

**Armagh Baptist Church – 30<sup>th</sup> May 2010**  
**The Life and Times of Timothy 8**  
**1Timothy 3:14-4:8**  
**Identifying False Teaching**

**Introduction**

We are now half way through our studies in Paul's First Letter to Timothy. Remember it was sent to Timothy while he was in Ephesus.

Remember it was sent to tell Timothy to stop the Elders in the Church who were teaching False Doctrine, and to replace them with good Elders (1v3-4).

A few weeks ago we saw the qualifications that Paul outlined as necessary for any man to fulfil if he was to be appointed as an Elder (1 Tim 3:1-7).

This morning as we come into chapter 4, we see in these opening verses that Paul points out the kinds of False Teaching that were being taught in the churches of Ephesus in those days. I say 'churches' because it is possible there was more than one church in a city the size of Ephesus.

There would have been Elders looking after each church or fellowship, and Timothy had been sent there to sort out the Eldership problems in each of these groups. (This could explain why some of the false teachings actually seem to contradict each other.)

The Truth is usually balanced. And it is possible to make the Truth into a falsehood by veering off either to the right or left; either by becoming too strict on a point of doctrine, or by becoming too loose on it as well. It's like a pendulum swing: there are the two extremes - but the Truth usually lies somewhere in the middle (e.g. Between Legalism and Liberalism).

It's interesting that Paul presents the Truth at the end of ch.3 before launching in to talking about Error at the beginning of ch.4. That's what he has been doing in ch.3:14-15...

*'Although I hope to come to you soon, I am writing you these instructions so that, if I am delayed, you will know how people ought to conduct themselves in God's household, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and foundation of the **TRUTH**.'*

So he stresses the importance of the church standing up for the Truth.

He then goes on to give us a quick summary of objective truth in v.16...

*'Beyond all question, the mystery of godliness is great:*

*He appeared in a body, (Jesus was God come in the flesh)  
Was vindicated by the Spirit, (When he was raised from the dead)  
was seen by angels, (The angels announced his resurrection)  
Was preached among the nations, (The Acts & Great Commission)  
Was believed on in the world, (As Gentiles have believed in Jesus)  
was taken up in glory.'* (His Ascension confirms all this to be true!)

That's what the early church believed about the Lord Jesus Christ, and that is what we believe about him today as well. It's important we stick to the Truth.

## **1. So how does False Teaching come about then? (4:1-2)**

Well Paul tells us that we shouldn't be surprised when false teaching arises in a church, or when we come across false ideas in other churches, because he tells us that the Spirit of God expressly told us that this would happen (v.1).

\* When did the Spirit of God tell us this?

Well Jesus warned of such deception in Matthew 24: (vs. 4-5, 10-13, 23-25.) Paul actually warned these very Elders of it in Acts 20:29-31. Both Jesus and Paul spoke by the inspiration of the Spirit of God. So don't be surprised.

\* Notice in v.2 that The Church of Jesus Christ has an enemy, and that enemy is the Devil, and the Devil and his demons will do all in their power to destroy the Church. If they can't destroy her by persecution from the outside, then they will try to destroy her by false teaching from the inside. That is why there are so many different churches and denominations and sects and cults today, because down through the centuries the Devil has had a field day. He has led the church astray again and again, and he's still doing it! So much so that it's hard to know which church is right today, or what is the Truth.

The only way of knowing is by checking out what you hear, or what is being taught, against the Bible - The Word of God. That is the only fixed point, in the sea of doctrines and teachings that are around today. To know the Truth - Check it out with the Bible! – (Just like the Bereans did in Acts 17:11)

## **2. So what sort of things were being taught in Ephesus? (4:3)**

### **(i) Misinterpretation (1 Tim. 1:4-11)**

There was an overemphasis on obscure Old Testament passages of the Bible (such as the Genealogies and the Law.)

Some of these erroneous elders had got carried away with their new authority as Bible Teachers. They realised they had to teach 'the whole Counsel of God' (and that was good) but the problem was that they had got side-tracked into irrelevant details of the Old Testament. Instead of teaching the people, they were confusing them instead, building doctrines from obscure passages.

### **(ii) Religious Money-Spinners (1 Tim. 6:5-10, See also 3:3 & 8)**

Another problem with these false teachers was not so much what they taught but what they practiced. They were greedy for money and so they were actually charging people for performing religious ceremonies.

