

## **SESSION 5: GETTING IT RIGHT DESPITE YOUTH AND INEXPERIENCE**

### **Timothy 4:1 – 5:2**

#### ***Instructions to Timothy***

<sup>1</sup>The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. <sup>2</sup>Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. <sup>3</sup>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. <sup>4</sup>For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

<sup>6</sup>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. <sup>7</sup>Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. <sup>8</sup>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.

<sup>9</sup>This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance <sup>10</sup>(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.

<sup>11</sup>Command and teach these things. <sup>12</sup>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. <sup>13</sup>Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. <sup>14</sup>Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.

<sup>15</sup>Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. <sup>16</sup>Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.

#### ***1 Timothy 5***

##### ***Advice About Widows, Elders and Slaves***

<sup>1</sup>Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, <sup>2</sup>older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.

---

## OBSERVATION & INTERPRETATION

1. *'The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons'* (v1). Paul asserts that the church is *the pillar and foundation of truth* at the end of chapter 3 (v15). Chapter 4 opens with false teachers and the lies they propagate. They deny what the church upholds. The Greek verb is 'will apostatize', used frequently of Israel's unfaithfulness to Yahweh in LXX.
2. This falling away has been indicated by the Spirit: *'The spirit says clearly...'* (v1). It could refer to Jesus' prediction (Mt.24:10-11), or to Paul's own earlier prophecy of false teachers who would invade the Ephesian church as *'savage wolves'* (Acts 20:29-30). This apostasy will happen *'in later times'* (v1), which have already begun, judging from Paul's switch back to the present tense.
3. Paul attributes false teachings to spiritual forces: *'deceiving spirits...taught by demons'* (v1). If Paul is speaking under the influence of the Spirit of truth, the false teachers are speaking under the influence of deceiving spirits. Rational and intelligent people can believe in error because there is a spiritual dimension where the spirit of falsehood can delude, bewitch and blind them (I Jn.4:6; 2Tim.2:26; Gal.3:1; 2Cor.4:4).
4. Though originating and inspired by evil spirits, false teachings come through human agents. *'Such teachings come through hypocritical liars...'* (v2). Literally, they come through the hypocrisy of liars. The double emphasis for effect here: hypocrisy is already a deliberate pretence; lie is a deliberate falsehood. So false teachers are seduced by deceiving spirits, but are intentional deceivers themselves. They do not believe what they are teaching.
5. There is also a moral dimension to false teachers/teachings: Their *'consciences have been seared as with a hot iron'* (v2). The reference is to the branding of cattle and slaves to establish ownership. Most commentators interpret this to mean the false teachers are branded as belonging to Satan. An alternate interpretation is to understand the term in a medical sense, to cauterize. When skin, nerve or a superficial tumour is cauterized it is destroyed by burning and so rendered insensitive. Similarly, a cauterized conscience is dead. It is a moral insensitivity which leads to false teaching.

Hence, the path to being false teachers:

- They are deaf to their conscience until it is killed into insensitivity
- They don't feel any wrong in becoming hypocritical liars
- They expose themselves to the influence of deceiving spirits
- They lead their listeners to abandon the faith

It begins when we argue with our conscience. So Paul says, *'I strive always to keep my conscience clear before God and man'* (Acts 24:16).

6. Paul teaches Timothy to discern false teaching. It can be identified by its **False Asceticism**: *'They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods...'* (v3). Marriage and food relate to two most natural and fundamental human appetites, sex and hunger. They can be abused, degenerating them into lust and greed. Hence the need for restraint and self control. But, false teachers go much further, arguing that sex and hunger are **themselves** unclean appetites. Because the body is evil, the only way to holiness is abstinence. Since food cannot be given up altogether, then at least the renunciation of meat.
7. Paul asserts 2 tests to sieve out false teaching. The first is a theological test based on the doctrine of creation (v3-5); the second is an ethical test, predicated on the priority of godliness.

