

1 Timothy 4 - Apostasy; Leading a Local Church: Personal Life and Public Ministry

III. Warning of apostasy (1 Tim 4:1-16)

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1 Timothy 4

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(1) Characteristics of the coming apostasy (4:1-5)

- (A) Its advent in the later times (4:1a)
- (B) Deception by evil spirits (4:1b)

(C) Commitment to demonic doctrines (4:1c)

1 But **the Spirit explicitly says** that in later times some **will fall away from** the faith, paying attention to **deceitful spirits** and teachings of demons,

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

1 Now the Spirit says clearly that in the last times some people will abandon the faith by following deceitful spirits, the teachings of demons,

1 Now the Spirit speaks expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

- The apostasy of the Church had already begun at this time; see [Apostasy of the Church, Last Days](#)

- "...the Spirit explicitly says" - when Paul says this to Timothy, a pastor at Ephesus, he's not making a prediction of the world...he's making a prediction about the church in the last days

— Paul's not condemning unbelieving spiritists and sorcerers, palm readers and fortune tellers...he's saying that the mindset of these people will begin to penetrate the church in the last days

— The Spirit is ***explicitly*** predicting this for the last days

- "...will fall away from" - *aphistemi*, the verb form of *apostasia*; compound word: *apo*, from or away from; *stasia*, to stand. So *apostasia* literally means "to stand away from" or "to depart"

— God revealed through Christ that, as time passed, some who held the truth would repudiate it. There are seven major NT passages that deal with the last days of the church:

1 Tim 4:1-3; 2 Tim 3:1-5; 4:3-4; James 5:1-8; 2 Peter 2:1-22; 3:3-6; Jude 1-25

— Every one of these passages emphasizes that the great characteristic of the final days of the church will be that of apostasy

— The NT pictures the condition within the church in the last days as a system of "denials":

- Denial of GOD: Luke 17:26; 2 Tim 3:4-5
- Denial of CHRIST: 1 John 2:18; 4:3; 2 Peter 2:6
- Denial of CHRIST 'S RETURN: 2 Peter 3:3-4
- Denial of THE FAITH: 1 Tim 4:1-2; Jude 3
- Denial of SOUND DOCTRINE: 2 Tim 4:3-4
- Denial of THE SEPARATED LIFE: 2 Tim 3:1-7
- Denial of CHRISTIAN LIBERTY: 1 Tim 4:3-4
- Denial of MORALS: 2 Tim 3:1-8,13; Jude 18
- Denial of AUTHORITY: 2 Tim 3:4

- Apostasy occurs in two basic areas:

- Doctrinal defection from the Bible

- Immoral or ungodly behavior
- The clear course of the last days of the church is the reason why Scripture gives constant warnings to the believer, especially pastors and leaders, to be on guard within the flock against doctrinal defection.
- "...deceitful spirits" - *planos*, wandering, roving, vagabond; same word from which we get our word for "planets"
- This apostasy (doctrinal defection) will come about as a result of their listening to persuasive arguments put forth by God's spiritual enemies and the demons behind them

A very extensive body of Scripture bears on the last days for the Church. Reference is to a restricted time at the very end of, and yet wholly within, the present age. Though this brief period immediately precedes the great tribulation and in some measure is a preparation for it, these two times of apostasy and confusion—though incomparable in history—are wholly separate the one from the other. Those Scriptures which set forth the last days for the Church give no consideration to political or world conditions but are confined to the Church itself. These Scriptures picture men as departing from the faith (1 Tim 4:1-2). There will be a manifestation of characteristics which belong to unregenerate men, though it is under the profession of "a form of godliness" (Cf. 2 Tim 3:1-5). The indication is that, having denied the power of the blood of Christ (Cf. 2 Tim 3:5 with Rom 1:16; 1 Cor 1:23-24; 2 Tim 4:2-4), the leaders in these forms of righteousness will be unregenerate men from whom nothing more spiritual than this could proceed (Cf. 1 Cor 2:14). [Chafer]

There are those who either treat the prophecies of our time as if they were already accomplished in history, or as if they're never going to be accomplished because they're all allegorical. These teachers also know what they're saying can't be reconciled with Scripture, but they ask you to believe it anyway, trusting in their superior intellect or advanced education instead of your own common sense. They take passages that can be clearly understood just as they're written by anyone with an average intellect and make them hopelessly confusing by violating the rules of context, redefining terms, and making that which is real into something symbolic.

(D) Hypocritical lies (4:2a)

(E) Seared consciences (4:2b)

2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars **seared** in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

2 and the hypocrisy of liars, whose consciences have been burned by a hot iron.

- 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
- "...seared" - cauterized
 - These apostates had developed cauterized consciences by refusing to respond to the truth that they knew. They now called the truth "lies."
 - The false teachers are liars; they deliberately deceive, because they have managed to dull their consciences due to their constant habit of deceit. They do not believe their own ideology, but propagate it from the lowest motives.
 - An apostate is not just wrong doctrinally; he is wrong morally
 - His personal life became wrong before his doctrines were changed. *Believing* and *behaving* always go together.

It comes as a shock to some people that Satan uses professed Christians *in the Church* to accomplish his work. But Satan once used Peter to try to lead Jesus on a wrong path (Matt 16:21-23), and he used Ananias and Sapphira to try to deceive the Church at Jerusalem (Acts 5). Paul warned that false teachers would arise *from within the Church* (Acts 20:30).

(F) Rejection of the institution of marriage (4:3a)

(G) Ascetic diet (4:3b-5)

- 3 who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.
- 3 *men* who forbid marriage *and advocate* abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth.
- 3 They will try to stop people from marrying and from eating certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.
- 3 Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.
- "Forbidding to marry" and "commanding to abstain from meats" are both contrary to Scripture
 - Beware of any religious teaching that tampers with God's institution of marriage
 - Marriage is the means by which God reveals His most intimate truths: Adam and Eve; Ruth and Boaz; Christ and His Bride (Eph 5:22ff, et al)

- 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;
- 4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;
- 4 For everything God created is good, and nothing should be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,

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

- Everything God created is good (Cf. Gen 1:31)

- We can abuse God's good gifts (fornication, gluttony), but marriage and food are essentially good and we should enjoy them, with thankfulness to God for giving them.

- Gratitude to God is the only condition connected with their use

- This verse does not say that everything is good for us (poison, pornography)—only that all things that God has created are essentially good

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

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

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

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

- When we thank God for His good gifts—and do not treat them as our rights—we remember they come from Him, and consequently we treat them as set apart ("sanctified") for our benefit.

- "...prayer" - *enteusis*, petition (Cf. 2:1); here, refers to a generic term for prayer, and clearly refers to thanksgiving

- Paul certainly sanctions the Christian practice of grace before meals, but the scope of the passage is much wider than just that

- All foods are clean, says...

- Jesus (Mark 7:14-23)
- Peter (Acts 10:9-15)
- Paul (1 Cor 10:23-33; Rom 14:1-12; Col 2:16-17)

The teaching of the apostates that Paul warned Timothy and the Ephesians to watch out for was *asceticism* (Cf. Col 2:20-23). Asceticism is the idea that abstinence from physical things is essential for spiritual purity. Specifically, these teachers forbade marriage and the eating of some foods. Paul reminded his readers that God created marriage and food for us to enjoy.

(2) Responsibility of Timothy in the midst of the apostasy (4:6-16)

(A) Be nourished in doctrine (4:6)

6 In pointing out these things to the brothers *and sisters*, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, ***constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine*** which you have been following.

6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, *constantly* nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have

been following.

6 If you continue to point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good servant of the Messiah Jesus, nourished by the words of the faith and the healthy teaching that you have followed closely.

6 If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

- The first "basic" Paul gave to Timothy was that he should "point out" (a very mild approach) the truth about God's good gifts (v3-5)

- To be a "good minister" of Jesus Christ, one must pass along the truth God has revealed without distortion. To be such a person, one must continually nourish himself on the truths of the faith contained in Scripture and continue in sound teaching.

