

2 Timothy 3:6-13 “Straight Talk about Ministering in the Last Days”**

Main Idea: According to 2 Timothy 3:6-13, if we’re going to minister in the last days in ways that honor Christ, we must fulfill two basic responsibilities.

- I. We must avoid (6-9).
 - A. Consider their tactics (6-8).
 - 1. They creep.
 - 2. They capture.
 - 3. They confuse.
 - 4. They corrupt.
 - B. Consider their outcome (9).
 - 1. They will not succeed.
 - 2. Their folly will be made known.
- II. We must follow (10-13).
 - A. Consider Paul’s standard (10).
 - B. Consider Paul’s suffering (11).
 - C. Consider the implications for us (12-13).
 - 1. We must prepare for suffering.
 - 2. We must prepare for the increase of evil.

Make It Personal: Some questions to consider...

- 1. What place did I give the gospel in the past week?
- 2. What have I avoided in the past week because of the gospel?
- 3. How have I embraced suffering in the past week for the sake of the gospel?

Scripture Reading: 2 Timothy 3:1-13

As far as gospel opportunities go, these are tremendous days to be alive. We see the need for the gospel every time we watch the news.

That makes our current series in 2 Timothy so timely. Paul wrote this letter when he was in a dungeon facing execution as a preacher of the gospel of Christ. He wrote it to encourage his son in the faith Timothy who was apparently losing heart. Paul shares some very practical counsel for how to live and minister when the world is hostile.

But you say, “I’m not Timothy.”

That’s true. We are not Timothy. But like Timothy, we too have been entrusted with the gospel message and commissioned to make it known (Acts 1:8). And we face what Timothy faced, a world that resists the exclusive message we proclaim.

I’ve entitled this message, “*Straight Talk about Ministering in the Last Days.*” I say *straight talk* because Paul doesn’t mince words.

“But mark this,” he says. “There will be terrible times in the last days.”

That’s straight talk. *There will be.* Not might, but will. *Terrible times.* Not just difficult, but terrible (‘perilous times’ says the AV). *In the last days.* The last days of what? This age of the Messiah, which began when Christ came to earth two thousand years ago.

We’ve opened a God-breathed letter that talks straight to us about how to minister for Christ in the last days.

As we look back, even in our own country, we can see we’ve come a long way. Our nation was founded by men who had a strong faith in God, and on biblical principles.

William Penn said in 1681, “If you are not governed by God, you will be ruled by tyrants.”

** Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

The Constitution of the New England Confederation in 1643 said, "Whereas we all came into these parts of America with one and the same end and aim, namely to advance the kingdom of our Lord Jesus Christ and to enjoy the Liberties of the Gospel in purity and peace."

Here's the Mayflower Compact of 1620, "In the name of God, Amen, having undertaken for the Glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith...do...solemnly and mutually in the presence of God covenant and combine ourselves together..."

George Washington made this Thanksgiving Day Proclamation in 1789, "Whereas it is the duty of all nations to acknowledge the providence of Almighty God, to obey His will, to be grateful for His benefits, and humbly to implore His protection, aid and favors...Now therefore, do I assign and recommend Thursday, the 26th day of November next...that we may then all unite in rendering unto Him our sincere and humble thanks for His kind care and protection of the people of this country, and for all the great and various favors which he has been pleased to confer upon us."

What's happened in America?

Exactly what Paul told Timothy in his last inspired letter. There he was sitting in a Roman dungeon, awaiting his execution because of his service to Jesus Christ. Timothy was far away in Ephesus. He too was under the heat of Christian antagonism.

So Paul told him in 3:1-5, "Don't be surprised Timothy. Don't be blown away by the hostility the world vents at Christians. That's the way men will be in this period of time, between the first and second coming of our Lord Jesus. The problem with the world is people, Timothy. And the problem with people is that they have a misdirected love: They love themselves (2), money (2), pleasure (4), instead of loving God (4)."

So how are we to live in such times? According to 2 Timothy 3:6-13, if we're going to minister in the last days in ways that honor Christ, we must embrace two basic responsibilities. We must *avoid* (that's verses 6-9), and we must *follow* (that's verses 10-13).

I. We must avoid (6-9).

Who must we avoid? We're introduced to them in verse 6, "They are the kind who..." In the AV, "For of this sort."

Please note that the characteristics Paul described in verses 2-5 are true not only of secular people "out there," but also people who wear the cloak of religion.

