

The Approaching Apostasy

by Alistair Begg

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the Spirit's authority and clarity to recognize the warning signs of apostasy and to take action to prevent it.

Duration: 48:56

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, 1 Timothy 3:15, Hebrews 3:12, 2 Peter 2:1

Topics: "Apostasy"

Description

In this sermon on 1 Timothy 4, the speaker addresses the warning given by the Spirit that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits. The readers are urged to be aware of false teachings that come from hypocritical liars with seared consciences. These false teachings include forbidding marriage and certain foods, which goes against God's creation and His intention for believers to receive all things with thanksgiving. The speaker emphasizes the importance of living life to the fullest as Christians, showing the world the beauty and enjoyment of a life lived in accordance with God's Word.

Transcript

1 Timothy chapter 4 and verse 1. The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth.

For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. If you point these things out to the brothers, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, brought up in the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales.

Rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance--and for this we labor and strive--that we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men and especially of those who believe.

Command and teach these things. Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity. Until I come, devote yourself to

the public reading of Scripture, to preaching, and to teaching.

Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through a prophetic message, when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters. Give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress.

Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. Dear Heavenly Father, I pray for your help now in turning to these verses.

You know, Lord, I long to be clear, and I pray that you would save us from confusion or from error, both in the way in which we speak or hear, that the Spirit of God will be our teacher. We can't do anything as we ought without your help, and so we bow our heads not out of a sense of routine but out of a deep sense of need. For if these moments are to mean anything for time or for eternity, then it is imperative, Lord, that you speak by your Spirit, through your Word, via the mechanism of the voice of a mere man.

And it's in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Well, we're returning to our studies in 1 Timothy after a gap of some few weeks now.

We paused before Christmas, and we're now trying to get back on track. We said in the study of the first three chapters that one of the key verses was the fifteenth verse of chapter 3. Paul, having identified the fact that although he was hoping to come and see them there in Ephesus, he recognized that his delay was such that this letter would help to answer the question as to how conduct should be in the church of the living God. And he provided them with a warning in the first chapter concerning the nature of false teachers.

He then also made some statements regarding his own personal journey of faith. He then, in chapter 2, provided instructions on worship, getting down to some very specific and naughty problems as it relates to the question of women and so on. We dealt with that in chapter 2. Then in chapter 3, he provided instruction in relationship to the structure of leadership within the church, dealing with the matter of elders and with deacons.

When we come to the fourth chapter, it is clear that he has, if you like, narrowed the focus of his impact down to an even tighter radius. And he is giving instruction expressly to Timothy, whose responsibilities in pastoral ministry are shared with others and yet, in some senses, unique to him. And he is telling Timothy, as verse 6 makes clear, that if he is prepared to do what is referred to in the first five verses, then he will prove himself to be a good minister of Jesus Christ.

And not only in the doing of that, but also, as verse 11 and following points out, if he will command and teach these things with authority--albeit with humility, but nevertheless with authority--and if he will endeavor to ensure that even though he's youthful, he is prepared to do his best to set an example in the matter of speech and life and love and faith and purity, then again, he will make an impact as a minister of the gospel. Furthermore, he should be in no doubt as to where the balance of his time should be spent. He doesn't need to wonder about it.

He doesn't need to wander around looking for people to answer the question. Until I come, says Paul, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. And as he preaches and as he teaches, he is to ensure that what he has been receiving from Paul he will in turn pass on to reliable men who will be able in turn to teach others.

In other words, there is a process of spiritual multiplication. And it is this very matter which is before Paul, as in these opening five verses he provides him with some of the material that, according to verse 6, Timothy, having had it pointed out to him, is in turn to point out to the others. Now, the matter of concern is the matter of spiritual apostasy.

And since apostasy is not a word that is used very much, let us simply define it, in terms of the opening verse, as an abandoning of the faith. An abandoning of the faith. The turning away from God on the part of those who had formerly turned towards God.

We had an inkling of it in the first chapter, towards the end, where he had urged Timothy to fight the good fight, to hold on to faith and a good conscience, because some had rejected these things and had been shipwrecked in the faith. So he says, it's very, very important that you understand this. Now, what I'd like to do is to draw our attention under three main headings.

