

Life is Liturgy

Question: *How would you guide a new believer in Christ who asks, "I want to be a more fully committed follower of Jesus, what should I do?"*

We need to be careful about answering it from a theological framework that divides life into

Spiritual vs Secular

Or from a framework that tries to avoid the extremes of...

Legalism vs License

In fact, Paul is going to warn Timothy that setting up those false dichotomies isn't just bad. It might be the result of false teaching.

One of the themes that runs through the Paul's letter to Timothy is false teaching. In fact, the letter begins with Paul writing this,

"³ As I urged you when I went into Macedonia, stay there in Ephesus so that you may command certain people not to teach false doctrines any longer ⁴ or to devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies. Such things promote controversial speculations rather than advancing God's work—which is by faith. (1 Timothy 1:3-4)

Paul is addresses false teaching again in 1 Timothy 4:1-6. He begins by writing this:

"¹ The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. ² Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron..."

Note: Paul is going to address a specific false teaching in the following verses. But, he wants us to know that this particular false teaching isn't just a bad theological take but it is a doctrine inspired by demons.

"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. ⁴ For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."

"⁶ If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed."

Note verse 6: This is a Pastoral Epistle. There are 3 letters that fall into this category. Paul writes 2 letters for Timothy, the pastor in the city of Ephesus and one to the pastor of the Island of Crete whose name is Titus. He is giving them instructions on how to pastor well. And, a common theme is making

sure they not only teach good doctrine but they also warn the people in their churches about bad doctrine.

Paul explicitly says, "a good minister points out truth and points out error."

So let's start with the errors and then let's look at the truth.

Error: Abstain from marriage. Abstain from certain foods.

Questions: *What is going on here and what does it mean for us... because it is doubtful you've heard a sermon about abstaining from marriage and certain foods in your lifetime.*

What is Paul specifically addressing here?

Paul actually writes about food in several other places.

Galatians 2: Paul rebukes Peter for refusing to eat non-kosher food with the Gentile believers

1 Corinthians 8 and 10: Paul tells the church in Corinth that eating meat sacrificed to idols doesn't make them any more or less spiritual.

So, this passage could be about refusing to non-kosher meat. It could be about eating meat that would be left over from sacrificing to the chief goddess of Ephesus, Artemis. It is most likely about something different because it is paired with abstaining from marriage and none of the other places in the New Testament where Paul speaks about food does he also speak about marriage.

Most likely Paul is refuting early gnostic influence in the church.

Gnostics (knowledge in Greek): Emphasized that the truly spiritual were:

- 1) Privy to "special knowledge." They were always looking for hidden meaning in religious texts.
- 2) Believed that the material/physical world was tainted by evil and only the "spiritual" was good
- 3) Practiced a severe form of ascetism- extreme self denial
 - Celibacy is inherently superior
 - Rejection of material possessions
 - Denial of physical pleasures.
 - Fasting from foods that would bring physical pleasure

Scripture affirms self-discipline as a path to dependency upon God.

Scripture rejects self-discipline that suggests the physical/material world is evil/impure and we become "pure" by abstaining from physical pleasures.

Gnostics taught that If I enjoy material things then I am participating in evil (much like the idea of eating meat sacrificed to idols.) If I eat food and I actually like it, I might want more of it and I am feeding not simply by body with the fuel it needs to survive but I am feeding an "appetite" for food which will diminish my appetite for God.

Note: So, most likely, these false teachers were proclaiming that if you really want to prove your devotion to Jesus that you should abstain from marriage and certain foods because both marriage and food offer physical pleasure and any enjoyment in the physical world is dangerous. Even if it does not lead to sin it won't help you be more spiritual. If you want to be really spiritual and prove your devotion to Jesus then the easiest way to do that is to set up a check list of "Do's and Don'ts" in your life and follow that check list. Don't get married and don't eat food you really enjoy would be on their list.

Paul addresses this mindset in Colossians 2:20-23

"²⁰ Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules: ²¹ "Do not handle! Do not taste! Do not touch!"? ²² These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings. ²³ Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence."

Note: There is an appearance of wisdom when we focus on the "do nots" of life. When we measure our devotion for God on how much of our time is spent doing secular activities vs spiritual activities we have an easy score card for loving God. But..."they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence." Living this way doesn't just not set us free from sin. It traps us. It keeps us from living fully.

So... there is more that is going on in I Timothy than just the actual teaching of abstain from marriage and certain foods. It is about a mindset and framework of seeing the world. And it is a framework that we need to acknowledge exists today.

Modern Western Christianity has been heavily influenced by gnostic teaching.

Resulted in a theology that majors in

- Escapism from the material (after-life "up there")
- Avoidance of physical pleasures in the name of self-denial that never "denies self"
- Compartmentalization of spiritual and non-spiritual
- The lack of full human expression of emotions
- Detachment from human suffering and human celebration

The Gnostics in Paul's day wanted people to categorize their lives into the spiritual and secular. This compartmentalization results in legalism.

- Extreme legalism thinks a person can earn their salvation by being good and avoiding evil.
- Popular legalism teaches that one becomes a Christian by faith alone and God's grace alone, but they prove their devotion by what they avoid in matters that aren't simply sinful but simply secular.

Thankfully Paul doesn't just point out the problem of false teaching, he offers a solution by way of truth.

After Paul identifies the lie, he leads us into truth. Notice what he says in I Timothy 4:3-5

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. 4 For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, 5 because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

Note:

- Twice Paul affirms that marriage and food and everything else original to creation was created by God.
- Everything God created originally is good
- Good things should not be rejected but appreciated by receiving it with Thanksgiving
- We consecrate the daily activities and secular duties in our lives through the word of God and prayer. That's not a reference to reading the Bible and having a prayer before I do something so that I turn that thing into a spiritual activity. It is a reference to Creation and God's Word when he spoke over His Creation, "it is good." My prayer is an affirmation of that.
- Therefore, nothing exists in categories of spiritual and non-spiritual. All of life can be sacred.

Competing Paradigms:

*Devotion is categorizing the world into Spiritual vs Secular and pursuing the Spiritual
Vs

Devotion is seeing all of life as Sacred and making everything spiritual

*Devotion is avoiding license by being legalistic
VS

Devotion is choosing to see life as Liturgy and living accordingly.

(Liturgy- Derived from the Greek word leitourgia, meaning "work of the people" or "public service," it refers to the ordered way a corporate religious service is conducted. It usually refers to the format of worship in a church service. However, because we take church with us...our "work" is always to take worship with us.)

I Corinthians 3 reminds us...

"¹⁶ Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple.

You didn't go to God's house to worship today. You all brought God's houses with you and transformed this space because you brought worship with you.

And when you leave you will take God's Temple with you. You will take worship with you. Everywhere you go is where God is. So every activity is an opportunity for worship. Nothing is just spiritual or secular. And ultimately, if I want to grow in my devotion to Jesus it is important I quit compartmentalizing my life.

Notice what Paul writes in **I Corinthians 10:31**

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God."

It seems like the "what" we do in life are less important to God than the "why" of doing whatever we do.

Paul is wanting us to see these things so we formulate a better answer for how to help someone/ourselves live a more fully committed life to Jesus.

NOTE:

- All life is can be Liturgy/Worship.
- There is no Secular vs Spiritual because everything and every moment can be Sacred.
- You carry the Sacred with you

Wrap up:

Physical pleasure can be an idol. It can be the purpose we live for.

Spiritual disciplines like fasting, simplicity, and solitude are important.

They should help remind us that all of life can be made up of sacred moments because God is in us.

God wants to use our time with our nose in the Bible to allow us to put our nose in a rose and give thanks for the gifts around us.

God desires your entire life to be God saturated. Because he wants to offer the world around you a taste of His love and His life.

People's primary experience of God won't be in a building we call "church." It will be through us- the individual "Temples" that carry the presence of God around in our world.

Take me to church this week because life is liturgy.