

Alarming Apostasy

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help, if we could turn to 1 Timothy, 1 Timothy chapter 4, and we're going to read the first five verses.

1 Timothy chapter 4, and we're reading from the beginning. Paul writes,

Sadly, however, this battleground has not only found its way into the life of our communities, it has also found its way into the life of our church and our congregations.

And it has caused many casualties, Christian casualties, and what we'll call this evening alarming apostasy.

The battleground between good and evil has caused Christian casualties and alarming apostasy, where professing Christians have been wounded by worldliness.

[2 : 0 6] They've succumbed to Satan. They've been lured into lies. They've turned away from the truth, and they have fallen away from the faith. And Paul has already mentioned two of the Christian casualties that there were at Ephesus.

In chapter 1, he highlighted two men, Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had made shipwreck of their faith by rejecting the gospel. Which is why in this section, in chapter 4, Paul reminds Timothy of what happens when a congregation is constantly bombarded by false teaching that is never dealt with?

What happens to a congregation that is constantly bombarded by false teaching that is never dealt with? Now, as you know, Paul, he wrote this personal and pastoral letter to gently guide Timothy through some of the pastoral problems he was facing.

But the truth is, Timothy's pastoral problems were actually positional problems, because, as we've said, there were erroneous elders, and there were disobedient deacons who were in positions of leadership at the church in Ephesus.

And the problem about these leaders was that they were soft on sin, they were loose on the law, and they were just glossing over the gospel, to the point that their false teaching had had this impact and this influence upon the congregation.

[3 : 3 1] But as we learned in chapter 3, we learned that when we have effective elders, when we have devoted deacons, it will have an impact, it will have an influence upon a congregation, because it will encourage them and enable them to be mission-minded in their membership.

Which is why when we come to chapter 4, Paul emphasizes and exhorts Timothy to deal with the problem. He exhorts him and emphasizes to Timothy to deal with these erroneous elders and these disobedient deacons. And as Paul says here, if you don't, it will only get worse. If you don't, it'll only get worse, and there will be other Christian casualties, and there will be more alarming apostasy. And so in this section, verses 1 to 5 of chapter 4, we see Paul dealing with two things, demonic deception and demonic doctrine. Demonic deception and demonic doctrine.

So first of all, demonic deception. Look at verse 1. Paul says, 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 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared. Now the alarming nature of apostasy is nothing new. Apostasy has been around for centuries.

It was rife in the Old Testament church, and as we see here, it was raging in the New Testament church. The Old Testament church, as you know, was God's covenant people who bore God's covenant sign of circumcision. They were part of the covenant community of God's people. They were given all the covenant promises of God. And yet what we read throughout the Old Testament is that there was periods of alarming apostasy. We see it in the period of the judges, where they did what was right in their own eyes, and it led to this constant cycle throughout the period of the judges. A cycle of rebellion and then restoration. Rebellion and then restoration. Rebellion and then restoration.

And then you go into the period of the kings. And the kings were meant to lead the Lord's covenant people to worship the Lord. But as we read in the period of the kings, the kings did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, and they turned the people away from worshiping their covenant Lord to worshiping Baal. And that was, in fact, the reason why the Israelites eventually ended up in exile in Babylon for 70 years. It was all because of their alarming apostasy. And this is why Paul opens this chapter stating in verse 1, he says, The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith. In other words, he says, The Holy Spirit has spoken through God's Word, both in the Old and in the New Testament.

[6 : 51] Because that's how the Holy Spirit speaks. He speaks through the Word. He speaks through God's Word because God's Word is Spirit-filled. It's Spirit-breathed.

It's the divine breath of God, the Holy Spirit. That's what Paul reminds Timothy again in his second and final letter. He says to Timothy in 2 Timothy chapter 3, All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. It's breathed out by God, the Holy Spirit.

Therefore, it's profitably, he says, for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent and equipped for every good work.

But notice what the Spirit says in verse 1. The Spirit expressly says that in later times, in the latter times, in the last days, some will depart from the faith.

So, the Spirit says, through Paul, that in the period between the ascension of Jesus and the second coming of Jesus, more people will depart from the faith.

