

The Great Apostasy

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Paul isn't really known for being a prophet. We don't refer to him as the prophet Paul. We call him the apostle Paul, right? But do you know that Paul, toward the end of his life, said some of the most amazing prophetic things, particularly as it relates to the last days and what goes on in the last days. And that's what we're going to be looking at in 2 Timothy chapter 3 today. We're going to be looking at this chapter because I felt like it was very appropriate as we leave our study of the Book of Acts and as our focus on the apostle Paul and his life kind of moves with that, we all need to see what he says here. All right.

Verse 1. Are you ready? *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty..” (ESV)* I want to stop you right there. Don't read ahead. I promise you we'll get through the chapter.

It's important that we stop though to talk about some of the specifics and technicalities related to this particular verse because he says, *“in the last days, there will come times of difficulty.”* What are the last days? Well, technically speaking, the last days cover everything from the inauguration of the Church on the day of Pentecost until the time Christ returns for His Church and captures us and takes us away. That is considered the Church age.

So, Paul was writing this in the Church age or in the last days, if you will. However, you'll notice that Paul talks about a time that is past himself. He does it by saying the words, there will come. So, it's obviously not something that Paul is experiencing currently, it's something that will happen in the days to come. We know from what he says here in this chapter and how it connects with other things related to the events of the last days that he's talking about the last days of the last days.

In other words, that time just before Christ returns for His Church and the onset of what we call the tribulation period. So, Paul is focusing our attention here, to this time frame, that is the last days of the last days. By the way, I believe we're in it right now. We're not waiting for the last days of the last days. We are in the last days of the last days, and I'll show you here in this passage why that is. But you'll notice that what Paul says is that, *“in these last days, there will come times of difficulty.”*

In other words, increased difficulty particularly for believers. Paul's writing to Timothy, it is a letter that he fully expected would be read to other believers. It was a letter that the Holy Spirit saw fit to hold for you and I over all these years and preserve it so that we could learn from it. This is a letter to you and I. You might just as well call yourself Timothy because it is a letter for us. What is he saying here? There will be increased difficulty in the last days. What is the cause of it?

What is the cause of that increased difficulty? You say, well, I don't know, it just says it's going to get more difficult in the last days. Yeah, but there's a cause. There's a reason things are going to get challenging, and I'm still talking futuristic. There's a reason things are challenging. And Paul actually talks about it in his previous letter to Timothy. I want to put it up on the screen for you here so we can see it together. It's from 1 Timothy chapter 4 and he says,

1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

Now the Spirit (and he's speaking here about the Holy Spirit, the Spirit) *expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith...*

Now, we'll come back to this in just a little bit. But there, Paul is giving us the reason for the difficult days that we are living in today. He says that people will depart from the faith. That, we have a word for that. The word is apostasy. And it's a big word, but that's really what it means. People will depart from the faith. They will abandon their beliefs. I ask you, are we seeing that in our day and age today? Are we seeing people abandon the faith? Are we seeing people depart? Are we seeing it in our own country? Absolutely.

I mean, anybody who tries to convince you that the United States is a Christian country today just isn't dealing with reality. I mean, we are no more a Christian nation today than is Iran. So, it is definitely something that we are seeing here in this section.

So, he says, “*some will depart from the faith.*” Again, you might want to write down the word apostasy. And somebody might ask at this particular juncture in our talk. So exactly how do you know or what, on what do you base your belief that we are living in this time of apostasy that the apostle Paul is describing here that he is speaking to Timothy about?

Well, it's really not that hard. Paul goes on to give a description of the kinds of things that we would experience or see around us when the world that we live in, particularly even the country that we live in experiences an apostasy or a falling away from the faith. Look with me in verse 2 here in 2 Timothy 3, "*For people will be lovers of self,...*" Does that sound like anything related to our culture today?

I mean, how many times have I told you, all you have to do is walk through the grocery aisle and you see a magazine. We have one now that's called Self. We have, it's the title of it. Self. And guess what it's about. Yeah, it's not about other people. It's about you. It's meant to focus on you. And these sorts of things are popular in our culture today because the culture is focused on self. And Paul says that there'll be lovers of self.

Look what else he describes is this time period, they will be: "*lovers of money*, (Well, that's not happening, is it? They will be) *proud, arrogant, abusive*, (Is abuse on the rise in our culture? Would you say? Yeah, I think so. How about) *disobedient to their parents*, (Yeah, we're living in that time) *ungrateful, unholy*, (Look at this) ³ *heartless, unappeasable*, (cannot be appeased) *slandering, without self-control...*"

Do you think about experiences or things that you've heard about where people just lack self-control? You know, just little things, things that weren't happening when I was a kid that are happening today where people have just lost control. They can no longer control themselves, their emotions, their anger and so forth.

