

## **Understanding the Seducing Spirit**

1 Timothy 4:1-3

54-29

Let's open our Bibles this morning to 1 Timothy chapter 4. As you know, we are studying this great epistle of Paul to Timothy and we are coming back to it after a little bit of a break. Looking at chapter 4...I want to read to you the first five verses so you'll have in mind the theme of our message today. Paul writes:

"But the Spirit speaks explicitly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies and hypocrisy having their conscience burned with a hot iron, forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from foods which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth, for every creature of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer."

The key to this passage is the simple phrase in verse 1, "Some shall depart from the faith." The rest of the passage describes elements of such a departure. Some shall depart from the faith.

In 2 Chronicles chapter 25, there is the story of a king, a king of Judah by the name of Amaziah. He was the son of Joash and the father of Uzziah who was king during the time of Isaiah the prophet. Amaziah reigned in Jerusalem twenty-nine years. Scripture says of him, initially, he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord but now with a willing or perfect heart. He functioned in accord with the religion of Israel on the outside. He knew it. He understood it. He behaved by its ethics, but not with a perfect heart. He had a heartless external religion.

He performed his religion only on the outside. His heart knew not God on the inside. So soon he was lured away into idolatry. That same chapter, 2 Chronicles 25 in verse 14, says he began to worship the gods of Edom to which he bowed down and burned incense. His life ended tragically. He was murdered by his own people. And the closing comment in verse 27 is that Amaziah turned away from following the Lord.

Departing from the faith is nothing new. It happens today. It happened in the church at Ephesus where Timothy was when Paul wrote. It happened in the history of Israel with everyone from kings down to peasants. There are always people who will understand intellectually, who will behave externally according to the revelation of God but who have no heart for that. In Hebrews 3:12 it says, "Those who depart from God demonstrate an unbelieving heart." And the heart is the issue.

All of this discussion really refers to a single word and that is the word apostate. An apostate is someone who departs from the faith they know, the faith they understand and the faith which they previously affirmed. An apostate is not someone who never knew but someone who knew, not

someone who never believed but someone who even on the outside believed, not someone who never behaved but someone who once behaved according to the revelation of God. But because the heart was never in it, because they never really knew God, they were lured away by the siren voices of the demons behind idols and false religious systems. They were led, it says in verse 1, by seducing spirits and the doctrines of demons to depart from the faith.

Do I need to remind you that all false religion and all idols propagate demon doctrine and are energized by seducing demon spirits? False religion is the playground of demons. Second Corinthians tells us that in chapter 11 Satan and his angels disguised themselves as angels of light and become the purveyors of religion. They call men to worship here or there, this system or that system, this idol or that idol, but behind the system and behind the idol are demons. Idols are more than just carved images. False religions are more than just systems of belief. They are demon-energized from the very start.

In fact, if you go to the Old Testament, Leviticus 17:7 says that whatever men sacrifice to idols, they sacrifice to demons. Deuteronomy 32:17, whatever men sacrifice to idols, again, they sacrifice to demons. Psalm 96 verses 4 and 5, Psalm 106 verses 36 to 39 says the same thing, all the gods of the nations are demons, demon idols. First Corinthians 10, Paul says those of you who come to the table of the Lord and then go worship at some pagan religious shrine, you cannot serve the table of the Lord and the table of demons. False religious systems and all idols are simply focal points for demon activity, for lying seducing spirits to purvey the doctrines of hell.

You cannot be unsophisticated in comprehending this fact. You cannot imagine for a moment that an idol is simply what it appears on the surface to be, or that a false religion is simply the collection of ideas that it appears to be without understanding that behind it is the energizing dynamic of fallen angels and a Satanic system of spirits who are through that means seducing people away from the truth into eternal hell. Apostasy is demon seduction. Idol worship is demon worship. And false teachers are demon agents. And it is that clear in the Word of God.

Scripture tells us, whether you're looking at the history of Israel, or whether you're dealing with the church, church history affirms it since the finish of the New Testament that there has always been a battleground between God and His truth and the devil and his lies. And that battleground is clearly drawn in Scripture and the fight goes on constantly. God calls to people through the truth and Satan with his demons tries to lure people away from truth with his hellish lies.

Now such activities as that were going on in Ephesus when Timothy was there. The presence of false teachers has already been indicated. Back in chapter 1, do you remember verses 3 to 7 where he discusses the fact that there were some teaching other doctrines, fables, endless genealogies, they were dealing with questions that did not edify? They thought they were teachers and desired to be teachers of the law but didn't understand anything that they were saying. Verses 18 to 20 tells us they were apostate, they had made shipwreck of the faith. They had departed from the truth and they should be delivered to Satan to learn not to blaspheme in such a way.

So at the very outset of this epistle, Paul introduces the false teachers. Then after dealing in chapter 2 and 3 with some of the ramifications of their false teaching in the order of the church as related to men and women and church leaders, he then returns to the matter of the false teachers themselves in chapter 4. He has, as I said, dealt with their teaching and its implications in chapters 2 and 3, called for proper kind of leadership, proper kind of roles in the church and now comes back to

dealing with this issue of false teaching.

And, people, I need to remind you again that this matter of false teaching is replete in Scripture and there is ever and always a call for the church to deal with it. This is not a popular thing today in the name of love, everybody wants to forget disagreements. And when you come out strongly and confrontively against false teaching, you are very often criticized and labeled. I know that happens to me quite frequently. But nonetheless, there is biblical mandate and there is eternal cause for the souls of men to deal with false teaching as such. The battle lines were drawn in Israel, they were drawn in the early church, they must be drawn today. And we like Timothy must be warned and instructed as to how to understand what is behind false teaching. It is demonic activity. That is very clear.

You remember that chapter 3 closed with a mention of truth. Verse 15, the church is the pillar and ground of truth. Verse 16, Christ, thy mystery of godliness, God incarnate, the very embodiment of truth. And as Paul has spoken of the truth in the church and the truth in Christ, he thinks immediately of the lying counterattack against that truth.

And so, in chapter 4 launches into a discussion of the demonic force that comes against the truth. He is still dealing with Timothy's role in the church, with the errors Timothy is facing and how they must be set right. The first five verses of chapter 4, he presents this apostasy and then from verse 6 to 16 tells Timothy how to be the kind of man necessary to deal with it, how to have the strength to counterattack the attacks of Satan.

Now as I said, the theme of the verse is this little phrase "some shall depart from the faith." Some, not all, but some, like Judas, like Demas, like the disciples of John 6 who walk no more with Christ, there will be some, he says, who will..and he uses the verb aphistemi which gives us the word "apostate," this form of the verb is apostasonti(?) and it means to depart from, to remove yourself from a former place, to remove yourself from the position you originally occupied to another place. That is a purposeful intentional deliberate departure from a former position. It isn't talking about an unintentional fall, it isn't talking about somebody struggling with doubt. It is someone who deliberately dispossesses himself of truth once affirmed to depart for another teaching, abandoning a once affirmed faith. Some will do that, he says, some will do it. The term "the faith" means Christian doctrine. Not faith in the sense of Christian believing but "the faith" in the sense of the content of what we believe. Some will depart from true faith, from the faith, Jude 3 says, once for all delivered to the saints, the content of holy Scripture. Defectors who understand, who outwardly affirm, who behave in a way that reflects such affirmation but who have not a heart for God, who rather have an unbelieving heart and under the seduction of demons will depart from the faith. Paul says, "Timothy, you must expect that, some will do it and you must know how to deal with it."

So in giving us instruction on this matter of apostasy, there are six features behind the scenes as we look at apostates. Paul gives us these. They are very basic. They are very helpful to us.

Number one, is there predictability, their predictability? We should not be shocked. We should not be surprised. We should be ready to recognize apostasy, it is predictable. Verse 1, "But, is a better translation of the word de, but the Spirit is now saying, present tense, explicitly that...goes on to say some shall depart from the faith." In other words, this is the result of the conflict and the Spirit has said it would happen. It is absolutely predictable. In contrast to the truth of verses 15 and 16, but comes the lie and the Spirit says some shall depart from the faith. The Spirit says it expressly,

explicitly, directly, clearly in well defined words, that's what it means. And He is now saying it present tense. The Spirit is right now more than once saying explicitly that people will depart from the faith.