First of all, to notice something about the Spirit mentioned in the opening two words, and then to give consideration to these teachers, who are referred to as false and hypocritical, and then finally to say a word concerning the readers of the letter, which of course includes not only those who were it in the first instance but also those of us who have the opportunity of reading it now. Under the heading The Spirit--and if I were taking notes, I would write down The Spirit as point A, and underneath it I would have two subpoints. I say I would have, I do have.

And the first of these is the authority by which he speaks. The authority by which he speaks. The Spirit here is clearly the Spirit of God.

Paul has already referred to him in 3. He makes reference to him again in 2 Timothy 1, 14. He refers to him in Titus 3 and in verse 5. Indeed, there are a whole host of occasions when, in these three pastoral epistles, as they are called, the Spirit of God, the third member of the Trinity, is mentioned in his role. And the Spirit is a Spirit who speaks.

And you will notice that the Spirit of God speaking means that the people, then, in turn, need to hear what the Spirit is saying. Now, for those of you who are familiar with the Bible, you will remember, perhaps, that the recurring statement, Let those who have ears to hear hear what the Spirit says to the churches. It's actually in the masculine and in the singular, He who has an ear to hear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

Now, that comes in the book of Revelation on seven separate occasions. I'm not going to bore you by going through them, but you can refer to them on your own. At the conclusion of each message that is delivered to each of these seven churches, we have this statement, Listen to what the Spirit says.

And interestingly, you will notice that it is in the present tense, as it is here in the opening phrase of 1 Timothy 4-1. The Spirit clearly says. It doesn't say that the Spirit said.

Now, clearly, the Spirit did say, past tense, but Paul is making the point that what has been said in the past is of contemporary significance. The Old Hymn says, What more can he say than to you he has said? So that what was said in the past--Romans 14--what was written in the past has been written so that through the endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope. So, the use of the present tense when referring to the communication of God is purposeful.

To this end, that his readers would not then be able to say, Oh, that is something for a way back then, or that is something for a way beyond us. But it doesn't really mean anything for today. We actually have the same emphasis in relationship to the Word of God in 1 Timothy 5 and in verse 18, where you have the Scripture speaking, for the Scripture says, present tense, Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain.

Now, if you have footnotes in your Bible, you'll be able to look down, as can I, and you will find that that is a quote from Deuteronomy 25.4. In other words, the Spirit of God said it a long time before Paul included it in his first letter to Timothy. But having said it, he says it. In other words, the authority by which the Spirit of God speaks is a constantly present authority.

And the abiding significance of what is said is on the basis of the authority of the speaker. And the use of the present tense serves to emphasize the ongoing and present significance of the warning that he gives. Now, if you're a thoughtful person, as many of you are, you will find yourself saying, Well, I wonder what it is that Paul is referring to when he says, The Spirit clearly says.

Is Paul referring to some time when the on? Or is, as is more likely, Paul referring to times in the past where the Spirit of God has spoken, and spoken concerning this very issue of people falling away from the faith? And if that is the case, can we think of instances prior to the time in which Paul is writing where the Spirit of God has spoken to this very issue? And those of you who know your Bible will say, Well, yes, I can think of a number of them. Because I can think of times when Jesus himself pointed to the fact that there was going to be apostasy. For example, in his words in Matthew chapter 24 and verses 10 and 11, Jesus says, At that time many will turn away from the faith, and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

The Spirit speaking. Through Christ, the Spirit still speaking. Mark 13, verse 22, At that time, if anyone says to you, Look, here's the Christ, or Look, there he is, do not believe it.

Why? For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform signs and miracles to deceive the elect if that were possible. And in another context altogether, in Luke's Gospel, where Jesus tells the parable of the sower, and when at the end of that he gives an explanation of the parable and explains that the seed is the word of God, that those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts so that they may not believe and be saved, then in verse 13, listen to what he says, Those on the rock are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away.

Now, here is Jesus clearly stating the fact of apostasy--that there will be those who apparently turn towards Christ in faith--a faith which was clearly spurious, for they would have continued had it been real--and now they turn from him, having turned towards him, and they abandon the faith which they had first of all received with joy. They had been the kind of people who were most vociferous about things when they returned to their office. They were back in their school, and they were telling everybody about what had gone on.

