

(5) ... through godly living

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[0 : 00] 2 Timothy, chapter 3, page 1198. But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janice and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and suffering that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra, which persecutions I endured, yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

[1 : 37] Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All scripture is breathed out by God, and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

Well, it's fantastic to be here in Grace Church, and a real privilege to be speaking to you this morning. Let's pray, shall we, before we begin.

Father God, I thank you for your unchanging word, for the power of it, and for the way that it changes us. And so, Lord, I pray that we would not be the same as we go out to when we first came in this morning, that you would change us by your word, allow us to listen to it, and be equipped by it for your glory.

[3 : 09] In Jesus' name, amen. Do keep your Bibles open to 2 Timothy chapter 3, as we look at that together. If you can keep your heads while all about you are losing theirs, and blaming it on you, yours is the earth and everything in it, and which is more, you'll be a man, my son.

Those are the first and last lines of that famous poem by Rudyard Kipling, called If, I'm sure you know it. And, in a sense, as we come to this third chapter of 2 Timothy, that is very much at the heart of what Paul is saying to his young spiritual son, isn't he?

You keep your head, Timothy. Don't get sidetracked. Don't get disillusioned. Don't get discouraged. Don't be caught off guard. Understand the times in which you live, and equip yourself.

Equip yourself to stand firm in those times. Equip yourself to continue to teach it, continue to stand firm in the faith, to teach it, and to live it out.

And so my prayer this morning is, particularly for our church leaders, but also for all of us, that we do the same, that we keep our heads about us.

[4 : 30] That is, one, we understand the times in which we live, and, two, we equip ourselves to live faithfully for the Lord Jesus in those times.

So understand the times in which we live. Now, we know, don't we, from what we've seen in the letters so far, that Timothy is going through some really tough times.

Here he is as a young, inexperienced pastor of a church, and he's desperately trying to navigate his church through some incredibly stormy seas. So he must be feeling ill-equipped.

He must be feeling pretty out of his depth. He's going through some incredibly tough times. And then in verse 1 of chapter 3, Paul says to Timothy, but understand this, that in the last days, there will come times of difficulty.

Now, it's hardly an encouraging word, is it, to an already struggling pastor, you might think, feeling already ill-equipped, already completely out of his depth. But actually, what Paul is saying to Timothy is, don't be surprised by the tough times you're facing.

[5 : 37] Understand that you will face these times, because these times, these periods of difficulty, are a characteristic of the age in which you are living, the last days.

So he says that, the last days. And in the Bible, that describes, the last days, describes the period of history between the first and the second coming of Christ.

And that is the age in which Timothy lived, and that is the age in which we live. Isn't it? So actually, the message for us, and our church leaders, is, like Timothy, exactly the same.

In these last days, where history as we know it is drawing to a close, Satan is throwing everything he has at the church, and we will experience tough times.

And those times will be especially tough for our church leaders. And actually, we just need to look around us, and there is no denying, is there, that we are in a tough time, where we do experience tough times.

[6 : 40] We just have to read the headlines, church split inevitable, went one red the other day, or we turn to our own experience. So some of you may remember the opposition that Grace Church experienced when it was being planted two years ago.

Tough times will happen, and it is our church leaders, like Timothy, who will be in the firing line. So Paul is saying, don't be caught off guard.

Don't be surprised. Don't be naive about the times in which you live. We must support one another. We must pray for one another, and we must particularly pray for our leaders as they experience tough times, as they face times of difficulty in opposition.

We must stand firm, and our leaders must stand firm. But then the question is, why? Why do we face such times, such tough times?

Well, in a nutshell, it is because of this. It is because of fake Christianity. So my main point, it's on the back of the service sheet, my main point is beware of fake Christianity, verses 1 to 9.

[7 : 53] Look at verses 2 to 4. Here, Paul lists the kinds of characteristics that the people who live in the last days will show.

For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

It's a condemning list, isn't it? It is not a pretty picture at all. People of absolute depravity and complete moral decline, these are the kinds of people who live in the last days.

Now, we don't have time to examine the whole list, but just notice a few important things with me. Notice that the list is a bit like a sandwich, really. At the top is lovers of self, lovers of money, and at the bottom is lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

So what top entails this list are these objects of love. And I think what Paul is saying here is that he's making us see that at the root of all this depravity, at the root of all this wrong behavior, is a twisted love, a misdirected love.

[9 : 21] So the love, the passion for, the devotion and worship of God is replaced by the love and worship of self, of money, and of pleasure.

And it's amazing, isn't it, how apt and how powerful the word of God speaks into our society because that is the very characteristics of the age in which we live, of our society today, isn't it?

Look after number one, the adverts tell us. In business, step on anyone you have to to get to the top. Or as one poet put it, I am the master of my, I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul, self-obsession, selfish ambition, self-love, and love of money.

Well, it's everywhere, isn't it? Especially here in London, we just have to look around us. I work, for the summer, I work for a removals company, so I'm in a lorry a lot of the time, and the other day I was sat in a lorry and a workmate turned to me and said in a rather scornful voice, he said, you know what my religion is, Dan?

Money. He said, love of money, it drives our society, and pleasure. It's not hard to see the all-consuming love of pleasure that drives the society in which we live, is it?

[10 : 44] The bigger house, the better car, the lust for more, the booming sex industry, all of it fueled by a twisted love of pleasure. And I guess it would be easy to leave it there, wouldn't it be easy to leave it at arm's length, to say, look at the terrible society we live in, isn't that terrible, thank goodness we're not like that.

But actually, then comes the bombshell of verse 5. Because the people in Paul's sight are not somewhere out there, they're not in society at large, they are very much in here.

So these people probably go to church on Sunday, they would come to Bible studies regularly, perhaps, they would go to prayer meetings, religiously, they know all the lingo, they know all the right words, they have an appearance, a veneer of godliness.

But underneath it all, they have bought into the values of the world and are no different from the rest of society. They're fakes, their character remains unchanged and they have never experienced the life-changing power of the grace of God in their lives.

So let's read it. Having the appearance of godliness but denying its power. And actually, it is this kind of nominal, fake Christianity that is so rampant, isn't it, today.

[12 : 18] It's not hard to think of examples, just one is the debate about the practice of homosexuality in the church, in the church leaders today. That's probably the most high-profile example at the moment and yet, it is just one of the many symptoms of a church, a worldwide church, in fact, that is being infused by fake Christianity, a Christianity that is empty of the life-changing power of the grace of God in the gospel of Christ.

A Christianity that is simply given up on the gospel, Christianity that just picks what it chooses, gives in to the value of the world. And Paul says, avoid such people.

Paul says, it's dangerous. Don't get caught up in it. It's dangerous for Timothy. It's dangerous for our church leaders. It's dangerous for us.

We must realize that. So we need to ask ourselves, as people who live in the last days, are we guilty of buying into ourselves this fake Christianity?

Because let's be honest, it's easy, isn't it? It's so easy to have an appearance of godliness. It's easy to look like we have it all together.

[13 : 38] But actually, what are we like below the surface? What are we like when no one is looking? Now, this is not a call for sinless perfection. All of us have faults, and we know that.

The question is, are we allowing ourselves to be changed inside out by the mighty power of the grace of God, or are we denying that power?

Are we no longer allowing ourselves to be changed, but simply putting on an act? It's a challenging thought, isn't it? Fake Christianity. It's dangerous.

We're all at risk from it. Flee it, Paul says. Avoid such people. And then we have to ask the question, well, why is it so dangerous? Why is Paul so concerned that Timothy avoid this kind of fake Christianity?

Let me read verses 6 to 9. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

[14 : 48] Just as Janice and Jambus opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith.

But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men. Why is it so dangerous? It is dangerous because it spreads.

Not only are people living this kind of fake Christianity, but among those people who live it are those who teach it. So Paul describes these false teachers here in these verses.

There's something very creepy about their description, isn't there? Almost like spiders weaving a web of deception and illusion for their unsuspecting victims, they creep into households and capture weak women.

Now, who are these weak women? Well, it must be something that was specifically happening in the church at that time where the false teachers were targeting this group of vulnerable women.

[15 : 50] Always learning but never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. It seems they were easily led, weren't they? Like sort of ice cream flavors of the month, they were jumping from one teacher to the next, listening to whatever whatever new fad came along but never growing in maturity, never coming to a full knowledge of the truth, always being deceived by these teachers who then Paul compares with Janus and Jambas.

Now, that is probably a reference to Pharaoh's top magicians in Egypt. So he compares them to magicians. Now, I've recently been reading about the magician Jasper Masculini.

