

GUARDIANS OF THE MINISTRY

1ST TIMOTHY 4:1-10

Notes on

1 Timothy 4:1-10

Having described the type of people who are qualified to be leaders in the church (and so by extension describing what a proper lifestyle looks like for all Christians) and the nature of the Church itself, Paul now brings the false teachers, whose presence in Ephesus is a main motivation behind this letter, back into view. He says their presence is not surprising. He suggests reasons for their behavior. And then he gives a couple of tests, one theological and the other ethical, for recognizing erroneous teachings like those infiltrating the church in Ephesus.

v.4:1 - The Spirit expressly says... This may be related to something Jesus said about people falling away from the faith (see Mt. 24:10-11 & Mk. 13:22), or to his own prophecy concerning the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:29-30), or to the Holy Spirit's inspirational word to him as he writes. In any case, what is happening is no surprise to God and shouldn't be to His people... **later times...** the indication here is that in some sense Paul and Timothy are living in these "later times" (and so are we today!)... As John Stott says (*Guard the Truth*, p.110): "So, 'later times' and 'the last days' (of 2 Tim.3:1ff) both denote the Christian Era, which Jesus inaugurated at his first coming and will consummate at his second. (Acts 2:17; 1. Cor. 10:11; Heb. 1:2)"... **depart from the faith...** the Greek word here is *apostesonti* from which we get the word "apostasy"... **deceitful spirits and teachings of demons...** Forces of evil are the first cause of the false teachers' behavior. As the Holy Spirit has spoken, so have demonic spirits, and they have followed the latter against the former. We do well, as followers of Christ and "guardians of His ministry," never to underestimate the power of evil against us...

v.2 - insincerity of liars... Evil forces tend to work through human agency. Though they have been deceived by spiritual powers, these teachers also cooperate with them. They willingly share, as liars who knowingly perpetrate what is false, in the spirit of deceit. This is the human cause behind what they are doing... **consciences are seared...** This is the moral cause of

Some Will Depart from the Faith

4 Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

A Good Servant of Christ Jesus

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. ⁷ Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸ for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. ⁹ The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰ For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

- 1 Timothy 4:1-10

their erroneous ways... "seared" means literally "seared by fire" or "branded." It could refer to their consciences being stamped as property of Satan (like slaves might have been marked in that day) or, more likely, to being "cauterized," like a nerve deadened through burning. These teachers have neutralized their consciences by constantly ignoring them. Thus, they have enabled themselves to lie & deceive with increasing impunity & subsequently made themselves easy marks for evil forces. And in the end they lead themselves and others away from the faith.

vv.3-5 - forbid marriage... require abstinence from foods... The first test of teaching is theological and involves the

doctrine of creation: *True teaching will honor God as the Creator and what He has made as good...* Such goodness is objectively affirmed by creation itself, made by God for us to enjoy, and by the Word of God. The false teachers are doing the opposite with their made-up rules concerning marriage



made by God (and it is possible that such ideas opened the way for their promiscuous practices—see back page) and their dietary restrictions... **received with thanksgiving**... Good Christians refute such error, subjectively, every time they recognize the divine origin of such gifts and receive them with thanksgiving (like prayers before a meal)...

v.6-10 - Here we find Paul giving Timothy practical advice about how to minister well in his present circumstances. Here also we discover the ethical test of teaching which involves godliness... *Good teaching will honor God by encouraging us to worship Him, obey Him and trust His "good doctrine"...*

v.6 - put these things before the brothers... It is worth noting that Paul in this very personal section of his letter does not emphasize refuting the false teachers but simply living out and sharing his genuine faith in Christ in word and deed. It is not a "just say no!" but a "say YES!" approach... His tone is gentle. The word here, as William Barclay says, "does not mean 'to issue orders'; it means rather to counsel, to advise, to point out, to suggest. It is a gentle, a humble, and a modest word" (Timothy, Titus, and Philemon, p.111)... **trained**... literally "nourished"... As good food keeps us healthy physically, so a diet of good teaching in God's Word make us spiritually healthy...

