

Train Yourself for Godliness

Scripture: I Timothy 4:6-10

Sermon Series: Timothy's Charge

Topic: Godliness

Introduction

Review

Paul has explained the purpose for which he wrote this letter in 3:15—so that everyone in the church will know how they ought to behave. Paul again warned Timothy of the danger of false teachings and the demonic spirits that stand behind them. Now, he addresses Timothy personally and calls him to a faithful, disciplined, and godly lifestyle.

Preview

Today we will think about godliness and how to grow in it. We will define it and then consider four ways Paul encourages Timothy to grow in godliness. The invitation is for us to receive these words as if they were written to us. These words have been embraced by the church because in them the church heard the voice of Jesus, calling his people to follow him.

Train Yourself for Godliness

The main point of this paragraph is found near the center of the paragraph, in v.7. Paul commands Timothy to “*train yourself for godliness.*” The word ‘train’ is γυμνάζω (*gymnazō*) from which we have our word gymnasium. The word means ‘to exercise the body (often naked), with disciplined training and practice.’ Biblical authors have applied the word to mental and spiritual training. We find the word in only two other places.



But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained (*gymnazō*) by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.
Hebrews 5:14 (ESV)

For the moment all discipline seems painful rather than pleasant, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained (*gymnazō*) by it.
Hebrews 12:11 (ESV)

The kind of training about which Paul is speaking is both the mental and spiritual exercise of doing and preferring good over evil. It is putting oneself into a religious regime of spiritual strength training. The aim of this training is **godliness**.

The word '**godliness**' is εὐσέβεια (eusebeia). The secular Greek usage of the word referred to a right and reverent attitudes and actions toward the gods.¹ Paul uses this word often in writing his Pastoral Epistles.² In the NT the word is often simply translated as '**piety**.'³ When Christians used the word it essentially referred to "a life totally consecrated to God, carrying an emphasis on the observable aspects of this type of life."⁴ Our working definition of godliness will be,

Possessing true knowledge of God, flowing from a real relationship with Christ through his indwelling Holy Spirit, that results in a powerful, inner devotion to Jesus demonstrated through reverent and righteous outward behavior.

Or more briefly,

Christlike living that flows from knowing, revering, trusting, and obeying God and his word through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Paul offers four ways to train for godliness.

1) Be Nourished in Faithful Words and Good Doctrine

First, he mentions spiritual nourishment of faithful words and good doctrine.

⁶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed.
1 Timothy 4:6 (ESV)

If you put these things before the brothers. This refers to Timothy's role as a teacher, preacher, and overseer of the church, which is what Paul had "**charged**" (1:3, 5, 18) him to do. "**These things**" may specifically refer back to preceding paragraph, but since the tone has now shifted more toward a summary nature—and Paul repeats the phrase in v.11—it certainly includes everything that Paul has thus far written and instructed in the letter. All that he has taught up to this point are the "**things**" Timothy is to "**put before the brothers.**"

¹ Werner Foerster, "Σέβομαι, Σεβάζομαι, Σέβασμα, Σεβαστός, Εὐσεβής, Εὐσέβεια, Εὐσεβέω, Ἀσεβής, Ἀσέβεια, Ἀσεβέω, Σεμνός, Σεμνότης," in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. Gerhard Kittel, Geoffrey W. Bromiley, and Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1964–), 176.

² He uses the word 10 times in this epistle and a total 12 times in the Pastoral Epistles.

³ As in Acts 3:12 where Peter said, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this [i.e. healing of the lame beggar] or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety (εὐσέβεια) we have made him walk?"

⁴ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 251.

This is the language Paul always uses to refer to the church, which is another reminder that the truth and instruction given in this letter are not exclusively for the church in Ephesus alone, but rather are for the churches of Jesus *"in everyplace"* (2:8).

The word for *'brothers'* (ἀδελφός *adelphos*) "is common for members of the same group, especially religious group."⁵ The word also refers to all siblings who are members of the same family, thus it means both brothers and sisters. It refers "to all the members of the church who are threatened by the heresy."⁶

It also means that although Timothy has been charged by Paul to exercise pastoral oversight and authority over and in this church—by guarding the doctrine and confronting the these false teachers—, yet he is to think of himself and act as a *brother*, as a fellow member of this spiritual family, and not as a lord or master over them. This reminds of our the words of the Lord Jesus, who said, *"Whoever would be great among you must be your servant* (διάκονος *diakonos*)."⁷ (Mt 20:26). And this is exactly what Paul writes in the next clause.

