



**Brief thoughts
on
1 Timothy 4**

This Epistle was written by Paul to Timothy who was at the time resident in Ephesus. Ephesus was a thriving Roman commercial and cultural metropolis which was home to the Temple of Artemis (or Diana), the mythological daughter of Zeus. There was, amidst the endemic mythology and paganism of the city, an assembly of believers gathered unto the name of Christ, among them Aquila and Priscilla.

We learn from Acts 20 that Paul had concerns for the future testimony of the local church at Ephesus. He summoned the elders of the church and reminded them of his love for the saints, the coming attack against the truth and their responsibility as shepherds in regard to it. "And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church...For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears" (Acts 20: 17-31).

This first letter to Timothy was written after this encounter and after Paul's house arrest in Rome. Timothy was left at Ephesus by Paul, who had to leave for Macedonia. Paul's purpose was to encourage and equip Timothy for his work in helping to preserve the testimony of the church at Ephesus – which was to stand apart from the community and culture of the world. It is, in *this* sense a **pastoral** letter. The term "pastoral" must not be construed to support the unscriptural idea that Timothy was a "pastor" of the church at Ephesus (or anywhere else). The NT knows of no such person or position, except in error. It is also a **custodial** letter, in that it urges Timothy to guard the precious truths that were passed on to him. "O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust (1 Tim 6:20).

The Chapter

1. Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;
2. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron;
3. Forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.
4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving;
5. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.
6. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.
7. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.
8. For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.
9. This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation.
10. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.
11. These things command and teach.
12. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.
13. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.
14. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.
15. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.
16. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

Introduction

The subject of chapter 4 reflects the two essential themes of the Epistle:

1. The **Pastoral** responsibility of the servant of God.
2. The **Custodial** responsibility of the servant of God.

As noted above, the former is to do with *spiritual wellbeing* and the latter is to do with *spiritual responsibility*. Both come together in this chapter because they are vitally interdependent.

The first man, Adam, was given a custodial charge – to “tend or keep [guard]” that which was committed to his trust by God. “And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the Garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it” (Gen 2:15). What an immense privilege; which carried a commensurate responsibility. Yet, Adam failed and sin entered the world and death came as a result of sin. The word of the Lord was rejected in favour of the word of Satan. Satan’s chief weapon against our spiritual welfare is to keep us ignorant and indifferent to the Word of God. The subversive question, “Hath God said,” can only be effectively countered by the faithful words of the last Adam and second Man. “It is written.” May we appreciate the important truth underlying the Lord’s reply to the Tempter. It is, in part, as many have observed a prime illustration of the absolute confidence and dependence the Lord had in the Scriptures. But it is much more. It illustrates the further principle, that by *exercising* (not simply expressing) such dependence on God’s Word, the Lord was being an obedient custodian of it. And so, Paul, in his final word to Timothy in this Epistle exhorts him to take heed unto himself and unto the doctrine and to “continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

Chapter Outline

- Verses 1-2: The **coming** apostasy
The **character** of apostasy and the apostate
- Verse 3: The **creed** of apostasy and of the apostates
- Verses 3-5: The **censure** against apostasy

Then in the light of verses 1-5 we have in relation to the servant of God:

- Verse 6: His **cause, calling** and **craving**
- Verses 7-10: His **challenges** and **cautions**
- Verse 11: His **commission**
- Verses 12-16: His **consecration**

The coming and character of apostasy (verses 1-2)

In these verses we have another warning of impending apostasy by Paul. Paul's foresight was not his own – it was the prescience of the Spirit of God that inspired his pen. The Spirit is careful to guard this fact and inspires Paul to predicate his warning with the statement, “now the Spirit speaketh expressly.” That is, the Spirit does not now inspire symbolism, metaphors or allegories, useful in their appointed place, but in plain words which are easily understood. The coming apostasy was certain. Its prophetic certainty has been validated by history's dark record of spiritual declension and departure from the faith.

