

# True Godliness

*Paul's Ten Commands to Timothy*

**1Tim 4:7b** Rather **train** yourself for godliness;

<sup>8</sup> for while bodily **training** is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the **present life** and also for the **life to come**.

<sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

<sup>10</sup> For to this end **we toil and strive**, because **we** have our hope set on the living God, who is the **Savior of all people, especially of those who believe**.

<sup>11</sup> Command and teach these things.

<sup>12</sup> Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

<sup>13</sup> Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

<sup>14</sup> Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup> **Practice** these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

<sup>16</sup> 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 4:1-7a)

## Spiritual Formation

Back at the turn of the century when I was at Denver Seminary, a convergence of factors created a “new way” of doing pastoral education at it and, subsequently, many other

Evangelical schools. The sudden death from a very fast spreading cancer of their fifth president, combined with a near nervous breakdown of one of the most popular and acclaimed teachers who subsequently dealt with it by discovering the quieter ascetic ways of the Benedictine monks,<sup>1</sup> combined with the similar massive burnout of pastors who at that time now averaged less than 18 months at one church and only four years total in the ministry, combined with a resurgence of using “spiritual disciplines” as the chief means of creating a godly life through extremely popular books like *Celebration of Discipline*, combined with a new movement making waves throughout Evangelicalism called **The Emerging Church**, a kind of postmodern reaction against the Seeker Sensitive Movement which sought a new(er) way of doing church that wasn’t focused on reaching the lost so much as inner spiritual change and social action **all fused together** to create what they called “**spiritual formation**,” which came from “**contemplative spirituality**.”

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<sup>1</sup> **Bernard of Clairvaux**, perhaps the most famous of the Benedictine monks, was second only to Augustine in (positive) references and quotations by John Calvin, who uses him favorably to root his views of the Bondage of the Will, Justification by Faith, and Predestination firmly in the ancient church. See **Jill Raitt**, “Calvin’s Use of Bernard of Clairvaux,” *Archiv für Reformationsgeschichte (Archive for Reformation History)* 72 (Dec 1981): 98-121. [file:///Users/douglasvandorn/Downloads/\[Archiv%20f%C3%BCr%20Reformationsgeschichte%20vol.%2072%20iss.%20jg\]%20Raitt,%20Jill%20-%20Calvin%E2%80%99s%20Use%20of%20Bernard%20of%20Clairvaux%20\(1981\)%20\[10.14315\\_arg-1981-jg06\]%20-%20libgen.li.pdf](file:///Users/douglasvandorn/Downloads/[Archiv%20f%C3%BCr%20Reformationsgeschichte%20vol.%2072%20iss.%20jg]%20Raitt,%20Jill%20-%20Calvin%E2%80%99s%20Use%20of%20Bernard%20of%20Clairvaux%20(1981)%20[10.14315_arg-1981-jg06]%20-%20libgen.li.pdf).

In the middle of my Master's Degree, the seminary made **massive changes** both to its class schedule and to its focus from what they deemed focusing on “knowing” and “doing” to also include “*being*.” The idea of “being” would be dealt with in a number of new classes and modules, but mostly it would take place through the implementation of a mentor system and weekly spiritual formation small groups. At the time, I had already completed my own personal transformation from a regular old Evangelical to a new and excited Reformed Christian. I was frustrated at the beginning, when I learned that I would have to retake certain classes and now be **forced into these mandated spiritual formation exercises**, which to me seemed like it contradicted the very point of something you don't do because you have to. I now had to. Over the course of the next 2-3 years, my frustration turned into all out desperation, as I increasingly saw the focus of students turn ever in on themselves and their own naval gazing. Of course, most of them thought it was great, and to this day, at least the basic idea of such an education continues at this and many other schools.

As this all rolled out, we had to read several old mystics such as **Teressa of Avila** and **St. John of the Cross**, not to

mention contemporary mystics such as Dallas Willard and Henri Nouwen. But I want to focus in for a moment on the work of Richard Foster. In 1978, Foster, who seems to be a Trinitarian even though he is from and continues to be part of the Quaker tradition,<sup>2</sup> wrote *Celebration of Discipline*—a book that has sold nearly 2.5 million copies, has been translated into more than 20 language, and stands as what *Christianity Today* called one of the top 10 religious books of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>3</sup> Like so many who have come before him, as he looks out at the world of Christian Religion, Foster’s critique of the problem is often spot on.

In his Introduction, he does not overtly set his target on others, though he does covertly smuggle them in. Rather, like a man who has come to the end of himself comes to realize, the problem really begins with himself. It is worth quoting the beginning of his 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary edition,

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<sup>2</sup> Quakers are notoriously anti-creedal, so getting a hold on what they actually believe is difficult. That also means they will have people who adhere to something where others do not. That Foster seems to believe in the Trinity comes from his book, “The first act of submission is to the Triune God.” (Richard J. Foster, *Celebration of Discipline: The Path to Spiritual Growth 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* [Perfect Bound, 1998], 122). That Quakers have not been Trinitarian is seen in the words of John Owen who said, “Convince any of them of the doctrine of the Trinity, and all the rest of their imaginations vanish into smoke.” (Owen, *A Discourse Concerning the Holy Spirit*, in *Works*, 3:66). Given this and several other

<sup>3</sup> All facts from Colleen O’Connor, “Filling Spiritual Voids, Not Just Pews,” *Denver Post* (May 7, 2016), <https://www.denverpost.com/2007/12/31/filling-spiritual-voids-not-just-pews/>.

## *Spiritual Bankruptcy*

Fresh out of seminary, I was ready to conquer the world. My first appointment was a small church in a thriving region of Southern California.<sup>4</sup> “Here,” I mused, “is my chance to show the denominational leadership, nay, the whole world, what I can do.” Believe me, visions of far more than sugar plums were dancing in my head. I was sobered a bit when the former pastor, upon learning of my appointment, put his arm on my shoulder and said, “Well, Foster, it’s your turn to be in the desert!” But the “sobering” lasted only a moment. “This church will become a shining light set on a hill. The people will literally flood in.” This I thought, and this I believed.

After three months or so I had given that tiny congregation everything I knew, and then some, and it had done them no good. I had nothing left to give. I was spiritually bankrupt and I knew it. So much for a “shining light on a hill.”

My problem was more than having something to say from Sunday to Sunday. My problem was that what I did say had no power to help people. I had no substance, no depth. The people were starving for a word from God, and I had nothing to give them. Nothing.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> This was Woodlake Avenue Friends Church in Canoga Park, CA. This is a Quaker church.

