

10,22,26 2 Tim. 3:10-17, Access to the Thoughts of God

We will be finishing 2 Tim. 3 tonight; so, let's begin by looking at vs's 10-13;

But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

I'm sure you've noticed over the weeks we've spent in 1st and 2nd Timothy that besides telling Timothy a great deal about spiritual leadership and the responsibilities that go with that, Paul also spent a lot of time talking about the implications in real life of *being* in leadership. Even though it's an honor to have that responsibility, it inevitably leads to personal suffering because the enemy will do all he can to ensure that we are not successful in helping God's people to understand the scriptures and grow spiritually.

Since teachers receive a stricter judgement than others in the Body of Christ (as James 3:1 tells us) we can see from what Paul has written that they also receive a greater intensity of opposition than others. If someone in leadership is doing what they are called to do, then those under their ministry will grow in their understanding of the warfare we are in and will become more effective in dealing with, and exposing, what Paul calls "Satan's devices (or strategies)" of deception in 2 Cor. 2:11.

And in many of Paul's lists of what he had to go through to be faithful to his commission, he almost always included extreme pressure designed to break him and cause him to back off or even abandon his calling in order to have life become easier to endure.

So, in vs's 10 & 11 Paul ties "doctrine, manner of life, purpose and faith" with "longsuffering . . . perseverance, persecutions and afflictions." To be faithful in doctrine, manner of life and purpose is to incur persecutions and afflictions.

A mistake we often make is assuming that since Paul reached so many people with the Truth of Christ, what little contribution you and I make to God's overall purpose is probably barely noticed by either the enemy or by the Lord Himself.

That is a huge mistake, because the effectiveness and spiritual value to the Lord of one of His servants is not based on the expanse of their influence but on their faithfulness to what God has asked them to do. And for most of us, actually nearly all of us with the exception of a few people who are called to have a larger ministry, we are crucial in God's plan in playing the part we are asked to play. In the Lord's eyes, this passage shows the way things *really* are;

(1 Cor. 12:21-23) The eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." No, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be weaker are (absolutely) necessary. And those members of the body which we think to be less honorable, on these we bestow greater honor.

Let me share something I came across that can help give us the right perspective on this. It's some comments by Sparks on Phil. 2:7;

"[Christ Jesus] emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men."

This means He accepted limitation. In heaven, our Lord is free to move wherever He wishes. But after He was incarnated and took upon himself the likeness of men, He grew up from babyhood to manhood. He grew according to the age of men, and as man He needed to eat and drink as well as to sleep and rest. This was a *tremendous* restriction to His deity. Indeed, He became even more limited by taking the form of a bondservant. As a man, He could have had the freedom of men as well as experiencing the enjoyment that men have. Now, though, taking the form of a bondservant, He sacrificed even the freedom of an ordinary man. He was restricted and bound in all His ways; He knew nothing except His Father's will. What incredible restriction He accepted in His humanity! Though being the infinite God, the Lord Jesus

accepted finite limitation; and through becoming man, He accepted even further restriction.

We will never know the full extent of the “limitation” Christ subjected Himself to in order to fulfill His mission, but think of the outcome (the fruit) of the Cross. The death of one extremely limited Servant of God in an obscure, Roman occupied country in the Middle East resulted in salvation for all who believe in Him and the defeat of every power of darkness that controls this world.

In Paul’s first verse he uses the word “followed” (“you have carefully followed . . .”) which should be translated as, “carefully observed through personal involvement”. It literally means, (quote) “To be always present, to attend one wherever he goes, and to examine thoroughly in order to conform oneself to what is observed.”

The reason I went technical on that is when you look at what Paul lists as the things Timothy is to “conform to”, you can see that what Paul did is list the most essential characteristics of a faithful disciple of Christ;

“. . . my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, (and) afflictions.”

