

# **A Study of First Timothy**

## **Week Three**

### **1 Timothy 4:1-5:8**

#### **Day One**

4:1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. 2 Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. 3 They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

v. 1 – Think about this: Why would Paul write to Timothy about something that wasn't going to happen for thousands of years? I raise that point because almost everyone who reads this verse thinks it pertains to their current generation. That is true today and it has been true for many past generations as well. I also raise this point because I think that interpretation is flawed if not totally wrong.

I don't think you can interpret this verse unless you take into consideration what it would have meant to Timothy and how it would have impacted the work he was doing. Do you think Timothy would have read this and said, "Gee, I'd better pray for my brothers and sisters who will be alive in 2,000 years? They are going to have it rough." No, I think the verse had meaning for Timothy right then and there, as well as having meaning for every generation since Paul wrote it.

This study is not meant to be comprehensive, but let's consider just a few points. Paul later wrote Timothy:

You know that everyone in the province of Asia has deserted me, including Phygelus and Hermogenes (2 Timothy 1:15).

What's more, the letter was written to Hebrews to convince those who were falling away from the faith to reconsider their actions. Finally, this verse in Timothy wasn't written about nonbelievers; it's written about one-time believers who would fall away after a time of walking with the Lord. With the difficulties that believers encounter, many of which they thought they would never encounter, I would say that every generation finds those who were swept into the church by revival or an outpouring of the Spirit but who eventually fall away, caught up in the false teachings of demonic forces.

The lesson is clear: Be on your guard, don't think it can't happen to you and pay attention to your heart. It isn't a warning about the end times.

v. 2 – I formerly believed that these doctrines that Paul referred to were those that denied the divinity of Christ or some other major Christian doctrine. I have reconsidered this position, however, and realize that it can also be crazy, weird doctrines that draw away

the disciples full love and devotion from Christ onto the leader or the movement he (or she) founded or represents. Paul referred to this when he spoke to the Ephesian elders:

Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! (Acts 20:30-31).

v. 3 – I don't think we have many doctrines that urge people to deny foods today. Do you know any? But there are plenty of doctrines that urge people to weaken their allegiance to Christ by strengthening their commitment to doctrines, movements and leaders.

I have written many times that I regularly pray, *“Lord, keep me from weirdness. Don't let me major in minors or lead people astray by what I teach. Protect me from delusion and deception, I pray in Jesus' name.”* **You would do well to pray that prayer as well. And you would also do well to reexamine every now and then what you believe and why you believe it.**

## **Day Two**

4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. 6 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.

v. 4 – I wonder (and I'll probably get in trouble with this) if some of the health food movements aren't a bit guilty of what Paul is talking about. Have you ever been around someone who is into health food for spiritual reasons? I refer to some of them as the “food Gestapo.” They watch what others eat and offer all kinds of advice, which is seldom sought or listened to for that matter. I know this is a stretch, but I do receive all things and foods with thanks. I don't think Coca-Cola is the devil, I think Satan is the devil. When I hear health food advocates, I'm never sure that I have identified the right devil!

v. 5 – I think it's important that we understand why we pray for our food. It isn't a ritual, and it isn't an empty tradition. We are setting our food apart as from God and asking Him to use it to nourish these bodies that He created. I'm not saying that God will somehow sanctify a fatty, greasy McDonald's beef burger or condone bad eating habits. I am saying that we don't have to be so meticulous about our eating that we miss the fact that part of eating is enjoying what we eat. That is God's design.

Food is also an important means of fellowship. My children are grown, but we had dinner together almost every day as a family while they were growing up, right up until they went to college. There was something special, even spiritual, about eating and talking together every day.

**Are you doing all you can do to use food as a means to bring your family together, whether your natural or spiritual family?**

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts (Acts 2:46).

Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling (1 Peter 4:9-10).