Paul is also inspired to declare when the apostasy will arise – “in the **latter times**.” The expression is latter “seasons.” That is, the season (note the definite article) refers to the time immediately after the apostolic period. We have confirmation of this first in Paul's warning to the elders of Ephesus in Acts 20. “For I know this, that **after my departing** shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.” Second, the nature of the apostasy – the abstinence from eating meats and forbidding to marry, date the latter times to the immediate post-apostolic days. The “latter times” is to be distinguished from “the last days” in 2 Timothy 3:1, which refer to the closing days of the Church Age. This departure from the faith or apostasy is the result of seducing spirits, the propagation of the doctrine of *demons* (not devils, as there is only one Devil, Satan) and lying hypocrisies spoken by men whose consciences are seared.

Apostasy

Paul gives us a clear definition of apostasy. It is a “departure (*aphistemi*) from the faith.” It is not a departure from *faith* – but from “**the** faith,” the body of biblical truth. The definite article (the) is critical in making this distinction. When Peter denied the Lord three times, it was a failing in his personal faith – not a denial of *the* faith, the principles of truth that had been revealed to him and believed by him. For instance, he still held the belief that Christ has “the words of eternal life” and was sure that He was “the Son of the living God” (Jn 6:68-69). To depart from the faith or to “fall away from” as the Greek has it, means to “leave and stand in another place.” An apostate then, is a person who has not just “left a position” but who has also “taken up or joined *another* position.” Peter was never an apostate. He did not join or propagate error. Judas certainly was. His profession was just that – a mere nominal expression of belief. He was never truly convicted concerning “the faith” (so too those in Hebrews 6:6 who had “fallen away”).

The sphere of apostasy

The character of the apostasy and the apostates are illuminated by the sphere in which they operate. For instance, in Acts 20 we have the **little flock** and so we get the *devouring* and *divisive* nature of the apostates and their apostasy upon the local assembly. “Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them” (Acts 20:29-30). In 2 Timothy 3 we have the **family**, and we now get *deception* within the homes, indicative of the Mormons and “Jehovah’s Witnesses,” so called. “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim 3:5-7). Then, here in 1 Timothy 4 we have **the faith** and so we see *departure* from the truth –the body of doctrine. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared [cauterized and to all intents and purposes, removed or dead], as with a hot iron.”¹

The creed of apostasy and of the apostates (verse 3)

Paul identifies specific examples of the poisonous creed of apostasy, but before he does so he brings before us three elements common to all apostasy.

1. Its **seduction**: Apostasy is contrived through giving heed to “seducing spirits,” waiting upon their every word and deed. These spirits refer to the apostates themselves. “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world” (1 Jn 4:1). Seduction was the means by which Satan trapped Eve. It will be the means by which he will, through that seductress Jezebel, bring into being the Great Whore – Mystery Babylon, that will sit on many waters, drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus (Rev 17).
2. Its **source**: The wellspring of apostasy is declared – the doctrine of demons (not devils, because there is only one Devil, Satan). Perhaps Paul was speaking of the post-apostolic place of “Satan’s seat” at Pergamos, as it was noted by the Lord (Rev 2:12-15). Pergamos became the fountain head of apostasy, which was then absorbed and advanced by Rome and the papacy – figured by the church at Thyatira, which “sufferest that woman Jezebel” (Rev 2:20). It laid the basis for the error of clericalism and false doctrine - forbidding to marry and abstinence from eating meats. The seductress Jezebel was an evil influence over the throne of Ahab, such that “there was none like unto Ahab, which did sell himself to work wickedness in the sight of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up [incited]” (1 Kings 21:25). How prophetically fitting, therefore, that the Lord identified the dire spiritual condition of Thyatira with the woman Jezebel! Thyatira, we know, is the budding apostate church that will enter into the Tribulation (Rev 2:22), and during that time, it will blossom into the apostate global Church - the Great Harlot, Mystery Babylon, who “sits on many waters.”