- Sometimes ministers are so busy finding food for their people that they fail to feed themselves

- "...nourished on the words of the faith and of the good doctrine" - the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27)

- Instrument flight example: *crosscheck* all six basic flight instruments; never fixate on any one or two!

- Every Christian ought to feed daily on the Word (Matt 4:4; 1 Peter 2:2; Jer 15:16) and avoid "one verse" theology

(B) 12 imperatives (4:7-16)

(a) Refuse fables (4:7a)

(b) Discipline yourself in godliness (4:7b-10)

7 But stay away from worthless stories that are typical of old women. Rather, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

7 Do not have anything to do with godless myths and fables of old women. Instead, train yourself to be godly.

7 But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

- Timothy should not become embroiled in refuting the "fables" of these false teachers, which have certain appeals, but only as curiosities. These fables were godless and worthless.

- Instead, he should train himself in godliness. This requires rigorous self-discipline, similar to that of an athlete.

8 for bodily training is *just slightly beneficial*, but godliness is beneficial for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and *also* for the *life* to come.

8 Physical exercise is of limited value, but Godliness is very dear, a pledge of life, both there and here.

8 For bodily exercise profits little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

- Timothy should direct his discipline at the development of spiritual, rather than physical, strength (1 Cor 9:24-27)

- Physical self-discipline has very little value compared with spiritual self-discipline ("godliness"), that results in both present and future improvements

- "...slightly beneficial" - for a little while

- The great purpose of life: the shaping of character and conduct by truth

- The Christian is to be as devoted to godliness as the athlete is to his sport

9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

9 This is a trustworthy saying that deserves complete acceptance.

9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.

- The "faithful saying" refers to v8

10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all mankind, especially of believers.

10 For it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers.

10 To this end we work hard and struggle, because we have set our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all people, that is, of those who believe.

10 For therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

- It is for "godliness" (v8) that the believer should labor, strive and discipline themselves for (Cf. 2 Peter 1:1-11)

- The incentive for this striving is that we look forward to a genuine "hope" beyond this life

- This is a strong verse against the idea of limited atonement. Calvinists argue that Jesus' atonement was limited to believers or those who would believe, not unbelievers.

- This verse separates Jesus as Savior for "all men" as well as "believers," countering the idea of limited atonement (Cf. 2 Peter 2:1; 1 John 2:2)

(c) Prescribe these things (4:11a)

(d) Teach these things (4:11b)

11 Prescribe and teach these things.

11 Prescribe and teach these things.

11 These are the things you must insist on and teach.

11 These things command and teach.

- "Prescribe...teach" - these verbs are present tense in Greek, suggesting continuing action

— Evidently Timothy needed some prodding to make him more assertive

(e) Let no man despise your youth (4:12a)

(f) Be an example (4:12b)

12 Let no one look down on your **youthfulness**, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith, *and* **purity**, show yourself an example of those who believe.

12 Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but *rather* in speech, conduct, love, faith *and* purity, show yourself an example of those who believe.

12 Do not let anyone look down on you because you are young, but be an example for other believers in your speech, behavior, love, faithfulness, and purity.

12 Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

- "...youthfulness" - a term applied to a person under 40

— As a comparatively young man, Timothy may have felt reluctant to instruct the elders in the Ephesian congregation, who were probably older than him

- Paul promised that no one in the church would discredit his teaching ministry if he backed it up with a godly lifestyle: in his words ("speech"), as well as by his actions ("conversation"), by his love for people, and his "faith" in God, and by his moral cleanness ("purity")

- "...purity" - includes both sexual purity and integrity of heart

(g) Give attendance to public teaching of Scripture (4:13)

