

## NOTES AND QUESTIONS FOR GROUP OR INDIVIDUAL STUDY IN THE FIRST BOOK OF TIMOTHY – PART FIVE – NOTES ON CHAPTER FOUR AND QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FIVE

Paul returns to the subject of ‘strange doctrines’. How do they originate? And what are their ongoing consequences? The problem does not begin with the false teaching but with the attitude of heart of the hearer who has already fallen away from the faith. Once we have stopped trusting the Lord we are wide open to any nonsense. Wrong teaching does not start in the mind of the teacher but in hell itself! The Devil is a liar,(Jn.8:44) who knows how to fool the unfaithful. The wrong teacher now becomes the liar who knows that what he is teaching is not true yet still does it. Satan has branded him as his, like a prize bull.

What horrific kind of wrong teaching is Paul referring to? He gives two surprising examples, forbidding marriage and prescribing a diet for someone else. False teachers’ rules about marriage could refer to demanding celibacy or defining who someone else may or may not marry. In I Cor.7 Paul encourages people in similar situations to himself not to marry, but he does not forbid them. His advice is not to rush into marriage but to ask God first. In I Thess.4:11 he tells us to ‘mind our own business’. There may be health reasons for us to counsel certain people to avoid certain foods but we are not to make this into a spiritual law. Jesus ‘declared all foods to be clean’.(Mark 7:19) Peter was reminded ‘what God has cleansed, no longer consider unhealthy.’(Acts 10:15) There was nothing wrong with what God created. It is what we do with it which is the problem. Paul reminds us in Romans 14 that rules about food or special days will be what weak Christians cling to but that rather than criticising them for this we should accept them despite their weaknesses. As we face life decisions about marriage, food or any other issue, search the word and ask God – and then do what He says.(4:1-5)

Again Paul comes back to the critical question. When false teaching is all around us how can we help? His answer is still the same, true teaching, sound doctrine. To be an effective teacher as a servant of Christ, we need to keep ourselves in top spiritual condition, learning daily from the Lord. It is the only way we can confidently avoid being influenced by the silly stuff which is going on constantly in our world. Paul compares what is needed to keep us spiritually fit to working out physically. Any of us to go to a gym or similar exercise know it just does not work to do it once a week. Spiritual exercise is even more in need of being regular. Physical exercise is good for our health now, spiritual exercise is good for now and for eternity. Maintaining either takes discipline and hard work. The secret is to keep focused not on the activity but on Christ. As an Olympic athlete, the gold medal is the goal. As a Christian, serving our Master who gives life is what keeps us going.(4:6-10)

Paul urges Timothy to keep prescribing God’s answer like a doctor writing a prescription. His treatment is the word of God which needs first to be read to as many as possible with strong urging to take the medicine. Once people have heard the word we can explain it but there is no point in preaching what has not first been read. Paul is aware that some will try to put Timothy’s teaching down because he is so much younger than Paul. The solution is not to defend ourselves but simply to keep on speaking and living the word with the overflowing

love of God even for the critics. Our message and life will speak for themselves. In the end our faithful witness will either be received by faith or rejected. Paul reminds Timothy of how his ministry started. Presumably the elders of the new church in Lystra recognised the calling of God on young Timothy when Paul first invited him to travel and work with him. Laying their hands on him was symbolic of Timothy submitting to the authority of God, and at the same time the elders committing themselves to supporting his future work.(Acts 16:1-3; 13:1-3) Once more Paul reminds Timothy that the preaching of the word of God is a totally life-absorbing passion not a casual hobby. Our critics will watch to see whether we keep going – or as is so often the case, get sidetracked and lose interest. As pastor-teachers our first audience is to be ourselves. If we care for our own souls well, there will be no shortage of eager listeners when we teach.(4:11-16)

#### QUESTIONS ON CHAPTER FIVE

1. How would the approach to dealing with problems described here work in practice? Where would teaching fit into this process? How is this different from what we so often do with difficult behaviour in the church?(5:1,2)
2. When women were widowed how were they to be treated? What is the responsibility of family, the church and the widow herself? What mistakes do women left alone commonly make? How can these errors be avoided? How do all of us often get the management of this kind of need wrong today?(5:3-16)
3. How were elders to be cared for by the church? How were mistakes by elders to be dealt with? How would it help the congregation if their leaders were treated wisely in these ways? How do we often fail to do this today and with what result? What might be the connection between such problems with elders and how mature they were in their faith?(5:17-22)
4. Why might Paul have been discouraging Timothy from drinking water only? How do you understand the advice about wine, his stomach and his frequent ailments? How could this advice fit today's circumstances?(5:23)
5. Give examples of how some sin is evident while other sin is not. In the same way consider how good deeds are also evident. Why do you suppose Paul put this comment in at this point in his letter? What did it have to do with his advice on how to deal with the problems of different groups in the church?(5:24,25)