And yet now here they are. Now, says Paul, this shouldn't take you by surprise, because the Spirit, speaking with authority as he does, clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith. That brings me to my second subheading.

There is an authority by which he speaks, but there is also a clarity with which he speaks. How do you find out about clarity? Well, you ask questions. You ask what, you ask how, you ask who, you ask where.

You know that from English. So ask the what question. He tells us what will happen.

What will happen? Well, just what we've said. Some will become separated from the living God, who previously turned towards him. They will be falling away from the faith.

Now, there should be nobody here in any doubt concerning this who lived through our studies in Hebrews. Hebrews chapter 3 and verse 12, See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. Now, that's not there as a fiction.

That's not there for the person three rows behind. That's not there for somebody that we were thinking about during the week. That's there for you.

That's there for me. Combine the Scriptures. The Spirit clearly says that in later times, some who received the word of God with joy and made a fuss about it will turn away from the living God.

Says the writer to the Hebrews, Make sure it's not you. See to it that you don't have a sinful and an unbelieving heart. Don't be the kind of person that begins to become carping in your criticism and disinterested in the things of the Scriptures.

Make sure that you are keen and you are zealous for the things of Christ. And make sure that you are encouraging one another daily as long as it is called today, because if you don't encourage one another, then you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. You become cold.

You become refrigerated. You know all the right words, you can sing all the right songs, you can go all the right places, but you died on the inside, and you are joyless, and your Christian experience is a painstaking external ritualism. And the only thing that keeps you to the task is the task itself.

Now, we could go all the way through Hebrews reiterating that we don't need to. Back in 1 Timothy 4, the falling away is a falling away from faith, and it is a falling away from the faith. The Spirit of God not only tells us what is going to happen but also tells us when it will happen.

It will happen in later times. This is a similar phrase to what you find in 2 Timothy 3, 1, where Paul says there will be terrible times in the last days. Now, you should be well enough taught on this, loved ones, to know that we're not trying to figure out here just whether this is 1998 or 2010 or whatever else it is.

Jesus never encouraged that kind of thing. He told us to be alert. He told us to be zealous.

He told us to be watching, and he told us to be waiting. But he didn't tell us to become crystal ball gazers. And when Paul uses this phrase, both here in 1 Timothy 4 and then again in 2 Timothy 3, he is referring to the time inaugurated by the arrival of Jesus which will be consummated by the return of Jesus.

Hence Hebrews 1.1. God has spoken in the past, in many and various ways, by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son. In these last days, the writer of the Hebrews in the first century says, in these last days--that was two thousand years ago, for goodness' sake! And everywhere I go, someone comes up to me--they did this week--and said, In your opinion, are we in the very final days? I say, Well, no, it's only Tuesday. I say, This goes through till Friday.

Of course, I knew what he meant, but I'm tired of that stuff. I mean, like, what's it to you, for goodness' sake? Is it making you more holy? I mean, if I answer one way, will you run out the door and start evangelizing the whole neighborhood? If I answer another way, will you go and sit down for a year? I don't know. All I know is that these times--and Peter understood it when the folks came and said, Look, everybody's drunk, and the place has gone hogwild in Jerusalem.

We don't know what's going on. Peter stands up and says, No, no, no, no. These guys are not drunk.

This is what the prophet Joel said in the last days. I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. When was that? First century Jerusalem.

Now, the reason I make much of this is because those of you who are in the know will know that this later times phrase is used by some to explain that this all happened within about a hundred years of Paul having written to Timothy. Another group take this later times phrase, and they're trying to explain that it's all yet to come, and it doesn't mean anything at all to 1998--unless, of course, this happens to be it, which, of course, they won't know. And in both of those extremes, what happens is they remove the sense of present-tense impetus which is so clearly contained in what the Spirit is saying.

What's going to happen? People will fall away. When will it happen? It'll happen in later times. It was clearly relevant to the people in Paul's day and Timothy's day.

