

GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

1ST TIMOTHY 4:11-16

Notes on

1 Timothy 4:11-16

Paul now gives Timothy a rapid-fire series of commands telling him how he is to live and minister in contrast to the character and behavior of the false teachers in Ephesus... 1. *Command.* 2. *Teach.* 3. *Let no one despise.* 4. *Set an example.* 5. *Devote yourself.* 6. *Do not neglect.* 7. *Practice.* 8. *Immerse yourself.* 9. *Keep a close watch.* 10. *Persist.* Each of these

words and phrases is in the imperative voice in the Greek and indicates a command for Timothy (and us) to follow rather than a suggestion for him to consider. We might call this section **“Timothy’s Ten Commandments!”**

v.4:11 - Command (1)... This is the same root word we found in v.1:3. It’s a military term. Once again Paul is giving Timothy authority to give strict orders and expect them to be obeyed... This strong word may be especially aimed at Timothy because he is a naturally timid person and Paul needs him to be more forceful. It may also be aimed at the church community in Ephesus, who certainly would have read this letter publicly, telling them that Timothy speaks with power conferred by Paul and according to the will of God... **teach these things (2)**... the “trustworthy sayings” and truths of Christ and the practices of godliness conveyed by Paul to Timothy are to be faithfully presented to the church...

v.12 - Let no one despise you (3)... Paul’s third word of command calls Timothy to offer effective resistance to those who would dismiss him and what he has to say. He is God’s man, and he is to be respected and heeded... **for your youth**... Timothy is a relatively young man (probably in his mid-thirties) living in a culture where older people were shown great respect and called to exercise authority over many who were older than him... **but**... this is a strong adversative word (*alla*) in Greek... **set the believers an example (4)**... The way Timothy is to combat those who might discount him because he is young is not through boastful or aggressive behavior but by proving to be an exemplary follower of Christ and leader of His

¹¹ Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.

- 1 Timothy 4:11-16

people before their eyes... How is he to do this? First of all Paul gives him five key areas to be aware of... **in speech** (literally in “word”—*logos*—how you speak to and about others in daily conversations)... **in conduct** (how the patterns of behavior life reflect the principles you live by)... **in love** (*agape*—how you demonstrate Christ’s kind of love... unconditional, self-giving, sacrificial...)... **in faith** (probably both how you prove yourself to be trustworthy and how you show forth the truth of your trust in God)... **in purity** (how you exercise self-control to keep yourself free from immoral and deceptive activities, attitudes and thoughts)... The false teachers by contrast were apparently contentious in speech, errant in behavior, and selfish rather than loving, having abandoned true faith in Christ and exhibiting and encouraging a purity based on outward ascetic practices while accepting and indulging in various forms of immorality.

vv.13-16 - ... How is Timothy to set a good examples for fellow believers? Paul spells it out further with the last six of “Timothy’s Ten Commandments”...

v.13 - devote yourself to (5)... literally “hold on to”... Timothy is to keep up certain normal practices... **the public reading of Scripture**... This is the first reference to the use of Scripture in Christian worship. At this point in history this would be what we call the Old Testament. Later the Gospel records of Jesus’ life and the letters of Paul would be added in. There are places where churches are instructed to read letters from the apostles aloud for the gathered church—1 Thessalonians 5:27; Colossians 4:16; Revelation 1:3 & 22:18-19. In this way Timothy would be helping his church to see that the real authority was found in God and conveyed through His Word... **exhortation** (or “encouragement” or “preaching”)... explaining and applying Scripture after it is read... **teaching** (instruction on Christian doctrine)... Here is the origin of the sermon in Christian worship...

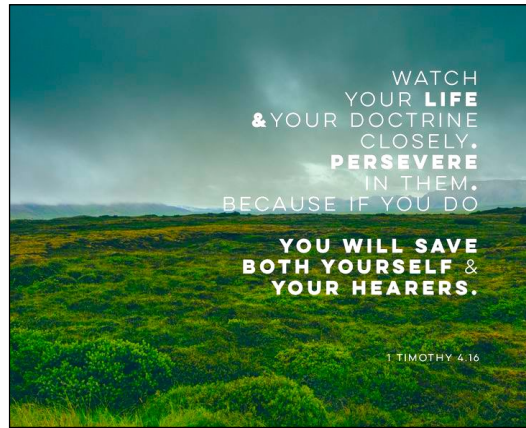


v.14 - Do not neglect (6)... Timothy has received a gift from the Holy Spirit that enables him to do the things he is called to do. It would be wrong for him to forget or fail to exercise this gift for God's purposes and for the building up of His Church... This gift was previously announced through **prophecy** (someone speaking for God through His direct inspiration) and authoritatively affirmed by the Church as elders **laid their hands** on him...

