

1 Timothy

I. Introduction

- A. **1 Timothy 4:1-5** . . . But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, [2] by means of [pastors, teachers, elders, Christian authors, and theologians who are hypocritical liars] seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, [3] men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. [4] For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; [5] for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.
- B. Last week we looked at the mystery of godliness, that is, the mystery of becoming godly which is the living Christ living within us. And we were warned that in spite of the living Christ living within us, we can be led astray and we can fall away from the faith.
- C. Pray

II. Four contributing factors to mediocre Christianity; all God created is good

- A. [3a] Men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods. This kind of religious life-style is sometimes called an ascetic life or a monastic life. And it is this life-style that I want us to look at for the next few minutes.
 - 1. From at least the second century onward, the ascetic life-style (*the practice of extreme rigidness and self-denial in religious things*) and the monastic life-style have been seen by many as spiritually superior, and the path to a deeper, more mature spirituality than can be gained by those living the common Christian life of marriage, family, house, possessions, work, church, and play.
 - a. My question is, is a deeper, more mature, spiritually healthy Christian life only possible for those who live the ascetic or monastic life-style? For me, the answer is NO.
 - b. And my reason for saying NO is because, whether you are an ascetic, a monastic, or a believer living the more common Christian life, we all have God's indwelling presence, His empowerment, His enabling gifts and promises for godly living, the leading and enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the power of

the living Word – which works in various ways to make us more like Christ, and fellow believers to help us along the way.

2. And yet, church history and my observation of Christians in general seems to say that few Christians living the common Christian life attain a deeply spiritual, mature form of Christianity.
 - a. The sad reality is, most Christians do not grow beyond a basic knowledge of God and theology, trust in God for most things but not everything, and a life that looks more Christian on the outside than it is on the inside and more Christian in most public settings than it is in the home.
 - b. It seems that only a few Christians living the common Christian life guard their time sufficiently and put in the effort required to actively pursue and grow to the place of fully trusting God, dying to self, whole-heartedly living for God, loving as God loves, and experiencing a personal and intimate relationship with God.

B. Why is this? My answer includes what I believe to be four prominent reasons: (1) human nature and life, (2) hunger, (3) time, and (4) the fact that it is easier and therefore more appealing to take on the look and activities of Christianity than to actively and consistently pursue godliness in thought, attitude, desire, word, and deed.

1. Let's start with human nature and life. The reality is, we are born with and we will die with what the Bible calls our old self (**Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9**).
 - a. And though it has been defeated in Christ's death and resurrection, it appears it will be part of us in some way or another until we enter God's eternal presence to live with Him forever.
 - b. This is why most of us experience the war that at times rages between our new nature – which is growing in Christ-likeness, and our old self – which though subdued, still tries to get its way now and then.
 - c. Therefore, given our human nature **and** all the people, activities, responsibilities, and cares that fill our time, along with our need to sleep, eat, and care for our body, it is easy to see why so many Christians living the common Christian life fail to attain a high level of spirituality and Christian maturity. However, human nature and a busy life are only excuses, not legitimate reasons.
2. Moving on to hunger. Jesus said, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied" (**Matthew 5:6**).

- a. It is my experience that few Christians hunger and thirst for God, godliness, and knowing God more deeply. Yet the reality is, you will only pursue God and godliness to the degree that you hunger and thirst for Him. Your zeal and persistence will never exceed your desire or determination. Therefore, you will only rise to the level of spirituality to which you are motivated to rise.
 - b. Now it may be that you lack the driving motivation of hunger and thirst. And this is a problem, but not an unsolvable problem. Why? Because you have an intellect.
 - (1) You can use your intellectual ability to discern how the principle of hunger and thirst works, and to discern what is best – according to God and His word, and to rely on God’s word and God’s help as you use your intellect and self-discipline to act as if you are hungry and thirsty.
 - (2) In other words, though lacking the compelling motivation of hunger and thirst, you can – by the use of your intellect and self-discipline – choose to pursue righteousness as if you were hungry and thirsty.
3. The next issue is the matter of time. Paul writes in **Ephesians 5:15-17**, “Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, [16] **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil. [17] So then do not be foolish (*in wasting time*), but understand what the will of the Lord is (*in order to make good use of time*).”
- a. Regardless of how busy we are with real, or imagined, or even frivolous commitments, responsibilities, and burdens, we have the ability to carve out time for whatever we deem more important than what is currently filling our time.
 - b. So though time is a legitimate factor in what we can do, for most of us, it isn’t the only factor standing in the way of a serious, intentional, and persistent pursuit of God and godliness.
 - c. The reality is, we all have the same amount of time – and that includes the ascetic and the monastic. Therefore, the problem is not how much time we have – though we frequently use that as an excuse for not doing things. The problem is how we use our time – which means the problem is you, and it is me – because we determine how we are going to use our time.
 - d. I want to acknowledge that there are times when the circumstances of life are so demanding that time becomes a legitimate reason for not getting everything done you need or ought to do – such as protecting time for the pursuit of God and

godliness. However, during those kinds of times, we can still pray, we can work at practicing what we have learned, and we can do our best to live up to what we know.

