

WILL YOU DEPART FROM THE FAITH?

I Timothy 4: 1-5 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Apostasy is a falling away, a withdrawal, and a defection from the Christian faith. Apostasy is used twice in the New Testament, in the Greek, **apostasi** speaking of falling away, apostasy, or referring to the person who defects, as an apostate.

Apostasi expresses abandonment of the Christian faith. Jesus predicted the great apostasy from Christianity, in the last days, saying in Matthew 24:10-12, “And then many will fall away and betray one another and hate one another. And many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” The apostle Paul prophesied that the apostasy would precede “the Day of the Lord,” in II Thessalonians 2: 1-4. In our text in I Timothy 4: 1, Paul says, which testifies, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times, some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” Hebrews 3: 12 warns us, “Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God.” The writer of Hebrews 6: 4-6 adds. “For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the Word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding Him up to contempt/open shame.” Hebrews 10: 26-27 adds, “For if we go on sinning deliberately after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a fearful expectation of judgment, and a fury of fire that will consume the adversaries.”

This possibility of entering-into the error of apostasy or becoming an apostate is not just a straw man warning. Today, in America, apostasy is happening before our eyes. Listen to a few more warnings. II Peter 3: 17 warns us, “You therefore, beloved...take care that you are not carried away with the error of lawless people and lose your own stability. Paul said in I Corinthians 10: 12, “Therefore, let anyone who thinks that he stands, take heed lest he fall.” I John 2: 19 states, “They went out from us, but they were not of us, for if they had been of us, they would have continued with us.” Paul told the Galatian believers who were trying to be perfected by keeping the law, in Galatians 5: 4, “You are severed from Christ, you who would be justified by the law; you have fallen from grace.” God has placed in my heart these last few weeks, a desire to let us know what the Holy Spirit has to say about falling away in the last days. Listen to a few quotes from men of God:

D. A. Carson, the Emeritus Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, my alma mater, has well said, “People do not drift toward holiness. Apart from grace-driven effort, people do not gravitate toward godliness, prayer, obedience to Scripture, faith, and delight in the Lord. We drift toward compromise and call it tolerance; we drift toward disobedience and call it freedom; we drift toward superstition and call it faith. We cherish the indiscipline of lost self-control and call it relaxation; we slouch toward prayerlessness and delude

ourselves into thinking we have escaped legalism; we slide toward godlessness and convince ourselves we have been liberated.” Vance Havner put it this way, “The temple of truth has never suffered so much from woodpeckers on the outside as from termites within.” The Puritan, William Gurnall once said, “None sink so far into hell as those that come nearest heaven, because they fall from the greatest height.” Pastor and author John MacArthur says, “Apostasy isn’t an unintentional departure or personal struggle with doubt. It is deliberately abandoning the truth for erroneous teaching.” Author John Stott once said, “The essence of apostasy is changing sides from that of the crucified to that of the crucifier.” A Puritan preacher, named Timothy Cruso, said, “Apostasy is a perversion to evil after a seeming conversion from it.” My favorite quote related to apostasy is one by Charles Haddon Spurgeon, who said, “Remember that if you are a child of God, you will never be happy in sin. You are spoiled for the world, the flesh, and the devil. When you were regenerated, there was put into you a vital principle, which can never be content to dwell in the dead world. You will have to come back, if indeed you belong to the family (of God).”

As we turn to our text this morning in I Timothy 4: 1-5, the Holy Spirit is exposing for us to hear and understand five tell-tale marks of an apostate. Millions today in our own country have fallen away from the living God, and away from the body of truth taught in God’s holy Word. What are these five tell-tale marks? I pray not one of us will bear in our lives, one or all, of these five tell-tale marks. It is never our job to judge who are apostates, and who are just prodigals, for only God alone knows the difference. God help us all to pray and cry out to God for mercy for all backslidden, fallen believer to come to the end of themselves and return to Jesus.

APOSTATES FORSAKING GOD ONCE HAD A MOMENTARY POSITIVE RESPONSE TO THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. (I.)

We read in I Timothy 4: 1, “Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith.” Notice, Paul doesn’t say they will depart from their faith, but from the faith. This falling away from the faith is falling away from the body of truth where there is no firm root. Jesus spoke of this happening in Matthew 13: 20-21, in his parable of the soils. He spoke of four surfaces where seed is sown, on a path, on rocky ground, thorny ground, and on good soil, saying, “As for what was sown on rocky ground, Jesus explained the meaning to His disciples saying, “As for what was sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet he has no root in himself, but endures for a while, and when tribulation or persecution arises on account of the word, immediately he falls away.” Apostates have a seemingly, temporary connection, believing in Jesus. Even though the initial response they have, appears to be joyful, it wasn’t and isn’t saving faith, for there was no lasting change. Paul explains in II Corinthians 5: 17, “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold the new has come.” Even during Jesus’ time on earth, he had such temporary followers. Listen to John 2: 23-25. We read, “Now when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the Passover Feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs that He was doing. But Jesus on His part, did not entrust Himself to them, because He knew all people, and needed no one to bear witness about man, for He

Himself knew what was in man.” Jesus never gave to many of these initial believers a believing union or a living root with Him. Something was missing in these seemingly eager believers that pre-empted a living root in them.

