



A Study of 1st & 2nd Timothy

1st Timothy 4:11-16 Practice These Things...

Last week when we ended our time together, I said I would begin this morning with an explanation of 1st Timothy 4:10. I want to do just that even before I read our actual text for the morning which is the paragraph following 1st Timothy 4:10. So before we turn to 1st Timothy 4:11-16, let us consider for a moment what 1st Timothy 4:10 says. The verse reads like this:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:10**...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.

Now the issue in this passage that concerns most people is the meaning of those last two phrases, “**who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.**” You can see that the verse raises two important questions.

How is God the Savior of all people?

And secondly....

How can Paul say he is the Savior especially of those who believe?

Now before we answer those two questions, I want to reflect for a moment on the beginning of verse ten before those two questions come up. Really, what I want to do is to just make sure that those two questions are set in their proper context. Now the phrase **“for this end”** used at the beginning of the verse points back to the idea of **“godliness and eternal life”** mentioned back in verse eight. You’ll remember that Paul was discussing the **“great mystery of godliness”** back in chapter 3 which he explained as being the redemptive revelation of the Lord Jesus. That is the mystery of godliness was concerned with the whole of Jesus’ incarnation and saving work. That’s true because after Paul says **“great is the mystery of godliness”** in verse sixteen he turns right around and explains what that mystery is in the next sentence by saying **“He was manifested in the flesh.”** My point is that Paul winds up saying that the Lord Jesus himself is the great mystery of godliness.¹ In other words, the mystery of godliness is the revelation of Jesus in the gospel.

Now it’s not that there are no ethical implications to godliness. There are plenty of ethical implications to the gospel. But they are just that...implications. They are implications and not the gospel itself.

Paul is saying that he and Timothy and all those faithful to the gospel continue to struggle and toil (it is quite possible that this last word **“toil”** may mean to suffer) for the advancement of the gospel of Jesus. Now in making the point that he and Timothy are struggling and toiling for the sake of the gospel, Paul continues the metaphor and imagery of an athletic competition that he began back in verse seven. You’ll remember he used the metaphor of an athlete in

training back in verse seven when he said. **“Train yourself for godliness.”** He then extended that particular metaphor by comparing **“bodily training”** which he thought to be of some value...with training in godliness which he thought to be of value in every way namely because it held value both for this life and for the life to come. What that means, I think, is that Paul was taking up the imagery used by the Lord Jesus himself when he said:

^{ESV} **John 10:10**...The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

You see Jesus was arguing that the kind of life he gives, eternal life, has meaning both in the kind of life it is now and later on. Paul’s point is the same. He is arguing that godliness matters both now and later on. And that reason that is true is because the eternal life we possess is not limited to the future but something that we actually possess right now. The kind of reverential respect and gratitude for what Christ has accomplished in our redemption has tremendous value and not just tremendous value once we get to heaven but actual value right now in how we engage with brothers and sisters in the church and unbelievers in the culture at large.

And it is a good thing that it does because sometimes living here and now with brothers and sisters in the church is quite difficult. The idea reminds me of that little quip J. Vernon McGee used to quote all the time:

To be above with saints we love, my won’t that be glory?
But to stay below with saints we know, well, that’s another story.

Anyway Paul says that the godliness or eternal life for which Paul and Timothy we here at Grace by logical extension strive has value both now and later on. And then he says in verse ten that the reason we labor and toil and perhaps suffer is because **“we have set our hope on the living God.”**

Of course, when the Paul talks about hope, he is not talking about **“wishful thinking.”** Rather, he is talking about a kind of settled assurance. It is kind of reasoned, committed assurance. It is much like when Abraham convinced himself that God was even able to raise the dead if that was what it took for him to fulfill his promise. There is nothing **“iffy”** about biblical hope. Rather, **“...hope is the confident expectation, the sure certainty that what God has promised in the Word is true, has occurred, and or will occur in accordance with God’s sure Word.”**² When we say we have the **“hope of the resurrection”** we do not mean that we are hoping that it is true in the sense that it may not be true but wouldn’t it be nice if it were. Rather, we mean we know it is true and have the assurance that it is true and that assurance gives us comfort and peace and a bit of endurance.