- e. I also want to acknowledge that not everyone has the mind or the abilities required to understand God more nearly as He is, or to discern God's word more nearly as it is intended to be understood, or to figure out how to apply the truth of God's word in the most practical ways possible.
 - (1) But we all can look to those who know and understand more than we do to take us further than we can take ourselves.
 - (2) And regardless of our lack of abilities, we still can grow according to the abilities we have.
 - (3) Jesus makes this point in the parable of the talents where He in essence says that it is not how well we do in comparison to others. What matters is how well we do in comparison to what we are capable of doing (**Matthew 25:14-18**).
- 4. My fourth prominent reason for why most Christians do not grow beyond a basic knowledge of God and theology, and beyond trust in God for most things but not everything, and beyond a life that looks more Christian on the outside than it is on the inside is the fact that it is easier to take on the more prominent and obvious activities of Christianity than to be a Christian.
 - a. This is why some false teachers promote aspects and practices of the ascetic and monastic lifestyle – such as forbidding marriage and eating a restricted diet.
 - b. Without question, their promotion of a restricted lifestyle looks like a superior form of Christianity. But looking like a superior Christian at certain times and in certain ways and in certain places is not the same as being a growing and maturing Christian at all times, and in all ways, and in all places.
 - c. In other words, mimicking a self-disciplined life, like that of the ascetic or monastic, without also putting in the hard work of dying to self and pursuing godliness in thought, attitude, desire, word, and deed, is what Jesus likened to cleaning the outside of the cup while leaving the inside dirty (**Matthew 23:25**).
 - d. The proper way of pursuing genuine godliness and mature Christianity is to clean the inside of the cup, first, so that the outside of it may become clean also (**Matthew 23:26**).
 - e. Therefore, beware of any church leader who proudly proclaims that he or she knows the way to a superior form of Christianity.

- (1) Genuine, God-pleasing Christianity does not come from mimicking the activities of godly saints or ascetics or monastics. It comes from traveling the path they traveled to get to the level of godliness they have attained.
 - (2) And that path as given to us in God's word includes putting to death the deeds of the flesh, dying to self, denying self, fleeing youthful lusts, taking up your own cross, disciplining yourself for the purpose of growing in godliness, pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace, putting on the mind of Christ, studying the word of God, living up to what you know, a lot of prayer for strength and help from God, perseverance, being part of a body of believers, and other such things.
 - (3) The reality is, there are no short cuts or mystical truths, or extra-spiritual paths to true godliness.
- f. Therefore, let us be honest about the efforts of our old nature to prompt us to sin. And if we don't yet hunger and thirst for righteousness, let us act and make choices as if we do. Let us wisely manage our time so that it includes time to pursue God and godly living. Let us – in the home, the workplace, the community, with friends, and in the church – care as much about the condition of our heart and our thoughts as we care about our words and deeds. And let us live to gain praise from God rather than man.
- C. [4] For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;
1. The phrase **“Everything created by God”** qualifies and therefore gives us the boundaries in which to determine what is good – for not everything in this world is good, or good for us.
 - a. In support of the phrase, “everything created by God is good,” we have **Genesis 1:31**, “God saw all that He had made, and behold, [He concluded] it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.”
 - b. In relation to food, we have **Genesis 9:1-4**, And God blessed Noah and his sons and said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. [2] The fear of you and the terror of you will be on every beast of the earth and on every bird of the sky; with everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea, into your hand they are given. [3] Every moving thing that is alive shall be food for you; I give all to you, as I gave the green

plant. [4] Only you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood.”

- c. It is true that under the Mosaic Law, God forbid certain foods – foods He created. Yet both the NT and the church holds that under grace, food restrictions have been removed – with the only requirements being the giving of thanks and eating with a clear conscience.
 2. Here in **1 Timothy 4**, Paul is dealing with the false teachers who were bending the law and the gospel to create their own version of spirituality – a version they deemed some of God’s creation to be good and some of it bad.
 3. Once again, those who taught and those who took hold of these false versions of Christianity believed their version was superior to all other versions and to the gospel itself.
 4. However, in spite of how spiritual these false versions sound, there is no superior spirituality that is greater than mature Christianity – which is available to all Christians. There are no mysteries to the path and actions required. There are no truths or special methods hidden in the Bible which only a select few are able to discover and know.
 5. All that God created is good, and all that God has revealed to us in the Holy Scriptures is good. Therefore, don’t be taken in by those who claim to have the secret of godliness beyond or different from what God’s word says.
- D. **[4b] Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude, [5] for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.**
1. Remember, Paul is primarily talking about food – so don’t think this means everything in our world can be made holy by giving thanks before partaking.
 2. And remember, **Romans 14** ought to influence the way we use the freedom we have in Christ, which here in **1 Timothy 4** is specifically related to food and marriage. But we will take that up next time we meet.