



1 Timothy 4:1-16

*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. 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.*

*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. 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.*

*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.*

Our topic this morning from 1 Timothy 4 is Training the Church in Godliness based on Paul's admonition to "train yourself for godliness" (v. 7). But what exactly is godliness? We often use the phrase, "He is a godly man" or "she is a godly woman," and even though we have a sense of what this means, could we come up with a good definition of godliness?

As a starting point, I like what Jerry Bridges has written, author of the book, *The Practice of Godliness*.

Godlike character is both the fruit of the Spirit as He works within us and the result of our personal efforts. We are both totally dependent upon His working within us and totally responsible for our own character development. This is an apparent contradiction to our either-or type of thinking, but it is a truth taught over and over in the Scriptures.<sup>1</sup>

Bridges and the apostle Paul bring out our first key point...

1. Godliness can develop and grow.

This is important because I think we would all begin with the assumption that we are not where we want to be. I have never heard a believer say, "I have reached the peak of godliness" or "I have enough godliness, I don't think I really want anymore." Here is an encouraging word for you—growth in godliness knows no limit. While we will never achieve sinless perfection in this life nor will we ever be like God in terms of his infinite attributes, we have the option to never cease growing in our Christian lives. So if you are like me and you are not yet where you want to be, take heart that you don't have to stay where you are at. There is no magic formula or pill that you can take. Again, the quote from Bridges and this text of Scripture imply that it will be hard work—you need to be trained—we can take encouragement from the fact that there is no limit to our growth in godliness.

That should be encouraging to our church body because we have many mature believers who have been striving their entire lives—you don't have to be done. There is so much more to come.

This should be encouraging to those who are in the early stages of their Christian walk. Maybe you have only been saved a few years or perhaps even a few months. You have a lifetime of growth ahead of you so don't worry that it feels like you are just getting started because you are just getting started, and that is exciting!

Finally, this should be an encouragement to those who are really "stuck" in their Christian walk. Even though we all have besetting sins we struggle with, you haven't seemed to make any progress in years. And typically I find that if you are not making progress you are almost certainly going backwards. But it doesn't have to be this way.

2. Beware the doctrines of demons

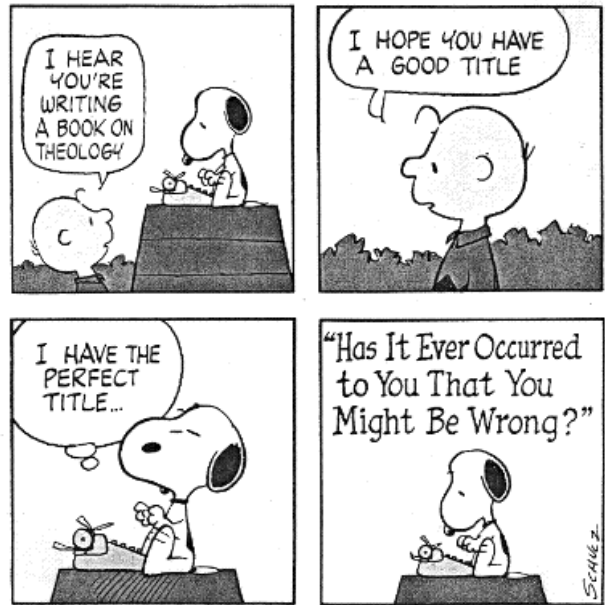
This is an important topic but also one that is greatly mis-used. There really are "teachings of demons" or "doctrines of demons" as it is usually called, but far too many people use this phrase to (pin-intended) 'demonize' their opponents. For example, I found this shocking quote.

Without equivocation, I believe it is spiritually dangerous for the body of Christ to be exposed to the teaching of eternal security! Once saved always saved doctrine of demons is lethal and the eternal security teachers are very dangerous people.<sup>2</sup>

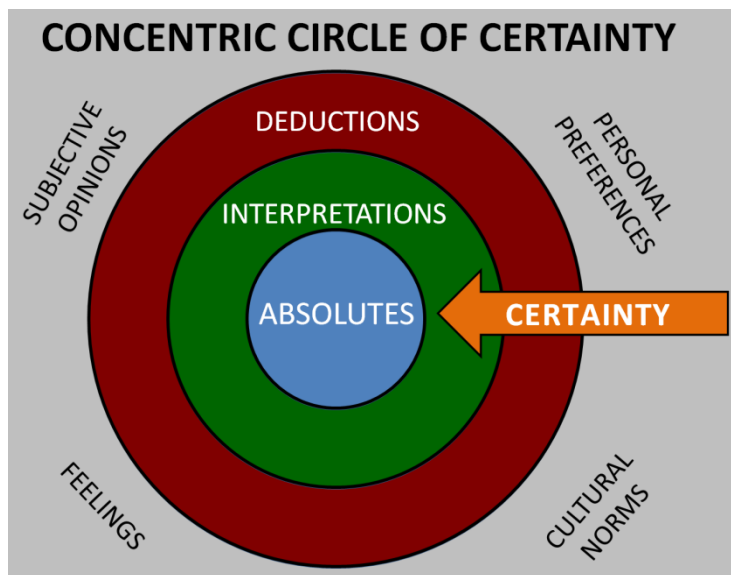
This is a sure way to at least attempt to win an argument. Apparently all you need to do in a debate is to declare, "What you believe is a doctrine of demons straight from the pit of hell." There are doctrines of demons but every disagreement is not evidence of a demonic doctrine.

