*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 7 - 12

Letters of Paul

**Monday, March 7 1 Timothy 4:1-5**

“Some follow deceiving spirits”

However far we may be into the “last days,” most would agree that there seems to be intense activity now on the part of deceiving spirits. Beliefs and practices that were usually only confronted by overseas missionaries a few generations ago are now found throughout North America. This is not the same as demon possession (also a threat in our times), which is the control of an individual by one or more evil spirits. What is in view in the present passage is the evil activity of blinding people to truth and persuading them of error.

The passage should not be used in an arbitrary way to condemn faithful people for one or another form of abstinence. The important truth to apply today from these verses is that we should beware of people who are deceitful, whose teachings are contrary to Scripture (possibly originating in demonic sources), and whose practices are a result of their evil origin. God has created a wonderful world to be enjoyed – and he has given us clear guidelines in his Word how to do so.

*Thank you, Lord, for the good gift of your creation. Amen.*

**Tuesday, March 8 Matthew 24:3-11**

“Watch out that no one deceives you”

Jesus is giving a preview of general conditions on the earth that will characterize the entire age before his return. He begins with a stern admonition: “Watch out that no one deceives you.” Many events may deceive the disciples into thinking that the end of the age has arrived. Instead, all of these events are general characteristics of this present age.

Jesus first warns of false messiahs. Christ, the Messiah, has come and it will be very obvious when he returns. Until then, do not be deceived by those claiming messianic identity or purpose. Jesus next warns that wars and rumors of wars will occur repeatedly throughout this age. The end is not near even through calamities may seem to indicate that it is. Next, Jesus explains that because people will reject him, his disciples will feel their anger and alienation for following him and proclaiming his message. Because of persecution, the faith of Jesus’ followers will be tested and many will turn away and even against their former fellow followers. And, false teachers will arise within the church and in the world, challenging the inspired truth of God’s Word.

*These are difficult days, Lord; give me the strength to remain strong. Amen.*

**Wednesday, March 9 1 Timothy 4:6-10**

“Train yourself to be godly”

The protection of the flock is a main (though not the only) responsibility of shepherds, and Timothy must care for the flock in Ephesus and confront the errors that are causing damage. But in spite of the severity of the errors, this passage does not instruct Timothy further as to the theological issues. Paul’s promise is not that if Timothy will explain these things he will conquer the deceiving spirits, defeat the false teachers, or save the flock from error, important as those effects would be. Instead, Paul concentrates on Timothy himself as a good minister of Christ Jesus.

While addressing error is important, Paul focuses on the *way* Timothy is to live in response to error. The antithesis to becoming involved with these myths and tales is not to bring an arsenal of theology against them but to be godly. The rigorous attacks of the heretics have to be met with an equally rigorous lifestyle of godliness. This has immense value for both the present time and the life to come. Surely this does not mean that we are never to combat error point by point with truth, just that such is not the main message of Paul to Timothy.

*The formation of godly character, Lord, benefits all areas of Christian living. Amen.*

*DAILY DEVOTIONS*

March 7 - 12

Letters of Paul

**Thursday, March 10 Acts 20:28-32**

“Paul’s instructions to the Ephesian elders”

These verses are taken from a larger section in which Paul speaks to the Ephesian church elders. Paul is aware of the danger of things going wrong in Ephesus. He therefore charges them on three points. (1) Most important, the elders must keep watch over themselves. (2) They must watch over the flock. They are to be especially on guard against those who will come even from within the church and distort the truth. (3) They must shepherd the flock, which involves tending, caring for, feeding, protecting, and leading.

Paul finally commits the elders to God and to the word of God’s grace. The message they received through Paul will enable them to stay close to God. Today we have this message in the Scriptures. Though Paul may not have intended both Old and New Testaments here, we can legitimately extend it to the entire Bible, for unlike the time of the first apostles, when their message carried final authority, today we have the Word of God in which that message is contained.

*Bless our church leaders, Lord, as they guard themselves and our church. Amen.*

**Friday, March 11 1 Timothy 4:11-13**

“Be an example to all believers”

In 1:3 Timothy was to command certain individuals not to teach false doctrines any longer. Having issued a negative imperative regarding teaching falsehood, Paul now gives a positive imperative to Timothy to teach the truth about which he has been reading in this letter. This includes the reading, preaching, and teaching of Scripture.

The pervading theme of Paul’s letters, which is the necessary blend of sound doctrine and godly living in the life of church leaders, reappears here. There is no single passage in Paul’s writings where all of the requisite virtues (or doctrines, for that matter) occur together. In this passage the key word is “example” in five areas: speech, life, love, faith and purity. They are specific enough but, taken together, they are also comprehensive enough to constitute an appropriate “example.” Thus, if Timothy models Christian virtues to the Ephesian believers, they will become examples along with him to the unbelieving world.

*May my life, Lord, be an example of Christ-likeness. Amen.*

**Saturday, March 12 1 Timothy 4:14-16**

“Be diligent”

Paul refers here to Timothy’s gift. We may assume that this gift, like those listed in chapter 12 of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthian believers, was an endowment by the Holy Spirit. We may also assume that it was a spiritual ability that one could fail to draw on, all while going through the motions of ministry. To accomplish his task Timothy must depend on the gift that God gave him. To neglect it will hinder Timothy’s spiritual effectiveness.

Verses 15-16 follow naturally on what preceded. The sacred endowment he received and the sacred task that lies before him requires wholehearted commitment, but it also requires that there be no inconsistency in his life. Paul does not hesitate to repeat the instruction that Timothy combine life and truth. He must do so not only for the sake of his own spiritual life in Christ but also because others are looking on. If he does not combine godliness with proper doctrine in his life, he will give the lie to his own claim to salvation and be a hindrance to others who seek to be saved.

*May I be diligent, Lord, to live the truth that I claim to believe. Amen.*