

GOD WITH US

Part 11: LATER LETTERS

Message 4 – Pastoral Epistles

Paul's Final Letter

2 Timothy 3, 4

Introduction

As Paul drew his final letter to a close, he had solemn words for his beloved spiritual son. The future would be difficult for the servant of God in a world that would turn toward increasing godlessness. Paul through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was warning Timothy of what would be taking place in his own and future generations. But, the same warnings are as relevant today in increasing ways. Opposition will be strong; deception will be rampant; people will live in ways that are completely opposite to the ways that God has designed them to live. Thus, Timothy must stay rooted in the unchanging, inspired Word of God. He must read it, live it, teach it and preach it until the day that God calls him home. He must walk in the footsteps of his devoted follower of Christ, the Apostle Paul and suffer, if necessary, to fulfill his calling from God.

Warning about the Last Days: 3:1-17

In ch.2 Paul gave us 8 pictures of the faithful servant of God. In contrast, ch.3 gives a vivid description of what people will be like in *“the last days.”* These “last days,” broadly interpreted, have been since the beginning of the kingdom of Christ, the Messiah which began in the 1st Century (cf. Acts 2:16-17; 1John 2:18). Since Christ ascended into heaven, it has been 2,000+ years, and with each millennium, the climate of living with God’s Word as our compass continues to grow more antagonistic. The *“difficult times will come”* for those who are trying to be faithful servants of God in a world that is increasingly filled with evil.

- Characteristics of people in the last days: 3:1-5

“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; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these” (3:1-5).

Lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure . . . rather than lovers of God. We were made to love God and to be loved by God; and to love our fellow humans as we love ourselves. This is A HEART ISSUE. If we love ourselves first, at the expense of others, this is at the root of the misplaced loves. In the last days, people will love the things God has created for human enjoyment without enjoying and loving God in the midst of enjoying His creation and gifts. It is ultimately God Who made all things for us to enjoy. We will love the gifts rather than the Giver.

Boastful, arrogant, conceited. Pride was the original sin that led to envy and coveting, causing Satan to rebel against God (Isaiah 14:12-15; Luke 10:18). In the end, *boasting, arrogance and pride (conceit)* will be some of the primary evidences that humanity has followed the deceiver.

Unloving, irreconcilable, gossips, brutal, treacherous. Human love for other human beings will, as Jesus said, “grow cold” (Matt.24:12), losing natural affection and concern.

Holding to a form of godliness . . . though denying its power. In the end, people will be “religious” in the formal sense. This form of religion will lack the life-changing power of the Spirit of Jesus. The reality of the risen Christ, and His power to “do above and beyond all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20) will be denied.

- False teachers in the last days: 3:6-9

Paul continues by warning of the false spiritual teachers who will lead humanity into this powerless, formalistic kind of religion.

“For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those two came to be” (3:6-9).

According to Jewish tradition, Jannes and Jambres were the names of the two leading Egyptian magicians who tried to compete with

Moses by doing magic tricks that resembled the miracles he was performing (read Exodus 7:11,22). Paul was saying that in the same way, there will be religious deceivers who try to imitate the true work of the Spirit and the true religion of Jesus Christ. . . but *“their folly will be obvious to all.”* In particular, they will exploit people, particularly the vulnerable, whom they use for their own purposes and pleasures.

- Timothy called to stay the course: 3:10-17

Paul now turns again to exhort Timothy to a life of faithfulness in the face of such great opposition and deception. The keys for Timothy will be two-fold: 1) He must continue to follow the right example, and 2) He must continue to be immersed in the truth of God’s Word.

“But you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! Indeed, all who want to live in a godly way in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil people and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and beneficial for teaching, for rebuke, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man or woman of God may be fully capable, equipped for every good work” (3:10-17).

You followed my . . . then Paul lists 10 things in his life and example that Timothy had already been imitating. Timothy had watched Paul in those 10 areas and saw a sort of *living Bible* he could pattern his life after. Like Timothy, we can never be reminded enough of what it takes to walk with faith that does not give up or give in. (See Acts 13:14 – 14:20 on Paul’s ministry and consequent suffering in the cities mentioned here – Antioch, Iconium and Lystra.)

The word *“inspired”* (3:16) is made up of two Greek words – theo (God) pneustos (breath). Scripture is “God-breathed,” that is, it comes from the very breath of God. For that very reason, it has the

power to equip us for every good work. This is why it is so important to spend regular, quality time in God's Word.

The most important "Bible" that many people read will be the Bible that is your own life. In fact, it could actually be the ONLY "living Bible" that some people will ever see! People need to see the reality of Jesus Christ being lived out in your experience, before they become interested and eventually convinced that they can trust the words of Jesus Christ for their own lives. The transfer of faith from one generation to the next will not happen "in word only;" it must happen as others see us living out the reality of our faith in everyday life. Our walk must match (and reinforce) our talk. Otherwise, what we say with our mouths will be regarded as sheer hypocrisy.