<sup>5</sup> Foster, xi-xii.

You can see how he smuggles in **others** through the words of the pastor who, when he says, “**Well, Foster, it’s your turn to be in the desert!**” is really saying, “**These people are insufferable. There’s no teaching them anything.**” But Foster knew *that* couldn’t be the case. If *he* came to town, *he* would change them all and then some! But it is just here that any outward looking around **turns inward on himself**. He comes to realize that in fact he is the one with the problem.

Importantly, he identifies himself as having “**nothing left to give.**” And that, after only *three months* into his first pastorate! These three months had left him “**spiritually bankrupt,**” and he knew it. It’s rather stunning to me that a pastor who graduated from Fuller Seminary would have problems finding something to say after only three months. I’m going to return to this, but I want you to note that **he doesn’t really say that *this* was his problem.**

Instead, he found that *his words* had no power to help people. He believed that *he* had **no substance or depth**. Do you see what he’s doing here? Who is the focus on? Even more, while he admits that the people were starving for a word from God, notice that he says that “**[I] had nothing left to give them. Nothing.**” Again, same thing. **Again, I’m going to come back to this,** because it is an extremely

troubling thing that is rooted here in a correct assessment of his own life.

If this lack of substance and depth was a problem for him, where did it come from, and, might we expand this question not only to himself but to his people and to what he views as most of the rest of the Christian world? He states it in the first paragraph of his first chapter. “**Superficiality is the curse of our age. The doctrine of instant satisfaction is a primary spiritual problem. The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people.**”<sup>6</sup>

Again, I very much agree with Foster that superficiality and instant gratification are serious spiritual problems that, while not unique to our age, have certainly been exacerbated by it. **So what is his solution?** It’s what made the book a best seller. “**The classical Disciplines of the spiritual life call us to move beyond surface living into the depths.**”<sup>7</sup> The depths of what? To hijack Patsy Cone, “**A deeper walk with Thee.**”

He divides his book into **twelve spiritual disciplines** that have ancient origins, at least most of which are found in the Bible, at least most of which can be fine things in and of themselves. Dividing them into three parts they are:

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<sup>6</sup> Foster, 1.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

**Part I: The Inward Disciplines**

- Meditation
- Prayer
- Fasting
- Study

**Part II: The Outward Disciplines**

- Simplicity
- Solitude
- Submission
- Service

**Part III: The Corporate Disciplines**

- Confession [of sin]
- Worship [with God's people]
- Guidance [especially through a "Spiritual Director"]
- Celebration [with others]

Before launching into each discipline, Foster even sets the tone with some **important and truthful preliminaries**. For example, quoting another author he says, “**We...want to make it quite clear that we cannot free and purify our own heart by exerting our own ‘will.’**”<sup>8</sup> He says many enter into the disciplines as an act of **will-worship**,<sup>9</sup> and by turning them into legalistic **law requirements**, which takes the spirit out of them.<sup>10</sup>

I will return to Foster and this whole idea of spiritual formation at the end. But I tell you about this up front so you will have in your mind one very popular way that Christians today seek for sanctification and that deeper walk with Christ, so that as we move through our passage, you can contrast this with what the Apostle tells Timothy about the very same subject.

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<sup>8</sup> Foster, 5. Citing Heini Arnold, *Freedom from Sinful Thoughts: Christ Alone Breaks the Curse* (Rifton, NY: Plough Publishing House, 1973), p. 94.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 9-10.



# 1 Timothy 4:7b-16—Context and Structure

Today will finish the last part of the longer unit of **1 Timothy 3:14-4:16**. We called it “**True Godliness vs. False Godliness**.” There are **three movements** in the passage. We have seen that **the first** moves from **behavior** (what Paul called “conduct” in **3:14**, which is “the mystery of godliness” in **3:16**) **to doctrine** (the early creed of six points about Christ). The **second** we saw moves in **the opposite direction** with the opposite results, going from **false doctrine** (in the form of “deceitful spirits” and the “teachings of demons” in **4:1**) **to pseudo-spirituality** or false godliness (in the form of an asceticism that forbids marriage and forces abstinence from foods in **4:3**). In the **third** and longest part, Paul continues this opposite directional movement, but now with **positive results**. He will go from **true doctrine** to **true godliness**. In what I’ve just summarized, merely note for now how **godliness cannot be divorced from doctrine**, nor can doctrine be divorced from ethics. True leads to true or true comes from true; False leads to false or false comes from false. This is inevitable.

While I think there **would be much fruit** to be picked by looking at the parallels between **vv. 1-5** and **6-10** or the

probable chiasm of the entire chapter,<sup>11</sup> I've chosen to look at this through the more familiar **outline format**:

<sup>11</sup> Recall from the last sermon:

<b>A A'</b>	<sup>1</sup> Now the Spirit expressly says	<sup>6</sup> If you put these things before the brothers,
<b>B B'</b>	that in later times some will depart from the faith	you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith
<b>C C'</b>	by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,	and of the good doctrine that you have followed.
<b>D D'</b>	<sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars	<sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.
<b>E E'</b>	whose consciences are seared,	Rather train yourself for godliness;
<b>F F'</b>	<sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods	<sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value,
<b>G G'</b>	that God created to be received with thanksgiving	godliness is of value in every way,
<b>H H'</b>	by those who believe	as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.
<b>I I'</b>	and know the truth.	<sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.
<b>J J'</b>	<sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good,	<sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive,
<b>K K'</b>	and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,	because we have our hope set on the living God,
<b>L L'</b>	<sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.	who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

- 1a) 1 Tim 4:1-5, Some will **depart from the faith, heeding** deceiving spirits + **doctrines of demons**;
- 1b) 1 Tim 4:6-8a, **Instruct** + **good minister** + **word and doctrine** + **exercise godliness**;
- 1c) 1 Tim 4:8b, The promise of **eternal life**;
- 1d) 1 Tim 4:9, This word is **faithful and true**;
- central axis) 1 Tim 4:10a, **For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach**;
- 2d) 1 Tim 4:10b, We **trust** in the living God;
- 2c) 1 Tim 4:10c, The **Savior** of all men, especially those who believe;
- 2b) 1 Tim 4:11-15, **Command and teach** + **good example** + **word and doctrine** + **exercise gift**;
- 1a) 1 Tim 4:16, Take heed to yourself + **doctrine, so you will save yourself** + those who hear you.

