

Last Days Ministries

By Jeff Noblit

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Bible Text: 2 Timothy 3:1-5; 13
Preached on: Sunday, November 18, 2012

Anchored in Truth Ministries

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Amen. Thank you Warehouse Quartet. It's a blessing.

1 Timothy 3. Will you go there with me tonight? 1 Timothy 3. I have a thinking Christian's sermon for tonight but one that is so very much needed. This is what is called a pastoral epistle as the Apostle Paul is exhorting Timothy, a young pastor, about what he's to be doing, what are to be his priorities and the things he's to be aware of and cautious about in his ministry. Lots of instruction. We'll cover several verses. We can't cover everything that's here but some pertinent things and I call this "Last Days Ministries." Last days ministries. This is a real important word for dads as I'm challenging you as I do often to be discerning and be mature in a very difficult day.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 and then verse 13, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God," and here's the clincher I want you to get, verse 5, "holding to a form of godliness." Now wait a minute, all of these awful things that he has described will be in people's hearts and lives and at the same time they will hold to a form of godliness, you could even put, a form of religion, "although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these." Now, verse 13, "But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." So he says in verse 1 of our text here, difficult days will come, and then he says you can expect these false teachers, these imposters, these that parade themselves as men of God and they use Scripture and they throw the name of Christ around, but they are going to grow from bad to worse during these last days.

Now, what are the last days? Now, I used to think the last days were those future days out yonder somewhere. That's not true. We're in the last days. From the moment the church age began, the last days began. We've been in the last days for 2,000 years. What we mean by that is: this is the last event on God's calendar before Christ returns. There is nothing else to come. This is the church age and the church age is the last days before the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. And he says there is going to be this continual flow, verse 1 again, of difficult times in these last days. Indeed, they're just going to keep going from bad to worse as these imposters come in and, as a matter of fact, when he says these

difficult days will come, the phrase "will come," means they are coming to set in. They will be soaked in, in a way. There will be established seasons of significant error and false teaching and misleading teachings about what true spirituality and what true Christianity really is. You could call it seasons or epochs of time. So it's demanded of us who are fathers, it is demanded of us who are small group leaders, it is demanded of us who are pastors, of course, to understand the nature of the times and minister with ministerial integrity in these difficult times.

Not too long ago a man that I admire as much as any pastoral theologian that I've heard or read of in the last century and that's Dr. John MacArthur, many of you have Dr. John MacArthur Study Bibles and commentaries and they're always trustworthy. And a person was interviewing Dr. MacArthur and said, "What is the one thing the church desperately needs today?" Without hesitation he said, "Discernment." Discernment. His point was there is so much out there that is parading itself as true religion, true churches, true Christianity, that's really not and we need to know about these false teachers and these false days.

Well, what are these dangerous seasons, these epochs of times that are coming? And I'd like to do just kind of an historical review and I want you to put your Christian thinking cap on. But before I start listing these, going back to really about 500 BC, I want you to understand these aren't just absolute cookie-cutter seasons, one chopped off and another one beginning. They certainly over mingle and remnants of the first one linger all the way up to the present, but there have been some general epochs and ages of difficult times or false seasons. And here's what I want you to focus on as we look at these: these are isms, if you will, or teachings that according to verse 5, hold to the form of godliness although they have denied its power. Holding to the form of godliness although they have denied its power. In other words, they have the façade, they have the view, they have the words, they have the verbiage of true religion, true Christianity, but they don't have the living, sanctifying power of Christianity within it. It's just a shell without real substance. It's like somebody telling you, "Here's a great automobile," and you look at that automobile and we own automobiles today, don't we? Here's a great automobile and you look and the tires look great, and the body looks great, and the upholstery looks great, and the dashboard looks great, everything looks great until you lift the hood and there's no motor in it. It had all the form but there's no power within.

