



## A Study of 1<sup>st</sup> & 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy

# 1st Timothy 4:1-10 In Later Times, Some Will Depart...

I am reading from 1st Timothy chapter four, verses one through ten. If you're using one of the pew Bibles, the passage is located on page 992...1st Timothy 4:1-10.

This is what God's Word says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:1** Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup> For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. <sup>6</sup> If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. <sup>9</sup> The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Father, we come to you this morning confessing to you our great need. Father we need and we desire that the Holy Spirit come now and take the things of Christ and make them real to our hearts...to come and take the written word and as its true author and therefore its infallible teacher to instruct us in the truth of your Son. Open the book we pray to see what you have accomplished on our behalf, in Christ, in whose name, we pray, Amen.

When I was in high school, I became deeply interested in literature. I think you could say I was consumed by it. I am not quite sure why or how that happened. I suppose it could have happened because I was so deeply influenced by an English teacher I had named Elizabeth Amos. She was brilliant and sarcastic with a wit as dry as a horny toad's back on a hot August afternoon in McAllen, Texas. Miss Amos was not the one that taught me to love stories...my grandfather did that. Rather, Miss Amos was the one that pointed me to better stories to read that further inflamed the love I already had for literature in general and stories in particular. For awhile, I got to the place to where I was reading a novel a week. But reading in an undirected manner soon caused me to realize that I was wasting a lot of time...that there was actually more bad literature out there than there was good. And because I didn't want to waste what precious little time I had, I asked Miss Amos to help me guide me as to what I should read. She thought about it and recommended that I begin by reading all the American Nobel Prize winners for literature.

And so I started with the first American Nobel Prize winner for literature, a man named Sinclair Lewis. I read his novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt* and then went on to read *Arrowsmith*. It was an unforgettable experience for me. The first two were pretty dark...pretty cynical. Satirical enough, in fact, that Lewis was originally

awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Main Street* only to have the Board of Directors for the prize overturn the decision of the governing board and take the prize back. In other words, they gave him the Pulitzer Prize and then thought about it and took it back. Later the governing board decided it wanted to kiss and make up and as a result offered Lewis the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith*. He refused it.

And then almost out of the blue Lewis was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature and that made the Pulitzer folks look like the idiots they were.

Anyway, in 1927 Lewis wrote a novel entitled *Elmer Gantry*. It was far and away the most controversial novel of its time. It was about a drunken womanizer named Elmer Gantry who more or less stumbled onto the world of fundamentalistic revivalism. In the story, Gantry develops a relationship with a famous female evangelist named Sharon Falconer. Gantry pursues her even as he builds up his own reputation as a fiery evangelist. But here's the main thing, Gantry doesn't believe one single word he says...not one word.

Rather, he is the consummate hypocrite. He is an alcoholic, narcissistic, vile human toad of a man that is very good at telling his hearers just what they want to hear.

Gantry does everything he does for the show and for the advancement of his own power and lust. He's reprehensible in almost every sense of the word...and yet, in the end he winds up relatively unscathed. Sharon Falconer (whose character was loosely based on the actual life of an real female evangelist named Aimee Simple McPherson) gets burned up in a fire and a number of other good men in the novel who along the way actually attempted to faithfully proclaim the

gospel have their lives destroyed by Gantry but Gantry himself winds up unscathed, the respectable pastor of a large downtown church where he lives out his life proclaiming a truth he doesn't believe while living a life on the side that is both emotionally and morally detached from everything he publically claims to believe.

You can understand why the novel *Elmer Gantry* became an immediate bestseller.

Everyone everywhere knew some preacher who was in some way much like Elmer Gantry. That is, they knew or knew about some preacher who ran away with a piano player or ran away with the church building fund or worse lived two completely different lives and seemed to get away with it.

The same sort of thing still happens today.

