

Prayer

Lord God, speak to us above the noise of our world. Speak clearly, so that we might not mistake Your voice, as we have done so often in the past. Speak with wisdom, so that we might hear, learn, and do what You have said. Speak directly to our hearts so that we may know for sure that the voice we have heard is Yours. Speak to us, Lord Jesus, and make Yourself known. AMEN

Prayer Suggestions

Prayer ideas

Read through a television programme guide and use it to remind you of issues which need our prayers

On-going prayers

- **Pray for Christian families.** *Pray for Christian children who find it hard to maintain their faith during their years of schooling and growth*
- *Give thanks to God for the many things you enjoy about life*
- *Pray for small businesses struggling to gain financial backing*

Meditation

You know all things about everything, O lord;
and yet You give of Your time to me.

You hear the sounds of the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You listen to what I say.

You are truth and justice personified, O Lord;
and yet You save me from my sin.

You create new things every day, O Lord;
and yet You rejoice in all I do.

You speak Your Word to the Universe, O Lord;
and yet You whisper in my ear.

Forgive me when I am selfish, O Lord,
and fail to give anything to You.

Bible passage – 1 Timothy 4:1-5

¹ Now the Spirit specifically says that in latter times, some will abandon the faith by giving close attention to deceiving spirits and demonic teachings, ² through the hypocrisy of liars whose consciences are branded as with a hot iron. ³ They forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God made to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected, but instead received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is made holy by God's word and by prayer.

Bible Study

Review

In the previous study, we read what seemed like an end to the first half of Paul's letter to Timothy. In reading today's passage, we may wonder whether Paul had finished chapter 3 one evening, but woke up the next

day burning to give further advice and with plenty more on his mind to say! This passage is fiercely direct and speaks with vigour about problems that were becoming a problem in the early church.

It does not take much to pick through this text to see the bones of his concern about the loss of Christians because of false teaching; *'in latter times, some will abandon the faith by giving close attention to deceiving spirits ...'* (4:1). It is impossible to know exactly when this letter was written, so we do not know whether Paul could have read Matthew's Gospel, which says something very similar; *'Beware that no-one leads you astray, For many will come in my name, saying "I am the Messiah" ...'* (Matt 24:4,5). Nevertheless, Paul certainly knew that Jesus warned against false teaching, and because it was happening before his very eyes, he felt it necessary to warn Timothy. Although the Church was indeed the Body of Christ, people were susceptible to the deceptive work of the enemy. Paul did not mince his words, describing false teaching as *'demonic'* (4:1) because of its power to draw people away from faith, and he accused false teachers of being insensitive to spiritual truth just as a burn on the skin becomes insensitive to touch and feeling (4:2).

But what was the teaching to which Paul so objected? We might have anticipated that Paul would object to those who tried to teach Judaism in the church as he had done in Galatians and Philippians, but here, he identifies the teaching of religious laws concerning marriage and food (as in Romans 14 and 1 Cor 7). In his various letters, Paul has much to say about moral behavioural, identifying the difference between what is 'of the flesh' or 'of the spirit', but he was not in the habit of making regulations about lifestyle issues. Now in the days of the early church, some people thought that the pressures of emotional relationships between men and women within marriage were a distraction from the things of God, but despite some sympathy for this view (see 1 Cor. 7), Paul would not forbid marriage. On the contrary, Paul taught that all things should be used for the glory of God, and not distract from the work of Christ (see 1 Cor 7:36f.).

The second issue is that of abstinence from various foods. Paul was probably referring to the eating of meat that had been dedicated to idols during sacrificial slaughter (see Romans 14). On the surface, it is quite understandable for people to object to eating meat dedicated to a pagan deity. However, in Paul's day, it was not possible to obtain meat slaughtered 'neutrally'. All animals killed for meat were offered up to some god; if people lived in Israel, their meat had been offered up to the Living God, but in other parts of the Roman Empire, then the meat for sale outside pagan temples had been ritually slaughtered. However, Paul's argument was simple; he said there was no point in worrying about such things. There was only one God known through Jesus Christ, and He had declared all food clean (see Mark 7:19), so the beliefs of Roman religious sects should hardly be considered a problem.

In a wonderful passage at the end of this text, Paul said to Timothy *'everything created by God is good ... it is made holy by God's Word and by prayer'* (4:4,5). In this way, Paul identified God's blessing through the Word (the Bible) and through prayer as greater than all pagan practices, and any teaching that attempted to make Christians sensitive to such things was false. The answer to these and all other issues were to be found through scriptures and through prayer. It was and is good advice, maintaining people's faith in the supremacy of God and Jesus Christ, and identifying all other religious practice as secondary.

Discipleship

Questions (for use in groups)

1. Are there problems of false teaching in the church today? What are they and what should be done about them?
2. Why should people still feel today that it is relevant to choose to abstain from marriage in order to serve God?
3. Discuss in your group whether there are any foods we should not eat for spiritual or other reasons.

Topics covered by this text

- *The demonic nature of false teaching*
- *False teaching concerning marriage and eating of meat*
- *The supremacy of Christ, as found through Scripture and prayer*

Personal comments by author

This passage is something of a favourite of mine because it contains the text which inspired me to use the title for this website; 'prayerandbiblestudy'; 'everything created by God is good ... it is made holy by God's Word and by prayer' (1 Tim 4:5). This text arises within a particular setting and argument by Paul, but the

point he makes is generally true. Scripture and prayer is the basis of our contact with God and therefore they are the means whereby we can keep false teaching at bay. This is more important for the church today than many recognise.

Ideas for exploring discipleship

- *Read Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians to check out some of the background to the issues in today's text. Pray about anything you come across which reminds you of problems within the life of the church today.*
 - *Plan to fast and pray for the Church of God, praying especially for maintenance of the Gospel and the identification and outlawing of false teaching. Seek the Lord's mind on these important issues.*
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Final Prayer

Jesus, You are the King of my life; You rule my mind, You care for my feelings, You plan for my life, You direct my conscience, You advocate me to the Father, and You deliver my soul from death. Glory be to You, Lord Jesus Christ, for You are the King of my life: AMEN
