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Title: The Goal of our Instruction - Part 2

Key verses:

1st Timothy 1:5 (NASB) – “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

James 1:27 (NASB) – “This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

Good morning, everyone. It’s good to see you all here today. Last January (two months ago), I delivered a sermon here encouraging you to get to know your Bible, read it frequently, and let its words transform your mind and your way of life. I took the title of that sermon from Colossians 3:16 – “Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you...” I gave you various techniques for getting scripture into your mind and heart. As you read your Bible again and again, you learn more about the Christian message and about how we are to live as disciples of Christ. In that message in January, I also wanted to share with you some specific passages of Scripture that have really impressed me in one way or another as I have encountered them over and over in my personal Bible reading. But I could not do that two months ago. However, this month on March 8th, I started a two-part series of messages to share with you many of these passages, verses that have been especially hard-hitting to me, verses that showed me that I needed to change my attitude or change my behavior. Also there are verses which impressed me in a different way: sometimes in my Bible reading I have been surprised to discover some new insights into the Christian gospel that I hadn’t noticed before. In my two messages this month, I want to share with you several of these passages which have really impressed me. If these verses made a big impression on me, then maybe some of you would benefit by having these verses highlighted for you. On March 8th I gave you Part 1 of this series and I am here today to give you Part 2.

I have taken the title of my series from 1st Timothy 1:5 (NASB) – “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.” My title is “The Goal of our Instruction,” and that goal is not primarily to acquire Bible knowledge. Of course, it is important to know your Bible and to know the basics of Christian doctrine. But the goal isn’t knowledge – the goal is a transformed mind and a transformed life. In Romans 8:29, the Apostle Paul says it is God’s purpose that we “be conformed to the image of His Son,” Jesus Christ.

In 2nd Corinthians 3:18 (ESV), Paul says this – “And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” We Christians – whose faces are now unveiled and no longer blind to the things of God – we now are able to behold the glory of the Lord, and ... look at verse 18: we “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.” *From one degree of glory to another* – that means through a step-by-step process, gradually throughout our life. *We are being transformed into the same image* – the image of Christ ... that is, back to the original “image of God” that mankind was originally created with in the Garden of Eden. We are being transformed, gradually, to that original image. None of us yet perfectly match that image right now in this life on earth – that process will be completed when Jesus comes again (cf. 1st John 3:2). But right now, here on earth, we should strive to live lives that reflect the character of our God and of His Son. And, look at the last

phrase of verse 18 – “For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” It is the Holy Spirit who empowers us to live this life.

My ESV Study Bible makes the following comment about verse 18: “As a result of beholding the Lord through the ministry of the Spirit, the believer is being transformed (a process of sanctification over time, not an instantaneous change) into the same image of God that was distorted at the fall (see Gen. 1:26–27; 2 Cor. 4:4; 5:17; also 1 John 3:2). The ‘image’ of God includes every way in which humans are like God, such as their moral character, their true knowledge, their many God-given abilities, and their dominion over creation (cf. Gen. 1:26–28), to be exercised with dependence on God as the Creator and giver of all things (see 1 Cor. 4:7).” (Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”)

Look again at the quote. “Through the ministry of the Spirit, the believer is *being transformed*” – this is the process of sanctification, and it takes place over time. Transformed “into the same image of God that was distorted at the fall.” Genesis 1:27 tells us that God created the man and the woman “in the image of God,” and that image became distorted when man fell into sin.

Let’s continue with the Study Bible comment: “The ‘image’ of God includes every way in which humans are like God...” And all this is to “be exercised with dependence on God as the Creator and giver of all things.” *Exercised with dependence on God* ... let me quote again the end of 2nd Corinthians 3:18 – “For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.” The Holy Spirit gives us the ability, the power, to do this.

A favorite verse of many people, including me, is Philippians 4:13 (ESV) where the Apostle Paul says – “I can do all things through him who strengthens me.” *I can do all things through God who strengthens me*. He will be with us and will strengthen us for the task that He has given us to do.

One of my all-time favorite passages of Scripture is Philippians 2:12-13 (NASB) – “So then, my beloved, just as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your salvation with fear and trembling; ¹³ for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” Here we see the twin truths: in verse 12, we work ... and in verse 13, God works. Both are true and both ought to be happening in your life.

Let me give a word of caution here. When verse 12 says “work out your salvation,” it does not mean that we are saved by working. No, there are plenty of verses throughout the New Testament that tell us that our salvation is by faith – it is not something we earn by doing works. What this verse here means is that as we live out our lives as saved individuals in God’s kingdom, that we live according to the principles of that kingdom, living clean lives and working at whatever tasks He has given each of us to do. In this verse, Paul first praises the Philippian Christians for their constant obedience, obeying Christ’s commands. And then he says, “Work out your salvation.” The New International Version says, “Continue to work out your salvation.” It is a life in which we are always active in some manner in Christ’s kingdom.

Frankly, this verse was a big surprise to me when I first noticed it and meditated on it. I had been getting some confusing signals from some corners of the Christian world that were making me afraid to work, afraid to be active. I once heard a sermon that advised us to be careful and “Don’t

run ahead of God!” I suppose the preacher wanted us to not get over-eager in service and work without listening to God or listening to any feedback from our Christian brothers and sisters – to plow ahead without regard to how we may negatively affect people or go head off in the wrong direction. However, that admonition to “not run ahead of God” produced in my perfectionistic mind a fear to act at all – maybe I’ll do it wrong, so hesitation and inaction plagued me during my young adulthood.

There was another slogan that had an adverse affect on me. Have you ever heard the famous slogan “Let go and let God”? I’m not sure what this admonition was intended to mean when it was first coined, but since I am someone who takes words literally, this dual admonition caused in me a fear to be too active. I took this slogan to mean that I should “let go” of self, let go of any hint of following my own agenda ... and then I should “let God,” but I was not really sure what “letting God” was supposed to look like. But the admonition to “let go” caused me to be afraid to act.

What a relief it was for me to discover Philippians 2:12-13!

“... Work out your salvation ... for it is God who is at work in you ...”

I am supposed to *work* in Christ’s kingdom. I have a task to do. 1st Corinthians 12 and other passages tell me that we each have differing spiritual gifts for the differing tasks that need to be done in the kingdom. And the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25 tells us that we each have differing abilities and we are each given a task in accordance with the ability that we have ... and that we had better do the task expected of us.

What I love about Philippians 2:13 is the promise that God is AT WORK in us while we are working at the task that He has given us to do. He has given us a task in accordance with our ability. And the Holy Spirit gives us a spiritual gift to empower us to perform that task. We work ... and God promises to be at work in us. The verse says, “... it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure.” *To will*. And *to work*. I have found over the years that as I have worked at the tasks He has given me to do, that I actually discover more and more that I will to do those things, it becomes by soul’s desire to do these tasks.

Next, I would like to share with you what might be the verse that has impressed me most. Have you ever wondered what is true religion? What is the most fundamental way we should be living our lives on earth to please God? True religion *is not* having your head in the clouds waiting for heaven. True religion is something both practical and God-honoring. The verse I wish to point you to is the last verse of the first chapter of the Epistle of James. When you see it, you might wonder why this little verse seems so significant to me. But it did make a huge impression on me when I first studied this epistle.

Here is James 1:27 (NASB) – “This is pure and undefiled religion ...”

“This is pure and undefiled religion in the sight of our God and Father: to visit orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself unstained by the world.”

This is pure and undefiled religion ... *this* is the religion that our God and Father desires to see in our lives ... that *we care for the most vulnerable people* in our society ... and that *we keep ourselves unstained by the world*. Unstained by the world.

