

Title: Dangerous Departure
Text: 1 Timothy 4.1-5
Theme: False views of godliness
Series: 1 Timothy
Prop Stmtnt: When religion labels something good as being bad, that religion is a false religion.

Read Text:

In his attempt at being devoted to Christ, Simon Stylites pursued a life of extreme discipline and self-deprivation. Simon lived in Syria around 400 A.D. and through ever increasing and some bizarre disciplines, he eventually decided to live the rest of his life on a little platform that sat on top of a column that was about 12 feet in the air. As you can imagine, Simon attracted many visitors. Some were curious. Many were amazed, some were impressed and some became disciples. He eventually moved to a platform that was around 45-60 feet high. And there he lived in an attempt to imitate the sufferings of Christ. Simon was an ascetic.

Are you familiar with the term asceticism? Asceticism is the idea that by means of extreme self-discipline and self-deprivation one can achieve higher levels of personal holiness. We tend to be impressed with people who are extremely self-disciplined and we tend to think that self-discipline is a means to being holy and there is a measure of truth to this. In fact, next week the text for the sermon includes v.7 which says “*train yourself for godliness....*” But, there is also a serious danger to avoid and sadly much of Christianity has squandered the gospel because it has not heeded the warning of this text.

I. **This is a serious warning!** (3.16 -4.1)

This is a serious warning from God because it is a warning about subtle influences that will cause people to defect from the gospel.

In this letter to Timothy, Paul just summarized the gospel by quoting a creed or a song that the early church used (3.16). This is a summary of what we call “the faith.” The doctrines or teachings that comprise the gospel, is “the faith.” Our faith (or the faith) is founded upon Christ and what he accomplished. This is called the gospel. Gospel means good news and the faith is very good news, because it informs us that even though we are sinners who have offended a holy God and deserve his wrath and absolutely cannot save ourselves or fix ourselves, that God, in his mercy and grace sent Christ to do for us what we could not do for ourselves. Christ lived a perfect life in our place and then he died a perfect death in our place. His death paid the penalty of our sin in full. That means, that there is nothing left for me to pay in order for me to be forgiven of my sin. Christ paid it all and that payment is credited to me when I turn away from my sin and trust in Christ alone. I am declared righteous in the eyes of God when I, by faith alone, trust in Christ alone. All that God has provided for me through Christ is available to me and you because of God’s grace. It is NOT because I can do anything to earn it. It is NOT because I can pay for it, work for it or do any single thing to deserve it. I am forgiven of my sin

and credited with the infinite righteousness of Christ by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. The gospel is a gospel of grace. Does that make sense? It is good news because it is what God did for us. It is good news for the poor because it is not something you can buy. But, Christianity has a terrible record on this. The history of Christianity is littered with promises of eternal salvation to people who will pay for paintings, murals, stained glass windows, organs, monasteries, cathedrals and buildings. Church officials strike deals with kings. If the king builds a new church, then the church officials will ensure that the people will pray for the king's soul after he dies. Such a deal, right? Unless you are not a king who can pay for a building where people will pray for you. What I am saying very clearly is that the teaching that if people will pray for your soul that you will get out of purgatory is NOT good news.

I am justified (declared righteous) by the gospel (God's grace). "For by grace you have been saved through faith and this is not of yourself, so that no one can boast (check wording) Ephesians 2.8-9. God's grace provided salvation through faith. In summary, we therefore say, that we are justified by grace (Romans 3.24). A person who has been justified or declared righteous is actually a Christian. No one is actually made a Christian through baptism or through a class, or through a ceremony. One is made a Christian by faith alone in Christ alone. This is the faith. Anything that deviates from this is not the faith. It may sound religious and look religious and feel religious and even be called religious, but it is not THE faith. The faith is salvation by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone.

God, in his grace has provided a complete and perfect salvation through Christ. This Christ – accomplished salvation, is appropriated to us by our faith and not by fasting, celibacy, or any form of self-punishment. Romans 5.1-2 says, "...since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. Through him we have also obtained access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and we rejoice in hope of the glory of God."

How are we justified (declared righteous)? It is by faith alone in Christ alone. You are not a genuine Christian because you were born into a family that attends church. You are not a genuine Christian because you were sprinkled with water as an infant. You are not a genuine Christian because you serve in the junior high ministry. How are we justified? By faith alone in Christ alone. You have to trust in Christ. No one can believe for you. This is the doctrine upon which the entire church is built. This is the most important truth that you could ever know. Therefore, this truth is always under assault. It is always in danger of being watered down or added to. The church has to guard the integrity of this truth. This text is warning us about subtle influences that left unchecked will cause people to depart from the faith.