Long before Timothy met Paul, he had learned much from his mother and grandmother (see also 1:5). *"From childhood (literally 'infancy') he had known the Sacred Writings . . . (3:15)"*. This is a reference to the Old Testament Scriptures, which had been read to Timothy from his earliest years. Now, Paul is exhorting Timothy to stay deeply rooted in God's inspired Word, for it has the ability to keep his life on track with God's plan and purposes. The word "equipped" (3:17) was used in Greek literature for ships that were "fully fitted" prior to a journey. God's Word can equip us for the journey of life.

Parents have the privilege and the responsibility to begin teaching the stories of the Bible, and the life of Jesus Christ in particular, to their very young infants. Children are so teachable, and love stories. Perhaps you were not raised learning the Bible stories when you were very young. You can (like many parents), learn the Bible stories as you read them to your children. Churches that take it seriously to partner with young parents in teaching children the Bible stories, will be a great support for you! Don't try to do it all alone. I (Shirley) chose to volunteer in the 2-year-old Sunday school class when our 1st child could attend. This began my decades of learning and teaching children and youth about the Bible in church.

Paul's Final Charge: 4:1-5

Paul draws the letter to a close by giving Timothy the most solemn of charges. The solemnity of this charge is clear in the way that Paul calls God the Father and Christ Jesus to witness it. When we see

clearly Who we will answer to in the end, it is more compelling to obey those authorities now.

Note on the names and titles of Jesus: Throughout Paul's letters, he often places the position of authority - "CHRIST"- before the name of JESUS. "Christ" is a title meaning "Messiah, or the Anointed One." (Same idea with "Jesus the Christ.") When "Lord" precedes "Jesus Christ," it adds the idea of ruling or kingship (lordship). In the 4 Gospels, "Jesus" was initially given to him at birth, which was a common name meaning, "God Saves." "*She will give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins*" (Matt.1:21). "Jesus" was used in the Gospels and in the Book of Acts. With the exception of the letter to the HEBREWS, the name "Jesus" was rarely used alone by the other New Testament writers, rather, it was accompanied by "Lord" or "Christ" or both. Thus, these writers were emphasizing the *position and authority of Jesus*, rather than simply giving His earthly (human) name.

"I solemnly charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires; and will turn away their ears from the truth, and will turn aside to myths. But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry" (4:1-5).

The essence of the charge is to preach and teach God's Word with faithfulness and patience in every season of life – especially when people want to turn away from truth to ideas that better suit their own interests. People will want to conform "God" to their ways, rather than being conformed themselves to God's ways. Thus, teaching God's Word in such an environment will require endurance combined with patience. The response of the audience cannot shape the determination of the teacher; rather, the determination of the teacher must shape the response of the audience.

The battle between “good and evil” has always been and always will be, fundamentally, a battle between the truth of God and the lies of Satan. The “father of lies” (Jesus called Satan in John 8:42-44, “the father of lies”) lied to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, (“Did God really say...? You will not surely die...” Gen. 3:1-5) and he has been lying to humanity ever since. We may think that “the culture is drifting;” but in reality, the culture is being guided by the “god of this world” (John 12:40; 14:30; 2Cor. 4:4), who opposes God’s truth on every front. The only weapon we can wield against his lies is the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God (Ephesians 6:17), our offensive weapon. This is exactly what Jesus did when He was tempted by Satan in the wilderness – He quoted Scripture to counter Satan’s lies (Matt. 4:1-11; Mk 1:12,13; Lk 4:1-13). The all-powerful One, Jesus, was our eg. If HE only answered Satan’s lies with the Scriptures, how much MORE do WE need to know the Scriptures to defend ourselves from Satan’s lies. In John 10:10, Jesus referred to Satan as “the thief comes only to kill, steal and destroy.” He WILL destroy our faith if we are not diligent to read, meditate and apply God’s truths. We must remain strongly rooted in God’s truth, or else we will be pulled away by the increasingly strong currents of Satan’s lies.

Paul’s Confidence: 4:6-8

Paul now expresses his own confidence in the Lord. He has completed the assignment given to him by Jesus, and now he is ready to meet his Lord and receive his reward.

“For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing” (4:6-8).

Paul’s life was a *drink offering* poured out on the altar of God. “*Departure*” was a word used of a ship being loosed from its moorings and setting sail. Paul was not just giving Timothy a solemn charge; he was also saying that he himself had lived out that same charge and was now ready to go meet the Master. The word “*appearing*” was used when a Roman Emperor would come to visit a city. They would deck out the city with garlands and wreaths; repave the roads and whitewash all the homes on the Imperial route. Everything changed when the appearing of the Emperor was

imminent. So, Paul says, everything should change for the believer who is eagerly anticipating the appearing of the Lord.

