

1 Timothy Chapter 4 (vv.10-16)

Paul is describing the qualities of a 'good minister of Jesus Christ' (v.6). First, he is *dedicated* to the word of God, reminding the brethren of doctrinal errors whilst nourishing his own soul with scripture (v.6). Second, he *denies* the 'junk food' of unholy stories that lack any credibility or spiritual value (v.7). Third, he is *disciplined*, constantly training (exercising) his spiritual life in the pursuit of 'godliness'.

Exercise of Godliness [vv.6-10]

v.10: Godliness and its attendant promise of eternal life was the reason (motivation) *both* Paul and Timothy '**laboured**' and '**suffered reproach**' (RV has 'strive', for which there is stronger manuscript evidence). 'Labour' (*kopiaio*) is used of the disciples *toiling* all night and catching nothing (Luke 5.5). The word means to employ strenuous effort to the point of physical and emotional exhaustion. 'Strive' (*agonizomai*) creates the image of an athlete *fighting* in a contest or *running* in a sprint, straining every sinew to reach the tape. If the AV is retained, then the picture changes to describe the external suffering received at the hands of men whilst engaged in service for Christ. Paul clearly believed the preaching of *eternal life* was worthy of his life's devotion. *Henry Martyn, the missionary to India, exclaimed, 'Now let me burn out for God.' Because of his diligent, hard work as a missionary to the American Indians, David Brainerd was dead before he reached thirty.* Their labour was inspired by an abiding confidence (hope) firmly founded on the '**living God**' (cf. 1 Kings 17.1) who alone is the *essence* and *source* of eternal life. Indeed, God is the 'Saviour of *all* men' (potentially), but '*specially*' (*malista*, a word of qualification) or 'to be precise', them that 'believe' (actually). This is the simplest way to understand the statement, but an alternative view suggests that God is acting towards *all* humanity in the character of a Saviour God – a 'preserver of men' (Job 7.20). At the present time He is not dealing with the world in *judgment* (2 Corinthians 5.19) but graciously gives life, breath and 'fruitful seasons' to all men (Acts 14.17; 17.25). "In this life, all men experience to some degree the protecting, delivering, sustaining power of God. Believers will experience that to the fullest degree for time and for all eternity" (MacArthur).

Example of Godliness [vv.11-16]

v.11: The remaining verses of the chapter encourage Timothy in the *promotion* of the truth, rather than *preservation* from error. 'These things', i.e. refusing *fables* and training unto *godliness* are to be continually '**commanded**' (authority) and '**taught**' (instruction). **v.12:** Paul now presents a series of *eight* imperative verbs in *five* verses. In summary, the 'good minister' of Jesus Christ is a *pattern* to be imitated (v.12), a *preacher* to be heard (v.13) and exhibits *progress* to be admired (vv.14-16). He must be an *example* (v.12), an *exhorter* (v.13) and *exercise* spiritual gift (vv.14-16).

- Imperative **One:** 'Let no man despise thy youth' (v.12). The word '**youth**' (*neotes*) describes a person of military age (up to 40) and thus well described Timothy who was approximately 34 at this time. His responsibility at such a young age may have caused some to 'think down upon' (**despise**) him (cf. 1 Samuel 17.28) describing contempt in the mind which results in injurious action. But if Timothy was to fulfil His God-given charge, he needed *respect*. The answer was not self-assertion or vocal protest but a life of example.
- Imperative **Two:** 'Be thou an example' (v.12). Timothy was to 'keep on becoming' a model (*tupos*) of Christian character and behaviour. *Tupos* describes the impress or mark left by a blow (as the nail prints, John 20.25). An impression of Christ should be apparent in the character of Timothy as an **example** to be imitated (Titus 2.7). This would be evident in *six* spheres:
 - In **word**. His speech, whether *private* intercourse or *public* teaching, must be carefully guarded (cf. 5.13; 2 Timothy 2.17; Ephesians 4.15, 25, 29-31; Colossians 4.6).
 - In **conversation**, i.e. personal conduct or manner of life which can either undermine or bring authority to a person's message (James 3.13; 1 Peter 3.1-2, 16).
 - In **charity** (*agape*). The kind of (volitional) love which sacrifices to seek another person's good, even though they may be an enemy (hostile). This kind of love harbours no bitterness or resentment.
 - In **spirit**. Whilst only occurring in the majority texts, this word suggests *enthusiasm*. "A quality strangely lacking from the make-up of many Christians. Plenty of enthusiasm for a football match, or for an election campaign, but so little of it for the service of God" (Guy H King).
 - In **faith**. Could either refer to *faithfulness* in the sense of one who is dependable and trustworthy (1 Corinthians 4.2), or Timothy's own personal, active confidence in God and His word.
 - In **purity**. Including both *actions* (cf. 5.2) and *motives*. Cf. 2 Timothy 2.22.

