

Prepare for Departure

How to Avoid Apostasy

Scripture: 1 Timothy 4:1-5

Sermon Series: *Timothy's Charge*

Topic: Faith, Apostasy, Truth

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

1 Timothy 4:1-5 (ESV)

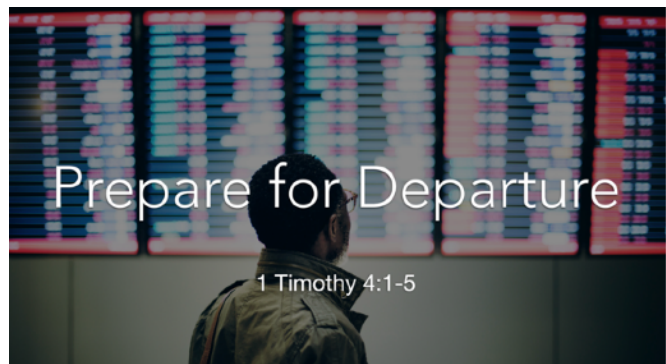
Introduction

Review

Last week Steve took us through the final paragraph of chapter 3, in which we find a short summary of the central truths of the Christian faith and the reason Paul describes the church of Jesus as "*a pillar and buttress of the truth*" (3:14). These words may be an early creed or even a song, but they focus attention on Jesus, who is described as, "*the mystery of godliness*" (1 Tim 3:16).

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

This are the foundational facts of the Christian faith. These facts are true. This summary describes what God actually did in the world history through the person of Jesus of Nazareth.



These statements are the pillars and buttress of the truth. You must believe these things are true in order to have eternal life. This was what pastor Steve covered last week.

Overview

Let's place this in context of where we've been.

- III. The Urgent Charge to the Church (2:1-4:5)
 - A. Prioritize prayer (2:1-15)
 - B. Appoint godly leaders (3:1-15)
 - C. Behavior and belief in the Truth (3:14-16)
 - D. Prepare for departure from the Truth (4:1-5)

In the next paragraph before us this morning (4:1-5), Paul addresses the issue of *how the church should respond when some within the church reject and depart from the truth*. We will see that the church should not be surprised when some people depart from the faith because 1) the Holy Spirit predicted and warned of this departure. It is certain. 2) We will see the reason some depart, 3) the means of the departure, and 4) how to prevent such departure from the faith in our own lives.

Prepare for Departure from the Faith

The main idea on Paul's mind is how Timothy and the church should respond when people depart from the faith. He has previously written that the church is the *"pillar and buttress of the truth"* (3:14), but what is Timothy and the church to do when people within the church intentionally depart from the truth the church teaches about Jesus? We see this in verse one.

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times *some will depart from the faith* by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,
1 Timothy 4:1

The departure from the faith is the primary issue which Paul is addressing. In the Greek, this whole paragraph (4:1-5) "is one sentence with a series of clauses"¹ and the subject is "departure from the faith." This is topic that Paul is preparing Timothy to deal with.

The word translated '*depart*' is the Greek word (*ἀποστήσονται* *apostēsontai*) from which we have our word *apostasy*. The word means "to depart from; to abandon; to forsake, to turn away."² This is not unintentional or accidental, but rather willful and knowing rebellion.³ This departure

¹ William D. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, vol. 46, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2000), 233.

² Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 448.

³ James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

is nothing less than apostasy. What should we Christians think when some among us willingly commit the sin of apostasy and walk away from Jesus?

1) The Certainty of Departure

First, such departure is a certainty and not a surprise. We should not think that Jesus is caught off guard by the defection of some who claimed to be his disciples. The departure from the faith has been clearly foretold.

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,
1 Timothy 4:1

Now the Spirit expressly says. That some would depart has been “*expressly*” spoken of beforehand by the Holy Spirit. When and where might this have happened? Was this something privately spoken to Paul or was he writing about something more widely known?

We know that all men who spoke on behalf of God did so by the power of the Holy Spirit (2 Ptr 1:20-21). No one did so more powerfully than did Jesus, who was mightily anointed with the Holy Spirit at the beginning of his ministry.

