

“Passing On The Torch”

A Study of 2 Timothy

Sermon # 4

“The Characteristics of the Last Days.”

2 Timothy 3:1-9

The Apostle Paul writing from a prison cell in Rome, knowing that his own death is imminent, warns his young son in the faith Timothy of the difficult days that lay ahead.

He says in verse one, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come.” But the apostle wanted Timothy - and us - to not only know that these things were going to happen, but comprehend why they are happening. The word “perilous” tells us that these things will be difficult, hard to deal with, or hard to bear.

The first problem for the modern reader is to understand what Paul meant by the phrase, “last days.” There are three broad possibilities. It can apply to the entire time span referred to as the “Church Age” which lies between the resurrection and ascension and the Second Coming of Christ. It also applies to unique periods of spiritual testing which have and will occur down through the ages. And it obviously applies to the last few months and years preceding the Lord’s Second Coming. I think we can see that the conditions portrayed by Paul did exist in New Testament times, have and will increase and intensify as we approach the end times.

Since we cannot with pinpoint accuracy tell when the Lord will return to this earth, we are told what the last days will look like.

The Climate of the Last Days (vv.1-5)

What we have in verses two through five is a shorter version of Romans 1:18-32. This is what happens when a people turn their backs on God. Although the description of the last days was written by Paul over 1900 years ago it reads like today’s headlines. Let’s take a few minutes to walk through the list of attitudes and actions that will mark those living in the last days. Then you tell me if we are in the last days or not! The characteristics Paul will describe speak not of bad *times*, but of bad *people*. The “difficult times” will be primarily because of “difficult people” (“bad people” more than “bad times”).

The individuals of this age will be identified first of all by what they love. The love spoken of here is not the selfless God kind of love (agape) but rather the a fondness for people or things (*philos*) because they satisfy natural human cravings. It is very appropriate that the first characteristic he mentions is “lovers of themselves” (*philautos*). Paul is describing a person

who cherishes or is obsessed with himself. This is the SIN which produces all others SINS. In fact, a good way to understand "sin" is by its very letters:

S - Self

I - Interested

N - Nature

The second characteristic follows very appropriately after "lovers of themselves" -- "lovers of money" (*philarguros*). Lovers of money are those who pursue and cherish money. A person working overtime to get wealthy qualifies as a lover of money. It doesn't matter if you are wealthy or not.

In this universe there is God, and there are people and things. We should worship God, love people, and use things (discriminately, wisely). But if we start worshiping ourselves, we will ignore God and start loving things and using people. And this is a sure fire formula for a miserable life, but it sadly characterizes most of America today and even many who call themselves "Christians". The worldwide craving for things is just one evidence that people's hearts have turned away from God.

The Characters of the Last Days (vv. 2-5)

Every other attribute in this list finds its root cause in one of these wayward loves (lovers of self or lovers of money) or both.

"boasters" (v. 2) describes an arrogant individual who exaggerates or is disposed to exaggerate their own worth or importance in an overbearing manner. In his boasting he overstates the limits of truth, stressing the fact to magnify himself in his attempt to impress others. Selfish people are naturally boastful. If you want to know whether somebody loves themselves, then just listen to who they talk about.

"proud" (v. 2) There is a difference between the boastful man and the one who is proud is that the boaster is a swaggering creature, who tries to bluster his way into power and eminence. No one can possibly mistake him. But the sin of the man who is proud is in his heart. He might even seem to be humble; but in his secret heart there is contempt for everyone else. He nourishes an all-consuming, all-pervading pride and in his heart there is a little altar where he bows down before himself.

"blasphemers" (v.2) given to bitter and defiant speech Barnes says, "The word *blaspheme* originally means to speak evil of any one, to injure by words, to blame unjustly. When applied to God, it means to speak of him unjustly, to ascribe to him acts and attributes which he does not possess, or to speak impiously or profanely." [Barnes Notes on the New Testament – Matt 9:3]

“disobedient to parents” (v. 2) A judge in Orlando, Florida, ruled that an 11-year-old boy had the right to seek a “divorce” from his parents so that he could be adopted by a foster family. But though there are few “legal” divorces from parents by children, it is far more common that young people simply disregard their parents.

“unthankful” (v. 2) He sees the world as "owing him" a job, housing, etc. The man who is consumed with self cannot find any room to appreciate others. “Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful. . . ”

“unholy” (v. 2) (*anosios*) This word describes the man who not only breaks the laws of God and society, but even breaks the unwritten laws of common decency.

“unloving” (v. 3) the KJV translates this

“without natural affection” this describes the breakdown of the family. There is a loss in love for those we should love the most. Every few months we hear of some woman who gives birth in secret, and throws the baby away, discarding it as something inconvenient. The simple, family affection God gave men and women by nature is being eroded more and more each year.

