

1 Timothy

#6 - 1 TIMOTHY 3:14-4:16



OVERVIEW – 1 TIMOTHY 3:14-4:16

Paul continues unpacking his primary concerns in this letter to Timothy i.e., to equip Timothy in countering false teaching (cf. 1:3-7, 20), and ensuring the faithful teaching of God's word and the faithful living of God's people. Following his instructions about recognising, recruiting and appointing 'overseers' and 'deacons' in the congregation(s) in Ephesus in 3:1-13, Paul turns again to apply these principles more specifically to Timothy as Paul's representative leader (cf. 1:18-19). Indeed, 'godliness' appears to be the governing theme of these verses (esp. 3:16; 4:7-8).

The true source of godliness (3:14-4:5)

Paul's use of 'I write' in v 14 (the only instance in the letter) expresses his own self-conscious reason for writing (cf. 1:3-5), and therefore provides the overall reason for why Paul wrote this letter to Timothy. Such a deliberate statement alongside the attendant theological description of the church (v 15) and of the truth or mystery of godliness that the church confesses (v 16) broadens Paul's outlook from it being only for the church in Ephesus to teaching that ought to apply to the global church.¹ In view of Paul's language of 'mystery' elsewhere in his letters (Romans 16:25; Ephesians 5:32; Colossians 1:26), it would appear he's referring to the mystery, now revealed, of the gospel – *from which* true godliness springs.² We cannot hope to reform our lives unless we know the God who is the very source of true spiritual transformation. To reiterate a point made in an earlier study, godliness is not to be confused with good-liness (simply being and doing good), and the opposite of godliness is not *ungodliness* but *godlessness*. Godliness is to focus our attention on the God of grace, mercy and peace in the Lord Jesus Christ (1:2).² Note that Paul's description of the gospel spans Jesus' incarnation (and by implication crucifixion), resurrection appearances, proclamation and ascension.

Paul then relates the prophetic ministry of the Spirit to the presence of false teaching, for the rejection of the source of true godliness only leads to receiving 'deceiving spirits and things taught by demons' (4:1; cf. John 16:7-11). Paul emphasises the reality that false teaching is not only a matter of spreading lies but living lives contrary to God's Word (v 2). Instead of a life flowing from 'a pure heart, a good conscience and a sincere faith' (1:5), the fruit of false teaching is seen in persistent apathy, rebellion and hypocrisy (cf. Matthew 7:15-20). The false teaching that plagued the Ephesian church also forbade people to marry and advocated a form of asceticism (denial of certain good pleasures in life – in this instance food, v 3).³ Instead, Paul testifies to the Bible's broader teaching on the inherent goodness of the created world and God's invitation for us to worship him, the Creator, through our enjoyment of it (vv 4-5; e.g., Genesis 1:31; Psalm 103:5; cf. Isaiah 5:20).

The practical value of godliness (4:6-16)

The letter's primary themes of the importance of good teaching and godly living continue as Paul reiterates their value to Timothy personally (v 6). He is to reject lit. 'pointless myths characteristic of elderly women;' not a generalised slight against *all* elderly women (cf. 5:2-3), but speaks to particular cultural influences of the time (v 7). By stark contrast, godliness (as defined above) brings benefit and blessing for God's people today and into eternity, and brings glory to our Saviour (vv 8-10).

Verses 11-16 could be summarised by Paul's exhortation in v 16: 'Watch your life and doctrine [or *teaching*; cf. v 6] closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.' Paul does not mean Timothy will save as Saviour (for that contradicts the entire testimony of Scripture!), but that Timothy himself will play a *unique* and *active* role in the fulfilment of God's salvation plan in the Ephesian church, through his own pursuit of godliness in life and persistence in knowing and teaching God's Word (cf. 2:15 for a similar sentiment and meaning of Paul's 'salvation' language in these letters).

¹ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles* (New International Greek Testament Commentary), 178.

² Philip D. Jensen, *1 & 2 Timothy For You*, 55.

³ The rejection of marriage could be linked to a contemporary cultural movement known by scholars as the 'New Roman Women.' However, the concern for asceticism doesn't line up with the concerns of the same movement so it must have come from a different cultural influence e.g., Greco-Roman philosophy of dualism: spiritual world (good) vs physical world (bad), or simply a misunderstanding of Jesus' teaching on self-denial – an example of the complex nature of cultural influences in Ephesus at the time. Robert W. Yarborough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Pillar New Testament Commentary), 230.

GETTING STARTED

1. What ingredients do you think make for a holistically healthy life? Consider positive things to do as well as negative things to avoid.

INTO THE TEXT

Read 1 Timothy 3:14-4:5

2. What is the reason Paul gives for writing the instructions in this letter to Timothy? (Compare 1:3-5)
3. In what way(s) do you think the church is ‘the pillar and foundation of the truth’?
4. How do you think ‘true godliness springs’ from the gospel (see notes)?
5. List the false ideas being taught in Ephesus. How do you think these lead to godless lifestyles?
6. How does Paul himself refute the hypocritical lies of false teaching in these very verses?

Read 1 Timothy 4:6-16

7. What ideas and teaching does Paul call Timothy to avoid?
8. What is the antidote to these?
9. Is Paul’s point in verse 8 that it’s good to maintain a good diet and exercise regularly? Why/why not?
10. How might Paul’s words to Timothy in verse 12 be both encouraging and challenging (both for Timothy and others in the Ephesian church)?

TAKEAWAY

11. From this passage, how might you respond to a struggling Christian who says, ‘I keep messing up, but I’ve just got to do better and be a better Christian?’ In other words, what is the path and method towards true godliness?