**What more can you do to be a person known for hospitality? How can you use food more effectively as a ministry tool?**

v. 6 – Paul wanted Timothy to be a good minister of Jesus. How could he accomplish that? Timothy didn't have to come up with all kinds of special insight or do tremendous miracles. He simply had to remind people of the basic truths of the faith, and those basics had to do with food, prayer and the conditions of the heart. You don't have to be a flashy pulpit minister to be a faithful minister. You can stick to the basics and still be an exceptional servant of Jesus.

This is so important because many people hold the pulpit as the goal and central work of the ministry. I disagree. It is working with people to protect them from error and to equip them to fulfill their purpose. Paul wrote the Ephesians:

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Ephesians 4:11-13).

**Do you shy away from “ministry” because you aren't a good public speaker? Is that your image of what it means to be a pastor? Can you see from the above passage that ministry is being effective at serving other people and not performing on a public stage? Even if you are an apostle, your main role is to make other people successful as they attempt to do the will of God.**

### Day Three

7 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. 8 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. 9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance 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.

v. 7 – What Paul didn't know was that wives' tales and godless myths would sell books in the modern era. Consider *The Late Great Planet Earth* by Hal Lindsey. That book has sold millions of copies and it is a myth! The *Left Behind* series is a series of wives' tales and has enriched Tim LaHaye to no end. Yet Bible studies and other devotional material don't sell well, according to publishers.

What have those books and others like them contributed to godly living? What have they added to the knowledge of God or devotion to Christ? Nothing! That is why I am so passionate against them and their kind. We are to help train people in godliness, not feed their mind useless information cloaked in seeming revelation.

My daughter has some friends who play professional American football. They know how to train for what they do or else they will lose their position on the team. The day after a game, when they are bruised and sore, they are required to come into the gym and work out! They are training for football. **How are you training for godly living? Are you as focused and committed as these professional players? What are you reading that will help you focus? What training sessions are you attending? I'm not talking about where you attend Sunday service. What else are you doing that is training you for godly living?**

v. 8 – I was just outside on the streets of New York City and there were people running and exercising in cold temperatures. They know that bodily training is of some value. Of how much greater worth is godly training! **What is your training program for godliness?** I spend time writing these studies every day. I earned my doctorate in pastoral ministries at the age of 45 after eight years of study. I am planning on earning another doctorate next year and will finish the program when I am 59 (for reasons I won't go into here), I have garnered five certifications to be a trainer for various disciplines over the last 10 years, and I read four to six books every month. **What's your training program look like? It doesn't have to be like mine; you just have to have some kind of plan. Do you?**

vs. 9&10 – Paul invested everything he had, everything he was, all his hope for the future, in Jesus, the Savior of the world. Wretched men have tried to twist this verse to mean that all men are saved. That's preposterous! Remember that you must consider *all* the verses on a particular topic before you can have a doctrine about that topic. Jesus is the Savior of all men who call on His name to be saved. Those who do not *cannot* find salvation; Jesus is the only way to God.

Paul also referred to the Savior of the world as the true and living God. Jesus wasn't just a prophet or moral teacher; He was and is the Son of God! He is the Holy One! He is worthy of all my efforts and as I serve Him, I fulfill the greatest commandment of all:

“Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matthew 22:35-40).

## Day Four

11 Command and teach these things. 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. 13 Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. 14 Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

v. 11 – Paul was adamant that Timothy lead God’s people into godliness and not into mythology. He wanted him to “stick to the basics,” which included teaching people how to live out their faith every day. The greatest commandment is to love God with all you have. The second is to love your neighbor with all you have. Almost all Paul’s letters followed that pattern. The first half was devoted to how to love God; the second half was devoted to how to love God’s people. So your training program in godliness can’t only include loving God. It must also include walking with and loving God’s people. **What are you doing to improve your love for your fellow believers? For all men and women? It isn’t enough to love God, as you know:**

If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1 John 4:20-21).

v. 12 – The word *youth* here probably indicates that Timothy was in his late 20s or early 30s. I am willing, however, to consider that this verse can apply to whatever age is considered a youth by the culture. Recently I was in Amsterdam and visited the home of Anne Frank, whose diary of her hiding from the Nazis in World War II is world-famous. Frank wrote her diary when she was between the ages of 13 and 16 and her work has impacted the world. **Why don’t we see the potential that young people have to impact the world around them? Why don’t we equip them to make a difference now?**