(See 1Timothy 6:5-10. Also hinted at in 3:3 & 8)

It doesn't specifically say it here, but the root causes are certainly sounded. The practice of charging worshippers for baptisms or for masses to be said for them or for a loved one, for indulgences, or confessions, or funerals or weddings has all grown up over the years.

A minister has the right to be supported by his church, (or a missionary by those who send him out), but for such a person to charge a fee for everything he does, is wrong. It's open to abuse, and it's dishonest, if he is already receiving a salary for his work in the first place. They were using religion as a way of making money. And sadly many have done so since!

### **(iii) Liberalism (e.g. 1 Tim. 2:9-12)**

In some churches there seems to have been an overemphasis on the new found liberty of the Christian (e.g. see 1 Timothy 2:9-12 re the place and dress of women in the church.)

The problem here was that these Christian women realised that they were no longer Jews, so they didn't have to keep all the taboos of dress, conduct, segregation and silence that they had to put up with in the Synagogues. So now they threw all this off, and were flaunting their new found freedom as Christian women. The problem was they had gone too far, and they were now in danger of up-setting the strongly held values of the society and culture in which they were living. So in effect they were making it even more difficult for people to come to faith in Christ. They were becoming a stumbling block for the Gospel. Again there is a happy medium that has to be found. Too far one way is bondage; too far the other way is Liberalism, which oversteps the mark of God's Created Order for Male and Female.

Another example of taking your liberty too far is the use or abuse of Alcohol. This is why Paul had to stress in ch.3 that both Elders and Deacons were not to be given to drunkenness or to indulge in too much wine. (3:3, 3:8).

### **(iv) Legalism (e.g. 1 Tim. 4:3)**

On the other hand some thought it was more holy to do the opposite, to abstain completely from certain things. Not just Alcohol, but also Marriage and even certain Foods! (4:3). This is the opposite of Liberalism, this is the problem of Legalism. Legalism is going further than the Bible goes by making up man-made rules and regulations.

The Bible warns about the danger of alcohol very strongly, but to go on and say that as a Christian "*Thou shalt not touch alcohol!*" may be good advice, but it's going further than the Bible goes. We are to teach God's Word as it is found in the Bible, but we are not to add to it, or take away from it. We are to go as far as the Bible goes, and we must stop where the Bible stops, otherwise we have made up our own regulations. Our own list of do's and don'ts and we have ceased to be Biblical.

Perhaps some of you wondered at me leaving the door open for women deacons in my teaching last Sunday morning, particularly since I had been so strong on women not being allowed to be elders in the church?

But I did so, because it is my job to teach exactly what the Bible teaches, and to leave it there. I can't go beyond what the Bible teaches to say for example that women shouldn't hold any office in the local church, and I can't keep hidden the 3 points of evidence that I gave you at the end of my sermon last Sunday morning, that certainly seem to suggest that there was at least one female deacon in New Testament times – in the church at Cenchrea – a lady called Phoebe. So if the Bible says it, I will teach it, I'll not hold back; but likewise I have to stop where the Bible stops, I can't go further. If the Bible says, no women elders, then that's what I will preach. If the Bible seems to suggest that a woman could be deacon, then that is what I will preach also. We can't make up more stringent rules than the Bible does - that would be bondage or legalism. But we can't ignore what the Bible teaches either - that would be liberalism. Remember the pendulum swing – the truth lies somewhere in the middle, not at the extremes of legalism or liberalism.

If we add to the Bible, or take away from the Bible, then we have put ourselves beyond God's Blessing, and brought ourselves under God's Curse instead. That is a very serious matter according to Revelation 22:18,19. As I said, the truth of God's Word is usually somewhere in the middle, not at either extreme - legalism or liberalism. The balanced position is in the middle.

As far as ch.4:3 is concerned, the two things that these particular false teachers were forbidding were Marriage and the eating of Certain Foods. Supposedly if you remained celibate / un-married you were regarded as more holy, or closer to God. Likewise if you abstained from certain foods (e.g. meat) you were regarded as very self-disciplined, self-controlled, so much holier than the rest, so you must be closer to God too! But where in the Bible do you get such ideas? That is the question. That is the bottom line. If it's not in the Bible, then don't teach it, don't believe it, and don't practice it!

### **3. So what is the Truth about these matters then? (4:4-5)**

Well Paul says in v.3 that God created both Marriage and Food. He says that both ought to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. In other words if you are a Christian, a true believer in Jesus Christ, then you shouldn't be taken in by such erroneous teaching.

