

* The Heights Baptist Church * Series: 1 Timothy: Instructions for the Church *
* Topic: Watch Your Life and Doctrine Closely * Scripture: 1 Timothy 4 * 5/26/24 *

MAIN POINT

As Christians, we are to watch our lives and our doctrine closely.

INTRODUCTION

What is an interest or hobby you have maintained for years? What keeps you interested so long?

In 1 Timothy 4:16, Paul told Timothy, “Watch your life and doctrine closely.” Some churches may emphasize one of these qualities while neglecting the other. And people may tend to separate them from each other, with sayings such as “He’s so heavenly that he’s of no earthly good.” Why are both of these qualities so important, and how should they work together?

1 Timothy is a letter written by the apostle Paul to Timothy, who was a church leader at Ephesus. Paul is giving direction to Timothy on how best to lead the church. Paul has emphasized the importance of holding on to the true faith while opposing false doctrine in the church, instructions for proper worship, and the qualifications for church leaders. Today, we will be considering the importance of persevering in both the way we live our lives and the depth of our knowledge of the Bible as Christians.

UNDERSTANDING

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

False teachings can go to two extremes. One is the idea that God is love, so I can sin all I want and he will still accept me as I am. This denies the fact that God is holy and a righteous judge who hates sin. This false doctrine is taught and embraced in Unitarian Universalist cults. The other extreme teaches that we need to earn salvation and grow as believers through good works. This false doctrine is taught by the Mormon cult. They mention salvation by faith in Christ, but they also require following the commandments of the Mormon “church” and the practice of good works to actually achieve salvation. The false teaching that Paul is combating in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 was more related to this second heresy, and was an early form of asceticism, which taught that a person could attain a high spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial.

How does forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods contradict the gospel (verse 3)? How do verses 4-5 demonstrate the error of forbidding these things?

One false teaching is to take things God created as good and declare them sinful. Some churches attempt to do this with things like food, sex, or music. All of these things are good when used the way God intends. When we misuse them, it is sinful, not because these things are sinful, but because our hearts are sinful. Any attempt to claim that people must abstain from certain things God created good misses two important truths of the gospel: that sin originates in the human heart and that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

What do you think it means that these false teachers’ consciences have been seared, as with a hot iron, and how can we prevent reaching this state as Christians?

Our consciences are designed to help us discern right from wrong. We have all heard of the saying, “Let your conscience be your guide.” The problem is our consciences can be corrupted by what we allow into our lives. We read here of a seared conscience, which has been deadened by continual neglect. The Bible also mentions a corrupted conscience (Tit. 1:15), a weak (over-sensitive) conscience (1 Cor. 8:7), a defiled conscience (1 Cor. 8:7), and both a clear conscience (1 Pet. 3:16) and a good conscience (1 Tim. 1:19).

So, whatever we allow into our lives that shapes our values can alter our conscience. And any time we ignore our consciences, we alter it. Here is another reason to strive to allow God’s word to shape us.

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10

What kinds of teaching would be examples of “godless myths and old wives’ tales (verse 7)?

Worldly philosophy, psychology, and “origins science” would fall under these categories. Think Freud, Marx, Darwin, etc.

We’ve seen that knowledge of the Bible is essential for us to be able to recognize and reject false teachings. How does it also relate to training ourselves to be godly?

When Jesus prayed for his disciples, he prayed, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth” (John 17:17). God’s word is an essential part of our sanctification process.

What point is Paul making by comparing the practice of godliness to physical training?

Note to study leader: The King James translation of verse 8 says, “For bodily exercise profiteth little...” This comes across differently than other translations such as ESV which says, “For while bodily training is of some value...” This issue here isn’t that either version translated the verse improperly. Our language has changed over the years. Literally, the verse reads, “bodily discipline only of little is profit...” So, the verse isn’t saying eating right and exercising has no value. These things have some value, but godliness is of much greater value, since it is profitable for this life and also for the life to come.

The word Paul used for “train” describes an athlete’s rigorous workouts. The tense of the Greek word indicates that getting in shape and staying in shape spiritually was to be Timothy’s constant pursuit. Picture here an athlete giving great effort and energy to train for a future contest. This is how God’s people are to work hard at spiritual development. Clearly, one’s maturing in godliness calls for hard work. Our initial salvation was a gift from God, but we must apply the energy Christ gives us to pursue God’s purposes.

How does this analogy provide balance to the previous verses about not adding works to the gospel?

How might having our hope set on God help us endure when spiritual growth becomes difficult?