[8 : 02] If it was prevalent in the Old Testament church, it will be prevalent in the New Testament church. It will be in these last days, which is now. We are living in the last days.

And the nature of apostasy, says the Spirit, will be alarming. Because it was rife in the Old Testament, and it will be raging in the New Testament too. But, you know, when you look at the Gospels, we see that Jesus was someone who often dealt with alarming apostasy.

And he dealt with it on a number of occasions. There were the crowds who followed Jesus. We see that in all the Gospels. All the Gospel writers, they talk about the crowds that followed Jesus everywhere.

And some of them followed Him for a while and then fell away. Some of them followed for a while and then fell away.

And what's interesting is that it was the same crowds who later shouted, Crucify Him. Crucify Him. We read in John chapter 6 that many of Jesus' disciples turned back and walked with Him no longer.

[9 : 17] And it's at that point that Jesus turned to His closer twelve. The twelve disciples. And He said to them, Do you also want to go away?

And you remember that it was at that point that Peter came forward and he made that confession of the Christians saying, Lord, to whom else can we go? You alone have the words of eternal life.

But as you know, not everyone within the twelve was of the same opinion. Because Judas Iscariot would prove to be the most alarming apostate in the New Testament church.

Judas was the first church treasurer. He was put in a position of trust. Judas preached God's Word. Judas performed miracles. Judas taught and told people about Jesus.

But Judas Iscariot proved to be the most alarming apostate in the New Testament church. when Satan entered into his heart. And you know, I always find those opening words of John chapter 13 to be some of the most solemn words in the Bible.

[10 : 28] Where John tells us that the devil, having put into the heart of Judas Iscariot to betray Jesus, it was a demonic deception.

It was a demonic deception. And that's because all alarming apostasy is a result of demonic deception. All alarming apostasy is a result of demonic deception.

Whether it's sacrificing to idols like it was in the Old Testament church, or selling Jesus for 30 pieces of silver like Judas, or serving false religions, or seeking false gains and goals, it's all demonic deception.

And of course, no one sees it as demonic deception at the time. Because the darkness of the devil is always disguised as an angel of light.

But it is demonic deception. And you know, Paul was someone who also encountered and experienced someone who had succumbed to Satan and demonic deception.

[11 : 32] There was this man called Demas. Demas had abandoned the faith and the gospel he preached. And Demas, he's mentioned in three of Paul's letters.

He's mentioned in the letter of Colossians and the letter to Philemon. And when he's mentioned in these letters, he's mentioned as someone who is actively serving in the church.

But by the time it comes to Paul's second and final letter to Timothy, Demas, we're told, has deserted the church. He has succumbed to Satan.

He has succumbed to his demonic deception. Demas has fallen prey to the love of the world and the lust of the world. And you know, my friend, what it should teach us is that it should be no surprise to us that there are Christian casualties.

It should be no surprise to us that there are some who are wounded by worldliness and lured into lies and succumb to Satan. It should be no surprise to us that there are some who turn away from the truth and fall away from the faith.

[12 : 44] And it should be no surprise to us because Jesus first threw our attention to the alarming nature of apostasy in the parable of the sower.

As we read earlier, the parable of the sower is all about the sower who sowed seed. And the seed fell on four types of soil. And the four types of soil, they represent the four types of heart that hears the gospel.

There's the hardened heart and the hollow heart and the hungry heart and also the healthy heart. And Jesus said that the hollow heart, which is the seed that fell on rocky ground, they are the ones who, when they hear the word, they receive it with joy, but they have no root.

And they believe for a while. But in time of testing, they fall away. My friend, the seed that fell on rocky ground had no depth, no root, and no earth.

All that grew upwards withered because it didn't grow downwards. It was a hollow heart. It was a hollow heart. But, you know, I want to be clear when we're talking about apostasy.

[14 : 05] An apostate is not a backslidden Christian. A backslidden Christian is someone who is aware that they are backslidden. A backslidden Christian loves the Lord.

But because of a certain sin or a certain circumstance in their life, they're not where they should be. And they know that they're not where they should be. That's why it's often said that the word backsliding is an anagram for slack abiding.

Think about it. The word backsliding is an anagram for slack abiding. Also, an apostate is not someone who struggles with assurance of salvation or questions if they're a Christian or not.

