



1 Timothy 4:1-16
House Rules: 1 Timothy
“Godliness Rules”

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Every now and then you hear about someone (or know someone) who has been a longtime Christian, maybe even a pastor, who ends up leaving the faith. It’s always a sad thing to hear. Pastor Gary Demarest, in his commentary on 1 Timothy, writes of a pastor friend of his who left the faith. At one time they were colleagues in ministry, and worked together on many different things. But then this guy fell away. He denied his faith, left the ministry, and no longer considers himself a Christian. Gary writes, “I consider him to be a prisoner of war, held captive and brain-washed by the enemy. And I pray for his liberation.”¹

Maybe you’ve had questions about Jesus. Maybe they’ve felt like obstacles to your faith at times. For some who may be hearing this, perhaps you *aren’t* a follower of Jesus exactly because of certain questions and doubts. There are always people who will seek to undermine our faith or prevent others from coming to faith.

As the Apostle Paul continues his letter to Timothy giving him wisdom and advice about leading the church in Ephesus, Paul addresses some of these kinds of things, and then concludes with ways to stay on track in the faith in spite of obstacles from others. So, this morning we’re in 1 Timothy 4:1-16, and we’re going to do things a little differently than normal, and read the Scripture passage in sections, and I’ll offer some comments and teaching about each section before moving on to the next section. **We’ll start with verses 1-5.**

So, Paul begins getting into more of the false teaching that’s been going on in Ephesus, where believers are believing things that simply aren’t of God. Now, this isn’t anything new. False prophets, or false teachers, go back into the Old Testament where we see a number of times that this problem is addressed. For instance, Ezekiel 13:9 God says through the prophet, **“My hand will be against the prophets who see false visions and utter lying divinations. They will not belong to the council of my people…”** (Ezekiel 13:9).

Jesus also addressed the issue on more than one occasion, including in Mark 13 where Jesus says that these false prophets will be a reality in the future, **“For false messiahs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect” (Mark 13:22).**

So as Paul writes, it’s nothing new then, and it has not gone away today. The messages that seek to draw us away from Jesus and the truths of Scripture may be different, but the effort to woo people away from Jesus is still the same. For instance, as we see from Paul’s writing, some of the false teachers in their day were forbidding people to marry or to eat certain foods.

What may have been going on was a rise in Gnosticism. It was a false religion or philosophy that had its roots in knowledge – the Greek word “gnosis” means knowledge and is the root word for Gnosticism. It had been around since before the time of Christ and persevered into the second Century A.D., and really, even beyond that in various forms. Anyway: **One of Gnosticism’s tenets was that anything to do with the physical realm (particularly the human body, sexual relations, certain foods – though they did eat!) these kinds of things were considered bad and evil.**

Today the effort to woo us away from Jesus is the same but the message is the opposite. Now it’s an “anything goes” attitude. Do whatever you want with your body, with whomever you want, eat and drink what you want and as much as you want. That’s the worldly doctrine of the day and it comes with a host of what we might call signs and wonders in print and on the internet that make it all look very alluring. But what they’re experiencing in their day is false teaching that was *forbidding* marriage and certain foods.

But, as Paul says, what God has created is good – and marriage between a man and a woman and the food that abounds upon the earth are given to us by God. They’re good. We receive what God gives us with thanksgiving, and things that are tainted by sin are “consecrated” – declared that they are sacred – by the Word of God and prayer. That is to say, things that are sideways with God come into line with God’s will through Scripture and prayer and through that become consecrated...they become holy. This is the essence of

the gospel of transformation. You and I have been tainted by sin, but he sees us as holy and blameless because of what Jesus has done on the cross. We learn about this through Scripture, and this gospel message becomes a reality in our life when we sincerely pray to God, confess our sin, trust in the cross of Christ, and turn to Jesus and follow him.

Let's read **verses 6-10** now... Then Paul begins to shift toward some directives about how to combat this false teaching. **Notice that nothing he says has to do with crafting a logical rebuttal to what the false teachers are saying. This isn't about an intellectual argument.** This isn't about memorizing certain things to say, or learning big words, or filling our heads with knowledge. So if that kind of thing is scary, don't worry about it. It really boils down to how Timothy, and those in his church (and now us), live their lives in relationship with Jesus.

