

## 1 Timothy 4. Maidenhead. 11 February 2012.

Our set reading for this evening consists of 1 Timothy chapter 4 ...

*But the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

*Because every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.*

*If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished with the words of the faith and of the good teaching which you have carefully followed.*

*But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. For bodily exercise profits for a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come.*

*This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.*

*For to this end we labour and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.*

*These things command and teach.*

*Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in faith, in purity.*

*Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to teaching.*

*Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the body of elders.*

*Ponder these things; immerse yourself in them, that your progress may be evident to all.*

*Take heed to yourself and to the teaching. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.*

The very first word of the chapter, 'But', alerts us to the fact that the opening section stands in contrast to that which the apostle had written at the close of the previous chapter. There Paul had described 'the church of the living God' as the 'pillar and ground (possibly 'foundation' or 'bulwark') of the truth'.<sup>1</sup> But now, over against that 'truth', and in particular the great Christ-centred doctrines of the faith, he has to sound a loud warning against error – against false doctrines. And so, if the close of chapter 3 summarises some of the key truths of *the faith*, the opening of chapter 4 directs our attention to some who departed from *it*.

Possibly to many of Timothy's brethren at Ephesus, the situation, though sad, was fairly straightforward. It seemed that some, who had once professed to be Christians, had, for one reason or another, more recently abandoned the true faith, and were now propagating their own erroneous views ... that they had not only 'missed the mark' when it came to consistent Christian behaviour<sup>2</sup> and to 'the faith',<sup>3</sup> but had actually 'departed from' – had 'apostatized' as the word is – from 'the faith'.

After all, was not this the very state of affairs about which the apostle had forewarned their elders some years before towards the end of his so-called 'third missionary journey'? Had he not then told them at Miletus, 'I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them?'<sup>4</sup> Surely, there was no more to it than that this had already begun to happen?

But, enlightened by the express ('the explicit') revelation of the Holy Spirit – made known either through others, or, more likely I think, to him – the apostle was able to look beneath the surface – to pull back the curtain, if you like, on what was really happening – and to unmask the real instigators of the false teaching – of the lies now being peddled.

Personally, I take the expression 'in later times' to refer to a period beginning soon after the revelation given by the Spirit – and not specifically to the closing days of the present age. Indeed, for that matter, I understand the similar expression, 'the last days', which the apostle uses in 2 Timothy 3 verse 1 in much the same way – as commencing in the days of the apostles – which is why Paul then instructs Timothy personally to 'turn away'<sup>5</sup> from those whose godless character he describes in the following verses.<sup>6</sup>

But, as I say, informed by the Spirit's 'specific' revelation, the apostle was able to pull back the curtain, and to expose the unseen prime movers in terms of the false teaching; namely, the sinister spirit-world agents of the great mastermind of evil himself – of the devil, to whose person and activities Paul has already referred in each of the previous three chapters.<sup>7</sup>

In one sense, then, over against 'the mystery of godliness', of which we read in the last verse of chapter 3,<sup>8</sup> we are now brought face to face with 'the mystery of lawlessness', which, according to 2 Thessalonians 2 verse 7, was already at work in Paul's day.

And it is, I note 'the Spirit' – the Holy Spirit – the Spirit of truth<sup>9</sup> – who exposes 'the spirits of error' – the 'deceitful spirits' ... similar in nature, no doubt, to the 'lying spirit' which, through the mouth of false prophets, once lured King Ahab to his violent death.<sup>10</sup> And their 'deceitful' character revealed where their loyalties lay – with the Overlord of evil himself – said by our Lord Jesus to be 'the father of *lies*',<sup>11</sup> and characterised towards the close of the New Testament as '*the deceiver*'.<sup>12</sup>

Nor was Paul a stranger to the workings of such demonic powers. His steps had been dogged by the devil's agents throughout his missionary work. So that his gospel work was opposed, for example, by a *Jewish magician* at Paphos in Acts 13, and by a *gentile medium* at Philippi in Acts 16. We can have no doubt what powers operated through both. What is more, the apostle had soon become a marked man. Luke tells us in Acts 19 that at *Ephesus*, famous (or infamous, more like), we note, for its *magical arts*<sup>13</sup>, 'some itinerant Jewish exorcists attempted to invoke the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had *evil spirits*, saying, I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul preaches. Seven sons of a Jewish chief priest named Sceva', Luke adds, 'were doing this. But the *evil spirit* answered them, Jesus I know, and Paul I know (I know of<sup>14</sup>, I am acquainted with); but who are you?'<sup>15</sup> Hasty exit by seven naked and wounded brothers! Clearly the forces of darkness in Ephesus (where Timothy now was<sup>16</sup>) were familiar with Paul's name.

