

1 Timothy Chapter 4 (vv.1-9)

Whilst the preceding chapters have dealt with the *gatherings* and *government* of the House of God in relation to its members, this chapter focuses on the theme of *godliness*, and Timothy in particular as a 'good minister of Jesus Christ' (v.6). Paul is therefore returning to the theme of Timothy's charge (1.18-19) by explaining how *false* teaching may be detected and exposed, and *true* teaching commended and endorsed.

Exposure of False Doctrine [vv.1-3a]

v.1: 'Now' or 'but' (adversative) gives a clear contrast between the local church as the 'pillar and ground of the truth' (3.15-16), and the warning that some will depart from such truth. Whilst the preceding chapter concludes with a divine person received into *heaven*, this chapter commences with a divine person speaking on *earth*. The **Spirit** of God 'speaketh expressly', i.e. in definite, clear and explicit terms. The *present* tense suggests this was a repeated and ongoing warning, possibly given by direct revelation (cf. 1 Thessalonians 4.15). No human speculation was involved. The apostles and NT prophets were vehicles of inspiration that belonged to the foundation of the church (Ephesians 2.20). This direct, divine communication has ceased, but the result is contained in Scripture. The revelation concerned '**later** (afterward) **times**' (*kairos*) designating a (near) future period characterised by departure from the truth. Paul could see this spirit of apostasy in active operation already. This was a warning *Paul* had already given to the elders at Ephesus (Acts 20.28-31) and is repeated by *Peter* (2 Peter 2.1), *John* (1 John 2.18-19) and *Jude* (Jude 4). The warning concerns a *deliberate* '**departure**', i.e. apostasy, a 'standing' or 'falling away' from the truth of 'the Christian faith'. This would include the false teachers and their followers – individuals who were not saved, but once professed Christian truth, i.e. nominal, not genuine believers (cf. 1 John 2.18-19). This initial apostasy will reach its zenith in the tribulation when there will be wholesale enmity towards divine truth (2 Thessalonians 2.3). The false teachers and their adherents were 'giving heed' (a devoted clinging) to 'seducing spirits' (demons) which influence those that propagate such error. 'Seducing' (*planos*), from which the word 'planet' derives, describes the inherent *deception* that causes men to wander from the orbit of truth. It contrasts the Holy Spirit who 'guides into all truth' (John 16.13). The false teachers were ultimately communicating the 'doctrines' which demons originate (or inspire), designed to blind their adherents to the truth (1 Corinthians 10.20). **v.2:** The human agents of such demons are '**hypocrites**', wearing a mask of super-spirituality (holiness) to hide their true identity, and liars, speaking falsehood not truth. Having sinned so much against the light caused their **consciences** to be 'seared' (cauterised), i.e. totally burnt and desensitised (cf. 1.19). *They no longer have any scruples (guilt) about contradicting the word of God and teaching things that are untrue (MacDonald).*

v.3a: Specifically, the false teaching appeared to be *asceticism* – the denial of natural physical desires in order to attain a higher spiritual status (level). The Essenes were a Jewish sect that practiced asceticism, denying marriage and enforcing special dietary regulations. It is possible their influence was being felt in Ephesus. Alternatively, there were also elements of Greek philosophy (as warned against in Colossians) which taught that *matter* (and therefore physical desires) was evil. This error blossomed into Gnosticism and is still promoted in Roman Catholicism today.

Whatever the origin, some were '**forbidding** to marry', suggesting that celibacy was a meritorious expression of total devotion to God. They also commanded the restriction of diet through enforced fasting or a list of forbidden foods. The word '**meats**' describes solid food but was often applied to animal flesh. Note the slippery slope. First, the abandonment of Christian truth results in *exposure* to the false doctrine of demons. Second, imbibing such teaching causes the conscience to become insensitive to right and wrong leading to a life of hypocrisy and believing a lie.

Exposition of Sound Doctrine [vv.3b-5]

v.3b: Implicitly, Paul is presenting two tests by which such false teaching could be detected. The first is *theological* relating to creation (vv.3-5). The second is *moral*, relating to godliness (vv.6-10). In relation to theology, Paul says 'which things' (neuter plural) probably referring to *both* marriage and meats (food). They were '**created**' by God to be enjoyed with '**thanksgiving**'. Satan seeks to deprive God of such thanksgiving, but those who have *believed* and *fully known* the truth, glorify God for such provisions (cp. Romans 1.21). **v.4:** Indeed, every '**creature**', or better, everything 'created by God' is '**good**' (*kalos*), Genesis 1.31; 2.18. All that God created has intrinsic worth (excellence) and is perfectly fit for purpose. As such, and particularly in relation to food, nothing is to be 'refused', literally 'thrown away' as Bartimaeus cast away his garment when he met the Lord (Mark 10.50). This sounds like scriptural confirmation we should all eat and be thankful for our greens! Such gracious provision must be received with '**thanksgiving**' – the upward movement of praise from the heart. The Jews always offered a word of thanksgiving before eating. When eating vegetables, they would say, "Blessed art thou, King of the Universe, who createst the fruit of the earth." The *Lord Jesus* always blessed food (Matthew 15.36; Mark 8.6; John 6.11), as did *Paul* (Acts 27.35; Romans 14.6). **v.5:** In addition, food is '**sanctified**' by