So what are some of these movements that Paul warned Timothy? There are going to be difficult days, they're going to come along and these false teachers and imposters, verse 13, will proceed from bad to worse? Well, let's go to the first one. 1. Is sacramentalism. 1. Sacramentalism. This is generally called the Dark Ages from about 500 to 1500 A.D. Now, the Roman Catholic Church is the instrument that was so foundational in this sacramentalism movement. What I mean by that, instead of pointing people to Christ, they developed a religious system, rituals and rites and ceremonies whereby you would look to those religious rites and ceremonies or "the sacraments" to get you to God. And it has a form of godliness, but you can take all of these sacraments you want from the hands of the priest, eat his wafer, drink the juice he gives you and get sprinkled with his holy water and go through all the motions, and you may have an outward form that would

impress many that you are spiritual or Christian, but there is no power in that. You'll just come in dead and empty and go out dead and empty.

The Roman Catholic Church teaches that the church is a surrogate Christ, saving grace comes through the church. I was watching a little bit of the Catholic channel the other day and it's just really alarming to me they just come out and say it. Used to kind of here in the south it was kind of hidden but if you watch the Catholic channel, sometimes you ought to just watch it and just listen to what they're saying. They actually say that grace is administered when you're sprinkled as a baby. Of course, what does that do? That puts the emphasis on the work or the ritual done to you by the church, not on your heart turning to Christ.

Well, that's lasted for what? Since 500 A.D. all the way up until our day, however, about the 1800s, there is another form of godliness that denies the power therein, another dangerous season and that's what we call rationalism. Rationalism. Somewhere in the 1800s, kind of the forefather, the grandpappy of rationalism was a German theologian by the name of Karl Barth and Karl Barth came up with a concept called neo-orthodoxy. Of course, the word "Orthodox" means "the generally accepted view of something," so he, Karl Barth said, there used to be these Orthodox doctrines of the Christian faith but now we've got to set that aside. There's a new type of orthodoxy, and basically what he was teaching under the idea of rationalism is that all true knowledge comes through the five senses you have, and nothing else is revealed any other way. If it's true, then you can find it with your eyes and your ears and your touch and your senses, your ability to think, and there is no way that any truth can come to you any other way than the five senses you have. So all the things you and I teach and believe about the work of the Spirit of God drawing, and we just sang it in a song, we just sang about the drawing power of the Spirit of God, they would reject that. That spiritual. It's supernatural. That's superstitious. It's just you're just a rational being. You can see it, you can hear it, you can understand it, then you make a decision and that's all that matters. So to them, religion became a personal thing and men fell in love with his intellect. We decided that we would go to the Scriptures and with the pitifully limited capacities of our fallen nature, we would examine and determine what was in the Bible that was true and good and anything outside of the comprehension of our physical senses was really not true and could not be trusted.

So we fell in love with our intellect and we began to say the human mind was infallible and men's ability to reason with the human mind is all that we need and so God became the subject of our investigation. He had to submit to us and his word was no longer the final authority, we became the final authority. And that's what you see in all the major educational institutions of higher learning, literally, in the world. That you can study religion in most of the great Christian universities and it's studied just like you study Shakespeare or any other writings of antiquity. You just bring this empirical scientific method to bear on the text of Scripture and you with your powers of the natural man can decide what's true and what's not true and everything that is spiritual or supernatural is to be rejected.

Now, liberalism of course, was an offspring of rationalism and liberal theologians and liberal theology is dominant today. Again, if you listen to some of them preach, they are going to use the name Jesus, they're going to quote Scripture and, men, fathers, heads of households, you've got to be discerning and listen to what they are saying and what are they bringing out of the text; are they letting the text speak and leaning on the Spirit of God to give truth to the people, or are they bringing a human, man-centered interpretation to the text? So the miracles of the Bible can't be trustworthy, can't be true. We are now rationalists.

Then there was another movement that came along and, by the way, I think there was certainly some good in this movement, Orthodoxy. Fundamentalism is another word that would come out here and, again, I would agree with the tenants of fundamentalism but what I mean by fundamentalism is that they held to sound doctrine of the Scriptures but it was a cold intellectual and harsh thing. It was just a very staunch and hard and cold pounding of certain things and a coercive spirit to get people to walk lockstep on true sound doctrine. So it had a lot of good head knowledge in it but it didn't touch the heart.

