

10,15,26 2 Tim. 3:1-9 Overcoming Deception

I want to start with the first section of this chapter – vs's 1-9; but before I go there, I want to share some thoughts I have based on part of some personal research I did trying to get a better understanding of the historical context of Timothy's circumstances. I believe those circumstances had a definite effect on why Paul wrote some of the things he did, things that might not seem as clear to us in our generation because when we think of a "church" we picture something significantly different than what Paul and Timothy were experiencing in real life 2000 years ago.

So, here's what I came up, and you can see if you think that this context or environment would have an effect on the implications of Paul's exhortations;

"Historical estimates of the average size of New Testament churches in the first generation are remarkably consistent: most first-century Christian gatherings were typically 15–35 people, with an upper limit of around 50 in the largest homes.

Across archaeology, Greco-Roman social history, and New Testament context, scholars converge on the same basic picture: Typical size: 15–35 people.

Scholars like Wayne Meeks, Roger Gehring, and Robert Banks consistently place the majority of house churches between 15–30 members. House churches were the *only* churches until close to 300 A.D."

When I considered this and tried to picture it as churches in various locations around a city, I realized also that it wasn't until Constantine made Christianity a state religion (which was around 300 A.D.), that Catholicism began and buildings were erected.

So, here's a couple of conclusions: When the Holy Spirit was determining how, when and where the body of Christ would meet and its members would gather and grow spiritually, regardless of how many individuals may have been converted at public presentations of the gospel, even if it was in the thousands (which happened) the Lord ensured that the *ongoing* meetings would be in homes scattered throughout the communities of that time.

1 Cor. 12 explains the gifts and interactions that would take place in the house churches and the elders with the gift of teaching would communicate the apostolic doctrine to the people. The pastors who were faithful to their calling would have had the responsibility of 15-35 people.

In our generation, a pastor with 15-35 people would be considered either the leader of a cult or a failure.

This is just one of a large number of differences between the early church and the American church; and it also demonstrates one of the reasons for the spiritual advance of the early Christians – they knew each other and cared for each other. All had parts to play, gifts to exercise, and the result was that they ‘turned the world upside down’. We have churches with 10,000 people who can’t turn their towns upside down.

The Holy Spirit’s design was not random; not well-thought-out. It was “intelligent design” at its best, in this case, establishing the best possible environment for Christians to grow spiritually. When God designs something He’s insistent that it be done His way.

I remember in seminary when the professor who took us through the Pentateuch, he spent time pointing out that when Jehovah instructed Moses about the construction of the Tabernacle, every nail, every board had to be exactly what God said – and there was an “or else” threat associated with any deviation from that plan. Verses like:

Exodus 25:9 “Make this tabernacle and all its furnishings exactly like the pattern I will show you.”

Exodus 25:40 “See that you make them according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.”

Exodus 31:11 “All these things... they are to make them just as I commanded you.”

They didn't know all the reasons God was so exact and insistent. But now that we know the spiritual significance of everything associated with both the Tabernacle and the Temple, it makes sense.

So, then I guess the question is; can't large churches do this by having small groups? Possibly, at least to some extent. But there's something about "big" that seems to create the mindset of allegedly "successful" on one hand, and the development of a Christianity that is mostly a spectator sport on the other. When in the Bible, the Spirit goes out of His way to point out the honor that God bestows on that which is small, weak, and accounts for nothing in the eyes of the world.

Whether through parables and teaching that talk about the "least" and the "greatest", the "first" will be the "last" or "my ways are not your ways" in contrasting the world's view and God's view; every place you look, the majority of the time it's the mustard seed not a massive warehouse that seems to be that which God sees as the greatest place of opportunity to manifest His glory.

The woman at the well, Anna and Simeon, Gideon's 300 men, etc. Wherever you go, you'll see the Lord making a very strong case for why His favor and honor are consistently being manifest based on the heart, not the achievements, of whoever He uses. It's the meek who inherit the earth, not the proud.

