

FIT FOR DUTY

I TIMOTHY 4:6-10

Main Idea

PASTORS MUST TEACH THE TRUTH NOT ONLY VERBALLY BUT ALSO THE WAY THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES.

I. HEALTHY FOOD VERSUS JUNK FOOD (VS 6-7a)

Pastors must continually feed themselves with classes and experiences that will help them grow in their knowledge of the faith.

- A. YOU CAN'T TEACH WHAT YOU DON'T KNOW (6a)
- B. LEARN FROM TRUSTED SOURCES (6b)
- C. STAY THE COURSE (6c)
- D. CAREFULLY EVALUATE YOUR SOURCES (7a)

II. HEALTHY LIVING VERSUS HYPOCRITICAL LIVING (VS 7b-10)

The way we live is a living testimony to the god we serve.

- A. PASTORS MUST BE IN TRAINING (7b)
- B. PASTORS MUST UNDERSTAND WHAT IS VALUABLE (8-9)
- C. PASTORS MUST LIVE WITH PURPOSE (10)
- D. CHECK YOUR PASTOR OUT

Fit For Duty

I Timothy 4:6-10

Paul has given Timothy a great deal of advice in how to get the congregation back on track. It seems that Paul advised Timothy to correct false teaching and immoral behavior in the church. He spent a lot of time pointing out the nature of false teachers. He said they were a waste of time. They spent their time with meaningless speculations. They wanted to be prominent teachers; but didn't know what they were talking about. They had violated their consciences so badly; their consciences had become seared and deadened; to the point they no longer worked. Their personal lives were shipwrecked. They had become liars and hypocrites. They turned away from the true doctrines of Christianity to follow the teachings of demons. In fact, Paul threw two of them out of the church.

At this point, now Paul turns his attention to Timothy. He has personal advice to Timothy as to how a good pastor keeps himself on track. If we were to describe Paul's spiritual advice and put it into physical terms; we would have to say that Paul advises Timothy to eat healthy food and to live a healthy lifestyle.

In the military, they have a phrase called, "Fit for duty." This means that a soldier is physically and psychologically healthy enough to perform his or her duty. When I was in Chaplain's training, one of the things we had to do was crawl through a live fire nighttime training exercise. We had to crawl about 100 yards at night while training soldiers fired live tracer rounds over our heads. There was no real danger because they fired at least 10 feet off the ground. Further they would simulate mortar fire by exploding some sort of devices. When we were half way through the course, one chaplain stood up and ran off the course into the woods screaming, "I can't take it anymore! I just can't take it anymore!" About 10 yards into the woods, he ran into a tree and knocked himself out. Obviously he was not fit for duty.

Many pastors disqualify themselves from the ministry and become unfit for duty because they fall into all sorts of immorality or start to teach false doctrine. Paul's strict warning to Timothy is the main idea of this morning's text. **PASTORS MUST TEACH THE TRUTH NOT ONLY VERBALLY BUT ALSO THE WAY THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES.** Most of us who have been called to the pastorate have to be kind of quirky people. Although in many ways we seem to be normal; there is something quite different about us. Well, let me just let this video explain it. I think it says it all.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TyNyHLCppMA>

Chuck Swindoll once said that the way you know if you have been called to be a pastor is if you can't possibly imagine yourself doing anything else.

The characteristics of false teachers were that they led people astray through bad doctrine and their own lives were a mess. Paul tells Timothy that in order to effectively counter this, he must stay grounded in the truth, the Word of God; and live out his everyday life according to those truths which accurately describe the nature and character of God. To me, there is nothing more devastating to a church than a pastor teaching false doctrine, being a hypocrite, and acting out in immoral behaviors. This can destroy a church.

I. HEALTHY FOOD VERSUS JUNK FOOD (VS 6-7a)

In verse 6 and the first half of verse 7 Paul instructs pastors to feed on healthy food rather than junk food. PASTORS MUST CONTINUALLY FEED THEMSELVES WITH CLASSES AND EXPERIENCES THAT WILL HELP THEM GROW IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH. One of the reasons I chose to be ordained with the Evangelical Covenant Church is because of their commitment to this principle. Each year every pastor is required to fill out a form that lists the classes we have taken, the religious training we have participated in, books that we have read, participation in denominational, conference, and local gatherings. We even have a program called "Sustaining Pastoral Excellence." Listen to how they describe their mission:

"We ask a lot of our ministerial leaders. The Evangelical Covenant Church is pleased to be able to partner with the local church in helping resource our pastors in fulfilling their call. It takes a denominational-wide effort to support those who help lead our churches in kingdom endeavors. Pastoral excellence involves holistic Christ-centered development, lifelong vocational and Biblical formation, and regular occasions of renewal and re-visioning that sustain healthy enduring ministry."