This is what I think we have seen in our own Southern Baptist Convention in the last 40ish years as we had a warfare against theological liberalism or rationalism. Came over from Germany, spread across Europe, came across the ocean, infected our universities and our own Southern Baptist graduate schools of theology; they are called seminaries. And our seminaries had gone way off base into rationalism and liberalism and we fought a battle to try to remove all of those professors and those teachings and restore Orthodox Bible professors and that has happened and there has been a wonderful historical renewal of sound doctrine and godly teaching in our seminaries. However, as I have said many times, in our denomination, the Southern Baptist Convention, we changed the mind of the denomination but we haven't affected the heart. Do you know what the heart is? The local churches. The local churches. You can fill your mind with all that you want but if the heart is not affected, it's not real yet. As a matter fact, the churches are far worse off today than they were 40 years ago. The churches are functioning as man-centered rationalistic liberal churches; though they have a form of orthodoxy, they're not living in it. So we want to be careful that we don't follow the false teaching of just a harsh, cold, lockstep commitment to doctrine on paper without a heart grasp comprehension, passion and joying in that doctrine.

Well, in the 20th century, there is what I would call politicism, a politicizing, if you will. Europe was sort of the first that became so political in their religious views. It's true in most of Europe today. Maybe I shouldn't say most because I don't know that for sure. It's probably true that there are state churches and the pastors and leaders of the state churches get a check from the state. The Cochrane's used to tell me that Josephine grew up there in Germany and said, "You know, my relatives in Germany can't believe that we joyously give to our church because they hate that they are taxed to give money to the state church, the Catholic Church." And that's the way it is. There was a mixture of the two. Hitler, for example, knew how powerfully the church was tied to the state so he just used his power of the state to develop, if you would, his own type of Christianity and used that as a force. You do realize in Hitler's Nazi-ism, there was a great movement of

professing Christianity. It had a form of godliness but denied the power thereof. However, are you listening, church? As in every culture and as in every time, there was a true remnant church. There was the great false church that did the talking but wasn't the real thing, but there was a remnant like Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who were martyred in Roman jails because they stood against the wickedness of the Nazi-ism.

Now, in America, we probably saw the first true politicism, this thing that looks like Christianity but denies the true power, in what was called the social Gospel. That was probably real popular in the 60s and today that word has fallen off and now you hear the phrase "social justice," and you hear the phrase, "liberation theology," which means that we're going to take over the governments of the world and intermingle our version of Christianity which is just that we take what we interpret as the social justice teachings of Jesus and get everybody on equal footing. It's just socialism or communism with religious garb on it is all it is. Then we're going to fix everything. Everything's going to be straightened out. There's even a group that would be more to our doctrine who would be Reconstructionists. This all comes under politicism. And these Reconstructionists want to unite the church and the state again and then use the power of the church to purify, rather the power of the state to purify the church.

Now, before there was an America and before there was a Roger Williams, the first Calvinist Baptist in America who started a church that was not a state church, all of our forefathers, the early Puritans, the early colonies and all of our European forefathers, believed in state churches because they believed the church needs the power of the state to backup the pure and godly principles of the church. And vice versa, the state needs the purifying effect of the church. While there's good reasoning there, I believe Roger Williams, the first Baptist who started the first Baptist church in America in Providence, Rhode Island. He gave it that name, by the way, because he was a Calvinist. And he started that church and he made a separation between church and state and he allowed others of different religious beliefs to come to Rhode Island, but some secularists and liberals like to say Roger Williams was a liberal who wanted to separate church and state. That's not true. Roger Williams let others come to Providence, Rhode Island and start their religion but he required them to debate him in the public square on the truth of Christianity. So he said, "You're not going to be coerced." Now, why would Roger Williams teach that? Because he knew you can't take just a cold system and use state authority and cause people to be real Christians. He taught that you've got to preach the Gospel and the Gospel will change men's hearts, then from the heart they would desire to be real Christians and good citizens of the state. And this whole idea that we've got to get government involved to take our liberal views of Christianity and involve them in the world is politicism and it's another one of these false movements; these things that look like the real thing but deny the power therein.