¹ The Greek word is *kauteriazō* – to render insensitive, from which we get “cauterized,” to burn away.

3. Its **system**: Apostasy is marked by a “theological system.” Men and women devise a set of “ideas” of what Christianity should be and then set about exporting them into the Bible in order to validate them. The result is an “ISM” which invariably leads to a “SCHISM.” Calvinism, Methodism, Unitarianism and such like are all culpable and reflect the creedal culture of apostasy. May the Spirit of God preserve us from all such “isms,” and especially from the often well-meaning but dangerous notion of “Brethernism.” Each “ism” (selectively) embraces elements of “the faith,” but not any one contains “the faith,” the entire truth that was once for all delivered. And so Jude exhorts the believers, “that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). Note again the vital definite article, *the* faith.

The censure against apostasy (verses 3-5)

Paul focuses on the false *teaching* of the apostates, which the saints and others may come to hear, rather than on the apostates themselves. The reason is that the false teachers, the apostates, have departed from the truth and are propagating their diabolical error. On the strength of Paul’s words, I am not to engage in debate with them, for as he says; their consciences are seared, meaning they *cannot* respond to the truth. How then do I respond when visited by well groomed men from the “Latter Day Saints” or by those who claim to be “Jehovah’s witnesses?” Do I engage them or send them on their way? Paul speaks of the *apostate*, one who has professed truth but has now taken another stand. Some of those who knock on our doors may not be in this category – never having known the truth and may well be converted to it. A timely word would then be appropriate. However, John’s interdiction must apply. “If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine [the doctrine of Christ – who He is and what He has done], receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed” (2 Jn 1:10).

Paul identifies two instances of their false teaching:

1. The prohibition to marry
2. Abstaining from meats.

No doubt, these prohibitions were contrived in the first instance to not only try to attain to a higher level of spiritual welfare, but to give an appearance of it – a “fair show of the flesh,” similar to the posturing of the Pharisees. “Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men’s bones, and of all uncleanness” (Matt 23:27). Far more serious, is that these prohibitions showed that these onetime professors had turned their back on the truth, which is that God had created *all* things “to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving. For it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.” The prohibition regarding marrying is not refuted here since Paul has dealt with marriage as a *principle* in Chapter 3, when he speaks about the elders and servants in the local church.

Notice Paul’s method. He first identifies the wrong teaching and then refutes it by the application of biblical truth – a vital process in keeping with the pastoral and custodial aspects of this chapter. If I am to be of spiritual help to the believers (and indeed myself), I need to be able to identify the false teaching. How? By following Paul’s direction in verse 16, to “take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.”

The servant's cause, calling and craving (verse 6)

In the light of the coming apostasy and its nature, Paul identifies three things relating to the servant of God in his pastoral and custodial responsibilities.

1. His **cause**: As the servant of God Timothy must seek the spiritual welfare of the people of God, identified here as "the brethren." This term we hasten to say, must never bear a capital "b." In Scripture it is descriptive of all who comprise the family of God in Christ; who are distinguished from all who are not of Christ. To use it in any other way is sectarianism. The idea of an "association of brethren assemblies" for whatever reason is an anathema to "the faith," for such a thing it is not found anywhere within it. It is not far removed from the seductive sentiment of Babel. "And they said, go to, let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth" (Gen 11:4). In fact it stands as a denial of the truth of Revelation 1-3, where the local churches are seen as individual lampstands, each independently answerable to the Lord. The protestation that we can preserve local independence before the Lord and still come under an association is, of itself bogus, and against biblical precedent. It places us and the generation that follows on the slippery slope into denominationalism.

The term "brethren"

Should the dear "sisters" in the church feel disenfranchised if they come under the term "brethren?" If God has seen fit to use it in such a way, and He has, then He sees no disenfranchisement in it – and so neither should we. Many are indeed servants of the church, as was our "sister" Phebe (Rom 16:1; 27).

A love for the biblical heritage marks Timothy and others so called, as "good [worthy] ministers [servants]" of the One to whom all are solely and severally responsible, Christ Jesus.

