

Last Days Apostasy

1 Timothy 4:1-10

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I want you to note 1 Timothy 4:1-2, and then we're going to begin to unpack this. Look at verses 1-2. Paul says, "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly," or specifically, "that in the latter times," notice that phrase, "some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared," or cauterized, "with a hot iron."

In 2 Thessalonians 2, Paul was writing to the believers in Thessalonica because some false teachers had come into the church and told the believers that they were going through the tribulation period. They said, "You're in the day of the Lord," another title for that period of time. Paul tried to reassure them that the day of the Lord was not upon them. He said, "...for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin," who is the antichrist, "be revealed." Two things have to happen after the church is caught up before the day of the Lord comes, and I believe that just before the rapture this is going to be happening. First, there will be a falling away. I believe that's an apostasy or a turning away from the faith, the same thing Paul is warning about here. Secondly, after the rapture takes place, the antichrist or the "man of sin" will be revealed; and he, of course, is again the ultimate apostate or the ultimate false teacher. The point I want to make is that in the end of time, the last days, before the Lord returns, that it will be characterized by a great falling away or a great departure, as it were, from the faith.

Jesus said in Matthew 24:4-5, "Take heed that no man deceive you. 5 For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ," or the Messiah, "and shall deceive many." In Acts 20, we got it on Wednesday when we went through the book of Acts, Paul was meeting with the very same elders of this church in Ephesus of which Timothy was the pastor. Timothy, that Paul is writing to, was pastoring in Ephesus; and Paul said to them, "For I know this, that after my departing shall previous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them." All through the Bible we are warned about this falling away and about these false teachers.

Tonight, in this chapter, I want to give you three things about apostasy. In verses 1-2, we see the danger of apostasy; in verses 3-5, we see the description of apostasy; and in verses 6-10, we're going to see the pastor's duty in light of the apostasy. First of all, in verses 1-2, we have the danger of apostasy. Go back with me to those verses, and let's read them again. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith," there's our word "apostasy," "giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; 2 Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron."

There are several things I want you to note about this danger of apostasy. First of all, notice its certainty (verse 1)—it is certain. "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly," the Spirit will speak expressly or the Spirit is speaking, present tense, expressly. The context is interesting.

Actually, a better translation than, “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly,” would be, “But the Spirit speaks expressly.” It’s intended to be a contrast. What is it intended to contrast with? Go back with me to chapter 3 and look real quickly for a moment in verses 15-16. Paul said to Timothy, “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.” Notice he wants Timothy to know how to conduct himself in the church. The church is the house of God or a family or a household. It’s the assembly, the ekklesia, the called-out assembly; and the church is “the pillar and ground of,” here’s the important word, “the truth.” As a church, we’re grounded and built upon the truth of God’s Word.

Notice in verse 16, “And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness,” and I pointed out that this was a hymn of the first century. It was actually a song that proclaimed these important doctrines: “God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.” This is how the transition goes from the end of chapter 3 to the beginning of chapter 4. At the end of verse 15 he refers to the church as “the pillar and ground of truth,” and he gives us the truth that “God was manifest in the flesh,” that is, His incarnation and His ultimate crucifixion. Jesus became a man and died on the cross. Then, “justified in the Spirit, seen of angels,” speaks of the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Thirdly, we see He was “preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world,” that speaks of the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. At the end of verse 16, it says that He was “received up into glory,” which speaks of His ascension and exaltation. The church is the pillar and ground of truth and is built upon the truth of Christ’s incarnation, His crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, and exaltation; and all of it combined is the proclamation of the good news of Jesus Christ, the preaching of the gospel. Then, there is a “but.” All this teaching about the “pillar and ground of the truth,” and in the contrast in chapter 4, verse 1, “Now,” or but “the Spirit,” is warning us. He’s speaking “expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith,” that we just read about at the end of chapter 3, “giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils,” so He is warning us of the certainty that in the Church Age there will be a turning away from the faith, an apostasy, and I’ll explain what that is in a moment.

