

## 1 Timothy 4:1-9 – “Staying True in Deceptive Times”

What we finished with last time in 1 Timothy was Paul stating that the church is to be the pillar and ground of the truth (3:15). And then the chapter closed with this great early hymn of the church on the life of Christ that revealed the great mystery of godliness. And it's that godliness is a reality for us, not by what we can do or achieve in and of ourselves, but by what Jesus has done for us [Read 1 Tim. 3:16]. Yet there are many at work in the world that try and distort that reality and truth. They will preach that you must do some special thing to attain to any kind of godliness (or God-likeness). You must go to church only on a particular day, you must follow a particular law, you need to abstain from this practice, and the list can go on and on. And the question is, what truth are they listening to? Jesus dealt with the Pharisees and Scribes who tried to attain to a righteousness and godliness through their own works, and Paul had to deal with similar people as well. And as we get into chapter 4, we'll see Paul warning Timothy of such people, and instructing Timothy what to watch for and how to handle these things to ensure we continue on in truth and in godliness.

### Summary Statement:

Paul warns Timothy about false teachings that will arise in the last days and calls him to be a faithful minister of the gospel, emphasizing the importance of sound doctrine and godliness.

### 1. Prediction of Apostasy – 4:1

**4:1 - *Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons,***

Paul writes first of all to detail what latter times are going to look like. And this isn't some wild prediction he pulls out of thin air, this is given to him by **the Spirit**. Whether this was by direct and divine revelation of the Spirit, or through the Word, we're not sure. But what we do know is that what Paul is about to reveal is not just his own thoughts, this is given explicitly by the Holy Spirit.

And what is being revealed is that ***in latter times some will depart from the faith***... Now the question always asked in these things is if a person is saved are they always saved? Can a person depart from the faith if they were truly in the faith? Does a person that reads the Passion translation go to heaven? [Ok, maybe not that last one]. But these are all things that you wonder what is going

on. And here's what I want to remind people – don't depart from the faith. Don't test those waters!

What we need to know is that we need to stay true to the faith, stay true to the Word of God, stay true to Jesus Christ. This hope is an anchor of our soul (Heb 6:19) so we do not drift! I'm convinced that nobody can say in the end days that they're not saved because they just weren't chosen. No, the reason you're not saved is because you did not receive the truth. And when you receive it, stay in it! Don't question it, don't listen to other things that are not in alignment with it. Stay true to the word.

- **Colossians 1:22–23**, *"...to present you holy, and blameless, and above reproach in His sight—<sup>23</sup> if indeed you continue in the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel which you heard, which was preached to every creature under heaven, of which I, Paul, became a minister."*

The Scriptures foretell that there will be a concerted effort on believers to move them away from their faith remaining in Jesus. Scripture warns that in the end days people are going to be deceived and leave the faith.

- **Matthew 24:11–12**, *"Then many false prophets will rise up and deceive many. <sup>12</sup> And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold."*
- **2 Timothy 3:1–3**, *"But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good,"*
- **2 Timothy 4:3**, *"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers;"*
- **2 Peter 3:3–4**, *"knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, <sup>4</sup> and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming?...""*

Now these were things Paul was seeing in his day. When Paul spoke of **latter times** he was referring to the time after Christ's ascension to His second coming. We know that Paul often spoke about the last days referring to a time much closer to Christ's second coming, but the idea is that Paul was expecting to see this apostasy in his day and expected it to only get worse as time progressed.

He warned the elders in Ephesus to be watchful of this:

- **Acts 20:29–30**, *"For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock.<sup>30</sup> Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."*

So there will be an attempt throughout the history of the church to draw people away from the faith, and some will depart (The word “depart” is *aphistēmi* (ἀφίστημι), “to stand off from, to fall away.” Our word “apostatize” is the English spelling of a form of the Greek word. The definite article before the word “faith” marks it out as speaking, not of faith as an act, but of the Faith, that body of doctrine which forms the basis of what we as Christians believe.<sup>1</sup>).

So stand guard.

- Paul says that this is going to be the behaviour of people as we move towards later days. Don't let people who are questioning their faith cause you to question your faith. May it be the reason you have certainty in your faith because they're fulfilling what Scripture has already said.
- We've seen many Christians over the years who once may have even had a ministry and yet have deconstructed. They've begun to question the foundations they were once taught and have departed from it.

And this deception is going to come in ways that you may not expect. It comes through ***deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons***.

People aren't often just sitting around enjoying life with God and then think, *'What am I doing? This feeling of love and forgiveness and hope of eternal life is just incompatible with me. I'm going to move on to a much more sad and hopeless life without God.'*

This isn't something that particularly pops into your head and makes sense. It's deceiving spirits that begin to lead people astray.

The devil is behind this. He wants to take as many people down with him as he can. And he does it very subtly. He presents things with an appearance of truth and spiritually, but it's deceptive to its core.

