

## TRAIN YOURSELF IN GODLINESS

It is so easy to buy into false doctrine, because false doctrine is many times what is popular. In a recent speech one of the top Eastman executives was addressing a group of Summer workers (college students) and was stressing the importance of having spiritual values and having sometime to believe in. Then he added, it doesn't matter what you believe in, just as long as you believe in something. Now, that is not a direct quote, but is the essence of the message. **Nothing** could be further from the truth. What you 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. If we question the idea that what you believe is important, then we need only look at communism, 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.

In Roman 1:17, Paul say that "faith comes by hearing and hearing by the word of God." Of course, he is speaking about true faith and not just any ol' thing 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 -- you name it, we can be influenced by it. Therefore, we must be careful regarding what we hear and read and examine the source and what it is really teaching before we accept what is being taught.

**I TIMOTHY 4:1-5** 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. The message was clear that during the period between the ascension of Christ and His return, that people would stray into error and would lead other into error. The source of this error is the source of all error and it is Satan himself. He uses demons to influence people with wrong ideas just as he influenced Eve in the Garden of Eden. The errors are persuasive and entice people away from God. "Believe as we do and you will be a god" is one lie, "there is no god other than the god that is within you" is another, and the ultimate lie of the humanist is "we cannot rely on some deity to save us, we must save ourselves."

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

In a effort to exercise control over their followers they will have all sorts of thing that people must or must not do. Abstinence from marriage, not eating certain things, not using medicine, and various other things are typical of the restrictions. 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 gives instruction to these young pastors regarding how to carry out an effective ministry. The necessity of recognizing and challenging false doctrines and teachers is one of the responsibilities of a pastor.

**I TIMOTHY 4:6-11** So much of effective preaching and teaching is simply reminding the

congregation 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 someones speculation about religious things. Some preachers use the pulpit to relate stories they have concocted about Biblical characters. Such things may be entertaining but they do not serve to make us more Godly.

Just as surely as an athlete needs to have physical training and discipline, the Christian needs discipline and spiritual training. Paul 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 lot of hardships and dangers for any that 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 order.

**I TIMOTHY 4:12-16** 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, in spirit, faith, purity) cover most of the areas that the world uses to judge Christians and whether we get labelled 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 strengthen 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 e courage 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 pastors 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 you set and what you teach others, and keep yourself on a sound foundation in what you believe.