

## 1 Timothy 4: Qualifications for a Servant of Christ

### Basic Outline

- I. Warning against Demonic Teaching (4:1-5)
- II. Encouragement to Pursue Training in Godliness (4:6-10)
- III. Exhortation to Pursue Ministry Gifting (4:11-16).

### Issues for Discussion

1. **“in later times”** – What was Paul referring to here? Although this exact expression is somewhat unique, there are expressions like it in the New Testament. For example, consider 1 John 2:18, where we read,

Dear children, **this is the last hour**; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is **the last hour**.

The Apostle John was warning his readers in their present experience, calling it **“the last hour.”** Peter wrote,

He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed **in these last times** for your sake (1 Peter 1:20).

Peter was speaking to the generation of his readers. Finally, consider Hebrews 1:1-2.

In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but **in these last days** he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe.

The writer mentions three time periods, namely, the very beginning when **“he made the universe,”** the Old Testament past with the mention of his **“ancestors”** and his present generation in the expression **“in these last days.”**

What is more, the Apostle Paul spoke of **“later times,”** not **“time,”** suggesting he had more than just his generation in mind. I believe these **“later times”** began with Christ and extend to our very day, even until Christ’s Second Coming.

2. **“some will abandon the faith...”** – The word **“abandon”** is translated from the Greek verb *apostasontai*, where we get our modern word **“apostate,”** which is defined as a person who has renounced their faith. According to Thayer’s Greek Lexicon, when the word is used in the middle voice (e.g. Luke 8:13) it means **“to withdraw oneself, absolutely to fall away.”** This may suggest that they were never believers in the first place, for we understand no true Christian can ever completely fall away (cf. 1 John 2:18-23; Hebrews 10:38-39; John 10:28-29; Romans 11:29).

By this definition, Joshua Harris may be called an **“apostate”** because he **“abandoned the faith.”** He is the best-selling author of *I Kissed Dating Goodbye* and the former Senior Pastor of the

Covenant Life Church in Gaithersberg, Maryland. Just last week, he announced that he was divorcing his wife and that he was no longer a Christian.

Paul wrote that those who “**abandon the faith**” “**follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.**” Paul reminded his readers that demons were at work (cf. Leviticus 17:7; Deuteronomy 32:17; Psalm 96:4-5; 106:36-39; 1 Corinthians 10:19-21), doing what the devil does well, namely, deceiving people. Paul wrote, “**Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light**” (1 Corinthians 11:14). He “**prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour**” (1 Peter 5:8).

Joshua Harris fell into “**the trap of the devil, who has taken him captive to do his will.**” He needs prayer and “gentle” instruction “**in the hope that God will grant him repentance leading him to a knowledge of the truth**” (2 Timothy 2:25).

Paul called the agents through whom the demons work “**hypocritical liars.**” They were false teachers, who were at the same time insincere in their heresy. In other words, both their teaching and their motives were corrupt. Paul described their consciences as being “**seared as with a hot iron.**” In other words, they were stubbornly intractable, unteachable, so molded in the error of their thinking that they could not recognize truth from falsehood or good from evil. They were like salt that had lost its flavor, good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot (Matthew 5:13).

We need to have discernment to know when to provide instruction and when to avoid contact altogether. Excommunicated believers, like Hymenaeus and Alexander were to be avoided (1 Timothy 1:20; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11; Matthew 18:17). Repentant believers were to be instructed and restored (2 Corinthians 2:5-11; 2 Timothy 2: 25-26). While we are not to judge unbelievers, those outside the church, we are to judge believers, those inside the church (1 Corinthians 5:12).

3. “**They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods...**” – The early church was not only plagued by Jewish legalism but also proto- Gnosticism. The Gnostics, especially a group called the Docetists, believed that all material things were evil. They separated themselves into two groups: The Ascetics and the Libertines. The Ascetics were known for their austere lifestyle and harsh treatment of their bodies. They did not marry and they had heavily restricted diets. They separated themselves from physical pleasures in order to attain a higher spiritual holiness. The Libertines did almost the exact opposite. They indulged in every kind of physical immorality and license because the material was “immaterial” and only their spirits counted for anything. Paul condemned both of these errors. The Ascetics were in view in 1 Timothy 4.

