

“Living For Christ In A Confused and Confusing World”

A Study of Paul’s Letters to Timothy

Sermon #8

“The Responsibility for the Truth!”

1 Timothy 4:1-16

Chapter three ends with a reference to the church as “pillar and foundation of truth.” The preoccupation of chapter four is a warning against the dangers of false teaching and denial the truth of the gospel. According to verse one, in spite of the church’s role as a guardian of the truth, “some will depart from the faith.”

In his responsibility to the truth Timothy is to carry out three duties.

First, He is To Stand For the Truth (vv. 1-5)

In verse one Paul warns Timothy about the causes of error and how to detect it. “Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”

First, Paul begins by stating that authority for his statement about this false teaching is the Holy Spirit “now the spirit expressly says.” The expression “the spirit says” is much like saying “*the scripture says*.” Paul here claims explicit divine authorization for his denunciation of the false teachers.

Secondly the timing is expressly stated as “in the latter times.” This is not necessarily a reference to “the Last Days” but to some time after it was written. Like many Bible prophecies it will have a near fulfillment (among the Ephesian believers) and a later fulfillment which will happen many times throughout Church history.

Third, he deals with causes of this false teaching. John Stott in his commentary outlines three causes of this false teaching.^{1[1]} The causes of this error are three-fold. First, we are told that it is diabolical in its source. Those who introduce a contrived holiness (asceticism) are acting under the instigation of the Devil. Behind the false teachers is the activity of demonic forces. The Bible reveals that the Satan is not only as a tempter, enticing people into sin, but as a deceiver seducing people into error. This is why otherwise intelligent and educated people can swallow fantastic speculations of cults and the New Age movement. (reincarnation, channeling, harmonic convergence and spirit guides).

One example is a cult called “Heaven’s Gate” headed by a man named Marshall Applegate and Heaven’s Gate Cult. In March of 1997 Applegate and 38 other members of the cult committed suicide in the belief that in so doing they could join members of “the next level above human” on a UFO

^{1[1]} John Stott. Guard the Truth: The Message of 1 Timothy and Titus. (Downer’s Grove: Ill., Intervarsity Press, 1996) pp. 110-111]

supposedly hidden behind the Hale-Bopp Comet. What other explanation besides demonic deception could account for otherwise rational people believing such drivel.

Secondly, there is a human cause. This demon inspired doctrines require human involvement to gain entry into the church. Verse two says that this individuals “speaking lies in hypocrisy.” If we are not careful we will pass over this phrase without realizing what a horrible condition it suggests. Their “hypocrisy” is a deliberate pretense and a “lie” is a deliberate falsehood thus they are double liars! These false teachers do not even believe themselves what they are teaching!

Third, the cause is a moral failure. The second portion of verse two says, “having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.” The phrase in verse two translated “seared with a hot iron” translate the Gr. Word (*kausteriazō*) from which we get the medical term cauterize. When skin, nerve or superficial tumor is cauterized, it is destroyed by burning and so rendered insensitive.

“A little girl in London held up her broken wrist and said, “Look, Mommy, my hand is bent the wrong way!” There were no tears in her eyes. She felt no pain whatever. That was when she was four years old.

When she was six, her parents noticed that she was walking with a limp. A doctor discovered that the girl had a fractured thigh. Still she felt no pain.

The girl is now fourteen years old. She is careful now, but occasionally looks at blisters and burns on her hands and wonders, “How did this happen?” She is insensitive to pain! Medical specialists are baffled by the case. It is called *ganglioneuropathy*.

