

I've given today's message the heading, "Leaders, leading in truth, training in Godliness." And that's the way it's supposed to be...

Jesus said, "I am the truth". Our Lord:– He personifies truth. And this is what I love about the Gospel: **It's true**; It's totally dependable; and it's unchanging... The Gospel (Good News) for the 1st generation of Christians, continues to be the exact same Gospel Good News today...

And let me tell you, I so wish, that we could have that sort of truth in every situation.

It is so frustrating that we have become a society:

- who alter things to fit our agenda;
- we create a new narrative to re-interpret data, or
- we even re-interpret history; and
- for many, the practice of logical, sensible truth-telling, has pretty-much become a thing of the past...

And worst of all, it happens in the church, too. The Gospel gets re-interpreted in **so** many different ways, to fit **so** many different agendas,,,,, such that it's no longer the Gospel.

But, this shouldn't come as any great surprise. Even to Timothy in Ephesus, it should be of no surprise to him, because Paul reminds him that: **the Spirit expressly says** (The Spirit doesn't just hint at) **the Spirit expressly says** that in later times some will depart from the faith...

(How?) by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons....

Owh,,, that sounds all very alarming... And we'd never fall for that... Are they being led into Devil worship and witchcraft??? (devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons)

It's much more subtle than that...

As we read on, what we realise, is that any teaching/theory/myth/old-wives-tail, that takes one away from the truth of the Gospel – whatever causes one to reject God's word, or causes them to embrace something new/different (to be devoted to) some other narrative,,, this is what he's talking about – This is what he means by: being devoted to **deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.**

It might:

- come across as being something good and godly; or
- some cause that we're personally passionate about;
- something that appeals to our quest for holiness;
- come across as a 'better form of holiness',,,

but if it's taking us away from the true Gospel of Jesus Christ, it's not only "not good" – it's demonic.

The Spirit expressly says this. Now, because we're working our way through whole books of the Bible, we're being reminded of this, over and over again. And this is the Holy Spirit, speaking to us...

The Spirit spoke through Jesus. Jesus said:

- Mark 13:(ESV)22 For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.
- Matthew 24:(ESV)11 And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray.
- Matthew 7:15 (ESV)15 "Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

So, the Spirit spoke through Jesus. And He also spoke through the Apostles. E.g. The Apostle Peter:

- 2 Peter 2:1 (ESV) But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will be false teachers among you...

And that's just a few examples. We find this throughout the Scripture, the Holy Spirit, speaking God's word, warning us of false teachers.

But a question I sometimes get asked,

"Michael, do you think a false teacher, knows that what he's a false teacher?"

*Are they **deliberately** misleading people? Or are they misled themselves?"*

Or, to use the metaphor of Jesus,

"Does a wolf in sheep's clothing, know that he's a wolf and not a sheep?"...

And based on Scripture, I actually reckon the answer is, "There's some of each."

Let me explain:

The first thing we have to understand, is false teaching, comes from **inside** the church.

- Peter said, "It'll be some of you" (when he's writing to a church).
- A wolf in sheep's clothing, on the outside, has every appearance of being a sheep.

In other words, it's a person who fits right on into the church. And their teaching may have an appearance of Godliness, and they might even attract lots of followers to them. And people will be **devoted** to their teaching. They'll be full-on convinced, and probably very excited and evangelical about what they believe...

But the problem is, what they believe, isn't the truth. It hasn't come from God. It may appear godly, but if it's not true, it hasn't come from our Heavenly Father. **Untruth** comes from the Father of Lies, and that's why it's called teachings of demons. No matter how godly it might appear, if it's not true,

it's the teaching of demons, and yet it's coming from inside the church.

So, if demonic teaching is coming from inside the church, does the wolf know that he's a wolf??? Well, I suspect: sometimes "yes", but we have it confirmed (in today's reading), usually "no"...

I have no doubt that there **are** frauds and charlatans, within the Christian church, who act as conmen as a means to get wealthy, or to wield power... They find people within the church, gullible targets for them to fleece... And we all know there's plenty of mansions and prestige cars bought on the donations of the 'faithful'. Conmen...

But **most** wolves don't know they're wolves. Most wolves look very much like a sheep because they believe they are sheep. But how can they get it so wrong? I'll tell you how:

² through the insincerity [hypocrisy] of liars
(wolves/false teachers) whose consciences are seared,

What we're talking about here, is the overwhelming self-deception of sin... Sin is our rejection of God. Sin, is to elevate my own thoughts/desires/feelings/sense of justice or morality – to elevate my intellect above God's revealed truth... That's sin...

And the self-deception of sin, is that we become so convinced by reasoning that appeals to our flesh, or convinced by a

teaching/theory/myth/old-wives-tail, that has captured our attention and we become **devoted** to these things,,. Our consciences accept that as truth, even if it's contrary to God's word/Godliness.

