

Wednesday Night BIBLE STUDY

Wednesday February 8, 2023 – First Baptist Church Buda
Midweek Prayer Meeting & Bible Study

Honoring 1 TIMOTHY GOD

HONORING GOD
“How Not To Fall Away?”
1 Timothy 4:1-5

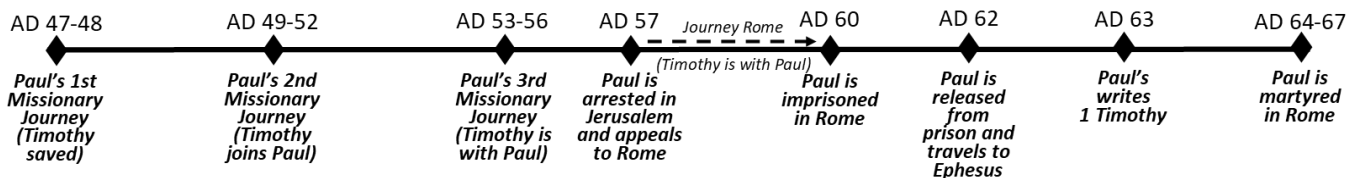
“¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” -1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)



Key Reminders for 1 Timothy:

- (1) **1 Timothy is a personal letter** – It is unlike most of Paul’s other letters that appear in the New Testament. Remember that most of Paul’s letters were written to churches and/or groups of churches, like Ephesians, Colossians, Galatians (a circular letter), etc. 1 Timothy was not a letter written to a group of Christians (churches). It is written to an individual and should be read and studied with that in mind. It’s personal in nature, rather than corporate. That doesn’t mean it’s not for the church today or applicable for the church and Christians. It is! It just means that in studying and understanding the letter for context purposes this must be kept in mind. It does have a bearing on interpretation of Paul’s letter.
- (2) **1 Timothy is written by Paul to Timothy, his apprentice in ministry** – As already - else’s mail, or better said we are privileged by design to get to read someone else’s mail. God wants us to for a reason. He wants us to apply the truths Paul spoke to Timothy to our own lives. Remember that the name Timothy means “one who honors God,” likewise our lives ought to honor God by how we conduct our lives, how we relate to believers in the church, how we serve and lead in the church, our behaviour, our spirit and attitudes, our words, our victory over the very things that defeat us and may keep us from being all that God has called us to be in Christ. Remember that Timothy was a young teenager from the town of Lysta when Paul first met him on his first missionary journey through Asia Minor. Paul led Timothy to the Lord, as well as the rest of his family... his mother and grandmother. When Paul returned to the area on his second missionary journey, apparently Timothy has grown in his faith to the point that Paul asked him to join him on his missionary journey. Timothy would remain a ministry companion to Paul for the rest of Paul’s life, as a faithful servant and fellow ministry.
- (3) **1 Timothy is known as a “Pastoral Epistle” (or letter)** – That makes this personal letter instructional especially for a pastor. There are three “Pastoral Epistles” in all in the New Testament; 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy and Titus, all written by Paul. They are “pastoral” in nature. In its simplest form, “pastoral” means pertaining to the pastor and or his responsibilities. The most common definitions of “pastoral” would be 1. Pastoral - of or pertaining to shepherds; hence, relating to rural life and scenes; as in a pastoral life (remember that pastors are often referred to the shepherd of the flock caring for their needs especially spiritual), 2. Pastoral – relating to the care of souls, or to the pastor of a church, as in, pastoral duties or a pastoral letter, 3. Pastoral – used to refer to the part of the work of teachers, preachers (pastors) and priests that involves giving help and advice about personal matters, or giving pastoral care through teaching, sermons, homilies, etc. The Pastoral Epistles are 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus. All three are letters from an old man at the close of his ministry who is concerned for his successors in the pastorate. As such, the letters concern the things that would be crucial for the young pastors to understand—church organization and discipline, including such matters as the appointment of elders and deacons, the opposition of rebellious members or false teachers, and the maintenance of doctrinal purity.

- (4) **1 Timothy was written to address problems in the church at Ephesus and encourage their pastor, Timothy** – Timothy would eventually become the pastor of the church at Ephesus, likely around AD 62, following Paul’s release from prison. Paul’s release allowed him the opportunity to travel to Ephesus and eventually place Timothy in ministry at that church. Paul often sent Timothy to churches as his representative (1 Corinthians 4:17; 1 Corinthians 16:10; Philippians 2:19; 1 Thessalonians 3:2), and 1 Timothy finds him on another assignment, serving as pastor of the church at Ephesus (1 Thessalonians 1:3)... a troubled church with problems (Revelation 2:4, “... *you have left your first love.*”). Timothy find’s himself... perhaps at a young age, pastoring a very strategic, yet troubled church with a lot of problems.
- (5) **1 Timothy was likely written about AD 63** - The Bible’s silence on the ultimate fate of Paul has generated a great deal of debate in modern times. The book of Acts ends with Paul sitting in a Roman prison awaiting his hearing before the Roman emperor, a privilege of appeal that all Roman citizens like Paul possessed. However, the writing of the Pastoral Epistles clearly dates to a time after the events of Acts. So where was Paul when he wrote 1 Timothy? Paul had expected the Romans to release him from prison, something that likely happened near the end of AD 62 (Philippians 2:24). As previously stated, his release allowed him the opportunity to travel to Ephesus and eventually place Timothy in ministry at that church. Paul then went on to preach in Macedonia, where he heard reports of Timothy’s work at Ephesus that prompted him to write 1 Timothy, probably in AD 63.



First Timothy presents one of the most challenging plights that faces the Christian even in our day... a falling away or drifting from the faith, something we are all susceptible too 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Look at it with me.

“¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” -1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

“¹But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ³ who forbid marriage and

advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; ⁵ for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.” -1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NASB)

- *What would cause someone to fall way from the faith? What causes some to fall away from the faith?*
- *What is the difference between falling way from the faith and falling from grace? Is it possible to fall away from the faith? Is it possible to fall from grace? What is the difference?*

Few subjects have created more disturbance in the Body of Christ and in the lives of Christians than the issue of falling from grace or falling away from Christ/faith. Simply stated, this is the question: “*Can a Christian lose his/her salvation?*” Amplified, the larger question would be: “*Once a person has been born again and saved into the family of God – received new life, a new nature, been justified and sealed by the Holy Spirit – can that individual ever become “unsaved” by sinning, or by ceasing to believe, or by any other cause?*”

In our fast-paced world of empty words, carnality, and shallow faith, not to mention the growing number of religious charlatans and defectors, the question becomes all the more important. Paul’s words to Timothy in the first phrase of verse the first verse of 1 Timothy 4 should be of concern to us, “*Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith...*”

JUST FOR YOUR INFORMATION – Just to give you an idea of how controversial and debated the subject of “falling from grace/faith is among main-line Christian denominations try your hand at the following exercise. Please a check mark [✓] beside the Christian denominations that you think believe you can’t lose your salvation or “fall from grace.”

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Methodist | <input type="checkbox"/> Lutheran |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Catholic | <input type="checkbox"/> Episcopal |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Nazarene | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Southern Baptist |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Church of Christ | <input type="checkbox"/> Holiness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Mennonite Brethren | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Evangelical Free |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Assembly of God | <input type="checkbox"/> Pentecostal |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presbyterian | <input type="checkbox"/> Free Will Batist |

That is an indication of how controversial this subject is and a need to understand the issue from a Biblical perspective. While this study really isn’t a Bible study on “Eternal Security” or the security of the believer, falling from grace or faith... it is a subject that at least gets introduced by Paul’s words here in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Before we get into Paul’s words and

our passage let's clarify some things concerning the subject of falling away or falling from grace that may help us understand better what Paul is talking about in his letter to Timothy.

In your own words, how would you define “eternal security?” Take a few moment and write your own definition of what you believe is meant by “eternal security.”

Other Names for the Doctrine of “The Eternal Security of the Believer” – The doctrine known as “The Eternal Security of the Believer” is also known by several different names. These other names may or may not rightly describe the doctrine, but they are none the less different title that you may hear used to refer to the same thing.

4 Names for The Doctrine of Eternal Security:

(1) **Perseverance of the Saints** – This is the terminology used by famous theologian and reformer, John Calvin and his later followers. This term is used in regard to “final perseverance” of the saints. It means that believers, “can neither totally or finally fall away from the state of grace, but shall certainly persevere therein to the end and be eternally saved.” All this according to the Westminster Confession. This doctrinal terminology for eternal security, “The Perseverance of the Saints” make us one of the petals in the tulip of Calvinism.

TULIP of 5 Point Calvinism

Total Depravity - Sin has affected all parts of man. The heart, emotions, will, mind, and body are all affected by sin. We are completely sinful.

Unconditional Election - God does not base His election on anything He sees in the individual. He chooses the elect according to the kind intention of His will (Eph. 1:4-8; Rom. 9:11) without any consideration of merit within the individual.

Limited Atonement - Jesus died only for the elect. Though Jesus’ sacrifice was sufficient for all, it was not efficacious for all. Jesus only bore the sins of the elect.

Irresistible Grace - When God calls his elect into salvation, they cannot resist.

Perseverance of the Saints - You cannot lose your salvation. Because the Father has elected, the Son has redeemed, and the Holy Spirit has applied salvation, those thus saved are eternally secure.