What was missing and what is often missing today in people who once have declared themselves believers in Jesus. The missing something is almost doubtless, true repentance. Apostates can hang around truth, talk the talk, seem to walk the walk, and not be saved. When we are united with Christ, no one can rob us of our Redeemer. Yet that union of us receiving Christ and Christ entrusting Himself to us, His Spirit bearing witness with our spirits that we are children of God—Romans 8: 16—that union is absolutely necessary for true salvation, or we will be rejected of God. Only Christ alone can deliver us. No one can rob us of our personal Savior and Redeemer. One of history’s worst apostates was Karl Marx. At age seventeen, Karl Marx wrote a graduation essay with this intriguing title, “The union of believers with Christ according to John 15:1-14, shows its basis and essence, its absolute necessity, and its effects. As a teen, Karl Marx, born May 5, 1818 in Trier, Germany, believed in Jesus’ words about union with Christ. Trier, Germany was 90% Catholic, and the great cathedral at Trier built back in 300 A.D, was said to have in its possession the very robe Jesus wore as he carried His cross to Calvary.

Karl Marx’ father, a Jew converted to Christianity, but did not become a Catholic, but a Lutheran. Karl’s father saw trouble on the horizon with his son. On March 2, 1837 in a letter from his father, Karl Marx read, “Karl, religion's good. It's good to believe in something other than yourself. It's good to believe in a deity.” That heart of yours, son, what's troubling it? Is it governed by a demon? Is it governed by a spirit? And is that spirit heavenly or is it Faustian?" (Faust was a German astronomer and necromancer reputed to have sold his soul to the Devil). Karl Marx, the father of communism, was playing in wickedness and his dad knew it. He hated humanity, even his own family. He was an angry man. When Karl Marx went to college, and still believed in Jesus, the professor who shaped his thinking was an atheist named Dr. Bruno Bauer, who was anti-Semitic. One of his early departures from believing to some extent in Jesus, was when he and Bruno Bauer rode into a local village on Palm Sunday on donkeys, mocking Christ’s entrance into Jerusalem. The soil of Karl Marx, like all apostates was rocky, and his momentary positive response to Jesus was not real salvation. Secondly,

APOSTATES FORSAKING GOD HAVE LISTENED AND TAKEN HEED TO DEMONIC LIES. (II.) We read in I Timothy 4: 1, “Some will depart from the faith, by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.” The ultimate source of apostasy is the devil and demons. When seeming prodigals who are not really saved, totally take in Satan’s lies, if they continue in believing these lies, they finally get to the place where they sell their soul to the devil—devoting themselves to him. The Greek word for giving heed or devoting themselves is **prosecho**. It means literally to hold the mind or to devote or to worship in thought seducing spirits. This isn’t a quick matter done by a young person, but it is a deliberate act that over time becomes a leaving of any trace of faith in Jesus to worshipping the devil, demons, and demonic lies. Just before Paul was martyred,

beheaded in Rome, he charged Timothy to preach the word, and he warned Timothy that even churches will be seduced to believe Satan's lies. II Timothy 4: 3-4 states, "For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears, they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth, and wander off into myths." Paul was prophesying that the day would come, and it is here, when church will be a place for ear tickling, where folk only will hear what they want to hear, or they won't go any more. Such a "gospel" is not the Gospel of Christ, but is a "gospel of demonic lies, that denies the need for repentance and holiness. Thirdly

APOSTATES FORSAKING GOD HAVE THEIR CONSCIENCES SEARED AND DESENSITIZED TO THE TRUTH. (III.)