If it wasn't, then why would he give them the specific instructions concerning verses 3, 4, and 5? Why would he tell them in verse 6 that you'll be a good pastor if you tell people about these things? If it was irrelevant to them, if it wasn't gonna happen until 2050, why would he waste his time telling them? It's because it was pressingly relevant. Because there's never a season when men and women do not face the temptation to turn away from the living God and turn to myths and genealogies. Now, if you're still with me, what we said was there is an authority by which he speaks, there is a clarity with which he speaks.

He speaks to the what issue--the falling away, apostasy. He speaks to the when issue by addressing the matter in later times. And he speaks to the how issue, still in verse 1, by pointing out that the ultimate cause of this abandonment is that people follow deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons.

This is a clear reminder of Paul's words in Ephesians 6. We wrestle not against flesh and blood but against spiritual wickedness in the heavenly places, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. If we could actually see the sort of demonic activity which is behind so much spurious stuff, we wouldn't be able to handle it. Now, the stuff that is being taught has as its ultimate source deceiving spirits and demonic activity.

How is this stuff, then, made proximate in the lives of people? That brings us to the teachers. Because if the ultimate source of this material is demonic, the proximate source--namely, how do you get it into the hands and minds of people? The answer is through people. What kind of people? People who are hypocritical liars.

People who stand as I stand. People who pronounce religious things. People who appear to be on the straight and narrow when, in point of fact, are far from it.

They may unwittingly be the proponents of demonic spirits. They may unwittingly be involved in it. But they won't come to you with horns and forks and dressed in red.

They will be smart, they will be well-heeled, they will be apparently well-versed, they will probably be quite intelligent. And their expressed desire is to deceive even the elect, if they could. It's a scary thought, isn't it? Were it not for the fact that we know that our times are in his hands.

Were it not for the fact that we know that Jesus will build his church, and the gates of hell will not be able to push against it. Nevertheless, it makes us aware and alert as we need to be in our day. Now, what are these teachers marked by? Well, first of all, they are marked by hypocrisy.

They are marked by hypocrisy. They are apparently the proponents of one thing while being the very voice of another. Now, in some cases this is most glaringly obvious, in others it's more better concealed.

I don't know whether you could call this man an apostate or just a flat-out heretic, but he's in Canada. He's the moderator of the United Church. And I'm quoting now from The Ottawa Citizen, October 29, 1997.

Now, this is a denomination of some three million in Canada, and this is the United Church's moderator. The divinity of Jesus and the reality of heaven and hell are irrelevant, says the new moderator of the United Church of Canada. I don't believe Jesus was God, but I'm no theologian.

I have no idea if there is a hell. I don't think Jesus was that concerned about hell. Is heaven a place? I have no idea.

I believe that there is a continuity of the Spirit in some way, but I would be a fool to say what it is. We've got enough problems trying to live ethically and well here to have any knowledge or understanding of what happens after we die. There are some three million people--only 320,000 apparently go to church out of the three million, which is a mercy in itself, when you think about it, if that's the kind of stuff that they're being fed up.

I'd like to write to all 320,000 of them, suggest they go golfing. It's more likely a branch might catch them on the back of the head and knock some sense into them better than that kind of twaddle. How anybody would go and listen to that is amazing.

Say, well, are you unsettled by it? No. And the Spirit clearly says that in the later time, some will abandon the faith. This man abandoned the faith.

I'm not being unkind to him. I'm just quoting what he was happy to tell the whole of Canada. He's happy for everyone to know that as far as he's concerned, the divinity of Jesus is in irrelevancy, the matter of heaven and hell is up for grabs, and so on.

These teachers, then, display an unbelievable hypocrisy. They're hypocritical liars, he says in verse 2, and their consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. In other words, they've lost all moral sensitivity.

They've lost any sense of spiritual empathy at all. They're like those to whom Paul refers in Ephesians 4, verse 19, where he says, Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality, so as to indulge in every kind of impurity with a continual lust for more. Now, you may have a different version of the Bible in front of you, where the suggestion seems to be not so much that they have been seared as with a hot iron as that they have been stamped with a hot iron.

