

The Good Servant of Christ - Part 1

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – Paul instructs Timothy to demolish myths by focusing on the teaching of Scripture
2. aim – to cause us to seek ways by which we recognize myths that divert from the true gospel
3. passage – 1 Timothy 4:1-16

b. outline

1. The Good Servant Sees (1 Timothy 4:1-5)
2. The Good Servant Trains (1 Timothy 4:6-10)
3. The Good Servant Teaches (1 Timothy 4:11-16)

c. opening

1. the beginning of a **new chapter**
 - a. a letter of Paul to Timothy, serving as a “church consultant” to the congregation at Ephesus
 1. or, as a pastor, in the sense of someone *shepherding* the church on behalf of the Apostle
 - b. a letter designed to address a significant issue in the life of the (every!) church:
 1. the teaching (by some) of heterodoxy: variations or perversions of the apostolic, orthodox content of Christianity – usually by those wishing to hold power over others (**chap. 1**)
 2. **something that was common to every church that Paul established and would become common in the life of the church down through time (see below)**
 - a. **i.e.** the *infiltration* of the church by those who would “use” it to advance *their own cause*
 - c. a letter which gives *real solutions* to this particular problem
 1. Paul’s **first imperative**: the church should be a *praying body*, with each member participating in their assigned role *for the advancement of the cause of Christ in the world* (**chap. 2**)
 2. Paul’s **second imperative**: the church needs to establish fully qualified and committed leadership *that holds fast to the apostolic, orthodox message of Christianity* (**chap. 3**)
 - d. a letter which gives a *concrete definition* to what the church *really is*:
 1. the “*pillar and buttress*” of the truth – the **repository** of the message of Jesus the Christ, who: entered into the world via human flesh, was vindicated as Lord by his life, death, and resurrection, was visible to all (even the heavenly audience) in all that he said and did, is the center of the message of redemption, has been believed to be the source and completion of salvation by many in the world, and will be the One to receive all glory and honor when his kingdom is consummated upon the earth (**3:14-16**)
 - a. **LOW**: the central message of the church is Jesus! the *only source* of righteousness by rebel sinners before a holy God – the church is the organism that advances *him* as Lord
 2. **Paul is convinced that the church is the divinely appointed institution to hold this truth out to the world, and anything that alters it is to be expunged from the church**
 - e. a letter which gives Timothy (specifically) advice on what to do about this reality:
 1. starting in **4:1**, Paul turns specifically to Timothy to offer him some advice on how to proceed
 - a. he instructs Timothy in order for him to be a “*good servant of Christ Jesus*” (**4:6**)
 2. he *begins* by pointing out *the problem that needs to be seen* (**i.e.** to be aware of; **vv. 1-5**)
 3. he *finishes* by giving instructions on how Timothy is to *make this seen* by the church

I. The Good Servant Sees (1 Timothy 4:1-5)

Content

a. the concept of apostasy

1. “*the Spirit expressly says*” = a concrete revelation by the Spirit of God
 - a. possibly to Paul (and the apostles) *directly*, or via the nature of the message of Christianity – either the Spirit *directly* told Paul to expect error to creep in, or Paul was so familiar with the *appearance* of heterodoxy in the churches that it *seemed* almost like a direct revelation
 - b. the Spirit of God was never “taken by surprise” when the church was invaded by error:
 1. no human institution (even if divinely established) can avoid the effects of sin in a fallen world
 2. there is no promise of the church being perfectly able to maintain its utter purity (**Matt. 16:18**)

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock [this profession of Jesus as the Son of God] I will build my church, and the gates of hell [all that shall try to stop the church from advancing this message in the world] shall not prevail against it.”

 - a. the church will come under the attack of the “prince of liars” to stop it from advancing truth
 3. the sovereign Christ can use *even error* in his church to advance his cause (although it certainly would not be his “first choice”; **Phil. 1:15ff**)

"Some indeed preach Christ from envy and rivalry, but others from good will. The latter do it out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former proclaim Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely but thinking to afflict me in my imprisonment. What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed, and in that I rejoice."

2. "in later times" = after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost; in the Church Age
 - a. not in some future "eschatological" time of tribulation, but in those times that come "after" the work of Christ to complete the foreshadowing of the Old Covenant types and symbols (**i.e. now!**)
 3. "some will depart from the faith" = rebel; forsake; keep away from; desert; depart; leave; withdraw
 - a. "the faith" (with the definite article) = the **promise** that one trusts in; the entirety of the message of Jesus Christ from which we believe the promises of God unto salvation (**Jude 3**)
 4. **(one of?) the greatest attacks the Spirit says will come upon the church by the forces of evil is false teaching that will lead many to abandon the truth (not the church, the faith)**
- b. the definition of apostasy**
1. **apostasy** = the abandonment or renunciation of a political or religious belief; to "walk away" from the faith, either in outright denunciation or in a gradual decline from orthodoxy (**i.e. a drifting away**)
 - a. apostasy is the opposite of perseverance – the steady faithfulness of a true follower of Christ *even through obstacles* vs. the abandonment of belief very often *because of obstacles*
 2. the theological acceptance of apostasy
 - a. **many deny apostasy:** in (hyper-)Calvinistic circles with "if God calls, then no one can truly walk away"; in synergistic circles with "once saved, always saved"
 1. **LOW:** it's not something we need to worry about or be on guard for ...
 - b. the N.T. gives a number of warnings regarding the reality of apostasy:
 1. here: "some will depart from the faith"
 2. **John 15:1-6** – in the analogy of the true vine, the warning about branches that produce no fruit
 3. **Mark 4:3-20** – in the Sower and the Seed, the warning of the shallow or weedy soil
 4. **Hebrews 6:1-8** – those who have "tasted" the things of Spirit, but fall away (an *external* façade)
 - c. the two (2) forms of apostasy that appear in the church today:
 1. those who abandon orthodoxy and leave the church (**1 John 2:18-19**)

"Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come ... They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us. But they went out, that it might become plain that they all are not of us."
 2. those who abandon orthodoxy and stay in the church (**Matthew 7:21-23**)

"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'"
 - d. the reformed position on apostasy is that while the truly foreknown and elect ones of God cannot fall away from Christ (**John 6:37-40**), there will be many who will show an *outward appearance* of faith in Jesus, but will (eventually) demonstrate that they are not truly regenerated (born again)
 1. thus, the teachings on apostasy are *not* that the elect can be "swayed" away from trusting in Christ, but (rather) *warnings to faithfulness* (for the elect) and *calls to faith* (for the reprobate)
 - d. **here:** Paul shows what *leads to apostasy* – its **source**, its **advocates**, and its **methodology**
- c. the characteristics of apostasy**
1. the **source** of apostasy (**v. 1**)
 - a. "deceitful spirits ... demons" = messages that are devilishly *contrary* to the true apostolic faith
 1. **e.g.** the movement of the gun sight just a single millimeter will result in missing the target
 2. most heterodoxy (thus the name) is the *slight* alteration of the *basics* of the Christian faith
 - a. or (as in fundamentalism), a focus on *non-essential* or *secondary* matters as primary
 - b. or (as in liberalism), a focus on a *singular* aspect of the gospel to the exclusion of all others
 - c. or (as in evangelicalism), a focus on *moralism* over the totality of the message of salvation
 - b. **Paul contends that apostasy begins from the pit of hell – the work of the devil to alter the message of the church so that those coming into it will not be introduced to the true gospel, thus failing to hear of genuine repentance and faith and never truly being saved**
 2. the **advocates** of apostasy (**v. 2**)
 - a. "liars ... consciences are seared" = those who do not tell the truth because they can no longer distinguish between what is true and what is false (**i.e. the puppets** of the devil)
 1. "conscience" = the element of the *Imago Dei* whereby human beings are able to **respond** to the *difference* between good and evil, shunning what is evil or feeling the deep shame of having imbibed in what is evil (**i.e. the guilty conscience**; the knowledge that such behavior is evil)
 2. "seared" (**only used here**) = branded; cauterized; burned with fire so that the conscience no longer has the ability to feel the shame of teaching what is false; being "given over" (**Rom. 1**)
 - b. **Paul contends that apostasy is advocated by those who may be apostates themselves – who consistently lie because they are no longer able to recognize the truth of the gospel**

3. the **methodology** of apostasy (**vv. 3-5**)
 - a. “*forbid marriage*” = to advocate forced celibacy, primarily for the purpose of “religious service”
 1. **e.g.** the religious orders (priests, nuns, monks) – those who forego marriage in order to focus on religious practice or asceticism (**i.e.** as one “married” to Christ)
 2. **note:** although Paul in **1 Corinthians 7** does advocate for singleness for the purpose of greater spiritual focus, he never *prohibits* marriage, but recognizes it as a good gift of God
 3. **IOW:** those who forbid marriage are **imposing** a lifestyle, as though that imposition makes one more “holy” before God (just by virtue of being unmarried; a *reverse* legalism)
 - b. “*require abstinence*” = to advocate forced prohibition, primarily for the purpose of “greater morality”
 1. **e.g.** the prohibition of alcohol – those who insist that to be a member of the church one must refrain from any alcohol as a measure of good standing (not necessarily *holiness*)
 2. **note:** although Paul in **Romans 14** does advocate for abstinence from anything that might cause another believer to stumble in sin, he never *prohibits* such consumption
 3. **IOW:** those who demand abstinence are *imposing* a lifestyle, as though that is being “good”
 - c. in fact, in **vv. 4-5**, Paul argues that *everything* created by God is good (inherently), and we are free to enjoy anything God has not prohibited, so long as we do so with an eye towards holiness within a *steady diet* of “*the word of God and prayer*”
 - d. **Paul contends that apostasy begins when those who think they are Christians begin to focus on the outward actions of life more than knowledge of the Lord and growth in the faith that comes from such deeper understandings**
 1. **e.g.** both the shallow-soil seed and the weedy-soil seed of **Mark 4** are choked out by things *around them*; they have no root; they wither and die when the things of this world get to them
4. **good-bye to Taylor and Keren Holt (and Atticus)**