



1 Timothy 4:1-16

A Word Fitly Spoken

3rd Sunday of Advent – December 11, 2016 (am)

INTRODUCTION

Pro.25¹¹ *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.* This is the kind of proverb that can make wisely reply: *Hmm...* It sounds really nice, until you realized you don't actually know what it means! One commentator wrote: *The meaning is not entirely certain; but it does speak of beauty, value, and artistry* (Ross 206). Another said: *The whole simile is of uncertain interpretation, but at least its components carry associations of attractiveness, value and craftsmanship* (Kidner 152). And yet, there's no doubt what's considered beautiful, valuable or crafted: it is *a word fitly spoken*, aptly spoken, in a timely manner (Strong), appropriate to the circumstances.

A *word* that speaks specific comfort into a sad or painful circumstance, or clear direction into a long season of aimlessness; a *word* that offers truthful reassurance at a time of lagging confidence—these are (*words*) *fitly spoken*. And they come to us like beautifully crafted artistry that graces our lives like sweet, refreshing fruit laid out on platters of precious metal. They're just what we wanted, and often more than we needed! Pro.18²¹ *Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it eat its fruits.*

In 1Ti.4, Paul gives to Timothy some (*words*) *fitly spoken*. They're more than just good instruction and clear direction, more than just (*words*) of reassurance, reminder, and responsibility. They're uniquely suited to Timothy in his current, hard assignment. They're sweeter than just the sharp commands barked out by a spiritual drill-sergeant. They're soaking in the fragrant oil of rich relationship. And because they're as personal as they are profound, and as pervasive as they are precise, we can still listen to them with great profit, even today, personally and corporately!

We get to listen in to the very personal part of this letter, and be blessed by it, even as the first-century church at Ephesus was. Though these *words* are spoken from Paul to Timothy as the pastor of that body, the body itself is instructed by them—reassured, reminded of their responsibility. And because they're inspired by the *Spirit of God*, we still listen with equal merit today. So, let's do that, and let's see what we learn about being the church, today.

Let's unpack this text under three principles.

THERE IS RELENTLESS COMPETITION WITH GODLINESS IN THIS LIFE. – 1-5

This competition will increase and intensify as these *last days* (2Ti.3:1) advance. And it'll be progressively unmasked as the initiative of Satan himself, foretold by the *Spirit of God*. **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. Liars* who know they're lying, and who no longer even feel a twinge of (*conscience*) in doing so, will actually lead away some who have professed *faith* in Jesus. We heard Jesus Himself speak of this in the gospels. Mat.24 **24**... *false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect.*

So, what were these (*insincere*) *liars* in Ephesus teaching? What was wrong with their teaching? They were **3**... (*forbidding*) *marriage and (requiring) abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* They were leading people away from things that *God* said were *good*, and they were doing so likely claiming it led to greater spirituality. This description is as close as we get to hearing the content of the *different doctrine* (1:3) that was being taught in Ephesus. And it's content that matches other early departures from the gospel in the first century. It's quite similar to what we saw in Corinth. Here in Ephesus it seems they were mostly elevating the spiritual over the physical to the extent that they earned their own *godliness* either by denying themselves certain physical pleasures (*foods or marriage or sex*) or by so emphasizing spirituality that they get to do whatever they desire in the area of physical pleasures.

So, Paul is reminding Timothy that *God created these things to be received with thanksgiving by those who* know Him (3) and use those *things* as He intended (*marriage, sex, foods, etc.*). He does so, not by appealing to some familiar NT situation: for instance, Peter's *vision* when he was sent to evangelize the Gentile, *Cornelius* (Act.10). Nor did he appeal to Jesus's affirmation that Mar.7**18**... *whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him*, and Mark added, **19**... (*thus [declaring] all foods clean*). Paul appealed all the way back to creation, saying, **4**... *everything created by God is good.* Gen.9**3** *Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. And as I gave you the green plants, I give you everything.* And this recalls His original giving of *the green plants*—Gen.1**30**... *to every beast of the earth and to every bird of the heavens and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. ...*

Paul is correcting the false teachers by going back to God's own *words* at creation. And what he says next is just what we'd expect to hear. He gives us a reason for his statement just made, **3** ... *that God created all things to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.* And then here it is: **4** *For everything created by God is good* (a good God could do no other!), *and nothing is to be rejected—nothing is to be considered taboo* (Guthrie 107). When I read this, I can't help but think about the forbidding red meat on Fridays, or worse, required celibacy for priests in the Catholic tradition. How much trouble has that generated for the church throughout the centuries? **4** ... *Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.* It's made holy as His *people* believe His *word* and receive His *good* (*gifts*) with (*prayers*) of *thanksgiving*. Where do we do this most consistently? Before meals. We receive with *thanksgiving* what our Lord provides, and I'm confident I've seen Him sanctify much in my lifetime! There are many different strange *foods* I've eaten just trusting God to sanctify them for my use!

Bottom line: *there is relentless competition with godliness in this life—invisible, but very real.*

GOOD SERVANTS HELP FIGHT THIS BATTLE BY TRAINING IN GODLINESS. – 6-10

6 *If you put these things we've just discussed 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, not the different doctrine (1:3) you're called to refute, Timothy.* Lay out this teaching like stepping stones through a minefield (Guthrie 108). That's the image here. To *put these things before the brothers* literally means *to set or put under, to support* (WSDNT). If you *support the brothers (and sisters)* with this teaching, that **4** ... *everything created by God is good... if it is received with thanksgiving*, thus refuting the *different doctrine* (1:3) that's being taught, *you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus*, and you yourself will be *training in the good doctrine you have followed. This is your means of growth as well, Timothy!*

7 *Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. ...* Paul is quite concerned about Timothy's not getting caught up in these *irreverent* (4:7; 6:20), *silly myths* (1:4; 4:7). In 14 he refers to *endless genealogies (that) promote speculations*. In 6:20 it's *irreverent babble and contradictions!* He addresses this issue at the beginning, middle, and end of this letter! **7** *Have nothing to do with (any of it, Paul says). Rather train yourself for godliness; 8 for while bodily training is of some value, we'd all agree, godliness is of value in every way, something we don't always see, or remember,*

as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. It pays dividends in time and eternity. What else does that?!

Godliness, *εὐσέβεια*, literally means well-directed reverence (WSDNT). There is a word for God-directed reverence, *θεοσέβεια*, which Paul used back in 2¹⁰. But *εὐσέβεια* is wider in its meaning. It was used of Cornelius before he came to faith. He was a devout man who feared God (Act.10:2). So it can mean devout or pious even for an unbeliever. But for those who are in Christ, *εὐσέβεια*, godliness means our reverence is directed to the Father, in the Son, by the Spirit!

So, what does that look like? Practicing, pressing, sweating to live in a reverence worthy of God, rooted in sheer hunger and thirst for Him and His Kingdom, knowing that because of His grace, not one ounce of our effort will be wasted! **8** For... bodily training is of some value, but 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 (we labor (WSDNT), athletic fatigue (Guthrie 110)) and strive, why, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. The living God is the Sustainer of life for all. Also, if anyone will be eternally saved, He's the only One Who can do it. And He's surely the Savior of those who do believe! Our hope is set on Him alone. And living in light of that hope is called godliness, well-directed reverence. And we spend ourselves training toward it, to overcome the world! (1Jo.5:4)

NOTHING SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO IMPEDE THIS TRAINING. – 11-16

Paul opens this paragraph by charging Timothy to **11** Command and teach these things. And then he proceeds to list several things that could keep him from doing so. It could be his age (12). Though he was no young man any longer (*νεότητος* may indicate any age up to forty years [Guthrie 111]), he was younger than Paul, and he may've been disrespected a bit on that basis. But look how Paul addresses that. **12** Let no one despise you for your youth... You can't stop them from despising you, but it doesn't have to get in your way. Live above it, Timothy! That's sort of what Paul is saying. Instead of reacting with self-pity or bravado, ... set the believers an example, live your godliness before them—in speech, what you say, in conduct, how you act, in love, what motivates you, in faith, what strengthens and guides you, in purity, what characterizes you.

I remember starting out as a pastor at a higher profile church when I was twenty-six years old. I was called to shepherd a large subgroup of that congregation whose average age was a bit over thirty-one. 1Ti.4:12 meant a lot to me at that time. But you know what? It still does. People can perceive youthfulness in us of all different sorts—spiritual, emotional, social, even biblical and theological.

That perception can get in the way of our shepherding if we let it. And the answer to that is always to return to the *trustworthy saying*: **8** ... *godliness is of value in every way...*, **10** ... *(labor) and strive* toward it, standing firm in your *hope*! Keep using your spiritual *gift* in service to God, resting in the sufficiency of His grace and the surety of His (*promises*)!

That's what Paul says to Timothy here! This is his calling in Christ. This is his responsibility in Ephesus! **13** *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching. Keep doing your job, Timothy! Exercise the authority you've been given in the office (3:1) you fill!* **14** *Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given to you... by a sovereign God for His purpose to be fulfilled through you.* **15** *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, throw yourself into them! Nothing should be allowed to impede your training in godliness so that all may see your progress. Don't hide it! Let it show!* It's encouraging to everyone in the body to watch their pastors grow, confirming not only that God is still active among them, but also that no one is yet perfect in godliness—no one but Jesus! **16** *Keep a close watch on yourself, Timothy, and on the teaching. Persist in this, and here's a promise worth hearing: for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers. Your heavenly Father will work through you! He will use you—the gift He's given you—to achieve His purpose in the church, for salvation can come only from Him!*

CONCLUSION

What a blessing this *fitly spoken word* must have been to Timothy, this refreshing reassurance and direction. Ephesus was no easy place to minister! We can read about the beginning of that church in Act.19. It's quite a story! And it does sound like there needed to be a bit of a pep-talk to refocus Timothy's eyes on the Source and strength of his authority, the reliability of his calling, and his equipping for that calling. The **14** ... *gift... which was given (him) by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hand on (him)* was sufficient to the task.

But you know what, my friends. Warrenville is no easier than Ephesus! *Competition* still rages, generated by the enemy of our souls! But the same God who called and (*gifted*) and made (*promises*) to Timothy in his day has called and (*gifted*) us in our day. He's called and (*gifted*) me. He's called and (*gifted*) you. And He still makes us the same (*promises*)! Each of our (*gifts*) is sufficient for His calling in our lives, so that His church, today, can achieve His purpose just as it did back then. And His *promise* of salvation, the fulfillment of our blessed *hope* in Him, is just as real and reliable for us as it was for Timothy!

Can you imagine how exciting it was, sitting with the church at Ephesus just after the middle of the first century, hearing a letter from the Apostle Paul to the pastor he'd sent to help your church? Can you imagine what it was like to hear these *words* for the first time? Knowing what it was like in your city, knowing the spiritual warfare that has raged between the supporters of the long-established Temple of Artemis and the newly-established church of *the living God*? Can you imagine, as a result, wondering about something so basic as whether it's okay to eat the meat you bought at the grocery store today?

Can you imagine the confusion when some respected members of your body begin to tell you that there really is something wrong with that? You really can't *eat* it and still be a Christian! You can't *do* this! You can't *have* that! And you know what happened to so-and-so who did eat, don't you?! Tsk, tsk!

Can you imagine then hearing that that all your pastor needs to do to *be a good servant of Christ Jesus is put before you (the stepping stones)* of belief and trust in the (*goodness*) of God to sanctify all things for your use, and that you can then *eat, use, do* things, confidently, with *thanksgiving* to Him? Can you imagine hearing that if your pastor will press on in this *teaching*, resolutely standing against the flow of life in this place, and if he will help you do the same, he, and you, can be confident of receiving God's salvation and being delivered from all this mess? Can you imagine?

Do you feel the blessing right now, today, of God's *word* through Paul to Timothy, to the Ephesian church, and to us? Do you hear the call to press on toward *godliness*, and service to His Kingdom by using your (*gifts*) as part of His church? Do you hear the need to stand firm, together, against the distortions and misdirections of the gospel in our day? Then you've now encountered some personal experience that helps you understand Pro.25¹¹ *A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver.*