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Introduction. The church is the "pillar and ground of the truth" (3:15). When the church gathers, it must be a time of solid teaching and edification. A Christian should have full confidence that his church stands for the truth of the word of God. "Worship" should not simply be about enthusiastic praise singing, though that is an essential element of it. Times of worship should include deep meditation on the truth of the Holy Scriptures.

Why is this so important? The beginning of Chapter 4 answers that question. Paul knew a time would come when people would be seduced away from *the faith* by bad doctrine. There is always some new thing, some new twist, some trendy concept or teaching that seems to catch fire and attract masses. Sensual appeal and novelty are powerful. *The faith*, however, does not change. God certainly can do anything at different times. But He will never contradict or even distract from His own word, and He will never see His Son de-emphasized. The core of revelation and doctrine does not shift. *Christ is sufficient.* We need not go looking for other things when we have received grace through faith in *Christ*.

At the time of Paul's ministry, the heresies of *Gnosticism* and *Judaizing* had already caused great damage in the church; the former seems to be in view in this letter (Galatians takes up the issue of the Judaizers most directly). People were saved by faith in Christ; false teachers introduced elements of doctrine that had nothing at all to do with that. In this case, Gnostic teaching taught a dualism that flesh was evil and only spirit good, so anything that catered to fleshly desire must be avoided. Note that false teaching always has some elemental truth: it is correct that *living for the flesh* is bad; and for designated times, Christians may fast or abstain from sexual relations in marriage (the latter is only with mutual consent and should be limited, see 1 Corinthians 7:5). But this does not mean that *everything* that pertains to the flesh is bad. Breathing, for example, is good. Sleep and rest in their proper place are good. Eating, drinking, and sexuality can obviously be perverted and abused, but in their proper place they are not only perfectly acceptable, but to be enjoyed with thanksgiving as blessings of God. But along came the false teachers spreading the nonsense that true holiness meant abstaining from sexual activity and certain foods. *What could such practice contribute to holiness and salvation that Christ alone had not provided? Nothing.* But it was novel, interesting, seemed safe... and false. Man, in his wickedness, always wants to be *religious*. Quickly, people fell from the faith because they concentrated on depriving their flesh (in this sense, Gnosticism and Judaizing were the same: both left grace for works - Gnosticism was pseudo-spiritual, Judaizing was religiously legalistic) as a means of spiritual growth. *Compare this passage with 2 Timothy 4:1-4.*

Bottom line: *you are complete in Christ*, in whom dwells all the fulness of the Godhead. See Colossians 2:6-10. Learn what HE commands and follow HIM. When anything would lure you away from trusting in Christ, FLEE FROM IT.

1. Verses 1-3 - In latter times some will depart from the faith.

- *the Spirit expressly says...* this could refer to prior teaching Paul was aware of from the Lord Himself or the other Apostles, or it could be a direct revelation to Paul, who was writing the inspired word of God. *in latter times some will...* here Paul is looking ahead to a future time. *deceiving... demons... lies...* Paul never lacked clarity when it came to false teaching. *conscience seared...* false teachers are able to lie because they are so trained in it that their consciences are no longer affected by their own evil. *forbidding to marry... abstain from foods...* One cannot justify himself or add to his sanctification one bit by arbitrarily remaining celibate or abstaining from certain kinds of food. This is false, gnostic, monastic, ascetic teaching. We do not perfect ourselves in the flesh once we

have been renewed by the Holy Spirit. **received with thanksgiving...** God provides for us, even for our earthly needs and enjoyment. The keys are *moderation, sharing, and thankfulness*.

2. Verses 4-5 - The counter-argument to the heresy of verses 1-3.

- **every creature of God is good...** this completely eliminates the validity of legalistically imposing Old Testament dietary laws (or any other such code). Someone may choose, for the sake of his own conscience, to be observant of such (a believing Jew, for example; or even someone wanting to win to Christ people who observed dietary laws). But it means nothing relevant to salvation by grace through faith, and it must not be imposed. **sanctified by the word of God and prayer...** Many external, earthly things can be enjoyed and even used for God's glory when sanctified by His word. They must be seen as gifts from God, and He must be thanked. And they must not become idols or stumbling blocks to others. But God created many things, and every one of His creatures is good.