That's what it means for one's conscience to be seared...

Some of us may remember, we talked about this, in the very first chapter of Timothy.

1:5 (ESV) The aim of our charge is love that issues from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.

And we talked about the difference between having a **good** conscience, and a seared conscience. And the difference between having a sincere faith and an insincere faith/hypocritical faith.

A good conscience is a conscience properly calibrated to God's perfect truth and way. A seared conscience, is a conscience that's blistered – it's out of whack – out of calibration. And so, although it feels right, we can be very wrong, because our consciences are not calibrated to God and God's word...

And so many (possibly most) false teachers do not know that they are a wolf in sheep's clothing... Why? Because of the self-deception of sin – their consciences are seared... They are so convinced of what they believe, because it feels so right to them. And if it feels so right, it can't be wrong (in their

eyes). But it **is** wrong, because it's quite different to what the Scripture clearly teaches.

And Paul gives us 2 examples of false teaching that were probably at play in Ephesus. These are examples of heresy (wrong doctrine) in his day. We would have different heresies at play today, although these do still exist. The important thing for us to understand, is these are merely examples. They are examples of deceitful spirits seeking to lead us astray in all sorts of ways.

The first example, is those who forbid marriage.

He doesn't have anything more to say about that. It's just wrong to forbid marriage. Why? Because marriage is something that God created. Jesus said:

Mark 10: (ESV) ⁷'Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, ⁸ and the two shall become one flesh.' So they are no longer two but one flesh.

It's God's design... And to teach that one should **not** marry, is against God's design; It's against God's word; **and** it's trying to add to our holiness... Do you know what I mean? It's the pride of man, that has the belief that I can do something extra, to make myself more holy. And in this case, the extra thing, is to make the sacrifice of not getting married.

Still today, the Roman Catholic church, forbid their priests from marrying. And they forbid married men from becoming

priests... It's a false teaching. And on the basis of this scripture, it's the teaching of demons.

The second example, is teaching that certain foods cannot be eaten. Alright, so some look back to the food laws of Leviticus, and say, "We can get extra holy by not eating bacon for breakfast, or not eating prawns at Christmas time, or whatever".

Or, some might be worried, my butcher sells this Hallel mutton, the sheep was facing towards Mecca and a prayer was said over it, to dedicate it to Allah, and I can't eat it. Rubbish. God created that food for you. The fact that somebody dedicated it to a false god doesn't make it unclean for us...

A pretty common one today, is the Seventh Day Adventists. Their statement of belief says that Christians should abstain from unclean foods specified in the Scriptures. And many (in practice) become vegetarians, because they believe it's more healthy, and if they eat healthily, they'll be more holy... Which is clearly wrong. Jesus told us, it's not what goes into our body, that makes us unclean...

Alright, to teach that one's diet can add something to our faith, is not only a nonsense, on the basis of this scripture, we know it's a teaching of demons. And Paul tells us why:

Everything was created by God, and it's not to be rejected. We receive our meal with thanksgiving. That's why we say

grace at our meal time. Our food – what we take into our bodies, is made holy by the word of God and prayer...

What word of God would that be?

Well, how about the word that Jesus spoke to Peter in a dream: Eat it Peter. What God has made clean, do not call common (Acts 10).

Any teaching contrary to this, might give the appearance of Godliness, but because it's contrary to God's word, it's demonic.

When we say grace before a meal, and I do hope you're not too modern for that, because saying grace is a beautiful thing. It's a prayer recognition of the God who makes us holy, and of His gracious provision. And it's a beautiful thing, for a family to pray to their Lord, around a meal table.

Righto, the **reason** Paul is warning Timothy about false teachings, is because it's important for Timothy to be a positive example (in all godliness), to deflect such things. For Timothy to be a good servant of the Lord Jesus Christ,, or let's extend it, for **any** pastor (that's what Timothy is) to be a good servant of the Lord Jesus Christ, they're being charged with 2 things here: to teach truth **AND** to warn against falseness.

Paul says to Timothy, ⁶ **If you put these things before the brothers** [if you point out this false teaching], **you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus**

And it's all in the context of him training (not only himself), but training the church in words of the faith and of **good** doctrine.

And so, in teaching, a Pastor's job, is to:

- point out false teaching (wrong doctrine) (won't make a pastor popular);
- train in **true** faith and **good** doctrine; and
- have nothing to do with godless teaching that lacks biblical substance...

And Paul is quite **blunt** in how he says this. He says ⁷ **Have nothing to do with irreverent** [godless/worldly/profane], **silly myths**... And the Greek word for "silly" literally means "old wife". He's literally saying, have nothing to do with "worldly old-wives-**tales**"... BTW, in this context, an "old-wives-**tales**" doesn't necessarily mean that it's a myth that's been passed down from generation to generation (although it can mean that). It's simply referring to a belief that is accepted as true, even though it is contrary to God's word.

