

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 26, Number 52

December 26, 2010



Truth Defines and Rejects Error

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 with a hot iron; 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. 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. (1 Timothy 4:1-5, KJV 1900)

We have seen in rather amazing brevity, a single verse, the foundational truth that the Lord's New Testament church is to preach and to protect, serving as both its pillar and ground. If the truth of 1 Timothy 3:16 never faced a threat and never witnessed a departure, there would be no need for the church's role in serving as the "...pillar and ground of the truth." We might ignore error and think only of truth in an ideal world, but we do not live in an ideal world. We live in a broken, fallen world, one that consistently energizes its forces in hostile assaults against this truth. Paul moves directly from that bedrock truth into the reality of errors that the New Testament church has resisted from the first generation.

Let's take a brief look at the actual form of the errors that Paul identifies here. Do not be surprised if some of these departures seem to be quite different in their focus from the truths that he affirmed in First Timothy 3:16. Satan, the great deceiver, succeeds as well by getting people to focus on the wrong things as by convincing them to believe error regarding the right things. In Colossians 2:23, Paul addressed another range of errors, but they have one significant point in common. Paul described those departures as having a show, a nice theatrical performance in their pretense of "...wisdom in **will worship**, and humility, and neglecting of the body...." Notice the central point. Instead of motivating people to worship God, they actually incite worship of man's will, demonstrated by a charade of false humility, and of bodily neglect, but none of these superficial attitudes and behaviors do anything for the person or for the honor of God. However well camouflaged to look nice and religious, they end up cultivating a sense of personal arrogance and worship of the individual's own will and dedication to the superficial performances of the flesh. Carnal Christians (Yes, there is such a thing. See First Corinthians 3:3) will admire the pretense of humility and praise any ritual that appears to neglect the body for religious reasons. Take a look at the diversionary strategies, the departures from the faith of which Paul writes in our study passage.

1. They give heed to seducing (deceptive) spirits, likely claiming all the while that they are following the direction of the Holy Spirit. How often have we heard heretical teachings introduced by such terms as "Then the Holy Spirit revealed this truth to me..." If what the man teaches fails to find its foundational support in Scripture (1 Timothy 3:16 teachings), the man may make any claim he wishes, but he did not receive that revelation from the Holy Spirit. Another spirit inspired his belief, dressed up to convince him that it was the Holy Spirit.
2. The doctrines they teach are not the doctrines that build on the foundational truths that Paul taught in First Timothy 3:16. Satan transforms himself into an angel and uses his morphed appearance to deceive and beguile people who have turned from God for their faith. How can Satan so effectively convince someone to believe his error? Examine his strategy in Genesis the third chapter. "...ye shall not surely die...your eyes shall be opened...**ye shall be as gods**, knowing good and evil." Why should Satan change his strategy when this one has continued to be so effective? He still uses his siren song to puff up the human ego, make the person believe that this new belief is intellectual and superior to the low-life ideas of ordinary Christians. Do not overlook that Satan is singing this song in the Garden of Eden. No pagan deities were known or imagined at the time. Satan was actually trying to convince Adam and Eve that they would be transformed into the image of God by eating this forbidden fruit. He further devalued what God actually said, "...ye shall **not** surely die." In simple terms, God didn't really mean what He said. He said, "...ye shall surely die," but He didn't really mean it. The deceiving song of Satan plays the same melody today. "Yes, Scripture says thus and so, but God actually intended a hidden meaning in those words.

Let me tell you the secret of what He really meant by those words.”

3. They speak lies in hypocrisy. They tell a lie and likely know it is a lie, but they say it with such nice, Christian tones that they make you believe it. In fact, they may actually start believing it themselves.
4. Their conscience is seared with a hot iron. They do have a conscience. They know truth from error, and in many cases they actually may at times wrestle with personal conviction at their teachings and actions, but they refuse to change their errant teaching.
5. They forbid to marry. They downplay the noble, God-given institution of marriage. Or they teach it, but claim it is better for Christian leaders to remain unmarried and thereby devote every waking moment of their lives to God. Hmmm.
6. They command people to abstain from meats. They impose dietary restrictions on people that contradict God's permissive diet. God blesses us to eat anything edible with one condition, that we give Him thanks as we eat it. By the way, while God gives us wide flexibility regarding what we may eat with thanksgiving, He does caution us against over-indulgence. He rather directs us to eat portions that are "...convenient..." to our body's needs. (Proverbs 30:8) God imposed strict dietary laws onto His people in the Old Testament, but this passage clearly indicates that those restrictions have ceased.

Notice the utter irrelevance to truth in all of these departures from the faith—not a one of them deals directly with the foundational truth that Paul affirmed in First Timothy 3:16. Don't miss the obvious point. That is the point; all of these departures aim to detract the mind and faith of the child of God away from that truth. They dress up the mind with a sense of religious dedication, but they never touch any principle of truth that Paul affirmed in that verse. Nor do any of these departures address the Person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in any way.

