

# With Thanksgiving

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 08 October 2023

Preacher: Joshua Winters

[ 0 : 00 ] Well, as we come to God's Word this morning, we're continuing on in 1 Timothy. So if you have your Bible, please open it up to 1 Timothy. Seeing as it's Thanksgiving tomorrow, I thought that we'd jump ahead a little bit in the letter to a place where Paul talks a little bit about Thanksgiving.

So we're jumping ahead to chapter 4, and we're going to be looking mainly at the first five verses here in chapter 4. Let me read it. This is Paul writing to Timothy.

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.

[ 1 : 18 ] If you point these things out to the brothers and sisters, you will be a good minister of Christ Jesus. So just a short passage here this morning, five verses, and just like back in chapter 1, Paul is warning Timothy about false teachers and their teachings.

But here in chapter 4, he actually gets a little bit more specific about some of the things that these false teachers have been teaching, or rather things that are coming, that they're going to be teaching.

Paul is known for his long sentences, and most of our English translations of the Bible break this up into a few sentences. But in the original language this was written, it's basically all one sentence from verse 1 all the way down to verse 5.

And Paul just keeps piling on the subordinate clauses and the prepositional phrases and the participles and the infinitives. You get the idea. So Paul starts by warning Timothy about false teachers in verses 1 and 2.

Then he kind of flows from there into talking about the kind of false teachings that they are doing in verse 3. And then from there, he kind of flows into a refutation of the false teachings in verses 4 and 5.

[ 2 : 38 ] And he declares God's goodness and how he has created all things for our benefit. Things that we should receive with thanksgiving. So we're just going to trace Paul's flow of thought all the way through, starting at the beginning here in verse 1.

He says, Some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

So Paul's warning Timothy. He knows something about what's coming. And he gives this warning to Timothy to help him minister to the people in the church there in Ephesus.

How does Paul know this? The Spirit clearly says. And then what follows is what the Spirit says.

Now, there's debate over how he knew that the Spirit was saying this. We won't get into all that this morning. But Paul, as an apostle, probably is able to clearly hear and discern the Spirit speaking to his own mind.

[ 3 : 43 ] And so he writes on behalf of Christ. And Paul wants Timothy to know that this isn't just his hunch about what will happen.

His opinion or speculation. This warning comes from the Spirit of God himself. And it's clear. The Spirit clearly says, explicitly says, that some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits and things taught by demons.

So this is a very sobering problem. Timothy, there are going to be people who abandon the faith. Literally, who depart from the faith.

Now, what does that mean? I don't think it means that people who have a genuine faith in the Lord Jesus will suddenly stop believing and lose their salvation. Rather, I think Paul is describing things from the outward appearance of it.

They're not departing from their own true faith. Rather, they're departing from the faith. They are going away from the truth. The gospel. The things God has revealed through Jesus.

[ 5 : 01 ] And the things that have been taught through the Spirit. Through the apostles. There is a body of teaching. A body of revelation. That God has given us through Jesus.

Through the Spirit. Through the apostles. And it is the Christian faith. The problem with these men is that they are going away from that. They are leaving that.

I think it means that some people who were among us. Who at one time said, yeah, I believe these things. They're now turning away. Suddenly, they're leaving off of this gospel.

And not only do they depart from it. But, Paul says, they go on to other teachings. And the language Paul chooses here is very strong.

He says, they follow deceiving spirits. That word follow could be translated. They give heed to. They pay attention to. They devote themselves to.

[ 6 : 07 ] So, not just that they don't really agree anymore with the Christian faith. But now they are quite strongly following. Giving their attention to evil spirits.

Deceiving spirits. And to things taught by demons. Literally, to the teachings or doctrines of demons. So, they've really exchanged one set of teachings for another.

The teachings of Christ. The teachings of the Holy Spirit. For the teachings of these deceiving spirits. These demons. This is serious.

The Spirit warns Timothy. Through Paul. That with these false teachers. There's more than meets the eye. The source of their teaching. Is actually spiritual.