#### ***A Theological Test: Creation***

Marriage and certain foods which the false teachers were forbidding, are gifts *'which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth'* (v3). God instituted marriage; how can anyone forbid it? In the light of Acts 10 (v9-23), God created the animals we eat; we should be partaking with thanksgiving in our hearts. Paul highlights the double consecration of the creation gifts, which he repeats 3 times for emphasis. Firstly, Paul states we should gratefully receive what God has created (v3). Secondly, the universal principle that is drawn: *'For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving'* (v4). At creation, God's verdict was that everything He created was good. We cannot vilify what God approves. Not everything is good; but everything *created by God* is. Thirdly, Paul adds that when we receive God's creation gifts, they are *'consecrated by the word of God and prayer'* (v5). Hence the double consecration: God by his own word declares His creation good; and when we pray to bless the marriage or food before we eat. If we do not pollute or pervert God's creation gifts, but receive with gratitude in our hearts, we can celebrate with a clear conscience. Fairbairn writes, *'God's word to man warranting him to use the creation gift, and man's word to God, acknowledging the gift, asking his blessing on it. Sanctification is complete both ways – objectively by the word of God, subjectively by prayer.'*

#### ***An Ethical Test: Godliness***

If Timothy would *'point these things out to the brothers'* (like a waiter serving table guest; or merchant displaying products to a customer), to refute the asceticism of false teachers, he would be *'a good minister of Christ Jesus'* (v6). Good teaching makes a good minister. S/he first nourishes him/herself before s/he instructs others: *'brought up ('nourished' in REB) in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed'* (v6). Before we can teach, we have to feed on the word ourselves. The best teachers have always remained students. They teach well because they learn well.

Turning to an athlete's training, Paul says to young Timothy, *'train yourself to be godly'* (v7). Literally, Paul means 'exercise yourself into godliness.' Of the

15 times used in NT, 'godly' or 'godliness' is referred to 13 times in the Pastorals and 9 in I Timothy. It means 'respect' or 'reverence'. In secular Greek, it denotes respect for rulers, magistrates and parents. In NT, it is used exclusively for reverence for God. It usually has the connotation of 'that mingled fear and love which together constitute the piety of man toward God'. It is a prevailing God-centeredness that informs all attitudes and behaviors.

Paul tells Timothy to 'exercise ourselves into godliness', using the words for gymnastics and gymnasium. In context, Paul seems to suggest we are to exercise the same way we nourish ourselves, namely in the Word of God. With the two metaphors (nourishment and exercise), disciplined eating and exercise are indispensable to health. In the same way, disciplined study and meditation in God's word are necessary for growth in godliness. Godliness will steer us away from '*godless myths and old wives' tales*'(v7) taught by the false teachers.

8. The '*trustworthy saying*' (v9) probably refers to v8 rather than v10, making better sense of v10: '*for this we labor and strive*', i.e. 'we exercise ourselves into godliness' because '*we have put our hope in the living God...*' (v10), who is the author and giver of life and life to come since '*godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come*' (v8).

*'...the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe'* (v10). Not to be mistaken for universalism, Paul is here 'modifying his general statement that God is the Savior of all men by adding the limitation that you cannot be saved unless you believe' (A.T. Hanson in *The Pastoral Epistles*, The New Century Bible Commentary, 1982).

Although young and inexperienced, Timothy can discern and refute false teaching by using the theological test or doctrine of creation and the ethical test. With the first, we ask, 'Does the teaching honor God as the Creator and giver of all good things?' By the second test, we ascertain if the teaching honors God by eliciting from us worship and godliness.

9. '*Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young...*' (v11-12)

The leadership responsibility at Ephesus was heavy – to refute the false teachers and to teach what is true. Paul instructs Timothy to **command** and to **teach**, both verbs in Present Imperative. He is to teach '*these things*', an expression that occurs 8 times in this letter (3:14; 4:6,11,15; 5:7,21; 6:2,17). Timothy's problem with discharging his responsibility was his age. A relatively young man in his thirties, Paul had to advise, '*Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young*'. Timothy was shouldering leadership responsibility beyond his years.

In Asian culture, youth and inexperience are treated with contempt. Older people often remind younger folks, "We have eaten more salt than you have rice, and crossed more bridges than you have roads." This distrust makes it

difficult for younger leaders to fulfill their leadership responsibility. How does a younger leader respond in this situation? Paul thinks it is possible to invite respect from all, especially older people. He uses the adversative **'but'** in mid-sentence to point to a different means: *'Don't let people look down on you because you are young; see **that they look up to you because...**'* (JB Phillips). Paul goes on to indicate six ways Timothy should lead to invite respect.

10. a) **Set an Example:**

*'...set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity'* (v12).