**You should know that God created Marriage** because it was not good for man to be alone. Man's Loneliness was the only thing about God's Creation

that wasn't good! (Gen.2:18). That's why God took a rib from Adam's side and made a woman, a wife, for him.

And then he said *"For this reason, a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh."* (Gen.2:24). There is absolutely nothing wrong with marriage. It is a gift from God to be enjoyed. God made marriage for our good, and as the writer to the Hebrews says, *"Marriage should be honoured by all, and the marriage bed kept pure."* (Heb.13:4a). Why? Because it goes on to say, *"God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."* (Heb.13:4b).

If you *forbid* people to marry, or *demand* celibacy, then that is what you are going to get, *sexual immorality!* God created marriage so that sexual intimacy could be enjoyed in the right context - in a relationship of trust and fidelity. If you take away that context by some religious rule against marriage, you still have the sexual desires and urges that need to be fulfilled. You might try to suppress them, but somewhere along the line it is going to lead to sexual immorality. And sadly, isn't that what we are seeing today in Ireland? In those churches and religious orders that demand celibacy, all kinds of sexual crimes and abuses are coming to the surface. That's what happens when religion tampers with God's plan. It's time the Catholic Church looked again at its teaching on marriage and celibacy. It is frankly unbiblical! Marriage is not demanded of *all*, but singleness is never commanded of *anyone* either!

### **Likewise as far as Food is concerned:**

God made all things, and He made all the food that we eat.

In Gen.1:29-30 God gave all green plants and seed-bearing plants, and fruit to mankind for food.

In Gen.9:2-3 God also gave us animals, birds and fish for food.

In the Old Testament some types of meat were forbidden for the Jews (e.g. pork). But if you know your New Testament, you will know that in Acts 10:9-16 God convinced Peter that all types of meat were now fit for food, even animals that he as a Jew used to think of as unclean.

Paul himself came to see this in Romans 14:14,

*"As one who is in the Lord Jesus, I am fully convinced that no food is unclean in itself."*

So to make vegetarianism essential for being godly, as some cults do, is just wrong. Or to say that a Christian should not eat pork, or anything else, as some Seventh Day Adventists do, is also wrong. These are man-made rules. Eating, or not eating these things, does not make you any more holy, or any less holy, than anybody else.

God gave us all these foods to be enjoyed, and He wants us to receive them with thankfulness.

It does no harm for us to remember this every time we eat a meal, by stopping just for a moment to give thanks for the food that God has given us. Many a person in our world today would be glad of whatever happens to be sitting in front of us on our plate in this country! So we should be thankful.

This brings us to our final point this morning...

#### **4. How can False Teaching be avoided? (4:6-8)**

I think we have already hinted at this several times this morning, but Paul spells it out for us here in vs.6-8.

It's what good ministers are given to the Church for - to preach the Truth! (v.6)

- \* A good minister will stick to the Truths of the Christian Faith that are well established in the Bible.
- \* He will stick to the good teaching that has already been followed by the Church.
- \* The Truth does not change from generation to generation. So he'll not want to deviate too far from his Christian fore-fathers, to the latest craze today!

On the other hand, a good minister will have nothing to do with godless myths and old-wives tales! (v.7)

\* We need to stick to the well-established facts of Christianity as found in the Bible, not start adopting myths and legends. We need to be careful of new ideas, or the latest craze, but we also need to avoid the current trend of going back to the myths and legends of the past.

\* In recent years Celtic Mysticism has been on the rise again, under the guise of the New Age. Celtic Mysticism is really based on the old religion of Ireland before Patrick came to this country with the Gospel. It's really the religion, myths, superstitions, magic and spells of Druidism. There is an alarming new interest in these old superstitions today, and some branches of Christendom in this country today are helping to revive it. You only have to scratch the surface of religion in some parts of the West of Ireland today, and you find the superstitions of Ancient Celtic Mysticism still there!

\* A good minister is to *"have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives tales,"* (v.7) Rather, he is to train himself to be Godly.

\* How can we do this? (v.13) By devoting ourselves (giving ourselves) to the reading, preaching and teaching of The Scriptures - God's Word (v.15 & 16).

#### **Conclusion**

If we want to live by the Truth - then we need to do likewise. Quite simply, we need to get into God's Word! There is nothing else for it. We need to make sure we are preaching and teaching God's Word at every level of local church life: from the Sunday School to Children's meetings, from Youth Meetings to Church Services we need to be preaching the Word of God: not the extremes!