We read in I Timothy 4: 2, "Some will depart from the faith, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared." The Greek word for seared is **kausteriadzo**. This is a medical term word used by Hippocrates in 460 BC, for searing flesh or blood vessels with heat. Paul is speaking here of false teachers whose minds, souls, and spirits have been scarred, seared, numbed, dumbed-down, and desensitized to the point where they teach hypocritical lies with no compunction, no conscience, no qualms, and no remorse. Here are 7 signs that apostasy is on the way? (1) You lose your love of the truth, II Thessalonians 2: 7-12. You start believing and speaking their lies, "You don't need to assemble yourselves to be saved. You don't need all those services. Once is enough and maybe once a month or quarter is good" (2) You feel no conviction of personal sin; sermons make you look at other's sins, not your own. (3) You watch reproof anger you rather than humble you. Proverbs 15: 10 states, "Discipline or correction is grievous to the one who forsakes the way; he who hates reproof will die." (4) You become a lover of pleasure rather than a lover of God and take pleasure in unrighteousness. (II Timothy 3: 4 and II Thessalonians 2: 12) (5) You justify sinning because God is the God of all grace. Romans 6: 1. (6) You resist repentance for any reason and willfully sin. (Hebrew 10: 22-26) (7) You harden your neck after repeated reproofs. (Proverbs 15: 10) Fourthly,

APOSTATES FORSAKING GOD FOCUS ON ERRONEOUS LEGALISTIC SIDELINE ISSUES, NOT ON THE GOSPEL'S CENTER. (IV.)

We read in I Timothy 4: 3 tells us these apostates are those, "who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth." It is a tell-tale mark of the devil to take something that is totally appropriate for certain people at times, and make it mandatory always. God wants us to fast sometimes as He directs us, because His Word says, "When you fast," – Matthew 6: 16. Yet requiring fasting every Tuesday and Thursday is not required of God. These apostates may "up the ante," saying marriage is forbidden or that we must not eat meat, or milk or eggs. These apostates are teaching that if we give up something like marriage or eggs or coffee or milk, or if we boycott certain stores selling products that are evil, then God owes us something. They are seeking to twist God's arm with legalistic fasting, giving up marriage, or foods, to make Him give us something we want. The practice is trying to make God indebted to us; to make God our servant, and we, His master. This is the Garden of Eden's lie all over, to make us like God, so we can seek to

overpower Him. We can't. It is foolish and ludicrous to deny the right to marry or to abstain from certain foods in an attempt to create a plan to attain holiness. These false legalistic laws seek to deny God the right to be glorified for the beauty He has created and given to us. Beloved, get married and stay married to each other, and eat well—try everything God provided, and praise Him daily for all He has created. Paul teaches us in Romans 14: 16-17, saying, “I know and am persuaded in the Lord Jesus, that nothing is unclean, in itself, but it is unclean for anyone, who thinks it is un-clean. For if your brother is grieved by what you eat, you are no longer walking in love. By what you eat, do not destroy the one for whom Christ died...But whoever has doubts is condemned if he eats, because his eating is not from faith. For whatever does not proceed from faith is sin.” Fifthly,

APOSTATES FORSAKING GOD REGARD THEMSELVES AS MORE SPIRITUAL THAN GOD AND HIS HOLY WORD. (V.) We read in I Timothy 4: 4-5, “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified/made holy by the word of God and prayer.” Now the apostle Paul is pulling out the stops as he concludes this theme. The apostle has in divine inspiration shown the difference in an apostle and an apostate. The apostle was a Christ follower who has seen the Lord, while an apostate is a defector who denies Christ. I love these words of the apostle about God sanctifying everything He made, nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy, sanctified by the word of God and prayer. Making up man-made rules never justifies us before God. It only makes us as foolish as the Galatian Christians in Galatians 3: 3 where Paul asked these believers, “Are you so foolish? Having begun by the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?” One of the tragic but true facts about apostates is that they consider themselves more spiritual than God Himself. One man who has been an apostate 20 years, when I called him and told Charles his book was not true, because it disagreed with the Bible, said, “I used to believe like you do, but that's stinkin' thinkin'.” For 20 centuries, men trying to make themselves holy have tried to out-god God. The monks of days tried to sleep standing up, and leaning against a sharp rock. What we eat or how we sleep won't make us more holy.

Drinking 15 sodas a day doesn't make you a rank sinner, but it may kill you early, or at least ruin your health. Sin is what makes us a sinner. Mandatory religious rules requiring celibacy or abstinence from different foods are add-ons God doesn't need. The Gospel is never Jesus +. The Gospel frees us from man-made laws. External self-denial, cannot replace, or add, to the power of Christ's cross. God settled that once for all with Peter in Acts 10: 9-16. Fish on Friday or wearing black or putting ashes on us is not necessary, but it can become one more invention of an idol to place in God's place. Let's get back to the Gospel center—the bull's eye—the virgin birth of Jesus, His death, burial, and resurrection for us, His coming again, and the total inspiration of every word in the Bible. The hymnwriter Edward Mote got it right, in 1834, when he wrote, “On Christ the solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.” Many will try to defy Matthew 7: 21-23. “Not everyone who says “Lord, Lord, will enter the kingdom of heaven...” Stay in the center with Jesus. God save us all from apostasy. I love you forever. Amen.