

<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> 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. (ESV)

- Timothy's calling
- Timothy's training
- Timothy's comfort

A brief recap. The letter of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy is in large part a warning. It is a warning against false teachers. And if you remember, the defining characteristic of their teaching was that they taught holiness through abstention.

There is a great scene in the John Ford classic western *Stagecoach* with John Wayne. And in the film, always walking in front of the saloon, were the ladies of the local Temperance Union, preaching a gospel of abstention from all that goes on in the saloon. The drinking, the women, the gambling, the smoking, the raucous music. It's a pit of filth, you see. So *stay out!*

Now don't they have a point? Some places *are* worse than others, right? You're more likely to get hit by lightning and die on a treeless hilltop than you are in your home, during a electrical storm, right? Aren't they preaching some good wisdom here? You're more likely to find Jesus in a church than a brothel, so do battle with sin by staying away from brothels. This makes sense, right? We must do battle with sin. The bible says that we have to be alert and self-controlled. Absolutely! 2<sup>nd</sup> Peter 1 says that God's divine power has "granted to us all things that pertain to life and godliness... so that through (Christ) you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. Make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness..." So escape corruption.

But here is the problem. What happens when this is not merely a supplement? When temperance, when abstinence, when personal purity is put *before* the good news or *becomes* the good news itself –

when escaping or abstaining from corruption. In other words, when you put your sanctification (what you have a part in by changing) before your justification? This is NOT the gospel!

There are not holy and unholy things; there are only holy and unholy people. False teachers and those that focus on abstention don't understand this. They think that if you don't cuss or chew or dance or play guitar, you'll be holy. But it's just not that easy. Holiness and godliness do not and cannot come through abstention. It comes through Christ. In *Stagecoach*, the temperance Union women – do they ever go into the saloon? No. But you can see the pride and the condescension

all over their faces that says "We are good, and if you want to be holy, abstain like we abstain." Friends, it is demonic to say I don't drink or smoke and I always use my turn signal, so I am going to heaven.

You're not made holy by something you don't do, but by something that Jesus *did*. False teachers want you to save yourself through morality and good works and lists of dos and don'ts, and it's these same kind of teachers that were on the scene to kill Jesus because his message of grace would have put them all out of a job. And all that Paul is saying here is, we can never let this legalistic, man-centered, sanctification-before-justification teaching ever get its nose in the church because it will put the *body* of Christ – the church – to death, too. Because Christ came not to change behavior but to change hearts. He goes *deep* to save.

You see, there is nothing more beautiful than what Jesus Christ has done, and we have no right to add anything to it. It can't be Jesus plus right observance of the Sabbath, or Jesus plus the King James Bible, or Jesus plus no alcohol, or Jesus plus politics, or Jesus plus veganism. No, it's just Jesus. Christianity is not *about* abstention. It is about redemption! Now might we abstain from drugs or alcohol if we are Christians? We might! But that will be a behavioral decision that flows out of grasping the Lordship of Jesus, not as a way of getting Jesus. No Christians drink biblically, we play music biblically, we make love biblically, we eat biblically, we laugh biblically. And we do this because our whole lives are consecrated before the Lord. Just before our passage, Paul writes, "nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." And by saying we do these things biblically, I'm not saying that you need to read your bible to convince God to love you. I'm saying read your bible so you *know* God loves you.

*Everything* belongs to Christ. It's all good. That's where we are: The gospel is that it is Christ alone who saves, and therefore we are finally free to enjoy all that he has made.

So when Paul says, "If you put these things before the brothers – the congregation – 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," this is exactly what he means. This is the calling of Timothy and all bible teachers. To put GRACE before the people – to make sure justification comes before sanctification – this is *your* calling. That's our first point.

Friends, some of you ask me how you can help this church. And I have a hundred practical ways to do this. But I have one way, that while not practical, IS critical: If you ever stop hearing about grace, SCREAM LOUDLY. Because some of you are from other churches where this happened and you simply moved on – but you see, it can happen here and Paul says "*Don't* let it happen there" – so don't! Don't let this happen here! Speak up!