(2) **Security of the Believer** – This is the shortened term most often used by proponents of the doctrine today.

- (3) **Assurance of Salvation** – Sometimes the doctrine of eternal security is referred to as “Assurance of Salvation.” This term or phrase is actually not a good description of the doctrine, but is very different. We will look at the difference briefly in this study.
- (4) **Once Saved, Always Saved** - While this is a somewhat accurate description of the doctrine of eternal security it is an oversimplification of the doctrine, and it is the terminology or phrase most commonly used by who do not hold to the doctrine... those who would say that Scripture teaches otherwise. Another phrase that is sometimes used along with “once saved, always saved” is “cheap grace” meaning that the emphasis on the doctrine of eternal security is upon being saved by grace alone plus nothing else cheapens grace and indicates that one could do whatever he or she wants and live as they please because they are recipients of grace.

A Good Definition of Eternal Security – A good, concise definition of the eternal security of the believer is:

“Eternal Security is the work of God that guarantees that the gift of salvation, once received, is forever and cannot be lost.”

3 Important Parts to the Definition:

- (1) **“the work of God” – John 3:16**
- (2) **“the gift of salvation” – Ephesians 2:8-9**
- (3) **“salvation... is forever and cannot be lost” – Romans 6:23**

Clearing Up A Difference – At this point it is important for us to clear up a misunderstanding that is often brought up in any discussion on the doctrine of eternal security and that is the difference between eternal security and assurance of salvation. There is a big difference between the two as already stated.

5 Reasons People Often Lack Assurance:

- (1) **Some doubt the reality of their commitment to Christ** – No evidence/commitment in their life and it causes them to doubt
- (2) **Some question the correctness of the procedure they went through** – Can’t pin point a specific time, didn’t follow the right procedure, don’t think they did it right the first time
- (3) **Those who don’t believe in eternal security will naturally lack assurance** – May be always wondering if they are still saved or if they need to do it again
- (4) **Unconfessed and unrepentant sin** – Sin in a believers life will always lead to doubt if it remains unconfessed
- (5) **A lost condition** – For that one who is having doubts or lack of assurance of their salvation they should check it out and be sure they are saved because some who doubt have reason to... they are indeed lost

Now there is a basic glossary of terms that I think need to be understood... maybe clarified to get at what Paul is actually saying concerning those who are *“falling away”* or *“departing (abandoning) from the faith.”*

3 Important Terms Related to “Falling Away”:

(1) Doubting [one’s salvation] (lack of assurance) - (Biblical example: Thomas/Peter)

Most believers, at one time or another, have doubted their salvation. There can be several causes of doubt, some valid and some not. If you doubt your salvation, there are some steps you can take to find reassurance, dispel the doubts, and rest in the promises of God.

First, it is good to know that whether or not you have doubts is *not* what determines your salvation. Some genuine believers struggle with doubt, while some unbelievers who presume to be saved never have a doubting moment (and they will have a rude awakening someday—see Matthew 7:21–23). So it is not automatic that the presence of doubt indicates a lack of salvation, or that the absence of doubt attests to salvation.

Some Reasons People Doubt their Salvation:

1. The presence of sin in their life - One reason people doubt their salvation is *the presence of sin in their lives*. Hebrews 12:1 speaks of “sin that so easily entangles.” Many true Christians struggle against “besetting,” that is, habitual sins, and this may cause them to doubt their salvation. *It is important here to recognize that, despite the Christian’s being a new creation in Christ, everyone still sins.* “We all stumble in many ways” (James 3:2). No one reaches a state of sinless perfection in this world. The difference for the believer is the attitude toward sin and the response to it. As Adrian Rogers said, *“Before I got saved I was running to sin; now I am running from it. And if I fail, I turn right around and start running away again.”*

It is also important to know that the presence of sin in one’s life *can* be a sign that you are not saved. The Bible is clear that willful, unrepentant sin is an indicator of an untransformed heart (see 1 John 3:6, 9; Romans 6:1–2). If you are living a lifestyle that the Bible condemns as sinful, then there is a spiritual problem. Do Christians sin? Yes. Do they willfully continue in sin? No. If you doubt your salvation because of sin in your life, then confess the sin to God and ask for His forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Then take steps to not repeat the sin. The very fact that you recognize sin and struggle against it in your own life is proof that the Holy Spirit is at work. Cooperate with what He is doing.