This is especially true in Paul's description of those God calls given in 1 Cor. 1 followed by the Lord's own reason for doing it this way;

(1 Cor. 1:26-29) You see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

By setting things up the way God did, it will never be man and his awesome accomplishments and mega-buildings that glorify God the most, it will be the

places and times that (for anyone paying attention), it would have to be God, and only God, Who made this happen.

When we look in 2 Tim. chapter 3 at the listing of what Paul cites as the characteristics of end time apostasy, the main thing we'll see is that in Christianity there will be an emphasis on *us* over *God* (all done in the Name of the Lord of course).

So, with all that in mind, here's Paul's description of Christianity 21st. century style.

(2 Tim. 3:1-9) But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 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! 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. 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.

I think the first thing we need to have in mind is that Paul is describing the spiritual condition of the Church, not the condition of the "harlot" in Revelation or of some global religious organization claiming to be Christian. The world has no desire to (quote) "always learn" more about Christianity and the world's "form of godliness" is significantly more serious than simply lacking the power of God's Spirit. Paul's audience is Timothy and his church in Ephesus, and his writing is intended to provide education to Christians of what's coming at the end.

We can see that many of the world's cultural or societal customs and norms have taken hold in the Church (disobedience to parents, lovers of self, creators of confusion, etc.). Paul isn't asking Timothy to tell the Church to fix all this, Paul's

purpose is to describe the actual condition of God's people in the last days based on the prophetic revelation he had received about this final generation.

Paul (and Timothy for that matter) knows that fixing these things is a result of the renewing of the mind and the transformation of the soul through spiritual growth. As we become increasingly conformed to Christ's image, certain flesh-based thinking and behaviors become exposed and they tend to fall away as they are being replaced by the mind of Christ gaining ascendancy in us.

Our focus, and the means of defeating the advances and appeals of the world, is not to fight the world, we don't wrestle with flesh and blood; our victory has been won in Christ and our personal changes that need to take place will happen naturally as the Cross deals with the old creation and the Spirit conforms us to the nature of the new creation.

So, as I said, this passage is not just a listing of things Christians shouldn't do; it's an eschatological passage describing the specific ways in which the world infiltrates the Church to leaven, shape and destroy her spiritually.

Paul also wrote about this in the following passages;

(Acts 20:29-31) I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also, from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking misleading things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.

(1 Tim. 4:1 & 2 Tim. 3: 1,7,8) The Spirit expressly says that in latter times some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons . . . know this, that in the last days perilous times will come; men will be lovers of themselves . . . always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth . . . Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.

As related to our passage in 2 Tim. 3, Paul said that the "perilous times" spoken of point to the rise of activities in the last days similar to that of Jannes and Jambres.

Paul was very specific about that and he wanted Christians living in our generation to know what he meant by the word “as” in vs. 8: “Just as”, or “in the same manner in which” Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith.”

Like I said, this was specific. One of the indicators of end-time deception is illustrated by the historical account of the confrontation between Moses and the Pharaoh’s magicians.

It’s important for us to know the nature of their resistance to the truth. In other words, the *way* in which “Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses” is replicated in the final Church. And that “way” was by the magicians imitating, as far as they were able, whatever Moses did. What Moses did, they could do, so from an objective observer’s viewpoint, there was no significant difference. A miracle is a miracle. If Moses did miracles to get the people out of Egypt, they would work miracles to keep them in.

And keep in mind that Paul’s point in adapting the battle between Moses and Pharaoh with end-time apostasy is not an issue of fake miracles (although that might happen too); but his main point is that the form of the final deception of the church is imitation.

The most satanic and effective resistance to God’s testimony in the world in the last days is offered by those who imitate the effects of the truth; they have “a form of godliness,” but not “the power thereof”.