I don't know if you've heard of him. He was quite an interesting character. I've been reading his biography. And he was an officer in the Second World War. He was fighting in North Africa. But he was also an accomplished magician.

So he would employ all his magician's tactics to try and deceive and elude the enemy when he was fighting in North Africa. He even tried at one point to hide the entire Suez Canal with a sort of mirrors, lights and mirrors effect.

I don't think it worked at all. I think it was a bit of a failure. But he was a master illusionist. And so these men too were our master illusionists.

[17 : 07] Just like Janus and Jambus deceptively opposed Moses way back in Egypt, so these men too deceptively oppose the truth.

And they enslave the vulnerable. It is the vulnerable who are most at risk. And actually that is the characteristics today of fake Christianity, isn't it?

Having an appearance of godliness that actually masks a teaching that ultimately deceives, enslaves, and opposes the truth of the gospel.

So we must ask, does that describe church leaders today? And I think we have to say that it does. Some church leaders, leaders who no longer hold to the truth of the gospel, but oppose it.

Now they may not oppose it overtly, probably not. Nevertheless, just like these men, they oppose it under the surface.

[18 : 10] So it may be in the name of relevance, it may be in the name of inclusiveness, it may be in the name of political correctness, but nevertheless opposing the truth of the gospel.

A primate in the recent Lambeth conference said this, and this is a sad statement, I think, that his experience of Bible studies and discussion groups at the conference have confirmed his worst fears.

He said this, I see a great wall being put up by the revisionists against those Orthodox who believe in the authority of Scripture. I'm shocked to say that we are finding it very hard to come together on even the essentials of faith we once received from the apostles.

It's a sad set of affairs, isn't it? Fake Christianity, it is very much alive today, and the question is then, in this climate, how do we and how do our church leaders keep our heads about us?

How do we respond to it? How do our church leaders equip themselves against it? And likewise, how do we ensure that unlike these vulnerable women who jumped from one teacher to the next, how do we make sure that we're not duped into it?

[19 : 30] But we recognize fake Christianity for what it is and we stand firm against it. Well, there is only one thing that we can do and it is this.

Never let go of the Bible. That is my second point, and that I think is the main point of chapter 10, of, sorry, verse 10 to 17. Now, there's a lot in these verses, but I think that is the main point.

Let me show you why I think that. So, Paul now shifts his attention, doesn't he, from the false teachers of verse 6 to 9 to Timothy, and he draws a line in the sand, as it were, and he says in verse 10, you're different, he says, you, however, and again in verse 14, but as for you, so he's drawing a distinction, he's saying these are the false teachers, the fakes, now you're different, Timothy.

Why is Timothy so different? Well, it's because Timothy has followed Paul's witness. Timothy, of course, has been with Paul, he's absorbed Paul's teaching, he's absorbed and watched Paul's life and ministry, and he has made it his own.

So look at verse 10 and 11 with me. You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra.

[21 : 06] Notice how many times Paul refers to himself in these verses, isn't it? It's almost like bragging, it seems almost like bragging, and yet it's not, is it? So what is Paul doing? Why is he referring to himself so much?

Well, let's put ourselves in Timothy's shoes for a sec. How does Timothy know that Paul is the genuine article? How does Timothy know that Paul is not just another false teacher, another fake?

Well, it is because Paul's life backs up his teaching. And when shone against the backdrop of these false teachers, it is quite compelling, isn't it?

So while they are reckless, he is patient. While they are brutal, he is loving. While they are lovers of pleasure, he endures persecution and suffering.

While they lack self-control, he is steadfast. So the genuine integrity and the life-changing power of Paul's teaching, the gospel, is demonstrated in Paul's own changed and transformed life.

[22 : 14] And likewise with Timothy, as he has followed in Paul's footsteps, as he has absorbed Paul's teaching, as he has worked to apply it to his own life, so he is being transformed.

He is demonstrating the characteristics like Paul of a godly life. And it is that teaching and that lifestyle that Paul now urges him to continue in in verse 14, but as for you, unlike those who are being deceived, unlike the false teachers, the fakes, as for you, continue in what you have learnt and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learnt it.

And so today, how do we, and particularly our church leaders, our pastors, our women workers, our Sunday school teachers, our Bible study group leaders, all of us stand against a prevailing tide of fake Christianity.

