

**Title: A Mature Church Perseveres in the Faith**

**Text: 1 Timothy 4:1-5**

**How does a church persevere in the faith?**

*On any given weekend, about three in 10 U.S. adults attend religious services, down from 42% two decades ago. Church attendance will likely continue to decline in the future, given younger Americans' weaker attachments to religion.*

*Specifically, more 18- to 29-year-olds, 35%, say they have no religious preference than identify with any specific faith, such as Protestant/nondenominational Christian (32%) or Catholic (19%).*

*Additionally, young adults, both those with and without a religious preference, are much less likely to attend religious services -- 22% attend regularly, eight points below the national average.*

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/642548/church-attendance-declined-religious-groups.aspx>

Expand on this information...

**Main Idea: The Mature Church Always Listens to God**

Name some of the voices the church of Jesus Christ might be tempted to listen to?

There are several "**ungodly voices**" that the church might be tempted to listen to, which could distract it from its mission to worship God well and make disciples.

Here are a few examples:

**Cultural Relativism:** This voice promotes the idea that all beliefs and practices are equally valid, leading to the dilution of biblical truth and moral standards.

**Prosperity Gospel:** This teaching emphasizes material wealth and physical well-being as signs of God's favor, which can distract from the true message of the gospel.

**Secular Humanism:** This philosophy centers on human reason and ethics without reference to God, often promoting self-sufficiency and diminishing the need for a Savior.

**Political Ideologies:** Aligning too closely with any political party or ideology can lead the church to prioritize political agendas over the gospel mission.

**Moral Therapeutic Deism:** This belief system treats God as a distant being whose main role is to help people be happy and feel good about themselves, rather than calling for repentance and discipleship.

**Consumerism:** Focusing on church growth strategies that cater to consumer desires can lead to a watered-down gospel that prioritizes entertainment over spiritual depth and transformation.

**New Age Spirituality:** Incorporating elements of New Age practices and beliefs, which often contradict biblical teachings, can lead to syncretism and confusion.

**Social Gospel:** While addressing social issues is important, focusing solely on social justice without the foundation of the gospel can lead to a neglect of evangelism and discipleship.

**Anti-intellectualism:** Rejecting critical thinking and theological study can lead to a shallow faith that is easily swayed by false teachings.

**Hyper-individualism:** Prioritizing personal experience and subjective truth over communal faith and biblical authority can erode the unity and doctrinal soundness of the church.

There is one voice that is consistently trying to gain a hearing and that voice is the evil one, Satan.

You do not need to be a very mature Christian to know he is not the one you want to listen to...

### 1. Church - Don't Listen to the Evil One (vs. 1-3)

#### **1 Timothy 4:1-3 (ESV)**

*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, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared, who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

If you remember from last week, a mature church has a very high regard for the truth, the Word of God.

Paul mentions the Holy Spirit in this verse and I think this is interesting because who is the author of the Scriptures?

The Holy Spirit...

#### **2 Peter 1:21 (ESV)**

*For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit.*

The Holy Spirit wrote the Scriptures through specific men that He chose to write the Bible that we have today.

And the Scriptures do warn that things will get worse and worse in the future, later times...

#### **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 with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.*

The stark reality is that not all who claim to be Christ followers really are.

**Matthew 7:21 (ESV)**

*“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven.*

Some start off professing Christ, but later, incrementally, start to deviate from the truth contained in the Scriptures.

They start to follow the line of questioning that the Evil one introduced in the beginning with Adam and Eve.

**Genesis 3:1–5 (ESV)**

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

This is what happens to those who profess Christ but start to listen to voices that are contrary to God’s Holy Truth. They start to slip little by little. They start to doubt the very Word that was given to lead them to ultimate salvation.

**The Bible Knowledge Commentary (4:1)**

*Spiritual error is seldom due to innocent mistakes. It is more often due to the conscious strategies of God’s spiritual enemies (cf. Eph. 6:12). The teachings (didaskaliais) of demons are false doctrines taught by errorists whose views are instigated by demons.*

The word for **“depart”** in this verse is **ἀποστήσονται** which is apostatize.

Jesus warned about this...

**Matthew 24:4–5 (ESV)**

*And Jesus answered them, “See that no one leads you astray. For many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will lead many astray.*

MacArthur argues that *“Apostasy will exist throughout that period, reaching a climax shortly before Christ returns.”* MSB

With the invention of the internet has come some amazing advancements in our society and our world. You can instantaneously connect with someone on the other side of the world.

