

Living in God's Church Today

A Good Servant of Christ Jesus

1 Timothy 4:6-10

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Scripture

In his First Letter to Timothy, Paul opened chapter 4 with a discussion about false teachers. Paul wanted Timothy to combat the errors of these false teachers. Paul set down several features regarding the false teachers in verses 1-5. Then Paul went on to tell Timothy that the way to deal with false teachers was by being a good servant of Christ Jesus.

Let us read about being a good servant of Christ Jesus in 1 Timothy 4:6-10:

⁶If 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. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for 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. ⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. (1 Timothy 4:6-10)

Introduction

Charles Hodge was one of the leading theologians in the mid-nineteenth century. He also served as the President of Princeton Theological Seminary from 1851 until his death in 1878. His funeral in Princeton was a momentous occasion. The professor of systematic theology at Princeton Seminary was

not only a learned scholar and a champion of Reformation orthodoxy, but he was also a beloved teacher and friend. On the day of his funeral, all the shops in Princeton were closed. After the worship service ended at the First Presbyterian Church, a great procession formed at the seminary and moved slowly to the cemetery. (I have visited that cemetery, and many notable men and women in the nineteenth century are buried there.) Of all the tributes given to Dr. Charles Hodge on that solemn day, perhaps the most fitting was given by Professor William Paxton: “When due allowance is made for his intellect and his learning, after all his chief power was in his goodness. Christ enshrined in his heart was the center of his theology and his life. The world will write upon his monument GREAT; but we, his students, will write upon it GOOD.”¹

“A minister of the gospel,” writes Philip Ryken, in whose commentary is the previous illustration, “can receive no higher praise.”² The tribute that Professor Paxton gave to Dr. Charles Hodge is the same epitaph the apostle Paul wanted Timothy to be given when he came to the end of his ministry. Paul did not urge Timothy to greatness; he urged him instead to be “a good servant of Christ Jesus” (1 Timothy 4:6).

As we begin today’s study, it is important to keep in mind what commentator Philip Towner wrote:

Just as a skillful coach will often return to the basics of the sport to pull the team or a player out of a slump, Paul returns to the basics to keep this church on track. As he seeks to counteract the influences of the false teaching here, he emphasizes one of the most important practical lessons of the

¹ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, ed. Richard D. Phillips, Daniel M. Doriani, and Philip Graham Ryken, Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007), 167.

² Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 168.

Pastoral Epistles: the soundness of a church depends on ministers and leaders who are sound in their faith and practice.

But wait! This teaching applies to all Christians. Yes, in this section Paul focuses on Timothy, the paradigm of the good minister or Christian leader, who must pursue spiritual priorities and pay attention to his lifestyle and calling. But we shouldn't be fooled by the term *minister* ["servant" in the *ESV*]³—the principles apply to all believers, just as all believers are to be vitally involved in ministry. The leader or minister [or servant] is to be a model. In the leader's ministry and life God's Word and its application must be central. Attention to these basics will make a critical difference. As we saw in chapter 1 of this letter, the minister and ministry that accord with God's will are exact opposites of the "enthusiasts" and their version of the faith.³

Lesson

1 Timothy 4:6-10 shows us the priorities of a good servant of Christ Jesus.

Let's use the following outline:

1. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Nourishes Himself on God's Word (4:6-7a)
2. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Trains Himself for Godliness (4:7b-9)
3. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Commits Himself to Gospel Proclamation (4:10)

I. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Nourishes Himself on God's Word (4:6-7a)

First, a good servant of Christ Jesus nourishes himself on

³ Philip Towner, *1–2 Timothy & Titus*, vol. 14, The IVP New Testament Commentary Series (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1994), 1 Timothy 4:6–16.

God's word.

Paul wrote in verse 6, **“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.”** Paul had just told Timothy to refute those who forbid marriage and require abstinence from certain foods. **“Words of the faith”** is a general reference to Scripture and **“good doctrine”** refers to the theology that Scripture teaches. Thus, Paul urged Timothy to nourish himself on God's word. By doing so, he would grow in his understanding of Biblical truth.

