The Epistle of First Timothy

Chapter 4

 We now have Church operations, basically in place, so what qualifications are needed for those who are called into various areas of leadership. Would you dare assume a role of leader in an area you are not familiar with? Probably not, but sometimes you can be pressed into that role and are very uncomfortable, and so will the people you lead, be uncomfortable with your leadership. How can one have authority within a job, when they are not understanding of the job needed to be done?

 So with this new organized Church, we have get some kind of leadership on place, but we never got away from the trials and temptations that assail any young gathering. When you and I were but children, we had mom and dad, or guardians to watch over us, yet those temptations away from our parents or guardians were ever present and many times we would see the ‘greener grass’ and want to take a look. We knew the admonishments, and the penalties for falling into the traps and snares of those temptations, yet we, many times were pulled into the world of disobedience. We paid the price for our disobedience, and returned to the safety of home, but, sadly, there were those who did not. Those temptations of the world or the Fagins of the world would catch them up. (Who remembers, ‘Oliver Twist?) Now who do suppose, were the Fagins of these new Church start-up’s? (and for those unfamiliar with Oliver Twist by Charles Dickens, Fagin was a low-life criminal who used little children to do his dirty work, teaching them to be thieves and pick-pockets.) And our Fagins were the Jewish leadership who brought the old ways back to the new in Christ, and tried to lead them away from the truth.

 Ever try to herd a bunch of kittens; they do go all over the place and without momma cat, that herding is quite impossible; so we have these young Churches planted in despoiled areas with so many temptations around us, and these are temptations we have grown up with, but friends, how many times, as a Christian, have we looked out at the life remembered, and wondered---’what might have been’? What if I had stayed in those circumstances, what would have happened to me? Or remembered some of the fun things and longed for those adventures again as those times and folks we left behind suddenly came into our lives again, to remind us of those days and the activities and fun we shared.

 With all of this in mind and as we look at our own particular circumstances, let’s return to Paul. Paul throws in the unifying aspect, which is, we all believe in the same thing. We have this in our Churches today, with the various creeds but same revelation we recite. The Apostles Creed is a great example we use today. But we also have the Nicene Creed, among others. These were created to bring a unifying thought to the people in the Church, and Paul in a way establishes a ‘creed’ for Timothy to teach to the people. In other words, belief in the virgin birth, believe in the Christ as man and God, believe that Christ was crucified for our sin atonement, believe that Christ rose from the dead and went into heaven and sits at God’s Right Hand. That means as we all recite whatever creed that is being used, we all recite the same thing. And when we all recite the same thing, we all come to believe as one, thereby the unity in the Spirit. So, as our people in Ephesus believe, but Paul is going to warn Timothy regarding human nature. Let’s see what he is saying.

 A] 1 Timothy 4: 1 through 5; (read)

 1] “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons--”*

 So, as Paul has explained the core tenets of the faith to Timothy, he now counters this with a very profound statement about the coming apostasy and that with this apostasy there will be a falling away from the faith by many who claimed their belief in God and Jesus, but cannot hang on during the tough times. Paul says the Spirit of God speaking to him, is very certain about this truth. Right now, the Church IS growing, the leadership is being put in place, people are being taught, but the time IS coming, he says; the time friends is now, as we are seeing so many of our mainline Churches diminishing in attendance, and although there seems to be new small start-up Churches here and there, too many are falling from the faith because they have lost their first love, and the temptations of the day are now too much as they are being weakened by mal-nutrition, or lack of feeding from the Word of God.

 Why does this happen? (Now I speak in generalities here,) Some of the Church leadership, today, has passed over the word, not teaching from and through Scripture but alluding to scripture to justify their neo-logic, and instead going to good works and being righteous in their own minds, justifying their actions with their own credos. Satan and his minions are hard at work distorting the message, and when man is not being fed from the Word of God, man suffers.

 2]--”*speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,--”*

 Now Paul is also speaking about the lies from the Judaizers, who strive to take the truth of the Atoning gift of Christ, and both dissuade the hearer, and to force the old law back on to the believer, using their knowledge of the Tanakh to confuse the message of salvation, coming on to the believer as the pious, righteous preachers, as they had done throughout the time Jesus was walking the earth and this occasioned that He really tore their charade to bits throughout His three years. However, as we have studied, although they were brought to a standstill until they had rid themselves of this Jesus menace, yet as the Jesus movement had grown, they also realized, the Jesus menace thing they thought they had ended, instead flourished, and this they couldn’t have.

