

Be Ministers of Godliness

Devotional Reading: 2 Peter 1:3-11 **Background Scripture:** 1 Timothy 4:6-5:16

TIME: About A.D. 62 **PLACE:** unknown

I Timothy 4:7-10

⁷ Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. ⁸ For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. ⁹ This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. ¹⁰ That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

I Timothy 4:11-16

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

¹⁵ Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. ¹⁶ Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

I Timothy 5:1-8

Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, ² older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

³ Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. ⁴ But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. ⁵ The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. ⁶ But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. ⁷ Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. ⁸ Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

LESSON AIMS

The aims of today's lesson are to:

- Identify the qualities demonstrated by a faithful servant of God.
- Express the importance of spiritual training in the life of a Christian servant.
- Stress that if we want to be good servants of Jesus Christ, we must invest our lives in the pursuit of godliness.
- Encourage students to evaluate their Christian walk in light of God's holy standards.

LESSON INTRODUCTION

There is no question that Timothy had the heart of a servant and that he was very dear to Paul. In his letter to the Philippians, Paul had written that he was sending Timothy to them because he knew of no one else who had the same spirit of unselfish commitment to their best interest (2:19-21). He went on to say that Timothy had served him as a son would his father (vs. 22).

Today there is great emphasis on the need for a good physical body. Our culture dictates to us that in order to be accepted we must look a certain way. The Bible, however, places less emphasis on the physical body and encourages us to develop our lives unto godliness. Our lesson this week helps us take those first steps in developing a life of godliness as we listen to Paul's advice to young Timothy.

We are privileged, then, to have a glimpse of a close friendship and partnership in Christ in Paul's letter to

Timothy. Just as a concerned parent would instruct his child, so here the apostle gave heartfelt counsel on how Timothy could grow in sincere usefulness and spiritual stature.

Too often the church has neglected to emphasize the powerful impact that spiritual mentors can have as they take a sincere interest in those who are young in the faith. As we study the exhortations to godliness in this week's lesson, may our hearts be stirred to offer support and encouragement to our brothers and sisters in Christ.

LESSON BACKGROUND

We recently studied a list of characteristics or qualities that should be present in potential leaders in the church. This week we study a passage that forced Timothy to take a long look at himself and his ministry. It is important for us to remember that these letters to Timothy are like personal notes to him—we are reading his mail.

Paul was not afraid to give Timothy the difficult assignments and the tough advice. This is what equips Timothy to deal with issues that pose challenges in the local church. As a younger minister, Timothy faced many hurdles in leading and relating to the various groups within his congregation.

Today's lesson is more than good advice from one long-dead man to another about a situation from ancient history. Those who minister to the church today have faced (or will face) many of the same challenges of the first-century church. Church leaders still need to develop the spiritual maturity and interpersonal skills that Paul urged on Timothy.

BE MINISTERS OF GODLINESS

Bookstores are heavily stocked with all the latest works on management and leadership. Authors and publishing houses try to persuade us that if we don't stay current on leadership trends, then we're behind the times. The Internet bookstore Amazon.com will offer you over twelve thousand "hits" if you search for books on the topic of leadership on its Web site. Woe to the leader who isn't aware of the latest and greatest in management theory!

Church leadership, however, is not an "idea of the month club." Church leadership finds its basis in a set of unchanging fundamentals that must be mastered.

Undergirding these fundamentals is the foundation of godliness. Without godly leaders, nothing good can happen in the church. This truth is just as important to the twenty-first century church as it was to the first-century church. It is a truth to learn (or relearn) in today's lesson.

LIFESTYLE OF THE GODLY MINISTER (I Timothy 4:7-10)

Go Into Training (vv. 7-9)

Paul had just finished encouraging Timothy to pass along sound doctrine to the people of Ephesus, the town in which he was ministering (1:3). Good teaching leads to growth in godliness. False teaching, on the other hand, has no constructive value.

Instead of following these puerile (childish) ideas, Timothy was to be like an athlete in training. He was to build himself up in holiness by attending to the great truths of the faith.

The false teachings tempting the church at Ephesus were "profane," meaning they had no source in the holy God but rather were cheap and common. They were made-up stories that only the weak-minded would fall for. These "fables" were rabbinic embellishments of the Old Testament law and genealogies that would cause

endless and unprofitable discussions and arguments. The mention of this at the outset of Paul's letter shows how concerned he was about this source of mischief.

1. What were the "godless myths" (I Tim. 4:7) that Timothy was to avoid?

Paul exhorted Timothy to pursue spiritual training by noting how much more valuable it is than physical exercise (Greek: *gymnasia*). Some commentators believe the reference to physical exercise is a further criticism of the principles of the Judaizing false teachers, who emphasized ascetic practices (Col. 2:20-22).

From the remainder of the verse, however, it seems that Paul was simply saying that physical exercise, while having little profit, does not have the combination of temporal and, more important, eternal profit that godly striving provides.

2. Why is spiritual discipline more valuable than physical exercise (vs. 8)?

Trust God (v. 10)

The words used here to describe Christian travail are very strong. To labor and strive suggests that we give our all to the task. Paul may be referring specifically to a leader's ministry in the church, but some think that he is speaking of the more general need of all Christians to strive for a life of godliness.

Either possibility honors the living God. The phrase who is the Savior of all men does not mean that God saves all people, but that he makes salvation available to all because of the cross. Salvation ultimately comes to those who believe, and not to unbelievers.

At the heart of our confidence in God is the knowledge that He is a God of grace. The text is not saying that He gives eternal life to everybody but that He does in fact deal graciously with all men—a truth made clear with every moment that He allows the wicked to go on living! He grants this even though their sins are deserving of immediate judgment (Ps. 36:6; Jonah 4:10-11).

God's grace is most evident, of course, in the lives of believers, who have placed their trust in Christ and are thereby delivered from eternal damnation.

3. In what way does God show His graciousness even to unbelievers (v. 10)?

DUTIES OF THE GODLY MINISTER (I Timothy 4:11-16)

Teaching and Modeling (vv. 11, 12)

Some things, says Paul, need to be addressed with authority. That is the reason he can say command ...these things. Paul will later tell Timothy how to command, but here he is stressing the importance of impressing truth on the congregation. These are not just suggestions! But for Timothy to command and teach may pose a certain problem, as the next verse shows.

The Greek word for young or youth can be used for a man who is of age to serve in the military. Some calculate that Timothy may be about thirty years old. Will his relative youth be a problem in teaching the older folks in his congregation? Perhaps!

So Paul recommends some ways to overcome this potential problem. The first concerns the way Timothy is to communicate: He is to set an example...speech. How often our tongue can get us into trouble! (See James 3:1-12). On the other hand, well-chosen words can heal and encourage.

Second, Paul says Timothy should be an example in life. Timothy's lifestyle certainly is to include everything he would do in love, in faith, and in purity. These are not new concepts in Paul's writings. He stresses them

numerous times, in various ways (I Corinthians 13; II Corinthians 6:3-10; I Thessalonians 1:3). Timothy's age will not be a problem if he demonstrates spiritual maturity.

A church leader who does not give attention to the areas Paul lists is certain to fail no matter what his age; a bad example ruins credibility.

Timothy's age made the example he set all the more important. He was probably in his thirties—not a teenager, but for the responsibilities he had, he was still quite young. Because of his age the members of the church would have had a natural tendency to magnify any shortcomings in his life. Timothy was to live in such a way that the people would have no just cause to look down on, or "despise" him.

There may also have been a hint here that Timothy was not to be fearful or intimidated but rather was to discharge his office boldly.

4. Why did Timothy's age make it especially important that he set a good example for the people (v. 12)?

Timothy needed to pay special attention to being a good example in three specific areas. The courage and joy in Timothy's life would testify to his faith. His concern and labor for others would demonstrate his love. Finally, his single-minded obedience to God's will (in all areas, not just the sexual realm) would give clear evidence of his purity. As he lived out these qualities, the people under his charge would grow in them as well.

5. What three areas did Paul single out as particularly important to Timothy's example (v. 12)?

Ministering and Sustaining (vv. 13,14)

Paul tells Timothy to give attention to the public reading of Scripture. Sadly, this is not often emphasized in many churches today. But public Scripture reading can have a powerful effect (see Nehemiah 8:1-12). Emphasis is also to be given to preaching and teaching.

This is a picture of some aspects of worship in the early church. There is a time for Scripture reading as well as a time to preach and teach what has been read. The early church often reflects the customs of the Jewish synagogue. In the synagogue it was standard practice to give words of explanation after the reading of Scripture.

Timothy had been blessed in a certain way by the elders. We don't know when or where this happened, but it could have been at Ephesus (I Timothy 1:3) or even Lystra (Acts 16:1). We're not even sure about the nature of the special gift with which Timothy was endowed. The important thing to Paul is that Timothy actually use his spiritual gifts. Why should God give a gift to a person who has no intention of using it? Such a person may as well not have the gift at all.

The phrase laid their hands on you has often been seen as an ordination, although this verse does not call it as such. Still, it appears very much as if this event was a precursor to what later would be called ordination. Acts 8:18; I Timothy 5:22; II Timothy 1:6; and Hebrews 6:2 also discuss the practice of laying on of hands.

Diligence and Perseverance (vv. 15,16)

The ministry that Timothy is involved in requires him to be totally absorbed. This complete commitment means that he will continue to grow spiritually in order that his progress may be obvious to all.

Paul exhorts Timothy to give attention to both his life and doctrine or teaching. Many Christian leaders and servants get these out of balance. We have all met people in the church who know the Bible book, chapter, and verse but have not learned how to apply it appropriately. As a result, they bear no fruit (Luke 13:6-9).

