

The Marks of Godliness

1 Timothy 4:11-12

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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.*

If I asked you to name someone whose life is an example of godliness, someone whose life is marked by speech that lifts up other people, someone who speaks the truth in love, someone whose disposition or behavior displays heavenly or Christ-like qualities, someone who has Christ-like love, who walks in faith and pursues purity of the heart, could you name one or two people?

The apostle Paul was one such man. His whole life was a life in pursuit of godliness. And Paul lived with such humility and high godly standards that he was not ashamed to tell others to imitate him and follow his example. And people who knew Paul had great affection for him. For example, when Paul was leaving for Jerusalem, they gathered around him with much weeping and embraced him (Acts 20:37). Paul set such a godly example that Priscilla and Aquilla risked their lives for Paul (Romans 16:3).

Now when we look at the world around us, it appears like ungodliness is the mainstream. Mainstream media is streaming sin. It seems like profanity has become so normalized these days. We drive by a street near our home and see a huge banner on this house's roof with words cuss words. So you look at the culture, at the political world, at the school, at the university, at the work place godliness appears to be an anomaly. I have worked in corporate world for over twenty years and it seemed that the higher you go up the chain, the frequency and fluency of profane and ungodly speech keeps going up. There are some bright spots but by and large we live in an ungodly and vulgar environment.

This past week, a popular psychology professor named Jordan Peterson made news for posting a video to invite young men into the church. Mr Peterson is not a Christian but he thinks the Christian has something to offer to young people. Peterson suggests these things "*Young men are welcome here. Ask more, not less, of those you are inviting. Ask more of them than anyone ever has. Remind them who they are, in the deepest sense, and help them become that*". So, I want to say you are not only welcome here but we need you.

And this passage comes to us as a breath of fresh air. Paul tells the young Timothy to train early in godliness not when he is older. Young people, you don't have to wait until you go to high school or college or get a job to train for godliness. Parents what a responsibility you have. And I am so proud of

some of our younger folks. I know some of you completed reading through the whole Bible last year and you are half way through it this year. Soak in the Bible. Apply the Bible to your life everyday.

Last week, we looked at the necessity for godliness in the Christian's life. We saw Paul's command to Timothy when he said, "*Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness*". If you are a believer, a follower of Jesus Christ, a Christian, the pursuit of godliness is not optional. Godliness is profit and holds the promise for eternal life with God.

Practically, what does godliness look like? What are the attributes or features of godliness?

Today, we will look at the five-fold marks of godliness.

In verse 11, Paul tells Timothy to *command* and *teach* these things. There are times when you hear people in different fields of expertise say, "*I highly suggest, strongly recommend such and such a thing a, a medicine or a book or a take a day off*". Paul says none of that here. The things that pertain to godliness must be taught in the church and must be commanded. That is Paul's thrust.

Let me read verse twelve for us to see those five marks of godliness.

Notice the first two *attributes* are external, behavioral and the next three are internal, heart focused.

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.*

Let me give you a little context for Paul's letter to Timothy. False teachers have sprung up in the church. They are promoting myths and speculations, ascetic beliefs by prohibiting marriage and foods. So, Paul tells Timothy to instruct the false teachers to stop. But Timothy is a young man. And very likely Timothy's instructions are not going to sit well with the false teachers. They are going to look at young Timothy and say, "*Who are you to teach us?*" Paul is aware of these dynamics. So Paul's solution is great. Teach these things but first be an example. Someone said, "*Example is the most powerful rhetoric*".

The way you live your life, the way you conduct yourself is going to be the greatest message.

Before we dig into verse 11, here is another translation that is a little more literal.

"Let no one think little, look down or despise you for your youth, but you yourself be an example of faithfulness in word, in conduct, in love, in faith in purity".

The first two qualities *speech* and *conduct* are closely connected. Why? Because both of these qualities are noticeable, observable or visible.

Growing up, I observed that early in the morning my dad was on his knees praying. I could notice his speech and conduct up close.

There are many things the Bible tells us about our speech and conduct.

Speech

Some people are ungodly and immoral but their talk is very smooth, charming and deceptive. And there are others whose words are just no good.

“A worthless man plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire” Proverbs 16: 27

“There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts..” Proverbs 12:18

“For the lips of an immoral woman are as sweet as honey, and her mouth is smoother than oil. ⁴ But in the end she is as bitter as poison, as dangerous as a double-edged sword.” Proverbs 5: 3-4

Do you know your words, your language, the things you say and the way you say things to others can make a difference and promote godliness?

