

*Watch Yourself and the Teaching: 1 Timothy 4:11-16*  
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In this fourth chapter of 1 Timothy we receive several important warnings and commands. In verses 1-5 there was the grave warning that “some will depart from the faith.” In verses 6-10 there was the inspiring command to “train yourself for godliness.” And now in verses 11-16 Paul gives Timothy several rapid-fire commands that are very practical and very weighty. Paul has such a pastoral heart, and we see that throughout this letter. He wants to see young Timothy grow and mature in his leadership role in the church. He wants to see the Ephesian church grow and mature under Timothy’s leadership. And Paul desires these things because he is so passionate about the Gospel and glory of Christ. He has a holy hatred of false teaching and anything that would lead the church astray. So he communicates with Timothy in a very direct way, and yet we know it is all done with a profound love for Timothy and for the church. Isn’t this a beautiful picture to see Paul, the great apostle and veteran pastor, preacher, missionary, church planter, take Timothy under his wing, who was young and relatively inexperienced. And Paul clearly instructs Timothy in the things he needs to be doing both in his own life and in the life of the church.

We’ll see these two aspects throughout these verses. There is the emphasis on Timothy’s personal life, and there is the emphasis on Timothy’s public ministry. He is to set an example with his life, and he is to command and exhort and teach. He is to be concerned with his life and doctrine. He is to keep a close watch on himself and on the teaching. This has been a wonderfully convicting and inspiring passage for me to study, and I pray that it will be an encouragement to all of us this morning. As I said last week, these verses are particularly addressed to Timothy and are therefore particularly relevant to men like Timothy who are in leadership roles in the church. But there is also plenty of application here for all of us.

If you are teaching the Bible in any way or leading any kind of ministry, then this has a very direct application to you. Whether it’s teaching a Sunday School class, leading a Bible study in the workplace, heading up any kind of ministry . . . If you are representing Christ, then it is of utmost importance that you keep a close watch on yourself and the teaching.

I think there’s also a very obvious application here for parents. As parents we are going to have a huge impact on the lives of our children, and they will see our lives and hear our teaching, whether we’re intentional about it or not. They’re going

to see us for who we are, and if we're being hypocritical they will see that. So we need to keep a close watch on our lives. And if we instruct them and train them in ways that contradict the Bible, that will have a very negative impact on them. So we also need to keep a close watch on our doctrine.

Finally, even if you are not in a teaching role or leadership position, it is still imperative that you watch your life closely. We should all strive to be exemplary in our speech and conduct and love and faith and purity. We must all keep a close watch on ourselves. This is an essential component of the Christian life. And regarding the teaching, even if you are not yourself a teacher, you are still responsible for the doctrinal purity of this church. The elders are responsible in a primary way, but the congregation as a whole is also responsible. You should be praying for those who teach. Pray for our personal holiness, and pray that we would be true and clear in our teaching of the Bible. And if the leadership strays from this, by personal sin or doctrinal error, those in the congregation need to confront that. So this passage is not only a specific admonition to those who are leading and teaching the church, but it is also a call for all of us to be attentive to our own souls and attentive to the purity of the church.

I'll use five headings to structure our study of this passage.

### **I. Command and Teach (verses 11 and 13)**

In verse 11 Paul tells Timothy, "Command and teach these things." Timothy must not only be teacher, but he must be an authoritative teacher. Again in verse 13, it's not only teaching that is mentioned, but also exhortation. The preaching and teaching ministry of the church is to be authoritative. It is to include commands and exhortations. This oftentimes makes it difficult to listen to faithful, biblical preaching, because we will end up hearing things that are an offense to our pride. We will be confronted with exhortations that we don't want to hear. But, brothers and sisters, we need to sit under this kind of biblical exhortation. The lies of sin will plead with us passionately and relentlessly, with much persuasive power. And to combat that we need to hear the Word of God expounded with passion and conviction and authority.