- In the very beginning he came to Eve in the garden very deceptively:

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<sup>1</sup> Wuest, K. S. (1997). *Wuest's word studies from the Greek New Testament: for the English reader* (Vol. 7, p. 66). Eerdmans.

- **Genesis 3:1–5**, *“Now the serpent was more cunning than any beast of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, ‘Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden’?”* <sup>2</sup> *And the woman said to the serpent, ‘We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden;* <sup>3</sup> *but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, ‘You shall not eat it, nor shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ”* <sup>4</sup> *Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die. <sup>5</sup> For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.’ ”*
- This is where it all began and it continues to this day with that same deceiving spirit. It’s a doctrine of demons.

Many cults today have been formed by a doctrine of demons.

- According to Muslim beliefs, the words of the Quran were dictated to Muhammed by an angel. He was illiterate so these were passed on orally. Muhammad thought he was originally visited by a demon, but that doesn’t sound like a very encouraging way to invite people into a new religion. So they said it was the angel Gabriel. After these messages were passed around orally, they were later written down and the Quran formed after Muhammad’s death – a doctrine of demons.
- Joseph Smith received his message in 1823 by an angel Moroni. This angel revealed that there were golden plates at a certain location that contained a history of an ancient man named Mormon and his fabled ancient Hebrew tribe. These plates claimed to hold a new revelation, a further witness to the truth of the Christian gospel. Joseph Smith was alleged to have received special glasses by which he could read these plates and pass down the teachings of Mormonism – a doctrine of demons.
- **Galatians 1:8**, *“But even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed.”*

## 2. Propagators of Apostasy – 4:2-3

**4:2-3 - *speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, <sup>3</sup> 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.***

And what’s really being warned about is the people that Satan uses to carry out his work. It’s not going to be a clear demonic entity telling you what to do, it’s

going to be people that look spiritual, that seem to be people that love God, but they are **speaking lies in hypocrisy**... Satan is the father of lies. He's crafty. He puts a spin on things that seem to make sense, but it's lies. And he has those who are wolves in sheeps clothing to pass on these lies with a religious wrap that make it sound good, but it's lies. They pass these things on in hypocrisy. They have no intention of doing what they tell others to do. They bring others into bondage and have no desire of putting that burden on themselves.

You may ask, how can people be so ruthless and so deceptive? The answer – they have **their own conscience seared with a hot iron**.

- **Conscience** is the Greek word, *suneidesis*. It literally means 'a knowing with' (sun = 'with', oida = 'to know'). The conscience is a wonderful thing because it's been put there by God to help us distinguish between what is morally good or bad. It commends the good and condemns the bad.
- But these false teachers who are speaking lies in hypocrisy have seared their conscience. The word for **seared** is *kaustēriazō*. It's where we get our word for cauterize. When you cauterize something you are burning it to the point where it is dead. You no longer have feeling there.
- Think of branding a cattle. You put a hot iron on that thing and hold it there, that skin and hair is not growing back. It's been deadened.
- So too, these false teachers have caused their moral compass to be wiped out. Their numb to what is right and wrong.

In Romans 1 it talks about the wrath of God being revealed against all ungodliness because many **suppress the truth** in unrighteousness (Rom 1:18). They're holding it down and searing that conscience.

- We have to be careful because we can easily ignore our conscience and keep pushing it down when we have those warning lights going off that we're wading into waters that are not morally good. Don't ignore it, because eventually you could end up searing it where there're no recovery.
- Illustration: A man was brought to the police station to describe the suspect for a police sketch, but he was hesitant because he was actually the perpetrator. His conscience however urged him to tell the truth. It was probably his most self-defining moment.

So here's what these false teachers were up to, some of these deceiving doctrines of demons are being exposed. These false teachers were telling people

that it was wrong to be married. Singleness equals holiness. This is where the clubs, 'bachelor to the rapture' and 'maiden to the marriage of the Lamb' began. They would also command that you had to abstain from certain foods. Eating meat is wrong. Veganism is next to godliness!

And the problem with all this is that they were trying to look spiritual by what they were restricting, but it was all an external show of self-righteousness. These false teachers were hypocrites. They acted the part, but that's not who they really were. Again, God wants our heart. He doesn't want a show of religious works. No amount of adherence to rules will earn our salvation.

- "Rules elevate human achievement and devalue the goodness of God. There is only one way to restore and maintain relationship with the holy God—trust in his Son, Jesus Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Again, marriage is given of God. It's a blessing to be celebrated. But singleness can also be a gift. There's nothing wrong with going on a diet and restricting yourself of certain foods, but these things must never become the criteria for receiving God's approval.

Many have tried to live a life of self-denial to bring themselves into a deeper relationship with Jesus. But this isn't accomplished by denying ourselves of things that God blesses.

Monasticism became very popular for this reason.

