

Exercise for Godliness

1 Timothy 4:1-16

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Introduction

We all know that if you don't do any exercise, don't try and lead a healthy lifestyle, eat lots of junk food – most probably going to get fat and flabby, higher risk of developing health problems and more prone to pick up diseases. Possibility of cancer, heart problems, diabetes, culminating in early death. The threat of these things should therefore motivate us to exercise, lead an active and healthy lifestyle.

What we see in this morning's text is a similar warning. Not to do with our physical health, but rather something much more important, godliness – as it has implications for our lives now and our lives in eternity. Paul is warning Timothy against the danger of destructive and demonic false teaching that has infiltrated the church. Result of this false teaching – leads to people shipwrecking their faith – it is unhealthy, dangerous – cancerous – deadly stuff! How then is the church to stay clear of this and keep healthy? Train, exercise in godliness. What we're going to see in this text therefore is that in order to grow in godliness, being healthy spiritually, avoiding toxic teaching that kills – we are to exercise in godliness – finding our hope and rest in Christ Jesus himself.

- Teachings of demons
- Training for godliness

A. Teachings of demons, vv. 1-5

Already seen as we've been working through 1 Timothy, that one of the big problems that Timothy was facing in the church in Ephesus where he was pastoring, was the prevalence of false teachers. Here we see some more details regarding these false teachers and what exactly they were teaching. Verses 1-2:

“Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...”

Clear first of all that Paul was acutely aware that he was writing divinely inspired Scripture. This letter isn't filled with his own opinions, instead it is inspired by the Holy Spirit. Special revelation that he received in his apostolic office, not available to us today, since office of the apostle no longer exists. How we hear from the Spirit is by reading the Spirit-inspired words of Scripture.

So we see here that Spirit says clearly that in the later times – meaning the present age. NT perspective – we've been in the end times since Pentecost. Warning from the Holy Spirit that some will depart from the faith. Greek = apostatise. What is apostasy? Genuine believers losing their salvation? No – that is not possible. All who are truly in Christ will endure to the end – born again with imperishable seed (1 Peter 1:23), he is faithful even when we are faithless (2 Tim 2:13).

Apostasy is the rejection of faith in Christ by someone claiming to be a Christian. Reality though is that when people commit apostasy, it is evidence that they were never true believers in the first place. 1 John 2:19 – **“They went out from us (rejected the faith), but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.”**

How do these people apostatise? Rest of verse 1 & 2 – **by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...”** They devote themselves to the teaching of false teachers who deliberately deceive and who are ultimately demonically inspired. They are not teaching things from God's Word, but find inspiration for their teaching from demonic spirits.

What does this teaching look like? Verses 3-5:

“who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.”

Nature of the false teaching is what we would call asceticism. Veneer of godliness, piety and spirituality by denying what is considered to be fleshly pleasures. Verse 3 – they forbid marriage and don't eat certain foods (meat). Believed that all sexual activity was evil in itself – fleshly, hence they reject marriage. Denial of these pleasures of sex and rich foods – the way you get closer to God – a salvation by works – legalism. Rooted in dualism, Gnosticism – the philosophy that everything physical is inherently evil, while only spirit is good. Body itself evil, our souls, inherently divine. Divine souls trapped in evil bodies.

On one hand, this philosophy led to extreme denial of earthly things – just seen. But also led to indulgence of sinful things too. Rationale of extreme dualism – if my body is evil, then doesn't matter what I do in the flesh, as only my soul is the important thing. Led to justification for committing all sorts of evil, sexual immorality with your body, believing that it is completely disconnected from your soul.

All utterly destructive and completely at odds with biblical truth. Truth? Verses 3-5 explain. Rejection of this spirit-matter dualism which lies at the heart of this false teaching. Bible sees a wholeness and unity between our bodies and souls. What we do with our bodies, we do with our souls – cannot separate them. Both body and spirit created by God to be used to glorify him. Verse 4 quotes Genesis 1:31, saying that because everything (both physical and spiritual) that God created is good, nothing is to be rejected. God has blessed us with common grace – good things in this life for everyone on earth to enjoy. Psalm 104:14-15:

“You cause the grass to grow for the livestock and plants for man to cultivate, that he may bring forth food from the earth and wine to gladden the heart of man, oil to make his face shine and bread to strengthen man's heart.”

God has blessed us with good things like all sorts of foods, meats, plants, bread, wine and oil to enjoy and give us pleasure – physical, earthy things. Receive them with thanksgiving – not evil in themselves. Likewise, while singleness can be a gift from God for some (1 Cor 7:6); for many, marriage is a gift from God – it is good for man and woman to marry and enjoy the blessings of sexual union within the covenant of marriage. Proverbs 18:22, **“He who finds a wife finds a good thing and obtains favour from the Lord.”**

Obviously abusing these good gifts from God is sinful – whether it is in form of drunkenness, gluttony and sexual immorality. Instead we are to responsibly enjoy God's common grace

blessings with humble thanksgiving, acknowledging that he is the one who gives us these good gifts that we may glorify him and enjoy him through them.

B. Training for godliness, vv.6-16

False teachers in Timothy's church actively teaching these destructive, demonically-inspired teachings – damaging people in the church, causing some even to apostatise! How does Paul instruct Timothy to deal with the problem? Verses 6-8:

“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. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for 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.”

