

Letters From My Father
Week 11
1 Timothy 4:6-10
“Doctrine, Doctrine, & More Doctrine”

Introduction

Abundant peace belongs to those who love Your instruction; nothing makes them stumble. **Psalm 119:165**

Before I was in full-time ministry, I was a commercial banker. And as such, I learned pretty early that counterfeit currency was one of the biggest threats to the economy. So, needless to say, we were trained on the importance of spotting a counterfeit bill. They sent us to banking classes with the emphasis upon “bank security”. These classes were designed to educate us on how to spot a phony bill from a mile away (so to speak). And I was actually fascinated by what we studied in those classes.

My expectation going in was that I would get to see and touch a lot of counterfeit bills so that I would better understand the “modus operandi”, if you will, of counterfeiters that are so prevalent in our society. Needless to say, I was rather astounded that we didn’t actually get to see any counterfeit bills at all, throughout the entire class! So, how exactly were we trained as to how to spot a phony bill? By studying the real thing! We looked at several US treasury bills. We handled them. We looked at them through a magnifying glass, and we painstakingly memorized every feature; the facial expression on the president’s faces and the colored thread woven throughout the certified treasury paper. We even looked at every printed word on the bills along with the hidden watermarks that are strategically placed upon each bill. It was an exhaustive study, and we were told that no matter the skill of the counterfeiter, it would be impossible to fully recreate a bill that possesses all the specific components of an original.

In Paul’s letter to Timothy at the church of Ephesus, he warned the young pastor to be on his guard for “counterfeit teaching”. He calls these false religious persuasions the “doctrines of demons.” And as Paul continued his warning, he spoke of the best way to refute these false teachers who would infiltrate God’s people. And how was Timothy to accomplish this task? Not by studying the cults themselves, but rather, by completely giving himself over to the study of God’s Word. For there can be no manmade substitute that will ever be able to withstand the light of the teachings that are inspired by The Spirit! The Word of God is both verbal and plenary (God-breathed and complete). Therefore, there is nothing equal to it upon the face of the earth. If you want to be able to spot a false teacher my friends, just compare what he is saying to what God has said. And trust me, the phonies will stand out from a mile away.

Not only will carefully studying God’s Word enable one to discern truth, but it also promises to bring joy to those who study and obey its teaching. So we, as Believers in Christ, must also become dedicated students of The Word. For there can be no such thing as a Christian who doesn’t long to obey the directives of Christ, or as The Savior Himself has said:

Why do you call Me “LORD. LORD.” and don’t do the things that I say? **Luke 6:46**

No, the child of God will have a longing to know the Word of God, for he has been born again from above, and therefore, his new nature will require him to feed upon God’s Word in order to thrive. It is that simple. So, as Paul concluded his warnings of the ravenous wolves (false teachers) who would infiltrate the sheep pen, he gave young Timothy an exhaustive list of do’s and don’ts, when it comes to the expedient way to insure that false doctrine was exposed and The Word of God was expounded within the church. For the sake of our study today, we will examine three of them, *Provision* (and *Priority*) *Preparation*, and finally the *Purpose* or reason, if you will, that we are to be so committed to the study of God’s truth.

Provision (and Priority) (vs. 6-7a)

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the good teaching that you have followed. But have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths...

1 Timothy 4:6-7a

I read an amazing quote from Pastor John MacArthur this week, so I wanted to make sure to give him credit: He said, “A shepherd’s heart is not measured by how well he pets the sheep, but rather, how well he protects and feeds them.” Now *that* is a true statement, if I’ve ever heard one! When Paul sent Timothy to Ephesus, I am certain that all of this talk about false doctrine ruffled more than a few feathers. But in order to protect the flock, at times you have to drive out the wolves. A good shepherd will protect his flock from false teachers and false teaching.

And the best way to guard against false teaching is, as I stated previously, to teach sound doctrine. Counterfeits are easily spotted, when people know what is genuine. Paul charged Timothy to “point out these things...”. The word that is translated as “point out” in the CSB is “hypotithemi” (pronounced hoop-ot-ith’-ay-mee), and it is a pretty mild verb, which means to “lay out before” or “put down”. Simply put, Paul is instructing Timothy to lay out the truth of God’s Word to his flock. Think of it as spreading out a feast upon the table.

