TRAIN YOURSELF TO BE GODLY

1 Timothy 4:1-16

Key Verse:7b-8

“Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.”

We thank God for the mystery of Christ and the mystery of godliness. His birth, life, death on the cross, resurrection and ascension with the promise of coming back are truly the mystery. What a precious life it is to grow in knowing this mystery of Christ. This is truly the core message of Christian faith and church. And the church is God’s household as the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the truth. What a message and what a mission we have as the church! May we truly keep and uphold the truth, living it, the life of godliness and proclaiming it in this world! Today’s passage says to train yourself to be godly/exercise unto godliness. In this passage, Paul gives a message to Timothy to establish him as a good servant/minister of Christ Jesus. Let’s see what are involved in this.

Verse 1 says, “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.” This verse draws our attention because it speaks of the Spirit, later times, abandoning the faith – which is apostasy – and deceiving/seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. We know that the Spirit, the Holy Spirit, is the Spirit of the truth (Jn 14:17; 15:26; 16:13). Here, Paul describes the battle between the Spirit of the truth and deceiving spirits. The Spirit teaches the sound doctrine that conforms to the glorious gospel of the blessed God. Jesus said in John 16:13, “When the Spirit of the truth comes, he will guide you into all truth.” Yet, there are spirits of falsehood, which are deceiving and seducing spirits, that present the doctrine of demons, not doctrines about demons but rather doctrines taught by demons. John also said in 1 John 4:1, “Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.” This battle between the truth and falsity has been so from the Garden of Eden when the devil twisted the word of God and seduced Eve. It will be so to the end of the age. Revelation 12:9 says, “The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil or Satan, who leads the whole world astray/deceives the whole world.” That’s why Jesus said, “Watch out that you are not deceived,” (Lk 21:8) when Jesus spoke of the signs of the end of age. Here, we are to know why some abandon/depart from (in Greek, *aphistémi*) the faith, and become apostates. Hebrews 3:12 says, “See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.” It can happen that one’s belief stays in his mind on the surface of the heart, and does not enter the heart. Then the person departs from the faith at the crucial time and cannot but follow the doctrine of demons. We need to struggle with God’s words until the word gets into our hearts.

We are to know that behind all the teachings against the truth of God’s words are demons and their root is demons’ doctrine with deceiving spirits. Such teaching includes all false religious systems. God wants us to be able to see beyond human levels. People are mere agents of such teachings. So verse 2 says, “Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” Those whose consciences are seared cannot discern what is right and what is wrong, as their hearts are calloused. When we think about just our physical bodies, the heart and the brain and each internal organ and each external part are given, we know that all came from God. No human power can produce any of them. However, some human minds go too far to the point of saying, “You can change your gender as you want through necessary surgeries. If your parents do not agree with you, we can help you.” More terribly many churches just condone and follow such claims. Their consciences have been seared, however brilliant they are. They are hypocritical liars. We should watch out for them. And each of us should not be a double-tongued (*dilogos*) person, but learn to speak with integrity. How precious the consciences are that can be responsive to God’s word at each time, repenting what is wrong and confirming what is right and being strengthened in the faith in Christ Jesus.

Here Paul says continually in verse 3, “They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods…” This kind of an ascetic lifestyle seems to make people more spiritual, overcoming fleshly desires and obtaining their own human achievement and righteousness and recognition. However, the biblical truth is that marriage is sacred coming from God, and married people struggle to fulfill God’s purpose for their holy matrimony. People can choose to live as a single for complete devotion to Christ, but prohibiting marriage is wrong. Also, people can fast to pray with an earnest, contrite and desperate heart to God. But prohibiting certain foods which they think are unclean is wrong, for Jesus declared that all foods are clean (Mk 7:19). Christianity is never to be external or outward, just keeping certain rules and rituals. Any human denial or sacrifice apart from Jesus is pointless and even dangerous. Any legalistic struggle and human effort without Jesus is actually against the gospel. The externalism is typical of all satanic false religion. And we should be careful of philosophical dualism, that says that Spirit is good and all matter is evil. Influenced by the philosophical duelist view, the Corinthians got confused about the resurrection of the body and even refuted it, thinking it, too, was evil. And again, we should watch our for externalism. Paul said in Colossians 2:16-17, “Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.” He also said in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, “Be joyful always, pray continually and give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” An important thing is to give thanks to God for all his provisions, whether our meals are poor or abundant. Here Paul says continually, “which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.” In doing all things, what matters is to thank God and glorify him, as he also said in 1 Corinthians 10:31, “Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.” At each time and in any circumstances, we should learn how to give thanks and glory to God in Christ Jesus.

