

# 1 Timothy 4 (Part 1):1-5 • A Warning for Later Days

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We are in 1 Timothy. So open your Bibles and head that direction. We're going to take the first five verses of 1 Timothy here, because this includes a prophecy that Paul writes to Timothy here toward the end of this letter. So, follow along with me as I read:

*<sup>1</sup>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, <sup>2</sup>through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, <sup>3</sup>who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth. <sup>4</sup>For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, <sup>5</sup>for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer. (ESV)*

Let's stop there. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, as we get into these verses this morning, we pray for understanding. Because we believe, Lord, and confess to You, that it is only through You that we are able to lay hold of the deep truths that are given in the scriptures.

You are the author, You are the teacher, You are the instructor, and we desire to learn. And so, we ask You, Lord, to open our hearts to do just that, and then strengthen us, Father, also to walk it out, to live what You have spoken to us this day. We thank You and praise You in advance for all that You're going to do today to nourish us in the Word. In Jesus name, amen.

As we get into these first five verses of chapter 4, we're going to see that the Apostle Paul had a word here of warning and you can see what it's about, it's about believers departing from the church, or more specifically departing from the faith. And this is what we call the apostasy, or an apostasy.

The word *apostasy* simply means "to depart," and specifically in this case to depart from that which a person holds to be true; from the things that they hold to be true. We've seen this throughout the years. It's happening today in some

sectors. There's always been liberal elements of Christendom that think they know more than God, and it gets a little tiring, frankly, you know, I've been hearing stuff like that for a long time and it happens; people depart, they depart from what they would otherwise know to be truth.

And what Paul is going to do here is he's going to give us some descriptive characteristics in the scripture here related to those who perpetuate this departing. He's going to talk a little bit about those people, and then he's going to talk about some characteristics related to what these people are propagating, what they're teaching the people. And so, we're going to hear a little bit about that.

But the first thing we take notice of is that Paul gives us a time reference here, although it's not very specific. You'll notice that he says, "*the spirit expressly says that in later times, some will depart from the faith.*" And so the only time reference we really have is in later times.

And you know what that means? It means in later times; it means later than when Paul wrote it. It does not say in the last days, it just says in later times. Now, here's the interesting thing, Paul is going to use his second letter to Timothy to give us a second prophecy. And in that case, he is going to say "in the last days." And the Greek word there that is translated last days is actually where we get our word *eschatology*. But this is not what's happening here in 1 Timothy.

But even so, I'd kind of like you to see the passage in 2 Timothy, because although this one talks about the church, people departing from the church and the characteristics of what that departure is going to look like, 2 Timothy talks about the characteristics of the world in the last days. Let's put it on the screen. Here's how it goes. Paul writes and says:

**2 Timothy 3:1-5 (ESV)**

*But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good. Treacherous, reckless, swollen without conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

*"But understand this, that in the last days (and there's that Greek word where we get our word eschatology) there will come times of difficulty. For people will be (and now he gives the description) lovers of self, lovers of money, proud,*

*arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents* (boy, I'm glad that isn't happening today,) *ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self control, brutal, not loving good. Treacherous, reckless,* (this is an interesting phrase) *swollen with conceit* (pretty descriptive, huh?) *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power,* (and then a word to the church,) *avoid such people.*”

Kind of interesting, isn't it? I mean, we read this description of the last days, and we think to ourselves, we're here. This is where we live, this is our address. This is it, you guys. I mean, literally, this description, this describes what we see on the news, it's what we see in society, it's what we see all over the place. This is where we live. So, yeah, here we are.

What you can see here in this passage in 2 Timothy on the screen is he is outlining specific characteristics of the condition of the world, and then tells us to avoid all of those things, and that's a good word for us today. But once again as we come back to 1 Timothy, and as we look at the warning that he's giving us in chapter 4, I want to remind you this one is about the church, not about the world. It's about Christendom. And as we unpack the words of this prophecy, we're going to see what Paul is saying to us specifically about this apostasy. Once again, look with me in verse 1.

