

1 Timothy

Chapter Four

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The previous chapter ended with a description of the body of Christ (the church) and its relationship to Christ (the hymn). Now he writes about teachers who will fall away from the true faith of the gospel and teach false doctrines. Some people are also critical of Timothy because of his youth and Paul begins to address this issue at the end of this chapter.

1Tim 4:1-2 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. ²by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

The Holy Spirit prophesied about people who will become apostates and teach false doctrines. Paul states that this will occur in later times but in verse three he slips to the present tense indicative of his understanding that this “later times” had already begun. Thus “later times” and “the last days” refers to the Christian era that began at the resurrection of Jesus Christ and will not end until His Second Advent. Paul knows this is happening because of the explicit teaching of the Holy Spirit. He may be referring to the prediction of Jesus:

Matt 24:10-11 "And at that time many will fall away and will deliver up one another and hate one another. ¹¹"And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many.

He could also be referring to his earlier prophecy:

Acts 20:29-30 "I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them.

2Thess 2:3 Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction,

He could also be claiming that the Holy Spirit was revealing such to him while he was writing the letter.

He begins by stating the causes of the apostasy in verses 1-2. He leaves no doubt about the cause of the errors for he clearly states that they are from deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. Some people begin to teach these erroneous messages and some gullible people begin to believe them. Behind the people making the statements Paul sees that the true source is from the Evil One and his spiritual followers. Jesus called Satan a liar and the father of lies:

John 8:44 "You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in

him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies.

People are no more like the devil than when they lie and participate in lies. The apostles often referred to human error having a devilish origin (2 Cor 2:11; Eph 6:11; 2 Thess 2:9; 1 John 2:18; Rev 13:14). Today we see all the fantastic religious teachings that intelligent people believe and we understand that they believe such because they have been deceived by a more intelligent source of their beliefs. There are two spirits at work in the world: *1John 4:6 We are from God; he who knows God listens to us; he who is not from God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error.* These evil spirits deceive and even blind people: *2Tim 2:26 and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.*

Gal 3:1 You foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was publicly portrayed as crucified?

2Cor 4:4 in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

In verse 2 we read that the secondary sources of these evil doctrines are the humans who have been deceived and are teaching these devilish doctrines. These people are hypocrites and liars, which is a terrible combination since hypocrisy is a deliberate pretense and lies are a deliberate falsehood. These people are the worst of deceivers for they do not even believe what they are teaching! He continues to tell us that the consciences of these deceivers have been made ineffective in guiding their actions. A use of the “branding iron” is to cauterize an area such as a nerve, which then becomes ineffective in doing its original task of warning a person of some danger such as the nearness of a fire that could cause damage. My neurosurgeon has suggested that a way to help the pain from my cervical pinched nerves is to inject the area with phenol which will permanently deaden the nerve so that I will not sense the pain. This is what has happened to the consciences of these deceivers. Their conscience has been rendered ineffective in warning them of ethical problems with their teachings. Such can happen to anyone if they continue to disregard the warnings of their consciences so that eventually there is no perceived warning. Paul warned of this problem in another of his writings: *Eph 4:19 and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality, for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.* Christians should constantly be aware of such a danger as was Paul: *Acts 24:16 "In view of this, I also do my best to maintain always a blameless conscience both before God and before men.* The downward spiral of sin usually starts small as each act leads to another and another and since the conscience becomes more and more seared, each becomes easier.

1 Tim 4:3-5 *men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods, which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For everything*

created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, if it is received with gratitude; ⁵for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

Now Paul moves to specifics regarding some of what these people were teaching. Sex and food are the two basic appetites of mankind but they can be twisted into lust and greed. Some people, such as the Gnostics, have taught about the evil of the physical body and that the solution is sexual abstinence and vegetarianism. Paul argues against this by giving a **theological test** and an ethical test. The theological test is given first and the ethical test is given in the next set of verses. People should not be allowed to argue against something that has been created by God. God instituted marriage and gave all food, including meat after the flood, for man. First it is created by God and called good. Next it is sanctified by prayer with thanksgiving. So anyone teaching against marriage and abstaining from some foods except during a fast is going against God. But **note carefully** that Paul says this applies to everything **created by God**. Not all that exists today was originally created by God but some have been tainted by the fall. An example is the claim by homosexuals that they were created by God and hence are acting according to their creation. But God made people male and female and instituted marriage only between man and woman.

Gen 1:27 And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

Gen 2:24 For this cause a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and they shall become one flesh.

Matt 19:4-6 And He answered and said, "Have you not read, that He who created them from the beginning made them male and female, ⁵and said, 'For this cause a man shall leave his father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife; and the two shall become one flesh'? ⁶"Consequently they are no longer two, but one flesh. What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate."

The Law was necessary because of the effects of sin and so it is not lawful to practice anything modified by the fall such as murder, coveting, stealing, etc. We should appreciate and be thankful to God for His creation in its original form and not claim some perversities as also created by God. Marriage between male and female was created by God and is sanctified by His Word so stating it.

1Tim 4:6-10 *In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. ⁷But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; ⁸for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. ¹⁰For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.*

Paul now begins the **ethical test** for what in life is precious. The theological test was to value what God has created. All that Paul teaches Timothy must be taught to the brothers and sisters in Christ over whom Timothy is their servant of Christ Jesus. The people Timothy teaches are to be constantly nourished on the words of the gospel and of sound doctrine. It is not enough for someone to just be taught by someone in some setting. The person must also digest the words and concepts so that they become an integral part of his conscience and a guide for all that he does and thinks. Few people attending a sermon then follow it with a deep study of the scriptures and their exegesis by the person giving the sermon. The teachings must burn our consciences so that they become more Christ-like with every passing day. There were many competing false teachings available to people in Ephesus and for people here today. They are to be judged by Scripture and quickly rejected if they do not pass testing. Worldly fables fit only for old women were the fairy tales that women told their children to help keep them from being a bother to others. They had no basis in Scripture but were based upon worldly tales of dragons, ghosts and things perhaps like are in the Harry Potter writings. The youth are still drawn to such fables and Ghost Hunters is a popular TV program. Christians are not to fill their minds with such but to feast upon the Word of God and digest its words. It is this “eating of His flesh” that Jesus referred (John 6:53-58) for His words must become part of our very being. In verse 9 he emphasizes that the exercise to become godlier is trustworthy and demands full acceptance.

Paul then tells Timothy to discipline himself for godliness. He contrasts this type of discipline with physical exercise. The Olympic Games were very strong in the area so Timothy would have been well aware of the physical exercise done by the athletes. Paul uses the Greek word *gymnazo* as the verb and *gymnasia* for the noun so the reference is clear even to English-based people. Paul says that such is of some importance and we all should do some to care for our bodies. But our soul is more important for it holds the promise for life here and hereafter. We are members of the Kingdom of Heaven (or God) now and forever so we should live now like citizens of that kingdom for the purified form of it will be how we live forever with God. We are then to study the word of God, to meditate on it, and to live it. Before our conversion there was no room for God but afterwards He is before all.

Verse 10 summarizes the importance of this spiritual exercise for it is for that purpose that Paul and his fellow missionaries labor and strive. Labor means to grow weary so he says that they work with great effort in their appointed tasks. Strive was used for an athletic contest so it meant to struggle to achieve the goal with all the available efforts the person possesses. The more one disciplines himself toward a goal the more he is able to labor and strive toward that goal for his stamina increases. Paul and his fellow workers have this enhanced ability to work for the gospel because they have placed their hope on the living God. Although this last part of the verse has caused a lot of discussion it certainly does not mean universalism for such would be against the other teachings of Paul. Some people think he means general salvation in the sense that the universe is kept functioning for the benefit of human life and “especially” then means that

spiritual salvation is only offered to believers. Others think that the Greek word *malista* that is translated “especially” should be translated “to be precise” so that Paul is saying that precisely only those who are believers can be spiritually saved. When he writes “living God” he is reiterating that God is not like the idols but he is actually living.

1Tim 4:11-14 Prescribe and teach these things. ¹²Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. ¹³Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. ¹⁴Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed upon you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

Paul tells Timothy that he is to properly exercise his authority as overseer of the churches in Ephesus and to teach the gospel (these things) properly. Timothy was probably in his early thirties so he must not let the false teachers criticize his youth. It is not unusual for youthful leaders to be treated with some contempt by older people who are under the authority of the younger person. Paul then tells Timothy how to prescribe and teach what he has been taught by Paul. He is not to be boastful, assertive or aggressive in attempts to bully his way over those who are jealous of him. He begins the description of how to lead with “but” in a strong tense as he gives him 6 ways to be the servant-leader of the other Christians. This is excellent advice for Christians in any situation. His speech, conduct, love, faith, purity, and example must be of someone who is under the authority of God, Who is love. I know of a relatively young political leader who tries to be autocratic to force people to do what he thinks should be done. Such actions will have the opposite effect, especially when done often. Actually the Christian’s speech, conduct, and example must reflect his love and faith as his conscience drives him to purity in all things.

The early church followed the example of the Jewish synagogue with public reading of Scripture at every worship service and Timothy is told to do the same. The Word of God must be given with proper teaching so that all present understand its message and they must be exhorted to obey and practice it in their lives. Timothy is also told to not neglect the gift given him by the Holy Spirit for God has gifted all His children with such gifts that are to be used for the edification of the body of Christ. Overseers must especially be using that gift rather than relying upon some human characteristic. This gift was given to Timothy during the special occasion of his ordination as an overseer of the Christians at Ephesus. The prophetic message would have been the recognition by someone at this ceremony as to the calling of Timothy for this leadership role. The laying on of hands by the elders was the final act of this service that would have been immersed with prayer. This ceremony states that God had called him (through the prophetic word), equipped him (the heavenly gift), and commissioned him (laying on of hands).

1 Tim 4:15-16 *Take pains with these things; be absorbed in them, so that your progress may be evident to all. ¹⁶Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things; for as you do this you will insure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.*

Timothy is then urged to take pains with all the above and such means to use all his abilities to succeed. He is to be absorbed in them so that he becomes one with them. He is to be totally absorbed in obeying Paul in all these matters. When he practices these actions properly everyone will notice that he is succeeding in being a “little Paul” in his servant-leadership. All the Christians under his care should easily observe his spiritual growth as he becomes more spiritually mature. We should all see this growth in the church leaders today. A Christian must first be very conscious of his inner self so that he can recognize if some human trait such as pride is becoming a problem. Any flaw in his inner self will eventually destroy his ministry. It may be that his teaching is actually addressing a problem within his own mind and he must pay close attention to his teaching to make sure that he responds properly to his teaching. Sometimes a pastor’s sermons may be more revealing about his own inner conflicts and he must be ready to address them quickly.

How does his perseverance in these things ensure salvation for himself and for those who hear him? Salvation is from faith alone and it is a gift of God to those whose eyes have been opened by the grace of God. So people do not save people, not even themselves. But if Timothy’s teaching is the pure gospel message, God will work through that message to save His people: *Rom 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek.* Christ told Paul that He was sending him to the Gentiles so that through his ministry God would save some: *Acts 26:18 to open their eyes so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the dominion of Satan to God, in order that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who have been sanctified by faith in Me.'*

Also by persevering in the faith, Timothy is showing that he is indeed preserved by God: *Heb 3:14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end;*