They are so committed to this principle that they actually back this up by helping pastors financially in order to help us participate in these experiences. Most of my friends are committed to growing in knowledge, faith, and experience.

Even though false teachers don't recognize this; to me the most fundamental principle is found in the first portion of verse 6; you can't teach what you don't know. In other words, I can't teach you how to speak Russian because I myself don't know Russian. I can't teach you organic chemistry because I don't know organic chemistry. Over the years I have met too many people who fancy themselves Christian teachers, pastors, and leaders; who know nothing about the spiritual life. Verse 6 starts out with this phrase, "If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus."

First of all these things refers to last week's message when Paul encouraged Timothy to teach the truth and the Word of God. Just so we are clear, at the time of this letter, the Word of God consisted of the Old Testament, the words of Jesus as recorded in pieces of the Gospels (perhaps complete Gospels) and the letters of the Apostles including Paul. Those were the authoritative documents of the day. Today we have the completed Bible which includes all of these. We look to the earthly life of Christ to understand God. Jesus said that He was the way, the truth, and the life; there is no other way to God but through Jesus.

These are the things Paul expects Timothy to point out to the congregation. The word point out is a compound word in Greek. It is composed of the word hypo which means under and tithēmi which means to place, to serve, and to make available for use. It also had to do with the person serving up these truths to put their life on the line. It's almost as if Timothy is a waiter and he is setting these truths before them. He is serving them these truths. He is making this available to them as if he were their servant. Pastors are to serve their congregations truth and make it available to them for use in their everyday lives.

I am not here to get up and yell and scream at you. I am not here to belittle you. I am not here to berate you. My job each Sunday is to serve you with the truth. I am not to lord it over you. We are

brothers and sisters in the Kingdom of God. My job is to lay out before you the truths of God's Word. I am to make it available for you to use in the course of your everyday life. I think that requires of couple of character thoughts. First of all, I am no better than any of you. I merely have training in a particular area. We are brothers and sisters journeying through life together as children of God. Secondly, I am not here to tell you what to do with your life. That is between you and God. Thirdly, if I am the resource person, I need continually to be growing and keeping up to date in the field of theology. If I am going to help you with your spiritual formation, I need to be moving forward in my own spiritual formation.

Paul tells Timothy this is what it takes to be a good minister of Christ Jesus. The word used for minister is the same word used for deacon and for servant. Again I like the word he uses for good. The word is kalos which means beautiful, good, and sound. Please don't miss this point. If I want to be a good and beautiful servant to Jesus my Lord; I must be a good and beautiful servant to you. If I am being a good pastor; you ought to hear the truth and the Word of God while at the same time feeling the love, grace, and mercy of God coming from me. If I don't know the truth and the Word of God; I can't teach it. If I am not being formed spiritually by God in my own life; I can't possible teach you about spiritual formation. The principle for pastors is that you can't teach what you don't know.

In the middle portion of verse 6 Paul reminds Timothy to continue to learn from trusted sources. The phrase here is, "nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed." The word nourished means to be constantly nourished, brought up on, raised with, and fed with. In the physical sense it would represent parents feeding their children as they grow. We know from the New Testament that Timothy had three sources of spiritual nourishment. From his second letter to Timothy, Paul reminds the young pastor that his mother and grandmother raised him on the Word of God. His mother and grandmother were believers and they led him to faith in Christ. We know from the book of Acts that Timothy learned the truth for his experiences in the Christian church. He seems to have been raised in the church. Timothy's third source of nourishment came from the Apostle Paul's mentorship. Timothy was taught truth and the Word of God. He knew the fundamental truths of Christianity.

However, it's not enough simply to be taught the truth. Each person must decide whether or not to accept the truth and to live by it. In the third section of verse 6 ministers are reminded to stay the course. Paul makes it clear that Timothy had been living according to the truths he had been taught. The words you have followed are one word in Greek. It means to follow a particular course. It has the sense of one accompanying the truth along the journey of life. Timothy was a disciple of the truth and the Word of God. Timothy walked through life with the truth at his side.

All good pastors have professors, teachers, churches, and mentors who have been part of their spiritual journey. Once a person becomes a pastor, they don't outgrow their need for nourishment. Personally, I stay connected to institutions and mentors who have faithfully guided me on my journey through life. I almost always connected to a spiritual director, counselor, professors, programs, and friends who are a continual source of learning and encouragement. I consider myself to be an evangelical; therefore I read a wide range of authors who also consider themselves to be evangelical. I want to make sure I understand the wide diversity of thought among us that call ourselves evangelical.