In the opening chapters of Revelation we find this same phrase, “*the Spirit says*” (τὸ πνεῦμα λέγει), used in reference to the very words of Jesus seven times (2:7, 11, 17, 25; 3:6, 13, 22). This makes sense in light of the doctrine of the Trinity and the fact that Scriptures refer to the Holy Spirit as “*the Spirit of Jesus*” (Acts 16:6-7; Rom 8:9; Gal 4:6).

Thus, Paul may very well be thinking about the teaching of Jesus⁴ since he on several occasions warned of such apostasy. From the beginning of Jesus’ ministry to the very end he said that there would be among his disciples false followers and pretenders.

²¹ “Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. ²² On that day many will say to me, ‘Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?’ ²³ And then will I declare to them, ‘I never knew you; *depart from me*, you workers of lawlessness.’
Matthew 7:21-23

¹⁰ And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. ¹¹ And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. ¹² And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. ¹³ But the one who endures to the end will be saved.
Matthew 24:10-13

⁴ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 188.

²² For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform signs and wonders, to lead astray, if possible, the elect. ²³ But be on guard; I have told you all things beforehand.
Mark 13:22-23

False followers and pretenders will do amazing things in the name of Jesus, but their hearts will not be truly his. That some people who appear to be followers of Jesus would turn away from him should not surprise the church. There are those who even appear to be strong in the faith who actually have no authentic and living relationship with Jesus. Despite the best efforts of faithful church leaders, pretenders will always find their way into the church. Jesus long ago warned and predicted that this would happen. Thus, no one should be surprised when some turn away from him.

In the later times. When are these “later times?” They began with the coming of Christ into the world and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost. When Peter preached on the day of Pentecost, which took place 50 days after the crucifixion of Jesus, he explained to the people what they were witnessing by quoting from the prophet Joel saying,

¹⁷ “‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh...
Acts 2:17

The “last days” began with the arrival of Jesus and the mighty work he began with the outpouring of his Holy Spirit. The author of Hebrews also explains,

¹ Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets,
² but in these *last days* he has spoken to us by his Son....
Hebrews 1:1-2

Since the time of Jesus, the Last Days have begun. Peter, speaking about Jesus, wrote,

²⁰ He was foreknown before the foundation of the world but was made manifest in the
last times for the sake of you...
1 Peter 1:20

The Last Days began when Jesus was revealed as Messiah. We have been living in the Last Days or the “later times” for the past 2000 years. These “later times” are present, not future. Today we are living in the Last Days. And Paul is warning Timothy and all churches that these last days will be marked by some people “departing from the faith.”

Depart from the faith. Departing from “*the faith*” means departing from the Christian faith, and the truth of the gospel. Departing from “the faith” means they “will depart from the core

teachings of Jesus and the apostles, along with their OT foundations.”⁵ It means they will turn away from Jesus as the Messiah and all that the apostles affirmed about him. Departing from “the faith” means rejecting Jesus himself.

2) The Reason for the Departure

Why would anyone do this? The answer is given at the end of the first verse. There is one reason given, which is *misplaced devotion* directed toward two objects.

¹ Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons,
1 Timothy 4:1

Devoting themselves to deceitful spirits. Those who “depart from the faith” misplace their devotion. The word ‘*devotion*’ means “to pay close attention to and to follow.”⁶ They have swerved from devotion to Jesus. They have stopped paying close attention to Jesus and stopped following him and have begun paying close attention to and following “*deceitful spirits*.” They are still “spiritual” people, interested in “spiritual” things, but they are no longer devoted to Jesus. They are spiritual people, but no longer Jesus people.

They have now attached themselves to “deceitful spirits.” Notice that “spirits” is plural. When this word is singular and used by Paul, the word always refers to the Holy Spirit, but when plural it always refers to *evil* spirits. These people have decided to turn away from the truth and in order to follow lying spirits, who present one way, but truly they are another. They are deceitful to the core. They are untrue, misleading, dishonest, pretenders. Just like Satan, these “deceitful spirits” masquerade as angels of light, but in truth they are demons of darkness (2 Cor 11:14). This is the first problem of those who depart from the faith; they devote themselves to deceitful spirits.