I think people like this could really benefit from a little wisdom from Snoopy in this cartoon.

Here is my working definition of a doctrine of demons. A doctrine of demons would be anything that adds or takes away from the Word of God. Now that is a very broad definition and in this broad sense, we would all hold to teaching of demons because we would have to have perfect theology. And because we do not have perfect theology, in some small, unintentional way, we add or take away from the word of God. Again, in a broad sense, we are all heretics because our theology is flawed and far from perfect.



The kind of false teachers and false doctrine that Timothy was dealing with in Ephesus was of a severe nature. Verse two is about all you need to know—*through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared*.<sup>3</sup> Not only were these men were causing great harm but they were also unteachable. Their consciences were seared and nearly beyond the point of return. The Holy Spirit teaches and convicts us through our consciences and if they are seared through repeated disobedience, it is like placing a nearly impenetrable wall around our hearts and minds.



Every so often I pull out this Concentric Circle of Certainty to illustrate the various kinds of doctrine and beliefs. Not every part of Scripture is equally clear. The most clear and fundamental doctrines about God’s character, sin, salvation, the resurrection and others are absolute beliefs. These absolute beliefs ought to be so certain that we would be literally willing to die for them. Roughly speaking, about the first half of our church’s statement of faith would fit into this category.

Then you move into areas of less clarity or certainty like interpretations and deductions, roughly equivalent to the second half of our statement of faith. (see attachment at end of sermon) Finally on the outer edges you have issues that are merely opinions and personal preferences. Doctrines of demons, then, could be anything that falls into the center circle and somewhat into the middle circle.

Finally, don't forget that these doctrines of demons are, by their very nature, deceptive. They are like giant sinkholes—if you fall into them, like the tragedy in Florida a few weeks ago, you are not likely to emerge alive.

The opposite of doctrines of demons leads to our third point...

### 3. Fill yourself with sound doctrine

Verse six in the antidote to doctrines of demons. *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.* By “these things,” Paul meant everything he has written to this point in the letter and by extension, all of his teachings. If you immerse yourself in sound doctrine, you will be well prepared to recognize the counterfeit.

This is especially true in our growth in godliness. Last week I contrasted the false theology of “try harder” and “pull yourself up by your own bootstraps” kind of theology. After the message, I had one person tell me that even though she grew up in what would be considered an evangelical church, she never once heard this message of grace. All she ever heard was commands to stop sinning and try harder.

Right doctrine begins and ends with the gospel, therefore, godliness begins and ends with the gospel. This week I emailed the article about why young people are leaving the church. One person emailed back and suggested that so many fall away because they were never saved in the first place. In other words, you can't expect a garden to bloom and grow when there is no soil. You cannot expect to grow in godliness unless there is true saving faith. But even if you are saved, the gospel continues to be the foundation of all growth.

I am not working to be accepted, but I am working because I am accepted.

### 4. Know the true value of godliness

Growth in godliness does not always sound that exciting. If someone asks you what your plans are for the weekend, I have never heard anyone say, “Well, ya know, I plan to grow in godliness this weekend.” Sometimes we don't strive for godliness because we don't understand its true value. If you guaranteed that there was ten dollars buried in my backyard, I probably would not spend much time digging a bunch of holes looking for it, but if you guaranteed to me that there was 100 million dollars buried in my backyard, the effort I would expend would be gargantuan.

If you don't know the true value of godliness, you won't be willing to put forth much effort. Verses 7-8 show the true value of godliness. *Rather train yourself for godliness; 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.*

We are used to thinking about the benefits of godliness in terms of eternity. We know that all sin and all pain will be vanquished. We know that we will dwell in the presence of Christ and Christ himself will provide the light. We look forward to heaven and we understand how godliness has value for the life to come, but what is the value of godliness in this life? Obviously, many truths like this one require several sermons to flesh them out, but one benefit is seen in Jesus; words, which are very similar to Paul's.

*There is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or lands, for my sake and for the gospel, who will not receive a hundredfold now in this time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions, and in the age to come eternal life (Mark 10:29–30).*

This is the treasure principle also known as heavenly rewards. Sacrifices that come by our obedience to the Lord will be translated into eternal rewards. Notice that these sacrifices must come “for the sake of the gospel.” Jesus’ words could easily be twisted into a prosperity theology where I give up a small thing now to get something better later. This is not a magical machine where you drop in your nickel and it pumps out dollar bills. It’s not magical, but it is miraculous.