2. The absence of godly works in their lives - Another reason people doubt their salvation is *the absence of godly works in their lives*. The Christian life involves more than turning from sin; it includes doing good. Jesus said that “every good tree bears good fruit” (Matthew 7:17), and Paul wrote, “Let our people learn to devote themselves to good works, so as to help cases of urgent need, and not be unfruitful”

(Titus 3:14). There are some who inspect the “fruit” of their own lives, find it lacking, and wonder if they’re truly saved. Their mistrust that they are a “good tree” could be because 1) they have set a higher standard for themselves than God has, minimizing what God is doing through them; 2) they are foolishly measuring themselves against others and their fruit (see 2 Corinthians 10:12); 3) they are being lax in their pursuit of good works; or 4) they are not saved and therefore do not have the motivating love of Christ. If you doubt your salvation because of a lack of good works, then confess the sin of omission to God and ask for His forgiveness for Jesus’ sake. Then it is time to “stir up the gift of God which is in you” (2 Timothy 1:6, NKJV). There’s plenty of work to do for the kingdom (Luke 10:2), and the Bible gives plenty of direction about the will of God, generally, for Christians. Be careful not to set up false performance standards or compare your good deeds with others’. Ask God what He would have *you* do, and do that.

3. **Wonder about the decision they made as a child** - Some people, especially those who were saved at a very young age, doubt their salvation because they don’t remember their conversion very well, and *they wonder if the decision they made as a child was genuine*. Such feelings are common in adults who were saved as children. In such cases, it is good to review the promises of God and remember that Jesus invites children to come to Him (Mark 10:14). Salvation is based on the grace of God and faith in Christ, not our knowledge, wisdom, or sophistication (Ephesians 2:8–9). Jesus promised that those who are His will “never perish” (John 10:28). If doubts persist about the genuineness of your childhood conversion, make sure of your faith. Regardless of what you did as a child, do you believe *now* that Jesus died for your sins and rose again? Are you placing your faith in Him alone?
4. **Persistent guilt over past sin** - Another reason for the presence of doubt concerning salvation is *persistent guilt over past sins*. We all have regrets about past misdeeds, and we all have a spiritual enemy that the Bible calls “the accuser” (Revelation 12:10). The combination of regrets and accusations can spur much doubt. Fortunately, “the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4). If you doubt your salvation because of guilty feelings, then ask yourself, “Were those sins over which I feel guilty confessed to God?” If so, then know this: God has removed that sin from you “as far as the east is from the west” (Psalm 103:12). This promise stands forever: “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

Sometimes, doubting is a good thing. Doubt can, like pain, alert us to a problem that needs addressed. We are to test ourselves to be sure that we are “in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). Be sure that you are born again. If you have trusted Christ as your Savior, then you have eternal life, and God wants you to be confident of your salvation (Romans 8:38–39; 1 John 5:13). **KEY TRUTH: The “doubter” (of ones salvation) may or not be a Christian. Sometimes the doubts come because they have something to doubt... they were never genuinely saved. At other times genuine Christians have**

doubts for various reasons, but this truth must be remembered; God doesn't discard us because of our doubts. Rather, He loves us in spite of our doubts, and our doubts may just indicate our desire to know a deeper relationship and walk with Him.

- (2) **Backsliding** – (*Biblical example: Peter*) The word *backslide*, in a Christian context, implies movement away from Christ rather than toward Him. A backslider is someone who is going the wrong way, spiritually. He is regressing rather than progressing. The backslider had at one time demonstrated a commitment to Christ or maintained a certain standard of behavior, but he has since reverted to old ways.

Backsliding may manifest itself in several ways,

- *Dropping out of church*
- *Losing fervor for the Lord*
- *Walking away from a ministry or a family*
- *Falling back into old habits*

Some people use the word *backslide* to mean that a person has lost his or her salvation. However, since a saved person is secure in Christ (John 10:28–29, “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all: and no one is able to snatch them out of My Father's hand.*”)—God will not kick His children out of His family—that is not what the word is speaking of.

Rather, when we speak of backsliding, we simply mean that someone is growing cold in their faith, toward the church and toward Christ. A backslidden condition could indicate the person was never saved to begin with—in which case, the backslider is only showing his true colors. But it's also possible for children of God to backslide, temporarily.

The Bible uses the phrase “*fall away*” rather than “*backslide*,” but the idea is similar. In the Bible to “fall away” can mean two different things.

- (1) In one instance, the person is saved but experiencing a temporary period of questioning that we could call a “crisis of faith.”
- (2) In the other instance, the person was never saved at all but only temporarily behaving as a saved person would.

We will call this taking Christianity for a “test drive.” In **Mark 14:27** Jesus tells His disciples, “*You will all fall away.*” What He meant was that, when He was arrested, they would experience a crisis of faith, a life event so shocking that they would run from Jesus and question the very core of their beliefs. It was a night of offense, a night of stumbling for them. But this was a *temporary condition*. Three days later, Jesus rose from the dead and appeared to the disciples. Their faith and hope were restored, stronger than ever.

The apostle Paul tells us how to handle a fellow believer who is backsliding in Galatians 6:1, “*Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.*”

James concurs when he says in James 5:19, “*My brothers and sisters, if one of you should wander from the truth . . . someone should bring that person back.*”

The backslider has wandered from where he should be and is “stuck” in sin, but the church will work to restore him and set him back on the path of righteousness. **KEY TRUTH: A “backslider” may be a Christian, and a Christian may backslide. This is not a losing of one’s salvation, but simply backsliding. God forgives and a backslide may repent, confess his or her sins and be restored.**

(3) **Apostasy** - (*Biblical example: Judas*) The words apostasies and apostasy occur six times in the Bible (Jeremiah 2:19; 5:6; 8:5; 14:7; Hosea 14:4; 2 Thessalonians 2:3). In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for apostasy is “*musba*,” and in the New Testament the Greek word for apostasy is “*apostasia*.” The basic meaning of both words is “defection,” “rebellion” or “a falling away.” An apostate is an individual who commits apostasy. An apostate falls away from the faith. I think our interest is in the New Testament use of the Greek use of the word “*apostasia*” meaning “defection, revolt” or “departure.” It is sometimes defined as “rebellion, abandonment, breach of faith.” In classical Greek, *apostasia* was sometimes used to refer to political or military rebellion... defection or abandonment. In summary, the basic definition of apostasy has the sense of abandonment and rebellion.

Therefore, apostasy is spiritual rebellion against the faith, which was once for all delivered to the saints (Jude 3). The definition of apostasy is falling away from the faith. In 2 Thessalonians 2:3, the word refers to a spiritual rebellion against God... “*Let no one in any way deceive you, for it will not come unless the apostasy comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction . . .*” (NASB) That is, apostasy is the falling away from God, abandoning God or rebelling against God.

An apostate is always recognized in Scripture as someone who was never a believer even though they attended church, sang worship songs, read the Bible and acted like a Christian. The sad truth is they were never real. They were a tare among the wheat. Tares look like the real thing. They look like wheat, but they are not. They were never a believer. That is the message of Jesus’ Parable of the Tares and Wheat.

There are individuals who have said a prayer and thought they were saved and going to heaven. The apostle warns in 1 Corinthians 15:2 that is possible to have vain faith. That is, someone can have empty faith that does not save. 1 John 2:19 describes apostates,

“They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us.” (NASB) This verses teaches us that some individuals will leave the faith some time or even years after professing to be Christians. But 1 John 2:19 teaches that *they were never real*. Judas Isacariot is an example. Jesus called him the son of prediction (John 17:12). 1 Peter 1:4-9 describes a true believer as one who will never leave the faith. Other passages are John 10:28-29; Romans 8:30-39; Philippians 1:6 and Jude 1. True believers will never become apostates, and those who apostatize were never believers. ***KEY TRUTH: An “apostate” was never a Christian, and a genuine believer/Cristian will not be an apostate. This is not a losing of one’s salvation. You can’t lose what you never had. But rather this is one professing to something they never had.***

Were these Christians at all? Had they made a genuine commitment to Christ as Lord and Savior (saved/born again)? Were they “religious” but not saved? Were they professors of faith but not possessors of faith? And another important question might be why did they fall away? Why do we? What things may cause some to fall away. Notice our passage in 1 Timothy 4:1-5 again, *“¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ² speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³ forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.”* -1 Timothy 4:1-5 (NKJV)

Here are some things that Paul specifically cause some to fall away. I’d say these are some warnings, some indicators, some things we need to be aware of so that they don’t cause us to grow weary, discourage in our faith and cause us to lose hope and fall away ourselves. These are some initial things that may cause us to fall away in the faith...

Initial Things That May Cause Us to Fall Away (Lose hope and drift in the faith):

- (1) **The deceiving spirit of the age (v.1)** – The deceiving spirit of our age has it tight grip on the hearts of many Christians and churches today, I believe this is what is behind the “deconstruction movement” and so many “losing their faith” and walking away from God, His church, and their faith
- (2) **The devil (v.1)** – The enemy deceives even believers. The enemy (the devil) certainly know how to trip us up, discourage us, creating doubts and fears that lead us away from our faith, cause us to lose hope na and focus on God
- (3) **Hypocrisy (v.2)** – When we profess one things, but live differently, professing to be a Christian but not living it out in our daily lives, pretending to be something we aren’t

- (4) **A seared conscience (v.2)** – Sin no longer bother us, we have compromised to the point that we can no longer discern the wrong, we accommodated the world and the worlds ways to the exclusion of God’s Word and the principles and standards found in His Word
- (5) **Legalism/Pharisaical religion (v.3)** – Religion and man’s attempts to get to God by codes, legalistic rules and laws, rule following, good works faith always prove shallow and ultimately disillusioning. Even for some genuine Christians, they can get so caught up in “rule following” that they become disillusioned with the church and faith.

