

## GUIDED BY GOD'S WORD

### 2 Timothy 3:1-17

One of the biggest endeavors of time and effort and expenses in our country relates to the education of our children. The methods of teaching are quickly changing and are becoming more technology driven with the students interacting with computers rather than people. Such trends have the potential to make a quality education possible for more people. This trend also has the potential to destroy all the learning of interpersonal skills and social interactions that have been an unintended consequence of the more traditional classroom setting. Of course, they could just develop another computer-based segment on social interactions and that would solve the problem! Probably not. Where all this will lead is still in the realm of the unknown.

While much attention is being paid to the delivery system for learning, little attention is being given to “what” is being taught and “why” is it being taught. In the early days of our nation (1800s), kids started out with the McGuffey Readers which were Biblical-like stories that taught morality and responsibility along with vocabulary and word skills. We have abandoned and are now shunning any mention of values that are related to moral absolutes and have moved to a more social values driven curriculum that is based on the latest political correctness fad. Without an adequate foundation of morality, is it any wonder that we see exactly what Paul wrote about two thousand years ago as to where a world of lost humans without the benefits of Godly principles would eventually arrive?

#### Know What to Avoid – 3:1-5

<sup>1</sup> But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 (NASB95)

The reference to the “last days” was intended to include the time in which Paul and Timothy lived as evidenced by the advice that Paul gave to Timothy to avoid people whose lives were devoid of any morality. When people reject the Word of God as a foundational and fundamental guide for living, then the result is a life that is driven by selfish interests that cater to materialism and promotion of their own achievements with little or no regard for anyone else. Whether it was in ancient Rome or the boroughs of New York and the suburbs of Washington, we can see that many live for the pleasure of the moment, have no regard for the values of the past, and have no appreciation for the hard work and sacrifice of the those who have dedicated themselves to making the world a better place.

It is one thing for people to ignore the reality of God and live as if He did not exist, but is rarely stops there. What we are seeing is an antagonistic attitude toward anything to do with spiritual truth. The result is a callousness that borders on cruelty and an unwillingness for some to change their attitudes and behavior even when they are punished for their behavior either by the circumstances they create or because they were caught for violating civil or criminal law.

Such people and conditions as described by Paul were present in his day. We look around us and see evidence in the world of such things. Paul was very concerned that people who had the morality and mind set of a lost world would infiltrate and influence the church. Ironically, some of the greatest abuses, to date, were likely during the reign of terror of the Papacy from the sixth through the eighteenth centuries. This was truly a case of having a form of godliness but denying the power of the gospel to change lives.

While what Paul described could easily be called a blatant abuse of position and authority in the church, we see more subtle evidence in the modern day church of organizations that are just going through the motions (having a form of godliness) but have no real impact upon the lives those who are in the church. About fifty years ago A. W. Tozer wrote the following with regard to a misunderstanding in the church of what true faith is:

My fear is that the modern conception of faith is not the Biblical one; that when the teachers of our day use the word they do not mean what Bible writers meant when they used it.

The causes of my uneasiness are these:

1. The lack of spiritual fruit in the lives of so many who claim to have faith.
2. The rarity of a radical change in the conduct and general outlook of persons professing their new faith in Christ as their personal Savior.
3. The failure of our teachers to define or even describe the thing to which the word faith is supposed to refer.
4. The heartbreaking failure of multitudes of seekers, be they ever so earnest, to make anything out of the doctrine or to receive any satisfying experience through it.
5. The real danger that a doctrine that is parroted so widely and received so uncritically by so many is false as understood by them.
6. I have seen faith put forward as a substitute for obedience, an escape from reality, a refuge from the necessity of hard thinking, a hiding place for weak character. I have known people to miscall by the name of faith high animal spirits, natural optimism, emotional thrills and nervous tics.
7. Plain horse sense ought to tell us that anything that makes no change in the man who professes it makes no difference to God either, and it is an easily observable fact that for countless numbers of persons the change from no-faith to faith makes no actual difference in the life.

Why has this happened? Leaders, as well as many people in the church, have missed the clear teaching of the Word of God that “you must be born again” and lacking that conversion, they still have all the basic characteristics of lost humanity as described in verses 2-4 of Chapter 3.

### Distinguish Truth from Lies – 3:6-9

<sup>6</sup> For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, <sup>7</sup> always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these *men* also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. <sup>9</sup> But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes’s and Jambres’s folly was also. 2 Timothy 3:6-9 (NASB95)

Heresy looks for someone who is trusting. Paul mentioned women as being likely victims of heresy since they tend to be more open, trusting and accepting of people. Many times there are well-intentioned persons who want to engage in self-improvement and will be drawn to those who teach that this goal can be accomplished by following a set of rules and working for their salvation. We see such “teachers” who literally do come to homes in the Mormons and the Jehovah Witnesses. These target people who “go to church” but who do not have an adequate foundation to recognize the false teaching that is being presented to them.