First, he reminds Timothy to “point out these things to the brothers and sisters” (v. 6) and if he does that he will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. In other words, Timothy should remind them of the truths Paul just mentioned that what God has created is good – and in particular to remind them about the goodness of marriage and food. And then he writes about being nourished on the truths of the faith which ultimately leads to him writing in verse 8, “train yourself to be godly. Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present and the life to come.”

The day in which they lived, exercise and daily routines went hand in hand. You worked in the field, you walked to the market place, you walked to your neighbor's house, you walked to the next city over if you needed to go there. Some had a donkey or some other mode of transportation, but most did not. Walking was a way of life. The idea of exercising intentionally was not unknown to them, but it certainly wasn't as necessary as it is for us.

Cars, planes, boats, light rail and other forms of transportation have all made exercise in daily life completely obsolete for us. Heck, we've even taken our human powered modes of exercise and electrified them so that we don't have to work as hard: battery powered bicycles and skateboards and more. You

hardly need to walk anymore. So, we spend money on transportation that keeps us lethargic; we spend additional money on food that generally isn't very healthy – especially if we're eating out a lot; and then to counterbalance all of that many people spend more money (and definitely more time) exercising to fix the problems we've created for ourselves. As a result, we've idolized exercise.

So, unless a person was going to compete athletically, the daily routines of life pretty much burned all the calories they needed to and strengthened all their muscles more than sufficiently. “A little exercise” as Paul writes here, was all they needed. **But what matters more, he says, is training to be godly.** Note that this is something *we* do. We do the training. This is not turning the faith into works righteousness. Rather, it is a work we do that flows out of the salvation that God gives us through Jesus Christ and his work on the cross.

Gary Demarest tells the true story of a friend of his who at the time spent a couple hours a day running, 30 minutes three times a week in a health club exercising, played racquetball 3 times per week, and belonged to a local tennis club where he played once or twice a week. The guy came to Gary and said that he was really struggling to find any joy in life – in his work, in his marriage, with his kids, or anywhere else. Together, they took an inventory of how he spent his time, and they realized the time and energy he spent on physical training compared to spiritual training was in the realm of 100 to 1, and that this was the source of his problems. It was a spiritual issue. **The guy's conclusion was, “I'm physically fit, but spiritually flabby.”**

You don't want that on your tombstone, folks. “Here lays Sally Jones: She was physically fit, but spiritually flabby.” How ironic would that be, given that the physical body is unfit at that point – it's dead – and the only thing that actually matters is our spiritual fitness. Spiritual fitness has value for today, tomorrow, and eternity. So: **How are we doing in our spiritual exercise?** If a 25-30 minute sermon constitutes your spiritual exercise – even if you're getting that once a week, which is at least double the national average of church attendance for people who go to church, even pre-pandemic – if that's all you're getting, I guarantee you that your spiritual

exercise is getting completely outweighed by all the messages that bombard us day in and day out. It's the spiritual equivalent of burning off 500 calories a week when you're consuming 15,000 per week. We need more.

I will briefly comment on verse 10 specifically because depending on the translation it almost sounds like a statement in favor of universal salvation regardless of what one believes. Paul writes, “...**we put our hope in the living God, who is the savior of all people, and especially those who believe**” (1 Timothy 4:10). It sounds like *all* people are saved – regardless of faith; and “especially” those who believe – like they have an extra special saving. This is, of course, completely contrary to the message of Jesus and that Paul himself then taught. So what does he mean? What he means is first that God is the savior of all people in terms of *potential* and in terms of God's *desire* that all would be saved, and in the sense that *only God* can do that saving. No one else can. Jesus himself famously says that “God so loved *the world* that he gave his one and only son.” So, the potential, desire and ability for all – not just a few – to be saved is definitely there. God can do it.