There are many people in our congregation and in the community who I believe that struggle with assurance. And they struggle with whether or not they're a Christian. But they're not apostate.

Because if you were to ask them, if you were to ask the backslidden Christian or the Christian struggling with assurance, if you were to ask them, do you love the Lord? Do you love God's Word?

[15 : 08] Do you love God's people? They would say, yes, of course I do. Yes, of course I do. Yes, of course I do. But an apostate. And this is, it's a sad reality.

And that's what Paul is presenting to us. It's a sad reality. The apostate would say, when the apostate is asked, do you love the Lord? Do you love God's Word? Do you love God's people? They would say, no, I don't.

There was a day I did. But not anymore. There was a day I did. And that's because an apostate, as it's described in the New Testament, is someone who once openly claimed and confessed Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior, but now openly refuses Him as Lord and rejects Him as Savior.

The example we have is within the twelve disciples. Peter was a backslider. He denied Jesus. But he loved Jesus. Judas was an apostate who turned away from Jesus and denied Him and even betrayed Him.

This is why Paul says in verse 1 that an apostate will depart from the faith, and they will devote themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

[16 : 37] Now, that doesn't necessarily mean that they're going to start participating in the occult or partake in devil worship. Rather, it means that they've now turned away and they've turned against the Lord.

They now desire and devote and they dedicate their life to what is unholy and ungodly. It's demonic deception. The God of this world has blinded their minds, which immediately raises the question in our minds, were they saved in the first place?

Were they saved in the first place? And according to Jesus in the parable of the sower, the answer is no.

The answer is no. The only heart in the parable of the sower that is saved is the healthy heart. The other three fall away.

The only heart that is growing and bearing fruit is the healthy heart. And you know, that's why when Calvin described the hollow heart, the seed that fell upon the rocky ground, Calvin said that that person, the person who fell away, they had temporary faith.

[17 : 55] That's how he describes it. They had temporary faith. But my friend, true faith, true faith has a healthy heart.

True faith bears fruit. True faith prays to be kept and perseveres to the end. That's what the New Testament teaches us.

True faith prays to be kept and perseveres to the end. So the lesson for us, my friend, is keep praying that you'll be kept and keep persevering to the end because the devil is out to get you.

He's out to get me. There is always demonic deception. True faith prays to be kept and perseveres to the end.

But in this section, Paul is dealing with, first of all, demonic deception, then secondly, demonic doctrine. So demonic doctrine. Look again at verse 1. It says, 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 through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

[19 : 30] The thing about demonic deception and demonic doctrine is that it dates all the way back to the Garden of Eden because it's there that we witness the first demonic deception with Adam's wife, Eve, who, as you know, she was deceived with demonic doctrine.

But the demonic doctrine of Satan in the Garden of Eden, it was very subtle because it began with only a question. Did God really say?

Did God really say? And you know, that has been the subtle tactic of Satan throughout the whole of history. You come to God's Word, did God really say?

Did God really say? That is the intention of demonic doctrine. It's always to undermine and undervalue God's Word. But you know, what's solemn and what's sobering is that an apostate is someone who once declared and defended the doctrines of grace.

But now they denounce them. They deny the doctrines of grace. And they do so, says Paul, because their conscience has been seared with a hot iron.

[20 : 47] Their conscience, he says, has been dulled and deadened. Their conscience has become numb and almost nothing towards the doctrines of grace.

And instead, their conscience has become accepting and even accommodating for all the demonic deception. But you know, the two areas of God's Word which were being undermined and undervalued here in the church in Ephesus, they were actually two of the greatest blessings and benefits of life.

Marriage and food. And you know, this is what's remarkable because if we were asked, well, what do you think would have been deceiving the people?

Do you know, if we were even to have guessed what the demonic doctrine that was being taught by these erroneous elders actually was, we would never have guessed. We would never have guessed that their demonic doctrine was about marriage and food.

We would never have guessed that that's what was dissolving and diluting the gospel in Ephesus. We would never have guessed that that's what was weakening and watering down the Word of God at Ephesus.

[21 : 58] We would have thought, well, it must be something more obvious than that, like denying the deity of Christ or ignoring the incarnation or rejecting the resurrection or altering the atonement or even abandoning the Word of God altogether.