In other words, that they have been branded. And that is one of the other possible explanations of the phraseology--that not only would we think in terms of their consciences having been cauterized, but we

would think of them having been marked with a brand in the way that a beast was branded to identify itself in relationship to an owner. And what Paul may be saying is, if you look at them carefully, if you get behind their hypocrisy, if you get underneath their robes, as it were, you will find that they are stamped with a mark of Satan himself.

Now, why would we be surprised by that? Because the Bible tells us that Satan would come as an angel of light, right? That he would come as a wolf in sheep's clothing. That his strategy is the Little Red Riding Hood strategy. My, my, Grandma, what big teeth you've got! What a big nose you've got! He's all dressed up, with his basket going through the woods.

Able to deceive even the elect if he could. Oh, he's such a nice man. Why would you say unkind things about him, Alistair? That's not nice.

If you knew Mr. So-and-so, you wouldn't say that. Yes, I would. I'd say it to his face.

I don't deny that he's a nice man. I don't know what kind of man he is. We're not talking about whether somebody's nice.

It's not a personality journey. The question is, are people telling you the truth or not? I don't care how nice the air traffic controller is if he flies me into the side of a mountain by telling me lies. I don't care if he's the nicest guy in the world.

He's a hypocrite and a liar. I thought I was at ten thousand feet, and I was at two and a half thousand feet in deep cloud, and he never told me. You want me to say, what a nice man he is, if he did it willfully? In these last times, they will be marked by a hypocrisy that they are prepared to display, and there will be an activity that they are prepared to deny.

And what is that? Well, it's two things--marriage and eating certain foods. You can't get married, and you can't eat certain foods. What kind of religion is this, for goodness' sake? Have you ever seen this in history? We'll just leave that and move on.

What underpins this? Let me tell you what underpins it. It is the idea that in abstaining from these outward things, we might obtain a higher spiritual perfection. We might become, to quote Joe Gauthier from New Year's Eve, we might become level-three Christians.

And as a result of refraining from these things, then we will advance in our spirituality. And so, these hypocritical liars come up with these things--he mentions just two, there's a whole host of them all over the place--but these unlawful requirements, Paul wants his readers to know, are never a means of promoting a superior state of godliness. And what they are suggesting is a self-induced form of asceticism.

They are suggesting that by not touching, by removing yourself, by isolation, by staying away from all this, you can advance the cause. And Paul says you can't. He says it here.

He actually says it with great clarity in Colossians chapter 2, at the end of Colossians 2. He says, Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belong to it, do you submit to its rules? What are the rules? Don't handle, don't taste, don't touch. These are all destined to perish with use, because they're based on human commands and teachings. Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility, and their harsh treatment of the body.

But notice this. They lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence. Isn't that what Jesus told the Pharisees? The Pharisees all, we wash the cup once, wash the cup twice, wash the cup three times.

Jesus says, You can wash the cup till there's no cup left. Well, he didn't say that, but I mean, this is a kind of paraphrase. Basically, he said, You can keep going through all that external rigmarole, but one day you might realize that it's not what goes into a man that defiles a man, it's what comes out of a man that defiles a man.

So the idea of being able to remove yourself from all these external things and by so doing advance the cause spiritually is a lie of the devil, which holds men and women in bondage and makes Pharisees out of them, and makes their Christianity a bunch of rules and regulations, which are first imposed upon themselves and then, even worse, imposed on everyone else with whom they come in contact. Now, what Paul does in Colossians 3--and you can do this as your homework, perhaps--what he does is he says, Listen, the external stuff can't restrain sensuality. But since you have been raised with Christ, and since the Spirit of God lives within you, then if you will respond to the prompting of the Spirit of God, then you will learn to put to death what is earthly, and you will learn to wear the clothes which are heavenly.

But it's not as a result of self-effort from the outside in. It is not a self-induced asceticism. It is a Spirit-filled discipline.

And that's why people are making such heavy weather of trying to be Christians, because all they've done is they've decided on a new form of externalism. They once did this and this and this, then they got kind of interested in Jesus, and now they do this and this and this. And they want to understand that now they have become Christians.

No. Once they were doing kind of pagan things, now they're doing kind of Christian things. But they're still pagans doing Christian things.