Pastor Larry and I have had, over the years connection not only audibly but visually through online platforms like Zoom or Facebook Messenger.

I've been able to complete two degrees online.

I can stay in touch with family and friends otherwise impossible.

Amazing!

But for all the good and convenience the internet brings, it brings even more possibilities for evil and wickedness.

False teaching abounds online.

*Sandy Chinavare, a wonderful member of our church and a front desk volunteer, some time ago asked me to look at, what appeared to be a viable Christian website. After some digging and research we found out that what appeared to be Christian was actually a cult.*

There are actually people in our world that desire to destroy biblical Christianity. They are empowered by demonic forces and they hate the gospel and what it stands for. Paul predicts this...

**1 Timothy 4:2 (ESV)**

*through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared,*

These people are hardened to the Lord and His truth. They have a form of godliness but they deny the powers thereof because they want things their way, not the way of the Lord. In this case, Paul gives some specific standards these false teachers require.

**1 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)**

*who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

This is a form of **asceticism**. What is this?

**Asceticism** is a lifestyle characterized by abstinence from various worldly pleasures, often with the aim of pursuing spiritual goals. Ascetics may practice extreme self-discipline and self-denial, foregoing physical comforts and material wealth to achieve a higher state of spiritual purity or enlightenment. This practice is found in many religious traditions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Islam.

In **Christianity**, for example, ascetic practices can include fasting, celibacy, and living in seclusion. Early Christian ascetics, like the Desert Fathers, sought to renounce worldly attachments to draw closer to God. Similarly, monastic traditions often involve rigorous self-discipline and meditation as means to transcend earthly desires and attain spiritual growth.

Okay, so how is this a problem?

Notice two key words Paul uses in verse 3...

*“who **FORBID** marriage and **REQUIRE** abstinence from foods...”*

In other words, it is not a problem for a Christian to fast or abstain from certain pleasurable things like various foods or even marriage. It is even encouraged at times.

However, those in spiritual leadership cannot forbid marriage (which is ordained by God) and they cannot require abstinence from foods or other things in which the Lord has no moratorium.

The issue Paul is dealing with is the heresy that salvation comes with the these requirements.

Paul takes a deep dive on this issue in his letter to the Galatians. The churches in Galatia were running after a different gospel than the Good News of Christ's finished work on the cross providing salvation to those who, by faith believe on Christ. We do not add to, nor take away from the Gospel message. Listen to his strong words to the church...

**Galatians 1:6–9 (ESV)**

*I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting him who called you in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel— not that there is another one, but there are some who trouble you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. As we have said before, so now I say again: If anyone is preaching to you a gospel contrary to the one you received, let him be accursed.*

Wow! Let him or her be accursed! Getting the gospel right is serious business! The lesson? Don't listen to false teaching which is rooted in the Evil One.

Later in the letter of Galatians Paul describes how Peter succumbed to the tactics of the purveyors of a perverted Gospel. Paul got in Peter's face publically about this!

**Galatians 2:11–14 (ESV)**

*But when Cephas came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For before certain men came from James, he was eating with the Gentiles; but when they came he drew back and separated himself, fearing the circumcision party. And the rest of the Jews acted hypocritically along with him, so that even Barnabas was led astray by their hypocrisy. But when I saw that their conduct was not in step with the*

*truth of the gospel, I said to Cephas before them all, "If you, though a Jew, live like a Gentile and not like a Jew, how can you force the Gentiles to live like Jews?"*

Giving up things does not earn you eternal salvation. Being harsh to your body does not save you.

There is nothing you can do to be saved - it is a gift of God.

Adding to the gift is an offense. However, receiving the gift with joy is a pleasure to God.

And it is those who have receive and accepted the Truth that truly understand this.

**1 Timothy 4:3 (ESV)**

*who forbid marriage and require abstinence from foods that God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.*

If your worldview contains the idea that you must earn or contribute to making God pleased with you so you can have eternal life with God, you are sorely mistaken.

You are listening to voices that are contrary to the Word of God. Demonic voices!

The message that you must earn or contribute to your salvation by giving things up like marriage and food, is a message from the evil one.

It is not the Good News that God sent His Son to rescue you from eternal Hell by dying on the cross and rising from the dead.

We as Christians must be so very careful about this.

Peter, who knew better, started listening to wicked voices.

And because Peter capitulated, others followed him. Thank the Lord that Paul had the spiritual backbone to correct Peter and this situation.

Folks, the application is easy here. Be sure to know who you are listening to.