And I note that it was when writing to the assembly at *Ephesus* that the apostle had spoken at greater length than anywhere else about the terrifying spirit forces arrayed against the church.<sup>17</sup>

But these forces were, as was their Satanic Majesty, masters of disguise, able, when it suited them – as here – to masquerade as the champions of truth and righteousness. Speaking of the false teachers at Corinth, the apostle wrote in 2 Corinthians 11, 'such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder!', he added, 'for Satan transforms *himself* into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if *his ministers* also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness'.

The false teachers at Ephesus who had 'given heed' to 'deceitful spirits' were *themselves* deceivers – were 'liars' – hypocritically saying one thing and practising another.

And, from constantly stifling and muffling the voice of their conscience, it (their conscience) had been seared – had been 'cauterized' – and was now as insensitive and dead to feeling as is skin which has become rigid and hard on account of being burnt with a branding iron – which is the significance of the word Paul used of them.

The apostle now focuses on two very practical elements of the demonically-inspired teaching of these men – not *here* that they *permitted* that which scripture – and therefore God – *forbad*, but that they *forbad* what scripture – and God – *permitted*. First, flying straight in the face of God's word 'at the beginning', as our Lord expressed it; namely, that a man should leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two would become one flesh ... flying straight in the face also of God's word even earlier that 'It is not good that man should be alone' ... flying straight in the face of such clear statements of the Lord God, they *forbad* their followers to marry. And second, they *forbad* their followers to eat certain foods.

It seems clear that, in the main, both of these false teachings were Jewish in origin and nature, and may well have stemmed from Jewish sects such as the Essenes. In all probability, their second erroneous teaching (that about the forbidding of certain foods) had its roots in the Jewish – and Old Testament – distinction between that which was clean and that which was unclean. And for us to properly understand both the teaching of these men and the way in which the apostle approached it in our reading, we need to take something of an excursion.

The facts run as follows.

At the beginning, man was given permission by the Lord God to eat only herbs and fruit – yet He (the Lord God) stressed at the outset that, with one notable exception, man was at liberty to eat freely of every herb and tree.

But as yet man had no permission to eat animal flesh – of any kind. But all that changed after the Great Flood – immediately following which God told Noah that ‘every moving thing that lives’ - every beast of the earth, every bird of the heavens, everything that creeps on the ground, and all the fish of the sea - ‘shall be food for you. As I gave you the green plants’, God said, ‘I give you everything’.<sup>18</sup> From that time on, man had God’s express authority to eat whatever animal flesh he wished.

Already a distinction existed between animals which were ‘clean’ and animals which were ‘unclean’ – which distinction governed, of course, the number of each ‘kind’ which were taken into the ark – either *seven pairs* or just *one pair* respectively.<sup>19</sup> But the distinction between ‘clean’ and ‘unclean’ wasn’t linked in any way with man’s diet. The distinction seems rather to have determined which animals were acceptable by way of sacrifice to God – and possibly which were suitable for domestic use.

But the law which *God* gave to Israel through Moses affected radically His people’s eating habits. For at Sinai the Lord forbade His nation to eat many of the creatures which mankind had eaten freely up until that time.

And this He did to teach them a very important lesson. They (Israel) had been separated from the other nations to enjoy a special relationship with God and to carry out a special role among the nations.<sup>20</sup> It was essential therefore that they kept themselves pure from the moral and spiritual pollution of the Gentile nations around them – from the sexual immorality, religious idolatry, injustice, incest and demonism which were rife throughout the heathen world.<sup>21</sup>

With this in view, God’s people were forbidden to intermingle with the pagan nations around – and it was here that the food laws came in. These laws were there, not so much to make social mixing with the Gentiles difficult – although, since Israel were not permitted to eat the same food as their Gentile neighbours (whether or not that food had been offered to idols) – these laws certainly did this ... but these laws acted mainly as a constant reminder to God’s people that they were separated to the Lord, and that they were, at all times and at all costs, to avoid the moral and spiritual uncleanness of the Gentiles. The Lord therefore backed up the food laws by an appeal to Israel’s calling, to be holy ... just as the Lord their God, who had brought them out of Egypt, was holy.<sup>22</sup>

As you can imagine, in future centuries godly Israelites therefore took the observance of these laws very seriously indeed.

Take the example of the prophet Ezekiel. Over half a millennium before *Peter’s* vision in Acts 10, in a vision God had called the prophet to eat food which was unclean ... as an acted parable of the way in which Israel would be compelled to eat unclean food during their forthcoming exile among the Gentile nations.<sup>23</sup>

You will not be surprised to read that Ezekiel registered the same protest and objection as Peter did almost 600 years later. Indeed, in the Greek Old Testament, the prophet’s opening words are identical to those of the apostle ... ‘By no means, Lord’. Peter was therefore in good company when he insisted that he had ‘*never* eaten anything that is common or unclean’.<sup>24</sup>

As another example of the care which the devout Jew took over what he ate, we recall Daniel’s resolve that he would ‘not defile himself’ with food which came from Nebuchadnezzar’s table.<sup>25</sup>

The same loyalty to God and His food laws can be illustrated from the period between the Old and New Testaments, from the days of the Maccabees, during which many godly Jews preferred martyrdom to eating ceremonially unclean food when the Syrian king, Antiochus Epiphanes, required that they eat swine’s flesh.<sup>26</sup>

With such examples in mind, we can, to some extent, understand why, in Acts 10, Peter objected so passionately to the demand that he kill and eat meat which God’s law classed as unclean.

I say ‘to some extent’ because, as we read, heaven had its answer ready ... ‘What God has made clean, do not regard as common’.

But when, we ask, had God ‘made clean’ that which He had once declared to be unclean?

As I see it, He did it about two years into our Lord’s public ministry, when, following His (our Lord’s) controversy with the Pharisees and scribes on the subject of defilement,<sup>27</sup> He (our Lord) emphasised to His disciples that nothing which enters into a man – that no food, that is – can ‘defile him’.<sup>28</sup>

‘In saying this’,<sup>29</sup> Mark adds in chapter 7 verse 19, ‘He made all foods clean’<sup>30</sup> – the word translated ‘made clean’ being the same as that used by the voice from heaven in Acts 10 verse 15.<sup>31</sup>

As Mark points out, by implication our Lord was revoking the food laws which He – the Lord – had laid down at the giving of the law, and for which, over the centuries, His people had been prepared to suffer and if necessary to die.

One commentator goes so far as to describe this passage ‘when it was first spoken’ as ‘well-nigh the most revolutionary passage in the New Testament’.<sup>32</sup>

Our Lord was concerned with the uncleanness of man’s heart, and made the point forcibly that food entering the body cannot defile a man morally or spiritually – for it reaches his stomach, not his heart. In doing so, He made it clear to His disciples that it was God’s earlier *prohibition* – that it was *His* earlier prohibition – on eating certain kinds of food which caused eating those foods to defile a man ... not the food itself.

But it is obvious from Acts 10 that Peter had not until then grasped the significance of what Jesus had said, and it is equally obvious from Acts 11 that neither had the other disciples.

As we noted a little earlier, in one sense, Peter’s life-long refusal to eat food once declared by God to be unclean was most commendable ... but, in another sense, Peter of all men should now have known better. For we know from Matthew’s account that it had been *Peter* whose request for clarification<sup>33</sup> had prompted the Lord to expand on His declaration that nothing which goes into a man can possibly defile him<sup>34</sup> – which clarification carried with it the implication that all foods were effectively ‘clean’<sup>35</sup> and therefore available to be eaten.<sup>36</sup>

And, for what it is worth, I believe that the ‘word of God’ to which Paul refers in verse 5 of our passage –which set aside the Old Testament food laws, thereby authorising the eating of all foods, and which, to some extent, *sets apart all kinds of food* to sacred use – can be traced back to the teaching of our Lord as recorded in Mark 7 and to the heavenly voice addressed to Peter in Acts 10.