I want you to notice that it’s the Spirit that is speaking. How does the Spirit speak? Primarily in the Bible, the Word of God. Amen? God can speak directly to our hearts, but the Spirit will never contradict what is revealed in God’s Word. The primary means by which the Spirit is speaking is through the Old and New Testaments. The Bible says, “All scripture is given by inspiration of God,” not perspiration but inspiration. It’s given by divine inspiration. That, by the way, means that God breathed the Bible, that the Holy Spirit breathed the Word of God. It’s literally breathed out. “All scripture is given by inspiration,” we get our word “breath” from that, from the breath of God, and it’s the work of the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Peter it says, “...but holy men of God spake as they were moved,” or carried along or borne along, “by the Holy Ghost.” In just a moment I’m going to talk about what orthodox Christians believe, and one of those is the inspiration of the Scriptures. False teachers deny the

Scriptures are the Word of God, but the Bible is the inerrant, infallible Word of God. It's given by inspiration of God, and the Spirit speaks all through the Old Testament with Israel and into the New Testament with the church about the dangers of apostasy.

I want you to note the time. We have the certainty of apostasy, then we have the time of apostasy, "...in the latter times," notice that in verse 1. That phrase, and you need to understand, isn't just at the end of time before the Lord returns, but it actually encompasses the entire Church Age right up until the time the church is caught up to meet the Lord in the air. There are references in the Bible to New Testament times being "last times" or "last days." It's interesting, in Hebrews, the writer of Hebrews said, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, 2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us," in, by, or through, "his Son." I believe that the last days can be referred to as the time of the Church Age. I do believe in that age the signs will intensify just toward the end of that time and that period, but living in the Church Age and up to the time when the Lord returns is the time when we will see apostasy. It happened in the New Testament, and in the second, third, and fourth centuries. All throughout the history of the church there have been those who have claimed to be believers and followers of Christ and then turn away from the truth of Scriptures and Christianity.

Thirdly, notice the description of apostasy. We have the certainty of it, the time of it, and then we have a description seen in the phrase there, "shall depart from the faith," stop right there. That is a great and very clear description of an apostate. The word "depart" there is the word apostasy, and that's where we get that term to apostasize. It literally means to fall away from or to step away from. What you need to understand is that apostasy is referring to people who profess to be Christians. They say they believe in Jesus Christ—they maybe come to church, carry a Bible, have been to Bible college or were raised in the church—they claim to be believers and then fall away. They turn away and deny the faith that they once held. What's happening in this case, though, is that they were never truly born again. Now, only God knows a person's heart, and we're not to judge a person's heart—it may be that it's just a lapse—but anyone who completely denies the Lord, denies the Scripture, denies what they profess and turns away is classified in the biblical sense as being an apostate.

Peter describes them in his second epistle. It's an entire book of the Bible given over to this subject, and he actually says it's like a dog that has vomited and then goes back to its vomit. It's like a pig that has been washed...these aren't my illustrations, by the way, so don't look at me like that. It's from the Bible. It's like a pig that has been washed and taken out of the pigpen, but the minute it's freed, what does it do? It goes back to its wallowing in the mire. The problem is that there was no regeneration. It wasn't really a sheep—they were dogs and pigs. They never really were regenerated, so they turn away from what they professed, but I don't believe that they truly possessed salvation, especially in light of our study in Romans 8. This Sunday we wrap up our series in Blessed Assurance, and Paul says nothing can separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, and it's a marvelous hymn of assurance. There are those who claim to be Christians.

Jesus described it as wheat and tares growing up together and you couldn't tell, so the weeds looked like the real thing—they looked like wheat. If you tried to go in there and separate them and pull out the weeds, you would ruin the wheat, so he says to wait until the end of time when the Lord comes and the Lord of the harvest will gather them together, and there will be a separation of the wheat from the tares. The wheat will be gathered into the barn and the tares will be burned with fire that is unquenchable. There's a lot of teaching about this in the New Testament. Jesus taught about it, we saw it happen in the book of Acts, and we see it talked about in the epistles. Even in the letters to the seven churches in the book of Revelation there are those who have the doctrine of the Nicolaitans and have turned away from the truth of God's Word. Notice, "some shall depart," in the statement there. Not everyone is an apostate. Not everyone in the church is a professor. There are those who possess, believe, live by and are built upon the truth of God's Word but do depart. They do turn away.

In 1 John 2:19, (the reason I wanted you to take notes is to write that down and look it up. It's a classic explanation of what an apostate is) John says, "They went out from us, but they were not of us," the reason they went out from us is because they were not of us. He says, "...for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us," so they went out from us because they were not of us; if they were of us, they would have continued with us. You can read that passage. It makes it clear that they were professors but weren't true possessors, and they turned away from the Lord.