What are some practical ways we could devote ourselves to training for godliness?

Paul challenged Timothy to faithfully teach the Bible as a means of “being trained in the words of the faith” (v. 6). Toward the end of chapter 4, Paul challenged Timothy to devote himself “to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching.” This tells us that studying the Bible is one of the most important means God has given us by which we can grow in our relationship with Him. It is very difficult to grow in your relationship with someone if you do not get to know them and the most reliable way God has given us to know Him is through His Word. God has also given us prayer (Col. 4:2) and the church as means of growing in our relationship with Him (Heb. 10:25).

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-14

Why might Timothy’s youthfulness have been a hinderance to his leadership in the church?

The longer people have been walking with Christ, the more the sanctification process will develop them spiritually, and the more knowledge of the Bible they will gain. But we all grow at different rates, and God equips us by his grace to perform whatever task he calls us to. Some people may not have been willing to acknowledge Timothy was ordained by God and the leaders of the church for this task.

Immediately after telling Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young”, Paul followed this up with the word “but...”. How did the counsel in the second half of verse 12 tell Timothy how he could help people realize it would be wrong to look down on him because of his age?

People can develop spiritual maturity at a young age, and they can remain immature for the rest of their lives if they aren't diligent in their walk with Christ (Heb. 5:11-14). Paul wanted Timothy to remember the real issue at hand: Christian leadership and discipleship are not so much based on how old they are, or even for how many years they had been a Christian. Much more importantly, how intimate is the person's walk with Christ as they put on the new nature, and put off the old? And Timothy could help the church realize it based on external evidence for his walk with Christ, and his knowledge of the Bible.

What does it look like to set an example in speech? In life? In love? In faith? In purity?

Paul stressed to Timothy that no one should despise his youth. In his selfless courage on behalf of his people, Timothy must take the initiative and set an example for other believers to follow both in word and deed. Paul encouraged others to imitate him just as he imitated Christ (1 Cor. 11:1).

APPLICATION

ASK A VOLUNTEER TO READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:15-16

What additional instruction did Paul give Timothy in these verses about continuing to grow as a disciple and a leader?

Paul taught Timothy that he should show progress in his walk with Christ, and that this progress should be evident to all (v. 15). The goal is not to bring glory to self, but glory to God. The word translated "progress" was used to describe an advancing military force. This progress happens through the study and application of Scripture (vs. 1) and using your spiritual gift to serve the church (vs. 14).

In Colossians 1:29, Paul said, "To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me." How does this verse help us understand how we should harmonize Paul's instructions earlier in 1 Timothy 4 not to add works to grace with his directions to train ourselves, to be diligent, and to persevere in our spiritual growth?

Grace should motivate us to actively develop our walk with Christ through the strength he provides, without falling into a works-based religion, and without becoming lazy and squandering our life.

What are some practical ways we could devote ourselves to growing as disciples?

Paul challenged Timothy to faithfully teach the Bible as a means of "being trained in the words of the faith" (v. 6). Toward the end of chapter 4, Paul challenged Timothy to devote himself "to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, and to teaching." This tells us that studying the Bible is one of the most important means God has given us by which we can grow in our relationship with Him. It is very difficult to grow in your relationship with someone if you do not get to know them, and the most reliable way God has given us to know Him is through His Word. God has also given us prayer (Col. 4:2) and the church as means of growing in our relationship with Him (Heb. 10:25).

"If God gives you a few more years, remember, it is not yours. Your time must honor God, your home must honor God, your activity must honor God, and everything you do must honor God." A. W. Tozer

PRAYER

Thank God for the free gift of salvation. Ask God to help us keep the gospel in mind as we seek to grow in relationship with Him. Pray that God would give us the grace we need to devote ourselves to the study of Scripture, and the grace we need to put off our old natures and put on our new natures in Christ. Pray that each of us would set an example to others in speech, life, faith, love, and purity. Pray that unbelievers would see your lives and know that Christianity is not just about what a person thinks; but relationship with Christ changes everything.

COMMENTARY

1 TIMOTHY 4

4:1-2. To deny the truth and abandon the faith, people would follow deceitful spirits and teachings of demons. Despite the assault of the physical world upon our senses, we live in a spirit-saturated environment. There is not a moment when we are outside the interplay of spirituality, for we are spirit beings. The very faculty of the human will is spiritual. Whatever we choose to believe or do is founded in our spiritual nature. When Paul wrote about following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons, he was not necessarily envisioning Satan worship or drug-led transcendentalist theology. There is a wide variety of ways in which Satan peddles his twisted inventions. All deceptions come from Satan's realm, but he uses many genteel ways to fashion these lies, spreading ideas which are anti-God.

