

Pastoral Epistles

In the pastoral epistle of First Timothy, we find the admonitions of a seasoned apostle to a young minister. The book is a deep well of practical knowledge, flowing over with ministry do's and don'ts. Today, however, the discussion will be confined to a mere pail full in chapter 4 verses 1 through 8.

In verse 1, an ominous warning is given: "...the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith" (vs. 1a). It is a sure thing. It will happen. People will fall away from the faith! How will this happen? By "paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons..."(vs. 1b). And through what means will this happen? Verse 2 makes this clear: "by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron..."(vs. 2). As one who teaches others through the Holy Word, such actions anger me. Many times I have turned on so called "Christian television" and heard "doctrines of demons" spouting forth. What's worse is that I am fully aware that these hypocrites and liars have sizeable followings. Conversely, though, it also humbles me to know that it is God alone who keeps me. He keeps me safe. He keeps me to right doctrine.

Verses 3 through 5 display some common forms of the prophetic deception. For instance, "men who forbid marriage" correlates to the lie of asceticism: that we can get closer to God by punishing our bodies needlessly. Also, "abstaining from foods" accurately represents the folly of legalism and self-righteousness. These inspired glimpses into prolific errors are invaluable to me. To know that the pitfalls of my day are the same as those in Timothy's, only repackaged, is the heads up that every minister needs. With such information it is difficult to be caught unawares.

Verses 6 through 8 are the prognosis to the diagnosis of verse 1 through 5. It is this portion that is the ray of hope and joy to the teacher, to the preacher. For "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus..." (vs. 6a). Now, this good servant has a certain diet: "...constantly nourished on the words of faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following" (vs. 6b). This intake ensures his life is in accordance with the will of God. Something particularly striking about the diet is its balance. It consists of "words of faith" and "sound doctrine." How important this is! If one eats only the former, he becomes a foolish zealot. And, if he eats only the latter, he becomes a stuffy scholar without relationship. This union of faith and doctrine is essential to everyone who desires to not only know truth but also walk in truth. The last part of this passage, verses 7 through 8, emphasize the need for self-discipline. I prefer to look at this principle as a self-inventory—continually examining motives, ambitions, and behaviors. While such a practice is an ever struggle, it yields great returns. For God promises: "...discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness; 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" (vs. 7b, 8). It is through such a spiritual workout that I expect to climb new heights every year. Praise be to God!

The apostle Paul's letter to Timothy is an inspiration to me. The passage that has been discussed herein is one of dynamic life-changing force. Its melodies ring especially wonderful to me because of my ministry, Ask the Preacher Box.

I am often encountered with questions from people who have been deceived through wicked doctrines and cult influence. Therefore, Paul's words to Timothy concerning false teaching and teachers become my banner in such times. They are my watch, word, and song!