These things came, but it started with something very subtle. And you know, we would have never thought it would be marriage or food, which only goes to show how subtle Satan really is.

That Satan seeks to gain a foothold in our lives with things that we would never even think of. Because as Paul says, marriage and food, he says in verses 4 and 5, he says that they are good things.

They're God things because they're created by God. And yet Satan, he subtly twists our delights into danger. And he makes something that is safe into something that is sinful.

Satan subtly twists our delights into danger and something safe into something sinful. Because the demonic doctrine of Ephesus stated that certain foods were forbidden and fasting was favorable.

[23 : 23] But then you apply it to nowadays. Nowadays, it actually goes even further. Because when Satan convinces someone that their appearance isn't appealing and they're not attractive to anyone, which is often done through the false and fake facade of Facebook and social media, and yet Satan subtly says, you are not fearfully and wonderfully made.

Satan subtly says, you're not beautiful in the eyes of God. Satan subtly says, your family and your friends think you are ugly. And you know, with something as simple and as subtle as food, Satan can twist our delights into danger.

Because what can sometimes start us maybe avoiding or abstaining from certain foods in our diet, it can quickly become fasting. And it's said that one in 50 people in the UK regularly fast and that fasting becomes an eating disorder.

And then it becomes bulimia or anorexia. That's how subtle Satan really is. But even more so when it comes to marriage.

Because in the first century, the demonic doctrine of Ephesus stated that marriage, which was actually something that was safe, God created it as something safe, they said it's something sinful.

[24 : 58] The erroneous elders taught that in order to be holy and happy, in order to be preserved and pure, you must avoid and abstain from marriage. But of course, this goes against the created order, the organization of creation because marriage is a creation ordinance.

Marriage was instituted and instructed by God at creation. Marriage is one of the blessings and benefits of life that should be protected and preserved. And you bring it forward to the 21st century.

Satan has subtly turned and twisted marriage from being something safe to something sinful. In fact, marriage is probably the most undermined and undervalued institution in our society today.

Not just because of affairs and divorce, but also because of the chaos and the confusion of the LGBT and same-sex marriage.

Of course, same-sex marriage is not marriage. Our government might claim and call it marriage, but it's not marriage. Because marriage, as the Bible tells us and teaches us, marriage is a holy state instituted by God at creation and instructed that man and woman should be brought together in a union.

[26 : 25] But what's devastating is that the chaos and confusion of same-sex marriage not only reigns in the communities of our nation, it also reigns in the church of our nation.

You know, later this month, the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland will approve an overture for the solemnization of same-sex marriage.

Ministers, elders, and deacons in the Church of Scotland and members, they're already allowed to be in same-sex relationships and same-sex marriages. But now ministers in the Church of Scotland will be allowed to perform same-sex marriage ceremonies in church, which is yet another heartbreaking move against many of the good and godly people who are in the Church of Scotland.

But you know, I always believe that there comes a time when reformation is impossible and separation is inevitable. And you know, Paul's teaching here about demonic doctrine and demonic deception, it makes us realize that this is so relevant to us.

So relevant to us. Because this is what happens when Satan silently and subtly gets a foothold and just opens the floodgates.

[27 : 58] It's demonic deception with demonic doctrine. Therefore, as a church, Paul is reminding Timothy here, but he's also reminding us, as the Church of Jesus Christ, we have a biblical mandate to directly deal with demonic deception and demonic doctrine.

Because if we don't, don't, we will become like the church in Smyrna. We will become like the church in Smyrna.

Geographically, the church in Smyrna wasn't far away from the church in Ephesus. It was only a few miles away. They were only next door.

But Jesus solemnly said about them that they had become a synagogue of Satan. You read the letters of Revelation.

That's how Jesus describes the church in Smyrna. They become a synagogue of Satan because they had succumbed to Satan's demonic deception and demonic doctrine.

[29 : 07] And you know, that's why Paul said at the end of chapter 3 that the church in Ephesus, in order for it to remain the church of the living God, you must have effective elders.

You must have devoted deacons. You must have a mission-minded membership. In order to be the church of the living God, you need to deal with and denounce all demonic deception, all demonic doctrine.

