

Godly Ministry

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, let's pray. God, our Father, speak to us from your word now, we pray.
- Make us wise for salvation through the Lord Jesus Christ. Make us like him, godly in thought, word and action.
- And fill us with eager hope for the promise of the resurrection to eternal life in Christ. And we ask these things in Jesus' name. Amen.
- Well, no doubt you were sad like me when the husband of Mrs. Prudence Kabila of Sierra Leone died a little while ago.
- No doubt it was a tragic event. But I was overjoyed. My sadness was compensated when she said to me that she was going to transfer to me 15 million US dollars from the estate of her late husband.
- [1 : 1 1] You can understand my sadness eased somewhat at hearing of his sad death. And eager to help her out, of course, in her grief and bereavement, I gave her my bank account number to transfer the money into.
- After all, it was helping her out. Strangely, a little bit after that, somehow money disappeared from my bank. But I'm sure that her money, when it comes, will far compensate for the money that I've somehow lost from my bank account.
- And during these penniless days, while I'm busking on the streets, I'm eagerly waiting for that 15 million dollars from her late husband's estate. Well, we're amazed that people fall for such scams.
- Well, I think we're amazed. I hope you haven't fallen for any. I mean, the cons and scams are just so bizarre that you wonder, how does anyone actually keep doing them?
- But presumably, they keep sending those emails out because people keep falling for the scams. It happens all the time, whether it's an email scam or some other sort of scam. People are gullible.
- [2 : 1 9] Why are we so gullible at things like that? I think our gullibility is driven by some sin or other. In this case, by greed.
- That is, it's our desire, our covetous desire, our greedy, sinful desires that make us gullible to fall for those sorts of West African email scams of millions and millions of US dollars floating into our bank account.
- And what happens is that greed blinds us to deceit. Greed makes us unaware of the lack of truth. Greed means that we're so blinkered that we'll fall for anything that promises to fill our bank accounts.
- And it may not always, of course, be greed. It may be pride, it may be flattery, promises of power, promises of influence, some status, etc. That is, these sorts of deceits plug into all sorts of different sinful desires and make us gullible to fall for them.
- Well, while our world, and Britain at no least at the moment, is fighting a war on terror, God is fighting a war on deceit. And deceit finds a warm welcome in the arms of lovers of sin.

[3 : 42] You see, sin drives people to believe deceit, such as the email scams, the sin of greed in that case. Chesterton famously said, When people stop believing in God, it's not that they believe in nothing, but that they believe in anything.

And the reason why people believe in anything is because sinful desires of one sort or another blind us to truth and make us vulnerable, gullible, inclined towards things that are so exotic, so hard to believe.

And yet if they promise us to fulfill our covetous desires or our desires of status or power or whatever, then we chase after them with such eagerness.

Now we ought not be surprised that God is currently fighting a war on deceit. The war on deceit was long predicted. It was there in the Old Testament.

It's there in the New Testament as well. Jesus said, in effect, that in latter days, in the last days, in times to come, before the end, there will be those who will deceive the people of God and lead them astray to believe all sorts of things that are untrue.

[5 : 03] Indeed, Paul himself anticipated that for the very place to which this letter is written. Ephesus, where Timothy is a sort of apostolic delegate at this time. He said that in Acts 20, in effect.

That is, it's a mark of the end times, long anticipated in Scripture, that the deceivers will come and they will deceive. It's not only the mark of the end times, by the way.

It's actually the mark of the early times. For when you think of the serpent's work in the Garden of Eden, deceiving Eve, which indeed Paul comments on in chapter 2, as we saw a fortnight ago from this very letter.

We live in times of deceit and God is fighting a war on deceit. And part of that war we find in the battle being fought in Ephesus in the first century by Paul and by Timothy.

False teaching, as it was in Ephesus all those years ago, is not innocent, harmless mistake. It's not somebody just sort of slightly getting it wrong.

[6 : 18] Oh, it doesn't really matter. It is demonic deceit. Demonic deceit. It is diabolical heresy. That is, its origin is the devil.

And Paul says, don't be surprised. See what he says in verse 1 of chapter 4, page 964, if you don't have the Bibles open. Now the spirit, that is God's spirit, expressly, clearly, unambiguously says that in latter times, some will renounce the faith by paying attention due to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

You see, this is a spiritual battle between God, who is spirit, and the deceitful spirits, the demonic spirits that come from the devil.