It's sort of like "friendly fire". When you're in a war, you have a known enemy, and you fight your enemy. But there are times when you may be in endangered by blasts from your own troops. It's called friendly fire.

We see some not-so-friendly-fire in verse 5. "Having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it..." What enemy plagues the church of Christ? Yes, one enemy is the world system (1 John 2:14). But another, even more subtle enemy is religion itself.

Here Paul warned Timothy that the church would be under attack by people who promote God and a form of godliness. They're just like the people described in verses 2-5. But though religious, they undermine the church.

How do they do it? Paul wants us to consider two things, so that we might avoid this dangerous enemy.

A. Consider their tactics (6-8). In essence, they do four things.

1. *They creep.* Verse 6, "For of this sort are they who creep into houses," says the AV. The NIV says, "They are the kind who worm their way into homes."

Jude warned about false teachers who “secretly slipped in among you” (Jude 4). Paul says they creep and worm their way in. This enemy is subtle. He comes across like he is one of us, a Jesus-follower. But not really.

And notice where he shows up. He worms his way *into homes*, says Paul. You drop your guard when you’re at home, and that’s where he comes. To your kitchen table, or living room sofa, or recliner in the den.

That’s a peculiar place for an enemy of Jesus to attack. Not in the public arena, but in the privacy of your own home. You wouldn’t think he’d have a fighting chance there. But he does, because he doesn’t seem to be fighting. He seems to be a friend. He worms his way into your life.

And to what intent? What do they aim to do?

2. *They capture.* They creep so they can capture. Notice verse 6 again, “...who worm their way into homes and *gain control over* weak-willed women.” In the AV, “...lead captive silly women...”

Watch carefully. When Paul describes “silly women,” he’s not being a chauvenist. He’s not suggesting that all women are like this, or that men are not vulnerable to the wiles of false teachers.¹ Keep in mind that in Paul’s day, women had a very low status in society. That made them especially susceptible to smooth-talking, cunning, and persuasive teachers who wormed their way into the house.

What is Paul describing here? Apparently there were religious charlatans in Ephesus. They did not believe in the gospel of Jesus, and certainly didn’t preach the gospel. They preached another message, perhaps a mixture of Jesus plus legalism (salvation by your own good deeds).

And why? Their aim was to “capture” unsuspecting and vulnerable people (capture = to take prisoner in war), to proselytize church members.

Their methods were sneaky. They came in the back door. They were secretive. They made home visits when the men were gone. Divide and conquer.

Again, notice their target. The end of verse 6 says, “...weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires...”

Now here’s a person who is susceptible, a person who has professed faith in Jesus, but is loaded down with sin because they live by their fleshly desires. That kind of person is ripe for the picking.

If you say you believe in Jesus, but refuse to put off your sin by His power, you are in trouble. Just like these “silly women laden with sins” (= morally weak, sexual sin?) who are “led away with various lusts” (= lit. “many colored lusts”).

A person who refuses to deal with sin in his or her life, and who consequently wrestles with guilt becomes fair game for a cultist or religious racketeer. Do you know why? When some smooth-talker comes into the house, he flowers a few words of flattery. Then he plays on a person’s guilt. Then he offers a quick and easy solution. It’s not long before he grabs his new followers’ loyalty, and eventually their money and service.

And remember, all this is done in the name of religion!²

Illust: Irenaeus tells of a heretic Marcus... (Barclay, 192)

Illust: Today, heretics worm their way into homes via television and social media

¹ Observation by Wiersbe.

² Observation by Wiersbe.

3. *They confuse.* Verse 7, "...always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth."

The truth. God is truth, and He has revealed truth to the world in His Word.

What are we supposed to do with the truth? According to 2:25, we're to help people come to "a knowledge of the truth."

But notice what these false teachers do with the truth. First, they refuse to acknowledge the truth (verse 7). Then secondly, they oppose the truth (verse 8). Oh, they learn, indeed, they are always learning. But this learning never results in affirming the truth.

Some people, like the false teachers in verse 7, are constantly learning truth, sort of like a hobby, but never really coming to grips with the truth. But learning truth is not enough. I must affirm truth and then, by God's grace in Christ, live in light of it.

So if I'm a business owner, I must let the principles of God's truth impact the way I run my business. If I work for someone else, I must allow God's truth to impact my attitude towards my boss and fellow workers. I must choose to let God's truth impact every facet of my life--my thought life, my hobbies, the way I treat people.

That's what it means to be *Christian*. But not for these pseudo-Christians Paul is describing. They creep, they capture, they confuse. And...

