



## First Baptist Church Selmer

"ORDER IN THE... CHURCH!" • SINCERE FAITHFULNESS • 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-10 • 4/21/2024

### MAIN POINT

A healthy church is made up of men and women seeking after God with sincere faithfulness to His Word and one another.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**What comes to mind when you think of false teaching?**

**What are some examples of false teaching today? How should we guard against false teachings in our daily lives?**

**How can we prepare ourselves to be able to identify false teaching?**

We tend to think of false teaching as unfortunate or slightly misleading, but that is not the way Paul describes false teaching. Paul likens false teaching to *"the teachings of demons"* and says that it is rooted in *"deceitful spirits."* The false teaching that Paul seeks to help Timothy correct undermines the gospel by attempting to add extra requirements to the gospel, a teaching known as Asceticism.

Asceticism is a voluntary self-denial from the satisfaction of bodily and social needs, including food, drink, sexual activity, sleep, clothes, wealth, and social interaction. Although spiritual disciplines of fasting and denial of the flesh are not inherently sinful, and even at times should be practiced, the problem in Ephesus was that self-denial was being placed on a spiritual hierarchy above the finished work of Jesus Christ. It was this teaching that forbade people to eat certain foods or enter into marriage.

In helping Timothy correct this false teaching, Paul encourages us to keep the gospel central in our thinking as we seek to grow in our walk with Christ.

# UNDERSTANDING

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5.

*1 "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." (ESV)*

The false teaching that Paul is combating in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 was very likely an early form of asceticism (also addressed in the letter to the Colossians): the idea that a person can attain a higher spiritual and moral state by practicing self-denial.

**False teaching can sound spiritual and contain some truth. How are some of the most common forms of false teaching today partially true?**

**How does forbidding marriage and requiring abstinence from certain foods contradict the gospel (v. 3)?**

**How do verses 4-5 demonstrate the error of forbidding these things?**

One of the most common forms of false teaching today is to take things God created good and declare them sinful. Believers should beware of any leaders or doctrines that teach unbiblical views on marriage or creation as anything other than good, right, and true.

Many Christians attempt to do this with things like food, sex, movies, or music. Although there can be sinfulness in each, these things can also be good when used the way God intends. When we misuse anything, it is not because all these things are sinful, but because our hearts are full of sin. Any attempt to claim that people must abstain from certain things God created good misses two important truths of the gospel: that sin originates in the human heart and that salvation is by grace alone through faith alone.

The danger of asceticism is that it can simply cause believers to drift away from the truth of the gospel. C.S. Lewis, regarding asceticism, once stated, "*As a matter of fact, if you*

*examined a hundred people who had lost their faith in Christianity, I wonder how many of them would turn out to have been reasoned out of it by honest argument? Do not most people simply drift away?"*

**What are some ways people try to add to the gospel? How might we guard ourselves against teaching that would add to the gospel?**

In verses 6-10, Paul challenges Timothy to diligently guard against such false teaching by studying the Bible and faithfully teaching it to the church at Ephesus.

| HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 TIMOTHY 4:6-10.

*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." (ESV)*

**Given that Timothy was already proven in his faithfulness and capability, are you surprised to see Paul challenging him to "train yourself for godliness" (v. 7)?**

**What does that tell us about how we should devote ourselves to spiritual growth?**

**How might studying the Bible and its essential doctrines prepare you to respond to false teaching?**

The word 'godliness' is used 15x in the New Testament, 13 of which are found in the Pastoral Epistles to Timothy and Titus, and 9 are found specifically in the letters to Timothy. When we train for godliness so that God will love us, accept us, or forgive us, we lose sight of the gospel which tells us that we are saved because of who God is and what He has done for us through Christ. We should pursue godliness not so that God will love us but because God has demonstrated His love for us (Rom. 5:8), has accepted us (Rom. 15:7), and has forgiven us (Eph. 4:32).

**Why does Paul use the verbs “toil” and “strive” when referencing his approach to spiritual growth? Why is spiritual growth so difficult for us sometimes?**

**How might having our hope set on the living God help us endure when spiritual growth becomes difficult?**

**What are some practical ways we could devote ourselves to training for godliness?**

Paul challenged Timothy to faithfully teach the Bible as a means of *“being trained in the words of the faith”* (v. 6). Studying the Bible is one of the most important means God has given us by which we can grow in our relationship with Him. It is very difficult to grow in your relationship with someone if you do not get to know them and the most reliable way God has given us to know Him is through His Word. God has also given us prayer (Col. 4:2) and the church as means of growing in our relationship with Him (Heb. 10:25).