Notice what they depart from, "the faith." Whenever you have the word "the" in front of the word "faith" it's not talking about your personal, individual, subjective faith, trust, or belief in God. The Bible says, "The just shall live by faith." If you're a Christian, you were saved because you trusted God, you had faith in God, and that's saving faith. Whenever it says "the faith," it's talking not about my individual or personal subjective faith, it's talking about the body of truth—Christianity—the doctrine that we believe. What "the faith" is is the truth of Christianity—the doctrines and the truths that we believe as Christians. They fall away from "the faith."

In the book of Jude, another classic reference to the apostates, (and by the way, that entire little one-chapter epistle is all about apostasy) Jude says that we must, "...earnestly contend for the faith," and he makes a statement that, "was once," and for all, "delivered unto the saints." In the English translation of your Bible it says, "delivered unto the saints," but the Greek actually is stronger. It says once and for all delivered to the saints. That's why if it's new, it's not true; and if it's true, it's not new. It's the old truths that God has laid out in His Word, but we must, "contend for the faith which was once," and for all, "delivered unto the saints."

I'm probably biting off more than I can chew, but I'll do my best to get through them. There are actually 16 quick points I want to make on what is "the faith." This is why I wanted you to get your pencils ready and write them down. What is it that we as Christians must hold to in order to be orthodox or have "the faith?" First, we must hold to the unity of God, that there is one God. If you're polytheistic, that's not Christianity. You've left the faith. If you believe that the trees are god and the sky is god and your dog is god and people are god or there are many gods, then that's not Christian doctrine. That's not "the faith."

Secondly, you must believe that God is triune—He's Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. To deny the trinity is to deny Christian doctrine, is to deny biblical Christianity. That is absolutely important and necessary. You may be ignorant. You may not understand it, but if you deny the doctrine as taught in the Bible...most all of your cults, by the way, have a skewed or false view of the triune nature of God. They don't really believe that. There are professing Christians that deny the trinity, and that's not Christianity.

Thirdly, you must hold to Christ's full deity, that the second Person of that triune God is Jesus Christ. There is God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, but Jesus Christ is fully God. If you deny the deity of Christ, you deny biblical Christianity. Fourthly, Christ's humanity. To be Christian, and have Christian doctrine, you must also believe that Jesus is fully man. Now, we're pretty attuned to the idea that we believe in the deity of Christ, and when the Jehovah's Witnesses knock on our door we say, "Oh, they deny the deity of Christ," but just as important as the deity of Christ—listen to me carefully—is the humanity of Christ. There were false teachers in biblical days that were actually denying that Jesus Christ was fully man. They believed He was God but didn't think He was man in a real body or a physical body. It's important that we believe both in His humanity and His deity—full humanity and full deity.

Fifthly, we believe in human depravity, that man has fallen as a result of Adam and Eve's sin and that he is separated from God and is depraved. Sixthly, Christ's virgin birth, that Jesus Christ was born of a virgin. Seventh, Christ's sinless life. To teach that Jesus Christ was human but sinful, that He did things that were wrong, is apostate.

Eighthly, Christ's atoning death. Christians believe that when Jesus died on the cross that His death was a substitution, that He died to atone and to pay for our sins. Ninthly, we believe in the bodily resurrection of Christ—emphasis on the word "bodily." It was not a spiritual resurrection (Jehovah's Witnesses teach a spiritual resurrection), but that He literally, bodily, physically rose from the dead. When they went into the tomb on that first resurrection Easter Sunday, there was no physical body there. Christ had risen from the dead, and He had a new glorified body.

Tenth, we believe in the necessity of grace for salvation, that we're saved by grace apart from works. Eleventh, the necessity of faith, that a person is saved by grace through faith in Christ alone—grace alone, faith alone, in Christ alone. Twelfth, we believe in the bodily ascension of Jesus Christ, that Jesus physically, bodily, ascended back into heaven. This is His ascension. Thirteenth, we believe Christ's priestly intercession, that He's in heaven and the only way that we can get to God the Father, or talk to him, is not through Mary, an angel, or a saint, but only through Jesus Christ. The Christian prays in the power of the Spirit to God the Father through the Son. We also believe in His bodily Second Coming. That's number fourteen, that Christ will come again. Christians can differ on their view of the rapture or whether they believe on it, but we must hold to the true teaching of the Bible that Christ will come in His power and glory the second time. We may disagree on the timing of that Second Coming, but we believe it.