When I was younger, my wife’s grandmother would cook a massive Sunday dinner for all the family. She had pretty much memorized all of our favorite dishes, and she made them all! I have never in my life seen a spread like that before. Not even a church socials, and I was raised in the Baptist Church! (If the Baptists had a flag it would have a casserole dish imprinted upon it!) Now, here we see Paul encouraging Timothy to spread out a table for his flock, to give them sound doctrine from God’s Word every Sunday to feast upon. It is the shepherd’s responsibility to feed his flock. If he cannot do so, then he is not qualified to be a shepherd. This is why the Elder’s description includes, “**must be... able to teach**” (1 Timothy 3:2).

And how would Timothy be qualified to perform his duty of faithfully teaching God’s Word? By committing himself to its intense study, or as Paul admonished Him, “**nourished by the words of faith and the good teaching that you have followed.**” A preacher cannot give out what he does not take in. Therefore, it is imperative that those who would lead the flock must be diligent students of the word themselves. Too many pastors these days are more concerned with what they call “loving the people” than actually feeding the flock. So, I now refer you back to Mac Arthur’s very poignant quotation. “A shepherd’s heart is not measured by how well he pets the sheep, but rather, by how well he protects and feeds them.” Seems even more relevant the second time doesn’t it?

Timothy was a student of God’s Word. Paul had seen to that in all the years that he had mentored the young man, but there will never come a time, this side of glory, that we have “fully mastered” The Word of God! This is why every good pastor will spend hours of time each week pouring over and praying over The Word. Without this, there will be no solid food to feed the flock. Too many churches have settled for “cotton candy preaching” in place of the meat of God’s Word. Now I must admit that cotton candy tastes good, but too much of it will rot your teeth out! If the church is to become healthy in every way, it must feast regularly upon sound doctrine. Nothing else will give the Believer the nourishment that he needs in order to thrive.

Notice also how Paul reminds Timothy to keep his priorities straight by commanding him to **have nothing to do with pointless and silly myths...** This is in reference to the counterfeit teaching that I alluded to earlier. Paul didn’t want his son in the faith spending any time learning what the false teachers were giving out, but rather, to focus upon God’s Word and allow The Word to expose them. This is how every Believer should prioritize their focus. You don’t need to do an in depth study of the occult or check your daily horoscope, if you belong to Jesus. In fact, you should avoid all those demonic doctrines like the plague. Become a diligent student of God’s Word, and you will find not only wisdom, but lasting happiness as well. Listen to the words of the Psalmist:

How happy is the one who does not walk in the advice of the wicked or stand in the pathway with sinners or sit in the company of mockers! Instead, his delight is in The LORD’S instruction, and he meditates on it day and night. He is like a tree

planted beside flowing streams that bears its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. **Psalm 1:1-3**

Preparation (vs. 7b-9)

...Rather, train yourself in godliness. For the training of the body has limited benefit, but godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance. **1 Timothy 4:7b-9**

This is some very good advice. That is why Paul follows it up by declaring it a “trustworthy saying”. This verse often offends the “gym rats” out there, but it is true nonetheless. But let’s teach this clearly. Paul is **not** saying that physical exercise is worthless. He is simply speaking again of priorities. We must, as Believers, “train ourselves” by the diligent study of God’s Word. When a person spends more time exercising his body than he does his soul, then his priorities are out of whack.

As Believers, we are to prepare (train) ourselves by the study of The Word, so that we are prepared for all the challenges we face. Look at it this way, no matter how much you work on strength conditioning for your body, that body is eventually going to die. It’s just a simple fact of life (or death). But your soul, now *that* is eternal. How foolish would it be to dutifully train a body that’s dying at the expense of the atrophy of one’s soul? So, there’s nothing wrong with going to the gym, my friends. In fact, it is beneficial (in the short run). But don’t spend your life focused more on physical fitness than the fitness of the soul. Prepare yourself for eternity. Study God’s Word. And train yourself for godliness.

The word for godliness in the Greek is “*Eusebeia*” (pronounced yoo-seb’-i-ah), and it means *to have a right heart before God*. In other words, the godly person will live according to The Word of God in reverence, in order to be pleasing to God. This is our heart’s desire. And once again, you can only “train” yourself in godliness, by spending a great deal of time and energy praying and studying The Word. This must become our top priority, not only for pastors, but for every child of God.

