

“Acknowledging Apostasy” (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

1. Now (1a)
 - a. Authoritative Agent: “The Spirit” = The Word. He is the authoritative agent of Scripture cf. 2 Sam. 23:2; Acts 1:16; 1 Pet. 1:11; 2 Pet. 1:21; 1 Cor. 7:40.
 - b. Clear Caution: Jesus warned (Mk. 13:22. Paul warned (Acts 20:29-31; 2 Thes. 2:3).
 - c. Current Circumstances: “Last days,” “latter days,” “last hour,” “end of the ages” refer to the eschaton – the final period before the LORD’s “second appearing” (Heb. 9:28). It encompasses the time between His advents (cf. Heb. 1:2; 9:26; 1 Pet. 1:20; 4:7; 1 Jn. 2:18). Although there is debate re: said period that all or some of the texts refer to just before the desolation/destruction of the Temple. Nevertheless, the warning is pertinent today as much as then.
2. Nature (1b) 1 Jn. 4:1-6 attests to the source of such doctrines. So too does Eph. 6:12.
3. (Naughty) Gnostics (2)
 - a. Agents: Humans are the agents (or instruments) of whom and by which the demons deceive.
 - b. Hardened: They are those who have had their consciences seared as with a hot iron. This illustration communicates that such have reached a point of apostasy where the Spirit is not – cannot – be acknowledged in a salvific way. Cf. Ro. 9:15-17 re: God’s hardening of Pharaoh’s heart, we read in Exod. 7:14; 8:15, 32; 9:7, 34 that Pharaoh hardened his heart repeatedly and in 10:1 we read God had hardened it! John MacArthur wrote, “Paul looked to his conscience as the divinely given witness to the condition of his soul (cf. Acts 23:1; 24:16; Rom. 9:1; 2 Cor. 1:12; 2 Tim. 1:3). The apostle has already stated that false teachers reject “a good conscience” (1:19), which is the very goal Paul pursued (1:5).”¹
 - c. Gnosticism was on the rise² as it emphasizes special knowledge (esoteric knowledge) which plays on pride. It views the human as a dichotomy of evil flesh and good spirit. Some Gnostics concluded that since evil flesh is not connected with good spirit that we should live hedonistically or as Epicurus promoted – but that would be obviously wrong to the clever demonically influenced apostates who attempted to lure believers in adhering to the Law in a legalistic fashion as a means of salvation. →
4. Nuance (3)
 - a. Therefore, the more ascetic philosophy was employed. Asceticism is a religious/spiritual practice of self-denial of sorts to different degrees.
 - b. Satan’s ploys are clever. He does not entice with overt evil but nuanced teachings evil masquerading as good! 2 Cor 11:14
 - c. 3b It is Satan’s pleasure when he can get humans to reject the very good gifts we are to enjoy. Instead of thanksgiving to God for such gifts, we abstain from them.
 - d. Asceticism works for the religious but Epicureanism (Antinomianism) works for the worldly. It may take little effort from demons to entice us to indulge in perversions of God’s gifts. Sex, alcohol, music, philanthropy, government, education, etc. are from God but we have ignored the very boundaries which are placed in order to enjoy and employ such to the fullest.
 - e. Believers are to guard themselves from both asceticism and hedonism.
 - f. However, extremism is not Satan’s only goal. He may have a higher one that involves the compromising middle. E.g. using Christian lingo, phrases, and platitudes while twisting the

¹ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). *1 Timothy* (p. 151). Moody Press.

² MacArthur pointed out a few references which may indicate that such was indeed creeping into the churches viz. 1 Cor. 7:1-7, 28-38; 15:12.

“Acknowledging Apostasy” (1 Tim. 4:1-5)

Scriptures to excuse behaviors. In fact, this ploy of ‘honoring’ the Law by strict diet and abstinence cleverly compromises the Law’s intent while appearing to uphold it.

- g. See “Further Study” below to review passages of these and related topics and Paul’s clarifications.

5. Natural (4-5)

- a. As with all perversions, we must contrast with truth in order to prevail/conquer. Paul has previously reminded his readers of God’s natural order and design as an impetus for our behavior (1 Tim 2:13-15) and again reminds them of the goodness of creation and its purposes. Flesh is not evil but the carnal/fallen flesh is. Adam had no sin prior to the Fall and Jesus (our last Adam) had nor has sin!
- b. God made the taste buds and sexual organs and such that we could enjoy His gifts in their healthy boundaries.
- c. Temporary abstinence is a spiritual discipline which can advance our growth and enhance the very gifts from which we abstain.
- d. When we give thanks and enjoy the gifts of God without perversion, we have the freedom to receive what is offered to us as we eat unto the Lord (read 1 Cor. 10:23-31). Self-denial as a means of salvation leads to self-righteousness, but self-denial from salvation and gratitude leads to fulfillment and maturity. Cf. Mk. 7:14-19.
- e. And perhaps the quintessential proclamation to combat such teaching is found in Col. 2:16-23. Apostasy’s multiple forms can only be combatted/defeated with Scripture 2 Cor 10:4-5

Further Study:

Generally, Paul’s letters bear witness to the fact that the issues of sexual relations and rules about foods were items of lively debate as his churches sought to understand the implications of salvation and the Spirit for Christian living in the last days (1 Thess 4:3–6; 1 Cor 7:12–16; 8:1–13; 10:25–31; Gal 2:11–14; Rom 14:13–21; Col 2:16). And in none of these cases do we know all the elements at work in the debates: Jewish tendencies and sensibilities, Spirit-enthusiasm, a too-realized view of eschatology. More specifically, first, the Jesus tradition could speak favorably of celibacy in the service of God (Matt 19:12), and Paul regarded it as appropriate in certain situations and possibly ideal (1 Cor 7:26–35). But the teaching of neither of these evolved into the blanket prohibition mentioned in 1 Tim 4:3.³

PC:

We must understand apostasy as it is perhaps the biggest threat to the church. Apostates are those influenced by demons who use subterfuge to lead believers astray. Here, Paul mentions the clever tactics of the hypocrites who feign righteousness with their seemingly righteous demands and prohibitions. They twist the plain meaning of Scriptures to suit themselves. The only way to combat such is to be familiar with the truth; and the only way to be familiar with the truth is knowing Scripture. And this means each of us must be learning, exposing ourselves to good sound teaching which can be observed to come from and cling to Scripture. Furthermore, when we practice such, holiness and gratitude naturally (or supernaturally) emerge. When all is done *from* our salvation and gratitude and for His pleasure, the believer finds true freedom and joy. Conversely, when what is done is done *for* salvation, we forgo God’s good gifts and rob Him of our earnest gratitude.

³ Towner, P. H. (2006). *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* (p. 294). Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.