4. *They corrupt.* Verse 8, "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected."

Paul uses an illustration from history to depict the kinds of people we are to avoid. Jannes and Jambres. Who were they?

You won't find their names in your Bible. Paul knew who they were, and so did Timothy, apparently because there was a well-known Jewish legend in their day that said that Jannes and Jambres were two of Pharaoh's magicians.

You remember the story? In Exodus 7, Moses went to Pharaoh and said, "God said, Let my people go!" But Pharaoh said, "NO!"

So what happened next? A contest. Between Moses and the Egyptian magicians. Jewish tradition says that two of these magicians were Jannes and Jambres.

What did they do? As Wiersbe points out, "These men opposed Moses by imitating what he did." When Moses cast Aaron's rod down so it turned into a serpent, the magicians did likewise. When Moses turned water into blood, the magicians followed suit. When Moses brought up all the frogs, so did the magicians. They resisted God's man Moses by imitating him (until the miracle of the lice which they could not imitate).

Satan's strategy hasn't changed. His ministers corrupt the truth by imitating it. They're like Jannes and Jambres. They try to look orthodox by doing what the true preacher does. And they try to sound like him too. So they talk about the truth. They even *learn* the truth. But in their hearts they refuse to affirm the truth, indeed, they *resist* the truth.

What would cause someone to do this? What's their problem? Paul says they have a mind problem and a faith problem. First, they are "men of depraved minds." In the AV, 'corrupt minds.' Sin affects a person's mind, his ability to think.

Secondly, they have a faith problem. "Who are far as the faith is concerned are rejected," says the NIV. "Reprobate concerning the faith," says the AV. The word "reprobate" means literally "not" + "pleasing"; not standing the test; counterfeit. A person

who is reprobate in the faith is one who may have made a profession of faith, but it was inauthentic. The test of time revealed his faith was not genuine.

Here comes the objection. “Wait. Are you insinuating that some people who say they are Christians are not?” That’s what Paul said, under the direction of God the Holy Spirit. And he said it in even stronger language in 2 Corinthians 13:5, “Examine yourselves to see whether you are in the faith; test yourselves. Do you not realize that Christ Jesus is in you—unless, of course, you fail the test?”

So there are the tactics of the false teachers. They creep, capture, confuse, and corrupt. And why do we need to know this? Because we must choose to *avoid* them and their tactics. “Have nothing to do with them,” says verse 5.

It’s tempting to do otherwise, to win a place at the table, so to speak, by adjusting our message, as they do. Why should we not? Of the many reasons, notice the one Paul mentions in verse 9, “But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.”

B. Consider their outcome (9). “But they shall proceed no further,” says the AV. Two things will happen, of this we can be sure.

1. *They will not succeed.* And...
2. *Their folly will be made known.*

There have been times throughout history when it seemed that heretics would win. Frankly, it’s discouraging to hear the statistics of the massive growth of cults like Mormonism and Jehovah’s Witnesses. But remember, falsehood may be fashionable, but only for a season. Error may spread and be popular, but only for a time. In the end, verse 9 holds true.

They will not get very far.

Their folly will be clear to everyone.

God will preserve His truth in His true Church.

Hymn: "The Church's One Foundation"

Last week, I spent time with a Romanian pastor, Benni. He shared how the Romanian church was under attack for decades by an atheistic system known as communism. But the Lord protected His church, and caused it to grow. Today the Romanian church faces other threats, one is materialism, another is the Orthodox Church.

But they will not get very far. And their folly will be clear to everyone.

I like the way Corrie Ten Boom put it, “If you look at the world, you’ll be distressed. If you look within, you’ll be depressed. But if you look at Christ, you’ll be at rest.”

These are great days to minister the gospel! To proclaim to sinners that God will forgive their sins if they will repent and put their faith in His Son and His sacrifice on the cross. But if we lose our saltiness, our message loses its power. So as we minister in the last days, we must *avoid*.

II. We must follow (10-13).

Follow whom? The Christ-honoring minister, in this case, Paul points to himself. Notice the strong contrast in verse 10, “You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance...”

Timothy certainly knew. But Paul wanted him to think again about it, and so must we.

A. Consider Paul’s standard (10). “You, however, know.”

Timothy, there are dangerous religious people who are a threat to the church. They creep, capture, confuse, and corrupt. But as for you Timothy! You know.

You know you are called by God to be different. You also know you have a God-given standard Timothy. You know it because you saw me model it for you.

