

2 Timothy 3:1-9

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[0 : 00] Second Timothy chapter 3 This know also that in the last days perilous time shall come For men shall be lovers of their own selves Covetous, busters, proud, blasphemers Disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy Without natural affection Truthbreakers, false accusers, incontinent Fish, despisers of those that are good Traitors, heady, high-minded Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God

Having a form of godliness But denying the power thereof From such turn away For of this sort are they which creep into houses And lead captive silly women Laden with lusts Led away with diverse lusts Ever learning And never able to come to the knowledge of the truth Now as Janus and Jambres withstood Moses So do these also resist the truth Men of corrupt minds reprobate concerning the faith But they shall proceed no further For their folly shall be manifest unto all men As theirs also was As theirs also was But thou hast fully known my doctrine Manor of life Purpose Faith Long-suffering Charity Patience Persecutions Afflictions Which came unto me at Antiof At Iconium At Lystra What persecutions I endured But out of them all The Lord delivered me Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus Shall suffer persecution But evil men and seducers Shall wax Worse Worse Worse Deceiving And being deceived But continue thou in the things Which thou hast learned And hast been assured of Knowing of whom thou hast learned And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scripture Which are able to make thee wise unto salvation Through faith which is in Christ Jesus All Scripture is given by inspiration of God And is profitable for doctrine For reproof For correction For instruction in righteousness That the man of God May be perfect Thoroughly furnished Unto all good works May the Lord add his blessing To that reading From his word We'll sing now in Psalm 10 From the beginning of the Psalm To the tune sent an Psalm 10 From the beginning of the Psalm Wherefore is it that thou O Lord Hast done from us afar And wherefore hidest thou thyself When times so trouble as are The wicked in his loftiness Doth persecute the poor In these devices they have framed Let them be taken sure The wicked of his heart's desire Doth talk with boasting great He blesseth him that's covetous

Whom yet the Lord doth hate The wicked through his pride of face On God he doth not call And in the counsels of his heart The Lord is not at all His ways they always grieve as are Thy judgments from his sight removed are At all his foes he puffeth with despite Within his heart he thus hath said I shall not move it be And no adversity at all Shall ever come to me These verses in Psalm 10 Wherefore is it that thou O Lord Dost stand from us afar Wherefore is it that thou O Lord Dost stand from us afar

[5 : 08] And wherefore is it that thou O Lord Dost stand from us afar When thy soul come as I The queen in his long feelings The first sacred good of whom In these devises they are great Let them be taken true The wicked of his high sea side That thou wilt forth

The prophet will seek her great Theopotam diesen He Through this line of grace on God he hath not gone.

And in the counsels of his heart the war is not at all.

In which day all his people are my judgment from his side.

We will have a heart for his heart. He hath not with his side.

[7 : 27] Within his heart he hath said I shall not do with thee.

And no adversity at all shall ever come to thee.

Amen. And we with this chapter resume our studies in this letter.

We remember that Paul is writing this letter from prison in Rome. And as he was expecting a death he wrote a letter to this man whom he refers to as the young man novice this Timothy who was

going to go over the reins of the Christian church directing it after Paul's demise. Paul recognized that Timothy was entered upon a very demanding work for which in many respects he was not all that well equipped certainly physically and perhaps even temperamentally. [9 : 37] Maybe that is why Timothy is always referred to as a man who was timid. In any case the letter is really couched in terms of encouragement.

He counsels him time and time again not to be afraid and not to be ashamed of the gospel or of any sufferings which he must endure for the sake of the gospel.

He asks him to be courageous in the face of all the difficulties and of all the problems and of all the disappointments and of all the distresses that he must experience if he is going to be a good soldier of the Lord Jesus Christ.

For he said such must endure hardness. Things will become extremely difficult.

In this chapter he gives us an account of what is referred to here the perilous times that shall come upon the church in the last days.

[11 : 06] Now this very vivid account of the contemporary sin is connected with these words here the last days.

And most of the commentators are of the opinion that this is just a one way in which the New Testament speaks of the time that was ushered in by the coming of Jesus into the world.

So that today, tonight, you and I are living in the last days. Now he says during that time, in that period, perilous times shall come.

And as you look at the description it's going to give for us here, you will recognize that looking back over the course of history, over the course of church history, that there have been periods, have been times in the history of the church, when things were truly perilous for the church itself.

Indeed, at the time that Paul wrote, there were some people who thought that the very fabric of the Christian church was about to fall around about their ears.

[12 : 35] Everything for which the apostles contended seemed to be collapsing around about them. People who come into church with false teaching.

People who used to be connected with the church were defecting. Very well known names in the history of the Christian church, like Demas, had fallen by the wayside.

They had thrown in the towel. They had given up the faith. Things were very bleak indeed for the church when Paul wrote this letter.

And as I said, there are times when you look back over the history of the church, when there have been similar periods. When it was even difficult, it would be difficult for people to say anything about the witness of the Christian church as such.

Well, there are times, as I say, when things are worse. As we look at it, things seem to be worse than at other times.

[13 : 44] And at this time, when Paul wrote, he was living in an age which seemed to be characterized, as he puts it here, by opposition to God and to the gospel.

And the church was facing a veritable onslaught of evil from evil men.

And therefore, the message to Timothy is this. In the face of all that, see that you continue to be faithful. Stand up for the truth, no matter what it costs.

And standing up for the truth is never easy. There are times when it is more difficult. He says, don't you be ashamed of the truth and don't be ashamed to stand up for the truth.

Now, someone has suggested that Paul being, as he tells us himself in the letter to Titus, written at the same time, an old man, Paul the aged.

[14 : 54] Though he was probably no more than over 60. Nevertheless, this man was careworn. He was, he had suffered, endured a lot. As he tells us in this chapter, the, what persecutions, he says, I endured, they had taken a toll.

And here was this old man writing this letter to the comparatively young man who was going to go from him. And someone has said, this is just the sort of pessimism that you expect from an old man. Leaving the sin of time and looking back and saying to people who are coming after him. Well, things were bad for me, but they're going to be much worse for you.

You know how it is that we think that people are older than ourselves tend to glamorize the old days. They always speak of the good old days.

And today things are worse than they were then. Well, of course, that can be very true. And certainly as you look at the spiritual condition of our own day, I think you would readily agree, those

of you who know something about church history, you would readily agree that certainly, for example, in our own island, things aren't as spiritually healthy as they were, say, 50 years ago. [16:20] Nothing like it. So, in some respects, perilous times have come upon us. And it was true in Paul's day, as he was leaving this world and as Timothy was taking over the reins, that perilous times truly had come.

And as someone has said, what he says here was amply vindicated by the history of the post-apostolic age of the Christian church, which was the seedbed of all manner of corruption. Now, it's difficult to believe that things could have become as bad as they had when Paul wrote this letter. And remember, he is here speaking about the Christian church.

He is speaking, as we see in verse 5, of people of a form of godliness, but to deny the power thereof. He's speaking about people who have come into the church, people who haven't abandoned religion at all.

They are religious. They have a form of godliness. See, in a minute. They've got a religion. But underneath the surface, things are far from well.

[17:38] And it's difficult to believe that the church of which Paul spoke could have become like that, because just 30 years before that, this church was full of spiritual life and vitality, full of spiritual enthusiasm and evangelistic zeal and missionary zeal.

Full of prayer. Full of consecration to Christ and commitment and full of prayer. Full of prayer. Time and time again we read of this body meeting for prayer and the Lord wondrously answering prayer. It was a church which you could say was characterized by an absence of formalism and by the true presence of spiritual life.

Yet into that church, people like Ananias and Sapphira came. Into that church came a man like Simon Magus.

Into that church came a man like Demas. And it was in the history of that church that Paul records the many defections in Asia.

[18:58] And as time went on, in the history of the Christian church, more and more people with very loose and nominal attachment to the claims of Christ, adhered themselves to the church.

And it became more and more characterized by a form of religion, but a rejection and an absence of the power of God.

And it is into that church from time to time that God has come with mighty movements of spiritual revival, reviving the church from within.

A church which had become spiritually malaise, spiritually dead, and in many respects, in many areas, decadent. And God, by his spirit came in and worked, reviving power from within the church and through the church into the unbelieving community around it.

Well, the question I think that we have to ask ourselves when we look at this passage here is this. How did this state of affairs come about?

[20:22] And he tells us it came about because men became lovers of their own selves. Men, he says, became lovers of pleasures.

And men ceased to love God. That's how it happened. Men began to look at other things instead of God.

And this Christ, as someone has told us, was brought about by ordinary men. Fallen men. Evil men. Whose nature was perverted.

Whose behavior was self-centered and godless. And whose mind was hostile to God. Who spread evil, heresy, and dead religion in the church.

Well, that's the picture that Paul paints for us here. The responsibility for the state of affairs for this perilous time. For the degeneracy of the church, the responsibility for it, lay with such men.

[21:41] And in this passage, he tells us something of the life that they lived. Something of the religion that they practiced. And something of the zeal that they exhibited.

Now look for a minute at the life that they lived. And that is painted for us here in verses 2 to 4. Listen to the description.

called the MO ■■■■■ Applause false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those who are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.

Now, it is pointed out by commentators, New Testament commentators, that Paul here uses 19 expressions to describe these men.

And they all stem from the three things that I mentioned earlier that these two verses tell us, that they loved themselves more than they loved anybody else, they loved pleasure more than they loved God, and they were opposed to God himself.

[23 : 14] And someone has said of them, that what was wrong with these people was this, it wasn't they didn't love, but their love was misdirected. And this becomes the root, surely, of all evil, in the church, and in our own lives at personal level, that we deny the purpose for which we were created, namely to glorify God and to enjoy him forever.

And we forget the great command that is given to every human being, thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself.

And when other things take God's place, it doesn't matter what it is, it doesn't matter what the pleasure or the pursuit may be, and it doesn't matter how legitimate it may be in itself, when anything assumes the place of importance that ought to be given to God supremely in the life, then we become lovers of ourselves, and lovers of pleasure, and haters of God.

God is dethroned, and whatever it is that grips you, whatever it is that masters you, whatever it is that you give yourself to, whatever is enthroned in the heart, becomes the dominant thing in your life.

And what happens then, he tells us is this, when men view themselves as more important than anybody else, when men view things more important than God, as he tells in Romans, when they worship the creature more than the creator, when men turn to that kind of life, it leads to a conduct which he describes here.

[25 : 21] It leads to arrogance, and contempt of people and of authority. Let us just hold on to one or two of the things that he mentions here.

They become covetous. That is, they want what isn't theirs. God didn't mean them to have. Covetous expresses itself in that way.

Remember how he put it to the, the writer of the Hebrews put it. Be, he says, be not covetous, but be content with the things that you have. In other words, accept God's providence and God's way for you, and don't stretch out your hand to take what isn't yours, and what God doesn't want you to have.

They become busters and proud and blasphemous. This is how self-will expresses itself. A blustering assertiveness in the face of all and sundry.

And look at this description of family life. Disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, and without natural affection.

[26 : 44] Perhaps this characterises the life and the day and the age in which you and I live. Children no longer are prepared to obey their parents. Children are no longer thankful for what their parents are giving to them.

They become more and more ungrateful, unappreciative. They take everything for granted. Unholy. The meaning of the word here is disrespectful, without natural affection. The affection that ought to be there in human relationships isn't there anymore.

These people are self-willed. They are truth-breakers. They are unreasonable. When you begin to deal with them, they are totally unreasonable.

They won't listen to reason. They become rebellious. Difficult to deal with.

[27 : 56] It's not a picture of society today. It's not even a picture of the church today. I can do what I like. It's difficult at times a day to advise anybody, to give them counsel.

And if you do advise and if you do give counsel, it's thrown in your face. There is an arrogant contempt amongst people today.

That never used to be the case. Well, of course, as one remembers it, certainly as one looks back today, some of you can look back from a higher vantage point than I can.

And look back longer than I can. Is it not true that this is a perfect picture of society today? And it was equally true here in Paul's day.

Look at the difficult day at family life. Look at the problem that so many teachers have with pupils today. Not just in the central belt, but here as well. Look at the antisocial behavior in our own midst.

[29 : 04] And that's what Paul is speaking about here. People are disobedient, disrespect to authority. You find it difficult to speak to them.

I'm sure there are teachers here at night who would agree with me that from the very earliest age, in school today, they find it difficult to discipline children. Difficult even to make them sit, to listen, and

to take on board what is being said to them.

Well, that's what Paul is saying about life in his own day society. Everyone, he says, suffers at their hands. They're fierce.

They are angry. They are like wild animals, almost animal behavior, despised of those that are good. They don't look to anybody who is no one is better than themselves.

They are high-minded. They shout other people down. They lack common decency. And all this stems from the fact that they love themselves and love pleasure more than they love God.

[30 : 23] is that not a striking characteristic of fallen man in every age, ungovernable, incontinent, the passions, the passionate and the lacking self-control.

There is an absence of restraint, an absence of loyalty, loyalty, and an absence of humility. Of course, if you say that in certain places, you're shouted down anyway.

You're laughed out of court. And it's very, very unfortunate that when people try to inculcate these attitudes of respect and humility and appreciation and loyalty and affection into young lives, you have other people at work destroying all that you're trying to do with a slogan today, the right of the child, the child's right, as though no one else had a right but the child.

Well, the one who has the greatest right to the child and to the adult is God himself. I think it was John Stott who said in his commentary on this letter, this he says is a remarkably apt portrayal of the so-called permissive society which genially tolerates every conceivable deviation from Christian standards of righteousness and morality and truth and, he says, whose ethos has crept into the church and that's what Paul is telling us here.

it's difficult almost to believe this were it not that the Bible itself records it. These people, he says, they're not religious, they're not also the pale of the Christian church, they're in it, they have a form of godliness but they deny the power from such, he says, turn away.

[33 : 06] Now, I must say that, as I said, were it not that this is written, it would be very difficult for you to believe that this could be the case. They have a religion.

That is a form of godliness. That is an outward shell that of itself seems to tell people the kind of conduct that they ought to have.

Someone has put it like this, that godliness here means a disposition to piety with the conduct that flows from it.

In other words, practical religion. They have that form. But he says they deny the power. They deny it.

The power that ought to be inside the form is renounced. It is cast away. It is cast off. And what is the power that ought to be inside this religion or this godliness?

[34 : 15] Well, it is the power that moulds our character and the power that moulds our life. The power that gives us direction as to how to live and how to speak.

The power that tells us that we ought to be in earnest concerning the things of God. It is all very well to have a form, and religion must have a form.

It must express itself outwardly in the same way as we do here tonight, with, for example, prayer and praise and reading and meditation and all that that is associated with the form.

Of course, it must have a form. But what's the point of the form without the power? That's the point, surely, that Paul is making here.

What's the point of having it unless there is something relevant and something meaningful in it and to it, something vital that brings me into contact with God, that brings my soul into fellowship and into communion with the Lord Jesus Christ by faith, the power that moves me to love him and to serve him and to trust him, the power that constrains me to commit my way to him.

[35 : 44] What's the point of a religion unless that is in it? What's the point of the shell unless that's the meat inside the shell?

Now, of course, we know that Paul was speaking about something new. If you read the Old Testament, this was the complaint that God erected to Israel during the days of Amos and Jeremiah and Isaiah.

Read Isaiah chapter 1. And read Jeremiah again chapter 1. These people, he says, these people who worship me, who haven't abandoned their religion, who haven't abandoned their feasts or their sacrifice or their offerings, who haven't abandoned their holy places and their assemblies, these people, he says, they have committed two evils.

Even in the very midst of the religion, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have healed for themselves, broken systems, and can't hold no water.

What's the point, he says, to be of your new moons and your Sabbaths and your religious observances? Psalm 50, that we sang here tonight, a perfect picture of the same thing, offering all these offerings to the Lord, whether he loved to him, or contact with him, or faith in him.

[37 : 08] And this is a question, sure, that this verse asks you and me to answer, as we consider not just the conduct of these people, but the religion that they practiced without any power whatsoever.

The question, surely, for you and for me, is this. Where is the power in our religion? Where is the power in our form?

In all our observances? And in all our doings? And in all our church goings? In all our Bible reading? In all our prayer life?

Where is the power? This, as someone said, was a picture of a heathen Christianity, of a corrupt Christianity?

And he went on to say this, Christendom, he said, is a is a largely a mass of pagans masquerading as Christians.

[38 : 22] where is our consecration tonight? You know yourselves that there are some people who, when they claim to be consecrated to Christ, are branded as being eccentric.

I think I told you the story of the man some years ago, who said to myself his son had gone to university. And his father, the father was a nominal Christian, one would have to say that. And his son at university was converted to the Lord Jesus Christ. And I remember he telling me one day, when I put his son's conversion, saying this to me, I hope he says that he doesn't go too far with his Christianity.

Same spirit you have in Pharaoh, speaking to Moses, you can go, but don't go too far. You can go, but don't take your children. Go, but yes, take on the cloak of religion.

Assume this mantle, but don't be out and out for Christ. No, no. Don't speak about spirituality of life. Don't speak about your prayer life, and don't speak about devotion, and don't speak about commitment.

[39 : 47] That's the meneer. without the power. And there are plenty of people, and I suppose that everyone in this church would come under this banner here.

There are plenty of people who are prepared to take heaven with a religion, but they don't want the power that must be in it if it's going to be meaningful and relevant.

Every church is Alexander McLaren, the Baptist minister of last century Manchester. Every church is a little core of earnest Christians who live the life and a great envelope surrounding them, who have the forum, but deny the power.

And these are very, very solemn and sobering words. And it applies, as it applied to Paul's day, to the church there, it applies to the church generally today, it applies to us in the Free Church of Scotland here in Stornoway tonight, that it may be very true that of the church and the religion that we practice and the forum that we have within it, there may be a very small number and a large mass who have nothing but the forum.

And in the light of these words, my friend, there is only one question I think that you and I can ask. It's a question the disciples asked at the Last Supper.

[41 : 30] Lord, is it I? That's the question. A form of godliness, but denying the power.

Well, perhaps even more amazingly, what Paul goes on to say, and I'm nearly finished, is this. These people have a zeal.

Not only do they have a religion, but they have a zeal. He says, shun these people, avoid these people, if you can't get rid of them. Without being facetious, one is tempted to say, easier said than done.

But look at the zeal that they have. Of this sort, he says, it is from this mass that you get people who steal into houses and lead captive silly women, laden with sins, and away with diverse lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

They influence others, and especially women. That's interesting. Now, of course, someone will say, ah, yeah, typical Paul, isn't it? Always heavy on the woman.

[42 : 43] He was nothing of the sort. There was no man who acknowledged the service that the woman gave to the cause of Christ better than Paul did, and who owed them a great debt of

gratitude.

But what he says here is this. These people, you know, they're masters at knowing who to evangelize. And they use underhand and very crafty and very devilishly sneaky methods. They steal into how the idea here being of horses, they wait their opportunity, and they take it. You see, when it's most opportune, they knock on the door. When they know maybe that there's no one in there, but what he speaks of here is silly woman laden with lusts, laden with sins, and led away with diverse lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now look at the picture he's painting for us here of the people on whom these men are praying. Women who are easily influenced.

He's not saying that all women are easily influenced, that's not the point. But he says that there are some women who are easily influenced, especially those, the people with problems.

[44 : 04] They are laden with sins, they've got a burden, and they've been led away with diverse lusts, they're at the end of the road, and someone comes to the door, he's got the answer to the problem.

Of course they're going to open the door, and of course they're going to open their ears, of course they're going to listen to this person who's got the secret for this problem that they have, who can offer them relief for their burden, who can offer them an easy way out.

And these women, he says, are ever learning and ever able to come to the knowledge of the truth. They are taking it all in. They seem to be learning something, and if someone comes today with an offer of help, they'll take it, then someone comes tomorrow with something else, and they'll take that.

They're always learning, always taking it in, because they're easily led. But he says, they never come to the knowledge of the truth.

The Bible, I think, speaks of this as a truth as it is in Jesus. The answer, if you want to put it like that, the answer to the problem of sin is only one, the Lord Jesus Christ.

[45 : 28] and these people, you know you've had them here, as you have them in other places, people who associate themselves in the church, claim to be Christians, claim to believe the things that you believe, then they knock at the door, and the first thing they do maybe is to denounce the orthodoxy of the church here or the church there, and they denounce the teachings that you're given, and they paint up, this is a perfect picture that is painted, of the strategy of some of the sects with which you yourselves are acquainted tonight.

The kind of religious commercial traveller or representative who comes with the answer to your problem. And isn't it significant that when you see sects like that springing up here, I can only speak of Stornway, I can't speak of anybody, of anywhere else with any authority, but I know that where some of them are sprung up in some areas of this island, they've been peopled exactly by the type of characters painted for us here, people who had horrendous problems, true enough, we in the Christian church maybe hadn't gone to them, with the only remedy for the sin of the world.

These people took advantage of our lackadaisical attitude to evangelism, and they went in with their own putrid brand, and offered a relief that was no relief at all.

that's a picture that Paul is painting. Now he says, I want to tell you something, he said, in Old Testament history, the time of Moses, there were two men, these men aren't referred, unspoken of, but ecclesiastical history leads us to believe that these were two of the magicians in Pharaoh's court.

And you know that when Moses performed miracles in the name of the Lord by the power of God, Pharaoh's magicians themselves were able to counter what Moses was doing.

[47 : 58] What they were doing, he says, is they were resisting the truth. Men who were corrupt in their minds and men who were disqualified, preprobate, men who had not only thrown off the faith, but denied the faith and disqualified from the faith and by the faith.

Well, he says, there were people like that in Moses' day. They were there because they resisted the truth. They were opposing God at every turn. And that is always what you have at the heart of evil, at the heart of heresy, at the heart of our wrong life and wrong teaching.

This is the principle operating in it, that which opposes God. Pharaoh did it, his magicians did it, these people did it in Paul's day and they're doing it in our day.

And the tragedy is that they're in the church as they do. And I need to refer to what has become so topical today, what we have come across in the newspapers and the media in the past few weeks.

Men who have a form of godliness and who present that which is opposed to the truth of God.
[49 : 21] But there's hope here and there's encouragement for us. Do you feel at times, do you feel terribly depressed because of the state of the church? Do you feel that the church has become a laughingstock of the world?

Do you feel that the church is almost disintegrating, falling apart as you look around you? Do you not see signs of decay, spiritual decay everywhere? And there are times when you must admit that you feel terribly depressed about it all.

These men seem to have the stage. And the truth, and especially evangelical Christianity and reformed Christianity, you hardly hear a mention of it.

or unfortunately at times a word from it. Listen, they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as theirs, that is Janus and Jambres, as theirs also was.

My friend, remember this. God proved to Pharaoh who was God. God has come and vindicated his own world, his own truth.

[50 : 47] These men seem to succeed, and movements seem to rise, and seem to mushroom. And there were many such in the world in days gone by, and there's no sign of them today.

But the Christian church survives. And the Christian church will go on. And God one day will manifest unto all men the folly of the people who oppose the truth of God.

aren't you thankful that this word, this verse is in the Bible? Errorists and their methods will become clear.

As I said, some of them had great followers in days gone by, but there are any few today. Perhaps some other movements have great followers today. One day they won't.

Look at the sacred field itself. not so long ago there were millions of people who worshipped Stalin and Lenin. And today millions despise them and condemn them and hate them.

[52 : 14] Today the rise of liberalism in our midst seems to be on the ascendancy masquerading under this cloak of Christianity but truth will out.

Truth will prevail. The truth as it is in Jesus. May I close and come back to this as you and I go out from here tonight having worshipped having practised our own form of religion let us ask ourselves is there anything in it is there life in this for me has this form in which my religion expresses itself has it brought me at any time into living passionate contact with the Lord Jesus Christ is his power operating in my life and has my life been transformed by that power so that I will seek him and follow him and be with him is he in my religion religion or have I nothing but religion and as I look around here tonight isn't it tragic that there should be some people present heading for eternity with nothing in their hand but the religion of their father and empty of the presence and the power and the reality of

Christ the Christ of the father let us pray oh lord have mercy upon us bless us we pray thee with thy power and thy spirit in our hearts and number us among those who live by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and the praise with thine forever in him amen