Fifteenth, we believe the inspiration of the Scriptures and their authority. The authority is not

the pope, the church, church tradition, experience, it's not my intellect, it's the Word of God. Sixteenth, we believe in a literal interpretation of the Bible. We don't allegorize it. We don't spiritualize it. We believe God said what He meant and meant what He said. You have to have a literal interpretation of the Bible to be able to derive its message and its meaning.

Some may differ as to the points that I made here and what really constitutes biblical Christianity. I took these points, by the way, from Norman Geisler's book, *Conviction without Compromise*, where he talks about the importance of essentials there must be unity. These are the essentials that he lists, and I agree with them.

There's the certainty of a last days apostasy. There's the description that's the falling away from the faith, but notice in verse 1 (we may not get through 10 verses tonight, right?) the source of apostasy, "...giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," or demons. Your Bible, like mine, may say "devils" in the plural, but there aren't devils. There's only one devil, but there are demons. The Bible uses the word "devils" in reference to demons. You say, "Well, what's the difference?" Satan was an angel that was kicked out of heaven. He fell. It's called the fall of Lucifer. When he fell, other angels fell with him in their rebellion against God. They became what we know as demons. There are angels, but there's a bad angel named satan or the devil and he has his helpers known as demons. They are fallen angels. In the spirit realm all you have is either God or angels. In the angels realm you have good angels and bad angels. In the bad angel realm you have satan and demons. That's how it all breaks down. These doctrines (and this is a fascinating thing) and false teachings have as their source satan who is an angel of light. He appears deceptively. He is a wolf in sheep's clothing. It's kind of, "Grandma, what big teeth you have." He looks, talks, acts, smells, walks like a Christian. He has a Bible and says, "Oh yeah, we believe in Jesus." They use the same terms, but they have a different dictionary. They're not really truly believers. They'll knock on your door and try to sell you their magazines, but they're not truly children of God. They're inspired by satan.

Satan's biggest ripoff is false religion—satan's great deception—and ever since he fell, there's been this war between God and the devil. As a Christian, we're in a spiritual warfare with the devil, and in the church, he is one who attacks and tries to deny the truth or tries to sow tares among the wheat. Satan is the source of these false teachings, and they're actually being inspired and led by demonic powers.

Notice the teachers and their description in verse 2. It says, "Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron." Again, there's a lot that can be said about these false teachers, and there are so many out there that I kind of hesitate to touch on them. Notice two characteristics about them. They're hypocrites and their conscience is seared. Evidently, they preach but don't practice. It's interesting that these false teachers will tell the people what to believe and how to behave, but they don't believe or behave themselves. They preach one thing but do another, so they're living hypocritical lives. They preach but don't practice, and their conscience is actually seared. We get our word "cauterized." It's to use a hot knife to cauterize something. They're seared with a hot iron. They don't even have any conviction about the lives that they're promulgating any longer. They're so deceived. Their minds are

clouded by their selfishness, their sin, and their hypocrisy. They preach but don't practice, and their conscience is seared with a hot iron.

I think of the two biggies in the modern church, that is, the Mormon church—the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints—and the Jehovah's Witnesses. Both claim to be Christian, but they're anything but Christian. Both claim to be orthodox and biblical, but they're anything but orthodox and biblical. All the things that I just mentioned, the 16 things, they all deny. They don't hold to the truth of what the Bible actually teaches. They deny orthodox Christianity.

Then, we have our modern preachers and our liberals that deny the inerrancy, infallibility, and authority of Scripture. There's many of them even on evangelical tv networks. Christians buy their books and tapes and follow them when their teaching is not biblical, so you need to be a student of the Word and know what you believe and why you believe it.

Let's move through this passage. We can cover the rest of it, for in verses 3-5 we have now a description of the apostasy. So, first he warns us of its danger in verses 1-2, and now we have a description of it in verses 3-5. He says, "Forbidding to marry," that's pretty bizarre, but that's one of the things they'll teach, "and commanding to abstain from meats," or food, "which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth." Notice the "truth" is singular there, not truths, which the false teachers promote. "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified," or being sanctified literally in the Greek, "by the word of God and prayer."

