

1 Timothy 4:7

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

Analysis

But refuse profane and old wives' fables (τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ, tous de bebēlous kai graōdeis mythous paraitou)—'reject the profane and silly myths.' Bebēlos means unholy, worldly, common—opposite of sacred. Graōdēs (only here in NT) means 'old-womanish,' characteristic of superstitious tales. Mythos are myths, fables, fictitious stories.

And exercise thyself rather unto godliness (γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν, gymnaze de seauton pros eusebeian)—'train yourself for godliness.' Gymnazō means to exercise naked (as Greek athletes did), to train rigorously. Eusebeia (godliness, piety) appears 10 times in 1 Timothy—it's a key theme.

Paul contrasts futile speculation with disciplined godliness. The false teachers wasted energy on genealogies and myths (1:4); Timothy must rigorously train in practical holiness. Spiritual growth requires the same focused discipline as athletic training—intentional, sustained, goal-oriented effort.

Historical Context

The Ephesian false teachers mixed Jewish genealogies, Gnostic speculation, and Greek philosophy into an elaborate but useless system (1:4, Titus 1:14). These 'old wives' fables' distracted from gospel simplicity and practical godliness. Paul insists Timothy reject such novelties and focus on the spiritual disciplines that produce Christlike character.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. What 'profane myths' (useless speculations) distract contemporary Christians from practical godliness?
2. How does spiritual training resemble athletic discipline—what specific practices does it involve?
3. Why does Paul emphasize practical godliness over intellectual speculation in combating false teaching?

Interlinear Text

τοὺς δὲ βεβήλους καὶ γραώδεις μύθους παραιτοῦ
G3588 **But** **profane** **and** **old wives** **fables** **refuse**
G1161 G952 G2532 G1126 G3454 G3868

γύμναζε δὲ σεαυτὸν πρὸς εὐσέβειαν·
exercise **But** **thyself** **rather unto** **godliness**
G1128 G1161 G4572 G4314 G2150

Additional Cross-References

1 Timothy 1:4 (References God): Neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith: so do.

2 Timothy 2:16 (References God): But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Titus 2:12 (References God): Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world;

Titus 3:9 (Parallel theme): But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain.

2 Timothy 2:23 (Parallel theme): But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

Hebrews 5:14 (Parallel theme): But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.

Acts 24:16 (References God): And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

1 Timothy 6:11 (References God): But thou, O man of God, flee these things; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

2 Timothy 4:4 (Parallel theme): And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.

1 Timothy 6:20 (Parallel theme): O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called: