

5. The apostasy and being a man of God

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What would you think of a surgeon who just opened you up and started cutting away everything in his sight? It would be more frightening for him to say, "I don't know where to start, but I sure am having a fun in cutting you up though." Like that, we want to make sure that what we do, we do properly, because what we are up to in sharing the Gospel has far greater, eternal ramifications.

Jude 3 Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.

Without question, the Christianity is under attack today. And I believe that most Americans, not to mention the rest of the world, have not really learned much about it. The fact is that when a lot of people are supposedly preaching the Christianity, they are not really preaching it at all.

I often hear people oversimplify or overcomplicate Christianity. Either they load it down with a bunch of rules and regulations that have nothing to do with the essential Christianity, or they strip it of its essential meaning by offering forgiveness without mentioning repentance or by telling people about a wonderful place called heaven without mentioning a very real place called hell. We need to find that balance and do it properly.

A. APOSTASY IN THE END TIMES

1 Timothy 4:1-5 Now 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.

Even though it has been more than 1900 years since Paul wrote to Timothy, we see the same kind of apostasy still going strong in the 21st century. Satan is still hard at work to bring down godly men and women as many as he can. It is one of his ways to hurt the heart of God.

In light of the great apostasy, apostle Paul, who considered Timothy as his spiritual son, warns him and us about this process of dropping out which we call "apostasy". It is departure from God's truth and it is not only possible, but it is inevitable to those who don't have their hearts in the Word and Christ Jesus.

In chapter 3, Paul told us that the purpose of the church is to uphold the truths of Christ. Now he warns us about those who let go of those truths – and worse, those will deny and distort them.

Apostasy has the name of satan all over it. He has been distorting God's truth from the garden of Eden. However, not every false doctrine come with its warning labels – "DANGER: Satanic Doctrine Enclosed. Open at your own risk." Actually, the false doctrines and teachers are often attractive, friendly and convincing.

Sometimes you see me getting hot under the collar when I talk about false teachers. You may wonder why I get so upset with them. It is because they introduce doctrines of demons and astray away people from the truth of God. As a shepherd of this flock, I have every right to be upset with them.

Many false teachers' movements are successful because they are convinced that they're teaching truth and their confident assertions sway those who lack a solid biblical foundation.

They say, "Doctrine isn't important for the Christian. It is a personal relationship with Christ that counts." It sounds right. Wrong!!! Our devotion should be based on the doctrine of Jesus Christ. Sadly, too many Christians have a flimsy understanding of such vital doctrines as Christ's atonement, His deity, the Trinity, the sinfulness of men and the holiness of God.

If I stop here and ask you to explain the any of these categories in short sentences, I can easily predict that more than 50% of our congregation and the rest of Christians can not articulate them in words. They may know the meaning somewhat abstractly, not in systematic way. Don't think that doctrines are for the pastors and those who dig into the Bible. Every Christian should have good knowledge about the truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ to defend what they believe.

A good example of this is not very far from here. One of the mega churches in Tucson is turning to a wrong direction. I have friends who attend this church and they gave me a sermon done by one of their teaching pastors on a few Sundays ago. He started his sermon in this way, "Is the Bible true? Is it really inspired by God? Is it really happened what it says in the garden of Eden between humans and the serpent?" Nothing wrong with opening one's sermon like that. Actually, it can be provocative to start with questions. But he didn't close it with firm clear answers from the Bible. In other words, he left a bunch of doubting questions in the people's minds. Actually he even endorsed the idea from that damnable novel "Da Vinci Code" that clearly stands against the Bible.

The current movement among the false doctrines is called "Emergent Church" or "Seeker sensitive church". They want the sinners come to church. I wholeheartedly agree. But once they have sinners in the church, they talk about positive attitudes and thinking, not the truth of God that requires repentance and turning away from their sins. They say, "We don't want to make them feel uncomfortable and bad."

These emergent churches across America get to have big size congregation, because no one needs to repent and they feel good about whatever they are doing including sex before marriage, homosexuality and you name it. Folks, that is an apostasy. If you leave out repentance from our confession as the believers of Jesus Christ, you just made the Atonement of Jesus Christ useless. The problem is not what they say, but it is what they don't say. That is a damnable heresy from the pit of hell.

Praying for the meal in public is not an option for Christians, rather it is a requirement. We don't need to be embarrassed to pray and thank the Lord for the meal in public. Whether it is a lobster and steak dinner or something we would see in our nightmare, we should know that it is our honor to pray and give thanks to Him for the meals we are about to have whatever the condition that is.

B. A GODLY SERVANT PRACTICING THE WORD

1 Timothy 4:6 If you instruct the brethren in these things, you will be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished in the words of faith and of the good doctrine which you have carefully followed. 7 But reject profane and old wives' fables, and exercise yourself toward godliness. 8 For bodily exercise profits a little, but godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. 9 This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptance. 10 For to this end we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of those who believe. 11 These things command and teach.