2. His **calling**: Paul tells Timothy *what* was expected of Him as a "good (worthy) minister," as one who is mindful of his custodial *responsibilities* to the local assembly. He was to "remind" the brethren; to "lay down" or better, to "set before" them the warnings and responsibilities mentioned by Paul. *How* this was to be done is given in verse 11 – "command and teach."
3. His **craving**: Paul now speaks of what was expected of Timothy as a good minister in regard to his *preparation* for it. He was to feed on "the words of the faith" and "of "good doctrine" which he has been doing (rather than "attained" as in the AV). We are to partake of the healthy spiritual diet provided in the words of faith and in good (sound) doctrine. Note once more the definite article in each case which refers to the body of revealed truth – the Bible. "For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the law of the LORD, and to do it, and to teach in Israel statutes and judgments" (Ezra 7:10).

The servant's challenges and cautions (verses 7-10)

Paul notes a number of things Timothy must be aware of. He is to:

1. **Refuse "old wives' tales,"** - a derisive expression for the meaningless and mystical fabrications that are peddled by some within and without the church. They are not profitable to us in our custodial and teaching responsibilities. They will not meet the challenge of apostasy.

2. **Exercise himself unto godliness** rather than physical exercise, which is of limited or measurable benefit, because it deals with the body and not with the spirit. The profitability of godliness is however immeasurable, transcending this life even unto the one that will be. The mantra of the ancient Greeks was “a healthy mind in a healthy body” (*mens sana in corpore sano*). The idea blurred the distinction and priority between body, soul and spirit. Scripture speaks of the spirit as our principle concern because it engages fellowship with God who is Spirit, followed by the soul – the seat of our emotions and then the body (1 Thess 5:23). Godliness, considering the context, means standing and serving according to the mind and will of God, as it is revealed in “the faith.” Accordingly, it brings us into the closest fellowship with God now and has its highest blessing in the day to come. In 2 Timothy 3:5 we have the expression “a form of godliness.” “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.” It refers to those who only have an appearance of standing and serving in “the faith.” This pretence became evident in the “latter times” – the times immediately after the apostolic period, as seen in the historical interpretation of the Lord’s seven letters.
3. **Labour and suffer reproach.** Paul noted something of this in the preceding chapter. “All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim 3:12). The reason why we *labour* and *suffer reproach* is because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, especially of those who believe.” Here, then, is the high principle upon which our labour is grounded and has its goal. Pursue it and we will inevitable come into reproach from the world. The world is comfortable to have dealings with “lifeless gods” and “graven images.” The expression “the Saviour of all men” does not refer to universal salvation, but to the universal *provision* for salvation that is available through Christ. This divine provision to all men becomes a reality to “those who believe,” hence the expression “especially of those who believe.”

The servant’s commission (verse 11)

Paul now exhorts Timothy “to command” and “teach” “these things.” “These things” should not be confined to the matters that immediately precede this exhortation in verses 6-10. To do so reduces the force of the precedent thought in verse 1, which is to be taken right through to the imperative of the last verse, which forms a vital complement and conclusion to it. “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils” (v 1); “so” - “take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee” (v 16). The verses that follow, verses 12-16, relate to Timothy’s personal consecration, which we take up below.

The expression “command” or “charge” (cf 1:3) conveys the thought that Timothy should exercise his teaching responsibilities with authority. This does not mean that he was to “scold” the believers, “lay down the law” so to speak or to introduce “sarcasm” in his ministry. We need only look to Paul’s example here where he warns by entreaty using gracious words – forbearing yet forthright!