When you and I are thinking about what happened to us when we left one life and entered another, the change was not simply behavioral; it was internal. We began to behave differently because something had changed inside of us. To line that up with what Paul listed, we could paraphrase that change like this;

My beliefs, the way I intended to live, my inner knowledge of having a new purpose for life, my assurance that this purpose is true and real, my willingness to endure hardship if necessary to pursue the outcome and fulfillment of what is stirring inside me, my love for Someone I was never sure even existed, and my desire to bring others into the experience and knowledge of what I have found.

We’ve all experienced those changes in one form or another depending on how the Lord has dealt with us. The enemy, of course, went to work immediately trying to distort, confuse or even remove those things, but there is something deep within us that is unmovable, and that *something* is a Person, the Holy Spirit, Who is

more than willing to overcome whatever comes against us and to make sure we are awake and aware of the fact that no matter what we might feel or experience, the fact that we are now a new creation of God is the deepest reality of our being – and that this new reality is absolutely true and will be true forever.

We are something other than what we were, and it's not just a matter of adopting a new set of beliefs or a new religion; it's something that has happened at the core of who we are as children of God, re-born from above.

This is why Jesus told Israel's greatest teacher and expert in the Jewish religion (Nicodemus) that he "must be born again" or he will never see the kingdom of God. Becoming a Christian is not something we decide to do and then start studying the Bible to see what that is – it's something that re-creates us from within into a new type of human that didn't exist before.

Then we study, not to find out how to *join* Christianity or how to be a good member of that religion, but to understand what has already happened to us.

So, Paul was presenting who and what Paul was to Timothy so Timothy could recognize the essence and reality of this new humanity he's become a part of and see, in Paul, how that inward re-birth plays out in outward action and behavior. In a sense, Paul was showing Timothy (and us) who we are and where all this is going.

Then Paul brings in the opposition of the enemy and reassures Timothy that the Lord will carry us through all that He allows the enemy to bring us into; and as we know from multiple passages, God will use every experience we have, no matter how difficult, to more fully develop our new inner man who, through *all* of this, is being increasingly formed into the image of our divine Forerunner.

From there, Paul warns Timothy that deception and adversity will continually worsen in this Age and that the only hope of survival and victory is going to be an increasing knowledge of God's Word (vs's 14-17)

You must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by

inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, in order that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

The scriptures we are studying have a supernatural ability because of the indwelling Spirit to give us the strength and discernment we need to survive all that will come against us. And even beyond that, it will be our growing knowledge of the scriptures at the level of a deep understanding of their meaning as revealed to us by God's Spirit that brings us to the place where we are (quote) “. . . complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

For all of us, this is the goal of our lives – to become vessels fit for the Master's use; and it will be a combination of prayer, study, divinely orchestrated circumstances and testing that takes us there. My only added emphasis on this would be that since we've all heard these things numerous times because nearly every book in the Bible reminds us of this, I would recommend that each day we try to see *that day* as a new opportunity for the discovery of things that either weren't known yesterday or that were not as clear as they need to be for us to live in their reality.

We all want to move beyond information to genuine spiritual life because that is our true state; that which is born of the Spirit *is* spirit. Any other life, religious or otherwise, falls short of what and who we are.

Now, along those lines, I want to touch on something we've never really spent any significant time on. When we were going through the Corinthian letters, it became obvious that trying to determine whether a person is or isn't saved based on their lifestyle is a mistake; we just don't have that kind of insight. To watch the lifestyle of many of the Corinthian believers, we could easily come to the conclusion that they weren't saved. As Paul put it, “(Their) lifestyle was indistinguishable from that of the natural man”, (the *not* born-again person).

But in Matt. 7 we saw the Lord warning a group of people whose lifestyle was filled with “many wonderful works” and various Christian activities and professions, being told that (quote) “I never knew you.”

(Matt. 7:22-23) Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'

The lifestyles fit, the words and actions fit, but they weren't saved. In Corinth, the lifestyle did *not* fit, but they *were* saved. Conclusion: it's nearly impossible to assign "saved" and "unsaved" to anyone based on outward observation alone.