- A. 4:1-6 (faith/ful) (holding-toward) (teach/ing) (faithful) (words)
- B. 7-8a (toward) (godliness) (profitability)
- B'. 8b (godliness) (toward) (profitability)
- A'. 9-16 (faith/ful) (word) (teach/ing) (hold-toward)

I. True Godliness (3:14-16)

II. Apostasy and False Godliness (4:1-7a)

III. Disciplines of True Godly Living (4:7b-16)

A. Discipline yourself for true godliness (4:7b-10)

1. Bodily discipline has some value (4:8a)
2. Spiritual discipline is even more important than bodily discipline (4:7b-8b)
  - a. Spiritual discipline holds promise for this life
  - b. Spiritual discipline holds promise for the life to come
  - c. The Life to come is of supreme importance (4:9-10)
    - (1) For it we labor and strive
    - (2) For it we have fixed our hope on the living God
    - (3) He is the savior who gives us eternal life

B. Prescriptions of spiritual discipline: ten imperatives (4:11-16)

1. Prescribe (command) these things (4:11)
2. Teach these things (4:11)
3. Let no one look down on your youthfulness (4:12a)
4. Show yourself an example of those who believe in:
  - a. Speech
  - b. Conduct
  - c. Love
  - d. Faith
  - e. Purity (4:12b)
5. Give attention to public reading of Scripture, including:
  - a. Exhortation
  - b. Teaching (4:13)
6. Do not neglect your spiritual gift (4:14)
7. Take pains with these things (4:15a)
8. Be absorbed in these things (4:15b)
9. Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching (4:16a)
10. Persevere in these things, for this will ensure salvation for:
  - a. Yourself
  - b. Those who hear you (4:16b)

I do this because it **highlights** in a way the others do not, perhaps the most important feature of our passage. **Vv. 11-16** contain **ten imperatival verbs** (verbs of command). The ten commands Paul gives to Timothy form **the doctrine** out of which he is to *train himself for godliness* (**7b**). Paul tells him how to do it; it isn't left a mystical a secret. **First doctrine, then godliness**. In fact, he seems to do this twice, in a kind of parallel between **7b-10** and **11-16** that highlights this in the form of the ultimate end: salvation:

**Train** yourself for godliness (7b-8)

**Practice** them (15)

**Command these 10 things** (11-16)

This will end in **salvation** (9-10)

**Save** yourself and your hearers (16)

In this way, what I've said about spiritual disciplines can be viewed in **sharp contrast** with our passage which is, in fact, about disciplining oneself for godliness, the very thing that so many are eager to do through so-called spiritual disciplines. As Foster says, **“God has given us the Disciplines of the spiritual life as a means of receiving his grace. The Disciplines allow us to place ourselves before God so that he can transform us.”**<sup>12</sup> As Paul says, **“Bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise**

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<sup>12</sup> Foster, 7.

for the present life and also for the life to come ... persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers” (8, 16).

## Train Yourself—For Godliness (1Tim 4:7b-10)

The positive movement from doctrine to godliness begins in 7b. “Rather train yourself for godliness.” Rather what? Rather than entertaining silly myths, or as we will come back to in the next chapter, “fables fit only for old women” (NAS. Literally: “the worldly and old-womanish myths”), train yourself for godliness. What Paul is about to say is the opposite of entertaining these “silly myths.”<sup>13</sup> That this training is to be considered doctrine is seen in vs. 6 where Paul said, “If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of *the good doctrine* that you have followed.”

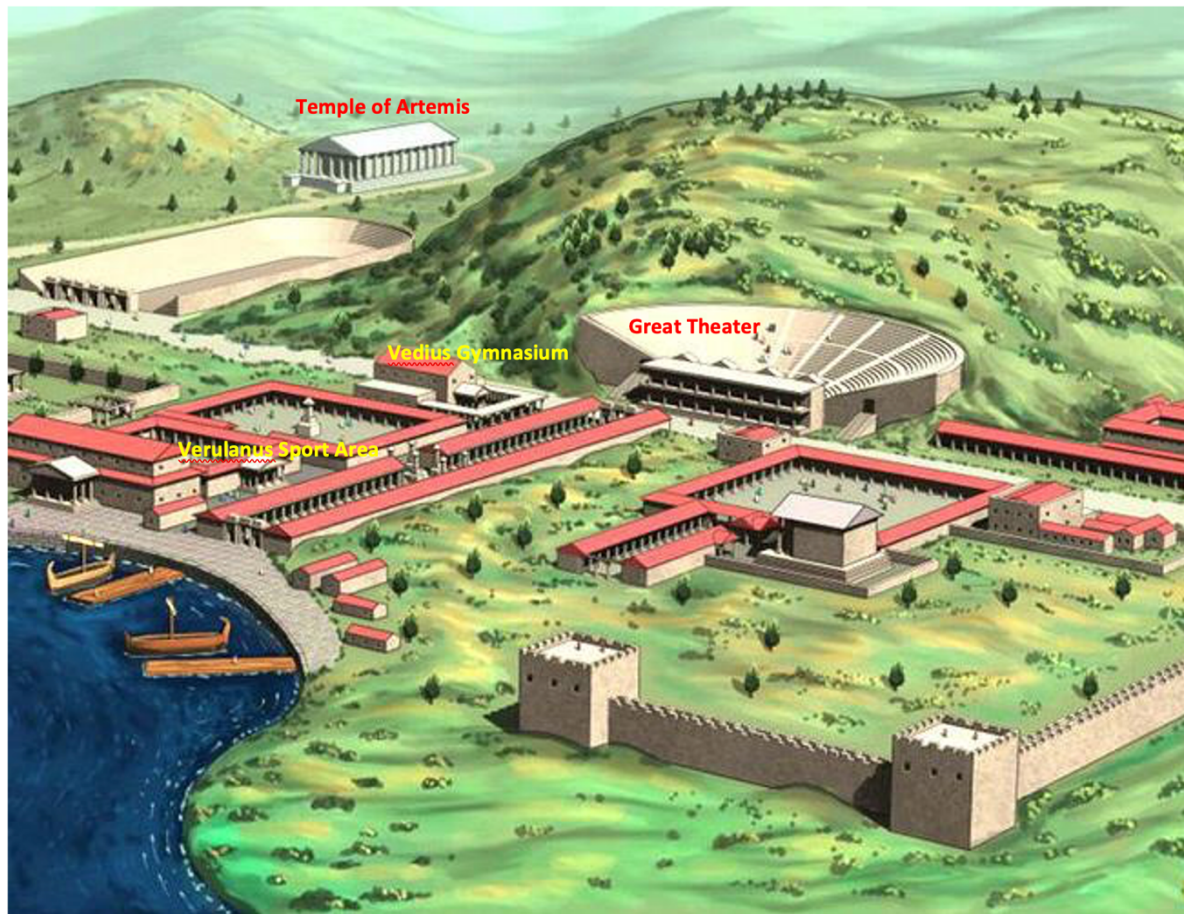
But before getting more specific about what the training consists of in the ten commands to Timothy, he explains the reasoning of why he should want to do this. One of the

