

1Tim 24-05-19a

Good morning, welcome to the Sunday morning services here at Grace and Truth Bible Church. We are continuing our study in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and we have been looking at some of the ways in which these latter day conditions may come about and how we can be prepared and what God has provided for us by way of preparation so that even in advance of the day we won't be here when it fully comes, when the man of sin is revealed and so on. But inevitably there is groundwork that is laid and to not be deceived, to be prepared, to be blessed and to be a blessing is our opportunity and we are going to see from the Word of God this morning how God accomplishes that for us and through us.

Let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we'll begin. Father, thank you for another day, another opportunity to spend this time together in fellowship being built up and encouraged by contact with believers who are motivated and appreciate the Lord Jesus and the wonderful revelation of your plan and purpose in the scriptures. We thank you for the opportunity to represent your son, the Lord Jesus, on this earth as his body.

We pray that our fellowship and our time of study and reflection this morning will contribute to that purpose, that the Holy Spirit will find us easily guided and readily impressed with the priorities that come from your Word so that we can think and act and speak in a way that is useful and beneficial to others, whether in the immediate fellowship in our neighborhood or in the world at large. We pray these things in Jesus' name, Amen. Reviewing our passage right quick in 1 Timothy chapter 4, the Spirit expressly says that in the latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons, speaking lies in hypocrisy, having their own conscience seared with a hot iron, forbidding to marry, to abstain from foods which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth.

Every creation of God is good and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving, for it is sanctified by the Word of God and prayer. These two examples are both something that affects us internally and our own intake, if you will, of food and the fellowship that surrounds the sharing of meals, and then relationships, whether or not marriage is to be encouraged and with whom. And these who forbid to marry are trying to alter the natural inclination as believers to relationships, whether they're intimate relationships.

This is put for our social interactions of all kinds. It is put for our orientation to authority and to structure that God has emplaced for the benefit of all mankind. It's one of the general blessings.

And for those who want to upset the natural order, whether it is related to gender, whether it is related to marriage, whether it is related to other kinds of social interaction,

we just have this quick example forbidding to marry. You shouldn't marry certain kinds of people. You shouldn't marry at all.

We know better than God about how you should act when it comes to divinely ordained structures. And we know better than God what's going on in creation. And it's one thing to abstain from something to which you are allergic or that is intrinsically unhealthy.

We generally have dashboard indicators. We eat something and it makes us feel bad. We say, I don't believe I'll eat that anymore.

Now we have tests that can tell us that we need to avoid various elements of food. Most of these elements are present in excessive quantities because science has genetically modified our food or has placed a bunch of additives in it and the sea of chemicals and preservatives and flavor enhancers and other non-natural things. What God has created is to be received with thanksgiving, not necessarily everything that man wants to put into highly processed foods.

But this is common sense. We have an inbuilt sense of what is a healthy relationship with others and what is not. We have an inbuilt sense of what is good for us to take into our bodies and what is not.

And man imposing himself and elbowing his way in is not necessarily right. With societal pressure to take God's place in guiding us with regard to our relationships, with regard to our daily operations is a part of this deception. And it is guided by doctrines that originate with demons.

It is a departure from the faith. Notice the context here is such that we're not trying to regulate people's lives and say you must eat everything, but these areas related to relationships and related to our care of our own bodies is guided by faith. This begins with departure from the faith and it ends with sanctification through the word of God and prayer.

Every creation of God, whether it is people or whether it is food, can be received with thanksgiving if faith tells us that this is a good choice. This is in the arena of faith. You can't just go scrape a piece of poison ivy off the ground and make a salad out of it and say, well, I thanked God for it and everything that God has created is good.

This is in the realm of faith and those who depart from faith start changing guidance that comes from faith. Things that we trust God for, things that we look to God for discernment and discretion and good judgment. In that regard, we looked Wednesday night at the persuasive tools that have been used and are being used to deceive and to lead astray, to encourage people to depart from faith as their guide and instead listen to man, listen to people, listen to science, listen to... And we are not anti-scientific.