Again, that's where spiritual discernment comes in. Once a believer hits spiritual maturity, they don't need outward observation to see reality; their spiritual senses are exercised to discern things like this. They can see through the surface; they can see the invisible.

So, the thing I want to look at for a few minutes is the principle of Tares and Wheat. We know they exist; we know that the outward Church globally is a combination of saved and unsaved people, all of whom *believe* they are saved.

The Lord will have to show us personally what He wants us to do about that, and to whom. But my point is that this is a consistently avoided topic in contemporary Christianity. Usually, the rational for *not* dealing with it comes from passages like this in Matt. 13:24-30;

Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, 'Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?' He said to them, 'An enemy has done this.' The servants said to him, 'Do you want us then to go and gather them up?' But he said, 'No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, "First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn."

Besides showing us that this problem exists and that there are numerous church-goers who are going to be absolutely shocked to discover they were Tares, it also shows us that the final separation and judgment will not happen until the end of the Age.

But another thing that we sometimes overlook is that it's the 'reapers' who can't tell the difference. So, who are the 'reapers'? Matt. 13:39; "The enemy who sowed them is the devil, the harvest is the end of the age, and the reapers are the angels." Angels will be relying on their Lord to make that distinction and guide them as they carry out the separation.

We aren't angels; we are indwelt by the Spirit of Christ.

(Acts 16:18 . . .) As we went to prayer, that a certain slave girl possessed with a spirit of divination met us, who brought her masters much profit by fortune-telling. This girl followed Paul and us, and cried out, saying, "These men are the servants of the Most High God, who proclaim to us the way of salvation." And this she did for many days. But Paul, greatly annoyed, turned and said to the spirit, "I command you in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her." And he came out that very hour.

After several days of being followed by a girl who appeared to believe all that the apostles were teaching, Paul saw through her, he exposed her and her false 'salvation', and he cast out the deceiving spirit within her. You'll also notice that this happened when Paul was in the 'atmosphere of prayer' (vs. 16; "As we went to prayer.")

The Holy Spirit bore witness with Paul's spirit that this girl was not what she claimed to be. Those traveling with Paul didn't notice it; and we've just seen that angels would probably have missed it too, but Paul's spiritual discernment, which was purely by the grace of God, allowed him to see exactly what was happening; and deal with it.

Paul was living in a different world than those around him. His world was spiritual; his enemies were spiritual, not flesh and blood, and his discernment allowed him to see what others couldn't see.

When I said that Paul was in “the atmosphere of prayer”, I was simply pointing out that, to the Holy Spirit Who wrote the book of Acts, it was very important that we realize we will never be able to see the activity of the spiritual world apart from a close, prayerful, abiding in Christ that aligns our mind with His, so that we are seeing what He sees.

Again, our goal is not to look for opportunities to judge people; but it’s important to realize that we will be of little value in ministering to the saved or the lost if we can’t discern their actual spiritual condition – whether the problem is a lack of salvation itself, or whether it’s a lack of a growing spiritual life. If, like our Lord, we can see the true character of the need standing in front of us, then we can know how to meet that need. If we can’t see beyond the surface, then our odds of providing genuine help are slim, at best.

In 2 Tim. 3:13 and 3:16 & 17 Paul had given Timothy two extremely important exhortations that would determine whether Timothy was going to be able to genuinely help both those within and those outside the family of faith;

Evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

For you and I to be “equipped for every good work” in a world and in a Christianity in which “evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived”, we have to be increasingly able to see through deception to reality; and be able to address the real need before us, or we will have no more to offer others to help them than someone who has no relationship with Christ at all.

It’s not a matter of “judging”; it a matter of helping, but the help offered must be coming from the Source of the indwelling Holy Spirit, not from a place of human insight and wisdom. And for that to happen, we have to study on the one hand so that our mind can be renewed and we have to be in an ‘atmosphere of prayer’ so that we’ll be open and available to receive whatever the Lord wants us to know and give to others.

Contemporary Christianity has become, to a large extent, a self-help organization with the *added* deception of believing that we would never depend on anyone but Christ for the answers we need; when in reality, we spend much less time broken before the Lord, fully aware of our inadequacy to minister true spiritual life to others than we do acknowledging our weakness and our desperate need that Christ be all and in all.

We profess one thing, but live another. And this is what I believe Paul is trying to warn Timothy about and is why Paul describes his “manner of life” numerous times so Timothy will be crystal clear on these things to ensure that Timothy knows in personal experience why *Paul’s* idea of effective ministry involves approaching all things as eternally important and must be taken seriously in an atmosphere of both prayer and what Paul calls “fear and trembling” for the express purpose of making sure it’s not Paul, but Christ, Who is meeting the need at hand.

Now, take what we’ve just seen and see if this following passage makes more sense now that we know what Paul was trying to accomplish in his own ministry;

(1 Cor. 2:1-5) brethren, when I came to you, I did not come with excellence of speech or of wisdom declaring to you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified. I was with you in weakness, in fear, and in much trembling. And my speech and my preaching were not with persuasive words of human wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, so that your faith should not be in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

It was imperative to Paul that Timothy (and the Corinthians – and us) realize that helping others, whether the lost in need of salvation, or the saved in need of encouragement and guidance for spiritual growth, neither of these things will happen for them unless the vessel is completely available to the only One Who knows exactly what they need. When that happens, two other things happen simultaneously;

- 1) The vessel is fully aware of his need to *not* get in God’s way; to not grieve or quench the Spirit of the One who has the answers. That’s where Paul’s “fear

and trembling” comes in. Paul is being extremely careful to not intrude on the activity of His Lord in any situation.

- 2) And second, the person in need, receiving what the Lord is offering, becomes aware, not of the *vessel's* great wisdom and compassion, but of the mercy, grace and power of God. That way, after Paul is gone, the person who was helped has had a renewed or increased measure of faith in God.

That may seem to be a simple concept, but I see these things as absolutely foundational to what it means to be an effective servant of Christ. As Paul told the Galatians: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life I now live, I live by faith (by complete dependence on) the Son of God.” Paul has humbled himself before the Lord knowing that Christ is our *only* hope of glory and that has made Paul someone who is fully available to the Lord; through faith and humility, Paul is “thoroughly equipped for every good work”.

I’m going to shift at this point, because I came across something that makes knowing the difference between the spiritually equipped disciple of Christ and the self-dependent servant of God even more serious and obvious than we might have thought. I’ll start with some comments by Sparks on 2 Cor. 2:14 which says, “The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God.” Here’s Spark’s take on the implications of Paul’s statement. And as I read this, hold on to the first sentence (I’ll repeat it after I read it). It’s one of those rare times that in one short sentence an author captures the bottom-line of all that Paul has been warning about in his letters to Church Leadership; especially in Paul’s eschatological sections as related to *our* generation; Ok, here’s the quote;

Christianity has become a system of human interpretation of the thoughts of God (repeat).

Therefore, spiritual death hovers over it. It is no living testimony for God. God has given us a burden in our hearts concerning His thoughts. We do not speak to criticize. We speak because we have to.... People that stand without reserve for the rights and honor of God will always be considered as enemies by those who reject the thoughts of God.... Wherever a religious system has come to reign, it will always be held against those closest to God that it is

they who bring the people of God into confusion. This is what makes the ministry (i.e. church leadership) so difficult. This is what makes the ministry so costly. Israel was so deceived that it thought it was doing right in its idolatry. This is the highest level of deception, not seeing that everything one does, including that which is sincerely intended, actually serves the devil. In the Old Testament, the prophet's disagreement is not in the first place with Israel. His battle is with the whole spiritual system into which Israel is entangled. 'Religious' people would not even rebel against the ministry of the prophet if the enemy did not instigate them. But the prophet is ready to encounter this. He is misunderstood, he is slandered and seen as an enemy; he is marked as the one who troubles Israel. But he has a vision. He does not serve himself. He knows that his standpoint leaves no room for personal ambition. But he has seen God. He is connected to God. And in the special standing which he has with God, the difference between the godly and the human has been revealed to him. With this vision he has become prepared to carry the cost that the service of God demands.