Even in my own limited experience, I have witnessed a number of very famous preachers be exposed as complete frauds or as living terribly duplicitous lives...Jimmy Swaggert, Jim Bakker, Peter Poppoff...I mean the list goes on and on.

On a lesser scale, the same sort of thing has even happened in our own denomination.

That is, there have been a number of highly respectable pastors, teachers, and RUF directors that have been caught leading quietly scandalous lives. We have had a number of men in our own presbytery be discovered and turned out of their ministries. A few have repented and been restored, but an even larger

number have turned their faces like a flint in order to pursue lives of open shame.

Now you may be asking, **“Alright Tom, I get your point. But really none of this is very pleasant. I mean it is a bit like picking a scab. We all know that there are occasional failures in ministry. So why bring all that up?”**

Well, I bring it up because I want to be a good servant of the Lord Jesus Christ. I say that because Paul makes the point here in the beginning lines of 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4 that being a good servant of Jesus Christ requires that Timothy makes sure he points out to the Ephesians that such hypocritical men exist and will continue to exist and will plague the church right up until the time of Christ’s return. In fact, Paul goes even further than that. Look again at verse one.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:1**...Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

The way Paul phrases this opening section is compelling. The verb **“says”** is a present tense verb in Greek. That means that it is likely that it was intended to be understood durative or repetitive in scope as in, **“the Spirit keeps on saying.”**<sup>1</sup> When you connect that to the fact the verb also has the adverb **“expressly”** or **“explicitly”** attached to it, it becomes quite emphatic. If I were to paraphrase it in order to make my point clearer for you I would put it something like this, **“The Spirit of God makes it quite clear over and over again that...in the last days a number of believers will depart from the faith.”**

Of course that raises the question, **“Where and when and how did the Spirit of God make that clear?”**

I think the short answer is that it did it over and over again in the life and ministry of the apostolic church. It did it for instance in the ministry of our Lord in Matthew 24:10. There the Lord Jesus talking about the last days says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Matthew 24:10...**And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. <sup>11</sup> And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. <sup>13</sup> But the one who endures to the end will be saved.

His point is that in the last days, a sort of lawless apostasy will come to pass in which false teachers will make every effort to pull away as many followers of the Lord Jesus as it can.

Talking about the same thing and the exact same period of time, the last days, the Lord Jesus says this in Mark 10:21:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Mark 10:21...**“And then if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or 'Look, there he is!' do not believe it. <sup>22</sup> For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. <sup>23</sup> But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.”

And then speaking more directly to that same problem at the church of Ephesus the Lord Jesus is quoted as saying this in the Book of the Revelation 2:1.

<sup>ESV</sup> **Revelation 2:1...**“To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: 'The words of him who holds the seven stars in his right hand, who walks among the seven golden lampstands. <sup>2</sup> '“I know your works, your toil and your patient

**endurance, and how you cannot bear with those who are evil, but have tested those who call themselves apostles and are not, and found them to be false. <sup>3</sup> I know you are enduring patiently and bearing up for my name's sake, and you have not grown weary. <sup>4</sup> But I have this against you, that you have abandoned the love you had at first. <sup>5</sup> Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first. If not, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place, unless you repent."**

You see what I mean.

Of course, it wasn't just the Lord Jesus warning his followers to be on the lookout for false teachers. Paul himself makes the same point to those to whom he ministered. Obviously he makes it here 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 4, but he also makes it clear in 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 3.

There Paul has an extended discourse on the nature of the times in the last days. At the end of the section he concludes with this:

**<sup>ESV</sup> 2 Timothy 3:12**...Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, <sup>13</sup> while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

He makes much the same point in 2 Corinthians 11.

**<sup>ESV</sup> 2 Corinthians 11:12**...And what I am doing I will continue to do, in order to undermine the claim of those who would like to claim that in their boasted mission they work on the same terms as we do. <sup>13</sup> For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. <sup>14</sup> And no wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.

You can see what I mean. It is a recurring motif.