HOW NOT TO FALL AWAY (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

We all know people who have fallen away from the Christian faith.

- These are people who at one time made a profession of faith in Christ.
- They may have joined a Bible-believing church.
- I know some who were seminary graduates, active in ministry, but either they drifted from the Lord or deliberately turned away.
- They may have become ensnared in a cult or entangled by worldly values or have fallen into moral problems, but they are no longer living as Christians.

If you think such a thing could never happen to you, take heed lest you fall! We’re all vulnerable and we are at war with a cunning, deceptive enemy. We need to understand how not to fall away. Paul gives us an answer in 1 Timothy 4:1-5. It is not a complete answer, of course. A complete answer would entail all the New Testament teaching on the spiritual life. But it is nonetheless a solid answer that will help us be on guard so that we do not fall away.

Paul refers to an explicit prophecy by the Holy Spirit that in later times some will fall away from the faith. He may be referring to Jesus’ prediction concerning the apostasy during the end times (Mark 13:22), or to other prophecies Paul made (2 Thess. 2:1-12; Acts 20:29). Or Paul may have received a new revelation from the Holy Spirit on this matter as he wrote this letter. “Later times” refers to the entire church age; but there will be a major apostasy just before the Lord’s return (2 Thess. 2:1-3). Apparently, some in Ephesus were already turning away from the faith. Paul is telling Timothy these things so that he will be on guard as the problems grow worse. He is saying that ...

KEY THOUGHT: To avoid falling away, we must persevere in God’s truth with thankfulness.

There are two parts to this passage (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

2 Part to 1 Timothy 4:1-5:

(1) The problem of these times = Apostasy (vv.1-3)

(2) The perspective for these times = God’s truth and thankful hearts (vv.3-5)

First he shows the *problem* of these times—those who fall away from the faith (4:1-3a). Then he reveals the *perspective* for these times—the outlook we need to persevere (4:3b-5). Let's explore these

THE PROBLEM OF THESE TIMES... *Apostasy (falling away)*

Those whom Paul describes as falling away are people who are not enjoying God and the blessings He provides, but rather have fallen into an outward form of religion in which they deny themselves things, such as marriage and certain foods. In order to see how they got to that point, we need to trace Paul's flow of thought:

Paul's Train of Thought in 1 Timothy 4:1-3:

(1) **We are engaged in spiritual warfare** – Notice again Paul's words to Timothy in verse 1 of our passage... he writes, *"Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons."* The Scriptures teach that God not only created the material world, but that He also created spiritual beings. We normally cannot see or hear them, but they are nonetheless real. Some of these beings, called angels, are servants of God. The other beings, demons or evil spirits, are under Satan's leadership. He (Satan/the devil) and they (demons) were once angels who served God. But Satan rebelled and a great number of angels followed him. He is now their general and they serve in his army to thwart God's purpose.

Paul says that these false teachers and those who follow them were actually following deceitful spirits and the doctrines of demons. The errors came through men in the church, but behind these professing Christians were demonic forces (see 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

We are sometimes surprised when the enemy comes from within the church. We think the enemy is "out there," not in here. But Scripture is clear that men in the church, recognized as leaders, who seem to be men of righteousness, will sometimes rise up to lead God's people astray. Often behind such men are demonic forces. Scripture shows that demonic influence can be blatant and obvious (for example, Gerasene demoniac).

But also demonic influence can be subtle enough to draw the unsuspecting into its grip. If you've ever been ripped off by a con artist, he didn't walk up and say, "I'm going to steal your money!" He earned your trust, but his intent was to use you for his own selfish ends. That's what was happening in Ephesus, and these deceitful evil spirits continue to work in churches to thwart God's truth by their demonic doctrines. So often we see things only on the natural plane. But it is crucial that we understand that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12). We are engaged in spiritual warfare!

(2) **Spiritual warfare involves the mind** – Notice Paul’s word especially in verse 2... I’ll back up and pick up from verse 1, *“¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron.”* Apostasy (or falling away) always begins in the mind. These spirits are “deceitful” and they teach doctrines that sound biblical but are just slightly off. They are out to fool you in your thinking. But God’s people *“believe and know the truth”* (4:3).

Anything goes... We need to be careful here. *On one extreme, there is a wide movement in the American church that minimizes truth.* This side says, *“They will know we are Christians by our love,”* and so they adopt a *“peace at any cost”* position that dilutes and ultimately destroys essential Christian truth. They emphasize tolerance and doctrinal diversity. If you speak out against error, this side accuses you of being unloving and divisive. But if you go down that road, you end up with the unbiblical view that truth doesn’t matter and that there is no such thing as sound doctrine (a major theme in this epistle).

