

Warnings About Doctrines of Demons; Rejecting Myths and Fables

1 Timothy 4:1-9

1 Timothy 4:1-9 - *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer. ⁶ If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. ⁷ But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. ⁸ For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. ⁹ This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance."*

Background Notes

In our talks from 1 Timothy, we've seen that false teaching was a problem in the early Church. In chapter 1 the apostle Paul told Timothy that one of his primary responsibilities in helping to pastor the church at Ephesus was to refute the false teachers (v 3-4). In chapter 4, the apostle raised the subject of false teaching once again.

As we begin our study of this passage, the first logical question is: When are the "latter times" (or "later times") that Paul mentioned in verse 1? The truth is that problems of the "latter times" had already started in Timothy's day, but they would continue to get worse and worse as time went on. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 says, *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"*

Notice that the last sentence is in the *present tense*. In other words, the last days had already begun - but they would get worse. *"...evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived"* (2 Timothy 3:13). So the false teaching mentioned in the first half of our chapter was already infecting the 1st century Church.

There were two different categories of false teachers: (1) believers who were teaching false doctrine, and (2) unbelievers who were teaching false doctrine. In 1 Timothy 1, the apostle especially addressed the problem of believers who were involved in false teaching. They had to be silenced. In chapter 4 he addressed the problem of unbelieving false teachers. Notice from verse 1 that these false teachers had departed or apostatized from the faith. In other words, they were never truly saved.

It is possible to have unbelieving false teachers in the Church today. Look at the various churches in our country today. There are many unsaved men and women in the pulpit. So the warnings in 1 Timothy 4 are certainly good for us today.

Doctrinal Points

1. There are doctrines of demons to refute.

Verse 1 says that the false teachers will give “*heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons*”. “Doctrines of demons” are not false doctrines about demons, but rather they are false doctrines **caused by demons**.

Demons are fallen angels or fallen spirit beings. The New Testament teaches that there are different kinds of demons. Different demons have different characteristics. Mark 5 mentioned unclean spirits - demons that cause unusually lewd and impure thoughts, words and actions. Mark 9 mentioned a spirit that causes a person to be deaf and dumb. Luke 13 spoke of a woman who was physically handicapped because of a demon.

So demons are fallen spirit beings that are involved in many different wicked activities. The particular demons in view in 1 Timothy 4 are *deceiving spirits that promote false doctrines*. These demons do not have to possess the body of the false teachers. No, the demons themselves are the *source* of certain false doctrines. False teachers are influenced by these demons, and they are attracted to and latch on to the false doctrines that are of demonic origin. These false teachers, with their demonic teaching, may *sound* religious - but they are hardened hypocrites (v2). They will use the Bible and “spiritual language” and sing Christian hymns - but they are **not of God**.

The same teaching about deceiving spirits is found in 2 Corinthians 11:13-15: “*For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works.*”

In Matthew 7:22-23 the Lord Jesus said, “*Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’*” Notice that the Lord did not deny that those false teachers prophesied and did miracles - but they are false teachers! They are not saved – they are lost.

Two characteristics of doctrines of demons are given in 1 Timothy 4:3-4: forbidding marriage, and commanding to abstain from certain foods. Did you notice how many cults and New Age groups today promote these ideas? A few years ago the mother of one of my students became involved in a cult (that claimed to be Christian). They advised her to divorce her husband so that her spiritual life could move forward. Nothing could be further from what the Bible teaches! All down through Church history there has been false teaching that promotes celibacy and denies certain foods. So be warned!

What should be done about such false teaching? It should be refuted with the truth. Verses 3-5 tell us that God has given us the gifts of marriage and of various foods, and they are *“to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”*

Verse 4 can be translated “every creation of God is good.” In other words, it can refer to both marriage and food, because both are creations of God for the benefit of mankind. Both marriage and food are sanctified, or “set apart for God’s use” by the Word of God and prayer.

Do you regularly pray that God will bless your marriage? We pray regularly before every meal that God would bless our food so that we can better serve Him. Why not also pray that God will bless our marriages - not just for our pleasure and companionship, but also for serving Him? This is the true teaching of the Word of God. So remember - doctrines of demons are to be refuted.

2. There are myths and fables to be rejected.

During this time period a lot of apocryphal writings from the inter-testamental period were circulating around. Many of these apocryphal writings contained fables, legends, and myths. The Jewish people never accepted these writings as Scripture, but they were popular tales of heroic feats – feats that were sometimes supposedly accomplished by biblical characters.

One of the apocryphal writings is called “Bel and the Dragon.” It contains legends about Daniel. Part of a summary on this writing says: “This addition to the Greek text of the book of Daniel comprises two popular tales, both designed to ridicule the folly of idolatry and to discredit even priest-craft. The first story tells of the great statue of Bel, the patron deity of Babylon, which every night devours huge quantities of food and drink and thus proves itself to be a living god. By clever detective work, Daniel unmasks the chicanery of Bel’s priests. The second story tells of Daniel’s refusal to worship a monstrous dragon as the god and his killing it with a ridiculous concoction of pitch, fat, and hair.”

That’s the kind of apocryphal writings that were circulating around at that time, and the false teachers were promoting them! Paul told Timothy that these myths and fables were to be rejected. The same is true today. These same apocryphal writings continue to circulate today. In addition, even more apocryphal writings are available today! False “gospels” purport to give us more information about Jesus than is given in Scripture. Popular novels and movies, false teachers, and pseudo-religious TV programs promote these deceptive false “gospels.” As in Timothy’s day, these false writings are to be rejected!

A former student called me last week to ask about the apocryphal “gospel” that talks about Jesus molding clay birds and giving them life so that they could fly away. I told him exactly what the apostle told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4. Reject these myths and fables!

Don't waste your time reading that stuff! Don't spend your valuable time watching sensational TV programs that proclaim to be about the Bible, but actually contain legends and myths. And watch out for novels and movies that deceptively mingle half-truths with error.

Instead, exercise yourself toward godliness!" ...*reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness*" (v7). How do we train or discipline towards godliness? Verse 6 has the answer: be "**nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed.**" Get to know the Word of God by reading and studying it – and then obey it! And remember - myths and fables are to be rejected.

Practical Application

Stay in spiritual shape!

Notice that I said stay in **spiritual shape!** It's good to stay in physical shape - in fact, I recommend it - but not at the expense of your spiritual life. That's the point of verse 8: "*For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*"

Some of the false teaching that was circulating and being promoted by the false teachers was asceticism, or excessively severe treatment of the body. The pre-Gnostic false teachers particularly taught asceticism. Severe restriction of the body was practiced in the hope of gaining spiritual benefit. Well, asceticism is certainly refuted in 1 Timothy 4! Bodily discipline and training, yes. Asceticism, no!

Even though bodily exercise or discipline or training is valuable, keep your priorities straight. **Godliness is what really counts!** "*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance,*" as verse 9 says.

Discipline and train your spiritual life, because your spiritual life has great value for this life, and for the life to come. Set your alarm clock early - not for running on the treadmill, but for prayer and Bible study before work or class. Run on the treadmill later in the day - or **after** the prayer and Bible study! Discipline yourself not to watch too much TV. Don't spend too much time online. Rather, spend some time memorizing Scripture, and become involved more in Christian service. It's great to stay in physical shape – but it's so much more important it is to **stay in spiritual shape!**