You will be a good servant of Christ Jesus. The word servant here is the word διάκονος (*diakonos*) which is the word used for 'deacon' (3:8). If Timothy teaches *"these things"* then he will be a "good deacon of Christ Jesus." As we saw when we considered 3:8-13, there is a broad and narrow use of the word 'deacon' in the NT. The narrow use refers to the office of deacon in the church, while the broader use of the word is sometimes translated as 'minister' or 'servant,' as in 1 Cor 3:5 where Paul refers to both himself and Apollos as 'deacons,' which is translated there as *"servants."*

Being trained in the words of faith and the good doctrine that you have followed. The word translated *'trained'* (ἐντρέφω *entrephō*) is found only here in the NT. This is not the same word as the word translated 'train' in v.7. The word means, "to bring up, rear, train in, to nourish on."⁷ The "related word *trephō* (to feed) occurs twenty-two times. Philo uses it nineteen times, frequently with the sense of the intellect or soul being "nourished" by resources coming from God."⁸ For this reason, many translations have have chosen to translated the word as 'nourished' (KJV, NASB, YLT, NRSV). This may be the better translation since what Paul is saying to Timothy is that, not only is he to teach the *"words of the faith and good doctrine"* to the church, but he himself is to "feed on" and *"follow"* these same faithful words and this same good doctrine. He is to apply the word of Christ to his own life and himself obey the commands of Jesus as he puts these commands before the people. The verb is a present participle, thus Paul is not referring to any past action, but rather to continual present state of affairs. Paul wants Timothy to practice what he preaches and himself feed on Christ's teaching.

⁵ I. Howard Marshall and Philip H. Towner, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Pastoral Epistles*, International Critical Commentary (London; New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), 548.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid., 549.

⁸ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 237 footnote 532.

He must nourish his own soul on faithful words and good doctrine before nourishing the soul of the church.

Nourishment of Faithful Words & Good Doctrine

Consider the nourishment and good doctrine found in just a few verses from Psalm 119.

¹ Blessed are those whose way is blameless,
who walk in the law of the LORD!

⁶ They will not be put to shame,

¹¹ I have stored up your word in my heart,
that I might not sin against you.

¹⁴ In the way of your testimonies I delight
as much as in all riches.

¹⁵ I will meditate on your precepts

¹⁶ I will not forget your word.

¹⁸ Open my eyes, that I may behold
wondrous things out of your law.

²⁷ Make me understand the way of your precepts,
and I will meditate on your wondrous works.

³⁶ Incline my heart to your testimonies,
and not to selfish gain!

³⁷ Turn my eyes from looking at worthless things;
and give me life in your ways.

⁴² then shall I have an answer for him who taunts me,
for I trust in your word.

⁴³ my hope is in your rules.

⁶² At midnight I rise to praise you,
because of your righteous rules.

⁶⁶ Teach me good judgment and knowledge,
for I believe in your commandments.

⁶⁸ You are good and do good;

teach me your statutes.

⁷³ Your hands have made and fashioned me;
give me understanding that I may learn your commandments.

¹⁰³ How sweet are your words to my taste,
sweeter than honey to my mouth!

¹⁰⁵ Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.

¹¹⁴ You are my hiding place and my shield;
I hope in your word.

¹²⁵ I am your servant; give me understanding,
that I may know your testimonies!

¹²⁷ Therefore I love your commandments
above gold, above fine gold.

¹⁵¹ But you are near, O LORD,
and all your commandments are true.

¹⁶⁰ The sum of your word is truth,
and every one of your righteous rules endures forever.

This is food for the soul. This is nourishment for spiritual strength. This is truth. This is good doctrine that will guide, strengthen, sustain, and teach you. Nourish your soul on the word of God, upon the faithful words, and the good teaching of Jesus and his appointed apostles!

2) Avoid Myths

Next on Paul's mind is what to avoid. Training in godliness means staying away from some things. After instructing Timothy upon the source of nourishment, he thinks of things to stay away from. As we all know, any good training regime not only includes things you ought *to* do, but also includes what you ought *not* to do.

⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.
1 Timothy 4:7 (ESV)

Have nothing to do with. This is strong language. Clearly this is an authoritative command. Paul wants Timothy to completely stay away from something. Whatever this is, Paul views it as truly dangerous to spiritual progress. He mentions two things; *irreverent* and *silly myths*. Paul

has already mentioned myths once at the beginning of his letter (1:4), but now he mentions this again. This describes the doctrine of the false teachers who are plaguing the Ephesian church. The attention by these false teachers to unhistorical and untrue myths must have been exceedingly problematic for Paul to repeat this prohibition. This was a serious problem in this church and in the lives of these believers.