What is our standard for living the Christian life? Paul calls attention to seven marks of the standard he set. First, you know all about...

1. *My teaching* - "my doctrine" (=instruction) - Timothy was Paul's disciple. Paul was the mentor, Timothy the mentoree.

1:6 "I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift.. by my hand."

1:13 "Hold fast the form of sound words which thou hast heard from me."

2:2 "...the things you have heard from me..."

Paul labored to teach the churches under his care sound doctrine. Timothy knew that. He knew Paul's aim wasn't to be flashy and flamboyant. He didn't try to entertain churches, to use his charisma to get a following like false teachers do. No. He taught sound, biblical truth.

This is the standard we are to follow. You know *my teaching*. Secondly, you know...

2. *My way of life* - "my manner of life" - God calls every Christian to be different from the world. To be distinct. We are called to live a holy life. We are to reflect God's holy character by our lifestyle. We must verify our teaching by our behavior. Paul did just that. And so he could say, "Timothy, you know I practiced what I preached."

This is our standard, too. And this. You know...

3. *My purpose* - I like the way Wiersbe describes Paul, "Paul was a servant, not a celebrity." Paul was a man driven by purpose.

Acts 20:24 "But none of these things move me that I might finish my course, and the ministry I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God."

Paul knew why he lived. When his feet hit the floor in the morning, he knew what he was to accomplish that day. His aim was simple, to know Christ better, and to make Christ better known to others.

And everyone who knew him knew that about him. You know all about my purpose, says Paul to Timothy.

If you asked the people who know me well, "What is Brad's purpose?," would they affirm, "Yes, his purpose is to know Christ and help others know Him.?"

This is the standard. There should be no question in people's minds as to our purpose. As one who has been saved by Jesus, our aim in all things should be to glorify the One who saved us, to make His reputation weighty in all we do.

4. You know my *faith*. Paul lived by faith, not by sight. He had a reputation for being a man of faith.

This too is our standard. We are to *follow* this. So ask yourself, "Am I known as a person of faith? Do people know that I trust God?"

Do your children know you trust God? What do your kids see you do when the bills pile up? Do they see you become agitated and irritable? Or see you trust God and His promises to provide?

Of course, this faith isn't something we manufacture. It's a gift. "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God (Eph 2:8-9)."

So when people see this faith in us, it just gives us another occasion to praise the One who put it there.

5. You know all about my *patience* (*makrothumia*, AV, "my longsuffering"). This word has to do primarily with your response to people who hurt you. You choose to suffer long with them. You don't give up.

Timothy, you know, by God's grace, that I have had a long fuse with people who have hurt me. I kept loving them, kept showing them Christ by word and action.

Can you say that? This is our standard as we minister in the last days. They will criticize us, laugh at us, attack us. But by God's grace, they must see that we suffer long with them. We don't give up, because we know where they are heading, which is where we once were heading.

6. You know all about *my love*. My agape. That's the standard of NT Christianity. "By this will all men know that you are my disciples," said our Savior in John 13:34-35, "by your love for one another."

You know I didn't respond to evil with evil, says Paul, but with good, with *love*.

7. You know my *endurance* (AV, "my patience"). This word *hupomone* refers to the ability to stick with it when the going gets tough, not so much the difficult people (that was *makrothumia*) as the difficult circumstances.

Timothy, you know I didn't run from tough situations. If God placed me someone, I endured, because I knew He had things to accomplish in and through me.

So this again is our standard. It's the path God calls us to follow as we minister in the last days. It's what Paul modeled. Paul is not boasting. He will say elsewhere, "By the grace of God I am what I am." But he is not ashamed to invite people to, "Follow me as I follow Christ (1 Cor 11:1)."

What happens if we live according to this standard? In the life to come, glory! "Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness... (2 Tim 4:8)." The glory is coming! But until then, there's something else the gospel minister can expect.

Paul experienced it, and talks openly about it in the next verse.

B. Consider Paul's suffering (11). Notice verse 11, "...persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them."

Remember, Paul is reminding Timothy of what he already knew. *You, however, know all about this, Timothy.*

How did Timothy know what Paul suffered in these cities? He knew it because he saw it firsthand. Lystra was Timothy's home. It was just fifteen years or so before this that Timothy first met this man who came to his city and proclaimed Christ.

It happened during Paul's first missionary journey. You can read about it in Acts 13-14. First, Paul went to Pisidian Antioch (13:14), preached in the synagogue, and to Gentiles as well. The result? "All who were appointed for eternal life believed," says 13:48. "But the Jews... stirred up persecution against Paul and Barnabas and expelled them from their region," according to 13:50.

