

The Practice And Progress In Godliness

1 Timothy 4:15-16

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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.

You know the old adage that says “Practice makes perfect”.

Do you know that it takes about ten thousand hours of practice or ten years to become an expert in any field? At least this is what some have proposed. Others have questioned the accuracy of these training hours, but you can be sure of one thing, if want to become good and really good at something, practice and practice it more. People who observed this sort of thing say it took at least ten years for seventy-three great composers to become really good and to flourish.

One article said that the best violinists, on average and over time, practiced much *more* than the good ones. Observers says that, within a group of talented people, what separated the best from the rest was how *long* and how *intently* they worked.

One of the scientists Edison or Einstein is quoted to have said, “Genius is 1% inspiration, 99% hard work”.

Now there are others who say, “you have it in you or you don’t”.

We are told that some people are born with a very special or an innate ability, a special endowment, or gift in their physical and mental faculties. That may be true to some extent.

But here in Paul’s letter to Timothy, Paul is urging Timothy to practice and persist in godliness.

Now, the question I have asked myself as I was studying this passage is this:

Is Paul telling Timothy to practice in order to become perfectly righteous OR is Timothy already righteous through Christ and therefore Paul is telling Timothy to live out his true identity?

Answer: It’s the latter.

The Christian journey does not begin with setting out to practice or train yourself to become perfect, righteous or godly. It begins with our acknowledgement that we are inadequate, lacking and unrighteous before a Holy and Righteous God. Some people may begin that way but a true understanding of God’s grace is knowing that no one is righteous before God. God is perfect and righteous and we are not.

So the first step before we pursue any kind of godliness is to know that we were ungodly and it only God who *justifies* the ungodly. This is the greatest news of all.

God’s grace is available to those the most unrighteous. It reaches the most ungodliest of people. Paul knew that. He called himself the chief of sinners. And yet, Paul is a justified sinner. And so are you.

The word justification is a big word. It is simply a declaration from God that you are no longer condemned. When you put your trust in Jesus as your substitute for your sin and its penalty, God declared you righteous.

Hear the words of the Apostle Paul in Philippians 3. *“not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ”*.

“Not that I have already obtained this or am already perfect, but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own”. Philippians 3: 9,12

One pastor put it this way – *“The whole point of justification is that not only does Jesus take our sin onto himself, but in the process he also gives us his own righteous perfection instead. This magnificent exchange makes us acceptable to God through faith in Jesus Christ; we are justified”* – Harold Senkbeil

So if *justification* is instantaneous – you are justified the moment you received the gift of salvation, *sanctification* is a life-long process.

You *practice* godliness because you have been made righteous. You *pursue* godliness because you have been you have been forgiven. You make *progress* because you belong to Jesus Christ. You persist because you Jesus persisted all the way to Cross to purchase a ransom for you.

So Paul in these last two verses of chapter four summarizes what he had told Timothy to do. Paul uses *four* key words to communicate what Timothy needs to do.

The first two words are *practice* and *immerse*. Verse 15.

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

1. Practice.

Paul knows what he is urging Timothy to do. Correct false teaching and promote sound doctrine and godliness. So if Timothy is to be a teacher someone who is sent a mission to correct false teaching and promote sound doctrine, he himself needs exemplary credentials. Jesus has a masterful illustration for this. *“He also told them a parable: “Can a blind man lead a blind man? Will they not both fall into a pit? ⁴⁰ A disciple is not above his teacher, but everyone when he is fully trained will be like his teacher. ⁴¹ Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? ⁴² How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your*

own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother's eye." Luke 6: 39-42.

Notice Jesus never says "don't instruct others". Jesus did say we must make disciples of all nations. But discipleship comes with clearing out our own specks first.

When Paul says "practice these things", he means live out your life with a speech and conduct that is pleasing to God. Live a life of love, faith and purity.

The second instruction he gives Timothy is the word "immerse".

2. Immerse.

- a. *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress.*

This literally means "*be in them*". The false teachers in Timothy's day were occupied in all the wrong things – myths, speculations, genealogies, denying others Christian liberty. In our day and age, there are so many things this world can throw at you to be occupied with some very ungodly things some neutral things. However, none of those things can and will promote godliness and develop godly character. Paul is repeating what he said earlier in a different way for emphases. Practice. Immerse. Paul's message to Timothy is that his life as a Christian be the most powerful message. Yes, Timothy gets to also be a teacher and preacher. But this is such a good reminder. How is your life being lived out?

What is outcome that Paul desires when you practice and immerse in the things that relate to godliness? Progress. Progress is self-attested and publicly demonstrated.

The next two words *conscientious* and *persist*. Verse 16.

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.*

3. Conscientious.

- a. This is verse is said to be a pastoral imperative. Timothy is to be the kind of man who is to practice a kind of self-vigilance or self-watch on himself. It means holding on to, paying attention to what is necessary for the health of your own soul. And Timothy needs to do more. He is a teacher a pastor a preacher. He is going to be judged by a higher standard for his teaching. Paul's instructions are such great instructions for today. Teaching require fidelity to the Word of God. Faithful teaching. And that teaching is to promote godliness.

The fourth word Paul uses in his instruction is *persist*. *Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

4. Persist.

- a. Paul is telling Timothy to stay where he is. He is to press on, to persevere. Endure. Don't give up. Things may be hard, things may change but God doesn't.
- b. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus says there are some who hear the word of God with joy. And they endure for a while but when trials come, they fall away. Paul has a great word for those who struggle to endure when trials come. Suffering produces endurance. Endurance produces character. Character produces hope (Romans 5). And hope does not put us to shame. Jesus told his first disciples that they would experience all kinds of trials but *"By your endurance you will gain your lives."* Luke 21:19
- c. Here Paul tells Timothy that he by persisting in sound doctrine, in promoting godliness, by being an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and purity these things are not just beneficial for his own soul but will also benefit his hearers. As a child Timothy was trained in the words of the faith. Now a pastor he needs to continue in what he was trained in. As a believer, you are required to do no less. Practice and persist in godliness.

So, to wrap it up, practice, immerse, be conscientious and persist in godliness.

Paul writes to the Corinthian church saying our journey as Christians is like a marathon. What keeps us in this marathon? Endurance. And the enduring power is not our own. It is our champion Jesus who ran before us. He is our ultimate prize. And he has a prize for us. Eternal life. A wreath of eternal life if we run with endurance. And while we live on this earth we can run by looking at him.

The author of Hebrews has word of encouragement for us.

"Let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God" Hebrews 12:1-2

----- Discipleship Questions-----

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **Practice and Progress in Godliness.** 1 Timothy 4:15-16

HEAD: These questions help you examine the truth of God's Word.

1. In this passage, what are four key action verbs Paul uses to instruct Timothy about his life and ministry in Ephesus?

HEART: These questions help you wrestle with what you believe.

2. Why does Paul tell to be conscientious or self-vigilant? Go around and share? Verse 16.
3. What is God convicting you of and to believe in light of this message?

HANDS/HABITS: These questions help you bring the truth into your everyday life and develop behaviors that change your habits.

4. For personal reflection: Are areas in your life where you need to turn away and look at Jesus?