

**“IMMERSE YOURSELF IN THESE THINGS”**

**I. Introduction**

- A. We sometimes hear of “immersion” experiences, especially when it comes to something like learning a foreign language.
- B. The idea is that the best way to develop a facility in a new language is to be put in a situation in which you will be forced to use that language all the time.
- C. In our text, Paul is telling Timothy that the best way for him to develop skill in ministry is to immerse himself in the doctrine that he is called to proclaim.
- D. While the most direct application of a passage like this is to those who serve in the office of minister, the things that are said here also apply to every believer in Jesus Christ.
- E. This should be clear in light of verse 12, where Timothy is told that his life is to be an example for other believers.

**II. Train Yourself for Godliness**

- A. Our text begins with Paul telling Timothy that he will be “a good servant of Christ Jesus” if he teaches the saints the things that are being discussed in this letter.
  - 1. The Greek term that is translated here as “servant” can have several different meanings depending on the context.
  - 2. Sometimes it means “servant” in a general sense, sometimes it refers to the office of minister, and sometimes it refers to the office of deacon.

3. Given the context of this passage, the best translation of this term here is probably “minister.”
  4. That being said, it is good to be reminded that ministers of the gospel are by definition *servants* of Christ.
  5. The task of the minister is not to make a name for himself, but to exalt the name of Christ and to point people to him.
  6. And while not every Christian is a minister of Christ in the official sense of the word, every Christian certainly is a servant of Christ in a general sense.
  7. Your calling, in every area of your life, is not to serve yourself and advance your interests.
  8. Your calling is to serve Jesus and to bring honor and glory to his name, adorning the gospel by your manner of conduct.
- B. Our text also tells us that a good minister or good servant of Christ is trained in “good doctrine.”
1. Adherence to sound doctrine is one of the key themes in 1 Timothy.
  2. This is not surprising when we consider that Paul wrote this letter at a time when the apostolic era was drawing to a close.
  3. The Pastoral Epistles emphasize that the church’s ongoing spiritual health requires that it remain fixed upon its apostolic foundation.
  4. And in order for that to happen, the church’s ministers need to be loyal to the faith that was once for all delivered to the saints.
  5. This is why, when ministers are ordained in our denomination, we are required to answer this question in the affirmative: “Do you promise to be zealous and faithful in maintaining the truths of the gospel and the purity, the peace, and the unity of the church...?”

6. Notice the order of these things that ministers must promise to maintain.
  7. Truth and purity are mentioned before peace and unity.
  8. The order is not random.
  9. One of the mistakes that ministers and churches frequently make is to sacrifice truth and purity for the sake of peace and unity.
  10. To do that is to perpetuate a false peace and a false unity.
  11. Genuine Christian unity is built on the foundation of God's truth.
  12. This is why Paul says that the church's ministers need to be trained in the words of the faith.
- C. There are two kinds of training in the opening verses of our passage.
1. The Greek word that is translated as "being trained" in verse 6 is not the same word as "train" and "training" in verses 7 and 8.
  2. While those terms have athletic associations, the verb that is used in verse 6 has to do with the nourishment and nurture of a child.
  3. The tense of this verb indicates that it is an ongoing activity.
  4. This tells us that ministers need to be regularly nourished by God's truth if we are going to be faithful in our ministry.
  5. As John Stott puts it, "All the best teachers have themselves remained students. They teach well because they learn well." [116]
  6. This principle also holds true for believers in general.
  7. If you want to be a useful servant of Christ, you need to be drawing regular nourishment from the Word and from the doctrine that it contains.

- D. While ministers need to be immersed in God's Word, we also need to recognize and avoid things that are not true.
1. To use Paul's language, we are to have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths.
  2. This would seem to be another reference to the false teaching that was plaguing the church in Ephesus.
  3. Such things are spiritual poison, which is why they need to be avoided.
  4. Again, this is something that is not just true for ministers but for all Christians.
  5. One does not need to look very far in our culture to find things that are irreverent and silly, things that are dishonoring to God and detrimental to our growth in grace.
  6. We need to be careful that we are not ensnared by such things.
- E. As I mentioned earlier, in verses 7 and 8, the terms "train" and "training" are drawn from the realm of athletics.
1. Paul is using physical exercise and conditioning as a metaphor for our ongoing discipleship.
  2. Athletes who want to excel in their sports need to put in the hard work of training.
  3. The saying "No pain, no gain" may seem trite, but it is true.
  4. The same principle holds true with regard to training in godliness.
  5. You will not become a godly person without spending time in prayer, without being a student of God's Word, without participating in public worship.

