

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

For reply: Email: truthfortoday@aol.com

Broadcast Date: 11 March 2001

No. T0153

Speaker: Mr. Peter Ollerhead

Paul's First Letter to Timothy: 1 Timothy 4:1-16

I think it was Mark Twain who said that when he was 15 he thought his father was a fool, but when he was 21 he wondered how his father could have learned so much in such a few years! Whether it was he or not the truth remains that young people quite often think that the older generation have very little to offer. I certainly can remember the time when I did not want to listen to advice if it was offered by someone of a different generation to myself. I trust that, now I am older, I am sufficiently wise to admit that experience can bring a wealth of helpful knowledge if I am humble enough to accept it.

1 Timothy 4 continues the advice which an older, more travelled servant of the Lord gives to a young man whom he considers a "son in the faith" (see 1 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 2:22, 1 Timothy 1:2, 8; 2 Timothy 1:2, 2:1). This has been the subject of our studies over the past three weeks. We have seen how Timothy was the child of a mixed marriage, his mother being a Jewess and his father Greek (Acts 16:1); how Paul met him first at Lystra, perhaps on his first visit which is recorded in Acts 14:8, but certainly on his second venture there, as is stated in Acts 16:1-5. From then onwards, Timothy became Paul's companion in the work of evangelising and church planting. At the time of writing Timothy, who was probably about thirty years of age, was at Ephesus (see 1 Timothy 1:3) bearing some of the responsibility, in Paul's absence, of ministering to the needs of the young church at Ephesus.

What the Spirit has revealed

1 Timothy 4, which is the passage for consideration today, begins with a thought about the Spirit of God. 1 Timothy 4:1 is, I suggest, linked with 1 Timothy 3:14-16 where Paul has introduced what appears to be the fragment of a hymn which contains six concise declarations concerning the momentous revelation of God. Paul had delivered, along with the other Apostles, the truths to which the church bears witness in every age. This revelation is for all men in all time. We do not amend or alter what the Spirit has delivered through the Apostles just because the fashion of men's thought has changed. This seems to be the burden of 1 Timothy 4:1-2, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron". I am quoting directly from the Authorised or King James Version of the Bible and shall be throughout this broadcast unless stated differently.

From this quotation we can see that Paul is convinced that the Spirit was inspiring his words. I repeat, again, my previous thought that the Apostles and prophets were the means through which we have received a divinely inspired Bible which is our sole authority in matters of faith. Some might claim that the world has moved on and that such simplistic statements are not tenable in today's world. Such an attitude says more about our view of God than anything else. If we are convinced that God did not speak to the world through Christ; nor show His redeeming love in Him, we will probably not accept that He has given to us a Book which tells of His purposes.

The claim that the Spirit was speaking through Paul and divinely inspiring Scripture must be tempered by the thought that this inspiration belonged to the founding days of the Church. Ephesians 2:19-22 states, "...ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints, and of the household of God; And are built upon the foundation of the Apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone..." This, to my mind, seems definitive.

Apostasy

There is also in 1 Timothy 4:1-2, a warning that some of the members of the church at Ephesus and elsewhere will abandon the faith and become apostate. The cause of this, according to 1 Timothy 4:1, is deliberate deception by the powers of evil. This evil teaching is in contravention of that of the Spirit which will seek to elevate and glorify Christ as we are taught in John 16:13-14. The teachers of this falseness are described as "hypocritical liars with seared consciences." (1 Timothy 4:2) This latter reference to the conscience would mean that these teachers had become quite careless about the effects of their teaching.

1 Timothy 4:3 brings before us two of the features of the wrong teaching; wrong, that is, if it is posing as Christian doctrine. These were a ban on marriage and abstention from food. Perhaps this second restriction only concerned

certain types of food but the emphasis, as far as the Apostles were concerned, was wrong. The believer in Christ has been brought into freedom from all regulations and laws. Paul did not want his converts to become tied into such practices in the belief that these things led to a holy or more spiritual life. So we are to keep clear of doctrine which poses in clothes of self-denial but does not lead to a closer walk with the Lord. Everything God created is good and doesn't need to be rejected but rather to be received with thanks. Such an attitude however, needs care otherwise we can descend into gluttony. Notice how Paul carefully keeps the balance in 1 Timothy 4:4-5, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer." Anything about which we have prayed, and about which we have a good conscience, will not be the object of selfish pleasure or personal aggrandisement. We need to preserve such an attitude in order to ward off the spirit of the world.

The mark of a good minister

The mark of a good minister of Jesus Christ is the ability to "...put the brethren in remembrance of these things," as we read in 1 Timothy 4:6. The "things" in view in this phrase are the warnings we have just considered and the glorious statement regarding the Saviour which we noticed at the conclusion of 1 Timothy 3. It also, or so I would judge, refers back to 1 Timothy 3:14 where Paul writes about "these things...". Thus, it includes all the instructions which we get in this letter that Timothy had to pass on to others. Ultimately it is the whole of the scriptural revelation which is to be used for building up the saints and servants of God, as Paul makes clear in 2 Timothy 3:16-17.