“...*the Spirit,*” he says, “*expressly says,*” – and this is one of those areas where we have to just assume that in the kind of church and services and connections that Paul had in the world at that time, or in the church, there were those who had prophetic giftings, and they would speak from time to time about the future, about things to come.

And apparently Paul had heard this repeatedly, to the point where he said, “The Spirit is very specific and expressly has communicated and revealed that in these later times that people will depart from,” notice this, “the faith.”

He doesn't say people will depart from the church specifically, although that can be probably kept in there, I suppose. But they're going to depart from the faith. Now that doesn't mean they're going to lose faith, necessarily. The word *faith* there means what we believe as essential about our Christian faith. It's talking about the essentials of Christianity. They're going to literally leave the essentials. They're going to go away from the virgin birth.

The death, the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ on the cross. And, you know, and on and on. They're going to leave those things. And that's what Paul is saying is going to happen.

And then he begins to give us some insight into what is going to cause this leaving. He says, and I'm still in verse 1, "*by devoting themselves...*" they're going to be devoted where they used to be devoted to the word, they're going to become devoted rather to deceitful, or your Bible may say, deceiving spirits and the teachings of demons. Now that doesn't mean that demons are going to get up and start teaching. That means that men and women are going to be so carried away by these demonic ideas. And literally he is telling us that these teachings that will come forth are crafted in the pit of hell.

And they will become popular, and they will be propagated by these individuals. And they may not even realize it, they may or they may not. But they are going to have demonic origin as it relates to the things that they are saying. So, what kind of people are we talking about that are going to actually do these things, or preach, or teach these kinds of things? That's where we get into verse 2, and he begins to speak to us about those people.

He says, "*through the insincerity of liars.*" That's a hard-hitting word. You call somebody a liar and you've just said something pretty serious. But you notice Paul says, "*through the insincerity of these individuals who are liars and whose consciences have been seared.*" So, the first thing we learn is that those who will encourage others to depart from the faith will be rather than genuine, insincere. And that of course means they will be artificial. They will be fake. They will be two-faced. Can I think of any more words? And that's why Paul says that they are liars.

And, you know, what's interesting about that is that's the M. O. of the enemy. Remember what Jesus said about Satan? He said, he's the "father of lies."

Do you know the Bible when it says someone is the father of something? It means he's the originator of it. The father, he is the originator of that. Abraham is the father of the Jews, so he began that process. Satan is the father of lies, he originated deception. Jesus went on to say that when Satan lies, he speaks his native language, which is an interesting way of saying he can't help but do anything else. He doesn't just lie. He is a liar. You with me?

I had somebody write me last week and ask me why Satan wanted Jesus dead, even though he perhaps knew that Jesus would be the Savior. Number one, we don't know exactly what Satan did or didn't know, but even if he did know, he would still want to kill Jesus. You know why? He's a murderer. That's what murderers do. They murder, and they don't need a reason. They do it because that's not what they do, it's what they are. You with me? Satan is a murderer. Satan is a liar. When he lies, he speaks his native language, and those who are

caught up in his deception carry on those lies. Literally propagate those lies, and that's why Paul refers to them here as liars because that's what they're doing.

But notice the second description of these individuals. He tells us that their consciences are seared. That's an interesting word and Paul's using a word picture. I don't know how many of you have ever branded cattle or – I've never actually done it, but I've seen up close cattle that have received a brand. And I've actually put my hand on it and felt the skin where the brand had been put on that, usually on the flank of that cow or something. It's crusty, and the skin has been burned, the upper layers of the skin have been burned away as have the nerve endings. And so that area of flesh is no longer subject to feel or any kind of feeling or sensation. Literally, the nerve endings have been seared away.