Now this is a way to refer to divine revelation. This is not anything new, the Holy Spirit has been saying this since the Spirit began giving Scripture in the Old Testament. There are injunctions in the Old Testament about apostasy. There are warnings in the Old Testament about people who would depart from the faith, about now all Israel being true Israel, not all Jews being genuine believing Jews, some of them having uncircumcised hearts, though they had circumcised themselves on the outside. The Spirit through all of the centuries of redemptive history has said there would be those who departed from the faith. There would be rebels within the camp of Israel. The prophet spoke of it, Daniel spoke of it, Ezekiel spoke of it, not an uncommon subject at all, rather distinctly and explicitly has the Spirit made such predictions.

In fact, we follow even into the New Testament and we sense how many have departed from the faith and how the Lord warned that they would do that. In Matthew 24, "Many false Christs, many false prophets would come, they would deceive many and many would leave the faith." Mark 13:22 says basically the very same thing. They would go away from the faith. The Scriptures indicate to us in 2 Thessalonians 2 that before the coming of Christ in glory there would be a massive departure from the faith. In 2 Peter there will come in the last times mockers and scoffers abandoning the faith. Jude 18, the same thing. First John 2, the Antichrist will come, as a result there will be people who will go out from us, it will reveal they never were of us, but they will depart from the faith. In 1 John again, in chapter 4, there is a very straightforward mention that there are false prophets who are gone out into the world and they will go out into the world and they will rest souls away to their own enterprise.

So, the Spirit has expressly, explicitly said this time and time again. And the present tense is now speaking, means that what He is saying right now is part of the continuation of that Holy Spirit revelation. Do I need to add as a footnote that all biblical revelation comes from the Holy Spirit? Holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. That's how Scripture was written, 2 Peter 1:21. All Scripture comes by the inspiration of God through His Spirit. So what he's referring to when he says the Spirit is now speaking is Scripture. He has spoken, He is now speaking through this verse right here as Paul pens it, the very word of the Holy Spirit comes. The stream of Holy Spirit revelation about apostasy is flowing to Paul at this very moment.

Now Paul knew this was going to happen in Ephesus because the Holy Spirit had said it to him before. Back in Acts 20, long before this event, the writing of this epistle to Timothy, when he gathered with the Ephesian elders in verse 29, he said, "I know that after my departure grievous wolves shall enter in and men who are perverse from among you will rise up and deceive many and lead them astray." The Spirit had told him that years before in the inspiration of that very moment recorded in Acts chapter 20.

So, the Spirit had said it expressly. It is inevitable, it is predictable, there will be people who depart from the faith. So we are not shocked by that. There will be those who make a momentary response like the seed that went into the rocky ground, but they have no root, no real life, no real union with God and they die out. Those who are choked out by the cares of this world and the love of riches. There will be those who hang around a while but when their heart is not given to God, they are seduced away by demonic spirits purveying their truth through human agents that we know as false teachers. So it is predictable.

Secondly, in understanding the apostates, we have to look at their chronology. When will this happen? He says in verse 1, "In the latter times." In the latter seasons. When is this? Is this a long time in the future? When is the latter times? Well, we need only to reflect on the Scripture to answer that question. First John 2:18 says it as simply as any verse, "Little children, it is the last time...little children, it is the last time." First Peter 1:20, talking of Christ it says, "He was manifest in these last times." In Hebrews 1:2, "God has in these last days spoken unto us by His Son." Hebrews 9:26, "Christ has appeared once in the end of the age to put away sin."

All of these verses tell us that the last times are the times after Christ came in His first coming. When Christ came, He began the last times, the Messianic era. The Messianic era begins with the coming of Jesus Christ. So we are now living in the last times, between His first coming and the Second Coming when He sets up His glory on the earth and then into the eternal Kingdom, all of that is the last times. We are living then in the last times. "My little children, it is the last days now." It is the time of Messiah, He has already come, He is now building His Kingdom in the hearts of men and will return to establish it on the earth and then throughout eternity. We are living in the last times.

So, what is the chronology of apostasy? It is now, in this dispensation that apostasy will occupy itself. So we expect it, it is predictable, it is for this age, until Jesus returns to judge and reign and set up His Kingdom.