In v6, apostle Paul teaches us that the marks of good minister of Jesus Christ are:

- 1) Instruct the people with the truth
- 2) Nourish themselves in the Word of God
- 3) Live the life according to what he has learn from the Word

Nowadays many people evaluate pastors by their eloquent speech, level of education, their air of professionalism or how big the church he has. But God sees the heart of men while we see the outside only. I am not called to be a popular person, but a pastor, a shepherd and teacher who speaks the truth no matter what even if it costs me my life.

If we are not nourishing ourselves on God's truth, we'll be tempted to fill ourselves with something else. The word 'fables' means 'myth' in Greek. The priority must be on God's Word, not on the words of men including Christian books. Even though they are helpful, they cannot replace the Word of God.

Need a modern-day example? How about the wave of "angelmania" washing over America? Books on angeles are everywhere. People practically worship them, pray to them and try to tap into their guides. It may sounds spiritual and entertaining, but it contradicts everything about the angels from the Bible. Just in case you've been believing in the Hollywood version of identity of angels, they are not formerly dead good people becoming angels. There is a Greek word for that. Bologna!

In v7, we find the word "exercise". We American love that word and hate it at the same time. We'd like to say, "I am gonna start to exercise from tomorrow." But when tomorrow comes, we come up just about every possible excuse why we cannot exercise. The Greek word for 'exercise' is "gumnazo" where we get our English word "gymnasium". It takes sweat, determination, perseverance and total submission to the Trainer.

Our bodies are God's temples, to be used for His glory, and His tools for His service. But bodily exercise benefits us only during this life, all the while godly exercise is profitable now and for eternity. Paul is not asking us to choose between the two. Because a healthy body can be used of God, but we must major on holiness.

I asked you to underline the word 'godliness'. The word 'godliness' comes from the old English word "Godlikeness". It means to have the character and attitude of God. This was a worthy goal, much more worthy than what we can get from physical exercise.

Though godliness does not make this life the most comfortable, or richest, or most pleasurable, or easiest in the life that now is, it undeniably makes it the best, the most contented, and the most fulfilling life one can live in this world.

C. PERSONAL INSTRUCTIONS

1 Timothy 4:12-16 Let no one despise your youth, but be an example to the believers in word, in conduct, in love, in spirit, in faith, in purity. 13 Till I come, give attention to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine. 14 Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the eldership. 15 Meditate on these things; give yourself entirely to them, that your progress may be evident to all. 16 Take heed to yourself and to the doctrine. Continue in them, for in doing this you will save both yourself and those who hear you.

The Greek word for 'example' is "tupos" which means a "pattern" to follow. That means I am here to make a pattern of our Lord Jesus to you. That puts a tremendous responsibility on me. At the same time, it does the same thing to you, too. As believers of Jesus Christ, you are making patterns of godliness to your unbelieving neighbors, family members and friends around you.

Obviously Timothy was young, he was vulnerable to the errors of youth which bring the often justified criticism of those older. To address this, Paul called him to live such a godly life that no one could despise his youth.

Apostle Paul instructs Timothy to do three things: Reading, Exhortation and doctrine.

1) Reading – As I mentioned at the beginning of this study, many churches become apostate and leave the truth of God, they choose not to read the Bible in their assemblies. They discard the Bible and study books that are written by men, such as The Purpose Driven Church, etc. at their Sunday morning services.

2) Exhortation – In addition to reading the Scripture, Timothy was to warn, advise and urge his congregation regarding the words of Scripture, helping them apply those words to their daily lives.

3) Doctrine – It refers to teaching in Christian doctrine. The people needed to know, understand and constantly be reminded of the great truths of the Christian faith.

The Lord didn't intend for His Word to be skimmed over lightly. We don't absorb God's truth by gliding over it. We must immerse ourselves in it, explore its depths and take in its wonder.

No pastor's sermon is worth listening unless the Lord puts the words in his mouth. Unless the Lord gives the gift of teaching, no one can speak the truth. At the same time, He can use anyone to speak the truth like the donkey which spoke the truth to prophet Balaam in Numbers 22. I, myself is another example of God's grace. The Lord chose to use me to preach and teach the Word to you whether you have your vote for that idea or not.

Timothy was encouraged to give it his all, to put forth a maximum effort, and by doing so, his progress would be evident to all. Often, progress is not evident because we do not give ourselves entirely to the pursuit of God and His will.

Often we fall short of all we can be for God because we are passive in our Christian life. We simply do not give ourselves entirely because we are selfish people. Jesus warned against this passive attitude in the parable of the talents, where the servant who did nothing was severely rebuked.

D. APPLICATIONS

1) The present-day apostasy is a constant reminder that we are living in the “last days.”

Scripture is very clear that apostasy will signal the approach of Christ’s second coming. As more and more people depart from His way, we should be looking for His return.

2) Praying for the meal in public is not an option for Christians, rather it is a requirement.

We don’t need to be embarrassed to pray for the meal in public. We should know that it is our honor to pray and give thanks to the Master of Universe for the meals we are about to have.

3) Though godliness does not make this life the most comfortable, or richest, or most pleasurable, or easiest in the life that now is, it undeniably makes it the best, the most contented, and the most fulfilling life one can live in this world.

4) God has entrusted His Word to us, which is rich in nourishment for the soul.

We must feast on it, apply it to our lives.