That's the word picture that Paul is giving here of these individuals who propagate this “later times” teaching. He says, but instead of their flesh being seared, their consciences have been seared. And what that means is, they can no longer feel any wrongdoing. They have no sense of wrongdoing.

A conscience, by the way, is something that God put in all mankind, but He uses that conscience to speak to us about that which is wrong. And there is an innate understanding in our hearts when something is wrong. Even if we perhaps learned that is wrong, there's just a sense that I know that this is wrong. And that's the conscience, but with these individuals, their conscience has been seared, so there's no feeling, the feeling is gone, and that's a serious place to be. That's a serious place.

You think to yourself, how does something like that even happen? How does somebody get to a place where they can no longer sense right and wrong? That literally the displeasure of the Lord is kind of cut off from them. Well, I believe, first of all, it doesn't happen overnight. I think it happens over a protracted period of time, where an individual repeatedly rejects the voice of the Lord, that still small voice of God speaking to them about that conviction of sin.

But we just kind of swallow it. We cover it up. We convince ourselves that what I'm doing or what's going on in my life isn't all that bad. It's not that bad. It's not that bad. Good grief, people are doing so much worse. So much worse than this. I mean, there's really nothing, and over time, and I keep doing that, and I keep doing that, and I keep doing that. And repeatedly, the voice of the Lord becomes less distinct and harder to detect. And people, that's a place that none of us want to be. None of us.

Paul goes on here now in verse 3 to describe some of the characteristics of the teachings that these hypocritical liars are going to bring out in the later times. Look at verse 3 with me. He mentions a couple of specific things, which I don't necessarily believe to be an exhaustive list, but he says, first of all, they're going to forbid marriage; you can't get married. And secondly, they're going to require abstinence from foods, even those foods which God created to be received, he says here, with thanksgiving, particularly for those who believe and know the truth. And he's talking to us about the characteristics of that we know as legalism.

By the way, strictness isn't always legalism. Just because someone is strict doesn't mean they're legalistic. The actual Biblical kind of definition of legalism is more the idea that I gain a righteous standing before God by keeping rules and doing things just so, or not doing some things. And that's a legalistic approach to pleasing God or something like that. And he's talking here about aspects and characteristics of legalism.

First of all, they forbid people to get married. And that's in direct contradiction to the fact that God created the institution of marriage. Now I'll tell you right now, not everybody has the ability or some people have the gift of singleness. Paul talks about this in 1 Corinthians. He says that some people have the – I don't think there's that many – but there are some who actually have the gift of singleness. Great, wonderful. We should not be putting pressure on people to get married if they have that particular gift. But for the vast majority of the rest of us, marriage is a good thing and these legalists are going to, however, forbid people from getting married.

Now somebody might stop here and say, now wait a minute, Pastor Paul, I think I remember reading somewhere in the New Testament. Didn't the Apostle Paul once write to the people there and tell them not to marry? Well, not exactly.

In 1 Corinthians 7, the Apostle Paul did write to the people, and he recommended to some to withhold or to refrain from marriage. But he mentioned the reason for that, and that was because of the present distress that the Corinthians were going through at that time. But if you read that chapter thoroughly, you're going to find out that in no way did he forbid marriage.

In fact, he said in that chapter, it's good for somebody, for a man to have his wife, or a woman to have her husband, and vice versa. It's good, it's a good thing. And so, he said in fact, it's better to marry than to burn with lust. That's where that verse appears as well.

So, far from forbidding marriage, Paul was recommending that because of what the people were going through, it might be easier for them not to marry. But this apostasy that Paul speaks of in these later times, is going to be fueled largely by a legalistic approach to being righteous before God based on the things I do and the things that I don't do.

And this is something that we've kind of always dealt with and it's kind of gone in waves. You know, I was reading – there's a great book, I've talked to you guys about it before. It's called *Church History in Plain Language* by Bruce Shelley. I first read that book when I was in Bible college, and it is a fascinating read. I found out after I got out of school that I really liked learning. I wish I had known that back when I was going to school, I mean when I was going to high school. I thought I knew everything back then. And then I got out of high school and realized I knew nothing.

