

BASIC TRAINING IN GODLINESS

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By the Book™ A Chapter by
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Let's Begin

The armed forces of the United States are the greatest military on earth. One of the secrets is the simple art of basic training. All enlisted men enter each branch of the military through a carefully constructed "boot camp." Good soldiers, we believe, must have a good beginning. No training is more significant than basic training. No less is true for the disciple of Jesus Christ.

In fact, basic training to be a disciple is found beginning in the Gospels with Jesus Himself mentoring His first disciples in what it meant to follow Him. Hence, it is hardly surprising when we find Paul calling his young pastor-protégé, Timothy, to not only complete basic training in discipleship himself, but also to place the church over which he ministers into a foundational program of discipleship.

Paul gives four crucial steps to maintain godliness as Timothy begins. Therefore, as we begin our study of 1 Timothy 4, let's follow the outline below:

- I. Step One: A Word of Caution (vv. 1-5)**
- II. Step Two: A Word of Counsel (vv. 6-8)**
- III. Step Three: A Word of Commitment (vv. 9-11)**
- IV. Step Four: A Word of Challenge (vv. 12-16)**

I. Step One: A Word of Caution (vv. 1-5)

Paul begins his caution with some words concerning the "latter times." He writes, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving; For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer" (vv. 1-5). By "latter times" Paul means the days just before the Lord returns (cp. 3:1). Hence, the "latter times" extends from Paul's day to our day and beyond; that is, the *end times*.

Reflection Connection

Do you think there is sufficient focus on the "latter times"? Why or why not? How may we deal with end times issues in a balanced manner? Explain.

Interestingly, Paul believes to be clear what

so many of us today assume is unclear. He confesses the Spirit speaks "expressly." The adverb "expressly" is the Greek word *rhētōs*, and denotes clarity and exactness. In other words, the Holy Spirit's words are specific and unambiguous. What a significant difference to the fog concerning end times we encounter today! Of course, we are not referring to date-setting, etc. We are concerned with certain events which we may confidently affirm will take place at the Lord's own timing.

For example, one specific event to which Paul refers and about which the Spirit clearly speaks concerns some who "shall depart from the faith." The phrase "shall depart from" is the single Greek term *aphistemi*, meaning a drawing away, a forsaking, or a ceasing. In essence, Paul is referring to a willful turning away from the Word of God. We call this apostasy (cp. 2 Thess. 2:4; Acts 20:28-30). And, Paul warns believers against it.

First, apostasy is *demonic in origin* (v. 1). Paul refers to the "seducing spirits." These supernatural spirits are both evil and work in individuals. Satan has armies of them to accomplish his bidding. They carry on a great variety of activities within governments, religions, cults, and even within the church. The main goal of a "seducing spirit" is to promote chaos and seduce people into believing false doctrine



concerning God, Jesus, the church, the Bible, and especially the way to get right with God. In short, the “doctrines of demons,” already was a reality in Paul’s day (cp. 1 John 4:6; 2 John 7).

Second, apostasy is *deceptive in operation* (v. 2). Apostates speak “lies in hypocrisy.” Pretending to be pious and religious, apostates fool weak believers, deceiving them into believing they represent the truth. The church always seeks to win the lost to Jesus Christ. Deceivers attempt to proselytize converts to their cause, their belief, their “cult.” Even more, their conscience is “seared.” The term was used of branding irons similar to blacksmiths. The devil’s initials are carved into their minds and hearts. They become insensitive to right and wrong.

Three, apostasy is *distorted in outcome* (v. 3). The consequences remain staggering. Celibacy becomes compulsory because they “forbid to marry,” wrongly assuming one is more spiritual if marriage is sacrificed. Moreover, certain foods are maintained as the only proper diet for people to consume. We may safely assume it wise to watch any group making a big deal about the kind of food one eats. Though some foods are obviously more physiologically nutritious than others, one kind of food cannot make a person any more spiritual than another kind (cp. Mark 7:14-23; Acts 10; 1 Cor. 10:23-33). Indeed all creation is to be considered good.