Of particular practical interest here, throughout the passage and indeed the Epistle, is the great importance Paul places upon “teaching” as an antidote to apostasy. He has in mind the oral exposition of God’s Word within the local assembly. Satan’s greatest weapon is the believer’s ignorance of Scripture; we have an example of it in the dark days of the Middle Ages, during which the people were deliberately denied access to the Word of God. They became prey to every wicked contrivance of the institutionalized professing Church, until liberated in some measure by the Reformation and the printing

of the Bible. It is a sobering lesson to us, who at times seem to take little advantage of the liberty we have to publically read and expound the Word of God. It would be a searching matter for each assembly to tally the hours given over in the passage of a year to public teaching of the Word. These are occasions when those gifted, as was Timothy, are afforded opportunity to exercise their gift (Acts 13:1; Rom 12:7). It is not here so much the “conversational discussions” and “morning devotions,” but the public exposition of the principles that constitute “the faith” by those who have the spiritual responsibility of teaching it. The *knowledge* of what the Bible has to say is our first defense and foil to apostasy.

The servant’s consecration (verses 12-16)

Paul’s attention now especially turns to his “own son in the faith” (1 Tim 1:2). (Note again, it is in “the faith,” the body of truth in which true fellowship is found). He has tender things to say regarding Timothy’s personal consecration. We may identify them as follows:

1. Be an **example** – so as not to bring discredit to his youth. There are believers older in years who often display reticence or even an aversion to teaching delivered by another, purely on the basis of their lesser years. Timothy is to walk watchfully, so as not to give liberty to those who are predisposed to such attitudes. It seems too, that the expression “let no man,” includes those who are not believers. The exhortation and principles that are enjoined by it are therefore broader in their application than within the local assembly. And, it is we observe, to be “an example “of” the brethren” rather than “to” the brethren. Timothy is to be what *all* the brethren should be, in his:
 - a. word [speech]
 - b. conversation [life in general]
 - c. charity [sacrificial love],
 - d. spirit [the spiritual component in man]
 - e. faith [personal trust in God]
 - f. purity [personal holiness toward God]
2. Be **exercised** – in reading, in exhortation and in doctrine. The AV does not give us the finer rendering of the Greek which is, “the reading,” “the exhortation” and “the doctrine.” The presence of the definite article is critical because it conveys the thought of a definite *public* practice in each case – the public reading of the Scriptures within the local assembly; the public exhortation of them and the public exposition of the doctrine. We have here the pattern for public teaching – the matter raised in verse 11, command and teach. Observe that it is first the reading of Scripture, the exhortations from it and, importantly, the doctrine upon which that exhortation is based is then expounded. An exhortation is vapid without the doctrine – “what we are to do” must be justified by “why we are to do it.”
3. Be **encouraged** – regarding the gift given to him. It was the gift of teaching. Three things may be noted about this gift.
 - a. It was a *personal* gift – given to Timothy. It was given to him by God and with it came personal responsibility for its use.
 - b. It was a *promised* gift – given through prophecy, i.e., by divine revelation received by one of the elders or apostles who had that gift of prophecy, which was relevant for that early

Church period and confined to it. Through this spiritual discernment they knew that Timothy was set apart to receive this gift. This is not the way of things today. A person is recognized as having a spiritual gift when that gift begins to be exercised among the believers. Discerning elders are required to acknowledge that gift and make room for it to develop, so that the believers can be spiritually edified.

- c. It was a *proclaimed* gift – by the laying on of the hands of the elders (presbytery). The practice of “laying on of hands” was purely for the purposes of public *recognition* and *identification*. Of itself it never “imparted” the gift (or anything else).
4. Be **engrossed** – in these things through “meditation.” Meditation is not “mystical contemplation.” It is being thoughtfully preoccupied with these things so that they become part of his “natural behavior.” This will be profitable to him and he will be an example for others to emulate. Here “these things” can be restricted to the things subsequent to verse 12 without violating the force of the passage.
5. Be **examined** – self examination by taking heed to himself as a matter of preparation for his responsibilities. Continuing in self examination and in “the doctrine” will save him and others who hear him. Beware of the noxious Calvinist doctrine of “the perseverance of the saints.” The salvation referred to here is not eternal salvation, but the preservation of a believer’s moral and doctrinal testimony before God and man.