Listen to Philip Ryken:

Paul and Timothy received this saving message for themselves when they set their hope on the living God (1 Tim. 4:10). Every believer has this same hope. We know that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God the Father. We know that God will save us on the Day of Judgment. Having this assurance, we make every possible effort to share that message with everyone else. We labor and strive to see men, women, and children receive eternal life. We have a burden for the global task of saving lost souls. Evangelism lies at the heart of every truly Christian ministry. The church will not rest until every last person on this planet has heard the good news of salvation from sin

and deliverance from death in Jesus Christ, "**who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.**"³

I don't think I could ever give a better picture of the comfort such hope gives us than the comfort we received Friday afternoon here at Emia's memorial service. I cannot tell you how lovely Carol Hudson's and Laura Ferratt's words were as they spoke of the hope Emia had in the promise of the gospel. I cannot tell you how what they said along with Kyle's reflection spoke piece to everyone in the room.

Anyway, Paul and Timothy are striving to maintain and guard the gospel even in the face of significant opposition and heresy and the reason they are doing that is because they have set their hope on the living God...the God who is both alive and gives life.

Look at verse ten again.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:10**...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.

And that gets us at last to the question of what Paul means when he says God is the Savior of all people but especially of those who believe?

Let's start with what it cannot mean. It cannot mean that all people are saved. We know that from many other passages in the New Testament and particularly from the other passages written by Paul himself. Take for example 2nd Thessalonians 1:5.

ESV 2 Thessalonians 1:5... This is evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are also suffering-- ⁶ since indeed God considers it just to repay with affliction those who afflict you, ⁷ and to grant relief to you who are afflicted as well as to us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with his mighty angels ⁸ in flaming fire, inflicting vengeance on those who do not know God and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. ⁹ They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might, ¹⁰ when he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints, and to be marveled at among all who have believed, because our testimony to you was believed.

Notice the text doesn't just say those who reject the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ will suffer a bit. Rather it says that those who reject or do not know the gospel of the Lord Jesus will suffer "the punishment of eternal destruction." They won't just die and be destroyed. Rather they will suffer eternal destruction (it will be eternally ongoing) and they will be eternally removed from God's presence. The fact that God is the Savior of all people cannot mean that all people eventually go to heaven. I wish that were true, but it's not true and it's not true because God's divine justice cannot permit it to be true.

So if it doesn't mean that what does it mean?

I think there are really two different ways the passage can be understood.

It may be referring to God's common grace or it may be referring to in a roundabout way to God's inclusion of the Gentiles in his great work of redemption.

Let's take those two explanations one at a time. Whenever we talk about the idea of "**common grace**" we are talking about the grace or kindness of God that is shared by all men (by men I mean men, women, boys, and girls).

Cornelius VanTil quotes Abraham Kuyper defining common grace this way:

The essence of common grace is the restraint of the process of sin; its scope is man and his world. Its ultimate foundation, we must add, is the mercy of God. Abraham Kuyper says: "Thus common grace is an omnipresent operation of divine mercy, which reveals itself everywhere where human hearts are found to beat and which spreads its blessing upon these human hearts."⁴

Here's what that means. In some sense, the kindness of God extends to all people everywhere. If he didn't, mankind would simply cease to be. God could have slammed down the hammer of judgment on mankind after the Fall but he didn't, at least, not in the sense of doing all that he could have done...in the sense of immediately pouring out the full extent of his wrath. Rather, he showed a kind of mercy...grace...kindness. It was not a saving grace in which every man, woman, boy or girl was redeemed from sin or saved. But it was a kind of grace in which he allowed man to still sense beauty and goodness. That is God allowed mankind to still maintain or enjoy some sense of the love and kindness originally intended for mankind.

Mothers love their babies whether they are Christian or pagan.

Fathers work to provide for their families whether they are believers or not.

The wicked laugh and enjoy the taste of a perfectly cooked steak every bit as much as believers do.

The wicked rejoice in the beauty of a Texas sunset in much the same way Christians do.

And the reason they can do that is because of God's common grace. It's not "Common" grace because it is mediocre or plain vanilla. Rather, it is common because it is shared by all people everywhere. God allows the rain to fall on the just and the unjust. Why? He does so because he is gracious. In that sense God is the Savior of all men...not that all men are going to heaven but rather in the sense that he pours out a wonderfully generous sort of common grace on all men giving them sense of purpose and joy and beauty. He saves them from a life of complete despair and meaninglessness. He lets all men, Christian and Hottentot alike, partake of his goodness. He is the Savior of all men, but he is especially the Savior of those who believe.

"Believe what?" you might ask.

I would answer, **"Believe the gospel."**

Here's how Calvin explains this idea.

To make this more clear, it ought to be understood that this is an argument drawn from the less to the greater; for the word Savior is here a general term, and speaks of one **"who defends and preserves."** Paul 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? Will he not take peculiar care in them? Will he not more freely pour out his bounty on them? In a word, will he not, in every respect, keep them safe to the end?⁵

So that is “**common grace.**” It is one way of explaining verse 10. It focuses, you can see, on the idea of God’s universal kindness to fallen man. God is gracious to all people and is in that sense a Savior to all while he is uniquely the Savior to all those who embrace the gospel.

Now the second way to understand verse ten is to see it as a roundabout way of referring more specifically to the salvation of the Gentiles. In that is the sense meant, it is best understood in much the same way we understood 1st Timothy 2:3.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 2:3**....This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior,
⁴ who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

I hope you’ll remember that there we understood the Paul to be to all kinds of people...not just Jews but Gentiles alike. A number of commentators argue that that is what is going on here in 1st Timothy 4:10. They argue that way because of the word translated “**especially**” at the end of verse 10. The word is Greek word *μάλιστα* and can be understood to mean something along the lines of “**namely.**”

The same word is used in 2 Timothy where it is translated “**above all.**”

^{ESV} **2 Timothy 4:13**...When you come, bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas, also the books, and *above all* the parchments.

The point some commentators make here is that Paul may have intended the word “**especially**” to be understood more along the lines of “**namely.**” If you understood the word that way in this passage about the parchments, it would mean something like this, “**When you come bring my cloak, and my books, and by my books I mean the parchments.**” If that is what was going on in 1st Timothy 4:10, it would mean something like this:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:10**...For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of *all kinds of people both Jews and Gentiles, and by all people I mean, of course, those who actually believe.*

Now what that would mean is that Paul is referring in this second view in a sort of roundabout way to the Gentiles. I personally think it is better to understand it as an issue of common grace, but the second idea will work if you don't mind a bit of lexical gymnastics.

Now with that as an explanation of 1st Timothy 4:10, let's turn to our text for the morning. I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter four, verses eleven through sixteen. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 992...1st Timothy 4:11-16.

This is what God's Word says:

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:11**...Command and teach these things. ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. ¹⁴ Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. ¹⁶ 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.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

Now before we look these six verses I want to take a minute and give you a review lesson in grammar. I'm sure you're all excited at the prospect. I hope you will be because when we finish our lesson this morning there's going to be a quiz.

Now the point of grammar of which I want to remind you is that there are four different basic kinds of sentences.

The most common type of sentence is the declarative sentence. A declarative sentence simply makes a statement of fact. It doesn't ask a question or attempt to be dramatic. It simply makes a declaration...a statement. Take for example the sentence, "**There's goes a brown dog.**"

It's a simple declaration. It's a statement of fact.

A second common type of sentence is the interrogative sentence. An interrogative sentence doesn't make a statement. Instead, it asks a question. Think of a detective interrogating a witness and it'll be easy to remember that an interrogative sentence is asking a question. Take for example the sentence, "**Is**

that a dog driving that car?" It's an interrogative sentence. It asks a question. I hope you don't mind if I stick with my dog motif. Do you?

A third type of sentence is the exclamatory sentence. They're intended to be quite emphatic. An exclamatory sentence can express anger or some other intense emotion. Take for example the sentence, **"That is one ugly dog!"** It's an exclamatory sentence. Exclamatory sentences always end with an exclamation mark.