Therefore, whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to be pleasing to Him. **2 Corinthians 5:9**

Dear friends, if our hearts don’t condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive whatever we ask from Him because we keep His commands and do what is pleasing in His sight. **1 John 3:21-22**

Do not make the mistake of putting all your emphasis on training your body at the expense of your soul. Prepare yourself in godliness for eternity, so that you may live in manner that pleases the God Who loved you and gave His son to die for your sins.

Purpose (vs. 10)

For this reason we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe. **1 Timothy 4:10**

And finally, as Paul is often wont to do, he explains the reason that he is so very passionate about the Word of God and the sound expository teaching thereof. It is because he, and those whom he leads, have put all of their hope in The Living God. And because of this hope that they share, they want others to obtain it as well. In other words, Paul’s deepest desire is for those who do not know Christ, to come to a saving knowledge of Christ through the teaching of sound doctrine. Anything that distracts from this mission is in and of itself an opposition to the truth.

Paul uses two words to describe the passion with which he goes about spreading the good news of God's Word. "Labor" is in the Greek "kopiao", and it means *to toil with a wearisome effect*. Paul was not lazy in his endeavors. He labored intensely to see to it that the gospel was spread throughout the known world. He was not able to get to all the places which he longed to go, but he certainly had an amazing impact on the world for the gospel of Christ. It was his ambition to speak to as many people as he possibly could concerning these truths of salvation. Anyone who would be a shepherd to the sheep should be no less in zeal for the teaching of God's Word. Pastors should labor intensively in their sturdy and in their presentation. For in truth, the stakes are life and death.

The second word that Paul uses to describe his toil is "agonizomai" (translated "strive" in the CSB). The word itself is where we derive our English word agony or agonize. Paul agonized over those to whom he preached and felt deeply in his very soul for them. His concern for lost souls, especially for those of his fellow Israelites, was exemplified by his writings in the book of *Romans*.

I speak the truth in Christ — I am not lying; my conscience testifies to me through the Holy Spirit — that I have great sorrow and unceasing anguish in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were cursed and cut off from Christ for the benefit of my brother and sisters, my own flesh and blood. ***Romans 9:1-3***

Do not miss what Paul is saying here. *He is saying that he would be willing to forfeit his own salvation and spend an eternity in hell, if only his fellow countrymen would turn to Christ and be saved.* Now that, my friends, is zeal for the gospel; to be willing to sacrifice oneself so that others might live. What would our churches be like if we had a burden for the lost as Paul did? Pretty convicting is it not? Now do you understand what he meant when he said that he "agonized" over the teaching of God's Word?

It is for the sake of the gospel, the reality that Christ Jesus died to save the world, that drove Paul to defend the Word with such zeal. Many have speculated as to what he meant when he said that Jesus is "...**the savior of all people and especially to those who believe.**" Some have tried to attest to this as a reference to "universalism", meaning that Christ's death on the cross provided all men with salvation, whether they believe in Him or not. Just to be clear, this is false doctrine. *The Bible* plainly teaches that the wrath of God remains upon those who refuse to believe in Christ (**John 3:18,36**).

Others have taught that even lost people have received some benefit because of the influence of Christianity in the world. While this is indeed the truth, I personally feel that it is out of context in this particular passage. I believe that Paul is simply saying that Jesus' blood is sufficient to save every lost person in the world. But, only those who believe actually receive this great blessing. For it is entirely possible for a prisoner on death row to refuse a pardon, even when it is offered. Through Christ, God has offered pardon for all, but to those who refuse it, there can be no hope of rescue. For this reason, we should teach God's truth all the more. For only by faith in God's promises can anyone obtain the hope of salvation. We must become zealous for God's Word; *Receive it, Believe it, Live it, Teach it, and Defend it.* For it is the only hope for fallen mankind. **Jesus is The Way, The Truth, and The Life, and no one comes to the Father but by Him!**

We are commanded therefore to train ourselves in godliness. In the Baptist church when I was young, we sang a hymn that still sticks with me to this day. The song was entitled *Trust and Obey*. And it perfectly sums up how the child of God is to live according to The Word in order to find the true happiness that Christ offers.

*When we walk with The LORD in the light of His Word
What a glory He sheds on our way.
While we do His good will, He abides with us still.
And with all who will trust and obey.
Trust and obey, for there's no other way
To be happy in Jesus, but to trust and obey.*

(Trust and Obey - J. Sammis 1887)

Truth!