

1 TIMOTHY

4

1 Timothy 4:1-7

4:1 *The Spirit says clearly that in later times some believers will desert the Christian faith. They will follow spirits that deceive, and they will believe the teachings of demons.*

The previous chapter closed with Paul's affirmation that the church is "the pillar and foundation of the truth," followed by his recitation of an early creed which spoke of the church's relationship with Jesus Christ, the One Who was Himself the Truth. Unfortunately, some people turned away from this irrevocable statement of the Christian faith. This was an occurrence that should not surprise those who had been redeemed by the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit.

This was the testimony of the Holy Spirit Himself. He had warned about people, who, although professing faith in Christ, had not really been redeemed. Just because someone professes belief in Christ does not mean that person is actually redeemed. That accounts for the wide disparity of behaviors among the people of the church community. The apostle John's letter shows great concern for those who do not really belong to the household of faith: "They left

us. However, they were never really part of us. If they had been, they would have stayed with us. But by leaving they made it clear that none of them were part of us” (1 John 2:19).

Such people were easily misled by those “spirits that deceive.” These self-proclaimed teachers pollute the purity of the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith, appearing to be righteous, but failing the test of doctrinal truth. They spoke the same language as the redeemed church, but the words they spoke meant something entirely different that opposed the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Jesus Himself told His disciples that such a display of faithlessness among the people of faith was to be expected: “False messiahs and false prophets will appear. They will work spectacular, miraculous signs and do wonderful things to deceive, if possible, even those whom God has chosen” (Matthew 24:23-24).

Those that turn away from the faith are hopelessly gullible people, misled by false teachers who deliberately teach doctrine that comes from demons. They are the instruments of the diabolical heresy imposed on the human race by Satan himself. Jesus taught His disciples this hard truth: “You come from your father, the devil, and you desire to do what your father wants you to do. The devil was a murderer from the beginning. He has never been truthful. He doesn’t know what the truth is. Whenever he tells a lie, he’s doing what comes naturally to him. He’s a liar and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

This event will unfold during the latter days, a term that early Christians construed as the current times in which they lived. In this passage, Paul spoke of this prophecy and quickly moved to the present tense, signifying that this time was already upon them even as he wrote this letter. Paul concludes by telling Timothy to avoid these people, again showing that Paul was already engaged in the battle for God’s truth with these kinds of people.

4:2 *These people will speak lies disguised as truth. Their consciences have been scarred as if branded by a red-hot iron.*

These people, the ones who deceive others with doctrine derived from diabolical resources, fool people because the lies they speak do so as though it were God's truth. Religious language can be very deceptive. People can use religious sounding language to espouse a doctrine that distorts the truth of Christ's gospel. Nevertheless, their doctrine cannot stand the test of the sound doctrine outlined in the creed that Paul outlined at the close of the last chapter. They appear as messengers of light, but are in reality the proponents of Satan's darkest deception.

These deceivers proudly proclaim their false distortions of the truth, basking in the adoration of those they have deceived. Even though Paul spoke in his letter to the Romans that God had given men a conscience to help them understand the verities of God's glory, these men had come to the point that their consciences had no impact on their behavior (Romans 2:14-15). It was as if their consciences had been cauterized by a hot branding iron. By constantly arguing with their conscience, stifling its warnings, and muffling its bell, they at last have reached the point where conscience no longer bothers them.¹

4:3 *They will try to stop others from getting married and from eating certain foods. God created food to be received with prayers of thanks by those who believe and know the truth.*

As Paul instructed Timothy about true doctrine, his opponents who were the harbingers of demon-initiated doctrine, and the reasons for that heresy, he now outlined some of the doctrinal teachings that had distorted the purity of the gospel.

Two of the false doctrines that these deceivers advocated was the denial to marriage and the consumption of certain foods. When these principles are promoted, Paul is saying that there is reason to raise a question about the biblical integrity of the teacher.

There are two reasons why this teaching is false. First, they are factually wrong. The Scriptures never demanded that people refrain from marriage or certain foods in order show their religious devotion.

The truth is that the Bible teaches precisely the opposite. From the beginning of creation, God advocated the union of the male and female, both for procreation and for companionship (Genesis 2:23-24). Jesus, the author of creation, affirmed this fundamental aspect of the natural order when He came to earth and taught His disciples (Matthew 19:5-6).

Second, these demon-inspired teachers are making rules that must be followed in order to show piety. They are establishing a legalistic system of works that supposedly show that a person really is profoundly religious. This also defies everything that the Scriptures teach. Jesus told the Samaritan woman: “23Indeed, the time is coming, and it is now here, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth. The Father is looking for people like that to worship him” (John 4:23). Following the leading of the Spirit and the instructions of his Lord, Paul taught how the Holy Spirit was the source that sets people free from such man-made restrictions: “God's kingdom does not consist of what a person eats or drinks. Rather, God's kingdom consists of God's approval and peace, as well as the joy that the Holy Spirit gives” (Romans 14:17).