### **Now second, Timothy's training:**

Verse 6 says, "Be trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. *Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather, train yourself for godliness*"

What is an "irreverent myth?" Some translations will say "godless myths." That works well in this context because Paul is contrasting what is God-less with what is God-ly. An irreverent, godless myth, is when something is said to be spiritual, but *without* God. So what would a godless myth be? That you are essentially a good person. That's probably the predominant American myth. "I think I am basically a good person." That's a godless and irreverent myth because it leaves out what God says about you – that you are born a sinner. How about this one: "Everyone worships the same God." No, that's not true. Or sometimes it sounds like this: All religions are essentially the same. We often accept that, but if that were true, you'd have to remove about a third of the OT where God is so concerned about his people following the other nations and their gods. It's a myth to say we all worship the same God, and that is a myth that has serious consequences.

Now you could say, "Well I am at a good church and we take the bible seriously," but there is more to it than that. Paul has to say to Timothy – AND TO US – "Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths, because there is no end to them." There are some of you that get caught up reading these false teachers and you have become a one-person apologetics machine. You're out there on the internet defending true Christianity. There's nothing really wrong with this – Peter tells us to always be ready to give a defense for the hope WE have. But don't make this a business! Have *nothing* to do with irreverent, silly myths. In other words, this stuff can take you over and suck away your faith. I've seen guys – for some reason guys are more prone to this – who use the bible like it is their truth-defender weapon. But it's been years since they read it devotionally. That is wrong! That's demonic! Because that is how Satan reads the bible! You're reading the bible just like he is. As a tool to use to destroy someone else! No you can't let someone else and their errors dictate how you read or listen to the word of God. Read the word of God, and you WILL be ready when you need to be!

Because this is how this training – training for godliness – really works.

Of the fifteen occurrences of the word "godliness" in the New Testament, thirteen of these are in these three brief letters from Paul that we call the Pastoral Epistles (1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy and Titus), with an amazing 9 occurrences in 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy alone.

I want you to think about the concentration of this one word, "godliness," in these three letters. Why is this one word jammed so often into this brief letter?

When I was a boy – through the influence of my aunt – I became interested in classical music, and one conductor in particular: Herbert von Karajan. And what fascinated me about this guy was that most of the time when he conducted, he had his eyes closed. No eye contact – or so it seemed. He was the conductor of the Berlin Philharmonic for 35 years, and he seemed to be able to conduct at times without moving.

But of course that was not the case. If you spoke to musicians in the Philharmonic, they would tell you that there had been many, many words shared by the conductor to the musicians in thousands of rehearsals over the years, trying to achieve "a sound," trying to build the sonority – and the unity – of the orchestra, from the ground up. Over the years, they had built such a rapport together that when the audience would come to see them perform, Karajan would look

like a brooding, half-asleep stone face. But in reality, the brass knew what a flicker of an eyelid meant, and the strings understood what it meant when a pinky was extended around the baton, and the woodwinds would see a slight shoulder-shrug and they knew just what to do. To the audience it meant nothing, but every movement or expression had been boiled down to its essence in such a way that they were pregnant with meaning to the musicians.

These pastoral epistles are Paul's very latest – his last – letters. And he is writing them to someone he knows so well, that ideas and concepts can be reduced down to a few brief words or concepts. And the apex of this communication – the grand focus of this letter – is to produce godliness. Everything that Paul is saying can be reduced down to this one word, and Timothy has been with Paul so long, he knows exactly what this single word means. It is a simple word but it is charged with final and ultimate urgency.

And this single word means so much more than we think it does. For Paul, "godliness" is not a static, stained-glass word. It is not a frozen, pietistic, moralistic word. No, for Paul – and therefore for Timothy's call and for us – godliness is *active*. It is a kinetic obedience that springs from a reverent awe of God.

You see, this is a pivot point in the letter. Paul says to Timothy, "At the end of the day, God will look upon you and say you are a good servant if you do one thing: put *these things* before the congregation."

Well, what are "these things?" It's the gospel – it's all that is in your bible. But then godliness is actively living, acting on, exercising these truths. In fact exercise is the very analogy Paul uses for godliness: "Train yourself for godliness, 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.

You know, we Presbyterians have the reputation for being the head-knowledge group. And it's hard earned. Traditionally, coming from Scotland, we saw what happened when the bible teachers were poorly taught, and that is that those churches folded up or were pretty soon preaching a different gospel. In response, we became "truthetyrians." But head-knowledge – even bible knowledge – if it isn't acted on, if it doesn't go into the heart – will never make you godly.