v.7 - The metaphor changes from nourishment to exercise... **silly myths**... literally "old wive's tales"...

baseless and superstitious stories idly passed around... **train yourself**... unlike the deceitful and self-promoting asceticism of the false teachers (denigrating marriage, and rejecting foods), Paul now suggests healthy Christian self-discipline, not as the end but as the means toward the goal of **godliness**...

v.8-9 - While physical training is good, but only for this life, training in godliness carries into eternity!... **The saying is trustworthy**... The pre-existing saying referred to is likely the one comparing **bodily training & godliness**...

v.10 - to this end we toil and strive... The promise of life that accompanies godliness motivates all those who have put their hope in Jesus Christ... And it helps them recognize and reject teaching that does not encourage them to worship Him!... **Savior of all people**... This is not an affirmation of "universalism" (everyone goes to heaven regardless of their beliefs, behaviors or desires) which the Bible and Paul clearly do not teach... It is an affirmation of God's character and role as the only real and effective savior of anyone... **especially of those who believe**... "especially" (*malista*) might mean "to be precise" or "in other words"... "Paul is not saying that God saves believers more than he saves others; he is simply modifying his general statement that God is the Savior of all men by adding the limitation that you cannot be saved unless you believe" (A.T. Hanson, The Pastoral Letters, p.92).

Read & Reflect - 4:1-10

First Reading: If you were Timothy how would you respond to what you read in this section? Discouraged Challenged
 Afraid Informed & Equipped Confident Other _____ Why?

What do you see as Paul's main concern in this part of his letter?

Search & Consider

4:1 - Why does Paul think he is living in the "later times?" What do you think this means? Have these times changed for us?

4:2 - What does Paul say about the troublemakers in Ephesus?

4:3 - What two things characterize their false teaching? What does this suggest about their views concerning God's creation and what it means to be "spiritual"? (See also Mark 7:18-19)

4:4-5 - How is Paul's view of creation and true spirituality different? In what two ways are created things "made holy?"

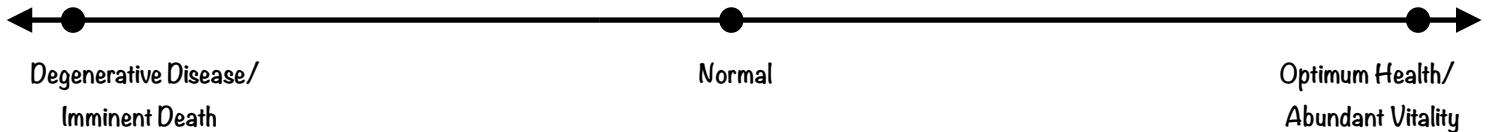
4:6-9 — What is Timothy instructed to do? Why is Paul confident that Timothy will be up to the task?

What does it mean to be "godly"? How might someone "train" to be more "godly"?

4:10 - According to Paul in this verse, why is it a good idea to "toil and strive" toward the "end" of godliness?

Apply

1. Where would you place yourself on the scale (below) in terms of your bodily fitness, healthy practices and/or physical sense of well-being today? (Mark with an "X")



2. Where (above) in terms of your spiritual fitness, healthy practices, and/or experience of God's abundance? (Mark with an "O")

3. What can you do to improve your "O" location? to improve your "X" location? Which is more important to you?

For Small Group Discussion - 1 Timothy 4:1-10

A. **OPENER...** What advertisement on TV, Radio, or in print do you think deserves the label "most deceitful" or "biggest lie" ?

B. **1 TIMOTHY 4:1-10...** Share your Personal Study Guide answers above... As time permits, you may also want to focus on these questions...

1. What are some ways that Christians deny the goodness of God's creation today? What are some teachings and beliefs still held today that deny the goodness of our bodies, of good foods, of material reality, etc.? How is what God says in His Word different?

2. What "words of the faith and of the good doctrine" have you followed in your life that have been particularly helpful to you?