Finally, the last type of sentence is the imperative sentences. Imperative sentences give orders. **"Hey grab that dog."** An imperative sentence is a command you see.

Men tend mostly to use the first three types while women tend to...sorry, I digress.

Anyway those are the four sentence types: declarative, interrogative, exclamatory, and imperative.

Now I bring that up because it is crystal clear right from the very beginning of chapter four is that something is different about the nature of the manner in which Paul is communicating with Timothy from chapter four on. Here's what I mean by that. Before chapter four in 1st Timothy Paul has used only four imperative verbs. Which means quite practically that he hasn't really given Timothy very many commands so far as to what he is to do.

Oh he has made some general declarative statements.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:6**...Certain persons, by swerving from these, have wandered away into vain discussion, ⁷ desiring to be teachers of the law, without understanding either what they are saying or the things about which they make confident assertions.

He has even been quite emphatic a few times.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 1:15**...The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost!

That really begins to change starting in chapter four and especially starting in chapter four verse eleven. But he hasn't made many commands. He hasn't written many imperative sentences.

Let me be a bit more specific.

In the first three chapters of 1st Timothy, Paul uses 112 verbs...and of those 112 verbs only four of them have been imperatives. That means that of the 112 verbs used in chapters only four are commands of any kind. That means that only 3.5% are commands.

The second half of 1st Timothy however is quite different. In chapters four through six, Paul uses 180 verbs. Of those 180 verbs, 45 are imperatives. That means that in chapters four through six, 25% of the verbs used are imperatives.

Let me put it another. In the first half of the letter, only one verb out of every thirty-three used is a command. In the second half of the letter, one verb out of every four is a command.

In 1st Timothy 4, Paul uses eleven imperatival verbs, and he uses ten of them in the paragraph we are looking at contained in verses eleven through sixteen. In other words, Paul has come at last to a very specific “to do list” for Timothy. In the first three chapters of his letter, Paul has spelled out how he views things. He has done that by basically analyzing what he thinks is going on in Ephesus. He has done that using a lot of declarative sentences. He has simply stated the facts. Now he is going to focus on the actual solution to the problem of the false teachers at Ephesus and the problem of unchristian behavior there as well, and the way he is going to do that is by giving Timothy some very specific things to do. And here’s the thing. The thing Paul wants Timothy to focus on is first and foremost is the reading and teaching of Scripture. Only Paul doesn’t want Timothy to simply teach the Scripture; he wants him to model the Scripture as well. That is he wants him to take that same instruction he gives to the Ephesians and apply it to himself and live it out before the people there in Ephesus. Look at verse eleven.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:11**...Command and teach these things.

The things Paul wants Timothy to teach and command are all of the things he has mentioned up until now. That is that there will be false teachers in the last days who will try to rob the Ephesians of their liberty in Christ. They will try to steal away the enjoyment of the many good things God has provided the Ephesians and replace those good things with all sorts of silly, speculative nonsense. Paul wants Timothy to remind the Ephesians about that...to teach and command such things. He wants Timothy to remind the Ephesians of the practical value of godliness which is, of course, the natural result of the gospel. Paul wants Timothy to point out to the Ephesians that the thing for which they

ought to strive and toil and even perhaps suffer persecution is the proclamation of the gospel. But Paul doesn't stop there. Look at verse twelve.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:12**...Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.

Now Paul is not saying here that Timothy should constantly chide the Ephesians for the fact that they think he is too young to do the work of ministry. Rather, he is saying that Timothy needs to lead a kind of exemplary life that demonstrates his spiritual maturity. Paul is saying that Timothy needs to demonstrate that maturity both in how he speaks, in how he acts, in how he demonstrably demonstrates his affection, his faith, and his personal holiness.

I suppose a pastor can demonstrate his street cred by cultural relevance by the way he dresses and by the lingo he adapts, but he can only demonstrate his spiritual cred by setting an example as to how he talks, lives, loves, and walks before the Lord. It was Robert Murray M'Cheyne, who said, "**My people's greatest need is my personal holiness.**" He was paraphrasing Paul here in 1st Timothy 4:12.

