

Instructions for Last Days Ministry

2 Timothy 3:1-15
Part 2

These last days are marked by waves of false teaching, and the faithful minister is duty-bound to firmly stand against them.

LTS: 2 Peter 1:21 - 2:9

Last week we kind of launched into a short series of messages on what Paul calls the “Last Days.” And as we saw last week, when the biblical authors speak of the Last Days, they mean that period of time between Jesus’ first and second coming. In that sense the entirety of church history has taken place in the “Last Days.”

Now if you weren’t here last week, let me assure you here that Paul’s objective is NOT to take us deep into a course on eschatology, but simply to warn Timothy, about a particular danger that is endemic to the “last days.” He says (v. 1) “In the last days there will come times (i.e. seasons, epochs, or waves) of difficulty.” And the cause of these difficult days is the influence of false teachers whose heretical doctrine provokes people in the church to become “Lovers of self, lovers of money, and proud (just to mention 3 of the 18 characteristics Paul identifies).

In the previous message I offered a list of general waves of false teaching that came over the church through the centuries. I mentioned sacramentalism, rationalism, mysticism, pragmatism, evolution, and psychology, all of which have found their way into the church. To be sure these general waves of false teaching are still with us. But there are also some very specific forms of false teaching that have also swept through the protestant, evangelical, and even (to some degree) reformed churches in recent decades. For example, believers in my lifetime have witnessed the influence of false teachers such as

- Robert Schuller and his Power of Positive Thinking false doctrine.
- Jim & Tammy Baker along with Jimmy Swaggart and others who deceived and robbed the church by their health & wealth false doctrine.
- In more recent years the church has been confused and conflicted over what has been called the New Antinomianism, led by Tullian Tchividjian and others who identify as conservative and reformed evangelicals.

- Today the church is being deluged by teaching on social justice that in some cases redefines the gospel into something the N.T. authors never intended.

Paul is concerned about these things. He knows he is about to die and he wants to make sure Timothy is clear on his duty to stand against the waves of false teaching as they come to inflict harm upon the church.

But specifically, how does a faithful pastor or faithful Christian stand against the influence of false teachers? Well, Paul offers six clarifying instructions that prepare us for ministry in these “Last Days”

But before we unpack this passage, let’s take a minute as always to stand and read together the wonderful Word of God.

Read 2 Tim. 3:1-15

Once again, I see six clarifying instructions that Paul hands to Timothy, and to us. We spent all of our time last week discussing the first; namely,

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

1. In verses 1-5 Paul offers 18 characteristics of those who have succumbed to the false teaching of their day. Moreover, as we will see later in this passage, they also describe the false teachers themselves.
2. We might summarize this list by saying that such people are characterized by love of self (and all of its various manifestations), and by having a form of godliness but denying its power to bring about real change (sanctification).
3. It’s important for pastors and their people to expect this kind general apostacy. Otherwise, when a minister of the gospel or a faithful Christian discovers that people are not as responsive to their ministry as they imagined they should be, they may be tempted to tweak the biblical message and method of gospel ministry to entice people to respond. But that would be a tremendous error. Indeed, it has been a devastating error in the church of our time.
4. Remember the story in Luke 16 of the rich man and Lazarrus? When the rich man died and went to hell he cried out to Father Abraham asking him to send someone back from the dead to tell his brothers so that they wouldn’t follow him into judgment. But Abraham said, “They have Moses and the prophets. If they are unwilling to

believe Moses and the Prophets (i.e. the O.T. Scriptures) they will not believe even if someone comes back from the dead.

5. The faithful minister's job is to proclaim God's word in God's way without regard for how people respond.

6. So the first instruction is: Expect a General Apostasy. Second...

II. Be alert for Deceivers (3:6-8)

From the end of v. 5 through v.8 Paul teaches how to respond to false teachers and reveals their tactics so Timothy will be alert to their schemes. It's as if Paul has gotten hold of the opponent's playbook and is revealing the details to us to tip the advantage in our favor.

1. Notice first how Paul wants us to relate to professing believers who teach and live in a way that is clearly contrary to biblical teaching and morality. Such people are not the believer's friend. In fact, Paul at the end of v. 5 declares, "Avoid such people." That is, don't sit under his teaching. Don't buy her books. Don't go to their conferences. Don't read his posts, tweets, blogs, Snapchats, or mode of communication I have missed. Avoid him. And tell your people to stay clear of them as well.

A. Now, some tender soul will say, "That's sounds so unloving! That's feels so divisive! That so legalistic! But remember this, my friends: As John Stonestreet often says, "All ideas have consequences, and bad ideas have victims." Paul is concerned about all the people in the church who are in danger of being victimized by the false teacher's bad ideas.