1 John 4:2-3 says, "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world." John's words cover a whole range of teachings, some religious in nature such as cults and various world religions and other atheistic philosophies. All of these doctrines that deny Christ are "anti-Christ. The false teachings find receptivity in those who are hypocritical liars, whose consciences are seared. Such people perpetuate the lies of Satan and his hosts.

4:3. Paul wrote of the legalists as those who forbid marriage and require abstinence from certain foods. Legalism enslaves people to joyless toil. Such systems misrepresent the God of grace and belittle the work of Christ on the cross. They lead people down a path of grinding effort, at the end of which there is no God—only insecurities, mental anguish, and more labor. The particulars of a legalistic system are not as important as its assumptions. In fact, the legalist often uses convincing arguments that have the ring of truth. Forbidding people to marry, for instance, may have come from Jesus' own teaching about Paradise-to-come in which there would be no marriage. Abstaining from certain foods may have been rooted in the Genesis account of paradise-past when vegetarianism seems to have been the rule.

4:4-5. Paul did not refute the antimarriage argument because he had implied his endorsement earlier in 1 Timothy (3:2, 12). But he did face the food issue by asserting that everything God created is good. He told the Corinthians, "Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do" (1 Cor. 8:8).

Paul also declared: "Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." This statement extends beyond diet, creating a context for understanding life and godliness. The touch of God purifies. In him there is no darkness at all. Everything that comes from God is good. In addition, prayer and Scripture go along with thanksgiving. By these a transformation takes place as a believer acknowledges God as the source of all that is good.

4:6-7. Not everything promoted as spiritual is good for our development. Some things fall under the category of irreverent, silly myths. These are to be strictly avoided. Paul declared. In our own time these may come in the guise of new theologies, popular spiritual movements, curiosities about numbers, pyramids, and dates. We must be aware of all the false and distracting "knowledge" that presents itself as spiritual and then stay far from it and warn others of its ungodly results. To be able to discern the false from the true, a believer must be solidly grounded in the truth of God.

4:8. Paul declared, "Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things." Physical training is limited to just that—the physical dimensions of life. Godliness, on the other hand, penetrates every aspect of life. Godliness affects everything: our view of self, marriage, parenting, business, civic responsibilities, environmental outlook, relationship with our next-door neighbors. Nothing escapes godliness; it covers everything.

Godliness is not limited only to the present; it also extends to our life to come: Godliness holds promise for both the present life and the life to come. It does not matter if a person invests in physical exercise or careful dietary plans. Inevitably, death confronts us. Jesus addressed this truth when he said, "What good is it for a

man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?” (Mark 8:36). What we become in this life we carry into eternity.

4:9–10. Spiritual growth and nourishment and disciplines for godliness do not exist in a vacuum. They must be grounded in the living Christ. Paul underscored this idea by stating, “the is a trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.” This is the thing for which the apostles and followers of Christ labor and strive. They had one purpose in their work. They committed themselves to one urgent and pressing goal—the spread of the gospel.

4:11. Paul’s instruction was for Timothy and all church leaders to command and teach others about the Savior. Grace is no side issue. Legalism is no weak enemy. Rules are great for discipline but not for righteousness.

4:12. Chronological age does not necessarily bring spiritual maturity (He. 5:11–14). Deep devotion and spiritual strength as well as apathy and weakness can be found among young and old alike. Paul’s encouragement to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young,” should remind us that the issue for leadership is never age but spiritual development. True spiritual progress is more than exegetical expertise; it is marked by exemplary conduct and love. But whatever the response of those around us, age is never an excuse for speaking or leading. As Christians we are to set an example in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Speech and life encompass the observable aspects of life. It is how we conduct ourselves. Speech is a valid indicator of a person’s character, “for out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34). Of course, the point is not to muzzle our mouths, for we can be silent and very wicked. The principle is to pursue Christ so diligently that the inner spirit is purified, producing only good and appropriate things to say. The same is true of our outward acts, our lifestyle. Faith and love are the essence of the Christian life. Faith is our knowledge and confidence in Christ, our deep reliance on what he has done and what he declares as truth. Love is the Holy Spirit’s action in our life, the evidence of our relationship with the God who rules. Purity refers to sexual conduct and integrity of heart. Sexuality seems to be a mysterious picture of our relationship to God. God is very particular about how we treat our bodies and honor others. Sexual purity is a symbol of spiritual consecration. Misconduct in this area of life ruins fellowship with Christ and destroys a person’s influence and reputation with others. Authentic spirituality cannot be separated from inner righteousness. Christianity which is honest and genuine envelopes the entire person, from inner heart and spirit to outward behavior.

