

# 'Watch your life and doctrine'

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Preacher: Mark Chew

[ 0 : 00 ] As we continue to look at that passage in 1 Timothy. Well, what I'm about to say may be a sweeping generalization,!

but sweeping generalizations are often made in life.! Some take the view that if you're good-looking, then you mustn't be very smart.

There was actually a whole survivor series built around that, wasn't there? Brains versus brawn. Or if someone is good with numbers, they can't be good with words.

You know, the art student versus the science student. Creatives versus logical people. A people-person versus a task-oriented person.

Now, of course, you rarely find someone who is good at everything, although, sadly, there are a few exceptions. But it's also not the case, is it, that just because someone is good at something, then he or she has to be bared with the other opposite thing.

[ 1 : 22 ] Because what I've just described are what we call false dichotomies. And today, sort of, when we look at the church and Christians, Paul wants to dispel another false dichotomy.

That between life and doctrine. You see, sometimes people would say that because a church majors on the truth or doctrine, you know, spends a lot of time in Bible studies and things like that, they're going to be lousy at good works.

Like caring for one another, caring for those in need. But conversely, the opposite view is also sometimes offered. That a church that's focused on doing good, with lots of outreach ministries and things like that, can't be very good on the Bible.

That they must be lax on theology or orthodoxy. Now, of course, what is being said of churches can sometimes be also applied to individuals.

And Paul is actually trying to address this very false dichotomy in our passage today. Because if you look right to the end of the section, he says to Timothy at the end that he is to watch both his life and doctrine closely.

[ 2 : 38 ] So really, our challenge today is that when we get to the end, we need to consider that whether as a church or as Christians, we're actually doing both, life and doctrine.

Or are we sort of leaning towards one because that's our sort of comfort zone, what we prefer. And therefore, really, we need to focus on the other. Now, if you were here last week, our passage, we heard about false teaching which resulted in false godliness, right?

The teaching around abstinence on marriage or certain foods. What they did was promote a fake godliness as false spirituality.

But now Paul turns from the negative to the positive. And so he says that if false teaching led to fake godliness, then good teaching forms the foundation of true godliness.

And that's why it's a false dichotomy, isn't it? Because a godly life actually relies on the foundation of good teaching. And conversely, one key aspect of teaching from the Bible is that unless truth is applied, it is actually of no good value.

[ 3 : 58 ] And so Paul continues in verse 6. Let's follow along. If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.

And so here Paul makes the point, and that's the first point of my outline, that godliness is nourished by the truths of the faith and good teaching.

And you can see already the connection that Paul is making, isn't it, between life and doctrine.

Because these truths which Timothy is to point out and teach are things that he himself have been following, practicing.

He's practicing what Paul wants him to teach. Now it's similar, isn't it, to the saying that goes, we are what we eat. If your diet is low on essential vitamins and nutrients or minerals, then eventually you'll suffer for it.

Many of you might have learned this in high school, but centuries ago, as part of your biology class, sailors that went out to sea for long periods of time, they developed scurvy, right?

[ 5 : 10 ] Because they lacked vitamin C, which you find in oranges and, I think, apples, lemons. They didn't have that on the ship, and so they developed scurvy.

And you know, the same goes for our spiritual diet. And when it talks about truth here, Paul's not thinking just about head knowledge or having the right theology.

Because Paul says that we are to be nourished on them. That is, regularly feeding on a healthy diet of God's Word, God's truth, so that we are sustained for our everyday life.

So, 15 years ago, I graduated with a Master of Divinity. But you know, that does not nourish me for the rest of my Christian life.

As it says in our reading from Psalm 1, Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked, or stand in the way that sinners take, or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night.

[ 6 : 20 ] So, that's at least twice a day kind of feeding, right? Shunning evil and evildoers requires meditating on the law of the Lord day and night.

Now, I'm not suggesting we turn this into legalism, and you have to do it literally when you wake up and when you go to bed. But what it gives us is a picture of nourishment. Just as we eat three times a day, sometimes more, the psalmist is saying we need to be nourished, be feeding on God's Word, having it remind us as we go through the day.