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<sup>13</sup> Lexicons define *graōdeis* as “characteristic of elderly women; tales such as elderly women tell” (Gingrich); “characteristic of old women, old-womanish; by implication silly, absurd” (Friberg); “In satirical description of pers. Who engage in fanciful interpretation and talk like old women who spend their time exchanging stories” (Danker).

problems that people who have nothing to say either do not understand or seem to forget is that God tells us to *train for a purpose*. If you understand that purpose, how can you have nothing to tell the people?

Paul begins with an analogy. “*For while bodily training is of some value...*” (8a). Curiously, the NAS translates this



as “*bodily discipline,*” a theme which very much fits as an analogy to “*spiritual disciplines*” which we have been discussing.

However, the word really means something more like “*exercise.*” It is the word *gumnasia*, from which we derive our word gymnasium.

There were *many gymnasiums in Ephesus*, the most famous of which is the Vedius Gymnasium, which was built

80 years after 1 Timothy was written. In the gymnasium, young people could take lessons for art, sports, literature, drama, and speech. By the time of 1 Timothy, Plutarch says they had degenerated into body sculpting (think ancient Arnold Schwarzeneggers). Curiously, the fact that **Timothy was young** comes up in our passage, thus explaining the reason for the analogy. Timothy more than likely recreated at the gym.



Vedius Gymnasium, Ephesus

Paul's focus here is on bodily training, and he says it has some value. Obviously, that value is health and strength and agility and dexterity and all the temporal things that come with it. Paul does not say it is of no value! Curiously, **Philostratus** "The Athenian" whom we saw last time wrote about the Life of Apollonius of Tyana, and was born just after the famous stadium was built, also wrote a work *On*

*Gymnasticus*. In it, he tells us that gymnastics (exercise) is *sophia* (wisdom), “inferior to no craft.” Putting it alongside of poetry, music, philosophy, and geometry.<sup>14</sup> But Paul’s purpose here is not to give Timothy a weight training manual.

Rather, it is to contrast that which has some wisdom and value with that which holds eternal value. “While bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way” (1Tim 4:8). Godliness is the goal of the training, of the doctrine. He says it has value in every way, but how so? He tells you, “... as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.” Notice, he does not pit the present life against the life to come. Nor does he only mention one or the other. Godliness has value *in both areas*, not just one.

Being godly has so many temporal benefits, one can merely scratch the surface. It fosters wellness of soul and spirit. The person who is godly can overcome the bitterness or sadness or anxiety or fears of life that come through other people’s speech, conduct, faithlessness, and evil. It draws others to you, to look up to you, to admire you, which gives

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<sup>14</sup> Heather L. Reid, “Philostratus’s ‘Gymnasticus’: The Ethics of an Athletic Aesthetic,” *Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome* 61 (2016): 82. 77-90  
[https://www.jstor.org/stable/44988074?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ae480ac71e376f42faf636bfeb988cfed&seq=7#page\\_scan\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/44988074?read-now=1&refreqid=excelsior%3Ae480ac71e376f42faf636bfeb988cfed&seq=7#page_scan_tab_contents).



you a platform if you have in mind the eternal purpose. It keeps you from getting into trouble. Most of all, it honors and glorifies God.

But its value, unlike physical training, does not stop at death. Godliness has value in the life to come. But how so? We come to perhaps the most confusing section of our passage, vv. 9-10. They are not confusing in what they say. Rather, they are confusing in trying to understand why they are here.

Seemingly out of blue Paul gives the third of the five Pastoral Letter sayings, “The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance” (9). What saying? “For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially those who believe” (10). What makes this difficult is figuring out its purpose here. He has just been talking to Timothy about training himself for godliness. Then he talked about how valuable it was, for the present life and the life to come. But suddenly, Paul inserts a saying that talks about setting our hope on the living God, the Savior of all people, especially those who believe. What sense does this make with what he has just been talking about? It is difficult to see.

Before answering, let's get a **theological point** out of the way. What does it mean that God is *the Savior of all people, especially* those who believe?<sup>15</sup> All of the Reformers, and not a few Church Fathers are in agreement<sup>16</sup> that we are talking here about temporal salvation and then **eternal salvation**. Calvin and Luther speak for most when they say,

He means that **the kindness of God extends to all men**. And if there is no man who does not feel the goodness of God towards him, and who is not a partaker of it, how much more shall it be experienced by the godly, who hope in him?<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Paul said something similar back in **2:4**.

<sup>16</sup> Shedd using the language “preserver,” cites **Chrysostom, Oecumenius, Ambrose, Aquinas** (via **Turretin**, 14.14.14). (William Greenough Thayer Shedd, *Dogmatic Theology*, ed. Alan W. Gomes, 3rd ed. [Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Pub., 2003], 758.) To this we can add **Calvin**, the **English Annotations, Libert Froidmont, John Mayer, Peter Martyr Vermigli**. (Lee Gatiss, Bradley G. Green, and Timothy George, eds., *1-2 Thessalonians, 1-2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon: New Testament*, vol. XII, Reformation Commentary on Scripture [Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic: An Imprint of InterVarsity Press, 2019], 180-82.) And many more.

