

We come to the end of Paul's first letter to Timothy. It is an interesting letter which at times is emotionally father-like, and at times is highly instructional. Paul offers his personal advice on four occasions, and we must remind ourselves when he does, he is not pronouncing doctrine, or law; he is addressing a particular situation in the Church at Ephesus. The best way to understand Paul in this letter would be to take a ring-side seat as a privileged spectator, listening in on a conversation between two men who enjoy a father son relationship.

Paul told Timothy, ***I desire*** men would pray lifting hands ... likewise women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty... (can't imagine women those days wearing hot pants and ultra short skirts, but they might have had clothing fashions that were immodest). Last week we read Paul advice, ***I would have younger widows remarry***, that they not go from house to house as "*idlers, gossips and busybodies, saying what they should not.*" We would miss the principles of Paul's of teaching, if all we do is to focus on his counsel to Timothy, which was specific to issues prevalent at Ephesus.

Timothy is facing the challenge of false teachers, and Paul is encouraging Timothy while affirming him in his leadership role. It is quite likely that false teachers might have challenged him on issues which Paul responds to in this letter. Paul summarises the character of false teachers as people who *want to be teachers of the law, but they do not know what they are talking about. They do not even understand what they say, they are sure about.*¹

Throughout history, false teachers have been and continue to be an affliction on the Christian faith. I am not aware of any other religion which

¹ 1 Timothy 1:7 (International Children's Bible)

is as concerned with false teachers, as the Christian faith, which has to respond to, and defend itself, against false claims on its principles of faith and doctrine. We have reason to believe we are uniquely targeted because we are **"keepers of Truth"**. When Jesus was taken in front of Pilate, he said *My kingdom is not of this earth; it is of another place...In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.* Unable to understanding the powerful impact of the statement Jesus had just made, Pilate asks rather flippantly, *"What is truth?"*

We the followers of Christ, are entrusted with Truth, and it is Truth which is being challenged by false teachers.

One of the sources by which false teaching is spread, is popular culture. Since the advent of the printing press, then telephone, radio, television, and more recently, computers and the internet, popular culture impacts more people, at a faster speed than ever before. Technology is a powerful medium which brings people together, helps medical science, serves humanity in countless ways, but the same technology is used to influence people's minds with a counter culture to Christian faith and doctrine.

I was in a London taxi cab on Wednesday afternoon. Within seconds of sitting down in the cab, the cabbie asked, *What do you do Sir? I am a minister of a Church*, I replied. Silence! Then in hushed voice the cabbie said, *Well, I can't say I am very religious Sir, you will pardon me, but I am a good man. My wife left me for another 35 years ago and I brought up two girls all on me own ...* and he launched into his life's story.

When he paused to inhale, I decided to take him out from the confessional booth and asked how long he was a cabbie. *Forty-five years*

Sir, and London born and bred. East end, you know! My father and so the conversation went until I asked what he did when he was not driving a cab. I sing Sir, sing for pleasure. Songs from the American songbook, a bit of Sinatra, the two Coles: Nat and Porter, Berlin, Fitzgerald, Holiday. Go to Spain on my holidays and sing there.

Fascinating conversation which evolved to the Beatles. He said, *They were pure genius. I mean, Lennon's "Imagine", is pure genius, so spiritual, and he sang the first verse.*

Imagine there's no heaven, It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people, Living for today...

I was looking for a connection to popular culture to help illustrate how it influences and spreads false teaching, and this London cabbie handed it to me on a gold plate!

Bob Spitz in his authoritative and detailed biography of the Beatles reveals the extent to which all four Beatles and Brian Epstein as well, were well into the occult, fuelled by days of being out of circulation because they were stoned on some happy weed or the other. The words they put to their genius talent as musicians, came out of the combination of drugs, alcohol and the occult.

Lennon invites listeners to, *Imagine there's no heaven, It's easy if you try, No hell below us, Above us only sky, Imagine all the people, Living for today...* followed by the refrain, *You may say I'm a dreamer, But I'm not the only one, I hope someday you'll join us, And the world will be as one.*

Rock critic Vern Stefanic noted that "*Lennon was more than a musician*" because he promoted "*an anti-God theme, and anti-America, pro-revolution stance*"².

