



BSFL: 1 Timothy 4:7-10; Titus 3:1-9

By Shawn L. Buice

GOODLINESS

A First-Century Understanding



What do you say to the young pastor who is having difficulties in his church? He has been in the church just over a year. He desires to lead the church but is uncertain about how quickly to make changes or address issues. He does not want to offend or ostracize anyone; yet, he believes the difficulties he faces need to be resolved. Sound familiar? Some of you have been there. Many of you know ministers who are in similar situations right now. *What counsel do you give?*

PAUL WROTE, GIVING COUNSEL TO A young pastor who was in a difficult spot. His name was Timothy; he was in Ephesus and was facing some pretty serious issues. Paul wanted to help Timothy respond properly to those issues.

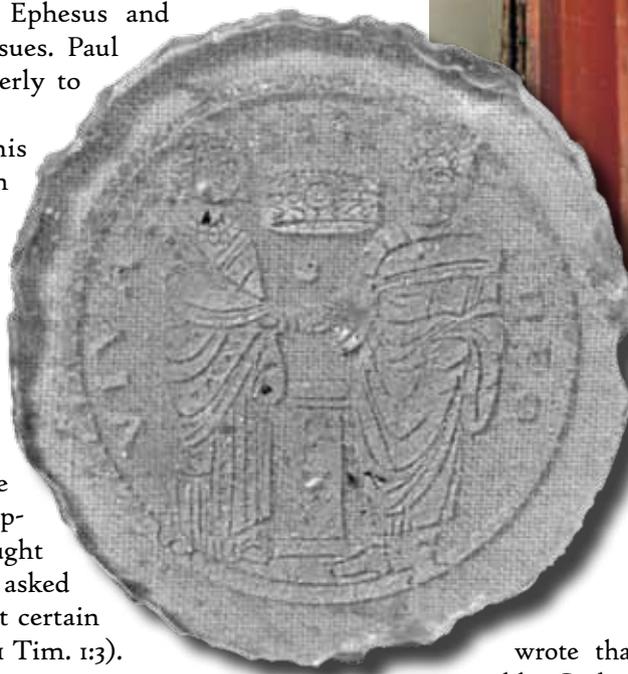
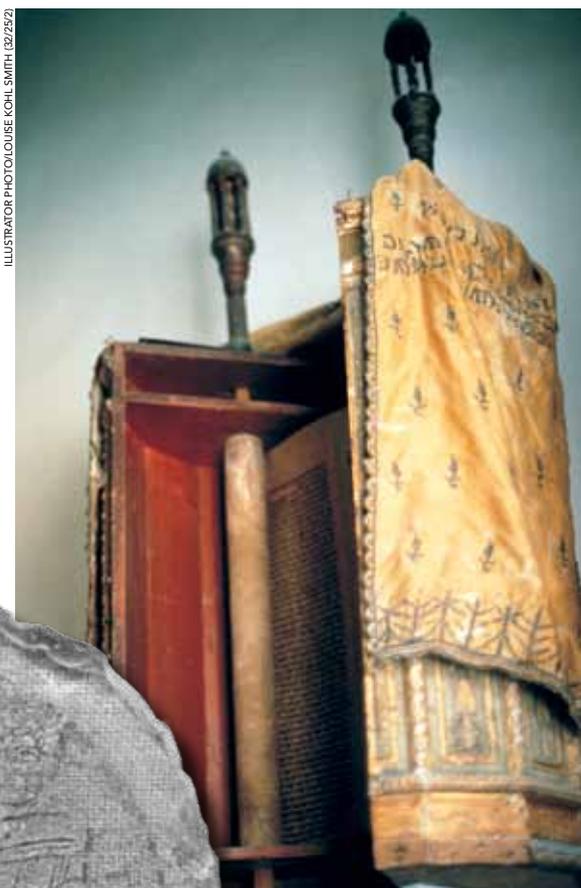
Paul first visited Ephesus on his third missionary journey. He stayed in Ephesus between two-and-a-half and three years.¹ Luke records Paul's farewell speech to the church elders at Ephesus. In that address Paul warned the church leaders that "savage wolves [would] come in among" them and would "rise up...with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples" away (Acts 20:29,30).² Apparently, what Paul cautioned the elders could happen in Ephesus, did happen. False teachers emerged and taught "deviant doctrines." Due to this, Paul asked Timothy to stay in Ephesus to "instruct certain people not to teach different doctrine" (1 Tim. 1:3).