Telling you that this is one of the verses that has impressed me most probably gives you some insight as to why a recurring theme in many of my sermons is *living a clean life*. That is one half of the true religion that pleases God. We are to keep ourselves unstained by the world.

And here is the other half of true religion: *To care for the most vulnerable people in our society*. In this verse, the focus is on orphans and widows. They are often used in the Old Testament as examples of being the people most prone to suffering oppression and injustice.

There is a reason this message resonates with me. The crucial years of the formation of my Christian worldview took place during my college and post-college years, when I attended some very fine evangelical churches. These churches rightly emphasized evangelism. Of course that is important – after all, in the Great Commission Jesus told us to make disciples of all nations. Unfortunately, during these years I was also taught to treat Christian involvement in social justice as something suspect ... something liberals did, not us conservative Christians who are concerned with the crucial business of saving souls. I was taught to treat as suspect anybody who was more involved in social justice than direct evangelism.

Well, through my repeated Bible reading, I have had to unlearn some of the unbalanced attitudes I was taught in my younger years. James 1:27 and other passages have taught me that a fight for social justice has its place in Christian service. Of course, evangelism is important, but let us not forget that social justice for the oppressed is also something close to God's heart.

We all know how passionate the Apostle Paul was to bring the gospel to the Gentiles. Peter and the other apostles were passionate too. But at that early stage, most of the apostles still mostly had a focus on evangelizing the Jews.

Paul writes something interesting in Galatians 2:7-10 (ESV) – “On the contrary, when they [the apostles] saw that I had been entrusted with the gospel to the uncircumcised [Gentiles], just as Peter had been entrusted with the gospel to the circumcised [Jews] ⁸(for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles), ⁹and when James and Cephas and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given to me, they gave the right hand of fellowship to Barnabas and me, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised. ¹⁰Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.”

Again, verse 10 – “*Only, they asked us to remember the poor, the very thing I was eager to do.*” Peter and the other apostles to the Jews had the same heart for the poor as Paul and his co-workers: they should remember to help the poor.

Through these verses I have shared with you the past few minutes, I came to realize that a full-bodied Christian ministry includes meeting peoples' physical needs.

And once again I discover that my precious ESV Study Bible which Pastor Alistair gave me makes a comment that is precisely parallel to what I discovered by myself 30 years ago. Here is the Study Bible's note on verse 10: “Paul's concern for the poor as evidenced here is in accord with the broader principle demonstrated throughout Scripture that genuine preaching of the gospel in every age must be accompanied by the meeting of physical needs as well, just as Jesus healed the sick and cast out demons along with his preaching ministry.” (Excerpt From: Crossway. “ESV® Study Bible.”)

Well, I would now like to turn to my theme verse for my two-part sermon series.

1st Timothy 1:5 (NASB) – “But the goal of our instruction is love from a pure heart and a good conscience and a sincere faith.”

I am using this verse as an outline for my message. The goal of Christian instruction is to make disciples who will ... A) love ... B) from a pure heart ... C) from a good conscience ... and D) from a sincere faith. In my March 8th message, I covered Parts A and B. Today, we will continue with Parts C and D.

In Part A (Love), we looked at the greatest commandment, Matthew 22:37b-39 (ESV) – “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. ³⁸This is the great and first commandment. ³⁹And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

John MacArthur makes the following comment on 1st Timothy 1:5: “The goal of preaching the truth and warning of error is to call men to true salvation in Christ, which produces a love for God from a purified heart, a cleansed conscience, and genuine faith. “**love**” - This is the love of choice and the will, characterized by self-denial and self-sacrifice for the benefit of others, and it is the mark of a true Christian. (MacArthur, John. The MacArthur Study Bible, eBook: Revised and Updated Edition. Thomas Nelson.)

In Part B last time (A pure heart), we looked at the importance of having a pure heart. We looked at the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus equated anger with murder and He equated lust with adultery. Giving in to anger or giving in to lust makes you as guilty of hell as if you had actually committed murder or adultery.