Despise evaporates in the face of admiration. If people could admire Timothy's example, they will have no problems with his relative youth. Peter gave similar instructions to church elders, *'...serving as overseers...not lording over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock'*

(I Pet.5: 2-3). Timothy was to be an example *'in speech, in life...'*, both in word and deed, in profession and performance. In those two dimensions, Timothy must demonstrate *'love'*, the pre-eminent Christian grace; *'faith'*, either trust in God or trustworthiness; and *'purity'*, which is Christian self control.

b) **Identify Your Authority:**

*'Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching'* (v13).

Timothy was to teach *'until I come'*...Timothy was to preach what Paul would have taught, in Paul's place and so in Paul's authority.

But, Timothy also had the authority of OT Scripture. One single Greek word is translated *'public reading of Scripture'*. It refers to the public reading of Scripture as when the priests read from the law in Ezra's day (Neh.8:8), Jesus read from Isaiah in the Nazareth synagogue (Lk.4:16), and the regular OT reading in synagogue worship.

We also know the apostles directed that churches should read their letters aloud to the congregations (I Thess.5:27; Col.4:16). The apostles put their own writings on the same level with OT Scriptures. So, on the Lord's Day, churches will have two public readings, first from the OT and then from the apostolic writings. This was accepted liturgy by 2<sup>nd</sup> century (Justin Martyr, *First Apology*. I.67).

When Timothy was *'preaching and...teaching'*, the understanding was there would be an exposition of the text that was read. The earliest sermons were drawn out of the texts that were read.

What came first was the reading of Scripture, identifying the authority. The exposition and application followed in the preaching and teaching. All preachers, especially younger ones, are to demonstrate their submission to the authority of Scripture, and their conscientiousness in expounding the text so that their teaching will be seen as not theirs, but the word of God.

c) **Exercise Your Gift**

*'Do not neglect your **gift**, which was given you through a **prophetic message** when the body of elders **laid their hands** on you'*(v14).

While the relationship between the gift, prophetic message and laying on of hands is not exact, all three are connected. We can assume that Timothy's **gift** (*charisma*), although not explicit in the text, has to do with his ministry of preaching and teaching. Commentators guess that his gift which contributes to the 'upbuilding of the church' (Calvin) involves 'teaching and ruling the church' (Alford) and 'discernment between the true and false' (Hendricksen).

The **prophetic message** identified Timothy as the person God had called (1:18). Those whom God has called, He also equips with gifts.

The elders **laid their hands** on Timothy to confirm God's calling. It is easy to see how this can be seen as the ordination of Timothy.

As Timothy was young, Paul reminds him that God's gift is not static or permanent. Gifts have to be developed, nurtured and exercised. Hence Paul exhorts Timothy, '*Do not neglect your gift*', but rather to '*fan it into flame*' (2 Tim.1:6). When a young minister focuses on his/her calling, empowering and commissioning, his/her youth and inexperience need not be an obstacle to ministry.

#### d) **Be Accountable**

*'Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress'* (v15).

Paul exhorts Timothy to show himself fully committed to the task: '*give yourself wholly*' or 'be in them', meaning to be totally immersed in the ministry. When we are totally devoted with our heart and soul, it will be observable and obvious to others: '*so everyone can see your progress*'.

While they cannot be flawless and perfect, those who serve God are expected to register improvements and progress. When such dedication to development is accounted for, youth and inexperience are not liabilities.

#### e) **Be Consistent**

*'Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them...'* (v16).

Keep a close eye on your own life and your work (teaching of doctrine). Both need to be nurtured and guarded. Walk and talk must be consistent. Neglecting your soul and heart to do the work of ministry is self destructive. To be self serving is to lose integrity for the ministry. No wonder Paul said to the Ephesian elders, '*Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock*' (Acts 20:28).

*'...if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers'* (v16).

Paul is not contradicting that salvation is by grace, but he means that the result of salvation must be a demonstration of good works from a heart of love.

Persevering in such good works is the ultimate evidence of our salvation.

If Timothy perseveres in the preaching of the Gospel, his hearers will be saved through the life giving-Gospel he is teaching.

#### f) **Relate Appropriately**

*'Do not rebuke an older man harshly but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity'* (5:1-2).

As a younger minister, Timothy had to work with people of all ages and of both genders. Paul prescribes appropriate attitude and behavior according to gender and age. Respect must be given to age, so admonitions to older men must not be harsh; the words *rebuke harshly* imply sharpness and severity. Not only respect, but also affection due to one's father or mother, as in the case of *older women*.