But you might be thinking, “How can giving up something now possibly be a benefit to me? I can see how it benefits me in eternity, but how does it benefit me now? It sounds like a loss to me, not a benefit.” Take Mindy Seeley for example. When they were leaving, one of her favorite lines was that even though they would no longer be in regular fellowship with all of us, there will be plenty of time for that in eternity.

Have the Seeleys lost any relationships by their move to the Bahamas? In one sense, they haven’t lost relationships themselves but they have lost the regular fellowship of those relationships. For some people, this sense of loss would keep them from going to the mission field, or it would keep them from stepping out in faith to do whatever God may be calling them to do. But the Seeleys did not let this stop them, any more than they were prevented from moving away from their family in Minnesota to come to Wisconsin to serve at Living Waters. So this eternal perspective has benefitted them in two ways. One, they take advantage of the ministry opportunities before them and do not let fear rule their hearts. That’s the immediate benefit in the here and now. Second, they know that they really are not giving up relationships or fellowship at all. At best, all they are doing is delaying the fellowship to be picked up again in heaven. This does not mean that they are not greatly missed nor that they don’t miss us, but only that the eternal perspective is by far the best life. As Paul wrote here, their pursuit of godliness holds great value for them both in this present life and in the life to come.

More than that—this eternal perspective is a most freeing way to live your life. You don’t have to worry about storing up treasures on earth. You are freed from materialism. You are free from your fears which hold you back. You are free to serve God in according to how he has called you.

Verse twelve gives us our fifth principle...

##### 5. Godliness has no age limit

Paul encouraged the young pastor Timothy with these words—*Let no one despise you for your youth, but set an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.* If you recall, Timothy was serving as pastor of the church in Ephesus which was the most important church in Asia Minor and arguably could be called the most important and strategic church in the New Testament. And he was young, probably in his late twenties, but he had already been engaged in a decade of ministry at Paul’s side.

This is a good reminder of all of the young people that God used for great glory throughout the Bible. Abraham was an old man when he was called by God but so many others were very young. Daniel was about fifteen when he was taken captive to Babylon and rose to prominence almost immediately. David was about seventeen when he slew Goliath and entered into service of King Saul. Samson was still a young man when he repeatedly delivered Israel from the hand of the brutal Philistines. Josiah was only eight years old when he was crowned king.

And let us not forget the more obscure friend of Job, Elihu. Elihu enters the story near the end after Job's three friends have proved themselves to be the most miserable of friends. He was young, but he did not let anyone despise him for his youth when he said, *I am young in years, and you are aged; therefore I was timid and afraid to declare my opinion to you. I said, 'Let days speak, and many years teach wisdom.'* But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that makes him understand. It is not the old that are wise, nor the aged that understand what is right (Job 32:6b–9).

This is not a proof text for teens to say, “See, I told you I was smarter than my parents!” Elihu was saying that gray hair gets you nothing. Just because you are old does not mean you have acquired Biblical wisdom. It might mean this, but it does not necessarily happen.

Finally, another young missionary was named John Mark. He abandoned Paul on his first missionary journey. I love Mark's story because he really messed up. He was afraid. He panicked and back in the day, if you were kicked off Paul's team, there wasn't much future left for you. But God in his grace is always looking for the fearful person in the corner. God searched out the broken hearted and contrite in spirit and redeems them—not from hell a second time, but he redeems them from insecurity and failure and uses them for might purposes. Mark failed miserably but later grew in godliness and not only became extremely useful to Paul again, but wrote the first gospel, the Gospel of Mark.

We should never despise the potential power of a young heart committed to Christ. This has been true for the past six thousand years of human history, the past two thousand years of church history and it is true in our own church as well. Lord willing, we will be holding what we are calling Super Saturday—the largest children and youth event we have ever sponsored as a church and the idea, vision and coordination are coming from two teenage girls in our church. So rejoice in our youth and do not despise their age.

#### 6. Godliness requires hard work

Paul ended this section of his letter with four imperatives or commands, vv. 15-16.

**a. *Practice*** these things. Godliness is never passive as Hebrews 5:15 states. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.

**b. *immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress***

Growth in godliness will lead to progress in the faith. I think it is wonderful to think that a chief elder, a mature young man like Timothy who was pastoring the most important, strategic church in Asia Minor would experience “progress.” This implies forward movement but not necessarily

the rate of movement. Everyone will grow at different rates and in different ways but every maturing believer will make progress. Christian, are you making “progress”?