“unforgiving” (v. 3) means implacable- beyond reason, unappeasable, having a bitter, unrelenting attitude that no one can talk to or soften in any way.

“slanderers” (v. 3) (*diabolos*) This is also the word for "devil" and it basically means "false accuser."

“without self-control” (v. 3) Literally it means *without strength*; that is, without strength to resist the solicitations of passion, or who readily yield to it.

“brutal” (v. 3) It means *harsh* and *severe*, and is the opposite of gentleness and mildness.

“despisers of good” (v. 3) Those we practice righteousness are in our day called intolerant, bigoted, narrowminded, anti-social and are labeled dangerous.

“traitors” (v. 4) It means any one who betrays-- whether it be a friend or his country. *Treason* has been in all ages regarded as one of the worst crimes that man can commit.

“headstrong” (v. 4) The same word in Acts 19:36, is rendered *rashly*. It occurs only there and in this place in the New Testament. It is opposed to that which is deliberate and calm; and here means, that men would be ready to do anything without deliberation, or concern for the consequences.

“haughty” (v. 4) Literally, *puffed up*. The meaning is, that they would be inflated with pride or self-conceit.

“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (v. 4) we even have a term to describe this it is called Hedonism. Notice that he doesn't say "more than" but "rather than". So it's not like people will "like God a little" but "pleasure more". No. People won't have any like for God at all! A literal translation here would be: "Pleasure-lovers rather than God-lovers."

“having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!” (v. 5). Paul says that these people will have a “*form of godliness*” the word “*form*” means semblance. It is a paradox that as men turn away from a real relationship with God they will become more religious not less!

Dr R.C. Sproul divides humanity into four groups.

- (1) Those who are not saved and know they are not saved.
- (2) Those who are saved, but not sure about it.
- (3) Those who are saved and they know it.
- (4) Those who are not saved but they think they are. (Matthew 7:22-23)

THE CONDUCT OF THE FALSE TEACHERS (vv. 6-9)

The first thing we see is that the infection of false teaching is a slow process and usually takes place over a prolonged period of time. “For of this sort are those who creep into households.” (v. 6) The word used for "creep" (*enduno*) comes from a root word which was used to describe "the setting of the sun." It is so slow that it is almost imperceptible, yet it is most certainly taking place. Heresy never comes knocking loudly on the front door, it sneaks quietly in the back door while no one is watching. (Jude 4).

Once in the house, they "make captives of gullible women...." (v. 6). The word for "make captives" (*aichmalotizontes*) means to "take captive at spear-point, to take a prisoner of war." These false teachers are "playing for keeps" and are bent on fulfilling their commission.

Paul gives the reason these women are such easy prey: they are "loaded down with sins, led away with various lusts... (v. 6)"

These gullible women are rendered vulnerable because of their sense of guilt over their sins. It is not considered good form to talk of guilt in our day, because we are trying to escape labeling anything as guilt. But we cannot escape guilt by calling it something else, because it still shows up in a sense of despair, emptiness and meaninglessness. But it is a sense of guilt that makes these women vulnerable to the false teachers because they want to escape their guilt without dealing with sin.

Paul goes on to characterize these individuals as “ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (v.7)” What seem to be being said is that these individuals are always learning but never able to come to an acknowledgement of the truth.

Verse eight suggest a parallel between two individuals names Jannes and Jambres and people who oppose the truth of the gospel. “Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith;” These two men are not name in the Exodus account of the contest between Pharaoh’s magicians who tried to discredit the miracles of Moses, but they are named by ancient Jewish commentaries. In Exodus, Moses and Aaron go before Pharaoh and did certain miraculous signs to prove to Pharaoh that he was dealing with representatives of the Living and True God. The magicians of Pharaoh’s court matched them miracle for miracle until the final miracle, when Aaron threw down his rod and it became a snake, so did the magicians. But serpent that had come from Aaron’s rod ate the serpent that the magicians had brought forth. Ultimately the false prophets had to admit that Moses had something working for him that they knew nothing about (Ex 8:19). Just as Paul says in verse nine, “but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.”

Even as Jannes and Jambres were eventually put to shame (though for a while they matched Moses “miracle for miracle”) and were eventually compelled to give reluctant glory to God, so also will the evil men of the last days.

Even as Jannes and Jambres’ power had limits, so does Satan’s power, even in the last days - God is still in control.

This is the message of great hope in the midst of this great darkness - the spirit of the last days has an answer to it in Jesus Christ. The spirit of the last days is not stronger than the power of Jesus!