter we looked at the false teaching that was influencing the church at Ephesus. We saw that part of the teaching prevented people from marrying and it ordered them to abstain from certain types of food. This all came under the name of godliness, if you want to be godly and a pleaser of God then this is what you must do. But Paul has exposed the real source of such teaching; it is demonic and therefore must be rejected.

The way to reject it is to be thankful to God for all that he has created and to use these gifts in a God given way, in a way that is in keeping with His word (vs. 4-5). Paul now continues on this theme of godliness, as he becomes very personal and addresses Timothy directly, rather than the church through Timothy. With so much false teaching about, how is it possible to be godly, how can one counteract such teaching and how can one be a good minister of Christ Jesus?

Well these are just some of the questions that Paul addresses in this little section that we are looking at today. Paul says that if you do certain things then you will counteract the false teachings, you will grow in godliness and you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus (v 6). The word that is translated 'minister' is the word 'servant,' and in our day the word minister is used of Pastors of churches. Although this passage does apply essentially to Pastors and Elders of churches it actually is also addressed to us all; for are we not all servants of Jesus Christ? The word 'good' (v 6) is a word that we have had before in 3:1 where it is translated as 'noble.' If you remember I said that the word could also mean good or excellent. So if you want to be an excellent Pastor or Elder here are some good instructions, or if you want to be an excellent Christian and servant of Jesus then follow this advice.

1. AN EXCELLENT SERVANT OF JESUS WARNS PEOPLE OF ERROR (v 6b)

Paul says that if you point these things out you are proving yourself to be an excellent servant of Christ Jesus. The things that Paul is to point out is what he has just been saying in verses 1-5, Timothy is to warn the church of the danger of such demonic teaching that was being presented in Ephesus. The word that is translated 'point these things out' is a very mild word; it carries the idea to remind or suggest these things.

It is not a case of Paul commanding the church not to follow such false teaching but the idea is one of gentle humble persuasion. Now let me apply this to leadership within the church (Pastors and Elders). While leadership is not to be dominated by negativity, there is a place for warning God's people against false teaching. This can be done from the pulpit, and privately and it must always be done in an attitude of gentleness as we seek to persuade people from the Scriptures not to follow such demonic teachings. This will involve rebuking people, or correcting them and exhorting them to remain true to the Lord. It will involve exposing false teaching from time to time, for so often much of the false teaching that affects the church today is dressed in evangelical clothing and evangelical language.

A good servant will see false teaching for what it is and will gently warn God's people. Remember what Paul said in 2 Timothy 4:1-5. What is true of the leadership must be true to some extent of every Christian who wants to be an excellent servant of Jesus. We must be willing to stick our necks out sometimes and gently warn fellow believers who are getting caught up in some demonic teaching. I must warn you that it will make you unpopular but it is necessary if we are going to be excellent servants.

2. AN EXCELLENT SERVANT WILL BE FEEDING UPON THE SCRIPTURES (v 6c)

The translation in the NIV is not helpful here. "Brought up" is a past tense and gives the wrong impression. What this verse means is constantly nourishing on the words of the faith and good teaching. It is a continuous present tense and the man or woman who wants to be an excellent servant will be someone who is constantly feeding themselves upon the word of God, upon the great doctrines of the Bible and upon solid teaching. Timothy has followed this teaching since childhood, when he first heard it from his Mother and Grandmother, but he could not be complacent; he had to daily feed himself upon God's great truths. Again there is an application here for Pastors and Elders in churches.

We ought to be men of the word; we ought to be daily feeding ourselves spiritually from the word of God. One reason for weak ministry in a church is the lack of study that the preacher puts into his sermons and into his own personal time. There are so many demands upon Pastors and Elders that it is so easy to do so many other things so that study time gets left out. Or for those of us who are in full time ministry it is so easy only to study for our sermons without spending some time on personal study and development especially if your personality is such that to sit at a desk and study for long periods of time is not easy.

But the Pastor and Elder who wants to be an excellent servant must constantly be feeding himself on God's truth. But the danger is perhaps even greater for those of you who are working in a secular job. Life can be so busy, with so many demands upon our time. Before we know it we lay our head on the pillow at night and remember that we have not spent any time reading the word never mind studying it. We must all plan this time into our day, just as you would plan anything else. If you don't, then you will find that you continually fail to find time for study of the word. It does concern me that what once was called the 'quiet time' is not dominate in many professing Christian lives and for some who profess Christianity the only time they read the word is at church.

We must find time to read; it but we must also find time to study it and mediate upon it so that we may grow. If a child fails to eat day after day he will not grow, everyday he needs good nourishment to grow and develop into an adult. So it is in the spiritual realm, growth doesn't come overnight; it takes time, commitment and a desire to learn. If we do discipline our lives in this area then we will become excellent servants of Christ Jesus.