Until we come to acknowledge that we're sinners, and then unless God comes and fills us with his Spirit and makes us, inclines our hearts to obedience, then we'll continue to go on our own way. Now, the underlying notion here has a very contemporary dimension to it. It takes until about the second century before Gnosticism gets into its own.

But the roots of this theory and practice were already abroad in a kind of combination of Jewish ritualism and pagan superstition. And so, these first readers were encountering people who were saying to them this. Matter is evil.

God is Spirit. He is not matter. And for these people, you see, Jesus was not actually God.

It was a perfect New Age thing. And that's why, incidentally, Gnosticism just expresses itself in the New Age movement. And if you go to Borders, you will find on the shelves a whole explanation of Gnosticism from the first century on, with the application now in the late twentieth century of people saying, it makes absolute sense.

And what they were saying was, God is Spirit, matter is evil. Therefore, we have to subdue matter. There are two ways you can do it.

You can either shun it, which is what is being dealt with here, or you can overcome it by indulging it. But whatever way you do, you just disregard it completely. You can disregard it by staying away from it, or you

can disregard it by doing anything you like with it.

And John and Peter and Jude and other places address that kind of sensuality, which was an effulgence from Gnosticism. And Paul here is addressing the other side, which is the idea of do not handle, do not touch, stay away, don't touch this, don't get married, don't do these things, and if you do all of that, hey, you're gonna be a great Christian. Now, let me just give you two illustrations, and I'll wrap this up.

One from the early centuries, and one from the twentieth century. Somewhere in here, there's a section on the ascetic movement. This was a book that I had to study--goodness gracious--in 1973.

And in here, it describes the arrival of asceticism in Mesopotamia and different places like that. And Chadwick points out, the writer, that a number of the ascetics became rather bizarre in their approach. And they used to mortify themselves, or seek to mortify the flesh, by doing things like having an iron chain as a belt as an expression of frequent austerity.

And there are a number of people I've seen in the malls who are wearing these things, but nothing at all to do with austerity. It's actually an expression of prosperity. But anyway, in that case, it was austerity.

And a few adopted the life of animals and went around and fed on grass, living in the open air without shade from the sun and with the minimum of clothing. And they justified their method of defying society by claiming to be, quotes, fools for Christ's sake. At the monastery of Talanesos in Syria, Simeon the Stylite, from 390 to 459, practiced his idiosyncratic austerity of living on top of a column.

His austerity was real enough and won the deep reverence of the country people. He attracted many disciples to the monastery and inspired later imitators like Daniel, who lived from 409 to 93. This Daniel spent thirty-three years on a column near Constantinople.

So he's up the pole for thirty-three years in the cause of Christianity. I don't want to be unkind to anyone. I don't want to trample on anyone's toes.

I want to be as nice as I possibly can. But let me tell you, I haven't seen anybody up the pole recently. Literally.

But the limited amount of travel that I do around this country, I keep coming up against this. An increased disengagement from the culture. We don't want to be involved there.

We don't want to be involved there. We don't want to touch this. We don't want to touch that.

So eventually, we're just living in a little bubble all of our own. We might as well be up a pole. All of the salt is in the cellar.

None of it's in the potatoes. All of the pepper's in the shaker. None of it's on the pork.

And the only time we apparently run out is to get political. And then we run back again. It's funny when Jesus never called us to run out for that.

You say, well, that's a long time ago. Yeah, well, what about Marshall Applewhite? Remember him? The music guy? Sorry. He got in touch with the lady.

He called her Peep, and he called himself Bo. He had been the music professor at the Episcopal Church, St. Mark's. And then, of course, he got his Heavensgate business going.

And in the group's documents, Mr. Applewhite and Ms. Nettles are described as representatives of an extraterrestrial plane called the Kingdom of Heaven come to earth to offer the way leading to membership there for those who could overcome their attachment to money, sex, and family life. See? It's the same thing. If you get away from all of this, you can be okay.

Some of the guys got castrated. The women turned their backs on any notion of human sexuality. They all looked the same--did you notice that?--when they died.