There also are others who live out the Christian lifestyle, but show little or no interest in matters of doctrine.

They are the ones who say, "Give us something practical! Don't bother us with tedious doctrine." Such people are spiritually shallow and may fall prey easily to false doctrine (Matthew 13:5-7). A balanced Christian and a balanced leader will be concerned with both doctrine and practical application. That kind of leader will bless those who are led.

Paul said that by circumspect living and the steadfast teaching of the truth, Timothy would save himself and others. Of course, this does not mean that we are saved by our good works and efforts.

God has ordained the means as well as the end of our salvation, which in Scripture includes not just our regeneration but also our sanctification and, one day, our final deliverance from sin as we come into the presence of the risen Christ (Rom. 8:23-25; I John 3:1-3). A truly regenerated person will live a godly life and heed the truths of God's Word. By these means he gives evidence of the Spirit's working in his heart, making his "calling and election sure" (II Pet. 1:10; Eph. 2:10; Phil. 2:12-13). It is in this way that Timothy's labors would have a saving effect.

6. In what way would the work of Timothy save himself and others (v. 16)?

SKILLS OF THE GODLY MINISTER (I Timothy 5:1-8)

Relating to Men of All Ages (v. 1)

Respect for those who are older was very much a part of the fabric of the ancient world. Even so, there may be times when a younger leader needs to disagree with those who are older. When this happens, the principle of treating the older man like a father is helpful.

To recognize someone as a father and others as brothers is the imagery of a family. When times of disagreement come, the family still has to stay together. This requires skill on the part of Timothy and all church leaders today.

Relating to Women of All Ages (v. 2)

The same basic principle from verse 1 is also applied to the women of the church. Paul adds the reminder that these relationships should be pursued with all purity. This extra caution is due to the fact that members of the opposite sex are involved. This surely needs to be heeded in our own day as well.

Concerning men older than himself, for example, Timothy needed to show respect for them. Instead of dealing with their sins harshly, he was to call them aside and humbly urge them as a son would his father. Older Women were to be treated as respectfully as older men. Timothy was to treat them as he would his mother.

7. How was Timothy to conduct himself when dealing with men and women who were older than he was (vv. 1, 2)?

Younger women were to be approached with the fondness and protective spirit one would have toward a sister, with the added proviso that all relations with the opposite sex were to be marked by moral rectitude (righteousness, integrity, decency) and pure thoughts.

8. What extra caution was needed when dealing with young women (v. 2)?

Relating to Widows of All Ages (vv. 3-8)

The churches of Timothy's day evidently take seriously the responsibility of supporting financially the widows in the Christian community. Widows have a very difficult time supporting themselves in the ancient world. The

Scripture groups "widows and orphans" together in numerous places to describe those who are most vulnerable. (James 1:27).

The church takes care of the physical needs of widows. In exchange for the financial support, these widows probably perform certain duties to help support the work of the local congregation.

The term "widow" means "to be deprived." Those who were widows "indeed" were women who had no one at all, not even family, to care for them. The church was to help these people and not to do it in a condescending way; it was to show the bereaved respect and honor. By doing this, the church would reflect the character of God (Ps. 68:5; Isa. 1:17-18).

9. What is meant by the phrase "widows indeed" (5:3)?

Paul made it clear, however, that the family is the first line of support for a widow. A widow's own family members have the first responsibility to support the one in need. The church must insist on this for the spiritual welfare of its people, for caring for one's family is a vital part of true religion (Exod. 20:12; Mark 7:10-13; John 19:26-27). This duty extends to the grandchildren (the meaning of the term "nephews" in I Timothy 5:4) as well.

10. Who is the first line of support for widows in the church (5:4)?

CONCLUSION

There is no doubt that service of any type is a complex matter. This is particularly true in church leadership. Those serving in that capacity not only need to understand the Scriptures, they also need to understand people. Ministry is for God and to God, but it is exercised in a setting of community.

The sheer difficulty of the task requires those who serve the church in both leadership and non leadership positions to call forth their best. This involves not only the best in terms of personal piety, but also all the wisdom and sensitivity needed to deal with people. It is a rare person who can do it all well, but they do exist. Some do it well intuitively and some do it well after years of trial and error. But it's something we can all improve upon!

Godliness is genuine piety. "Piety" may be defined as reverence for God or the devout fulfillment of religious obligations. Biblical Christianity is not a mere set of religious beliefs, one among many; thus, in this day of widespread postmodernism, we must underline the fact that the only valid godlikeness is to emulate the one and only true Jehovah God.

If we say we are godly people, we are called to demonstrate that through our love for others, especially to those who are close to us and to whom we owe care.

PRAYER - Father, help me to evaluate myself. Help me to behave properly in my personal life as well as in the way I relate to people. May I do it all in Jesus' name and for his glory, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER - Church leadership begins with holiness.