When I was a little boy, there was no such thing as road rage. It's common place today because people can't control themselves. Somebody cuts them off in traffic. I have to get out my baseball bat at the next stoplight and I will ruin your car. Right?

It's happening. Don't you hear about it in the news? It didn't happen when I was a young boy. These things are on the rise. He says that people will be: "*brutal, not loving good*, (It literally means not lovers of good) ⁴ *treacherous, reckless*, (I like this next phrase) *swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God* (Do we love pleasure in our culture today) ⁵ *having the appearance of godliness but denying its power*. (Paul just simply says) *Avoid such people.*"

So we go through this incredible list, which sounds to me like the nightly news. I mean, it really does. I mean, the focus on self, the focus on me, the focus on everything that matters to me. The incredible emphasis on just my comfort and

pain relief and all these things that we're seeing in our culture today. Absolutely amazing. But then, he says this thing at the end of this section that we just read that almost kind of shocks us a little bit. Did you notice what he says? He says that there will be an appearance of godliness among this kind of a culture, among this kind of a society.

And I look at that, initially, and my first response is, are you joking? I mean, you have just described the most carnal sort of culture that could be described. I mean, just people literally living from the depth of their gut and doing what they're going to do, and so forth. And then he says, but there's going to be an appearance of godliness.

And you look at that, and you think, wow. And we would probably wonder what he was talking about if we weren't living in the midst of it and we see what's happening. There is an appearance of God. What we call it today is spirituality and spirituality is on the rise.

Just look at the movies and the TV shows that are coming out today that are catching people's attention. Hollywood's dialed in on this thing, by the way. Hollywood knows that our culture has an interest in supernatural phenomenon, magic, things that are beyond the norm or beyond the natural that enter into a spiritual dynamic.

And they know that we want to see stuff like that, so they're cranking out movies and TV shows regularly that deal with those sorts of issues. How many shows and movies are going on right now about people who have something supernatural happen to them and so they live eternally?

I can name you a few of them right off the top of my head. But this is something that people are fascinated by because there is a rise in spirituality. I remember even as a kid, I've told you before that when I was a teenager, I kind of flirted with Jesus for a short time, read the Bible and kind of thought, you know this is pretty cool. And then I never really walked with the Lord in any kind of a place of Lordship, right? I kind of recognized that He was a pretty good guy. And then I think I wanted Him as my Savior, but I did not crown him Lord until I was about 25 years old.

Well, in the in-between time of that flirtation and being about 25, when I dedicated my life to the Lord, I was greatly interested in spiritual things, and I remember that. In fact, I remember that there was my favorite music artist, recording artist back then, recorded and released an album. I could, to this day, it's called Healer, I can remember it. And it was very spiritually thematic.

Nothing related to Christianity, by the way, and this particular artist came out very contrary to Christianity and the things that we believe, and yet he released this incredibly spiritual album.

I was really drawn to that stuff at that time. I thought that was really cool. And I didn't have the Bible to guide me in that journey, but I was still drawn to it. And people are drawn to it increasingly today. What does Paul say that characterizes that baseless spirituality?

Look with me here again in this verse that we read. When he talks about this spirituality, he says, in verse 5, “*having an appearance of godliness.*” It appears godly in the sense that it's spiritual, but he says, “*but denying it's very power.*” It literally denies the power of what? The Gospel.

You've got to understand, when Paul uses the word power, he's not just spitting into the wind. Power to him means something very significant. He's referring to the power of God to change a life. The power of God to transform someone from the person that they were to the person that God wants to make them. That's what Paul talks about.

In fact, Paul will say elsewhere in some of his letters, the Gospel is not about talk. It's about power. Paul liked power, particularly the power of God. And so, when he uses that word power, he's speaking very specifically. What does he say about baseless spirituality?

It has an appearance on the outside of kind of this sort of ooooh godliness thing. The spiritual, you know, that's kind of, it's very attractive. There's no power in it. There's no power to change your life. There's no power for holiness. There's no power for righteous living. There's no power to know God in the depth of who He is in baseless spirituality. Just an appearance. It's all on the outside and so forth.