Even someone that I admire, I was fortunate to be asked to spend a whole day with him not long before he passed away, Dr. Jerry Falwell, and I think Dr. Falwell at times got very, very involved in politicizing or being politically involved with his religious efforts. Now, don't misunderstand me: Christians ought to be salt and light in the political world, but sometimes I wish Dr. Falwell had put more energy into his local church and making it

sound and solid and being the light and the salt that it ought to be. Now, that's not a personal attack in any way, shape or fashion, but, brothers and sisters, the answer is not the Republican Party. The answer is not the political system. And I'm kind of like my granddaddy, my granddaddy said he only voted for one Democrat in his life and he had to because it was his first cousin. But nevertheless, Republicans are not the answer and Democrats sure aren't the answer, Christ is the answer. And as I've said so many times, what would it be like if all 45,000 Southern Baptist churches had true membership? Had real accountability for their membership? Real loving compassionate church discipline for unrepented of sin? How that would have an impact on the culture. Friends, listen, the culture, we're a joke to the culture. The church has no effect on the culture because we have no genuineness.

Well, politicism, and then in the 1950s, this will ring a bell with most of you. It's been around a long time but we really saw this flowing strongly in the 1950s and that is ecumenism. Ecumenism just said we've all got to get together. So we all ought to get together, all of us who claim to be Christians, and let's downplay, if not completely leave out, all the doctrines that cause division, and unity became the idol of the day. Leave off everything that might cause any disunity. We don't need all these denominations, they would say. We don't need all these separations among Christians. Well, I would agree to that, but what happens is you've got to be committed to truth and we'll unify on truth. You don't unify on unity, you unify on truth. They'd say, "Well, all we need is Christian love and we'll just all unify around Christian love." You know, the Greek word for "love" is "agape," and one fellow said, "That's just sloppy agape is what that is." And it really was.

They came up with the phrase that they called the Jesus hermeneutic and what they did, they had a liberal view of Jesus which is they took the Jesus of Scripture and knocked off everything that didn't fit their social agenda. Everything about loving everybody and caring for everybody and healing everybody. Again, more of a socialistic Jesus is what they came up with. Then they said you've got to interpret all the rest of the Bible by this view of Jesus that we have. So you just dumb everything down to Christianity is nothing more than everybody gets treated fair, everybody gets cared for, everybody has a fair shake, etc. etc. etc. Ecumenism.

Then a movement that's certainly been around for centuries but it really took off, the charismatic movement had a lot of this in it, all of us, our denominations have and that's experientialism. Experientialism. This is a difficult one to combat because people can have deep, deep experiences in religion that are not founded on truth, and they'll die before they give it up. That's been around so long and what they actually mean by that is truth is determined by experience. They'll say, "Well, I saw a vision or I received a revelation from God." That's the truth. Folks, there are millions and millions of people today that sit on the edge of their seats waiting for some idolized spiritual authority to tell them what God told them to tell them. And they base their lives on it and it's just an amazing thing. Listen, brothers and sisters, whether it's Benny Hinn or Jim Baker or Jeff Noblit, it's "What saith the Scripture?" that matters. You are to test what I say by the word of God. Now, I hope after 33 years you would say, "I think he's fairly trustworthy."

I'm going to be paranoid about everything but nevertheless I and all men, I may preach the most incredible sermon and lather this thing up and whip it up and get you flopping on the floors and foaming at the mouth and feeling so blessed and at the end of the day it be nothing but a worked up psychological mess. God wasn't near the place.

We had a young boy in our church years ago who was in rock 'n roll music and was probably going to make it big and he was gloriously converted and he joined Grace Life Church; we were First Baptist Church in that day. He was invited after he was converted to come and share his testimony at another type church, a charismatic type church, and I'm not picking on the charismatics. There are some good brothers and sisters who are charismatics but there has been a lot of excesses in that movement. Anyway, he said, "I was in this service and I shared my testimony. The preacher got up and things got to rolling and, I mean, it got really excited and people were laying out on the floor and wailing and falling out and things were happening," and he said, "It was just kind of like the preacher decided it was over and within five minutes everybody was up and in the Fellowship Hall eating hotdogs." That's the way he said it. I said, "What did you think about that?" He said, "Brother Jeff," now he's a brand-new Christian. He said, "I don't know but I feel like if God got a hold of them the way they say God got a hold of them, they couldn't eat hotdogs five minutes later." I think there's some truth in that. Just the experience they were after and there's a lot of that that goes out.