Now, if I've been talking about false dichotomy, Psalm 1 gives us a dichotomy that is actually true, isn't it? That good and evil don't mix. If false teaching leads to godlessness, then only good teaching feeds a godly life.

It doesn't go the other way. Now, Paul is about to leave the topic of false teaching, but he throws in another example or two in verse 7. And he says, have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales.

Rather, train yourself to be godly. And I'm sort of glad that Paul didn't give us any details as to what these old wives' tales are, because guess what? We'll probably be talking about them and wondering what they should be.

[ 7 : 39 ] But I'm fairly sure that whatever they are, it is speculative teaching or so-called wisdom, right, that is found nowhere in the Bible. And so it's not related to the gospel of Jesus.

It's not essential for our faith. It's not the truth of the faith that is required for godly living. I don't know, but sometimes when you look online or read up stuff, from time to time, such fads do crop up in the church, don't they, around the world, where it's being promoted as, oh, this is an essential thing that we need to do now as Christians, that it's a spiritual thing that they've just discovered. And sometimes it's even connected with reports of revival, and then people get, wow, if it's happening over there, then we also need to do these things in order for us to have the same experience of revival.

So a while ago, you know, my social media came up with, you know, kept coming up with this thing about the personality tests. Okay, I've got a name for it, but I don't want to mention it, because otherwise you'll start checking it out.

But that particular test analyzed, you know, the different types of people they are. And, you know, because, you know, most of my friends on social media are part of ministry, there was a bit of talk about whether ministry teams needed to get on board with this stuff in order to be able to work in unity.

[ 9 : 06 ] Now, it could be that there are some insights to be had from this thing, but it's not in the Bible, is it? Nowhere in the Bible do we have personality types or whatever. So it can't be the truth of the faith.

And it should not be promoted as such. In fact, we do know what the Bible says about unity, isn't it? How are we united? In Christ. By the Spirit.

So, really, we should focus on that as the truth of the faith and digest it and meditate and work that out as to how to express the unity of the Spirit rather than get carried away with these personality tests or whatever.

Which, of course, people do charge money for it. So, you know, someone's making money, isn't it? Of course, I'm not saying again that some of these things don't highlight, you know, some good observations about differences in how we are and how we work.

But ultimately, what nourishes us, the essential nutrients, right, are the truths of the gospel. And in this case, it's the recognition that it is a spirit, God himself, that binds us together in peace because of what Jesus has done.

[10:21] So, Paul says instead that we are to train ourselves to be godly. And as I was saying, that means deeply digesting what God's Word teaches and then working hard because that's what the training bit is about, isn't it?

To live it out. And just as nourish implies daily consistency, the word training also implies consistent discipline.

We need to put effort into it. We need to give it focus. It's not just something that will happen by the by. Now, some of you gym goers and fitness fanatics, I think probably quite a few of you here, will understand this next thing that Paul gets to in verse 8 because the comparison he now makes between godliness is with physical training.

Verse 8. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things. It's holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.

And that is why we labor and strive because we have put our hope in the living God who is the Savior of all people and especially of those who believe. Well, if you're into physical training, you know what it takes, right?

[11:41] You're looking at me like, you know what it takes, right? No pain, no gain. Got that one? Yes. And you know, if your PT or your physio or whatever gives you a regime, you know, then you stick to it, right?

You know, yes, 50 times. Okay, maybe 45. It's okay. But you've got to stick to something, right?

And you might watch what you eat, you know, some of you guys, protein shakes.

Is that right? Or is it something else nowadays? No, no protein shakes? Bad things? No? Okay.

But, you know, it's about the intake and then the physical exercise that goes with it, right? But whatever it is, what you do needs to be intentional, right?

How you do it, why you do it. Or because, and I hope you're doing it because it holds out for you the promise of some reward. Now, for some of you, it might just be to look good.

Hopefully not. For others like me, it's about a healthier life as a result or being pain-free. Or maybe it's just driver goals that I'm trying to achieve.

