

## STUDY ON THE BOOK OF FIRST TIMOTHY

### Setting A Godly Example!

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-7

#### **Introduction.**

Chapter 4 marks a major transition in the focus of Paul's letter. First Timothy chapters 1 through 3 emphasized personal matters related to church worship. Here, the primary topic is dangers posed by false teachers and the specific responsibilities of various groups. Chapter 4 is often viewed as being written in two parts: a description of the false teachers in Ephesus (1 Timothy 4:1–5) and practical steps for defence against these false teachers (1 Timothy 4:6–16).

Verses 1–5 begin with a focus on what the Spirit says will happen in the end times (1 Timothy 4:1). As we wait for the return of Christ, many will fall away from the faith. Some of these people will attempt to enforce false rules as conditions for following God. Verses 6–16 shift to a focus on combatting these false teachers and their teachings. Paul's advice here is extremely practical. For the most part, these directions involve what Timothy needs to accomplish in his own life and teachings.

#### **Apostasy Foretold**

*“Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons...” (v1)*

Paul especially marked this as a revelation from the Holy Spirit; either as a spontaneous word given as he wrote or quoting from a previous prophecy. Paul knew certain dangers would mark the latter times.

- The danger of apostasy (some will depart).
- The danger of deception (deceiving spirits).
- The danger of false teaching (doctrines of demons).

It has been more than 1900 years since Paul wrote to Timothy about the latter times, but he did not misunderstand his time or our own. What the Holy Spirit said then was happening then and is happening now – even more.

#### **The Faith**

This doesn't mean losing the ability to believe, but losing the content of what Christians should believe. It describes the essential teachings of the Christian faith. When some... depart from the faith, they are abandoning the essential teachings of Christianity. The Bible uses the phrase “the faith” in this way many places: Acts 6:7 and 14:22, Colossians 1:23, 1 Timothy 1:19, and Jude 1:3. Because of the danger of the latter times, if Timothy were to remain a faithful minister to God's people, he must keep a dead reckoning on the truth — the faith. If this were lost, not much else really mattered.

#### **Deceiving spirits**

This refers to demonic spirits (angelic beings who have rebelled against God), who seek to deceive men and women and to entice them away from the truth. Some lies are so powerful that they have an evident spiritual dynamic behind them. These are lies crafted and promoted by deceiving spirits.

#### **Doctrines of demons**

This speaks of the specific teachings of these deceiving spirits. Demons are theology majors and have systems of doctrine. We find the first demonic doctrine in Genesis 3. There Satan, speaking through a

serpent, taught Eve: You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God (Genesis 3:4-5). Since then, every demonic doctrine has found its way back to this root: the idea that we can be gods and operate independently from God.

It is hard to say if there is more false teaching today, or if it is merely a case of modern technology being able to spread the lie better. But the old saying is certainly true today: a lie travels at top speed while the truth goes on foot — and more people within the church are following these doctrines of demons.

### Demonic Doctrine

*“... speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 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.” (vv2-3)*

**Speaking lies in hypocrisy:** This describes those who depart from the faith. This certainly points to the ones who willingly embrace falsehood to justify their sin or pride; but it also refers to those who claim to teach the Bible, while just using it to support their own ideas or agendas.

**Having their own conscience seared:** Their conscience, which at one time would have convicted them of their departure from the truth, now doesn't reply at all. It is as if the nerve endings of their conscience have been burnt over and are dead to feeling. Paul here refers to the ancient practice of branding a criminal on the forehead with a distinguishing mark. For these, it was not their forehead that was branded with a hot iron, but their conscience instead.

**Forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods:** This describes the legalistic teaching of those who have departed from the faith. They taught that it was by following this list of man-made rules that one was justified in God's sight — that you would be more holy to God if you didn't marry, and if you did not eat certain foods.

There have always been those in the church who regard themselves as more spiritual than God Himself and have a stricter set of rules for living than God does. We often think that if we sacrifice something for God (such as the right to marry or to eat certain foods), then He owes us something. This is legalism at its worst; trying to manipulate God into giving us something. The idea is that we can make God indebted to us, make Him our servant and make ourselves His master. In this we fulfil the original doctrine of demons — that we should be gods.

Countless millions through the centuries have sought to sacrifice something, and make God owe them blessing, or forgiveness, or mercy, or whatever. That is the religion of self-flagellation; it is not the relationship with Jesus Christ described in the New Testament: being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus (Romans 3:24).

### Freedom

*“For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” (vv4-5)*

Regarding what we eat, we can eat all things. We receive things rightly when we receive them with thanksgiving, with an abiding sense of gratitude towards God. We receive the blessings of food, shelter, and comfort as gifts, and not as rights.

We are not limited by any kind of diet; what we eat does not make us more righteous before God (though what we eat may affect our health). This issue was settled once for all when God spoke to Peter in Acts 10:9-16.