It is like Timothy by following the apostle's witness. And for us, that is found in the pages of the New Testament, isn't it? We have the same resource as Timothy had.

So that means, yes, we must work hard to teach it, and we must pray for our teachers and our leaders as they seek to do that. But it means more than that, doesn't it?

[23 : 28] Because it means to really follow the apostle's witness as Timothy did means to absorb it. It means to live by it. And so we must spend time reading the New Testament for ourselves.

We must spend time soaking in it. We must spend time making it center stage in our lives. We must apply it to our hearts and allow it to change the way we think, to mold the way we act, to shape the way we are, our very existence, and so begin to follow Paul's godly example of faith, of patience, of love, and of steadfastness.

It's vitally important for all of us to do this, but it is all the more important for our church leaders like Timothy to do this. Genuine teaching that is true to the apostle's witness, that is true to the gospel, must show itself in the life of the teacher.

And in fact, surely that is one of the ways in which we can discern false teaching. We need to ask, is the teacher being changed?

And so we must pray for our church leaders. We must pray for our ministers, that they practice, continue to practice what they preach.

[24 : 50] we must give them time and space to allow the teaching of the New Testament, to allow them to dwell on the teaching of the New Testament, to allow it to transform their own lives, as Timothy did, and like Timothy to follow in the apostle's witness.

And as with the New Testament, so with the Old Testament. Paul goes on to say, verse 14, but as for you, continue in what you have learnt, and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you have learnt it, and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, that is, the Old Testament, that Timothy was very familiar with from his family, and why?

Because they are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. Isn't that a fantastic thing? Just as Paul's teaching points to Christ and the gospel, so in harmony with that, the Old Testament points us to Christ, the cross, and the good news of the gospel.

We must never neglect teaching it, we must never neglect spending time in it, we must never neglect letting it change the way we live. We must preach it, we must know it, because it points us to Christ.

So follow the apostle's witness in the New Testament, hold fast to the teaching of the Old Testament. And now what Paul has been steadily working up to, those famous verses 16 and 17, let's just read that together.

[26 : 16] All scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work.

this is Paul's grand finale, this is what he's been working up to in these last verses. Why is the Bible our only effective weapon against fake Christianity?

Why is the Bible all we need? Why is it so important for Timothy and for us and for our church leaders to never let go of it? Well, it is because, Paul says, all scripture, that is the New Testament and the Old Testament, the Bible in its entirety, is breathed out by God.

It is the very word of God. It is all God's truth. It is God's word breathed out through the minds and the hearts of faithful men who recorded it in their own words, inspired by the Holy Spirit.

Isn't it incredible? It's just an incredible truth that all we have here comes from the very heart of the creator of the universe, God himself. And yet, in the last days, in an age of tough times, of fake Christianity, in an age where many in the church have given up on the Bible and rely on other things, it is all too easy to forget what we have here, the wonder of what we have, this incredible truth.

[27 : 52] And so we need to pray. We need to pray like never before that our church leaders and teachers hold on to the Bible with all their might because it is the very word of God.

And we need to pray that they have the boldness to stand by it in its entirety, not adding to it, not taking away from it, not relying on anything else, but relying on the word of God because verse 17 says it is the word of God that will make them competent.

It is the word of God that will equip them. So we need to pray that they never give up teaching it, but continue to bring the word of God to bear on our lives and likewise we need to bring the word of God to bear on our own lives.

Submit to it, be changed by it. It is the word of God that will teach us God's truth. It is the word of God that will correct us from error.

It is the word of God that all we need to train us in righteousness. So let's not fall into the trap of fake Christianity, a Christianity that is given up on the Bible.

[29 : 06] Let's allow the word by the power of the Holy Spirit to change us from inside out because it is all we need to be trained in righteousness and equipped for every good work.

Let's pray. Amen. Father God, thank you so much that all we need is right here in the Bible.

So Lord, I pray that we would never let it go, that we would allow it to shape us, to mould us in the way we should live, and that we would hold fast to it all for your glory.

In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. Thank you. Amen. Thank you. Even if you should say it in smooth to name my foot, that we would be clear, and I haven't been in smooth as well.

Just like I know for you. I Shot knowing that I let another God wow I harvest and look on the coast of for you.

[30 : 17] To stay really and I only