<sup>17</sup> **John Calvin** and William Pringle, *Commentaries on the Epistles to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 112. The note in Calvin here is good. “The word *Saviour* is not here taken in what we call its proper and strict meaning, in regard to the eternal salvation which God promises to his elect, but it is taken for one who delivers and protects. Thus we see that even unbelievers are protected by God, as it is said (Matt. 5:45) that “he maketh his sun to shine on the good and the bad;” and we see that all are fed by his goodness, that all are delivered from many dangers. In this sense he is called “the Saviour of all men;” not in regard to the spiritual salvation of their souls, but because he supports all his creatures. In this way, therefore, our Lord is the Saviour of all men; that is, his goodness extends to the most wicked, who are estranged from him, and who do not deserve to have any intercourse with him, who ought to have been struck off from the number of the creatures of God and destroyed; and yet we see how God hitherto extends his grace to them; for the life which he gives to them is a testimony of his goodness. Since, therefore, God shows such favour towards those who are strangers to him, how shall it be with us who are members of his household? Not that we are better or more excellent than those whom we see to be cast off by him, but the whole proceeds

I think he is speaking about general salvation. He saves from the perils of adultery, fornication, poverty, error. Whoever now has escaped some peril escapes as God saves him. Ps. 107 confirms this idea ... [1 Timothy 4:10] clearly distinguishes between “all men” and “those who believe.” The latter He saves eternally, but not the former. Accordingly, when we make a distinction of salvation between faithful and faithless people, we must draw from those passages this conclusion, that Paul here refers to general salvation. That is, God saves all the faithful, but He does not save the faithless *in the same way*. After all, He gives the victory even to wicked kings, but to David He gave a singular victory.<sup>18</sup>

As I looked at many commentators on this, I thought it was worth commenting on that while he agrees that this is something like “providential goodness and temporal salvation; which all men have a share in,” John Gill specifically says, “God the Father and not Christ, is here called the living God, who is the Savior...”<sup>19</sup> On the other

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from his mercy and free grace, that he is reconciled to us through our Lord Jesus Christ, since he hath called us to the knowledge of the gospel, and then confirms us, and seals his bounty toward us, so that we ought to be convinced that he reckons us to be his children. Since, therefore, we see that he nourishes those who are estranged from him, let us go and hide ourselves under his wings; for, having taken us under his protection, he has declared that he will show himself to be a Father toward us.”

<sup>18</sup> Martin Luther, *Luther's Works, Vol. 28: 1 Corinthians 7, 1 Corinthians 15, Lectures on 1 Timothy*, ed. Jaroslav Jan Pelikan, Hilton C. Oswald, and Helmut T. Lehmann, vol. 28 (Saint Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1999), 261–262.

<sup>19</sup> John Gill, *The Cause of God and Truth* (Paris, AK: The Baptist Standard Bearer, Inc., 1855, 1992), Section XLVI: 1 Timothy 4:19, p. 52. [https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/gill/The\\_Cause\\_of\\_God\\_and\\_Truth\\_-\\_John\\_Gill.pdf](https://www.monergism.com/thethreshold/sdg/gill/The_Cause_of_God_and_Truth_-_John_Gill.pdf).

hand, **Paul Hobson**, signer of the First London Confession (1644) specifically identifies **God as Christ**, which would be an explicit passage calling Jesus God.<sup>20</sup> Perhaps Gregory of Nyssa helps us navigate this best:

The Savior of all, especially of believers, is spoken of by the apostle as one. Yet no one argues from this expression that the Son does not save believers or that those who share in salvation receive it apart from the Spirit. But God who is over all is the Savior of all, while the Son brings salvation to effect by the grace of the Spirit. Yet on this account Scripture does not call them three Saviors, although salvation is recognized to come from the holy Trinity.

(**Gregory of Nyssa**, AN ANSWER TO ABLABIUS)<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> “Christ was the Saviour of every man from the execution of that curse, and they have some time to live here in the world, or else their destruction had been in their conception, either of all or so many as Christ did not undertake for, for Gods Word is exactly true in all things ... Christ by his Death doth not only free the Creature from the immediate execution of that curse, but he hath also taken them from under the dreadfull killing power of that state which man was in when he fell, which was to lie under the fire and killing appearances of God, in that killing Law, nothing standing between God as fire, and they as stubble, but he hath brought them into a state and under the authority of himself, wherein there is a cessation from that fiery appearance of God, and they are now under the tender of life and salvation by Jesus Christ, according to these Scriptures *Matth. 13.38. chap. 24.14. chap. 26.13. Mark 10. ch. 14.9. chap. 16.15. Rom. 10.18. Col. 1.6.* And this is to be done for the gathering out the chosen of God from the world, till Christ hath brought his Enemies under his feet, and then resign up the Kingdom to his Father, and God become all in all, *1 Cor. 15.24,25.*” **Paul Hobson**, *Fourteen Queries and Ten Absurdities About the Extent of Christ's Death, the Power of the Creatures, the Justice of God in Condemning Some, and Saving Others, Presented by a Free-willer to the Church of Christ at Newcastle, and Answered by Paul Hobson a Member of Said Church* (London: Printed by Henry Hills for William Hutchison Book-seller in Durham, 1655), 6–14. At <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/search/label/1%20Tim.%204%3A10>.

<sup>21</sup> In **Peter Gorday**, ed., *Colossians, 1–2 Thessalonians, 1–2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 190.

Of them all, Augustine is probably **the most pastoral**, giving those who have not yet believed in the Lord a very good reason.

You see, if Christ is the Savior of all, especially of the faithful—it is the apostle’s judgment, and a true one, that Christ is the Savior of all—then nobody may say, “I have no need of a savior.” If you say this, you are not bowing humbly to the doctor’s orders but perishing in your disease.

(Augustine, *Sermons* 292.4)<sup>22</sup>

As we conclude this, I want you to see that this is not merely a conclusion necessitated by theology. What no one I looked at noted, but which certainly would have **made this interpretation absolutely certain**, is the parallel Paul puts forward here between “**Savior of all people, especially of those who believe**” (1Tim 4:10) and “**it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come**” (8). Very clearly, **those who believe** will have **life in the world to come**. The parallel is that the **Savior of all people** saves them temporally, just like training is of “some value” in the same sense that godliness is also of value “**for the present life.**”

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<sup>22</sup> In Gorday, 190.

## Parallel of 1 Timothy 4:8 with 1 Timothy 4:10

Holds promise for the <b>present life</b> (8a)	And also for the <b>life to come</b> (8b)
Savior of <b>all people</b> (10a)	Especially of <b>those who believe</b> (10b)

Now we need to return to our problem. **Why would Paul add this?** What I've just said is the beginning point to understanding why. Clearly, he is setting up a parallel between what he said and the trustworthy saying. Somehow, they are related. But how is training in godliness which is of value in every way related to the trustworthy saying? I will suggest three connections from these verses.

