

The Pastor's Life

1 Timothy 4:4-8

A certain church found itself suddenly without a pastor, and a committee was formed to search for a new man. In due course, the committee received a letter from a clergyman applying for the position. The letter went like this:

“Gentlemen: Understanding that your pulpit is vacant, I should like to submit my application. I am generally considered to be a good preacher. I have been a leader in most of the places I have served. I have also found time to do some writing on the side.

“I am over 50 years of age, and while my health is not the best, I still manage to get enough work done so as to please my parish.

“As for references, I am somewhat handicapped. I have never preached in any place for more than 3 years. And the churches I have preached in have generally been pretty small, even though they were located in rather large cities. In some places I had to leave because my ministry caused riots and disturbances. Even where I stayed, I did not get along too well with other religious leaders in town, which may influence the kind of references these places will send you. I have also been threatened several times and even physically attacked. Three or four times I have gone to jail for witnessing to my convictions.

“Still, I feel sure I can bring vitality to your church even though I am not particularly good at keeping records. I have to admit I don't even remember all those whom I've baptized. However, if you can use me, I should be pleased to be considered.”

Hearing the letter read aloud, the committee members were aghast. How could anyone think that a church like theirs could consider a man who was nothing but a trouble-making, absent-minded, ex-jailbird? What was his name?

“Well,” said the chairman of the committee, “the letter is simply signed ... PAUL.”¹

1 Timothy 4:4-5 NAS:

⁴ *For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;*

⁵ *for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.*

¹ Tan, Paul Lee: Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations : A Treasury of Illustrations, Anecdotes, Facts and Quotations for Pastors, Teachers and Christian Workers. Garland TX : Bible Communications, 1996, c1979

1 Timothy 4:4-5 NLT:

⁴ Since **everything God created is good**, we should not reject any of it but **receive it with thanks**.

⁵ For we know it is made acceptable by the word of God and prayer.

Have you ever wondered why we give thanks before we eat? Or why we sometimes call it “asking the blessing? “Maybe you have never thought about it, or just accepted that that is what Christians do--they pray before they eat. Yes, we do pray before we eat and these verses give us one of the reasons why. “*Everything created by God is good, so we should receive it with a prayer of thanksgiving.*”

Remember those false teachers in Ephesus? Earlier we saw that they were teaching that the single life is more spiritual than the married life.² **Among other things**, they were also teaching that certain foods should be avoided if someone wanted to be very spiritual. But the truth Jesus taught was that everything God made for the nourishment of mankind is good, and it is to be thankfully received. Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude. In New Testament days, **false teachers**, among other things, were teaching that people should discipline themselves not to eat certain foods. This teaching was contrary to God’s purpose for creating animals. By the time God created Adam and Eve, He had already created everything they would need to sustain themselves. Then in Genesis 9 we read:

Genesis 9:1-3 NLT:

¹ Then God blessed Noah and his sons and told them, “Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth.

² All the animals of the earth, all the birds of the sky, all the small animals that scurry along the ground, and all the fish in the sea will look on you with fear and terror. **I have placed them in your power**.

³ **I have given them to you for food**, just as I have given you grain and vegetables.

All foods should be received with gratitude because the food has been given to us to strengthen us to do God’s work. It has been set apart for God’s use by God’s command. **We then are to give thanks to God through prayer for His provision whenever we are about to eat**. Those who do not thank God for their food and do not pray for His blessing in the use of it, are not worthy of His provision and blessing. Food can be eaten and enjoyed after proper thanks is given. We should thank God and treat His gifts with respect.

Jewish people always praised God before their meal. Another blessing was used after meals and included the statement “**God is good and does good.**” This Jewish custom was an appropriate way to show gratitude to God for His provisions.³ We could paraphrase

² Wiersbe, Warren W. *Be Faithful*. Wheaton IL: Victor Books, ©1981. Page 56.

³ *The IVP Bible Background Commentary – New Testament*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: “1 Timothy 4:1-5 Errors of the Heretics”.

the verse: *"Everything . . . is set aside for special service because of God's declaration, to which we add our declaration of thankful prayer."*⁴ You may recall the account of Peter's vision in Joppa.

Acts 10:13-15 NAS:

¹³ *A voice came to him, "Get up, Peter, kill and eat!"*

¹⁴ *But Peter said, "By no means, Lord, for I have never eaten anything unholy and unclean."*

¹⁵ *Again a voice came to him a second time, "**What God has cleansed, no longer consider unholy.**"*

Paul once again emphasizes that God's purpose in giving good things to people is so that, in their enjoyment of those gifts, they would praise Him. By gratefully receiving God's gracious gifts, believers fulfill that noble intention for which those things were created. The doxology of Romans 11:36 sums up this perspective:

Romans 11:36 NAS:

³⁶ *For from Him and through Him and to Him are **all things**. To Him be the glory forever. Amen.*

Now let us read the same verse from the "New Living Translation," which may give you a little bit of a clearer picture as to the meaning of this verse.