People like this can do the same things, adopt the same forms, use the same doctrine and phraseology, and can profess the same convictions as others. If the true Christian feeds the hungry, clothes the naked, visits the sick, teaches the scriptures, witnesses to the lost, engages in prayer, and sings worship songs, then the imitator will also do these things. Again, Paul is telling us that *this* is the special character of the resistance offered to the truth in the last days. It describes the work of 21st century Jannes and Jambres.

Just to give you a feel of what that might look like, I'll share something that I shared a couple years ago in a different context. This is a true event that the writer captured on paper and passed to his readers;

The whole assembly stood there with the greatest reverence before this highest Majesty and most powerful Inspirer of awe, before which the greatest of souls becomes so little as to be almost nothing. And if we had not been witness to the movement of the body during this event, the raising of hands during the songs and prayers, and the expressions of humility – and if we had not heard the beating of the hearts before this immeasurable grandeur – we would have thought ourselves transferred to another life; to heaven. And, truly, we were at that hour in another world; the world of the Spirit. We were in the house of God, in God's immediate Presence, and all with lowered heads and humble tongues and voices raised in prayer and praise, (were surrounded by) weeping eyes, awestruck hearts and pure thoughts of intercession.

This was the author's description of a worship experience which occurred in the early 1900's and it shows the spiritual impact on those who were there, which seemed amazing. But the event itself was an Islamic worship service call a Ka'aba.

So, the question we have to ask is, 'what if an event like that was held in a Christian church on Sunday morning and instead of being saturated with the forms and words of Islam, was instead saturated with Christian forms, activities and words? Would we know whether we were dealing with the Holy Spirit or with the spirit of Jannes and Jambres which Paul prophesied would infiltrate the Church in the last days and offer a near perfect *imitation* of true Christianity? “. . . (Matthew 24:24b); “If it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect”.

I just feel that for those of us who already know that “self-love”, “lovers of money”, “disobedient to parents”, “proud and haughty”, “loving pleasure more than God”, etc. it's more important for us to be able to detect the less obvious, and more subtle dangers we face, like the tactics of the enemy that he used with Jannes and Jambres being reproduced in our generation leading God's people to “always learn but never come to the knowledge of the truth.” Not “truth” as in sound doctrine

(which can be professed without understanding the meaning behind it), but “Truth” as in genuine spiritual life.

That’s why I’m focusing on those things. It’s so you and I won’t be pulled into that which is carnal and appeals to our religious conviction, but contributes nothing to the life and growth of our inner man.

We could be drawn into a “form of godliness” that appears genuine, but isn’t. In general, the church in America is not spiritually weak because it is comprised of mostly unbelievers; it is weak because it is comprised of infants who no longer understand spiritual maturity and spiritual discernment.

The true path of spiritual advance has been replaced by an imitation – a deception. We have been offered an alternate Christianity and we have embraced it with great zeal. Satan is the deceiver of the nations, but he is also the deceiver of those within the church whose spiritual stature has not prepared them for the incredible subtly of end-time deception.

That is what Paul is warning us about.

Here’s Ironside’s summary of this part of 2 Tim.;

These are the great outstanding features of the “last days”-closing the church dispensation and to be immediately followed by the coming of the Lord. Can any believer in Holy Writ doubt our being now in the very midst of those days?

But it may be here objected: “When have men in general been other than as here depicted? Is not this but a repetition of what Paul has already said in describing the heathen world in his own day (Romans 1:29-32)? In what special sense are they any more characteristic now than then?” To these very natural queries I reply that such things, indeed, ever described the heathen, but in 2 Timothy 3 the Holy Spirit is describing conditions in the church in the last days! It is not the openly wicked and godless who are being depicted here. It is those who have a form of godliness while denying its power. This is what makes the passage so intensely solemn and gives it such tremendous weight in the present day.

So, again, without detailing each of Paul's words in this section of 2 Tim. 3, since many are self-explanatory and obvious, I want to touch on those which could slip by us if they weren't pointed out. I'm going to use a variety of authors, each who had their own style of describing what Paul wrote. I don't have all the commentator's names, but what they *said* is what I want you to have.