Are they rooted in truth? The truth of the word of God or in a source of information that is contrary to God.

We must be very careful because 98% truth is still a lie.

Satan is called the father of all lies. So be careful which voices you are listening to.

And Jesus said these words demonstrating there is no middle ground in following Him.

**Matthew 12:30 (ESV)**

*Whoever is not with me is against me, and whoever does not gather with me scatters.*

Are you with Christ? Then be very careful to not listen to the evil one.

**Review** - The Mature Church Always Listens to God

Don't listen to the Evil One

## **2. Church - Listen Instead to God (vs. 4-5)**

### **1 Timothy 4:4-5 (ESV)**

*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

Do you understand the character of God? Some think God is a cosmic curmudgeon.

Some think Him to be an angry Father.

Some think that He is watching our every move to see if we are doing everything right and when we slip up He is there to punish us.

While it is true that our God is a God of wrath and anger, that wrath and anger is against sin.

Sin is an abomination to our Heavenly Father.

And for those that choose their sin over our Father's gracious and good gift of rescue from eternal Hell, they will receive what they desire - Which is to have nothing to do with their Creator God who is revealed in the Bible.

But our God is not a monster....

### **Psalm 30:5 (ESV)**

*For his anger is but for a moment, and his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may tarry for the night, but joy comes with the morning.*

And do you know where our ultimate experience of joy rests? In His rescue of sinners like us.

Isn't God good to devise a plan of rescue so any individual does not need to endure Hell, but instead enjoy Heaven at the expense of the life's blood of the redeemer, Jesus Christ?

And Paul's point in verses 4-5 are clear. This good God created everything and it is good.

### **Genesis 1:10 (ESV)**

*God called the dry land Earth, and the waters that were gathered together he called Seas. **And God saw that it was good.***

### **Genesis 1:12 (ESV)**

*The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. **And God saw that it was good.***

**Genesis 1:17-18 (ESV)**

*And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. **And God saw that it was good.***

**Genesis 1:21 (ESV)**

*So God created the great sea creatures and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. **And God saw that it was good.***

**Genesis 1:25 (ESV)**

*And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind. **And God saw that it was good.***

God then created Adam and He said...

**Genesis 1:31 (ESV)**

*And God saw everything that he had made, and behold, **it was very good.** And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day.*

In chapter 3 of Genesis, we see the first man and women rebel against God and then plunge humanity into the sinful condition we all suffer from today.

**Romans 3:23 (ESV)**

*for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God,*

This catastrophic event was all because Adam and Eve refused to listen to God who created all things to be very good.

We continue to live under the sinful curse, not only us but all of God's good creation.

**Romans 8:19-22 (ESV)**

*For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*



Creation, along with all the children of God long for the redemption of all of creation, that we will at last be freed from sin and death.

But what about the here and now? Is God's creation good, even though it and we are under the curse of sin?

Even under the curse, creation retains its **essential** goodness and purpose.

**Psalm 19:1 (ESV)**

*The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.*

Creation continues to reflect God's glory and power, serving as a testament to His nature and character.

This is why Paul can say...

**1 Timothy 4:4 (ESV)**

*For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving,*

The “**everything**” here is in reference to what he said about being mandated to give up certain things by the false teachers.

And the reason we do not NEED to give these things up is because they are gifts from the sweet providential hand of our heavenly Father.

We don't reject these gifts, instead we celebrate them with hearts overflowing with gratitude.

**James 1:17 (ESV)**

*Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow due to change.*

The gifts of **marriage** and **food** are both essential for the stability and growth of humanity, reflecting God's provision for our physical and relational needs.

But there is an interesting end to this verse that requires some clarity and explanation.

**1 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)**

*for it is made holy by the word of God and prayer.*

Everything (i.e. food and marriage, etc.)

There is a sense in which through the redemption of Christ believers are now considered holy and have the capacity for holiness.

We are remade new in this sense.

**2 Corinthians 5:17 (ESV)**

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

So marriage is made holy (it is reversed to a pre-curse) state because we are made new in Christ.

Marriage, when looked through the lenses of God's word and prayer, we see an institution designed to bring glory and honor to God.

This is Paul's point in his letter to the Ephesians when he discusses the roles of husband and wife.

**Ephesians 5:22-32 (ESV)**

*Wives, submit to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife even as Christ is the head of the church, his body, and is himself its Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit in everything to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, that he might sanctify her, having cleansed her by the washing of water with the word, so that he might present the church to himself in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, that she might be holy and without blemish. In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church, because we are members of his body. "Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and hold fast to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh." This mystery is profound, and I am saying that it refers to Christ and the church.*

When this description is accomplished well in Christian marriages, it brings glory to Christ as it accentuates the gospel.

