

A Study on 1 Timothy

Week 8 | 4:6-16

Overview | Godliness in personal and public life

We saw in the previous two passages of this middle section of 1 Timothy (3:14-16 and 4:1-5) that Paul is speaking directly to Timothy although his instructions do have implications for the whole church.

In this section (4:6-16) Paul directly speaks to Timothy regarding his personal conduct and his public ministry. Timothy is to be an example of the type of leader that church in Ephesus needs. His conduct and ministry should reflect biblical principles and wisdom which is in direct contrast to the way the false teachers were living and leading.

This section can be structured as follows:

1. The personal conduct of Timothy as an example to the church (4:6-10)
 - a. Doctrine (4:6, 7a)
 - b. Life (4:7b, 8)
 - c. Salvation (4:9, 10)
2. The public ministry of Timothy as an example to the church
 - a. Life (4:11, 12)
 - b. Doctrine (4:13, 14)
 - c. Salvation (4:15, 16)

“Timothy is to watch his life and teaching which will lead to the enjoyment of final salvation for both him and his hearers. There are therefore three aspects to consider in both parts of the passage: a godly life, sound learning/teaching, and final salvation. Focusing on these things, both in private and public will enable Timothy to be viewed as a good servant or minister of Christ Jesus (Macleay, p. 162).”

The Personal Conduct of Timothy | 4:6-10

As Paul addresses Timothy, he instructs him that in order to be a “good servant of Jesus Christ” (faithful overseer) he must “put these things in front of the brothers.” “These things” refers to what he has just mentioned in the previous verses, correcting the false teaching by going back to the Word of God. We see from this at least four things that Timothy, in the role of an overseer, must do:

1. He must teach the Word of God (4:6a)
 - a. This includes both teaching truth and refuting error.
2. He must be trained in the Word of God (4:6b, 7b-8)
 - a. The word “trained” can also be translated as “nourished.” Both of these ideas communicate the necessity for being disciplined and fed by the truth.
 - b. Healthy diet and exercise (spiritually) is what is in view. Paul uses the metaphor of physical health to display the necessity of spiritual health. How we go about disciplining our bodies by how we eat and exercise with the goal of physical health gives us insight into how to pursue spiritual health. It takes discipline. It takes perseverance. However, the reward for spiritual health has implications for eternity.
3. He must follow the Word of God (4:6b)
 - a. “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves. For if anyone is a hearer of the word and not a doer, he is like a man who looks intently at his natural face in a mirror. For he looks at himself and goes away and at once forgets what he was like.” - James 1:22-24

4. He must reject false teaching (4:7a)

- a. The phrase “silly myths” is more literally translated “worldly fables fit only for old women (NASB).” This is like saying “old wives’ tales.”

In verse 9, Paul uses a phrase that he uses 5 times in his pastoral letters (1:15; 3:1; 4:9; 2 Tim. 2:11. Titus 3:8). The phrase is, “the saying is trustworthy...(4:9).” Whenever Paul uses this it is to draw attention to the words around it. In one sense it’s also like a formal notation that he is quoting a firmly held view about the subject matter. In each instance it functions to draw our attention to the truth of the gospel.

There are two aspects of this that he mentions:

1. Our role – we “toil and strive” (4:10a)

- a. Much like Paul rights in Philippians 2:12 that we are to “work out our salvation with fear and trembling,” Paul tells Timothy to “toil and strive.”
- b. This does not mean that we add anything to our salvation but rather for those who have truly been saved we are called to work, to train, to strive toward godliness as a proof of that salvation having taking root in us.

2. God’s role – our hope is “set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people” (4:10b)

- a. It is God who does the saving. He initiates, he sent his son to die for us, he causes us to believe, and he keeps us.

What does it mean that he is the “Savior of all people, especially of those who believe”?

- “All people” – As it was in 2:4, the term “all” means “all kinds of people.”
- “Especially” – This can also be translated as “namely” or “that is.”