Paul's Instruction

In order to counter the false teaching in Ephesus, Paul commanded Timothy to act on two fronts. Paul's first admonition was that Timothy needed to "point these things out to the brothers" (4:6). "These things" refers to the false proclamations that ultimately came from "deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons" (v. 1). The false teachers "forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods that God created to be received with gratitude" (v. 3). Timothy was to expose the false teaching and then offer the proper biblical response to this heresy.

Paul gave the correct response. He reminded Timothy what the Bible had to say about food and marriage. Paul

Right: Torah case from Hebron.



Left: Marriage scene etched in glass and highlighted with gold; from Rome and dated to the 4th–5th centuries A.D. The inscription reads: "Live in God."

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DAVID ROGERS/ METROPOLITAN MUSEUM OF ART/ NEW YORK (337/14)

wrote that "everything created by God is good, and nothing should be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, since it is sanctified by the word of God and by prayer" (vv. 4-5). In other words, Timothy could know that marriage and food are good because God created them both.

Paul did not stop by highlighting the need to counter the false teaching. He next instructed Timothy to keep an eye on his character. To teach correct doctrine only was not sufficient. What really would set Timothy apart from the false teachers and lend further credibility to his teaching would be the life he lived before them in Ephesus.

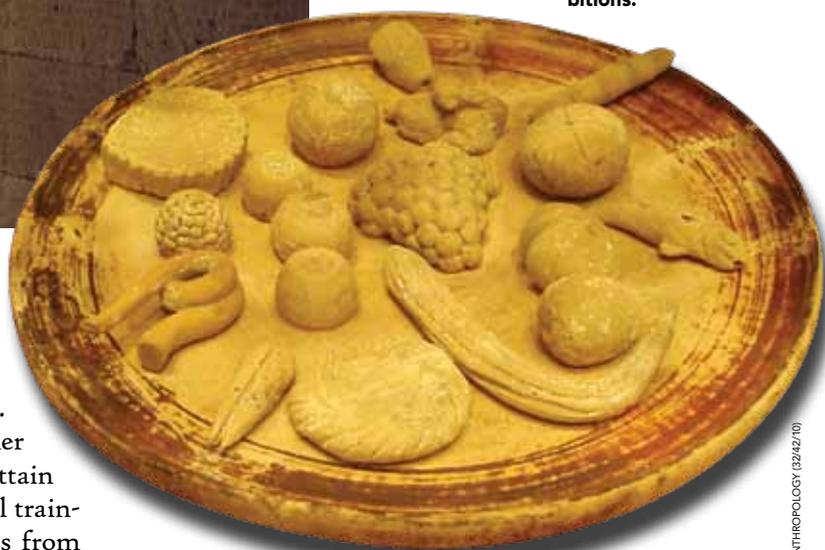
So, Paul's second admonition was for Timothy to "train [himself] in godliness" (v. 7). To emphasize



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Left: Law code discovered at Gortyn on the Island of Crete dates to first half of the 5th cent. B.C. and is the earliest known European law code. It refers, though, to earlier laws. The lines are written in boustrophedon text, meaning every other line alternates—being read left to right and the next, right to left.

Below: Dated to the 3rd cent., from the region of Tuder (modern Todi in central Italy, northeast of Rome) a terracotta votive offering tray filled with miniaturized foods and cooking wares. Paul reminded Timothy that false teachers forbade both marriage and the consumption of certain types of food—but the Lord made no such prohibitions.



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/BRENT BRUCE/UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA MUSEUM OF ARCHAEOLOGY AND ANTHROPOLOGY (32/42/10)

his point, Paul employed a metaphor from the arena of athletics. The Greek word translated “train” commonly described gymnastic exercises.³ The implication was that this activity would require effort on Timothy’s part. Godliness would come at a price. To further impress upon Timothy the effort required to attain godliness, Paul drew a comparison with physical training. According to Paul, the benefits one derives from physical training are limited to this life (v. 8). The benefits of training for godliness, on the other hand, far surpass the benefits of bodily exercise. Godliness is valuable because “it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come” (v. 8).

Since Paul commanded Timothy to train for godliness, one must next ask, what is godliness? This particular Greek word is an interesting term. Paul used it in only 3 of his 13 letters, those being First and Second Timothy and Titus.⁴ Of these three, Paul used the word primarily in 1 Timothy.⁵

Historically, the word “godliness” has a rich history. Persons of ancient Greek culture used the word to describe “piety, reverence, loyalty” that one demonstrated to “parents or deities.”⁶ These concepts were present in the Roman world, too.⁷ This is to say that Roman culture also expected individuals to demonstrate reverence to their parents and gods.

The Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament (the Septuagint) reflects a slight shift in meaning in the word godliness. For example, the Books of Proverbs

and Isaiah use “godliness” to pull together the “ideas of covenant loyalty and the appropriate behavioral response to the law.”⁸ In the Old Testament, then, godliness continued to describe a type of loyalty and reverence. Different from the Greek or Roman concept, though, this loyalty was based on a covenant and was demonstrated by one’s behavior or response to the law.

This concept formed the backdrop for Paul’s usage of “godliness” in his letters to both Timothy and Titus. New Testament scholar Philip Towner explained that the term godliness, as Paul employed it, described “comprehensively the integration of the outward and inward dimensions of life, and it [was] to be lived actively (1 Tim 4:7-8) and intentionally (Titus 2:12).”⁹ Paul was telling Timothy, therefore, that his lifestyle needed to reflect his belief in God’s Word.

Timothy’s Application

How did this apply to Timothy’s life in Ephesus? To combat what was going on in Ephesus, Paul



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ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/G. B. HOWELL/ ATHENS ARCHAEOLOGICAL MUSEUM (35/5/15)

Left: Ruins of the market area in Ephesus.

Above: In Greek culture, people presented gifts or "votives" to a god or deity as an act of worship. This votive relief, which was unearthed near the Temple of Athena in Sounion (south of Athens, Greece),

dates to about 460 B.C. and depicts an athlete placing a crown on his own head. A victor in a local competition likely dedicated this votive to the temple. His wreath would have been made of metal and fitted to the drilled holes that are visible around the head.

encouraged Timothy to work on two fronts. First, Timothy needed to teach correct doctrine. Paul knew from experience that an effective way to counter false doctrine was to teach sound doctrine. In fact, a detailed analysis of 1 Timothy reveals that one of the primary emphases in this letter is on teaching. A second and equally important component that Paul highlighted was Timothy's need to live correctly. Timothy not only had to teach the right concepts, but he had to make sure his life mirrored what he taught.

In 1 Timothy 4:6-10, both of these concepts, teaching and living, are present and are uniquely intertwined. Paul seemed to be telling Timothy that to combat strange or unorthodox beliefs, his teaching and lifestyle had to be aligned. That alignment of teaching and lifestyle would serve as the evidence of godly living.

We live in a day when Christians are accused of lacking character and integrity. In many circles, believers believe the right things. Unfortunately,

though, their lives do not mirror their beliefs. Paul's words to Timothy are thus relevant for us today. For all believers, character still counts! We need to train ourselves for godliness. Living out lives of godliness will reflect our loyalty to God and His Word. **B**

1. John B. Polhill, *Paul and His Letters* (Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 1999), 80.
2. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from the Holman Christian Standard Bible (HCSB).
3. "γυμνάσιον" (*gumnasio*, train) in Walter Bauer, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (BDAG), rev. and ed. Frederick William Danker, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 208.
4. The noun form occurs in only two other books in the New Testament: Acts and 2 Peter.
5. See 1 Timothy 2:2; 3:16; 4:7,8; and 6:3,5,6, and 11.
6. "εὐσεβεία, ας, ἡ" (*eusebeia*, godliness) in BDAG, 412.
7. Philip H. Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 172.
8. *Ibid.*, 173.
9. *Ibid.*, 174.

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