

IN WORD AND DEED

1 Timothy 4

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1 Timothy 4:1–16 (NIV)

“The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives’ tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe. Command and teach these things. Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life

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and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

In this fourth chapter the apostle in addressing Timothy is really concerning himself with two themes. Verses 1–5, as we have just read, are concerned with false teaching or doctrine. False doctrine. And verses 6–16 is personal advice related to Timothy’s life, particularly verses 6–10 concerning Timothy’s life as he relates individually to the Lord and as he lives a life that is proper for himself. Then verses 11–16 concern Timothy’s responsibilities to the body of Christ, the Christian congregation.

I. Combat false teaching.

We find in verses 1–5 described for us a departure from the faith which is taking place at the city of Ephesus where this letter is written and where Timothy is. There are some things we can note about these five verses.

First of all, the departure from the faith which was spoken of here was prophesied. In fact, it was the Lord himself who indicated a couple of days before His death that the time would come when many would bear false witness (Matthew 24:10–11). The Lord three times uses the word “many” to characterize the nature of false teaching. Many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. Paul himself, when he had finished his ministry at Ephesus—he stayed at Ephesus, this queen city of Asia Minor, for some three years, longer than any other city to which he had ministered. When he was closing his ministry there and he’s giving a farewell address to the elders he says to them in Acts 20:28 and following that they’re to take heed to themselves and to the flock over which the Spirit of God has made them guardians. He says false teachers will come in as wolves and will lead many astray.

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The strong teaching of Paul in that particular section was that many within the church would give themselves or be tempted to give themselves to false teaching. Thus, when we come to the letter of Timothy we find that what Paul had prophesied is now being put into motion—false teachers have arisen and they're devouring some persons in the flock of God. It's a great comfort, though, to realize that the church at Ephesus took Paul's counsel at face value and very strongly dealt with the false teaching, so that by the time we come to the second chapter of Revelation which was written perhaps thirty years after this letter, when the Lord himself writes a letter to the church at Ephesus, He is able to commend that church that they have put down those who have given false teaching.

What is the value of it being prophesied that false teaching would emerge? The value is this: That we live in a day when there is a multiplication of false teaching to an extent that was really unparalleled in the New Testament. We have cults and isms, which say that they are Christian, which threaten the church by devouring the converts of the church, by teaching wrong things. We're asked why are there so many of these. Maybe the weakness is in the church, some will say. The church needs better doctrine. The church hasn't been consistent or the church doesn't have the answer. Therefore we need kind of an add-on gospel. Some of these criticisms of the church may be right and well deserved. But the fundamental factor is the Lord himself and the apostle and the New Testament are clear witnesses to the fact that the church would always go through those times when it is being tested not only by conflict coming against it but from heresy within.

John in 1 John 4:6 makes an astounding claim: "We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us." That's kind of a braggadocio claim. Whoever knows God listens to us. "And he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error." Very

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clear statement saying that those who follow in the way of Jesus Christ as delivered and taught by the apostles are walking in the light.

Therefore, when Paul begins talking to Timothy about heresy he is indicating that what Timothy is facing has been prophesied. The Spirit had spoken. In fact, the Spirit's speaking may have been what we previously already have in the Word. Or it may have been that at some gathering in the past of the church, the Spirit of God through a prophetic utterance in the congregation had attested to the fact that false teaching would emerge in the church. "In the later times" may be a figure of speech indicating that the prophecy once given before is now coming to pass. Or it may be there's still some more time to emerge before the full flower of the false teaching is to really inundate the church or try to take it over. But a strong warning is prophesied.

Paul then makes an astounding claim about false teaching and one which we're tempted to overlook in our tendency to want to be nice and courteous and loving with those who teach things that are contrary to the central message of the gospel. That is, his claim that false teaching is produced by deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons. What an incredible claim, when you think about it. It should be noted here that Paul in this passage is not referring to doctrines *about* demons. There are people with demonologies these days. It's not doctrines *about* demons but doctrines *of* demons. The essential claim that the apostle is making is that behind human institutions of error, behind religions of error, is demonic power and so forth which in essence forms the producing power for the belief. This is carried consistently in a number of Paul's statements throughout his letters.

