

1 Timothy 4

- We spent the last chapter understanding the Bible's qualifications for those who lead us in the church
 - We learned about the qualifications for overseers and deacons
 - Looking at the details, we found requirements on marriage, family, temperament, biblical scholarship, and other character traits
 - Taken together, the requirements ensure that the church is led by men who exemplify the most godly among us
 - So not only will they serve Christ and us well, but they will also serve as models for our own pursuit of godliness
 - But buried in these details we find an even more important purpose for selecting the right kind of leaders
 - It's a purpose that's forward-looking, prophetic
 - Yet it's also an ever-present concern for the church
 - One that requires strong, biblically-grounded leaders to confront
 - So now we move into chapter 4 where Paul explains this reason for strong leaders who will hold the line in guarding the church

1Tim. 4:1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons,

1Tim. 4:2 by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,

1Tim. 4:3 men 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.

1Tim. 4:4 For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude;

1Tim. 4:5 for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.

- Paul introduces a prophecy to explain the need for strong leadership
 - He prefaces his explanation by crediting this prophecy to the Holy Spirit
 - This letter was written in the middle of the first century

- So it was probably written before many other New Testament works, including most of the Gospels and the book of Revelation
- Therefore, when Paul says that the “Spirit” explicitly taught the church about these future events, he means a revelation Paul received himself
 - He says “the Spirit” to make clear this revelation was not delivered by Christ in His day
 - Furthermore, Paul uses the adverb “explicitly” (“clearly” in Greek) to emphasize that there was no doubt of confusion over the Spirit’s revelation
- So the Spirit taught expressly about a coming situation for the church in the “later times”
 - Later times is a reference to the culminating events of the present age
 - Jesus Himself spoke in the Gospels about ages, long periods of history that serve certain purposes in God’s plan
 - And as one age comes to an end, it will lead us into a new age

Mark 10:29 Jesus said, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or farms, for My sake and for the gospel’s sake, **Mark 10:30** but that he will receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and farms, along with persecutions; and in the age to come, eternal life.

- Furthermore, as the end of an age approaches, the Lord brings signs to the world announcing the coming end
 - Jesus spoke at length of the signs that will announce the coming end to this present age
 - You can learn those signs in Matthew 24 and Luke 21
- So in this passage, Paul is adding another event to the Bible’s list of signs that will announce the end of the age during later times
 - And the sign is that some will fall away from the faith
 - There are three key words in this prophecy we need to understand
 - The first word is “some”

- I think it's a bit misleading that my translation chose the word "some" to describe this group
 - In Greek the word means "certain ones"
 - The word does not imply a specific size of the group...it could be "some" but it could also be "most"
 - The point is that a significant number of a group is involved
- And the second word we need to understand is "faith"
 - The faith means the community of all believers
 - Specifically, the community of all those who have been born again by faith
 - Simply put, the faith means all true believers in the church
 - It's important to understand that when Paul says "the faith," he *isn't* referring to all those who participate in church (i.e., the weekly corporate gathering)
 - Paul is speaking of the spiritual body of Christ, which is why he used the term "faith" rather than "church"
 - So we have one group (certain ones) who are not part of the community of true believers ("the faith")
- Which leads us to our final word of interest: fall away
 - The word in Greek translated "fall away" (*aphistemi*) means to depart or withdraw
 - When we put it together with the first two words, we find an interesting conclusion
 - At the end of this age, a group, perhaps many, will depart from the true faith
 - But they don't necessarily withdraw or depart from the gathering
 - So what does this mean?
 - We know from other scripture that the one who has truly become born again by faith in Jesus Christ cannot be unborn again

- They are forever a child of God, regardless of what comes or what they do
- They may fall away from the gathering or even from their walk with Christ
- But spiritually speaking, they cannot fall away from the faith
- Therefore, those who fall away from the faith are those within a certain gathering that are not actually members of the body of Christ
 - The falling away or departing does not describe a removal of bodies from the room
 - Rather, it refers to an absence of the Holy Spirit within those bodies
 - It describes a growing presence of unbelievers within the gathering that meets and calls itself the Church
- Elsewhere, Paul calls this future falling away of true believers within the church as “the great apostasy”
 - In 2Thess 2 Paul explains that the final events of this age, events that usher in the next age, include an apostasy

2Th. 2:1 Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to Him,

2Th. 2:2 that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.