So, I started learning about history and I found it fascinating, but one of the things Bruce Shelley brings out in that book is how in the early days of Christianity, monasteries began to spring up. Are you familiar with monasteries? They were populated by monks, and these were individuals who took vows; they took vows of chastity and vows of poverty, and oh mercy. You read about some of the things the monks did to resist or to cut off the flesh. And it was radical.

They would starve themselves for days on end, and they would go without sleep for days. Or if they did sleep, they would sleep on stone; cold stone without a blanket because they believed somehow that in order to reach God, they had to deny the flesh in every way. And it comes from a particular idea that believes that the flesh is always evil. And so, you can't let anything of the flesh get in the way of you being purely spiritual and connecting with God. And that'll be very pleasing to God.

And they probably jumped on verses from the Apostle Paul, where he said, "*In my flesh dwells no good thing.*" But Paul was talking about the sinful nature. There are things in your flesh that have no morality connected to them. Your flesh gets hungry every few hours, and you have to eat and consume things in order to have energy.

That's not immoral. There's nothing sinful about that, but it is fleshly. You need sleep after a certain number of hours, and you have to do that. There's nothing sinful about falling to sleep. But you see, the monks got that all messed up, and they began to see anything that emanates from the flesh, any need of the flesh, as innately evil. And so, you have to cut it out in order to reach God. And when

you do that, God is going to be very pleased with you. And you know, what's interesting about that is that it sounds very fanatical, doesn't it? But you know what? It's made its way into the church, in many ways.

And to this day, some of those same concepts are here that can be seen in Christianity. People seem to still believe that if I can just sacrifice something, I can get God's attention, or he owes me some of that. He owes me some attention. I think some people even think that fasting is all about that. It's like, well, if I pray under normal circumstances, he can choose to listen or not. But boy, when I start fasting, He owes me His ear. He's got to listen because I'm fasting now. I've given up eating for however long and He's going to look at that and go, oh, well, okay. We got to pay attention here guys.

That's not what fasting is about at all. But the point is there are people who do that still to this day. It's kind of like having a relationship with God that's kind of like that quid pro quo; that I'll do this for you, and then you owe me something in return. Happens all the time. So just like the monks, people are still sacrificing things and thinking that by sacrificing them, I'm better than you.

And that's what kind of happens is we get kind of all caught up in the things we sacrifice. And we think that it really, truly does make us better than somebody else. But at the end of the day, it's all about self-effort.

When we begin to sacrifice for God, it's all about self-effort. It's all about me doing something to get God's attention so I might just be able to convince Him to bless me. Because things haven't been going very great. So I need to really sacrifice a few things around here so I can get His attention, and then maybe He'll bless me. And this is the opposite of the Gospel. Let me show you what Paul wrote in Romans 3. I love this passage:

**Romans 3:23-24 (ESV)**

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus,*

*“For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified by (their good works and their attempts to please God through their... oh, wait a minute. That's not what it says. I just kind of threw that in there, just kind of, you know, because that's the whole legalistic thought. No, they're justified by) his grace as a gift, (Isn't that fascinating?) through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* Not in good works, not in sacrificial service, not in denying the flesh. You with me?



Grace. Unmerited favor, unearned. You didn't earn it, you got it anyway. Thank you, Jesus. I'll take it. Right?

You need to say that to the Lord often. I don't deserve it, but I'll take it. A lot of people go, I don't deserve it, so I can't take it. I hear a lot of people, and they may not say that word for word, but that's the way they live. I don't deserve it. I can't accept it. No, you say, I don't deserve it, I'm taking every bit of it because it's grace. You can't earn his favor.