Irreverent. The word means is βέβηλος (*bebēlos*) and means “profane; worldly, godless.”⁹ It makes complete sense that if one is to train oneself in godliness, then one should completely avoid that which is godless. If one aims to be godly, then one should “have nothing to do” with what is ungodly.

Silly translates the γράωδης (*graōdēs*) which literally means, “characteristic of old women —‘like old women say, like old women do.’”¹⁰ In this context it refers to false stories told by gossipy old women who have nothing better to do than prattle on about meaningless nonsense. This “idea is a common sarcastic expression in philosophical argumentation.”¹¹

Paul’s point is clear. If Timothy is to train himself for godliness, then he must avoid and reject ungodly talk. The Christian who would train himself or herself in godliness, but have nothing to do with profanity or worldly talk. If you want to be a godly person, then do not engage in or listen to godless, profane, irreverent talk.

3) The Value of Godliness

The third point in training for godliness involves seeing the value of godliness. No one will endeavor to be godly if it is not seen to be valuable. Thus, Paul uses an everyday analogy to illustrate the value of godliness.

⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1 Timothy 4:8 (ESV)

Bodily training is of some value. Paul picks up an idea that everyone can relate to. Everyone knows that physical exercise is good. It is of “**some value**.” And those who exercise know that physical exercise requires exertion and effort. Physical training is hard work. The older you get the harder it gets. And physical training only profits for a little while. The body does not last forever, while the soul does. If we think about and plan for physical fitness, then should we not

⁹ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 754.

¹⁰ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 108.

¹¹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 251.

think about and plan for spiritual fitness? Of course we should. The wise person will. This leads us to godliness.

Godliness is of value in every way. Godliness is a spiritual quality. Godliness is a characteristic of the soul. The soul endures forever, therefore the wise person will not fail to consider that part of herself that will last forever. If it is wise to care for the body, which only lasts—if we're fortunate—for 70 or 80 years, then how better is it to care for the soul, which lasts forever? Paul argues that godliness is not only valuable for the future, but also for the present. "Godliness holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come."

1. *Promise for the present life.* Paul addresses the value of godliness later in this letter.

⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain, ⁷ for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content. ⁹ But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation, into a snare, into many senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction. 1 Timothy 6:6-9 (ESV)

Paul connects godliness with contentment, saying that it brings about "*great gain*" in the present time. Godliness brings contentment. Contentment is being satisfied with all that one has rather than bemoaning all that one does not have. Contentment is thanking God for all that he has given you, while discontentment can lead to anger at God for not giving that which one thinks he or she deserves. Constantly focusing on all that one does not have will lead a way into the trap of senseless and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

The Trap of Discontentment (Optional)

The trap of discontentment involves the misconception that God owes you something or a certain way of life. The truth is that God owes no human being anything. Sin has robbed humanity collectively and each of us individually from all rights, except the right to his eternal judgment. The "*wages of sin is death*" (Rom 3:23). We are all sinners and truly all we justly deserve is death. But because God is gracious and merciful and does not immediately put to death every sinner, we mistakenly think that we are good and that we deserve good things. The truth according to Jesus is, "*There is none good but God alone*" (Mk 10:18).¹² And when we don't get them, we are angry at God. We all think more highly of ourselves than we should. But we are missing important information. If had accurate information, then we would think more accurately about ourselves.

I recently went swimming and my watch recorded my swim as a "workout." After I finished swimming I received a celebratory notification declaring that I just set a

¹² Romans 3:10.

new personal record for swimming my longest distance. It was not a new personal record. I'd been swimming many times, but I had never been worn my watch. So while my watch thought I was amazing for setting a new personal record, the truth is that it was simply the first time I recorded a swim workout and the distance I swam was not noteworthy at all.

We are like my watch. We think we're amazing. But we do so mistakenly. I'm not amazing because I'm a sinner. Truly I do not deserve one single day of life. All I do deserve is to be eternally separated from God. What is amazing is that God has chosen to be gracious to me. He has given me far more than I deserve.

I have food and clothes and a roof over my head with these I will be content. I will not be discontent because I buy my food at Market Basket rather than Whole Foods. I will not be discontent because I buy my clothes at Kohls rather than Macy's. I will not be discontent because my house is in Woburn rather than Beacon Hill or Back Bay.

Godliness can bring great gain in this life, for it leads to contentment. Godliness can also bring many other blessings in this present life, such as, sweeter communion with the Father, the blessing of a clean conscience, the peace of knowing that you are living in a way that pleases the Father, and the encouragement of knowing that you are never alone. More could be added, but perhaps this will suffice.