These things that Paul is writing about in this section, like the command of the last paragraph to "train yourself for godliness," these are things that need to be taught to the congregation, but they also need to be commanded with authority. Ligon Duncan observes how counter-cultural this verse is, because many today are saying that we need to move away from "the direct proclamation of a sermon" and replace it with "the give and take of therapy." People don't like to be "preached at." They would

rather be part of a dialogue. And he responds to that sentiment in our culture by saying, People have never liked to be preached at. “There’s never been a time when people liked to have their hearts probed.” ([www.fpcjackson.org](http://www.fpcjackson.org), sermon on 1 Timothy 4:11-16) But this is what we need, and it is what God’s Word prescribes. We are to command and teach these things.

The other thing that is mentioned in verse 13 is the public reading of Scripture. Paul says, “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture.” We’re reminded here that Paul is hoping and planning to come to Ephesus and he is writing this letter to help Timothy in the meantime. We saw this in 3:14, “I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God . . .” And now Paul says, “Until I come.” In other words, I’ll relieve of you of some responsibilities when I get there, and I’ll give some further instructions at that time, but until then here are some things you need to be doing. And the three he gives in this verse are “the public reading of Scripture, exhortation, and teaching. These things make up an absolutely crucial aspect of the church. There must be the public reading of Scripture, accompanied by exhortation and teaching. John Stott writes, “It was taken for granted from the beginning that Christian preaching would be expository preaching, that is, that all Christian instruction and exhortation would be drawn out of the passage which had been read” (*Guard the Truth*, 122). This is what we desire here at Three Rivers Grace. Whoever the preacher is for the morning, we want to gather around God’s Word and be taught by God’s Word and exhorted from God’s Word. And when this is done rightly, it will be evident that the authority is in God’s Word and not in a man. Paul wanted that to be clear in Timothy’s ministry. The authority doesn’t reside in Timothy, or in any church leader, but in Scripture. And that’s why our preaching and teaching must be firmly rooted in Scripture.

## **II. Set an Example (verse 12)**

Paul also tells Timothy to set an example with his personal life. There are certain things that he must do in his public ministry, but there is also the all-important issue of his personal holiness. There are certain things he must command and teach, but there is also a certain way in which he must live that is just as important as what he commands and teaches. His life is just as important as his doctrine. The two are intertwined, and we could say that any leader in the church is preaching, not only in the words that are spoken from the pulpit, but also in the actions and attitudes that are displayed in one’s life. And the sermon that is preached by one’s

life can have more of an impact, for good or ill, than any sermon preached from a pulpit.

Timothy must set the believers an example by the way he lives. He is a young man, probably in his 30s, and therefore despised by some. So Paul encourages him, “Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.” First of all, in speech. Church leaders, and all of us, must be exemplary in our speech, that is, in controlling our tongues. The Bible has plenty to say about this. James 3 talks about taming the tongue. Proverbs 10:19 says, “When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but whoever restrains his lips is prudent.” Paul, in other letters, commands us not to use speech that involves falsehood, lying, slander, corrupting talk, obscene talk. Instead, we should speak the truth. Our words should edify and give grace to those who hear. Our words should express thankfulness. (see Ephesians 4:25, 31; 5:4; Colossians 3:8-17) In these ways, our speech should be holy and thus set an example for others.

Next, set an example also in your conduct. In the way you conduct yourself, you should be growing in holiness, becoming more like Christ. You must put off your old self and put on the new self (see Ephesians 4:22-24). You are a new creature in Christ, and as a minister of the Gospel the fruit of that should be abundantly evident.