So he went to Iconium. And what happened there? Look at Acts 14:5-6. "There was a plot afoot... to mistreat them and stone them. But they found out about it and fled to the Lycaonian cities of Lystra and Derbe."

God used the persecution to bring Paul right to Timothy's town. And what happened there? Acts 14:19 says, "They stoned Paul and dragged him outside the city, thinking he was dead."

So Paul fled that dangerous place and never returned, right? No. On his next missionary venture, guess where he went? Notice 16:1, “He came to Derbe and then to Lystra, where a disciple named Timothy lived.” Then verse 3, “Paul wanted to take him along on the journey.”

Yes, Timothy knew. Everywhere Paul went, he suffered for Christ. Some feel it was Paul's response to suffering that God used to reach Timothy. Timothy was a citizen of Lystra. He could well have been there and seen the angry mob stone this preacher and leave him for dead. I can't help but think it was Paul's response to persecution that played a vital part in Timothy's decision to become an ambassador for Christ, just as Stephen's bravery in martyrdom impacted Paul.

But it wasn't just the suffering that Timothy knew. Paul says at the end of verse 11, “Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.” Remember that too, Timothy. The One I suffered for stood with me, and delivered me, again and again and again.

See 4:18

Wiersbe gives us food for thought, "I wonder how Paul would match up with today's concept of a Christian leader. He would probably fail miserably. If he applied for service with a modern mission board, would he be accepted? He had a prison record; he had a physical affliction; he stirred up problems in just about every place he visited. He was poor, and he did not cater to the rich. Yet God used him, and we are being blessed today because Paul was faithful." (251)

Now watch what Paul does next. After reminding Timothy of his suffering, Paul invites Timothy (and us) to consider the implications.

C. Consider the implications for us (12-13). Verses 12-13, “In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”

Two implications...

1. *We must prepare for suffering.* Everyone, he says. Not some, but all.
2. *We must prepare for the increase of evil.* “Evil men and impostors will go from bad to worse.”

So when should we tell people that being a Christian involves suffering and the threat of deception? Should we wait until after they've walked with Christ for awhile, and then spring it on them?

No, we should do what Paul did, which is what Jesus did. The Lord told people right up front that if they were going to follow Him, it would cost them everything (Matt 10:38). And it would be worth it, for in the end they would gain the greatest gain, Christ Himself!

Corrie Ten Boom certainly knew about suffering. She endured a Nazi concentration camp for hiding Jews, and watched her sister die. She put it this way, "If God sends us on stony paths, he provides strong shoes."

We need to embrace the path of suffering, for on that path God carries us, and uses us to make His wonderful gospel known to a world in need.

Make It Personal: Some questions to consider...

1. *What place did I give the gospel in the past week?*

As Paul penned this letter, the gospel was forefront on his mind. He loved the gospel. He believed it, preached it, wrote about it, disciple men to proclaim it, suffered

for it, and will shortly die for it. He's writing this letter urging Timothy to contend for it, to train still others to make it known (2:2).

There is no message like the gospel.

In the beginning God. That's where the gospel begins, with God. This is God's world. He made it. He made for His purposes.

But herein lies our problem. In the beginning, the first man and woman, and every man and woman since, has gone his and her own way. We have sinned. We are lawbreakers. We are trespassers in God's world.

And for this we deserve eternal punishment. Indeed, when we were born into this world, we entered under God's just wrath, condemned, heading for eternal suffering. And there we would be forever.

But God. "But God demonstrated His love for us in this, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:8)." "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16)." "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, was buried, and raised on the third day (1 Cor 15:3)."

"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved (Acts 16:31)."

This is the gospel! The question I'm asking is, what did I do with it in the past week? Did I praise God for it? Did I affirm it as the basis for my eternal destiny? Did I share it with anyone?

To my non-Christian friend, I would say this. You need to *believe the gospel*, and if you do, by God's grace, He will save you and give you eternal life!

2. *What have I avoided in the past week because of the gospel?* That's Paul's first point. Have nothing to do with them. We don't live like the world does, or false teachers do. Avoid them.

So is there evidence I did that in the past week? Are there places I chose not to go, things I chose not to listen to, because of the gospel I cherish?

3. *How have I embraced suffering in the past week for the sake of the gospel?* True, we don't seek suffering, but when God puts it in our path, we embrace it. We know He will use it for our sanctification, yes, but also to capture the attention of a lost world.