Throughout Biblical history there have been examples of people who presented themselves as possessors of the truth and who oppose what God is doing. Moses found such people in the government of Egypt. These magicians tried to duplicate the signs and wonders done by Moses. They were partially successful with their false miracles; however, all they did was to help harden Pharaoh’s heart.

In the present day church, many would liberalize the message to make it palatable to the appetite of the world. This “easy believe-ism” attracts those who want to have the benefits of salvation in eternity but to live according to their own whim in this life. It is amazing how many people attend Bible studies and never apply the teachings of these studies to real life

applications. It is almost as if they go to such studies for the sake of the fellowship, to have attendance on their resume, and to be learning for the sake of learning.

### Be Prepared for Persecution – 3:10-13

<sup>10</sup> Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> 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! <sup>12</sup> Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:10-13 (NASB95)

It is one thing to read about characteristics for successful living and we can profit from such learning. However, when we read such things we have a tendency to think these are lofty ideals and we may one day progress toward them; however, we do not really see ourselves operating in that manner. On the other hand, when we encounter a real live example of someone who embodies and practices all the right things, then we are inspired to do likewise because we realize these are not just ideals but are really achievable. Paul served as an impressive example for Timothy and because Paul was faithful to his calling from God, he could say to others “Follow my example.” All of us should strive to live our lives in such a way so we could advise others to follow our example because we have done “the right thing.”

Our goals in life, the lifestyle we practice and the principles by which we operate must be aligned with each other in a consistent way or our lives will be filled with conflict. A secular example may help us see what this statement means. If a person had a goal in life to become wealthy, then his lifestyle would need to be adjusted so he did not spend everything he had on entertainment and vacations. The principle by which he would need to live would be one that acknowledged the value of diligence and hard work rather than just “getting by.” Alignment is also needed in the totality of our lives. We cannot compartmentalize our lives into the religious and the secular or the spiritual and the physical and ignore the influence of one on the other. Timothy had a good example in Paul's goals (purpose), his lifestyle (manner of life) and his principles (doctrine). There are a number of values characteristic of people who are really successful in life. Among these are faithfulness, tolerance for hardship, genuine love, and the endurance to follow through until the job is done. We tend to associate these with the religious and spiritual part of life, but these characteristics and values are the very ones that are important in **all** of life. We need to be fully committed to what we are doing. We can expect difficulties and roadblocks; however, we must keep our perspective correct regarding the value and worth of people, and have the fortitude to complete a job that is underway.

Paul could point to many examples of the problems he encountered as he was faithful to his call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some of these difficulties occurred in Timothy's hometown of Lystra and it is probable Timothy saw how Paul handled such situations. Such knowledge of how to handle adversity is useful to all Christians because, if we are faithful to God's calling, then we **will** encounter opposition from the world. Paul pointed out to Timothy, evil people are in the world who have different agendas than doing the work of the Lord.

### Be Equipped for Right-Living – 3:14-17

<sup>14</sup> You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, <sup>15</sup> 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. <sup>16</sup> All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; <sup>17</sup> so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NASB95)

Everywhere we turn we can find some new philosophy of life someone is promoting. The obvious books and magazine articles on such subjects and the more subtle messages from

TV programs and novels advocate a variety of philosophies. As Paul advised Timothy, we too should continue in the teachings of the word of God, because we know these to be correct. It is in the word of God we find our only salvation in Christ Jesus. Though there are many today who question the validity and truth of the Bible, we will find every word is true. We ignore its teachings to our own peril and we faithfully follow its teachings to our benefit. The Bible is truly God's blueprint for us to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ so we can be equipped to live successfully.

How important is it that we know the source of the advice that we choose to follow? Paul reminded Timothy that he should continue in what he had learned and become convinced of. So much of what we "learn" may not turn out to be true because our experience in the trials of life do not match up with what we had been taught and, consequently, we are not convinced or persuaded that the information that we had been taught was really true. One of the things that we continually hear today is that if we can just provide people with healthy food, medical care and an education that they will become better people and all mankind will become better off because of this. You would think it should help, but we do not see a lot of evidence that confirms that teaching. Providing people with free food does not insure that they will be healthy. In fact, the more people are provided with free food, the more obese they become and the less healthy they are. Free medical care can lead to people being less responsible in taking preventative measure to be healthy, and better education without a moral foundation just leads to smarter criminals.

Timothy had been taught by people who loved him (his mother and grandmother as well as the apostle Paul) and they based their teachings on the infallible word of God. The wisdom of the word is able to lead us to salvation since the message originated from the Savior. The results of giving heed to the word of God is that we can learn the truth or godly precepts, we can see evidence where these truths are proven to be correct, we can discover ways to correct errors that have been made, and find guidance as to the direction our lives should take so that we are becoming more like the Savior. If we live in such a manner then we will be ready for whatever comes our way in life and be able to be useful to God who wants to work through us to accomplish the work of the kingdom of God.