

Guarding and Growing In Godliness

Part 1

1 Timothy 4:1-10

False teaching is a real threat to faith. Therefore discipline yourself for Christ-like maturity.

LTS: Psa. 119:33-48

Read 1 Tim 4:1-16

We come now to the fourth chapter of Paul's letter to Timothy. As you know, Timothy was the young man to whom Paul entrusted the difficult responsibility of setting things right at the church of Ephesus. In chapter one he tells us that this church had run into great difficulty because it had allowed men to gain influence in their midst who turned out to be false teachers. Paul knew it was going to be difficult to turn things around so he writes this letter (as he explains on 3:15) "so that... you [Timothy] may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and buttress of the truth."

In the first 5 verse of chapter four Paul is going to offer Timothy some sharp and condemning criticism of these false teachers and he will want Timothy to pass his thoughts on to the whole church. How would you like to have his job? I mean, in our day that's a good way for a pastor to cut himself off from the good graces of significant members of the church. We don't want to hear criticism of other people's ministries. We tend to think those who preach like that are bad ministers. But notice what Paul says to Timothy. He writes (6), "If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed."

Again, he says (11) "Command and teach these things."

Why does Paul get so aggressive towards false teachers? It's because so much is at stake. Heaven and hell are on the line for those who hear such teaching. That's why Paul concludes this chapter by saying to Timothy (16), "keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching, Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers."

Clearly, whatever Paul has to say in this chapter is important. So what is he writing about? In a word, he is writing about godliness. He is writing about how Timothy (and all believers for that matter) should pursue godliness. I have entitled this message Guarding and growing in

Godliness. And I want to proceed under three headings in answer to the question, “How do we guard and grow in godliness?”

I. Be Defensive:

II. Be Discerning:

III. Be Disciplined:

If we are going to guard the godliness we have in Christ, and if you are to grow in godliness we must first of all...

I. Be Defensive:

1. In sports parlance it has always been an axiom that *the best offense is a good defense*. Paul would have us believe that this is good spiritual counsel as well. The false teachers in the church of Ephesus had done a lot of harm, but the fact that they found a way into the church should have been no surprise. Why? Because (1) *“The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith devoting themselves to deceitful spirit and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...”*

2. Now before we dive into this, let me take a short aside on the phrase, “The spirit expressly says.” For those of you who are studying Bibliology in the *Equipping For Ministry* course this may be particularly interesting. I want you to notice the tense of the verb “says.” It is not past-tense. Paul didn’t write, “remember what the Spirit said in times past,” but “The Spirit expressly says” (present, active, indicative verb). The question is, how is the Spirit speaking to his church?

- A. In the book of Revelation we have a similar kind of statement where the author (John) repeats seven times, “Listen to what the Spirit says.”
- B. Now, clearly the Spirit has spoken in the past. But what Paul is saying here in 1 Timothy is that what the Spirit said in the past is significant to us today.
- C. The old hymn has us sing, “What more can He say than to you He has said?”
- D. Paul wants us to know that what the Spirit has said in the word of God is not merely for ages past but is for us this very moment, no matter what historical moment we may find ourselves living in.
- E. Flip the page with me and look at 1 Tim. 5:17 We see a similar construction when Paul writes, *“For the Scripture says ‘You shall not muzzle an Ox when it treads out the grain’ and ‘the laborer deserves his wages.’* Here it’s the Scripture doing the speaking. And that Scripture is a quotation of Moses out of the O.T. book of Deuteronomy. The Spirit said those words a long time before Paul included it in his

letter to Timothy. But having said it, He says it!¹

- F. In other words, the authority by which the Spirit speaks is a constantly present authority.
- G. Does the Spirit speak today? Yes! How does He speak? He says what He has said in His word. What He said in the past has as much abiding authority today as it would have if He has spoken it this morning because when we read the Scriptures the Spirit is actually speaking in the present tense.

3. Now, what is it that the Spirit says to the church?

Read 1:1-3

4. You see, today our responsibility is to heed the Spirit's warning. There will be people that we know who will depart from the faith because they became ensnared in the trap of some false teacher. And this is the frequent warning of the N.T. Beware of false teachers!