Devoting themselves to... teachings of demons. These “deceitful spirits” are actually demons. Behind a facade of truth is a false demonic face. These demons know how to deceive and they engage themselves in the practice of *teaching*. This is amazing, isn’t it. Doomed demons busying themselves with developing deceptive curricula. Demons are educators. They are expert educators in deception. Their teaching is not benign. What is demonic teaching?

³ If anyone teaches a different doctrine and does not agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, he is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.
1 Timothy 6:3-4

⁵ Robert W. Yarbrough, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, ed. D. A. Carson, Pillar New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; London: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Apollos, 2018), 226–227.

⁶ George W. Knight, *The Pastoral Epistles: A Commentary on the Greek Text*, New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI; Carlisle, England: W.B. Eerdmans; Paternoster Press, 1992), 189.

What is the Teaching of Demons?

What is the doctrine of demons? Demonic doctrine is anything that deviates from apostolic teaching. It is anything that disagrees with the teaching of Jesus and the goodness of godliness. Thus, demonic doctrine twists the teaching of Jesus and subverts the seriousness of sin. Here are five examples of demonic doctrines.

1. **Righteousness is earned, not received as a gift.** "If you want to get into heaven, then you gotta work for it." Any doctrine that teaches that you must do enough good deeds in order to earn entrance into heaven is demonic. Any teaching that tells you that doing more or doing a particular sacred deed or performing a specific religious ritual will guarantee you entrance into heaven, that teaching was dreamed up by a demon. Jesus said, "*Sanctification comes by faith in me*" (Acts 26:18), not works done by you. Righteousness is a gift given only by Jesus to only those who have faith in him.
2. **Rejecting the true nature of Jesus.** "Jesus is just a" Any doctrine that says Jesus was merely a man and not the Sovereign, slain and resurrected, sinless, Son of the one true and living God and Creator of all is rooted in demonic teaching. Any doctrine that says Jesus was merely a powerful prophet or a talented teacher or a respected rabbi is rooted in demonic doctrine. Jesus said, "*Unless you believe that I Am, you will die in your sins*" (John 8:24).
3. **Rejecting the sufficiency of Scripture.** "The Bible is good, but our book is better." Any doctrine is demonic that says you need more than the revealed word of God. Any doctrine that claims to be superior to Holy Scripture is demonic. Any doctrine that teaches another book is necessary to truly know God is demonic in origin. Jesus said, "*Not one iota, nor one dot, will pass from the Law until all is fulfilled*" (Mt 5:18). "*Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away*" (Mk 13:31). The Law refers to the OT and Jesus' words are found in the NT. Any teaching that says you need more than that is demonic.
4. **Reinterpreting the sinfulness of sin.** "Does the Bible really say _____ is a sin?" Any doctrine is demonic that takes what God clearly says is sinful and reinterprets it into something that is commendable. You can often find this in books that have titles like, "What the Bible really says about ..." As if God has been unclear about what is sinful for a long time and finally someone has come along with sagacious mind and perspicacious pen and finally revealed the truth. When that which is forbidden by God is suddenly commended by man, then demonic teaching is behind it. Jesus said, "*You hypocrites... you teach as doctrines of God the mere commandments of men.*"⁷
5. **Revering self above the Suffering Savior.** "You are what God loves most of all." Any doctrine teaches that you are the most valuable being in the universe is a demonic

⁷ My own translation of the essence of Mark 7:6-8.

doctrine. Any teaching that proclaims self as the center of God's universe is demonic. There was a popular worship song several years ago that for the most part was a very good song, except that it had one terribly erroneous line that said of Jesus,

Like a rose trampled on the ground
You took the fall
And thought of me
Above all

It's unclear if the authors of the song were intending to communicate that as Jesus was dying he was thinking about the two of them above all or if they were intending for every individual singer to imagine that Jesus was thinking of himself or herself above all, the fact is that neither are true. I don't know exactly what Jesus was thinking about as he was dying but I'm quite certain he was not thinking about Todd Cravens and how wonderful it would be to have me with him for eternity. The final prayer recorded in John 17 and Jesus' words on the cross—all of which were directed to God the Father—reveal that Jesus was thinking about God the Father above all and not me and not you. Jesus was keeping before him in his dying moments the unspeakable joy set before him of having done all that was pleasing to his Father. He was thinking of pleasing God His Father above all, not humanity collectively or individually.