v.15 - Practice these things (7)... Timothy is to improve in these things through constant practice... And to drive the point home, Paul says **immerse yourself in them (8)**... Literally, he says "be in them"... He is to become inseparably connected to them. The truth of Christ, the identity and gifts given him by God and the resulting godly behavior are to be not only what Timothy "does" but what he "is!" Such practice and such "immersion" will result in growth toward greater health and wholeness, toward Christ, for Timothy. And such growth will be clearly witnessed by those around him. This is an important goal off Timothy's efforts: **so that all will see your progress**, Paul says. This is an excellent word for all of us working to follow Christ our Lord. None of us have arrived yet. We are all in process. Nobody needs to see our arrival or perfection (to try to project such an appearance would be phony, pretentious

and discouraging to the mere mortals who know they haven't achieved such a high status); however, people can be encouraged when they see progress being made in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity in goofballs like me and you.

v.16 - Keep a close watch on yourself (9)... Literally, "Hold on to yourself." Paul concludes the exhortations of chapter 4 with a couple of summary commands. First, Timothy is to maintain control over himself... He is never to fall asleep at the guard station of his life... And he is never to get lazy, or lose hold of, **the teaching** he knows, trusts and shares... Finally, he is to **persist in this (10)**... "Stay on"



these things, keep at it, never give up, never surrender... In so doing, Paul says, **you will save both yourself and your hearers**... Such perseverance will result in the great concern of Paul, of Timothy, of Christ, of His Church: *Salvation*. It is not that Timothy will actually save anyone. Only God can do that. But he will be used as God's agent in a profound

way: For the accomplishing of His divine purposes of bringing His people out of death and into life eternal!

Read & Reflect - 4:11-16

First Reading: Which of the "Ten Commandments" to Timothy do you find most interesting or challenging? Why?

How is Timothy's lifestyle to be different from that of the false teachers of Ephesus?

Search & Consider

4:11 - What "things" is Timothy to "command and teach"?

4:12 - How and why might opponents use Timothy's youth against him? How is he to combat such opposition? (Is such advice only for the young?)

4:13 - What do we learn in this verse about how the 1st-century church went about worshipping God together?

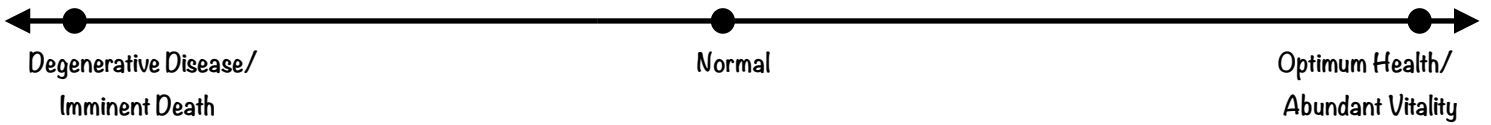
4:14 - What do you think Timothy’s “gift” is? Where did it come from? How does he know he has it (What clues has he been given?)

4:15 — As Timothy “practices” the things Paul is telling him, as he “immerses himself” in them, what will be the result?

4:16 - What is Timothy to “watch” (or “hold onto”)? Do you think it will be difficult or easy for him to do this? Why?

As Timothy “persists” in these things what will happen? What does this mean?

Apply



1. Where would you have placed yourself on the scale (below) in terms of your spiritual fitness, healthy practices, and/or experience of God’s abundance a year ago, or 10 years ago? (Mark with an “O”)? Compare it to the scale you marked last week...
2. Are you able to see progress? Do you think others can see it? (Maybe you could ask a Christian friend for their input.)
3. What justifications might others use for “despising” or “looking down on” you (your youth, old age, name, education...)? How can you combat such disparaging opinions (give some specific examples)?

For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 4:11-16

- A. OPENER...** What are some things you have “immersed” yourself in during your life (careers, hobbies, studies, relationships...)? What sorts of things do you see Paul calling you/us to “immerse” ourselves in today?
- B. 1 TIMOTHY 4:11-16...** Share your Personal Study Guide answers above... As time permits, you may also want to focus on these questions...
1. Which of Paul’s “10 Commandments” to Timothy do you think is the most important? Why?
 2. Why is it significant that people saw the progress in the faith that Timothy was making? Is the same true for us today?
 3. Why is it important for pastors/leaders to “keep a close watch” not only on what they are teaching but also on themselves? What happens to people who fail to “keep watch” on themselves?