The first author wrote, "Consider the word 'Boasters'. Read the popular so-called Christian books, attend Christendom's great conventions of young people or old. Listen to the great pastors of the day. What is their theme? "Rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing!" Great swelling words are rapturously applauded by people dwelling in a fool's paradise, even when uttered by men who are doctrinally tearing the Bible to shreds, and who deny practically every truth that it contains."

Second, (This one I do know, it's Ironside again) "Blasphemers! Yes, there it is—that big, ugly word that one hesitates to use, but which is chosen by the Holy Spirit Himself to describe the men drawing salaries as ministers of Christ who use their office to eventually dishonor His name! The whole host of the new theologians, misnamed "higher critics," and all their ilk—all who deny the foundational doctrines of the Christian faith, and as such to be judged unsparingly in the harvest of wrath so near at hand! And think of the disloyalty to Christ of Christians—real Christians, I mean—who can sit and listen to such men week after week and are too cowardly to protest, or too indifferent to obey the Word, "From such turn away!"

Next, (This is Tozer on Paul's phrase a "form of godliness") "Millions of men and women refuse to face up to the fact that religion, in and of itself, will not resolve the sinner's need. It is amazing how many things religious people want to do to you. They can start with infant baptism and end up with the last rites when you are 108 years old—and all of that time they will manipulate you and sweet massage your soul. When it is all done, you are just what you were. You are just a decorated and massaged sinner who did not eat meat, congratulations! When religion has done all it can, you are still a sinner who either went to church or did not go to church. Religion can put

us on the roll and educate us and train us and instruct us. But after all that, there is still something within our beings that cries, "Eternity is in my heart and I have not found anything to satisfy it!" Only our Lord Jesus Christ is enough to satisfy the eternal longing in our souls.

Next, the author wasn't cited; but he wrote, "morphosis, the GK for "form", refers to outward shape and appearance, such as that of a silhouette, which is an outline or shadow of something. Morphosis as used in this verse refers to the outward resemblance, as distinguished from the essential reality.

Morphosis refers to an outward resemblance, as distinguished from the essential reality.

Isaiah's OT description of faithless Israel fits these charlatans who "draw near with their words and honor (God) with their lip service, but they remove their hearts far from (Him) and their reverence for (Him) consists of tradition learned by rote." (Isa 29:13) These men go through all the correct movements and maintain all the external forms of religion; but they know nothing of the dynamic power of the Spirit-filled, supernaturally energized Christ life which transforms sinners into saints."

Ok, finally, (Quote) "This is God's picture of the last days. And I challenge you to look about you and see if these are not the conditions that characterize the vast majority of Christendom today-no reality, no power, yet much natural emotion and profession. May God give us to be genuine, to be real, that eternal things may so grip our souls that we will live and do the work and be real witnesses for Him."

Now, let's touch on a few of the verses that need some explanation as to what Paul's point is by including them; vs. 6 "Of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts."

Paul talks about the deceivers "creeping into" and "making captives". What I'll read is from a Lexical expansion of the word Paul uses, which is "creep into" in some translations and is "enduno" in the Greek. The writer draws from other places in

the New Testament where this word is used to help us get a feel for the consistency of its meaning. I've always really appreciated that interpretive technique, because the more verses that are used showing what a word means the clearer that meaning becomes;

“(enduno from en meaning “in” plus dúno meaning “sink”) means to slip in, insinuate oneself into, enter secretly (with insidious methods and ulterior motives), worm one's way in. Enduno conveys the idea that these men were sneaking in stealthily and undetected. Enduno comes from a root word which was used to describe "the setting of the sun" which is so slow as to be almost imperceptible, and yet it is most certainly actually taking place. In a similar manner, these heretics don't come knocking loudly on the front door, but sneak quietly in the back door (so to speak) while no one is watching- or even if they *are* watching, the movement is so "slow" as to be imperceptible. They are very good at it. They are continually stealthily sneaking (present participle) into households, creeping in undetected, disguising "themselves as servants of righteousness" (2 Cor 11:15). They are like those described by Jude who “crept in unnoticed”. Peter also warned the saints about the clever nature of "false teachers among you (coming from *within* the body just like the men Paul is warning Timothy about) who will skillfully introduce (secretly & craftily) bringing in error *alongside* of the truth.