There is another insensitiveness which is deadlier and more dangerous—insensitive-ness to sin! Paul said of this malady: “Having their consciences seared as with a hot iron” (I Tim. 4:2). Just as a cauterized conscience has been ‘anaesthetized’ or deadened. [Free Will Baptist - www.bible.org/illus/1Tim]

“Yet, in order for our conscience to be a truly safe guide, it is of equal importance that we allow it to be educated by the infallible standard of God’s word. In 1 Cor 4:4, Paul says, ‘My conscience is clear, but that does not make me innocent. It is the Lord who judges me’ (NIV). The Lord judges us by the infallible standard of His word (John 12:48). In order for our conscience, then, to function as God intended, we must allow it to be educated by the word of God. We must not intentionally or persistently violate it by doing what we believe is wrong. Finally, when we do violate it and thus feel guilty, we must correct our actions by repentance, confession and prayer.” [Joe L. Norton Ed. *Contending for the Faith: A Commentary ON 1 & 2 Tim, Titus, Philemon*. (Irving, TX: Contending for the Faith Pub., 1990) p. 63]

In standing against error Paul says (vv. 3-5). “Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (4) For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; (5) for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

In Ephesus two things stand out as symbols of a false religious lifestyle. (1) the forbidding of marriage and (2) urging avoidance of certain foods. More than twenty centuries have passed since then

and there are still many people who believe that they can earn God favor by adherence to these kinds of personal restrictions.

The Catholic church is presently in a great struggle to maintain its ancient requirement of a celibate priesthood.

But the conclusion of this teaching is that, to regard what God created as something unclean is sinful. To teach that abstaining from marriage and certain foods is the high road to closeness with God is blasphemy. To require that individuals who want to be 'good' Christians must abstain is dangerously false. Perhaps of great significance is the reminder at the end of verse three to "know the truth" the word translated "know" he is the strongest possible form of the word in Greek (*epegnokosin*) and is literally "fully know."

Secondly, He Is To Be A Good Servant of Jesus Christ (vv. 6-11)

"If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. (7) But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. (8) For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come."

The word "exercise" (v7) in "exercise yourself toward godliness" is a translation of the Greek word (*gumnazo*) which we get our *gymnastics* and *gymnasium* from. Paul says physical exercise has some value "profits a little." But training in godliness has unlimited potential both in this world and for all of eternity. As the Greek culture emphasized the dedicated of the body, Paul urged Timothy to exercise or discipline himself for the purpose of godliness.

The truth found in verse eight is so basic that in verse nine Paul calls it "faithful saying and worthy of full acceptance." And verse ten goes on to say, "For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. (11) These things command and teach."

The affirmation of verse nine refers back to verse eight rather than ahead to verse ten. In verse nine we find the third of five "faithful sayings" which occur in Paul's letters (1 Tim 1:15, 3:1, 4:9; 2 Tim 2:11, Titus 3:8). You will remember that we have previously said that these "faithful sayings" are the equivalent of when Jesus saying in the Gospels "Truly, truly or Verily, verily." When Jesus used those words he was saying, "Pay attention this is important!" That is what Paul is doing here! Each time Paul uses the words "this is a faithful saying" he is underlining a fundamental principle. The principle here is, *Bodily Exercise is of some value, but godliness is profitable for all things!*

Verse ten is problematic to us because of phrase "Savior of all men, especially of those who believe." In what sense is God savior of all men? Some have used this verse to justify universalism, the teaching that all men will eventually be saved. Others hold that this teaches that God is potentially the savior of all men, but actually only to those who believe.

Third, He Is To Take Heed to His Ministry (vv. 12-16)

First, he is to take heed to his ministry by, Establishing His Creditability (12a)

“Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”

In verse twelve “despise” means to treat with contempt. The combination of Timothy’s retiring nature and his relative youth made him a natural target for critics. Paul reminds Timothy that there are those who might be tempted to look down upon him for his youth, but they will not do so if they could admire his example. The greatest single tool of leadership is the power of a godly example that others can follow.

While it is true that we not control the attitude of others we can make sure that we give no occasion for offense. It is interesting to consider that the word (*neotes*) translated “youth” here is used to describe anyone less than forty. Timothy is probably about 35 years old at this time, but he is at least 30 years younger than Paul was at this time. Paul is described as “Paul the aged” (Philemon 9) and is probably about 65, but perhaps prematurely old from all that he has suffered in the ministry.

As far as age is concerned the point of this verse seems to be It’s What You Do—Not When You Do It That Counts!

For example - “Ted Williams, at age 42, slammed a home run in his last official time at bat.

Mickey Mantle, age 20, hit 23 home runs his first full year in the major leagues.

Golda Meir was 71 when she became Prime Minister of Israel.

William Pitt II was 24 when he became Prime minister of Great Britain.

George Bernard Shaw was 94 when one of his plays was first produced.

Mozart was just seven when his first composition was published.

Now how about this? Benjamin Franklin was a newspaper columnist at 16 and a framer of the United States Constitution when he was 81.

You’re never too young or too old if you’ve got talent. Let’s recognize that age has little to do with ability.” [Charles Swindoll. *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, p. 104]

Secondly, he is to take heed to his ministry by, Modeling The Things He Teaches.

Timothy is also reminded to “be an example to the believers.” He is literally told to continue to be an example. But not just an example “to” the believers but an example (*tuπος*) literally a pattern of what a believer is to be.

He is to be a good example in his public life (outward appearances). This is to be done first “in word” - he is to be careful and controlled in what he says. (Matt 12:34-37, James 1:26). The truth for pulpit and pew alike is that if we going to get ourselves in trouble it is with our mouths.

Proverbs 10:19 “In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, But he who restrains his lips is wise.”

Proverbs 18:13 “He who answers a matter before he hears it, It is folly and shame to him.”

Proverbs 13:3 “He who guards his mouth preserves his life, But he who opens wide his lips shall have destruction.”

He is also to be careful “in conduct” (James 3:13, 1 Peter 1:15).

He is also challenged to be a good example in his private life (in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity). Just one note here, “faith” here does not refer to belief, but to faithfulness or commitment!

“A good example of call to live our faith is found in the Christian walk of Will Houghton, a preacher who became the president of Moody Bible Institute during the 1940s, played a large role in the conversion of an agnostic who was contemplating suicide. The skeptic was desperate, but he decided that if he could find a minister who lived his faith he would listen to him. So he hired a private detective to watch Houghton. When the investigator’s report came back, it revealed that this preacher’s life was above reproach; he was for real. The agnostic went to Houghton’s church, accepted Christ, and later sent his daughter to Moody Bible Institute.” – [H.V.L. Our Daily Bread, September 29 - www.bible.org/illus/1Tim]

Third, he is to take heed to his ministry by, Be Devoted To the Word (v. 13)

“Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.”

When Paul says “give attention to” he is literally saying that Timothy is to continually give his attention to these things.

Paul says not only that there is to be a public reading but that he is to base his exhortation on the scripture read. Nehemiah 8:8 gives one of the clearest portraits of what a sermon is to be, “So they read in the law of God distinctly and gave the sense and caused them to understand the reading.” “It is taken for granted from the beginning that all Christian preaching would be expository preaching. That is drawn out of the text that was read.” [John Stott. Guard The Truth. (Downer’s Grove, ILL, InterVarsity, 1996) p. 122]

Next, he is to take heed to his ministry by, Being Committed To His Gifts (v. 14)

“Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership.”

Timothy is literally told to “*fan into flame*” the gift of God. Timothy’s gift is a once-for-all- time gift, an unchanging gift of God but it has to be cultivated and used.

Fifth, he is to take heed to his ministry by, Reflecting Continual Spiritual Growth

(v. 15) “Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.

John Stott says, "Some Christian leaders imagine that they have to appear perfect, with no visible flaws or blemishes. But there are at least two reasons why this is a mistake. First, it is hypocritical.... and secondly this pretence discourages people."

[Stott. p. 123]

Finally, He is take heed to his ministry by, Consistently Living Out the Truth (v. 16)

"Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you."

Paul says "take heed to yourself" because it is unfortunately possible to be involved in the things of the Lord and have no time left for the LORD himself.

He also reminds Timothy to give heed "to doctrine." We are sometime confused about the importance of doctrine to daily life. What we believe (doctrine) has everything to do with how we live, because what we believe about God determines how we live. If we do not live according to what we know of God and his word, we will either cease to believe it or attempt to change His word.