Thirdly, we learn another thing about apostates, their source. We've already alluded to it, let's look more closely. They are apostate during this dispensation as the Spirit predicted because they give heed to seducing spirits and the teachings of demons. The source, now mark this, the source of apostasy is demonic. It is supernatural. Paul said it in Ephesians 6, we do not wrestle against what? Flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world, spiritual wickedness in the heavenlies, supernatural demonic spirits. And what happens to these people who have an unbelieving heart, as Hebrews 3:12 describes it? Who depart from the living God is that that unbelieving heart, even though there is a facade of religion, is lured away and seduced away by demon spirits. It cannot be wooed by the Spirit of God, it is an unbelieving heart. It is not a heart that hears the Spirit, it is a heart that hears the prince of the power of the air as his siren voices are mediated to and through demon spirits.

Now the term "giving heed" is a very strong word. It doesn't mean just to listen to, it's also used in chapter 1 verse 4. It means more than giving your attention to, it means to assent to. It means to devote oneself to, to attach oneself to, to cling to a person or thing. It is a present-tense verb in this case, it has the idea of a continual clinging to the seduction of the spirits and the doctrines they purvey. What a statement...what a statement.

Here is a person exposed to Christian truth, here is a person who understands the gospel intellectually, here is the person who one way or another affirms a confidence in that, a person who outwardly identifies with the Christian faith but because his heart is not truly God's he is lured away by the seducing spirits who purvey their doctrines right out of hell. He turns from the truth to the lies of the devil and is drawn away from the true faith unto eternal damnation. And we are to expect it, it is predictable in our own time.

Now may I say something to you that I want you to grab? When people are lured from the truth...I

hear this so often with parents who say, "You know, our child was raised in a Christian home and they went away to the university, or whatever, and they were deceived and led astray and now they totally deny the faith, etc." I want you to understand, they were not the victim of some erudite educated authority-bearing professor, they were not. They are not the victim of some well-meaning religious leader who's a little bit off in his doctrine. They are not the victim of some clever writer who has purveyed some false truth in a very clever way in a book. They are the victims of demonic spirits. They have been led astray from the pit of hell. That you must understand. And when you're playing with lies and false religion, you are not just playing with something that is merely a human aberration, you are toying with demonic teaching and the seducing spirits that come from Satan himself.

As a result of that, we should be immensely cautious before we ever expose ourselves or anyone we love to any false teaching. That is why in 2 John you have that tremendous warning that says, in effect, there are going to come false teachers, that we know, it's inevitable. Many deceivers are entered into the world, he says. And then he says, if they come to your house, don't you even bring them in and bid them God's speed, if you do you're a partaker of their evil deeds, shun them, stay away from them, don't listen to them. Anytime you get near anybody that's under their teaching, Jude says snatch them like you would snatch a stick out of a fire and make sure you don't get burned yourself.

In Deuteronomy 13, we have a warning that is very, very straightforward. The Spirit of God says to Israel, "If you hear a report in one of your cities, any city in your land, you hear this report that certain men worthless base men are gone out from among you," that is they have departed from the truth, "and they have withdrawn the inhabitants of their city, saying, Let us go and serve other gods which you have not known. If you hear of a city and there are certain apostate men in that city who are luring people out of that belief in God to the idolatrous enterprise to which they're committed, then he says inquire, make search, ask diligently," in other words, be sure that it's true, "and behold if it is true and the thing is certain that such an abomination is wrought among you, here's what you do, kill all the people in that city with the sword, destroy it utterly, everything that is in it, all the cattle that is in it with the edge of the sword, gather all the spoil that is left, clothing and utensils, everything left in the city, valuable or not, pile it in the middle of the street, burn it with fire and every bit of spoil with it for the Lord your God, and it will be a heap forever, it will never be built again. And there shall cling nothing of the cursed thing to your hand, don't take anything out of that place that the Lord may turn from the fierceness of His anger and show you mercy and compassion."

Now do you get the idea that God is serious about doctrines of demons? Burn the city after you've killed everybody in it. Burn everything that's in it after you've killed all the animals in it so that it's nothing but a heap and it will never be allowed to be rebuilt again. Why? God is giving a monstrous object lesson as to how He feels about the doctrines of demons and seducing spirits. It must be destroyed in the broadest terms.