II. **This is a serious warning not to add rules to the gospel.** (1-3)

Once we become a Christian, how do we grow as Christians? Growing as Christians is called progressive sanctification. So, I am asking, how are we sanctified? How do we think, act, and live more and more like Jesus? Justification is by faith alone.

Sanctification is by faith-driven obedience. We are saved “for good works” (Eph 2.10). But, here is the very, very important distinction. Our obedience is to be motivated and driven by our faith in God, not by our faith in ourselves. For example, as a follower of Christ I read and study the Bible. I do not read and study the Bible in order to have a good day. I do not read and study the Bible in order to get God to like me more or give me more good things. I do not read and study the Bible because that will impress God or cause God to be obligated to answer my prayers. All of that are examples of self-driven obedience (which is really not obedience). So, a well-meaning person says, if you really want to be spiritual, you will read your Bible every day. Now, I can read my Bible because I love God, and I hunger for his truth and I want to believe God more, and embrace his promises deeper and think about him more consistently and orient my life around him more faithfully, OR, I can read my Bible in order to just put a check in the box in hopes that I will appear to be better than others or “more spiritual.” Both are examples of reading the Bible, but the motives behind it make all the difference.

Reading your Bible is wonderful. I encourage you to do it. But, it is very easy to make that an activity that is driven by will-power, instead of faith. Sanctification has to be based on the gospel. Justification has to drive sanctification, otherwise, if we attempt to grow by our own effort, we will create a culture of Christianity that will be legalistic, man-centered, fearful, and will eventually ruin the gospel. This text is warning against creating rules that sound spiritual but are making false promises of spiritual growth based on rules that God never made.

Scenario #1

Jason has a heart for reaching Muslims in a country that is closed to the gospel. He believes that he is called to go to this country, and he believes that it would be too dangerous to bring a wife into this setting. Therefore, Jason chooses not to pursue a girl and get married. Jason, as a single man, goes to this country and has an effective ministry. In fact, through his witness, many people come to Christ. Is that wonderful? Yes! Absolutely. But, what happens if someone decides that since Jason was so effective for the gospel as a single man, that all guys who really want to be leaders in the church or leaders in missions have to be single too? Is that okay? NO!! Praise God for Jason. But, do not make singleness rule and claim that people cannot truly be devoted to God unless they are single.

Scenario #2

Lindsay loves to eat ice cream every night. It is like her reward for making it through the day, but over time she has noticed a few things: 1) She tends to wake up a bit sluggish and she likes to read her Bible and pray in the morning before she starts her day. 2) She has come to look at the ice cream as her right and has found that she tends to get upset if she, for whatever reason can't have any. She is sort of surprised at how something like ice cream can have such a hold on her. 3) She has noticed that every year she has put on about 5-7 pounds, and this additional weight has complicated some other things. So, Lindsay decides that she is going to give up ice cream. When she does, she finds out that

she is sharper in the morning and this has been fruitful in her bible reading and prayer time. She does not feel like ice cream is ruling her life anymore and she is losing some weight. All of this is good. But Lindsay writes a blog and shares her experiences. Over time other girls follow her lead and they form a group in order to help each other not eat ice cream. If you are a member of the church, where one of these clubs exist, then you can see how easy it is to define being a truly spiritual girl based on whether or not you eat ice cream. Over time, the definition of spirituality moves from embracing what Christ has done to what disciplines you are doing.

III. **Why is this such a big deal?** (1b-3)

As I've been saying repeatedly, it is a big deal because it distorts the gospel. In fact ...

A. **It is demonic.** (1b)

Forbidding people to get married and require abstinence from certain foods is the result of deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons. That is severe! When we usually think of demons, we think of devil-worshipping ceremonies full of violence, blood-letting, spells, possession, cursing, all sorts of darkness. On one level, I find this a bit surprising. We read that the Spirit of God has expressly issued this warning that in the later times people will depart from the faith because they are following insincere liars who are teaching doctrines from demons. And I'm thinking wow, what are they teaching? What awful, gruesome, twisted and perverted thing are they promoting, only to find out that the demonic teaching is telling people they cannot get married or they have to abstain from certain foods. And those of you who grew up in religious traditions where the priests had to take vows of celibacy and where you could not eat certain foods on Friday, are realizing that these are not trivial matters.

When you tell people that they cannot have what God says they can have, you are participating in the teaching of demons.

B. **It is a lie.** (2)

The people who are promoting this stuff believe lies and if they can get you to follow them, it validates their lie. Paul says that they are insincere. They are liars because they are placing their word above God's Word and this helps expose why this is such an important truth to grasp. When, in the name of God, you tell someone that they cannot have something that God says they can have, you are presenting a distorted view of God.