B. Some of those victims will turn away from the gospel shipwrecking their faith on the hidden reefs of a works-based righteousness. Others will shipwreck on the shoals of licentious living under the guise of personal liberty.

C. O' beloved, listen to me, false teaching is a serious danger. And the most loving thing shepherds can do for their flock is to lead them away from such danger and guide them into the green pastures and quiet waters of the truth.

D. The Psalmist had a rather gracious way of offering the same warning we now hear from Paul. Psalm 1 reads,

Blessed is the man who does not walk in the way of the wicked, not stands in the path of sinners, or sits in the seat of scoffers. But his delight is in the law of the Lord. And on His law, he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does he prospers. The wicked are not so but are like chaff which the wind drives away.

- E. Beloved, all of Scripture sounds this same warning - a clarion call to listen to the wisdom of the Father for His glory and your own great joy.
- F. By the way, this is why we are so vigilant and discriminating about what goes into our church library and bookstore. (I once found a copy of Rabbi Cushner's book, *Why bad Things Happen to Good People*. False teaching). And this is why when someone comes with a box of books to donate to the library we always ask, "What do you want us to do with any books that we decide NOT to use?" You see, my friend, as Christian already know, ideas matter. Truth matters. False teaching matters. And so, Paul requires faithful ministers to respond appropriately and decisively to false teaching. Avoid them.

5. We get a much clearer picture of the danger false teacher bring to the church when we read about their strategy to proselytize and get people to join them in their error.

Read v. 6-7

6. You see, among those who have embraced false doctrine are some who are down-right evangelistic about it. They go out of their way to entice others to join them in their error. How do they do it? What's their strategy? Paul says, "The creep (or "worm their way) into houses and take advantage of the vulnerable."

7. In Paul's words, they "capture weak women."

- A. Paul pictures this as almost a military operation. To "capture" means to take captive, **to gain control over**, make a prisoner of, as a prisoner of war.
- B. And notice whom they are taking captive. Paul calls them "Weak women." He is not speaking about all women, but rather those who are weak minded or Lit. "little women," a term of contempt for certain women who were idle, silly, and undiscerning.

- C. They were also women who were full of guilt due to personal sin. Paul says they are “burdened with sins” and “led away by various passions.” And since they were not dealing with the guilt of their sin in a biblical manner, their consciences were susceptible to teaching that appeals to their lusts and illegitimately relieves them of their guilt.
- a. The word “Passions” here is often translated “lusts.” (James 4:1-2)
 - b. These women were in the church, but they were not godly women. They had a form (Morphosis), a shell, a façade of religion but no intention of humbling themselves, repenting of their sins, and following Christ in truth.
- D. It is likely that these were wealthy “Society women.” IN our day this would be those women in particular who sit at home watching soap operas or waste all their time on social media and are not striving to grow in the knowledge of God. They have a form of godliness without any real spiritual substance.
- E. Furthermore, these were women who wanted to be thought of as educated. They loved to hear sermons, especially if the teaching was new.
- F. John R.W. Stott observes,
- They were the kind of women who would ‘listen to anybody’, at the same time they could ‘never arrive at a knowledge of the truth’. Constitutionally incapable of reaching any settled convictions, they were like little boats tossed hither and thither by a storm (cf. Epb: 4:14). In such a state of mental confusion, people will listen to any teacher, however specious. It was no love of truth that impelled them to learn, however, but only morbid love of novelty. Such women, weak in character and intellect, are an easy prey for door-to-door religious salesmen.”¹

8. I think this would be an excellent time for me to say on behalf of the men of this church that we praise God for the many gifted, discerning, theologically minded, modest, morally pure Female Jesus-lovers He has given Calvary Bible Church. Over the years I have known of many occasions when false teaching or sinful controversy have been averted by the wise intervention of spirit-filled, Scripture-saturated women in this church body. Some of you have known the Lord for longer than I have been alive. Others have proven themselves to be wise and godly beyond their years. We are unspeakably blessed to have you as sisters in Christ. And your faithful ministry to the rest of us has been incalculably precious to us. We praise God for you.

¹ John R. W. Stott, p. 89

9. In the next verse (8) Paul switches back from the vulnerable women who are being taken advantage of because of their own foolishness and sin, to the men who are Paul's primary concern.