2Th. 2:3 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,

- In addressing the fears of the church in Thessalonica, Paul reassured them that they were not enduring the Tribulation
- Paul says that the Tribulation, which he calls the day of the Lord, cannot begin until several things take place
- Among those preceding events is the apostasy
 - This is a different Greek word (*apostasia*), but it carries a similar meaning
 - It refers to a rebellion against an authority or standard

- Paul gives no explanation in 2Thess for what the apostasy will be
- So we must assume Paul knew that his readers were already familiar with this concept
- And since Paul says this truth was taught explicitly by the Spirit, we must assume he delivered the same teaching everywhere
- So the Spirit teaches that near the end of this age, the body of Christ will experience a falling away
 - The constitution of the gathering itself will change
 - Where once it held most or entirely true believers
 - At the end of the age the Spirit says explicitly that a number of those gathered will not actually be believers
 - The “church” gathering will consist of some (or many) who do not know the Lord
- Obviously, unbelievers have always hung around the edges of the true Church
 - Even in the first century, the church encountered “false confessors” who found something attractive about Christian life or experience
 - For example in Acts 8 we read about a man named Simon the Magician, who became fascinated in the movement of the Holy Spirit
 - When the Spirit came upon new believers in Samaria, Simon asked the apostles to sell him the same power
 - They rebuked him, calling him out for trying to obtain with money what comes only through a relationship with Christ
 - While the church has always dealt with this, the end times will bring something altogether different
 - Instead a few unbelievers, the last days church will become an apostate church
 - Though true believers will remain, the rise of unbelievers within the body will become a serious and persistent problem
 - Even worse, the apostate group within the gathering will perceive itself to be true Christianity

- Even as they gather under a banner of Christ, they will remain unaware they lack the substance of what they claim
- Like Simon, they will seek to obtain illegitimately what can only come by faith
- Jesus talks about this coming period of His church when He writes His letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor
 - In His letter to Laodicea, the city that pictures the last days church, Jesus describes the apostasy

Rev. 3:14 “To the angel of the church in Laodicea write: The Amen, the faithful and true Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God, says this:

Rev. 3:15 ‘I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot; I wish that you were cold or hot.

Rev. 3:16 ‘So because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold, I will spit you out of My mouth.

Rev. 3:17 ‘Because you say, “I am rich, and have become wealthy, and have need of nothing,” and you do not know that you are wretched and miserable and poor and blind and naked,

Rev. 3:18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by fire so that you may become rich, and white garments so that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness will not be revealed; and eye salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see.

- From Jesus’ comments we can clearly see the apostasy taking hold in this church
- The church is lukewarm, neither hot nor cold
- The church is straddling a line that cannot be straddled in reality
 - The community calls itself Christians, but in reality they do not have saving faith
 - They are lukewarm in the sense that they look like Christians (“hot”) but they are actually not Christians (cold)
- In reality, there is no “halfway” position to the question of saving faith
 - Which is why Jesus tells this church He will spit them out (literally “vomit” in Greek)
 - So this so-called church was self-deceived and in jeopardy of eternal judgment

- They thought themselves spiritually rich and in need of nothing
- In reality, they needed to receive what Christ alone could provide them
- The church in Laodicea represents the church in the last days, and it is the epitome of a falling away from the faith
 - A congregation is still meeting – and maybe even growing – but it lacks the very thing it claims to offer the world
 - We might ask how can such a thing even happen in the first place?
 - How does a group that began with true Christians turn into a group of unbelievers blissfully content to congregate under the banner of Christ?
- Paul explains how beginning in the second half of v.1
 - It begins with paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons
 - The problem begins where it always does: with the enemy
 - Specifically those who are the fallen are those who follow lying spirits, or demons
 - And furthermore, they follow the doctrines or teachings of these demons
 - There are two elements at work here
 - First, the demons themselves are working to lead unbelievers away from the truth
 - They captivate the minds and hearts of unbelievers in a variety of ways, but always by appealing to the flesh
 - In the last days, these deceitful spirits will enter into the church and draw people away into these deceitful schemes
 - Whether through signs and wonders, promises of material wealth or other earthly desires, the demons attract a following
 - They empower or even indwell certain men and women for the purpose of influencing others and obtaining a following