A young monk arrives at the monastery. He is assigned to helping the other monks in copying the old canons and laws of the church by hand. He notices, however, that all of the monks are copying from copies, not from the original manuscript. So, the new monk goes to the head abbot to question this, pointing out that if someone made even a small error in the first copy, it would never be picked up! In fact, that error would be continued in all of the subsequent copies.

The head monk, says, 'We have been copying from the copies for centuries, but you make a good point, my son.'

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<sup>2</sup> Larson, K. (2000). *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon* (Vol. 9, p. 204). Broadman & Holman Publishers.

He goes down into the dark caves underneath the monastery where the original manuscripts are held as archives in a locked vault that hasn't been opened for hundreds of years. Hours go by and nobody sees the old abbot. So, the young monk gets worried and goes down to look for him. He sees him banging his head against the wall and wailing,

'We missed the **R**! We missed the **R**! We missed the **R**!'

His forehead is all bloody and bruised and he is crying uncontrollably. The young monk asks the old abbot, 'What's wrong, father?'

With a choking voice, the old abbot replies, 'The word was...

CELEBR**R**ATE !!! '

You see, a person can cut themselves off from every vice in the world, but can still deal with lust or pride in their heart.

- True righteousness is only fulfilled by Christ; our job is to abide in Him.

### 3. Problems with Apostasy – 4:4-5

**4:4-5 - *For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.***

What a great verse! God has given us much – so have at it. And receive it with thanksgiving.

Now I'm sure there's some limits here somewhere. I'm not sure because you pray over the 3 Big Macs you're about to pound down with a supersize coke is something to receive with thanksgiving. I'm not sure if any prayer is going to help. That may be the one time God says, you've gotta give me something to work with here.

The idea here in these verses is that what God has declared good is to be enjoyed by us. We have instructions in His Word of what that is and we acknowledge it through prayer.

Paul moves from warning us about what to watch out for... to calling us into what to work toward.

#### 4. Prescription Against Apostasy – 4:6-9

**4:6 - *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.***

Timothy's role was to certainly expose error, but more so, to teach truth. To instruct meant 'to lay down, or put in remembrance'. Timothy had to keep laying out what was right and true so that people would know the error of those attempting to distort the truth. He had to constantly remind the church of what was right and true.

Now if Timothy was going to be sharing the truth with people, he better know the truth then right?

- Ever had a salesperson try to sell you something they have no idea about? (eg. me selling paint at Sears)

So Paul says: ***nourished in the words of faith and the good doctrine***. Sharing the Word of God is nourishing, but to effectively teach it as well would require Timothy to be feeding on it daily himself. It's not enough to just teach it, he needs to be in it and getting strengthened by it.

There's going to be no Biblical wisdom, teaching or instruction that will flow from your life if you yourself are not in the word.

As this happens, we will be clearly living it out. This is being a good minister!

**4:7 - *But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.***

There are a lot of things that we can get distracted by. We are in no shortage of fables, conspiracies, A.I. generated stories, impending alien exposure. We have so many things bombarding us that may seem interesting, but Paul tells Timothy to reject these things so that you can focus on what is really important – exercise!

But notice, it's exercise ***toward godliness***. We can gravitate to so many things that may be interesting but have no profit in moving us toward godliness.

**exercise** = *gumnazo* [γυμνάζω] to exercise vigorously – either body or mind.

There is a lot of things that we can put our body and mind to, but is godliness one of those things? Paul is saying to train yourself in these things, work for it.

- I'm not sure if there are many people here who enjoy exercising. I mean the actual pushing of your body and muscles to extremes not meant to be done by anyone in their right mind. I'm sure there are not many who enjoy exercising. But what is it we enjoy? The results!!!!!!

Exercising oneself to godliness may at times feel like a cumbersome painful experience. But it's the results we get pumped over.

As we exercise in this manner we begin to see the things that once got under our skin, the things that once fed the flesh, no longer have as great an effect on us.

People may wonder, *'What's happened to you? Why aren't you getting so angry at the person that cut you off?'* Or, *'Why are you so much more helpful than you used to be?'*

Our response can be: *'Aah, I've been working out! I'm getting buffed up in the Word and in prayer – I'm becoming more like Christ!'*

The journey may at times feel excruciating, but the end result is glorious!

**4:8-9 - *For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. <sup>9</sup> This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance.***

Now there is some good that can come from this. But it profits just a little in comparison to the gain we receive when we exercise ourselves to godliness.

You see, you can have a person that is an exercise freak and they may have a body that is as fit as you can get, but unless they have their lives anchored to Christ, that body and soul is perishing. Physical exercise is good, but it's only good for a while, whereas godly exercise lasts for all eternity!

#### Points to Ponder:

1. Am I anchored solidly in the faith? Have I allowed drift to occur where I'm not where I once was?
2. Am I rejecting distractions that don't produce godliness? What's filling my time, mind, and attention?
3. Am I actively training for godliness? Spiritual growth is not accidental, it's intentional.