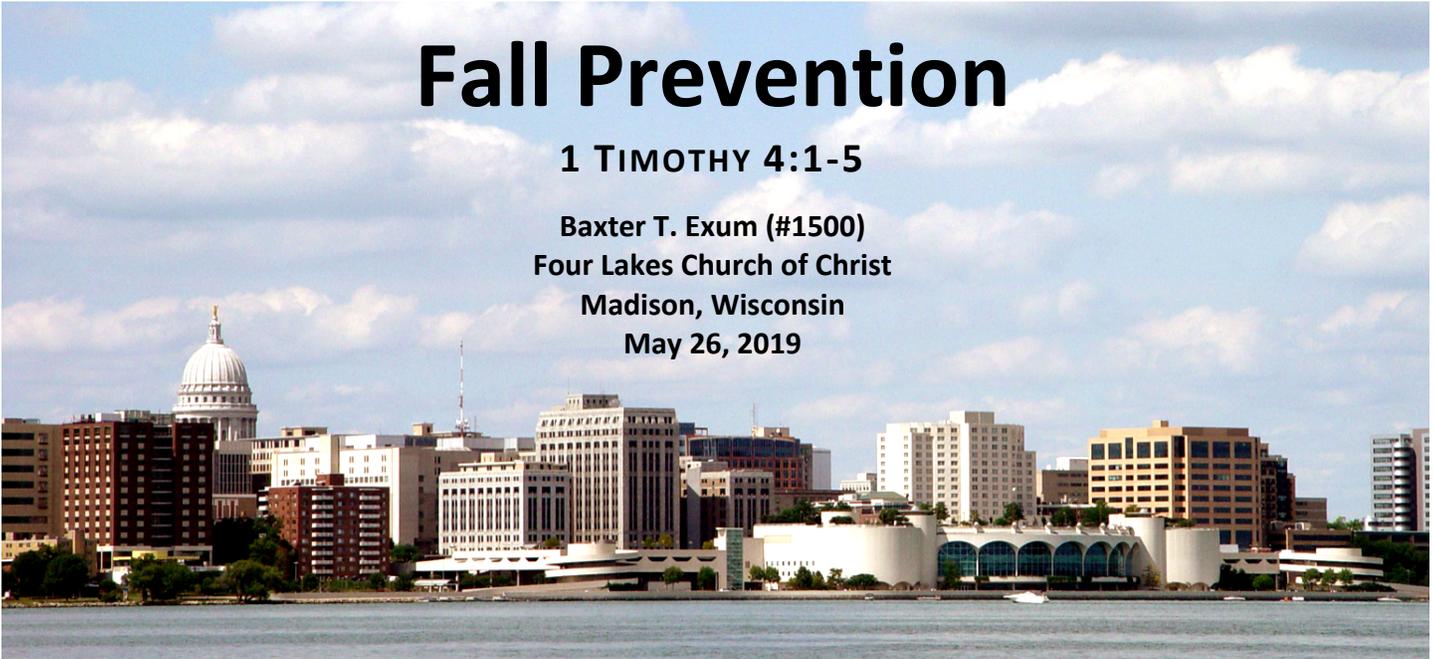


# Fall Prevention

1 TIMOTHY 4:1-5

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This morning we return to our study of 1 Timothy, and in 1 Timothy 4 we come to an ominous warning. Most of you know that I love being outside, and when you do some hiking here and there - if you go anywhere exciting and worthwhile, you have a way of finding some rather ominous warning signs. And these are in no particular order:

- This one comes near the end of the Presque Isle River, where it empties into Lake Superior, about 45 minutes northeast of Hurley. Basically: Stay on the trail and do not swim in this river, and the reminder at the end, that “Wading or swimming could end your vacation.”
- This one comes from Keola’s Bible camp in Alaska, Midnight Sun Bible Camp. We hit the shower house while we were up there last summer, and I know you can’t read the fine print, but the sign explains that due to bears, campers must always have a buddy and bear spray when using the restroom in the middle of the night! And then they have an extra can of bear spray mounted on the wall between the boys and girls side. Since we couldn’t take ours on the plane, we donated our bear spray to the church that runs the camp on our last day up there. I cannot imagine directing a youth camp where one of the rules is to take bear spray to the shower house!
- This is a warning on the tsunami evacuation stairs where my sister lives out in Port Angeles, Washington. I took those stairs to get coffee downtown every day.
- This one comes from right here in Madison! It’s not really hiking related, but this is from Fraboni’s Deli just off Monona Drive. A great place to eat, but the woman behind the counter looked rather serious. I put my phone away.
- This one isn’t really hiking related either, but it was something of a warning. This is in an aircraft hanger up in Anchorage. They had an open house and some demonstrations the day we were there, and it is apparently very important to pilots that they not lose the ice scoop!
- You might have seen these signs at the Dane County Coliseum. Some of our young men let me tag along to the monster truck rally a year or two ago. And if you know the coliseum, you know how snow can slide down that domed roof.
- This one is on the visitor center at Hurricane Ridge in Olympic National Park out near my sister.
- My sister and I found this one on a beach out in Washington State. To me, it looked like something from a horror movie, but I am sure there was a good reason for it. I took a quick picture right before we walked past it.