Timeless

This emphasis upon the nourishing nature of the word of God is further expressed at the end of 1 Timothy 4:6 where Paul describes the word of God as "words of faith and of good doctrine." Again it could be suggested by some that we need to alter the teaching to match the knowledge current in the world at the beginning of the 21st century. It is a plausible argument but it must be categorically refuted because what would be taught would not be New Testament Christianity. It is not that we in the church are time warped, but rather that the truths which we embrace are timeless. How can the expression of the love and grace of God in Christ be anything other than timeless. Years ago when I was a teenager I was a member of an organisation called "Youth for Christ". I think it was brought to this country by Billy Graham but I am not too sure about that. What I am sure about is the motto which we used in those days which was "Anchored to the Rock and geared to the times". That attitude is still valid today. Preachers and evangelists need to be able to present the message in modern terms but always to remain in line with the revealed word.

Training in Godliness

Contrasted with the "words of faith and good doctrine" are "profane fables and old wives' tales" (1 Timothy 4:6-7). Paul warns against such legends and myths in his letter to Titus, who was doing similar service to Timothy but in Crete. Here he writes, in Titus 1:14, "Not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth." Paul was ever zealous to keep the disciples of Christ in the truth of Christ. Consequently he urged Timothy to train himself to be godly. There is a salutary note here which, I feel, is important for our society today for there seems to be an obsession with physical fitness and "working out"!!

Far be it from me to decry the desire to improve one's health and fitness. It is self evident that we in the west are generally not as fit as we ought to be. To retain or regain physical fitness we need more exercise not less. This said, I am still of the opinion that we are in danger of being beguiled by image. The desire to have the correct physique is indicated by the number of health clubs and gymnasiums which seem to be springing up everywhere. Let us notice that the Apostle writes in 1 Timothy 4:8 that "bodily exercise is profitable for a little time but godliness is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come". If we, in the church, put as much effort and time into our spiritual exercises as some of our fellow men put into pumping iron then our portrayal of Christianity might be rather more powerful.

Striving in spiritual matters

This point is emphasised in 1 Timothy 4:10 where Paul urges Timothy to labour and suffer in the cause of godliness. The word "labour" has the connotation of intense effort or toil. "Suffer", which is translated as "strive" in the New International Version, has the thought of the effort needed in an athletic contest. The question now comes before each one of us, speaker and hearer alike, as to how far our faith takes us. How much does our belief in Christ cause us to strive energetically in spiritual matters? If our church has a prayer meeting, am I there? Am I available to help in the youth activities or other duties for the sake of Christ? Do I ever read and study the Scriptures? Or is my time, my energy, my intellect and my money all my own, to be devoted solely upon myself? The Christians at Ephesus were asked to demonstrate their belief and trust in the living God in various ways as we shall see as we look at 1 Timothy 4:12-16.

Before we look at 1 Timothy 4:12-16 can I refer back for a moment to the phrase, "a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation", which we can read in 1 Timothy 4:9. This striking formula brings to our attention a form of words which had already become accepted as a universal expression of a truth. These words were, perhaps, from a prayer or a hymn common to most of the churches in that Greek speaking world. To what does this phrase refer? I would judge that it is the thought of godliness which has been before the Apostle in 1 Timothy 4:8 and to which we have already referred. This further emphasises the plea for an energetic response for, according to 1 Timothy 4:11, Paul demands that Timothy teaches these implications of the faith to the converts where he is living and working.

We have now arrived at the closing section of our passage where the Apostle outlines some of the ways in which Timothy can exercise himself unto godliness. 1 Timothy 4:12 speaks about his youthfulness not being a hindrance to his service. The word which describes his age is one used to depict the inclusive age for service in the Roman Legions so it must be realised that he was not a teenager. Even so, just as it is difficult for young people to accept the advice of older ones, so it is for older generations to accept authority from the young. Timothy was to order his behaviour and attitude in such a way that no one could fairly look upon him with condescension or dislike.

Being an example

In order to accomplish this, he had to strive to be an example to the believers in speech, life, faith, love and purity (1 Timothy 4:12). This is a passage of scripture that it would be easy to pass over with very little comment but the deep responsibility attached to such a stipulation demands further consideration. The word "example" contains the thought of a pattern or figure. When I was at school taking woodwork lessons, our teacher would demonstrate a particular technique or skill for us to watch carefully and then try to replicate. He would leave his work on view for us to compare our efforts with. Needless to say, our first labours with saw, planes and chisels left much to be desired when set against the pattern from the hands of the master. The responsibility of the teacher to make a tenon joint for a group of school boys is nothing when compared to that thrust upon Timothy at Ephesus where his life was to be an example of Christian living.

Five features of the Christian life

As we have seen, 1 Timothy 4:12 brings before us five features of the Christian life in all of which Timothy was to shine.