Now how is Timothy to set about commanding and teaching these things? Look at verse thirteen.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:13**...Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

The way Timothy is to fulfill his charge is to read, teach and apply the Scripture. The word exhortation has to do with applying Scripture. Timothy is not simply

to publically read the Scripture...that would certainly value in and of itself. But he is to do even more. He is to teach what the Scripture means which means he is to explain it and then he is to apply it to his hearers...to exhort his hearers to godliness.

Timothy is never to get slack in undertaking this particular task. Look at verse 14.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:14**...Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you. ¹⁵ Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.

Timothy is never to forget his ordination and the reality of the giftedness God has bestowed on him at the hands of the elders at Ephesus. He is to constantly and ever exercise his gift. He is to practice it. He is immerse himself in his teaching and preaching. I love the Greek here. He is to **“be in it.”** It almost has the idea of wading out into a river or lake. If Paul had been from East Texas, I think he might have said, **“Get out there hip deep.”** Paul’s point is that Timothy is to use his gift and he is to do so in a manner that makes his progress obvious to all. By progress, Paul is not referring to Timothy’s homiletical skills although I think those should continue to improve as well. Rather, Paul is talking about Timothy’s spiritual maturity. I think his point here refers back to his being so young.

Finally Paul summarizes his point and explains the benefit of Timothy’s faithful ministry both in attending to the word and to his own personal holiness. Look at verse 16.

^{ESV} **1 Timothy 4:16**...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.

Now don't be shocked that Paul tells Timothy his hard work and diligence can save himself and his hearers. Paul has not suddenly gone berserk and begun to think that we are saved by works or our own efforts or that ministers can in and of themselves save anyone. Rather, Paul is making the point that God has chosen the foolish things of the words...the ministry of the word mediated through Scripture and the stammering lips of broken clay vessels to advance his kingdom and gospel.

His point is that what Timothy does has genuine significance and he is to stay at it. Now I have already made the point that this paragraph contained in verses eleven through sixteen contains ten imperative verbs acting as commands to Timothy. I should have also made the point that all of these imperative verbs here are also present tense verbs which in Greek implies a sort of continual durative aspect. Which means is that Paul is not only commanding Timothy to tend to these things...but he is commanding him to keep on doing these things over and over again...perpetually.

He is to keep on commanding and teaching these things.

He is to keep on setting an example for the Ephesian in speech, love, faith, and purity.

He is to keep on devoting himself to the public ministry of the word.

He is to keep on using the gift he has been given.

He is to keep on practicing and immersing himself in these things.

He is to keep on persisting in these things until the very end.

And the benefit of all that is that is that God will use that faithful ministry of word and life to his own spiritual good and to the spiritual good of those to whom he ministers.

Let me close with this lovely example from Philip Ryken.

When it comes to persevering to the very end, it is hard to think of a better example than Thomas Boston. In the last months of his life, that faithful Scottish minister was confined to his bed by serious illness. Yet Boston continued to preach. His little congregation would gather around the window of the manse , from which he would read, preach, and teach on the Lord's Day. Boston's last sermon was "The Necessity of Self-Examination." In it he challenged his beloved congregation to remain in the faith. He begged them to make sure of their eternal salvation, to "bend all their endeavors and attention to gin a blessed and happy eternity." Every pastor who fits the biblical portrait begs his people to do the same thing: to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ unto salvation.⁶

Let's pray.

¹ John R.W. Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus* (BST). (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 106. "And fourthly, it focuses on the person and work of Jesus Christ since 'the mystery' is essentially the mystery of Christ."

² J. Hampton Keathley III, "Hope" at bible.org. <https://bible.org/article/hope>

³ Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 176.

⁴ Cornelius VanTil, "Common Grace" in *Westminster Theological Journal* 8 no 1 N 1945, p 39-60.

⁵ John Calvin, *Commentary on 1st Timothy*, vv. 3:10.

⁶ Ryken, 191-2.