Science is wonderful as it testifies to nature and God's ordained facts and information

that are contained in nature. But in a departure from the faith, these things take place and deception occurs when we depart from the faith. Our faith informs us and gives us a truth detector.

And in that light, we looked at our conscience, which is our reality and truth detector. In that light, turn with me to the book of James, few pages forward from Timothy, Titus Philemon, Hebrews, James. This is a very nefarious and very effective campaign to deceive, to create false narratives that have an agenda, that have a goal.

We are enjoined, we are exhorted and commanded not to be deceived. And yet the most powerful tools for deception ever devised are now in operation. And here is the fundamental point.

This is the trunk of the tree that all of our branches this morning are connected to. I wanna share with you something that has recently been put in place. There is an artist from Lithuania.

His name is Benedictus Gillis, G-Y-L-Y-S. Benedictus Gillis is an artist and he's put up a very interesting piece of art slash technology. It is a portal between a street in Dublin, Ireland and a street in Manhattan, New York.

A giant sculpture containing an eight foot wide circular screen has been erected on a busy thoroughfare at the heart of each of those cities. You may have seen science fiction depictions in the past going all the way back to Star Trek. And I think there've been entire series around these alleged portals and gateways.

You step through it and you suddenly have traveled through a wormhole to some far off place. But this is an eight foot wide circular screen. And these screens show a live streamed video 24 hours a day, seven days a week of what's going on at the other end.

You walk down a drizzly Dublin street in the afternoon and there shimmering ahead of you on the pavement is an eight foot slice of New York in the morning sun. You can wave through this portal to a stranger going about his or her day 3,000 miles away and he or she can wave back. Imagine the possibilities.

I'm reading from an article from a place I'll tell you about later. Imagine the possibilities, a kiss across the ocean, a connection between the new world and the old one. Curiosity and laughter, glinting interactions between strangers amid the play of happenstance and the quotidian events of an ordinary day.

We would all revel in the new possibilities of human connection, right? Except no, that isn't what happens. Portal to hell is what the New York Post called it. Live Dublin, New York City video art installation is already bringing out the worst in people with lewd displays.

It reported with a mixture of feigned dismay and barely repressed glee that middle finger exchanges and other lewd gestures are a common means of communication on both sides of the portal. The portal had only been open for a few hours when the police had to forcibly remove a young woman who was quote, grinding her bum on the screen on the Irish end of the connection. Drunken Dubliners have taken to waving swastikas images of the burning towers of the World Trade Center at their American counterparts in New York.

In response, an American TikToker flashed her chest claiming she wanted to show Dubliners her quote, two New York homegrown potatoes. Those of us for whom this is not a surprise recognize that this is really just a microcosm of the internet itself. The wired world seemed to promise a new era of global human connection that would allow us to share the fruits of our knowledge, expand our communities, banish misunderstanding and widen our spheres of empathy.

Instead, 90% of it has been turned over to pornography. The rest of it is used to insult people we've never met, ambush innocent passersby with shocking internet images and ensure that death threats, rape threats and pranks spread at scale. Yes, we also share a few cute pictures of cats.

Thank heavens at least for those. Humanity is a many splendid thing, but it is a teachable moment whenever, now here's my point. This is the point of the illustration.

Whenever we are tempted to imagine that some technological gizmo will transform human behavior and usher in a new age of Aquarius, we are brought rapidly down to earth. Technologies don't change human behavior, they simply amplify it. So the portal, according to the post, bringing out the worst in people is just what technologies are going to do.

We are all still apes with ape brains and ape instincts. When we see someone peering at us, our instincts may tell us to smile and wave, but more often as with chimpanzees at the zoo, they tell us to fling something at the bars. We would like to see the whole world as one big family, but Dunbar's number, which says we're not neurologically equipped to handle the personal network of more than about 150 people, you can read up on that.

It means we struggle a little bit with the principle. We look through a magic portal, see somebody in cycle shorts in Manhattan, and instead of greeting him as a brother in humanity, there is some part of us that thinks that's a stranger and a foreigner and therefore funny, and what's more, he can't get me from there. I should do something lewd.