Verse 6 says, “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus.” Here “minister” is in Greek, *diakonos*, meaning “servant”, which was translated to “deacon.” “*Diakonos*” is different from “*doulos*” in Romans 1:1, “Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus…” “*Doulos*” is often translate slave. It has the idea of subjection, submission. “*Diakonos*” has the idea of service ability or usefulness. This majors on the usefulness of the man. So a good minster or servant of Christ Jesus is to be excellent in his usefulness to the cause of Jesus Christ. The servant is to point out and explain clearly such subtle issues mentioned above, for they are related to deceiving spirits and things taught by demons beyond a human level. In this way, Paul says that the main topic of this chapter is about how to be a good servant of Christ Jesus as a direct message to Timothy. Now, Paul’s instruction to Timothy then becomes normative for all those who want to be good servants of Christ Jesus.

Here verse 6 continues, “brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” Paul recognizes how Timothy was brought up in faith. He says in 2 Timothy 1:5, “I have been reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother, Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” And Paul says in 2 Timothy 3:15, “how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.” Timothy was also brought up through Paul’s shepherding and Bible teaching as Paul said in 2 Timothy 2:2, “The things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses…” Paul wanted Timothy to be continually nourished in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine to be a good servant of Christ Jesus.

Then Paul says in verse 7, “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather...” Here “godless myths and old wives’ tales” is also translated, “irreverent, silly myths,” or “profane and old wives’ fables.” And the word “myths” is opposite to “the truth” as written in 2 Timothy 4:4, “They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.” So here what Paul says is “reject and stay away from such unholy and worthless myths and tales; have nothing to with them.”

Verse 7 continues, “rather train yourself to be godly.” “Train” is in Greek *gumnazó*, from which we have the word “gymnasium.” We all know the importance of physical training, which is very vital for our body. People may think, “Training is only for our physical body; we live by the Spirit. What kind of training is this?” But here Paul said, “Train yourself to be godly.” In other translations, “train/exercise yourself toward/unto godliness.” In chapter 3, we thought of the mystery of godliness, which is great. Godliness, is in Greek *eusebeia*, meaning reverence, piety, true spiritual virtue. For godliness training or exercise is absolutely needed. We are to be trained especially in the word of God and prayer. Jesus said in his prayer for his disciples, “Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth…For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified” (Jn 17:17, 19). Jesus sanctified himself to obey God. Hebrews 5:8,9 says, “Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him.” Jesus defeated the devil’s temptations by the words of God he memorized and kept in his heart (Mt 4:4, 7, 10). Jesus said in John 15:7, “If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.” The words of Jesus cannot remain in us naturally, but through our intentional and repeated effort to keep his words in our memory system and in our hearts. Jesus’ prayer became his spiritual habit, praying early in the morning and in the evening (Mk 1:35; Lk 22:37). And Hebrews 5:7 says, “During the days of Jesus’ life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission.” As we studied in the book of Daniel, Daniel kept the words of God in his heart, so he could remember them in his prayer that the desolation of Jerusalem would last seventy years, and prayed earnestly based on God’s word of promise according to the prophecy by the prophet Jeremiah (Da 9:2). And he prayed three times a day as his custom (Da 6:10). Joshua was a victorious general, undoubtedly trained to fight in the battle. But God’s training for him was first of all training in the word God. God said to him in Joshua 1:8, “Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful.”

