**BE A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS**

1Tim 4:1-16

“If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.”(6)

In this chapter, Apostle Paul is charging Timothy to guard the gospel truth in the midst of apostasy caused by false doctrines. St Paul urges him to be a good minister of Christ Jesus, train himself to be godly, and exercise spiritual leadership by setting an example for the believers.

**BE A GOOD MINISTER OF CHRIST JESUS (1-6)**

Look at verses 1-2. “The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.” Paul knew that “savage wolves” would come in the Ephesian Church and would not spare the flock according to Acts 20:29-30. Some of the church members would arise and distort the gospel truth in order to draw away disciples after them. All of a sudden, as if they were infected by a contagious disease, they would be shaken and abandon their faith which was delivered to them by the precious blood of Jesus Christ. They stopped loving Jesus. They no longer worshipped the Lord Jesus. They followed deceiving spirits and even demonic teachings, boasting their knowledge and attacking God’s innocent flock. These demonic teachings come through “hypocritical liars (2)”. At first, they sound like a descended angel and remarkably spiritual, but in reality, they are hypocritical liars. They do not live according to what they know or teach. They live a double life, teaching people one thing while doing the other in their practical life. They lie as if it is real and absolutely true without even blinking their eye. St Paul reveals that their consciences are corrupt, and that they are seared as with a hot iron, meaning they do not sense the truth and having a room for it. Genuine repentance is not possible in such a corrupt heart.

Then, what specific teachings did they bring about in the church? Look at verse 3. “They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.” The false teaching was a combination of Jewish legalism and false asceticism, influenced by Gnosticism (Wallace, 2004). They claimed that Christians were justified by following the Jewish law – specifically restricting their diets, not by faith in Jesus Christ. They also claimed that they would earn salvation by having a strict and simple way of living that avoids physical pleasure. They even denied a marriage which God established in the beginning. So they forbade people to marry and ordered them to abstain from certain foods.

It seems the restricted dietary laws was more problematic in the church as St Paul particularly argues it. They wanted to keep dietary restrictions exactly articulated in the Old Testament – Leviticus 11:1-46 and Deuteronomy 14:1-21. According to the regulations, you may eat any animal that has cloven hooves and chews its cud (Lev. 11:3; Deut. 14:6). Any land mammal that does not have both of these qualities is forbidden. The regulations specifies that the camel, the rock badger, the rabbit and the pig are unclean because each lacks one of these two qualifications (Lev 11:4-8). Even touching a carcass of such animals was prohibited (Lev 11:8). Sheep, cattle, goats and deer are clean, which the Jews call “kosher” even today. Of the animals living in the waters, you may eat anything that has fins and scales (Lev. 11:9; Deut. 14:9). Thus, shellfish such as lobsters, oysters, shrimp, clams and crabs are all forbidden. Fish like tuna, carp, and salmon are all permitted (Jewish Virtual Library, 2015).

Beyond the aspect of regulation, we need to think why God commanded such exclusive dietary laws for his chosen people. Some say keeping such laws benefit their health. However, health is not the main reason for Jewish dietary laws and in fact many of the laws have no known connection with health. To the best of our modern scientific knowledge, there is no reason why camel or rabbit meat is any less healthy than cow or goat meat, according to a Jewish article (Jewish Virtual Library, 2015). They simply keep these regulations called “Kashrut” because God said so. God wanted for his chosen people to be holy by obeying his commands including these. That is the heart of the law.

If God did not send his Son, Jesus Christ, this law should still bound us all. Then, what happened when Jesus Christ came and redeemed us with his own blood and sacrifice? Contrary to the law, in Acts chapter 10, the Lord told Apostle Peter to kill and eat such animals (Acts 10:13). As Peter resisted, the Lord said three times, “Do not call anything impure that God has made clean.” (Acts 10:15-16). The core issue here is not about foods, it is about faith – the righteousness by faith only, not by obeying the law. Later, in the council of all apostles and elders including Paul and Barnabas, they determined that it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that both Jews and Gentiles are saved (Acts 15:11). The council decided not to burden the Gentiles who are turning to the Lord by requiring them to obey Jewish laws including the dietary law (Acts 15:19). Simply, they advised the Gentiles to “abstain from food polluted by idols” and “from the meat of strangled animals and from blood” as it is quite well known in every city (Acts 15:20-21). Therefore, as St Paul said, all foods should be received with thanksgiving by those who “believe” and “know the truth” (3b). Further, listen to Paul’s explanation in verses 4-5: “For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer”. (Now, you may go to Red Lobster and enjoy exotic foods there, if you have faith and pray with thanksgiving. Of course, you have to pay the bill.)