Jim and Tammy Baker were real into this movement. Benny Hinn, I think even Jimmy Swaggart had a lot of experientialism in his ministry. Now, listen to me, we, based on biblical authority, strongly believe in experiential religion. You must experience the new birth. You must have experienced conviction of sin. You must have experienced the weight that you're a sinner. You must have experienced the coming of Christ and that forgiveness of sins. Now, we don't base it on feelings but they are feelings that are there, amen? It's a real experience but that's very different from experientialism. Very different.

Some of our early church fathers, well, not real early because that would go back 2,000 years, but let's say some of the leaders of some of the great spiritual movements of God like the Great Awakening in the early parts of the 18th century, Jonathan Edwards for example. Jonathan Edwards was a brilliant, brilliant man. The man was probably a genius. Even secular historians say the pastor, Jonathan Edwards, was one of the most brilliant intellectuals of American history. One of the first presidents of Harvard University, was the first president, I think, of Harvard University. But anyway, Jonathan Edwards was a great instrument in what was called the Great Awakening that literally rocked Europe and the early American colonies for several years and hundreds of thousands of people were converted. Do you know who most of these people were? They were members of the Anglican church, the church of England, that had fallen into just dead orthodoxy, and Jonathan Edwards and men like John Wesley and George Whitefield and others, were preaching, "You must be born again, there must be an experience of grace in your heart. It's not just going through the cold, remote emotions of religion that makes you a child of God." And God was moving. They would have meetings that would go on for hours and people were wailing about their sins and crying out to God and experiencing great repentance and faith.

But, Jonathan Edwards, read his writings, he talks at great length at how much hard work it was to separate the true from the false. He said while God was truly bringing revival and saving so many souls, there was a movement that came along with the true that was counterfeit, where people just wanted to experience something. And being a godly, discerning, mature Christian leader, he worked hard to separate out the two. You know, you can build a lot of following and a lot of emphasis. I honestly used to think as a young minister that if you really give people sound doctrine and sound teaching, people will love it and support it, but I found out it was right the opposite. Men with Ph.D.'s, men with learning, men of power and authority, they flock to these false ministries and give them millions of dollars. Benny Hinn brings in over \$100 million a year preaching garbage that is way heavy on just having an experience, not receiving the truth. Be careful, these are things that have the form of godliness but deny the power thereof.

Now you say, "Wait a minute. It looks like it's got a lot of power." No, you need to watch those people on Monday after the Sunday service is over, and on Tuesday, and on Wednesday, and see if there is a, never perfection, but see if there is a pattern of the fruit of the Spirit: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Why do you think some of these greatest leaders of experientialism type movements have fallen into ill repute? Because it lacked the power thereof. Now, folks, that could happen, I think, to anyone but there seems to be an unbelievable number of those who have fallen into ill repute.

Well, subjectivism is the seventh one. I say this came in around the 80s, subjectivism. Just a self-exaltation is what this is. Everybody got to be worried about self-image and, boy, that came into the church. Got to have a good self-image. Look, you don't need a good self-image, you need a good Christ-image. Self-love and self-advancement. And I'm not saying there's not some good but I've learned enough about some of these divorce recovery things that you see at churches, it's just about as weak as it gets and it's heavily focused on self and not on God-centeredness and your responsibility to God. I've even had people who've been in those classes tell me it's just a chance to get hooked up and fornicate and get in trouble again, a lot of times, rather than get right with God. But I don't want to chase that rabbit any further. I've chased that one long enough, let that one go, alright?

Self-image, self-love, self-advancement, and here's the idea of this movement, this subjectivism: the church must meet all my needs. The church must make me feel better. The church must make me feel better about myself. It must make me feel better about my family. And it's a place where my needs are met and furthermore, if they don't do that, then I'm out of here because I'll find one that will. By the way, a church that proclaims to you, "We are here to meet all of your needs," is a place that's not going to meet any of your needs ultimately, because what you need is God and what you need is Christ.