In order to be the church of the living God, says Paul, we need to put on the whole armor of God that we may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil because we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities and powers, against the spiritual rulers of darkness of this world, against the spiritual wickedness in high places.

You know, that's why Paul sent to the church in Ephesus in Ephesians chapter 6, and to us. He says, stand firm. Stand firm, having fastened to you the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, shoes ready with the gospel of peace, have a shield of faith to extinguish the fiery darts of the evil one, put on the helmet of salvation, carry with you the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God, and then he says, and this is how we'll conclude, praying at all times, keeping alert with all perseverance, and boldly proclaiming the mystery of the gospel.

And what is the mystery of the gospel? The last verse of the previous chapter. Proclaiming the mystery of the gospel, 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.

[31 : 12] my friend, we are to stand firm and keep preaching Christ and Him crucified. Despite the demonic deception, despite the demonic doctrine, we keep preaching Christ crucified, because it is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe.

Well, may the Lord bless these thoughts to us. Let us pray. O Lord, our gracious God, that Thou wouldst keep us.

For Lord, we know we cannot keep ourselves. Help us, Lord, as Thy people, to be like the good soil that received the good seed, that we would continue to bear fruit, that we would continue to persevere to the end.

And Lord, we bless Thee and we praise Thee for the promises that we are able to cling to. The promises that we are able to confess. And Lord, help us to do so daily. Lord, keep our going out and our coming in.

Lord, protect our minds and our hearts. Keep the evil one from us. And help us daily to put on the whole armour of God, that we might stand firm against the wiles of the devil.

[32 : 31] And Lord, we know he goes around like a roaring lion, not only in congregations, but also in denominations and churches throughout the world.

Help us, Lord, we pray, to stand, to stand against him and to know that greater is he who is in us than he who is in the world.

Lord, lead us and guide us then day by day by thy spirit and go before us. For we ask it in Jesus' name and for his sake. Amen. We're going to sing again this time in Psalm 27.

Psalm 27, it's in the Scottish Psalter, page 236. Psalm 27, we're singing from the beginning down to the verse marked four.

And then after we sing, the live stream will come to an end and I'll ask two of the gentlemen here this evening to lead us in prayer.

[33 : 38] And just a couple of things to highlight or a few things to highlight for prayer, just to keep your mind on these things. This week, this is the praying for one another prayer notes that came out on Monday.

We're encouraged to pray for the free church youth camps that are going to take place in the summer. That's where so many children are. And children that don't have any gospel background and they're brought to these camps and they hear the gospel.

So pray for the seed, the seed that is sown. That's what we should be praying for. We're also encouraged to pray for Kilmally Free Church and as they, like many other congregations, resume church and worship and encouraging people to gather again with them.

So remember Kilmally, Christ Church Glasgow, that's a new church plant in, not Partick, but it's just up from Partick, Broomhill.

Is that right, Murdo? Broomhill. Is that right? It's around that area. Yeah, so Christ Church Glasgow, that's where they've planted.

[34 : 45] There's also East Kilbride, which is a vacant congregation. That's where obviously Ian Thompson was, who's now ministering Garibost Free Church. So please remember these congregations as they continue, like us, to sow the seed.

And also remember our friends in the Slavic Gospel Association as well as we heard from them on Sunday evening. So we're going to sing Psalm 27, verses 1 to 4.

The Lord's my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed. My life's strength is the Lord of whom then shall I be afraid. When as mine enemies and foes, most wicked Persians all, to eat my flesh against me rose, they stumbled and did fall.

We'll sing down to the end of the double verse marked 4. To God's praise. verse 1 to verse 1 to the Lord my light and saving health, who shall make me dismayed.

My life's strength is the Lord of whom then shall I be afraid.

[36 : 04] When a slid heaven means unfold, most wicked persons all, to eat my flesh against me rose, face stumbled and did fall.

Against me though I know sent can, my heart can't fear let sit.

Though war against me rise, I will be confident in this.

One thing I hope the Lord desire and will seek to all day that all day that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold may and admire, and that I in his holy place may reverently inquire.

And that I in his holy place may reverently inquire. Thank you.

[38 : 06] Thank you.