Today, the truth – salvation by faith in Jesus Christ only – is clear to us, but early Christians did not have such a clear understanding as we do today. Some of vulnerable believers were attacked by the false teachings and deceived. False teachings were truly destructive, robbing the innocent of salvation and eternal life. In a similar way, even today, there are hundreds of false teachings and distorted doctrines – for a few examples, claiming to worship on the Sabbath, baptism as a requirement for salvation, denying the humanity of Jesus Christ, claiming God’s grace is not sufficient, a gospel of prosperity, and list goes on and on. There are also hungry wolves seeking to prey upon the innocent and vulnerable sheep. Disguised as an angel, they approach you only to deceive and kill you at the end.

In the midst of confusion and uncertainty, how can we discern from these flooding false teachings and the savage wolves? St Paul labels them as “deceiving spirits”, meaning that they are lying to you and deceiving you. A problem is that we do not stand firm in the solid ground of faith. Whatever the teaching or whoever the teacher may be, anything or anyone that is trying to rob you of pure faith in Jesus Christ is your enemy. Flee from them, for their goal is to destroy you. Instead, listen to those who urge you to return to Jesus Christ, asking and rebuking you to repent of your sins although they sound harsh to your sinful nature. Furthermore, we must be nourished “in the truths of the faith and good teaching” by diligently and sincerely studying the word of God (6).

Not only do we keep our faith, but we also must fight the good fight as a good minister of Christ Jesus by teaching the sound doctrine (6). Look at verse 6. “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” Apostle Paul says that Timothy will be a “good” minister of Christ Jesus if he points these things out to the brothers. In the light of the gospel truth, if we keenly understand the truthful word of God and teach people, we are serving our Lord Jesus Christ, as a good servant. This teaching requires a dedicated study of the word of God. In the verse 13, Paul commands Timothy to “devote himself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching”. It simply means a devotion to the deep and sincere study (reading) of the Bible. This devotion to the word of God in prayer is a prerequisite to the preaching and teaching, for it will equip one with “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17).

We must cultivate our heart to devote ourselves to the sincere study of the word. Prior to attending the Midwest Regional Bible conference, I realized the soil of my heart was like a path, the worst among the four in the parable of the sower (Mk 4:1-20). My heart was so corrupt that when I heard about the theme of the conference, Follow Me, I said “again” in my heart and thought. I was not excited and did not want to go to the conference, saying it is expensive while willing to buy more expensive things. Besides the conference, I would come to worship service habitually, leaving from home hesitantly at 10:50 or later without any preparation of my heart. I would come to worship service and Bible study meetings without any spiritual preparation, making excuse of a busy life. I ended up hearing and losing precious words of God on the spot. Sometimes, I dozed during the worship service, blaming the pastor’s low tone voice. I did not even know my heart was like a path. But God graciously helped me as I decided to attend the prayer meetings held by the pastor held early in the morning. It was a short 30-min prayer meeting, but mysteriously as I attended it, God grew a spiritual desire in my heart. He cultivated my heart so that I even began longing to attend the conference which I did not want to initially go to. At the conference, God opened my ear to hear his clear voice, “Follow me” and I am very grateful for his mercy. After 12 years of hard work, God has given me a rest. Many of you know how my family suffered as foreigners who must have a VISA to stay in the land and do not have permission to work at all. The merciful God graciously gave my family permanent resident status last February 2014. For the first time, I was free to apply for off-campus jobs without any restriction, and he opened a door for me to work full-time. However, I was following things in the world, rather than following Jesus. I wanted to get a better position, dreaming of working for a big name corporation, instead of fully submitting to Jesus to serve his mission which is to testify to the gospel of God’s grace for college students. I decided to follow Jesus by denying myself and taking up my cross, in the course of serving campus mission. I am sharing my story to emphasize the cultivation of our heart so that we can devote ourselves to the study of the word of God.

In the light of Romans 1:5, we are all ministers of Christ. For his name’s sake, we received grace and apostleship to call people to the obedience that comes from faith. Some of us are sheep, actually we are all Jesus’ sheep, and some of us are shepherds. We are all servants of Christ Jesus. As a minister of Christ Jesus, we want to serve our Master well, desiring to hear his commends. Apostle Paul clearly says, “If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” When we devote ourselves to the study of the word of God and teach the word to brothers and sisters and anyone, we will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. In his glorious return, the glorious King will commend us, “Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master’s happiness!” (Mt 25:21 & 23). However, those who do not desire to be a good minister of Christ will be shamed and troubled on that day (Mt 25:26). They are wicked and lazy servants (Mt 25:26).

Not only does teaching the truth make us a good minister of Christ Jesus, but it also nourishes us. Look at verse 6b again. “......you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, *brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed*.” Verse 6b is written in the KJV as “nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine”. In the NABS, it is written as “*constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine”. In the ESV, it is written as “being trained in the words of the faith and of the good doctrine”. In summary, it means that as we teach the word of God, it will constantly nourish and train us in the truths of the faith and of the good doctrine. Teaching the word of God is feeding and nourishing ourselves in the good doctrine constantly.