The Reformation Bible teacher, John Calvin asked, “Is faith completely overturned on account of the prohibition of marriage, or of certain kinds of food? We must consider a more important reason. Men pervert and invent at their pleasure the worship of God, assuming dominion over their consciences. They then dare to forbid the use of good things which the Lord has permitted. As soon as the purity of the worship of God is impaired, there no longer remains anything perfect or sound, and faith itself is utterly ruined.²

4:4-5 *⁴Everything God created is good. Nothing should be rejected if it is received with prayers of thanks. ⁵The word of God and prayer set it apart as holy.*

Not only are such false doctrines erroneous, they deny the most basic element of God's creation. God does nothing bad. What the inestimable, unknowable God created was fundamentally the expression

of His abundant goodness. Thus, all of God's creation is good. No matter what man may say or think, God Himself states that His creation is good: "And God saw everything that he had made and that it was very good" (Genesis 1:26-31).

How dare man override what the Creator has said is good? Man sins against his Creator when he dares to tell people that they should refrain from those things that God has said are good. Man shows the stupidity of his rebellion when he dares to tell God that there are things that He has made that are not good.

There should be no manmade rules that reject what God has given. Obviously, there are plants and animals that are not good for people to eat. But this does not permit false teachers to make rules that apply a system of legalistic works to prove that a person belongs to God. Instead, in the context of God's good creation, people are enjoined by their Creator to enjoy the richness of His bounty in the beauty and abundance that His creation provides.

It should be clear that only man dares to tell God that His creation is not satisfactory for man's needs. Therefore, as Paul continued his argument against the false teachers and their erroneous doctrines, he reminded Timothy that God made everything good. This fact can only be known in its truest sense by those the Spirit has redeemed. Entreating the Spirit to open our understanding to the truth of God's Word, He shows believers the salvation that is theirs in Jesus Christ. Man's dominion over the world was lost when Adam sinned and was restored to those who have been saved through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Calvin concluded: "It [the world] is unclean to us, till God graciously comes to our aid, and, by engrafting us into his Son, constitutes us anew to be lords of the world, that we may lawfully use as our own all the wealth with which he supplies us."³

4:6 *You are a good servant of Christ Jesus when you point these things out to our brothers and sisters. Then you will be nourished by the words of the Christian faith and the excellent teachings which you have followed closely.*

Paul never doubted Timothy's faith. He knew him too well. Timothy had been schooled in the precepts of the faith at his mother's knee with the encouragement of his grandmother, Lois. In addition, Paul had schooled him in the rich doctrine of the apostles. Nevertheless, Paul felt it was important to encourage Timothy by reminding him that he was a servant of Christ Jesus and a good servant when he taught these things to the believers at Ephesus. It was absolutely essential that Timothy convey the richness of the doctrines of the Christian faith as well as the dangers that threaten the purity of that faith with the legalistic foolishness introduced by those who really belonged to Satan. Timothy had been unusually well schooled in the precepts of God's Word throughout his young life. That teaching now had to be passed on to other believers.

Notes/Applications

Paul's recitation of an ancient creed provides the launch pad for his warnings in this section. That ancient creed cited six progressively operative doctrines of the mystery of the Christian faith:

The mystery that gives us our reverence for God is acknowledged to be great:

*He appeared in his human nature,
was approved by the Spirit,
was seen by angels,
was announced throughout the nations,
was believed in the world,
and was taken to heaven in glory.*

(1 Timothy 3:16)

There is only one Truth, which saves sinners. Christ alone is that Truth. He alone is the Way, the Truth, and the Life (John 14:6). Anything more than this primitive creed is an offense to the God Who not only created man in His image, but also gave His Son to be the sacrifice for their sins. Anything less denies the uniqueness of God's plan of salvation by which He brings people home to the household of God's redeemed people.

Yet, there are so many lies and so many distortions of that truth. For some reason, people feel that God's plan is not enough; Christ's sacrifice is insufficient; the Spirit's work fails to tell the whole story. Somehow such people feel compelled to add some system of works that prove on a physical basis that they really belong to God.

Many people who profess their belief in Jesus eventually succumb to the very human desire for some secret knowledge that places them on the inner circle of those who really know God. These people may be faithful in their attendance and service to a local church body. As they have moved through the differing phases of their spiritual growth, they begin to feel that they have arrived at some spiritual plane that is superior to those around them. They become arrogant and presumptuous, believing that they know things that the spirit has conveyed to them from some teacher that they have admired. In the end, they have been seduced by religious jargon that has provided the human search for special meaning. They believe that they are on the inside of God's circle. The rest are on the outside, struggling to survive in a sea of false religious piety.

But none of this is a surprise to those who have seen the Lord of glory seated at the right hand of the Father. Those who have been touched by the Holy Spirit realize with absolute certainty that they have sinned and fallen short of that glory. They too proceed through differing phases of spiritual growth, but that growth is provided by the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit. The Word of God has come alive as the Spirit quickens the mind and heart.

Like Timothy, believers read Paul's instructions and realize that, as the living, breathing church of the risen Savior they are the pillars and foundation of the Truth—God's Truth embodied in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. They too are charged to keep the doctrines of the Christian faith in purity. They too are compelled to proclaim this eternal Truth to the whole world and, at the same time, confront those who have presumed to add or take away from the dynamic simplicity of God's plan of salvation by which some are saved and others are judged.