



STAYING ON COURSE

Believers must be nourished on God's Word so they will know the truth.

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-13

Our world is filled with scam artists and people bending the truth for their own benefit. We should carefully examine the claims a person makes, especially when they want access to our money. In the same way, the devil continues to sell beliefs and behavior that either deny or twist the message of the gospel. It is imperative for followers of Christ to be aware of distorted beliefs and deceptive doctrines. We must be equipped by God's Word and stay the course of true faith.

Have you ever been the victim of a scam or false advertisement? How did you respond in the future to other "can't miss" opportunities?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 TIMOTHY 3:14–4:16

Paul wrote this letter while visiting Macedonia. He had left Timothy in Ephesus to help the church gain more solid ground in Christian living and doctrine. While Paul hoped to rejoin Timothy soon (1 Tim. 3:14), he knew that much needed to be done in the meantime. He wanted the believers to know how to conduct themselves not only in church, but as the church (3:15).

Paul knew that both right behavior and right belief were vital as the church encountered opposition. In chapter 4, he warned Timothy about the false teachers who not only would arise in the later times but were already afflicting believers in Ephesus. Hypocritically demanding of others what they would not endure themselves, these phony prophets claimed to be defenders of the Jewish law. In reality, they were subverters of both law and grace.

Paul saw Timothy as his son in the ministry and, as such, wanted him to succeed as “a good servant of Christ Jesus” (4:6). Rather than indulging in speculation and myths, Timothy’s teaching should focus on godliness so that people would place their hope securely in Christ alone.

Timothy had a gift for preaching and teaching, but Paul did not leave him in Ephesus merely to teach the church. He wanted Timothy to be an example of how to live for Christ (4:12). Timothy was to give careful attention to his life and his teaching. Persevering in both would not only benefit his hearers, but himself.

Read 1 Timothy 4:1-13, looking for the imperatives given by Paul. What do these imperatives indicate about the expectations for Timothy?

EXPLORE THE TEXT

BE AWARE (1 TIM. 4:1-5)

¹Now 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.

VERSE 1

Paul understood that the world was a battlefield between truth and falsehood. He affirmed that in the latter times—a period that began with Jesus' first coming and will conclude with His second coming—it would be necessary to practice discernment.

Paul knew this because *the Spirit* made it clear. Jesus taught that false prophets would rise up and deceive many (Matt. 24:11), and the Holy Spirit confirmed that some *will depart from the faith*. The verb *depart* signifies a defection from someone or something. It involves a willful abandonment of truth. Jesus used this same verb in the parable about the soils to describe people who “believe for a while, and in time of testing fall away” (Luke 8:13).

Without any spiritual discernment, people will welcome teaching that distorts the truth about Jesus.

Paul emphasized two reasons people depart from the faith. First, they pay attention to *deceitful spirits*. They listen to and give heed to lies spread by Satan, the master of deception. Second, they embrace the *teachings of demons*. Without any spiritual discernment, people will welcome teaching that distorts the truth about Jesus.

VERSE 2

Although toxic and demonic teaching came from the devil, it came through men. Paul characterized those who transmit such teaching as *liars whose consciences are seared*. Their deadly lies were cloaked by a hypocritical mask of sincerity. The Greek word translated *seared* referred to a burning or branding with a hot iron. The word suggests that, as livestock were branded with marks of ownership, so also the false teachers were branded by Satan, and he owned their consciences. The word *seared* also carries the idea of cauterizing, which deadens



the feeling or destroys the sensitivity of an area of the body. Consequently, the false teachers had consciences that were cauterized to the point they had no perception of truth and righteousness.

This passage does not contradict the security of a believer. Paul's warning to Timothy involved an awareness that some who claim to be followers of Christ have a spurious faith wrapped in a camouflage of religious works. Accordingly, their faith rested in their own rules of righteousness instead of the righteousness of Christ.

VERSES 3-5

False teachers were promoting behavior that denied God's purpose for **marriage** and **foods**. Some of these teachers in Ephesus were influenced by the idea that spiritual things were good but physical things were morally bad. So in a misguided effort to achieve a higher spiritual status, they labeled marriage and marital intimacy as sinful. God never commends an activity that contradicts or compromises His stated purpose as revealed in Scripture. God ordained marriage between a man and a woman from the beginning of creation, and His blessing upon it continues. Celibacy mandated by human rules cannot produce righteousness.

The false teachers promoted a legalism that minimized God's grace and maximized man's rules. Paul emphasized that not only were the false teachers wrong about their food rules, but those foods were created by God and should be **received with thanksgiving**. Rather than deny the goodness of God's creation, a believer can delight in it and enjoy it as God intended. This truth, however, is not a license to abuse the things God has created for our pleasure. Food can be eaten for pleasure and nutrition, but gluttony is an abuse. God blesses sexual intimacy in marriage, but adultery and pornography are abuses of His gift.

The word **made holy** in verse 5 denotes something set apart and devoted to God. The **word of God** may refer to the act of blessing food. Praying over a meal doesn't make it more blessed. It does, however, reflect a believer's attitude of gratitude for what God has already blessed. The *word of God* could be a reference to creation, when God pronounced His work as good. More likely it signified the gospel message that abolished food rules as a means of achieving righteousness.

How does sin desensitize a person to truth? What other factors might desensitize a person to truth?

BIBLE SKILL: *Compare passages that use the same word or phrase.*

To understand the term “later times,” compare Paul’s description in 1 Timothy 4:1-4 with the following passages: 2 Timothy 3:1-9; 2 Thessalonians 2:3-12; 2 Peter 3:3-7; and Jude 1:18-19. Write a summary of what you discover. Compare the above passages with Hebrews 1:1-3. How does this comparison add to your understanding of later times? How does your concept affect your daily decisions and conduct of life?