What a great example Paul gives us of “finishing well.” Paul had learned this from Jesus, his Lord. On the last night with his disciples, Jesus prayed to his Father in John ch. 17. “I have brought you glory on earth by finishing the work that you gave me to do” (Jn 17:4). As Paul neared his own death, he was confident that he had fulfilled God’s purposes for his life. He had fought, finished, kept. This is a question each of us should ask ourselves: When we reach the end of our journey, will we be able to say these same words with assurance and confidence?

Final Requests: 4:9-18

The letter now becomes very personal as Paul requests certain things from Timothy. Paul asked that Timothy would hasten to come before winter, bringing John Mark also, and some practical items: Paul’s cloak and his books.

“Make every effort to come to me soon; for Demas, having loved this present world, has deserted me and gone to Thessalonica; Crescens has gone to Galatia, Titus to Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Pick up Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for service. But Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. When you come bring the cloak which I left at Troas with Carpus, and the books, especially the parchments” (4:9-13).

The “parchments” refers to Paul’s special books, kept on animal skins. This is likely a reference to his copies of the Scriptures.

There is a special warning about a dangerous person named Alexander, who harmed Paul greatly. He may have accused Paul at his trial, while no one stood up to defend Paul. Timothy is warned that Alexander will likely try to harm others as well. Yet, in spite of being deserted at his trial, Paul knew that the Lord was standing by his side the whole time, giving him the strength to testify of his faith in Christ Jesus to his final breath.

“Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm; the Lord will repay him according to his deeds. Be on guard against him yourself, for he vigorously opposed our teaching. At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them. But the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me, in order that through me the proclamation might

be fully accomplished, and that all the Gentiles might hear; and I was delivered out of the lion's mouth. The Lord will deliver me from every evil deed, and will bring me safely to His heavenly kingdom; to Him be the glory forever and ever. Amen" (4:14-18).

Final Greetings: 4:19-22

Paul was usually very personal at the end of his letters, sending greetings to beloved friends in the city that was receiving the letter – in this case, Ephesus, where Timothy was the pastor.

"Greet Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. Erastus remained at Corinth, but Trophimus I left sick at Miletus. Make every effort to come before winter. Eubulus greets you, also Pudens and Linus and Claudia and all the brethren. The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you (4:19-22).

Prisca and Aquila had been friends and co-workers for much of Paul's ministry. They show up often in his life and letters. They were now back at Ephesus leading a house church. Onesiphorus was commended at the beginning of this letter as a courageous minister to Paul (1:16-18). Trophimus from Asia had accompanied Paul on his final journey back to Jerusalem (Acts 20:24; 21:9). At some point in Paul's later journeys, Trophimus had reunited with the apostle, only to be left sick at Miletus. (Paul had healed people throughout his ministry, but evidentially in this case he did not heal him. It seems that not every sick person is miraculously healed, which we have all experienced). Eubulus, Pudens, Linus and Claudia are all strong Roman names. It is possible that they were among those in Caesar's household that had come to faith in Jesus during Paul's final imprisonment. These final people are only named, but the Lord knows of their faith and courage as Roman believers.

"Grace be with you." This was Paul's personal farewell, his trademark in the way he closed his letters. Paul, who was first "Saul," a persecutor of Christians, dramatically encountered the risen Lord Jesus Christ as he was traveling on the road to the City of Damascus, to persecute and arrest the Lord's followers (Acts 9:1-22). He NEVER ever grew tired of telling people that he of all people deserved judgment, but the **GRACE OF GOD** was poured out on him instead. Take time to REMEMBER what you were like before you believed in Jesus Christ. As you remember your worst

moments even in your present circumstances, don't allow Satan's lies to try to bring you SHAME, but rather, focus on the GRACE OF GOD. Allow his undeserved GRACE to wash over you and draw your heart to God through Jesus Christ.

Discussion Questions

1. Ch. 3 begins by the Holy Spirit predicting through Paul, what types of attitudes and behaviors in people that will be obvious. Which of these have you observed to be happening around you?
2. Which can you identify of these even in yourself? Remember, God's love and grace and is ready to heal you and grow you as you admit (confess- 1John 1:8-10). Do you have a trusted friend, spouse or even child whom you can ask if they experience you speaking or acting like any of these?
3. Paul exhorted Timothy to continue remembering what he had learned and become convinced of from his mother and grandmother, but also from Paul (3:10-14). Who have you learned about God from? Has their influence in knowing and living out their faith helped you to become "convinced?"
4. 3:16,17 tells us what is so unique about Scripture. Describe how you have been impacted by God's Word. How do you feel more "equipped" to handle a person or a circumstance through what you are learning?
5. Paul does not shrink back from writing to Timothy about God's power amidst fears, suffering, hardship and abandonment. Life as a disciple and servant of Christ was hard for Paul and would also be for Timothy. How do these realities that Paul and Timothy experienced impact you?
6. How are you remaining anchored in the face of challenges in your own life?
7. Read through 2Timothy again. What are some main take-aways that you want to focus on?