

A Harsh Reality in our Time

1 Timothy 4:1-5

Introduction: Right around this time 75 years ago, a reign of terror and death was all but ended. The Allies has tightened the noose around Germany, and a once seemingly unstoppable war machine was reduced to rubble and hiding in subterranean shelters. On April 30, 1945 Joseph Goebbels became Chancellor of Germany, following Adolph Hitler's suicide. On May 1, 1945, Goebbels followed suit, ending a 1 day rule over what was left of the Nazi party.

Goebbels is a fascinating character. He grew up considering going into the priesthood, which his parents hoped he would pursue, but ended up going into politics. Though an unimpressive physical specimen, Goebbels was one of the most ruthless drivers of expanding the War, of persecuting the Jews, and the proliferation of the loss of life. As the *Minster of Enlightenment and Propaganda* (they don't offer that major anymore in college), he established "the big lie", first casting out a ridiculous notion that the Jewish population in Germany was the center of the nations' problems, and then simply continued to pound the lie into the minds and hearts of the German people. By controlling the radio, newspapers, and all other forms of communication, he was able to sway people to believe and do what they would have NEVER DREAMED of doing months or years before. By the last year of the war, he was the architect of *TOTAL WAR*, convincing families that the fight was not just for soldiers but children, conscripting women to the labor force, and in the end of the war put older men who were untrained on the front lines against Soviet tanks and artillery. Goebbels life proved a timeless truth: *the pen can be mightier than the sword*, or to say it another way, *words can have a greater effect and impact on lives than any weapon man can produce*. Words matter. Ideas without truth are dangerous. And there is nothing new under the sun.

False teaching has always been and will always be a reality. There is a battle raging for the minds and hearts of people, and the worst thing any of us can do is ignore or deny it. This false teaching is by nature **subtle**, meaning it rarely comes out to tell you its false. It typically has a **kernel of truth** and is able to change truth **by degrees**, not by absolute statements. It is **relentless**. We see that today as every movie, advertisement, or show carries with it a world view and message that we watch, and subtly begin to believe. How many of us have cheered when the couple gets together in the movie and we celebrate, even as they engage in sexual immorality. In order to normalize a false teaching, one simply must throw out the barrage over and over until we are desensitized to what we are seeing and instead of reacting we simply stop thinking, and what we see in **un-reality becomes a new reality for us**.

False teaching works through **information inundation**. We live this today with social media and blogs where everyone has a platform to *be an expert*. Anyone can write an opinion piece and convince people of their position whether it was based on sound research or not. We read a few articles by doctors and think we are experts in a field. We've watched this especially as people post snippets and articles online, without any context or backing, and it becomes difficult to discern what is true and what is not. It is why the **church** is so important, as the pillar and foundation of truth, because false teaching can be piddled out so easily and we can

think that something that "sounds" good is true, even if it subtly is boring under the foundation of truth. We know our **education system** is set against truth, teaching contrary to what God has ordained and created, which by nature is called **rebellion**. How many stories have we heard of our students and loved ones who've gone away to universities and are captivated by philosophy or worldly ideology that does not bring happiness or joy but only a sense of personal freedom. And even the **church** can be a place of false teaching, as Paul warned the church at Ephesus, "*I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves will arise men **speaking twisted things to draw away disciples after them.***" (Acts 20:29-30)

Is this my attempt at being an alarmist? I hope not. It is a realization that what we face is something that is **timeless** and **promised**, meaning we must be **prepared** since we cannot stop it but rather face it. As we will see in this passage, Paul gives us the harsh reality for our time, a battle for our mind and heart, that is ALWAYS raging. So for the next **3 weeks** we will look at what the war is and how we combat it, so that we will **endure, grow, and be effective** in this time and space God has placed us.

In the context, here is what is at stake: ***the true gospel and godliness***. We ended last week with 6 stanzas that changed the world, all about Jesus Christ, His incarnation, birth, death, resurrection, and ascension with the promise of His return, which was witnessed by angels, proclaimed throughout ALL the nations, and believed on for eternal life! **This is the mystery of godliness**. Not that we could save ourselves or DO anything to make ourselves acceptable to God through our effort, but relying completely and resting in the finished work of Jesus, both for justification AND sanctification, or being made right with God through forgiveness and becoming more holy and obedient over time. These are inseparably works of God through Jesus Christ. As we have stated before, there are only **2 religions in the world, or 2 ways people think they can be godly, or get to God: Human achievement or Divine Accomplishment**. That has separated believers from unbelievers, redeemed and unredeemed, sheep and goats, and those part of God's church and those outside of her.

