

DEPARTING FROM THE FAITH

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The Apostle Paul provided direction for the work of his son in the faith, Timothy. In 1 Timothy 4:1-2 he warned the younger man about those that would depart from the faith. That warning provides us with a concise and clear definition of what it means to “depart from the faith.” The passage says, “*Now the Spirit speaks 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.*” In this passage, “*departing from the faith*” consists of three things: (1) Listening to the wrong things, (2) Saying the wrong things, and (3) Becoming unwilling to tell the difference between right and wrong.

Notice that the text uses the words “*giving heed.*” This expression includes the idea of *listening, agreeing and accepting and then doing something as a result.* A person that gives heed “pays attention.” The word also has in it the concept of “turning the mind to” one thing or another.

You can see the problem with this. If we give heed or turn our minds to good things and ideas, good consequences will follow. If on the other hand we allow ourselves to listen and heed bad things, bad consequences will result. Paul spoke of seducing spirits and doctrines of devils. Some ideas are not worth listening to. If indeed we listen to foolishness, even innocently, there is the danger of being beguiled by it. In other words, bad ideas can seduce an innocent unwarned listener.

“Doctrines of devils” are bad ideas. By this I do not mean that these ideas are a little less beneficial than some other ideas. No, it is much worse than that. Bad ideas, doctrines of devils, are of a nature that they are capable of turning a mind in the direction of damnation. Such ideas ought to be rejected out of hand and not given any credence at all. For instance, to say that Jesus is not the Son of God is a doctrine of the Devil and must be rejected. If it is not rejected it will seduce its hearer.

When one ventures down this pathway, the next stop is *saying the wrong thing.* Examples of this are given in this passage. Forbidding to marry, abstaining from meats and accepting profane and old wives’ tales are three things mentioned. When a man allows his mind to be seduced by error he will end up saying all manner and sort of things. Those bad ideas will surface and manifest themselves in ridiculous statements (this is “speaking lies and hypocrisy”).

But this is not the worst component of departing from the faith. Note that the apostle says that such individuals had “*their consciences seared with a hot iron.*” Now cauterized conscience does not work too well. Indeed, it is worse than an untaught conscience. An untaught or uninformed conscience has hope of becoming properly educated and thus beneficial. This burned over and seared conscience is in tough shape. It is unable to discern the difference between right and wrong. The results of this process manifest themselves regularly in our secular culture. People who shoot at helicopters trying to rescue folks from a flood are people with seared consciences.

This passage gives precise information about the nature of the process of departing from the faith. Good Bible students will read and learn. Good Christians will determine to be faithful unto death and thus receive that crown of life (Revelation 2:10).

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