There is no youth or “baby” Holy Spirit. A young person has the same Spirit as an adult has, the same Spirit that raised Christ from the dead. Why do we limit their effectiveness? It makes no sense to me. The purpose message has found a home among the youth of the world because they “get it.” They know they have something to do and they are not going to wait 30 years like some of their parents did to do it. They want to do it now and I say, “Amen!” Let’s help them in every way we can.

v. 13 – When I visited the Temple Mount in Israel a few years ago, I observed an Imam in the Al-Aqsa mosque sitting and reading the Koran out loud, addressing his reading to no one in particular. He was just proclaiming the Koran into the atmosphere. I have always thought we should do the same thing. Why not read the word of God publicly for seven consecutive days in a church. There would be no preaching or teaching, just public reading of the Word. I think it would be powerful.

v. 14 – This verse intrigues me. I used to teach that the prophetic laying on of hands *confirmed* the spiritual gift to which Paul was referring. That’s not what the verse says,

however. It states that the gift was *imparted* by the laying on of hands. **What was that gift? Was it Timothy's role in Ephesus, where he was when this letter was written? What is some spiritual gift or charisma that had not been previously present in his life before hands were laid on him?**

I'm not sure, but I think there is more spiritual power and transaction than I had originally thought when believers lay hands on another believer. I know I have been consciously trying to touch more people when I preach and close in prayer. I don't feel the need to say much; I just sense that I should make physical contact and pray a blessing on those who come forward.

**If Paul cautioned Timothy not to neglect his gift, then it must be possible for us to neglect a gift in us? Are you neglecting any gift in you? Are you paying a price to make that gift all it can be, to insure it is impacting as many lives as possible? What more can you do?**

### Day Five

15 Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. 16 Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. 5:1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

v. 15 – All believers and especially leaders are to make progress in their faith, walk and work. This doesn't just happen. You must be diligent and "give yourself wholly" to whatever it is that you need to do. You also need to do it in such a way that others will notice and be encouraged by your example.

Paul wasn't asking Timothy to do anything he himself wasn't willing to do and that is one of the keys of successful coaching and mentoring. You can't take people where you haven't been yourself. Whether or not people listen to you depends on your credibility in their eyes. They will think, "Can this person take me where I need to go? Did they go there themselves?" You can't rely on titles or the maxim, "Do as I say and not as I do." You've got to have credibility if you are going to lead and build people. And there is no way to get that credibility except by paying the price to obtain it.

**Are you making progress? In what areas, you may ask? I don't know; you tell me. What areas are important to you? I think I am making progress in writing. Why do I bother? Because writing and communication are important to me. What's important to you? Are you making progress in those areas? What can you do to improve even more?**

v. 16 – It is so easy to relax where spiritual things are concerned. In the past, you got up early to pray, but now you don't. You used to fast weekly, but it's too hard to do now. I

am prey to the same tendency. **Is that tendency what Jesus referred to in Revelation, do you think?**

Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love. Remember the height from which you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lamp stand from its place (Revelation 2:4-6).

**Do you need to return to your first love? What does that mean? I don't know, you will have to tell me. Your spiritual work and condition contributes to the condition of others. When you are diligent, they benefit. When I write, others benefit from my insight and they grow in the knowledge of God and faith. I know because they write and tell me so. Where is your diligence and progress paying off for other people? Do you know? Is that even important to you?**

Notice the nature of Paul's letter to Timothy; it is full of commandments: "Be diligent, give yourself wholly, watch yourself and persevere." These were not options or suggestions, they were commandments. God isn't suggesting that you make progress; He is commanding you to do so. So get busy!

vs. 1&2 – Paul gave some basic instruction as to how a young man should treat those under his pastoral care. Timothy should treat young men and women with purity, as siblings. He should treat older men and women with respect, exhorting them carefully as he would his parents. This was my great downfall as a pastor. I didn't always treat people with this kind of gentleness and respect. The good news is that this kind of behavior can be learned, but only when you humble yourself and recognize your weakness, asking God's help.

