

1st Timothy 4:11-16

11 These are the things you must insist on and teach. 12 Let no one despise your youth, but set the believers an example in speech and conduct, in love, in faith, in purity. 13 Until I arrive, give attention to the public reading of scripture, to exhorting, to teaching. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders. 15 Put these things into practice, devote yourself to them, so that all may see your progress. 16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; continue in these things, for in doing this you will save both yourself and your hearers (NRSV).

As you probably know, Timothy was a missionary with the Apostle Paul. When Paul continued on with his mission, Timothy stayed in Ephesus where he was faced with a problem. People there were teaching a conflicting doctrine that threatened the church. Timothy was young and what he lacked in experience he made up for with skills and abilities. The title *Mortal Peccadillo* is a bit weird. Peccadillo is a rare word that means a very slight offense, something that is not a big deal. It is an intentional oxymoron. A slight offense cannot be mortal. A mortal sin is something that is serious and results in damnation. Another title could easily have been *Grave Pettiness*.

The Scripture provides words of encouragement to Timothy when he needed some emotional support. It is a call for confidence. A young person does not have the confidence that develops from experience. Don't let others look down on you. People treat you according to how you teach them to treat you. People respond to you according to your demeanor, honesty, character, attitude, confidence, manner of speech. The Scripture is also a call for devotion. Devote yourself to studying the word and teaching the word. Set the example for others to follow by living righteously and teaching the word. Don't let them discredit you. Instead, set the example for others to follow. Don't neglect your gift of salvation and put it into practice. Pay close attention to yourself and watch your life closely. Continue in these things and don't every stop.

The lesson is of sound teaching and Godliness. Sound teaching is important for developing correct doctrine which is necessary to keep people from getting off track like the Pharisees did. Godliness is a matter of personal characteristics of integrity and devotion. Timothy has to teach doctrine that is exemplified by the life that he lives. He must be above reproach. He must have a solid moral character and a loving disposition. He is to set an example by his behavior. The lesson is for both clergy and laity. All gifts are given by God. You are expected to make full use of your gifts by responding energetically, giving of yourself, and upholding standards of virtue.

Many years ago, I had a youth that was about to get baptized. I met with family and we discussed baptism and its significance. The young girl grew up in the life of the church. She learned right from wrong from her family, the church, and many lessons of life. However, I needed to make sure that she understood why she was getting baptized. I had to make sure that she was ready. When I asked her why, she answered "For the forgiveness of sins."

It is so simple. We don't need detailed theological interpretation to understand the forgiveness of our sins. Here's the real deal. It is God that determines what sin is. It is

God that you have to answer to. Your sin is between you and God. The following is a real life example of where some of the problems with attendance come from in modern society.

We struggled for many years to have a child and had to do multiple rounds of IVF to have her. When it came to baptism, I did some research and found that the Catholic church believes it's a mortal sin to conceive a child this way, and that the parents need to confess their sin and ask God for forgiveness. There was no way I would ever ask for forgiveness for this. I never asked for severe endometriosis and uterine tumors. Clearly, she was wanted and loved. That should be enough. I left and never looked back.

The couple that is struggling to have a baby. They found a healthy medical way to have a baby. But when it came time for baptism, she was informed that it was a mortal sin. This is a serious problem that is based on archaic ideology. In vitro fertilization is known to be the most effective assisted reproductive technology available. But is it a sin? I question and challenge the concept that this is even a sin, much less a mortal sin. Now, I do not want us to get bogged down in theology but a mortal sin is something that is serious. I looked up a list of mortal sins and I began to wonder "Is this our God? Where is the love?" This is more in line with the doctrine of the Pharisees than Jesus.

Everyone needs to study the Bible. That is the only way we can learn when, how, and where, others get off track from the will of God. Jesus is not about a list of mortal sins. Jesus is about the love of God. Do not let someone else stop you from your journey of faith. Stay true to the word and remain devoted. The problem Timothy faced was that other people judged him according to perceived vices and failed to acknowledge his main virtues. The problem with the real life example is very similar. The sin is choosing to reject others instead of accepting them. The self-righteous blaming others for vices while neglect the main virtue of love.

What I think is a mortal sin is when a religious organization adheres to strict laws that are based on petty issues and neglect the love of God. This is the same thing the Pharisees did. Their sin was so serious that God intervened. A consequence of this is that people are turned off from religion. While we ourselves do not commit this kind of offense, we pay the price for it as mainstream society get turns off from organized religion due to the dogmatic attitudes of others. Unfortunately, the love of God continues to be neglected as people are taught to follow human doctrine that conflicts with the love of the Lord.