All right, so verse 6 goes on. Look with me there in your Bible. He says, “*For among them are those who creep into households (yuck) and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, ⁷ always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. ⁹ But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.*”

You might think, Janice and Jambres, wait a minute, who are those guys? I need to look that up in my Bible and find out where they appear in the Bible. You're

not going to find them appearing there by name. They do appear in the Bible, but not by name. This is the only place where they're actually named. And Paul is bringing this name really out of extra biblical sources. But these were the magicians who stood in Pharaoh's court and who opposed the message of the Lord to Pharaoh, which he brought with signs and wonders.

Do you remember? Moses and Aaron came and began to show Pharaoh signs and wonders. And do you remember what his magicians did? They counterfeited the same things, right?

And so, he's referring to Janus and Jambres as these kinds of individuals who are involved in a baseless spirituality that only counterfeits the very power of God but has no ability to actually change your life. So, he's using these men as a description of this baseless spirituality because all it ends up doing is bringing opposition to the very Word of God that you and I are to hear and to accept and to follow.

And again, it's kind of lights and magic and froth and bubble and it looks always very interesting and very attractive, but it's baseless just like these individuals. All right.

Now, you'll remember that when we started off here just after reading verse 1, I brought up the passage from 1 Timothy 4, which talked about why the world is going to be plunged into a time of apostasy and that people are going to, it says, because they're going to depart from the faith, right? Well, let's get a little bit deeper into why they're going to depart from the faith.

And I'm going to highlight at this time on 1 Timothy 4 and here it is in red and underlined.

1 Timothy 4:1 (ESV)

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

Now the Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons.

Here's why they're going to depart from the faith, because they are going to be devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and the teachings of demons. Now, this is an interesting passage. Don't get all weirded out. Doesn't mean some demons are going to step up to the pulpit and start teaching. It means that the things that people hear in the last days, rather than being founded on the eternal principles

of God's Word are in fact going to be founded upon satanically inspired messages and teachings that are going to draw people away, right? They're going to be drawn away to these various things.

And that is going to precipitate this departing from the faith, which is in fact, the apostasy that we are living in right now in the United States of America and around the world. This is what is going on in the world that you and I live. All right? It's interesting. Actually, just one verse later, when you get to verse 3, look what Paul says. This is interesting. He says,

2 Timothy 4:3-4 (ESV)

For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.

For the time is coming (And you know what? It's here) *when people will not endure sound teaching*, (Meaning biblically founded teaching) *but* (he says) *having itching ears they will* (they're actually going to) *accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions*, (In other words, tell them what they want to hear. And then what will they do? They will) *and will turn away* (which again is the definition of apostasy. They will turn away) *from listening to* (What?) *the truth and* (they will) *wander off into myths*.

And fables and whatever kind of tickles their fancy. That's what people are doing today. That is why there is an apostasy that is going on today. Alright, we've established that a great apostasy is predicted in the Word of God.

And that it would be predicated upon the rejection of God's Word and a corresponding popularity on other teachings that are satanically inspired. Okay, did you stay with me there on that little progression? Apostasy is coming based on a rejection of God's Word, based on an acceptance of other teachings that are going to be made popular, and that sort of thing.

So now that we've established the reality of all this bummeriness, that's not a word. I just made that up. You might want to write that down, though I kind of like it. I might be using it again.

Now let's talk about how God's Word encourages us as it relates to standing. Because you know what? We're called to stand. This is a hard time to stand, you guys. This is a hard time to stand for our faith in Jesus, but we've got to stand

because if we don't stand, we fall. And if we fall, we fall away. And we are part of the apostasy rather than those who stand.

So, let's see what the Word of God says as we continue with this chapter. Look with me again in your Bible, verse 10. We're in 2 Timothy chapter 3, verse 10. He's talking to Timothy and that means he's talking to you and I. *"You, however, have followed my teaching..."*

Guys, hang on, you've got to see this. We've established apostasy comes when people let go of the teaching of God's Word, embrace other satanically inspired teaching, and Paul says, but you, he's talking now to Timothy, he's talking to us, he's talking to the remnant of the faithful, and he says, *"but you have followed my teaching."*

And when he says my teaching, he's basically essentially establishing for us what is the New Testament, the essence of the New Testament and the things that are taught therein. He says you've followed it.

Listen, this is the key you guys. This is the key. It's hanging on. It's hanging on to the Word of God, but it's also hanging on to good examples. He goes on here. You haven't just followed my teaching. You've also followed, *"...my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions (even. You've evened followed those) and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me."*

Paul speaks of following the Word and following Godly examples. Aren't you glad we still have Godly examples today? I look at some of the people that God has raised up to be Godly examples to us all. You know, men who've been around a long time, men like Billy Graham.

What a Godly example of a man who perseveres and continues to preach the Word and now his sons are doing it now that he can't. I think of Franklin Graham and God's raised up yet another man who's come from the same family to be an example of what it means to stand.