**First**, notice how Paul is “**toiling and striving**” (vs. **10a**). “**For to this end we toil and strive.**” This toiling and striving of Paul is **parallel to the “training”** of Timothy. Paul's toiling and striving is *his* spiritual exercise, *his* discipline. In other words, they are to the same end, which is exactly what Paul says, “**For to this end...**”

## Parallel of 1 Timothy 4:8 with 1 Timothy 4:10

<b>Train</b> yourself (7b-8a)	For to this end we <b>toil and stive</b> (10a)
Holds promise for the <b>present life</b> (8a)	And also for the <b>life to come</b> (8b)
Savior of <b>all people</b> (10a)	Especially of <b>those who believe</b> (10b)

In the parallel in Colossians, that end is the **missionary work** that Paul is doing which seeks the end goal of conversation and salvation of souls. “**For this I toil, struggling**

with all his energy that he powerfully works within me” (Col 1:29). Along those lines, notice the second point, the plural pronoun: we. “We toil...” “We have hope...” Who is the we? It could be Paul and Timothy collectively. It could also, and probably also does include Paul’s other missionary companions.<sup>23</sup>

That leads to the third point. This is the language of “the living God.” Of all the adjectives that describe God, why add this one? When you go searching for Paul’s usage of “living” to describe God, you find that it relates directly to missions and conversion and, to put it in vs. 8 language, “the life to come.” Missions: “We bring you good news, that you should turn from these vain things to a living God” (Acts 14:15). Conversion: “You turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God” (1Th 1:9). Life to come: “... and for the life to come ... we have our hope set on the living God” (1Tim 4:8, 10).

All this takes place in the church ... the church of the “living God” (3:15). We are in it this very moment. If you would listen to Augustine and not perish in your sinful disease, then you need a God who is alive, one who has

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<sup>23</sup> On the whole idea that this is closely related to missions see Mark Goodwin, “The Pauline Background of the Living God as Interpretive Context for 1 Timothy 4.10,” *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 61 (1996): 65-85.

conquered death, one whose spirit is the Breath of Life. As someone says, “It is the living God who makes the promise of life (ἐπαγγελία ζωῆς) come true.”<sup>24</sup> All this is to say that Timothy’s training in godliness has one very practical eternal outcome ... the saving of souls from hell to eternal life. Mark Goodwin summarizes, “The Savior-title serves to stress the saving power of the living God active in Jesus’s resurrection, an action which signalled the future resurrection of the dead. ... Paul toiled and strove because he was an apostle of the living God, sent by the living God as the instrument of divine salvation. Paul’s hope in the living God was a hope based on his personal experience of call and commission.”<sup>25</sup>

## 1 Timothy 4:11-16—Ten Imperatives for Godliness

### *Command and Teach*

So how does he go about doing this? Now we move into the second, parallel and last part of this long section that began in 3:14. This is the section which contains the ten imperatives. Paul is explicit. “Command and teach these

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<sup>24</sup> M. Dibelius and H. Conzelmann, *The Pastoral Epistles* (Hermeneia: trans. P. Butolph and A. Yarbro; ed. H. Koester; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), p. 69.

<sup>25</sup> Goodwin, 84-85.



things” (11). Ironically, these two words are the first of the two imperatives.

Commands are things that are mandatory. You *must* do them. Paul is commanding Timothy to command others. But Who? Those under his care; the people in the church. Remember, Timothy is a pastor. The very first thing Paul tells this pastor to do is to command others how to become godly in the church. Commanding is only something that can be done where there is authority to do so. Timothy has this authority from God *as recognized by the church*. They recognized Timothy as their pastor and all have of their own accord confessed that they are under the authority of Christ. Therefore, the authority is God’s and resides in the office he holds. I do believe that there is a sense in which Christians can command each other in the same things, because we are a priesthood of believers. But it is especially the role of the pastor to do this. A pastor who will not is failing to carry out orders.

Teaching is the logic behind the command, giving reasons to people so that they might understand why they are to do them. Teaching was one of the items in the list of elders (3:2), of which Timothy is certainly one at Ephesus.

It is also a function of Apostles, which Paul is now carrying out at the “command” of Christ! (See 1:1; 2:7).

### *No Despising (12a)*

The **third** imperative takes us directly to Timothy’s age. “**Let no one despise you for your youth**” (12a). In both Greece and Rome, social and political leadership was for older men.<sup>26</sup> The Latin word **senate** comes from *senex*, “**old, senior.**” In Athens and other cities like Ephesus, there were semiofficial elders called Gerousia (from Gk *geron*, “**old man**”), which were important in politics, religion, and society. Young men (*neoi*) went up to 40 at which time you “graduated” to Gerousia. Timothy is obviously still a *neoi*, and Paul seems to be **worried that his age might be used to undermine his ministry.** We see the same thing today in virtually every area of society, including churches where often we are told that there is some magical age that someone must be to be a pastor or hold an office. That’s unbiblical. If they meet the qualifications, Paul would have no problem. But he warns them, others will seek to use this to undermine you. Do not let them do it.

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<sup>26</sup> **Clinton E. Arnold**, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary: Romans to Philemon.*, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2002), 466.

## *Set an Example to the Believers (12b)*

But **how should he do this**? Through force? Intimidation? Superior intellect? The fostering of fear? No, just the opposite. “**But set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity**” (12b). The word “**but**” (*alla*) connects this to not letting people look down on you. The way you counter this is through **a godly life**! This is just as Paul said, godliness has value *in the present life*!

He lists **five examples** of how to set an example. *Speech*. Curiously, this is the word *logos*. It isn't referring to good speeches (sermons), but to the way you talk and thereby represent Christ—the Logos. The speech isn't to be adolescent, coarse, filthy, abusive, intimidating, authoritarian, gross, but mature, soft, clean, helpful, welcoming, authoritative, and Christ-like.

*Conduct*. This is putting out of the body what is supposed to come out of the mouth. This is the manner of life, behavior. Precisely how the entire section began.

*Love*. In Greek, there were many different words for what we call love. Four are the best known.<sup>27</sup> There was empathy (*storgē*), the liking of someone through fondness of familiarity—a parent for a child for example. There was

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<sup>27</sup> C. S. Lewis wrote a book on them called *The Four Loves* (1960).

brotherly love (*philia*). This is the love between friends and siblings. There was romantic love (*eros*). This is romantic love, sexual love, the love of a husband and wife. The fourth love is *agape*. This is **unconditional love**, and as such it is more of an action than a feeling. This love does not change with circumstances or feelings. The word Paul uses here is *agape*.