Now finally, you probably noticed here that Paul also mentioned that the legalists and the false teachers would demand people to abstain from certain foods, and in the last couple of verses, four and five, Paul explains why this is wrong. He says in verse 4 *“for everything created by God is good.”* And of course, he's referring to food there.

I don't think it refers to liver though. Liver and onions are not on that list. No! My mother loved liver and onions when I was growing up. I know, shoot me now. I used to sit in front of that plate – I didn't even want to look at that, let alone smell it, and for heaven's sake put it in my mouth! Do you know what a liver does? Yuck!

So, when he says everything is good, I have to kind of say, well...but I understand what he means. It was created good. I'll give Him that much. Aren't you glad that I agree with God on this thing so that you can be? Anyway verse 4, *“for everything Created by God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it”* has plenty of ketchup. No, sorry. I can't get off this. I used to drench liver in ketchup so I could possibly just taste something else. Oh, I'm traumatized. Can you tell?

*“Nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the Word of God and prayer.”* And even though the legalists were trying to get people to give up certain foods, again, that sacrifice, that idea of sacrificing so that God's going to – I'm going to get God's attention here. I've been giving, did you notice God? I gave that up. I'm not eating this. I gave it up. And I did it for you. So are you impressed? Again, it comes down to self-effort and that sort of thing.

But somebody might kind of say, now wait a minute here. I read through the Old Testament. Didn't God forbid the eating of some foods? I mean, I think I remember something about that, and the answer is yes. There were foods that God said were unclean for the Jews. They were, in fact, forbidden from eating

those foods. But it seems like we're all too ready to forget the fact that was under the old covenant that God made with Israel, not the church.

God made the Mosaic covenant with Israel, not the church. I have to keep repeating that because I think some people just really have a hard time hearing that. And they read things, and they're like, oh, we have to do this. Even when Paul says things like he did in Romans 6:14. Let me show you this, I mean, this ought to close the argument:

**Romans 6:14 (ESV)**

*...you are not under law, but under grace.*

You would think that would kind of end the debate right there, wouldn't you? I mean, you would think when somebody comes out and says that clearly, you are not under law, but you are under grace, we would kind of go, oh, okay, no problem. But no, we just want it. No, I'm going back to the law. It's just really something. And you know, regarding what you eat and stuff, Jesus even talked about that. I want to show you this. It's in Mark's gospel. And the "he" is Jesus:

**Mark 7:18-19 (ESV)**

*And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.)*

*"And he said to them 'Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside (he's talking about what you put in your mouth) cannot defile him since it enters not his heart but his stomach and is (ultimately) expelled (look what it says in parenthesis) (Thus he declared all foods clean.)'"*

Again, you would think that would end the argument when the Son of God comes along and declares all foods clean. And yet, for some people, that's not enough.

I don't know if you guys are familiar with the Hebrew Roots Movement. It made its way into our area a few years back. And ultimately it started off as a, I think, a fairly positive thing. It was an attempt or a desire, I should say, from some people to really learn more and understand more about the Hebrew culture that is behind the Old Testament so that we could understand better the types and shadows that are fulfilled in the New.

There's nothing wrong with that. As somebody who's taught through the Old Testament, I love learning about Hebrew culture. And it's true, it does give you great insight. The more you learn about the culture of the people, the more you can understand the things that are going on in the scripture of the Old Testament.

The problem is as people start getting into things, they start saying, well, you know, it's okay. We understand we're saved by grace through faith, not by law. But you know what, let's go ahead and just observe these Old Testament feasts anyway. Let's do Passover, and let's do this, and it all starts off very innocently. But then after a period of time, they're keeping them because they think they have to. And they start instituting certain food regulations. And they end up believing eventually that I have to keep these food laws in order to be righteous before God. And so it goes from this really kind of a neat sort of an attempt just to understand more about the Old Testament into legalism.

