

June 23, 2019

Instructions for Last Days Ministry

2 Timothy 3:1-13

God never said ministry in the last days would be easy, but his instructions for faithfulness are clear.

LTS: 2 Pet. 3:1-13

In my early trips over to the former Soviet Union it was not uncommon to hear amazing stories about the spiritual hunger of the people when the Berlin Wall came down and the Union collapsed. For 70 years there had been a famine in the land; a famine for hearing the word of the Lord. During those seven decades, most church gatherings were illegal. Congregations often met in the snow-covered forests in the dead of winter where they were least likely to be discovered. I learned of pastors who had been arrested, sent to labor camps in Siberia, or shot simply for teaching people about God. I heard about shortwave radio stations from South America which offered programs that did nothing but read the scriptures systematically and very slowly so people in the lands of Russia could write by hand their own copies of the Scriptures.

When the wall came down on Nov. 9, 1989 the American church wondered if the true church had actually survived behind the iron curtain. And it didn't take long to find out. Turns out they not only survived but thrived. They had not capitulated to the western pressures toward liberalism. How could they? All they had was their Bibles. You have to go to school to learn liberalism. But the reality was, hardly anyone in the former Soviet Union actually owned a Bible.

Of course, as soon as this became known large shipments of Russian bibles began to arrive all over the lands of Russia. Everyone wanted a bible. No sooner did a case a Bibles come off the truck then they were immediately devoured by the people. Everyone wanted a Bible, and everyone wanted to hear the gospel.

This is reminiscent of the historical tales that are recorded about how people in the American Colonies responded to the preaching of George Whitefield in the 1700's. The Spirit of God moved in extraordinary ways wherever Whitefield preached. When it was announced where he would stand in the pulpit next, tens of thousands would gladly make any sacrifice necessary to get there and hear the Word of God preached. And thousands upon thousands received Christ at those gatherings. Under the

preaching of this man the Great Awakening- both in England and America - broke out and untold numbers were transformed.

O what it must have been like to be a minister of the gospel in those days! To stand in the pulpit, or on a street corner, or on top of a table in a field and preach the gospel to spiritually hungry masses! What a thrill that must have been!

This was the privilege of such men as John & Charles Wesley; Jonathan Edwards, David Brainerd, George Whitefield and many unknown but faithful ministers of that time when the Spirit of God moved in extraordinary ways. But what's a minister to do in a day when it seems hardly anyone has an appetite for hearing the word of the Lord. Moreover, how do you faithfully minister the word when the church itself turns her back on the Scriptures?

That's a good question, because that seems to be the general spiritual atmosphere that has repeatedly descended upon the church through the ages. In the early years of church history, the church gave way to sacramentalism in the Roman Catholic deviation. Then came rationalism, followed by mysticism, and pragmatism. In the early 20th century, psychology became all the rage. And when professing followers of Christ embraced psychology and couple it with Darwin's theory of evolution, now you've got a real mess on your hands, and the beginnings of a major apostacy from the Scriptures.

These are the very things Paul was speaking about in 2 Cor. 10 where he said that "though we walk in the flesh, we do not wage war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are divinely powerful to destroy strongholds." And what are those strongholds? He says, "We destroy every lofty opinion raised up against the knowledge of God and take every Thought captive to obey Christ." Paul's mission was to faithfully preach the word and to demolish any demonic teaching that crept into the church to do her harm.

That's why Paul warns in our text for the morning (v. 13) that "evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Yes, there are enemies of the church in the culture at large, but the greatest enemies come from influential imposters who are IN the church and lead people out of the way of Christ.

How does a ministry of the gospel (or any Christian, for that matter) prepare to minister the word of God in an atmosphere of apostacy?

In our passage for this morning Paul offers six points of instruction to help prepare Timothy to serve as a faithful minister of the word of God in an atmosphere of apostacy.

- I. Expect a General Apostasy (3:1-5)
- II. Be alert for Duplicitous Deceivers (3:6-8)
- III. Rest in a Sovereign Promise (3:9)
- IV. Follow a Worthy Example (3:10-11)
- V. Embrace a Sobering Reality (3:12-13)
- VI. Fulfill your Foremost Calling (3:14)

Before we unpack Paul's instructions, please stand with me for the reading of God's word.

Read 2 Tim. 3:1-14a.

The first instruction Paul offers Timothy about how to be faithful minister in these Last Days. Is...

I. Expect a General Apostacy: (3:1-5)

1. You will recall that in the final verses of chapter 2 Paul instructs Timothy to gently correct certain opponents in the hopes that God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth and they might come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being held captive by him to do his will."

2. Then we come upon chapter three and the first word we read is, "But." Paul is introducing a contrast. In the previous verse he was speaking about certain opponents who needed to be corrected, "But... understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty." In other words, we need to expect that there will NOT only be isolated circumstances of difficulty but "times" or "season" or "Epos," or waves of difficulty. And these waves of difficulty will be marked by apostacy within the church.