In another letter of his to the Ephesians, in Ephesians 6, he notes that we're not wrestling against flesh and blood but against powers and principalities and rulers in high places. To the Corinthians he writes that those who bow down before idols are doing more than worshipping

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idols. He indicates that they are offering offerings to demons and not to God. And in Galatians he goes on to indicate that false doctrine, even if it comes from an angel from heaven, if it's contrary to the doctrine which is delivered to the apostles by Jesus Christ, it is doctrine in error. What is the doctrine of demons? If you were looking for a demon doctrine what would you expect to find?

I have a friend I met a few months ago. He had joined the Children of God when it first began here maybe eight or nine years ago. His wife was one of the first six members when it was very much then an effective and fervent evangelistic team of young people. Over the years, however, they have evolved into kind of a religious system which is both doctrinally heretical as well as morally repugnant. About a year or two ago this person, when he began to realize what had happened to the group which he was in, came to himself and the Lord and made a clean confession. In the midst of a time when he almost committed suicide he really found the strength and the undergirding power of Christ as he sought to come out of this false cult and philosophy. In sharing with me, he indicated that from his experience in the Children of God he's been able to put together a kind of address which is called "Doctrine of Demons" in which he goes through Children of God and uses them as an example of what is really common to all kinds of false cults and groups that pretend that they are Christian but really are not. What doctrinal items that they share in common. I think he would have said something like this: The doctrine of demons would be fundamentally in one way or the other an attack upon God's Word. As I look at it, there are really four ways in which error can come. In which demons would be behind and propagating. To deny the Scripture would be one way that false teaching would come. We see this in the Garden of Eden. The attempt to deny what God has said.

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Or a second attempt would be to twist what God has said, to take a passage which is very clear of God's Word and twist it into something else. We see this, for example, in the temptation of our Lord who, when facing Satan, what was Satan attempting to do? To twist the Scripture.

Or possibly take away from the Scripture. Certainly groups that attack the deity and the saving power of our Lord Jesus Christ are doing this very thing with the Scripture.

Or maybe even adding to it by saying that in addition to the Scripture there's other revealed literature and books, which give added knowledge of God. That added knowledge, when looked at carefully, is a contradiction to what the Scripture is saying.

Behind the systems of false religion, the apostle is saying, stand demonic or wrong spiritual power. He's cautioning Timothy and the church of this.

If false prophecies have been prophesied, then they're produced by demons. Paul indicates that it is promulgated by persons who are pretentious, of liars whose consciences are seared. The word for "pretension" here is literally "hypocrisy." Paul is saying that these false doctrines which come upon the church are really coming through the ministry of persons who are lying but who in the process of lying have lost the ability to distinguish truth from error. That's why it's noted that their consciences are seared.

The word for "seared" is the word we get "cauterized." It's literally carried over from the Greek into the English. I suppose one good way to illustrate the meaning of the term here is if you laid a hot iron on your hand it would burn some tissue away. It would destroy some tissue in the process. It would brand my hand. This is the very impact of the word that Paul is describing.

Those who have given themselves to teaching false doctrine ultimately will become branded with the mark of Satan so that the tissue of their conscience is destroyed. The capacity to know right from wrong is lost. The conscience is not whole.

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We need to go beyond the ability to simply logically talk to a person about doctrine. We need to press on and ask the Lord to bring healing to the conscience, to bring some sort of ability to restore the capacity to know truth from error. Burned into insensitivity.

What is the nature of the teaching, which is coming forth? It's fascinating that at Ephesus, as reflected in this Timothy letter, the message being proclaimed was a false message of holiness. It was a message which enjoined Christians to abstain from marriage and abstain from certain foods. In effect, it also said all sexual relationship is wrong. The body is no good. The spirit is right. One must stay away from things related to the body.

We should note that in this letter Paul consistently does away with the notion that the spiritual professions are more holy than the laypeople, or that if you're going to be in a "spiritual profession" then you should abstain from marriage in order to be more spiritual. It's seen in 1 Timothy 3 that even the bishops can be married—the husband of one wife. There were those within the church who were bringing forth this doctrine.