That word “alongside” shows us something extremely important; 90% truth mixed with 10% falsehood or imitation will eventually leaven the whole loaf. That’s one of the things, along with the humble, compassionate and intelligent appearance of the heretic, that makes him so effective. He can mostly tell us the truth until he has us in the palm of his hand. At that point, we will believe nearly everything he says without worrying about having to do any personal inspection to make sure what we’re hearing is true.

The enemy has had 6000 years to study us in order to discover what works and what doesn’t in terms of stagnating or shutting down our spiritual advance. And from what we learn of him throughout the Bible, we know that there is no way our

intellect could ever match his. Our only successful weapon against him is an increasing knowledge of scripture coupled with spiritual discernment.

He knows that, and he is very effective at convincing most believers that they have, or are getting, everything they need to be spiritually invincible, even though (as we see from Paul's warnings in 1st and 2nd Timothy) the main characteristic of the last generation will be the majority of Christians thinking they know enough, but not even being close to knowing enough, to resist those the enemy is using against us.

For the most part, Laodicea is losing the battle against deception, and Paul's lists about all of this in his letters to Timothy are designed to equip the leadership of the churches to have what they need to protect themselves and their people.

As long as we are teachable enough to believe that the danger is real, God will be more than willing in response to our faith, our dependency on Him, to protect us, equip us, and show us what we need to see to overcome the spiritual conflict we are in.

We don't have to be doctorate level Biblical geniuses, we just have to be fully dependent on the only One Who is able to raise us above the power and subtle deceptive tactics of the enemy. As we continue to study and learn, the Lord will saturate our minds with the Truth and when that Truth is needed, the indwelling Spirit will make sure we have it.

When Hosea says that God's people are destroyed for lack of knowledge, he's simply pointing out that our battle will always be a battle of the mind. Our greatest enemy is deception and our greatest weapon is God's Word engrafted into our souls by faith.

Ok, one more passage in this section before we move on. Paul calls the deceivers, men of "corrupt minds" (vs. 8). This is a little technical, but if we can get an idea of what it means, it can be very helpful. So, I'm going to use a section from a linguistic key by an author named "Borrow" to open this up for us. First, the actual meaning of the word "nous", translated "mind";

Nous is a comprehensive name for the thoughts existing in the conscience; the reasoning faculty, man's power of judgment; thinking, understanding; it

is the constellation of thoughts and assumptions which make up the consciousness of the person and acts as the agent of rational discernment and communication; it's our thinking power, our reason in its moral quality and activity; it is the intellect in its evaluating or discerning faculty.

Then he pulls in what we see throughout the Bible about the role that the mind plays in our lives. To save some time, I won't quote each verse attached to his comments, but I'll make sure they are in the notes when I send them out;

Old Testament writers understood the mind as the inner being of a person—much like a person's heart. When the Gospels speak of a person's mind, it is mostly in connection with a person's heart as well ("in the thoughts of their heart"; see Luke 1:51). The only other significant occurrence of the word mind comes in Jesus' statement of the great commandment: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind (*dianoia*)" (Mt. 22:37; Mk 12:30; Lk 10:27). The Gospel writers are unanimous in their agreement that Jesus quoted Dt 6:5 and added "with all your mind" to the quote. In the writings of Paul, we enter the Greek world's understanding of the mind. Paul used two words for the mind: *dianoia*, meaning "understanding" or "mind," and *nous*, meaning "mind" or "intellect." The mind possesses the ability to understand and to reason (1Cor 14:14–19); it is the seat of intelligence. In other places, Paul used the Greek word for mind to refer to the entire mental and moral being of a human. A person's actions flow from the inclinations of his or her mind; whether a person is good or evil depends on the state of that person's mind. Paul makes it clear that a person's condition depends upon how that person controls his or her mind. Ro 8:6–7 speaks of a person's mind being controlled either by the flesh or by the Spirit. The person whose mind is controlled by the flesh is evil and the mind controlled by the Spirit leads to good. Other passages refer to the inclination of a person's mind being controlled by the god of this world (2 Cor 4:4). People whose minds are controlled by the god of this world will have their minds darkened and will not be able to understand either the world or the church as they really are (2 Cor 3:14). It is like a veil over one's understanding; but it is only the Lord who