And, you know, Franklin Graham doesn't have the same standing in culture that his dad, Billy did. Billy was invited into the White House from several presidents. Franklin's not getting invited into the White House. He's on the outs with our government, but you know what?

He's saying the same things his dad did, but Franklin is standing in a new era. Billy stood in an era that came out of the forties and fifties and through the very difficult times of the sixties and seventies when, by the way, this apostasy began. Don't think apostasy is limited to where we're living right now.

This began decades ago. There's a lot of Christians that are getting really upset and doing the whole just kind of freaking out thing about what's happening in here in these last days. This has been brewing for decades you guys. But now we've got, God's raised up new men to stand and be an example to us of that strength of character that isn't obnoxious, but stands up and says, you know, there is a truth. And it's given by God, and we need to stand in that truth, regardless of what comes our way, and so forth.

They saw that kind of stuff in Paul. Paul even references the way that he lived, and then again, his persecutions. You even followed my example in my persecutions, and so forth. And then Paul says this about persecution. Look at verse 12 in your Bible. In fact, he says, *"Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted..."*

Have you ever heard that verse before? People quote it from time to time. Everybody who wants to live a Godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. What context does Paul give that statement in? The context is apostasy. The context is the coming apostasy. It was coming for his day. It's here in yours.

And what he is saying to you Christians, and I'm speaking to you born-again Christians here today. What he is saying to you, and I is if we choose to say, I'm going to live my life in Christ openly, there is persecution in your future, if not in your present.

Some of you may be losing friends or have lost friends. Some of you may be losing your job. It may be even worse. I can see a day coming where for those of us who simply get up and proclaim the Word of God, there may be jail time or at least fines in our future because we simply say, this is what God's Word says. We will be charged with hate crimes, although our hearts have absolutely zero hate in them. Only love and a desire to see people saved and come to the Gospel of grace. But we will be charged with it nonetheless. Mark my words.

So, this is the world that you and I are living in. You want to be a Christian? Wonderful. You want to live a godly life. Expect the fallout. It's coming, if not here already. And then Paul ends this section talking about this great apostasy, about how we're to stand strong in the midst of it. And what does he do? He goes back to the Word. He goes back to the teaching of the Word.

Verse 14, *“But as for you, (he says) continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵ and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, (Talking about the Scriptures) which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”*

Paul reminded Timothy. He says, Tim, you were raised in the Scriptures from your earliest days. Let me just remind you. Those are the very Scriptures that are able to make you stand, to make you wise unto salvation if you will continue. Did you notice that essence there in verse 14?

He says, *“continue in what you have learned.”* The Greek word also is translated elsewhere to abide, to abide, to stick close, to hold fast. Don't stray, Paul is saying to you and I, don't stray, don't move off the dime. Stick with the Word.

And you know, there are a lot of Christians, guys, can I just tell you this? There's a lot of Christians today in different sectors of the body of Christ who've given themselves permission to believe outside of the authority of God's Word. And you know what they base that an equal authority to God's Word?

They base it on experience. If it happens to me, I'll believe it. If it happens to you and you tell me about it, I'll believe it. I don't need any kind of corroborating evidence from God's Word. All I need to do is either experience it myself or understand from you that you've experienced it and we're just going to call it good.

And they've given themselves that permission, even when it's unbiblical. Or extra-biblical and they'll just say, Oh, that's great. Praise the Lord that, you know, and they're just, oh look what God did. People that is going to be, that is going to be devastating to some people, particularly in this apostasy period that we're in right now. We can't afford to veer off from God's Word. This is how it, this is how it happens. We hear things, we're told things, and we don't have the guts to say, where is that in the Bible? Where is that in God's Word?

Don't ever be afraid to ask somebody who just got done telling you something to say to them. Where do you find that in the Bible? Would you show me that please? Or at least write down that verse. Or if you don't have it now, email me and let me know where that is in the Bible because I want to check that out. That's, listen, if they're offended by your question, then that tells you right there that there's a problem. Right? So just ask them. Where's that found in the Bible? People say this to me all the time.

So and so told me such and such. It's like, well, where'd they get that? Well, they got it somewhere, I suppose. Maybe it just came out of their own head. But the point is, it's not biblical. So, are you going to believe it or not? We have to just start getting strong when it comes to the Word of God and saying, I'm not going to believe it if it's not in the Bible. You tell me this is true and I just, no, uh huh. It's, I'm, I, you know. So, it's an important thing.

