

**Text:** 1 Timothy 4:8–10

**Title:** Is Godliness Worth the Cost?

**Subject/Complement:** Christians must exercise rigorous spiritual discipline because of its eternal value for us and the eternal significance of the ministry.

**T-H-T:** Godliness and God's harvest are worth every cost.

**Purpose:** I want to persuade my audience to work hard at godliness and disciple-making because they see effective power of God and the value of his eternal reward.

### Introduction

#### Read vv. 6–10

I said last week that the mood of the epistle takes a significant turn in this paragraph. In 2:1–4:5, the book feels like a manual on church order as Paul fires through various issues of church conduct. If Paul had delivered 1 Timothy orally, in this longer section, he would have spoken broadly to the entire church with the manner of an authority or expert in church governance. He will again pick up that tone in chapter 5. But before he goes on with his instructions to the church, he pauses for a moment in 4:6–16 and looks in the eyes of his spiritual son Timothy. His tone changes from that of an authoritative expert to that of a father. He speaks compassionately but firmly, urging Timothy to work hard at his ministry and to develop the kind of godliness that would give him authority to lead.

Last Sunday, we studied vv. 6–7 where Paul goes right after Timothy regarding spiritual discipline. He calls Timothy to feed his soul on Scripture. Then in v. 7 he commands Timothy to train for godliness with the discipline of an athlete. Just like an elite athlete must reshape his whole life including what he eats, when he sleeps, and where he lives in order to train well, so a Christian must radically alter the routines of life in order to pursue godliness. Godliness must be more than a hobby. It must be a way of life.

This may require some significant changes to how you live. It may require reworking your closest relationships. It may require giving up a hobby that is a big part of your life but is ungodly or distracting from godliness. Giving generously to the church may require adjusting your budget.

When you consider all of the potential implications of pursuing hard after godliness, it can be pretty scary because Jesus demands everything. So, is Jesus worth it? Is he worth more than my hobbies, my money, and my relationships? Is godliness worth the cost? We haven't even begun to talk about the cost of being a "good minister" as v. 6 says. Being a bold witness and investing in disciple making can also be extremely costly. Is pursuing the Great Commission worth the cost?

Paul figured you might ask these kinds of questions, and so he answers them in vv. 8–10. My outline today is built around two questions. *The first question is...*

I. **Is godliness worth the cost (v. 8)?**

- a. The whole point of v. 8 is to answer this question. Verse 7 commands us to “exercise yourself to godliness.” Paul knew that he was asking a lot of Timothy, and so in v. 8 he reminds Timothy of why godliness is worth the effort. He makes his point through a contrast between the benefit of physical exercise and the benefit of spiritual exercise. *He first notes that...*
- b. **Physical exercise has limited value.** When I first began studying this passage I wondered if this “bodily discipline” was the legalistic asceticism in vv. 3–5. However, it’s hard to see how Paul would recognize even a little benefit of a teaching that denied the gospel. As well the word translated “exercise” or “discipline” in v. 8 refers to physical exercise. I said last week, it is the term from which we get *gymnasium*. And so “bodily exercise” just refers to regular, physical exercise.
- c. Paul says that exercise has some value. First Corinthians 6:12–20 teach that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit. It is not just a shell that houses the real you; rather, it has real spiritual significance. And we need to care for our bodies accordingly. It’s possible that Paul is taking a veiled shot at the Stoics. They believed that the body is evil. Therefore, they didn’t care for their bodies or try to maintain good health. However, Paul says that there is some value to exercise and by implication other habits of good health. If your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit, you ought to maintain it and keep it holy.
- d. Therefore, Paul acknowledges the importance of caring for the body, but he also **rejects an obsession** with physical fitness, which was also common in Greek culture. I said last week that gyms were very common in Greek cities and physical education was very important. But Paul says that physical fitness only has limited value.
- e. **The reason for this is because it only lasts for a short time.** We know this is Paul’s point because in the next line Paul emphasizes the eternal benefits of godliness. And so bodily care has only limited value because physical fitness only lasts for a time.
- f. We all understand this reality. When those of you who are older watch the little ones around with endless energy, you remember a time when that was you, and you can’t believe how quickly that fitness and energy came to an end. If you are into sports, maybe you have seen a picture or watched an interview of a retired athlete who used to be in incredible condition, but now he is overweight, and he walks with a distinct limp. His body is just a shell of what it once was.
- g. But despite all of the examples around us, many people still worship fitness. If you go to a gym, you are in love with their own bodies. They invest huge amounts of time and money into looking beautiful. Others invest very heavily in eating a pure diet. Again, being healthy is a good thing. But, we must never forget that

good health is temporary. There is no fountain of youth. The healthiest person on earth will still grow old and die. It's so sad how many people cling desperately to good health because they have no hope beyond that. They fear growing old, and they fear death, and so they do everything possible to squeeze as much life out of these broken bodies as possible.