Because guys, we have a gravitational pull toward legalism. We have to understand that our flesh wants to be legalistic. It wants to know that it knows, I've done this and now I have that. That's the way our flesh is. Grace is a difficult thing for people to lay hold of. You walk up to somebody and say, hey, I've got something for you. It's a gift. And they're going to say, what's the catch? It's just this natural way we think. We assume.

And God comes along, and He offers us salvation by grace through faith, and we're like, yeah, right. What's the catch? I've got to do something, right? I'm going to do something. And if they can't find it in the proclamation of the gospel, they'll find it somewhere else. I'll go back to the Old Testament and find it there. Oh! We've got to keep the Sabbath! That's what we've got to do. You see, it's just way too easy.

Well, anyway, getting back to this thing about food, sort of restrictions on the Jews. Even people that understand grace still get confused. I got a question from someone just this last week about it, so I thought I'd share it with you. Here's the question that someone wrote to me just this week. He said:

*I am following your explanations on Leviticus Ch. 11 – “Clean and Unclean Foods” and all the very minor details, instructions and intricacies regarding food rituals given from God to Moses. What I found interesting is that in the New Testament I believe it was Peter who had a dream and God showed him in no uncertain terms that all animals can be used for food, that everything He created was good. There were no restrictions and regulations as in the Old Testament. My question is, did God change His mind and/or why were the*

*Jewish people treated in a different way? What was bad in the O.T. is now good in the N.T.?*

So, you see this guy understands, there were no restrictions and regulations as in the Old Testament. My question is, did God change his mind and/or why were the Jewish people treated? What was bad in the Old Testament that is good now in the New Testament? And I thought, wow, this is a really good question, actually. So, I'll share with you my answer. Here's what I wrote him, I said:

*Food restrictions in the OT did have some practical aspects, but most of all God was using those restrictions in the Law of Moses to teach His people how to differentiate good from bad, holy from unholy, clean from unclean. Think of the Law of Moses as being similar to how a parent uses strict restrictions while their child is young, but then relaxes those restrictions as the child grows. So, it's not a question of what was "bad" and has now become "good." Rather it's about what has changed about God's people. Under the New Covenant, believers now have the Holy Spirit indwelling them, whereas the Jews did not.*

Do you understand what I said to this guy? It's not about something that was bad and now is good. We've changed. There was a growing up process. The law was given – well, let me put it in the words of the Apostle Paul. Here's what he said to the Galatians. He said:

**Galatians 3:23-25 (ESV)**

*...before faith came, we were held captive under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith would be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came, in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian,*

*"... before faith came, (we were all) we were held captive under the law, (that's what a child is. They're captive under the law of their parents) imprisoned until the coming faith could be revealed. So then, the law was our guardian until Christ came in order that we might be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian."*

Now, that word *guardian* in the Greek means "instructor or tutor." So, under the law, we had a tutor to help us understand the basics. Just like a child is being taught. But now, what happened under the new covenant? The lawgiver came to live inside of our hearts. And that is vastly superior to a set of rules.

And it is equated to a child growing up and gaining maturity. And I no longer have to tell my child, you can't go past that spot right there. Right? Wouldn't

that be ridiculous? I said that to my two-year-old. Can you see that crack in the road? You can't ride your bike past that crack in the road. They go, okay.

Now can you imagine me telling my twenty something kid, see that crack right there? Can't go past that. How ridiculous. This person's an adult. He's grown up. He's ready to move on from these basic rules that are given as a guardian. So, I love how this last verse is actually rendered in the NIV. It says:

**Galatians 3:35 (NIV84)**

*Now that faith has come, we're no longer under the supervision of the law.*

That's not a fantastic word-for-word rendering, but it is a very good understanding of what Paul is saying. The law was given to supervise our growth, but now we've received the Spirit, and there's a different dynamic going on and guiding our lives.

Let me just kind of say here in closing that just because Paul just mentioned the forbidding of marriage and the restrictions of some foods doesn't mean that's all that these teachers of the later times are going to try to get people to do.

