

A MIRROR OF THE LATTER DAYS

II Timothy 3

This chapter turns our attention to the future and describes a time of general moral decadence. In verse one there is a reference to the last days, which is a common New Testament phrase denoting the period immediately preceding the consummation of the present age. Yet this future was not unrelated to the time of Paul. In the period between the ascension of Christ and His return grievous times must be expected. These times are to be perilous and grievous because of conditions in the world at large, but particularly in the churches. It is of the latter in particular that our scripture lesson is speaking.

As to the type of people living in the latter days, three things are recorded in the Word of God.

I. Their Opinions Are Wrong.

1. Their opinion of themselves.

They are called "boasters." This is true because they boast of what they are and what they do. Boasters are those swaggering, bragging persons who glory in making a big display of themselves, whether the realm be in riches or in knowledge. They are simply empty pretenders.

They are also called "proud." They pose as superior to others. They are haughty, as if those who are more humble were beneath their consideration, in fact, beneath their notice even. These high-minded individuals are conceited, or eaten up with self-esteem, or bloated with self-importance.

2. Their opinion of others.

God's Word says that they are "despisers of those that are good."

II. Their Affections Are Wrong.

1. They are lovers of themselves.

Wrapped up in themselves, they made a very small parcel or package. Being lovers of themselves, they should be informed that this is neither the highest quality of love nor is self the best object on which to expend love.

2. They are lovers of money.

3. They are lovers of pleasures.

They substitute pleasure for God. What a wild, feverish rush after pleasure is evident today! Love of pleasure has sapped love for God in many lives.

Self, money and pleasure are to be respected, and are to be kept in their proper places, but they are not to be loved. Misplaced affection is the explanation of so much of the evil living that these days display. Moral corruption always follows from the false direction of love. Nobody has any right to be a self-lover, a money-lover or a pleasure-lover. Everybody should be a God-lover.

III. Their Behavior Is Wrong.

1. They are railers.

They are abusive, foul-mouthed railers against their fellowmen.

2. They are disobedient to parents.

From early childhood many display a spirit of rebellion against their parents. Multitudes of parents have never brought their children under control. This disobedience to parents is one of the crowning sins of this age. Unless there is a change for the better, there will soon be a breaking-up of the social fabric as it is constituted at present. One of the characteristic features of the present is opposition to authority. Children are refusing restraint, and parents have largely lost the sense of their responsibility toward the rising generation. Children who are not trained in obedience to parents will not be obedient to the laws of the land or be obedient to God. For several years parents have been sowing the wind, and the reaping of the whirlwind is certain to follow. Many are without any natural affection. They do not have that natural attachment for their kind which appears in the beasts of the field.

3. They are ungrateful.

Oblivious of all the goodness of God and the kindnesses of men, they take everything for granted. Having no use for God while everything is going well, they desire to use Him only as Someone to blame when things go wrong.

4. They are unholy.

Not only do they lack gratitude, but purity also. They are so irreverent that scarcely anything is held sacred.

5. They are false accusers.

Scurrilous, scandal-mongering slanderers, they deliberately manufacture falsehoods against others in order to injure and destroy them.

6. They are dissolute.

Seemingly they do not try to exercise any self-control whatever. The woeful lack of self-control and the tremendous amount of immorality throughout the land is disturbing the more serious-minded people of our day.

7. They are fierce.

There is a tremendous increase in cruelty. The savage tongue is still inflicting wounds that break hearts, blast hopes and ruin lives. Many are so savage that they are more like wild animals than human beings.

8. They are treacherous.

They are so undependable that they are fully prepared to change sides, if it seems advantageous to do so. Having no real convictions to stick to, they do not have any sense of loyalty to any cause or to any person unless it is self.

9. They are reckless.

Highminded and bloated with self-importance, they are determined to have their own way, entirely heedless of the consequences.