[12:46] Now, Paul is not knocking physical training, right? In fact, in those days, it was actually quite popular among the Greeks and the Romans. The modern-day Olympics arose out of all that kind of gymnastics that they were doing and running the marathon as well.

But here Paul says that physical training is of some value only. That is, it's only good for this life. By contrast, godliness training has value for all things.

And he explains that to say, yes, for this life too, because it trains us on how to live and conduct ourselves as Christians in God's household. And so, if we live a godly life in this life, it's a powerful witness to the gospel.

It helps us to be a witness to the world. It builds unity of the Spirit as we relate to each other. It blesses those we serve. It promotes peace in our community.

It strengthens our faith. It gives us joy. It gives us satisfaction. And on and on. So, all these benefits are for this life, right? So, godliness is good for this life.

[13:56] But then Paul says, wait, there's more, because godliness is also good for the life to come. In other words, the godliness that you practice now does not have a use-by date.

Whereas the muscles that we build up now will decline with age. And sadly, I'm of that age where it sort of deteriorates faster than it's being built up. Godliness does not fade with age or death.

Even in our later years, we can keep up our godliness training because it will pay back in the life to come. We're not putting all this effort in with a sort of faint hope.

You know, maybe there's a 10% chance that this is going to all be of some value when we get to heaven. Paul says, no, our hope is guaranteed by none other than the living God, who has already saved us by his son.

And so, Paul says, we can put in a maximum effort. Our labor, our striving will not be in vain. The outcome is 100% secure. Now, just as an aside, some of you will probably ask me, but the fact that Paul says that God is the savior of all people is not a teaching that Paul will save all people.

[ 15 : 15 ] Because it's qualified by this, especially those who believe. So, if you put both phrases together, what he means to say is that God is capable of saving all people.

In fact, he is the only one capable of saving all people. Everyone and anyone can be saved, but it is only those who believe who are actually or especially saved.

All right. So, really, Paul, in these verses from 6 to 10, is urging Timothy to do two things, right? To nourish himself in the truths of the faith, and then secondly, to train himself in godliness through these truths.

Stay away from false teaching and godliness, but dedicate and focus on the truths and from godliness that arises from it.

Because if he does, and now we're moving on to verses 11 to 16, Timothy will benefit or save both himself and his hearers. And you can see here Paul moves seamlessly between asking Timothy to do these things himself and then instructing him to teach them also.

[ 16 : 27 ] So, verse 11, command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young. But set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, love, faith, and purity.

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of scripture, to preaching, and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them because if you do, and here's the phrase, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

Now, as I said, the focus now shifts to Timothy's ministry to others. And as a servant of Christ Jesus, Timothy should practice godliness to benefit himself, yes.

But then Paul says that this same godliness will serve those in God's household. Because, firstly, it sets an example for the other believers in speech, conduct, and what I call character.

[ 17 : 32 ] That is love, faith, and purity. And Paul is saying, actually, the example you set is good for all aspects of life for the believer. And so, as Timothy talks the talk, he also has to walk the talk, doesn't he?

He's not just telling people how to live. He has to show them as well in his own life. And because, I think you all appreciate this, isn't it? Nobody likes leaders who are hypocrites.

Now, I have to admit that apart from Jesus, no leader is ever going to be perfect, right? We are not always going to be the best examples of what we teach.

But, nevertheless, there needs to be some consistency between the teaching and the living. And when a leader actually fails, then actually part of godly living is to admit it and to say, yeah, I've stuffed up, and then to work to change for the better.

And so, those who are formerly leaders need to set an example for those they serve. That's a key requirement of ministers. But I think, as well, the principle applies to everyone, whether you are formerly a leader or not.

[ 18 : 48 ] Because here, the word used to describe Timothy, minister, actually simply means servant. And all of us Christians are servants, aren't we? Not just the leaders. And so, the truth is, we are always an example to others, aren't we?

Whether we're in formal leadership or not. And actually, we are examples whether we are good or bad examples. People who look up to us tend to follow, good or bad.

