

From the Pulpit of the Japanese Baptist Church of North Texas
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Training for Godliness

1 Timothy 4:6-9

4:6 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.

4:7 Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness;

4:8 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.

4:9 The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance.

I had fortune to meet three great preachers when I came to U. S. The first one was Dr. W. A. Criswell. I've heard a episode about him. A boy listened to Dr. Criswell's preaching from a car radio with his parents. He suddenly asked to his father. "Daddy, is God talking now through radio?" Dr. Criswell preached as a messenger of God, like a prophet of the Old Testament.

The next person was Dr. John MacArthur. He uses not "Pastor" but "Pastor and Teacher" for his title. He teaches the text of the Bible faithfully and leads us to the Biblical truth when he preaches.

The third preacher was Dr. Charles Swindoll. He preaches things relevant to the daily life and problems of life. But he always invites us to the Word of God from ordinal matters. In the first year of my study in U. S. I was so attracted by his preaching, and I listened

eagerly to his radio program, “Insight for Living” and his tapes. I also bought his several books.

To me, the most precious one of his many books is “So, You Want to Be Like Christ? — Eight Essentials to Get You There.” When it was published in 2005, I bought it and read it. I couldn’t wait to introduce this book to the congregation, and I quoted a paragraph from the book in my sermon on July 10 of the year.

After this book I read Richard Foster’s “Celebration of Discipline.” I also read James Houston’s “Joyful Exiles” in 2006. Then I took an extension course of “Christian Spirituality” at a university. Rev. Dr. Kevin Joyce was the professor. Since I met Rev. Joyce, I continued to learn from him by attending his seminars and retreats while I was in California. This became a major turning point of my journey of faith.

The book, “So, You Want to Be Like Christ?” by Chuck Swindoll was the start point of this journey. But any books written by men never be replaced with the Bible even though they are highly valued. The books are only aids for us to go seek the Word of God, to understand it, and to put it into practice. I will often quote from Chuck Swindoll and other spiritual leaders, however, please focus on the Bible text. Since the Word of God is always the final source of our faith.

1. Godliness As the Goal

Chuck Swindoll picked 1 Timothy 4:7 as the theme verse of his book. It says, “Rather train yourself for godliness.” The New Japanese Bible uses “*keiken*” instead of “*shinjin*” of the Colloquial Bible. I think the Japanese word, “*keiken*” is more popular and better much to

the English word, “godliness.” I will use “*keiken*” for “godliness” through out my preaching.

Then, what is “godliness?” The New Testament was written in Greek, and the original word was translated into “godliness,” and other words in English. And, “godliness” means the sincere heart to God and the life-style fearing God. The literal meaning of “godliness” is that we become like God. This means that we imitate God as in 1 Peter 1:15, “as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct,” and 2 Peter 1:4, “so that through them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire.”

In Japan people easily call those who can do excellent jobs “gods.” There have been “god of learning” and “god of art” since old era of Japan, and people have faith in them. There are even “god of baseball” and “god of soccer” in modern Japan. Recently many people said, “*kami-tteru*,” or “divinely” or “miraculously” in English when someone did an excellent job.

But the Bible teaches that there is a great distance between God the Creator and men the creature and deep chasm between holy God and sinful men. It is idle worship to make men gods. It is arrogant and awful thought if we want to become “gods.” However, at the same time, the Bible teaches that sinful men would be sanctified from sins and partake the holiness of God. Since men were specially created in “the image of God” among His creatures, men can get back “the image of God,” which have once destroyed by sin, and be changed to those who are loved by God and love God.

It is said that salvation is to be forgiven our sins and to be given the

status of the children of God when we believe in Jesus Christ. It is true. However this statement describes only a half of the salvation. The salvation of Jesus Christ gives us not only the forgiveness, but also sanctification of sin. It gives us righteous life. It gives us not only the status of God's children, but also the new birth with the nature of God's children. It gives us growth as children of God. We become more like God's children. These are inseparable elements of the salvation.

The salvation means that we become not only the believer in God, but the men of "godliness" by living nearer to God. "Godliness" is an essential part of the salvation of Jesus Christ, and the goal of every believer in Christ. Therefore, 2 Peter says, "you may become partakers of the divine nature," and continues, "For this very reason, make every effort to supplement your faith with virtue, and virtue with knowledge, and knowledge with self-control, and self-control with steadfastness, and steadfastness with godliness, and godliness with brotherly affection, and brotherly affection with love."

Do you firmly have this goal to become "godly?" Is this YOUR goal of your life of faith? Do we seeking for the goal as a church? We have to ask ourselves in the beginning of the year.

This goal is too high for us. But it is not what we cannot achieve. Because Jesus Christ made this possible. Though He was the Son of God, he became a man. God Himself crossed over the un-accessible distance between God and men. The God Son became a man to draw us to God. In Him we can partake God's nature.

Moreover, Jesus Christ lived as a servant of God. He showed us what is the godly life trusting God in his life on earth. Therefore we

can say, “godliness” is “to imitate God,” more specifically, “to imitate Christ.” Jesus Christ is the Savior of those who believe him, and he is the example of the believers. As Hebrews 12:2 says, let us fix our eyes on “Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith.” Let us also give thanks for the grace of God who gave us this great goal and leads the way to the goal.

2. Godliness Through Training

The Bible commands us, “train yourself for godliness.” Because we cannot reach the goal of “godliness” with do nothing. The trend of the world is against “godliness.” People will recognize us if we have ability, power, fame, and wealth, but they never appreciate our “godliness.” They think that “godliness” is the most un-useful thing in the world, and make it fun of it.

And, the people of the world persecutes Christians who has no common value with them. There is the persecution not only in the early church, but now. We know that there is the persecution to church and Christians in the country in which there is no religious freedom, but there is the different type of persecution in Japan and even in U. S. Christians may have cold reception or neglect in work place or private circle of people. The saying of Timothy 3:12 is very true. “Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

And faithful Christians also have been suffered not only by the world, but also by those who has no Christian doctrines and conducts though they confessed that they were Christians. Therefore 2 Timothy 3:5 says, “(the people) having the appearance of godliness, but

denying its power. Avoid such people.”

In any case it is not easy to seek after a goal through the whole life. It may be the most difficult goal to be “godly.” Therefore, we need the training for godliness.

In original language of “training” is “*gymnasia*.” An English word “gymnasium” came from this Greek word. In U. S. almost of all people go to gym or fitness centers. When you go to a gym or fitness center, a coach evaluate the conditions of your body and figure out your strength and weakness. The coach suggests you the training goal, and determines the training schedule. As long as you go to gym, you have to follow your training schedule. In the first century there were no fitness centers, but the athletes of Olympic had a special training. When the Bible mentions “training for godliness,” it points the spiritual training by spiritual coach with the goal and schedule.

The Bible says, “for while bodily training is of some value.” This does not ignore the physical wellness. We need more exercise in modern life-style in U. S. It’s important physical training for keeping health. Actually many are very eager to do so. They spent time and money unsparingly. How wonderful if we do the spiritual training with the same eagerness. As the Bible says, “godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come,” the training for godliness promises us the richness of present and future life.

When Chuck Swindoll was the president of the Dallas Theological Seminary, Mr. Tom Laundry, former head-coach of Dallas Cowboys, was serving a board member. Chuck Swindoll wrote his word in his book. He was asked by someone, “What is your job as a head coach of

professional football players?” during a breakfast meeting. Mr. Landry answered, “My job is to get men to do what they don’t want to do in order to achieve what they have always wanted to achieve.” It is to become Super Bowl champion for the football players what they want to achieve. However, they need to repeat basic trainings to win the game. Professional players tend to do more advanced and distinguish play. Mr. Landry introduced very creative attack and difference formations to the game, but he always value the basic training which players do not want to do. He made a lot of efforts to get men to do what they don’t want to do. He led the team to the Super Bowl championship while he was the head coach.

When I read Mr. Landry’s words, I thought that the pastor’s job is very similar to the football coach’s. Almost all Christians accept the value of “training for godliness” or “spiritual training.” But, only little amount of time is set aside for the training in individual’s life or in church activities. We spent time and energy for what we want to do and for our pleasure. Our heart may be satisfied with them. But it is just superficial satisfaction. Our spirit is never satisfied with them. Listen to your inner voice. The believers must listen to the voice of their spirit, saying, “I want to come close to God. I want to become like Christ. I want to seek the goal of godliness.” Follow the voice. Let’s seek the goal together encouraging each other.

God commands each of us, “Rather train yourself for godliness.” Let’s answer to the Word of God by faith. What and how should we do for seeking the goal as an individual, as a family, and as a church? Let’s seek His will and follow His guidance.

(Prayer)

Heavenly Father, You clearly showed Your will at the first Sunday of this year. “Rather train yourself for godliness.” How can I answer to Your command? What can we do as a church? Lord, give us Your answer in prayer. We pray this in the name of Lord Jesus.