False teaching is false because it is not rooted in God's Word. Instead – rooted in teaching of demons – runs contrary to the Word. Antidote to false teaching? The Word of God! Be trained in it and rooted in good doctrine that comes from the Word. At the same time actively reject false doctrine, which is called here in verse 7, **“irreverent, silly myths”**. Instead – **“train yourself for godliness”**. The word used for “train” here is “gumnaze” – gym – physical training, exercise is in mind here. As beneficial as keeping your body in shape is, through physical exercise, exercise for godliness is even more beneficial and infinitely more important. Why? Bodily training – experience the benefit in this life – healthier, live longer. Training in godliness – not only experience the benefit in this life, but also in the life to come. What then is the purpose of this training? Verse 10 tells us:

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

Train in godliness, root yourselves in God's Word because through it, we are strengthened in the truth of the gospel. At the heart of false teaching lies an implicit denial of the gospel. Seen with the asceticism present in the Ephesian church context – strong legalism – no marriage, no meat, deny yourself, do x y z – then you will be a holy person and earn enlightenment and salvation.

Similar with false teaching today in our context – if you do more signs and wonders, speak more prophetic words, sow a seed of faith, do these supposedly spiritual things – and then you will be really spiritual and experience blessing and favour. In by grace, stay in by works, Jesus + other things (miracles, prosperity, health & wealth). Forms of legalism. Really no gospel at all.

Instead, verse 10 calls us to set our hope, not on our performance of various spiritually-sounding practices, but **“on the living God, who is the Saviour of all people, especially those who believe. (Gk = Saviour of all people – that is believers)”** Who is this living God, the Saviour of those who believe? Jesus Christ! Our human sinful default setting is to try and save ourselves – which all false teaching and other religions teach you can do – man-centred, makes us our own saviours, our own gods. Complete delusion!

There is only One who can truly save us from sin – Christ Jesus our Lord – who paid our debt for sin by dying on the cross in our place, rising again to life on the third day – forgiving sins, breaking the curse, and reconciling us to our Father. This is the true hope we have – that our salvation lies not in our own efforts or spiritual practices or levels of faith – but in the finished work of Christ, the living God, who has accomplished salvation for us!

Having this hope in the truth of the gospel, how are we to train, to exercise for godliness so that we do not fall into deception? Two ways. Verses 12-13:

“Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.”

First way to train in godliness – v.12 – set an example of living a life of integrity. No disconnect between what you believe and how you live. Be active in putting sin to death, living a life of obedience to God’s Word that is demonstrated in how you speak to others, how you conduct your life in purity, how you love others, growing your faith in Christ – trusting him alone for salvation. Direct connection between real holiness and holding to sound teaching.

Second way to train in godliness – v.13 – devote yourself to God’s Word. Because all false teaching is a departure from the truth of God’s Word, in order to grow up as a strong and

healthy Christian, who is able to resist the lure of false teaching – root yourself in the truth of God’s Word. Private study of it, certainly. But cannot end there in our private devotions – true Christianity is a public faith, rooted in the ministry of the covenant community, the church.

Focus in this verse is the public ministry of the Word – “public reading of Scripture, exhortation and teaching”. Showing us the importance of the ministry of the Word that takes place every Lord’s Day at church. Something special and unique that the Lord does by his Spirit when we gather in worship and hear God’s Word read and preached week after week. One of the means of grace – ways in which God promises to apply Christ and his benefits to us by his Spirit – preached word.

Westminster Larger Confession 155:

Q. 155. How is the word made effectual to salvation?

A. The Spirit of God makes the reading, but especially the preaching of the word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.

Incredible benefits and blessings promised to us through the preaching of the Word every Lord’s Day! Don’t miss out! Want to train in godliness, increase your immunity to false teaching, strengthened against temptation, put sin to death, grow in Christ, built up in grace and be strengthened in the truth of his Word – sit under God’s Word every Lord’s Day!

Verses 15-16 conclude:

“Practise these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Paul exhorts Timothy to train for godliness – by practicing these things – living a life of integrity and devoting himself to God’s Word. Why? Lives, eternities are at stake! Timothy’s duty as the pastor of the church to faithfully preach God’s Word. Neglects that - preaches

his feelings, pop-psychology, self-help philosophies, some new revelation, anything other than God's Word – his congregation will not hear the gospel, will not hear that it is God who save sinners through Christ – wither away, shipwrecking their faith.

Instead – faithfully and relentlessly preach the truth of God's Word in order that the church is strengthened in the gospel of grace, fed and built up in Christ and in the knowledge of his salvation.

Conclusion

So much spiritual junk food on offer, so many distractions in our lives. If you're not vigilant – easy to be led astray – into lure of sin, enticed by spiritual-sounding, yet dangerous teaching. Reality – so much is at stake – eternal state of your soul. What you believe really matters. Promise of false teaching – through your own abilities, your own spiritual practices, you can get right with God. Reality - lead only to burn out, ultimately destruction – none of us have the ability to save ourselves, all sinned and fallen short.

Only One who has done what is necessary to get right with God – Jesus Christ. Only he succeeded where we all failed – only he perfectly obeyed God's law, only he paid our debt for sins, because of that – only he can make us right with God.

Set your hope in Christ, the living God, our Saviour. Trust in his true, pure gospel – “good doctrine” – his finished work, find strength in his grace and his words – Mt 11:28-30.

Come to me, all who labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. ³⁰For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”