Why? Because this hypocritical liar had convinced them of the doctrine of demons, of deceiving spirits by which he himself had been deceived, and so deceived all these other people into believing the most unbelievably incredible material. Surprised? No. Why? 1 Timothy 4. In later times, some will abandon the faith, and they will follow deceiving spirits.

What are the readers to do? Two things, because my time's gone. Well, they're to enjoy the remedy that is there. There's a remedy that they encounter, and there is a liberty that they enjoy.

It's a wonderful little section that Paul then goes to. He says, Listen, God created these things--marriage and these foods--to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. Not just by those who believe and know the truth.

He says, But if men can enjoy being married, and if men can enjoy the food, then why in the world wouldn't Christians be able to do the same? And then he gives the principle, For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer. In other words, when we live in the enjoyment of what God has provided in creation for us, then we may enjoy it to the full. It is not that by our praying we somehow or another transfer some special intrinsic goodness to the food.

I mean, sometimes when we sit in some restaurants, we might wish that we could, but the fact of the matter is, we can't. So what does it mean, it is consecrated? It simply means this, that when I genuinely thank God for what he's given me, then the food is set in its proper perspective, and when it is set in its proper perspective, then it may be enjoyed, and it will be enjoyed as something sacred. And the same is true of sex.

You cannot violate God's command in relationship to human sexuality, either by fornication or whatever else it is, and pray first and pray afterwards. As if somehow or another we could transmute evil into good simply by saying, Well, let's have a little word of prayer about this. That's not what he's saying.

He's saying, but when a husband and wife understand the beauty and the enjoyment and the fulfillment that is represented in human sexuality, then they may enter into it with thanksgiving and with great joy. And when we sit down to eat our food, they say, It is an amazing thing that God would provide for us in this way. We don't have to worry about whether it's pork or whether it's fish on Friday or whatever else it is.

Sit down and enjoy it. I keep meeting Christians who are frightened because things are going too well. They're enjoying themselves, and they think they're waiting.

Oh, man, I've had such a good year, I think I must be doing something wrong. My marriage is in good shape. There's something fouled up here.

Where do you get this from? You want to live thirty-three years up a pole or something? Do you realize what Paul says by the time he ends up? He says in 1 Timothy 6--we'll come to it eventually--he says, Tell the rich people not to hang their hat on being rich. He said, But remember this, God has given us everything richly to enjoy. He's not talking about ill-gotten gain.

He's not talking about rampant materialism. He's not talking about a preoccupation with ourselves that makes us think we're smart because of what we've achieved, because after all, all that we are and all we have is a gift from God in any case. But what he's saying is that God provides these things for us, and that Christians of all people ought to be able to show the world the beauty and the wonder and the enjoyment of living life.

And by our very vitality in life, the world would be coming to us and saying, How come it's like this? Why is your marriage like that? Why is it like this when we eat in your home? And what will the answer be? We've rejected the nonsense from the hypocritical liars. And the remedy is found in God's creation principles. And the liberty that's enjoyed is a wonderful liberty.

So go home and enjoy your lunch. Let us pray. Father, so many men coming after your Son have tried to tie us up in knots in relationship to what it means to follow you, that we do need to pay careful attention to Paul's words here and be on the alert.

Lest we take the grace of God and we use it as a basis for license--namely, just saying we can do what we like, which would be to violate your truth--or that we use it as a foundation for legalism, which again would violate your truth. Help us not to fall down either side of the narrow striding ridge which is living in the perfect law of liberty. Thank you for the wonder of your Word, that having been set free, we don't get entangled again in a yoke of bondage.

Father, I pray that you will help us to be discerning in these days. Grant that our words may be full of grace and seasoned with salt. Grant that coming out of this sermon, you will remove from our recollection anything and all that would be unhelpful and harmful to the cause of Christ.

Grant that we might just follow hard after you. Make us soldiers of your cross, bearers of your name. Help us in every right way to live life to the full.

After all, Jesus said, I have come that you might have life, and that you might have it in all its fullness. Let us then go back to a world in which men and women merely exist, to show them humbly what it means to really live. And may the grace and mercy and peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit rest upon and remain with each of us today and forevermore.

Amen. That concludes this message. Thanks for listening to Truth For Life.

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