Evidently also within the Jewish Christians in the area there was still the kind of hang-up on the subject of what foods to eat and what foods not to eat. Some had, evidently, in their abstention from certain foods, had made abstaining from these foods a matter of pertaining if you don't abstain you're not saved. They made it an issue related to salvation.

So what is really happening here is the Lord's clear words in Mark 7 are not being carried out. He had declared all foods to be clean. Paul—on two other occasions, Romans 14 and Colossians 2—talks about the need for charity in respect to foods. If you don't believe in eating something, then don't eat it. But don't insist that your brother have the same convictions on that matter as you do.

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Wouldn't it be nice if the church today only had these two heresies? If I were Timothy, I think he would say the strands of the heresies that have emerged over the centuries have become more powerful. They have become more difficult to blot out and take care of and wrestle against.

But whether it's heresy like forbidding of marriage, or abstaining from certain foods that God has created and making that a condition of salvation, there is to be a watchfulness and a diligence on the part of Christians lest we be led astray into wrong teaching.

Paul says that food is to be received by the Word of God and by prayer. It is consecrated by the Word of God and by prayer. Food is consecrated by the Word of God, for God's Word says all things are good. And it is consecrated by prayer, that is, if it's received with thanksgiving. Here we have in this letter one of the few references in the New Testament which can be construed as saying grace at meals, which we do today. Here in the Early Church when they sat down with their food, saying grace over their meal, receiving it with Thanksgiving. The food that you eat, you may not always feel like saying thanks for it, but the Scripture says receive with thanks.

You can't help but read Paul's letters and note how continually he's referring to the fact that we should give thanks to God for persons, for food, and even for bad circumstances. Give thanks to God for all things, whether it's food or persons or circumstances.

II. Be a good minister.

Having dealt with the theme of heresy, Timothy then is pointed to the aspect of his being a good minister to the Lord Jesus Christ. This word for minister is the same word for deacon. It can mean someone who's involved in the proclamation of the Word and in administrative responsibilities in the body of Christ.

The personal life is spoken of first in verses 6–10. What a man is is more important than what he says or what he does. We've noted that principle in the previous chapter. Paul indicates to

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Timothy that he must be nourished on the words of faith and the good doctrine. He indicates to Timothy that Timothy had been doing that because he'd followed these good words of faith and doctrine.

The word for “nourished” literally carries the idea of “being trained up in.” The thesis behind it to Timothy is that you cannot give to others what you yourself do not have. But the impact and the steady hammering truth of that Scripture over and over again says that in all of our personal relationships we cannot give more than we have.

Timothy is urged to stay away from godless and silly men. The word for “silly” is literally the word for “old wife’s tales.” It is pointing Timothy to true doctrine as opposed to speculative ideas. Timothy was instructed, as are we, to train ourselves in godliness. The word for “training ourselves” is the word which we derive “gymnastics.” The idea behind it is we are not simply to be athletes—although being athletic is profitable as Paul indicates and working out is good—but working out spiritually is even of more value. Whereas physical workouts affect the body, the spiritual workout affects all of the man for this life and for the life to come. Therefore the goal is to be an athlete of God. Paul indicates in verse 10, “To this end we toil and strive at being really athletes for God.”

The word for “strive” is literally the word “agony.” In the Greek it’s the same word we derive agony from. When you think of agony, I suppose, one way I could think of agony would be running a mile. As I come to the last lap of the mile, the agony of trying to finish the race. That’s the kind of effort that’s involved here of living the life of the Christian. Paul is saying here to Timothy and to all of us, “Don’t be passive in your spiritual disciplines. Don’t say, ‘When I get around to it, I’ll do it.’ ” The apostle is putting down the passive kind of concept of the Christian life. But the active idea of toiling or striving is involved.

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Our hope is set upon the living God who is the Savior of all men, especially those who believe. Paul here is really saying two things. God is potentially the Savior of all men. But actually and literally and really the Savior of those who believe. God desires all to be saved.

