

Abounding Grace Christian Church

A Study of Paul's First Letter to Timothy – Part 10

I. Exposition of Chapter Four.

A. Verse 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. “Now the Spirit expressly says...” – Paul is sensing strongly from the Holy Spirit the things he’s about to write. The New Living Translation: “*Now the Holy Spirit tells us clearly...*”. Dr. Bob Utley writes; “This may refer to (1) OT prophecy; (2) Paul as the recipient of direct inspiration from the Spirit (cf. Acts 20:33); or (3) inspired messages from other gifted leaders (cf. Acts 21:11).”¹

2. “...that in latter times some will depart from the faith...”

a. “...latter times...” – This is understood as being synonymous with the phrase, “last days.” According to the Bible, the “latter times” or “last days” are the time period between the first coming and the second coming of Christ. (cf. Acts 2:14-21). Martin Manser confirms this:

“The final epoch of history which is marked by the coming of the Messiah and the establishment of God’s kingdom. In the NT it is portrayed as the period between Jesus Christ’s first coming and the consummation of all things at his return, and is marked by godlessness and the persecution of God’s people.”²

b. “...some will depart from the faith...” – Remember in chapter 3, the Apostle Paul refers to the church as “...the pillar and ground of truth...” (v. 15), and then proceeds to tell of some of the great truths of the Gospel (v. 16). Now, Paul is warning, however, that there is going to be some who will “depart from the faith”, or depart from the truth of the Gospel. The word “depart” means; “to abandon a former relationship or association, or to dissociate —‘to fall away, to forsake, to turn away.’”³ Even though there are some who believe in the doctrine, “once saved, always saved”, the Bible makes it very clear that this is not necessarily the case. Cf. Hebrews 3:7-14; Hebrews 6:4-6; II Peter 2:18-21.

3. “...giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.” – The words “giving heed” are one word in the Greek and mean; “to hold the mind towards, i.e. pay attention to, be cautious about, apply oneself to, adhere to:”⁴ So, the thing that precedes the departing from the faith is a person begins to pay attention to, listen and embrace “...deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.”

a. “...deceiving spirits...” – This shows forth the fact that there is a very real spiritual warfare that is occurring in our world. Jesus dealt with “unclean spirits” (e.g. Matthew 10:1; Mark 1:23-27), Philip cast them out (Acts 8:4-8) and Paul cast out a “spirit of divination” (Acts 16:16-18). Believers are told they will cast out demons (Mark 16:17) and we are told that we don’t wrestle with flesh and blood but with wicked spiritual forces (Ephesians 6:12). In this case, the spirits referred to are called “deceiving”, which means; “misleading, leading into error.” So, people who depart from the faith are those who are deceived, or led into error, by false teachers being used of Satan. What is the remedy for deception? We must be lovers of the truth of God’s Word. (cf. II Thessalonians 2:9-10).

b. “...doctrines of demons.” – What are “doctrines”? This word simply means, “teaching” or “instruction.” Paul is saying that demons have teaching which would, obviously, be contrary to the teaching of Gospel. Warren Wiersbe writes:

“This is the only place where demons are mentioned in the Pastoral Epistles. Just as there is a ‘mystery of godliness’ concerning Christ (1 Tim. 3:16), so there is a ‘mystery of iniquity’ that surrounds Satan and his work (2 Thes. 2:7). Satan is an imitator (2 Cor. 11:13–15); he has his own ministers and doctrines, and seeks to deceive God’s people and lead them astray (2 Cor. 11:3). The first test of any religious doctrine is what it says about Jesus Christ(1 John 4:1–6).”⁵

B. Verse 2 – “...speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron,” – “Hypocrisy” is defined as; “to give an impression of having certain purposes or motivations, while in reality having quite different ones—‘to pretend’”⁶ To have one’s “...conscience seared with a hot iron” means ‘to refuse to listen to one’s conscience, to be completely insensitive to.’⁷ Another meaning is “cauterized.” The Complete Biblical Library adds some interesting thoughts:

¹ Robert James Utley, *Paul's Fourth Missionary Journey: I Timothy, Titus, II Timothy*, vol. Volume 9, Study Guide Commentary Series (Marshall, Texas: Bible Lessons International, 2000), 54.

² Martin H. Manser, *Dictionary of Bible Themes: The Accessible and Comprehensive Tool for Topical Studies* (London: Martin Manser, 2009).

³ Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 448.

⁴ James Strong, *A Concise Dictionary of the Words in the Greek Testament and The Hebrew Bible* (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2009), 61.

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 224.

⁶ Louw and Nida, 765.

⁷ Ibid., 332.

“The human agents of these demons are found ‘speaking lies in hypocrisy.’ False teachers were foretold by Jesus (see Matthew 24:11; Mark 13:22). These hypocritical liars mentioned by Paul were probably early Gnostics who taught that *spirit* is altogether good and *matter* is totally evil. The word ‘seared’ is the root for the word cauterize. ‘Conscience’ is another important word in this first letter to Timothy; this is the fourth time it has appeared: 1:5, 19; 3:9; 4:2. The idea of a seared conscience may mean their consciences have been branded with a hot iron to indicate ownership by Satan.”⁸

C. Verses 3-5 – “...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. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”

1. **“...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods...”** – Now Paul begins to mention some of the **“doctrines of demons”** which were being propagated by the false teachers of that day. This certainly doesn’t mean that these are the only false doctrines being taught, then or now. Scholars differ as to what these two things are referring to. Dr. Norman Geisler writes:

“The apostasy of 1 Timothy 4:1–3 is a particular kind of apostasy related to Gnostic dualism. This school of thought said spirit is good and matter is evil. Apparently, there were some false teachers who believed that all appetites relating to the (material) body—including sex and food—were evil and should be avoided. Hence these false teachers forbade people to get married and ordered them to abstain from certain foods.”⁹

Dr. Craig Keener offers a slightly different view:

“Asceticism was on the rise in Greco-Roman paganism, and although most teachers (both Jewish and *Gentile*) advocated marriage, the value of celibacy was becoming more popular (especially among *Gentiles*, but some Essenes also seem to have practiced it). ‘Abstaining from foods’ probably refers to Jewish food laws”¹⁰

2. **“...foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. For every creature of God *is* good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”** This particularly was applicable for those who were attempting to impose Jewish food laws onto the new believers. As we saw in the beginning of this letter, some of the false teaching did have to do with mixing in Jewish law (cf. 1:7). The need for the giving of thanks for one’s food is emphasized twice here. (See also Genesis 1:31; 9:3 and Romans 14:6).

“They will say it is wrong to be married and wrong to eat certain foods. But God created those foods to be eaten with thanks by faithful people who know the truth. Since everything God created is good, we should not reject any of it but receive it with thanks. For we know it is made acceptable by the word of God and prayer.” – 1 Timothy 4:3-5 – NLT

D. Verse 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.” – Paul exhorts Timothy to **“...instruct the brethren in these things...”** regarding what is, and isn’t good doctrine. If he does, he will be a **“...good minister of Jesus Christ...”** – The word **“minister”** is better translated as the word **“servant”**. So, for Timothy to be a good servant of Jesus Christ, he needs to teach the believers about the false doctrines that were being promoted and, instead, teach good doctrine. Being **“...nourished in the words of faith...”** refers to Timothy. The New English Bible helps in understanding:

“By pointing out such things to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, having nourished yourself on the words of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.” – 1 Timothy 4:6 – NET

E. Verse 7 – “But reject profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness.”

1. The word **“profane”** means; **“pertaining to being profane in the sense of worldly or godless”¹¹**

2. **“...old wives’ fables...”** – **“silly myths...stories old women told to children.”¹²**

“These are, of course, the false teachings and traditions of the apostates. These doctrines have no basis in Scripture; in fact, they contradict the Word of God. They are the kind of teachings that silly people would discuss, not dedicated men and women of the Word! No doubt these teachings involved the false doctrines just named (1 Tim. 4:2–3). Paul also warned Titus about ‘Jewish fables’ (Titus 1:14). Paul warned Timothy about these same ‘fables’ in his second letter (2 Tim. 4:4).”¹³

⁸ *The Complete Biblical Library: Acts – Revelation, Volume 2*, (Empowered Life, Tulsa, OK, 2016), 893.

⁹ Norman L. Geisler and Ron Rhodes, *When Cultists Ask: A Popular Handbook on Cultic Misinterpretations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1997), 275.

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament*. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 614.

¹¹ Louw and Nida, 754.

¹² *The Complete Biblical Library: Acts – Revelation, Volume 2*, 894.

¹³ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Bible Exposition Commentary*, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996), 226.