Nothing goes... *On the other extreme, we can be so zealous for the truth that we shred relationships and end up falling into spiritual pride because we hold to “The Truth.”* I get a newsletter from a man who attacks and separates himself from many well-known evangelicals because he finds errors in statements they have made in print or in taped messages. If you go far enough down that road, you end up in a church of one member, because you’ll never find another person who agrees with you on every minor point of doctrine. So you have to determine how serious a matter is and what the consequences will be if people follow this teaching.

In the situation Paul is correcting, you might think, “What’s the big deal about forbidding marriage and the eating of certain foods?” But Paul saw behind these practices to the heart of the teaching, which was to put a relationship with God on an outward basis... work, the law, what you do. This fosters hypocrisy and pride and leads people away from seeking to please God from the heart, and away from grace. So, Satan is out to influence your thinking. Spiritual warfare involves the mind. But it never stops there.

(3) **The mind affects our morals** – Look at *verses 1-3* again with me... Paul says, *“¹Now the Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, ²speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, ³forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.”* These men who gave heed in their thinking to the doctrines of demons ended up being hypocritical liars, *“seared in their consciences”* (4:2). When God’s truth confronted their guilty consciences, instead of dealing with it through repentance, they

put on a good front to others as hypocritical liars. Their wrong thinking led them to wrong morals.

The conscience is not an infallible guide. If you violate your conscience and don't repent, your conscience becomes hardened or callused. If that process continues unchecked, you reach a point where your conscience is seared (the word means "cauterized").

- You have grown insensitive to sin
- You can lie and not even realize you're doing it, because your conscience is seared
- You can gossip and backbite and feel no remorse about it, because your conscience is seared
- You can cheat, steal, hurt others, even commit immoral acts, and easily justify them because your conscience is seared

A person who falls away from the faith can go one of two directions, morally speaking: **Legalism** or **licentiousness**. Second Peter and Jude describe men who fell away from the faith into licentiousness. They once made claim to be Christians. But their brand of false teaching led them and their followers into immoral behavior (2 Pet. 2:1-3, 18-20). That's one route apostasy can take.

But the doctrines of demons can also lead to legalism, which Paul is addressing here. These men were forbidding marriage and advocating abstaining from certain foods. This was probably an early form of Gnosticism. The Gnostics claimed to be Christians, but they adopted a number of wrong doctrines, one of which was that all matter is evil and spirit is good. This wrong thinking led them into these two wrong extremes morally of legalism and licentiousness.

Some of the Gnostics concluded that since matter is evil, we must control the body through asceticism or denying oneself any physical pleasure. Others concluded that since matter is evil and spirit is good, there is a wide division between the two. What you do with your body doesn't matter, since it's all evil anyway. It's your spirit that counts. This led them into gross immorality and indulgence of the flesh.

- Legalism and licentiousness are not opposed to one another, with grace being the balance between the two.
- Rather, legalism and licentiousness are two sides of the same coin.
- Both are devoid of a personal relationship with the living God in which all areas of life are brought under His lordship as a response to His grace.
- Neither legalism nor licentiousness focus on inner righteousness.
- The legalism Paul is attacking is as demonic in origin as licentiousness.
- It is the end result of wrong thinking which stems from deceitful spirits.
- It leads to pride, not to godliness in the inner person.
- The attraction of legalism is that it builds up the self... makes one look religious, spiritual, pious because of their rule following and dutiful practice

- After presenting the problem of falling away, Paul goes on to give the perspective needed to persevere.

THE PERSPECTIVE FOR THESE TIMES... *Perseverance in God's truth with thankful hearts*

In contrast to falling away, which in the case of the legalists meant outward religion without the living God, the perspective for perseverance is holding to God's truth with thankfulness. The flavor of verses 3b-5 is that of gratefully enjoying God and His creation. Notice it (1 Timothy 4:3-5), *"³ Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For every creature of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; ⁵ for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer."*

There are several aspects to such perseverance:

How Not to Fall Away?:

(1) Make sure you hold to integrity and truth - These false teachers had become hypocritical liars (4:2). Hypocrisy means maintaining an outward front to look good while you're violating your conscience when others aren't looking. In order to cover your sin, you have to lie, so you let go of truthfulness.

- To dodge the conviction that comes through God's Word of truth, you don't confront your life with Scripture.
- To salve your guilty conscience, you add certain outward practices that make you seem spiritual.
- That's how Satan gets you to fall away.

The antidote is to hold to integrity and truth, both God's Word of truth and personal truthfulness. If you sin, confess and forsake it, don't cover it up. Daily be in God's Word and let it search your heart so that you can confront sin and grow in holiness.