Now notice that little phrase "seducing spirits." This refers to the source of these errors, heresies, false doctrines, supernatural demon spirit beings who are fallen angels. The word "seducing" comes from a very form which we get our word "planet." That's the idea of wandering. Those spirits who would lead you to wander from the truth, who would lead you astray. It came to mean to seduce or to deceive. In contrast to the blessed Holy Spirit in John 16:13, it says "And the Spirit is come, He will guide you into all...what?...truth." The Spirit leads you into all truth, these spirits lead you into all error. They seduce, they lure, they deceive and they are powerful. They are the principalities and the powers against which the church must wrestle.

And what they seduce you with are the teachings of demons. People, the world is full of demon teaching. Anything that contradicts the Word of God is not some human concoction or human aberration, it is a teaching from demons. They're behind it all. That's a subjective genitive, doctrines of demons. Doesn't mean teaching about demons, it means teaching done by demons.

The history of seducing spirits, you can go all the way back to the garden where the first demon, the Demon himself with a capital "D", Satan, seduced Eve with his luring seductive implication that she might be being cheated out of the best thing that God had by not being able to eat of the one tree in the garden. He seduced Eve. And such seductions are chronicled throughout all the history of the Scripture. And you see them all the way into Revelation. And you get a glimpse in the book of Revelation of all the deception of the demons in the end of the history of man. So from Adam to Revelation, it is a history of seducing spirits plying doctrine of demons...doctrines of demons against unwitting human souls.

False teaching doesn't come from clever men. It comes from demons. And that's why you can't expose yourself to it. That's why it's so marvelous to have your children under the teaching of those who teach the Word of truth.

Now I want to say that not all demon teaching on the surface looks demonic. Some of it is more subtle than that. It's not all cultic or occultic. Some of it is very subtle...very subtle. In fact, so subtle that we might not even recognize it as such, unless we look very closely.

I was interested this last week to read in USA Today in their opinion section an interview with the man who heads up the organization called "Fundamentalists Anonymous." It's like Gamblers Anonymous or Alcoholics Anonymous. It's for people who are trying to kick fundamentalism, people who are trying to break loose from the anxiety and the pressure and the depression and whatever circumstances they feel have hamstrung their life because of an orientation with fundamentalism.

That is very curious to me...very curious. The man who heads it up says he is a Christian and now is a member of an American Baptist Church. And he is not at all claiming to have departed from the faith. I had two thoughts about Fundamentalists Anonymous. One was, by the way 22,000 people have some way or another made contact with that organization wanting to defect from fundamentalism or get some help. And what I thought to myself is how subtle Satan is that there are some people who are wanting out of what is called fundamentalism when they really have not ever understood the fundamental truth of the Word of God. What they have been engulfed in was nothing more or less than a legalism, a legalism that was stifling, debilitating, unfulfilling and never drew true spirituality out of their heart at all. And they're defecting from something that isn't fundamental Christianity at all, but simply a legalistic substitute with its own code of works by which you attain a right relationship with God.

On the other hand, there are probably some people among the 22,000 who are genuinely escaping from the true faith. For them they ought to have another organization called "Apostates Anonymous," because they really are leaving the faith. The two are not the same. Some people are leaving what was not the faith but a legalistic substitute. Some people are leaving the true faith.

And as I said, it isn't popular to point these things out. It isn't popular to expose error, to expose

heresy. But many people are playing foolishly with the subtleties of Satanic doctrine and will be seduced away unless things are pointed out to be what they are. It is predictable that people will defect. They will do it in this dispensation. And they will do it under the power of demonic sources. And when you expose yourself, your friends, your children or whoever to lies, to wrong teaching, to false religion, you are putting them in the environment where demons are doing their seducing.

Number four, we must also recognize not only the source but the teachers. This is done through human agents, though the source is supernatural the means is natural. The source is supernatural, the means is natural. The seduction occurs on the human level. And verse 2 says, "These seducing spirits plying their doctrines of demons use...and here are two substantives in the Greek...they use hypocritical lie speakers," that's the best way to translate that. They use men who are hypocrites telling lies. They appear to be religious. They appear to be preachers or priests or religious leaders of one kind or another. They may be good on the outside. They may be very religious in their appearance. They may be devout. They may wear robes, have beads, wear backward collars, they may appear to be pure in their motives. They may look on the outside like they want to be helpful to men and women and assist them in religious enterprises.