A FINAL THOUGHT...

How might our persistence in our faith in Jesus and His Good News help in the process of God’s salvation for others and for ourselves?

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Holding on to Yourself in a “Let-Yourself-Go” World

We live in a time when people, young and old alike, are increasingly encouraged to “live for the moment,” to “go for it” now and not to waste time worrying about tomorrow. You deserve some fun. You deserve whatever it is you want to have or to experience. Some of this is motivated by greed. Sellers want you to buy their wares now so they can more quickly turn what is yours into what is theirs. You deserve whatever it is you want to have or to experience (And we will tell you what you want, and you will believe us.) Get it. Now. Let yourself go. Now. But this emphasis on today without reference to yesterday and without concern about tomorrow is also part of a great shift in the way people in our day and age tend to think.

J. Daniel Hays in his book The Message of the Prophets explains this as he looks at the broad sweep of history and human thought: *Throughout history, people have had different views of the future and of the concept of movement forward toward a future. Premodern society gave priority to the past, focusing their hopes and understanding on their forefathers. Modernity, springing up in Western cultures out of the rational and science-based emphasis of the Enlightenment, produced a hope in human progress and in humanity’s control of the future, often replacing religious-based hope with secular-based hope. Education and technology replaced grace and divine creation in the attempt to remove fear of the future. Through human achievement based on science, modernity believed that the future would always be better. With the end of modernity and the emergence of postmodernity, however, the belief that science and technology could guarantee a safe and better future all but collapsed. As in the premodern era, fear is back for many; the future is frightening rather than encouraging. This postmodern society is now focusing on the present and withdrawing from the bleak prospect of the future. The Western postmodern culture has lost faith in any kind of meta-narrative that gives hope for the future (p.78).*

If there is no tomorrow... If the world is a brakeless bus crammed full with all humanity careening out of control and with increasing speed toward the cliff... If my life will end soon enough and after death comes nothing... Why not give myself to something that provides thrills for now—sex, drugs, expensive distractions and risky behaviors? And if such things cause me problems later on, so what? And if some folks suggest that such self-centered sins and idolatries always come with a high price, what difference will it make when we’re all dead and gone?

Then we read the last of Paul’s “ten commandments” to his young friend and colleague found at the end of 1 Timothy chapter 4. He tells Timothy to “persist” in the things he is commanding *“for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.”* There is a tomorrow, Paul is claiming. There is always a tomorrow. And so one can be “saved” supernaturally into a positive and glorious and eternal future with God rather than perishing into the negative and horrific natural consequences eternally attached to our sins and idolatries. And the obedient choices to which Paul calls Timothy, and us, have an effect on this real salvation for ourselves and for others!

How are we to go about fulfilling this high call? Paul’s previous summary command to Timothy (“Timothy’s Ten Commandments” #9) tells us. *Keep a close watch on yourself...* Literally, *“Hold on to yourself”* (4:16). Socrates once famously said “The unexamined life is not worth living.” Paul, it seems, would agree. It is important for us to be continually examining ourselves: What am I doing? Why? What is motivating me? What am I hoping to achieve?... What is true? What is good? What is healthy? What is fair and beneficial to others? What honors God? Is that what I am doing?... Is this consistent with His revealed character and purposes? Who am I? Whose am I?...

Among people who like to claim and encourage a loss of control due to outside forces (life circumstances, spiritual forces, drugs, peer pressure, public opinion, etc.), Paul’s *“Hold on to yourself!”* is a profound command: Control yourself. You are a human being made in God’s image, not an animal made to follow slavishly your urges and instincts...

And here is Dr Hays’ encouraging epilogue to his analysis of history and human thought quoted above: *The Bible, however, and the Old Testament prophets in particular, gives hope to such a disillusioned culture. In contrast to postmodernity, the Bible offers a meta-narrative with an ending. The prophets declare that history is moving toward a God-controlled end.* - J. Daniel Hays, The Message of the Prophets, p.78



“Timothy is to watch both himself and his teaching... The proclamation of the gospel cannot be separated from the character of the proclaimer... ‘Watch’ can mean to ‘hold fast’ or to ‘aim at,’ to ‘fix one’s attention on.’ Timothy must hold tightly to who he is and not allow himself to be caught by the teaching of the opponents.”

- William D. Mounce, Pastoral Epistles, p.264

“In our postmodern culture which is TV dominated, image sensitive, and morally vacuous, personality is everything and character is increasingly irrelevant.”

- David F. Wells, No Place for Truth