Now, some of the men who have ridden this wave of subjectivism are men like Bill Hybels in the Willow Creek Church in Chicago, I think it is. Is it Chicago? Did I get that wrong? That's right, Tom? Rick Warren, the Southern Baptist who took the world by

storm with his "Purpose Driven Life" and the "Purpose Driven Church" movement. It has a lot of subjectivism, especially his earlier messages were very weighty in self needs and self-fulfillment. Andy Stanley and Ed Young Junior. Ed Young Junior is the son of Ed Young Senior, by the way, and Ed Young Senior was a president of the Southern Baptist Convention. These are men who have become the prominent leaders and voices in Southern Baptist life so you wonder why I'm down on it a lot, that's why I'm down on it a lot. Ed Young Junior does conferences with T. D. Jakes. Have you ever seen T. D. Jakes on television? T. D. Jakes is a member of the United Pentecostal Church which denies the deity of the Holy Spirit. But why would Ed Young Junior have a man who denies the deity? Brothers and sisters, that's blasphemy. That's heretical. Why would he have a man who denies the deity of the Holy Spirit, a cardinal doctrine of the Christian faith that Baptists have held to for thousands of years? Why would he have that man in his conference? Because he's into subjectivism. People like that. It helps meet their needs. It's where they are. I saw a video tape where Ed Young Junior, now he's got a church of about 20,000 people in attendance out in Texas. He's got, there's a video of him applauding Joel Osteen. Why? Why would he fall off the wagon that far? Well, it's just a total commitment to, "I want people to be brought in and I want to be committing to whatever they subjectively want and want to hear."

Well, there you have it. Just let me read them again and, again, there is an overlapping but generally you can see these in these ages like Paul told Timothy, these days, these epochs will come and they're difficult and it is difficult, especially when you attack them because people think you're against everything. Well, you're not against everything, you're just for the truth. Sacramentalism, then rationalism, then Orthodoxy, then politicism, then ecumenism, then experientialism, and the subjectivism.

Now, let's get back to what Paul told Timothy. What kind of minister or what kind of ministry is going to be effective in those societies? Well, they're going to have to be men of great spiritual integrity. They're just going to have to have the kind of integrity, now, integrity means an unbroken completeness. It means we don't let cracks come in. And the word "integrity" in the ancient Greek is the picture of a vase, a vessel that would hold water that has no cracks and wax painted sealing the cracks. What they would do is they would put wax and then paint over it and you couldn't see it, but that vessel, that vase had no integrity. Well, we need to have men who don't have cracks in their spiritual ministries. Secondly, we need ministries of great scriptural integrity. Then we need messages that preach words of great spiritual integrity.

Look at 1 Timothy 4:6, if you will, and notice what Paul tells Timothy here as he's preparing him and exhorting him about how to stay faithful in these kind of climates where these kind of difficult epochs are going to come and these false teachings that don't have true power of Christianity in them. He says, I'm back to 1 Timothy. I was in 2 Timothy. 1 Timothy 4:6 now, he says, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine which you have been following." Now, first of all, in pointing these things out to the people. What he's saying to him is, "As a faithful minister, you must be diligent and faithful to point out the errors that are prominent in professing religion of

your day. It's not going to be easy, Timothy, but in pointing out these things to your brethren, you will be a good servant," he says, "of Jesus Christ."

But not only warning people of error but, secondly, he needs to be an expert student of the word of God. One of the campaigns that I have been on ever since I began my ministry is to try to get churches to let their pastors spend time studying the word of God. It takes time. A pastor just cannot be available and do hospital visits and all the counseling and all the administration. My goodness, and then expect him to have meditated and prayed over and studied up and discerned. That in itself is a warfare because Satan doesn't want the pastor to do that and what has happened is most pastors I know have quit. Now, they haven't left the church but they quit trying. There's just not the energy to do what needs to be done in the word of God and do all the other things that churches are asking pastors to do.

So he needs to be an expert student of the Scripture and notice what he says here in verse 6 of 1 Timothy 4, "In pointing out these things to the brethren, you will be a good servant of Christ Jesus, constantly nourished on the words of the faith and of the sound doctrine." Constantly nourished. Expert student of the Scripture. A third thing, he needs to avoid the influence of unholy teaching. Look at verse 7 of this text. Verse 7 says, "But have nothing to do with worldly fables fit only for old women. On the other hand, discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness." That's the fourth thing here: he's a man who disciplines himself in personal godliness. He ought to be a man who is striving to walk in personal holiness and be an example to the flock of God.