Then, more specifically, you should be an example in love, in faith, and in purity. As Paul writes in 1 Corinthians 16:14, “Let all that you do be done in love.” So as you preach and teach, as you counsel and lead, as you rebuke and exhort, as you serve to meet practical needs, as you pray for the congregation, let all your activity be marked by a love for others. Be a person who genuinely cares for the well-being of those under your care, and thus be an example of love. “In faith” could mean either “faith” or “faithfulness.” The word can be used in either way, and it’s difficult to know which one Paul intends here. We should pursue both, of course. We ought to pursue a deeper trust in God, a deeper faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross to forgive our sin. And that faith in Him, that hope in Him, will translate into more faithful obedience to Him.

Then, finally, Timothy is also to set the believers an example in the area of purity. The same word is used again just a few verses later, in 5:2, where Paul tells Timothy to treat younger women as sisters, in all purity. For all of us, and especially for those in leadership and teaching roles, there is to be absolute purity in the way we relate to those of the opposite sex. There is to be purity in things we choose to watch, in the things we look at on the internet, and in the things we think about.

In all of these ways, we should seek to be an example for others: in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Think for a moment about those who are watching your life. Some of you might think that you're not setting an example for anyone. Maybe you think you're too young to be an example. Timothy could identify with that. Or maybe you think since you're young in the faith or not very knowledgeable of the Bible, or because you're not in a leadership role, that you can't be an example for anyone. But I would venture to say that someone is watching your life—probably many people. It could be members of your family, coworkers, neighbors, friends. In the church there are those individuals who are in your small group who are attentive to your life and can be encouraged by your example. Think about the children of this church. As they grow up they're going to be looking at all of us, collectively and individually, and trying to evaluate what this Christianity thing is all about. What kind of example are we setting for them? Don't be mistaken: someone is watching you. And the way you live will either magnify the Gospel or slander the Gospel. Let us set an example that honors Christ.

### **III. Use Your Gift (verse 14)**

Next, let's move to verse 14 and examine the command to *use your gift*. This is such an encouraging word in the midst of these weighty commands. As we read this passage, maybe you were struck with the question, How can I do these things? How can I be an example to others? How can I keep a close watch on myself and on the teaching so that I don't stumble or fall? It can easily become discouraging to think about these commands and realize that there's no way I can do this—on my own. That's why verse 14 is such a word of hope, because we see that Timothy received a gift from God. He was called to this position of ministry, and that calling was made clear through prophecy and recognized by the elders who ordained him. Do you see the encouragement here? Whatever it is that God calls you to do, He will equip you to do. He will give you the gifts to accomplish what He wants you to accomplish. It's right to acknowledge that we can't do these in our own strength. But it would be wrong to become discouraged by that fact, because God has gifted every believer to do *something*, and whatever that something is, He will enable us to do it by His grace. Timothy was young and inexperienced, and even frail and sickly, and yet he was called to this task and gifted to serve the church in this way. Be encouraged by that.

We must also be convicted and motivated by this warning not to neglect the gift you have. Isn't that an interesting command? We have been gifted by God in different ways, and yet

it's possible for us to neglect that gifting. Paul says a similar thing to Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:6, "For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands." We see in both of these statements the sovereignty of God in giving us gifts according to His design, and we also see our responsibility to fan those gifts into flame and not neglect them. We see God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God is sovereign in these things—it's only by His grace that we can do anything good, and it's only by His grace that we have any spiritual gifts. And it's also true that we are responsible to cultivate those gifts. We must look at what God is doing in our lives, and seek the counsel of others, to discern what God has called us to do and gifted us to do. And then we need to pursue those things with all of our energy. Fan into flame the gift of God. Do not neglect it. Use your gift.

