



1 Timothy

RBS
1 Timothy 4:1-16

Lesson 4: Spiritually Fit for Kingdom Work

“Train yourself for godliness” (1 Timothy 4:7).

Doctrinal Focus: 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.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

Back in 1 Timothy 1, we learned that there were false teachers in the Ephesian church, and that these teachers were causing some major problems. Though we do not know all of the details related to their heresies, we do know that it concerned the law of God:

Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions (1 Timothy 1:6-7).

Because of the dangers posed by the false teachers and their misuse of the law, Paul labored in chapters 2 and 3 to establish the qualifications for godly church leadership in order to protect the church from these wolves in sheep's clothing. Now, in chapter 4 of 1 Timothy, Paul continues to combat these teachers by uncovering the wickedness of their false teaching (verses 1-5), and instructing Timothy to maintain a ministry that will preserve the purity of the local church.

Verses 1-5

Chapter 4 begins with the confident assertion that the current difficulties experienced by the local church are not unexpected. Rather, the Spirit of God has clearly revealed that in the later times, we should expect such troubles in the church (cf. Daniel 12:1; Mark 13; 1 Corinthians 7:26; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7; 1 John 2:18; Jude 17-18). Consider, for one example, Paul's

prophecy in Acts 20:28-30:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood. I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

We should also understand that the term “later times” in verse 1 refers to the entire period of time between the first and second comings of Jesus. In other words, all of church history, until Christ returns to destroy this world and bring forth the new heavens and earth, will be characterized by the danger of false teachers in the church. Such teachers are unregenerate, faithless, insincere, and deceitful liars who propagate doctrine that is satanic in its origin (i.e., “demonic teaching”).

In this particular context, Paul mentions two specific issues. The first false teaching is the forbidding of marriage mentioned in verse 3. It appears that these false teachers were advocating a brand of asceticism that forbade marriage as either something evil or unclean, or perhaps as an act of sacrificial piety. Either way, however, such a prohibition is contrary to the very word of God. In Genesis 2, God created marriage as a covenant relationship between a man and a woman. This

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relationship was created as a part of the original created order, something before humanity's fall into sin. In fact, the creation of the woman and the marriage covenant is the very thing that takes day six from "not good" for Adam to "very good"! Praise the LORD for the creation of woman and the covenant of marriage!

In addition to the prohibition against marriage, it also appears that the false teachers were forbidding certain foods, perhaps related to the clean and unclean laws stipulated back in the Book of Leviticus, for example. However, subsequent to the work of Christ, these laws had come to an end. However, surrendering this distinctive marker of belonging to God under the old covenant proved difficult, even for some of the apostles. Consider the events recorded in Acts 10:9-15 (cf. Galatians 2:11-16).

The next day, as they were on their journey and approaching the city, Peter went up on the housetop about the sixth hour to pray. And he became hungry and wanted something to eat, but while they were preparing it, he fell into a trance and saw the heavens opened and something like a great sheet descending, being let down by its four corners upon the earth. In it were all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air. And there came a voice to him: "Rise, Peter; kill and eat." But Peter said, "By no means, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean." And the voice came to him again a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common."

Both marriage and food are good things. They are to be received with thanksgiving. The apostle Paul grounds this assertion in the reality that "everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4). According to verse 5, we know this to be true from God's word, which leads us to thankfulness in prayer for his good gifts to us. By way of contrast, the false teachers seek to restrict the reception of God's good gifts as a way of false piety or righteousness, the denial of true godliness that can only come by God's grace through faith in Christ Jesus.

Verses 6-10

In the remainder of this chapter, Paul sets before Timothy a set of specific instructions concerning how he is to conduct ministry in the Ephesian church. Though this section is very personal and specific to Timothy, there are important implications and applications for the church in all times and places.

Verses 6-10 and 11-16 parallel each other. They both begin with an exhortation to teach, command, and set "these things" before the local church. The designation "these things" appears to be a reference to everything that Paul has written in this letter—all previous instructions from chapters 1-3, and those that follow in chapters 5-6. By doing this, Timothy will combat the work of the false teachers as a "good servant of Christ Jesus."