I say ‘to some extent’, because, as no doubt you noticed, the apostle links the sanctifying of our food, not only to ‘the word of God’ but to ‘prayer’ ... prayer, I suggest, in the form of ‘thanksgiving’ – which again I am sure you noticed receives honourable mention twice in verses 3 and 4.

And, if nothing else this evening, let us reaffirm our resolve to express our gratitude to God for all that He provides for our daily sustenance.

And in this, as in all else, our Lord Jesus has left us the perfect example.

For, although He knew that the five barley loaves He took into His hands had come directly from a young lad,<sup>37</sup> we are told twice that He gave thanks *to God* for the bread before distributing it through His disciples to the multitude of 5,000 men, beside the women and children.<sup>38</sup>

And although He knew that the seven loaves came directly from His own disciples, He gave thanks for the bread *to God* before giving it back to His disciples for passing on to the multitude of ‘4,000 men, beside the women and children’.<sup>39</sup>

And, again, although He knew that the bread in the Upper Room had been provided by Peter and John<sup>40</sup> as part of the preparation for the Passover meal, He gave thanks for it *to God* before giving it to His disciples as a token of His body about to be given for them.<sup>41</sup>

And yet again, although He knew that the loaf in the village home at Emmaus had come from the store of the two disciples who lived there, He gave thanks for the bread *to God* before breaking it and giving it to them – with such dramatic results!<sup>42</sup>

In each case, though our Lord knew well *through whom* God had supplied the bread, He was careful to give *God* thanks for it, in glad recognition that, when all was said and done, it represented His Father’s provision for Him as well as for others.

When writing to the churches at Rome, the apostle Paul had occasion to address two factions there who disagreed strongly over which food Christians could and should eat. ‘He who *eats* (who freely eats *all* kinds of meat, that is), eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks’, Paul wrote in verse 6 of chapter 14, ‘and he who does *not* eat (who avoids, that is, certain meats which<sup>43</sup> he believes are still off God’s menu), to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks’. The evidence that both parties ate ‘to the Lord’ and to the glory of God was seen in their both giving God thanks – in the context, whether they are sitting down to a sirloin steak or to a vegetarian salad.

Now, with *his* eye on these demonically-deluded false teachers who maintained that certain foods were taboo, Paul insists that *all* foods God created by God are to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe ... for every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving'.<sup>44</sup>

Make no mistake, our very lives depend on the daily provision which God the Father makes for us. And, as Christians, we owe Him at least our thanks. And by that I do not mean simply muttering a few unthinking and hurried words before tucking into our meal.

And perhaps some of us would do well expanding our thanksgiving just a little. I was affected some time ago by some words I came across from an American author and preacher by the name of Lewis Smedes. Even though the man was devoted to the Lord, he suffered badly at times from deep depression. Indeed, at one point he sank so low that he stopped preaching altogether. But, as he put it, God lifted him up from his black pit. Later he wrote, and let me quote his own words, 'I have not been depressed since that day, though I must ... tell you that God ... comes to me each morning and offers me a 20 milligram capsule of Prozac. He clears away the garbage that accumulates in the canal of my brain overnight and gives me a chance to get a fresh morning start'. And then came the words which hit me the hardest, 'I swallow every capsule', Mr. Smedes wrote, '*with gratitude to God*'.<sup>45</sup>

Was taking Prozac a sign of weak faith, do you think? Do you not agree with brother Smedes that his Prozac wasn't a *substitute* for God, but His daily *gift*?

And I realized that not once when I had given thanks with Linda for our breakfast and for whatever sleep we had enjoyed the night before ... not once had I thought to give thanks to my Father for the medication which kept *her* going, and helped *me* on my way. Guess what ... not a morning passes now but that we bow our heads to offer our thanks for food, for rest ... and for our medication.

How easy it is to accept gladly the benefits which come from the careful use of painkillers, from sleeping tablets, possibly from anti-depressants and even more critical treatments such as radiotherapy ... or whatever – and never think of expressing our gratitude to the One in heaven without whose guidance the medical world would have lacked the wisdom and skill to make such help available to us.

And Paul, I note, practised what he taught. Because sometime before his letter to Timothy he suffered a shipwreck at Malta. Luke tells us that the day before the ship ran aground, and after those on board had eaten no proper meal for two whole weeks, 'Paul urged them all to take some food', adding (Luke that is), 'when he (Paul) had said this, he took bread, and, giving thanks to God in the presence of all, he broke it and began to eat'.<sup>46</sup>

Let me tell you a (possibly true) story I came across some time ago.

The story runs that a Christian farmer spent a day in a large city. Entering the restaurant for his noon meal, he found a table near a group of young men. When his meal was served, he quietly, with bowed head, gave thanks for the food before him. The young men, observing this, thought they would ridicule and embarrass the old gentleman. One called out in a loud voice: 'Hey farmer, does everyone do that where you live?' The old man looked at the ... youth, and calmly said: 'No, son, the pigs don't'.<sup>47</sup>

Which leads me to the obvious application ... when *you* sit down to eat, don't make a pig of yourself.

Moving on, I note that Timothy was told to 'instruct the brethren in these things' – clearly including the warning about the false teachers and their false doctrines. For although the teaching of that which is sound and right is in itself an effective antidote to doctrines which are false and wrong, there are times when the saints need to be warned directly against such teachings ... in much the same way, I suppose, as we need, not only road signs which help us by giving us information about *the right way* we are going, but signs which give us warnings against the dangers of pursuing a *wrong way*.

If you are to be a 'good minister ('servant', that is) of Jesus Christ', Paul says, you will need both *spiritual nourishment* – 'good' nourishment – and plenty of *spiritual exercise*. First, moving on now from the physical foods which sustain your natural life, you will need to 'feed yourself spiritually'.

For the person who aims to *teach* must first *learn*. To *give out*, one must first *take in* – 'constantly nourishing' oneself, as the tense is.

The apostle was cautioning Timothy to keep himself focused mainly on the great truths of the faith, which he knew to be wholesome, rather than on the *profane* (the unhallowed and godless) – and *silly* fables and myths being peddled by the false teachers – the equivalent of spiritual junk food. The phrase 'old wives' fables' was often used in philosophical debates as a term of disdain for any viewpoint which lacked credibility – which was fit, the phrase was saying, only for mindless and gullible old women. Paul used the term here, not in any way to

belittle elderly sisters in the assembly – for whom he had the *highest regard*<sup>48</sup> – but as a sarcastic description of the idle and profitless speculations being aired by the false teachers.

But along with good spiritual nourishment, the person who wants to be a good servant of the Lord Jesus must engage in the spiritual exercise of godliness. As you will have guessed, the whole picture of ‘exercise’ derives from the games for which the Greeks were famous ... such as those at Delphi, Isthmia, and – of course – at Olympia. Indeed, the remains still stand of the amphitheatre where athletes competed at Ephesus (where Timothy then was).

As the apostle pointed out, bodily exercise has limited value – is profitable only for ‘a little’ – for a little while, for the here and now, as I understand him<sup>49</sup> ... whereas godliness has unlimited value – is profitable in every way, in that the person who exercises himself in godliness enjoys communion with God, and a thousand other blessings, *in this life* – irrespective of his earthly circumstances – and secures for himself a greater and extended capacity to serve the Lord in His glorious kingdom in *the life to come*.<sup>50</sup>

In this sense, the godly man can be said to have the best of both worlds!

As I understand it, the trustworthy saying referred to in verse 9 points back mainly to that which is said in verse 8.

It is ‘to this end’, namely with a view to the promise which godliness gives for both this life and the coming one, Paul tells Timothy, that he (Paul) and his fellow-workers ‘labour’ – a word carrying the idea of strenuous toil to the point of fatigue (a word well suited to the training necessary before engaging in some form of athletic contest) – and ‘strive’ – a word which suggests an athlete who expends every ounce of his energy in his struggle either to win his race or to overcome his antagonist.

And Paul and his colleagues can confidently give of their very best because their hope is fixed – is continuously fixed (the force of the tense he uses) – on ‘the living God’ – a divine title he uses seven times in all.

And this ‘living God’ is, Paul says, ‘the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe’ – not meaning, I suggest, that He (the living God) has provided a salvation which is available to all – although that is most gloriously true<sup>51</sup> – but that He is ‘the Saviour’ in the sense that He is the great Preserver and Benefactor, whose providential care extends to all<sup>52</sup> ... to the evil as well as the good, to the just as well as the unjust, to the ungrateful as well as the thankful.<sup>53</sup>

At the time that Paul wrote, the state religion was what has been called ‘the Imperial Cult’, in which the reigning emperor was given the title ‘saviour of the world’ because he was deemed to be the preserver of mankind on account of his beneficent reign. Surviving Greek inscriptions from Ephesus – as elsewhere – often use the word ‘saviour’ as a title not only of emperors,<sup>54</sup> but of supposed gods,<sup>55</sup> of proconsuls and of leading civic officials – usually because they were regarded as having delivered men from some great calamity or supplied some great need.

