

1 TIMOTHY

December 11, 2022

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.¹

“This is the Word of God” – “Thanks be to God.”

On September 12, 1962 President John F. Kennedy was giving a speech at Rice University in Houston, Texas. The official title of the speech was “Address at Rice University on the Nation’s Space Effort” but it is remembered mostly by one statement that President Kennedy made.

We choose to go to the Moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard.

That statement echoed a speech he had given to a joint session of congress in May 1961, but it was this version in Houston that is mostly remembered. With that statement in the closing paragraph of his Houston speech Kennedy identified the goal line in the space race between the United States and the Soviet Union.

NASA, the four-year-old agency founded under Kennedy’s predecessor that had been running in second place to the Soviet Union after Sputnik, Laika the dog, and cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin made history. While America celebrated our Mercury astronauts and Shepard, Grissom, and

¹ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:1–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

Glenn had become national heroes...the reality was that the Soviets were winning the space race.

Then Kennedy made the speech at Rice and suddenly the race kicked into high gear. The crowds cheered. The news led with the story. America had a goal and the moon was it. We would put a man on the moon before the end of 1969...in just seven years.

Well...almost everyone cheered. The scientists and mathematicians at NASA realized at that moment that their work had just exponentially increased.

You see, developing the math with 1960s computers that would rightly send a tiny capsule with three men inside from a huge spinning ball through the vacuum of space to a smaller ball that was orbiting the big ball becomes the nightmare of story math problems. Do you remember those from school? The problem is that if you get the math wrong on this problem you don't just get marked off on the test, but you put three men's lives in danger.

People like Stanley Schmidt, Rudy Kalman, along with numerous math geniuses and now thanks to the film "Hidden Figures" we know the women Katherine Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, Mary Jackson, and Christine Darden (called hidden due to the ungodly segregation laws and racial division of the time) were essential to getting the math correct.

What does this have to do with 1 Timothy?

A too long introduction to a quick point. If the math was just off a little bit, what we may say an insignificant bit, a .000000001 portion, it would not seem like a big deal at Cape Canaveral when the rockets were launched. But...it would soon become a big deal as the drift from where the rocket was supposed to go verses where it actually went would become very clear, and potentially deadly.

Paul, the apostle, is mentoring, instructing, teaching, and encouraging his young pastor Timothy in this letter. What is written here no doubt echoes what the Spirit had been giving Paul to say for the years prior. It is likely that Timothy had heard much of this prior to reading the letter, but to have this arrive at such a dire time within the early church's history was just what was needed.

The declaration of the gospel in hymn form as Paul gave in the close of chapter 3 would be that statement to the pastor "Don't forget. This is what we're all about." In other words – this is the goalpost. This is the goal. This is the truth. It is not changing.

1 Timothy 3:5

**He was manifested in the flesh,
vindicated by the Spirit,
seen by angels,
proclaimed among the nations,
believed on in the world,
taken up in glory.²**

The good news in a verse. The incarnation, sin manifested in his body...thus the proclamation of truth, the crucifixion of the sin of the world upon him, vindication by the Spirit, resurrection, and ascension of Christ declared – the truth.

Timothy was charged, just as I am charged, just as you are charged...to get this right. To stay the course. To do the hard work here because it must be done. To check and double-check the teachings. To stop presuming that everything is okay because it seems to be.

I was talking with a pastor friend earlier this week about a newer church (one that was planted in the past eight years) and how the church has grown in attendance. We love this pastor of this church, but the growth

² [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 3:16). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

came quickly and he's a relatively young guy. His church was initially Southern Baptist, but they have shifted to non-denominational primarily due to disagreements with the Baptist Faith & Message, our statement of faith. That's fine, and not the point. Here's the point. This brother was sharing that he met with the pastor of this young church shortly after they launched. The church was running hundreds almost immediately, so it was pretty amazing. The questions came regarding the shift from our doctrinal statement and the young pastor responded, "We are growing, so we must be doing this right."

And while with pious hindsight outside that situation we may cringe, the truth is that in the church model that is prevalent in our nation and throughout the west, if not throughout history, that statement would be echoed by many.

Now, living organisms grow and the church is a living organism, not just a gathered organization. Thus, growth is good and reaching more people is great and filling the building is amazing, and all that may be good and righteous and spot on. But...that does not necessarily mean that things are being done right. When I say right, I mean biblically and gospel-centered.

It matters how you view things like this. It matters immensely. Seeing life with a culturally defined lenses may actually create a sense of life, but lead to death.

Paul addresses an interesting reality that the church in Ephesus and Pastor Timothy were facing. There were those within the church who were likable, friendly, maybe even family, but were just a bit off when it came to doctrinal integrity. Paul already had addressed the men in the church that were falsely leading some members into a piety through teachings that were ungodly. Those men were to be put out of the church. This group was also creating division.

There is much going on here in this passage but I will attempt to summarize it and help us see how it impacts the church today.

LATTER-DAY DEPARTURE

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons³

The Spirit says...God has said and is saying. We could say the same today but by using the phrase “Scripture says” because the Word of God is his gift to us – immutable and inerrant and the words of the Spirit.

God the Spirit says that in later times...in latter days.

