



KING'S HARBOR CHURCH

Love God. Love People. Make Disciples.

Discipled Into Godliness (1 Timothy 4:1-11)

I. INTRO

- A. Are you legalistic? (I can be...)
- B. What is legalism? Legalism is belief that obedience to the law or a set of rules is the pre-eminent principle of redemption and/or gaining favor with God.
- C. Here's a way to compare legalism to the gospel:
 1. Legalism: I obey, therefore I am accepted by God.
 2. Gospel: I am accepted by God, therefore I obey.
- D. Paul sent Timothy, a young man – probably in his early thirties, to Ephesus to counteract extreme legalistic teaching with the gospel. (We'll see a synopsis in the verses today.)
- E. Veering off into legalism can be subtle. Many of us are box-checkers. How did Mike say it last weekend? Some people know the lyrics but they don't know the melody.
- F. Here's the question that I'd like for us to ask of the text today: How do we avoid legalism and pursue a gospel-based and Holy Spirit empowered godliness?
- G. I will read the passage, pray, and then we will dive in... *"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. ⁶ In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine, which you have been following. ⁷ But have*

nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women [thought to be a sarcastic cultural idiom inserted into the letter]. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸ for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. ¹⁰ For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. ¹¹ Prescribe and teach these things.” --1 Timothy 4:1-11

H. The first five verses are a transitional paragraph...

1. It **concludes** Paul’s instruction in chapters 2-3 and **begins** new instruction that is carried over through to the end of this chapter.
2. Notice that v. 1 begins with a prophecy: ...*“But the Spirit explicitly says...”*
 - a. It’s not clear if it’s a prophetic word that Paul is receiving in the moment or a prophetic word that has already been received and embraced by the church – and Paul is referencing it.
 - b. It MAY be a reference back to Acts 20:29-30 (7 or 8 years later) where Paul seemed to prophesy to the elders about false teachers: *“I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.”* --Acts 20:29-30
 - c. Here in 1 Tim 4:1 prophecy becomes a theme in Paul’s letter. The first time prophecy was referred to was back in 1:18: *“This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my son, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight.”* --1 Timothy 1:18
 - d. KHC is a continuationist church, meaning that we believe that all of the gifts of the Holy Spirit continue to be relevant and essential for the church’s flourishing – when used within the parameters of Scripture. (Prophecy is NOT extra-biblical revelation.)
3. In chap 4 Paul is writing in the same style as he wrote in chap. 1, **describing** the nature of the problem and **prescribing** Timothy's role in dealing with it (4:6-16).

II. BODY

A. Disciplined Into Godliness (We are to be disciplined TO Christ and INTO godliness)

1. How do we avoid legalism and pursue godliness? By realizing that we have nothing to prove and no one to impress because the gospel empowers all that we do. (We never outgrow our need for the gospel.)
2. Paul, in this passage, provides us with some **overlapping characteristics of godliness**:
 - a. **A Clear or Good Conscience (v. 2)**
 - b. **Sound Doctrine (v. 6)**
 - c. **Personal Discipline (v. 7)**
 - d. **A Hope Fixed on God (v. 10)**

B. We'll look at them one at a time:

1. **A Clear or Good Conscience (v. 2)** [stated in the negative]
 - a. The conscience is a **running theme** in Paul's letter to Timothy (1:5, 19; 3:9).
 - 1) 1:5: *But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good **conscience** and a sincere faith.*
 - 2) 1:19a: *keeping faith and a good **conscience***
 - 3) 3:9: *holding to the mystery of the faith with a clear **conscience***
 - 4) Here in 4:2: *by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own **conscience** as with a branding iron*
 - b. Our conscience is a kind of early-warning or alarm system that alerts us when we are moving into a danger zone. Think of the warning lights on the dashboard of a car – if a light flickers – or goes on and stays on, we need to pay attention.
 - 1) "Your conscience is a gift. God gave it to you for your good. And when it's condemning you, you need to discern why and then respond."¹

¹ Andy Naselli and J.D. Crowley. *Conscience: What It Is, How to Train It, and Loving Those Who Differ*, Crossway 2016.

- 2) The conscience is our awareness of what we believe is right and wrong. It is basically the moral compass or our ethical awareness turned back on ourselves.
- c. There are three things we need to keep in mind:
- 1) Our conscience is not infallible, it needs calibration. Calibration happens through acquiring Sound Doctrine...
 - 2) Our conscience can be "seared." Think of a branding iron. The skin is deadened, the nerve endings are killed, and rendered insensitive.
 - a) A seared conscience no longer feels anything.
 - b) A person with a seared conscience can no longer hear its promptings. (Can a seared conscience be healed and restored? Yes.)
 - 3) Our conscience is cleared through repentance and confession in the context of community. *"Confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed."* --James 5:16a
- d. We are to listen to our conscience. We are to cultivate a good or clear conscience. In addition to repentance and confession how do we do that? By acquiring Sound Doctrine...

2. Sound Doctrine (v. 6)

- a. Sound doctrine has been a VERY common reoccurring theme in this letter to Timothy and the church in Ephesus.
 - 1) One of the first topics Paul instructs Timothy about is to *"command certain people not to teach false doctrines..."* (1:3)
 - 2) And, *"whatever else is contrary to sound doctrine that conforms to the gospel..."* (1:11)
- b. The Greek word Paul uses here for *doctrine* means healthy rather than diseased. This is Paul's way of saying that **wrong doctrine**, or **bad doctrine**, eats away at our spiritual health.
- c. To say it another way, if we lack spiritual vitality and the growth of the Fruit of the Spirit (Gal 5) -- love, joy, peace, patience, etc. it

may be because our grasp of biblical doctrine is shallow and thin, or distorted, or mistaken.

d. Two application questions to help us consider our grasp of sound doctrine:

- 1) What specific false thoughts or disturbing emotions hinder me when I don't trust (or grasp) that God has this particular attribute?
 - a) I.e., The Supremacy, Sovereignty, Holiness, Power, Faithfulness, Goodness, Patience of God, etc.
 - b) Search online: Attributes of God by AW (Arthur) Pink
- 2) Although my conscious mind may agree that God has this attribute, does my outward life demonstrate that He is like this?²
- 3) Illus -- A few days ago I posted onto the Pastor's Blog an article by Tim Keller reflecting on the book *The Shack*, which just came out as a movie last week.
 - a) Keller came to the same conclusion that I did (he just said it better). The author of *The Shack* fails to hold the attributes of God in appropriate tension: The Holiness and Wrath of God with the Grace and Mercy of God. He seems to believe that we can only have one or the other.
 - b) It takes some very sound doctrine to reconcile the tension – because they feel like two non-intersecting tracks to us... (They intersect at the cross.)
 - c) A paradox is a seeming contradiction. Sound doctrine happens when we learn how to hold seeming contradictions in appropriate, biblical tension.
 - d) Paul says it well in Rom 11:22: "*Behold the goodness and severity of God...*" --Roman 11:22

e. If you spend some time reflecting on these questions you may begin to see that many of our most **personal and practical problems** are actually doctrinal ones. Sometimes we don't grasp

² *Experiencing God's Attributes*, NavPress 1978.

the goodness and severity of God, or we don't connect it to our lives so that it creates "soundness," or spiritual health in us.

- f. **Good doctrine gives us a solid foundation for personal discipline...

3. Personal Discipline (v. 7)

- a. What is Personal Discipline? It is the shared responsibility of God and the believer in the pursuit of holiness or the process of sanctification (transformation).

- b. What is God's responsibility and what is my responsibility??

1) God's responsibility...

- a) To **provide** us with the basis of our salvation by receiving the perfect sacrifice of the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world (Jn 1:29).
- b) To **send** the Holy Spirit into our hearts to convict us of sin (recalibrate our conscience) and to empower us to godliness (Acts 2:38)
- c) To **work** in us, both to will and to work for His good pleasure (Phil 2:13)

2) Our responsibility...

- a) V. 7b & 10a: "Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness...For it is for this we labor and strive."
- b) Let's look at the three underlined words:
- i. Discipline = *gumnazo* (To exercise naked usually in a gymnasium or school of athletics)
 - ii. Labor = *kopiao* (To toil)
 - iii. Strive = *agonizomai* (To agonize)
- c) First of all we need to acknowledge the similarities of the words discipline and disciple.
- d) It is clear, when reading the above verses that Paul is advocating some sort of **intentional growth process**, involving **intelligent planning**, and **consistent follow-**

through in order to develop spiritual strength and maturity. That's exactly what discipleship is.

- e) Every church is responsible to develop and implement a clear discipleship pathway. That is a big part of what we've been doing the last couple of years.
- f) How do we begin? Like most kingdom principles, the specifics can be counter-intuitive...
- i. *"I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."* -- John 15:5
 - Abiding in Christ means yielding to God's Word to fill our minds, direct our wills, and transform our affections.
 - The Greek word most often translated "obedience" means to listen from a surrendered place of submission. (The word for disobedience means to listen from alongside.)
 - We surrender to and rest in sound doctrine – Union with Christ, Justification, Adoption, etc.
 - ii. And then we see that **fruit comes from abiding** –
 - *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness,²³ gentleness, self-control."* --Galatians 5:22–23
 - One theologian says the work of the Holy Spirit reaches its **consummation** in self-control.³
- g) **The focus of personal discipline is to fulfill God's assignment on our lives – not to earn favor with God (for the Christian that has been achieved). We are to seek to serve God's mission.

³ Steve Lawson: <http://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/self-discipline>.

- c. The grace of God and personal discipline must go hand-in-hand. We cannot depend only on God to sanctify us as if sanctification were an act rather than a process. There must be a balance.

4. A Hope Fixed on God (v. 10)

- a. Here's the problem: Our English word "hope" is too weak for biblical hope.⁴
 - 1) We say, "I'm not sure, but I *hope* so." Hope, in English, conveys uncertainty, which is the polar **opposite** of the biblical word for hope.
 - 2) "*Faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.*" --Hebrews 11:1
 - 3) Biblical hope is a life-changing certainty about what's going to happen. --Tim Keller
- b. Illus -- Take two people, Persons A and B. Put them both in a room creating widgets for 10 hours a day for a year under horrible conditions. Tell Person A that he'll receive \$10,000 at the end of the year, and tell Person B that she'll get \$1 million. Person A says, "This sucks! I don't need this." Person B says, "I'm cool with this!" We are irreducibly hope-based creatures.
- c. **Hope determines effort** (Mike D). Christian hope is based on the ultimate future state, not the immediate.
- d. In *Mere Christianity* C. S. Lewis writes, "This is what we are in for! Nothing less...Everything you've ever longed for will be present in your heart at the moment of the first embrace [with Christ]."

III. CONCLUSION

- A. 1 Timothy 4:10 can be confusing to unpack... "*For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all [people], especially of believers.*" --1 Timothy 4:10
 - 1. There are two primary ways to view this verse, which are based on translating the word "*especially*":
 - a. One Greek scholar says, "*especially*" would be better rendered, "*that is.*"

⁴ Adapted from Tim Keller.

- 1) He's saying the last three words become the **explanation** or **further clarification** of the preceding statement.
 - 2) From his perspective the translation could be: "...God, who is the Savior of all people, that is, of those who believe."⁵
- b. Another interpretive view is that the verse is teaching that we have our hope set on the living God, who is the "preserver and sustainer" (Soter) of all people -- showing mercy to all, each and every day but the Redeemer of those who believe -- much like the idea of **common grace** (it rains on the just and the unjust alike) and **saving grace**.
- B. "A young man became an apprentice to a blacksmith. He learned how to hold the tongs, how to lift the sledge, how to smite the anvil and how to blow the fire with the bellows. Having finished his apprenticeship, he was chosen to be employed at the smithery of the royal palace. However, the young man's delight came soon to an end, when he discovered that he had failed to learn how to kindle a spark. All his skill and knowledge in handling the tools were of no avail." -- Abraham Heschel ⁶
- C. As we move toward **communion**...This is what Paul is attempting to say: Discipleship into godliness prepares us for continual surrender to the Holy Spirit and to participate with God so that the spark remains kindled.

⁵ George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles* (New International Greek New Testament Commentary), Eerdmans Reprint ed. 2013: 203-204.

⁶ *Man is Not Alone: A Philosophy of Religion*; Farrar, Straus & Giroux, Updated ed 1976: 260.

P.A.S.S. Questions For KHC Community Group Leaders

Sermon Dates: Mar 11-12, 2017

Sermon Title: Discipled Into Godliness

Sermon Passage: 1 Timothy 4:1-11

P - Participation (get everyone involved in the dialog)

1. Why do you think it's so easy for Christians to lapse into legalism?

A - Application (makes it personal)

2. What is the difference between legalism and the gospel?
3. What is "*nourishing*" to the Christian?
4. Of the four main points -- a clear or good conscience (v. 2), sound doctrine (v. 6), personal discipline (v. 7), and a hope fixed on God (v. 10) – where are you strongest? Where are you weakest?

S - Scripture (thinking biblically is a learned behavior! :-)

5. What did the Spirit say would happen in the latter days?
6. What should Timothy remember when faced with opposition and discouragements?

S – Sharing (aim for a time of honest reflection, authenticity, and transparency in a safe atmosphere modeled by you).

7. Paul challenges Timothy to "*train yourself for godliness*" (4:7). How are you doing this? What could you do? What help do you need?