I was interested recently to read about the bishop in South Africa who told the President to go to hell. It was curious to me that that seems rather to be the opposite message of someone in the ministry. I thought our message was to tell people to go to heaven, but I'm not sure what the source of his message is, so I don't know that I can claim that for him.

You may appear religious, the facade may be a facade of religiosity, but the truth is demon sources do not come without masks. And they mask themselves and their demon face with a mask of religion. Inevitably they do. And they find hypocritical lie speakers, those who will be hypocritical in the sense that they pretend religion they don't possess. They pretend to exalt God whom they don't exalt at all, but rather Satan whom they do exalt. They are deceivers and liars who come masked in their religious garb, their religious three-piece suits, whatever it is. Sometimes they carry a Bible. Sometimes a prayer book. But always they wear a mask. They are lie speakers. They may be a professor in a quote/unquote Christian college. They may be in a quote/unquote Christian seminary. They may be in a church somewhere. They may write a book. They will find an audience and they will purvey their hellish doctrine under the direction of seducing spirits who no doubt not only seduce people through them but have seduced them as well. They are the purveyors of the doctrine of demons.

The source is demonic, the means is human. And that is why the Bible warns not only about devil doctrine but it warns also about false human teachers.

Further it says about them that they seem to be able to do what they do without any compunction. They have had their conscience burned as with a hot iron. Now some feel that that alludes to the fact that slaves in that culture had the brand of their master branded in their forehead and that what it's saying is they're branded with the devil's own brand. They belong to the devil. They aren't demons but they are nonetheless the devil's agents. That could be the meaning.

I think it is better here in this context, though, to see it not as the burning of the brand of the devil's mark in their head, although that's definitely true, but to see it as explaining how they can carry on this hypocrisy day after day, month after month and year after year is because their conscience has been burned. Not their forehead but their conscience, and he is very careful to use the word

"conscience" which means their sensitivity to right and wrong, their sensitivity to truth and integrity. It has been scarred beyond function.

Conscience is the tool that sends off impulses to affirm or condemn an action and thus control behavior. Let me say that again. Conscience is the tool that sends off impulses to affirm or condemn a certain action and thus control behavior. But those hypocrites, those masked demon doctrine teachers, those purveyors of the lies of hell have no conscience anymore. Their conscience has been turned into scar-tissue and no longer do they feel a thing. The nerves are dead. They are burned.

In fact, the term "seared" or "burned" is the technical medical term used by Hippocrates that we now call cauterizing. It is the verb kausteriazō. And it means "to cauterize, to burn, to scar." They have been scarred to the point where they can carry on their lie and their hypocrisy and seem to have no compunctions.

If there's one thing that I'm maybe more exercised about than anything else in my own ministry, it is the fear that I might speak something that isn't the truth of God. That is of grave concern to me. I pray regularly that every time I step into the place of teaching God's Word, I never ever utter anything that is not true. That is something my conscience pounds into me all the time...are you sure? In my study long after I have completed a sermon, I may spend hours, I may spend a whole day digging back into something I've already prepared because there's the lingering thought that something might be amiss. Perhaps I didn't understand it correctly. My conscience demands out of me that I deal with truth as truth because it's God's truth. And yet there are some who can preach and teach and call out their religion and pass off the stuff they do and never even seem to twinge over the fact that it might be lies out of hell because their conscience by its constantly being ignored has been so abused...so abused.

They themselves in the radical act of apostasy have scarred their own conscience. And with a scarred conscience, they feel nothing as they purvey their lies.

So, they are predictable. They are for this dispensation apostates. We should expect them. Their source is demonic. Their teachers are human. Let's look at their teaching, number five. And this is just a sample. This is what was going on there. Anything other than the Scripture is their teaching. But notice the subtlety of this. Here's what they taught. Verse 3, "Forbidding to marry and to abstain from food."

They had two things they were majoring on. One was that if you wanted to be spiritual and if you wanted to know God and you wanted to possess salvation, you shouldn't get married. Secondly, you had to abstain from food. Broma, means "that which is eaten."

This is typical of Satan's style. It doesn't at first seem too bad. Well, if you want to be single, be single. Single doesn't seem to be a big deal. In fact, 1 Corinthians 7 honors singleness. And if you don't want to eat, that's fine. There's a place for fasting. There's a place for a rather austere diet. We don't want to make too much of a deal out of this. But that's not the point.