But it's not from the Spirit of God. Rather, these things. That they're going to be teaching. They're going to be advocating. The ultimate source of those ideas. Is demonic.

[ 7 : 09 ] Fallen angels. Again, more questions arise here. Like, you know. Did the false teachers know that they were hearing these things from demons? Or are they just deceived?

And I mean, Paul doesn't give a fuller explanation here. He does mention that these spirits are deceiving. It's quite possible that these teachers might not know the truth of who is really behind all of this.

That they are teaching. Jesus said that the devil is the father of lies. Paul wrote to the Corinthian church and said that Satan masquerades as an angel of light.

Which means that the devil and his demons are well-practiced deceivers. I would suggest to you that they may be the most skilled and brilliant liars that this world has never seen.

You've heard it said maybe that the best lies. Meaning the most likely to be believed. Are those that are almost true. There's so much truth in it that the false part is just easily accepted with the rest.

[ 8 : 20 ] The devil and his demons, they know how to craft. How to present falsehood in a way that's quite compelling. And attractive. And rational. So that we'll swallow it.

Hook, line, and sinker. And maybe even think in pride. I came up with that. That's my idea.

I discovered that. So these are deceptive spirits. Now, I've been avoiding this part of the verse until now. When will all this take place?

Who is the spirit talking about? When is this going to happen? The spirit clearly says that in later times, some will abandon the faith and follow deceiving spirits.

Now, if you've been one who, like me, is eager to unravel the mysteries of the end times, this phrase probably struck you as referring to the end times.

[ 9 : 23 ] But before we go right into that, we must be careful here. We shouldn't let our eagerness to know the end color the way that we read what Paul has said.

Notice that he says, in later times and not in the last times. In later times. Not in the last days. And there are a number of clues here left by Paul in the context which suggests that Paul's not speaking about the end times but about the near future to Timothy.

The first clue is that the false teachings that are going to be advocated are abstaining from marriage and certain kinds of food.

This really does seem to fit better with the ascetic teachings of the Gnostics and dualism which came full force in the second and third century.

you read some of the bizarre religious practices of the desert fathers and the early monks. I'm not going to talk about all that stuff because it's just it's bizarre.

[ 10 : 33 ] Fasting for months and doing weird kinds of things depriving themselves and you know all these kinds of things. I mean some people might argue that people devalue marriage today and that's true but this seems to be a different sort of thing.

This is forbidding people to marry as though it were a hallmark of true religion. The second clue Paul takes great pains to refute this false teaching right here in the letter in verses 3 to 5.

And then in verse 6 he urges Timothy to teach the refutation to the church. It seems Paul wants Timothy to be proactive here to inoculate the church in Ephesus by teaching the truth and exposing this falsehood right now before it has a chance to really take root.

And the third clue there are other letters of Paul that have a lot to say about false religion and false teaching when it comes to matters of food and drink. The letter to the Colossians the Romans the Corinthian epistles some of those have more to do with Jewish food laws but others more with that Gnostic teaching that the material world is inherently evil that the body is base and dirty and therefore self-denial and fasting from certain foods is what makes one truly spiritual and acceptable in God's eyes.

Now these teachings wouldn't really sweep over and take over until about another hundred years later but already in these times in the other epistles of Paul we start to see glimmers of it taking root.

[ 12 : 18 ] and so I would suggest to you that Paul may be warning Timothy and the Christians there in Ephesus about specific teachings of demonic origin that are coming hard and fast in the next hundred years.

Now could there still be some second greater final fulfillment of these kinds of things in the end times? Perhaps. Certainly there will be doctrines of demons false religion worship of the beast false teachers other passages in scripture make that clear but will these specific doctrines of demons be a hallmark of the end times?

Maybe or maybe not. It remains to be seen. Part of the challenge here and the reason why Paul warns Timothy as he does is that these false teachers will arise in a way that's especially deceptive.

notice verse 2 such teachings come through hypocritical liars whose consciences have been seared as with a hot iron.

