

Branded In Their Conscience

"... through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth" (1 Tim. 4:2f)

Those who would depart from the faith would be characterized as those who spoke the doctrines of devils through hypocrisy of lying men; men who were branded in their conscience as with a hot iron. While many have difficulty identifying when this falling occurred and what its outgrowth was, it seems apparent, at least to me, especially of what the apostle wrote -- for two good reasons: one: what departures from the gospel persist unto our present day save Catholicism? Two: what two characteristics -- "*forbidding to marry*" and "*commanding to abstain from meats*" so eminently fits any body of people more concisely than Roman Catholicism? Nay, let the dissenters from this conclusion produce something which more closely identifies this "falling away" than that above, before casting aside this conclusion.

It is true that efforts have been made to identify "*forbidding to marry*" with groups whose background lay with the Essenes -- an isolation group which existed in the days of John and Jesus and which group was likely to have been the reason for the preservation of the Dead Sea Scrolls, an invaluable find of the mid-twentieth century which has helped to confirm accuracy of our present day Old Testament. That group did have some who "forbade to marry" (which some speculate brought their demise), but such groups were present already when Paul wrote his letter to Timothy and were outside the church. Paul wrote of future departures from within the church which would "forbid to marry."

A modern twist was made some years ago by a California brother (whether in jest or in earnest, I know not) who, prominent in the doctrine that the "*fornication*" of Matthew 19:9 is not a physical sex act but the violation of the covenant of marriage by obtaining a divorce. That doctrine teaches that in such instances, both guilty and innocent may remarry with God's favor and assert that they are apostates who dissent from that position, who identify the fornication of Matthew 19:9 as a physical act, which once committed, allows only the innocent to remarry. The California brother said those who would not allow both parties in a divorce to remarry are those of whom Paul wrote who "forbid to marry." Whatever speculation others make, the apparent allusion to a wholesale apostasy of those who would "forbid to marry" fit Roman Catholicism's prohibition that their priests and nuns marry

"like a glove." The recent visit of the Pope to our country and his expression of sorrow over the recent scandal so widespread among American priests and their abuse of young boys ignores the root of the problem. Were they to be candid and honest with themselves they would realize their doctrine of celibacy is the real cause of their problem. Paul, along with Barnabas, had a right to marry (1 Cor. 9:5) And, while Paul might wish that others be as he, he counsels, "*Nevertheless, because of sexual immorality, let each man have his own wife ...*" (1 Cor. 7:2). Catholics could have spared themselves much embarrassment had they followed the scriptures rather than the decree of their church.

"*Commanding to abstain from meats.*" True, many of the Judaizers of the first century sought to bind the law's prohibition against certain meats upon disciples. Still, it is a truth which cannot be gainsaid: Catholicism has, in years past, forbade eating of meats on certain days and certain times; and while admittedly those instructions presently have been lifted, who knows that at some future time or whim, they might impose them again? Such is the power of that apostate church. Jesus made all meats clean (Mk. 7:19). Paul said, "*Every creature of God is good and nothing is to be rejected if it be received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified through the word of God and prayers*" (1 Tim. 4:4-5). Sanctified through two things: through the word of God (God has made all meats clean); and sanctified through prayer, expressing thanks for God's blessings. Jesus gave us an example in offering thanks. Before He fed the 5,000 He looked up to heaven and "*blessed, and break and gave the loaves to the disciples*" (Mt. 14:19). Should we do any differently?

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