By way of example only the inscription on a statue base in honour of Julius Caesar includes the words,<sup>56</sup> ‘The cities of Asia ... (honour) Julius Caesar, high priest, imperator, and twice consul, god manifest ... and universal saviour of human life’. In this case, Caesar earned himself the title ‘saviour of human life’ because he had prevented monies deposited in the temple treasury of Artemis from being confiscated during the Roman civil war – which would have represented a disastrous drain on the local economy<sup>57</sup>

Timothy would have been familiar with many such pagan inscriptions, and would therefore have readily understood Paul’s use of the title ‘Saviour of all men’ to describe, not lifeless idols, fictional ‘gods’ or mere mortals, but ‘the living God’.

In itself, the apostle’s description of Timothy as a young man indicates only that he would have been no more than 40 years old at the time. I suspect that Timothy was very young (probably between 20 and 25 years of age) when he joined Paul on his (Paul’s) second missionary journey. In all probability that would have been about 12 years earlier, which would suggest that he was now in his mid-to-late thirties. But, whatever his actual age, Paul told him that, what he lacked in years, he was to make up in character and conduct – winning the respect of others older than himself by the model he set for them to follow ... himself being a model in word and in deed ... and in love, faith and purity<sup>58</sup> – perhaps pointing to his responsibility to men, God and himself respectively.

Thinking of that word ‘purity’ for a moment, I note that today’s article in ‘Our Daily Bread’ refers to a computer enthusiast. ‘One night’, the young woman who wrote the page says, ‘when our family was at his house, I noticed a verse taped to his monitor: “I have made a covenant with my eyes” (being the first verse of Job 31). Evidently, he understood the potential danger of spending hours alone in front of a computer with easy access to indecent images’. I guess that, if Paul and Timothy were alive today, the older man may well have recommended that the young man take some similar precaution.

'Give attention to' – devote yourself to – reading ... to public reading that is. For it is clear that, in their church meetings, the early Christians followed the practice of the Jewish synagogues in having the scriptures read publicly, followed by appropriate practical application and exhortation and/or doctrinal instruction.

Last evening I dug out an old volume from my library entitled 'The Burden of the Lord', in which the author quotes Dr Campbell Morgan as having complained, 'I do not know anything that is worse done in the church today than the reading of the Bible by preachers'. Hmm ... I very much doubt that this has improved in the last 70 years.

One little story I enjoyed from the same book runs as follows ... 'One preacher, thinking that the words printed in italics in the Authorised Version were intended to be emphasised, severely taxed his listeners in a public reading of a sentence from the Bible, by loudly stressing the last word: 'he spake to his sons, saying, Saddle me *the ass*. And they saddled *him*.<sup>59</sup> Hopefully, we do better than that!

Surely God's word deserves the very best we can give it. And those of us who do read publically would do well to prepare both ourselves and our planned reading privately – and in saying 'prepare ourselves' I have my eye on that which Paul said in the last verse of our chapter.

And given the time, the last verse is a good place to be!

Given that your gift is just that – a gift – from God – you must not 'make light' of it, neglecting it contemptuously – which is what Paul's word means. It must be developed – must be fanned into a flame – by constant use.

'Ponder these things', Paul adds, 'immerse yourself in them (entirely and always absorbed in them), that your progress may be evident to all'. And so, the good servant and the godly servant is also the growing servant, who by persevering in all that Paul has told him, will himself be saved – be preserved – from spiritual failure and a wasted life, and will save – will preserve – those he teaches from error and from spiritual shipwreck.

May God help each of us, whatever particular gift or gifts we have, to so serve Him that, not only our souls, but our lives, will be saved for His glory.

---

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> 1 Tim. 3. 15.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Tim. 1. 5-6.

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. 6. 21.

<sup>4</sup> Acts 20. 29-30.

<sup>5</sup> 2 Tim. 3. 5.