**TRAIN YOURSELF TO BE GODLY (7-10)**

Look at verse 7. “Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly.” As a preacher, Timothy may be tempted to look into godless myths and others that may intellectually attracting. But Apostle Paul tells him to stay away from those empty things. Rather, he urges Timothy to train himself to be godly. Unlike hypocritical liars, Timothy, as a good minister of Christ Jesus, must train himself to be godly. He has to put what he teaches into practice, growing his godly character. Timothy must live by the Holy Spirit, bearing the fruit of the Spirit, which is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22). Sometimes, he may fail or fall, then he should repent and try it again. Sometimes, he feels like nothing is improving, but the he has to continue running the race.

“Train yourself to be godly”. Here we see that we cannot be godly over one night or a short period of time. It requires a substantial time and ongoing efforts as if a marathoner continues to run to improve his record. It is a life journey. We continue training ourselves to be godly until we enter the kingdom of God. Here we also see sanctification is our responsibility. Although we are born of God by believing Jesus Christ, our sinful nature is still with us, always looking for an opportunity to overpower us. It is a constant spiritual battle. It is our responsibility to continue training ourselves to be godly in the course of sanctification.

Then, how can we train ourselves to be godly? We train ourselves to be godly by living according to the Holy Spirit, not our sinful nature (Romans 8). In our struggle against sin, we resist to the point of shedding our blood to train ourselves to be godly (Hebrew 12:4). We train ourselves to be godly by holding onto the truth (John 8:31). We train ourselves to be godly by putting what we learn from Scripture into practice until we build a Christian character (Philippians 4:9). Jesus says, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it.” (Luke 11:28)

Why should we fight this difficult fight? Look at verse 8. “For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.” A hard physical training makes your body strong and look great with the six pack. But godliness has value for all things, holding promise both the present life and the eternal life. Thinking about the glorious life as he articulates the value of godliness, Paul’s heart is moved. He says, “This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance (and for this we labor and strive), that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe.”(9-10). The word of training ourselves to be godly is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance for eternity. So, just like a hard-working marathoner, let me us make every effort to train ourselves to be godly, so that we become a good minister of Christ Jesus.

**SET AN EXAMPLE FOR THE BELIEVERS (11-16)**

Apostle Paul charges Timothy, a young minister of Christ to exercise spiritual leadership by setting an example. Look at verses 11-12. “Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” Timothy was about forty years old at that time, which was considered young for such an important leadership (InterVarsity Press, n.d.). Due to his youth, some church members would look down on him, thinking he was inexperienced. This becomes an issue because it would undermine his spiritual authority and leadership over the church as a minister.

We must not look down on a minister of Christ. We shall not judge a servant of God by simply looking at the minister’s age – young or old, gender, ethnicity, backgrounds, shortcomings, or weaknesses. It is particularly tempting to despise a servant of God if we grew up together in the same church as it would blind us spiritually. We must see the minister from God’s point of view, not a human’s. We should remember that Samuel became a minister of God while he was still a boy (1Sam 2:18). Regardless the outer appearance, if God appoints one to his divine service, we must accept God’s sovereignty and treat the minister with reverence and a right attitude. We must uphold the minister in the church so that the divine authority and spiritual leadership are established.

As a servant of Christ, Timothy must overcome this challenge on his own to guard the gospel truth and minister the church. Apostle Paul charges him, not elders or church members, not to look down on the servant. He must stand up and establish his spiritual authority for the sake of the gospel truth and God’s household as the appointed minister. Look at verse 12 again. “Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.” Timothy shall establish a spiritual leadership by setting an example for the believers in every way, not by raising his voice or manipulating people. By setting an example among and for the believers, Timothy must demonstrate his spiritual leadership, and people will follow him. This is crystal clear, and it requires for the minister a spiritual struggle to be godly – a tough but straight way. In an analogy, in the movie, *How to Train Your Dragon 2*, both Toothless and Hiccup establish their leadership by demonstrating their character as Alpha and Chief by protecting the dragons and the entrusted people. They earned their leadership very hard. Likewise, as a minister of Christ, we shall set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity.

Finally, Apostle Paul charges Timothy to devote to studying the word of God. Look at verses 13-14. “Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message when the body of elders laid their hands on you.” We do not know exactly what specific gift Timothy had received, but in the context, it seems he had received a gift of preaching and teaching the word of God. Apostle Paul charges Timothy to “devote” him to the study of the Scripture – to preaching and to teaching, by having him fan into flame the gift of God (2Tim 1:6). This devotion to the word of God is the foundation for becoming a good minister of Christ. As we appreciated in verse 6, a good minister cannot teach or preach without devoting to the study of the word of God. In verses 15-16, Paul closes his instructions on the minister “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

In this chapter, we have seen how Apostle Paul charges his successor Timothy to become a good minister of Christ Jesus. One becomes a good minister of Christ by devoting oneself to the study and preaching of the word of God. The minister must train oneself to be godly, and the minister must establish and exercise spiritual leadership by setting an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. May God richly bless each of you to be a good minister of Christ Jesus! May God bless our pastor to continue being a good minister of Christ, our Lord!

References

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