This final phrase is thought to be a direct attack on the practice in Ephesus of worshiping dead emperors. Paul makes a point to mention the “living God” who is the only one can save those who believe (Mounce, p. 257). This summarizes the entire goal of this section where Paul encourages Timothy’s conduct so that, in the end, our hope would be focused on Jesus.

The public ministry of Timothy | 4:11-16

As Paul shifts to the public aspect of Timothy’s ministry he echoes what he has encouraged him to do in private. He is to “command and teach these things (4:11).” “These things” refer to all that has just preceded it. Timothy is to teach the truth, point out error, and to teach and model what spiritual discipline looks like.

One obstacle that Timothy might run into is his age. It’s possible that some might not respect him or look to him as an authority because he is young (most likely in his thirties). Rather than encouraging Timothy to aggressively assert his authority he encourages him to model godliness (set an example v. 12) as a means of winning them over. He is to model conduct and qualities of godliness. Each one of these is in direct contrast to the attitudes and behaviors of the false teachers.

- Speech – Godly speech contrasts the abusive and malicious speech (6:4, 5).
- Conduct – Godly conduct contrasts the quarrels, arguments, friction, etc. (6:4, 5).
- Love – Love toward one another moves away from stirring up controversies (1:4).
- Faith – Persevering in the faith contrasts those who had abandoned it (1:20; 4:1).
- Purity – It’s possible that moral standards had slipped within the church and this was a call back toward holiness (5:2, 22).

In addition to setting an example for the church, one of the ways that Timothy will help lead in the change within the church is in the public ministry of the Word (4:13).

- “Devote” – to set one’s attention to
- “Public reading of Scripture” – This picks up on the tradition of the Jewish synagogue and now the Christian church. The public reading of Scripture is central to the worship of God’s people. To be grounded on the Word, we must hear it, read it, and be saturated in it.
- “Exhortation and teaching” – This involves the dual role of explaining God’s word as well as calling people to respond in obedience to it.

Timothy has been gifted for this very purpose – to teach and exhort the church. This was confirmed by the elders when they commissioned him by the laying of hands. One item that may be confusing is understanding what it means that the gift was given by prophecy.

- It echoes what Paul said about Timothy in 1:18.
- The prophecy is about “God’s authoritative guidance in Timothy’s ordination...The fact that the council of elders (*presbuterion*) laid their hands on Timothy recalls the reference in Deuteronomy 34:9, ‘Joshua...was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him’, as the Lord commanded (Cook, p. 81).”

Paul returns to the idea of the truth. Whereas Timothy must “put these things before the brothers (4:6),” and “command and teach these things (4:11),” here is told to “practice these things (4:15).” Timothy must be so saturated with the truth that not only is he teaching and reminding the church of them, he is actually practicing them and modeling them so that the church can see his growth in godliness and be encouraged.

Paul closes this section with the sober reminder to “keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching (4:16a).” He sums up the concern he has had from the beginning – that the godliness of the leaders and the purity of their teaching are congruent and, that Timothy, as one who has been appointed to lead and teach the church, would exemplify this.

He finishes with an interesting phrase: “Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers (4:16b).” Denny Burk comments on this, “When Paul speaks in this way, he is not claiming that the person in question is the ultimate cause of anyone’s salvation. He is merely speaking of Timothy as the *means* by which God brings salvation to people. God’s sovereignty in this work does not negate the means he uses to bring salvation. God has chosen to use his people to bring his word to sinners, and a faithful preacher is a crucial part of God’s plan (Duguid, Hamilton Jr., Sklar, p. 424).”

So What? |

Resource List

Teaching 1 Timothy by Angus Macleay (Primary Source for class)

1 Timothy by Philip Graham Ryken

Let’s Study 1 Timothy by W. John Cook

Word Biblical Commentary: Pastoral Epistles by William D. Mounce

1-2 Timothy & Titus by Philip H. Towner

Expository Commentary: Ephesians-Philemon edited by Iain M. Duguid, James M. Hamilton Jr., Jay Sklar

Commentary on 1 Timothy by John Calvin

ESV Study Bible