That's the battle that's being fought. And Paul says, they risk renouncing the faith. They are being led astray from the gospel faith.

And they are ending up following falsehood and so on. Paul's attitude to this false teaching and heresy is a far cry from what we find in our modern Western churches so often, where it seems that tolerance and diversity know no bounds, where the substitutionary death of Jesus for our sins, which is the linchpin of the gospel, is widely denounced even by evangelicals in our own day and age, where the uniqueness of Jesus as fully divine and fully human is roundly not believed by all sorts of people in different Western churches and church leaders as well, where the offensive doctrine of the universalism of everybody going to heaven willy-nilly of what they believe is actually boasted in by many, where interfaith worship is the goal of many church leaders, where biblical morality is despised as being primitive or quaint or fundamentalist.

[8 : 20] Paul has no time for heresies like that at all. See what he says in verse 2, that these heresies are being propagated through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are seared with a hot iron.

That's not a particularly tolerant statement. They are hypocrites, liars, and their consciences are seared. They are hypocrites because they're promising life but delivering death.

They're leading people to waterless springs. That's the deceitful expression that Peter uses in a letter dealing with a similar issue in another place. They are liars. They're opposed to the truth.

They're speaking things that are fundamentally untrue, deceptive, and leading people to falsehood. And then this wonderful picture, well, wonderful in one sense, evocative picture, their consciences are seared.

You know how sometimes if you burn yourself with an iron and that little bit of skin becomes in effect dead. That's what they've done with their consciences. Their consciences are deadened, literally cauterized, anesthetized.

[9 : 31] They're unresponsive to what is right or wrong. Their moral compass is dead. And that is a description of those who preach heresy and falsehood.

Remember the contrast that we've already seen in this letter. Back in chapter 1 at the end of verse 4 and into verse 5, Paul, in contrasting the false teachers, says that the divine training that is known by faith has the aim, in verse 5, of love that comes from a pure heart, a good conscience, and sincere faith.

That is, truthful teaching leads to faith and a good conscience and life and love. False teaching has seared consciences and is propagated and is propagated by the hypocrisy of liars.

Later in chapter 1, Timothy is exhorted in verse 19 to fight the good fight of preaching the truth, having faith and a good conscience. By rejecting conscience, certain persons have suffered shipwreck in the faith.

And they are those who follow these preachers whose consciences are seared, are dead to what is moral and immoral, the distinction between them. And indeed, in the instructions that we saw last week, speaking about the overseers and the deacons, in verse 9 about the deacons, they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience.

[11 : 03] The conscience is the act of the will in a sense. It's got the moral compass in it. The conscience of those who follow the truth will be clear following the truth of God. These people have consciences that are dead, seared as if by a hot iron.

Demonic in origin, but human in duplicitous execution. That is this heresy, the false teaching that leads people astray has a demonic or devilish origin, but it's actually executed by human beings who are duplicitous or double-tongued.

They're hypocrites, they're liars, speaking one thing, promising one thing, but delivering far from what they promise. Now, the exact false teaching that's taught in Ephesus at this time is not entirely clear.

Paul doesn't give us a long list of their false teaching because Timothy would have known it and his initial readers would have known it. We have to glean bits from the letter as we go.

Back in chapter 1, verse 4, he speaks of those who engage or occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations. The allusion seems to be back into the Old Testament, especially to the early bits of the Old Testament and the genealogies and so-called.

[12 : 23] In chapter 1, verse 7, speaking of the false teachers again, they're desiring to be teachers of the law without understanding either what they're saying or the things about which they make assertions.

That is, some wrong teaching about Old Testament law. And that may be associated with a sort of elitism, some appeal back to Judaism and holding fast to some of the Jewish doctrines in this chapter here, chapter 4, in verse 3, they seem to be prohibiting marriage and demanding abstinence from foods, which may be particular unclean foods from the Old Testament or it may just be fasting in a sort of an excessive ascetic way.

It seems also from chapter 2 with Paul's emphasis there as we saw a fortnight ago on the gospel being for all and God wanting all to be saved, an emphasis that we'll pick up again tonight later.

It seems that somehow they seem to have an exclusive or an elite view of who might be saved or who might be a Christian, whether that's a sort of Jewish subset or some other subset.

