

If you have been in the church for while... the chances are... that you have heard the claim (at least once) that the United States Secret Service never shows bank tellers counterfeit money when teaching them to identify it. The agents who do the training... show bank tellers only examples of genuine money... so that when the phony money appears before them... they will know it by its difference from the real thing. ... The application is given that Christians are better off studying truth... instead of heresy.)

Over the years I have heard this story told countless numbers of times. ... There's only ONE problem. ... It may not be true. ... Theologian Roger Olson writes:

*On checking with the Treasury Department's Minneapolis Secret Service agent in charge of training bank tellers to identify counterfeit money, he laughed at the story and wondered aloud who would start it and who would believe it. At my request he sent me a letter confirming that the Secret Service does show examples of counterfeit money to bank tellers.*

I'm grateful for Roger Olson checking this popular church-story out. (You see)... I believe it is important and valuable for Christians to be prepared by knowing (not only theological correctness) ... but also to be familiar with the characteristics and some examples of basic heresy... that Satan perpetuates in our churches. The Apostle Paul (in the passage of Scripture that we come to in our study through 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy) seems to agree.

Last week... we saw that Paul wrote to Timothy saying... that the church is to be “the pillar and support of the truth” (3:15). And right after that... in today's passage... he shows us how to recognize false teachers. ... How tragic it would be (!) for us to hold-up and support AS TRUE a false theology.

As we open 1 Timothy chapter 4... Paul says... If we are going to be the pillar of truth... we should not be surprised to see some fall away from the church... pursue rival systems of thought... and become enemies of what we hold forth. We need to know that we will be challenged... falsehood will come from unexpected sources... and we need to be able to recognize it.

False teaching was rampant in the first century, and it is rampant now. The world *and* the church are full of theology that is unbiblical. For example, prosperity theology (the “health and wealth gospel) says that if you trust Jesus... He will give you health and wealth. ... Cult theology (on the other hand) typically says that Jesus was only a prophet... a man... and not God in human flesh. ... And then there’s what we might call “popular theology” - a theology consisting of ideas about how you can improve your life through positive thinking... and obtain all that you desire by (simply) retraining your brain to be more positive. ... This teaching (today) comes from best-selling authors who pastor our nation’s largest churches. Be on guard against such errors. Do not support it.

(And) in light of Paul’s warnings about false teachers... we should not be surprised by them. ... Don’t let that kind of apostasy (fellow church members who leave) throw your own faith into a tailspin. God has told us ahead of time that it will happen. ... But our passage today isn’t just about normal church members walking away. It is about church leaders... influential teachers... and pastors who depart and become false teachers.

We shouldn’t be shocked by the sudden change into false teachers... from those we have known as “outstanding Christians.” ... Beyond their outward

appearances... we need to be able to detect their error... and not support them in it.

So our passage today will make *four things* clear to us:

1. The **certainty** (or predictability) of apostates (1)
2. The **characteristics** of apostates (false teachers) (1-2)
3. The **content** of their apostasy (3-4)
4. The prevention and **cure** of apostasy (5)

So let's get started...

### 1 Tim 4:1-2

Don't be fooled: false teaching is demonic... (straight from hell.) And it *comes to life* through **deceptive teachers**. ... These teachers are "liars whose consciences are seared." ... They are men and women who have become *numb to the truth* and are spreading "distractions from God's truth about what He likes."

Now don't misunderstand. These are not individuals who rise up in the church and announce, "*My conscience is seared, and I'm here to spread lies about what God REALLY desires.*" ... (If only it were that simple.) ... That's what makes false teaching deceptive — it often comes from people *in the church* who claim to be spreading the truth.

The point is well made: the church and the genuine believer have to be *constantly* on guard against false teaching. The terrible danger of false teaching *always* confronts the church and every believer. And note: this is a revelation of the Spirit of God *Himself*. It is the warning of *God's Spirit*. The

Spirit has spoken *expressly* (rhetos)... that is... “in specific terms”... “in plain words”... “distinctly”... so that there can be no question that this is **not** a frivolous warning... (like those spam phone call messages that tell you your car’s warranty is about to expire...) ... False teachers will arise **inside the church**... during the latter times.