As a young boy, Lennon went to Church, but was asked not to return because he sang the hymns, replacing words with obscene four-letter words; McCartney said, religion "doesn't fit into my life", describing God as "a force we are all a part of." Lennon added, "We're all God."

It does not take a major stretch of imagination, to understand the false teaching being promoted through popular culture and the global impact of this teaching. Knowing this, would you still wonder why our churches are not frequented by the generation who were fed on the Gospel of the Beatles?

Please do not for minute think it is over. Listen to lyrics of the songs in the current (2016) Eurovision contest (a selection of verses of their songs):

Bulgaria: You and I, we collide // Like the stars on the summer night // We can shine forever // And you and I, we're alive // What we feel is what is right // We can run like never //// Together we're untouchable // You and me against the world // Together we're invincible.

On the theme of stars, **Israel's** Doron Medalie sings, *Cause we are all // Made of stars // Silver fragments falling.*

Greece: We're the rise in the rising sun // Dance with us and have some fun // We're the rise in the rising sun // Join with us for a Utopian Land.

Many of the songs have highly suggestive lines, some of which I would not repeat in Church, *You shake me like an earthquake ...* (Armenia);

² *Tulsa World*, Dec. 12, 1980, p. 20

Some songs use Truth, but present a confusing picture.

Albania: ...The message is, love can bring change.

Ukraine: When strangers are coming, They come to your house. They kill you all and say, We're not guilty, not guilty. // Where is your mind? Humanity cries. You think you are gods. But everyone dies. Don't swallow my soul. Our souls. // (*refrain*) We could build a future, Where people are free to live and love. The happiest time.

Popular culture distorts Truth in the same way that satan distorted truth at the beginning of human history, *Did God really say, you would die, if you ate of the fruit from the tree at the centre of the garden?*

Perhaps Netherland's entry is a genuine cry for help:

Netherlands: I'm going nowhere and I'm going fast // I should find a place to go and rest // I should find a place to lay my head tonight // Every morning there's another start // Every morning hits so hard // Guess I'm running scared, guess I'm running on empty // Mister, can you help me? 'Cause it seems I've been led astray // I keep searching for an answer, for a way // Won't you help me?

As we bring to a close, Paul's first letter to Timothy, his advice should be taken seriously. *If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the wholesome, life-giving words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine and teaching which is in agreement with godliness (personal integrity, upright behaviour), he is conceited and woefully ignorant [understanding nothing]. He has a morbid interest in ... (promoting) perpetual friction between people who are corrupted in mind and deprived of the truth, who think that godliness is a source of profit [a lucrative, money-making business*

—withdraw from them]. But godliness actually is a source of great gain when accompanied by contentment [that contentment which comes from a sense of inner confidence based on the sufficiency of God]. For we have brought nothing into the world, so [it is clear that] we cannot take anything out of it, either.

So, on this Pentecost Sunday, let's consider the power God has given us through the gift of the Holy Spirit,³ to discern right from wrong, good from bad, Holy from unholy. Paul's final plea to young Timothy, *O man of God, ... aim at and pursue righteousness (right standing with God and true goodness), godliness (which is the loving fear of God and being Christlike), faith, love, steadfastness (patience), and gentleness of heart. Fight the good fight of the faith.* Paul's most touching and endearing closing line, *O Timothy, guard the deposit entrusted to you!*

We are not left alone, to be accosted and buffeted by false doctrines. This world has a lot to offer which is good, but we need to be aware of popular culture's subtle teaching which runs counter to the *wholesome, life-giving words of our Lord Jesus Christ.*

Pentecost releases us to Godly living. We have the word of God to hand, we have the promise of God in our heart, we have love of God shown to us by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, **and** we have the power and strength of the Holy Spirit to guide us through the maze of confusing messages offered by popular culture, to eternal life with God. Pentecost releases us to Godly living. Could we ask for more? **AMEN**

³ Acts 2:33