Dr. Alexander MacLaren described those who have these characteristics as "pagans masquerading as Christians." Religion is not entirely denied, but it amounts to no more than an empty shell. There is an outward form, but no power. Its adherents are positively rejecting the effective power.

Certain men among the false teachers, who are masters of cunning, will gain access into the homes of gullible women; captivate the confidence and allegiance of some of the silly ones and exert such powerful influence over them that they will make

them the captives of their will. Exponents of religious error always find their easiest victims among a certain class of neurotic and sentimental women, who desire secret instruction and occult solutions of the problems of sin and of sorrow, especially such as are disturbed by guilt of conscience, and such as allow their emotions to control their reason and to determine their morals. These women apparently want advice, but their minds are so fickle and warped that they do not seem to be capable of attaining the knowledge of the truth. Their main quest is for sensational rather than serious information, and consequently they fall an easy prey to false teachers.

IV. The Behavior That Is Right. 3:10-17.

It is significant that doctrine is mentioned before duty, but it must be linked with life. The pattern for the Christian as set forth here involves three things:

1. Consistency in living.

Paul's practice coincided with his preaching. What he said in his preaching and teaching, he carried out in his conduct. Lips and life coincided exactly. That was an important part of this pattern.

2. Continuance in laboring.

Paul's one great overmastering purpose in life was an all-out service for the Lord.

3. Constancy in loving.

He kept on loving, putting up with and enduring so much, but loving just the same. A Christian is not necessarily granted immunity from the sufferings of the common lot of man, but normally he will be subject to the buffetings of life. They may hurt him, but they will not harm him, for out of them all he shall be delivered.

In such an age as this, when there is abroad so much loose thinking, lop-sided teaching and lax living, few things are so important as that Christians should be men and women of the Bible. Having learned the things from the lips of someone, and been assured of their truth by their effects in the lives of others, we are to prove faithful by living in accordance with them.

There are various reasons why we should accept the authority of the Bible.

1. It is the best standard.

All that one needs to be taught about the way of salvation is found in the Bible. What we must believe, what we must be and what we must do are set forth in the Bible with a clearness and a completeness found nowhere else. Not a doctrine, nor an inspiration, nor a duty is omitted.

2. It is a sufficient standard.

The Scriptures give us enough truth for all religious purposes. In them we have all the truth required for the religious life of men. The Bible alone tells us what our souls need.

3. It is an authoritative standard.

The Scriptures speak with authority, as does no other literature. The scriptural standard is the only one we are under obligation to accept. The Bible is not subject to addition or development or modification of any kind. It is the absolute and final authority on all questions of faith and morals. "Thus saith the Lord" is the end of all controversy.

4. It is an inspired standard.

The men to whom God gave the messages which He had placed into permanent form by writing were selected with great care and because of their fitness to do the thing which He wanted done. There was a fitness of character, of intellect, of attainment and of the age and place in which they lived. God selected men who could write. After He had selected them, He did not leave them to themselves. They needed something more than natural endowment and the influence of their age. They needed special illumination and guidance. This special qualification was given directly from God. His Spirit acted continually upon the spirit of the man whom He had selected to write. These holy men of God wrote as they were moved by the Holy Spirit, and their message was about eternal life.

The word "inspired" literally means "God-breathed." By inspiration we mean the conscious in-breathing of God which qualified the men to utter the truths which God wanted all men to receive. The Bible was written by men of God, who were qualified and prompted to do so by the Holy Spirit, in obedience to the divine command. The Bible itself declares that it is inspired. "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 perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16-17. Not only is the Bible inspired, but it inspires those who study it.

Truly the Bible is a wonderful book.

- (1) It is wonderful in the truth it proclaims.
- (2) It is wonderful in the treasures it contains.
- (3) It is wonderful in the triumphs it reveals.
- (4) It is wonderful in the trust it invites.

Well may we study the contents of the Bible, practice its precepts, proclaim its message, glory in its triumphs and magnify its Master.