And yes, we tend to look more to leaders, for example. But if everyone in the church is doing something a certain way, or we see someone doing something well, our natural inclination is actually to copy them, right?

And to follow, because we want to do the same. And I have to say that one of the things that's really pleasing, which some of you newcomers do say to me eventually, is that one reason why they are led to join our church is the warm welcome that they receive.

Not just by me or the leaders, but by everyone. And so, they, when they join, some of them may not be the, you know, they might be shy or whatever, so they might not be naturally good welcomers in the first place.

[ 20 : 06 ] But because of the example that had been set by the rest of you, you know, they naturally then want to do the same. Because they want to bless others in the same way that they have been blessed.

So, I do want to encourage all of you, whether you're leaders or not, formally appointed or not, to live a godly life because your godliness will rub off on others and be an encouragement to them to do the same.

Now, being an example is, if you like, referred godliness, that is implied teaching. It reinforces, but it does not replace the need for, what Paul now comes to, direct teaching or explicit instruction. And that is the public reading of scriptures, preaching and teaching. And again, Paul uses the word devote, which has that same strong sense, isn't it, of, like, nourish and training, of needing consistency and intensity and focus.

So, Paul's instruction really is that we are to saturate our church life with God's word, reading and explaining it, because that is what nourishes us. When we gather on Sunday, when we meet during the week, you know, growth group, or even as we are talking to each other, pick up the phone or texting, when we use the truth of the faith, when we teach or encourage each other in God's word, we are, like, sort of giving each other the little vitamin sort of shots that we need, like the pills, whatever, the minerals, the nutrients, to help keep us going through the week in our godliness as we train to live a godly life.

[ 21 : 50 ] And so, Paul says that this is to be the particular focus of Timothy, because he's the leader and the pastor, but also because there has been a gift imparted to him by God through the laying of hands of the elders.

Doesn't quite say whether it's at the time of his appointment or earlier, but either way, Timothy is to focus on it. And then, Paul says, gives an encouragement to Timothy because of his youth.

And as I've said to the leaders, I think, earlier this year, this could be what we call today imposter syndrome. Timothy was young, and he was in part of a culture which equated age with wisdom.

And we sort of do that nowadays anyway, isn't it? That we look up to people who are older thinking that they're wiser when perhaps, but not necessarily so. And so, Paul encourages Timothy not to let people look down on him.

Now, I think more accurately, Paul is actually encouraging Timothy not to be troubled when people do, in fact, look down on him because of his youth. Because the reality is, and you know this, you can't stop people thinking or doing what they want, right?

[ 23 : 03 ] But Timothy is saying, Paul is saying, don't let that get to you if people are indeed looking down on you. Don't take it to heart as to what people think or say just because you're young.

And so, I want to say that to many of you because most of you are much younger. Don't agonize too much about what older people may say. Don't agonize too much about what older people may say.

Sure, be open to the advice. Take it on as constructive criticism anyway. Not that you are then stubborn and just keep doing what you want, but it's about the attitude.

And that is the attitude of not letting people get you down by their criticism. Instead, as Paul says, the response ought to be that we set an example in conduct, speech and character, isn't it?

Keep on doing what God wants you to do. In fact, that's a great example of character, isn't it? That when people criticize or look down on you, instead of being pitiful on yourself, you respond in a godly way.

[ 24 : 09 ] And that is to say, that's okay, I'm going to keep going. And so, in fact, when you do that, you are setting an example that proves them wrong, that you're too young, you're not, because of how you responded to their criticism.

Now, of course, this needs to be balanced. Remember, in two chapters ago, where Paul says that not those who are young in faith, which is different to being young, should be appointed to leadership too soon.

But really, again, that is not the problem of those who are young. The question that that has been put to is to people who are in authority, who are appointing people.

And so, Paul is saying, don't appoint those who are too young in their faith. But if someone who is a leader has asked you to step up, then I think you should pray about it and consider it carefully.

But then if you should accept it, then serve faithfully. Don't second guess what the leader or the leaders have decided. If they got it wrong, that's on them to answer to God for.