The point is the subtly of self-worship is demonically seductive. It even creeps into worship songs written by wonderful song writers and otherwise godly and good musicians. I suspect the number one idol today is, in the words of Carl Trueman, is "autonomous, expressive individualism." Most of humanity considers the own individual rights before ever giving two seconds worth of thought to Creator rights or divine rights. Almost every human being lives daily life as if the world revolves around their own purposes rather than around the purposes of God Almighty. The subtle whisper in the ear of our soul that, "You are the most important person in the universe," is a lie come to us from the tongue of Satan or one of his demons.

Some will depart from the faith because of misplaced devotion. They swerve from devotion to Jesus and rather devote themselves to deceitful spirits and doctrine of demons.

3) The Means of the Departure

What is the means of this departure? How did those who depart from the faith come to be devoted to deceitful evil spirits and teaching of demons? How is the teaching of demons disseminated? Demons do not do the actual teaching, but rather they need humans to be their mouthpieces. Someone has to teach the demonic doctrine and that someone are those devoted to these evil "deceitful spirits," which Paul now describes in more detail.

² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

1 Timothy 4:2-3

Through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared. Demons do not actually do the teaching, but rather they look for liars who are willing to do the teaching for them. Demons can't setup YouTube and Instagram accounts, so they need human help with those kinds of things. Demons can't publish books, but humans can. Demons can't sign publishing deals or set up cameras, lights, and microphones. Only people can do those things. But once a demon has found the proper subject, then the treacherous teaching begins.

Who are the proper subjects to purvey such demonic teaching? Insincere, literally "*hypocrisy*," *liars* with seared consciences. They say one thing and do another. The demonic search begins for people who are prone to lying. They look for those who like to "stretch the truth" just a little. Soon, a little leads to a lot. It is a universal truth that evil always goes from bad to worse.⁸ One lie always leads to two, which then leads to three more to cover for the first two, and soon there's a whole web of lies that leads further and further into darkness. Sadly, we all know how sin works. There's a demonic whisper, "Just this once!" And thereafter, "Well, you've already done it once, so why not again?" Then, like a twisted two year old, "Again! Again! Again!"

At the beginning there's always an inward pang of conscience. There is within us a spiritual voice that clearly says to us, "You know this is wrong" [*Like David coming lingering outside after cheating on the test*] However, the longer you ignore the inner voice of conscience, the softer that voice becomes. The more you stubbornly persist in sin, the less clearly the voice of conscience will be. And if you continue in sin—lying to yourself, saying yes to what is wrong and no to what is right, rebelliously continuing on a path you know to be wrong, then there will come a time when the voice of conscience is *seared* and silenced all together.

The word translated '*seared*' is *κεκαυστηριασμένων* (*kekaustēriasmenōn*) and is the word from which we have our word 'cauterize,' which means 'to burn' in order to stop the bleeding. Used here the word means "to stop the voice of correction."

Demons thrive in the lives of those with cauterized consciences who have grown so accustomed to doing and teaching evil that they no longer feel anything when they do evil and speak lies. Demonic teaching is bold and in mouth of insincere, hypocritical liars who have so willingly loved a lie that they appear convinced that their deceptive teaching is true. Liars with lots of likes and followers and corporate sponsors, led on by demonic doctrines are leading many to depart from Jesus every day. Paul gives two examples of their demonic teaching.

Who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods. We can summarize the demonic teaching of these insincere liars under the umbrella topic of *asceticism*, which is severe self-discipline and denial of appetites. The underlying belief behind this doctrine is that the body is

⁸ 2 Timothy 3:13.

evil and to give in to bodily desires is sinful. These liars were preaching a different gospel of self-denial as a means of spiritual progress.

