

Passing the Torch "Perilous Times" 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Introduction

2 Timothy is Paul's final letter; he writes to Timothy, his young son, in the faith. Paul writes this letter from his prison cell in Rome. He knows that his time is short, and his death is imminent. Paul, however, identifies himself as "a prisoner of the Lord." Every action, every word, every experience is a part of his faith journey in Christ. He warns his young son in the faith of the difficult days that lay ahead.

Though facing death, Paul peers into the future, zealous for the ongoing proclamation of the gospel. He realizes the end-times will be full of evil and peril for Christians. In Chapter 3 verse 1 he writes, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:" (2Ti 3:1 NKJV)

Paul wants Timothy to know that difficult and unbearable times lay ahead. And if that was true for Timothy then, it's certainly true for us today. The "times" Paul writes about were already in existence.

But Paul wants Timothy and succeeding generations to know that these perilous times would increase and intensify as the return of the Lord nears. Since we do not know when the Lord will return, Paul tells us how those days will look.

I. Perilous Times Require Discernment

First, Paul reveals that the perilous times of the last days will require great discernment. Verses 2-5 echo Romans Chapter 1. Verse 2 says, "For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!" (2Ti 3:2-5 NKJV)

This is a description of what happens when people abandon their faith in God. Paul describes the actions and attitudes of faithless people in the last days. These characteristics not only indicate the end-times but end-time people as well.

The word perilous conveys the idea of trouble, difficulty, and stress. That is the climate that will overshadow the last days. Matthew uses the term in Chapter 8 when Jesus encounters the two demoniacs of the Gadarene who were so fierce that no one could pass that way.

The "last days" began with the birth of the church on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2. But they have a special significance to the final days immediately before the return of Jesus to the earth. Spurgeon said, "Apart from the Second Advent of our Lord, the world is more likely to sink into a pandemonium than to rise into a

millennium." Jesus rebuked the religious leaders when they refused to see the signs of their times.

Paul says the end-time generation will be identified by what they love. They will be "lovers of themselves" and "lovers of money." Obsession with the "love of self" is the basic sin from which all others flow. The moment you become the center of your life, your faith in God becomes secondary, and all your relationships start to deteriorate. William Barclay writes, "The essence of Christianity is not the enthronement but the obliteration of self." (Barclay)

People have always loved money. But today, it's easier to pursue than ever before. Lovers of money are those who obsessed with money. And you don't have to have a lot of money to be obsessed with it. It's easy to become a slave to your money, even if you're poor. In fact, some poor people are more obsessed with money than some rich people. They don't see money as a means of stewardship; they are slaves to it! They hoard it, they regularly check on it, they won't spend it, they are afraid of losing it, and they never have enough of it.

Many people don't trust in God at all; that's only a slogan printed on their true god. But there are also those who use their money to gain influence and power over others. These are the people who say, "Money is power!" Paul told Timothy in his first letter, "The love of money is a root of all evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows." (1Ti 6:10 NKJV)

Greed is a terrible taskmaster. Greed is a perfect formula for a miserable life, and its lure captures the heart of people from all walks of life.

II. Avoid Becoming Self-Absorbed

Paul goes on to describe what happens to those who become self-absorbed and greedy. He says that these people will become boastful and arrogant and exaggerate their importance in overbearing ways. They will stretch the truth to exalt themselves and magnify their own importance to impress other people.

A selfish person is naturally boastful and loves to talk about themselves. They act as if they are the most important person alive. They'll talk to you, but only until someone more important comes along. As far as their concerned, you don't really matter. But don't be too offended, because God doesn't matter to them either. The only person that really matters to them is them!

The proud person believes they belong in a class far above everyone else. They are perfectly comfortable bullying their way into power and prominent positions. The Bible says that the sin of pride is in the heart, not in the words of a person. Amazingly, a prideful person can even fake humility if they need to, just to get what they want, But secretly, they have only contempt for other people.

Blasphemers are defiant and insubordinate people. If a blasphemer disagrees with someone, they have no problem railing on them with bitter and coarse language.

The word blaspheme means to speak evil of anyone or to injure by words; to blame unjustly. It goes well beyond using curse words. You can see why we shouldn't blaspheme God since He is the source of all goodness. And yet, many people rail on God every day because He doesn't give them what they want.

Probably all of us at one time or another disobeyed our parents. But during the end-times poor parenting will produce defiant children who will usurp the authority of the household. Respect for other people is something that we learn within the family. Interestingly, today there are more and more seminars and classes on how to deal with your unruly children. King Edward VIII was quoted as saying, "The thing that impresses me most about America is the way the parents obey their children." So many children today are telling their parents what to do.

Another characteristic of end-time people is their unthankful, unholy, unloving, and unforgiving nature. These unthankful people believe the world owes them a job, or housing, or education, and a host of other things. And even if they get them, they have no sense of appreciation. In Romans, Paul says that people like this, "Although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, but were unthankful."

The unholy have no fear of God. They have no fear of breaking God's laws, or the laws of society, or even the laws of common decency. The end-time generation will also be unloving and without natural affection. There are many today who can discard human life with no remorse at all. Many cycle through multiple relationships with no desire or ability to form any lasting bond.

Then there are the unforgiving; people who hold grudges and won't let it go. Unforgiving people are those who develop a vicious, bitter, and unrelenting attitude that will not yield even to a soft heart or sincere apology.

And what about slanderers. The word "slander" is also the word for "devil" and means "false accuser." There is an army of these people on the loose today! Our nation is being torn apart by these individuals. People have always told hurtful lies about others, but today, in media and politics, slander has been elevated to both big business and big money. Media editors and news castors now serve as prosecutor, judge, jury, and executioner and rarely apologize when they are proven to be wrong.