1. Speech

The first of these is speech. I believe this includes both formal and informal occasions; of ministering to the church publicly and in general social conversations. In his letter, James gives us a warning about unguarded tongues. In James 3:5-6 he writes, "Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell." So often we want to carry out what we consider to be great deeds of faith before we have learned to control our own instincts. How many churches, fellowships and families have been ripped apart by unsanctified tongues? We do well to follow faithfully the words of Paul to Timothy in such matters.

2. Conduct

Timothy was also to be an example in conversation (1 Timothy 4:12), though here "conversation" means manner of living or conduct. This again is a pertinent point. Do we have a sanctified lifestyle or is our conduct little different from others who have no belief in Christ? People are motivated by their beliefs or lack of them. One might deprecate the violent antics of some in the anti-hunting lobby but at least they feel sufficiently passionate about matters to take to the streets. Are we, who claim to be Bible believing Christians, sufficiently motivated to display a Christian lifestyle that is honouring to the Lord?

3. Love

The next of the virtues that Timothy was to practise was charity. Here again the word has changed in meaning since 1611 when the Authorised Version of the Bible was published. Today it would be translated "love" though Barclay writes that it is almost an untranslatable word. He states "it has the meaning of unconquerable benevolence" (William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible; Galatians & Ephesians*, St Andrews Press, Edinburgh, 1981) No matter what others say, or do to them, no matter how they are treated, those who have this love will seek nothing but the good of those who wreak such things on them. Never resentful, never seeking vengeance or retribution such a display of Christian love is not a matter of the heart only but primarily of the will. This is a quality of love which can only be achieved by the power of the Spirit of God.

4. Faithfulness

You will notice if you read our passage in the King James version that the word "spirit" is also included in 1 Timothy 4:12 amongst the list of features that Timothy was to display. Most of the better translations do not include this and so we will move on to consider the next word which is "faith" where the prime thought is of faithfulness or loyalty. It is easy to be loyal to a person or cause when things are going well and the cause is a popular one. The doubters and fine weather friends leave when there is a hint of trouble or difficulties arise. Paul wanted Timothy to display a fidelity to Christ whatever the situation.

5. Purity

The final quality that is brought before our attention in 1 Timothy 4:12 is purity. Such matters are far more easier to discuss than to practise. Here Paul' desire for Timothy and the Ephesian Christians is for a high standard of holiness. Their self-control, honesty, chastity, honour and consideration for others was required to be constant. They owed allegiance to the moral standards of the Lord Jesus and not to those of the world in which they lived.

The public reading of Scripture

1 Timothy 4:13 is interesting as it tells us of the type of services that were current in the church at that time. The public reading of Scripture was urged upon Timothy. This was similar to the practice in the synagogue, where a passage from the Law or the Prophets would be read. It is not known when this was supplemented amongst Christian gatherings with the sayings of Jesus, but Paul certainly quoted one to the Ephesian church as we can read in the Acts 20:35. This saying is not one that we can read in any of the four gospels.

Preaching and teaching

Additional to the public reading of scripture were exhortation and doctrine, or preaching and teaching as the New International Version states. These functions are still extremely necessary in the modern church for we do not gather to inform one and other of our own notions or theories. One of the primary reasons is for the reading and exposition of the word of God. I like Ellicott's comments on this verse where he suggests that "'exhortation' applies to the feelings and 'teaching' to the understanding". (Charles J Ellicott, *Ellicott's Commentaries, Critical and Grammatical, on the Epistles of St. Paul: Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus*). Both are needed.

Further commands

1 Timothy 4 closes with further commands to Timothy. He is not to neglect the gift which enabled him to carry through this teaching ministry (1 Timothy 4:14). Paul makes similar requests in 1 Timothy 1:18 and 2 Timothy 1:6. Timothy is to meditate or think about these things (1 Timothy 4:15). He was to continually turn them over in his mind and to find the relevance of these timeless truths in the world in which he lived. We, too, need to fix the words of Scripture in our lives and on our society. The servant of the Lord should be at the frontier where faith meets unbelief. We can't do that on second hand truth.

The Christian teacher is not a middleman between a commentary on Scripture and a congregation. There is also the thought of progress here. The Christian life is not static but one of continuous learning. "Take my yoke upon you and learn from Me" (Matthew 11:29) was the request from the Lord to His disciples. This is not a once only experience. It also still challenges us today, for we all need to become more like Christ. I think it was Sir Francis Drake who wrote a prayer that stated that it was the continuance in a cause which yielded the true glory. May we all, who name the Name of Christ, continue faithfully in the pathway of discipleship, and continue to gather with His people as long as He gives us the strength to do so.

The Lord's blessing be upon you all.

Please Note:

We encourage you to use this transcript for your personal or group Bible studies. This material should not, however, be used in any publications without the express permission from Truth for Today, whose contact details can be found on page 1. Large Print copies of this document are also available upon request.