4:13. Paul told Timothy to give his energies to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching when the church came together. The public reading of Scripture, along with teaching, was an accepted custom of the Jews in the synagogues (Acts 13:15). This practice is carried over to corporate Christian worship (Acts 13:15; 2 Cor. 3:14). The public reading God’s Word is a command for the church. While churches may have different formats and cultural preferences, certain essentials must be present. One of these essentials is the public reading of Scripture.

The Word of God is powerful (Heb. 4:12); creates change (Isa. 55:11); is essential for life (Deut. 8:3). Too often our familiarity with the Bible causes us to forget that these written words contain the very breath of God—his wisdom and intelligence, yearnings, energy, strategies, and humor. The Bible is a bit of the mind and personality of God laid open for us. The public reading of God’s Word prepares our minds and hearts for the preaching or teaching which follows. The Holy Spirit acts through the revealed truth which God has given. As the church reads and affirms what God has declared, the Spirit is freed to instruct, convict, and guide. The public reading of Scripture also hedges the church against error.

The problems facing Timothy and the Ephesians centered on false teaching. The corporate reading of truth is a defense against falsehood. Preaching (exhorting) and teaching (explaining) are also essentials of public worship. Preaching deals with encouragement, exhortation, and warnings from which the preacher intends to elicit a response from the hearers. Teaching is regarded as instructional. A teacher explains the principles of Scripture in more intellectual terms. The point is not to create some rigid rules, but to understand that both teaching and preaching are Spirit-given gifts which must be exercised for the good of the fellowship of believers.

4:14. Although this verse is an intensely personal message to Timothy regarding his spiritual gift, the same directive can be leveled to all Christians, especially those who lead: Do not neglect your gift. Each Christian has been given a spiritual gift from the Holy Spirit to help serve the church. With the gift comes a responsibility which cannot be shunned. The gift Paul referred to here was some capability which Timothy was given. For Timothy, it came through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on him. It seems likely that this was Timothy's ordination into ministry, a ceremony of approval by mature Christian leaders signified by the laying on of hands. This was an affirmation of God's call upon Timothy's life for a special leadership ministry in the church.

4:15. Paul told Timothy to be diligent in all these things. The word diligence means "to keep at it," "to practice with serious intent." This is not a once-in-a-while proposition. This is day-to-day dedication. Paul reinforced this appeal: give yourself wholly to [these matters]. Literally this means, "be in these." Live them, breathe them, immerse yourself in them. This is your life, not a job. As Thomas Carlyle said, "No man ever became a saint in his sleep." This admonition was directed toward all who claim to be followers of Christ. Such a life does not happen automatically without concerted effort and desire. As Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples" (John 8:31). A true follower or disciple of Christ abides, or lives, in what Jesus taught. "These matters" that Paul called on Timothy to practice and be committed to are the things commanded in the previous verses. These encompassed his doctrine and how he lived his life. These will be summarized again in verse 16.

If we live in God's teaching, pursuing him every waking moment, everyone [will] see your progress. A life growing progressively close to God, dynamically changing, cannot be hidden. Christianity is not a matter of creed but of life. Timothy was to lead the way by pouring himself into Christian life and ministry. The church would respond because it would see progress, the authentic presence of Christ in his people.

4:16. This can be considered the key verse in 1 Timothy chapter 4. Paul summarized what he had just written about in this way: "watch your life and doctrine closely." Ultimately, Timothy could effectively control only himself. We are the only person over whom we have immediate authority. Our ability to lead, serve, and guide others is connected to our ability to manage and live our own life while abiding in Christ. The Christian life hinges both on our conduct and on our knowledge of the Bible. Paul could not emphasize it enough: persevere in Christian life and doctrine. Perseverance is evidence of the new nature; a disciplined person is willing to continue in God's way. Such commitment will be tried again and again.

The result of such continuance and devotion is that it would save both yourself and your hearers. The gospel leads us to salvation, but it also should affect the entirety of our lives after we are saved. Salvation has a beginning point at conversion and leads to its full realization when we are united with Christ in heaven. In between is what we call "sanctification", which is the process of becoming more Christlike in our person, behavior, and doctrine. Exemplary living and God's truth will safeguard church leaders and those whom they lead. A leader's perseverance in godliness will save his congregation from the dangers of false teachings which can shipwreck faith and cause ruin to the soul.