**Faith**. Faith is not the infamous leap in the dark. As the Reformed came to describe it, faith is a combination of **knowledge** (*notitia*), **ascent** (*assensus*), and **faith** (*fiducia*). Knowledge means gaining facts and having understanding about something. This is why teaching and commanding are so important. Ascent means agreeing that those facts are true. Faith, however, goes a step beyond. Satan has knowledge and ascent that Jesus is God. But he doesn't have faith. Faith is the personal application of those facts to me. I believe that Christ died for *my* sins. I believe that Christ was raised to life so that *I* might be raised to life. Jonathan Edwards added what I think is an important appendix to faith—**delight**. That is, faith isn't just the acceptance that this is for me, it is the delight and hope and wonder that it is for me.

**Purity**. This fifth example refers to an upright and morally blameless life. Not a perfect life. It does not mean a sinless life. But a life characterized by integrity, obedience,

repentance, and progression. In many ways, these are simply outworking's of the qualifications that Paul gave in ch. 3, and as such, help us make our way back out of the letter's huge chiasm.

### *Devote Yourself to the Public Reading of Scripture (13)*

The **fifth** imperative is “**Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching**” (13). This gives you the feeling that Timothy may be more like a church planter; but Paul had no intention of settling down in Ephesus for the rest of his life. What he means by “**until I come**” is that Timothy must continually do this. Paul doesn't know what's going to happen to him. If Paul should come, he will help him out. If he should not, Timothy must still do this.

Do what? Three things. Timothy is to make sure that **Scripture is read publicly in the church** on a regular basis. In those days, entire books would be read in a sitting of the church. We try to emulate that in our own from time to time. But certainly this at least means that the Scripture must be read all the time, even if it is just a little.

Supplementing the reading is the exhortation and the teaching. **Exhortation** is *paraklesis*; **teaching** is *didaskalia*. The

former has overtones of encouragement and comfort; consolation. The latter is more like instructing in doctrine. It might be tempting here to see this as the difference between a sermon and a Sunday School class, but Paul is not using the usual word for a sermon (a proclamation: *kerugma*). I think people make too big of a deal distinction preaching and teaching. Maybe they grew up in a hollerin' Southern Babbbbtist church or sat in one too many dull boring lectures in school and they therefore have very different views of what those should look like.

In my mind, the two words here are more like the difference between the law and the gospel. The Gospel is the doctrine that comforts, encourages, lifts up, sustains, gives life. The Law is the doctrine which we are to obey. Because we fall short of it, we need the Gospel, and the pastor can never neglect one, let alone both. They are, as Spurgeon and others have said, the sum and substance of the Scripture.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> “There is no point upon which men make greater mistakes than upon the relation which exists between the law and the gospel. Some men put the law instead of the gospel: others put the gospel instead of the law; some modify the law and the gospel, and preach neither law nor gospel: and others entirely abrogate the law, by bringing in the gospel. Many there are who think that the law is the gospel, and who teach that men by good works of benevolence, honesty, righteousness, and sobriety, may be saved. Such men do err. On the other hand, many teach that the gospel is a law; that it has certain commands in it, by obedience to which, men are meritoriously saved; such men err from the truth, and understand it not. A certain class maintain that the law and the gospel are mixed, and that partly by observance of the law, and partly by God's grace, men are saved. These men understand not the truth, and are false teachers.” C. H. Spurgeon, “Law and Grace (Rom 5:20-21),” [https://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/spurgeon/law\\_and\\_grace.htm](https://biblehub.com/sermons/auth/spurgeon/law_and_grace.htm).

## *Do Not Neglect Your Gift (14)*

Sixth, Timothy is **not to neglect** his gift (16). It was given to him by **prophecy** when **the council of elders laid their hand on him**. Unfortunately, we do not have any solid evidence as to what this gift is or to the moment Paul has in mind. Was it his ordination service? Some kind of commissioning service? Was it as his baptism? But the point doesn't really matter much. The significant thing is that Timothy has been **given a gift** by God. I would assume it has something to do with preaching and teaching, but it really could be just about any of the spiritual gifts. God doesn't give the gifts so that we can stuff them under the carpet. They are given for the edification and building up of the church. How can one exercise it if they aren't part of a church?

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Ursinus, who authored the Heidelberg Catechism said that this law/gospel distinction has “**comprehended the sum and substance of the sacred Scriptures**” and are “**the chief and general divisions of the holy scriptures, and comprise the entire doctrine comprehended therein.**” To confuse them is to corrupt the faith at its core. **Zacharias Ursinus** and G. W. Williard, *The Commentary of Dr. Zacharias Ursinus on the Heidelberg Catechism* (Cincinnati, OH: Elm Street Printing Company, 1888), 2.

Theodore Beza, who was the chief student of John Calvin, once said, “**Ignorance of this distinction between Law and Gospel, s one of the principal sources of the abuses which corrupted (previous to the Reformation) and still corrupt Christianity.**” **Theodore Beza**, *The Christian Faith*, 40-41. These are all quoted in **Michael S. Horton**, “The Five Solas of the Reformation,” *Here We Stand* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1996), 108. 99-130.

## *Practice and Immerse Yourself in These (15)*

The next two imperatives occur in vs. 15. Timothy is to “*practice these things.*” And he is to “*immerse himself in them.*” Practice (*meletaō*) here relates back to the training. To get the body of Mr. Universe, you must lift the same weights over and over, day after day, month after month, year after year, with higher and higher poundages. This practice is not weights, but the care for and diligent study of both God’s word and oneself.

The word immerse is not in the Greek. The imperative is actually the word “is” (*eime*). Literally, “*In these things be.*” How do you render that in English? With a word like immerse or be absorbed or give yourself wholly to them. If this is your calling, then you will want to do it. If it is not, then it will be a chore of chores.

The Apostle gives a reason for this. “*So that all may see your progress.*” The pastor who does not grow himself is no pastor. He is a stunted dwarf. Pastors do not know everything going in; they will not know everything going out. Pastors are not perfect men coming in; they will not be perfect going out. But they should be progressing in all of them.



## *Keep a Close Watch on Yourself and Your Teaching (16a)*

The **ninth** imperative is to *keep a close watch* (16a), literally “hold fast” to **yourself** and “**the**” **teaching**. The temptation is to relax, to pull back, to rely on what you’ve already done, to stop altogether. Therefore, Timothy must watch himself, that is all that Paul has said about his conduct and morality, and his doctrine, that is everything he has told him about how he communicates the Scripture.

## *Persist in This (16b)*

**Finally**, and complementary, he is *to persist* (16b). He is not to give up, not to give in. He is not to let the people, the elders, the townsmen, the government, his family, or himself get to him. **Perseverance** is the great final point of the TULIP, and we usually think of it in terms of persevering to salvation. In fact, what Timothy is told here is closely related.

A **final reason** is given. “**For by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.**” Notice how this **parallels vs. 10**. Paul is duplicating his thought, because 7-10 parallel 11-16. Both sections end at the same place. All of this is done *for salvation*. This perseverance is more than just that of a pastor. It is that of *a Christian*. Timothy is not to do this

*because* he's a pastor. He's to do this *because* he's a Christian. In this way, this (and many other imperatives here) are not just for the pastor, but for all Christians. We can all relate in our own spheres of influence and vocation and family to what Paul tells Timothy. It just so happens, however, that Timothy has the double responsibility. If he does not persevere, what will happen to his hearers?

## True Spiritual Discipline

I want to return to the [interesting biography of Richard Foster](#). In so doing, I offer [a warning](#) to all seeking the ministry and to all who would be looking for a pastor. In fact, it is a warning for all Christians, as 2.5 million readers of his book can't all be pastors.

Incredibly, he said that [after only three months](#) he had nothing left to give to his people. He was spiritually bankrupt. He had all this head knowledge he got from seminary, but it didn't translate into anything practical. Many schools and pastors and churches have realized that this is a huge problem in the contemporary church. Many Christians have seen in their own life a dryness, an almost deadness in their spiritual walk. Perhaps you feel the same way?

In what I'm about to say, I do not want to poo-poo spiritual disciplines or even to deny, necessarily, mystical experiences. As I said earlier, most if not all that he gives are biblical things, and we are experiential creatures. Nor do I want to say anything bad about his correct warning that if you undertake such disciplines as some kind of a legalistic to-do list, that this defeats the point. Of course it does! (Which is why for the life of me I can't understand forcing them down the throats of students, even with the best of intentions.)

What I want to suggest is that there is a more fundamental problem than shallowness or youthful pride that comes before the fall, or spiritual burnout. Those are all symptoms, not underlying causes. Notice that in our ten imperatives, not a single one has as its goal personal spiritual formation. There is spiritual formation here and it is to be practiced. But spiritual formation has a greater goal ... *others*. Not just "me n' Jesus." But me and how I glorify God by helping others come to know and believe in him. To be fair, some of Foster's disciplines have this too. But *all* of Paul's do.

There is also very little to nothing here about having some kind of personal mystical other-worldly experience of God. Yet, that seems to be what many think will end their

burnout. People crave this, and in some ways that's not bad. Christians should have a personal relationship with God, but to seek otherworldly experiences is to not only miss the point of why burnout occurs, but to come dangerously close to the Fire of God, which if one gets too close will not warm, but incinerate you.

The tendency to **look inward rather than outward**, at our navel rather than our neighbor is a real problem. That isn't Christianity. But there is an even greater one.<sup>29</sup> I think the most fundamental is **the denial of the necessity and power of Scripture**, from which we derive our doctrine. How can a man fresh out of seminary have nothing to say after only three months, unless he thinks Scripture is not that important? Why should they read it publicly, teach it publicly, give exhortations from it publicly if all doctrine does it cause burnout? What's the point?

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<sup>29</sup> There are many I could choose from with Foster, who is a Quaker. These include the inner light, denial of the sacraments, denial of the Trinity (not to Foster, but Quakers more generally), denial or lessening of the effects of the fall. See **Joel R. Beeke** & Mark Jones, *A Puritan Theology: Doctrine for Life* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2021), 429-441, summarized by **Andrew Compton**, "Owen Against Quakerism," *The Reformed Reader* (Nov 26, 2014), <https://reformedreader.wordpress.com/2014/11/26/owen-against-quakerism/>. For a specific look at Foster see Michael S. Horton, "Following Jesus: What's Wrong and Right About the Imitation of Christ," *Modern Reformation* 18.2 (March/April 2009): 14-18. At <https://www.monergism.com/following-jesus-what%E2%80%99s-wrong-and-right-about-imitation-christ>.

Scripture itself does not tell you that head knowledge is an end to itself (which, quite frankly, many Reformed people make it, which only exacerbates the knee-jerk reaction into the spiritual disciplines). Rather, Jesus says, “You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me” (Jn 5:39). It isn’t Scripture *vs.* Jesus here. It is the Scriptures *lead you to* Jesus. And Jesus in turn *leads you to others*, your neighbor.

Your words do not have power to help people. So why look there? His do. And he has said so much that with a thousand lifetimes you could not exhaust it, let alone do so in three months. His not only help them, but save them. Why is Timothy to undertake these 10 imperatives? **To save both himself and his hearers.** This is about godliness, not experiences. Godliness that leads to salvation. And **godliness cannot be divorced from doctrine.** The right doctrine leads to godliness. To get godliness, you must practice the doctrine. Command, teach, let no one look down on you, but be an example in your personal morality, give attention to the word, take pains, be absorbed in, pay close attention to, and persevere in the study, the teaching, the encouraging, and rebuking of Scripture and in making sure

you are maintaining a life of obedience so that others might see your good work and rejoice at your Father in heaven.

There must be **true understanding** that God's word is not an end to itself, but that it leads you to Christ. There must be **assent** that it is powerful to transform me and others. There must be **true faith** that what God says to us in 1 Timothy 4 and every other chapter of the Bible is for our salvation and sanctification. And there must be a true **delight** in knowing it, hearing it, internalizing it, being encouraged and rebuked by it, putting it into practice, and being given new life from it. If one has this, then they have a foundation that will never lead to burnout, just as Jesus said, "I give you water which if you drink of it will make you never thirst again" (**John 4:13**).

In believing these things you will find that the **superficiality** of our age and the **instant gratification** that is offered will pale in comparison to the **depths** of the riches of the Living God and the **life-long pursuit** of holiness that leads to salvation. The Spirit through the Apostle speaks the truth. He is not lying. He tells you the answer. He has not kept it a secret. You don't have to go looking for all these other things. All that is required of you is to believe him.

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