BE DISCIPLINED (1 TIM. 4:6-10)

⁶If 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. ⁷Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; ⁸for 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. ⁹The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. ¹⁰For 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.

VERSE 6

Teaching and preaching doesn’t have to be harsh to be effective. The Greek word translated **put ... before** indicates gentle persuasion. Paul wanted Timothy to mix tenderness into serious warnings. He especially wanted Timothy to **be a good servant** of the Lord by demonstrating discipline in his life and teaching. In order



to accomplish that lofty goal, Timothy needed to practice two disciplines. First, he needed to be **trained in the words of the faith**. Servants of Jesus are nourished not by words of faith but by words of *the faith*, meaning the gospel. No servant can be effective in his ministry if he fails to receive the nourishment of the gospel of Christ. Timothy also needed to feed on **good doctrine**. Timothy not only had been taught the Scriptures since he had been a child (2 Tim. 3:14-15), he had **followed** them.

VERSES 7-10

Paul made it clear that a compromise between truth and falsehood was not acceptable. He urged Timothy to **have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths**. Instead, Timothy was to **train** himself **for godliness**.

Training doesn't happen by chance or coincidence. It is a deliberate discipline and commitment toward a focused goal. Training in godliness involves both attitude and action, belief and behavior. The Greek word translated *train* is related to the word "gymnasium." Paul used that word to reinforce spiritual exercise as an essential aspect of Timothy's role as a godly leader. In order to lead well for Christ, Timothy must learn well from Christ. Learning involves spiritual training. Spiritual training involves the exercise of rigorous devotion. The exercise of rigorous devotion leads to effective impact for Christ.

Paul believed that both physical and spiritual discipline are valuable. **Bodily training** provides benefits for health and strength, but those benefits do not last. By contrast, training in **godliness ... holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come**. Paul was not suggesting that physical exercise was insignificant. Since our bodies are the temple of the Holy Spirit we should stay in sufficient shape to serve Jesus effectively. Paul's point to Timothy was one of prioritizing godliness as a discipline that matters both now and forever.

For godliness, believers **toil and strive**. We don't labor to earn God's favor but rather because we have received God's grace. The word *strive* carries an athletic meaning that referred to the agony involved in a contest. Paul was emphasizing that living a godly life was not a leisurely stroll down easy street. It involves an agonizing struggle against sin and Satan.

Paul referred to God as **the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe**. God's offer of salvation is available to all people. Salvation is effective, however, only for those who place their faith in Jesus. Paul was emphasizing that no one can be saved without faith.

What makes godliness a difficult discipline? How does the commitment to discipline yourself in godliness fit into your priorities?

BE AN EXAMPLE (1 TIM. 4:11-13)

¹¹ Command and teach these things ¹² Let no one despise you for your youth, but set the believers an example in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. ¹³ Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching.

VERSES 11-12

Paul gave Timothy a robust challenge to **command and teach these things**. *Command* was a strong word for directing others with authority. *Teach* was the customary word for transmitting information that could be applied.

Timothy may have been reluctant to *command and teach* the church in Ephesus because of his young age. First-century culture valued the aged. An older teacher generally was considered wiser and more knowledgeable than a young teacher. Paul wanted Timothy not to allow anyone to belittle his ministry simply because he was relatively young (though Timothy may have been at least thirty years old).

Paul's admonition that no one should **despise** Timothy's **youth** served as a two-fold encouragement. First, it affirmed Timothy personally. Second, it was a message to the believers that Paul had left Timothy in charge as overseer. Age is not a disqualifier from leading.

The best way for Timothy to deflect complaints was to **set the believers an example**, beginning with his **speech**. Paul expected Timothy to speak with Christ-centered authority while avoiding words that could stir strife and alienation. In addition, Timothy's **conduct** should be exemplary. **Love** was the unmistakable mark of an exemplary spiritual leader, and Paul wanted Timothy to walk in it. **Faith** was essential for Timothy's leadership in a culture of unbelief.



His bold trust would serve as a model for other struggling seekers. Moreover, Timothy needed to pursue **purity**. For the sake of the gospel, his life needed to be beyond reproach morally.

In what ways could you be an example for believers, beginning in your home?

VERSE 13

Paul planned to visit Timothy soon. (See 1 Tim. 3:14.) Until he did, Timothy was to give attention to three areas of ministry. First was the **public reading**. This would have included Old Testament Scripture and letters of Paul that were circulating the churches. Public reading of Scripture was the customary practice in first-century congregations.

Second was **exhortation** of God's Word. This was a form of preaching that involved urging listeners to apply the truth of Scripture. Third, **teaching** believers to understand essential doctrines and fundamental elements of the faith.

Like Timothy, all believers must remain focused on God's Word.

Until Paul could return to Ephesus, he expected Timothy to focus his attention on God's Word. Like Timothy, all believers must remain focused on God's Word.

KEY DOCTRINE: Scripture

The Bible reveals the principles by which God judges us, and therefore is, and will remain to the end of the world, the true center of Christian union, and the supreme standard by which all human conduct, creeds, and religious opinions should be tried (Ps. 19:7-10).

IN MY CONTEXT

- Believers must be aware that false teachers will try to lead them astray.
- Believers must be disciplined in their lives, seeking to honor God through living out the gospel.
- Believers must remain focused on God’s Word to be an example of godly living.

How can your vigilance be strengthened as you learn about false teaching and heresy?

Discuss as a group ways of engaging each other in discussions about theology, including false doctrines. How can the group serve as a means for discovering false teachings?

Reflect on 1 Timothy 4:13. List one action you can take for each of the three areas Timothy was told to focus on.

Prayer Needs