13 Until I come, **give your attention** to the **public reading**, to **exhortation**, *and* **teaching**.

13 Until I come, give attention to the *public reading of Scripture*, to exhortation and teaching.

13 Until I arrive, give your full concentration to the public reading of Scripture, to exhorting, and to teaching.

13 Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

- "...give attention to" - devote yourself to, be absorbed in

- "...*public* reading" - ensure church leaders publicly read Scripture in the meetings of the Church
 - This practice is essential in the corporate worship of God's people (Cf. Ex 24:7; Deut 31:11; 2 Kings 23:2; Neh 8:7-8; Luke 4:16; Acts 15:21; 2 Cor 3:14; 1 Thess 5:27)
- "...exhortation" - encouragement, coupled with the reading of the Word
 - Describes the explanation and application of the text that was read (i.e. the expository sermon; Cf. Acts 18:15)
- "...teaching" - doctrine; the systematic instruction in the doctrines of the faith
 - It may have been a thematic approach to instruction instead of a section by section exposition of a passage

(h) Neglect not your gift (4:14)

14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was granted to you through *words of prophecy* with the laying on of hands by the council of elders.

14 Do not neglect the spiritual gift within you, which was bestowed on you through prophetic utterance with the laying on of hands by the presbytery.

14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy when the elders laid their hands on you.

14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

- Timothy needed further encouragement to keep using the abilities that God had given him to serve the Lord

— Timothy had received ordination for service to God by "the laying on of" Paul's (Cf. 2 Tim 1:6) and some elders' hands

— At Timothy's ordination, a prophet who was present received a revelation from God that Timothy would serve Christ in a particular way

(i) Meditate on these things (4:15a)

(j) Give yourself wholly to these things (4:15b)

15 Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your **progress** will be evident to all.

15 Take pains with these things; be *absorbed* in them, so that your progress will be evident to all.

15 Think on these things. Devote your life to them so that everyone can see your progress.

15 Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

- As Timothy concentrated on these responsibilities (v6-16), his personal progress in godliness would become evident to his fellow saints in Ephesus
- "...progress" - a Greek military term which means "pioneer advance," describing the soldiers who go ahead of the troops, clearing away obstacles, etc., making it possible for others to follow
- No pastor can lead his people where he has not been himself

(k) Take heed of yourself (4:16a)

(l) Continue in these things (4:16b)

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to the teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will **save** both yourself and those who hear you.

16 Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you.

16 Pay close attention to your life and your teaching. Persevere in these things, because if you do so, you will save both yourself and those who listen to you.

16 Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

- In summary, Timothy was to pay close attention to both his personal life ("thyself") and his public ministry ("the doctrine") carefully

— A pastor must keep an eye on himself while he is watching over others

— This is the same warning that Paul gave the Ephesian elders (Acts 20:28)

- "...save" - *sōzō*, not a technical word, although it's often used to describe salvation/justification; it can also mean to deliver, to keep safe, or to preserve. The definition is based on the context in which it is used.

— Timothy would "save" himself from failure and a wasted life (Cf. 2:15; James 1:21), and the salvation of those to whom he ministered from error and regression

Christians do not always remain faithful to the Lord, either in their beliefs or in their behavior. Hymenaeus and Alexander, who were evidently fellow workers with Paul and possibly elders in the Ephesian church, denied truth regarding the resurrection (1:20; 2 Tim 2:17)—and vigorously opposed Paul's teaching (1:20; 2 Tim 4:14). Paul warned Timothy not to wander away from the true teachings of the faith (6:20-21). When cultists come knocking on the door, they want people to adopt their unbiblical views and to abandon their belief in the truths of orthodox Christianity. Paul's warning in 1 Tim 4 is very relevant, much needed, and vital for us to heed as genuine believers.

*When God wants to drill a man
And thrill a man*

*And skill a man,
When God wants to mold a man
To play the noblest part;
When He yearns with all His heart
To create so great and bold a man
That all the world shall be amazed,
Watch His methods, watch His ways!
How He ruthlessly perfects
Whom He royally elects!
How He hammers him and hurts him
And with mighty blows converts him
Into trial shapes of clay which
Only God understands;
While his tortured heart is crying
And he lifts beseeching hands!
How He bends but never breaks
When his good He undertakes;
How He uses whom He chooses
And with every purpose fuses him;
By every act induces him
To try His splendor out—
God knows what He's about!*

—Anonymous