Technology amplifies human behavior. And because our human behavior, apart from rehabilitation through Christ, is a manifestation of our sinful nature, and given the tools and given the leverage, that is all amplified. This is what happens with the internet.

This is what is now happening with artificial intelligence and so on. So we are believers. We do have access to the sanctifying, cleansing, rehabilitating, eternal life-producing, fruit-bearing power of God.

So how do we avail ourselves of it in practical ways in the light of these ever-increasing assaults on us and temptations that leverage human ingenuity to perpetrate evil and manifest our sinful natures? In the book of James 1, beginning at verse 13, let no one say when he is tempted, I am tempted by God, for God cannot be tempted by evil, nor does he himself tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. This is the key to how deception, persuasion, manipulation, using technology or using any other means, this is how it works.

This is how Satan operates. And this is the key to our peace and to our power. We are not fooled by appeals to our God-given better nature, to our faith and our hope and our love.

Appealing to those qualities of character that are produced by the word of God and the Holy Spirit doesn't lead us into error, doesn't lead us into deception, and doesn't lead us into sin and becoming a part of evil, being taken down a path and manipulated. That doesn't happen. We are tempted.

We are led astray by appeals to our own desires. We've seen this in our Proverbs study, the young man in chapter two through 12 of Proverbs. This is an appeal to the prior nature, to lust, when lust is conceived, it brings forth sin and sin when it is finished brings forth death.

So our first point in terms of defense against these very powerful unprecedented attacks via technology, via artificial intelligence, via the internet, via everything that streams, everything that comes across on a rectangular screen. Our first line of defense is first of all, awareness of how they work. And you can talk about the technology.

It's fun for those of us who are computer-minded to see how they have crafted these programmatic simulated intelligences, the way they work and the way they gain their power. But that's not really the key to living a life that pleases God and that bears the fruit of the spirit. The key is not understanding how those things work and operate nearly so much as it is understanding our own hearts, minds, and souls.

And the first point of understanding is we are led away by our own desires, by our sinful nature. Most of humanity has no defense against sophisticated appeals to a fallen nature. We like the idea of something for nothing.

We like the idea that there's a Nigerian prince who's willing to send us a big chunk of cash if we will just help him get it out of his nationalized bank. We like the idea that we can avail ourselves of all sorts of stimulations and entertainments at little to no cost to

ourselves. And so sophisticated attacks leverage these fallen aspects of our nature.

James says, when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin. Sin, when it is full grown, brings forth death. That's verse 15 of our passage.

So verse 16, do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. Do not be deceived. So if we are commanded, exhorted, encouraged to not be deceived, how are we to avoid these powerful sophisticated attacks? Well, every good and every perfect gift, verse 17, is from above, comes down from the father of lights with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.

Of his own will, he brought us forth by the word of truth so that we might be a kind of first fruits of his creation, his creatures. What is the solution? First of all, knowing that God is fully aware that the attack on us is falsehood, it's deception. It is appeal to our corrupt nature, which we have not yet escaped.

We are in the world and the world goes after us. And what is the solution? Look at verse 19. So then, my beloved brethren, notice he repeats the same phrase that you found in verse 16.

Do not be deceived, my beloved brethren. So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to emotional outburst, wrath. Be a good listener and evaluate what you hear before you speak, before you opine, before you react or respond, before you form an opinion.

Let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath. Many of these appeals are designed to evoke an emotional response, to get past the reasoning part of the brain and get its hooks into the emotion. The wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

The emotion of man, the righteous indignation, the angst, the reaction of man and wrath here, as with so many things in the word of God is an example of anything that comes from that non-thinking part of our soul. The wrath of man, the pity of man, the reactive opposition of man doesn't produce the righteousness of God. What does produce righteousness? You know the answer to this question.

We lay hold of God's righteousness by faith. Faith comes by hearing. So be swift to hear, slow to speak.

