

## SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE BELIEVERS

1 Timothy 4:1-16

Key Verse: 4:12

*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.*

In today's passage St. Paul teaches us how to train ourselves to be good ministers of Christ. Most importantly, we learn how to set an example for others. Let's pray that we may all grow as spiritual leaders who can set good examples for others around us through spiritual training.

### I. WARNING AGAINST FALSE TEACHERS (1-5)

Look at verses 1 and 2. *The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.* In Mark chapter 13, Jesus had warned that false teachers would appear and try to convince believers to abandon the faith and follow their own ideas (Mk 13:22-23). Their motive wouldn't be pure. Their conscience would be crooked. Their teachings would be from the deceiving spirits and demons. Paul calls them hypocritical liars.

What did the false teachers teach? Verse 3 says that they told people not to marry and to abstain from certain foods. These teachings were probably based on the Gnosticism of the first century that claimed that the body was evil and only the soul mattered. The problem was that their teachings were false. They were not based on God's word. In Genesis, we learned that God established marriage so that man and woman may be united to serve the Lord as a team. God himself ordain the marriage! God also gave us food to eat, all kinds of meat (Ge 9:3) as well as fruits and vegetables (Ge 1:29-30). Jesus says that food does not make us unclean; it is the evil thoughts inside us that make us unclean. In saying this, Jesus declared all foods "clean" (Mk 7:19). But by focusing on dietary restrictions, the false teachers tried to divert people's attention away from the true gospel. It was dangerous to listen to them.

Look at verses 4 and 5. *For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.* St. Paul told them that they should receive God's blessings with thanksgiving. We should thank God for the food that he provides. We should eat it by faith with no guilty feelings and work hard for the Lord.

There are false teachers and false teachings today as was in the first century. Their goal is still the same—to advance their own agenda, not the true gospel. They often use clever and mysterious ideas to attract people to them. New Age movement, Cabbala, and Scientology are only a few examples. The other day, I read a news report that says that some people now follow a new trend called "Burger King Spirituality" which means "Have it your way." They claim that they can be spiritual without going to church. All

they need is a beach to meditate on, they say. This kind of idea attracts people because they seem to offer more freedom. But they are false teachings based on human ideas. God wants us to worship him based on his words. God wants us to worship him on his terms not our own.

## II. TRAIN TO BE A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST (6-10)

After warning about the dangers of false teachings in the church, Paul now teaches Timothy and us to how to be a good minister of Christ. Let's read verses 6-7a. *If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales.* God has saved us from our sins and called us to be his servants who can minister to people who don't know Christ personally. How can we be good ministers of Christ? First and foremost, we should be brought up in the truths of the faith and the good teaching. This means that we must feed on the word of God—the truths of the faith. There is a computer programmer's lingo that says, "Garbage in; garbage out." Our minds are similar to computer storage. If we store unwholesome things in our minds, unwholesome things come out. Only if we store the word of God in our hearts through faithful Bible studies, meditation and prayer, we can have God's wisdom on how to help others and good words can come out of our mouths. In Paul's time, some people apparently were into godless myths and old wives' tales. In fact, mythology was huge in the Greek culture. Once, Paul and Barnabas healed a cripple man in Lystra. After witnessing this miracle, people there thought Paul and Barnabas were the Greek gods Zeus and Hermes who came down from heaven. They tried to worship them. But Paul told them that he and Barnabas were merely humans and they should worship God instead.

Paul told Timothy to stay away from the teachings that were interesting but had no truths in them. Myths and old wives' tales were popular among people. Books on these topics sold like hot cakes. But people needed good teachings based on the truths of the faith. They needed to hear the word of God. And this is true today. People today are more interested in some funny and entertaining stories than the truths of God. Books on famous movie stars, singers and politicians sell well. So it is tempting for even God's servants to focus on these stories rather than the truths of God. We can easily feed on juicy stories from the Internet, TV and magazines all day long. Sports and entertainments are big in our society. They attract people's attention, just as godless myths and old wives' tales drew attention in Paul's times. But Paul says to be good ministers of Christ, we should feed on the word of God. The Bible feeds us with the truth.

What else can we do to become a good minister of Christ? Look at verses 7b and 8. *Train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.* Training today is usually associated with athletes and jobs. But Paul says we should train ourselves to be godly, that is, we need spiritual training to become good ministers of Christ.

St. Paul says that physical training is of some value. During my participation in high school sports, I received physical training. I had to get up early in the morning despite my desire to stay in bed on a nice summer day. I had to run sprints and go through the miserable feeling of muscle soreness. Sometimes my workouts for football, wrestling or track were so intense that they would make me sick to the point of vomiting. But I did it because it made me a bigger, faster and stronger athlete. Without such training, no one can be a great athlete. Some athletes train themselves every day for several years to be able to compete in the Olympic Games. Physical training can not only build muscles but also help a person to be more self-disciplined. Such training is of some value.

However, Paul encourages us to train ourselves to be godly. He wants us to receive spiritual training, because physical training is of some value in this world but spiritual training can help us with our future life in the kingdom of God as well as the present life in this world. Tiger Woods trained himself to be a great golfer, but his training could not make him a disciple of Jesus. What we need is training in the word of God. Nowadays I get up early in the morning, not for physical training but for my morning devotion with daily bread and prayer. I can feel that my spiritual muscles get bigger as I go through this training to be more godly.