Now... every time the Bible refers to “the latter times” (or “last days”)... it refers to the time period that began with Christ’s resurrection... and will continue until his return (when he will set up his Kingdom and judge all humanity.) ... 1 John 2:18 supports this fact when it says: “*Children, it is the last hour.*” And the writer of Hebrews wrote: “...*in these last days has spoken to us through His Son...*” So we see from the way Scripture itself uses the concept... that “*latter days*” is our present church era... from Jesus’ resurrection... to the time of His 2<sup>nd</sup> Coming. (It is certain that **our day** will contend with apostates.)

Jesus **and** the apostles... forewarned us that false teachers will abound — loving money and attention... distorting the truth... dividing believers... and causing many to go astray as they follow lying spirits and teachings that come from demons.

**Matthew 24:5 (ESV)**

*<sup>5</sup> For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.*

**Romans 16:18 (ESV)**

*<sup>18</sup> For such persons do not serve our Lord Christ, but their own appetites, and by smooth talk and flattery they deceive the hearts of the naive.*

**2 Peter 2:1 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will*

*be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing upon themselves swift destruction.*

**Jude 1:18-19 (ESV)**

*<sup>18</sup> They said to you, “In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions.” <sup>19</sup> It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit.*

Already in the first century those ideological... moral... and spiritual tendencies... were appearing. (And) a passage that we studied a few weeks ago (2 Thes. 2:1-12)... taught us that it will climax in the great rejection of Christianity at the revelation of the antichrist.

From the 1<sup>st</sup> century forward... there will be church participants... who will turn away from the faith... even though they appear to be faithful believers. They pretend to be religious... but their consciences are dead.

We can recognize false teachers by the description Paul gave in these first two verses. You see... false teachers commit four tragic errors.

**1. False teachers “depart from the faith.”**

This passage is not dealing with the philosophies and false teachings taught by the unbelievers out in the world. It is talking about false teachers within the church itself.

“Depart” is *aphistemi* (in the Greek)... and it means “*to stand away from.*” A departure suggests (not only) that you have a point to which you are going... but also a point from which you have come. ... The word simply means an intentional removal from one place to another. ... They leave intentionally... turning their back on the truth.

One cannot accidentally become an apostate. It's a choice. Neither can one become guilty of apostasy over nonessential doctrines... or issues that the Scriptures do not definitively address. ... For example... I disagree with fellow believers who believe Christ will rapture the church AFTER the tribulation... but I don't consider them "apostate." THAT is a nonessential doctrine.

Those who apostatize are ones who have professed (at one time) to hold to the faith... (the essential teachings from the apostles)... but now they have departed from it. But their departure does not mean that they were saved and have now lost their salvation. ... An apostate is an unsaved person who eventually reveals his true spiritual identity by his voluntary denial of redemptive truth. ... How do I know this...? ... Because John specifically told us this about apostates:

**1 John 2:19 (ESV)**

*<sup>19</sup> They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us.*

**1. False teachers "depart from the faith."**

**2. False teachers follow deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons.**

What has caused them to depart? ... Is it because they have become better educated... more intellectual? ... Is it because of scientific developments and increased knowledge... which reveals that the faith can no longer be held? ... No... Paul says... "Some shall depart from the faith - *giving heed to seducing spirits.*"

Spiritual error is seldom due to innocent mistakes. It is more often due to the conscious strategies of demonic forces. And they are very deceitful!

Apostasy often masquerades as holy... righteous living... within a caring community. ... Rest assured... apostasy will not bear the obvious imprint of demons. ... False teaching will never enter your church with the name “Doctrine of Satan” printed all over it. ... Deceitful spirits cleverly drape their doctrines in the respectable (even pious) robes of religion.

The teaching appeals to the flesh... and is presented with charm and charisma. ... Apostates are clever people who know how to win people over.

Bill had been the highest authority in a former church that I pastored... for over 30 years (when I came there.) ... He was well-loved in the community and in the church. He had chaired the church’s leadership board for those 30 years... and nothing was ever done in the church... unless it had Bill’s approval.

He relied on a persuasive technique (whenever someone needed to see things his way)... of using warm... and folksy stories to make his points. (He told his stories with extreme charm... as a simple down-home country-boy... and like I said – “Bill was warm and folksy”)... He would throw in several head nods... but here is the funny thing: RARELY would he ever explicitly state the point of his story. ... He would simply stop and ask: “*Do you see what I’m saying?*” ... If you would volunteer a conclusion... he wouldn’t say much else... and that lead you to believe that it was his point.