By the way, last time I forgot to include a notable verse from Paul’s second epistle to Timothy. Here, Paul is admonishing his long-time ministry co-worker, Timothy. Paul writes in 2nd Timothy 2:22 (NASB) – “Now flee from youthful lusts and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.” It’s remarkable to me that this middle-aged, faithful Christian minister needs to be reminded to flee youthful lusts, and to pursue righteousness, pursue faith, pursue love and pursue peace, which is what those with a pure heart would do.

Today, we will look at Part C: A good conscience.

In Acts 24:16 (ESV), the Apostle Paul says this – “So I always take pains to have a clear conscience toward both God and man.”

In 1st Timothy 1:18-19 (NASB), Paul writes this to his co-worker – “This command I entrust to you, Timothy, my child, in accordance with the prophecies previously made concerning you, that by them you fight the good fight, ¹⁹keeping faith and a good conscience, which some have rejected and suffered shipwreck in regard to their faith.” Timothy is admonished to do three things: fight the spiritual battle for the kingdom of God, stay faithful to the truth, and have a good conscience. If you do not hold fast to a good conscience – if you reject it – you run the risk of suffering a shipwreck in regards to your faith. Verse 20 names two men for whom this happened, and they became false teachers (²⁰“Among these are Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have handed over to Satan, so that they will be taught not to blaspheme.”)

John MacArthur makes the following comment: “A good conscience serves as the rudder that steers the believer through the rocks and reefs of sin and error. The false teachers ignored their consciences and the truth, and as a result, suffered shipwreck of the Christian faith (the true doctrine of the gospel), which implies severe spiritual catastrophe. This does not imply loss of salvation of a true believer, but likely indicates the tragic loss that comes to the apostate. They had been in the church, heard the gospel and rejected it in favor of the false doctrine defined in verses 3–7. Apostasy is a turning away from the gospel, having once known it.” (MacArthur, John. *The MacArthur Study Bible*, eBook: Revised and Updated Edition. Thomas Nelson.)

In 1st Peter 3:15-17 (NIV), the Apostle Peter says this – “But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, ¹⁶keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.”

Sometimes people will speak maliciously against us in regards to our Christian behavior and witness. We see throughout the Book of Acts (and throughout Christian history) that Christ’s witnesses are often persecuted for preaching the gospel and for being Christians. In Acts 3 and 4, Peter and John have gone to the temple in Jerusalem, Peter healed a crippled man, and then he preached the gospel. In chapter 4, they are arrested and brought before the Jewish Council, the Sanhedrin. They are ordered to preach no more about Jesus and the Resurrection.

Here is the reply Peter and John made to the council, in Acts 4:18-20 (NASB) – “And when they [the council] had summoned them [the apostles], they commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than to God, you be the judge; ²⁰for we cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard’.”

Sometimes, we have to obey God rather than man, if it means that man would hinder the preaching of the gospel.

However, generally speaking, we ought to obey our leaders – our religious leaders and our governmental leaders. I’m an American, and I know that sometimes we Americans love freedom so much that we don’t like to follow laws that we disagree with. Maybe it’s like that in other countries as well.

However, Romans 13 causes me to stop and ponder this attitude. Let’s read Romans 13:1-5 (ESV) – “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. ²Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. ³For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, ⁴for he is God’s servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God’s wrath on the wrongdoer. ⁵Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God’s wrath but also for the sake of conscience.”

For the sake of conscience, we should obey the governing authorities. Let’s look again at 1st Peter 3:16-17 (NIV) – “Keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. ¹⁷For it is better, if it is God’s

will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.” For the sake of our Christian testimony, let us be models of obeying the governing authorities.