3. Now, we need to understand that when the N.T. authors speak of the "Last Days" they are referring to the times that come between the first arrival of the Christ and the return of Christ. For example:

A. In Peter's first sermon at Pentecost (Acts 2) he refers to that time as "The last days."

B. The author of Hebrews, likewise, declared (Heb. 1:2) "In these Last Days God has spoken to us by His Son.

C. 1 Jn. 2:18 the apostle says, “Children, it is the last hour.

4. So Paul is speaking to Timothy about his day AND our day. His time and our time. We are in the Last Days. And in these last days we should NOT think that our ministry is going to be easy. Rather, we should expect that we will often have to minister the word in an atmosphere of apostasy; A time when people will NOT want to hear the word of the Lord.

5. In fact, Paul has already talked about this back in his first letter to Timothy. Listen to the words of Paul

(1 Tim. 1:4) “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...”

6. You see, Paul wants Timothy to be prepared for this. People will not always flock to you as if you were George Whitefield. People won’t always be hungry for the word of the Lord as they were after the collapse of the Wall. Much of your ministry will be to people who are going to push back against the clear teaching of the word and the gospel itself, because they have been trained to believe error in the church.

7. How do we know that his concern is about people in the church? Well, listen to how Paul describes them:

A. (v. 4) The expectation is that they should be “lovers of God.” That’s the first mark of a Christian.

B. (v. 5) They have the appearance of godliness. In other words, they strive to be seen as Godly , but at the same time deny his power.

C. (v. 7) They are “Always learning, but never arriving at the knowledge of the truth.” They say they are having bible studies, but they have no interest in what the Bible actually teaches.

8. So, Paul is NOT talking about a time of resistance from irreligious people, but from many who claim to be religious. They claim to be Christian. They may even be in your church! In fact, they ARE in MANY churches. These are people (and whole denominations) who say they are followers of Christ but whose lifestyle and beliefs and religious practices are blatantly contrary to the teachings of Scripture.

9. What are the characteristics of such people? Paul stuns us by naming 18 characteristics of religious people who are living in various stages of apostasy. Paul explains, “For people will be...first of all”

A. Lovers of Self:

- Even under the inspiration of the H.S. I don't think even Paul knew how pervasive and all-consuming this characteristic would become.
- IN our day the psychological doctrine of self esteem has rolled through the western world like a great philosophical tsunami. No one even debates the issue anymore! The most fundamental virtue of our time is this "Love thyself."
- When Erick Erikson and Abraham Maslow introduce the doctrine of self-esteem they were convinced that if they could just get everyone to love themselves, the psychological disorders would simply melt away. Instead, it has created a world of fundamentally narcissistic humans who are committed NOT to loving our country, or loving their neighbor, or even loving God, but loving themselves.
- If you doubt, consider this term: The Selfy Generation.
- Or, consider the growing number of women in our country who have publically engaged in Sologomy. [Is that a new term for you?](#) Sologomy happens when a person (usually a woman) organizes a public ceremony by which - while gazing into a mirror and reciting something akin to formal vows - [she marries herself](#).
- The doctrine of self-love has brought narcissism into the church. So Paul warns against lovers of self.

B. Lovers of Money:

- It think we might safely say that being a lover of self is the root of the other 17 vices Paul identifies. A person who's first love is himself will need to be a lover of money to support the relationship.
- The Scriptures are replete with warnings about being a lover of money.
- The Pharisees were called lovers of money.
- 1 Tim. 6:10 Paul warns that "The love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves

with many pangs.”

The next two, characteristics: Proud and Arrogant, are like a two-headed monster. They are joined together and can never be separated.

- C. Proud: Boaster or braggart. This is one of the many poisonous fruits on the tree of self love. Boasting is nothing more than self-worship. You worship yourself and you want everyone else to worship you as well.
- D. Arrogant: Haughty. This is when a person loves himself so much he is constantly exalting himself over others. He is the epitome of one-up-man-ship. The word that rolls off his tongue more than any other is the word “I.” An arrogant person tends to have a mean streak about his pride, especially when it seems like someone is gaining the upper hand. Perhaps that’s why the next characteristic is...
- E. Abusive: It seems fitting that the GK word for Abusive is *Blasphemos* - from which we get Blasphemer, or *Blasphemos*. A blasphemer is one who defames, denigrates, insults and slanders others. To blaspheme God is to insult him or accuse him of evil. To blaspheme is to engage in verbal hatred of another. And of course, this is only the beginning of the sins of an abuser.
- F. Disobedient to Parents: It has been said that “Love and obedience toward parents was one of the most central virtues of antiquity.”¹ One who could not even obey their father and mother was not to be trusted.
 - In our day general disobedience among children is epidemic. But it shouldn’t surprise us. After decades of training parents to love themselves, be true to themselves, esteem themselves, and be loyal to themselves, do we expect them to raise children who are submissive, obedient, and happy?
 - A self-love oriented home will produce a child-centered home, and child-centered homes are unhappy homes. That’s why the God who loves you has issued the

¹ Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (2 Ti 3:2). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

command, “Children, obey your parents in the Lord for this is right. It’s the first commandment with a promise: that it may go well with you and you will live long on the earth.”