Today I am known for having good people skills, but it wasn't always that way. I had to learn that not all people were like me or motivated by the things that motivated me. When I accepted the differences as God-given (not everyone was supposed to be like I was), then I started to make the adjustments. It all required humility, however, as I had to ask forgiveness when I failed and study hard to apply the skills I needed to build better relationships. **How are your people skills? What can you do to make them even better?**

### **Day Six**

3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. 5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help.

v. 3 – Paul and the early church put quite a high value on taking care of the widows. They must have been a group who suffered greatly without their husbands to provide for them. Keep in mind that there were no government programs to assist them as some

countries have today. So the church took it upon itself to care for the believing widows. The early church seemed to take care of anyone who could not take care of themselves. I wish today's church would do the same.

I think Christians still tend to take care of the destitute, but they do it through programs that are outside of the local church. The local church is so consumed with staff and buildings that it often cannot do much for those in need.

v. 4 – Paul was directing that families take care of family members before the church took care of anyone. Notice this simple truth: God is pleased with children and grandchildren who take care of their parents and grandparents in need. There is a repayment of sorts that may need to take place when parents and grandparents have a financial need.

**Is there anyone in your family who has a need that you can help them with?**

**I want to return to that phrase “pleasing to God.” I would recommend that you do a search of that phrase, along with the word “pleases” and see what you come up with. If the Bible tells us that something pleases God, then we should be diligent to carry out that deed or develop that attitude. You may want to keep those “pleasing” verses in your journal and track your progress in each one of those areas.**

v. 5 – Paul was interested in helping widows who were spiritual, who had put their hope in God. If those widows did so, then it was up to the church to express the help that the widows' trust merited. **Are there any widows in your life whom you can help? Who are they? What do you think you can do?**

Is there any other group in your church that may be in the same position as the widows were in 2,000 years ago? Orphans? Homeless people in your city? Single-parent families? My point is that we shouldn't make the hard and fast doctrine of helping widows from what Paul wrote, but rather determine to help all and any who are in need, which is the what I think Paul was trying to get us to realize:

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers (Galatians 6:10).

### **Day Seven**

6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Give the people these instructions, too, so that no one may be open to blame. 8 If anyone does not provide for his relatives, and especially for his immediate family, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.

v. 6 – It doesn't seem like all the widows in Paul's day weren't little old ladies with gray hair. Some of them were young yet widowed. Paul didn't want the church supporting

the idleness of younger women who needed help but weren't devoted to God and His church.

It seems that Paul was saying that widows were to make the most of their relationship with the Lord since they were by themselves. Do you see your relationships (or lack thereof) as God-ordained? I have known some singles who didn't believe they could exist without someone else in their life. I would imagine Paul would have told those people to get married but not to rely on the church for life support while they pursued their own lives.

v. 7 – I'm not sure what Paul meant here that no one would be open to blame. What kind of blame? Perhaps he meant that he didn't want the church to be accused of supporting the lifestyle of irresponsible younger widows. I think this is one cultural issue that it is tough for moderns to understand, since we have some support systems for widows and single parents.

I think the most important issue here was that Paul did not want the church's reputation to suffer for any reason. Paul was sensitive to the fact that the church was a fragile entity in the midst of a hostile world. Whether addressing the fact that a man was living with his stepmother, slaves continuing in their role in society or persecution, Paul urged the saints to behave in such a way as the church would not incur any more criticism or controversy than necessary.

v. 8 – This is a strong condemnation for anyone who doesn't help his family financially. Paul said that they were worse than unbelievers! I know a woman now who is going through a divorce and the reason is that her husband has never provided for the family. I think she has a strong justification, although many may disagree. I would use this verse as my reason for saying this.

**Is there any relative who needs your financial support? Are you willing to help? Are you doing all you can do to support your family? If so, then you are pleasing God. If not, you are in trouble with God, according to Paul.**