Now before you go getting' all comfy – you feeling, emotional types, there is the opposite extreme. A number of years ago, the Christian writer and essayist Os Guinness came out with a book called *Fit Bodies, Fat Minds – Why Evangelicals Don't Think*. Great title. His point is that the American religious consciousness has moved away from knowledge and that we even see spirituality as being the enemy of knowledge. His point is that we live in a world that is anti-intellectual. We live in a world where our entertainment is something like Extreme Makeover. Fix the body, and the rest of you will feel better. Transform the outside, and we change the person on the inside. No, the bible says that we are transformed from the inside out. And there is nothing more extreme than that! Change your body – enhance it, augment it, exercise it. This may be of some good, but like a tattoo on a great big bicep, someday that muscle is going to be hangin way down here (illustrate) and you won't even be able to see what that tattoo was! No, God stamps you on the inside as his, and he changes everything. If you let him renovate you on the inside, your marriage changes, your relationships change, your approach to work changes,

your view of creation – it's beauty and worth – all of this and more will change. Godliness is simply acting on these truths and letting them renovate your heart.

When Paul says "train yourself for godliness," it is Paul's way, with just a slight head-nod, of saying, "Your life in Christ must not be cloistered!" *Godliness* must not be cloistered. The godly among us are those people whose reverent worship of God flows into obedience throughout the week. It's like playing sports. They give you a playbook, but at some point you have to get out there and just play. Make all the Xs and Os instinctual. So if you travel for work, read your bible on the plane – and then live it out! If you sell things for a living, read and hear the word preached, and then sell biblically. If you are a student, read your bible, and then study in light of what you've read. Exercise your heart and mind, and then live it out. That's godliness. It's important – this is the third time that he says "this is a trustworthy saying!"

If this confuses you – "train yourself for godliness," find the godly people in this church. They stand out, don't they? Ask them how they do it!

### **Lastly, Timothy's comfort.**

What gives us hope, what makes us want to toil and strive towards godliness, is that we serve a living God (v. 10). Everything out there that people worship is either the one, true, living, triune God, OR ... an idol.

Now if you've been around Hope for awhile, this is a strange word that you will hear an awful lot. Idols. And you think, I don't have any wooden statuettes on my shelf, and if someone came into my home, they wouldn't find me bowing down in front of some trinkets and candles and beads.

Maybe not. But there are a lot of things in our lives that become *idolatrous*. You see, the reason we talk about idols here is that idolatry displays maturity in sin (repeat). Hearts that are active – but not toward God so that they are active, *godly*, hearts, but toward things that are not God, so that they are *godless* and irreverent. Idolatry is when we develop our hopes and place them on anything other than God. It is the maturity of sin because it isn't just moving away from God but is moving towards something else. Worshipping the created over the creator to make creation give us what we want. It could be a piece of fruit. It could be a golden calf. But it could be anything that makes what we want more manageable. Anything that brings what we want closer.

Idols make God more manageable because the idol is intended to convey the *power* of God. The idol, in a sense, puts God at our disposal. Idols bring God down. God fashioned us with his hands, right? But when we make idols, we fashion God with *our* hands. Idols humanize God. They make him more like us! The idol we make will always want what we want.

And that is why they are dead. Because God saves people who are dead in their trespasses and sins, and delivers them to live, so that when we turn back to these weak and dead and deadly things – money, power, sex, drugs, and the self – then we end up serving dead things and our lives become zombie like because we become the living dead.

No. Timothy's comfort – our comfort – comes from serving the *living* God. Jesus is not an academic exercise – he is truth personified. We serve the LIVING God. Jesus has risen! He is ALIVE!!

Now, we need to wrap up, but there is this last verse, and while our final point here is that serving a *living* God who saves sinners like you and me and Timothy is a comfort... well this last verse has NOT been a comfort to many. What does this mean, "We have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who *believe*?" Is God a universalist, saving everybody? Is God desirous to save all people but only those who can summon up belief are saved, making YOU the author of salvation?

I think Paul assumes that you know those are not the case! That would be what the false teachers say! No, when Paul says "especially believers," he means he "precisely." This Greek word means "namely" or "precisely" or "especially." IOW, "The gospel is for all people, or to be precise, *those who believe*." It goes back to first Timothy 2:4, remember? God desires ALL people to be saved. Even the kings, the Neros, the bad people, the oppressors, EVEN THE PAULS! He saves all those kinds of people, namely, those who believe. What a comfort! There is no one who cannot be saved!

Will you trust him? Will you be one of those who believe?

Let's pray.