3. What kinds of "training in godliness" would you recommend to those you care about?

C. **A FINAL THOUGHT...**

What kinds of things have you "set your hope on" in your life? Why is it vitally important that now "we have our hope set on the living God"? Name two ways that this affects the way we live today?

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At the outset of Paul’s letter to Timothy, he pointed to false teachers and urged Timothy to stand firm against their ideas, to guard the ministry of the Gospel entrusted to him by Jesus through Paul. Here in chapter 4 Paul focuses again on these deceived and deceiving “liars.” He tells Timothy (and us) something about the nature of their errors. And he gives him (and us) tests to use to confirm that these prophets are in fact “wolves in sheep’s clothing.”

Paul reminds us that what God has made, marriage and food in particular, is good. We are to enjoy what God has made, what God has given, and we are to give Him thanks for it all. The first test, the *theological test*, involves this reality, and Timothy’s opponents in Ephesus, with their forbidding of marriage and rejection of foods, are failing it. They are dishonoring God and what He has made. They are, interestingly enough, attacking two of the most basic appetites God has built into the human body—sex and hunger. These appetites, they seem to be suggesting, are unclean in themselves. They are not. This is not to say that these appetites cannot be twisted by men into various lusts and greeds and perversions and gluttonies that are not good, but the things themselves are good. Teaching that denies this is not true and is not from God.

The New Testament has lots to say about self-denial, but not about self-denial as an end in itself. We are told to deny ourselves and to take up our crosses in order that we may follow Christ; and nearly every description of what we shall ultimately find if we do so contains an appeal to desire. If there lurks in most modern minds the notion that to desire our own good and earnestly to hope for the enjoyment of it is a bad thing, I submit that this notion has crept in from Kant and the Stoics and is no part of the Christian faith. Indeed, if we consider the unblushing promises of reward and the staggering nature of the rewards promised in the Gospels, it would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea. We are far too easily pleased.

- C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory*, p.3-4)

It is unfortunate and true that such creation-denying ideas have found a welcome home among God’s people in the Church throughout its history and still today. We looked at the desperate attempts church folks made through the years to keep from affirming the goodness of nerve-tingling sex in the blessing of one-man-one-woman marriage by God’s design when we studied the Song of Songs. And many still believe that virginity is holier than marriage, even a requirement for the highest offices in the church, and that Christians prove their faithfulness more by what they don’t do than by what they do. Such ideas are false, and they lead to pride: Look at me and all I refuse to enjoy!

In our tradition, we like to remind ourselves that “*the chief end of man is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever.*” The second part of this affirmation is also important. God blesses us with what He has made and we are to enjoy it all, and all of Him, with thanksgiving and praise. This points to the second test of teaching, the *ethical test*: Sound teaching that is right and true leads us to godly behavior. The teaching Paul urges Timothy to reject was not encouraging people to obey God like “*the good doctrine you have followed.*” It is an ironic fact of history that aberrant quasi-Christin teaching which denies God’s good creation often leads to immoral behavior. Borrowing from Gnostic ideals (apparently part of the ideological-soup-du-jour of the 1st century though it came to full flower in the 2nd) that affirmed that material reality was bad/insignificant while spiritual things were good/important, people would conclude that our bodies count for nothing so it doesn’t matter if we use them for immoral and impure activities. This kind of thinking remains with us today, and people are being harmed and God is being dishonored.

When believers engage in the radically faithful act of table grace, as they bow and give thanks to God before they eat, we see both of these tests in operation. This action affirms that God is the Creator, and that what He has created is good: the *theological test*. Formal thanks to God before our meals also manifests the second test of teaching, the *ethical test*. Teaching that is right and true leads us into godliness, and it is people with some measure of godliness who take the time to give thanks in Christ’s name as part of their mealtime ritual.

“Does this teaching encourage my meal-time prayers?” We may want to ask ourselves this simple question as people all around us encourage us to accept and follow all kinds of interesting ideas.

*You say grace before meals. All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera,
And grace before the concert and pantomime,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,
swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.*

- G. K. Chesterton