2. *Promise for the life to come*. There is also value to godliness for the future. Those who now live like Christ will in the future be rewarded like Christ. Godly living now, according to Jesus, is like *"laying up treasure for yourself in heaven"* (Mt 6:19-20).

Do you see the value of godliness? Godliness is valuable in every way. It is valuable for this present life and it is most valuable for the life to come.

4) Hope in God Who Saves

Finally, the last portion of training for godliness is setting your hope on the living God.

¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

1 Timothy 4:10 (ESV)

Paul describes godliness as a means to an end. Godliness is the means to eternal life. Therefore he says, *"to this end we toil and strive."* Godliness is a necessary evidence of salvation. Recall what the author Hebrews teaches us.

Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord. Hebrews 12:14 (ESV)

Godliness and holiness are synonyms. Personal holiness is required of all who are truly followers of Jesus. The *toiling and striving* being called for in the Christian life is not a work to earn salvation, but rather the work of fighting against the sin that so easily entangles us. Christians do not fight to earn the gift of the Holy Spirit, but rather because we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit, we fight to be holy, like our Savior is holy. We, like little children, must toil and strive to be like our Father. Because He is holy, we too are called to be holy.

And we can have great confidence that we will win this fight, because on Him "*we have set our hope*." Jesus is living. Jesus toiled and strove against sin in this life and he overcame! He for forty days in the wilderness fought against Satan and every temptation that the daily threw at him, and he never sinned. Jesus, for about 33 years fought the daily temptations that every person faces, and he never sinned. Therefore, on him "we have set our hope" because he demonstrate that a holy life is far better and more satisfying than any sin. We hope in Jesus who is the Savior all people!

This verse does not teach universalism, which is the doctrine that all people will be saved in the end. Paul¹³ and Jesus both teach that in the final judgment these who have faith in Christ will be given eternal life with him in heaven and those who have refused to surrender to Jesus will endure eternal punishment in hell. Jesus is unquestionably clear on this point. When the unrighteousness are separated from the righteous at the final judgment, they each have two distinct eternal destinies.

"And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."
Matthew 25:46 (ESV)

Just as heaven is the eternal abode of those who set their hope on Jesus, so hell is the eternal abode of those who refuse to hope in him.

So what is Paul saying here? As we saw back in chapter 2, there are evidently some among the false teachers who were saying that there were some kinds and classes of people whom God would not save, but Paul denied this, saying that God desired all kinds and classes of people to be saved. So it may be that Paul is saying that God is "the Savior of all [kinds] of people, *namely* those who believe." The word translated 'especially' can also be translated 'namely.'¹⁴

Conclusion

Let us consider how to train ourselves for godliness.

1. ***Spiritual nourishment comes from the word of God.*** Are you feeding on the word of God? Are you regularly "eating" faithful words and good doctrine?

¹³ Romans 2:5 (ESV) But because of your hard and impenitent heart you are storing up wrath for yourself on the day of wrath when God's righteous judgment will be revealed.

¹⁴ See ESV footnote at 4:10.

2. ***Have nothing to do with irreverent, untrue teaching.*** There are some things we ought to have nothing to do with. What needs to be removed from your life? What do you need to stop listening to or watching?
3. ***Spiritual strength comes from spiritual effort.*** In the same way that physical strength and endurance requires planning, exercise, and consistency, so does spiritual growth.
4. ***Growth in godliness is possible.*** You can grow to become more like Christ. It is possible to have your mind and heart shaped into the mind of Christ and the heart of Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. What is the main idea of this passage? How would you explain it to a coworker?
2. How would you define godliness?
3. What is the "trustworthy saying" in this paragraph?
4. What stands out to you most about Paul's command to "train yourself for godliness"? Why do you think spiritual growth requires intentional effort?
5. What are some common "irreverent myths" or distractions that compete with biblical truth in the modern church?
6. How would you explain the difference between legalism and gospel-driven obedience?
7. Why do you think Paul compares godliness to physical training? What similarities exist between the two?
8. What spiritual disciplines have most helped you grow in godliness? Which ones do you struggle to maintain?
9. How does 1 Timothy 4:8 correct both a prosperity gospel mindset and an overly pessimistic view of the Christian life?
10. What are some specific ways godliness benefits believers in "this present life"?
11. Why is contentment such a difficult virtue in our culture? How does godliness produce contentment?
12. How does the hope of eternal life motivate present obedience and endurance?
13. What is one practical step you could take this week to "train yourself for godliness"?