False teachers are ever going to be an ongoing problem in the last days. And that fact, of course, raises a different question. It raises the question, “**What exactly what does Paul mean by the latter times or last days?**”

I think the best answer to that is that he means the present time. Dispensational American theology has always suggested that these latter times or last days are the days at the very end of the age right before the Lord Jesus returns. But Paul poses the idea that the latter times, the last days, were occurring right then during his own life time. That is, he held the same idea as the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews where he says:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Hebrews 1:2**...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world.

The last days, the latter times, are now...not later on. In the last last days, he has spoken to us. You see what I mean.

Peter expresses the same idea in 1<sup>st</sup> Peter 1:20.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Peter 1:20**...He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the last times for the sake of you <sup>21</sup> who through him are believers in God, who raised him from the dead and gave him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

You see what I mean. The latter times, the last days, are really the time between the resurrection of Jesus and the return of Jesus. Peter and Paul were in the last days every bit as much as you and I are.

I particularly appreciate the way Philip Ryken puts it:

Since human beings are curious about the future, we are bound to ask "**When will these later times be?**" There is an important clue in this passage. In verse 1 the Holy Spirit speaks about the future: "**in later times some depart from the faith?**" Yet by verse 3 the apostle is speaking in the present tense about things happening in the Ephesian church at that very moment. This indicates that the later times of the final age have already begun.

When someone asks, therefore, "**Do you think we are living in the last days?**" the answer is always, "**Yes!**" These are the later times. These are the last days, which, as John Wesley said, "**extend from our Lord's ascension till His coming to judgment?**" George Knight helpfully defines them as days "**inaugurated by the Messiah and characterized by the Spirit's presence in power, the days to be consummated by the return of Christ.**" The end times thus encompass the whole Christian era from the resurrection of Jesus Christ to his second coming in power and glory.

If these are the later times, then apostasy is to be expected. <sup>2</sup>

Now since these are the last days, and since the last days or later times are times that will be marked off by apostasy or falling away it raises the question, "**What exactly does Paul say this later time apostasy will look like?**" Look again at verse one.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:1**...in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, <sup>2</sup> through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup> who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

The word for "**depart from the faith**" there in verse one is the Greek word from which we derive the word "**apostatize.**" Paul's point is that some will fall away or be drawn away from the faith of the Bible to something quite dreadful...to deceitful spirits and to the teachings of demons. Now I don't think the implication is that those who fall away will necessarily know they have been

lured away by demonic doctrine but the point is that demonic doctrine and lying spirits are out there and are looking for a place to get a toehold among the faithful. But how, you might ask does that happen. How do lying deceitful spirits and demonic forces get that toehold? They do it through teachers who are hypocritical liars who have had whatever faithfulness existed in them burned away by hearts and minds constantly exposed to sin.

Let me explain some of key ideas Paul poses here. The word **“hypocritical”** is almost an exact transliteration for the word used here to describe teachers who have become hardened liars. Originally the word ὑποκριτής was applied to actors in the theatre. You know the kind ancient Greek actors I mean...the kind that put on a mask and took on the identity of a make-believe character. That is the kind of liars these false teachers are. That put on a face...a face that looks like the kind of face their listeners would expect to see...but underneath it is completely fake. Now unlike those who are drawn away by false teaching these hypocritical liars are not deluded. They know what they are doing...they know they do not believe what they are teaching. In fact, they no longer even make moral assessments about the things they teach...they do what they do to promote their own best interests and to lure those to whom they speak away from the truth. They do so with seared consciences. Now I have to tell you I think Paul’s description here is just about the most graphic used anywhere in the New Testament.

