

Fact Sheet for **“Are you in training?”**
1 Timothy 3:14-4:16

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I've been swimming laps at the Cottage Grove pool for 22 years. I try to swim 3 miles a week. At the very first I got faster. But progressively my mile has gotten slower. It now takes me 5 minutes longer to swim a mile. And the high school swim team makes me feel as if I am swimming in quicksand. Training for athletic records is for the young, but spiritual training is not dependent upon youthfulness. And it is a training we should all work at. Paul wrote about this training in 1 Timothy 3:14-4:16.

¹⁴ ¶ I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵ if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth.

“these things” – He particularly had in mind the qualifications for overseers and deacons.

“so that” – These words show Paul's goal

“you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God” – This was not just theology.

It was a pattern for behavior.

“truth” – what corresponds to reality. The church is the repository and the protector of that truth.

¹⁶ Great indeed, we confess, is the mystery of godliness: He was manifested in the flesh, vindicated by the Spirit, seen by angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, taken up in glory.

This seems to be wording taken from a first-century hymn. Jesus had absolute, squeaky-clean righteousness. **He was manifested in the flesh** (His incarnation), **vindicated by the Spirit** (demonstrating that He was righteous), **seen by angels** (His exaltation), **proclaimed among the nations** (see Colossians 1:21-23), **believed on in the world** (the progressive fulfillment of God's redemptive plan), **taken up in glory** (His ascension). He lived a life of perfect obedience to the Father.

^{4:1} ¶ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

“in later times” – This will certainly be true then but it even started in the first century.

“some will depart from the faith” (compare 1 Timothy 1:18-19)

“deceitful spirits and teachings of demons” (see Ephesians 6:12)

² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

There were false teachers, and false teaching that was infecting the Ephesian church in the 1st century and would bloom in many churches during the 2nd century. It went like this... The spirit is good, matter is evil. Jesus therefore could not really have come in the flesh. All appetites relating to the body should be rooted out. This includes marriage and certain foods. The things they fiercely advocated were not in actuality helping them avoid sin (*Colossians 2:20-23).

⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

You could sure run with this one if you took it out of context! What about heroin from poppy plants? What about psychedelic mushrooms? What about marijuana? What about tobacco? They all were

created by God, along with several other plants that have a variety of effects on the human body. Here are two considerations that have nothing to do with context. 1) There are legitimate medical uses for several of these plants. 2) What is illegal or legal may not be what is wise. But here is the contextual consideration. Paul was writing to Timothy about marriage and foods (verse 3), not about drugs. And the word for food in verse three particularly refers to meat. It is the same word used by Paul when he was writing to the Romans about eating "meat" that had been sacrificed to idols (Romans 14:15). You cannot use verse five to say anything about drugs. To do that you must go to other passages of Scripture, not this one.

⁶ ¶ If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

My favorite place to run was the five mile loop at Point Defiance State Park in Tacoma WA. One day everything was just right. The weather was perfect for running. I had gotten a good night's sleep. I had eaten well and was hydrated well. I was sailing! Three to four miles into that five mile run I glanced at my watch and saw that I was running 5-minute 45-second miles. It felt great! No matter how hard I train I will never run another 5-minute 45-second mile. I'm too heavy. I'm too old. I haven't run for over 20 years. However, I can still train for godliness and be better at it today than I ever have been. And through the pen of the Apostle Paul God says that godliness holds promise not only for this life, but also for the life to come! Think about that one.

The word translated "trained" in verse 6 is also used for training up a child. The word translated "train" in verse 7 is a different word. It is the word we get "gymnasium" from and it means to exercise. Paul wrote that Christians should exercise themselves for godliness. It doesn't matter how heavy you are. It doesn't matter how old you are. This training can always mean that you can be better at it today than you were yesterday. This training should be life-long. And it holds promise for both the present life and also for the life to come. I can't tell you what that will mean in eternity, but God knows!

⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. 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.

Remember what Paul wrote earlier in this letter (1 Timothy 2:3-4)? Jesus is the only way of salvation for all people, but only those who believe in Him will be saved.

Now I'll give you a handy interpretive tool when you are looking at the writings of the Apostle Paul. When Paul was reasoning through a subject he had long and complicated sentences. However, when Paul has finished his close reasoning and has several thoughts he wanted to communicate he wrote in simple sentences, often seen in single verses. At times Paul emphasized his previous point in those short sentences. At other times he merely communicated several short but related encouragements. It is the latter that he does here.

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.

Paul instructed Timothy not only to keep watch on his own teaching, but also on himself. Pay attention to your private life as well as your public ministry. As you do you may just find that the believers who are best at godliness are among the oldest.