Satan obviously had a motive in the Garden of Eden; he also has a motive in his framing of these departures from the truth. Simply stated, it is control. When people obey God and hold steadfastly to what God reveals as truth (as Scripture specifically defines in First Timothy 3:16), they put themselves under God's control. Paul addresses this point in the sixth chapter of Romans with his repeated exhortation to we yield ourselves to God as those that are alive from the dead; as instruments in the hands of God. The soldier controls the weapon in his hands, but, in Christian service—Christian warfare—the weapon that God uses is not an inanimate piece of sharpened iron. His weapons are thinking, moral, spiritually alive

and active people. They are anything but passive in His hands. They willingly, consciously, act to put themselves under God's care and use. Paul teaches this same spiritual lesson in First Timothy 2:20-21 through the analogy of dishes in a household. There, as here, Paul associates God's use of willing, godly, obedient children with faithful service, "If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour..." Satan's primary objective in such irrelevant attitudes and habits is the same as it was in Eden, control. He seeks to entice God's children away from their faith and obedience to God, so that he may control them and destroy their usefulness for God's righteous kingdom. Do not allow him to so compromise your life. Remain faithful, yielded to God, and clean for His holy use.

When people decide to ignore the teachings of Scripture, they will always seek impressive and convincing rationalizations for their error. Joshua reminded Israel that the only choice that God would approve was to put away false gods and serve the Lord God of Israel. His often quoted—and just about as often falsely interpreted—"...choose ye this day whom ye will serve..." was only addressed to people who had already decided that they would not serve the Lord. In fact, they actually took their rebellion even farther, "But if it seem evil unto you to serve the Lord..." (Joshua 24:15) Imbed this principle into your mind as a New Testament believer. Our one and only right choice is to serve our God in His way and on His terms. Don't add anything to His way as set forth in Scripture, and don't take anything away from that way.

When you read or hear someone advocating a novel idea or activity with "What is wrong with...?" or "Who could object to..." condition your heart to see a giant red flag rising to the top of your mind's flagpole. Let's visit the six key departures from the faith that Paul lists and rephrase them as one who seeks to legitimize them might defend them in defense against the New Testament believer who objects.

1. Seducing spirits. "Oh, I know this sounds different, but the New Testament doesn't really say very much about how we should go about our church's worship activities. Thus it is actually quite permissive. I'm just trying to reach out to more of God's children to get them interested in our faith."
2. Doctrines of devils. "Yes, the Bible speaks of the mystery of godliness, but it also speaks of the mystery of iniquity. Why would you object to my idea that God uses both of these mysteries equally and turns them all to His glory?"
3. Speaking lies in hypocrisy. "This doctrine I'm advocating will serve to build stronger churches, so why would you object?" While the New Testament teaches that God shall preserve His truth and maintain His church,

it never teaches that He does so by pretentious insincerity. In many instances, the very doctrine advocated has been advocated in the past, and it killed churches, rather than building them.

4. A seared conscience. Sandra and I endured a neighbor for a few years who practiced lying, and we learned over time that every time he defended his words with "Trust me. I'm a Christian," he in fact was lying. Every single time.
5. Forbidding to marry. Some who claim to be historical Christians openly teach this idea, forbidding priests to marry. Others are more indirect, but equally wrong. "If I choose not to marry so that I can devote my whole life to God, why should you object?" In fact some people do just this. God bless them. But in the case of this departure, a simple observation of the person will clearly reveal that the person who makes this claim is not devoting much of anything to God or to His people. He may be devoting far more resources to self and using this claim as a convenient cover.
6. Commanding people to abstain from certain foods. Scripture never discourages a person from making dietary choices based on taste or culture. Paul even defended the eating of meat that had formerly been offered to idols, if the practice did not create a stumbling block for weak or ungrounded believers. The point of objection appears when people try to defend their dietary preferences with the false claim that God requires such a diet of them. Therefore, they will claim spiritual superiority over others because of what they eat or refuse to eat. That attitude reveals the depth of true departure from the faith.

All of these departures follow a pattern. They have one thing in common. They tend to impress people who observe them that they are so religious, so dedicated to God, and so very sincere. However, they all build on superficial ritual and ignore the condition of the heart, as well as the authoritative teaching of Scripture. They will twist (2 Peter 3:16; the word "wrest" means to twist out of place, as a bone in the body is twisted out of its natural joint) the Scriptures unmercifully to rationalize and to gain a semblance of support from the Scriptures for their error, but they cannot so support their error with a true and contextual interpretation and application of the Scriptures. That, my friends, is why Paul categorically describes such ideas and habits as departures from the faith.

Little Zion Primitive Baptist Church
16434 Woodruff
Bellflower, California

Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor