

Message Five

Living in the Focus of the Lord's Recovery as Inoculators and Ministers of the New Covenant

Scripture Reading: 2 Tim. 2:1-7, 15; 2 Cor. 2:14-16; 3:1-3, 16-18; 4:1, 4-7

I. 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 so that they also 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 apostles 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 to war; to war the good warfare is to war against the different teachings of the dissenters and to carry out 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 this earth, we must clear away all earthly entanglements and lay hold on the eternal life, not trusting in our human life—2 Tim. 4:7; 1 Tim. 6:12; 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.
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—vv. 26-27; Rom. 8:13.
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 to 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, our lusts, 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 so 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.

II. Second Corinthians uses five very significant and expressive metaphors to illustrate how the ministers of the new covenant and their ministry were constituted, how they behaved and lived, and how their ministry was carried out:

A. The ministers of the new covenant are captives in a triumphal procession for the celebration of Christ's victory—2 Cor. 2:12-14:

1. Paul uses the metaphor of a procession held in honor of the victory of a Roman general to illustrate what he was in the ministry—v. 14.
2. Paul and his co-workers had been conquered by Christ and had become His captives in the train of His triumph, celebrating His victory; therefore, Paul's ministry was a triumphal procession of the victorious General, the Lord Jesus, leading many captives—Eph. 4:8; Col. 1:18b:
 - a. In our experience, however, much of the time we must admit that instead of being captives to Christ, Christ is a captive to us—cf. Acts 26:14.
 - b. A captive of Christ is daily conquered, defeated, and captured by Christ; for this we should pray, "Lord, make me Your captive. Never let me win. Defeat me all the time."

B. The ministers of the new covenant are incense-bearers to scatter the fragrance of Christ—2 Cor. 2:14b-17:

1. As captives of Christ in Christ's triumphal procession, we are simultaneously incense-bearers; through us God manifests the savor of the knowledge of Christ in every place—v. 14.
2. Actually, to scatter the incense of Christ is to live Christ—Phil. 1:19-21a.
3. Because we have been captured, subdued, possessed, and gained by Christ, He has the liberty to saturate us to make us a fragrance of Christ—2 Cor. 2:15.
4. The ministers of Christ, the lovers of Christ, are prepared to give forth Christ's fragrance in all circumstances and in any kind of environment—S. S. 4:10-16.
5. Those who scatter the fragrance of Christ are not like the many, adulterating the word of God for profit; but they speak as out of sincerity, as out of God, before God, and in Christ for the building up of the Body of Christ—2 Cor. 2:17; cf. 13:3.

6. As incense-bearers scattering the fragrance of Christ, we are the ambassadors of Christ—5:20.
- C. The ministers of the new covenant are letters written with Christ as the content to convey and express Christ—3:1-3:
1. Christ is written into every part of our inner being with the Spirit of the living God to make us His living letters, that He may be expressed, read, and known by others in us—vv. 2-3; cf. Eph. 3:17a.
 2. The Spirit of the living God, who is the living God Himself, is not the instrument, like a pen, but the element, like ink used in writing, with which the apostles minister Christ as the content for the writing of living letters that convey Christ—Phil. 1:19; Exo. 30:23-25.
 3. The heavenly, compound ink is the compound Spirit, the essence of this Spirit-ink is Christ with all His riches, and we are the pen; to have this ink in our experience, we must enjoy and be thoroughly saturated with Christ as the life-giving Spirit; then we will spontaneously minister Christ to those whom we contact, making them living letters of Christ—Phil. 1:19; 2 Cor. 3:3, 6.
 4. On the one hand, the believers were the letter of Christ; on the other hand, they were the letter of the apostles inscribed in their hearts—vv. 2-3.
- D. The ministers of the new covenant are mirrors beholding and reflecting the glory of Christ in order to be transformed into His glorious image—vv. 16-18; 4:1:
1. Whenever our heart turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away from our heart, and we can behold the Lord of glory with an unveiled face—3:16, 18.
 2. Actually, our turned-away heart is the veil; to turn our heart to the Lord is to take away the veil.
 3. An unveiled face is an unveiled heart to behold the glory of the Lord—vv. 16, 18; 1 Sam. 16:7; Eph. 1:18a.
 4. The glory of God is in the face of Christ, and His face, His person, is the indwelling treasure in our spirit—2 Cor. 4:6-7; 1 Pet. 3:4:
 - a. We are earthen vessels who are worthless and fragile, but within our spirit we contain a priceless treasure, the face, the person, of Christ Himself—2 Cor. 2:10; 4:6-7.
 - b. In the whole universe, there is nothing so precious as to behold the face of Jesus—Gen. 32:30; Exo. 25:30; 33:11; Psa. 27:4, 8; Rev. 22:4.
- E. The ministers of the new covenant are earthen vessels to contain the Christ of glory as the excellent treasure—2 Cor. 4:7:
1. These vessels are like today's camera, into which Christ, the figure, enters through the flash of God's shining—vv. 4, 6-7.
 2. Christ as the priceless treasure is contained in us, the worthless and fragile vessels; this makes the worthless vessels ministers of the new covenant with a priceless ministry—v. 7; cf. Gen. 4:26.
 3. This treasure, the indwelling Christ, in us, the earthen vessels, is the divine supply and power for the Christian life; God's power is manifested in man's weakness, and man's weakness cannot limit God's power—2 Cor. 4:7; 12:10.
 4. The new covenant ministers are Christ's chosen vessels to contain and express Him—Acts 9:15; Rom. 9:21, 23; cf. 2 Cor. 4:5; Dan. 5:2-3, 23.