“Gracious words are like a honeycomb, sweetness to the soul and health to the body.” Proverbs 16: 24

“..the tongue of the wise brings healing.” Proverbs 12:18

Paul wrote to the Corinthian church to excel in speech. 2 Corinthians 8:7

“Let your speech always be gracious”. Colossians 4:6

“Put away from you crooked speech, and put devious talk far from you.” Proverbs 4:24

“But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth”. Colossians 3:8

James the brother of our Lord says that the tongue is like a deadly poison.

“but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. ⁹ With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. ¹⁰ From the same mouth come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.” James 3:8-12

There are times when I have asked the Lord to sanctify my tongue, my thoughts, my speech, my conversation. What an opportunity we have to grow in godliness everyday.

Conduct

Now, James in this chapter says that speech and conduct are linked. So he says show your good conduct with good works done in gentleness (James 3:13).

Peter tells us that our *conduct* must be holy *because* God is Holy. He also writes that if a spouse is not obedient to the Word of God, win their with your conduct.

Now it is entirely possible to put up a front, to mimic speech and conduct without a change of heart. However, that is going to be a terrible burden in the long run. That is going to be life waiting to implode. Someone who is merely trying to change external behavior without godliness on the inside is going to run out of steam eventually. I have tried that and its tiring. I remember once visiting a Navy base and observed all the nicely painted armored vehicles and tanks. And I asked if they were operational. I was told they are just showpieces and they paint them every year.

Jesus goes to the root of the issue in Luke 6.

Luke 6:45 “*..out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks*”.

“*..out of heart comes the issues of life*” Proverbs 4:23

Whatever is inside is eventually going to come out. The heart like a spring, a pond, a reservoir, a storage tank. If the spring is polluted, there is no point fixing the plumbing, the faucets and the pipes. But if the pond is clean and fresh, good things are going to come out of it.

That is why Paul lists the next three marks of godliness for the external marks. What are those?

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Love, faith and purity.

At the beginning of this letter, Paul tells us his motive. He says “the aim of our instruction is love..” (1 Timothy 1:5).

How did Paul’s motivation become love when he was once given to rage and violence? He used to persecute other Christians. Answer: Paul experienced the *great* love of Christ. That love was his inner secret of his godly speech and conduct. “*we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind*”⁴ *But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us*”. Ephesians 2:3-4. This is the only place in the New Testament where love is qualified with the word “*great*”. The word is “mega” love. The magnanimous love of Christ.

And Paul was appointed to serve Jesus and his Gospel. God found him faithful because he didn’t go back to his old way of life once he made a commitment to Jesus. (1 Tim 1:14).

Addressing women in chapter two, Paul tells the women in Ephesus who were so fearful of childbirth that they don’t have fear. They will be saved if they continue in faith and love.

Faith:

About faith, the author Hebrews tells that without *faith* it is impossible to please God. Faith, however, must be coupled with love. Paul writes this way to the Corinthians. “*And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.*” ³ *If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing*” 1 Corinthians 13:2-3

Faith and Love go together.

Lastly the third mark of godliness is purity. This is such an essential trait for every Christian especially those in leadership. It is so sad and disappointing to hear on such a regular basis that some evangelical leaders, some of the having served for twenty or thirty years in ministry, suddenly fall because of integrity and purity issues.

Paul’s instruction is much needed reminder for today.

One verse that I keep reminding myself is from Ephesians 5:3 “*But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God’s holy people*”. (NIV). Not even a hint of impurity. Very high standards.

So, to summarize what we saw so far.

Set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity.

You may listening to these instructions and thinking “my goodness these are very high standards to attain and live by”.

Can anyone live like that? No and yes. No, not by yourself. Yes, in and through Jesus Christ. If Jesus has reconciled you, forgiven you, justified you, you can live a life of godliness. He supplies the strength. J I Packer in his book titled “A Quest For Godliness” writes that “the only healthy Christian is the humble, broken-hearted Christian. Constant self-abasement, he says, is the most necessary part”

Consider the *speech* and *conduct* of Jesus:

“*And all spoke well of him and marveled at the gracious words that were coming from his mouth*” Luke 4:22. When the religious leaders sent officers to arrest Jesus, they came without arresting because they were astonished at how Jesus spoke. “*No one ever spoke like this man*”. (John 7:46)

“*..neither was deceit was found in his mouth*” 1 Peter 2:22

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

MESSAGE SUMMARY: **The Marks of Godliness.** 1 Timothy 4:11-12

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

1. After having considered the profit and promise of godliness last week, what are the five marks or traits of godliness that Paul instructs Timothy to live by, set an example and teach? So around and share why these crucial for the believer.

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

2. Why are qualities like love, faith and purity necessary for godly speech and conduct?
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: In which area do you desire to grow in godliness? Love, faith, purity?