I want you to notice this description of apostasy. This is pretty bizarre. We can't tarry on it, but they reject the Bible's teaching on marriage. Evidently, this is what was happening when Paul wrote to Timothy, and believe it or not, it's happened through the Church Age and even on today. They deny what the Bible teaches about marriage. Evidently, what they were saying was, "If you don't get married, if you stay single, you're more spiritual." No one is saying, "Amen," at that right now, so everyone must be married tonight. That's not what the Bible teaches, okay? The Bible doesn't teach that you're more spiritual if you don't get married. Paul does say in 1 Corinthians 7 that you'll have trouble in the flesh, there will be trials and challenges, but the Bible also says, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, and obtaineth favour of the LORD."

Marriage is God's idea. Marriage is a gift from God, and Jesus sanctified marriage when He went to the wedding at Cana. Remember when He turned the water into wine? He never married, but He spoke about marriage and quoted the book of Genesis and Matthew 19 when the Pharisees and the scribes came to try to trap Him in the issue of divorce. "Is it lawful for a man to put away his wife for every cause?" Jesus said, "Haven't you read your Bibles? He that made them at the beginning made them male and female," and said, "For this cause shall a man leave father and mother, and shall cleave to his wife: and they twain shall be one flesh... what therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder." They were kind of freaking out because Jesus is actually telling them, "You need to read your Bibles, Guys."

When I deal with false teachers sometimes I think, Aren't they reading their Bible? Don't they know what the Word of God teaches? It's sad and tragic that the Roman Catholic church has actually told the priests that you're more spiritual if you're "married to the church" or to the nuns that you're more spiritual if you don't get married. You're "married to the church." We know practically the problems that have been caused by that. Nothing in the Bible would indicate that any Christian or any pastor or minister or any man of the cloth or a clergyman is more spiritual because he's not married. Marriage is a blessing from God. Paul spoke about it. Jesus spoke about it, and it's not something that makes you more spiritual just because you're not married. Actually, the Bible does say in 1 Corinthians 7, and I taught on this at the marriage retreat, that "It is good for a man not to touch a woman, Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband." It's actually there, lest satan tempt you, that you have that need met in your life in the marriage covenant relationship. It's ordained of God.

The Bible says in Hebrews 13, "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge." Don't let anyone tell you that marriage is something that's a necessary evil or that you're more spiritual if you're not married. Now, if God has called you to be single, then that can be a gift and a blessing from God, and you can use your singleness for service instead of selfishness. Paul talks about that as well in 1 Corinthians 7, but it doesn't make you more spiritual. I have noticed that a lot of cults have a perverted and a twisted doctrine of marriage. It's a common error in many cult groups. They have a twisted and perverted and misunderstanding of the doctrine of marriage.

There's a second description of these apostates and these false teachers is that they also "...commanding to abstain from meats." To be true to the text, I want to point out that in my King James translation it uses the word "meats," but it's not talking about the flesh of animals—it's not talking carnivorous, it's talking about food. Some modern translations render it like that and it would include meat, but it's talking about food, dietary laws. We know from studying the New Testament that's another sign of a false teacher—don't eat that, don't touch that, don't drink that—they have their rules and dietary laws.

Isn't it interesting that the Roman Catholic church denied the priests of being married, and you're not supposed to eat meat on Friday. They have their very strict laws and their rules denying foods. There are legalistic groups that say, "You're gonna be more spiritual if you don't eat a hamburger. If you don't go to In-N-Out you're going to be part of the Deeper Life Club." I guess I don't get to join. If you're not a vegetarian, then you're not spiritual. When my wife got saved, she was a vegetarian. She got saved, set free, and then someone was sharing with her the Scriptures, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink," and she was so excited she ran right out and got a hamburger immediately! "Thank God, I'm free at last!" You might not want to eat meat for health reasons, and that's fine, but don't tell me that you're more spiritual, that you hear from God because you don't eat meat or you don't eat certain foods or you follow dietary laws.

Remember what Jesus said about this? He said, "It's not what goes in a person's mouth that

defiles them, it's what comes out because what goes in just passes through but what comes out comes from the heart. What is in the heart is evil thoughts, adulteries, and those kinds of things." Write down Colossians 2:16, "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holiday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." Don't let anyone put you on a trip to say, "You're more spiritual if you worship in Saturday," or "You're more spiritual if you don't eat meat," or "You're more spiritual if you're a vegetarian." That's legalism, and we're set free in Christ. Don't be taken into bondage by those things.