So we will look at **5 realities of false teaching and what it leads to, and how we counteract it**. Please follow along as look at this section:

The Certainty of False Teaching

"Now the Spirit expressly says that in the later times,

There is nothing new under the sun. From the Old Testament (Deut. 28:15ff; Ezek. 20:38; Neh. 9:26), to the New Testament there have been warnings and promises of false teaching leading to people following away from the truth. Jesus made it known that *false christ's* would deceive many (Matt. 24:4-12). Toward the end of the age there would be those who depart from the faith (Jude 18) and wholesale departure during the future time of tribulation (2 Thess. 2:3-12). One of the marks of the end times would certainly be a ramping up of people falling away, but that reality is still here today:

"Take care brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God." (Heb. 3:12)

The Holy Spirit says this WILL happen in the later times, or the times between Jesus' first coming and his second. We are in that time now, so it should not shock us to see false teaching nor those departing from the truth.

The Consequence of False Teaching

...some will depart from the faith

This is a sobering reality. It is a certainty that some, not all, will abandon or leave the faith, or what some would call "apostate". They will depart from a **faith they know, understand, and maybe previously affirmed**, but their heart was not transformed. They are like the seed that fell on the rock, who heard and received it with joy. But these **have no root; they believe for a while, and in times of testing fall away** (Luke 8:13). There is external affirmation but no heart change, reaction to the truth but no root.

This reminds us of what the gospel of Jesus Christ does. It changes us from the inside out, transforming a heart of stone to a heart of flesh, moving us from enemy to friend, from wrath to peace. This is why we do not focus on mere external conformity with anyone, particularly our kids. I remember my **best friend** growing up was exactly this. We did everything together, including Christian School, camp, and church. But toward the end of high school he confessed to me he really didn't believe. He could talk circles around most in terms of theology and knowledge of the Bible. He loves his wife and parents. He He's an upstanding guy. But his heart has not changed. He was NOT born again, not converted. He was one like **1 John 2:19 who "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."**

Now to be clear, this type of leaving or abandoning does **NOT MEAN** someone who is struggling with doubt or sin. We all will have struggles at times with believing all what God has said and commanded. Faith is by nature hard. Especially for those NEW in the faith or younger in life, it can take time to come to grips with things we cannot see or even explain sometimes. We should give people room to go through some "crisis of faith" moments without writing them off. But what this is talking about is not a season of doubt or struggle, but a decision to reject the full teaching of the gospel, and thus reject Christ. This does not have to be declared audibly, but by someone's life decisions.

The Captivators of False Teaching

..by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared...

Notice that false teaching has both **demonic AND human origins**.

There is always a battle we cannot see and forces that do not show themselves. In 1 Corinthians Paul made the point that there is no such thing as an idol, since there is only one God, and an idol is merely a piece of wood. (1 Cor. 8:4) But he also went on to say that BEHIND idols are demons (1 Cor 10:20). Demonic teaching is seducing. It has the semblance of wisdom, but is really earthly and unspiritual (James 3:15). We saw this in a huge way in the **Garden of Eden**, where Satan himself tempted Eve to disobey God by seducing her with trying to be like God, and appealing to the lust of her eyes, flesh, and pride. Satan is a prowling lion, desiring to captivate the minds and hearts, blinding the eyes (2 Cor. 4:4), and who disguises himself like an angel of light (2 Cor. 11:14).

The means by which demons operate is by human vessels. The problem with false teachers is that they rarely announce themselves as such. They mask themselves as religious teachers, Bible scholars, professors, pastors, and preachers. The problem with these is hypocrisy, but they SEEM genuine. They may even use Scripture. But they believe and teach a lie. They teach some form of human achievement, passing it off as wisdom. Their consciences **are seared**, like a hand pressed against a hot iron, or a part of your body that is desensitized.