Younger men are to be treated as *brothers*, loving them instead of condescending to them. Younger women are to be considered *sisters* with sensible restraint and *absolute purity*.

In the 'church family', we cannot treat everyone alike! Towards the elders, we are to behave with respect, affection and gentleness. To our own generation, our attitude should be equality; to the opposite sex with self control and purity; and to all people with love that binds us together as family.

These are 6 helpful and practical indicators can enable younger leaders be effective.

---

## APPLICATION

1. All through history, there have been groups who have imposed prohibitions on food or marriage. The Essenes, a Jewish group at Qumran 'reject pleasures as an evil, but esteem continence...to be virtue, and to neglect marriage' (Josephus). The Encratites 'preached against marriage, thus setting aside the original creation of God, and indirectly blaming him who made them male and female for the propagation of the human race'. They also enjoined abstinence from animal food, 'thus proving themselves ungrateful to God who made all things' (Irenaeus). Even the church father, Tertullian regarded virginity as always higher and holier than marriage.

2. Evangelical Christians tend to have a better doctrine of redemption than of creation. We are more grateful for the blessings of grace than of nature. G.K. Chesterton asserts a different perspective:

*You say grace before meals.  
All right.  
But I say grace before the play and the opera,  
And grace before the concert and pantomime,  
And grace before I open a book,  
And grace before sketching, painting,  
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;  
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.*

We need to appreciate and celebrate, recognize and acknowledge all the gifts of the Creator: the glory of the heavens and of the earth, of mountain, river and sea, of forest and flowers, of birds, beasts and butterflies, and of the intricate balance

of the natural environment; the unique privileges of our humanness (rational, moral, social and spiritual). We are created in God's image and appointed his stewards; we relish the joys of gender, marriage, sex, children, parenthood and family life; of friends, the rhythm of work and rest; of serving the common good, of worship; of human creativity expressed in music, literature, painting, sculpture and drama; and in the skills and strength displayed in sports.

### 3. Leaders who contributed despite their youth:

**Alexander the Great**, who would become the Conqueror of the Ancient World, was born at Pella, Macedonia in 356 BC. His father was King Phillip II and his mother was Olympias, a deeply spiritual woman who taught her son that he was an ancestor of Achilles and Hercules. From the earliest age, then, Alexander was conditioned for conquest and kingly glory. He, thus, became focused on being a great ruler.

When he was 13, Alexander became student to the great Greek philosopher Aristotle. Under Aristotle's tutorship he gained an interest in philosophy, medicine and science. However, Aristotle's concept of small city-state government would not have gone down well with the young prince who was bent on world domination. Aristotle did, however, cultivate Alexander's interest in reading and learning.

At age 16 Alexander was called to Macedonia to put down a Thracian rebellion while his father was away. Distinguishing himself immediately, Alexander quelled the rebellion, stormed the rebel's stronghold and renamed it Alexandroupolis, after himself.

Of course Alexander went on to conquer all of his "known" world after he was twenty, but his drive and ambition was obvious from the quelling of the Thracian rebellion.

There's a rundown of Alexander's early life here: Greek History: Alexander the Great (<http://www.hellenism.net/eng/alexander2.htm>)

**Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart**, born in 1756, began composing minuets at the age of 5 and symphonies at 9. When he was 6, he and his older sister performed a series of concerts to Europe's courts and major cities. Both children played the keyboard, but Wolfgang became a violin virtuoso as well. In 1762 the Mozart children played at court in Vienna; the Empress Maria Theresa and her husband, Emperor Francis I, received them. From 1763-66, the Mozart children displayed their talents to audiences in Germany, Paris, at court in Versailles, and London (where Wolfgang wrote his first symphonies and began a friendship with Johann Christian Bach, who became a great musical influence on Wolfgang). In Paris, the young Mozart published his first works, four sonatas for clavier with accompanying violin (1764).

In 1768, aged 12 he composed his first opera, *La Finta Semplice*, which had its premiere in Salzburg. In 1769-70, Leopold and Wolfgang undertook a tour through Italy. This first Italian trip culminated in a new opera, *Mitridate, re di Ponto*, composed for Milan. In two further Italian journeys he wrote two more operas for Milan, *Ascanio in Alba* (1771) and *Lucio Silla* (1772).

There's a detailed biography at "The Mozart Project" <http://www.mozartproject.org/biography/>