Legalism is rarely satisfied with just two rules. It does remind me though of Barney Fife. You guys ever watch reruns of Andy Griffith? Barney used to – he called his jail, you know, he had two cells, I think it was, he called it The Rock. Remember that? Here at The Rock, we have one rule: obey all rules! I loved it. And that's kind of the way legalism goes. Obey all the rules!

Legalism just does that. It just adds and adds and adds. Do you know that even in the Old Testament, God prophesied through Isaiah speaking to the people of Israel saying that they were going to take the basic instruction of the law and they were going to add to it ad nauseum to the point where it became ridiculous and it actually caused their own downfall. Let me show you this from Isaiah:

**Isaiah 28:13 (ESV)**

*And the word of the LORD will be to them precept upon precept, precept upon precept, line upon line, line upon line, here a little, there a little, that they may go, and fall backward, and be broken, and snared, and taken.*

And I've got to tell you something, this is probably the best description of endless legalism that I've ever heard. That when you are starting to live by rules, I'm telling you, you're going to die by rules. They will suffocate you. Isn't that what Jesus said to the religious leaders, Pharisees, and so forth of his time? He says, you load these burdens upon people's backs, and you're not willing to lift a finger to help them, but you just load rule upon rule. That's exactly what

legalism does. But rather than leave you with a bummer about legalism, let me close with a wonderful passage I believe that talks about the new covenant of grace from Galatians, where Paul says:

**Galatians 2:15,16,21**

~~*We ourselves are Jews by birth...yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified. For if righteousness were through the law, then Christ died for no purpose.*~~

*“We ourselves are Jews by birth. And yet we know that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ and not by works of the law, because by works of the law, no one will be justified. (And I love this last sentence) For if righteousness were through the law, (in other words, if it could be gained through good works and keeping rules) then Christ died for no purpose.”*

If rules can get you into Heaven, there was no reason for Jesus to come. Right? Isn't that true? It's crazy. Remember when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane? Terrible suffering. He cries out in prayer, and He says, “*Father, if there be any other way, let this cup pass from me.*” Did you ever notice the cup didn't pass?

And by the way, the cup was the cup of God's wrath that He had to drink full. But He said, “if there's any other way, let this cup pass.” Guys, there was no other way. The fact that He took that cup fully as our Savior proves there was no other way. There was no other way to get the job done.

Your goodness did doesn't earn you anything. So as believers, we're prepared, right? And this is why Paul is giving us this in these first five verses of chapter 4, to equip the body of Christ to say, don't go there. Even though in your flesh dwells no good thing, don't go there. Don't think that by crucifying the flesh, you're going to be made righteous before God.

Now, we are to bring our flesh to the cross, but not for righteousness, for holiness. And that's something we can only do after we're saved. You can't bring your flesh to the cross before you're saved to be justified before God. It's not possible. Only through the power of the Holy Spirit can we say no to the flesh.

So, we're going to stop there. We'll pick it up right where we left off. Let's stand together, we're going to close in prayer. We'll have some folks down front here to pray with you if you need prayer this morning for any reason at all.

Father, we just take a moment now just to quiet our hearts and just commit the message that we've heard here from the scriptures, into our hearts into our minds that we might be transformed by it, Lord, and that we might be set free from the bondage of trying to please You by good works or trying to become righteous, be made righteous in Your sight by living a holy life. Lord, we can't do it. We can't do it.

And we just confess to you right now that it is only by grace through faith that we can be saved. Lord, equip us to stand against legalism and the introduction of rules and restrictions to earn our way to You. It cannot happen. And we just determine in our hearts, Lord God, to hold on to the faith that was once for all conveyed to us through the scriptures, through Your holy apostles.

Lord, help us to stand strong, even in these dark days. We look to You to accomplish it in the name of Jesus, who is the Savior. And all God's people said, amen.

God bless you. Have a good rest of your Sunday.