In order to fully engage this ministry, Timothy must train himself in the careful study of God's word (i.e., "words of faith" and "good doctrine"). This is training in "godliness," and this type of training has enduring, even eternal benefits (i.e., "the life to come"). The significance of this training is highlighted by Paul's use of a third "trustworthy saying" (cf. 1 Timothy 1:15; 3:1; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). This third trustworthy saying places the importance of Timothy's work in its appropriate context. First, Paul and Timothy are laboring for the "hope" that we have in the living God. But the hope for which they labor is not simply the hope that God exists and so we can rest as happy deists. No way! Their hope, and ours, is that the living God is the Savior of people, which means that he is the only Savior. This should remind us of what Paul said earlier, "For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus" (1 Timothy 2:5). There is, therefore, only one Savior for both Jew and Gentile. Additionally, this salvation has come to all of humanity through faith and not by works of the law. This is in direct opposition to the false teachers who are advocating some form of works righteousness. But Paul will have none of this. The living God is the only Savior, and this salvation comes only to "those who believe"—to those who repent of their sin and self-righteousness, and cling to the person and work of Christ Jesus, alone!

Verses 11-16

Similar to verses 6-10, this section contains additional instructions for Timothy. Notice how both sections begin with admonitions to teach "these things" (vv. 6 and 11), while concluding with statements regarding the salvation of God's people (vv. 10 and 16). The instructions in this next section, however, are more specific and personal than the previous section.

As just stated, this section begins with the command to teach, and the theme of teaching plays an important role in the pastoral epistles of Paul. In 1 Timothy, for example, Paul is concerned with the false teachers, and Timothy is to combat them with teaching, but teaching the truth. Additionally, one of the central requirements for the elder or overseer is that he is a skilled teacher. Because God has revealed himself to us in his word, God's teachers in the local church must be skilled in Scripture and its interpretation, especially in terms of biblical content and sound doctrine. And so, Timothy's training in godliness is given special attention. He is to "devote" himself to the reading of Scripture, the preaching of Scripture, and the teaching of Scripture (v. 13). He must "practice," "immerse" himself, "keep a close watch," and "persist" in the development of his calling and gifts as a teacher (vv. 15-16).

Paul's instructions to Timothy concerning his work in studying and teaching the Bible are also practically motivated. Timothy's work as an elder in the Ephesian church must also serve as an

example for others to imitate. Timothy must learn to teach both with the words he speaks and the life he lives—"an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity" (v. 12). In this way, his progress will be apparent to all and so contrast and shame the corrupt and decaying lives of the false teachers.

How God's people engage God's Word is a matter of tremendous importance. For Paul, it is a matter of life and death. As verses 10 and 16 indicate, Paul's teaching concerns matters of eternal life and death. Paul and Timothy are toiling so that, by faith, people might place their hope in the living God, the one and only savior of the world. And so Paul encourages Timothy, "for by doing so you will save both yourself and your hearers" (v. 16). This is why we must carefully preach and teach the word of God.

For God's Word says,

How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!" But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Isaiah says, "Lord, who has believed what he has heard from us?" So faith comes from hearing, and hearing through the word of Christ (Romans 10:14-17).

Recommended Commentary

1 Timothy by Philip Ryken (Reformed Expository Commentaries)



1 Timothy Lesson 4

Questions for Discussion

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-16.

1. First Timothy 4 describes, in further detail, the Ephesian heresy and how Timothy is to combat that heresy. How does 1 Timothy 1-3 prepare us for the content of chapter 4? Is the context related? Unrelated?
2. By way of review, according to 1 Timothy 1, what is the basic or fundamental nature of the false teaching in Ephesus? How do the qualifications for elders and deacons listed in chapters 2 and 3 serve to combat false teaching and false teachers?
3. Were the difficulties in the Ephesian church unexpected or expected according to verses 1-5? To what specific period of time is Paul referring when he mentions the "*later times*"? How do the answers to these two questions equip you to better encounter difficulties in your own local church context?
4. What was the source, or nature, of the Ephesian heresy according to verse 2? Is false teaching simply bad teaching, or is there something more to it? How does Paul describe false teaching and false teachers? What does this tell us about the dangers of false teaching in the church?
5. What were the false teachers forbidding? Why was this wrong for them to do? Do you see anything in your own life that functions in much the same way? How are such things identified and dealt with?

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6. How is Timothy to serve as a good minister of Christ Jesus and his church (cf. Acts 20:27, "*for I did not shrink from declaring to you the whole counsel of God*")? Does Timothy's example apply to everyone in the church? Why or why not?

 7. What does it mean for Timothy to train himself for godliness? What does this training look like? In what type of training does he engage? What is the role of the Bible in his training?

 8. How must all Christians train themselves in godliness? How can we do this on a daily basis? What are the fundamental components of such training?

 9. How is the local church, and the church at large, protecting itself from false teachers? What importance should this issue have in the weekly life of the church?

 10. Given the reality of true and false teaching in the local church, why is it important to have wise, well-trained pastors leading the church?