I recently saw Mark Spitz on TV. He won a record seven gold medals at the 1972 Olympics in swimming. He said that in preparation for those Olympics his training over many years involved the equivalent of swimming around the circumference of the earth. In other words, success at the elite level requires intense training and effort. The only way to grow in an understanding of Biblical truth is by reading it, studying it, memorizing it, meditating on it, and mastering its contents. There are no shortcuts. This is true for every Christian but it is especially true for pastors. No Christian should expect to have a fruitful Christian life without putting effort into **“being trained in the words of the faith and the good doctrine.”**

Paul had just encouraged Timothy to correct the false teaching, having been trained in the words of faith and of the good doctrine that he had followed. Then Paul wrote in verse 7a, **“Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.”** This negative prohibition contrasts with the positive encouragement of the previous verse. The phrase **“the words of faith”** are directly opposite to **“irreverent, silly myths.”** When false teachers, or perhaps even some church members, came to him to discuss the wild inventions contained in the myths (that Paul

had mentioned earlier in 1:4), Timothy was not to treat them seriously by discussing them. Rather, he must firmly refuse to discuss such foolishness. He was not to waste his time on these myths but free himself to nourish himself on God's word so that he could proclaim it clearly and boldly and accurately.

Pastors sometimes have church members come to them with questions. The members may have read or heard some teaching and they are not sure how it lines up with Biblical truth. Usually, these members are eager to learn the truth and the pastor can point them back to the teaching of God's word and clear up any confusion or questions they may have had. This is only the case if the pastor himself is nourished on God's word. If the pastor has a poor grasp of the Bible, he may not be able to refute errors easily. That is why a pastor must always be reading and studying and growing in his own understanding of God's word. The best way to refute error is by having a very good understanding of the word of God.

So, first, a good servant of Christ Jesus nourishes himself on God's word.

II. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Trains Himself for Godliness (4:7b-9)

Second, a good servant of Christ Jesus trains himself for godliness.

Paul did not want Timothy to have anything to do with irreverent, silly myths. Instead, Paul exhorted Timothy in verse 4:7b, **“Rather train yourself for godliness.”** The Greek word for **“godliness”** (*ensebeia*) occurs 15 times in the New Testament and it means “the devout practice for, and appropriate beliefs about, God.” Godliness is the essential prerequisite out of which all faithful ministry and service flows. The Greek

word for **“train”** (*gymnazo*) occurs 4 times in the New Testament and it means “to develop a person’s behavior by instruction and practice.” It is used here as a command. Our English word “gymnasium” comes from this word. At the time when Paul wrote this letter to Timothy, young men were expected to “train” in the areas of physical exercise. They trained without clothing so that nothing would encumber them and get in the way of their progress. Paul was taking athletic imagery and applying it spiritually. He wanted Timothy to focus as diligently on his spiritual disciples as the athletes did on their athletic disciplines.

In his commentary on First Timothy, Kent Hughes tells the following story:

Consider the example of Lt. General William K. Harrison who was the most decorated soldier in the 30th Infantry Division, rated by General Eisenhower as the number one infantry division in World War II. General Harrison was the first American to enter Belgium during that war, which he did at the head of the Allied forces. He received every decoration for valor except the Congressional Medal of Honor—being honored with the Distinguished Service Cross, the Silver Star, the Bronze Star for Valor, and the Purple Heart (he was one of the few generals to be wounded in action). When the Korean War began, he served as Chief of Staff in the United Nations Command and because of his character and calm self-control was ultimately President Eisenhower’s choice to head the long and tedious negotiations to end the war.

General Harrison was a soldier’s soldier who led a busy, ultra-kinetic life, but he was also an amazing man of the Word. When he was a twenty-year-old West Point cadet, he began reading the Old Testament through once and the New Testament four times annually. General Harrison did this until the end of his life. Even in the thick of war he maintained his

commitment by catching up during the two- and three-day respites for replacement and refitting that followed battles, so that when the war ended he was right on schedule. When at the age of ninety his failing eyesight no longer permitted this discipline, he had read the Old Testament seventy times and the New Testament 280 times! No wonder his godliness and wisdom were proverbial. It is no surprise that the Lord used him for eighteen fruitful years to lead Officers Christian Fellowship (OCF).⁴

Training yourself for godliness is possible, even for the busiest among us.

Having urged Timothy to train himself for godliness, Paul then wrote in verse 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.”** Athletes who exercise their bodies generally feel physically better. But eventually, the athlete’s body will get older and weaker. It will decline and decay and, eventually, die. On the other hand, believers who develop spiritual disciplines will find that the benefit to themselves increases over time. It never diminishes. Growth in spiritual discipline has an impact on our present lives and also in glory.

What are the spiritual disciplines that need to be developed? Kent Hughes suggests that godly men need to develop the disciplines of purity, relationships, mind, devotion, integrity, tongue, work, perseverance, church, and giving.⁵ Women need to develop these disciplines as well.