So, they reject the Bible's teaching on marriage. They teach a false estheticism, is the second point, and I want to show you here some marks of false teachers. They come along with new truths. They have extra-biblical authority, and they teach another Jesus. They teach, as I pointed out a minute ago, salvation is by works. It's interesting that again the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has The Book of Mormon, Pearl of Great Price, Doctrine and Covenants, and a whole slew of other books that they put on an equal par with the Bible or with the Word of God, and the authority doesn't lie in the Scriptures alone but in the writings of the cult leader and the false teacher.

Lastly, let's look at verses 6-10. By the way, verses 4-5, I don't want to miss. He says, "For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5 For it is sanctified," or being set apart, "by the word of God and prayer." We need to remember that when we eat, we should pray over our food and give thanks. God sanctifies that food, and there is nothing evil or sinful intrinsically in anything that we might eat. It's sanctified by God's Word and by prayer, and that's what we want to be devoted to—the Word of God and prayer.

In verses 6-10, I want you to note the pastor's duty in light of apostasy. He is writing to a pastor (this is a pastoral epistle), and the pastor needs to be on guard. Notice verses 6-10. He says, "If thou," speaking to Timothy, "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," by which you have followed up until now. "But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come. 9 This is a faithful saying," here's another one of the "faithful sayings" in 1 Timothy, "and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe."

There are five points I want to show you from this text that is the pastor's duty in light of apostasy. First, he must warn the church. Look at it in verse 6. "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister," so a good pastor, a pastor worth his salt, is a pastor who warns the people about false teaching. There's to be a positive and a negative. This is not popular today. As a matter of fact, you're going to find people fall away if you actually warn them about false teachers. "Well, that's not nice. That's not kind. We need to love everybody and get along and don't name names. Don't point at anyone being wrong," and "We're supposed to have unity," but we never have unity at the sake of purity. Purity always comes first before unity; or you might say, first there is purity, then there is peace. You can't

have peace if there's not purity, so it starts with doctrinal purity. Now, we don't want to be antagonistic. We don't want to be unloving. We don't want to be fighting, but we contend for the truth of the gospel. We want unity, we want harmony, but not at the sake of truth. If we forsake truth, then we forsake... and what is happening, the church today lives in a culture that has completely abandoned truth.

In this postmodern world we live in there is the absolute abandonment of truth. There are no absolutes. You can't be absolutely sure of anything. You don't even know if you're a man or a woman anymore. Literally, that's where we've come to. There's no right; there's no wrong. Whatever you think is right is right, whatever I think is right; or my truth is my truth and your truth is your truth, and everything's cool. Try sharing that with your math teacher at school. When you hand in your math page and you got some equations wrong, just say, "Well, your truth is your truth, and my truth is my truth. I really feel that this is the right answer." Your teacher is going to say, "I don't care what you feel, it's wrong." I use math as an illustration because that's all I do is get everything wrong when I got into math. I hate math, but there's a right answer and a wrong answer. There's not, "Whatever you think, whatever you want." There's a right and there's a wrong. For some reason when we come to moral issues we have this kind of no right, no wrong, whatever you want to say. If we don't have a fixed point, and that being God, then we're left adrift on a sea of moral inabsolutes with no real right or wrong. No one can say, "You can't do something," because there's no really right or wrong. We just impose our own standards, but there's no higher authority.

The pastor must warn that there is truth and there is error. Not everyone that says, "Lord, Lord," not everyone that preaches the word, not everyone that teaches is biblically sound, accurate, or telling you the truth. Just because they come and knock on your door and say, "Yeah, we're Christians, too. We believe in Jesus," doesn't mean that they are true believers in Jesus Christ. A true pastor will warn the church, and he says, "If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister," but the word "minister" actually, used in the general sense there, is servant; so that's my second point. A good pastor must be a servant, so first he must warn the church of the dangers of false teaching; and secondly, he must have a servant's heart, you will be a good servant. Thirdly, he must build up himself on sound doctrine. Notice at the end of verse 6 it says that you will be "nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained," or by which you have followed until now. The pastor must study the Bible, be grounded in the Bible, and be building himself up in the truths of God's Word.