II. Step Two: A Word of Counsel (vv. 6-8)

The second step in basic training in godliness focuses on a word of counsel. Paul writes, “If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained. But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself *rather* unto godliness. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come” (vv. 6-8). The Apostle desires to “put in remembrance” these principles. In other words, they must take his counsel to heart.

Paul’s advice has a two-fold focus. On the one hand, Paul counsels them concerning *growing* in their faith (v. 6). Paul uses the image of being “nourished up,” an image which implies a daily, constant diet rather than a single feast. Believers must spiritually eat from God’s table each day. Indeed every word which proceeds from God is nutritious for our spiritual maintenance (cp. Matt. 4:4; 1 Pet. 2:2; Jer. 15:16). Good Bible teaching nourishes one’s faith. Unfortunately, too many have an aversion to deeper doctrine. People want spiritual pastries rather than spiritual meat.

On the other hand, Paul focuses on *training* (vv. 7-8). Believers are to refuse “fables.” Spiritual energy cannot be wastefully consumed on silly myths. Some are so stuck on minor, insignificant aspects of the Bible they miss the far-reaching truths of Scripture. As the old saying goes, they miss the forest for the trees.

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Reflection Connection

Reflect on those methods you use to daily nourish your soul. Do you think the methods are adequate for your spiritual growth? Explain.



In addition, Paul indicates the believer's training should include "exercise... godliness." The goal of every believer's life is to live in Biblical godliness. Nothing mysterious exists about what Paul means by godliness; he simply means to be like Jesus. And, while bodily exercise is commendable and even helpful to a certain degree ("profits a little"), one who exercises godliness, does that which is profitable for all things. Just as athletes train their bodies, so the Christian trains his or her soul.

III. Step Three: A Word of Commitment (vv. 9-11)

The next step finds the Apostle appealing to Timothy with a word of commitment. He writes, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe. These things command and teach" (vv. 9-11). Since the word is a "faithful saying" believers have no alternative but to "accept" it.

First, Paul speaks about the *outcome* of our commitment. Paul never backs away from considering work in God's Kingdom as "labor." The term carries with it the idea of intense and wearisome effort.

One who "labors" for the Lord toils to the point of exhaustion. In addition, the work we do for Christ rarely lacks in our suffering "reproach" for the sake of our Lord. In other words, Paul reminds those who seek godliness in his Kingdom to expect the harvest for which we serve the Lord to come with a weary struggle.

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Second, Paul speaks about the *object* of our commitment. As we look beyond the outcome of our struggle, we are encouraged to also see the object beyond our struggle, a vision of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, the "living God," and our "Savior." All our hope is placed in Him. And, while He confidently remains the Savior of all those who believe in Him, He potentially is the Savior of "all men." Paul does not mean by this that all men in the end will be saved. He was no universalist. Rather, because all men can believe as the Holy Spirit convicts them of sin by the preaching of the Gospel, He is potentially the Savior of all men. Our commitment is to a universal Savior.

IV. Step Four: A Word of Challenge (vv. 12-16)

Paul ends this section with an intense but practical challenge. To young Timothy he writes, "Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (vv. 12-16).



Undoubtedly, Timothy was a young man. And with his youth came a natural tendency for older men to perhaps question more meticulously than normal. Paul challenges Timothy to not allow his youth to hinder him from being a mature man of God. Furthermore, his challenge to Timothy serves the entire body of Christ as a model for us to not allow either inexperience or knowledge to become an obstacle to our passion to seek holiness. While we must remain humble, our humility should not quench our heart's fire to serve God to the fullest.

First, Paul challenges believers to attend to the *pattern* of life (v. 12). The word "example" implies a model or a skeletal copy. When younger believers look at us, they should be able to follow Jesus

by following us! Note, also the term translated "conversation." In modern English, we typically mean by conversation, that at least two people are talking to one another. In other words, it relates specifically to speech. However, the Old English term had a much richer, broader meaning which included one's entire lifestyle and manner of living. While speech is certainly included in Paul's meaning ("in word"), Paul has in mind our entire life experience being a pattern for others to follow. No wonder the disciple is focused on godliness!