But the reality is that only *some* believe in Jesus and are *actually* saved. So, they in particular, or “especially”, or the word can just as easily be translated as “chiefly” or “above all” *are* saved. To finish Jesus' own statement about God loving the world that he gave his only son, so that “whoever *believes in him* shall not perish but have everlasting life.” (John 3:16). God wants the world to be saved; belief and trust in Jesus is the way that God does that.

Let's now **read the last few verses**...First Paul commands Timothy to command and teach these things. This is important stuff, not to get sidetracked and distracted from the faith – and this is how we burn more calories. What follows is how we stay spiritually fit, how we stay focused and keep training and growing in the faith. But first we get this well-known verse 12 where Paul encourages Timothy not to let anyone look down on him just because he's young, but: “...**Set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity**” (1 Timothy 4:12). Speech and conduct are external things – it's how we relate to other people. Faith and purity are inside us, or at least are rooted on the inside. Love sits in the middle of these five things and binds them all together because love is an internal thing and an external thing. To

quote Jesus, we are to “love our neighbor as ourselves.” It’s hard to love externally when we don’t love internally. So, love bridges these things together.

And even though Timothy is young, he can be an example in these things. And here at Rose Hill, I think that’s a place where we do pretty well, though there’s room for growth. For instance, we have young people – like college age and younger – leading worship pretty much every Sunday at 9:30 and regularly at 11:00 as well, even if not every Sunday. **But do we let them be like Timothy and ask them to set an example in speech, conduct, love, faith, and purity?** Are we allowing them to be a “Timothy” among us, showing us how we could live and function and be as a church family so that the light of Christ would shine more brightly? Yes, it’s a two-way street, and there’s much for older generations to share as well...but the traffic flow is *mostly* in one direction. Maybe the best example we parents and grandparents could give of what it means to follow Jesus is to allow the younger generation to have more input and influence in who we are as a church. **We say children and youth and young adults are the future of the church...so why not let them be more part of the present as well?** In fact, if they’re going to be the future, they *need* to be part of the present.

And then we get a list of things that Timothy is to do in setting this example, and that leads to spiritual fitness. Now, as the leader of the church, some of these are kind of specific to him and his role. But: **For any of us who consider ourselves disciples of Jesus, these things apply to us at some level as well.** So, Paul tells him to be devoted to the public reading of Scripture, preaching, teaching...don’t neglect his gift (meaning, spiritual gift that is benefitting the church), be diligent, and give himself wholly to these things, so that everyone may see his progress (his faith development). He continues, telling Timothy to watch his life and doctrine closely, and to persevere, because he will save himself and his hearers. And that last statement isn’t a statement negating the saving work that Jesus does on the cross, but simply recognizing Timothy’s role, and now our own role, in the exercising of our faith so that we don’t end up being deceived by those who would seek to do tear us away from Jesus. It all flows out of the verses we started with, where there are some false teachers. **Paul is telling him, and**

now us, how to stay on the straight and narrow path...how to stay in step with Jesus.

So, godliness rules, and here we are given insight into how to live a godly life – which is how you help others to know Jesus as well. And it's mostly about Timothy's "doing." For us:

- Being in worship shows devotion to Scripture reading, preaching, and teaching, whether you're up front or in the pews.
- We've all been given a spiritual gift or maybe a few gifts – so don't neglect the gifts you have.
- Be diligent about this stuff, give yourself wholly to these things.

Today, if Paul were here, he might tell us: Instead of turning on the TV every night, why don't you put your faith to good use? Get to know your neighbor. Invite them for a meal. Ask how you could pray for them, or serve them somehow. Serve other people in need. Get plugged into a ministry at church. Get involved in a small group – and make sure your small group isn't just about Bible study, but about being a group on mission: getting out and living the faith together.

The end result of this kind of devotion and diligence and perseverance is that people would see your progress...our progress...they would see the difference Jesus has made in your life as you exercise your faith wholeheartedly. And then they too would be encouraged to live a godly life, following Jesus. Let's pray...Amen.

¹ Gary Demarest; "The Preacher's Commentary: 1&2 Thessalonians, 1&2 Timothy, Titus," page 195-196.