

## STAYING ON COURSE

1 Timothy 4:1-13

It is so easy to buy into false doctrines, because false doctrines are often popular as well as politically correct. In a recent speech a local business executive was addressing a group of temporary summer workers (college students) and was stressing the importance of having spiritual values and having something to believe in. Then he added, it doesn't matter what you believe in, just as long as you believe in something. **Nothing** could be further from the truth. What we believe in is serious business since it not only influences how we behave and relate to the world around us, to other people and to God Himself right now and tomorrow, **but** it has profound influence on our eternity.

On a more immediate time frame, the consequences of beliefs can be seen by a cursory examination of recent history. If we question the idea that what you believe is important, then we need only look at communism, consider the consequences of legalized abortion, look at the gay community, look at what Hitler did before and during WWII, look at what is happening in the Middle East with Israel and the Arabs and ISIS. Now we are hearing about politicians wanting to cancel the debts of those who irresponsibly spent more than their resources and those picking up the bill for these cancellations will be those who acted responsibly.

In Roman 1:17, Paul wrote that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Of course, he was writing about true faith and not just "anything" we might believe. This verse can also apply to other things. We could say that "Whatever we believe is a result of what we have been taught." If we are taught (hear) the right thing (the word of God), then what we believe (have faith in) will be right. On the other hand, if we are taught error, then our beliefs will also be in error. There are many "teachers" in the world. In fact, everything we encounter teaches in one way or another. Television, newspapers, novels, other people, music, poetry, social media – you name it, we can be influenced by it. Therefore, we must be careful regarding what we hear and read and carefully examine the source and what it is really teaching before we accept what is being taught.

### Be Aware – 4:1-5

<sup>1</sup> But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, <sup>3</sup> men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer. 1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NASB95)

The term "later times" is considered by many scholars to be a reference to what Timothy would see happening during his ministry rather than a reference to "end times" that would be associated with the return of Christ in the distant future. During this "near future" times, there did arise those who took positions on spiritual issues that were not aligned with the true faith and teachings based upon the principles of the Kingdom of God.

This passage gives us a glimpse of the operation of the early church. When the Church met there was interaction with the Holy Spirit. It was not unusual to have prophetic messages when believers came together in the name of Jesus. Paul's warning to Timothy was to encourage him to be watchful that what was being shared in the church was not in error.

Most translations render the Greek word "aphistemi" as "to fall away" or "to depart" in English usage. This would strongly suggest that those false teachers were once "believers" and

had changed. "Aphistemi" can also mean "to stand apart" which would not necessarily imply that such teachers were ever "in the faith" as true believers. Some of the false doctrines that were attempting to corrupt the first and second century church came from those who were associated with the Essenes (an ascetic Jewish group) in the first century and with the Gnostics in the second century. The promoters of these ideas were causing people to turn from embracing the truth of the gospel which is that we are saved by grace through faith and is not something that we earn by what we do or don't do.

The source of these errors is the source of all errors and it is Satan himself. Not only does he use demons to influence people with wrong ideas just as he influenced Eve in the Garden of Eden but other people who have influence are used also. The errors are persuasive and entice people away from God. "Believe as we do and you will be a god" is but one lie of the devil. Others who see themselves as intellectually superior to the masses promote an idea such as "there is no god other than the god that is within you." The ultimate lie of the humanist is "we cannot rely on some deity to save us, we must save ourselves."

Even today, some of the false teachers are misled and they themselves believe the lies that they teach. Others know that their message is in error and are just doing it to get rich. Such people have obviously deadened their consciences to the point that they no longer have any sense of right and wrong. That is tragic.

In an effort to exercise control over their followers they will have all sorts of things that people must or must not do. Abstinence from marriage, not eating certain things, and various other things are typical of the restrictions that have been seen from such groups in the past. Such practices were not limited to the first century but are found even today.

The two letters to Timothy and the one to Titus are referred to as Pastoral Letters since Paul gave instructions to these young pastors regarding how to carry out an effective ministry. Recognizing and challenging false doctrines and teachers are key responsibilities of a pastor. Success in teaching others is related to having those being taught recognize the relationship among doctrinal truths, our knowing and understanding and embracing those truths, and then ultimately how these all work together to produce actions and influence the world in which we live.