### **Sanctified by the word of God and prayer! What would this mean?**

Paul here has in mind prayer before a meal. Notice that the emphasis is not on asking God to bless the food; but on thanking God for the blessing of providing food to eat. The word of God sanctifies food in the sense that God gave two general commands to mankind to eat the good things of the earth.

*“And God said, “See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food.”” (Genesis 1:29)*

*“Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs.” (Genesis 9:3)*

It is good and proper for us to pray before eating a meal, but it should not be done in a ritualistic, superstitious way. Nor should it be done to show others how spiritual we are — which is imitating the prayer practices of the Pharisees (Matthew 6:5).

### **Teach the Truths of the Faith**

*“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. But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.” (vv6-7)*

Notice that the pastor’s job is primarily instruction of the brethren. If the minister does not instruct the brethren in these things, then he isn’t really a good minister of Jesus Christ. But, if Timothy will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, he himself must remain anchored in God’s word, carefully following the good doctrine.

Paul is disdainful of the false teachers' "godless myths and old wives' tales." Have nothing to do with them, he insists. The implication is that instead of trying to expose and refute these myths and tales on their own terms – and so generate more exposure, discussion, and controversy – he is to reject them firmly and focus his attention on teaching the truth.

**Reject profane and old wives’ fables:** The priority must be on God’s Word, not on the words of man. Paul cautioned Timothy to keep focused on the Word, not on things that come from man. The greatest effort must be put into God’s Word, not man’s word.

**Reject profane and old wives’ fables:** This is the negative aspect of the command. In the positive aspect, the priority must be kept on eternal things, not temporal things.

**Exercise yourself toward godliness:** Ancient Greek and Roman culture put a high value on physical exercise. Paul tells Timothy that the same work and commitment that others put towards physical exercise should be put toward the pursuit of godliness.

### **Explanation on Godliness (eusebeia)**

So just what is godliness? First, "godliness" is not a synonym for "boring." Our culture caricatures godliness as boring. But Jesus certainly wasn't boring. His wit is evident, his sense of humour well developed. Paul's life didn't seem boring. Rather godliness should be seen as good, clean-living enjoyment of life and of God – healthy, balanced, God-oriented living.

The word "godliness" comes from a Greek stem seb-, which meant originally "to step back from someone or something, to maintain a distance," then "to have awe at something, especially something lofty and sublime." This stem is combined with eu- ("abundance, fullness of") to form eusebeia, which means in classical Greek, "awe, respect for the divine, for the social order."

In the New Testament, the word is used in the sense of, "awesome respect accorded to God, devoutness, piety, godliness." The word group appears in the Pastoral Epistles as a verb, an adjective, and an adverb. Paul also contrasts for us the opposite of godliness (asebeia): "godless, ungodliness, impiety."

### **Godliness and Lifestyle**

The spread of false doctrine at Ephesus is producing ungodliness, ungodly behaviour, and unrighteousness. So, Paul is very concerned that the Christians in the church at Ephesus are practicing godliness in their everyday living. He is adamant that healthy doctrine produces healthy behaviour. Unhealthy teaching produces a kind of lifestyle that is only a "form of godliness," a kind of outward religion and religious belief, but one which lacks its real essence and power (2 Timothy 3:5).

### **Fearing the Lord and Godliness**

The idea that best expresses the idea of godliness in the Pastoral Epistles is the Old Testament expression, "to fear the Lord," which was almost a synonym of "believer" under the Old Covenant. Someone who fears the Lord does not live in terror of God but has a healthy respect for God and seeks in both heart and in action to "love God" and not be offensive to God.

Our respect for God shows not only in the way we joke, but by how we live. Godly people live in such a way as to please God. Ungodly people don't really consider or care what God thinks about their way of life. Hypocrites lead double lives -- one for others to see, alongside a secret life that is unseen -- except by God.

### **Godliness as an Attitude of Seeking to Please the Lord**

Paul exhorts us:

*"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God." (Romans 12:1-2)*

Godliness has this attitude:

*"Therefore, we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him." (2 Corinthians 5:9)*

*"Walk as children of light... finding out what is acceptable to the Lord." (Ephesians 5:8, 10)*

### **Godliness and Love for God**

Godliness is not just avoiding sin in order to escape punishment. It is avoiding things which we know don't please God, because we love him more than we love sin, more than we love our own way. Godliness fulfils the first great commandment:

*"Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength." (Mark 12:29-30).*

This is why godliness can only be the fruit of love for God -- not an outward obedience or legalism, but an inward seeking of God in love.

### **Godliness, Training, and Discipleship**

Do we sometimes fall short of these qualities? Oh, yes! But when we do, we repent, ask forgiveness, and get up to follow our Lord once again, washed in the forgiveness of God (1 John 1:7, 9).

