

## How to Detect Spiritual Imposters 1 Timothy 4:1-5

### Introduction:

1. There is a sobering passage in Matthew 7, straight from the lips of Jesus Christ. It has to do with the subject of spiritual imposters. vs. 21-23
2. Things don't always appear as they seem on the surface. This is very true in the spiritual realm.
3. In our text before us, notice how Paul warned about this also. Read verses 1-3.
  - *"The Spirit speaketh expressly..."* This means that the Holy Spirit has something very important to say, and we need to listen. Did your parents ever say, "Now listen up?"
4. What does the Holy Spirit have to say? Eventually (in the latter times), some shall depart (desert) from the faith.
  - This word *"faith"* speaks of the body of sound doctrine that God gave to the body of Christ through the apostle Paul. Our belief system is referred to as *"the faith."*
  - **Illustration:** If I started preaching that Christ's death was not enough to save you, and you have to join the church, be baptized, etc., I would have left *"the faith."* I left that body of sound doctrine delivered to us from the apostle Paul.
5. Paul warned Timothy that this would happen. People who once appeared to be sound in the faith would depart from it and begin to teach false doctrine. Where would the false doctrine come from? It would come from *"Seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils."*
  - *"Seducing"* literally means "imposter."
6. Christians, we cannot be naïve. Not every person that carries a Bible and talks about Jesus is a true teacher of God's Word. Paul warned that false teachers will appear as the apostles of Christ and angels of light. 2 Corinthians 11:13-15
7. So how do you detect a spiritual imposter?

### First, they speak lies in hypocrisy. vs. 2a

1. Obviously, if they are teaching doctrines of devils, we know that they are speaking lies. Satan is a liar and the father of lies. But notice that they do it *"in hypocrisy."*
  - This word *"hypocrisy"* means "to decide, act, or speak under a false part."
2. This is where it gets tricky. False teachers do not advertise that they are teaching doctrines of devils. "Come to the First Church of Satan and hear doctrines of devils."
3. No! They speak lies in hypocrisy. They speak lies, but they have a religious sugar coating.
4. In the context, they lay down rules, regulations, and standards of conduct for their flock, but they have no biblical basis.
5. On top of this, **they** don't even keep all of their religious rules. Their own lives are proof of their hypocritical lies.
6. Jesus was merciful, compassionate, and gracious with the down-and-out sinner, but Jesus had no tolerance for the religious Pharisees. It was because they spoke lies in hypocrisy. Matthew 23:25, 27-28

7. Satan desires to move people away from the simplicity that is in Christ. Satan has his ministers (spiritual imposters) that he uses to get people to focus on religious rules rather than Christ.
8. Satan can do this in anybody's life. You think you are okay because you do this or that, or keep a list of rules, but it is a religious sham and masquerade. Christ is not living through you.

### **Second, their conscience is seared. vs. 2**

1. Conscience is that within us which enables us to distinguish between right and wrong.
  - Conscience is what separates man from animals. Mankind has a conscience that tells him that things are good or evil, right or wrong, moral or immoral.
2. When truth is ignored or rejected, it results in a weakened faith, which can result in a seared conscience. 1 Timothy 4:1-2
  - "*Seared*" means "branded; rendered insensitive."
  - Like flesh which has been seared with a hot iron, conscience no longer responds and can no longer be depended upon.
3. When this happens, there is no limit to how far a person can plunge into wickedness. There are religious teachers and spiritual leaders that have used and abused people so much, they no longer feel guilt or conviction. They even believe their own hypocritical lies.
4. They are convinced that they are doing God a service, but they are simply pawns of Satan. Titus 1:15-16

### **Third, they teach a false, religious piety. vs. 3**

1. In Paul's day, false teaching was already very prevalent. 1:6-7
  - They were teaching that one becomes holy, religious, and acceptable to God through self-denial.
2. Paul gives two examples of this in our text. vs. 3
  - "*Forbidding to marry*" – Hebrews 13:4; 1 Corinthians 7:2; 1 Timothy 3:2 (bishops); Matthew 8:14 (Peter was married)
  - "*commanding to abstain from* [certain kinds of foods]" – vs. 4; Romans 14:1-3; 1 Corinthians 8:8
3. These are just two examples that Paul gives. The possibilities are endless. Religion is a big-money business, and false teachers have been exploiting it for centuries. It always revolves around the commandments of men. Matthew 15:9; Colossians 2:22; Titus 1:10, 11, 14
4. Of course, all of this is simply a cover-up for the religious teacher's own sin.
5. Do you know what all of this is designed to do? It is designed to make people reliant on the religious teacher instead of on Christ. They don't teach the completeness of Christ's work, your sufficiency in Christ, and your completeness in Christ.
6. They don't want people looking to Christ and His Word, they want people looking at them, relying upon them, and trusting in them.

**In Conclusion:**

1. There is so much religious chicanery and tomfoolery today. It is everywhere you turn (radio, TV, Internet). It was prevalent in Paul's day and still is today.
2. It can get confusing, but God has given every believer two powerful resources for being able to detect spiritual imposters. They are found in verse 5.
3. The Word of God and prayer are the key. You have God's completed Word and God's Spirit living inside of you to help you understand it. You also have direct access to God in prayer. You don't have to rely upon me to spoon feed you God's Word, nor do you need to go through me to stand before the Lord in prayer.
4. A religious imposter is not going to tell you this or emphasize this, but aren't you thankful God has told you the truth in His Word?