- They will follow after these demons, not knowing they are demons of course
- Secondly, Paul says those who fall away will be paying attention to doctrines of demons
 - Even after the deceitful demon has moved on and the person they indwelt has past away, their doctrines live on
 - The false gospels, the false teachings on spiritual gifts or the purpose of the Law and the many other false doctrines that permeate the church today got their start somewhere in the past
 - They are doctrines invented by demons, which have captivated many over the years
 - These doctrines are perpetuated by men who themselves lack the truth, Paul says
 - In v.2 Paul says these false teachings will be carried forward by men who are hypocritical liars
 - They are liars because they preach false things
 - And they are hypocritical because they don't even believe what they preach
 - We might wonder how a person could deceive so many so freely and not experience some regret or shame, but Paul says these men won't
 - They are seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron
 - To be seared means to be marked with heat
 - And the idea is that of a permanent scarring
 - So a conscience permanently scarred is a conscience that feels nothing, regrets nothing, and cannot be made sensitive again
- I believe we are living in the time that Paul predicted and of that which the letter to Laodicea described
 - Demons with their false doctrines have gained a foothold in the church using false teachers under their control
 - By their influence, they are sowing seeds of apostasy

- Left unchecked, these agents push out any message of the Gospel and the Christ Who saves
- And in its place, they offer false and useless teaching
- Such that if unbelievers enter the assembly, they find nothing to convict them much less guide them to the truth
- Unbelief soon flourishes in that environment
- We can already see the beginnings of this apostasy around us
 - In many places around the world, congregational gatherings are met by pastors offering no authentic Bible teaching
 - The Gospel itself is under assault in these places, because it's never taught
 - Instead, congregations encounter men peddling outright lies, including false promises of miracles, wealth, healing and other things
- As this trend grows, it captures more and more believers who will suffer a lack of spiritual growth and maturity as a result
 - But it also attracts more and more unbelievers who are never converted by the false teaching
 - As the believers slowly die off or leave in search of true teaching, the apostasy grows
 - The church body becomes increasingly a body of unbelievers
- This is happening today, and the Spirit explicitly says it will continue until the end of the age
 - This a clear indication to us today that we have reached the promised last days
 - Earlier periods of church history also encountered apostasy, of course
 - But those earlier periods were temporary
 - And they lacked some of the key markers that will accompany the later days trend Paul describes here

- Specifically, Paul says these men of the last days will forbid marriage and call their followers to abstain from certain foods
 - These markers don't seem especially remarkable
 - But in reality they are unique to the last days
- First, men will forbid marriage
 - The Greek word translated forbid is *kuluo*, which can also mean to hinder or stand in the way of
 - So these men will hinder godly marriage in one way or another
- Secondly, these men will give a spiritual argument for abstaining from certain foods
 - Obviously, dietary restrictions were a favorite tactic of the Judaizers who pressured Christians to adhere to Mosaic dietary laws
 - But remember Paul told Timothy that the Spirit was speaking explicitly about the later times or last days
 - So Paul is looking past the struggles of Judaizers of his day and toward something else
- How are we to recognize these signs as indications of the end?
 - First, the institution of marriage has always been universally understood to be the life-long union of a man and woman
 - Certainly people engaged in perverted sexual practices from man's early history
 - But society didn't debate the concept of marriage
 - They may have questioned the need for it or the sanctity of it, but never the definition of it
 - But in the past century, and especially in the past several decades, the institution itself has been assaulted in ways never seen before
 - The concept of marriage itself is being hindered
 - Men and women now declare that God's definition of marriage is no longer true

- And so people are coming together in ways that are not truly marriage (in God's eyes), yet they use the word
- This is hindering true marriage, and it's a trend unique in all human history
- Secondly, in the last days false teachers will advocate for abstaining from foods
 - Abstaining from a type of food is a common trend today
 - Many of us abstain as a matter of personal preference or for physical reasons of one kind or another
 - But there is no basis in scripture for a Christian to abstain from foods for spiritual reasons
 - Paul says in v.4 that all foods are to be gratefully enjoyed by those who believe and know the truth assuming we receive it thankfully
 - In this context, the truth refers to understanding that salvation in Christ brings liberty to the believer
 - When the church sees false teachers advocate for abstaining as a matter of spiritual health, we have entered the last days
 - Notice Paul adds a qualifier that these things become good for us because they are sanctified by the word and prayer
 - Paul is saying we come to appreciate the goodness of what God has created for us when we study scripture
 - In scripture we learn that He gave us every plant and every living thing as food
 - Furthermore, we acknowledge our thanks through prayer
 - This is a clear command in the New Testament for believers to engage in routine giving of thanks over our meals
- But in the last days, such thankfulness will be absent because the false teachers do not teach nor even understand the word of God
 - As a result of their seared consciences, they do not understand spiritual truth
 - Therefore, they substitute false teachings on physical matters