Paul warns Timothy in the first half of verse 7 to carefully evaluate his sources. Since Timothy has been so grounded in the truth, Paul wants him to measure everything according to that. He warns Timothy to shun, to avoid, to stay away from godless myths and old wives' tales. The Greeks, Romans, and Jews all had their share of folklore. Gnostics were starting to rise and all sorts of crazy stories were starting to emerge. Today, it would be like Paul warning us to have nothing to do with the crazy stuff that comes up on the internet. People say things like, "It must be true if it's on the internet." There is so much spiritual stuff that comes out on radio, television, and the internet; a lot that claims to be Christian. There may be some stuff that is really good; but there is much more stuff that is bad, deceptive, and confusing.

People can't even discern the difference between fiction and nonfiction. I can remember when the Da Vinci Code was written by Dan Brown. People used to inform me that Jesus was married, had children, and that His children were still living today. People often quote Benjamin Franklin as if he were an author of Scripture. People say, "Cleanliness is next to godliness," and "God helps those who help themselves," as if they were to be found in the Bible.

There is a lot of junk on the radio, on television, and on the internet that claims to be Christian. You must be very careful to test these. Those that do not conform to the truths of Christianity taught in the church; please be sure to avoid them like the plague. Hopefully you have a pastor you can trust to teach the truth and the Word of God. Just like every good pastor builds a group of people and institutions around himself or herself to mentor them; so you as congregation members must build up around yourself a group that can mentor you in the truth. But Paul's exhortation to Timothy and to all of us who are pastors is this. **PASTORS MUST CONTINUALLY FEED THEMSELVES WITH CLASSES AND EXPERIENCES THAT WILL HELP THEM GROW IN THEIR KNOWLEDGE OF THE FAITH.**

II. HEALTHY LIVING VERSUS HYPOCRITICAL LIVING (VS 7b-10)

Just as Paul told Timothy to eat healthy spiritual food rather than spiritual junk food; in the second half of verse 7 through verse 10 he tells Timothy to engage in healthy living rather than hypocritical living. The message for pastors is this. **THE WAY WE LIVE IS A LIVING TESTIMONY TO THE GOD WE SERVE.** As I read through Paul's letters, I'm guessing he was a sports fan. He uses a lot of sports metaphors. If Paul lived in Chicago, he would be a Bear's, Bull's, Hawks, and most definitely a Cub's fan. He would be talking about Super Bowls, World Series, Stanley Cups, and all sorts of championships. Almost any sports cliché we could think of; Paul could use.

In the second half of verse 7 he tells Timothy that pastors must be in training. Instead of just going to the television, radio, or internet, Paul tells Timothy to train himself to be godly. The word Paul uses for train is the same word we get gymnastics, gym, and gymnasium from. It has to do with strenuous exercising. In today's language; it would involve weight training along with cardio training. The area of training in this case has to do with becoming a godly pastor. The focus is on behavior. In other words, Timothy is urged to train his behavior so that it conforms to the nature and character of Jesus. In today's language we could call these spiritual disciplines. Too many times Christians engage in spiritual disciplines as a way to measure their spirituality. They look at the disciplines almost as if they were tickets to punch. They could say, "I read my bible today, I memorized some verses, I prayed for others, I fasted today, I gave money to the church and to the poor," as if all these things earned us spiritual points. That only leads to spiritual arrogance and

self-righteousness. The spiritual disciplines are tools that help us put the truths we learn in Scripture into practice in our everyday lives. Let me give a few examples. Two of the disciplines are Bible reading and Bible study. The purpose is not just the reading so we can say I read the Bible every day. The purpose of reading and studying the Bible is to correct my mistaken views of life. I read the Bible so that I can see what God expects out of me and to identify where my thinking, speaking, and behavior are not in conformity with that.

Giving is another spiritual discipline that is often used for self-righteous purposes. I don't give 10% of my money to church and I don't give money to the poor because I think somehow God will take away my money if I don't or if I give because I want God to continue to give me more. I practice giving as a discipline to affirm the truth that all I have comes from God, that money and wealth are not the most important part of life, that God is a generous God and when I give away my money it makes me more like God.

Spiritual disciplines are meant to help us conform our old habits into new ways of behaving that conform to the new things we are learning about God.