Far too many Christians think that time alone helps them

⁴ R. Kent Hughes and Bryan Chapell, *1 & 2 Timothy and Titus: To Guard the Deposit*, Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2000), 109.

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, *Disciplines of a Godly Man*, 10th anniversary ed.; rev. ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001).

to grow in godliness. That is simply not true. Time alone does not make an athlete better. It is time PLUS exercise and practice. Christians must exercise and practice the various spiritual disciplines to grow in godliness. That is to say that you will never grow by merely attending a worship service. You must put time into reading God's word and praying and serving and giving and repenting and paying attention to every area of your life. And when you fail, as you will, like an athlete you must pick yourself up, dust yourself off, and carry on. There is simply no shortcut to training yourself for godliness.

Then Paul wrote in verse 9, **“The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”** This statement occurs five times in Paul's Pastoral Letters (cf. 1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Timothy 2:11; Titus 3:8). The statement is an announcement of an important point or key doctrine. Scholars are divided about whether this statement in verse 9 refers to what precedes it or to what follows it. However, it seems more likely that the statement is endorsing verse 8, which states, **“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.”** Interestingly, Paul seems to have had several **“sayings”** that were **“trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”** I can imagine those who heard him regularly came to recognize his repetition regarding important statements.

Years ago, I heard a speaker at a men's retreat say that if one had been a Christian for a while, there were not many new things to learn. He believed that his job as a speaker was to remind and reinforce truths that we already knew. In our age of people seeking novelty, it is refreshing to know that are certain **“sayings”** that are **“trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.”** We don't have to keep rushing after new

“truth.” We simply need to stand on the truth that has been there all along.

So, first, a good servant of Christ Jesus nourishes himself on God’s word. Second, a good servant of Christ Jesus trains himself for godliness.

III. A Good Servant of Christ Jesus Commits Himself to Gospel Proclamation

And third, a good servant of Christ Jesus commits himself to gospel proclamation.

Paul wrote in verse 10, **“For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”** The **“end”** or goal to which **“we toil and strive”** is a life disciplined by godliness (4:8). When Paul said that God is **“the Savior of all people”** he was not teaching that all people will be saved. This is made clear by the addition of **“especially of those who believe.”** Paul was not teaching that God saves believers more than he saves others. Paul was simply modifying his general statement that God is **“the Savior of all people”** by adding the limitation that a person cannot be saved without believing. It seems that Paul’s primary point is that it is by a godly life that we point people to Jesus who saves all who believe in him. A good servant commits his life to proclaiming the gospel to all because eternity is at stake.

How many people make a profession of faith in Christ and then do not grow in godliness? I don’t know. But it seems that far too many professing Christians think that being a Christian means having a membership in a local church or perhaps attending a couple of Sundays a month or perhaps giving a few dollars occasionally to the church. But, it seems to be

clear that for Paul a Christian trains himself for godliness and toils and strives to this end. A Christian commits himself to pointing others to the living God, who is the only Savior.

So, first, a good servant of Christ Jesus nourishes himself on God's word. Second, a good servant of Christ Jesus trains himself for godliness. And third, a good servant of Christ Jesus commits himself to gospel proclamation.

Conclusion

Therefore, having analyzed the topic of a good servant of Christ Jesus in 1 Timothy 4:6-10, let us commit ourselves to growing in Christ Jesus.

Phil Ryken summarizes our text:

What makes a minister good? Paul tells Timothy three things that it takes to become a good minister: good teaching (1 Tim. 4:6), godly training (1 Tim. 4:7–9), and a global task (1 Tim. 4:10). Good teaching, godly training, and a global task are not exclusively for ministers, however. The Bible hints at this when it refers to Timothy, not as a minister, but as a good “servant” or “deacon” (*diakonos*) of Christ.... Any Christian who puts these verses into practice is a good servant of Jesus Christ (cf. Matt. 25:21).⁶

Good servants of Christ Jesus are growing in him. Make a commitment today to grow in Christ by nourishing yourself on God's word, training yourself for godliness, and committing yourself to gospel proclamation. Amen.

⁶ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy*, 168.

Mission Statement

The Mission Statement of the Tampa Bay Presbyterian Church
is:

*To bring people to Jesus Christ
and membership in his church family,
develop them to Christlike maturity,
equip them for their ministry in the church
and life mission in the world,
in order to magnify God's name.*

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