

Be careful not to abandon the faith

We constantly hear about churches or individual believers going off the track. Some stay Christians in a sense, but go into error and continue in that error. Others leave the faith altogether and either go completely into the world, follow other philosophies, or become adherents of other religions. It's easy for us to say that that would never happen to us, but we ought to remember that we need to "Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." (1 Peter 5: 8)

1 Timothy 4: 1 – 10

The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons. Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron. They forbid people to marry and order them to abstain from certain foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and who know the truth. For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed. Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come. This is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance. That is why we labor and strive, because we have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe.

1) Deception, the main cause of abandoning the faith

- 1 Timothy 4: 1 The Spirit clearly says that in later times some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.
 - Doctrines of demons doesn't mean that the doctrine looks evil and scares people away. On the contrary they look attractive and draw the unsuspecting to them, but to ultimately destroy them.
 - Neither are false teachers vile looking creatures with dirty mouths. They are well dressed and preach from the Bible.
- Satan, the great deceiver, is the one behind these false teachers and false doctrines
 - Revelation 12: 9 The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray.
 - 2 Corinthians 11: 13 – 14 For such people are false apostles, deceitful workers, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light.
- At the beginning of the letter Paul exhorted Timothy to command certain people not to teach false doctrines.
 - False teaching is one of the primary ways that deceives believers to be led astray.
 - It is deceptive in the way that it is close to the truth, but not the truth.
- Some false doctrines being taught in the church
 - Legalism - strict, literal, or excessive conformity to the law or to a religious or moral code.
 - Health and prosperity gospel
 - Speaking things into existence – name it and claim it
 - I can sin as I want because God has forgiven me of all sins
 - God is love and won't send anyone to hell. Some even teach that hell doesn't exist
- Being enticed by other philosophies is another form of deception that leads Christians astray
 - Colossians 2: 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.
- Before we blame false teachers and worldly philosophies for Christians being deceived, we need to come to terms with the fact that only those whose hearts aren't right with God will be deceived.
 - James 1: 13 – 15 When tempted, no one should say, "God is tempting me." For God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death.
 - We give in to false teachers and philosophies when we only hear what we want to hear.
 - 2 Timothy 4: 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

2) The need for discernment

- Hebrews 5: 14 But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.
 - Blatant sin is obvious and doesn't need discernment to know that it's wrong.
 - Discernment is needed for grey areas that are often used by false teachers teaching false doctrines. It seems right, but it's wrong.
 - A common example is the teaching of forgiving yourself. Nowhere in the scripture are we taught to forgive ourselves. We need to accept God's forgiveness, and if we do that no other we accept that whatever we have ever done has been washed away and there's no need for us to forgive ourselves.
- Solid food refers to sound doctrine of the scriptures
 - 1 Timothy 4: 6 If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus, nourished on the truths of the faith and of the good teaching that you have followed.
- We need a thorough knowledge of the scriptures to discern truth from falsehood
 - False teachers were forbidding people to get married, whereas marriage was instituted by God and is good.
 - False teachers were forbidding people to abstain from certain foods, whereas "everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer."
 - False teachers teach that God wants us to be wealthy, whereas Jesus actually taught that we need to deny ourselves, take up our crosses and follow Him.
 - False teachers tell us to call things that are not into being,
- Humanism is at the heart of false teaching – it's all about us, and what we are, and can have, and can get
- God is at the heart of true Biblical teaching – His honour and glory. His will being accomplished

3) The value of godliness

- In essence godliness is the lifestyle that has God at the centre of it, living according to His character
- What has godliness got to do with not being deceived and not abandoning the faith?
- As we have already seen one of the reasons people get deceived is that they don't live godly lives submitted to God and are keen to follow anything that justifies an ungodly lifestyle
 - Godly people aren't led astray that easily as they are more concerned about pleasing the Lord than themselves.
 - 1 Timothy 4: 7 – 8 Have nothing to do with godless myths and old wives' tales; rather, train yourself to be godly. For physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come.