Paul knew the importance of the training of our minds to live by the Spirit and said in Romans 8:6, “The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace.” The mind can be controlled by our sinful nature or by the Spirit. He also said in Romans 12:2, “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.” Without renewal of our mind we follow the pattern of this world. Our mind can be renewed by the words of God. He said in 2 Corinthians 10:3-4, “Though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world.” Our weapon is the word of God, which is the sword of the Spirit (Eph 6:17). Paul continues 10:5, “We demolish arguments and every pretention that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.” What a mind battle! Paul compared Christian life to athletes, saying in 2 Timothy 2:5, “…if anyone competes as an athlete, he does not receive the victor’s crown unless he competes according to the rules.” And he said in 1 Corinthians 9:25-27, “Everyone who competes in the games goes into strict training. They do it to get a crown that will not last; but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore I do not run like a man running aimlessly and I do not fight like a man beating the air…” We all need a clear direction in our Christian life and ministry. May I have a clearer direction to serve the ministry of God’s word and 1:1 based on the words of God, “Feed my lambs” (Jn 21:150 and “You will receive power when the Holy spirit comes on you…” (Ac 1:8).

About prayer Paul said in Philippians 4:6, “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.” He also said in Colossians 4:2, “Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.”

We cannot forget how God trained his former slave people, the Israelites, in the desert. God gave them manna training everyday for forty years to mould them into a kingdom of priests and a holy nation from such a people soaked with slave mentality. Moses recalled that training and said in Deuteronomy 8:2-3, “Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years…to teach you that man does not live on bread along but on every word that comes from the mouth of the LORD.” What a precious lesson it is! Now God rains down spiritual daily bread from heaven each day. Daily Bread training is necessary, and also weekly testimony writing as our godly training. I believe that these are very precious as a heritage from God. Proverbs 22:6 says, “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” This spiritual training may be handed down to our children and children after children, next generations until our Lord Jesus comes again.

Paul says in verse 8, “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” Physical training is profitable, making our body strong, and its effect ends in death. But godliness is profitable not just to the body but the body and the soul, making our inner person strong. It is profitable not just for a brief time but for a lifetime and for eternity, assuring us of eternal life and rewards in heaven.

And verse 9 says, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.” To avoid all unholy and ungodly things and to train ourselves to be godly was well accepted and approved as a great teaching in the early churches. It’s a truism. It’s an axiom. It’s a maxim. Paul continues, “(and for this we labour and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savour of all men, and especially of those who believe.” Those who train themselves to be godly are not the ones who put hope in this world but who put their hope in the living God, who is eternal, as the sustainer, provider and deliver for all human life and truly the Saviour of those who believe.

In verse 11, “Command and teach these things.” This is a strong word given to Timothy. And in verse 12, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” It is believed that one’s leadership comes from his example; this is true especially in the church, here in the areas of speech, life, love, faith and purity. Also, how important parents’ exemplary life at home is for their children!

And in verse 13, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of the Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.” Here the public reading includes explaining after the loud reading. Jesus once stood in a synagogue and read the words of Isaiah in a scroll and then sat down to explain the passage (Lk 4:17-21). In the book of Nehemiah 8, Ezra read from the Book of the Law aloud at a square to those who could under stand and they listened attentively. And the Levites read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read (8:2-8). And here preaching is in *Greek paraklésis* and in most other translations, is exhortation. So preaching and teaching are like our GBS and 1:1 Bible teaching. I heard about one man who is 103 years old, yet still going around to give lectures. Those who live and die as devoted Bible teachers are really precious in view of Christ and his coming kingdom.

And in verse 14, “Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” This is related to God’s call for Timothy to do the evangelical work. What Paul said here indicates that Timothy was in a very hard situation almost to the point of neglecting and giving up God’s calling. Paul also said in 2 Timothy 1:6-8, “…I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline. So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord, or ashamed of me his prisoner. But join with me in suffering for the gospel…” Peter said in 2 Peter 1:10, “Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure.”

And in verse 15, “Be diligent in these things; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.” Here “be diligent” is in other translations “ponder” or “meditate” or “take pains” and “give wholly” is “absorbed.” It will be great to show one’s progress and growing though not perfect.

And in verse 16 Paul says finally, “Watch your life and doctrine closely.” That is, “watch yourself and your teaching.” Paul also said in Acts 20:28, “Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers.” It does not mean to be selfish, but it means how I live always comes first before others and that matters in the end. Paul also said in 1 Corinthians 9:27, “No, I beat my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be qualified for the prize.” Here Paul continued, “Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

May we really train ourselves to be godly and each one grow to be a good servant of Christ Jesus!