- Imperative **Three**: ‘Give attendance to’ (v.13). In respect of local church gatherings, Timothy must pay close attention to (implying *preparation* in private) ‘the reading’, ‘the exhortation’ and ‘the doctrine’. The article suggests these were already specific and recognised habits. ‘The **reading**’ refers to the *public* reading of the scriptures in the assembly (not his own personal Bible reading). This was essential given that few people had copies of the word of God. Manuscripts were limited and expensive to reproduce. Jim Allen says, “Since the words in the codex were not divided, this called for care as well as technical ability. This public reading was a vital channel in the dissemination of truth.” ‘**Exhortation**’ (*paraklesis*), often translated *consolation*, was an appeal to the *conscience* (and will) to put truth into action. ‘**Doctrine**’ refers to an *explanation* (exposition) of the meaning of the reading (cf. Nehemiah 8.8). About AD 150-155, *Justin Martyr* described a typical Christian worship service: “On the day called Sunday, all who live in cities or in the country gather together to one place, and the memoirs of the apostles and the writings of the prophets are read, as long as time permits; then, when the reader has finished, the president speaks, instructing and exhorting the people to imitate these good things.” See Acts 13.15; Colossians 4.16.
- Imperative **Four**: ‘Neglect not the gift’ (v.14). For his *own* encouragement and *assurance* of the saints, Paul reminds Timothy of His divine *calling* (prophetic word), *equipping* (spiritual gift) and *commending* (hands of the elders). Timothy’s ‘**gift**’ was a special and personal (‘in thee’) *spiritual ability* enabled by the Holy Spirit. He must not ‘**neglect**’ such gift, not that he was failing in its use, but it required co-operation and application if it was to be properly developed. Clearly it is possible for a believer to be careless in the development of their spiritual potential, just as the unsaved tragically fail to take advantage of God’s free offer of salvation (Matthew 22.5; Hebrews 2.3). This gift was given ‘by’ (*dia*) or ‘through’ **prophecy**, denoting attendant circumstances (cf. 1.18). Obviously, prophetic ministry had identified Timothy as one fitted for a particular sphere of service (cf. Acts 13.2-4). Thus, the prophet did not *confer*, but rather *announced* the gift. This was accompanied by the ‘**laying on of hands**’ of the ‘presbytery’ (elders viewed as a collective group) which was a *public recognition* (cf. Numbers 8.10; 27.18, Deuteronomy 34.9) of Timothy’s spiritual gift and an *identification* with his call to service (Acts 16.1-3).
- Imperative **Five**: ‘Meditate upon these things’ (v.15). Timothy was to ‘carefully attend to’ (*meletao*, the very opposite of ‘neglect’) the injunctions from v.12. *Meletao* indicates ‘strategy’ and ‘premeditation’ suggesting a focus on preparation, praying and planning for such things.
- Imperative **Six**: ‘Give thyself **wholly** to them’ (v.15) suggests being absorbed, engrossed and wrapped up in such spiritual activities. They were to be his continuous habit and given undivided attention. Then his ‘**profiting**’ (*prokope*, spiritual progress) would be visible to all. The Greek word was a favourite of Stoic philosophers to describe a student’s progress in their studies. It was also used of a pioneer cutting a track through dense jungle. His spiritual progress would therefore blaze a trail of example for others to follow (Hebrews 12.13).
- Imperative **Seven**: ‘Take heed unto **thyself**, and unto the (thy) doctrine’ (v.16). In summary of the preceding injunctions, Paul categorises the qualities of an ‘excellent minister’ into two groups: *personal holiness* and *public instruction*. In all his labours, he must first be especially mindful (vigilant) in relation to his own personal *spiritual* (4.7) and *moral* life (5.22). Any failure here would significantly affect his ‘**doctrine**’, i.e. *authority* to present the word of God, and *ability* to handle its truth effectively (2 Timothy 2.15). Timothy should continually be evaluating his life so that both aspects—his life and teaching—might maintain a right course.
- Steven Lawson: “Pure water cannot flow through a rusty pipe and still remain clean. Neither can the pure truth of God’s Word flow through the corrupt life of the preacher without the message being adversely affected.”
- DG Barnhouse: “The man who is to thunder in the court of Pharaoh with an imperious ‘Thus saith the Lord!’ must first stand barefoot before the burning bush.”
- Imperative **Eight**: ‘**Continue** in them’ (v.16). This *final* imperative probably forms the start of a new sentence. Timothy must remain *preoccupied* (persevere) with these duties (vv.15-16) in order that he might ‘**save**’ himself and those who listen to him. The context demands that the salvation in view is a present, practical salvation from spiritual dangers, not least demon-originated false teaching (vv.1-3). Without Timothy’s faithful and devoted ministry, he and his listeners would likely slip into *doctrinal*, and therefore *personal* and *moral* failure. Alternatively, if eternal salvation from sin is in view, then Timothy’s faithful ministry would provide incontrovertible evidence of his own salvation and be used of God in the salvation of others.