- This was on a trip out west a few years ago, driving through Wyoming. Due to the wind that day, they actually shut down the road for all semis. The picture is a bit crooked due to holding the wheel and the phone going 80 MPH with 80 MPH cross winds.
- A number of trails have taken me through bear country. One of these is from the Smoky Mountains, and one is from somewhere in Washington State. Tennessee has things in nature that can kill you. Basically, try not to look like food to a bear.
- These are the vicious animals we have around here. This was on a hike with Hans last year, to the animal sanctuary at the MacKenzie Center up near Poynette.
- Out near my sister, they have cougars. These are from two of the trails we've been on out there. The theory with cougars is to make yourself look like more trouble than you're worth. And never turn your back on a cougar apparently.
- Goats are also a threat. I thought my sister was joking when she told me to steer clear of goats. And then I started seeing the signs. Goats will kill you. This past Friday, I Googled "goat helicopter," because I remembered that they actually kidnapped and relocated some goats out of Olympic National Park a few months ago. Here is the headline in the Seattle Times, "Opioid darts, helicopters, refrigerator trucks: How to move a goat from one mountain range to another." I learned too much. The goat-nappers carry Narcan in case they are exposed to the tranquilizer, which is 10,000 times more potent than morphine. I highly recommend you research the flying goats out in Washington, but on the trail, goats are dangerous.
- And then we have snakes - this is at a rest area somewhere in South Dakota, I think. I stayed on the sidewalk.
- And this last one is from a hike my sister and I took north of Anchorage last summer. I've seen quite a few cliff warnings, but there was just something about this guy going over head first. It seemed especially ominous for some reason.

But the point of all of this is: Back in 1 Timothy, when we come to 1 Timothy 4, we come to an ominous warning. Paul interrupts this generally positive book with these words, ***"But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith...."*** We will get to the rest of the passage in just a moment, but here at the beginning, we find that the warning comes from the Spirit. This is from God - not from a park ranger, not from a deli owner, not from the Department of Transportation, not from a camp director, but from God. And the warning is clear. This isn't a feeling, this isn't a nudge, but the Spirit uses words, ***"the Spirit explicitly says."*** God has warned Paul through His own Spirit. And the warning is about something that will happen in the ***"later times."*** Generally, this refers to the Christian age - any time from the cross to the end of time. And that is true here, but in this case, the warning is about something that will happen at some point in the future, after Paul writes these words. And the warning is that some will ***"fall away."*** And the word Paul uses seems to be the basis of the English word ***"apostasy,"*** to fall away. One source I read this week suggested that ***"apostasy"*** is the opposite of what it means to ***"repent."*** When we ***"repent,"*** we turn back to God. When we fall away, we turn away from God. So, this is a serious warning, and it is a warning Timothy needs to obey. This is something he needs to do something about. This is not a warning to ignore. Warnings help us prepare. When we hear the fire alarm or when we have a tornado warning, we know that there is something we need to do, and we need to do it both quickly and decisively. The same is true here, and the warning Paul gives is that ***"some will fall away from the faith."***

We need to note here that to fall away from the faith, a person first needs to be IN the faith. In other words, we cannot fall away from something we were never in in the first place. If I leave the city of Madison, it means

that I was here at one point. I mention this, because some will argue that it is impossible to fall away from the faith. And yet, Paul warns about it. So, this is a very real danger.

