

## **Notes from Sermon given by Ian Stackhouse - Sunday October 22<sup>nd</sup> 2006 1 Timothy 4:6-16**

I have turned 42 this year and have recently realised that I can no longer fully identify with Timothy as I used to do. I am nearer to Paul's age than to Timothy's, but I am not depressed about this or entering a mid-life crisis, but I have resolved to get fit, not in a gym, but perhaps with some kind of running regime, because 'physical training has some value'.

However, what shocks or offends us in this passage is that in order to be spiritually fit we have to do exercise, and enter a regime of discipline. Christianity is something to be worked at, not because that earns favour, because everything is by grace, but because if you are going to grow you have to submit to a life of discipline like a runner. Now this does not conform to the modern church's idea that Christianity is about the presence of God, about the love of God surrounding me. But here we find that Christianity is something to be worked at like piano scales. 'Train yourselves' *gymnaze (Gk)* yourself to be godly. Get into the gym of God to become the person God wants you to be.

But how? Paul does not say explicitly, but he does refer to hard work and labour or struggles (the word used for wrestling), but most of us think that he refers in the word 'training' to prayer, preaching and teaching, pastoral care and evangelism so that we are all formed into the likeness of Christ. The Congregation is shaped by the Word of God, like a sculptor working away at a slab of stone has a vision of what's inside that stone.

That's the goal - the life we have in God, our eternal destiny. Physical training is short-sighted, as it is only to do with this life, but training in godliness is for the life to come. 'The Earth is Heaven's workshop, Heaven's womb.' God created the earth in order to work on us, but the power of death and decay is so strong that the shaping of our lives must involve the energies of leaders and the Congregation. Coming to Church is WORK. We must give ourselves to the truths, to sound teaching and reject godless myths, like the Da Vinci Code, or Richard Dawkins' book 'The God Delusion'. Christianity is taught, not just caught, and this is our FIRST priority; if we are going to survive, then we have to commit ourselves wholeheartedly to the Word of God, allowing it to shape our lives. Regular exposure to the Scriptures will change your life. The modern church by and large is not doing this - 'sermons are too long' - but what is 30-40 minutes of preaching as compared with the hours of drivel that is pumped into our homes on TV! This Church will preach the Word week after week - we want the whole counsel of God. "Sermonettes lead to Christianettes"

Let the Scriptures judge you. If you don't understand it then that is good, because they are bigger than you, and you need to come back, not to be entertained or to get something out of it, but to press in more deeply, to enter into it. And let what you say match the example of your life with absolute purity.

We are about to set up next term Bible Instruction 'from cradle to grave', with Elizabeth Hodgkinson and I presenting plans for a whole programme of spiritual formation and education. We will not survive, unless we give ourselves to the Word of God.