Well, as he did in chapter 2, Paul goes back to Genesis to correct verse 3, they forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, but then Paul adds, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth, for everything created by God is good.

[13 : 51] Words that I think echo the end of Genesis 1. God saw everything that he had created and behold, it was very good. And nothing is to be rejected provided it is received with thanksgiving, for it's sanctified by God's word and by prayer.

Back in Genesis as well, all the foods that were created in Genesis 1 are there for humanity to eat. In Genesis 9, that is reiterated with the addition of eating meat from slain animals.

Paul, it seems, is alluding back to Genesis to correct the false teaching. It seems to be that from the early parts of the Old Testament, these people are getting the gospel horribly wrong.

Gospel freedom is being compromised by these teachers who for whatever reason and from whatever teaching are forbidding marriage and also demanding the abstinence from foods.

In this letter, Paul is strengthening Timothy for the fight or the war on deceit. He's arming him to silence the wolves as we saw in chapter 1 three weeks ago.

[15 : 01] And so he goes on to say in verse 6, If you put these instructions before the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound teaching that you have followed.

Nourished on the words of faith. Nourished on the gospel. Nourished on the scriptures. That's what Timothy is and what he is to keep being as a minister of the gospel in Ephesus.

Nourished on the words of faith to lead to life, to lead to growth and maturity. Unlike the heresy, which actually leads in the end to death, though Paul doesn't say quite in as many words.

Nourished also in verse 6 on the sound teaching. Remember last week that those who are to be teachers in God's church are to be apt teachers. That is, they're to teach soundly the truth, they're to hold fast to the words of faith.

Timothy is to be an example of what other Christian leaders are to be. Believing, holding fast, too nourished on the words of faith and the sound teaching. Which note, in verse 6 at the end, he has followed and continues to follow is the sense of that.

[16 : 13] Not just that he believes cognitively, but that he actually puts into practice in his life. He follows the sound teaching. He obeys it. His life reflects what he is teaching.

Timothy is to find strength then and nourishment from the gospel, from the scriptures, from the words of faith that God has entrusted to him. And then from that, from his own self-care and self-nourishment, he is to be a teacher for the benefit of others as well.

In contrast, he says, Paul says to him in verse 7 at the beginning, have nothing to do with ungodly myths or profane myths and old wives' tales.

That's the heresy that Paul's describing. They're godless myths. That is, they're speculations, ideas that do not lead to godliness. They're old wives' tales.

They're made-up stories or made-up demands that perhaps, in saying old wives' tales, reflects again what we saw a fortnight ago, that there was a particular problem with some women in their teaching in Ephesus at that time.

[17 : 27] Rather than ungodly myths, Timothy is to train himself in godliness at the end of verse 7. Well, let me tell you what is no secret to those who know me well.

The place that you are least likely ever to find me is the gym. Now, I know that that's very counter-cultural because I know that in our society the gyms are everywhere.

in every apartment block, on every sort of major street corner or wherever you like to go, there are gyms. And people, oddly, I'm bamboozled by this, but people actually go there and they do gym things at these gyms.

So I'm led to believe. Now, despite it being a huge fad and despite me being the sort of person who chases after the latest trend, as you can tell, I don't think I've ever been in a gym other than once to have a look at what it actually was that was a gym.

And so one of my favorite verses of Scripture is verse 8. While physical training is of some value, I'm still working out the word some, godliness is valuable in every way, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

[18 : 53] The implication, I think, is that physical training is of benefit maybe for the present life, but godliness training is valuable for not only the present, but even more importantly, for the life to come.

The word for train yourself in godliness at the end of verse 7 is the word from which we get the word gym or gymnasium. It's a Greek word. The same in verse 8. Physical training is the word gym.

Paul is saying that the godliness gym is more value. Well, it begs the question then, how do we work up godly muscle for the times in which we live, for the war on deceit?

Well, we work up godly muscle if we're putting together this paragraph from being nourished on the words of faith in verse 6, from the sound teaching that we follow.

You see, remember that God's gospel goal is godliness. So if we are to train ourselves in godliness, we will nourish ourselves on the gospel, on the words of faith, on the scriptures, Old and New Testaments that have been handed down to us.

[20 : 07] That's what Timothy is doing and what he's modelling and what therefore this injunction is implying for others who are to be like him to be godly people. We are to train ourselves in godliness through the words of faith that are passed to us.