- G. Ungrateful: This means they are thankless. One of the marks of an unbeliever in Romans 1 is that they don’t give thanks.
- H. Unholy: These are people in the church who look clean and godly on Sunday morning. Away from the church, however, they live just like the world. This is a person whose self-love drives him to gratify his lustful passions in immoral behavior, godless entertainment, and the abuse of what they refer to as their liberties.
 - Today in the Larger evangelical church there are those who call themselves Homosexual Christians.
 - These are people whose flesh has no break peddle. They are unholy.
- I. Heartless: This word can be translated “Unloving” or without natural affection. This points back to the home characterized by abuse. According to the Bible, To love - is to give. But to this kind of person life is all about taking from another in order please himself. He is heartless. He has no concern for others. He knows nothing of weeping with those who weep, because they are only concerned about their own welfare.
- J. Unappeasable: This might be translated unreconcilable. This is someone who just doesn’t have the ability to confess his own sins without blaming others, and is not even capable of granting forgiveness to someone who asks.
- K. Slanderous: You may be interested to know that in GK the word is *Diaboloï* - from i which is the word for Devil. The devil is a slanderer from the beginning. This is a person who feels the need to constantly put others down. They are malicious gossips who often don’t even realize that their motive is to harm others with their words.
- L. Without Self-control. Self-control, as you know, is a fruit of the Spirit. This person has no command over his impulses and desires. He has jettisoned his inhibitions and shame and doesn’t care what people

think. Perhaps he is addicted to alcohol. I read in one publication that the foremost sin among young church planters in our generation is drunkenness. Such men are the pastors of their churches and yet, as MacArthur puts it, they are “like a driverless car careening haphazardly and crashing into whatever gets in their way. The lover of self eventually loses control of his own life and becomes a slave to his passions.”²

- M. Brutal: Again, you can probably not imagine how much domestic violence takes place in so-called Christian homes.
- N. Not loving good: Phil. 4:8 says “Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.” But this person thinks only about fulfilling his lusts. He calls good evil and evil good.
- Can a professing believer support the killing babies in the womb? It happens all the time.
 - But by the time a person begins calling good evil and evil good, she has already cultivated a heart that can justify anything no matter how contrary to the character of the God they claim to know.
- O. Treacherous: This is a traitor or betrayer. This is someone who has no regard to contracts, promises, or vows. They may marry, but have little understanding or will to stay married. When they going gets tough, they punch out.
- This is the exact opposite of the man of God described in Psalm 15. That’s where David says the man the pleases the lord “swears to his own hurt, and does not change his mind” (Psa. 15:4).
 - Even in the church its sometimes difficult to find a man who has that level of integrity; who loves God and his neighbor more than self.
- P. Reckless: A reckless person is willing to try anything and do anything

² John MacArthur, *Commentary on 2 Timothy*, p. 115)

without regard for consequences. They are thoughtless and self-centered.

Q. Swollen with Conceit: Lit - they are puffed up.

R. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. This characteristic is the bookend on the whole list. Is kind of a summary. Believers are called to “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength.” In other words, we are to love God more than anything else. But this person has no real love for God. Jesus said, “If you love me you will... keep my commandments.” The fruit of love for God is a happy, joyful obedience to His words. But these people have no joy in God because they have little love for God. They love fleshly pleasure instead.

S. And notice how Paul sums up the whole list in v. 5. “They have the appearance (the form or shape) of godliness but deny its power.”
What kind of power?

- The power to humble yourself and love other people.
- The power to exercise self-control.
- The power to use money for the good of others rather than just always gratifying your lusts.
- It’s the power to live in a manner that makes Christ preeminent rather than self.

9. You see, the first lesson for ministering in an age of apostasy is don’t let yourself get caught off guard. Don’t think that if people aren’t responding there must be something wrong with the message. Don’t try to make the message more palatable. Rather, expect a General Apostasy. Expect that even some who call themselves Christians will balk at the truth when confronted with it. You just stay faithful.

10. This is the theme of this passage. And we’ll see it clearly when we approach v. 16 where Paul reminds Timothy of the origin and sufficiency of Scripture. And we’ll see it again in 4:1 where he exhorts Timothy in the strongest terms possible to “Preach the Word.

Conclusion:

As you have listened to Paul's list of characteristics of apostate Christians, if you listened honestly you may have seen something of yourself. Perhaps you're a lover of self, or a lover of money. Perhaps you're an abuser and just can't seem to change. Perhaps you're a lover of money. Can I just say this morning that there is HOPE for you?

Do you remember the term "Blasphemer"? Well, Paul called himself a blasphemer. He confessed, "I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent" of Christ. But the Lord had mercy on him and changed him from the inside out.

One-time Paul even referred to himself as the chief of sinners. You see, my friend, having a relationship with God in Jesus Christ begins by being honest about who you are. The law of God was never intended to make you righteous, but to reveal God's standard of righteousness and expose how unrighteous we really are. By that means we find the need to fly to Christ for righteousness.