Romans 11:36 NLT:

³⁶ *For **everything** comes from him and exists by his power and is intended for his glory. All glory to him forever! Amen.*

The **false teachers** in Ephesus were teaching that everything God made was not good. This is an intentional contradiction of the Word of God.

All through the Pastoral Epistles, Paul stands toe to toe with false teachers for their open rejection of God's Word.⁵ Contrary to other false teaching which was misleading many of the citizens of Ephesus, God created and blessed both **marriage** and **food** and stamped them both with His seal of approval.⁶ God created them both for **those who have the wisdom to believe and know the truth** when they see and hear it. God created all things for the same reason: to bring joy to the lives of those who trusted Him and to glorify His Holy Name.

1 Corinthians 10:31-11:1 NLT:

³¹ ***So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.***

⁴ Bruce B. Barton, David R. Veerman, Neil Wilson, *Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*, (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 1993), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, Under: "1 TIMOTHY 4".

⁵ MacArthur, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary – 1 Timothy*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), WORDsearch CROSS e-book, 154.

⁶ Gen. 1:28-31; 2:18-24; 9:3 .

³² *Don't give offense to Jews or Gentiles or the church of God.*

³³ *I, too, try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what is best for me; I do what is best for others so that many may be saved.*

¹ *And you should imitate me, just as I imitate Christ.*

Unbelievers can enjoy food and marriage also, and certainly do, but they do not accomplish the true purpose for these gifts and they definitely do not bring praise to God by the way they use these gifts. Therefore, it is clear that God made all things for **those of us who believe and to know the truth**, because believers are the ones who will bring Him glory. Think about it! Unbelievers are willing to share in the benefits God has provided for believers without giving God the thanks and glory that He deserves for His goodness and grace. We won't get into what ultimately happens to such people, but you can take it to the bank that it will not be good.

Genesis 1:31 NAS:

³¹ *God saw all that He had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

Those good things from God that believers gratefully receive are **sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer**. To be **sanctified** is to be set apart for holy use. The **means** by which that is accomplished is **the word of God and prayer**. **Prayer** obviously refers to giving thanks out of a feeling of gratitude. **The word** seems to refer to the very word in Genesis 1, that everything God made was good. But it is also possible that Paul has in mind more than Genesis 1:31, namely, the New Testament Gospel.⁷

When we see the phrase "*the word of God*" in the Scriptures, it often refers to **the message of salvation** (2 Timothy 2:9; 2:15). It is that **Word of God** by which all believers come to know **the truth in Christ**. Part of that truth is that Christ has abolished the Old Testament dietary laws. According to Mark 7:19, Jesus "*declared all foods clean.*"⁸

Mark 7:14-23 NAS:

¹⁴ *After He called the crowd to Him again, He began saying to them, "Listen to Me, all of you, and understand:*

¹⁵ ***there is nothing outside the man which can defile him if it goes into him; but the things which proceed out of the man are what defile the man.***

¹⁶ [*"If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."*]

¹⁷ *When he had left the crowd and entered the house, His disciples questioned Him about the parable.*

¹⁸ *And He said to them, "Are you so lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into the man from outside cannot defile him,*

¹⁹ ***because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?"***

(Thus He declared all foods clean).

⁷ 1 Tim. 1:3-11; 6:3-5, 20; 2 Tim. 2:14-18; 23-26; 3:13-17; 4:1-4; Titus 1:9-16; 3:9-11.

⁸ Acts 10:9-15; Rom. 14; Col. 2:16-17.

²⁰ *And He was saying, "That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.*
²¹ *"For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries,*
²² *deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness.*
²³ **"All these evil things proceed from within and defile the man."**

Dietary regulations were meant to be temporary. Once Christ came they were no longer necessary because His one sacrifice, dying on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins, cleansed all those who believe in that substitutionary death of Christ. To continue the dietary regulations would be nothing less than to establish a doctrine of salvation by works rather than faith. That would deny the work of Christ on the cross and thereby dishonor God. If a believer trusts that the Word of God has eliminated the need for dietary laws, and offers thanks to God in **prayer**, he or she can enjoy God's gifts and glorify Him in the process.

False teaching can only be defeated by the **Word of God**.

Hebrews 13:2-9 NAS:

² *Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.*

³ *Remember the prisoners, as though in prison with them, and those who are ill-treated, since you yourselves also are in the body.*

⁴ *Marriage is to be held in honor among all, and the marriage bed is to be undefiled; **for fornicators and adulterers God will judge.***

⁵ *Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU,"*

⁶ *so that we confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?"*

⁷ *Remember those who led you, who spoke **the word of God** to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith.*

⁸ ***Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever.***

⁹ *Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for **it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods,** through which those who were so occupied were not benefited.*

1 Timothy 4:6-10 NAS:

⁶ *In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, **constantly nourished on the words of the faith** and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.*

⁷ *But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;*

⁸ ***for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things,** since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to*

come.