If the conclusion that Bill seemingly wanted you to make... did not (in some way) work out... HE WAS OFF THE HOOK. He would say: *"I never suggested that. You misunderstood..."*

(Now) Bill had done a lot of favors for people in the church and around town. He was an excellent mechanic... and wood craftsman... and he freely used those talents. He had many loyal friends... who felt very beholding to him... because Bill had done many favors for them. A lot of people thought that he could do no wrong... and readily accepted his *"I never suggested that. You misunderstood..."* ... *"Oh... yeah-yeah... I must have..."*

The former pastor (before me) suddenly retired – before he was prepared to... because Bill got in front of the church one Sunday (during announcements) and announced the pastor's retirement party – and this was news to the pastor. (No prior mention of his retiring was ever made – by Pastor Brad or Bill.) This was the first time that he learned that his ministry was finished. Bill had no conscious about treating Pastor Brad so inhumanely as this. ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... ..

One day Bill came into my office to tell me one of his stories. Only this time **HE** gave the conclusion. He told me about a re-occurring dream of his. His daughter-in-law (who had difficulty carrying children full-term through several pregnancies)... was standing on a grassy hill. She was smiling... waving her arms... and motioning for others to join her. Suddenly the children that she had miscarried came running up. They were telling her (and Bill) *"It's all right, Mom."* ... And then Bill gave me his shocking conclusion. He said: *"This is why I do not believe abortion is wrong!"* (Bill



knew that I sat on the Board of Directors for our local Crisis Pregnancy Center.)

What!? I asked incredulously. What about Psalm 139:13-16... and a few other passages (in God's Word) that I cited that clearly indicate abortion is murder (and therefore wrong.) He simply said: "*No... No... Abortion is not wrong. I know because of this dream that God gave me...*"

Over the next several years... Bill shared with me OTHER dreams and directives that he held firm – *over the clear teaching of Scripture*. ... An apostate will distort... or dismiss what Scripture teaches.

(You know) Even though we have such clear warning in Scripture... it is (never-the-less) very surprising that apostates (who follow doctrines of demons) surface in our FINE evangelical churches... as accepted leaders. But we need to be watchful.

**1. False teachers “depart from the faith.”**

**2. False teachers follow deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons.**

**3. False teachers are hypocritical liars.**

#### **1 Tim 4:2**

The passage literally reads, "... *giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of demons in hypocrisy of liars*".

**They are hypocrites... #1. Because...** they teach something different from what the Scripture says - *and they know it!* (They know they are not teaching what Scripture says.)

**They are hypocrites... #2. Because...** the apostate will pretend to be very pious and very religious.

I have come to be suspicious of this pious position taken by super–duper saints who claim to have something special. My friend... if you do have the truth it will make you *humble*... because the first thing you will find out is how little you know. (I realize that I have much more to learn about the Bible.) ... But an apostate (in most cases)... will know very little about the Word of God... and yet speak as if they were an *authority*. “Speaking lies in hypocrisy,” they pretend to be something they are not.

**They are hypocrites... #3. Because...** they claim to be a minister or teacher of Christ and the gospel. But they are an instrument or tool of some seducing and deceptive spirit... who teaches doctrines that contradict or dismiss Biblical truth.

**1. False teachers “depart from the faith.”**

**2. False teachers follow deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons.**

**3. False teachers are hypocritical liars.**

**4. False teachers have their consciences seared with guilt, (that is cauterized, hardened, and made insensitive.)**

It does not bother most false teachers to teach contrary to the truth of Scripture. (“*My dream is what is true!*”) ... They can ignore and deny the Scripture and present their own ideas... and it does not bother them at all. They feel no guilt or remorse as they spread falsehoods that keep people from being rightly related to God (and going to Hell.)

The word “seared” clearly suggests that there once was a time when their conscious was active (it did work at one time.) But now it is like scar tissue... burned senseless until it ceases to function.

False teachers minimize their own sin or fail to take their own guiltiness seriously. (“*You misunderstood. I didn’t say that...*”) ... They might put on a good show if caught... but they use cleverness to quickly rebound to resume their positions of power and influence. Furthermore... their response to the sin of others depends entirely upon **convenience**. They brutally punish the sin of those they do not favor... while they minimize or rationalize their own sin and the sin of their cronies. (They inspire great loyalty to themselves from others.)