the 'word of God' and 'prayer'. That is, **scripture** declares all kinds of food as having been setting apart *from* the ordinary (common) or unclean and rendered suitable for eating and sustaining our physical bodies in the service of God (Acts 10.9-16; 1 Corinthians 10.26, 31). This is duly acknowledged as the believer renders thanks to God in **prayer**. The word of God has also sanctified the marriage bond as being a divine institution. Any such union should thus be dedicated to the glory of God through prayer. *Addendum: Early man was vegetarian (Genesis 1.29), but after the flood, God enlarged the human diet to include meat (Genesis 9.3). The Mosaic law limited the intake of meat to prescribed types (Leviticus 11). A distinction was made between clean and unclean beasts. Since a Christian is not under any obligation to the Mosaic law, he is free to enjoy all types of food (Gromacki).*

Exercise of Godliness [vv.6-10]

v.6: God's simple antidote to that which is erroneous is the teaching of the word of God by the exercise of spiritual gift (Ephesians 4.12-14). This was part of Timothy's responsibilities if he would be a '**good** (admirable) **minister** (servant) of Christ Jesus' – the portrait of whom Paul is about to sketch in the remaining verses of the chapter. *Jesus Christ has ministers of all sorts—good, bad and indifferent—but I cannot imagine a nobler ambition than to be 'a beautiful minister' reflecting His glory.* First, he must '**remind**' the brethren of these doctrinal dangers (vv.1-5). Paul uses the word *hupotithemi*, literally 'to put under', meaning to *gently advise* or *suggest*. It almost likens Timothy to a builder placing doctrinal steppingstones under the saints' feet so they would not fall away into apostasy. Timothy could not engage in this ministry unless he was daily '**nourishing**' (feeding) his own soul at the table of the good word of God. Scripture is here described as 'the **words of the faith**', i.e. inspired words in which the truth of the faith is contained (cf. Ezra 7.11). He had also received '**good doctrine**' (singular) or 'sound instruction' from varied sources (including Paul) in contrast to the 'doctrines of demons' (v.1, the *plural* indicating many and varied contradictory teachings). To his commendation, he had '**attained**' (fully followed, JND) or *closely traced* the pattern of Paul's teaching in practice as well as belief (cf. 2 Timothy 3.10). *Stott: Behind the ministry of public teaching there lies the discipline of private study. All the best teachers have themselves remained students. They teach well because they learn well.*

v.7: The 'good servant' will also require *denial* and *discipline* as well as *dedication* to the word of God. He must constantly '**refuse**' (*decline* or *shun*) the junk food of '**profane**' (unholy, void of all relation to God) 'old wives' **fables**' or silly fictitious stories perpetuated by old women sitting around gossiping with nothing better to do. This phrase was commonly used in philosophical circles as a term of disdain for a viewpoint lacking credibility and thus appealing to uneducated old ladies! Such 'fables' must not be discussed seriously lest they be given a dignity they do not deserve. In the matter of *discipline*, Timothy must be '**exercised** (*gymnazo*) unto godliness'. As athletes train their bodies, so Christians must train their souls. The English words *gymnasium* and *gymnastics* are based on the transliteration of the Greek word for 'exercise'. Timothy was to develop spiritual muscle in the form of '**godliness**'. This key theme in the Pastoral Epistles describes a believer with the right *attitude* (reverence) and *response* (obedience) towards God. to cultivate godliness would require constant, strenuous spiritual activity in the form of prayer, Bible study and meditation. So, the 'excellent minister' of Christ does not pursue fame, popularity or reputation – he pursues godliness. *Smith: We may put service first; but there is ever the grave danger of being active in service while neglecting personal piety.*

v.8: This verse develops the benefits of such *spiritual* exercise (discipline) unto godliness. Whilst it is true, physical bodily exercise (not taken to the extremes of asceticism) is profitable 'for a little', i.e. beneficial in a limited temporal and physical sphere, **godliness** is profitable 'unto all things', i.e. beneficial in the temporal *and* eternal spheres, creating entire well-being – physically, mentally and spiritually (Proverbs 3.7-8). The *supreme* advantage of godliness is the attached '**promise**' of divine **life** (*zoe*), both now *and* in eternity. In essence, *zoe* is a **quality** of existence (not just *mere* existence) which comprises *fellowship* with God in Christ, the *love* of God shed abroad in the heart and the *peace* of God which passes all understanding. As William Hendriksen says, "The pursuit of godliness results in the increasing *possession and enjoyment* of this reward. And this *life* which God bestows is both for the present and the future, for the age that *now* is and *the coming* age. It can never cease." **v.9:** In a parenthetical statement, Paul affirms the *superiority* of godliness. This is the *third* and final 'faithful saying' of the epistle – a statement worthy of full confidence and trust. 'All acceptance' means to be *approved* and *welcomed* without reservation or doubt by *all*. May we thus recognise the importance of the pursuit of godliness above all else.