Many servants of God in history went through spiritual training before God. Moses received palace training for 40 years to become a prince of Egypt. He felt he was a great leader. So he tried to appoint himself as a leader for the Israelites. But they rejected him as their leader. He had to flee to Midian to receive God's training to be a spiritual leader. For 40 years, he had to get up every morning to take care of his father-in-law's sheep. Nothing was happening there except for the sheep. He spent his time 24/7 with the sheep. He smelled like sheep. He talked like sheep. But through the training, he learned how to take care of God's sheep. He learned patience and how to guide the Israelites who were his sheep. He became a great shepherd who led the Israelites out of their slavery in Egypt. We learn that we should receive God's training willingly if we want to be good ministers of Christ.

Look at verse 9. *This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance.* Paul is saying, "Listen, this is important. Pay attention!" Then he says in verse 10: *(and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.* We should put our hope in the living God. We work hard to serve the Lord because of our hope in the living God. If our hope is for this world only, it would be better for us to enjoy as much pleasures as we could before we die. But we know that we will be with the Lord when we die. Death is not the end of everything. We will be with Jesus in eternity. It is important for us to remember this truth as we live a life of mission in this world.

### III. SET A GOOD EXAMPLE (11-16)

Timothy was the pastor of the church in Ephesus, but he was younger than some other leaders in the church (He was probably in his late 30's). Some of them were old enough to be his father or uncle. Timothy was also a soft-spoken, mild-mannered person. He did not have natural charisma. So some people must have looked down on him. This was a

challenge for Timothy as the leader. Paul knew it was more difficult for him to lead the church because of his age. But he told Timothy that he should not let people to look down on him because of his age. Then how could Timothy lead the church as a young pastor? Paul's answer was that Timothy had to lead by setting a good example.

Let us read verses 11-12: *Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.* How can we set good examples for all believers? St. Paul mentions five areas—in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. Let us think about each.

**First, we leaders are to set an example in speech.** What does this mean? Ephesians 4:29 says: *Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen.* As servants of God, we should not cuss and slander others. More importantly, we should say things that will build up others in faith. Sometimes we say things carelessly without thinking about how it affects others. But what we say matters. What we say may build up or break down another person. Sarcastic comments rarely help others. Words of unbelief don't build others up. Given my background and personality, it is very difficult for me not to be sarcastic, but I am trying to set an example in speech.

**Second, we are to set an example in life.** A leader can say all the right things, but if he doesn't live a godly life, his words are empty and cannot help others. It is not enough for a leader to talk the talk. We must walk the walk. Our actions speak louder than our words.

**Third, we are to set an example of love.** The greatest example of love is how Jesus gave up his life on the cross to save us from our sin and death. Jesus told us to love one another as he loved us. We can love our Bible students in small ways. Suppose I have a ticket to see the Super Bowl. Unfortunately, the game falls on the same weekend as a Bible conference which I want to attend with my Bible student. I may feel like dying giving up the ticket, but I can show my love for him by giving up the opportunity to see the Super Bowl. Dying in this way for one another is a small but good example of how we can share the love of God.

**Fourth, we are to set an example in faith.** Abraham was the father of faith. He made a decision to leave behind his old life and start a new life of faith. To him faith was not a theory or abstract idea in the head. He believed in God's promises and acted on his faith. I thank God for helping me to leave behind my old life. My weekends and my nights nowadays are very different from what they were a few years ago. I pray that I may continue to set a good example through my life of faith.

**Fifth, we are to set an example in purity.** A Spiritual leader should look at another woman with a pure motive rather than lustful desires. In fact, Paul says that a leader should look at younger woman as sisters with absolute purity (5:2). Many ministries are ruined when a pastor fails in this. The evangelist Billy Graham made a decision early on

not to be alone with another woman unless someone else was present. He set a good example in purity. I used to look at women with lustful desires, but that was before I became a disciple of Jesus. Now as a young shepherd, I am learning to look at young women as sisters, with absolute purity.

We might ask ourselves: how can we possibly set good examples in all these areas? What can we do? Look at verses 13-14. *Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.* Again, the answer is the word of God. Young spiritual leaders must devote themselves to studying, preaching and teaching of the Holy Scripture. God's word can make us wise if we humbly learn from it. We can set good examples in life by repenting our sins as we study the word of God.

Paul also encouraged Timothy not to neglect the gift God had given him through a prophetic message when the elders prayed for him as they laid their hands on him. We don't know for sure what this gift was. In the context of this passage, the gift probably refers to teaching and preaching of the Scripture. Whatever it was, Paul told him not to neglect but use it fully for God's glory. Each of us also received gifts from God. Some of us can sing well while others can smile more frequently. Whatever our gift is from God, we should not neglect or hide it, but use it for God's glory.

Paul's final words to Timothy in this chapter are verses 15 and 16 which read: *Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.* Paul told Timothy to be diligent in preaching the truths, training himself to be godly and setting a good example for others. He told Timothy to give himself 100% so that people might be able to see the progress in his life as the living proof. We are not to remain stagnant in our spiritual growth. We must be growing continually. We must devote ourselves to the word more and more in order to grow in faith. As humans we were born into sin and built up years and years of meaningless things. As we grow wiser in God, we can see that these things we built up are useless for our eternal life. We must repent and change our direction in life and our value system. I personally had to give up alcohol. Alcohol would lead me to many nights of drunkenness and would have a domino affect on things such as sexual immorality and slander. I was not what Paul would consider a good example. But I have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. Now God is enabling me to set a good example for other young people around me. I praise God for this grace. Because of this grace, I can proclaim Jesus and spread the word and truth.

In conclusion we learned how to train ourselves to be good ministers of Christ. Through spiritual training, we can set good examples for others in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. I pray that the Lord may help us to be great ministers of Christ.