 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.”*

 Some of this could go back to the teachings of the Jewish Groups, the Essenes and the Therapeutae, (A monastic sect from the Greek speaking world established through the teachings of Philo and some off shoots of the Jewish Essenes) who called it meritorious not to marry, and to abstain from relationships. As the scholars I study explain, the Essenes and Therapeutae led a monk-like existence, alone and isolated, but still within larger populations in various cities throughout Macedonia, Asia Minor (present day Turkey) and a few in Israel; yet as one can see from some the teachings regarding the Essenes, there were many large communities of these Essenes with women and children. This tells me that it was the leadership that practiced abstinence but the followers did not. But this is what they tried to push on the new Church of believers.

 Also, from the Hebrew law, there was the practice or requirement of certain foods being deemed unclean, however later on, God showed Peter at the house of Cornelius, that all foods were fit as God had said, ‘Don’t call anything unclean, I have called clean’ (paraphrase). The main thing here, is God gave to His human creation, food from both the animal and plant species. And we should be truly thankful.

 4] “*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.”*

 All that God says and does, is holy and if whatever is set apart for God’s purposes is set apart by prayer, then God being true to His Word accepts it. God’s word does not condemn food, and it was God who provided food for Adam and Eve and all His creation. All living things need fuel to make the energy to live. Isn’t God’s creation marvelous? ANYTHING that lives must consume a fuel, or food, that converts to energy, that nourishes the body to live, and whether plant or animal one species will consume another. We, today call that the ‘food chain’. And frankly we are a part of that food chain too (albeit pretty much at the top of that chain). Man, being omnivorous, consumes both plant and animal, and God has provided both for our use. If God provided it, it already is holy, don’t you think?.

 B] 1 Timothy 4: 6 through 11; (read)

 1] “*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.”*

 We have a pretty clear picture of life in Ephesus by now, and what it might have been like to be a member of a small Christian Church. We have seen the pressures these folks were under, from a garbled leadership, to outside sources able to influence some of the things going on within this body of believers. And Paul, as he has been admonishing Timothy, TELL THEM! If he tells them how to be strong, how to stand against the false teaching permeating the body, then he IS doing the job. Also, notice what Timothy has that allows him to be able to teach??? He himself has been nourished in the word. Do we understand this? I have seen where folks want to take up teaching, yet their knowledge is weak and as a result the teaching will be weak and of little use.

 Even today, as we watch churches struggling against the world, we note that the Word of God has been replaced with personal justification, self-intoned and self-taught righteousness. As the human body needs the nourishment of meats vegetables and fluids to make the body strong, so the spiritual body and the spiritual body collective needs the vitamins and minerals from the Word of God to make the Bride of Christ, the Christian Church, strong. Remember disciples were learners, and it wasn’t until they had completed their learning that they became apostles and teachers. We all need to be disciples and even when we have learned the lessons being taught, there are still more lessons to be learned.

 2] “*But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.”*

 This is directed right at Timothy, to keep himself strong. The problem that seems to permeate the seminaries today is word study, and striving to find deeper meanings into words and sayings where the simplicity of truth should prevail. This is exactly what the Pharisees were doing, and this is where the Books of traditions came from. The Jewish scholars of old called Pharisees, actually starting to do a preservation of the Scripture while in exile, would, during their study and writing, take questionable words or phrases, reinterpret them and create new meanings, and eventually the Mishnah, Talmud and Gemmara, the Books of Traditions, were born, and thus was born the leading away of the Jews from the law and toward the Traditions..

 Timothy is still young, green, malleable, and impressionable, so Paul is pushing on him to not pay attention to that which is wrong, (easy to say---not so easy to do) not to get caught up in the arguments in the Books of traditions, but to stay strong in the scripture and the gospel or Good News, that is the exercise. To make himself spiritually strengthened toward Godliness, to study and to do. WE can all study and read all the books available, but unless we undertake to put into practice to do what is taught in these studied, all that learning is for naught.

 3] “*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.”*

 When I was in my teens, had I the common sense to take better care of my body, eat properly, exercise regularly, I might have not had the heart and lung problems I now have in my older age. Bodily exercise DOES profit the body, however also remember the body is finite, it has an end, but the spiritual body of the Christian is eternal and much more emphasis should be taken to make the spiritual much fitter. First, I have the fuel for the energy and then the exercise to use the fuel in the proper manner to help the body to grow strong and healthy. And as is required of Timothy or we also, today get the fuel from the Word of God, we then exercise our spiritual bodies becoming more Godly in our daily lives. The stronger I become spiritually now in this life I have on earth, the stronger I am in the eternal life that is promised ahead.

 4] “*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.”*

 Paul is just emphasizing what he just said in the last verse. Exercise, exercise, exercise! Both physically as well as spiritually. I was reminded by Dr. J. Vernon McGee, that Paul had been in Ephesus, and knew that the sports and games that were being played, the arenas that held all those sporting events, that he, many times alluded to, and now he alludes to the preparation for the games and the sporting events, and equates this to the preparation for Christian service, which is quite similar.

 In the games, the athletes will exercise strenuously and then participate, but one day they will grow too old to be a part of the games anymore, and then what? Therefore, what did all that heavy preparation get them in the end except instant glory? But we exercise our spiritual body through the Scripture, and then we will have that strong eternal body with God.

 5] “*For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, Who is Savior of all men, especially those who believe. These things command and teach”*

 *“Timothy! This is what you and I are laboring for, in the first place, even to the facing of ridicule and shame from all those folks who do not believe. They have a terrible time understanding and accepting the fact that we teach and preach about the Living God and His Gift of Salvation.”* Paul is striving to encourage and strengthen Timothy’s faith as he is to begin this daunting service. This is a huge responsibility, but a job, Paul feels, that Timothy is ready for.

 Timothy is to be strong, to stand fast and teach these things. It is not easy and you don’t throw a newbie into the game without preparations, and advice. And that the newbie knows that the teacher has his back. A family member and her husband many years ago went to Nigeria as missionaries, and that definitely is a dangerous place to be, but they did have an organization at their back, and after nearly forty years came home in retirement, having done their job well leaving a legacy for others. Timothy has his head knowledge, but he also has Paul to refer to when the need arises. He is not alone as Timothy has the Holy Spirit.---But Paul is not done.

 C] 1 Timothy 4: 12 through 16; (read)

 1] “*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity.”*

 Here is a worthy admonition for all young men fresh out of Seminary eager to become part of a ministry! BE AN EXAMPLE!!! Live what you have been taught. I get the feeling that Timothy was probably in his late twenties and up to this point, has been a student of Paul as Paul had been a student of Gamaliel and had been entrusted with messenger roles. Apprenticeship is a most valuable educational experience. You feel the heat, but there is always someone there to place the healing ointment when you get burnt.

 2] “*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying of the hands of the eldership.”*

 Timothy has been prayed over, prophesied over, and has the gift of ministry, and Paul is encouraging, exhorting, pushing Timothy to use these gifts of ministry, and to bring proper teaching to the people, because this is what he is meant to do. Here it is, where we are to use the Gifts, the Holy Spirit has endowed us with, and using these gifts as God will us, that is when the fruits of the Spirit become noticeable.

 3] “*Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all.”*

 Timothy is to take all that Paul has been telling him keeping all of the things he was told, and act on them, not being sidetracked by the world. He is to dedicate himself to the task at hand. Too many young men, today, have a hard time committing themselves to the job that needs to be done, because they get caught up in the thrills of the world, of things that excite young people. I am sure Timothy is no exception, and understanding his commitment at such a tender age, the thrills of the world passed him by. But they would be momentary, where his dedication is permanency.

 4] “*Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.”*

 Here we need to say, the Pastor of any Church has a huge, a positively massive, responsibility on his shoulders, and if he is not prepared, he does himself a disservice but even more so a disservice to God and to the people he is in charge of. Therefore, Paul is explicit in his admonishment to Timothy, be prepared!!!!!! a good motto to follow.