In fact, three dimensions of our manner of life are implied in Paul's words. First, our *social* dimension of living which includes our relationships with others both in the church community and outside the church community. Second, our *spiritual* dimension of living which concerns our "love" for the Lord Jesus, our "spirit" of enthusiasm in serving Him, and our "faith" when times become discouraging. Finally, our *moral* dimension of living which pursues a life of "purity." We stand loyal to standards set by Jesus Himself. The beauty of life as Jesus lived it becomes the beauty of life as we live it.

Second, Paul challenges believers to attend to the *progress* of life (vv. 13-15). Paul's goal for Timothy was that "thy profiting may appear to all." Others needed to see Timothy progressing in the Christian faith; they also need to see us. One said it well: you cannot lead others to where you have not been. Paul also uses the term translated "meditate" to emphasize the need to attend carefully to progressing in life. No believer should be at the same spiritual stage ten years from now where he or she presently is. Paul elsewhere insisted he was ever "pressing for the mark for the prize..." (Phil. 3:14).

Two specific spiritual elements Paul mentions would keep Timothy progressing in his faith. First, he cites the Word of God—"give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine." Holy living and sound doctrine go naturally together. Indeed it would be unimaginable to think of true godliness apart from Biblical doctrine. Second, he mentions the "gift in thee" given to Timothy (v. 14). As Paul laid hands on this young man, it was a moving time. God set him apart and equipped him for a specific task, an equipping every believer receives. Hence, for Timothy and no less for us, the gift should not be "neglected." Rather the gift should be "stirred" up within us for great usefulness to the Lord (cp. 2 Tim. 1:6).

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Reflection Connection

Do you ever consider that your life is a pattern that another Christian is using as his or her own model? What would you do differently if you actually met a person who revealed this to you?



Golden Greek Nugget

Paul's instruction to Timothy came with a promise that if he heeded the instructions, Timothy would undoubtedly become a "good minister" of Jesus Christ. Often we have our own ideas of just what a "good minister" is. We do well to note what Paul means by the terms. The Greek term translated "good" is *kalos*, which means beautiful and fair in appearance. Beauty and completeness become harmonious. In addition, the term translated "servant" is the Greek term *diakonos*, which primarily denotes a servant, a worker, or "one who pursues." It is the same word Paul uses elsewhere for "deacon" (3:8), though there he employs it in a more technical or official capacity. Paul is suggesting the "good minister" is a beautifully balanced, hard-working servant of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Finally, Paul challenges believers to attend to the *purpose* of life (v. 16). Nothing is more significant to growing and progressing in godliness than to "take heed" to our lives. In other words, Paul challenges us to a serious, earnest examination of our life in Jesus Christ. We are to take a good look at ourselves in the Gospel mirror.

Similarly, the Apostle John wrote, "Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward" (2 John 8). If we do look deeply at ourselves, the impact of it cannot be overestimated. Understand: we are not to examine in order to determine whether our lives are worthy of being saved. Our worthiness is already ruled out as a means to gaining right standing with God (Eph. 2:10).

Instead, we are looking at our lives to determine our progress and growth in godliness in Christ. We are challenged to be an example for other believers to mimic and to win others to faith in Christ. Apart from this twin-goal, our purpose from God can never be realized.

Wrap Up

Basic training in godliness remains a great need in today's church. We have no better instruction than the Apostle Paul in his instructions to his young pastor-in-training, Timothy, we have clear steps to take to make sure we are off to a good spiritual start. He first cautions believers to expect an intense struggle in faith when the focus centers on godliness. He follows his caution with clear counsel which leads to a commitment in facing the challenge before all believers—living an intensely self-examined life all for the glory of God and winning people to Christ.