**c. *Personal accountability—Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching***

Remember that Timothy was battling a small army of false teachers and Paul repeatedly Timothy to watch out for these dangerous men. But here he also warned of another dangerous man—himself. Timothy could stumble because Paul had witnessed other leaders fall away. NO ONE is beyond stumbling. No one is safe. No one is immune. Whenever you hear about the moral failing of a well-know Christian leader, what’s the first thing that pops in your head? I can’t believe it could happen to *him*! But it did and it does and that’s why we need to keep a close watch on ourself and our beliefs.

Some of you will be familiar with Joshua Harris who wrote, *I Kissed Dating Goodbye*. Joshua was a ‘Timothy’ and was mentored by a Paul and eventually took over as senior pastor of a large church in a small denomination. This church was the flagship church of the denomination and Joshua was carrying the torch for his former mentor. This past December, Joshua led this flagship church out of the denomination that had given them birth because of ongoing issues of leadership, including his own mentor. This would be like Timothy separating himself from Paul because Paul has stumbled in the faith.

**d. *Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.***

All of this takes great effort and endurance but let me add one more “P” word not in our text.

**e. *Power* of the Holy Spirit**

To repeat a part of Jerry Bridges quote, “We are both totally dependent upon His working within us and totally responsible for our own character development.” Don’t ever attempt this in your own strength.

Rich Maurer  
March 10, 2013

**EFCA Statement of Faith**

The Evangelical Free Church of America is an association of autonomous churches united around these theological convictions:

**God**

1. We believe in one God, Creator of all things, holy, infinitely perfect, and eternally existing in a loving unity of three equally divine Persons: the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Having limitless knowledge and sovereign power, God has graciously purposed from eternity to redeem a people for Himself and to make all things new for His own glory.

**The Bible**

2. We believe that God has spoken in the Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments, through the words of human authors. As the verbally inspired Word of God, the Bible is without error in the original writings, the complete revelation of His will for salvation, and the ultimate authority by

which every realm of human knowledge and endeavor should be judged. Therefore, it is to be believed in all that it teaches, obeyed in all that it requires, and trusted in all that it promises.

#### The Human Condition

3. We believe that God created Adam and Eve in His image, but they sinned when tempted by Satan. In union with Adam, human beings are sinners by nature and by choice, alienated from God, and under His wrath. Only through God's saving work in Jesus Christ can we be rescued, reconciled and renewed.

#### Jesus Christ

4. We believe that Jesus Christ is God incarnate, fully God and fully man, one Person in two natures. Jesus-Israel's promised Messiah-was conceived through the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, was crucified under Pontius Pilate, arose bodily from the dead, ascended into heaven and sits at the right hand of God the Father as our High Priest and Advocate.

#### The Work of Christ

5. We believe that Jesus Christ, as our representative and substitute, shed His blood on the cross as the perfect, all-sufficient sacrifice for our sins. His atoning death and victorious resurrection constitute the only ground for salvation.

#### The Holy Spirit

6. We believe that the Holy Spirit, in all that He does, glorifies the Lord Jesus Christ. He convicts the world of its guilt. He regenerates sinners, and in Him they are baptized into union with Christ and adopted as heirs in the family of God. He also indwells, illuminates, guides, equips and empowers believers for Christ-like living and service.

#### The Church

7. We believe that the true church comprises all who have been justified by God's grace through faith alone in Christ alone. They are united by the Holy Spirit in the body of Christ, of which He is the Head. The true church is manifest in local churches, whose membership should be composed only of believers. The Lord Jesus mandated two ordinances, baptism and the Lord's Supper, which visibly and tangibly express the gospel. Though they are not the means of salvation, when celebrated by the church in genuine faith, these ordinances confirm and nourish the believer.

#### Christian Living

8. We believe that God's justifying grace must not be separated from His sanctifying power and purpose. God commands us to love Him supremely and others sacrificially, and to live out our faith with care for one another, compassion toward the poor and justice for the oppressed. With God's Word, the Spirit's power, and fervent prayer in Christ's name, we are to combat the spiritual forces of evil. In obedience to Christ's commission, we are to make disciples among all people, always bearing witness to the gospel in word and deed.

#### Christ's Return



9. We believe in the personal, bodily and premillennial return of our Lord Jesus Christ. The coming of Christ, at a time known only to God, demands constant expectancy and, as our blessed hope, motivates the believer to godly living, sacrificial service and energetic mission.

#### Response and Eternal Destiny

10. We believe that God commands everyone everywhere to believe the gospel by turning to Him in repentance and receiving the Lord Jesus Christ. We believe that God will raise the dead bodily and judge the world, assigning the unbeliever to condemnation and eternal conscious punishment and the believer to eternal blessedness and joy with the Lord in the new heaven and the new earth, to the praise of His glorious grace. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*, p. 211.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.evangelicaloutreach.org/doctrine-of-demons.htm>

<sup>3</sup> see Romans 1:32—Though they know God's righteous decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.