[ 25 : 17 ] You, on the other hand, your job is simply to be faithful. Yes, to be humble, to learn, but actually, just to get on with it. And of course, good leaders are also there when they've appointed you to support and coach you so that they don't get it wrong and you don't get it wrong.

So, let me encourage you then, if you're young and you're serving in the leadership, don't allow criticism to get you down.

Sure, you could have done it better. That's often very true. I can do many things better as well. But let's just keep going because that is the godly thing.

That is the training in godliness that God desires of us to move forward with. But whether you're young or old, let's just finish now by all of us turning to application.

And here, I think the last two verses, 15 and 16, which I've already read, summarizes this whole passage very well and also provides us with the prompts to work out how we are going.

[ 26 : 22 ] So, verse 15, And if you've been sort of counting, there are actually four verbs there and they are all in the imperatives.

That is, they are all instructions to do something. Be diligent. Give yourself wholly. Or rather, dedicate yourself. Watch your life and doctrine closely.

And fourthly, persevere in them. And so, here are the three prompts that I want to ask you to consider. First, as I said at the start, how are we going with life and doctrine?

How are we going with life and doctrine? So, not just life, not just doctrine, but both life and doctrine. Or is it that you sort of gravitate towards one aspect, because, you know, that's where you're most comfortable. A lot of Bible study and reading up and all that. But they're not really focused about whether it's really changing your life and how you practice your godliness.

[ 27 : 37 ] Or are you the busy kind of person, doing a lot, you know, helping, caring, serving, all that, but then not much time being nourished through prayer, in the Word, and meditating, like it says in Psalm 1.

So, that's the first question. How are you doing with life and doctrine? The second, how diligent and persistent are we? That is, do we practice this consistently?

Stick to it, through the ups and downs of life, through the pressures and the stress. Regularly showing up, serving faithfully. Now, again, I'm not talking about legalism.

I'm not talking about there being no grace, and you just turn up whatever, and, you know, you kill yourself doing it. But I'm talking about the fact that some of times, we need to be diligent as in not just going through the motions, right?

But actually persevering, because that is coming from our own heart's desire. That we've been so transformed by the good news of Jesus, saved by it, that yes, we want to be godly as a result, as a response to what our faith in Jesus has done.

[ 28 : 55 ] And thirdly and finally, how wholehearted are we? Because Paul says there, to give ourselves wholly to it. And that means, seeking godliness, nourished by the truths, ought to be a priority of our lives.

Right? Not some add-on, not some tackled on that, oh, when I get the spare time, but actually, the thing that drives our motivations and our ambitions in life.

Give ourselves wholly to it for the whole of our lives. Now, all of this is really strong encouragement from Paul, isn't it? He uses superlatives in each of these cases.

And the reason is because the consequences are huge, aren't they? Whether it's Timothy, or us as leaders, or simply as Christians, the reward is salvation of great value, not just for this life, but for eternity.

And, not just for ourselves, but for those whom we serve. Those who look at our examples, and our teaching, and are motivated to follow the same.

[ 30 : 08 ] And so, Paul says that God is our saviour, and that's true. We can't save ourselves. Jesus is the only one that can die as the atoning sacrifice for our sins.

But he also then says that if you do, we will save ourselves and our hearers. And by that he means not that we take the place of Jesus, that we become saviors of others, but rather, it is by our example, and by our witness, and by our teaching, that God will use us as his agents, as his messengers, to save ourselves and to save others.

God still does the saving, but we get to be agents of his salvation. And that's a real great joy and blessing and responsibility and privilege, isn't it?

And so let's pray that God will urge us and strengthen us and motivate us to do all that. Let's pray. Father, thank you for the truths of the faith which nourishes us for salvation and gives us all that we need to lead godly lives.

Help us to watch our life and doctrine closely, to persevere in them and to do it wholeheartedly for the whole of our lives so that all of us, together, as God's household, may be saved, not just in this life, but for the life to come.

[ 31 : 39 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.