We have seen (in our passage) the certainty that false teachers will rise up from within the church... and then we looked at 4 common characteristics... in order to recognize them. ... Now it is time for us to consider their content (what the apostates try to get true believers to do.)

In verses 3 and 4... Paul identified what they were attempting in Ephesus... and from their unique circumstance... we can extrapolate a common element that we see them do in our churches today.

### **1 Tim 4:3-4**

So... let’s look at the root of what they were attempting to do with their false teaching. There three things that are at the root of what we see in these verses. **1. They wanted to create confusion about the goodness of God.** **2. They wanted to create a system of self-effort in**

order to get close to God. (And) 3. *They wanted any who would follow them to be distracted from the Word of God by minimizing it.*

In Ephesus they were trying to accomplish this with two issues in particular – food and marriage. They were teaching a well-disciplined spiritual life... of self-denial.

Woa! – Hold on! ... “What’s so bad about self-denial... even abstaining from good things? ... An emphasis on a little self-control... in our age (which seems to have very little)... should be seen as a good thing... shouldn’t it. After all... we live in an age that insists on being denied nothing.

What is wrong with denying yourself certain foods that may harm your body...? Can we not tell a diabetic to avoid sugar? ...An over-weight person to avoid carbohydrates...? Or anyone who wants to take care of their body (as the “temple of God”) to avoid certain food that science tells us will eventually do it harm? ... And what implications does this have for fasting? Isn’t this recommended in the Bible...?

Concerning marriage... didn’t Paul write in 1 Corinthians chapter 7 that he wished all men could remain as he is (and by that he meant unmarried)...? ... THEN how is what these teachers were teaching in Ephesus – so wrong?

Because unlike Paul... these teachers taught that by doing these things you can obtain special closeness to God. You will have greater access to God. Your relationship with God is primarily about your effort in earning it. You will deserve it!

No! Go ahead and restrict your intake of certain foods for whatever practical reasons you have – but **not** to gain greater closeness to God. ... And if you are single and sense that God is using you and wants you to remain that way... then do so. But don't insist that others must.

The problem with centering on what one does (or does not) do - as a rule for spirituality... is that it directs attention away from God as creator and provider ... and from the true nature and practice of spirituality.

**Romans 14:17 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking but of righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.*

An apostate wants to **1. create confusion about the goodness of God.** You **do** realize (don't you?) that a confusion about the goodness of God is behind EVERY sin that you or I commit? "*God is holding out on me...*" *I'm not getting all that I deserve...*" or **not** being thankful for ordinary and common things in our life. (Confusion about the goodness of God is behind EVERY sin that you or I commit.) Realizing this is a key to preventing our falling prey to apostates.

**2. An apostate wants to create a system of self-effort in order to get close to God.** (And) **3. An apostate wants us to be distracted from the Word of God by minimizing it.**

Now we are ready for the prevention and **cure** of apostasy.

## 1 Tim 4:5

“Made holy”...? The Word of God and prayer make these things holy? What in the world does this mean...? ... To make holy (or sanctify something) means that you put something to its proper use. Things like marriage and food are put to their proper use by the Word of God and prayer. ... **[ P A U S E ]** ...

The Bible alone must remain the basis of faith and practice. It informs us the true way for us to use food to the glory of God. The opinions of religious cultists and legalists (who want us to believe that there is a special way to honor God by our external behaviors)... should never be superimposed upon the Word of God.

Second... in “prayer”... the believer must thank God for His provision....

The appeal of an apostate is to our desires. *“You want a closeness to God that you’ve never had before...?”* ... *“Do you want more of your prayers to be answered?”* ... *“Do you want to experience God’s power?”* ... *“God has **NOT** been giving you what you deserve, has He?”*

The prevention and cure of the apostate’s lure is knowing the Word of God and by cultivating the habit of thanksgiving. We must see all of our provisions (just as God’s Word teaches)... that they are gifts that we have no right to... but are only ours by the grace and mercy of God. ...

Thanksgiving is a recognition that you do not possess anything in yourself... you did not earn it... but it is a GIFT FROM OUR LOVING GOD. Treat your food and marriage this way.

(LISTEN!) We are not engaged in a perpetual Sunday School party – Folks! We are in a deep abiding war that is being fought with spiritual weapons. We are up against spiritual “principalities and powers” and they are “rulers of the darkness of this world.”

Be on guard. Be watchful of apostates... and protect yourself with prayer and God’s Word.