

In The Latter Times • 1 Timothy 4:1-5

I. INTRODUCTION

A. A Good Minister

1. Let's begin by reading v. 6. The Apostle Paul writes to his young protégé Timothy . . .

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

2. The “these things” Paul refers to are what he has just written in vs. 1-5
3. A dangerous false teaching was being promoted in Ephesus where Timothy was pastor
4. And in these verses, Paul tells him to stand against it
5. Just as Tim needed to be consistent and faithful to preach the *positive* message of Jesus Christ, he also needed to warn his congregation with a negative word about the dangers around them.

B. Signs

1. As you travel down the highway, you see two kinds of sign
 - a. most signs give *directions*;
 - 1) they tell you how far to the next off-ramp or city
 - 2) they have arrows & post the speed limit
 - b. other signs post *warnings*; slippery when wet, curves ahead, bridge out
2. While most of the pastor's ministry is the *positive* preaching of the Good News of Jesus Christ, being a *good minister* means giving an occasional *warning*, just as Paul instructs Timothy to do here
3. Friends, I want to be a good minister.
 - a. and that means occasionally I have to post *warning signs*
 - b. danger ahead – heresy looming – false teaching, false prophets – Beware!
4. It's my desire that you all would be the best fed and led group in Ventura County.
5. To that end, we need to look at what Paul writes in the first 5 verses of 1 Timothy 4 with a careful and open heart

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-5

1. Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,
2. speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,
3. 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.

4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;

5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

1. Before we dig into each verse and pull this apart, let's stand back and take a wider look at what Paul is saying.
2. Remember that he's speaking to a specific situation in Ephesus both he and Timothy were intimately aware of
3. Some of the elders of the church had gone astray and were promulgating false teaching
4. *What* they were teaching is revealed in these verses
 - a. it had to do with *marriage* and *food*
 - b. they were saying that if people *really* wanted to be close to God, they ought not marry
 - c. and if they desired God's pleasure, certain foods were prohibited.
5. There was a heresy that was gaining ground at this time in the Church that said in order to be a good Christian, you had to follow a strict lifestyle of *asceticism*, meaning they had to avoid things that are pleasurable.
6. This teaching was a growing problem in Ephesus, with some of those men who had at one time been leaders in the church, spreading the error of asceticism among the disciples
7. Paul tells Timothy that he needs to take a stand against it
8. In these verses, he explains *where* this heresy comes from, *who* teaches it, and *why* they teach it.
9. Then he gives the corrective for refuting it
10. Let's see what he says . . .

B. V. 1

1 Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,

1. The Holy Spirit had made it plain again and again through the words of Jesus and the prophets of both the OT and the Church that the last days would be marked by grave spiritual deception.
2. The phrase Paul uses, "later times," is found only here and means the tail end of the last days which began with Jesus' first coming and will culminate in His second coming.
3. Paul peers ahead to the end of days and sees people departing from the faith; but as he looks at Ephesus he can see the seeds of that future apostasy in the soil of his own day.
4. This is a pumpkin seed
 - a. it's a little thing but if I put it in the soil and give it some water, it will grow into a huge plant
 - b. in fact, this one seed will produce a vine so long, and leaves so broad, they will strangle any other plant in the garden
 - c. the pumpkin it will produce can grow so large that it will suck the life right out of the soil and ruin it for other crops

5. As Paul sees the seeds of future apostasy in the soil of the Ephesian church, he tells Timothy to root them out
6. But first, he tells him where they come from - they are sown by deceiving spirits
 - a. Satan is an imitator who can only ape God
 - b. so just as God has His messengers of truth; the angels and gospel evangelists and pastors
 - c. the devil, who is the father of lies, has his own spiritual messengers; demons who carry their deception to the itching ears of false teachers
7. We should take careful note that the last verse of ch. 3 is a stirring summary of the gospel and the heart of the *positive* message Timothy was to preach

¹⁶And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifested in the flesh, Justified in the Spirit, Seen by angels, Preached among the Gentiles, Believed on in the world, Received up in glory.

8. Paul turns right around after penning that brief bit of orthodoxy and proceeds to expose the lies that will try to distract people from it
9. He calls Tim to identify those seeds of deception that were at work in the church and combat them with the herbicide of truth
10. Solid Bible teaching is Round-Up to the weed of heresy!