- Denying oneself foods we used to enjoy is a false work of asceticism
- Asceticism is an attempt to make oneself holier through self-denial
- It's a work of the flesh, so it profits the person nothing spiritually
- But it will become a favorite tactic of false teachers in the last days
- For example, early teachings of the Seventh Day Adventist church advocated vegetarianism as a spiritual requirement
- So how does abstaining from foods come to mark the last days?
 - The opportunity for widespread abstaining is a relatively modern privilege
 - In ancient times and especially in poor cultures, life itself depended on eating what was available and affordable
 - Under those conditions, abstaining wasn't practical or possible
- Therefore, we can know we have entered the last days when teaching of abstaining from foods is common and practical
 - Only in the past century has such thinking become possible for most people
 - Only the wealth of the world and its ease of accessing food in the last days will allow abstaining to become common place
 - And in that way it becomes a sign of the last days
- Paul tells Timothy the last days church will face these problems, as motivation for Timothy to appoint proper leaders and maintain proper teaching
 - Timothy can't change the future
 - The apostasy is coming and certainly Paul isn't expecting Timothy to stop it
 - Instead, Paul is giving Timothy instruction intended to preserve the true believers in the midst of such things
 - At least believers may be preserved in their godly walk in the truth even as the rest of the crowd is taken away by lies

- Which leads Paul to his next command to young Timothy

1Tim. 4:6 In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following.

1Tim. 4:7 But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness;

1Tim. 4:8 for bodily discipline is only of little profit, but godliness is profitable for all things, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come.

1Tim. 4:9 It is a trustworthy statement deserving full acceptance.

- First, Paul asks Timothy to point these things out to the brethren
 - The things Timothy is to point out are the negative trends he just described
 - Just as I pointed them out to you today, Paul wants Timothy to point them out to the brethren
 - Many times believers won't recognize the signs of demons and their false teaching
 - They depend upon mature and learned elders and pastors to point out bad influences using scripture
 - The enemy is crafty, and his lies are often hard to spot
 - Only when we hold his claims up to the light of scripture will his lies become evident
 - Note Paul didn't say condemn or silence others
 - He simply said to point them out, which is a relatively mild response
 - Making note of the bad teaching or teacher is sufficient to protect the believer while avoiding slander or inciting unnecessary conflict
- Paul says that the pastor, teacher or elder who is vigilant and willing to point out false teaching will be a good servant of Christ
 - This is high praise indeed, since pleasing Christ is our highest goal
 - As we confront false teaching we must remember our goal is to please Christ

- Because I assure you that pointing these things out will not please the enemy and usually isn't popular
- And you expect the enemy will retaliate anytime we take a stand for truth
- Nevertheless, this is the mission of church leaders, which is why the church must appoint strong, capable, godly leaders to protect the true believers
 - The task of protecting the flock from false teaching puts pressure on leadership like nothing else they will do
 - It will test our willingness to seek the praises of God over the praises of men
 - It will test our patience to endure the attacks of the enemy
 - It will test our commitment to the inerrancy and authority of the word of God
 - And it will test our egos as we watch our congregations shrink while the apostate congregations grow
- That's why Paul says Timothy (and all leaders) must be constantly nourished on the words of the faith and sound doctrine
 - Words of the faith refers to the teaching of scripture
 - Our leaders must be constantly nourished by the word of God if they are to succeed in defending their flock against the coming apostasy
 - Constantly nourished means a daily emphasis on study for the purpose of growing in understanding
- And that daily practice leads to appreciation of sound doctrine
 - Doctrine is the assembling of scripture's teaching into principles that frame our thinking and practice
 - Doctrine must come out of the text of scripture if it is to be accurate
 - So Paul says leaders must study to learn and then bring that learning to the church body in doctrines to be followed