#### **IV. Make Progress (verse 15)**

In verse 15 Paul exhorts further to "practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress." I find this inspiring and hopeful. In light of the understanding of God's gifting and God's enabling grace in our lives, this is a tremendous word of encouragement. Isn't it exciting to know that we can make progress in the Christian life and in Christian ministry, and that others will be able to see that progress! That gives me great hope, and it should give you great hope, too. If you're discouraged by your lack of holiness or your lack of ability to minister in the ways God has gifted you, then heed the command of verse 15. Practice these things, immerse yourself in them. In other words, strive with all your might to grow in holiness, so that you can be an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. Labor to know God's word so that you can teach and exhort others. Fan into the flame the gift God has given you. And just like the athlete, which we saw the illustration of in the previous passage, work at these things with a view to making progress. The Olympian doesn't train week after week just to maintain a certain level of ability. There's the desire to become faster, stronger, to be more agile, to have greater skill. Similarly in our spiritual lives, we should be training ourselves for godliness (verse 7) in a way that over time we show progress. We should be able to look back over our Christian life and see improvement. I should be able to see that there are things that I understand in God's Word that I didn't understand a year ago. By God's grace, I should now have greater control over my speech than I did a year ago. My conduct should exhibit more godliness. My love for others should be deeper and more authentic. My faith should be stronger. I should be growing in purity. I should be able

to sense that the gifts God has given me are developing and growing and blossoming in new and exciting ways.

And others should be able to see that progress as well. I encourage you to talk to someone about this. Talk to your spouse, or talk to a Christian friend you've known for awhile, and simply ask, Do you see me making progress in my walk with the Lord? Am I growing? And if not, what needs to happen?

#### **V. Watch Yourself and the Teaching (verse 16)**

Finally, we come to verse 16 and this climactic statement that summarizes much of what has already been said in verses 11-15. He says, "Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching." Keep a close watch, Timothy. Keep a close watch, elders of Three Rivers Grace. Keep a close watch, congregation. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. These are the two aspects that have been stressed throughout this passage. There is an emphasis on one's personal life, and also an emphasis on the public ministry. There needs to be personal holiness and biblical faithfulness.

Each of these is necessary. Neither is sufficient. It's important to understand that each of these components is necessary for the Christian minister, but neither is sufficient. I remember one of my philosophy professors in college explaining the difference between necessary and sufficient. I believe he used a baking analogy to explain it. He said something like, If you're going to bake a cake, eggs are necessary, but they're not sufficient. You have to have them in order to make the cake (they're necessary), but eggs are not *all* you need (they're not sufficient). That's what we need to understand about the two things that Paul mentions in this verse. Both of these ingredients are necessary, but neither is sufficient. You can't just have one or just have the other. You have to have both. It is absolutely necessary that you watch your life, but that alone is not sufficient. And it's absolutely necessary that you watch the teaching, but that alone is not sufficient.

On the one hand, you may have a very pious-looking person who is a coward in the pulpit and doesn't want to offend anyone by teaching anything controversial. Or on the other hand there are individuals who know the Bible and can teach sound doctrine, but their life contradicts everything they're saying. So there needs to be a constant watch on one's life *and* doctrine. There must be continual growth and sanctification happening in our hearts, and there must be continual growth and refinement in our understanding of biblical truth. Both are necessary. Neither is sufficient.

This week I listened to a very helpful message by C. J. Mahaney which he preached at the Together for the Gospel

conference in 2006. He preached from this verse (verse 16), and he spent a lot of time talking about how to watch your life. He commented that this is more difficult than studying doctrine, not that studying doctrine should be taken lightly. But the task of studying your own soul is very difficult, indeed. We are proud people, and we don't want to see our sin or acknowledge that we need to change or grow. But we have to look humbly and honestly at ourselves, and we need to ask others around us for their assessment, too, so that we might keep a close watch on ourselves. I must watch my life and the teaching, and I need others to be watching me, too. What areas of sin need to be addressed? What patterns of pride or laziness or selfishness or lust or greed or apathy need to be confronted in my life? In what ways do I need to grow in my understanding and proclamation of the Gospel? You men who are serving with me as elders, you are responsible to put a microscope on my life and on my teaching, and help me see these things. And I'll try to do the same for you.