3. AN EXCELLENT SERVANT TRAINS HIMSELF TO BE GODLY (v 7 –9)

Paul says have nothing to do with such false teaching, a teaching that he describes as godless myths and old wives tales (v 7), but instead train yourself to be godly. The false teachers were saying that godliness is found in following their teaching, but Paul says No! Their teaching is nothing but godless myths, but in disregarding their teaching; do not disregard their goal of godliness. You simply cannot be an excellent servant of Jesus and not be godly, but how do we become more godly than we are now? Paul says it takes training or discipline. The word that is used is a word from which we get our word 'gymnasium.' Paul says that every Christian must go to the gym if he is going to be spiritually fit. Greek culture emphasised the need for dedicated training of the body and every city would have its own gymnasium, so Paul under the influence of the Holy Spirit uses such a concept to help Christians see the importance of the spiritual gym.

You don't get fit without discipline and a training programme. It's no good going to the gym one night and then coming home and having fish and chips for supper and then not going back to the gym for another two months. No! Physical fitness takes real discipline and dedication. No one, Pastor, Elder or member of the congregation will ever become godly without the same sort of dedication and training programme.

This programme involves prayer, bible study, witnessing, right priorities, and right use of all the means of grace and so on. We all show some sort of discipline in our lives, it took discipline to get you out of bed and to get here, but perhaps we all need to show even more discipline. Could we have come earlier to attend our short prayer meeting?

Would rising half an hour earlier in the morning give us more time for prayer and study? Would reorganising our free time give us more time to be involved in spiritual activities? The more I go on in my own Christian life the more I am convinced that discipline is the key. Perhaps one reason why we do not grow as much as we should in this age is the fact that discipline is not as much emphasised, as it ought to be. Everything is instant in our society, but godliness is never instant, it takes discipline day in and day out for the rest of our lives.

Discipline involves being prepared to turn the TV off; it involves plodding our way through that Christian book, no matter how difficult reading it might be. It involves making that visit to another Christian for fellowship. It involves making sure we have organised our diary so that we can go to the bible study. It involves making sure that we use our time wisely so that we are not just wasting our time on meaningless pursuits.

Look at the benefits of godliness; the discipline is all worthwhile when we see the benefits. Paul says that there is no doubt that there is some benefit in physical training, but those benefits are limited compared to spiritual training. Physical discipline and training has benefit in this life of ours; but spiritual training has value for all things or in all directions. Spiritual discipline is beneficial for both now and eternity. It gives us eternal life now (quality of life) and it gives us life in heaven (quality and quantity).

This truth is so obvious says Paul that he calls it a trustworthy saying. If you remember a trustworthy saying is something that is self-evident, something that needs no explanation.

I go along with most but not all commentaries here by saying that this trustworthy statement refers to v 8 and not v 10, but you will need to read the commentaries to find out why, as I don't have time and besides it will be good training for your godliness to do so. Therefore are we going to commit ourselves to the training in godliness?

Perhaps some of us have become a little lapse in discipline, our spiritual lives and activities have become a little haphazard, perhaps we need to get back into training, and we need to take our spiritual lives more seriously. If we do then we will see the benefit now in this world but ultimately the pursuit of greater godliness prepares us for the greater blessings of eternity.

4. AN EXCELLENT SERVANT IS COMMITTED TO WORKING HARD TOWARDS GODLINESS (v 10)

It is towards godliness that Paul and Timothy strive. Seeking to live in a Christ like manner for that is what godliness is all about is simply hard work. Yes Salvation is by grace alone, but every Christian is to be disciplined in his walk towards God and prepared to work hard in order to become more holy. The word 'labour' means 'to work to the point of weariness' and the word 'strive' means 'agony' it means to engage in a struggle. We wrestle against the evil one, he is out to get us to become lazy in spiritual things, and he wants to hinder our walk with God he wants us to become less Christ like. Therefore if we are going to grow in grace, we will have to work hard at it, we will labour and strive. Is prayer not hard work? Is serious study of the Word easy? Is living a disciplined Christian life a piece of cake? No! Its hard work, that's why so many of us struggle in all of these areas.

The reason why we labour and strive at godliness is because we have put our hope in the living God who is the Saviour of all men either in the sense that he is kind to all, and preserves life, or he

means all kinds of people. If the second understanding of this verse is right then the last phrase means something like, what I mean is who believe are saved.

If the first way of understanding this verse is right then he is saying he is the Saviour of all people in that He gives and sustains life, but in particular He is the Saviour of all who believe. Salvation in fullest sense is meant here both physical and spiritual. I personally prefer the first interpretation but however we understand it the meaning is clear.

We have trusted Christ with our whole lives, He is our Saviour, He looks after us day by day, He is gracious and kind to us but more importantly He died for us, pardoned us and has set us free from sin and Satan. Therefore our response is one of labouring and striving towards godliness. We will pay the cost of self-discipline in order that we may strive to be more and more godly.

May God by his grace help us as we strive towards godliness?

Amen