11. Make no mistake where false teaching ultimately comes from friends
 - a. it's origin is the pit of hell
 - b. deceiving spirits are on the prowl, looking for open ears into which they can inject their spiritual poison
 - c. and they're subtle in their approach
 - d. they don't come with a badge that says, "I'm a demon with a big fat lie that I want you to swallow so I can drag your eternal soul into the flaming abyss."
 - e. no – they're experts at fishing for souls – they use *Power Bait* and *shiny lures* that hide the hook
 - f. they whisper things we *want* to believe as true because they're enticing to the flesh
12. Demons are far too clever to suggest on Monday morning after you've had a great Sunday at church with God revealing Himself and His love as never before, that now you become an atheist
13. That's not how they work – it's too obvious where that comes from and too far outside the realm of possibility
14. No, they come on Monday and suggest something much smaller, more "reasonable", like you have the right to expect that *same* experience *every* Sunday, and when you don't, it's because the worship team is off, or the preaching is poor, or this or that, and certainly you can do better if you started your own church
15. That's the way spiritual deception works
 - a. small at first
 - b. but if you take that first step, it leads inevitably to more and greater error -
 - c. till eventually you've departed from the faith altogether

16. The key to overcoming apostasy is to not make that first step on the path of error

B. V. 2

1. In v. 2, Paul moves from the demonic source of deception to the human agents who spread it

2 speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,

2. Most false teachers are *hypocritical liars*

- a. they KNOW what they're teaching is bogus but they teach it anyway
- b. why? Because having gone against their conscience from the first, their conscience has become *desensitized*

3. Some slave-masters of the ancient world would take a hot iron and brand their slaves with a mark of ownership

4. These brands would forever after be hardened scar tissue that had lost it's sense of touch

5. False teachers identify themselves as slaves to error because their conscience is gone!

- a. at first, their conscience nagged them that what they were getting in to was wrong
- b. they knew what they were espousing was a violation of scripture and contrary to the Spirit of the Lord – but they plunged ahead with it
- c. and after a while, the conscience gave up
- d. eventually a perverse pleasure rose to replace it so that they come to delight in seeing just how far they can go with their craziness

6. I've been absolutely appalled at just how far the false teachers on TBN have gone over the last 25 years with their heresy - not everyone on there is a false teacher, but a number of them are.

7. They began with a minor miscue on what faith is and now have spun it into a full-blown mystery religion with their own apostles, prophets, evangelists and pastor-teachers

8. Paul says the false teachers, the heretics, are *hypocritical liars!*

- a. they know what they're saying is untrue
- b. and the whole time they're telling people what to do, they're doing something else!

9. Why do false teachers *pursue* their error?

- a. well, they're usually wrong *morally* long before they're wrong *doctrinally*
- b. the heretic's personal life becomes suspect before his teaching strays
- c. he changes his teaching to support his desires
- d. believing and behaving always go together

10. If my conscience bothers me, then I can do one of two things

- a. I can repent and change my behavior
- b. or I can rationalize my sin -
- c. and all the better if I can wrap my sin in some scripture I've twisted into a covering for it
- d. if my conscience still nags me, I can prove the truth of my new

- interpretation of scripture by getting others to believe it too
- e. the larger my following, the more proof that mine is the correct view, and so my sin isn't really sin.
11. I wonder how much of the current heresy of the faith movement is nothing more than a covering for the sins of greed and covetousness.
 12. Speaking of hypocrisy – the leaders of that movement live in mansions on hundreds of acres of prime real estate, chauffeured in stretch limos, and wearing expensive tailored suits and dresses
 13. And the whole time they do, they teach their followers that they ought to give, give, give!
 - a. thousands of precious little widows send in their husband's monthly pension checks
 - b. others make contributions and put them on their credit cards!

C. Vs. 3-4

1. The heresy Paul and Timothy dealt with was of a different nature
2. We find out what it was in v. 3 . . .
 - 3 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.**
3. The hypocritical lying false teachers Timothy had to confront were teaching that if a person wanted to get close to God, he or she had to practice a strict *asceticism*.
4. Greek philosophy, with its stark dualism, was starting to infiltrate the Church and formed the kernel of this error
5. The Greeks believed the material world was inherently and unalterably evil!
6. God, as spirit was wholly good and could have nothing to do with the physical world
7. Therefore, the reasoning went, in order to obey and honor God, you had to deny yourself the pleasures of this life.
 - a. since sex and food are two of the most common and universal forms of physical pleasure-
 - b. these two parts of human life were banned
8. Paul shows that the exact opposite is the case.
 - a. far from the physical creation being removed from God and evil
 - b. God CREATED the world and all that is in it
 - c. God created man *as* male and female and gave them a command to be fruitful and multiply
 - d. I have good news – SEX was God's idea, and it was He who gave us the capacity to experience such incredible pleasure in it.
 - e. the only boundary He confines it to is marriage between one woman and one man
 - f. food is also God's idea!
 - g. the first chapters of Genesis speak of the incredible diversity God gave in man's diet
 - 1) in chapter 2 we're told the plants are our vegetable garden
 - 2) chapter 9 includes the beasts as fare for the table

- 3) put 'em together and you have a burger – the perfect food!
9. Far from feeling guilty or dirty in the midst of marital love and while sitting at Wood Ranch with a plate of tri tip in front of you, you should thank God for His goodness and enjoy.
 10. In fact, the enjoyment of God's good gifts is really an act of obedient worship
 11. To reject them, and to call evil what God has called good is sin!
 12. Peter learned this while in Joppa.
 - a. three times he had a vision of a vast sheet, lowered from heaven filled with all kinds of animals
 - b. a voice said, "Rise Peter, kill and eat."
 - c. each time, Peter replied – "Not so Lord, there are unclean animals there."
 - d. then the voice of God said, "Peter, do not call unclean what I have made clean."
 13. At each step of the Creation, God said, "It is good!"
 14. Looking back over it all on the last day, He announced this benediction, "It is VERY GOOD!"
 15. Who today can gainsay God and say that what He has given to bless us and make this life a thing of joy and give us a slim foretaste of the glory that awaits us in heaven, are evil and wrong and have to be resisted!
 16. On Christmas, I will give my children presents.
 - a. they are good and I've spent some time in the selection, purchase and wrapping of them
 - b. do my children honor me and give me pleasure when I hand them to them on Christmas morning, they fold their arms across their chests and say that they don't want them?
 - c. no! if they did that I would be cut to the heart!
 - d. I want them to open them and make them their own, seeing in them a manifestation of my love and concern that their lives be made more rich and full.
 17. Look again at what Paul says in v. 3 because it refutes a common misconception about Christianity . . .
- 3 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.**
18. Far from the worldly being the ones who are getting the most out of this life, it's Christians who ought to be living so fully, so joyously, with such delight in the simple pleasures of God's good world that the lost get jealous!
 19. You see, there's something we can say they can't; "My Dad made this! And He made it for ME!"
 20. Isn't that exactly what Paul says in v. 3?
 21. God created marriage and food to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
 22. He goes on and says . . .
- 4 For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving;**
- 5 for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.**

23. So much for the diets being advocated in some circles today as being “God’s approved menu.”
- a. Paul couldn’t be any clearer - nothing’s to be refused if it’s received by a heart of reverent surrender to God
 - b. the practice of giving thanks and saying grace sets apart the merely common to the special use of God
 - c. so whether we’re eating a meal, enjoying a moment of marital intimacy, or whatever activity we’re engaged in, prayer makes it an act of worship!
 - d. G.K Chesterton wrote:

*You say grace before meals. All right.
But I say grace before the play and the opera,
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting,
Swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink.*
24. Paul is purposefully all-inclusive in saying *everything* is good and *nothing* is to be refused because he wants to squelch the mentality that would put a religious ban on anything God has given
25. Now certainly, there’s a need to exercise common sense in our diet and moderation is a principle we need to employ in *all* things.
26. But the Apostle makes it clear here that asceticism is not a means of approach to God.

D. In Ephesus

1. In Ephesus such rules were starting to get in the way.
2. False teachers were advocating a strict avenue of approach to God that demanded people abstain from pleasure
3. Why? Where did this come from?
4. Paul is clear; ultimately this came from the pit of hell.
5. The agents who spread it were men who had tired of leading people to **Jesus** and wanted to gain a following of their own.
6. So they presented a new way to God, through *asceticism*.
7. They took one truth of the Christian life, that we’re to deny the flesh, and twisted it to unbiblical proportions.
8. Then playing their pipe of false doctrine, they went whistling off into the countryside, leading a line of blind followers
9. The devil knows all he needs do is just nudge us off the straight track of truth, and there’s no telling where we’ll end up
10. It’s ever his tactic to get us side-tracked on things like diet, or the simple redefining of a word like *faith*
11. Yes, Satan is a master of obscuring what’s important and getting us to major on the minors
12. Thus, it’s imperative that you and I be on guard and diligent to make sure we’re staying centered in Christ

III. CONCLUSION

A. Korean Air 007

1. On Sept. 5th, 1983, Korean Air Flight 007, left Anchorage, Alaska bound for Seoul.
2. The course of the Boeing 747 should have taken it over international waters, across Japan, and on to Korea.
3. It contained the latest and most sophisticated navigational equipment, but that equipment only responds to the input of human hands and minds
4. For reasons not entirely clear, the flight got off track somewhere not far off the Alaskan coast
5. Though it was just a degree off course at first and it's flight path was not noticeably errant to the AWACS plane flying nearby, as time stretched on, the plane went farther and farther off track
6. It's first small error in navigation resulted in the plane flying hundreds of miles off course
7. Entering into Soviet airspace, and not responding to their queries, the Communists scrambled a couple fighters from Sakhalin Island which closed on the passenger jet and fired missiles into it, killing everyone.
8. The death of those 269 men, women, and children began with a one-degree error that was never corrected

B. Getting Off Track

1. Those who depart from the faith, don't wake up one morning and say, "I think I'm going to become an apostate today."
2. Apostasy begins with a small variation, a slight turning of the heart away from God
3. It's a side-tracking of our affection that leads to larger and larger deviations till eventually there's a whole-sale departure from the faith.
4. You and I live in those later times Paul spoke of in v. 1 – days that would see some depart from the faith
5. Jesus said that these days would be marked by wide-spread deception and because of that the love of many would grow cold.
6. How critical then that you and I be vigilant and on guard lest we be led astray –
7. God – Keep us true!