## APPLICATION

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**What extra requirements are you most tempted to add to the gospel? How does doing so hinder our spiritual growth?**

**What is one step you could take this week to devote yourself to godliness?**

**How might the time you spend studying the Bible need to change for you to devote yourself to godliness?**

## PRAYER

Thank God for loving, accepting, and forgiving us through the death and resurrection of Christ. Ask God to help us keep the gospel in mind as we seek to grow in relationship with Him. Pray that God would help us devote ourselves to the study of Scripture so that we would be able to identify false teaching and hold firmly to Christ’s gospel of grace.

## COMMENTARY

| 1 TIMOTHY 4:1-10

4:1-2. When Paul wrote about following deceiving spirits and things taught by demons, he was not necessarily envisioning Satan worship or humanistic spirituality. There is a wide variety of ways in which Satan peddles his twisted inventions. All deceptions come from Satan's realm, but he uses many gentle ways to fashion these lies, spreading ideas that are anti-God.

The apostle John wrote, *"Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world"* (1 John 4:2-3).

John's words cover a whole range of teachings, some religious in nature such as cults and various world religions, as well as antireligious as in trendy philosophies. All find their source in demons. The false teachings find receptivity in those who are hypocritical liars, whose consciences are seared. At times, even without knowing, some inside the church perpetuate the lies of Satan to others.

4:3. Paul wrote of the ascetics (legalists) as those who forbid marriage and require abstinence from certain foods. Legalism enslaves people to joyless toil. Such systems misrepresent the God of grace and belittle the work of Christ on the cross. They lead people down a path of grinding effort, at the end of which there is no God—only insecurities, mental anguish, and more labor. The particulars of a legalistic system are not as important as its assumptions. In fact, the legalist often uses convincing arguments that have the ring of truth. Forbidding people to marry, for instance, may have come from Jesus' own teaching about Paradise-to-come in which there would be no marriage. Abstaining from certain foods may have been rooted in the Genesis account of paradise-past when vegetarianism seems to have been the rule.

4:4-5. Paul did not refute the antimarriage argument because he had implied his endorsement earlier in 1 Timothy (3:2, 12). But he did face the food issue by asserting that everything God created is good. He told the Corinthians, *"Food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do"* (1 Cor. 8:8).

Paul also declared: *"Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."* This statement extends beyond diet, creating a context for understanding life and godliness. The touch of God purifies. In Him, there is no darkness at all. Everything that comes from God is good. In addition, prayer and Scripture go along with thanksgiving. By these, a transformation takes place as a believer acknowledges God as the source of all that is good.

4:7. Not everything promoted as spiritual is good for our development, however. Some things fall under the category of irreverent, silly myths. These are to be strictly avoided, Paul declared. We must be aware of all the false and distracting *"knowledge"* that presents itself as spiritual and then stay far from it and warn others of its ungodly results. To be able to discern the false from the true, a believer must be solidly grounded in the truth of God.

4:8. Paul declared, *"Physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things."* Physical training is limited to just that—the physical dimensions of life. Godliness, on the other hand, penetrates every aspect of life. Godliness affects everything: our view of self, marriage, parenting, business, civic responsibilities, environmental outlook, and relationship with our next-door neighbors. Nothing escapes godliness; it covers everything.

Godliness is not limited only to the present; it also extends to our life to come: Godliness holds promise for both the present life and the life to come. It does not matter if a person invests in physical exercise or careful dietary plans. Inevitably, death confronts us. Jesus addressed this truth when he said, *"What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?"* (Mark 8:36). What we become in this life we carry into eternity.

While discipline sounds similar to legalism there is one large difference: Legalism is self-centered, and discipline is God-centered. The legalistic heart says, "I will do this thing to gain merit with God" while the disciplined heart says, "I will do this thing because I love God and want to please Him."

4:9–10. Spiritual growth, nourishment, and discipline for godliness do not exist in a vacuum. They must be grounded in the living Christ. Paul underscored this idea by stating, *"this is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance."* This is the thing for which the apostles and followers of Christ labor and strive. They had one purpose in their work. They committed themselves to one urgent and pressing goal—the spread of the gospel.