Let me move on to one more area of life where our conscience may be affected. 1st Thessalonians 4:3-7 (NASB) – “For this is the will of God, your sanctification; that is, that you abstain from sexual immorality; ⁴that each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor, ⁵not in lustful passion, like the Gentiles who do not know God; ⁶and that no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter because the Lord is the avenger in all these things, just as we also told you before and solemnly warned you. ⁷For God has not called us for the purpose of impurity, but in sanctification.”

We must abstain from sexual immorality, from fornication. That means abstain from any sexual activity outside of marriage. God created sex to be enjoyed between a husband and a wife. This is the traditional Christian teaching. I was raised in a conservative family and a conservative church, so this is what I was taught. As I grew older in high school and college, I came to realize that many of my peers did not share this view of morality. I could understand those cravings your body has that would drive you to seek out someone for sex. I’m a normal male, I know those feelings. Since I was still unmarried in my 20’s, I started thinking of compromising in this area of morality. A lot of guys do. But this verse stopped me. I was reading my Bible daily, so I would occasionally come across this verse or related verses like Hebrews 13:4, Colossians 3:5, Revelation 21:8, 1st Corinthians 6:18. And Ephesians 5:3 (ESV) – “But sexual immorality and all impurity or covetousness must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints.”

Let look again at 1st Thessalonians 4. “For this is the will of God ... that you abstain from sexual immorality.” “That each of you know how to possess his own vessel in sanctification and honor.” What does the word “vessel” mean here? It might mean *body*, though it could also mean *wife*. Treat your own body in sanctification and honor. Or: treat your wife with honor by being faithful to her. Either way, this is an important admonition. Most commentaries say this word “vessel” probably refers to one’s own body, and we should treat our body with honor by not indulging in sexual activity outside of marriage – if we do engage in that, we dishonor our body and we dishonor the God who made it.

Verse 6 says “That no man transgress and defraud his brother in the matter...” We are not to *defraud* our *brother*. What does *brother* mean? Perhaps a fellow human being. Perhaps a fellow Christian, a Christian brother or sister. So, this means that I am not to defraud a fellow human being (and especially not defraud my Christian sister) by using her body to gratify my own body’s cravings. Yes, I agree with this. Because I take Scripture seriously, my conscience would not allow me to compromise in this area of morality. This verse and related verses kept me out of trouble in this area of life.

Let us move on briefly to Part D of my outline: A sincere faith.

Hebrews 10:21-25 (NASB) – “ And since we have a great priest [Jesus Christ] over the house of God, ²²let us draw near with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled clean from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. ²³Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; ²⁴and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, ²⁵not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more as you see the day drawing near.” (As you see the day of Christ’s return drawing near).

Well, there is a great deal we could say on the topic of faith. There is so much I wanted to share with you today that I have not left myself with enough time to discuss faith. Perhaps in the future I will return to this topic, but for now I will just highlight a few thoughts from this passage in Hebrews 10. We have a great high priest who is the Lord Jesus Christ. And we are to draw near to our Lord with a *sincere heart*. And in *full assurance of faith*. Our hearts are *made clean* from our former evil conscience. Our *bodies are washed with pure water*, meaning our daily actions are cleaned up. Let us *hold fast the confession of our hope* without wavering, remembering that God is one hundred percent faithful even if we falter sometimes. And remember that we live in a community, the church, with our Christian brothers and sisters, so *we stimulate and encourage one another to live this life of faith*. Especially as we see the day of Christ's return drawing near.

Every once in a while, I notice something in the news that brings to mind the coming tribulation, as described in the book of Revelation. With this recent coronavirus outbreak and the impact it is having on the economy, this brings to my mind Revelation chapter 18 where judgement comes on evil Babylon in one day and the economy collapses quite suddenly. (Babylon is a symbol of the world system). I see in current events a small taste of the coming Great Tribulation.

Therefore, all the more, let us remember to stay faithful, keep a good conscience, live lives that honor God, share the gospel, care for people in need, and encourage our brothers and sisters.

This is the end of today's message.