Indeed, if you look to verse 10 again, sorry, to verse 8, godliness has benefit holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.

That is, godliness trusts in the promises of God for the future. It's holding fast to the words of God, to the promises of God. It is nourished by them and they're future-oriented and thus they train us in godliness for the life to come.

That's also what Paul is in effect saying in verse 10, to this end we toil and struggle because we have our hope set on the living God who's the saviour of all people, especially those who believe.

Godliness doesn't just happen overnight, a bit like physical training. See, I'm not going to wake up tomorrow fit and ready to run a marathon or to ride around the bay or to play a game of AFL football, none of which I actually want to do anyway and I'd be rather horrified if I did wake up ready to do all those things tomorrow.

[21 : 28] But just like physical training, godliness takes time and it takes effort. It's not just that we suddenly click our fingers and suddenly we find ourselves godly.

Godliness is the fruit of training, of gym, of discipline. And we develop godliness firstly by being nourished on the words of faith but then by putting it into action, by training ourselves in life.

So for example, as we develop the godly character of say gentleness, we actually strengthen our gentleness godly muscles in the situations where it is tempting and easy not to be gentle.

So that as we're confronted with a situation, with a difficult person or a trial or a test, as we hold fast to the scriptures and know that gentleness is what we're meant to exercise, and as we exercise gentleness in that situation, we actually strengthen ourselves as gentle people, as godly gentle people.

And the next time round we do it again and we actually begin more and more to cultivate the character of gentleness in our lives. Or to take another example, temptations of lust or greed or whatever.

[22 : 49] You walk past the casino or whatever, you might very well be tempted to go in thinking maybe I'll find Mrs. Kabila's late husband's \$15 million floating there for me in this casino.

Resist the temptation. Godliness with contentment is great gain, Paul will say in chapter 6. And each time we practice from the words of faith and clinging to the promises of the gospel, we will train ourselves in godliness.

Unless we exercise some effort it's not going to happen. But it's a training ground. The same sort of thing when we're tempted to lie, for example. As we resist the temptation, holding fast to the godly character of honesty in love, and as we keep on doing that in the situations where we're tempted to lie, we will grow and train ourselves in godliness.

So think of the sins that you are most prone to fall for. Whether it's greed or lying or anger or lust or whatever it is.

And develop a training regime nourished by God's words that exhort us not to lie or be greedy, to be satisfied with what we've got, etc. nourish yourselves on those words, learn them, meditate on them, feed on them.

[24 : 19] And then as each situation confronts you when you're tempted not to be godly, stop yourself. Rehearse the words of scripture in your mind. Train yourself to be godly.

And each time you, in a sense, take that godly step, the next one will be perhaps slightly easier. and you cultivate deep, lasting godliness.

That's the godly gym that you and I as believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are to devote more time to than physical training. It's actually under pressure that we actually find godly muscles coming out.

too many Christians you see spend so much time toning up their abs and pecs and everything else, apparently, they're completely oblivious to toning up the spiritual muscle.

We train to run marathons or play football or swim a mile or whatever it is, but we actually show little concentration sometimes in toning up our godly muscles.

[25 : 29] Physical training, Paul says, is of some value but godliness is of value in every way so Paul to Timothy to us, train yourself in godliness for the sake of salvation, for the sake of heaven, for the sake of the gospel, for the sake of others, for the sake of yourself.

Well, where's Paul's argument taken us to thus far? Deceit does not lead us to godliness. It might promise it but it's hypocrite when it does.

It's a liar when it does. Sound teaching leads us to godliness. The gospel leads us to godliness. Deceit, rather, is devilish and diabolical and demonic and leads to death.

The words of faith which nourish us, the words of the gospel, they lead us to godliness, the hope of heaven and eternal life. You see, the war on deceit requires training.

Just like any soldier going into battle requires training. We're to train ourselves in the gym of godliness. We're to toil and struggle, verse 10 says, because of our hope set by the gospel on the living God who's the saviour of all.

[26 : 35] Paul, I think there is correcting the false teaching and heresy that he was correcting also in chapter 2. God's gospel is for all. God wants everybody to be saved. He is the saviour for all people, especially or particularly or those who believe.

That is, that's where the effect of the gospel is seen. Timothy's role here is not just that Timothy is corrected, he doesn't need the correcting, but Paul is strengthening him so that through his example and his teaching, others will not be led astray.

