

Message Two

Inoculation against the Decline of the Church

Scripture Reading: 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 18; 2 Tim. 2:1-7, 15

I. According to the desire of His heart, God's eternal economy is to dispense Himself into man and make man the same as He is in life and nature but not in the Godhead and to make Himself one with man and man one with Him, thus to be enlarged and expanded in His expression, that all His divine attributes may be expressed in human virtues—John 1:12-14; 1 John 3:1a, 2; 2 Pet. 1:4:

A. We need to “learn Christ...as the reality is in Jesus”—Eph. 4:20-21:

1. *The reality is in Jesus* refers to the actual condition of the life of Jesus as recorded in the four Gospels; Jesus lived a life in which He did everything in God, with God, and for God; God was in His living, and He was one with God—this is what is meant by “the reality is in Jesus.”

2. We learn from Him (Matt. 11:29) according to His example, not by our natural life but by Him as our life in resurrection; to learn Christ is simply to be molded into the pattern of Christ, that is, to be conformed to the image of Christ (Rom. 8:29).

B. “Even as He is, so also are we in this world”; Christ lived in this world a life of God as love, and He is now our life that we may live the same life of love in this world and be the same as He is—1 John 4:17; cf. Isa. 7:14-15.

C. “Glorify God in your body” (1 Cor. 6:20)—this is to allow God, who dwells in us (1 John 4:13), to occupy and saturate our body and express Himself through our body as His temple.

D. “Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God”—1 Cor. 10:31:

1. The glory of God is the expression of God, God expressed; God's glory has its riches, which are the many different items that constitute God's divine attributes, such as light, life, power, love, righteousness, and holiness, expressed to different degrees—Eph. 1:18; 3:16-17a; Col. 1:27.

2. We have been predestined for this glory and called to this glory—1 Cor. 2:7; 1 Pet. 5:10; 1 Thes. 2:12.

3. We are being transformed into this glory and will be brought into it—2 Cor. 3:16, 18; Heb. 2:10-11.

4. Eventually, we will be glorified with Christ (Rom. 8:17, 30) and bear the glory of God for God's expression in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:10-11).

II. Teachings that differ from the unique teaching of God's eternal economy (1 Tim. 1:3-4; 6:3-5, 20-21) and heresies (4:1-3) are the source of the church's decline, degradation, and deterioration:

A. Teaching differently tears down God's building and annuls God's economy; even a small amount of teaching in a different way destroys the recovery—cf. 1 Cor. 3:17.

B. To war the good warfare (1 Tim. 1:18) is to war against the different teachings of the dissenters and to carry out God's economy (v. 4) according to the apostle's ministry concerning the gospel of grace and eternal life, that the blessed God may be glorified (vv. 11-17).

III. The degradation and apostasy of the church took place at the end of the apostle Paul's ministry—cf. 1 Cor. 9:1-2:

- A. All the believers in Asia turned away from Paul's ministry, including Phygelus and Hermogenes—2 Tim. 1:15.
- B. Hymenaeus and Philetus said that the resurrection had already taken place, that is, that there would be no resurrection; this is a serious heresy that denies the divine power in life—2:17-18; 1 Cor. 15:52; 1 Thes. 4:16; Rev. 20:4, 6.
- C. Demas, a co-worker of the apostle Paul, loved the present age and abandoned Paul—2 Tim. 4:10.
- D. Alexander the coppersmith did many evil things to the apostle and greatly opposed the apostles' words—vv. 14-15.
- E. At the apostle's first defense no one was with him to support him, but all abandoned him—v. 16.

IV. Even during a period of decline, a downward trend when most of God's people are carried away, there is always a remnant who remains faithful—1 Kings 19:14, 18; Rom. 11:5; Ezra 9:8; Neh. 1:3; Hag. 1:14:

- A. Onesiphorus was an overcomer who resisted the general trend and stood against the downward current to refresh the Lord's ambassador in spirit, soul, and body, not being ashamed of the apostle's imprisonment on behalf of the Lord's commission—2 Tim. 1:16-18.
- B. Timothy was one who was fully perfected and equipped to minister the word of God, not only in caring for a local church but also in confronting the worsening decline of the church; he was like-souled with the apostle Paul to genuinely care for the church with all the saints and remind them of Paul's ways which were in Christ—3:13-17; Phil. 2:19-22; 1 Cor. 4:17; 1 Tim. 1:16; 4:12.
- C. Luke was the beloved physician, a faithful companion of Paul until Paul's martyrdom—Col. 4:14; Philem. 24; 2 Tim. 4:11.
- D. Titus walked in the same spirit and in the same steps as Paul to care for the churches—2 Cor. 7:6-7; 12:18; Titus 1:4-5; 3:12; cf. 2 Tim. 4:10.
- E. Mark was useful to Paul for the ministry—v. 11; cf. Acts 15:37.