- h. Of course there are plenty of **other ways** that people try to squeeze as much as possible out of fading pleasures because they have no hope beyond the present. And it's essential that we as Christians constantly remember that all of this is a vapor. We should enjoy the good things God has made, but always from an eternal perspective. *But while physical exercise only has temporary value notice in the next line that...*
- i. **Godliness has eternal value.** The major emphasis of this statement is on the incredible worth and eternal benefit of godliness that far exceeds any benefit of physical exercise or worldly pleasure.
- j. God says that godliness is profitable "**for all things.**" The idea is that godliness is profitable in every sense. All of us have probably received a flyer in the mail that seems too good to be true. An investment company promises to double your savings, and we assume there must be a catch. We don't even look into at the flyer; we just throw it away. But there are no catches in God's promises. There are no hidden qualifiers in the fine print. God's promises are not a scheme intended to take advantage of us. Godliness is worth it.
- k. This is because God's promises are not **bound by human limitations**. In particular, everything we do is bound by death. We've come up with all sorts of innovations and ways to make life enjoyable. But all of these pleasures are still limited by the fact that death is coming, and we cannot escape. The world can promise nothing that will last for more than a few years. But Paul says that godliness promises a **reward that shatters the bonds** of death. The rewards of godliness are not limited to a moment, a few years, or even a lifetime. The rewards of godliness are eternal.
- l. There will be **many incredible joys** in eternity. We will live in a perfect environment that is free of sin and imperfection. We will enjoy many good things that reflect the gracious heart of our God. But the greatest joys in life are always found in relationships, and heaven will be no different. Above all else, heaven will be wonderful because God will be there, and we will walk with him and fellowship with him without limitation.
- m. And any mature Christian who has walked with God for years longs for this gift above every other. We long to see him in all of his beauty and to understand more of his ways. We long to fellowship with him without the barrier of sin or the frustration of a wandering mind. Sitting at the feet of Jesus for all eternity will be awesome. And it will make every temporary joy or pain in this life look very small.
- n. The joys of heaven are truly wonderful, and we can all **recognize that logically** that they are superior to the temporary pleasures of this life. But actually

**changing our affections** and values so that we live for eternity is a whole lot harder. It's really hard to pass on something you can see and touch for something years down the road that you have never experienced. And God understands this challenge. Therefore, Paul adds that his eternal blessings have spilled into our lives right now.

- o. Notice that the promises of godliness are not just for heaven; they have spilled into **“the life that now is.”** Very often when we think of eternal life, all we think about is the fact that we will live forever in a perfect place. But most of the time when the NT talks about eternal life, it focuses more on a **quality of life** that invades the life of a Christian from the moment he is born again. First John in particular teaches that eternal life is not so much about a length of time but about a person, Jesus, who lives within us and changes us from the inside out.
- p. Christ **opens our eyes** to the deceitfulness of sin and the true glory of God. He lets us see God's beauty in a way that unbelievers can never quite see. Because of that we love and worship him. And then as we pursue godliness, we experience the fruit of the Spirit. Rather than being marked by hatred, envy, and selfishness, we manifest love, joy, and peace.
- q. Our lives **aren't easy** by any stretch. In fact, life can be very hard for the one who is pursuing godliness. But God gives grace to see by faith that the reward is coming and to be satisfied in him along the way. And so yes, our ultimate reward lies in the future, but that doesn't mean that the life of godliness is without blessing. We get to experience the **benefits of eternal life right now** as a **foretaste** of the ultimate reward that is to come.
- r. And so the **first question** we are trying to answer today is whether or not godliness is worth the cost. Is it worth it for you to take that uncomfortable step of sacrifice that you know God wants you to take but that you are dreading? Well, Missionary Jim Elliot famously said, “He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.” This statement puts things in perspective. It is so powerful because God required the ultimate sacrifice from Jim Elliot when he was only 29. He was trying to reach the Auca Indians with the gospel when they attacked him with spears. He had a gun in his pocket, but he couldn't imagine the thought of sending these sinners into eternity and destroying all hope of reaching them with the gospel, and so he allowed them to take his life. Jim Elliot's life in this world was very short, but he was immediately taken into the presence of the Lord. Jim Elliot gave something that he could have held onto for a few years. But he gained an eternal reward that the Bible says makes anything we could enjoy in this life look very small.
- s. Is godliness worth the cost? Absolutely. And so **what are you holding onto** that you value more than godliness? Where have you become so enamored with a little toy or trinket that you cannot see the beauty of God? Where are you chasing a carrot of fleeting happiness rather than resting in the sufficiency and grace of Christ? Take an honest look at your priorities and compare the fleeting value of the things you love with the eternal value of godliness. Godliness is worth the

effort because it is “profitable...” *But Paul isn’t done. There’s one more question we need to answer.*

## II. **Why should I labor in ministry (v. 10)?**

- a. I should note that v. 9 can be attached to either v. 8 or v. 10. Most scholars attach it to v. 8 because it sounds more like a common saying than v. 10 does. Regardless, v. 10 continues the argument from v. 8.
- b. In particular it continues to focus on the effort that the Christian life requires. But v. 10 is not so much concerned with developing personal godliness like vv. 7–8; rather, it returns to the emphasis of v. 6 on the work of ministry. This becomes apparent when Paul says that the motivation for his labor is God’s global purpose of salvation. Therefore, we ought to understand *laboring* and *suffering reproach* as referring to his efforts in spreading the gospel. *And so just like pursuing godliness is costly, Paul tells us that...*
- c. **Ministry is costly.** The word translated “labor” refers to strenuous manual labor. You wouldn’t use for someone who sits at a comfortable desk all day doing easy work. No, this term describes someone working in a mine, throwing hay bales, or putting on a roof.
- d. There’s a **textual variant** with the second term. The NKJV has “suffer reproach,” while other translations have something like “strive.” If the NKJV is correct, Paul is referencing how he suffered for the sake of the gospel. If “strive” is correct, Paul is returning to the athletic imagery and comparing his effort in ministry to how a runner exerts himself in a race. Regardless, the **point is clear**. Paul **worked hard** to spread the gospel, and he was willing to make any sacrifice to see it go forward.
- e. By this time in Paul’s life he had been **imprisoned** several times and not long after he wrote this letter he would be arrested for the final time and ultimately lose his head because of his preaching. And he endured all sorts of lesser trials as well. Paul paid a steep price for his ministry.
- f. And Paul is **calling Timothy** to follow in his path. He must stand up to the false teachers no matter how much hatred and slander it would bring. He must work hard at preaching and teaching, ministering to people and at whatever else he needed to do. Timothy needed to do the hard work of being a good minister, and he is calling us to do the same.
- g. The ministry will probably never be as hard for us as it was for Paul, but there’s always a cost. It will rarely be comfortable to talk with someone about the gospel. If you invest in people, they will break your heart. Ministering through the church will require lengthening your already long days and putting yourself in uncomfortable situations. There will always be something else you could do with the money you put in the offering plate.
- h. For some of you it **may mean far more**. The ministry God has for you might require giving up a profitable career and the comforts of family to become a pastor or missionary. It might mean giving your children to the ministry and having them live far away. And when you start to think in these terms, it can get

really scary. The Perkins family was here a couple of weeks ago before they travelled to Papua New Guinea. By going into such an underdeveloped context, they are risking their lives for the sake of the gospel.

- i. When you start to talk about death, it's probably easier to be the one who dies than to lose a loved one. Jim Elliot died and went into the presence of the Lord. His wife Elizabeth on the other hand suddenly became a widow and a single mom at 29 years of age. The ministry can be very costly. And so again, is the ministry worth the cost? Again, Paul answers absolutely.
- j. **Ministry is worth every sacrifice.** *Paul gives two reasons why. The first is...*
- k. **God is alive.** Paul also called God the "living God" in 3:15. This phrase contrasts our God with the dead idols of the pagans. He is not the product of human imagination; rather, he is the one and only true and living God.
- l. Therefore, when we trust in him, we can be sure that he will keep his promises and reward every sacrifice. You will never give him more than he will give in return. And so give generously to God. Don't hold anything back from the ministry that God has for you. Don't back down from sharing the gospel. Invest in making disciples. Invest in the ministry of this church because your labor is not in vain. You serve the living God. *The second reason the ministry is worth it is...*
- m. **God is the Savior.** This statement comes up often in debates about the extent of the atonement because good men differ on the purpose behind Christ's death. Everyone agrees that Jesus' death was of infinite value and that it is sufficient to pay for the sins of all people. But those who hold to a limited atonement believe that Jesus' purpose in his death was only to atone for the elect; whereas, those who hold to an unlimited atonement believe that Jesus' purpose was to make payment for the sins of all people. This verse is often used to argue for an unlimited atonement because it says that God is the Savior of all people but that the salvation he provides has a special effect on those who believe.
- n. Now proponents of a limited atonement will often work around statements about "the world" or "all men" by saying that the point is not literally all people but instead all kinds of people regardless of their race or status. And this is Paul's primary concern here. The false teachers were promoting an exclusive gospel that they claimed was not available to everyone. And so Paul is saying in v. 10 that Christ didn't provide a salvation with racial boundaries. The gospel is for all kinds of people. But the all kinds of people cannot only be the elect because Paul differentiates between those for whom salvation is available and those who actually believe.
- o. Some who hold limited atonement will change "especially" to "that is" and try to say that the two groups are actually one group, but this not a legitimate way to translate the conjunction. It means "especially" or "particularly." The more common response is to say that God is the Savior of all men in the sense that he gives them non-salvific blessings or what we commonly call common grace. But the problem with this is that Paul never uses "salvation" to talk about common grace. And when he talks about salvation in this epistle, he means redemption

(2:3–7). And so the most natural way to understand this statement in the context of 1 Timothy is that God has made salvation available to all people through the death of Christ; however, not all will be saved. The atonement will only be applied to those who believe.

- p. And both sides of Paul’s argument inspired him to preach. First, Paul was inspired to preach by the power and good news of the gospel. The gospel has the **power** to deal with man’s greatest need. It opens blind eyes, and it gives new life. It turns wicked sinners who deserve eternal condemnation into saints who are accepted by God and will live forever with him.
- q. And the gospel is **good news** because it gives these gifts freely. We don’t earn salvation; Jesus gives it to us freely based on what he did on the cross. As well, the gospel is good news because it is available to **all men**. Jesus didn’t just provide salvation for the Jews or the socially elite. No, he provided a salvation that can rescue any sinner who comes to him in faith. And so Paul was inspired to preach by the power and good news of the gospel.
- r. But he was also inspired to preach by the reality that it is **only applied** to those who believe, and you can’t believe the gospel unless you hear the gospel. People will sometimes try to argue that people can be saved without ever hearing the gospel, but Paul denies this thinking over and over in his writings. We must preach the gospel; otherwise, the nations cannot receive the good news of the Savior.
- s. Again, is the ministry **worth the cost**? Is it worth being mocked or hated? Is it worth leaving family and going around the world? It absolutely is because God is the Savior. God is worthy to be known and worshipped by all people, and his gospel is the only way that sinners can be made right with God.

### **Conclusion**

And so as v. 6 says, are you a good and faithful minister of Christ? Are you faithfully sharing the gospel and ministering to your fellow believers in a way that would please your Lord, or are you letting the cost of the ministry hold you back? Let’s all see today that Jesus is worth it and that giving up something that you cannot keep will always be worth gaining something you cannot lose.

Finally, I would imagine there is someone among us who isn’t ready to pursue godliness and engage in the ministry because Jesus is not yet your Savior. So what does it mean that God has provided salvation? The Bible teaches that we need salvation because we are sinners, and our sin deserves God’s wrath. And God cannot simply turn a blind eye to our sin because he is just, and he must punish sin. And Jesus took that punishment when he died on the cross. And so we don’t make ourselves right with God through our works; rather, we simply receive salvation by faith. Verse 10 says we must believe. If you have never put your faith in the gospel, I hope you will do that today. I hope that Jesus will not just be a Savior but that he will become your Savior.