Timothy's just a youth, we're told, verses 11 and 12, these are the things that you must insist on and teach. Let no one despise your youth. That means the commentaries say under 40, I would say 46 myself, but anyway, apparently under 40 you could be called a youth and you are to set the believers an example.

His example is to be impeccable. It's to do with the observable things of speech and conduct or behaviour. As well as those things characterised by love, faith and purity.

The importance of godly character for leaders is something that we saw emphasised last week in chapter 3. But not only is Timothy an example, he is also to teach. That is, he's got a ministry that goes with the example.

[27 : 58] Without the example, the ministry is just words that are empty in the end and so on. The example and the words have got to be compatible and go together.

Godly example and godly gospel teaching. Three things in verse 13. He is to give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting and to teaching.

To the public reading of scripture. scripture. We might be a bit surprised that that takes such priority. But so it should. God's word being publicly read so that people will hear it.

Remember, they didn't have books like we do. They couldn't just sit down each morning or night and read their Bibles mostly. They wouldn't have had copies. So even for them, even more perhaps than for us, the public reading of scripture is important.

But nonetheless, it remains an important part of our gatherings together each week as the public reading of scripture. To be done well in a way that edifies and corrects us as we hear God's word directly read.

[29 : 00] It's part of the Old Testament practice that the scriptures would be read regularly as you see in a number of places through the Old Testament. Not only that, to exhort and to teach. And by placing the reading of scripture followed by exhorting and teaching, it is clear that Paul's implication is that the exhorting and the teaching is consistent with what is read in the scriptures.

So that as the scriptures are read, then Timothy is to exhort and to teach what those scriptures say. So that those who hear, those who gather together to listen, will actually put into practice the words of scripture in their lives.

Timothy is one young man in a den of wolves. And so Paul is trying to bolster his courage and steal him for this war against deceit. So he goes on to finish this chapter.

Do not neglect the gift that is in you which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. Paul, I think, in saying that to Timothy is reminding him that the resources that he needs are God-given.

He's not reliant upon his own strength, but on God's gift. It was spoken through prophecy, something Paul mentioned back in chapter 1, verse 19, as though Timothy was prophesied to be a leader of God's people.

[30 : 17] And that was, in a sense, authorized through the presbyters, the elders, a group of them laying hands on him. Paul is encouraging Timothy like he does at the beginning of 2 Timothy.

There he makes the same comment, in effect, about the gift of God or the gift of God's spirit. God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but a spirit of power, love, and self-discipline.

In a sense, 2 Timothy 1.7 that I've just read summarizes, I think, what Paul is in effect saying here. It is a God-given strength that Timothy is to rely upon and take encouragement from in the ministry of sound teaching and good example that he is to deliver for the people in Ephesus.

Notice that verse 14 says, do not neglect the gift. That is, gifts of God to us, gifts for ministry, can be neglected, can be ignored by us.

That is, God may well gift us with various things that may edify, build up, and encourage the people of God, but for whatever reason, selfish or not, we may neglect the exercise of those gifts.

[31 : 31] What gifts has God given you for the benefit of other believers and indeed for those who are not believers? Are you neglecting those gifts? They're gifts actually given to the church rather than to you or to an individual and therefore we carry responsibility in the exercise of the gifts that God gives.

Well, Paul concludes this section with these words, put these things into practice, devote yourself to them so that all may see your progress, that is, they may see a godly person growing more godly.

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching, continue in these things for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers.

That is, by Timothy's example and teaching, not only will he continue and find the realization of the promise of eternal life, but that those who hear him will be kept on the path to life and not be seduced by sin.

They're serious matters. They don't end up at the same destination. Deceit leads to death, the devil's delight, but the gospel leads to godliness, God's joy.

[32 : 54] Friends, in response to this, we must keep praying, I think, for our Christian leaders and teachers. In the war on deceit, we must cultivate and train ourselves to be godly.

Deceit is the handmaiden of sin, godliness the handmaiden of truth. The options are stark, the destinations are diametrically opposed.

Pray not to be deceived, pray to put away sin so that your eyes are open to the truth. Train yourself in godliness, tone up your godly muscle, not only for your own sake, not only for the sake of eternal life, not only for the sake of others, but for the sake of God's gospel and his son's death for us.

Amen. Peace. Peace. Thank you.