### Be Disciplined – 4:6-10

<sup>6</sup> In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following. <sup>7</sup> But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; <sup>8</sup> for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. <sup>9</sup> It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers. 1 Timothy 4:6-10 (NASB95)

So much of effective preaching and teaching is simply reminding people of what they already know. The truth – words of faith and good doctrine – needs to be served up again and again. What we teach should be sound and not just someone's speculation about religious things. Such speculations may be entertaining or "tickle our ears" but they do not serve to make us more Godly.

Just as surely as athletes need to have physical training and discipline, the Christian needs discipline and spiritual training. Paul's contention was that spiritual conditioning is more important than physical conditioning. The reason is quite logical, we may have our physical bodies for a hundred years, but our spiritual self we will have for all eternity. Other reasons to be in good spiritual condition are that there is a lot of difficult work that needs to be done and

there are many hardships and dangers for any who truly put their trust in God and walk by faith in the midst of an unbelieving world. We need to be strong in the Lord and put our trust and reliance in Him. As a pastor-teacher, Timothy was to keep on proclaiming these truths and teaching his flock to do the right things and to set their priorities in proper order.

We have a tendency to compartmentalize everything. There are certainly some benefits of this tendency; however, we also need to be mindful of the interactions among these various compartments. Some examples of compartments that we sometimes recognize are jobs, hobbies, family, home, church, social, friends, relatives, etc. Sometimes people will have different standards that they apply to how they interact within these various segments.

Paul mentioned three different areas in verses six and seven of this chapter that we are currently examining. The first area is “words of faith and sound doctrine.” We should recognize that this is not two separate items, but one. The second area is “discipline” which is related to how we think about things, our attitudes, control of our emotions and even the resolve of our will. The third area is termed by Paul as “godliness” or “piety.” Alexander MacLaren saw this term to mean “well-directed reverence as shown in conduct” or “active godliness.”

As already mentioned, our tendency to “compartmentalize” our lives can impact these three areas. Some of us spend considerable amounts of time and effort studying the Word of God and learning what we trust are doctrinal truths. You may know some people who attend two or three Bible Study groups every week in addition to being in church at every opportunity. Being enlightened can become an end in itself.

We may also spend time and effort to get our Sentiments, our Affections, our Feelings, and our Emotions brought under control by discipline and training. Some people may actually make an effort to bring about alignment of the truths learned in Bible Study with these S.A.F.E. items. Others may not ever see a connection because of our tendency to compartmentalize.

With regard to our actions, all of us actually do things since we are alive and interact with others and the world around us. We take actions. The way we conduct ourselves in the actions we take is typically what influences how we are known. It is possible to compartmentalize our conduct and have our conduct stand apart from and not be aligned with either the facts that we have studied or the proper sentiments and emotions that we know we are supposed to have. If our conduct is not based upon the right beliefs and inspired by the right affections, then we could conclude that “we really don’t have it all together.”

The admonition to “exercise ourselves unto godliness” would start with learning the truth so that the truth will influence who we are (mind, emotions, and wills) so that our actions will be conducted in alignment with and supportive of the principles of holiness that characterize God.

#### Be an Example – 4:11-13

<sup>11</sup> Prescribe and teach these things. <sup>12</sup> Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe. <sup>13</sup> Until I come, give attention to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation and teaching. 1 Timothy 4:11–13 (NASB95)

Paul took special interest in Timothy. He had known his mother and grandmother and Paul had been instrumental in Timothy coming to know the Lord.

Because he was young, Timothy would have had some difficulty in being accepted by the congregation at Ephesus where he was the pastor. Paul gave him excellent advice in ways to overcome a lack of acceptance in any situation and that was to be a good example to the people. All the areas that Paul cited (conduct, charity, speech, faith, purity) cover most of the areas that the world uses to judge Christians and whether we get labeled as real or hypocrites. It is important that all Christians be good examples in all these areas; however, it is especially

important that a pastor be faithful in this. All of us need good solid examples and models as a means to inspire us to do better and to just realize that we can do better. When we see the possibility of living a life dedicated to God and not dominated by self, then we are strengthened in our faith to do the same.

Paul went on to encourage and direct his young friend. Two of the important jobs of a pastor are to encourage and to teach those in his pastorate. This requires spending time in the word of God so that the basis of the encouragement, advice and doctrine are sound. If a pastor spends his time reading secular psychology books rather than the Bible, then he will find himself recommending secular solutions to spiritual problems.

All of us can profit from Paul's advice to Timothy: mediate on these things, pay close attention to the example we set and what we teach others, and keep ourselves on a sound foundation in what we believe.