



Spiritual Warfare: Pulling Down Strongholds

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-3

LESSON 23 – DO NOT BE DECEIVED

PASTOR PHILLIP M WAY

Deceiving Spirits

- ▶ 1 Timothy 4:1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, 2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, 3 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.

Cunningly Devised Fables

- ▶ 2 Peter 1:12 For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. 13 Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, 14 knowing that shortly I must put off my tent, just as our Lord Jesus Christ showed me. 15 Moreover I will be careful to ensure that you always have a reminder of these things after my decease. 16 For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.

Empty Deceit

- ▶ Colossians 2:8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ.

Profane and Idle Babblings

- ▶ 1 Timothy 6:20 O Timothy! Guard what was committed to your trust, avoiding the profane and idle babblings and contradictions of what is falsely called knowledge— 21 by professing it some have strayed concerning the faith.

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

- ▶ In debunking doctrinal myths, we are often faced with the challenge of proving that what people think the Bible says is not what the Bible says.
- ▶ As an example, how often do we hear it said that we are to pray as if it depends upon God and work like it depends upon us? Usually this is accompanied by the statement, “Remember, God helps those who help themselves.”
- ▶ But this is a woefully erroneous statement. The Bible does not ever say anything close to this and cannot be used to defend the logic or the conclusions that might be reached from embracing this philosophy.

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

- ▶ God gives grace to those who do not deserve it – that is why it is grace. He helps those who depend upon Him in humble submission. He resists the proud and tells us that our own righteousness amounts to a stinking filthy rag when compared to His holiness and righteousness. So no, God does not ever say that He will help those who make the effort to help themselves. God would have us depend upon Him, for without Christ we can do nothing anyway. The truth is that God helps those who DIE to themselves.
- ▶ So where does this phrase come from? It originated in one of Aesop's Fables titled "Hercules and the Wagoner." In that fable we read:

God Helps Those Who Help Themselves

- ▶ “A Wagoner was once driving a heavy load along a very muddy way. He came to a part of the road where the wheels sank half-way into the mire, and the more the horses pulled, the deeper sank the wheels. So the Wagoner threw down his whip, and knelt down and prayed to Hercules the Strong. ‘O Hercules, help me in this my hour of distress.’ But Hercules appeared to him, and said: ‘Man, don’t sprawl there. Get up and put your shoulder to the wheel. The gods help them that help themselves.’”
- ▶ So from a fabled prayer to a half god/half man in Greek mythology we come around to believing that the Bible actually teaches self-help.
- ▶ But don’t let the secret out. If we tell the church that her members must be KILLING self instead of helping self, the “Christian” bookstore might have to close up shop!

Permission or Forgiveness

- ▶ Another myth is found in the statement, “It is easier to get forgiven than to get permission.” Often this is used to premeditate sin, all the while believing that since God would say “No!” if we asked then we should not ask and should “just do it” and then ask God to forgive us later. This idea though proves a wrong view of God, self, sin, forgiveness, and truth. Yes, it is that serious!
- ▶ The Word of God establishes the truth that in order to be forgiven we must repent of our sin. That means that if we flippantly think that if we tell God we are sorry after the fact then He will forgive us. But sorrow does not equal repentance!
- ▶ We are told that Esau was sorry to the point of tears, but he never was repentant (Heb 12:16-17). And if we do not repent, we cannot be forgiven. If we brazenly think that we can sin and just say we are sorry and that is all God requires then we simply do not understand the holiness of God or the heinousness of sin.

Carnal Christians

- ▶ Another myth is found in those who think that there is such a thing as carnal Christians. These people excuse sin or backsliding by saying that they, or the one they know and love who is sinning, is just being carnal. They are just “in the flesh.”
- ▶ The Bible uses the term carnal very specifically to refer to those who are lost. These are people who do not know Christ. They are unsaved. They are described as being fleshly, natural, corrupt, and depraved.
- ▶ Christians on the other hand are said to be “in the Spirit”. We are alive in Christ and dead to sin. We are not carnal, nor are we ever “in the flesh.” In fact, Paul in Romans 6-8 never uses the term “in the flesh” to refer to believers. He does though speak about the flesh that is in us!

Carnal Christians

- ▶ In Christ we are a new creation (2 Cor 5:17). Our old nature has been replaced. We are a new man, created by God in righteousness and holiness (Eph 4:24). And we are not ever “in the flesh”, but this fallen body, this part of us that is yet to be remade and is waiting glorification, this flesh fights the spirit. The war that we fight is not about us being in the spirit or in the flesh, for we are already in the spirit, and are fighting the flesh that is in us!
- ▶ A simple reading of Romans 6 through 8 will prove what I am saying here.

Too Heavenly Minded

- ▶ Finally, have you ever heard someone say, “He is too heavenly minded to be any earthly good”? Is there any truth to this? Can a person indeed be so heavenly minded as to be no earthly good? I would suggest that the truth is that if we are not heavenly minded enough then we can be no earthly good! In fact, Colossians 3:1-2 tells us: “If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.”
- ▶ So we see from the pages of Scripture that we are commanded to set our minds on things above, not on things on the earth. That means we are indeed to be heavenly minded. To take it a step further, we are told by Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21:

Too Heavenly Minded

- ▶ Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
- ▶ We are to set our minds on things above and lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven. This means that we are to have an eternal perspective, to see life as God sees it. So how is it that we can do this? How can we think this way?

Think on These Things

- ▶ We need to admit that too often we think about things and dwell on things that the Scriptures specifically tell us to ignore! We think about things on the earth, we allow our minds to be filled with images and thoughts that lead to the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. We think about things that make us discontent. Things that discourage us. Things that take our eyes off of Jesus.
- ▶ And most often we allow these thoughts entrance to our minds through our eyes and ears by the things that “entertain” us. Movies, music, television, books and magazines. No wonder these are the areas where we see the fiercest fighting about our liberty in Christ. No wonder people get defensive about these things. But the truth is that too often these are secret areas where we go to feed our flesh! Whatever excuse we offer, we are simply yielding ourselves to sin to be its slave.

Think on These Things

- ▶ When we think about it, entertainment often is just a sleazy counterfeit for joy. And while we amuse ourselves to death, we think we are allowed this liberty in Christ. But Christian liberty is never to be used as an occasion for the flesh. Never. (Gal 5:13). Instead, Christian liberty is given to us to use for the glorification of God and service to our fellow Christians!
- ▶ How then are we to think? What defines the things we are to put in our minds and meditate upon? There are several lists given in the Scriptures that tell us how to think and what to think about. Verses that tell us to meditate in the Word of God and verses that tell us “think on these things” giving us specific things to think about.

Think on These Things

- ▶ The key verses for us today are those in Colossians 3:1-2 and Philippians 4:8. There we are told to set our mind on things above and to think on things that are “true, noble, just, pure, lovely.” Things that are of good report, with virtue and praiseworthiness. To understand then how we are to think and how we are to believe, and how we are discern what to put in our minds and what to shun, we must learn to live these verses. There is a battle being waged for our minds – do we even know how to fight the fight? If not, we have already lost.
- ▶ Think about it! Have we believed a lie or fallen for a myth? In the world of special effects and urban legends it makes for good entertainment to see myths busted. In the church, if we leave the myths alone the spiritual consequences are devastating. Theological lies and false doctrines are spiritual poison. And they are myths that we must confront, that we must bust, as if lives depended upon it!