<sup>6</sup> 2 Tim. 3. 1-5.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Tim. 1. 20; 2. 14 (with 2 Cor. 11. 3); 3. 6-7.

<sup>8</sup> 2 Tim. 3. 16.

<sup>9</sup> John 14. 17; 15. 26; 16. 13.

<sup>10</sup> 1 Kings 22. 21-22.

<sup>11</sup> John 8. 44.

<sup>12</sup> Rev. 12. 9; cf. Rev. 20. 10.

<sup>13</sup> Acts 19. 19.

<sup>14</sup> W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, article 'Know'.

<sup>15</sup> Acts 19. 13-16.

<sup>16</sup> 1 Tim. 1. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Eph. 6. 12.

<sup>18</sup> Gen. 9. 2-3.

<sup>19</sup> Gen. 7. 2.

<sup>20</sup> Num. 23. 9; Exod. 19. 5-6.

<sup>21</sup> Lev. 18. 24-28.

<sup>22</sup> Lev. 11. 44-47; 20. 25-26.

<sup>23</sup> Ezek 4. 9-13.

<sup>24</sup> Acts 10. 14 with Ezek. 4. 14 – where Ezekiel says he has never in his life polluted himself by eating food forbidden in the law..

<sup>25</sup> Dan. 1. 8.

<sup>26</sup> 1 Macc. 1. 41-63.

<sup>27</sup> Mark 7. 1-16. 'Galilee was very Jewish in religious outlook and practice, and that it is dubious to make strong distinctions in these matters between Galilee and Judea ... The discovery of *ritual washing pools* ... and other evidence of *observance of clean/unclean food practice* are key evidence'.

<http://larryhurtado.wordpress.com/2011/09/23/jesus-of-galilee/>

<sup>28</sup> Mark 7. 17-18.

<sup>29</sup> Or, possibly, 'The effect of this saying was ...'.

<sup>30</sup> As I see it there can be little doubt that the masculine (καθαριζων), and not the neuter (καθαριζον), is the correct reading. See the apparatus in the UBS Greek New Testament. [Καθαριζων ... ,D ,X ,W ,L ,B ,A .xθ, 0274, f1, f13, 28, 565, 579, 892, 1071, 1216, 1241, 1342, 1424, Maj-part (E, F, G, H, S), Co, Or, Chr, GrNy etc.]. Against Sinaiticus, Vaticanus, Alexandrinus, the Western Text etc, etc, the oldest manuscripts which give the neuter reading date no earlier than the 9<sup>th</sup> century!

"Purging all meats". The most approved reading here is undoubtedly the masculine (καθαριζων), and not the neuter (καθαριζον) ... Accepting, therefore, the masculine as the true reading, the only possible rendering is that which makes this last clause a comment by the evangelist upon our Lord's previous words, in which he indicates to the reader that our Lord intended by this illustration to show that no food, of whatever kind, when received with thanksgiving, can make a man unclean. The clause must, therefore, be connected with the preceding words, by the introduction of the words, in italics, "*This he said, making all meats clean.*" The passage, thus rendered, becomes a very significant exposition of what has gone before", The Pulpit Commentary on Mark 7. 19 (E. Bickersteth).

'But Mark declares, that "cleansing the meats", He spoke this. He did not however express it, nor at all say, "but to eat such and such meats defiles not the man", for neither could they endure to be told it by Him thus distinctly'. (John Chrysostom, Homily 51 on the Gospel of Matthew.)

'For if "not that which entereth into the mouth defileth the man, but that which proceedeth out of the mouth," and especially when, according to Mark, the Saviour said these things "making all meats clean," manifestly we are not defiled when we eat those things which the Jews who desire to be in bondage to the letter of the law declare to be unclean', (Origen, Commentary on Matthew, Book XI, Section 12.)

[For the Origen quote, see [http://jonathanhayward.com/ccel/fathers2/anf10/anf1047.htm#P7530\\_1557579](http://jonathanhayward.com/ccel/fathers2/anf10/anf1047.htm#P7530_1557579)]

In terms of English translations, the KJV, NKJV and JND stick with the καθαριζον of the Received Text. Adopting the καθαριζων are RV, ASV, RSV, NRSV, ISV, ESV, NIV.

<sup>31</sup> "It is doubtless due to the fact that St. Peter, the informant of St. Mark, in writing his Gospel, and as the sole ultimate authority for this vision in the Acts, is the source of both narratives, - that we owe the hitherto unnoticed circumstance that the two verbs, 'cleanse' and profane (or 'defile'), both in a peculiarly pregnant sense, are the two most prominent words in the narrative of both events". (F W Farrar, Life and Work of Paul, i, 276-277). 'Defile' is to 'make/regard as common'; that is, 'What God cleansed do not treat as defiled', Acts 10.15.



---

<sup>32</sup> William Barclay on Mark 7. 14-23.

<sup>33</sup> In Matt. 15. 15; cf. Mark 7. 17.

<sup>34</sup> Matt. 15. 17-18; Mark 7. 18-19a.

<sup>35</sup> Mark 7. 19b.

<sup>36</sup> It seems likely that Peter was very much the guiding influence behind the gospel according to Mark. Apart from evidence in the New Testament itself of a close personal relationship between the two men, many early Christian writings bear witness to Peter's influence. It seems to me that Peter not only pondered here in Acts 10 the significance – and meaning – of his vision at Joppa, but that, in the light of what that vision taught him, he later thought back on what our Lord had said about food not defiling a man – and came to the conclusion that the implication of our Lord's teaching was not only that so-called 'unclean' food could not defile a man personally, but that it could no longer do so ceremonially – and that therefore the distinction between so-called 'clean' and 'unclean' food no longer applied ... leading to the explanatory comment which Mark added, 'In saying this, He made all foods clean'.

<sup>37</sup> John 6. 9.

<sup>38</sup> Matt. 14. 19; John 6. 11.

<sup>39</sup> Matt. 15. 34-38.

<sup>40</sup> Luke 22. 8.

<sup>41</sup> Matt. 26. 26.

<sup>42</sup> Luke 24. 28-31.

<sup>43</sup> In accordance with the Old Testament dietary laws.

<sup>44</sup> 1 Tim. 4. 3-5. Paul concluded, 'for it is sanctified (set apart for our use and benefit) by the word of God (which has pronounced all foods now clean) and prayer (when we lift our hearts to God in thanksgiving for it)' – that is, by both His word to us and by ours to Him.

<sup>45</sup> Quoted in John Ortberg, *God is closer than you think*, pages 161-162. See too <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2002/decemberweb-only/12-16-51.0.html>

<sup>46</sup> Acts 27. 33-35.

<sup>47</sup> "Clyde Murdock tells of a Christian farmer who was spending a day in a large city. Entering the restaurant for his noon meal, he found a table near a group of young men. When his meal was served, he quietly, with bowed head, gave thanks for the food before him. The young men, observing this, thought they would ridicule and embarrass the old gentleman. One called out in a loud voice: 'Hey farmer, does everyone do that where you live?' The old man looked at the callow youth and calmly said: 'No, son, the pigs don't.'"

(Prairie Overcomer, October 1987, p. 36) (<http://www.lilesnet.com/thanksgiving/quotes/>)

<sup>48</sup> 1 Tim. 5. 9-10.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. James 4. 14.

<sup>50</sup> See the parables of the pounds and of the talents.

<sup>51</sup> 1 Tim. 2. 3-6.

<sup>52</sup> Psa. 36. 6; 145. 9; Acts 14. 17; 17. 25.

<sup>53</sup> Matt. 5. 45; Luke 6. 35.

<sup>54</sup> Such as Hadrian and Antoninus Pius.

<sup>55</sup> Such as Zeus and Artemis.

<sup>56</sup> In full, 'The cities of Asia, along with the [citizen-bodies] and the nations, (honour) C. Julius C. f. Caesar, the high priest, imperator, and twice consul, the manifest god (sprung) from Ares and Aphrodite, and universal saviour of human life'.

<sup>57</sup> See ... [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\\_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/WTJ-NT/Baugh-1Tim4SaviorAll-WTJ.htm](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/NTeSources/NTArticles/WTJ-NT/Baugh-1Tim4SaviorAll-WTJ.htm)

<sup>58</sup> There is no real evidence of sexual impurity associated with the Temple of Artemis; see ... [http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article\\_ephesus\\_baugh.html](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk/article_ephesus_baugh.html)

<sup>59</sup> 1 Kings 13. 27.