6. And as Paul explains, godliness is far more important than physical fitness or bodily health.
  7. While physical exercise only has value for this life, spiritual training has value both for the present life and for the life to come.
  8. Godliness makes us spiritually productive in this life, and it prepares us for eternity.
  9. This is why Paul says that he toils and strives after godliness.
  10. There are many things for which we toil and strive, but godliness should be the thing that we hold in higher regard than anything else.
  11. Is this reflected in your life?
  12. Do your strivings testify to the fact that your ultimate hope is set not on the things of this world, but on the living God?
- F. At the end of verse 10, Paul refers to God in a manner that might sound peculiar to us.
1. He calls God “the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.”
  2. What does Paul mean by this?
  3. He cannot be saying that all people will be saved.
  4. We know this because he clearly says elsewhere in his writings that some people will bear the penalty of eternal destruction in hell. (2 Thess. 1:9)
  5. Some interpreters, including John Calvin, suggest that in this verse the term “Savior” is not being used in a redemptive sense but is simply referring to the benevolence that God extends to all men.

6. If this is correct, the overall point would be that God shows his kindness to all people in a general manner and shows his special care to Christians.
7. While this interpretation is possible, it would be the only instance in Paul's writings where the term "Savior" is used in this way.
8. All the other uses of this word refer to God as the source of salvation, and only those who believe the gospel have God as Savior in this sense.
9. That being the case, it seems much more likely that the phrase "the Savior of all people" means "the Savior of all *sorts* of people."
10. As for the phrase "especially of those who believe," a strong case can be made that in this context it should be translated this way: "that is, of those who believe."
11. If this is correct, then Paul's overall point here is simply that the living God is bringing people from all races, all places, and all walks of life to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

### III. Devote Yourself to the Church's Public Ministry

- A. This brings us to verse 11, where Paul begins a new paragraph in the same way that he began the preceding one: by telling Timothy to command and teach these things to God's people.
  1. This task was made especially challenging for Timothy because of his youth.
  2. Based upon what we know of Timothy from the rest of the New Testament, he was probably in his mid-30s when this letter was written.
  3. In the ancient world, people were considered to be in the stage of youth up to the age of 40.

4. And in that culture, the young were not held in as high regard as those who were more advanced in years.
  5. In some ways it was the inverse of our society, a society that in many respects takes its cues from its youth.
  6. In Timothy's context, his youth was a liability for ministry.
  7. Yet note how Paul tells him to overcome this.
  8. Timothy is not to be heavy-handed in asserting his authority.
  9. Instead, he is to demonstrate his maturity by his words, by his conduct, by his Christian character.
  10. He is to live an exemplary Christian life, the kind of life that will serve as a model for other believers.
  11. This is the goal towards which every Christian should be striving.
  12. God does not want you to remain a perpetual infant or adolescent in the faith.
  13. He calls you to grow up to be a mature man or woman of God.
- B. Timothy is also instructed to devote himself to the public reading of Scripture and to the exhortation and teaching that should accompany the public reading of God's Word.
1. Here we see that, as important as the private study of Scripture is, private study is never to be looked upon as a replacement for the public ministry of the Word.
  2. In the first century, the public reading and exposition of Scripture was a key aspect of synagogue worship.
  3. We see an example of this in Luke 4, where Jesus is invited to give the public reading and exposition of Scripture at the synagogue in

Nazareth.

4. The early church incorporated this practice into its worship.
  5. The first Christians were even instructed to read the apostolic writings in their public gatherings for worship, a fact that tells us that those writings were deemed to be on par with Old Testament Scripture. (see Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27)
  6. Paul's emphasis upon the importance of the public reading of the Word of God reminds us that the authoritative basis of all Christian teaching is Scripture.
  7. The job of the minister is not to entertain people, or to make people feel good, or to tell people how they can have a better life.
  8. The job of the minister is to expound the Word of God with all faithfulness, setting forth Jesus Christ as the author and finisher of our faith.
- C. Paul next urges Timothy to fulfill his ministerial duties by reminding him that he has been gifted by God for the gospel ministry.
1. God provides for the church's ministry by calling and equipping men to serve in the special offices of minister, elder, and deacon.
  2. While this is something that continues to take place all throughout the church age, Paul's words in this text indicate that there were special circumstances attached to Timothy's call to the ministry.
  3. We are told in verse 14 that Timothy's gift was given to him "by prophecy."
  4. During the apostolic period, the gift of prophecy was still active in the church.
  5. As Paul says in Ephesians 2:20, the ministry of the New Testament prophets was bound up with the ministry of the apostles in giving



the foundational testimony upon which the church is being built.

6. Because Timothy was publicly set apart for ministry during that apostolic period, it was possible for prophetic utterances to be given to attest to Timothy's gifting for ministry.
  7. And while the prophetic element in Timothy's call was unique to that apostolic context, the act of ordination by a presbytery or "counsel of elders" is something that continues throughout the church age.
  8. The solemn laying on of hands by elders testifies that the church recognizes a man's calling and sets him apart as divinely gifted for the work of the ministry.
- D. The last two verses of the chapter once again emphasizes the importance of continuing in sound doctrine.
1. Timothy is to be so absorbed in the things that he teaches that his life is transformed by them.
  2. This brings to mind the lines from Calvin's *Institutes* where he says, "We have given the first place to the doctrine in which our religion is contained, since our salvation begins with it. But it must enter our heart and pass into our daily living, and so transform us into itself that it may not be unfruitful for us." [3.6.4]
  3. Again, this is not only true for ministers and other church officers.
  4. All believers are to be transformed by the ongoing renewal of their minds.
  5. And because the church is the pillar and buttress of truth, it is vital that the church maintain the truth and keep it from being tarnished by scandal.
  6. This is why Paul exhorts Timothy to keep a close watch on himself and on the church's teaching ministry.

7. Paul even goes so far as to say that if Timothy persists in this, he will save both himself and his hearers.
  8. While salvation is ultimately the work of the Lord, God uses the ministry of men to carry out his saving work.
- E. One final thing to note about this passage is that Paul refers to those who are being saved as “hearers.”
1. This underscores that the primary means of grace that our Lord employs to carry out his saving purpose in the lives of his people is the faithful preaching of the Word.
  2. This is why the Scottish minister William Still offered these words of advice in a book that he wrote for pastors: “Your quiet persistence will be a sign that you believe God has a purpose of grace for this people, and that this purpose of grace will be promoted, not by gimmicks, or stunts, or new ideas, but by the Word of God released in preaching by prayer.” [*The Work of the Pastor*, 25]
  3. This is why it is so important for Christians to make every effort to be present at the church’s public worship services each week.
  4. If you want to be a good servant of Christ, you need to be immersed in good doctrine.
  5. The the principle context for that kind of “immersion experience” is public worship, where the Word of God is taught by those who have been gifted and authorized to do so.
  6. Consider these words from the Anglican minister J.C. Ryle, with which I will conclude: “We shall all do well to remember the charge... ‘Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some is.’ (Heb. 10:25.) Never to be absent from God’s house on Sundays, without good reason, — never to miss the Lord’s Supper when administered in our own congregation, — never to let our place be empty when means of grace are going on, this is one way to be a growing and prosperous Christian. The very

sermon that we needlessly miss, may contain a precious word in season for our souls. The very assembly for prayer and praise from which we stay away, may be the very gathering that would have cheered, and stablished, and quickened our hearts. We little know how dependent our spiritual health is on little, regular, habitual helps, and how much we suffer if we miss our medicine." [J.C. Ryle, *Expository Thoughts on John*, vol. 3, 454-455]