

PRIORITIZING GODLINESS

1 Timothy 3.14-4.16

Paul provides guidance to Timothy on how he should use his energies. We have clear directives consistently repeated.

In 1 Timothy, the Apostle always has an eye on false teaching. In this case we get more content of the false teaching. They were peddling a form of asceticism (1 Timothy 4.1-4). Paul's commands to Timothy aim at an effective local church ministry.

Train: We are to practice the disciplines of the faith

Paul uses a modern illustration in that everyone knows the importance of physical training. It is good to take care of our bodies. Even those of us who are not in the best physical shape aspire to better health. What is required is a plan and discipline.

If physical training is important, how much more important is training in matters of the soul (1 Timothy 4.8).

We can train towards “godliness” (1 Timothy 4.7). The aim of theology is Christlikeness.

We are trained spiritually through “the words of the faith” and “good doctrine” (1 Timothy 4.6). This must include reading God's Word and working-out an accurate theology.

Think of how an understanding of God's purposes helps us in times of trial. How does a sound biblical ecclesiology combat loneliness? When we are weighed down with guilt, how refreshing to understand the call to repentance and the promise of forgiveness (Psalm 51).

Timothy is to “practice these things” and “persist” (1 Timothy 4.15-16). The ancients believed in habituation. To be better at something, keep doing it.

Teach: We are to sit under God's Word

Timothy is to bring the church under the Word of God (1 Timothy 4.13). Scripture is to be read in the assembly. The pastor is to teach and exhort the hearers to action from the passage of Scripture. What the preacher says comes from God's Word.

When confronting the false teaching about asceticism, Paul goes to the biblical doctrine of creation (1 Timothy 4.3-5). “Everything God created” is different from “everything” and “everything humans create”. We can affirm and enjoy, with thanksgiving, what God has made.

While the charge to teach is directed at Timothy, the pastor, we see elsewhere that every Christian is to speak God's truth for the sake of building up the body (Ephesians 4.11-16).

Grow: We are to make progress in our faith

There is an expectation that Timothy grows in his faith and as a minister. Our spiritual development should be evident to those close to us. Once again, an embodied community is assumed.

God gives gifts to His people so that we might use them to His glory. As we use our gifts, God matures us.

We don't want to confuse age with spiritual maturity. Despite his relative youth, Timothy was to set an example in his speech and how he behaved (1 Timothy 4.12). The young people in our church should realize the influence they can have inside (and outside) the church.

Key Ideas: Let's prioritize growth in godliness.

Application Questions:

Identify and discuss the things Paul tells Timothy to do and to avoid in order to minister well.

How does Paul understand the connection between Timothy's personal life and his public ministry? How does this relate to the qualifications for leadership in 1 Timothy 3?

What is the difference between "teaching" and "exhorting" (1 Timothy 4.13)?

What changes can I make to prioritize my growth in godliness?