So these people who have departed from the faith and are speaking these falsehoods these lies they're doing so under the cloak of hypocrisy.

[ 13 : 38 ] So these teachers seem to be in the Christian faith they seem to be in the church they seem to be among those who say yes I believe in Jesus. It's not as though they run up the flag or post on social media I don't believe in Jesus anymore.

I found a better teaching that we should follow. Rather it's more like the Pharisees in Israel in Jesus' day. They're faking righteousness. They're pretending to be good Christians.

They're feigning faith. They're claiming to be followers of Jesus and yet they are calling people subtly away from the gospel. They're calling people away from the good news that salvation is by faith alone and not by works.

They're saying no, no, no, no you need to do this to be right with God. Marriage? Uh-uh. Eating these kinds of foods? No.

You need to abstain from those things. Let's look briefly at these teachings. Forbidding people to marry and ordering them to abstain from certain foods.

[ 14 : 45 ] So there is a devaluing of marriage and most likely sex is included in that. And I think the logic here again probably is pointing to what the Gnostics taught that sex is base.

It's dirty. It's a fleshly thing. It's unspiritual. True religion. It's to rise above that. It's to rise above things like marriage.

They might say we see this kind of infiltrating the church later on with the monastic order. And by the fourth century the Catholic Church fully incorporated this idea and decided that marriage be altogether prohibited for priests, bishops, deacons, and clerics.

But this is clearly against the teaching of Scripture. The Apostle Paul and Jesus did talk about celibacy and how there were some practical advantages to it.

But nowhere ever did they forbid marriage. In fact, Paul in certain circumstances instructed people to get married as we'll see later on in this letter.

[ 15 : 56 ] Jesus, speaking through the author of Hebrews, said, marriage is to be honored by all. Hebrews 13 verse 4. It's to be held in high regard. It's to be valued for what it is.

The other demonic teaching Paul lists here is abstaining from certain foods. These hypocritical liars were going to urge people not to eat certain foods as a matter of spirituality, as a matter of devotion to God.

And there's lots that we could say about this. I mean, it has relevance to the teaching of the Judaizers, that group of men and women who were trying to get the followers of Jesus to go back to the Old Testament.

And no, if you want to be right with God, you need to be circumcised. You need to not eat foods that are ceremonially unclean. You need to observe the law. Again, a subtle shift in the focus.

Suddenly, it goes from Christ and his righteousness to now works. and what I need to do to be righteous in God's eyes, which is not the good news.

[ 17 : 05 ] Again, we see it in the teachings of the Gnostics with the desert fathers and the early monks in the second and third centuries. They bought into this lie that the way to live a holy life is by having less of the earthly stuff, less of the fleshly appetites.

Deny the body what it desires. True spirituality, they would say. Closeness to God is only achieved when we deprive ourselves, is what they seem to believe.

Interestingly, you see some of that even in the eastern religions as well. So God, through his spirit, is warning Timothy and the church at Ephesus about these kinds of deceptive teachings which are soon to arise and may lead people astray.

And then he launches into a full-out refutation of these false teachings. 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. So Paul basically says what these false teachers are going to teach is wrong.

[ 18 : 25 ] It is flat out wrong. It is wrong to forbid people to marry. It is wrong to teach people that they need to abstain from certain foods. Why? Because God created these things to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

God created marriage. He created the things of earth that we eat for food. food. And I love the simple truth that Paul declares here. God created these things because he wanted you to have them.

To be received. He wanted you to have them. To which we say what? I thought God just wanted to take all the good things from me.

I thought he wanted to keep me from enjoying life in this world. Well who gave you that idea? It was the devil who suggested to Adam and Eve in the garden long ago that idea.

But it was a lie. We became corrupt. We lost our sensitivity to the truth and to the knowledge of God. To the goodness of God. And so the human race has been suspicious of God ever since.