- A. Heb. 3:12 "See to it that there not be in any one of you a sinful unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin."
- B. The Spirit says that this will happen to some people in the church. The implication is, don't let it happen to you. And do everything you can to make sure it doesn't happen to those close to you. Encourage one another day after day as long as it is called today.
- C. Are you involved in this kind of defensive ministry? Are you being careful about false teaching? And maybe it's not so much false teaching from within a church or a professing ministry; maybe it's the false teaching of the world? Do you put your spiritual armor on every day and are you helping others to battle against the world, the flesh and the devil?
- D. The Spirit is speaking, The Spirit is warning, and we would do well to heed His word.

5. What kind of false teaching was going on here? Paul says it was a kind of asceticism. It was a kind of teaching that forbade marriage and required abstinence from certain kinds of food. This was a kind of teaching that said godliness is all wrapped up in the denial of pleasure for the spiritual purity. This get really practical for people in the Catholic tradition as the season of Lent began this past Wednesday ("ash Wednesday") when faithful Catholics begin practicing abstinence in marriage and fast on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. And if they are really committed, they will follow canon law 1250 that exhorts them to fast every Friday of the year.

¹ Alastair Begg, *The Approaching Apostasy*, audio message, 1 Tim. 4:1-5, (Gospel Coalition Website, visited on March 1, 2017). <http://resources.thegospelcoalition.org/library/?f%5Bbook%5D%5B%5D=1+Timothy&page=7>

6. Beloved, let's be clear about this. Abstaining from certain foods or food altogether is NOT the path that leads to godliness. In fact, turn with me to Col. 2:16-17

Read Col. 2:16-17

7. Abstaining from certain food and lawful pleasures may make one feel better about himself. It may fill him with a sense of self-righteousness, but it won't make him godly.

8. And Paul is saying in no uncertain terms that those who teach godliness through asceticism are "deceitful spirits" who proclaim "doctrines of demons through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared..." And the motive is usually to make themselves rich.

9. So be defensive. Listen to what the Spirit says to the church. He is saying that there will always be false teachers who make their way into churches to lead people astray and separate them from their faith. Don't allow yourself to become a casualty to their deceitful scheming. Second...

II. Be Discerning:

1. Why should we know that asceticism, as a means to godliness is false? Because we understand the character of God and His creation. We understand from Genesis 1-2 that everything God created was good. He was the one who invented Marriage. He is the One who created the garden of Eden and told the man and his wife that they could eat from every tree with the exception of one. But the emphasis was on the variety of food that God has provided and His command for them to eat. In other words, God commanded the man and his wife to enjoy the goodness of God's provision.

2. So we should know that abstinence and asceticism doctrines are false because ...

Read v. 3-4

3. Have you ever wondered where we get our tradition of giving thanks before eating a meal? This is the text that takes us there. Paul is saying that when it comes to food, there are no spiritual restrictions. There is not "Kosher" regulation. There is no such thing as "clean" or "unclean." It's OK to eat a hotdog, or pork chops, or catfish, or chicken livers, or anything else that's edible. "Nothing is to be rejected." The only qualification is a thankful heart.

4. When we sit down to eat we should take a moment to recognize that every good gift comes from the father. When we share the joys of marriage as husband and wife, God is pleased with that enjoyment. And we should give thanks to him for being the source of such delight.

5. Obviously, we can abuse these gifts through gluttony or fornication, but the delights experienced in food and marriage are essentially good and God means for us to enjoy them in a manner that glorifies Him as the Giver of every good thing.

6. As Paul says (5), they are made holy by the word of God and prayer. I think “prayer” here refers to prayers of thanks giving. And the “word of God” points to what the Spirit has taught us about the gracious, giving character of God toward his people. So we remember what Scripture teaches about the goodness of God and we thank Him for every lawful pleasure we enjoy in this life.

7. This is the point at which Paul says to Timothy...

Read v. 6

8. In light of our study on deacons a couple weeks ago, its interesting to note that Paul tells Timothy that if he teaches these thing to the church of Ephesus he will be consider a good *diakonos* – a good servant/minister.

9. The word “train” (6 ESV) is probably better translated by the NAS as “nourished.” Only one who is being properly nourished by the word can hope to minister to others as a teacher who faithfully instructs and corrects.

10. The word “nourish” also fits better with the athletics language coming up in the next few verses. A skilled athlete needs both a proper diet and proper exercise (training). Spiritually speaking, Timothy had both.

7. How do we guard and grow in godliness? We must be Defensive. We must be Discerning. And next week we will look at the final point of this text, Be Disciplined.

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