Paul refuted the false teaching with Scripture. God created marriage. God created food. These were to be received with thanksgiving “**by those who believe and know the truth.**” With this identification Paul was making a contrast with those who “**abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons**” (4:1), the “**hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron**” (4:2).

In writing “**everything God created is good,**” perhaps Paul was reminding Timothy of Genesis 1:31: “**God saw all that he had made and it was very good.**” In Genesis 9:3 we read that God

gave everything for food: “Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.” So God’s spoken word in creation and His written word in Scripture consecrated (i.e. “made holy”) what God created. Deuteronomy 8:10 taught God’s people to receive God’s good provision with thankful prayer. So, prayer also consecrated what God created. And in Genesis 2:24, we read how God also created marriage: “**That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh.**” So we include both marriage and food among the things that God both created and consecrated by His Word. The Word of God provided objective blessing. Prayer provided subjective blessing.

4. “**If you point these things out to the brothers and sister, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus**” (4:6) – “Things” may relate to everything that proceeded from Paul’s first instruction to Timothy in 1 Timothy 1:3, including his instructions on proper attire, attitude and function in worship, the qualifications of elders and deacons, as well as the corrective instructions regarding marriage and foods.

Paul characterized these instructions as belonging to “**the truths of the faith and the good teaching you have followed**” (1 Timothy 4:6). He contrasted them with the “**godless myths and old wives tales,**” to which the prohibition of marriage and the abstention from certain foods belonged. The former was grounded in biblical truth, while the latter was based on myth and rumor.

“**Physical training is of some value...**” –Paul acknowledged that while certain ascetic practices may be temporarily helpful, godliness was better by far. So he commended Timothy to “**train yourself to be godly,**” for this would benefit him in both the present and future life. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon taught something similar: the vanity of earthly (“under the sun”), temporary ambitions and pursuits versus heavenly, enduring aspirations and pursuits: to “**fear God and keep His commandments**” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). In principle “physical training” might encompass any earthly pursuits, which begin and end during one’s earthly life.

**This should seriously cause us to reflect on our priorities; that is, where do we spend our time, our money and our efforts; and what priorities do we set for our children. Is training in godliness our priority for us and our family?**

The word for “train” and “training” is the Greek word *gymnos and gymnasias*, where we get our English word “gymnasium.” The term literally means “to exercise naked,” likely because Greek athletes trained and competed with only a loin cloth on. The word pictures training “with complete physical, emotional force. From HELPS Word Studies:

The word presumes full discipline, necessary to be in “top working condition”(full agility, skill, endurance). This is gained only from *constant*, rigorous training (exercise). It conveys acquiring *proficiency through practice* – regular exercise with graduated resistance (the physical element is also included with the spiritual of being in "God's gymnasium").

This word is used in Hebrews 5:14 of training to discern right from wrong and in Hebrews 12:11 of the disciplined training that produces a harvest of righteousness. Here are some observations on disciplined training from one of my favorite pastor commentators, Steven J. Cole:

Train yourself to be godly - it is not an Atkins diet; it requires long-term and consistent discipline. It's a lifetime process. Like staying in shape, you can do it for 25 years, but the day you quit, you will start getting flabby. It involves hard work – “We labor and strive...” “Strive” is an athletic word, that is, going against your natural feelings. Since athletes put themselves through years of hard work and training to get a silly gold medal, shouldn't we be willing to pay the price to be godly to get an eternal reward? Discipline means discarding hindrances - “Have nothing to do with myths and old wives tales” (4:7) - same as “endless myths and genealogies.” Greek athletes would strip off clothing so as not to be hindered from their purpose of winning their event. *Sin is a hindrance. TV is a hindrance. Other worldly priorities can be hindrances.* Discipline means keeping your eyes on the goal, namely, godliness. It has the nuance of “one who is growing in conformity to God in his character and daily life because he has fixed his hope on God (4:10). It involves godly thought, speech, and actions. Keeping our eyes fixed on Christ that we might become more like Him (Hebrews 2:2). Discipline requires you to consider how you use your time - “Make the most of your time...” (Ephesians 5:15-17). Discipline is not opposed to grace, and grace is not absent discipline (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:10; Titus 2:11-14). Discipline is the only way to true freedom, because it takes us out from our slavery to sin (cf. Romans 6:19-23). Discipline does not mean that we drive ourselves relentlessly. Discipline is not being so rigid that you are insensitive to what God is doing - For example, you're having your devotional time and your toddler bounds into the room and says, “Daddy, look what I did!” You say, “Go away! Can't you see that I'm reading the Bible?!” You're not being disciplined; you're being rigid and insensitive to your child. Jesus always did the Father's will, but He always had time for people who interrupted Him (Mark 5:21-43). The goal of the Christian life is not happiness and fulfillment. It is godliness and becoming a good servant of Christ Jesus (4:6). But the beautiful irony is that as we pursue that goal, God blesses us with true joy and fulfillment, because godliness holds promise both for the present life and for the life to come (4:8).

Paul wrote, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.” This expression demands that we pay attention. It was this pursuit of godliness that characterized their laboring and striving. In Titus we read that the grace that saves is also the grace that “**teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age**” (Titus 2:11-12). Paul had put his hope in the “**living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe**” (1 Timothy 4:10). The words “**especially of those who believe**” simply meant that while God's offer of salvation was to all in potential, only some, those who believe, would be actually saved. This text parallels Titus 2:11-14, where the call to godliness is accompanied by the hope of eternal life.

5. “**Set an example for the believers in speech, conduct, in love, in faith and in purity**” (1 Timothy 4:12) – Paul instructed Timothy to boldly “**command and teach these things**” (4:11) and not be deterred by those who looked down on him because of his relative youthfulness. Timothy was likely around 35 years old at this time.

Timothy was to be a model and example for the believers. “Example” translates the Greek word *tupos*, where we get the English word “type.” It carried the meaning of “an example to be

imitated" (e.g. 1 Peter 5:3 pastors called to be *examples* to the flock; In 2 Thessalonians 3:9 Paul and his companions set themselves as *examples* in toiling for their own support). So what was Timothy supposed to model?

- **Speech** – Timothy was not to be engaged in “meaningless talk” (1 Timothy 1:6) and not to be quarrelsome (2 Timothy 2:24). In Ephesians 5:4, Paul wrote, “**Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving.**” In Colossians 4:6, he wrote, “**Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.**”
- **Conduct** – Paul wanted Timothy to demonstrate godly conduct (cf. 1 Timothy 4:7). Jesus taught, “**In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven**” (Matthew 5:16). Again, Paul wrote in Galatians 6:9, “**Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up.**”
- **Love** – Paul wrote, “**The goal of this command is love, which comes from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.**” Jesus taught, “**A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another**” (John 13:34-35).
- **Faith** – God’s work advanced by faith (1 Timothy 1:4). Hymenaeus and Alexander suffered shipwreck with regard to their faith. Deacons were to “**keep hold of the deep truths of the faith**” (1 Timothy 3:9). Timothy was “nourished **on the truths of the faith**” (1 Timothy 4:6). Timothy was commanded to “fight the good fight of the faith” (1 Timothy 6:2). This faith primarily involved the true Gospel of salvation in Christ in contrast to false teaching of the Judaizers and the Gnostics.
- **Purity** – Consider these shocking statistics from Barna Research in a survey conducted between 2014-2016 (Get the full report here: <http://www.covenanteyes.com/lemonade/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/covenant-eyes-porn-stats-2018-edition.pdf>) :
  - The following percentages of men say they view pornography at least once a month: **79% of 18-30 year olds**; 67% of 31-49 year olds; 49% of 50-68 year olds.
  - The following percentages of women say they view pornography at least once a month: **76% of 18-30 year olds**; 16% of 31-49 year olds; 4% of 50-68 year olds.
  - **90% of teens and 96% of young adults are either encouraging, accepting, or neutral when they talk about porn with their friends.**
  - **64% of self-identified Christian men and 15% of self-identified Christian women view pornography at least once a month (compared to 65% of non-Christian men and 30% of non-Christian women).**
  - 1 in 5 youth pastors and 1 in 7 senior pastors use porn **on a regular basis** and are currently struggling. That’s more than 50,000 U.S. church leaders.
  - 9 of 10 Millennials access porn on their mobile phones.