And this kind of warning is not a surprise to us, is it? We've seen this kind of falling away all through the Bible. We think of this study of Judges we just wrapped up this morning. That whole book is a story of falling away. Moses warned about it in Deuteronomy 28, but the people fell anyway. In the New Testament, Jesus warned about false prophets in the Sermon on the Mount (in Matthew 7:15-16).

So the question is: How can we protect ourselves from this? How can we protect each other? After all, this is Paul's purpose for writing. So, since falling away is a very real danger, how do we guard against it? How do we stay safe? Let's look at the passage, and then I'd like to point out four ideas - 1 Timothy 4:1-5,

***<sup>1</sup> But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, <sup>2</sup> by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, <sup>3</sup> men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from foods which God has created to be gratefully shared in 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 gratitude; <sup>5</sup> for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer.***

- I. So, when it comes to keeping ourselves safe from falling away, I want us to notice four steps here, starting with Paul's reminder (in verse 1) that **THE SOURCE OF APOSTASY IS SATAN.**

Or maybe another way of putting this would be to remember that we are in a spiritual struggle, or as I've put on the wall up here, we avoid falling by "Recognizing the Source of the Threat." It seems that if we are defending our homes or if we are defending this building from a PHYSICAL attack, it would help tremendously to know where the attack is coming from. In the same way, one of the first elements in defending against a spiritual attack is to know where the attack is coming from. And Paul tells us here that the danger is spiritual. He gives the warning that we are not to pay attention, ***"...to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons."***

This mirrors the warning Paul gives in Ephesians 6:11-12 (in a passage written to the same congregation Paul is writing here in 1 Timothy), ***"Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places."*** So, we are in a spiritual struggle facing a spiritual enemy. Satan's primary mission, his objective, is to pull us way. Satan wants us to fall, and he will use ***"deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons"*** to accomplish that mission. We think of what Job went through. Job and his friends did not know that he was in a spiritual struggle, and yet, that is what it was. Satan was working behind the scenes to make that man's life miserable, and his goal was to embarrass God. And just as Satan wanted Job to fall, he also wants us to fall. And today, he uses deception to try to make that happen. In 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, Paul also warns about, ***"...false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ. No wonder,"*** he says, ***"for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds."*** He had warned about this in verse 3 of the same chapter, ***"But I am afraid,"*** he says, ***"that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ."*** The gospel is pure and simple, but Satan tries to make it complicated. And so we have the warning against paying attention ***"to deceitful***

***spirits and doctrines of demons.***” And before we move on, I would just briefly point out the contrast here in verse 1 - on one hand, we have the Spirit of God explicitly warning us about something (he does this by using inspired words through the apostle Paul), and then we have (with a stark contrast), ***“deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons.”*** So, we have the simplicity of the word of God, and then we have everything else. But the idea here at the beginning is: The first step in not falling away is knowing what we are up against. We need to know the source of these strange doctrines. This is a spiritual struggle.

## II. The next part of this involves UNDERSTANDING THE MODE OF DELIVERY.

And I’ve worded it like this, because of Paul’s transition between the first two verses here. We have to guard against the ***“doctrines of demons”*** that are delivered, ***“...by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.”*** So, these spirits and demons do not deceive us directly, but they work through others in some way. Sometimes we’ve noted that God does not tell people what to do to be saved directly, but he works through faithful teachers - Paul was taught by Ananias, Cornelius was taught by Peter, Timothy was taught by Paul, and so on. In perhaps the same way, Satan doesn’t deceive us and pull us away directly, but he works through others. He works ***“by means of the hypocrisy of liars.”*** We think about Jesus’ warning about wolves in sheep’s clothing (in Matthew 7:15). On the outside, they appear to be sheep, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. We hate to think this way about religious leaders, but this warning comes from Jesus. There are some people, many people, in fact, who teach one thing and do something completely different. They are hypocrites and liars, as Paul says.