Having talked to Timothy's personal life—that he must continue to be nourished by faith, the faith and by good doctrine, he must excel in godliness—Paul then turns to Timothy and points him to the way of ministry among the flock of God for the body of Christ.

One thing which he indicates is for Timothy to not let persons despise his youth. This is somewhat amusing when you recognize at this particular time Timothy is probably between the ages of 38 and 40. I'm not there yet where Timothy was at the writing of this letter, and Paul says don't let people despise your youth.

Why was the despising of youth dangerous? It was dangerous because if people thought that Timothy didn't have the credentials of a life that stood behind his teaching then they wouldn't listen to what he had to say. The whole doctrine and teaching of the church of Jesus Christ had fallen into disrepute because persons didn't have respect for the person who was ministering and teaching it. So he says, "Don't let people despise your youth. If you have been set apart by God and this church for this ministry, then stick to it."

How do you think Timothy got people not to despise his youth? Paul shows him the positive way. If you don't want people to despise your youth, then set an example in speech, in conduct (or King James says "walk" which means way of life), in love (agape, genuine concern for others), in faith and in purity. Purity of motive and action. Five ways of being an example. That word "example" is the word from which we derive "type." It can mean, for example, when you're typing on a typewriter, striking the key so that it leaves an impression on the paper. It

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types an impression. When we speak of a person leaving a mark on our life, or when someone sets a mark for us to follow, that's the kind of idea that's involved.

So if Timothy is not to have people despise his youth, then he must be an example in the very areas where youth is likely to be deficient. Youth is likely to be deficient in carelessness of speech, silliness of conduct, intemperance in regard to love, often selfishness, lack of faith and trust, and lack of purity. So Paul is telling Timothy, "Get with it so that people don't despise your youth."

Then Paul points Timothy to his public responsibility of teaching and pulpit ministry. There are three things in regard to the speaking ministry that are put before Timothy. Attend—meaning really give attention to, really be involved—attend to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching.

Why is the emphasis here on the public reading of Scripture? It's no doubt because of the fact that in the first-century church, the church that received this letter, people didn't go to church with their Bibles. They didn't have the Bibles in the pew racks. They didn't have pews to have the racks in. Many of the people, most of the people perhaps, were illiterate. If they were to hear the Word of God it would have to come from someone's reading it. Evidently the practice of Timothy's ministry was simply this: read a portion of Scripture, then exhort from it, and teach from it.

In fact, the word "preach" here—and there are several words in the New Testament which are used for preach—the word here literally means to exhort or to comfort, to bring consolation. To cheer up. It's the same word which we also use for the Holy Spirit, the Comforter. In the noun form it refers to the Holy Spirit, one who brings consolation or comfort or encouragement. In other words, Timothy is being told not only read the Word of God but say what it means to our

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individual daily lives. Encourage and cheer up, exhort, encourage the other persons in the congregation. And also teach from this Word. Let it be the systematic program of instruction, doctrinally and morally in the church.

Timothy, in his pulpit ministry, is to appeal both to the heart (that's involved in the word "preach") and to the mind (that's involved in the word "teach"). Timothy, evidently, maybe at this point in his life, is discouraged because there is hearsay in this church. He has been evidently teaching and he's not been successful yet in putting it out. Perhaps because he hasn't been successful he may have a tendency to neglect this teaching and reading ministry, which is his. So Paul finds here a need for consolation to Timothy and says to him, "Do not neglect the gift, which you have."

There are times when, as one who has this very responsibility that Timothy had, you wonder, am I getting through? Is the Word getting through? Is Christ getting through? Paul is saying, "Keep at it, Timothy! Keep at it. Don't neglect the gift, which you have."

The word for "gift" is the word from which we derive "charismatic." It's a gift, when used in the New Testament to describe the gift of God to man. Never the gift of a man to another man. It's a special gift from God.

I like to think that Timothy's being set apart for ministry and hands were laid upon him when he was ordained for the ministry. That the elders gathered around and laid their hands on him. As they were praying individually for him, utterances and prophecy came that was said of Timothy, "God has given you a ministry of teaching, use your gift."

