

*We exist to make disciples who delight in God and make Him known
by proclaiming the gospel of Jesus Christ.*

Pastoral Reality Check

2 Timothy 3:1-5

Keywords: Sanctification, Holiness, Good Works, Purification

PowerPoint Presentation included: NONE

SermonAudio Blurb:

I. Introduction.

- A. Last week we saw Paul charge Timothy with the difficult task of being patient when wronged, gently correcting those who oppose him.
 - 1. The reminder is that this is part of how those controlled by the gospel operate, keeping in mind that they were once enemies and opposed to the grace of God through Jesus.
 - 2. Paul tells him that he cannot know the mind of God with these people. It is very possible that God intends to bring them to repentance and therefore Timothy should respond to them with that thought in mind.
- B. It is a nice statement that has a lot of hope attached to it.
 - 1. Would it not be nice to see a famous atheist convert to Jesus Christ.
 - 2. Would we not love to see one who has made it their life to mock the gospel now become a fierce preacher of it? A person like Paul?
- C. But he doesn't leave it there, he continues to write and in our passage today we see that he is also very realistic
 - 1. The reality is that those who will oppose and continue to oppose will out-number those who repent.
 - 2. We live in the last days and Paul describes it as a time where the church will face growing difficulty. Where hearts will grow cold. Where sin flows seemingly unrestrained within the Church.
 - 3. And therefore he instructs Timothy, and us, with this serious reality check.
- D. Read passage.
 - 1. He first speaks of difficult times ahead for the Church through people who are held captive to sin.
 - 2. Then he gives an illustration on how this works out in very real terms by examining the destructive actions of some of them.

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3. Finally he shows that though this is the reality, there is an even greater reality behind it, the reality that the Sovereign God shall bring it to an end.
4. We will examine the first of these this week.

II. Pastoral Reality Check.

- A. First of all, we must realize that things will not improve over time but rather they will decline (1-5).
 1. “Last Days”
 - a. Does not refer to some time in the future right at the end of this age.
 - b. It speaks of now.
 - c. Acts 2:17.
 - (1) He is quoting the prophet Joel who spoke of a time when God would pour out His Spirit upon mankind.
 - (2) Notice the parallels in 17-18: sons/daughters; young men/old men; men slaves/female slaves. The point is that gender and class lines are not barriers to the blessing of the Spirit.
 - (3) And so when the Holy Spirit came in Acts 2 we have what is essentially the entrance-way into the “last days.”
 - (4) And we have been in the “last days” since that time.
 - d. 1 Peter 1:20 speaks of the idea that Jesus Christ appeared in these last times for our sakes.
 - e. 1 Corinthians 10:11 Paul tells the church that we are given the stories of the Old Testament for our instructions so that we do not fall into the same errors since we are living in the last days.
 - f. Hebrews 1:1-2 says that God spoke to us in many ways but now, in the last days, He has spoken to us through His Son—Jesus.
 - g. 1 John 2:18 warns us therefore that we live in the last hour and that many false saviors will arise.
 - h. So understand that when he speaks of “in the last days” he is referring to the very time Timothy was living and it continues on up past our time.

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2. Understand that the people Paul refers to in our passage are not those who are outside the church.
 - a. Unredeemed mankind has always been this way and will continue to be this way. (Briefly review Romans 1:18ff)
 - b. What Paul is reminding Timothy, and something we need to be reminded, is that in the church itself this will happen.
 - c. The reality of life in the Church of Jesus Christ is that there is going to be this on-going conflict between good and evil, sin and righteousness, true followers of Jesus and false ones.
 - d. As Jesus warned in Matthew 7, false prophets shall arise who are dressed as shepherds but are actually ravenous wolves. How do you identify them? By the fruit of their ministry.
 - e. Paul's warning in Acts 20:22ff (which is sort of like a mini repeat of this letter to Timothy). Point out from **where** the "wolves" will arise.
3. "Difficult times"
 - a. Literally it speaks of terrible/dangerous/perilous/violent seasons of life.
 - b. The idea of times/days/seasons speaks to the ebb and flow of these events. Some parts of the last days shall be better than others.
 - c. But we must always be on the alert, interpreting the "times" properly so that we are not taken by surprise when people like this rise up in the church.
4. The reason that the terrible seasons of life come is explained in the next verses . . . "for."
 - a. This list is just that, a list.
 - b. There is no clear pattern that stands out with the exception of one—misplaced love.
 - (1) Note those who are learning Greek how several of the words begin with the prefix, *philos*, meaning "love."
 - (2) Notice all of you how the list is bracketed with this idea of loving something wrongly.
 - (a) vs 2 lovers of self and of money.

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- (b) vs 4 lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.
- (3) There you have it. The core of the problems in the Church is when there is a misplaced love and delight.
- c. In fact, my whole argument is that sin will always increase in the Church when there improper love is allowed to increase.
 - (1) And I think this describes our time today in America very well.
 - (2) And I think it explains what we are witnessing before our very eyes as well.
 - (3) Watch, listen, and observe. Which of these attitudes and sins listed do you not see abounding in the Church at large today?
 - (4) Obey parents? I think not, I am to busy loving myself.
 - (5) Hold grudges and refuse to be reconciled, instead just leave the church and go somewhere else? You betcha.
 - (6) Be all about yourself, conceited and filled with vanity. Complain because things are not “doing it for you” at the church and go find another one? Sure.
 - (7) How many horrible decisions that destroy relationships are made due to an improper love of money? We are told in 1Timothy 6 it leads to all sorts of evil, but in the church today that is not really believed by many, is it?
 - (8) The spirit of this age is one of ungratefulness.
 - (a) Toward parents and spouses.
 - (b) Toward leaders and teachers.
 - (c) Toward employers and employees.
 - (d) Toward government.
 - (e) But most of all ungrateful toward God.
 - i) Bitterness burns in the hearts of too many in the church today.