It was a problem in Ephesus in Timothy's day, and it's a problem in our world today – that people in the church sometimes get distracted from the Gospel and get distracted from what we know **is** true, and they get **more** passionate and **more** concerned and **more** enthused, about worldly old-wives-**tales** ...

and so a church might focus on things like:

- climate change;

- global warming;
- social or political activism;
- questionable prophecies;
- latest end-times fad
- program that's going to make-my-life more fulfilled...

We're not meant to focus on worldly old-wives-tales. What do we focus on? We focus on what we **know is** true; **Faith**; and **Good** doctrine.

And the way to do this, is to train in Godliness...

If we are training in Godliness, (which is about **true** faith and **good** doctrine (and applied practically in our lives)), all of the old-wives-tales, that the Devil is using to try and distract us, we'll know better than to be distracted by those sorts of stories...

It seems to me, that **this** is the key verse, in this letter. It was written to Timothy as the pastor of that church, telling him to train himself in godliness, but as **we** read this letter, we realise that it's not only Timothy who should train in Godliness...
"What's good for the goose, is good for the gander."

And so the key verse for **us** today, is about the importance of training in Godliness.

Have nothing to do with worldly old-wives-tales, **Rather** train yourself for godliness. Train yourself for what we know is true...

Do you notice the way these 2 things are in opposition to each other:

- worldly old-wives-tales (myths; hear-say; theories)

vs

- being trained for godliness by focusing on Faith (in the Lord Jesus Christ) and truth (**good** doctrine), based on God's word.

You see, when human fiction or theory, gets placed alongside Godly fact,, and when that fiction or theory becomes an article of faith, the church is in a real pickle... And that's why myths are teachings of demons.

So, let's talk about "training".

Today, there's a multi-billion dollar industry centred around fitness training. If you go to any of the cities, (particularly in the wealthier suburbs), it seems there's a gym on every street-corner... And I've noticed the car-parks are always full. I've never been able to work this out – they'll drive their car there and then hop on an exercise bike, or drive there and then get onto a treadmill...

Anyway, it's a massive industry, and of course, where there's a dollar to be made, there's plenty of Christian versions of fitness training. I did a search on the Koorong website, and I came up with 1200 hits on "fitness".. Here's a few:

- *Fit for the King*
God's plan for weight loss and total health
- *Fit to serve*
Becoming what you were created to be
- *The 90-Day fitness challenge*
achieve your goals in 12 empowering sessions
- *a DVD workout: Praise moves*
The Christian alternative to yoga

There is a massive fitness industry. And fitness is a good thing, but Godliness is much better.

V⁸ for while bodily training is of some value [little/slight – the emphasis is on “it’s small value”], **godliness** is of value in **every** way...

What he’s saying, is training the body/for fitness, is of limited value, but training in **godliness** is of **limitless** value....

Training in Godliness is of value in this present life, and in the life to come.

In our Australian, sport-loving culture, I see this happen, over and over again: parents going to great lengths, to ensure that their children have every available opportunity to fulfil their sporting potential. They drive them all over the countryside to get them to sporting events; They sacrifice all manner of other activities to make sure they make it to their training sessions... And if everything works out perfectly, what’s the

most they can hope to achieve? Success at an elite level? An Olympic gold medal???

I don't know about you, but for me as a parent, I'd rather see my children being trained in Godliness, because it helps us to live Christ-like lives, and it prepares us for the life to come.

And this is why I keep encouraging every one of us, "Get involved in a bible-study group. Make it a priority in your life." And that's why the focus of what we do here at church: A major part of our worship, is biblical teaching and training in Godliness...

We're not on about pep-talks or improving one's life-experience... Our focus, is on God's word, for being trained in Godliness...

We're going to leave it there today, and next week, we're going to continue on with this reading, and see more of what Godliness training is about.

Let's pray:

Heavenly Father,
we want to thank You
for Your Holy Spirit.

For Your Spirit,
who expressly says (in Your Word),
how we individually,

and how we as a church,
should conduct ourselves in Godliness.

Lord, we thank You,
that even though we get flooded
with myths and old-wives-tales,
that we know Your truth;
and we know the beautiful
age-old Gospel as it truly is.

Lord,
by Your Holy Spirit,
and by Your Word,
train us in Godliness,
that we can honour You,
every day of our lives.

Lord,
give us a resolve,
to make this a priority,
To Read Your Word in private;
To study Your Word together;
And to pray together.

Lord,
train us;
strengthen us spiritually;
And may it not just be a head thing;

May Godliness be demonstrated in
what we think;
say;
and do...

And Lord, I pray for me.
because I know that this isn't
a situation of
"Do as I say, not as I do" ...
As You said to Timothy,
"Train yourself in Godliness" ...

Me too...

Ready us, for the Day of Your coming,
in Jesus' Name,
Amen.