C. **It assaults the character of God.** (3b)

We give up sin for joy, but we are never called to give up joy, nor the means that God has provided for our joy. Food and marriage are wonderful gifts from God for our joy. When you make a rule that people cannot have something that God made for joy, then, in the minds of those people it does not present God as being a God who loves to provide

means of joy for his children. This brings us to the final two verses which we realize is what Paul is really driving at.

IV. **God is good and generous.** (4-5)

A. **Everything that God created is good.** (4a)

Satan's devices are fairly straightforward. 1) Divide and conquer 2) Make what is bad appear to be good, until it is too late. 3) Make what is good appear to be bad.

So, what happened in Genesis 3? Satan was successful in making what is bad appear to be good. In so doing, he was attacking the very nature of God. If there is something that is actually really great and awesome but someone says that God forbids it just because, well then, God is an ogre, a scrooge, a killjoy and tyrant. The same misrepresentation of God is displayed when what is actually good is portrayed as being bad.

Imagine that you have a daughter whom you love intensely and imagine that you are very wealthy. In an effort to express your generous love for your daughter, you desire to be generous with your wealth. So, you purchase land and you build a home for her. You love building this home because you know that she will be so excited and so overwhelmed and will be reminded by that home and land everyday of your love for her. You cannot wait for her to live in and enjoy this home. But, the night before she takes ownership of the home something happens. There is a relative who hates you and despises you because of your success. This relative ruined his life and is so embittered by your success that he has devoted his life to hurting you in anyway possible. So, on the night before you sign the deed over to your daughter, this relative convinces your daughter, that you cannot be trusted and that this home and land is actually a trap. You want to trap her in this because you want to control her. And this relative makes up lies and is able to convince your daughter that instead of being good, loving and generous, that you are actually dangerous. So, on the day when you anticipated her joy, she says "no, I will not take this. I should not have this because it would be bad for me.

Why is the house and land supposedly bad for her? It is bad for her because, in her mind, you are not really good. The goodness of the gift is tied directly to the goodness of the giver. A good giver will give good gifts. If someone says, "Hey, I have something for you." Your response to that is based on your assessment of the giver. If you think that the giver loves you, then the "Hey I have something for you" is going to be exciting. If you think that the giver wants to destroy you, then the "Hey I have something for you" is frightening.

The text says, "For everything created by God is good." It is good because God is good. Because God is good, he cannot create anything that is not good. A frontal assault on God's goodness may not work, but if you can convince someone that what God made is not good, then you have been successful in driving a wedge in their view of God. But that truth (everything created by God is good) has to be taken by faith. The goodness of God's creation is intended for us to be experienced so that we might continually be convinced of

the goodness of God. Therefore, the goodness of God's creation is intended to add high-octane thanksgiving fuel for my worship engine.

B. Everything that God created is to be received with thanksgiving. (4b)

Thanksgiving fuel is so spiritually ignitable. So, let's say that you are here this morning, but you would rather be in bed. Are you thankful? No. Are you going to sing? Probably not. Are you going to be amazed at God's mercies in your life? Not likely. Why are you not thankful? You do not have what you think that you want.

But, what if yesterday, you thought that you were going to die (write out scenario), or you thought your child was going to die, and God so clearly intervened and rescued you or your child from certain death that you are still trembling. What if last week your doctor said, call your family and write out your will, and yesterday said, "I don't understand this, but you are completely healed." Do you now want to stay in bed? No! You want to be here and phrases of songs that you sang a hundred times now they just overwhelm you. You are thankful because you believe that God is good. Everything that God created is for you to see that he is good.

C. Everything that God created is holy for the believer. (5)

"It is made holy by the word of God and prayer." Wow! That's why you can go into a steak house on a Friday night during lent and thank God for this awesome rib-eye, right? But, seriously, I want you to understand this. If God says something is fine, it is fine and it is not fine for someone else to say otherwise. Those who say that you can't get married or that you can't eat certain foods are attempting to deprive you of the very gifts that God has intended for your good and they are good when they are received with prayer, by which I think Paul is talking about thanksgiving.

God wants you to live with all of our senses, even your taste buds, alive to his goodness and generosity. If he gave Christ for your salvation, why would he demand you to punish yourself in order to be better? He doesn't. Christ was punished for you and it was enough. Believe it.

The beauty, freedom and joy of this blessing is so glorious and so powerful that it is hated by every enemy of God and therefore, must be protected and championed by his followers.