The point is, they were seeking by ascetic means, by self-denial to attain spirituality. In other words, salvation for them was built on what they denied themselves. This is typical of all false religions.

They devise human means by which you become saved, either by things you do or by things you what? Don't do. That is typical of all the religion of human achievement. And initially looks very, very subtle. But self-denial on the physical level was the supposed means of true sanctity, true holiness. The Essenes believed this. They were a Jewish sect that appear in Palestine as early as 166 B.C., living in a community down by the Dead Sea. Very likely were involved in the writing of the Dead Sea Scrolls, those scrolls were found adjacent to their community. They had an ascetic life style. They denied themselves everything. In fact, they denied themselves marriage. All the Essenes except one group never married, and, of course, they died out. That's one way to put an end to your movement. They all, also, had special dietary abstinences which they adhered to. And maybe they were behind this influence in Ephesus. Maybe there had been some Essene influence there, that holiness came through self-denial.

There was also the beginnings of what we get now called philosophical dualism. The philosopher said, "Spirit is good and all matter is evil." You've heard of that. Anything that is tangible, touchable objective is evil. Anything that is untouchable, spirit, thought, idea, ideal is good. And so they denied themselves all those evil tangible things like marriage relationships and foods and certain things, believing that such abstinence put them in the place of pleasing the deities and the gods of their own Greek world.

Now maybe the Greek thought had influenced them. Perhaps that Greek thought was what influenced the Corinthians and got them so messed up about marriage they had to be corrected in chapter 7 of 1 Corinthians. Perhaps it was that that even got them confused about the resurrection of the body because the ascetic view, the philosophical dualist view would want no resurrection of the body since it was evil anyway. So it had encroached upon the life of the church, both philosophical dualism and Essene asceticism. And there were some who were now saying that true spirituality's attained by what we do or what we don't do, what we accept or what we deny ourselves.

That kind of externalism is typical of all Satanic false religion. I don't care what it is. You can go from the least sophisticated animism of tribal people who believe they appease gods by going through religious functions by lighting fires, by burning incense, by building altars, by doing this or that, all the way to the high level sophistication of the Roman Catholic Church that believes true spirituality and holiness is gained by those who abstain from marriage, who abstain from meat on Friday and so forth, the celibacy of the priesthood, the celibacy of nuns in convents, all of that, all the way down to whatever abstinences or whatever indulgences are plied in an animistic tribe, all are the same religion of demons. It's all the same. No spirituality is any way, shape or form related to what you do or don't do, what you accept or deny yourself in terms of those things which are given by God for the enjoyment of man. And that's Paul's point. That's why in Colossians 2 verse 16 to 23 he says, don't let anybody judge you regarding what you eat, what you drink, what you keep a feast day, whether you keep a new moon, whether you keep a sabbath, those are only shadows, the reality is here in Christ. Don't let anybody tie you up in some silly worship of angels. Don't let anybody hold you to touch not, taste not, handle not, all that ascetic approach to life. That is unacceptable, he says, for you are complete in Christ.

This kind of thinking developed in a second century into full scale gnosticism. Even further into the fourth century. And the gnostics, looking at everything in the physical and the fleshly and so forth saw it as something evil. That is not the case, but that is typical of demonic religion. You see, the true religion says the Lord has done it all. False religion says we've got to do it by self-denial or indulgence of some kind or another.

So, their teaching here will always be the same. It will be that man achieves spirituality by his own efforts. That brings us sixthly to their error. What is the error of such apostasy, such false teaching? Verses 3 to 5 give it to us just very briefly. Did you forget that God has created to be received with thanksgiving all these things? God created marriage. God made marriage. God took Adam and gave him a wife and they were married, right? In fact, Peter calls marriage the grace of life. And God made all foods. In fact, when God made everything, He stood back in Genesis and looked at it and said it's what? It's good. It's good. How can you deny men what God has created to be received with thanksgiving by them who believe and know the truth.

You say, "Well, wait a minute? Is it just for believers?" No, but it's primarily for believers. God designed marriage for all men. God designed food for all men, but especially believers. Why? Listen carefully. You know why God made marriage? The same reason He made anything, for His own glory. You know why God made all the food?

