
Sermon Notes

April 11, 2021

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

Diabolical Doctrine

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Subtle Changes

- ❖ Moving away from Christ
 - subtle influences can gradually erode one's beliefs until no belief remains
 - C. S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity*, "If you examined 100 people who had lost their faith in Christianity... do not most people simply drift away?"
- ❖ Some elders in the 1st century church of Ephesus begin to drift away from depending solely on the finished work of Christ for their salvation
 - adding man-made rules to the simple, gospel truth
 - ideas about denying and suppressing fleshly appetites such as ***do not handle! do not taste! do not touch*** (cf. Colossians 2:21)

The Mystery of Ungodliness

- ❖ Following the beautiful hymn of praise to Christ that ends chapter 3 and summarizes "the mystery of godliness", Paul proceeds to expose issues of ungodliness within the Ephesian church

- expect bad theology... the Holy Spirit says it is coming!
- what is so sadly the case in the 21st century, was every bit as true during the 1st century: the world is full of bad theology
 - errors that captivate people's thinking from the world of false religion and the fanciful speculations of New Age philosophies
 - sub-Christian cults that distort the person and work of Christ
 - man-centered, market-driven pragmatism known as "the church growth movement"
- Philip Ryken: "The world is full of untrue, unsound, unbiblical theology... Although Christians may be saddened by false theology, they should never be surprised by it."
- ❖ Jesus speaks of false prophets and people falling away in Matthew 24:10-11
- ❖ Paul warns the Ephesians elders in Acts 20:29 of the dangers that lie ahead
- ❖ Timothy is no stranger to the dangers of unsound doctrine

Apostasy

- ❖ Turning away from the living God after having previously turned toward Him
 - anyone who has genuine saving faith in Jesus Christ cannot lose that faith
 - *apostasy* refers to someone who once **claimed** to be a Christian but later on reveals their true colors and renounces the gospel

- denying the very thing they once said they believed
- despite a claim to be a Christian and a “Christian veneer”, there never was any real connection with Christ or authentic Christianity
- ❖ *In later times*
 - when the Bible speaks of the “last days” it refers to the entire period between the 1st and 2nd coming of Christ
 - apostasy is an ongoing feature of this entire time frame
- ❖ Paul outlines the way apostasy comes from bad theology
 - one source of false teaching is demonic: *deceitful spirits and teachings of demons*
 - the other is from hypocritical humans: insincere *liars whose consciences are seared*
- ❖ Two common errors that crop up in the church when it comes to thinking about demons
 - attributing everything bad that happens to demons
 - the opposite error when it comes to thinking about demons is to deny that they exist (Ephesians 6:12)
- ❖ Hypocritical humans
 - insincerity: Greek theater, wearing masks
 - many false teachers are good actors
 - *seared* = cauterized
 - the importance of maintaining a good conscience

Specific Issues

- ❖ Abstinance from marriage and the eating of certain kinds of food
 - the false teachers are wrapping these two items up as part of their teaching on salvation
 - a common name for adding neutral items, or indifferent matters into the core of the gospel is legalism
- ❖ Asceticism: abstaining from all or some forms of pleasure for religious or spiritual reasons
- ❖ Paul instructs us on how to guard our lives from falling into either apostasy or asceticism
 - thanksgiving!
 - *nothing is to be rejected* that has been created by God
 - “Can I thank God for what I am doing right now without being ashamed of myself?”

Personal Application

1. Where do you see the kind of “bad doctrine” Paul describes in these verses showing up in the course of your normal, everyday life?
2. Do you sense that you are prone to adopting either of the two common errors that crop up in the church when it comes to thinking about demons? If so, what will help you develop and hold onto a more balanced point of view?
1. Are you aware of any tendencies within yourself that might lead you toward either apostasy or asceticism? How can you benefit from Paul’s counsel to resist either of these two dangers?