And then he continues by describing these people as those who are ***“seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron.”*** The conscience always tells us to do what we think to be right. What we THINK is right may or may not actually be right, but the conscience always tells us to do what we THINK to be right. To actually be right, the conscience needs to be properly trained, the conscience needs to be properly educated and informed. But the danger here comes when religious leaders and teachers know what is right, but they intentionally turn away from it. They continue living in hypocrisy, teaching one thing and doing something else. And over time, the conscience is ***“seared.”*** That is, the conscience becomes numb and useless; it becomes calloused. I’ve told you about my friend in college who in a speech class demonstrated how to remove a fishhook. He started by inserting a fishhook in his own hand. That’s the only thing I remember from that class. I don’t even remember what I spoke about that week, but I know how to remove a fishhook! But he inserted that hook through a callous on his hand. It didn’t have any feeling. And that can happen spiritually, where we teach one thing and do something else, and if we do it long enough, we don’t care anymore. We become calloused. This happens all the time, and Paul says that we need to be aware of it. We need to be on guard against this. If you remember the history in Ephesus, a number of years before this, Paul met the elders from Ephesus and warned them (as elders) that, ***“...after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them. Therefore be on the alert....”*** This threat came from within the eldership! So, it seems that Satan uses hypocrisy as a tool for pulling people away. He uses dishonest and insincere religious leaders to pull us down, to pull us away.

How do we avoid this? First of all, if we are the ones doing the teaching, we need to make sure that we make a sincere effort to actually do what we tell others they need to be doing! Let’s not be hypocrites! But then, let’s also make sure we educate the conscience properly. We need to know what the word says. And we’ll get back to that in just a bit. But we need to protect ourselves spiritually. We can’t be filling our minds with all kinds of filth during the week, and then going out and teaching a class while essentially faking it. Our thoughts need to

agree with what we are teaching. And that goes for all of us. What are we struggling with? Is there something we are doing right now in our personal lives that makes us feel guilty? That is the conscience speaking. Let us not ignore the conscience!

- III. **So, to help avoid falling, we need to realize where the threat is coming from, we need to be able to identify those who are working on Satan's behalf (so to speak) - hypocritical liars with seared consciences - and then we need to BE AWARE OF THE ACTUAL FALSEHOODS THEY ARE SPREADING - WE MUST IDENTIFY THE FALSE TEACHINGS.**

And Paul gives us two examples here: In this case, they were to be on the lookout for ***"...men who forbid marriage and advocate abstaining from [certain] foods."*** This is certainly not an exhaustive list by any means, but in those early years, this is how it would start. And notice how it starts small. These are some areas that might not affect every person. So, if somebody comes in and suggests that to be pleasing to God you need to not eat meat on Fridays, for example, we might be tempted to let that slide. We might justify it, "Well, I don't need to eat meat every day of the week anyway, and just to avoid some conflict in this area, I might just go along with this. After all, I can eat fish on Friday, and fish is pretty close to meat." Is this sounding a bit familiar? Or concerning marriage, yes, Paul did suggest that marriage wasn't for everybody, especially during a time of persecution, and this new rule doesn't affect me directly, so I think we can just go along with this one as well. And yet, it starts small, doesn't it? And before long, we have an entire class of unmarried people getting together and making up rules for the rest of us who are married. And before long, we have an entire class of people who obviously aren't skipping any meals, getting together and making up rules for what the rest of us can eat. And this has a way of building over time. Paul tells us here: Watch out for this! He gives us these two man-made rules as examples of what to avoid. And each one has just a bit of truth to it. Like I said, in 1 Corinthians 7, Paul does mention abstaining from marriage as a possibility. And in Matthew 19, in the context of a discussion on divorce, Jesus does point out that some people may need to live in celibacy. And concerning food, we might agree that God does care about what we eat. In the Old Testament, there were food restrictions (so this has the ring of truth to it), and in the New Testament we are not to be gluttons, we are to take care of this body we've been given, and so on. But just like Satan did in the garden, he takes a bit of truth, and he adds to it, he twists it a bit, and before long, what is right is portrayed as being wrong, and what is wrong is portrayed as being right. In fact, the two things declared by God to be GOOD in Genesis (food and marriage) are now declared to be BAD. And then we have a whole system of man-made rules. We think of Jesus' condemnation of the scribes and the Pharisees in Matthew 15, ***"You hypocrites, rightly did Isaiah prophesy of you: 'This people honors ME with their lips, but their heart is far away from Me. But in vain do they worship Me, teaching as doctrines the precepts of men.'"*** In context, there, by the way, Jesus was outraged that these people were using God as an excuse for not taking care of their elderly parents. They had completely flip-flopped right and wrong and were using God's Law as an excuse.