When are these latter days?

That phrase “latter-days” suggests the American-birther cultic religion known as Mormonism, or Latter-day Saints. Just that title fits nicely into the description in verse one, but Paul was not referencing Joseph Smith’s creation at that time.

The later times or latter days would be the days following the ascension of Christ into heaven until the time of his second coming or glorious appearing. So, Paul and Timothy were living in the later times. We are living in the later times. These are the days between the big days. Thus, we face what they faced.

In these days of the church, the age of the church, there will be some within the church gathering who will depart from the faith.

Christian Deconstructionism has become a trending term in America describing those who grew up in church, were in church youth groups at some point in the last thirty years but have since “seen the light” and are

³ [The Holy Bible: English Standard Version](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:1). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

de-churching themselves from what they describe as toxic patriarchal, intolerant, narrow-minded, religious mind-control. It is causing a bit of consternation among church-going families in many places (even here.)

Yet, it is not new.

It is just renamed and modernized.

“Some will depart from the faith” has been true for two-thousand years.

I don't like it. You don't have to like it. But, it is real. So, don't be surprised by that which has been going on for centuries.

LYING DECEIVERS

When Paul says that those who are leaving are devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, we are suddenly thrown into a totally different mindset.

Demons? We know the beings are real. Scripture speaks of them. For those who grew up during the Satanic Scare of the 1970s and 1980s have thoughts that bubble to the top. Pop culture embraced the dark side of spirituality and churches, and youth groups and pastors began ramping up their anti-demon messages. Some went to some interesting extremes. Does backward-masking ring a bell for anyone? Airbrushed ice cubes in liquor ads? Goat head hand-signs? Pentagrams? Knights In Satan's Service? Stevie Nicks? Led Zeppelin? Hotel California? And more?

Marketers loved it. But many Christians were suddenly looking for demons in everything. I'm not saying that there is not demonic influence throughout the world – the Bible states that. But if there are more church members who know the latest devil rumors about the latest pop-culture icon than they know verses of scripture...the deceiver has won.

In the case of Ephesus, the teachings that were demonic and deceitful...sounded like Scripture. They sounded like God's words.

Why? Because false teachers do not stand up in church and state “I am a deceitful, demon-led, influencer seeking to destroy God’s church.” No, in most cases they may not even know that is a reality, but some seek to cleanse the church by ungodly means, using distorted verses (even Satan used scripture in his temptation of Christ,) and an evil justification for false holiness that does nothing but elevate themselves and minimize Christ.

It is the opposite of John the Baptist’s statement where he said “I must decrease. He (Jesus) must increase.”

Be wary of churches or religious organizations where the leader is more widely promoted than the only One worthy of worship.

LEGALISTIC DUALISM

So, what were these deceivers teaching? In the culture of the day, dualism was prominent. We don’t use that word much today, but the gnostics of the era were known for this. The Greek philosophers of history taught this. There is a bit of truth to the fact that there are two separate realities – the physical and the spiritual. Plato even stated this.

We are still impacted by this.

The concept of dualism assumes there are two separate entities – good and evil – which are equally powerful. In what has been termed “Christian dualism” God represents the good and Satan the evil. The

This belief is not new. It is also not Christian. You will see a version of such in Buddhism, in New Age philosophies, in Star Wars...and as Timothy discovered...in the church.

Those Timothy were facing were believers in ascetism. That group was focused on self-denial (which is a biblical tenet.) Yet, as Paul states, they had “seared consciences.”

Their sensitivity to the Spirit had been cauterized. They were listening to liars and could not, would not hear the voice of God.

The ESV study bible says that these people “were desensitized and rendered ineffective by their rebellion to the gospel.”

That which Paul stated at the end of chapter 3 would not prick the hearts of the ascetic ones in the church. The dualists who believed that everything physical was evil. That was where they landed. Pleasure was bad. Passion was evil. Romance was ungodly. They taught this and while extra-marital sexual relations make the marriage bed impure, these people went so far as to say that even marriage was wrong because it could lead to passion between husband and wife.

Self-denial in the extreme.

They also had reinstated dietary laws that ignored God’s word to Peter. Religious veganism was instituted by those seeking personal piety.

From the outside looking in, these monastic, celibate, vegan men and women would seem set apart, righteous, special, and maybe even holy.

But Paul said they were faithless, deceitful, and evil.

Likely even Timothy was being influenced a bit by their beliefs. We know many of the church fathers and early Christians slid into extreme self-denial that went beyond marital purity (which is good) and fasting at times (which is right) and self-denial (as Luke described it) to an extreme, man-made, God-abandoning level of self-love through the most absurd means.

WHY IS IT WRONG?

It is sinful to call that which God says is good to be evil.

Simple.

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.⁴

But how do you know what God has said? You see how that biblical lens is needed? Now more than ever. God has spoken. He is truth. His word is true. He is not seeking our approval. He is seeking our devotion and worship, in spirit and in truth.

In a world of so much confusion, we must get this right. You see, just to be off a few degrees may not seem like much...but eventually it is deadly.

Thanks be to God for his truth.

⁴ [*The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*](#). (2016). (1 Ti 4:4–5). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.