⁹ *It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.*

¹⁰ *For it is for this we labor and strive, because **we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.***

“In pointing out these things to the brethren,” (1 Timothy 4:6) Paul has warned Timothy of the false teachings that were to come into the Church. There will be people who pretend to have faith but are just worshipping an idol, a god they have created in their own mind.

“You will be a good servant of Christ Jesus.” All of those who believe minister for God in one way or another by applying their spiritual gifts in His service. But here Paul is speaking to Timothy as a teacher of the Word of God. Teaching is a gift that some have and some do not. But all believers are ministers.

“Constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine, which you have been following.” Exercise in order to maintain good health is sound reasoning, but our main objective in life should be to grow in the Word of God, not to seek the world’s approval by following their standards. The world today, through a never ending onslaught of advertising, tells us that we are acceptable if we are good-looking, have six-pack abs, a perfectly sculpted body, all the newest and most up-to-date electronic gear, and participate in all the foolishness and outright sin that so many others have accepted. Our constant diet should be on the Word of God which will provide us perfect nourishment.

Here are some other things that Paul suggests Timothy should avoid:

1 Timothy 4:7:

⁷ *But **have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;***

I kind of like this story told by J. Vernon McGee:

“As a young boy I remember there were a lot of sayings that the older people would quote to us children. I remember one dear Christian woman who had some peculiar ideas. One was that everybody should take sulphur and tartar mixed with a little honey or molasses. I was fed that because my mother listened to her. I took enough sulphur and tartar to make a small mountain! I have no idea whether it did me any good or not, but she thought it was the only thing I needed as a boy. Similarly, when it was discovered that I had cancer I was given over a hundred books on diet to help rid me of the cancer. I couldn't have followed one of these books without contradicting another! One said to eat plenty of grapes, the other said not to eat grapes. One would say to take honey, another to keep away from it. I decided to listen to the Great Physician and to leave my case in His hands.”⁹

⁹ Op Cit, MacArthur, 170-181.

Timothy is also told by Paul to practice godliness in his life.

1 Timothy 4:8:

⁸for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Please do not get the idea that Paul is telling people that exercise is a waste of time. That simply is not true. In fact in 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NASB, Paul writes:

1 Corinthians 9:24-27 NLT:

²⁴*Don't you realize that in a race everyone runs, but only one person gets the prize? So run to win!*

²⁵*All athletes are disciplined in their training. They do it to win a prize that will fade away, but we do it for an eternal prize.*

²⁶*So I run with purpose in every step. I am not just shadowboxing.*

²⁷*I discipline my body like an athlete, training it to do what it should. Otherwise, I fear that after preaching to others I myself might be disqualified.*

Paul was no stranger to physical exercise. Paul likely walked thousands of miles in preaching the Gospel of Christ and taking that message to the Gentiles in that part of the known world. He did not travel in “Air Force One,” or a private limousine. He did not even ride on a donkey. Paul walked, and it took someone who was in good physical condition to cover the ground he did throughout the Roman Empire.

Paul's emphasis on **godliness** rather than on **physical exercise** was directed at a city that overly emphasized the importance of athletics. Kind of like the United States today. Look at the stadiums we build all over the country to worship sports. Far too many people are willing to worship sports rather than God, and that includes many who consider themselves to be Christians. I would very much like to see people in churches leaping to their feet and cheering for God the way they do for their home team. There is nothing wrong with sports if we keep it in the proper perspective, but the attitude regarding sports in this country has gone way over the top.

Physical conditioning could help your quality of life while you are alive in this world, but spiritual conditioning will do you good in both this life and the next. Believers will one day have new and perfect bodies that will not require an hour-a-day on the treadmill. That body will be perfect in every way and it will last forever.

So just what is meant by the term, “godliness”? Does it mean we walk around with our hands folded all the time, as if in prayer? Does it mean we are in church for every meeting? Does it mean we spend all our time reading the Bible? The godly person indeed may spend a good deal of time doing those things, but those actions are not what makes him or her godly. “Godliness” refers to living a life that is Spirit-directed; it means putting God first in all one's thoughts, actions, and plans. It means “letting the Word of God dwell richly” (Colossians 3:16) in his or her heart and thoughts. Beyond that it

means letting the Word of God direct the things you do in everyday life. It means living a life of obedience to Christ who said, “*If you love Me, you will keep My commandments*” (John 14:15 NAS). Godliness, therefore, is an attitude, an inner state of being that controls one’s outward actions. It is a perfect example of the selfless love described in 1 Corinthians 13.

“Any Christian who lives a careless life rather than a godly life will find that even in eternity he will pay for it. Are you as anxious about godliness as you are about physical exercise, about athletic events?”¹⁰ We hope so.

¹⁰ Ibid.