The imagery he invokes is to a conscience burned into oblivion with a red-hot knife. It may be implying that such men’s minds have been branded. If that is what Paul intends, then these false teachers have consciences that are branded by their demonic masters. That is, the false teachers are the property of their

demonic masters and only do their bidding. Still, it may have a different meaning. The underlying word *καυστηριάζω* may refer to the idea of a wound being cauterized. I don't know if you ever seen a western where a cowboy has to have a open wound cauterized to stop the bleeding are to stop an infection but if you haven't the act involved sticking a red hot knife to an open wound in order to burn it closed...in order to make it scar over. If that is what Paul is referring to here, then what he means is that these false teachers are hypocritical liars who have had had their consciences seared over by the constant red-hot scarring effect of their continued lying. Their consciences no longer feel anything...they are morally numb like a thick piece of scar tissue.

Now the way these teachers with seared over consciences demonstrate their subversion of the gospel is by forbidding God's people the right to enjoy the very things that God has ordained for their joy. That is, they want to restrict what their hearers eat...or even the fact that they wish to become lawfully married. You see what they want to do is to forbid those things that God has prepared for the blessing and enjoyment of his people. They want to take God's "Yes" and turn it into an emphatic "No!"

Now the way Paul deals with the sin of these false teachers and their asceticism is by appealing to creation. Look at verse four.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:4**...For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup> for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

Now you don't have to be Bible scholar to recognize that Pau is appealing here to God's act of creation in Genesis 1 and the seven times in a row that God remarks or see that all that he created was good.

For example after God created the sun and the moon, the text says in Genesis 1:18:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 1:18**...And God saw that it was good.

And after God created the birds and the animals the text says in Genesis 1:21:

<sup>ESV</sup> **Genesis 1:21**...And God saw that it was good.

And on it goes in Genesis 1 seven different times. Paul's point here, however, is that these false teachers in Ephesus are looking at the good gifts of God and saying, **"You know that's not good. In fact, you shouldn't do that. You should refrain from eating this or that, and you should refrain altogether from marriage. Not only is it not good, it is rather downright sinful."**

You see the point. These false teachers have turned God's pronouncement on its head. But such wonderful blessings ought not to be denied but rather embraced. The problem is we have grown too accustomed to God's kindness. We would be much better off if we ceased to take such things for granted. Listen to G.K. Chesterton:

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 ink.<sup>3</sup>

One thing we might do is simply open our eyes to God's bounty. I always like to give my students an assignment at the beginning of each year. I like to ask them to count how many variations of the color green they see on the way home from school. They often marvel that there are thousands of variations of this one primary color. And each one is to be noted and enjoyed as a kindness from the hand of our great Creator God.

Still there are dangers. Writing on this passage, John Stott adds this:

Notice carefully, however, what Paul writes. It is not that **"everything is good"**, but that *everything created by God is good*. This is an indispensable qualification, since not everything that exists has come unsullied from the Creator's hand. For the creation was followed by the fall which introduced evil into the world and spoiled much of God's good creation. Indeed the creation has been **"subjected to frustration"** and is now **"groaning"** in pain. We therefore need discernment to know what in our human experience is attributable to the creation, and what to the fall. A flagrant current misuse of the creation argument is the claim that the practice of heterosexual and homosexual people are equally good because equally created. Homosexual Christians regularly say, **"I'm gay because God made me that way, and so I intend to celebrate my homosexuality."** But no, what God created was **"male and female,"** with heterosexual marriage as the intended consequence. It is no more appropriate to celebrate homosexuality than other disordered human tendencies which are due to the fall like out irrationality, covetousness or pride.<sup>4</sup>

You can see the problem. Now what does Paul want Timothy to do about the problem? Look a verse six.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:6**...If you put these things before the brothers, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine that you have followed. <sup>7</sup> Have nothing to do with irreverent, silly myths. Rather train yourself for godliness; <sup>8</sup> for while bodily training is of some value, godliness is of value in every way, as it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

Paul wants Timothy to make these distinctions clear for his hearers. He says that if Timothy does so he will be a good servant of Christ Jesus. In fact, there is a very clear connection between the goodness of Timothy doing that and the goodness of God's creation itself. It is as if Paul is saying, **"Alright then, these false teachers are saying getting married is not good...and eating certain things or drinking certain things is not good either. However, everything that God has made is good and if you will point that out to the brothers that will be pretty good as well."**

Now how is Timothy to point such things out? He is to do so according to verse six having been trained in the words of the faith and good doctrine he has followed. That is, he is to do so based on the words and teaching of Scripture.

Paul adds to that, of course, the idea that Timothy must not get caught up in all the ridiculous irreverent mythological superstitions of the false teachers. Rather, his training should be training focused on growing in godliness. Obviously, Paul is invoking the imagery of the gymnasium here.

Paul injects the imagery of physical exercise here not to encourage or discourage physical exercise one way or the other. He is not promoting that you buy a Bow Flex for Christmas. Nor is he recommending that you sell the Bow Flex you already own. Rather, he is appealing to the imagery of physical exercise simply

to illustrate his point. Physical exercise has its place...has its own intrinsic value, but godliness has value in every way imaginable. It benefits both this life and the life to come.

And that raises the question of what exactly does Paul mean by godliness.

Listen to how Philip Ryken defines godliness.

The word **“godliness”** means reverence. It denotes the respect that the believer owes to God—what one scholar describes as **“that mingled fear and love which together constitute the piety of man toward God.”** Such godliness comes from the awareness that all of life is lived before the face of God. Calvin thus called godliness **“the beginning, middle and end of Christian living.”** The godly person places God at the center of every activity and endeavor. God is in the sleeping and the waking, the eating and the drinking, the coming and the going. The godly person walks with God at home, at work, at church, at school, and at play. Godliness includes godly thoughts, godly speech, and godly behavior. It is the attitude toward life that David expressed when he said, **“I have set the LORD always before me.”** (Ps. 16:8). Godliness comes from a God-centered life.

Now here’s the thing. Paul tells Timothy that godliness has value not just for now but for the life to come. There is a sense in which godliness on earth prepares us for an eternity in which we live in the very presence of God himself. I couldn’t help but think of C.S. Lewis’ little book the *Great Divorce* when I read through this text again. It’s a story about a busload of tourists from Purgatory who visit heaven only to find out they don’t really like heaven very much. I think C.S. Lewis was right to suggest the idea that people that don’t like God very much on earth are going to really going to be in a mess when or perhaps if they ever get to heaven.

You see godliness in the present has value in terms of the joy we get in this life but it also has value eternally in that it prepares us for an eternity lived in God's presence.

Paul thinks this last point is very important. Notice the next verse, verse nine.

<sup>ESV</sup> **1 Timothy 4:9**...The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance. <sup>10</sup> For to this end we toil and strive, because we have our hope set on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, especially of those who believe.

Paul's point is that this assertion about the value of godliness is a trustworthy saying and worthy of our acceptance in much the same way that his previous statement about being the foremost of sinners was a trustworthy statement and worthy of full acceptance. In fact, it is the point on which we as the people of God are to focus. It is the very thing for which we ought to toil and strive. And we ought to do so because we have set our hope on the one true and living God who is our Savior.

Now I will talk about the difficulty of the last part of verse 10 next week but in the mean time let me end with this. It is true that in the later times, the last days, there will be some who turn away from the faith and devote themselves to deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons...but it is also true that there will be some perhaps many that do not. There will be many faithful ministers and teachers of the gospel that remain faithful and keep these things ever before our eyes. To do so is a good thing and something worthy of our attention and praise. By doing that and that alone will we be counted as good servants of Christ Jesus.

Let's pray.

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<sup>1</sup> George W. Knight III, *The Pastoral Epistles (NIGTC)* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing, 1992), 108.

<sup>2</sup> Philip Graham Ryken, *1 Timothy (REC)* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P& R Publishing, 2001), 154.

<sup>3</sup> John R.W. Stott, *1 Timothy & Titus (BST)*. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 115.

<sup>4</sup> Stott, 114-15.