- Paul isn't expecting a leader's study to take the place of individuals studying scripture as well
- But leaders study and learn so they may teach doctrine in order to help guide their congregation's own study
- In contrast to feeding on scripture, Paul says Timothy should have nothing to do with fables
 - The Greek words say "reject profane and old women's fables"
 - A fable is any fictitious story
 - It's a story because it tried to acquit itself
 - Like the scams you get by email telling a story of some tragedy and asking for your financial help
 - The elaborate detail seems to give the fable credibility among those taken in by them
 - False teaching is usually presented in this way, as a fable or story that attempts to address doubts and prove itself
 - A common fable today is that man never walked on the moon
 - But the fable is often accompanied by explanations for the many objections we are bound to raise against it
 - We have no way to verify any of the claims...it's just a story but one artfully told
 - That's exactly the way Satan works...he's the original conspiracy theorist
 - In the Garden he told woman to eat of the tree
 - When she objected, he had a story ready for her
 - He said God didn't tell you the whole story...there was something more
- Paul says reject profane fables, which refers to blasphemous teaching, things that are offensive to the teaching of the word of God
 - So measure all teaching against scripture
 - Remain nourished by that word so that you will be prepared to see the flaws in Satan's stories

- And then reject the stories
- Don't play with them or allow others to entertain them
- Reject them, silence them and move on
- Secondly, Paul tells Timothy to reject women's fables
 - The term "women's fable" could mean a couple of things
 - First, Paul could simply be using a colloquialism of his day
 - Women often worked together in the chores of the home, so they passed their time talking and sharing stories
 - Men, on the other hand, worked in the fields, and so they had to stop working to talk with one another
 - Therefore, a "women's fable" became a way of describing idle talk not worth serious attention
- But Paul might also be alluding to the influence of women in spreading false teaching in Ephesus
 - As we noted earlier, the women in the church seem to have been deceived by the false teachers
 - And then under their influence, they helped spread the false teaching
 - In that way, they were sharing women's fables
- Interestingly, Paul counters such things with disciplining oneself for godliness
 - Discipline refers to the process of denying the flesh's desires while building up our spiritual strength
 - The flesh is constantly warring against the will of God given to us by His Spirit
 - Since we know these fables and false teaching were instruments of the enemy to bring corruption into the church, Paul wanted Timothy to be ready to resist
 - In the same way that an athlete takes preparations to ensure his body is ready for the difficulties of the contest, so must spiritual leaders discipline themselves to prepare for spiritual battles
 - Timothy needed to be ready for the fights

- Even if he had a firm grasp on doctrine, he could still be taken down through some sin or temptation left unchecked
- Disciplining himself for godliness meant taking weapons out of the enemy's hands
- Why give the enemy or our flesh any more advantage than they already have?
- Discipline means taking steps to constrain our flesh while strengthening our spirit
 - Constraining the flesh means setting up barriers to bad behavior
 - Avoiding sources of temptation
 - Taking proactive steps to contend with the flesh's desires
- And strengthening the spirit means taking up the habits of godliness
 - Praying regularly
 - Congregating with the body regularly
 - Fasting
 - Studying scripture
 - Confessing sins to one another etc.
- In vs.8-9 Paul compares spiritual discipline to disciplining the body
 - Building up the body offers "little" profit, Paul says
 - It's little profit because there is some value
 - A healthy body is a nice thing, and worth pursuing to a degree
 - But in the end the body dies, so any efforts to preserve it are fleeting at best
 - If we invest too much time in preserving or building up or disciplining the body, our efforts die when our body does
 - So it profits us, but it's of little profit
 - But if you build up godliness, it profits you now and into eternity

- The spiritual maturity we gain here will persist into our life and in our new body in the Kingdom
- This is an important principle in scripture, that our pursuit of spiritual maturity and godliness now, profits us in the Kingdom also
 - First, it profits us in rewards, as Jesus teaches in many places
 - Our willingness to deny ourselves and serve Christ brings recognition and reward in the Kingdom
 - For Christ rewards us based on our faithfulness to Him now
 - Secondly, our degree of spiritual maturity follows us into the Kingdom
 - We will all live there without sin, which will render us a different person obviously
 - But the removal of sin from our body doesn't change the nature of our spirit
 - And our spiritual maturity is developed here while we work to resist our sinful body
- So Paul tells us this is a trustworthy statement, that is you can bet on Paul being right
 - Make the sacrifices necessary today to defend the truth and resist sin and it will pay off in the Kingdom
 - Both for those you guard today
 - And for yourself