For all of us, in our small groups and in other times of accountability, we need to help one another with this. We need to watch our own lives, and then this also needs to be a community project because we are each so blind to our own sins. We need to be open and transparent with others around us so that they can keep a close watch on us, and we can keep a close watch on them. The exhortation in Hebrews 3:12-13 speaks directly to this matter. "Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called today, that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin." In this way let's help one another keep a close watch on our life and on the teaching.

As I've thought about the relationship between life and doctrine, and as I've continued to read *Revival and Revivalism* by Ian Murray, something that has left an impression upon me is the way that God has worked in the lives of pastors to give them not only an accurate understanding of doctrine, but also a personal fervor and passion for the truth. Those who were training young men for the ministry understood the need for this. Princeton in the 1700s, for instance, was a place where this was taken very seriously. Murray writes, "The Princeton leaders had consciously faced the key question: What was it that gave life to plain, scriptural preaching? And their united answer was, it was preachers knowing and feeling in their own experience the realities of which they spoke" (45). That really captures a key aspect of the importance of one's personal passion for the Lord and the need to cultivate that throughout one's life. There are the obvious ways that one's life can undermine sound doctrine, when a person falls

into some blatant sin. And there are obvious ways that sound doctrine can be compromised and distorted. But there's also the very real danger that sound doctrine would simply become hollow and lifeless. I could stand up here and say things that are absolutely true without knowing and feeling in my own experience the realities of what I'm talking about. And I'm sure I've done that to varying degrees in the sermons I preach. But my sincere desire, and you can pray for me in this, is that I will know and feel these amazing truths that we are examining together in God's Word. I want to be gripped by these things. I want to burn with a godly zeal for the Gospel, and I want to be used by God to cause others to burn with that passion, too. Pray for me, and for the other elders, and all those who teach and lead in this church, that in an ever-increasing way we will know and feel in our own experience the realities of which we speak.

The passage concludes with a sentence that adds an amazing weight to these exhortations. Paul writes, "Persist in these things, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." That is an amazing statement, and at first a puzzling one. It's puzzling because we know that the Bible teaches very clearly that we are incapable of saving ourselves and we are incapable of saving anyone else. So how could Paul say to Timothy that he can save himself and save his hearers? There are other texts that speak in this way, too, and the point is not to contradict the fact that God is the only Savior. The point is to recognize that God uses means to accomplish His purposes. And a very significant means of grace that God often uses to save sinners, and to cause them to persevere to the end, is the life and teaching of those who are involved in the ministry of the church. George Knight cites other places in the New Testament where this kind of language is used, where a human being is the subject of the verb "to save," and he says, "Thus we see that the NT speaks of human agents in addition to the ultimate and absolute source, God himself" (*The Pastoral Epistles*, 212; he cites Romans 11:4; 1 Corinthians 9:22; 7:16; James 5:20; Jude 23; Mark 8:35). God is the only Savior. It is only by His marvelous plan of salvation that any of us is spared the punishment we deserve. It is only by the blood of Jesus Christ that we escape the penalty of hell and instead receive the free gift of eternal life. This is the wonder of the Gospel. There is nothing we can do to earn this great gift. It is received by faith.

So the statement that one can save himself and his hearers is not meant in an ultimate sense, but in terms of certain means that are involved in God saving sinners. Through the preaching of the Gospel, through the exhortation and teaching that continually implores sinners to repent of sin and trust in Jesus Christ, through the godly example of those who are walking faithfully with the

Lord, God will use these means to change hearts. He will use these means to sustain faith. As we persist in watching our life and doctrine, we will give evidence of God's sustaining grace in our lives, and we will be used by Him as a means of grace to others, as well.

This is the gravity of keeping a close watch on yourself and the teaching. God will work through us—through the testimony of our lives and the purity of our teaching—to draw others to Himself and to preserve them in faith. As you consider these weighty exhortations, let them be a motivation to you to pray for your leaders. And let this passage be a guide for *how* you ought to pray for your leaders. And then also apply these things to your own life as you seek to be a Christian example and Christian witness to those around you.