Now there is nothing wrong with dedicating your life to remaining unmarried out of devotion to Jesus and there is great benefit to practicing the spiritual discipline of periodic fasting. Paul himself was unmarried and he would often fast, but in Ephesus these false teachers were “*forbidding marriage*,” by evidently teaching that sexual relations between husband and wife were sinful. And they “*required abstinence*” from certain foods as a rule and standard of righteousness. In other words, they were saying if you really want to know God, then you must never get married and you must never eat this or that kind of food. What they were doing is establishing their own rules of righteousness.⁹ They were setting up their own religious standards by creating a new religion founded upon human effort. They are teaching that righteousness is earned through determined work, not given as a gracious gift through faith. However, they were speaking demonic lies.

Th means of the departure from the faith is the ascetic teaching of liars who learned these doctrines from demons and then convincingly taught it in the church at Ephesus.

4) The Antidote to Apostasy

What is the anted to this apostasy? How do we prevent departing from the faith? Paul offers two steps to prevent departure from the faith. First, believe and know the truth and secondly give thanks to God.

³ ...God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

1 Timothy 4:4-5

God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. The first step in fighting apostasy is *believing and knowing the truth*. Paul writes, “**Everything created by God is good.**” He is quoting Genesis 1, which seven times states that when God created he saw that what he created was good.¹⁰

Marriage and food are both created by God. Marriage is God’s idea and food is God’s idea. God could have made a world in which neither were required. He could have created a world in which people were solar powered so that all that would be needed to get more energy was to stand still in the sun for 45 minutes each day and boom, off we go to work. Or he could have created a world in reproduction required no sexual activity but rather every year or two a woman would lay an egg and put it in nice nest and then it would grow for 9 months and then it hatches and out crawls a little human. But God didn’t create that world. He created this world in which he gave foods in the form of plants and meat and marriage and sexual

⁹ Romans 10:3.

¹⁰ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31.

relations as the appointed pathway to populate the planet. God created both marriage and food and he has given them as good gifts to mankind. Thus, they both are to be received with thanksgiving to God for having given such good gifts. Liars who teach otherwise will lead many to depart from the faith.

The only way to avoid being deceived by a lie is to know and believe the truth. If you know and believe the truth, then you will be able to discern a lie as soon as you hear it.

The Marriage Lie

Someone might tell you, Jesus was never married because the true pathway into heaven is through singleness. Sexual indulgence is sinful and since Jesus forsook marriage and we are his followers, then we must follow him in this holy way so that we too can enter into heaven and live forever with him.

If you know and believe the truth, then you will know that this is a lie and a perversion of what Jesus said. While it is true that Jesus remained unmarried, it is not true that Jesus ever taught that marriage sin or that sex between husband and wife was sinful. Jesus honored marriage by attending a wedding celebration, by praising marriage as God's plan from the foundation of creation, and by clearly teaching that singleness is a gift given only to some and not all people (Jn 2; Mt 19:4-6, 11).

The Food Lie

Someone might tell you that holy people are vegetarian because in the beginning God created the world and in the garden of Eden he gave to man all fruit bearing trees, clearly teaching us that God's original design is that humans be only vegetarians. However, if you know and believe the truth then you would know that God himself later (Gn 9:3) granted permission to eat meat, Jesus "*declared all foods clean*" (Mk 7:19), God granted Peter a threefold vision affirming all foods clean (Acts 10:10-16), and the first church council affirmed the same (Acts 15). Therefore it is a lie that eating meat is sinful and being vegetarian is more holy.

The point is, if you know the truth then you will not be deceived by demonic lies. As it concerns the Lord Jesus and the way of salvation, the only way to know and believe the truth is to know and believe the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments. If you want to know the truth, then you must know God's word. Knowing and believing the truth is the first antidote to apostasy.