Paul goes on. He ends verse 16 and he says this, “...*all scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*”

How many of you, when you were kids, memorized this verse? Come on, put your hands up. There are some of you. How many of you have heard this verse before? Put your hand up.

You've heard this verse before? Sure. “*All Scripture is breathed out by God, (or God breathed, literally means) and is profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness.*” We've seen this verse a lot. Let me ask you one more question. In what context is Paul giving this statement? The context is the coming apostasy.

And it is important for you to see this statement in context because in context it is telling you and I that the Word of God is from God. It bears the origin from God. It bears the authority of God. We believe things because the authority of God's Word is behind it. You see? And that's what Paul is doing here for you and I. He's establishing an understanding of why we believe God's Word. It is God breathed, inspired by the Spirit, right? And that's why we are holding fast.

I'm going to end with this, but Jesus, I'm sure you're not surprised to learn, Jesus also spoke a lot of the coming time of apostasy in the last days, and He also talked about some of the characteristics of that and I want to share something with you from the 24th chapter of Matthew verse 12. It says,

Matthew 24:12 (ESV)

...because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

...because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.

Okay? First thing he says is what's going to happen? Lawlessness is going to increase. What is lawlessness? People, it's that attitude you and I hear practically every day that says nobody is going to tell me what I can and can't do. What does the world call that? Independence.

What does the Bible call it? Lawlessness. Rebellion. The world will, if you make a statement like that publicly, the world will fall all over you to congratulate you on your independent, strong spirit. Listen, it's just the spirit of the times. It's the spirit of the times. Lawlessness. Nobody's telling me what to do. It's my body.

It's my life, I'll do with it as I please. And nobody, including some God of the universe is going to tell me how to live my life, right? It's just lawlessness. So, what does lawlessness produce? It produces a heart that grows cold in its ability to love. That's what it actually produces. You know what's interesting about that? I found an incredible definition in a quotation of a commentary that I read about what coldness of heart, kind of how it's defined. Can I put this on the screen for you as well? It says,

The deadening of people's love for other people manifests itself in the devaluing of life, a greater focus on one's own pleasure and protection and a decrease in sensitivity to the needs of others.

— Holman New Testament Commentary

The deadening of people's love for other people manifests itself in the devaluing of life, a greater focus on one's own pleasure and protection and a decrease in sensitivity to the needs of others.

Isn't that interesting? But that's what a love that grows cold actually accomplishes, a devaluing of life. And you think, wow, is that the world that we live in today? Are you kidding me? We have to set aside a day on our calendar as Christians to remind ourselves that we believe in the sanctity of life.

We call it Sanctity of Life, Sanctity of Human Life Sunday. Why are we doing that? Because the world in which we live is increasingly devaluing life, human life. And so we have to step up every so often and just say, no, we believe in the sanctity of human life.

But it's because everything that we're talking about here as it relates to the coldness of heart, the apostasy of the Church, people falling away from the Gospel, from the Word of God. It's not going to happen; it's happening. And here's the question that I need to present to you and I, are we ready? Are we prepared? Because it's here. Not coming. It's here.

The reason I ask, are we ready is because if we're not, we might just get swept away. And we need to be strong. We need to be people who make up our mind right here, right now, regardless of the fallout, I'm sticking with God.

I love God. I love God's Word. Jesus is my Savior. I'm not backing down on that one. Jesus is the only Savior. I'm not backing down on that one either. That's a non-negotiable. Jesus is the only way that a man can be saved. Oh boy, does that put you on the outs with people today! Just go around telling people that it's only through Jesus they can be saved.

You are bad guy number one. How dare you? How dare you say that? I didn't. He did. *"I am the way, the truth, and the life, and no man comes to the Father except by me."* Jesus said it. I didn't. I'm just repeating it. But don't think that by repeating it, I'm not going to get into trouble. Because I will.

Increasingly so, because the world in which we live is growing cold, colder by the day. Guys, it's reality. I'm sorry to give you this wonderful, warm and fuzzy message here today. I really, I'd love to be able to give you good things and I'd love to make you laugh. But this is one of those things that's rather sobering. And you know what? We can't laugh our way through the apostasy. We've got to understand, this is life. This is the life that you and I have. This is where we live.

This is what we've been born into. You're here right now, right this minute. And that means God intended you to be here, to live in the last days of the last days. It's where you are. And I'm not looking forward to it any more than you are.

Here's the point. God will give us the grace to stand. And having done everything, to stand. And not be bowled over, knocked down, and shut up. But to continue to speak the truth in love to a lost and dying generation that is desperately seeking answers but finding none outside of the person of Jesus Christ.