Now look at verse 10, also he's to be a hard worker. He says, "it is for this we labor and strive, because we have fixed our hope on the living God, who is the Savior of all men, especially of believers." He uses that word "labor" and "strive." There is a hard work in studying, in teaching, in administering, in refuting false doctrine, and establishing the saints in sound doctrine.

Then verse 11, he's got to teach with authority, "Prescribe and teach these things." Of course he says in verse 12, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness." Timothy was a young man and I'm sure he came against some criticisms and maybe even some snickers and some, not the candy bar, but people just kind of, "Well, he's a young guy, you know, he doesn't know much." And Timothy was under Paul's command and under Paul's authority and he was to teach and prescribe these things even though he was a young man.

He was to be a model of spiritual virtue, verse 12, "Let no one look down on your youthfulness, but rather in speech, conduct, love, faith and purity, show yourself an example of those who believe."

Then there are some other things here that, look at verse 15, if you will. Now, all of this is the ministry of the word that is being talked about concerning the pastor. "Take pains with these things." That's a present imperative which means it's a continual action and it's a command. "I command you to continually be doing something." All right, Paul, what is

Timothy, the young preacher, is commanded to continually be diligent about? He says, "Well, he's to be diligent about being absorbed, immersed in these things so that your progress may be evident to all." One scholar said what this verse is saying is Timothy is to be up to his ears in the work of the ministry of the word of God. Now, why is that? Because difficult days are coming. Difficult epochs are coming. Satan will come at you with sacramentalism, and he'll come at you with Orthodoxy, and he'll come after you with subjectivism and on and on we could go and you're going to have to be diligent to know what is the false and erroneous teaching that Satan is bringing against the church today.

Now, as I conclude my message this evening, how many churches do you think are balanced on this right here? How many do you think are very serious about their preaching pastor really being absorbed in these things so he can faithfully do the things Paul charged Timothy to do? Here's what I have found: most churches would not allow him to lead these ways at all. They would say it's not that important. They put up with a poor pulpit ministry. They would put up with gimmicks and shallowness and worldly things slipping off through the pulpit as long as he would do the personal ministry. I hear this all the time and if you've said this lately, I don't mean this as a rebuke to you but it's not good thinking. They'll say, "Well, you know, this guy, he's a good pastor but he's not a great preacher." Wrong. Great pastoring is great preaching. I don't mean great preaching as to his style and his delivery, I mean if he is faithful to preach you the word of God and warn you from these errors, these things that have a form of godliness but deny the power therein, then he is pastoring you well.

But listen to me, if he's not doing that, I don't care how much time he spends in your time of crisis, he's not pastoring you well at all. And thus the era of the Roman Catholic Church, they teach that when the priest is there, God is there. No, God is there through his word. God reveals himself through his word. Faith comes by hearing and hearing the word about Christ. How does Christ become real to people? Through the word. Listen, you're far better off knowing Jesus than you are knowing Jeff. Did you hear that? You're far better off knowing Christ than you are Jeff Noblit. I've heard a lot of people tell me that and I'm very glad. I've had people tell me, "You know, the Christ you've preached has been very real to me in my time of need, in my time of crisis."

So what happens? These churches that don't take this serious, these churches that do not have this priority so they don't have pastors who are faithful, they don't have pastors who are absorbed in these things, they do not have pastors that are up to their ears in the ministry of the word and so what happens? They are easy prey for the false teachings who have the form, the outward appearance of true things but are not the true things at all.

You are a very rare congregation because contrary to having people who would be critical of me for not doing a number of other things that would be common, perhaps, in a church setting, you are a people who strongly urge your pastor to, "Whatever you do, pastor, give us the word of God." And I believe I've tried to be faithful to warn you of the false and in Paul's word to Timothy, dangerous forms of doctrine that deny the power

thereof. I think if you've listened well and I think if you've prayed and I think if you've been discerning, you've been well equipped in these areas. I would hope that if you left the shepherding of this pulpit that if you went to other places you could discern before long whether this was a genuine and true ministry or not. That's my prayer.

Let's stand together in prayer tonight, alright?