The second antidote to apostasy is "*receiving with thanksgiving*" the good gifts God has given. Twice in these last two verses Paul states thanksgiving is crucial to keeping the faith. Once you know the truth, that God gives good gifts for the enjoyment of his people, then the appropriate response is return thanks to God for his gracious gifts. A thankless person is a joyless person, but a thankful person is a joyful person. "Nothing is to be rejected if it is receive with thanksgiving." "For it is made holy by the word of God and prayer." Give thanks to God for everything. G.K. Chesterton said,

"You say grace [ie. thanks] before meals. All right. But I say [thanks] before the play and the opera. And [thanks] before I open a book, and [thanks] before sketching, painting, swimming, fencing, boxing, walking, playing, dancing, and [thanks] before I dip the pen in the ink."¹¹

Conclusion

1. **Don't be surprised when some depart from the faith.** There will always be false believers among true believers. Just as Judas the betrayer lived among the eleven true disciples, so within the true church of Jesus there will be fake followers. Do be aware of this and do not be surprised by this, nor allow this fact to unsteady your own faith in Jesus.

2. **Don't be deceived by liars.** There will always be hypocritical liars and lovers of self who will happily teach demonic doctrines in order to draw followers away from Jesus and to themselves. The apostle Paul said to the elders of the church of Ephesus, "

²⁹ I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them.

Acts 20:29-30

3. **Do know the truth.** The only way to discover a lie is to clearly know the truth. Jesus said, "*I am the truth.*"¹² He said to Pilate, "*For this purpose I was born and for this purpose I came into the world—to bear witness to the truth.*"¹³ Jesus said to his Father, "*Your word is truth.*"¹⁴ Know both Jesus and the word of God and you'll be able to discern the lying doctrine of demons.

4. **Do check your devotion.** To what or whom are you devoted? To what or whom do you give the greatest degree of dedication, time, and energy? To what or whom have you given the deepest affections of your heart? Will you depart from Him with divided devotion before the end or will you endure faithfully devoted to him until the end?

5. **Do give thanks.** Do you truly know that every good and perfect gift in your life has come down to you from God the Father above. Do you focus more on all that God has given you or more on what he has not given you? Do you more often give him thanks for all that you have from him or are you more often complaining for all that he has not yet given you which you think you deserve?

¹¹ Bryan Chapell, *1-2 Timothy and Titus, Preaching the Word Commentary* (Crossway: Wheaton, IL ?)

¹² John 14:6.

¹³ John 18:37.

¹⁴ John 17:17.

Discussion Questions

1. When Paul speaks of "departing from the faith" (1 Tim. 4:1), what does he mean by "the faith?" How is departing from the faith different from struggling with doubt, temptation, or spiritual weakness?
2. Paul says the Holy Spirit expressly warned that apostasy would occur. Why is it important for Christians to understand that false teaching and apostasy are not unexpected? How should this shape the way we respond when someone abandons the faith?
3. According to this passage, what is the root cause of apostasy? How does misplaced devotion eventually lead someone away from Christ?
4. The sermon described "teachings of demons" as any teaching that contradicts the gospel and the apostolic Scriptures. What are some examples of teachings or cultural ideas today that subtly compete with or distort biblical truth?
5. Paul describes false teachers as hypocritical liars with seared consciences (vv. 2–3). What does it mean to have a seared conscience? How can believers guard their consciences from becoming hardened by sin?
6. The false teachers condemned things that God had declared good, such as marriage and food. Why is it dangerous to add human rules where God has given freedom? Are there ways Christians today can unintentionally elevate personal preferences into spiritual requirements?
7. The sermon emphasized that knowing the truth is the primary antidote to deception. What practical habits help believers become deeply grounded in God's Word so they can recognize error?
8. Paul repeatedly connects gratitude with perseverance in the faith (vv. 3–5). Why do you think thanksgiving is such an important safeguard against spiritual drift? What role does gratitude play in your own walk with Christ?
9. The sermon challenged us to examine our devotion. What currently receives the greatest share of your attention, affection, time, and energy? Are there any good things that may be competing with wholehearted devotion to Christ?
10. Looking at Paul's concluding applications, which one do you most need to embrace this week?
 - Not being surprised by apostasy?
 - Refusing to be deceived by false teaching?
 - Knowing God's truth more deeply?
 - Examining your devotion?
 - Growing in thankfulness?
 - What specific step will you take this week to apply it?