Read v. 8

10. Here Paul offers an example of what the false teachers are like. They are like Jannes and Jambres. These names are never used in Scripture but are all over the writings of Jewish tradition... , Jannes and his brother Jambres were said to be Pharaoh's magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7:11.²

11. Paul's point here, is, that Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses by attempting to imitate his miracles, thus neutralizing the evidence that he was sent from God. In like manner, the false teachers in Paul's day, opposed Paul's ministry of the biblical gospel. How did they do it?

- by setting up a [similar claim](#) to that of the apostles;
- by pretending to have as much authority as they had;
- and by thus [neutralizing the claims of the true revelation of God](#), and leading off weak-minded persons from the gospel. This is often the most dangerous kind of opposition that is made against the true church.³

12. Men like this always present themselves as superior in intellect and spiritual maturity. But Paul sees right through them. They are in fact...

- A. Men of corrupted minds. Corrupt means ruined, depraved, perverted. They may look good on the outside but they are utterly corrupt.
- B. And in God's eyes they are disqualified. Their faith is unapproved and worthless. They are wolves in sheep's clothing. They are clouds without water. They are hidden reefs in your gatherings.
- C. And by the way, "The Faith" in the N.T. is always a reference to the true Gospel of Jesus Christ.

12. How is a minister to be faithful in these last days?

First, he Expects a General Apostacy.

² Keener, C. S. (1993). *The IVP Bible background commentary: New Testament* (2 Ti 3:8). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

³ Barnes, 4/11

Second, he remains alert for Deceivers and then third, he

III. Rest in a Sovereign Promise (3:9)

Read v. 9

1. Of course the villains in the church may win the day for a while. They will make some progress and even cause significant harm. But in the end, they will be exposed for what they truly are.

2. Jannes and Jambres ultimately could not match all Moses' signs. They were exposed for the deceivers and tricksters that they were. And in Paul's day, God would also confound this heretical movement in his own time. In Paul's first letter to Timothy he wrote (1 Tim. 5:24), "The sins of some people are conspicuous, going before them to judgment, but the sins of others appear later." In other words, "Time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time the truth will come to light." A wise man once said, There is something patently spurious about heresy, and something self-evidently true about the truth. Error may spread and be popular for a time but it 'will not get very far. In the end it is bound to be exposed, and the truth, is sure be vindicated. This is a dear lesson of church history.

3. Need some examples? Try these on...

- A. Where is the false teaching of [Open Theism](#) which is said to have be the most significant controversy about the doctrine of God in evangelical thought in the 20th century? It is gone!
- B. Where is [The Immergent church and its false teacher, \(Rob Bell\) . That movement](#) was all the rage in the U.S. just a decade ago? It has all but completely dissolved. Their foolishness had been exposed.
- C. Where is the false teaching of [Harold Camping](#) (former president of Family Radio network) who predicted that the 2nd coming of Christ would happen on May 21, 2011, and who called all Christians everywhere to leave their churches and prepare for the end. When Christ didn't come, even the mainstream media declared him to be a false prophet.
- D. Time and truth go hand in hand. Given enough time the truth will come to light, and their foolishness will be exposed.

4. In the light of this reality, what's a faithful minister to do in these difficult Last Days? How about this: Rest in a sovereign promise.

A. When Paul says "they will not get very far" I submit to you that he is standing firm on Jesus' awesome promise, "I will build my church."

B. Paul isn't operating from a whimsical, "don't worry, Be happy" mindset. No! Regardless of how Paul labored and suffered for the welfare of the church, at the end of the day he could lay his head down and rest believing that No Matter What, Jesus will build His church. And not even the gates of hades (i.e. Death Itself) has the power to overturn it.

5. And if I can take just a short aside for a moment: Do you know how God usually preserves healthy church from heresy? This may surprise you. He does it through community.

6. In Eph. 4, Paul teaches that God gives Pastors and Teachers to the church to...

"equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ until we all attain to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ, so that we may no longer be children tossed to and fro by the waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by human cunning; by craftiness and deceitful schemes. Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the Head, into Christ."

7. How do we thwart the plans of false teachers? We devote ourselves to bible-saturated community where people regularly speak the truth to one another in love. By the corporate strength of the community of Christ we resist being carried away by every wind of doctrine.

8. Mark Dever writes:

Creeds, confessions, and statements of faith are useful. Denominational accountability is beneficial. Sound public teaching is invaluable. But nothing safeguards the gospel quite like the supernatural community of faith that gospel preaching produces.⁴

9. Beloved, this is one of many reasons why we should not forsake the assembling of ourselves together (as the author of Hebrews says). And Sunday morning should NOT be the only time we are together. We are not a club. We are the body of Christ and for our own growth and protection he wants us to be together.

⁴ Mark Dever, *The Compelling Community*, (Wheaton, Crossway, 2015), 41

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