Paul also says the end-time generation will lack self-control. Literally, the word means "without inner strength." The lack of self-control is seen in the increase of so many vices, including sex, drugs, alcohol, food, work, shopping, you name it. Whatever we do, we do it to the extreme, out of control. If you need proof, just look at the way we've handled this pandemic.

Paul also adds those who are brutal. It means harsh and severe, which is the opposite of a gentle and mild approach. Cruelty and brutality are not new, but Paul says that a particular kind of brutality will mark the last days. We have become a brutal society. Police brutality, political brutality, domestic brutality is all indication that our society is out of control. And yet, we think we are the most advanced generation on the planet. But statistics say that in this century we are murdering more people than ever before. These are violent, brutal times where many are despisers of good.

Those who practice righteousness are called intolerant, bigoted, narrowminded, anti-social, and are labeled dangerous. At the same time, violence, immorality, destruction of property, and life are herald on the silver screen and in video games as acceptable entertainment for our culture.

Paul adds to the list traitors, the headstrong, arrogant, and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. These are people who are all about themselves. They don't have time for others, let alone time for God.

A headstrong person is stubborn and will impulsively do things without deliberation or concern for the consequences. A haughty person is one who is arrogant and puffed up with pride and self-conceit.

In the last days, Paul says many will be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. They are what you call hedonists. It's not that people will like God a little but pleasure more. The New Testament truth is, people won't have any interest in God all. They will be pleasure lovers rather than God lovers. They will have a form of godliness but deny God's power. From such, Paul says, "turn away." Isn't it paradoxical that as people turn away from a relationship with God, they become more religious?

We don't have to choose between pleasure and God. Psalm 16 says that at God's right hand are pleasure forevermore. Living for Christ will bring you many pleasures and satisfaction. But that only comes as you put God first and refuse the world's pleasures.

In our self-obsessed world, even Christians feel free to pick and choose what biblical truths they want to live by and believe. Many act like they're spiritual, but feel no obligation to be biblical. In the last days, many people will despise the power of godliness that can guide them to God. Many will refuse to accept God's power to help and guide them through His Word.

Paul says, "From such people turn away." That can be a tough thing to do! Sadly, many people who are on this list are not only well-known leaders but sports heroes and Hollywood stars. Paul says it is the Christian's responsibility to turn away from these attitudes as well as the people who do these things. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15, "Do not be deceived, evil company corrupts good habits."

III. Recognize the Strategy of Corruption

In verse 6, Paul calls upon us to recognize Satan's strategy of corruption. He writes, "For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth." (2Ti 3:6-7 NKJV)

Paul knew that these dangers were in the world in his day and would be increasingly present in the last days before the return of Jesus. He seemed especially concerned that these evils would be allowed into your home. Those marked by end-time depravity have adopted a strategy of corruption. Their goal is to take others captive and enslave them to their way of thinking.

The people of the end-time generation will be extremely gullible. They will believe anything that is pleasingly packaged. There is one sure way to know if you can walk away from Satan's attempt to enslave you. Ask yourself, "What voice am I following?" Who do you listen to? The voice of the world will entice you or scare you into following its plan and then makes your escape extremely difficult.

Satan has crept into many Christian homes today and is corrupting families through television, internet, smartphones, and other electronic devices. The devices themselves are not evil; it's how they are used by the devil to corrupt you that makes them bad. Don't be gullible and don't be led astray by the various lusts Satan wants to bring into your home! The battle for family faith is won or lost at home. Paul says the end-time generation will always be learning yet never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. That is an amazing statement. Paul writes this before the discovery of the internet.

The Satanic spirit of the last days will promote a strategy of corruption with a specific intelligence about it. Those inspired by the Satanic spirit of the last days will know how to manipulate systems and lead people astray. But for all their skill and knowledge and marketing brilliance, they never come to the truth or lead people to the truth. The spirit that dominates end-time leaders will blind them to the Spirit of Truth. They will continuously be acquiring knowledge and yet never be able to acknowledge God's eternal truth.

Conclusion

In verse 8, Paul writes, "Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was."

(2Ti 3:8-9 NKJV)

Jannes and Jambres were examples of the kind of corruption Paul was talking about. These two men were the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses before Pharaoh in the Book of Exodus. They were able to work real miracles, not mere magic tricks. However, they performed their miracles by the power of darkness, not the power of God. They matched Moses miracle for miracle until their powers

ran out. That is when their power proved to be inferior to God's power. These same powers of darkness will characterize the end times (Revelation 13:13-15 and 2 Thessalonians 2:9). Satanically inspired leaders will resist and persecute the church and the truth of Scripture. In the last days, we will see more and more demonically inspired leaders who will miraculously work to discredit God's message and plan. Like the Egyptians, they will persecute and attempt to enslave God's people.

But Paul says they will progress no further. Just as Jannes and Jambres were eventually put to shame and ultimately compelled to give glory to God, so will the evil men of the last days. Satan will unleash great power to overcome and subdue the people of this world, but remember, even in the last days, God is still in control.

Paul's message today is intense. But, there is great hope even in the midst of this great darkness. Satan will ultimately answer to Jesus Christ. We don't have to be bound by the spirit of our times. We can live in freedom from the devices of the world. They may put you in jail! They put the Apostle Paul in jail!

Our freedom is internal; it's within! Because of Jesus, there is always hope. Because of Jesus, we have faith in God's word. Whom the Son sets free, is free indeed! So, don't let the world press you into its mold. Be transformed by the renewing of your mind.

Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing, and perfect will.