V. Second Timothy is a book written for inoculators, those who would inoculate others against the decline of the church—2:1-7, 15:

- A. The inoculator is a teacher—v. 2; Eph. 3:2:
 - 1. If someone in a local church has a deposit of the Lord's healthy words, he should train the faithful ones that they too may have a good deposit from the Lord and be competent to teach others—1 Tim. 6:20; 2 Tim. 1:12-14.
 - 2. We must shepherd the saints with the teaching of God's economy—Eph. 4:11; cf. 1 Tim. 3:2; 4:11-16:
 - a. We should shepherd people by dispensing the divine life in the humanity of Jesus to cherish them and by teaching them the divine truths in the divinity of Christ to nourish them—Eph. 5:29.
 - b. Shepherding the flock of God by declaring to them all the counsel of God, the economy of God, protects the church from the destroyers of God's building, mingles them with the Triune God as grace, and binds them together in His oneness—Acts 20:26-30; Eph. 4:14; 1 Tim. 1:3-4; Rom. 16:17; cf. Ezek. 33:1-11; 34:25; Zech. 11:7.
 - 3. The inoculating teacher, as a good minister of Christ Jesus, is nourished with the words of the faith and exercises his spirit to live Christ in his daily life for the church life—1 Tim. 4:6-7.
- B. The inoculator is a soldier—2 Tim. 2:3-4:

1. The apostle considered their ministry a warfare for Christ, just as the priestly service was considered a military service, a warfare—Num. 4:23, 30, 35; 1 Tim. 1:18; 2 Tim. 4:7.
 2. The Lord's ministry is the sounding of the trumpet for the army to go on to war; to war the good warfare is to war against teachings that differ from the teaching of God's economy according to the apostle's ministry—1 Cor. 14:8; 1 Tim. 1:18; Num. 10:9; Judg. 7:18.
 3. To fight a good fight for the Lord's interests on the earth, we must clear away all earthly entanglements and lay hold on the eternal life, not trusting in our human life—1 Tim. 4:7; 6:12; 2 Tim. 1:1; cf. 2 Cor. 5:4.
 4. We must fight the battle against death, the last enemy of God, by being full of life to reign in life—Num. 6:6-7, 9; 2 Cor. 5:4; Rom. 5:17; 8:6, 11.
 5. Our will must be subdued and resurrected by Christ to be like the tower of David, the armory for spiritual warfare—S. S. 4:4; cf. 1 Chron. 11:22.
- C. The inoculator is an athlete—2 Tim. 2:5:
1. We must run the Christian race until we finish our course, fully accomplishing our ministry in the unique ministry of God's economy so that we may receive Christ as our prize—1 Cor. 9:24-25; Acts 20:24; 2 Tim. 4:7.
 2. We must subdue our body and make it a conquered captive to serve us as a slave for the fulfilling of our holy purpose, not by our own effort but by the Spirit—1 Cor. 9:26-27; Rom. 8:13; 6:12-14, 20-22.
 3. We must live the normal church life by pursuing Christ as righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart—2 Tim. 2:22.
- D. The inoculator is a farmer—v. 6:
1. The church is God's farm, God's cultivated land, and we are God's fellow workers, working together with Him by an all-fitting life to sow the seed of life into people and water them with the Spirit of life by His healthy words—1 Cor. 3:6, 9; 2 Cor. 6:1a; Luke 8:11; John 7:38; 6:63; 2 Cor. 3:6:
 - a. The word of God as a grain of wheat dispenses God as life into us to nourish us; it is also a fire and a hammer to purify us and break down our self, our natural life, our flesh, and our concepts—Jer. 23:28-29.
 - b. God has sent forth His word as rain and snow to water His people in order to sanctify them, transform them, and conform them to His image that the Body may be built up—Isa. 55:8-11; John 17:17; Eph. 5:26.
 2. In our contact with the saints, we should have just one motive—to minister Christ to them that they might grow in the Lord—1 Tim. 5:1-2.
- E. The inoculator is a workman—2 Tim. 2:15:
1. To cut straight the word of the truth means to unfold the word of God in its various parts rightly and straightly without distortion (as in carpentry).
 2. There is the need of the word of the truth rightly unfolded to enlighten the darkened people, inoculate against the poison, swallow up the death, and bring the distracted back to the proper track—cf. Acts 26:18; Psa. 119:130.