

2Timothy 3:1-9

We need to see this in context as it appears to be a strange passage alone.

Paul writes this letter from prison in dark days, believing he has probably going to be executed. He is seeking to encourage Timothy in his ministry.

So he talks of guarding the Good News in chapter 1

To be faithful in his work in chapter 2

He is going on to challenge Timothy to proclaim the Good News later in this chapter 4.

In today's passage, he is recognising the world we live in. And it isn't that good! Pay attention to the opening words:

Terrible times are not here described as the four horsemen of the apocalypse. Paul describes three aspects of terrible. False morality and false religion and false discipling. So if these are prevalent in our society , or worse our church, these are terrible times.

You think COVID-19 is bad, but God is more concerned with the integrity of his people.

You were called by grace, the Holy Spirit moved your heart and mind to repentance, Jesus died on a cross to take the punishment of your sins, You were saved by grace, you did nothing but receive it as a free gift. God entered your life by his Holy Spirit.

The question is :

has it transformed you or are you still living in sin?

Are you still holding out against the Holy Spirit transforming your innermost thoughts?

Is your worship great in church on Sunday but silent on Monday morning?

Is your valuation of discipleship about being good friends and enjoying each others company alone? How about your giving,

your self-control, your day to day life, is their integrity in your relationships?

So we look at this passage, not as a passing interest in the pastoral problems of a past age but as a challenge to examine our lives to see if grace is having the effect that God expects.

1. False Moral conduct.

² *People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,*
³ *without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good,*
⁴ *treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—*

To Peter the key problem is what you love. The problem in the church is God does not have exclusive rights to our heart. Here we are challenged to the other loves. Much of this resonates with the society we live in. We applaud self-interest, accumulation of money, arrogance, being abusive, despising parents, few make any attempt at holiness and our TV is full of excitement around unholy behaviour. And we could go on. But we live in a pleasure loving society and that is underlined by people's react to restrictions due to the pandemic. We care more about a meal out, a football match than protecting our community. But most of all God is on the back burner, if at all and despised by many.

We find it all too easy to join them.

Compare Peters complaint about the enemy within to what we are called to:

To love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul and strength

To love your neighbour as you love yourself.

To love one another as Jesus loved you

To love your enemies, do good to those who do you harm.

You see, the enemy within has forgotten that they are saved by grace. That they are those who have responded to the love of God in Christ Jesus. They have turned from sin to love God and then our eyes have become attracted by what the rest of the world thinks and does and we get drawn in to temptation. So the challenge this morning is which list describes you? Time to turn to the Jesus way and away from the world's path to destruction

2. Shallow religion

⁵ *having a form of godliness but denying its power.*

Have nothing to do with them.

The second terrible thing in the church is shallow religion. We come to church and say nice spiritual things but we do not allow the Holy Spirit to transform our lives. Worse when it does not bother us. We might even pray wonderful prayers but do we believe that God is actually going to respond to those prayers? We talk about faith but we do not apply it to our daily lives. I have a book called 'Forty-Four Sermons' by John Wesley. It was compulsory for all leaders in the Methodist church to read. But the Methodist Church, on the whole, moved away from a personal faith in Jesus to a shallow religion. Chapter one is on Salvation by faith, the second is called 'The Almost Christian' and is all about sham religiosity which is passionate about what you do rather than receiving what God has done. That is changing now as the shallow religiosity is dying out and what is left are moved by the Holy Spirit.

The challenge here is to live as Jesus describes to the Woman at the well of Samaria. *They that worship must worship in spirit and in truth.*

3. Sham discipling

⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth—men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Jannes and Jambres are the traditional names of the priests of Egypt who imitated Moses wonders – turning staffs into snakes, hands to leprosy, water to blood, etc. They are examples of fake religion. And the church has been constantly spoiled by them throughout history. In recent years we have become more aware of the abuse of power in the church where Christian leaders have use their position of authority to coerce people and abuse them. We are ashamed of the way the good News has been dragged in the dirt as a result and many people have suffered appallingly for many years. That is why we have embraced the concept of our protection of vulnerable people.

But I want to concentrate on the antithesis.

Genuine fellowship is not about me but about you. So when we are looking for what we gain rather than what others gain we are stepping off the high road of faith. That is true of Worship style, Fellowship, prayer, discipleship in fact every aspect of the Christian life. Jesus calls us to follow him and he did not ever put his needs above the needs of others.

Genuine spirituality is about your walk with Jesus, about what happens in your heart and mind.

Genuine discipleship is about following Jesus , not doing what I say. Real pastoral work builds up people in their faith so that they are not dependant on what others say.

So, although this passage warns us off evil , we learn that we must embrace godliness. In simple terms that is Follow Jesus. And to do that you need to know what Jesus said. Since I have been on Facebook and Twitter, I have put a quotation of the words of Jesus in the public space, every day I can. If you #Jesussaid you can check me out on this. But knowing the words is useless if you don't let the Holy Spirit transform your life to follow what Jesus said and did.

That is the way of Jesus: To be obedient to the Father.

Grace is not a new set of orders but grace brings in a new way of thinking. A way of thinking where your love for God, your neighbour, one another and even your enemies changed not only the way you think but the way you speak and the way you act. So Paul will go on to encourage Timothy saying in 4: [1](#)I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of His appearing and His kingdom: [2](#)Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and encourage with every form of patient instruction.

So read the Word, listen to the Holy Spirit and turn away from false morality, shallow religion and false discipling and be a faithful follower of Jesus. Walk the Jesus walk. Keep in step with the Holy Spirit.