More and more kids re getting exposed and addicted. This is more pervasive than the opioid epidemic. If you have teen kids, I definitely recommend getting blocks on computers, mobile phones, etc. It’s not a matter of “trust,” but wisdom. (e.g. Net Nanny or Covenant Eyes, etc.). Paul wrote, “**But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper**

for God's holy people" (Ephesians 5:3). He also taught, "It is God's will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality" (1 Thessalonians 4:3).

6. **"Devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching" (1 Timothy 4:13)** – Here Paul encouraged Timothy as to the central resource for developing righteousness and promoting truth in the community of believers, namely, the declaration and exposition of the Word of God. In 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Paul wrote, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Roger Waggoner gives a good distinction between biblical preaching and teaching:

Preaching in New Testament times therefore related primarily to **announcing** good news. In the New Testament, the content of that good news centered around the themes of Jesus, Christ, the word, the gospel, and the kingdom. On the other hand the nature of teaching in New Testament times was primarily to explain ideas and their implications, and to exhort people to live by declared values. Whereas the message **preached** was the message announced, the message **taught** was the message explained, clarified, and applied, with exhortation to live by it. Whereas the message preached (announced) was primarily for the purpose of conversion, the message taught (explained, clarified, applied, with exhortation) was primarily for the purpose of building faith, Christian conviction and character. Source:

<http://www.thebible.net/biblicaltheism/0402biblicaldistinction.htm>.

7. **"Do not neglect your gift..." (1 Timothy 4:14)** – Timothy received this gift through prophecy and the laying on of hands by both the elders and Paul (2 Timothy 1:6). The gift involved spiritual battling (1 Timothy 1:18). Paul encouraged Timothy to "fan (his gift) into flame" (2 Timothy 1:6). It would help Timothy battle fear and give him power, love and self-discipline (2 Timothy 1:7). He was to use this gift in his public reading of Scripture and preaching and teaching (1 Timothy 4:14). The gift was empowered by God's **grace** that is in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1). "**Grace to you**" and "**grace be with you**" open and close every Pauline letter (e.g. 1 Timothy 1:2; 6:21). They stand as bookends to the revelation given to Paul in his letters. They were Spirit-empowered words (1 Corinthians 2:13) giving Timothy divine **encouragement** to fulfill his God-given ministry. John Piper suggests this charge from Paul to Timothy:

These aren't ordinary words, Timothy. They are God's words. You were with me on the beach in Miletus. Do you remember what I said as I left? I said, "I commend you to God and to the word of his grace, which is powerful to build you up [in courage!] and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:32).

8. **"Be diligent...save both yourself and your hearers" (1 Timothy 4:15-16)** – Paul charged Timothy to work hard in his ministry, both for his sake and his hearers. His efforts would be a testimony and example for the believers. His careful and diligent attention to the Gospel and truth would "**save**" him and his hearers from the "**devil's trap**," from demonic deception (cf. 1 Timothy 2:14-15; 3:7; 4:1), which had caused some to "**suffer shipwreck with regard to their faith**" (1 Timothy 1:19) and even "abandon the faith" (4:1).