When the Israeli government finally caught up to and captured Adolph Eichman, one of the chief operators of the Nazi death camps, they were astonished by his response to what he had done, literally kill millions of people. He was incredibly nonchalant, justifying himself that he had only done what he was ordered to do. Such cauterizing of a conscience happens when one repeatedly goes against what they know to be true. False teachers believe their lie, teach falsely, profit from it, and lead people astray.

The Content of False Teaching

...who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Here is what gets really interesting. I would think false teachers who lead people away from the truth would offer MORE: more power, money, pleasure, etc. But the teachers in Ephesus were the opposite. They taught spirituality and godliness could be achieved by **abstaining** from things. There is a type of wisdom there. It seems like a higher form of living somehow. But what they taught was a form of **asceticism**, something practiced by both Jews and Greeks during the 1st century. The Essenes were Jews who lived in caves and stayed away from culture (culture = bad). Gnostics believed in a philosophical dualism, that the spirit was good but the body was bad, so any pleasure in the body was also bad. In the book of Colossians Paul made it abundantly clear that this form of asceticism cannot reach what it offers: **"These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of NO VALUE in stopping the indulgence of the flesh."** (Col. 2:23).

Here is what is fascinating and cautionary. Notice that these were two things attacked in the Garden by Satan. Instead of withholding he said God was withholding. Instead of driving a wedge in marriage he says marriage is bad. Satan takes the good gifts God has given and turns them into idols, or symbols of righteousness, instead of merely enjoying them. God is no prude. He has given gifts to be enjoyed. But also **notice the confusion**, that there are times

when marriage is NOT His will, and times when we fast during prayer. False teaching turns good things into ultimate things, and peddles them as ways to become godly.

The Counteracting of False Teaching

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if its received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer."

God created all things to enjoy, because when we would enjoy the gift giver. When we delight in the gift alone its called idolatry. So in redemption we can once again see what God has made as good, as a means to enjoy God, not try to make Him love us. We enjoy food, drink, relationships, marriage, etc., when we understand it's all from Him and a means to give Him glory, when we give thanks. We also make sure that it is not violating Scripture (which means we DO stay away from sinful things), and make sure that we are not ruled by our desires. Prayer allows us to remember these things. And before you think this simply means to pray before a meal, consider what GK Chesterton said.

GK Chesterton said this about praying at meals:

*"You say grace before meal? All right
But I say grace before the play and the opera
And grace before I open a book,
And grace before sketching, painting, swimming, walking, fencing, boxing, playing, and dancing;
And grace before I dip the pen in the ink."*

Godliness is not lived in the negative but he positive! Godliness is through Christ alone, who changes our heart, frees us from our slavery to sin, and makes us His slaves. We do not try to earn, and do not think that we can do that through abstaining from good things God has given us to enjoy.

This is why we need the church. if you are listening today, I hope you hear that this passage is one that calls us to commitment to the church, the pillar and foundational of truth. In the church, through God's Word, we can see through the lies of false teaching. We move from living on memes on social media and live out the truth with those who are willing to confront and challenge us in the truth. I love being in a place that if I teach something, anything contrary to Scripture or less than the gospel of Christ's work alone, I will have people in a loving way correct me. This is how we avoid the lie. This is how we make sure that we are NOT devoting ourselves to demonic teaching which captivates over time in a relentless drum beat. We want Scripture to drown out all other noise.

But what's the difference between asceticism and discipline? That is what we'll tackle next week.

Discussion Questions for 1 Timothy 4:1-5

- What are some of marks of false teachers today? How do we identify the difference between what is false and true?
- Why do you think Satan and deceivers would use marriage and food as areas to abstain, thinking that will make one godly?
- How do you deal with doubt, especially when it is about God or His promises? How do we overcome it?
- How do we practically enjoy all of God's good gifts as a means of worship and bringing Him glory (1 Cor. 10:31) without making them idols?

Areas to commit to Prayer:

- Is there someone in your life that has abandoned the faith? Pray for that person, and also that God would guard and keep those in our families and church away from it
- Thank God for the good gifts He's given for us to enjoy
- Reflect and praise God for the mystery of godliness that we have in Jesus Christ alone, and that we do not have to earn anything with Him
- Pray that God would make us all more discerning when it comes to the truth and false teaching