This is what I meant earlier by spiritual discernment. One does not have to be a prophet or a leader to have their spiritual senses exercised to distinguish between that which is of God and that which is of Man. The person just has to have grown to a place where they are willing to pay any price necessary to uphold the honor of the Lord. There's no place for personal ambition or people-pleasing. To *that* person "... the difference between the divine and the human has been revealed."

Some of us don't see spiritual reality because we are too cowardly to go to war against all that dishonors the Lord; others don't see it because they are still trying to live on milk when solid food is needed; and some don't see because they aren't even born again – they have no functioning human spirit to *be* exercised, trained or brought to maturity.

Whatever the case, when Paul (and the other apostles and writers of New Testament prophecy) detail the spiritual condition of the final generation of Christians, the one thing that stands out above all others which characterizes that

generation (*our* generation) is that they are “ever learning, but never able to come to a knowledge of the Truth”.

And because that comes out on top as the greatest deception of our time, the solution is brokenness through suffering creating genuine teachability followed by an unquenchable hunger to know the Truth as it is in Christ. Once that mindset drives a life, God’s responds by bringing to that person exactly what they need to have to move from where they are to where they need to be in order to honor their Lord.

Which is another reason I’ve been so insistent on us seeing the scriptures as the treasure they are in God’s mind. Not that these are the only places this is emphasized, but the book of Proverbs along with Psalm 119 are literally saturated with exhortations to treat God’s Word with a much greater personal desire and respect than most people believe is necessary.

Just a couple quick examples;

Prov. 8:11 For wisdom is better than jewels, and all that you may desire cannot compare with her . . . Blessed are those who find wisdom . . . She is more precious than rubies; *nothing* you desire can compare with her.

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible - 176 verses and nearly every single verse talks about the incomparable value of God’s Word.

And, of course, this can be summed up in the passage we’re studying in 2 Timothy 3:16. Just as John 3:16 is the capstone of salvation, 2 Tim. 3:16 is the summation of the most important thing related to spiritual growth.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete (lit. brought to full maturity), thoroughly equipped for every good work.

What does God have to do to convince us of the importance of what He has written and preserved for us? Even the Son of God is said to be the “Word” of God in flesh and blood.

(John 1:1 & 14) In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God . . . And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

Finally, in keeping with the purpose of the letters to Timothy (church leadership, or we could say, 'pastoral responsibility') I'll close with some exhortations by L.S. Chafer that were directed to pastors regarding the importance of the scriptures to their ministry;

Theology is the study of God's thoughts. No substitute will ever be found for the knowledge of the Word of God. That Word alone deals with things supernatural, eternal and infinite, and it alone has power to convert the soul and to develop a God-honoring spiritual life. There is a limitless yet hidden spiritual content within the Bible which contributes much to its supernatural character. . . Acquiring the knowledge of the spiritual content of the Bible is a life-long task. The great preachers who have moved the hearts of men with divine power have been saturated with the Bible truths secured through a first-hand, daily study of its text. General facts of human leaning may be acquired by the usual means, but spiritual truths are apprehended only as taught to the individual heart by the Spirit through diligent study and prayer.

So, I'll close our study tonight with the same encouragement Paul gave the leadership of the Church at Ephesus (Timothy's church).

(Acts. 20:32) Now, brethren, I commend you to God and to the Word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified.