

1 Timothy – The Household of God

This charge I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made about you, that by them you may wage the good warfare (1 Timothy 1:18 ESV)

I hope to come to you soon, but I am writing these things to you so that, ¹⁵if I delay, you may know how one ought to behave in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, a pillar and buttress of the truth. (1 Timothy 3:14-15 ESV)

Some Will Depart
January 30th, 2022
1 Timothy 4:1-5
Rev. Levi denBok

Introduction:

Good morning! Please turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Timothy chapter 4.

Here's an old saying that's worth hanging onto: An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

This is true in life – just ask your doctor or your dentist – but it is equally true in the church. When little habits are left unattended and little hard talks are avoided – when an ounce of prevention is neglected – the church can go sideways in a hurry. It often takes years to undo the damage. In fact, sometimes the damage is never undone.

What kinds of things am I talking about? I'm talking about things like the little Bible study that the elders never paid attention to that turned into a cult, and five families left the faith. The pastor that slowly developed a habit of playing loose and free with the text eventually led an entire congregation into ruin. The little pocket of grumblers that were left unopposed and eventually found a way to split the church in half.

These things happen all the time! There are people in THIS city who are hardened to the gospel because they lived through the fights, and the power grabs and the division.

It's going to take a pound of cure to rebuild those bridges! O that someone would have taken an ounce of prevention.

In our passage this morning, the Apostle Paul is helping young Timothy to rebuild and restore the Ephesian church. The Ephesian elders had been charged by Paul to protect the people of God. But they failed in their assignment. In this passage, Paul is addressing the issues that the elders should have addressed. He's knocking down lies and pointing the church toward the truth. Look with me to 1 Timothy 4:1-5. Hear now God's holy, inspired, inerrant, living and active word to us today.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ² through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, ³ who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. ⁴ For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, ⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:1-5 ESV)

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

In the previous paragraph, Paul had just called upon the church to be a pillar and a buttress of the truth, because when the truth of the gospel is distorted people go to hell. Those are the stakes. Therefore, the church must take seriously her calling to lift high and to defend the truth of the gospel. This is not an easy assignment because, in every generation, the truth is under attack.

In our passage for this morning, Paul addresses a PARTICULAR attack that was being levied in Ephesus. There were some false teachers who were arguing that *real* Christians – *holy* Christians – should abstain from marriage and observe strict dietary restrictions. They were teaching a form of legalism. Legalism says that you're not *really* saved by grace. You're saved by effort. You're saved by being better than everyone else. You're saved by following this strict set of rules.

Legalism is one of our enemy's favourite weapons and he still swings it at the church today. In this passage, Paul addresses this particular attack, but in doing so, he also lays out directions that can be applied as we fend off any attack against the truth of the gospel.

Before we go any further, I want to make sure that we understand the weightiness of this passage. Look again at verse 1:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times **some will depart from the faith** (1 Timothy 4:1a ESV)

Are you hearing that? Some will depart from the faith.

Look around the room this morning. Think about our children who are worshiping right now in Redeemer Kids.

I don't know about you, but that verse grabs my attention and it makes me want to weep! I don't know about you, but I want to see every single man, woman, boy and girl from this congregation make it to the finish line!

Some will fall away. But in our passage this morning we will find principles for protecting the people of God. Let's learn this lesson and apply these principles, because an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

Principles For Protecting The People Of God

First, if we want to protect the people of God, then we need to:

1. **Recognize that false teachers will come**

This isn't a question of *if* false teachers will come. It's a question of *when*. Look again at verse 1:

Now **the Spirit expressly says** that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1 ESV)

The elders in Ephesus had let their guard down and the church was suffering the consequences and Paul is saying here: "What? Are you surprised? This is EXACTLY what the Holy Spirit said was going to happen!" For example, the Holy Spirit said through Jesus:

For false christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. ²⁵ **See, I have told you beforehand.** (Matthew 24:24-25 ESV)

The Holy Spirit also spoke through Paul **to the elders of Ephesus!** He said:

I know that after my departure fierce wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; ³⁰ and from among your own selves will arise men speaking twisted things, to draw away the disciples after them. ³¹ **Therefore be alert** (Acts 20:29-31a ESV)

The elders of Ephesus had ZERO excuse for being caught unprepared. Brothers and sisters, neither do we. False teachers will come. False prophets will arise. Movements will take hold. Charismatic leaders will draw crowds. Through YouTube and podcasts and sermon audio you are more susceptible to this threat than any other human being in the history of the world.

Does it sound like I'm exaggerating? I'm not! You are more exposed and vulnerable to this threat than anyone else in HISTORY! People who want to derail your faith – teachers who want to weaponize and militarize our young men – prophets who want to monetize that new believer you're mentoring – have greater access to the church than they have ever had in the history of the world!

I have not been a pastor for long. But already I've watched with horror and disbelief as brothers and sisters who appeared to be solid in their faith were led into ruin by teachers who they've never even met in person – teachers that I didn't even realize that they were listening to.

It's hard to guard against the wolves when the whole congregation is potentially carrying them around in their pockets.

So, here is a practical application: Elders, we should ask the members of this church about the teachers and the podcasts that they're listening to. Members, you should make it a habit of reaching out to your elder to let them know who you're listening to. Is there a preacher you love who you listen to for five hours a week? That's great! But let us know, so that we can warn you if there's anything in his doctrine that might lead you off the path. I recognize that this sounds like a ridiculous, controlling, countercultural idea, but I'm saying it anyway, because Paul gave this warning to elders:

Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, **which he obtained with his own blood.**
(Acts 20:28 ESV)

Already, I am going to have to stand before Jesus and explain why these families that he purchased with his own blood and that he entrusted to my care were led astray by false teachers. What am I going to say on that day? “Jesus, I didn’t know! I didn’t ask!”

Well, I’m asking now.

How do you protect the people of God? You recognize that false teachers will come, and you conduct yourselves accordingly.

Second, if we want to protect the people of God, then we need to:

2. Understand that the devil is the true enemy of the church

Paul writes:

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons (1 Timothy 4:1 ESV)

The true enemy of the church is not the false teacher. The true enemy of the church is not the culture. The true enemy of the church is not Islam. The true enemy of the church is not the state. All of these and more can be wielded as weapons, but our focus should be less about the particular weapon and more about the enemy who wields it.

The true enemy of the church is the devil.

If we get this wrong, we can do some horrifically unhelpful things.

If we believe that the false teacher – that the *person* – is the enemy, then we’ll simply wage war with the person! “Drown the witch! Burn the heretic!” Thankfully, the church never made *that* mistake through the ages, right?

If we believe that the culture is the enemy, then we will just hide! We'll build segregated, secluded communities apart from the world! We'll keep to ourselves, ban technology, and create our own little micro-community of heaven with no compassion for the people all around us who have never even heard the gospel! Thankfully, the church has never made *that* mistake.

If we believe that Islam is the enemy, then we'll be tempted to fight our way to glory. We'll respond to violence with violence and wage war in the name of the Prince of Peace. We'll stain the sand of the holy land with the blood of men and women created in the image of God and all in the name of the gospel! But of course, no one would ever make *that* mistake.

If we believe that the state is the enemy... Well, you get the picture.

If we want to protect the people of God then we need to open our eyes and aim at the right enemy! When Paul first wrote to the church in Ephesus, he reminded them:

For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places. (Ephesians 6:12 ESV)

People are not the enemy. The devil is. Therefore:

We don't mock and insult false teachers – we correct them, because we want them to be saved. And then we pray, because this is ultimately a spiritual battle.

We don't hide from the culture – we go into it as salt and light because Jesus came to save sinners. And then we pray.

We don't hate Muslims – we share the gospel with them because we love them and we want them to see that Jesus is the not simply another prophet – he's the Son of God and the King of Kings and HE LOVES them! And then we pray.

We don't mock or overthrow government – we show them honour as God's word clearly and unambiguously commands, and we exercise the political rights that we have been given peacefully and respectfully. And then we pray.

If we want to be a church that protects the people of God then we need to be a church that fights on our knees. We need to understand that the devil is the true enemy of the church.

Third, if we want to be a church that protects the people of God, then we need to:

3. Resist every temptation to compromise

The false teachers in Ephesus were deceived because they had gone against their consciences. We saw this in the end of chapter 2 with Hymenaeus and Alexander. We see it again in this text:

some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, ²through the insincerity of liars whose **consciences are seared** (1 Timothy 4:1b-2 ESV)

These false teachers have embraced a lie and are now wilfully passing that deceit on to others because they have seared their conscience. They became deceived in order to make peace with their sin, and now they are passing on the lie to others.

I used the analogy a few weeks ago that our conscience is like a lane assist alarm. As you veer out of your lane, a sensor goes off to alert you that you need to get back in line. Well, as these false teachers veered outside of the lanes of holiness, the lane assist alarm was blaring. But they ignored it. Then they adopted a false teaching in order to justify it. Then they spread the lie to anyone who would listen. John Stott describes the progression this way:

First, they turned a deaf ear to their conscience, until it became cauterized. Next, they felt no scruples in becoming hypocritical liars. Thirdly, they thus expose themselves to the influence of deceiving spirits. Finally, they led their listeners to abandon the faith.¹

¹ John Stott, *Guard the Truth – The Message of 1 Timothy & Titus*, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 112.

When you ignore your conscience – when you choose to persist in sin even though everything inside of you KNOWS that you shouldn't – you put yourself in a terribly dangerous place. When you ignore that alarm in your heart, eventually you will become DESPERATE for false teachers who will give you permission to turn that alarm off. The devil wants to bring you down, and he will send teachers your way – bringing the teaching of DEMONS – to convince you to distrust and disobey the Word of God.

That's the playbook.

Are there any alarms that you're currently trying to drown out? A show you shouldn't be watching? A habit you shouldn't be indulging in? A bitterness you refuse to let go of?

Is that alarm bothering you?

Good! The alarm is supposed to bother you! Do you know who installed that in your heart? Your Heavenly Father who loves you and who wants what is best for you!

If we want to protect the people of God, then we need to resist every urge to compromise. We need to tremble at the word of God and to teach one another to do likewise because, fourth, if we want to protect the people of God, then we need to:

4. Become diligent students of God's word

At this point, we're going to wade into some of the particulars of the false teaching that was making its way through Ephesus. Paul warns about teachers:

who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. (1 Timothy 4:3 ESV)

As I mentioned off the top, one of the particular attacks that the church in Ephesus was facing was this ridiculous legalism that said that true Christians shouldn't marry and shouldn't eat certain foods.

Lest we be tempted to dismiss these as ancient, irrelevant issues, let's remember that the Catholic church still forbids marriage for its clerics and that people have left THIS church because we don't follow the Mosaic dietary restrictions. These are still live issues!

Therefore, we need to prepare ourselves to answer these kinds of objections. We need to defend against these attacks against the gospel.

But how can we prepare? The answer is simple: Read your Bible. Read it every day. Adopt a reading plan so that you read it cover to cover. The more familiar you become with God's truth, the easier it will be to sniff out a lie.

So, for example, let's consider the lies that were making their way through Ephesus.

Lie 1: God forbids marriage. How would you answer that? Well, you could start by going back to the very beginning. In Genesis 2 we read:

Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. ²⁵ And the man and his wife were both naked and were not ashamed. (Genesis 2:24-25 ESV)

Marriage can't be a sin! Because God INSTITUTED it! Marriage is God's idea!

In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul mentions that some people have the gift of singleness and that they are a great gift to the church, but in that same chapter he is clear to point out that those who are called to marry *should get married!* Therefore, if you are a Bible reader, there is no reason why you should ever be deceived into thinking that marriage is somehow unholy. That's an easy one to answer.

Lie 2: Some foods are unclean and shouldn't be eaten. This one is a little trickier, because they might even turn to Leviticus 11 and start reading to you from the dietary laws of the Mosaic covenant. How would you respond?

Once again, the answer to this question is hiding in plain sight on the pages of your Bible. You would want to turn, for example, to Mark 7 where Jesus says:

Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him,¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?” **(Thus he declared all foods clean.)** (Mark 7:18b-19 ESV)

That should end the discussion right there, but you could also turn to Acts 10. There, Peter sees a vision of a sheet from heaven filled with the animals that were prohibited in the Mosaic food laws. God calls out to Peter and commands him to take and eat, but Peter won't because the animals are unclean. At which point, God declares:

“What God has made clean, do not call common.” (Acts 10:15b ESV)

Or you could turn to Romans 14. Or you could turn to Colossians 2. If you are reading your Bible every day, the truth is going to saturate you, and the lies will just look more and more ridiculous.

Listen: You don't need to become an expert on every brand of foolishness that the devil dreams up. There aren't enough hours in the day. You do, however, need to pick up your Bible every day and read. If we want to be used by the Lord to protect our kids, and our friends, and the people that we mentor from the lies of the enemy, then we need to become diligent students of the word of God.

Finally, and we will close with this point, if we want to protect the people of God then we need to:

5. Delight in God's good world

Look again at verses 4-5:

For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,⁵ for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (1 Timothy 4:4-5 ESV)

Isn't this fascinating? Do you want to protect our little ones from falling away from the faith? Here's one of the things that you need to do: Enjoy God's creation!

Life is hard. Yes. But life is also good! God made this beautiful world and He made it for His glory and for our enjoyment! John Piper's famous line is perhaps the most helpful quote that I've ever memorized:

God is most glorified in us when we are most satisfied in Him.²

Christianity is not about a list of rules to be obeyed – it is about a holy, glorious, God to be praised!

Christianity is not about the abandonment of happiness – it's about joy unspeakable and full of glory!

Christianity is not about despising and rejecting God's good creation – it's about enjoying God's good creation in a way that brings Him glory!

And He is MOST glorified in you when you are MOST satisfied in Him!

Your spouse is a gift from God, and you should enjoy that good gift! God gave us the Song of Songs to remind us of the beauty and the glory of romance! Let the heretics be prudes – the Christians should delight in marriage more than all the rest! Because it's a gift from God, and He loves when we delight in it!

That pork sandwich is a gift from God, and if your conscience allows it³, you should enjoy that gift! God made your tongue with tastebuds, and he made flavour for your enjoyment! So, give thanks before your meal. Praise God around the table for the food that He has blessed you with. And then take and eat! Glorify Him by enjoying His provision!

I want my kids to see in the way that I live my life that God is GOOD! I want to worship with them as we walk through the woods. I want them to see me marvelling at God's glory as I look out the window in May at the apple blossoms in bloom. I want them to catch a glimpse of the kindness of God as I laugh with Amanda. I want to teach them that ALL of these good gifts that we enjoy are from God. They were made for our enjoyment.

² <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/god-is-most-glorified-in-us-when-we-are-most-satisfied-in-him> Accessed Feb. 11, 2022.

³ Romans 14 and Colossians 2 remind us that some weak consciences won't allow this, and those consciences should be followed even though they are wrong.

And as we do that – as we delight in God’s good creation and give thanks to Him for it – we protect the people of God.

The joy of the Lord makes legalism look like lunacy.

This morning, I want to challenge each one of you to think through the principles that we’ve considered, and I want to challenge you to consider what it would look like to apply an ounce of prevention.

Have you been living with your guard down to false teachers? What would it look like to add a little bit of discernment and caution to your life?

Have you forgotten who the true enemy is? What would it look like to shift a little more of your time and attention to prayer? Maybe you could make a schedule, or a plan?

Have you been ignoring your conscience? Maybe today is the day that you let go of something that you’ve been holding onto for a long time.

Are you stunted in your Bible reading? What would it look like to grow in that area by one degree? Maybe you could ask someone what their daily Bible reading looks like?

Have you forgotten to delight in God’s good world? Perhaps the most worshipful thing you could do this afternoon would be a walk in the woods. Maybe you could carve out a little extra time in your schedule to slow down and give thanks.

Little steps. Little changes. Listening. Discerning. Obeying. Growing.

This is how we protect the people of God. And this is the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. Let’s pray together.