I was blown away this week to see that a late-term abortion provider had an opinion piece in the New York Times, and the headline said, "Pregnancy Kills. Abortion Saves Lives." I could read his words, and I could understand what he was saying (in that the words were in English), but what a bizarre flip-flop of the truth on this issue! We aren't discussing abortion this morning, but what he did with this headline is what often happens with various false teachings in the religious realm. What is false is defended as being true, and what is true is ridiculed as being false. It's the same thing we see with the gay marriage debate. It's what Satan did in the garden. He took God's warning about eating from the tree, he added one word, and then he made God seem just a little more strict than he actually was - not only were they not to eat from the tree, but Satan made it seem as if God had also forbidden them from even touching it. He made God's law seem ridiculous.

Satan then uses that little bit of mental gymnastics to convince the woman to do exactly what God had told them not to do. That is how false teaching works. And then the sin that it promotes and defends spreads just like yeast in a lump of dough (1 Corinthians 5), and before long, entire religious groups have drifted away into apostasy. They have fallen away. Perhaps you have seen charts listing various false teachings and when they began: Infant baptism first promoted in 150 AD, sprinkling first substituted for immersion in 251 AD, priests dressing different from everybody else around 500 AD, musical instruments added to worship (and strongly opposed) around 600 AD, incense used in worship in 796 AD, fasting on Fridays during Lent in 998 AD, celibacy in the priesthood in 1079 AD, and on, and on, and on.

We can't study every departure from the faith, but we do have these two examples here as a warning. We need to be aware of what is false.

#### IV. And this leads us to the last step in this passage, and that is: **WE MUST KNOW THE TRUTH.**

And I've put this here because Paul explains why these doctrines are false by appealing to Scripture. The answer to whacked out doctrine is Scripture! These foods they were being taught not to eat were actually, ***"...created [by God] to be gratefully shared in by those who believe and know the truth. For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with gratitude; for it is sanctified by means of the word of God and prayer."*** So, if somebody tells us that it is a sin to eat something, our response is that God has declared that all food is good, if we are thankful for it. The creation itself was declared to be ***"good"*** in Genesis 1, God allowed the human race to start eating animals after the flood in Genesis 9, the Jews had some food restrictions in their Law, but in Mark 7:18-19 Jesus himself declared all foods spiritually clean. In other words, we can eat what we want without living in fear of offending God. I might need to restrict my freedom a bit so as not to cause somebody else to fall (as we learn in Romans 14), but all food (the food itself) is okay to eat. We learn this in Scripture. The word of God, then, destroys this particular false doctrine that you couldn't eat certain foods. But we do need to be thankful. Several years ago, somebody asked me about the practice of praying before meals and where that came from. It is in the Bible! Jesus often prayed before he ate. Paul endorses it here. If we're in public, we don't need to make a big deal about it. Jesus warned about this in Matthew 6. So, we might need to pray on our own so as not to attract unnecessary attention. But we are not to be like our dog who finishes her food as it hits the dish. But we need to slow down a bit to thank God for our food.

But back to the passage here: The answer to an endless stream of false teachings is Scripture. And this ties in to where we are headed next week - the role of the preacher. The preacher's main job is to preach the word of God. He might do other things, but he can never get distracted from his main mission of proclaiming the word. But that is next week.

#### **Conclusion:**

Today, we have learned some strategies for protecting ourselves from falling - we recognize the source of the threat, we understand the mode of delivery, we identify the false teachings themselves, and above all we must know the truth of God's word. Some of you here today know what kind of an impact a single fall can have on your life - sometimes for the rest of your life. I think of my grandfather who fell in the airport down in Tampa on his way back to Nashville. He broke his hip, and it changed his life. In a sense, that event was the beginning of the end for him. And if that is true physically, it is also true spiritually.

And so, we started with some warning signs. This passage right here is yet another warning sign given by Paul to the church in Ephesus. He warns the elders in Acts 20, he warns the young preacher Timothy here in 1 Timothy 4, he warns the whole church in the book of Ephesians, and unfortunately, by the time we get to the book of Revelation, it seems that the church in Ephesus had left its first love. Despite the warnings, by 95 or 96 AD, most of them had drifted. But, we learn from their mistakes. As a congregation, we cannot allow ourselves to get pulled away from the simplicity of God's plan.

His plan for our salvation is that we look at Jesus' death, burial, and resurrection, and that we respond in faith with obedience. We believe in Jesus as being the Son of God, we turn away from sin, and we allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism. At that moment, our sins are covered by his blood and we are born into God's family. If you have any questions at all, we hope you will get in touch. But if you are ready to obey this good news right now, we hope you will let us know as we sing this next song. Let's stand and sing...

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