I was with a couple of pastor friends the last couple days. I just got back last night from Colorado. We had a meeting up there, and I was sharing with them the importance of studying theology, that if you want your preaching to have content, you want it to have truth, that you need to study systematic theology and then expound the Scriptures and bring in the truth of God's Word. I think that's important for a pastor to not only warn the church and to live as a servant to the church, but he must be grounded in biblical truth and know the Word of God.

The fourth quality of a pastor, he must reject false teaching. Notice verse 7, "But refuse profane

and old wives' fables," or just foolish stories, just fables, "and exercise thyself rather unto godliness." All the years I've been a pastor, I can't believe the stupid, silly, dumb, crazy, bizarre things that people believe—the books that have been written and the things that people gravitate to and believe. I had some of the craziest ideas brought to me that are so unbiblical. People grab ahold of them and gravitate to them. A lot of them are just made-up fables or fairy tales. They're not grounded in God's Word, and we need to reject the false.

Fifthly, and lastly, he must live a godly life, and that's seen in verses 8-10. He says, "For bodily exercise profiteth little," notice that he starts this illustration of exercise and uses an image from the athletic world at the end of verse 7, "...exercise thyself rather unto godliness." You do that by praying, reading the Word, and studying the Bible. You know, people exercise—they go to the gym, they jog, they ride a bike—they exercise and take care of their bodies. If we, as Christians, would put as much effort and energy into exercising ourselves unto godliness, the church would be a lot stronger and a lot healthier. After saying, "...exercise thyself rather unto godliness," he points out, "For bodily exercise profiteth little." Now, he doesn't say it doesn't profit, so go ahead and go to the gym, that's fine, but keep it in perspective—it profits little—compared to what? Compared to godliness because godliness is profitable (verse 8) "unto all things, having promise of the life that now is," it'll bless your life right now, "and of that which is to come." If you put all the focus on the physical, that has nothing to do with eternal value; but if you put your focus on the spiritual, it benefits you now and in eternity. That's what he's talking about.

In the context, the false teachers were teaching false estheticism—denying the flesh, don't get married, don't eat certain foods—and you're part of the "Deeper Life Club." Paul is saying, "Bodily discipline is good, but it's much better to devote and consecrate yourself to godliness." Then, he closes with, "This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Now, living a godly life (verse 8), he works hard (verse 10), notice in verse 10, "...we both labour," we get our word agonize from it. It's the Greek word *agonizo* which means to agonize, so a minister must work hard and then he suffers for Christ's glory. In verse 10 it says, "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God," he trusts in God, lives by faith, and in verse 10 he preaches the gospel. He says, "...who is the Saviour of all men," referring to God, "who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe." Notice that God wants to save all men, but only those who believe are going to be saved. I don't believe in limited atonement. I believe that Jesus died for the whole world, but only those who trust in Christ and believe in Him will be saved.

Now, let me wrap this up with four simple thoughts. First of all, there's a constant presence of apostasy in the church, and it reminds us of the truth of God's Word that we're living in the last days. The Bible actually predicts the closer we get to the coming of the Lord, the more there will be a falling away from the faith. The closer we get to the coming of the Lord, more people will fall away from the faith. In the last days, the Bible says, because iniquity abounds, the love of many will wax cold. Do you know that Jesus started off with huge crowds following Him? At the end of His earthly ministry, He only had a small group of people following Him. His church

shrunk in three years because He was going to a cross. He was going to suffer and die. Jesus talked about drinking His blood and eating His flesh, and people turned and walked away. Jesus turned to His disciples and said, "Are you going to go, too?" They said, "Where can we go? You have the words of eternal life."

What we see today in the church, even with some of the church growth, so-called, it's not necessarily a sign that the church is healthy because of the doctrinal departure that's taking place, the apostasy in these last days. We also need to remember that satan is the source. No matter what we do, we're battling not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers and spiritual wickedness in high places. Thirdly, we need to remember that movements fueled by false teachers are difficult to resist. Christians are ignorant of the truth, and they don't want to believe the truth of God's Word.

Lastly, we must stay faithful to the faith, once and for all delivered to the saints. I don't think there is anything more important for you than to stay as close as you can to this book. Stay on your knees and stay in God's Word. There's nothing more important—stay on your knees and stay in God's Word. Amen?