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- ii) Bitter because they followed the “rules” and things are not turning out like they thought they should.
- d. And the driving force of this is a misplaced, improperly oriented love.
 - (1) Matthew 22:36ff. Words so well known, but are they embraced with a whole heart?
 - (2) Paul describes this love for God as a key mark of those who are true Christians.
 - (a) Romans 8:28
 - (b) 1 Corinthians 2:9; 8:3.
 - (c) Ephesians 6:24.
 - (3) This love for God leads to a love for people.
 - (a) "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:35)
 - (4) This reminds me again of Proverbs 4:23, Watch over your heart with all diligence, For from it flow the springs of life.
- 5. All of this leads to vs 5
 - a. A “form” of godliness.
 - (1) They look solid. They say the right words. They have a life of external rule-keeping.
 - (a) But there is really nothing there that is true godliness.
 - (b) It is like an egg that has nothing inside the shell. Or a beam that has been eaten by termites.
 - (2) Externalism that is self-made rather than drawn from a heart in love with God.
 - (3) Think Philippians 2:1ff as an example of the opposite.
 - b. “Denying its power”

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- c. What happens in the Church in various seasons is that the emphasis upon loving and delighting in God through Jesus Christ is diminished.
- d. What replaces it is traditions that started out as good, but now are simply the forms of religions that people cling to and perform.
- e. But what is this power that they reject? It doesn't say here but it is probably found in 1 Timothy 1:6-7.
 - (1) Remember that "spirit" in vs 7 refers to the Holy Spirit.
 - (2) So Paul is telling Timothy, and us, that the Spirit that God poured out upon us is not one of cowardliness but of this triad of power, love and discipline.
 - (3) And that is what power these imposters are denying. Their godliness is the result of their own efforts and religiosity rather than flowing from the power of the Spirit.
- f. Notice the triad given in vs 7, power, love and discipline (true godliness)
 - (1) The Spirit brings power.
 - (a) *Dunamis*, dynamite.
 - (b) Ephesians 1:18ff; 3:14ff (note "Spirit", strengthen, love, power in this)
 - (c) This power was promise in Acts 1:8 where Jesus said, but you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be My witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth."
 - (d) Romans 15:13, 19.
 - (e) Our entire ability to persevere, to put away sin, to hope in the faithfulness of God is all dependent upon the power of the Holy Spirit working in us.

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- (f) We can do nothing truly for the Lord in our own ability. All of it is borne along by His quiet, powerful working.
- (2) The Spirit brings love.
 - (a) In Galatians 5:22 the first “fruit” of the Spirit in our lives is love.
 - (b) Romans 5:5.
 - i) Not our love for God but His love for us is the point of this passage.
 - ii) vss 6-11 then lays out the ways He has shown us the depth and glory of His love for us.
 - iii) Notice how it was poured out within our hearts. “Through the Holy Spirit.”
 - a) This gives it an infinite aspect if you will think about it for a second.
 - b) That word, “through” speaks of the channel through which the Father pours His love into us.
 - c) Now, if that channel were anything else but God Himself, then it would be limited.
 - d) But it is not, it is our infinite God who is the channel. And therefore we are receiving an infinite amount of the Father’s love through the channel of the infinite Holy Spirit.
 - e) There will never be an end to this love.
 - f) John 7:38-39 "He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being shall flow rivers of

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living water." 39 But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive. . . .”

g) Beloved, if you are struggling with true hope, if your heart is given to despair and depression, please set your heart to think on these things.

iv) What would change in your life, your words, your delights and your attitude if you lived under the constant conviction that through the infinite Holy Spirit the infinite love of our Heavenly Father was filling and flowing in you?

(3) The Spirit brings discipline.

(a) Unique term used only here. Gives the sense of carefulness, sobriety of mind, wise and restrained in decisions.

(b) Another fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5 is that of self-control.

(c) The Holy Spirit is who teaches us wisdom for living. Not passively received, but as a gift through diligence and humility of mind.

(d) The Spirit settles us down to the task of pressing on and growing up.

(e) When you lack that discipline it is again not the fault of God. It is the resisting of the work of the Spirit in you, if you are truly saved.

(f) But if you are convinced that the Spirit in you is one of discipline then as you struggle with it, you know you can cry out for God to work and know that He will because he already has!

B. Notice the command then, avoid such men as these.

1. The challenge for pastors and leaders in the church is to mark out those who rise up but deny the power of the Spirit of holiness.

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2. Those men are not to be part of your fellowship. They are to be avoided.
3. It speaks of the pastoral responsibility to excommunicate these people. And to warn the people in the church to avoid them.

III. Conclusion.

- A. We will see the antidote clearly as we continue through this chapter. But let me give you a quick glimpse into it—it is the clear teaching, preaching, hearing, and obeying of the Word of God.
- B. The greater and better the Word of truth is expounded and understood the clearer God's people will see error and lies.
- C. The more godly and pure the people of God are the more those who walk in a false godliness will be revealed.

Small Group Questions

- Think hard about the “love” terms in vs 2 and 4 and consider what they might mean to the various “American Dream” ideals we have today?
- In this list, which of these vices do you find your heart most vulnerable? How can the CG help you in battling them?
- How can these people be reached if we are to avoid them? How does this command relate to what Paul commanded in 2:23-26?