[ 19 : 46 ] Does he really want good things for me? Is worshipping and following Jesus just about giving up everything good? Paul smashes this lie of the devil.

He smashes this suspicion of the flesh. He says God created marriage and the delights that go with it because he wanted you to have it. He wanted you to receive it.

He created all kinds of foods, things on this earth to be received. with thanksgiving. For our benefit, he wanted us to have them.

He wanted us to eat them. And Jesus widens this all the way in verse 4. He says, for everything God created is good and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.

So Paul refutes the lies of the demons flat out. True spirituality is not denying ourselves of a peculiar list of things because these things are unclean or impure or our body appetites are less spiritual, base, fleshly.

[ 21 : 03 ] Rather, true spirituality is receiving and enjoying all the good things that God has made and doing it with thanksgiving. Let's talk about that word, thanksgiving, for a moment.

I really like that word. It's like two words sandwiched together, thanksgiving, and it implies action, just like it does in the language of the Bible that was originally written in.

It's an action word. Some translations actually render it as gratitude, but I think that falls short of its full meaning. It's not just that we should feel fortunate or privileged or content.

The word for thanksgiving implies action. It implies what it seems to say, that we actually give thanks, that we express thanks to God.

Like with words. sadly, for many in our society, the holiday that we're celebrating this weekend is not about giving thanks to God anymore.

[ 22 : 17 ] For many, it's just a moment or a day to feel grateful, to feel happy about how well off I am compared to others who are in lesser circumstances.

This is not what Paul is talking about. Thanksgiving means verbally saying thank you to God for the things that he has done and given to us.

I love the way that Paul refutes this false teaching. He just proclaims it. God is gracious. He is generous. He's filled this whole world with good things for us.

Things that meet our needs, things that we can enjoy, that bring delight. He wants us to have these things. He wants us to enjoy them and the way that we do that which is fitting is by giving thanks to God as we receive them.

I was reminded of Psalm 104 as I was meditating on these things. Verse 14 and 15 talks about what God does in connection to the earth and creation.

[ 23 : 33 ] It says he makes grass grow for the cattle and plants for people to cultivate, bringing forth food from the earth, wine that gladdens human hearts, oil to make their faces shine, and bread that sustains their hearts.

vegetables. So why did God make wheat and grape vines? It says he gives rain on the earth which grows the wheat and the vines to bring grain to make bread and grapes to make wine to sustain us and to gladden us.

There's both there, sustenance and enjoyment. God didn't just create things in this world just for practical purposes to keep us alive, but he also made things for our enjoyment.

Think about this for a moment. God could have made us with tongues to get the food down, but no taste buds. Noses, but no sense of smell, just used for breathing.

He could have given us ears, but no ability to discern melody, eyes, but a whole world with no colors. All of these things, smells, flavors, colors, music, they're purely things of pleasure.

[ 25 : 10 ] They're things of delight. They aren't essential to sustaining our bodies. They're just things that bring pleasure. God made those.

He wants us to be happy. He wants us to enjoy the good things that he has made. What kind of land did God promise the Israelites?

A land flowing with milk and honey. This expression captures God's goodness, his generosity, as an undeserved gift.

He wanted to give him a land full of the good things of earth, both the milk, sustenance, and honey, sweetness. Speaking of honey, one of my favorite proverbs, Solomon saying to his son said this, he said, eat honey, my son, for it is good.

Honey from the comb is sweet to your taste. And then he goes on to apply that to wisdom as a metaphor. But the foundation of it is true.

[ 26 : 24 ] It's good. It's sweet. God has put these kinds of things into our world for our enjoyment. Even though meat was not originally part of our diet in the garden, God has even given us that as well to eat and enjoy.

Genesis 9 verse 3. Everything that lives and moves about will be food for you. Just as I gave you the green plants, I now give you everything.

Another one of my favorite proverbs, better a small serving of vegetables with love than a fattened calf with hatred.

love. Now this proverb obviously is more about relationships. It's about what's going on between the people around the table. It's a contrast. But notice the fattened calf is the ideal meal.