Can I tell you how to be sure to hold to integrity and truth...

- *Be grounded in the Word of God which is truth*
- *Seek God's face daily through prayers*
- *Grow in the context of other brother and sisters in Christ*

(2) Be alert to the spiritual danger that comes through the mind - Stay on guard to the fact that Satan and his forces are trying to deceive our minds against God and His truth (2 Cor. 11:3). Satan especially appeals to our pride by getting us to think that we can gain merit with God by keeping man-made rules. We start thinking we're better than others because we keep such rules.

Remember this: *Any teaching that exalts self is from the enemy.*

God's Word humbles us by teaching that every good gift we enjoy comes from God's undeserved favor; thus we must be thankful to God for His blessings. Especially we need to be alert to the danger of doubting God's goodness.

In the original temptation, Satan appealed to Eve's mind and got her to doubt God's goodness: "C'mon, Eve! God is trying to hold back something good from you. This fruit will make you like God!" (see Gen. 3:1-6). The serpent was pulling God down ("He's not really good") and building Eve up (exalting self, "you can be like God").

He's still using that false teaching to cause many to fall away. You must be especially careful to guard yourself from wrong thinking when you're going through a difficult trial. Satan comes along and sows doubts about God's goodness: "If He were really good, He wouldn't let this happen to you. It's okay to be angry at God; He wasn't faithful to you by letting this happen." It's in the context of trials that Peter tells us to humble ourselves under God's mighty hand and then says in 1 Peter 5:8-9, "*Be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls about like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. But resist him, firm in your faith.*"

(3) Remember that God wants us to enjoy Him and His blessings with thankful hearts

- Christians are the only people who can truly enjoy life, because we're right with the Creator of all life through faith in Jesus Christ. We know that God is for us and is working all things together for good for those who love Him (Rom. 8:31, 28). Thus Paul directs us to give thanks in everything (Eph. 5:20; 1 Thess. 5:18), to be overflowing with gratitude to God because of His great salvation so freely given (Col. 1:12; 2:7).

Paul mentions gratitude twice in our text (in 1 Timothy 4:3 & 4). If you're bitter toward God or if you're grumbling about His dealings with you, you're vulnerable to Satan's attacks.

Mark it well: *The path away from God is the path of ingratitude, of doubting the goodness of God (Rom. 1:21; Jude 16).*

God's people who persevere believe in the goodness of God, even in trials, and thus are filled with gratitude. And we not only can be thankful for spiritual blessings, but also for physical joys. When Paul says that everything created by God is good, he means, in the context for which God created it.

- God created marriage and the pleasure of the sexual relationship in marriage.
- He created good food for us to enjoy. (You can say "Amen!")
- God has created the beauty of this world for us to enjoy.
- He has made human beings in His image... although marred by the fall, we can enjoy the unique people of this world.

- We can enjoy the creative abilities God has given to people, such as literature, art, and music.

In all these things, we don't just enjoy the gift, but also we enjoy God who has given them for our enjoyment. I'm not talking about overindulgence or self-centered living. (Paul deals with the need for discipline in the verses immediately following.) I'm saying that the spiritual is not just a segment of life. Rather, all of life is spiritual and sacred, because we live it in a relationship with the Creator who designed it all for His glory and our enjoyment. ★

➡ The Puritans had it right, "What is the chief end of man? To glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

We make all of life holy ("sanctified," 4:5) "by means of the word of God and prayer." Paul is referring to prayer before meals. We thank God for His provision. When Paul mentions "the word of God," he is referring to God's pronouncement in the creation that everything He made is good (Genesis 1:31). So this extends beyond table grace to all of God's creation which we are to enjoy. When we hike in the mountains or enjoy the company of family or friends, when we enjoy a concert or a good book, we do it with thankfulness to God, the Creator and giver of every good gift (James 1:17). If we know Him, we can enjoy Him through all that He has made.

CONCLUSION

To avoid falling away, we must persevere in God's truth with thankful hearts. It's not always easy, but even in times of trial, we need to affirm God's goodness and thank Him for His many blessings.

A number of years ago, a magazine editor's life was saved through a kidney transplant. He commented on the difference between his attitude toward life before and after his operation: "Instead of living life to the fullest, I [formerly] let myself be bothered by things which I just laugh at today. It never occurred to me then to enjoy the coming of spring, a cool drink of water on a hot day, eating good food and all the things that normally we don't notice but let pass by."

I have no reason to think the man knew God. But we do, so we have hope not only in this life, but beyond the grave. Let's commit ourselves to His truth as revealed in His Word. Let's enjoy God and His many gifts to us so that we don't fall away.