Practicing the spiritual disciplines can also help us in determining what's important. In verses 8-9 we learn that pastors must understand what is valuable. I think some commentators have misused this text to conform to our modern day thinking. Look at the first sentence in verse 8. Paul says, "For physical training is of some value." Modern day commentators say that Paul was telling pastors to exercise our bodies because our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit. We should regularly exercise and keep in shape. That is great advice but that's not to be found in this passage. We should all exercise and keep ourselves in relatively good shape. I need to take that advice.

However, I think in this passage, Paul is trying to point out what is valuable and what's not. The first two lines in verse 8 follow the form of Hebrew poetry. The poetic parts involve physical training, spiritual training, value, little, and great. Here is what Paul is contrasting. Physical training – little – value. Contrast that with godliness training – great – value. Paul's point is not to say that we should engage in physical training. He is saying that in view of what's important in life, training in godliness is extremely valuable. Let me get at this another way. We know the benefits of exercise. If we exercise and watch what we eat, we will keep our weight down, our blood pressure down, and our cholesterol levels low. We will feel good. Those are nice perks in life.

However, in comparison to what we receive as a result of training in godliness, the worth of the results of physical training appear to be nothing compared to the benefits of training in godliness. Paul says the benefits of training in godliness have benefits for this life and the afterlife. Instead of the word benefits, he uses the word promise. The promise from God is that if we draw near to Him; He will draw near to us. Jesus came to give us an abundant life. One day we will sit at the banquet table in heaven. When we place our faith in Jesus, we enter eternal life at that very moment. Even though we must continue on in our journey through this world; we will complete our course here and the very next step we take will be on heaven's shores.

There is some debate as whether the trustworthy saying is found in verse 8 or verse 10. I think the trustworthy saying is what we just talked about in verse 8, "Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things."

I think most of the pastors I know personally realize what is valuable and what is not. We know that nourishing ourselves with good spiritual food, practicing the spiritual disciplines, and living a life that is being transformed by the Holy Spirit is valuable; we realize that these have eternal consequences.

Verse 10 puts the final stamp on this thought. This is a nice reminder for pastors. Why do we continue to labor and strive? We have Good News for this lost and hurting world. We have the truth that can bring them love, joy, peace, and contentment. We have the words of healing and eternal life. We have been given the privilege of serving up healthy spiritual meals to God's people. We serve Jesus Who is the way, the truth, and the life. We have been given the honor to serve alongside Jesus Christ.

If pastors burn out; they burn out for a great and glorious cause. We want nothing more than to see the people we serve grow to maturity in your faith, love, devotion, and service for Jesus.

Some people misunderstand these last two lines. Paul describes Jesus as the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe. Some try to make this mean that all people will be saved even if they don't believe in Christ. That heresy is called universalism. The entire Bible and Jesus Himself make it clear there is a heaven and a hell. Heaven is a place where believers will spend eternity together with their Lord and Savior Jesus. Hell is a place where unbelievers will spend eternity separated from Jesus.

Jesus is the Savior of all people in that He came to die for the sins of the whole world. But each individual person must choose either to accept Christ as Savior or reject Christ as Savior. On the cross, Jesus hung between two criminals; one chose to receive Jesus as his Savior, the other chose to reject Jesus as Savior.

That's why the last line says, "Especially of those who believe." The word especially could be translated, in particular. Jesus came to be the Savior of the world; in particular those who have placed their faith in Him. Please do not miss that nuance. Yes, Jesus can die for the sins of the world; but His salvation is only applied to those who give themselves to Him in faith. Please make sure you have done that.

This letter to Timothy seems to have been made public. As the congregation heard this letter read; they were invited to check their pastor out. Look, these kinds of passages have two purposes. The first is to encourage those in the ministry to stay on the right track. The second is for the congregation to check their pastor out.

All my sermons are made public. They are written out in full manuscript form on our website. They are there so you can check out whether or not my teachings are consistent with good solid theology. Secondly, you can check out whether or not I practice what I preach. I'm pretty open and transparent so you can easily judge. Pastors have to remember this. **THE WAY WE LIVE IS A LIVING TESTIMONY TO THE GOD WE SERVE.** Pastors have the power to do a great deal of good or a great deal of harm. People often get their idea of Who God is by observing who we are and how

we think, speak, and act. Pastors have an awesome responsibility. PASTORS MUST TEACH THE TRUTH NOT ONLY VERBALLY BUT ALSO THE WAY THEY LIVE THEIR LIVES. I work at this a lot. I try my best to keep on growing both in thought and behavior. I love all of you and want the best for you. Please continue to pray for me that I can live up to all a pastor should be.