And when we have a proper view of food - as a gift from God for not only our sustenance and preservation, but for celebration as well, we too can use food for the glory of God.

**1 Corinthians 10:31 (ESV)**

*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.*

Our marriages are made holy by the word of God and prayer.

and...

Our food is made holy by the word of God and prayer.

**The MacArthur Study Bible (Chapter 4)**

*The means for so doing are thankful prayer and an understanding that the Word of God has set aside the temporary Mosaic dietary restrictions (Mark 7:19; Acts 10:9-15; Rom. 14:1-12; Col. 2:16, 17).*

On the other hand - in regard to the unbeliever...

**Titus 1:15 (ESV)**

*To the pure, all things are pure, but to the defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure; but both their minds and their consciences are defiled.*

So, Believer, because of prayer and the word of God not only are you considered holy, but so is everything God has created!

And it is made holy by prayer and His beautiful word...

*One day, you come across a beautifully crafted radio labeled "God's Radio." It's said to have the ability to let you hear the voice of God. You're intrigued and eager to try it out.*

*You turn on the radio and adjust the dial, seeking the right frequency. At first, all you hear is static, but with patience and careful tuning, you begin to hear a clear, gentle voice.*

*As you listen, you notice some static and interference. You realize that removing nearby electronic devices clears the signal, making the voice of God even clearer.*

*Now, with the frequency clear, you hear God's guidance, encouragement, and wisdom. The voice is calming and reassuring, providing direction for your life. You feel a deep sense of peace and purpose.*

*Excited about this incredible device, you share it with friends and family, encouraging them to tune in and experience the voice of God for themselves.*

God hasn't given us a radio where we can hear His beautiful voice. But He has given us His beautiful Word. After all, this is His way of communicating to us today. He speaks to us through His Word.

He has also given us the gift of prayer. This is our way of touching the holiness of His Heavenly home.

Prayer and reading God's Word transports us to holiness!

Christian, do you want to hear from God? Open up your Bible and start to listen to what He has to say to you. And then pray it back to Him!

*Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end in prayer.*

**William Bridge**

Seriously, when you know how to read and understand the Bible, it will, by the power of the Holy Spirit, transform you.

*You put these three things together—the historical context, the social context, and the literary context—and you really have the trinity of contexts that feed into good Bible reading. - Darrell L. Bock*

*The Bible does not thrill, the Bible nourishes. Give time to the reading of the Bible, and the recreating effect is as real as that of fresh air physically. - Oswald Chambers (Lecturer and Missionary)*

I need to challenge all of us here this morning. Whether you are an elder, deacon, or whomever you are in this congregation.

#### BE INTENTIONAL ABOUT YOUR BIBLE READING.

*Hit-and-run Bible reading can often become hit and miss.*

*John Blanchard*

#### MAKE A PLAN AND STICK WITH IT.

#### GET SOME ACCOUNTABILITY.

#### LISTENING TO THE BIBLE COUNTS.

#### START YOUR DAY OFF WITH YOUR BIBLE BEFORE YOU GET ONLINE.

*I venture to say that the bulk of Christians spend more time in reading the newspaper than they do in reading the Word of God.*

*Charles Spurgeon*

#### DO WHAT GOD TELLS YOU IN HIS WORD - Information + Application = Transformation!

Do whatever you can to fill your mind with the voice of God.

There is no greater comfort, no more powerful source of peace, no stronger source of encouragement than hearing the voice of your Heavenly Father.

#### Review - The Mature Church Always Listens to God

Don't listen to the Evil One

Listen Instead to God

#### Conclusion

As we pursue maturity as a local congregation. It is crucial that you demand from the church leadership a pulpit and all areas of teaching to be thoroughly Bible saturated. We also must be leaders who pray.

And what this church must expect from each one of you that you are minimizing the voices from the world, and instead turning up the volume of God's voice through His holy Word. In addition, you, people of ABC, must become prayer warriors.

ABC - if we accomplish these two things well, God's holiness will manifest itself among us! God will accomplish amazing things through this congregation.

We will not simply stay alive, but we will thrive!

Families will flourish.

Children will chase after God.

People in this community will be reached for Jesus.

Disciples will be made.

**We as a whole will undoubtedly, unreservedly,** passionately persevere in the Faith!