Now, years later in Timothy's life when he's going through a time of discouragement, perhaps Paul is saying, "Return to that original inspiration which started you out in the ministry and draw your strength from that."

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Practice the duties; devote yourself to them. It's the thing which you've got to keep doing so that all can note your progress. It's great to see that word "progress" here in this text. Sometimes you may have a tendency to feel that a person who's in the pulpit has already arrived at everything that there is to ever arrive at. But if the person who is the Christian pastor has already arrived, then why does anybody need to see his progress? There is no progress, only a finished portrait. It's a great comfort to me to recognize there is such a thing as growth in our Christian life.

Paul says, "Hold to these things, the teaching and your personal life, because by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers." As we've already seen in Timothy, "saved" can mean more than eternal salvation. It can mean, for example in 1 Timothy 2, a woman will be saved through bearing children. It can mean she can be saved from the gossip circle. That's what she's really being saved from evidently in that context.

Here, to be saved—saving both yourself and your hearers—means saving them from the errors of a false teaching which is prevalent at Ephesus, and that this kind of right living setting an example before the congregation properly ministering the Word will be a preservation both for yourself and for the church.

As I look over this passage, I try to go through it and ask what things can I personally apply to my life? What things can I ask the congregation as individuals to apply to each of your lives?

For, if one of the purposes of reading the Word is to exhort or give personal counsel, what is to be said?

I have three brief questions. They're crucial questions from this text.

First, am I becoming an athlete of God? Wouldn't it be great to be in the Christian Olympics?

Second, am I developing the gift which I have, the gift which God has given to me? I have a responsibility in developing that gift. God gives seeds. That's the same way with our gifts and

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abilities. He gives seeds, and it's up to us to water and to nourish and let the sunshine of development come upon them.

The last question to ask, are there any areas in my life where my conscience is seared or in danger of becoming seared? Is there any practice or sin which I have been committing which, when I initially committed it, I knew very strongly the distinction between right and wrong and the Spirit very faithfully bore witness to me of that. But now the witness is dull and I'm in danger of letting my conscience be seared so that I don't keep that sharp and finely tuned distinction between what is right and wrong. Between what is godly and what is not godly. I hope that these questions are of help to you and you'll keep them through the week as a kind of personal checklist for each of our own spiritual lives.

Closing Prayer

Lord, the picture of the hot branding iron coming into our conscience, we can't draw another picture of what our conscience would look like. But Lord, it's possible through that vision to project our conscience and to see, Lord, a hot branding iron come and really burn its way into it so that nerve ends which had been very sensitive to You have become cauterized, stopped up so that the sensations of righteousness and evil are not there and there's only the dullness. Instead of the joy and cleanness of the Christian life, there is a great deal of emptiness. A great deal of sadness. For sin always brings sadness. Lord, I pray through the healing power of Your Spirit that as we yield ourselves to You again this day that if there be a need in anyone for the healing of the conscience toward You that there would be a full restoration, something very beautiful, an inward consciousness of You developed. I'm surprised as I read the Gospels and Epistles to really come face to face with this great truth. In the last analysis, Your gospel is rejected, not on a rational basis but it is rejected when we have sins in our life that we're unwilling to confess and

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let go of. I pray that the same kind of clear conscience which we see everywhere on the apostle's pen in these pastoral letters, in the last years of his ministry, that clean and clear conscience would be a part of every one of us so that we need never fear being embarrassed or ill at ease in Your divine presence. Help us to live each minute of our life so that if in that minute we would be called to stand in Your presence we could easily step from where we are to where You are. And that we could do so with clearness so that even all the X-ray power of the Spirit of God would find in our lives the cleanness and purity of our Lord Jesus Christ who gave himself freely and by His blood washed away all our sins. We thank You, Lord, for Your righteousness which You impart to us and for the righteousness which in turn You ask and invite us to live. May we be Your athletes. Effectively working out for You. Effectively running and winning the race for You. Thank You, Lord, for this people, for each and every person here. I thank You that You have an answer, and the answer, for each person's need and longing through Christ our Lord. Amen.