And when an issue arises, when a circumstance is presented, when we encounter a situation, there's a conversation, there's a relationship issue, there's stress, there's difficulties, there's hardship, there's some new element introduced into our experience. We want to stop and think, hear what God has to say. This is really the theme throughout this first chapter of James, back in verse two, count it all joy when you fall into these trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience.

Look at these, not as an injustice, not as a wrong to be righted, not as a crusade to be undertaken or a cause to be financially supported. When something comes up, we encounter that which requires an opinion, requires some sort of response on our part, even if it is the response of sitting tight and doing nothing to use the resources God has given us. And greater is he that is in you than he that is in the world.

However persuasive, however powerful, however all encompassing, however ubiquitous the attack of demonic doctrine, the attack of falsehood, of twisting the truth and subverting reality, however powerful that becomes, it isn't as powerful as God. You think about the deliverances that God has recorded in his word in the Old Testament. Just go quickly through them.

What's the first and biggest deliverance you can think of in the Old Testament? What's the second book of the Old Testament? Exodus. How powerful was Egypt? How enslaved and abused were the Israelites? Whose power overcame the seemingly inescapable oversight and oppression of the Egyptians? God delivered his people for the sake of his own name. And if supernatural intervention is necessary, God is fully capable and ready to do so.

You think, just think of the most commonly understood Bible stories of the Old Testament. You think about David and Goliath. Seems a foregone conclusion that a young shepherd is not gonna overcome a giant experienced warrior with a sword and a spear.

You think about Daniel, the book of Daniel. You think about the power of the government and the power of people to misrepresent Daniel's motives. And get him thrown into the lion's den.

What are the odds of escape? When has anybody ever walked back out of the lion's den? But when God is for us, who can be against us? You think of the three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Who gets thrown into a fiery furnace and survives? But God wasn't ready for them to leave this earth. And you suddenly see the fourth man in the flames.

They said, God may deliver us or he may not, but we are not gonna bow down. We're not gonna be deceived. We're not gonna be cajoled.

We're not gonna be pressured into doing something that is against our faith. And however powerful, whatever you threaten us with, nobody wants to die a fiery death if it's in their right mind. Relying on God's grace, relying on God's sovereignty, relying on God's vindication was the key.

You think about the Israelites going into the land and the battle of Jericho. You've got an unassailable fortress. You've got walls that can't be dug through, can't be scaled, can't

be breached.

But when it is time for those defenses to fall, God, by a very unorthodox means, brings those walls down and Joshua and the armies of Israel achieve a wonderful victory. What is the common thread in these deliverances? You can go to Gideon defeating the Midianites. You can go to Paul and Silas being locked up in the Philippian jail.

Wherever you look in the word of God, when it seems as though there is an inescapable threat to the people of God, think about Esther and the plotting and scheming and deceiving and lying of Haman. What is the common thread? Those who are delivered place their total confidence in God. God can save by many or by few.

You think about Jonathan with his armor bearer. Faith in God, confidence that doing the right thing and relying on God for the outcome is the place of security. To not walk in the counsel of the ungodly, not stand in the way of sinners, not sit in the seat of the scornful.

To abide in the shadow of the Almighty and avoid the snare of the fowler and the perilous pestilence, quoting Psalm 91, Psalm 1. These are the fortress. This is the stronghold of our faith. Whatever this world tries to throw at the people of God, there is greater power, there is greater security, there is eternity in God's deliverance.

And to place our faith in Him, that is the test. Know that the testing of your faith produces patience, James says in 1 3. Let patience have its perfect work that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. If any of you lacks wisdom, he talks about lacking nothing, but the thing you absolutely do not want to lack is wisdom because wisdom is what gives us insight into how to make our faith operate.

What should I trust? To what should I look? How do I make faith happen in this circumstance? It's threatening, it's disturbing, it's unsettling, it's ubiquitous. I see other people deconstructing their faith and departing from the Bible, departing from church, departing from their faithful Christian families, going their own way. I'm disturbed, I'm unsettled, I'm alarmed, I'm sorrowful.

I am oppressed, I'm afflicted, what do I do? I need wisdom to know what to do. If I lack that wisdom, I look at the situation and I'm not sure how to proceed, what do I do? If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God. This is a great first step.

If you're not sure how to get faith operating, start with something that you do know. Many times when we go into the unknown, we can start by thinking, well, what do I know? And if we lack the wisdom at the outset to parse and to proceed through a difficult situation or a challenge or an attack on our peace and on our happiness and on our bright outlook, our faith and our hope and our love, we know that the key is faith, right? We know that. So let me get my faith started up.

Let me grab the starting rope and pull on that thing and get my faith engine going. So if I

lack wisdom, what do I do? I go to God in prayer. I'm gonna go ask God for wisdom.

Going to God is an act of faith. Requesting wisdom is an act of faith. And what are we doing by following this biblical guidance? I'm concerned, I'm dubious on how to proceed.

Well, let me do something that I know works. I know that I can go to my heavenly father. I can come boldly to the throne of grace for help in time of need by a new and living way.

My heart having been sprinkled from an evil conscience, I'm endeavoring to ensure that my truth detector and my rightness detector is cleansed and functional. My body washed with pure water, I've gotten sinful behaviors, sinful thoughts out of the way, right? We know how to do that. We acknowledge it so that we are cleansed by the blood of Jesus Christ, sprinkled from an evil conscience, bodies washed with pure water.

We come to God and what do we do? If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God who gives to all liberally. We won't just get a little bit of guidance, we will get plenty of guidance. Affirmation of the edges of the narrow road, a true direction to the straight gate that leads to life by request.

If I'm not real sure how to get there, I go to my heavenly father, having prepared myself for that interview, heart having been sprinkled so that my conscience is functional and I will recognize the answer when God provides it. If I start making requests and my conscience is not clear, how will I know that this is God's answer and not some humanly devised deception or demonically devised deception? Before I pray, I've got to be prepared. Ask of God gives to all liberally and without reproach.

Why is there no reproach? Because I have already taken the steps to cleanse my heart and my conscience. I have already washed my body with pure water. I've acknowledged my sins.

He is faithful and just to forgive and to cleanse. Now there's no basis for reproach. Through the Lord Jesus Christ, his wonderful work for us on the cross, any reproach that might attach to me is removed because the blood of Jesus Christ, his son cleanses us.

It's for real. It is supernaturally powerful to remove corruption and defilement and the obstacles and inhibitions to a healthy, good, functioning conscience. My conscience is fixed.

Now, when I go to God and request wisdom, he is going to give it to me and give it liberally. It's a promise. Take it to the bank.

Now it all depends on God. I have used his power. I've availed myself of his grace to be qualified and without reproach.

I come boldly for grace to help in time of need. And I ask my father, I need wisdom. I

want to be blessed.

I want to be a blessing. I want to reflect your glory. I want to represent the Lord Jesus Christ effectively, powerfully.

I want to be a big lamp on a big lamp stand shining a bright light. I want God's power, not just a little bit. I want a lot.

To whom will God never grant that request? Only if you try to approach and you are reproachable. Remember those that tried to bring strange fire before the Lord? They tried to bring strange fire. Fire came out from the Lord and consumed them.

The earth has opened and swallowed those who have a different idea of what is righteousness and what is not. We have to make sure we're on solid ground. We have to enter through that new and living way through the veil of the flesh of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Sprinkled, cleansed. Now we can come boldly. Without reproach, God will give us wisdom.

This wisdom is more powerful. The word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than any sword man can create and forge and sharpen.

God's word is sharper. It is going to lay things open and bare. We will know exactly how to proceed.

It's a promise of God. And with that, we can have confidence. We can have security.

We can have peace. We can enjoy conflict. We can count it all joy when we fall into various trials because we know that God has left us here precisely to face those trials, to move through those challenges, to learn how to get our faith going and access the power of God.

He achieves the goal in us and through us. He is at work in us and among us to will and to do for his good pleasure. Well, a lot of good guidance there from Paul and from James.

Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we're going to continue our study of the results of having and maintaining our good conscience.