can open peoples' minds. When we are born again, we can experience God's renewing of our minds (Ro 12:2; Ep 4:23). It is our responsibility to renew our minds by regularly studying, praying for understanding, and receiving instruction in God's Word; but again, *only* the Holy Spirit can make us spiritually-minded (1 Cor 2:15–16), because it's only when the Spirit reveals the true and full meaning of something God said that we genuinely understand it.

For me the bottom line of this is simply that what we believe about God, ourselves and others is going to be determined by what we have, in our minds, accepted as true. Much of what that comes from the decisions we make about what our seeing and hearing are bringing to us. We sit, we listen, we watch, we contemplate and then we decide. And when those decisions are made, it is to our benefit on more levels than we can imagine, that what we finally settle on is actually true because out of the mind, the heart, are the springs of life (Prov. 4:23). That will be the enemy's target and he will arrange our environment to reinforce what he wants us to believe.

Our inner man, our heart and mind, represent our private thoughts, motives, desires and moral choices. Just as a freshwater spring feeds a river, our internal thought life determines our external words, attitudes and actions. God is aggressively at work transforming, renewing our minds, to see all things as *He* does so that everything about us that's external in manifestation will have Christ as the ultimate internal Source.

As we abide in Him through prayer, study and dependency, and as His words abide in us, the external fruit of the new creation we have become at our new birth, and are now growing more fully into the likeness of the Source of that humanity, the Lord Jesus, will increasingly be manifest. This is God's work, not ours. We don't conform ourselves; we consistently place ourselves in the environments conducive to God's work in us. We've already been planted in the soil, we just the weather and sunlight of God's Word to soak into us so that what is planted can grow to maturity.

The enemy's work is to un-freshen the water, to in some way spoil or poison it; and to put a veil over our eyes so that the light of the glory of Christ as seen in His Word can't penetrate our roots and keep us healthy and growing.

Our only hope is a combination of dependency on God over dependency on our own conclusions. Walking by faith is more than just trusting that the Lord will meet our daily needs of food, shelter and clothing- it's trusting that He will also meet our spiritual needs; that *He* will take on the responsibility of changing the things in and about us that need changed.

It's not easy to "lean *not* unto our own understanding, but trust Him in all our ways", because we tend to be egocentric and we exaggerate our own capability when, if we're going to exaggerate anything, we should be exaggerating our desperate need of Christ in *all* things and put "no confidence in the flesh". When that happens, when we 'cast our burdens' (even the burden of ourselves) on Him, for us, that's the place of rest and the place where the Lord is most active. A leopard can't change his spots; it would take a miracle for something like that to happen. All the efforts of the leopard will be in vain, but God delights doing miracles, especially for those He loves.

That would be us.

So, to penetrate the increasing envelopment of imitated Christianity, we have to have more than words alone. We have to have spiritual sight, spiritual discernment, we have to be able to sense and to see that which is invisible. And that ability is given only to those who move from spiritual infancy to spiritual maturity.

Spiritual maturity happens in real life experience when our minds are consistently aligned with the mind of Christ due to a life-long saturation of the truths in God's Word. The scriptures are the written unveiling of the thoughts of God. When that reality hits home, we will see the Bible as it really is and our desire to understand and live it the reality it presents will be all the motivation we need to explore its treasures.