It's incredible. You know, God could have just made porridge and that would have been it for everybody forever. But why did God make the range of variety of food? He made it so that He would be what? Glorified. But the world eats the food and the world enjoys the marriage and the world never even considers the one who gave it, right? So in the truest sense, marriage, food, every good thing God made, He made primarily for those who believe and know the truth...why?..because if they were made for His glory, the only people who fulfill that purpose are the people who know Him because it's only us who give Him glory for it. We're the ones who thank God for our marriage. We're the ones that thank God for our food. We're the ones that show our gratitude.

So in the truest purest highest sense, everything God ever made He made for those who believe and know the truth. Isn't that a wonderful statement? The world, yes they get in on it, the rain falls on the just and what? The unjust. They benefit from marriage. They benefit from food. But they never were the reason God gave it because the reason He gave it was His own glory and only believers give that back to Him. So every good thing God made. He made for us.

How stupid to come along and deny marriage and deny certain foods and think you're holy when what you're really doing is you're denying God the right to be glorified for the beauty of what He gave us. You should be better to be married and eat everything He provided and praise Him than think you're holy by abstaining from those things.

Verse 4 follows it up. "For every creature of God is...what?...inherently excellent," kalos, every creation of God whether...and I think here he's referring to both marriage and food, "Every creation of God is in itself inherently good and nothing is to be thrown away...nothing if it's received with thanksgiving." That's the purpose.

Now there's the key again. God gave it to us in order that we might do what? Thank Him. That's why it's primarily for believers because believers are the only ones that thank Him. So when you receive it and thank Him, you fulfill its purpose...you fulfill its purpose. Take it and give God thanks.

So the first error of apostates and their false teaching was the failure to thank and praise God for what He made. The second error was to fail to understand that everything He made is good, not evil. And the third error was failure to believe what the Word says because it says it's good. God said it's

good. Genesis 1:28 and 29, "It's good."

And verse 5 says "It is sanctified, or set apart, by the Word of God." That refers to the gospel of Jesus Christ in the pastoral epistles. That phrase is used, one, two, three, four, five, six, this may be the seventh time total and it refers always to the message of salvation. Through the message of salvation we have come to know the Lord, we have come to know the truth in Christ. We have come to know that Christ has abolished all food laws, all dietary laws. The gospel has ended all those dietary restrictions. They were given only for a brief time in Israel's history to develop their moral faculty of discernment and to teach them to understand the truth of separation. But once Christ came, they were set aside. They had a limited national purpose, to reimpose them is to manufacture a works righteousness system which dishonors God by saying He created something evil when He did not.

And so, if we understand that the Word of God in the gospel has freed us from dietary laws and if in prayer we offer God thanks, then we can receive any and all of His good gifts. You see? Mandatory celibacy, abstinence from certain foods is demon teaching. It denies God's creation. It denies God's desire for thanks and praise. It denies God's Word revealed in the gospel of Christ which sets aside any such restriction. External self-denial is a severe error from demons.

So, we are taught then to understand the error of the apostates, thinking they please God by their show in the flesh like the Pharisees. They severely displease God and follow the lies of demons.

Amaziah, he did the right thing on the outside, but he never had a heart for God. He turned away from the Lord. And that takes us back where we need to be, where's your heart? That's the issue. Let's bow in prayer.

Everyone staying for just another moment, these are grave issues in which we deal in the Scriptures, matters of eternity. I don't know where your trust is for your relationship with God, I can only hope and pray it isn't in some self-denial or some works that you have done. The gospel of Jesus Christ has come to present salvation to you by grace through faith. You believe in Christ and He graciously gives you salvation which you could never earn either by anything you did or anything you didn't do. And once you become a Christian, you are freed from all restrictions and whatever good gifts God provides, you can take and offer Him thanks and praise. And that's the reason for which He gave them in the first place, that they might redound to His glory which only happens through those who believe and know the truth.

So if you're a believer and you have come to the point where you have given your life to Jesus Christ, then take His good gifts and thank and praise Him for all of them. Enjoy the bliss of marriage and the fulfillment of the physical. Enjoy the wonder of all the food that God has provided in the bounty of His incredibly vast mind. Enjoy it all and thank Him and praise Him that in Christ you are free from any necessary effort to attain what has already been given you in grace. If you're depending on something other than Jesus Christ for your salvation, you are seduced by demon spirits to believe a lie. Open your heart to Christ.

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