The roast beef dinner on the table is good. I hope that we can enjoy the fattened turkey with love around the table.

[ 27 : 36 ] in the parable of the prodigal son. Jesus told when the son finally came home and repented of what he had done to his father.

What does the father do? He kills the fattened calf and throws a banquet to celebrate. So yes, even meat has been given for our sustenance and our enjoyment.

All of these things, both plants and animals, God has made. And all of them are good. None of them are to be rejected if we receive them as gifts from God while saying thank you to him.

Finally, Paul tacks on one more clause here at the end. Nothing's to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer.

So the foods we eat and the marriages that we enter into are consecrated by the word of God and prayer. They're made holy. They're made fit for us.

[ 28 : 44 ] They're specifically designated for our benefit and enjoyment by two things. By the word of God and prayer. How do we know that all of these things that God has made are good?

good? It's very simple. God said so. The word of God declared it right at the beginning.

He made all of it. It is good. It is good. He saw all that he had made and it was very good. Even again after we had sinned and after the flood, he declared I have given you these things for food.

They are good for you to eat. Sin has affected all of creation and all creation groans as it says in Romans chapter 8. But it doesn't change or erase the inherent goodness of everything that God has made.

So his word, his declaration over all that he has made, his designation of it, makes it good for us to eat.

[ 29 : 57 ] And finally, prayer also sets it apart for us. Here I think Paul is referring specifically to the prayer of thanksgiving. This is probably the closest thing we get in the Bible to an instruction to give thanks, to pray before we eat.

Jesus modeled that. He gave thanks before he ate. And many of us have just been doing that because it was handed down. as a tradition from people that believed.

But it's not just a custom. It really is our moment to sincerely from the heart say thank you to God for that stuff that's on the table.

God to to begin to think about. I mean we may look at the food in our fridge or on our table and we may think I worked for this.

I went to work I got the money I went to the store I paid for it I prepared it or I did all the work of planting the seeds putting them into the garden watered the plants harvested them cleaned them off but where did you get the strength to do that work?

[ 31 : 25 ] was it not from your last meal? it's the food that gives you the strength to cultivate and to work and what is most of that nutritious food that we enjoy that keeps us alive?

what's it made of? not rocks and dirt but plants and living things organic matter all ultimately created by God himself where did the seed come from that you planted in the garden and watered and made grow?

where did the water come from that falls from the sky? who filled this earth with plants of all varieties that reproduce cucumbers and melons and carrots lettuce animals that give their byproducts and their meat take away all the plants and animals on earth and we'd be left with nothing for food but sand and dirt and rocks think about that how long would we live on that?

so I hope and I pray that this Thanksgiving the meal tastes even better than it did last year I hope it tastes better because we are even more mindful of what the food on the table is and what it represents it represents the God in heaven and his goodness his love his kindness to us it represents his happiness to provide for us and not only the sustenance but also the sweetness and the savory both the dinner and the dessert and so this Thanksgiving as you gather with family or friends I want to encourage you to eat and enjoy celebrate kill that fattened turkey and do it with Thanksgiving to God

I want to encourage you to go beyond that typical mealtime prayer of thanks take some time with those around you today or tomorrow or however you're going to celebrate to just stop and give actual thanks to God not just for the meal but for all the things that he has done and given countless blessings thank him for these gifts from the least to the greatest this is what the Thanksgiving holiday was meant to be all about a day of worship a day of prayer a day of feasting yes and celebration to give thanks to God for his goodness to us let's pray Father in heaven we ask that you would help us to live in this truth and to cling to it that you are a God who doesn't withhold from us but a God who is happy to give to us and the proof of that is most seen in Jesus the greatest gift of all and if you would give us him would you withhold from us the other things the other good things no we say thank you for Jesus thank you for everything that you have given us and may our celebrations this weekend reflect something of your goodness and your grace to us we ask in Jesus name

[ 35 : 25 ] Amen