

2 Timothy 3:1-9

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[0 : 00] So we're carrying on in our series in 2 Timothy. It'd be a great help to me if you have your Bible open on that particular page or on your phone.

Because we'll be looking at the verses as we go through. And in many ways, last week, we thought about false teachers. And that was primarily about word ministry, where people are teaching truth that is not in line with the teaching of the New Testament, of the teachings of Jesus Christ.

This is sort of part two of that. Part two of what false teachers are like. We'll come in from a slightly different angle. Last week, it was more towards when truth was taught wrongly.

This week, that still comes into it, but it's more of when a false teacher becomes known, not because of what they teach, but because their lives don't match up with what they teach.

It's slightly differently, because when that happens, people might say all the right words, but actually they're known as a false teacher because their lives don't teach the truth.

[1 : 18] Which is slightly different. Well, this passage is really all about, and as we've looked through both weeks, it's really the centre of it all, which we've mentioned before, which is often what's at stake in churches and in gospel ministry.

What's often at stake is how we treat people. It's how we treat people. And just to remind us that everyone deserves to be treated. Every person that bears God's image deserves to be treated with the same dignity and equality and respect as everyone else, because everyone bears God's image. And actually, actually, how we treat God's image is a direct reflection on how we treat God. I just want to explain that little illustration.

I think I might have used this before, so bear with me if you've heard this. But I don't know about you, when I was younger, and maybe many of us did this in our bedroom.

I used to put posters on the bedroom wall of footballers that I admired. If you weren't into football, maybe it was your favourite musician or actor or famous person.

[2 : 31] But when you do that, when you put up an image of someone, what you're saying is, I admire the person, the real life person of who this image depicts.

I admire them. I have a certain respect and admiration and I want to show them dignity. And if you were to meet that person in real life, they're the people who you'd get starstruck by.

However, if I was to put an image of someone and throw a dart at it, if you deface the image, it does suggest that they're not your favourite person.

Because how you treat the image of that correlates to actually how you treat the real thing. The same goes for God. The same goes for living God.

How you treat the image of God is a direct reflection on actually how you treat God. It's actually why you can't separate the two commandments, love God and love neighbour.

[3 : 36] They can't be separated. Because how much you serve your neighbour, how much you love your neighbour reflects on how much you serve and love the living God. The value you place on your neighbour, because the image of God shows how much you value God.

Equally the opposite is true. Sinning against your neighbour, not loving them, treating them selfishly is actually a reflection on how you treat God.

Our passage today gets at this issue. But it's not about those who love God or love neighbour. But it's about those who love themselves to a dangerous extreme.

It is so extreme that people, they're not only not loved, but they're seen as collateral damage. In people getting, so that people can get what they want.

In this series in 2 Timothy, as we've been continuing to look through it, we've been thinking about this verse and I've reminded us every week of what it means to guard the good deposit entrusted to us.

[4 : 41] And here, guarding the good deposit means protecting the vulnerable against selfish evil. That's what it means. It means protecting the vulnerable against selfish evil.

And we're going to be looking at this difficult issue by thinking through what it means for someone to have that identity and what it looks like. Now just before we get going with all that, just a bit of context of what the passage is talking about.

You'll notice in verse 1, you'll see it starts with, in the last days. And often, that can be a little bit confusing language for people.

People think that it means a specific time in the distant future. That it's like a prediction in the last days, when is that going to happen. But theologically speaking, the last days are from the moment Jesus ascended to heaven until the time he returns.

It's the time of the church. The reason we know that is because of what Peter says at Pentecost in Acts 2, 17. He says, in the last days, God says, I will pour out my spirit.

[5 : 50] So from Jesus pouring, from God pouring out his spirit until now, that has been the period of the last days. Also Hebrews 1, in these last days, he has spoken to us by his son.

So whenever we read all we see, when it talks about in the last days, is it talking about now? Yes. Because we're living in the time waiting for Jesus' return since Pentecost.

Or after his ascension. We live in the end times, and we have been for just short of 2,000 years.

And it says that in these last times, that there will be difficult times to come.

That in these days, it's going to be difficult. And we see that that means that the difficult times have been for the whole history of the church. It's not a prediction of difficult times to come. It's saying difficulty will be during the whole of the time until Jesus comes back.

And what is this difficulty? Well, we're going to be thinking about it. And the first thing that we're going to look through is verse 2 to 5. And the question that I want us to think through is, and you'll notice where it comes up, is what does it mean to be a lover of self?

[7 : 03] What does it mean to be a lover of self? In verses 2 to 4, we get this long list of character traits of the types of people who make life difficult.

And you could spend a long time looking at each one individually. It's a wide-ranging list. But actually, the way that this functions is the first and the last terms of that big, long list act kind of like brackets.

What that means is that everything between the first and the last term is somehow related to them.

And you see the terminology that underpins it all. It says, it's the phrase, the lover of.

You see that in verse 2, people will be lovers of themselves. And then we have that all, the big, long list. And then verse 4, when the list finishes, you see lovers of again.

They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Like I say, these two terms, lovers of self, lovers of pleasure, they bracket the rest. Everything within the first and the last term is an example of what being a lover of self, a lover of pleasure looks like.

[8 : 16] And it's just as important as an aside to grasp how this list functions in the passage.

Because there's lots of lists in the New Testament that dictate lots of sins.

But this list functions slightly differently. Now, don't get me wrong. We look through that list and every one of us could find ourselves in that list in some way.

We've all done things because at some point in life, which one of us hasn't been proud or unforgiving or slanderous. We've all done that. And on one level, it reminds us of how much we've been forgiven.

However, however, the first and last terms which I've mentioned are asserting something slightly different. This list isn't meant primarily to convict us of our sins, although it does do that.

No, rather, it's about those whose love of self and pleasure is a lifestyle. It's whose life is governed by self, which is governed by pleasure.

[9 : 25] It's more like where love for self is the identity that they live out of every day. People who haven't been changed by the grace of God, who are not seeking to put these things to death.

It's when love for self by an individual is not seen as something wrong, but actually as a way to thrive. As an identity where the old man has not been put to death.

There's no desire to. It's people whose love for themselves directs their life. captivate with themselves what they need and hell-bent on appeasing themselves.

Doing everything to satisfy this need to be loved. They're the centre of their world. Getting what they want by any means necessary.

But I think because of what comes later in the passage, this is related to people. That when this lifestyle is lived out in its extreme, it can become very dangerous.

[10:32] Modern day terminology of someone who lives like this, we have a phrase. We would call them a narcissist. And I just want to be clear.

I said this already. If you've done things on that list, I'm not saying you're a narcissist. I'm not saying that. I'm talking about when this way of living is taken to its end point.

Which I think this passage is getting to. It's when people are collateral damage to get what people want. I don't know if you know the story of Narcissus.

Narcissus is in love with himself. And there's a time when he sees his reflection in a pool of water. And Narcissus can't pull himself away from looking at his own reflection.

Because he admires it so much. But there's a twist in the story. Is that he doesn't realise it's his reflection. He thinks it's someone else.

[11:34] And he can't understand why this person in the water doesn't admire him as much as he admires them. And he dies because of the passion inside him is not reciprocated by the reflection that he's looking at.

And I think this is the type of person that Paul is warning Timothy of. Because of the way he talks about them, which we'll look at.

Narcissists get what they want by any means necessary. Because they think they deserve what they desire because they're in love with themselves.

Yet deeply insecure because they can't satisfy that deep love with themselves. And it is opposition to God in the absolute extreme.

And so, now that we've sort of clarified and defined what these sort of opening few verses are talking about. That it's talking about someone who, a dangerous type of individual who loves themselves.

[12:46] What we see in verses 6 to 8 is the effect that that might have on the church or on people. That these lovers of self actually wreak havoc.

Paul gives us an example of what these kind of people do. Just look with me from verse 6. This is why, this is the reason why I think, which I think it's getting at these kind of people.

Because he says, they're the kind who worm their way into haughtiness and gain control over gullible women. And we see here the type of people that are vulnerable to this kind of a dangerous individual.

In this instance it says gullible women, which that word for gullible can also be translated as weak. And the thing that is weak here is it is their spiritual maturity.

We know that because further on in verse 6 we read what these women are like. It says, they who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.

[13:56] Always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. And I think whilst they are spiritually weak and gullible, verse 7 is actually quite encouraging, isn't it?

Verse 7 says, they're always learning but they're never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. I take this to mean that people, or in this case women, are the ones who struggle with sin but want to leave that life of sin behind.

They want to learn. But they can't seem to find the freedom in the gospel that they long for. Perhaps in today's world it might be those who hop from one self-help book or course or retreat to another, restless and longing for peace but still drifting into a type of addictive lifestyle that they can't get free from.

But long for it. And this sort of way of living makes them vulnerable to somebody who could offer them that.

Perhaps burdened by past sins, feeling unworthy or not able to accept forgiveness. They're vulnerable and desperately want to feel accepted and approved by anyone and anything.

[15:20] And it's into these homes that lovers of self come. Verse 6, worming or sneaking their way in. And I think it's purposefully there, that language, because it is very reminiscent of the snake in the garden.

Sneaking and worming his way to whispering to ease here. Offering false acceptance and false promises. And in extreme cases that would lead to an abusive relationship.

So the lover of self gets what they want and feels that they deserve. To make this as clear as possible, Paul makes a comparison in verse 8.

Just as Janas and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who as far as the faith is concerned are rejected.

Janas and Jambres were the names of Pharaoh's two magicians. You might remember them in Exodus 7. They don't have a name there. But we can read from other literature outside of the Bible that this is who he's referring to.

[16:30] You remember, it's the time in Exodus 7, Moses goes to see Pharaoh. And Aaron throws a staff on the floor. It turns into a snake. And Janas and Jambres do the same thing with their own staffs.

But it's not by the power of God, but we read it's by secret arts. However, the snakes are eaten by Aaron's snake. And the point is, Janas and Jambres look powerful to the Egyptians.

They're held in high esteem. And they're at Pharaoh's right hand. But they use secret arts. But they don't pull the wolf over God's eyes. That is the point.

You see what Paul is saying. He's saying, my dear Timothy, be on your guard, son, for these lovers of self.

In the same way Janas and Jambres deceive the Egyptians, these men will deceive the vulnerable people in your congregation. And unfortunately, as we'd expect, we live in the last days.

[17:37] So we have seen this very recently played out in the church. In the last five years, we've seen church leaders who've been found out to be bullies, who've committed sexual abuse, emotional abuse.

The list goes on. One example, only a few years ago, a very prominent, well-known speaker, who was well-known for defending the faith, was found out that he was requesting sexual abuse from women, telling him that it was his reward from God.

And telling women they would receive blessing from God for rewarding God's man. Amen. But what these women needed was Jesus.

They didn't need deception, but love, compassion, and truth. They were weak, probably maybe weak spiritually.

Maybe they didn't know the forgiveness that the Lord Jesus could offer them. But were so wise.

They needed the Jesus of John 4.

[18:53] Met the very vulnerable Samaritan woman. Meeting Jesus alone, near the well, five times a widow, burdened by her own sexual sin that she went in the heat of the day where nobody else would see her.

Continuing to live with this family, she wasn't married to her, married to her, very vulnerable. What does Jesus say? Whoever drinks the water, I give them, will never thirst.

Indeed, the water I give them, will become in them a spring of water, welling up to eternal life. Or perhaps the woman in John 8, caught in the act of adultery, being accused by all those around her, such a vulnerable woman.

What does Jesus say? That any of you who is without sin be the first to cast or throw a stone at her.

This is the truth, this is the kind of gospel man that they needed in their lives, showing love and compassion, yet not divorced from truth.

And as a church, it is a gospel category to protect the most people. Children, single mothers, widows, the elderly, those who have cognitive disabilities, those struggling with addictions.

[20:21] It is a gospel category because it reflects the way Jesus loves the marginalized and the oppressed. Those for whom living in a world that has been cursed by sin has taken its toil.

So the question is, the question really is, what do we do about it? What do we do about that? We're going to look at the third thing, which is really coming around to how we as a church should respond as Jesus would respond to those situations.

And we look with verse 9. Well, they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.

Through God's man, Moses, Janice and John, Bizzle, were exposed. Through God's man, Paul, these men, the ones that he's talked about so far, in the nation, five meters, they were exposed.

And through the God's man, Jesus Christ, evil was exposed. The Pharisees were exposed who, you might remember, he says, what are you Pharisees who, you do all the right things, you cleanse your hands when you need to, you tie all the right amounts, but you are like whitewashed tombs.

[21:50] He says, you're dead inside. He exposes them. And we pray that evil will be exposed before any deception takes place. Light exposes darkness.

It's why I started with that first phrase that God is light. In him, there is no darkness. Secret things are done in the shadows, but Jesus is the light of the world that exposes wickedness.

And he's made us the light of the world and we have a responsibility to expose the darkness, for folly to be exposed, for it to be clear to everyone, as Paul says.

And so I think the question that we need to ask is how can we be the light of Jesus and how can we expose wickedness and folly for what it is? How do we negate this deception from occurring?

And in times gone by, the church has not spotted or has not spotted it or worse, not exposed it. And I think in order for us to do that, we need to have a clear list of priorities, principles of light for what matters in the church.

[23 : 00] And I want us to suggest four values, well, I'm going to suggest to us four values that will aid us. The first value is this. We prioritize character over charisma.

Or giftedness, we prioritize godliness over giftedness. You know the types of charismatic leader. It's leaders whose enthusiasm is contagious. And don't get me wrong, that is a great thing, having a leader that can create energy for bigger and better kingdom endeavors.

We need that. The problem is actually not charismatic leaders. The problem is when we prioritize charisma over character. It's when we confuse giftedness with godliness.

He's a really good preacher. He must be godly. He's brought lots of people to Christ. He must be godly. A lot of people have grown spiritually under his ministry.

[23 : 58] He must be godly. When we determine someone's character based on what they've achieved, we create a situation where, or if we have that principle, where spiritual abuse can happen.

The second value, we prioritize individuals over the institution. what this means is if an issue occurs, we prioritize the individual, the potential victim.

Because there might be a temptation to be concerned about the future of the institution if the scandal is made known. What will happen to the cause of Christ if this gets out?

which is really a cover up for what will happen to our institution if this gets out? What will it make our leaders out to be? What will happen to my church?

When the questions we should be asking are what can we do for the people who are hurt? What will happen to the cause of Christ in decades if we cover this up today?

[25 : 06] Third value, we prioritize accountability over advancement.

Even the leader of a small church can have an eagle the size of a continent. Having spiritually hungry people feeding on your every word can be mouth-watering.

Our church leaders need accountability. That is why in church leadership we have plurality with character traits such as above reproach, faithful to one's wife, self-control, heading up the list of non-negotiable qualifications from one to fifty-three.

And it's why within our own denomination I have people like Craig and Derek and other leaders that are older and wiser than me who are there to challenge me that can be brutal with me and so we can be brutal with one another about where we might be missing the mark.

We prioritize accountability over advancement. And fourthly, we prioritize meekness over muscle. Meekness is having strength but keeping it under control.

[26 : 25] It's the decision to choose words of grace amid feelings of frustration. Church leaders need meekness for those situations in which they could exploit people's spiritual vulnerability for their own gratification.

we prioritize meekness over muscle. Character over charisma. The individual over the institution. Accountability over advancement and meekness over muscle. That's what we can do to expose it. That's how we can be the light of Jesus Christ which is there to expose the darkness.

However, however, there is only so much that we can do and having these values in place can only go so far. Yes, there's always more that we can do to protect the most vulnerable but as I've mentioned before even the most discerning people have been deceived.

And when it does happen there are things that we can do. We mourn. We mourn.

[27 : 41] And we hear it. And we remember verse 19 from last week. The Lord knows those who are His. The Lord knows those who are His. That is the most important.

The Lord is our shepherd. And He's the one that we trust to lead us in paths of righteousness. The Lord knows those who are His.

Jesus is the light that exposes. Let me just remind us of what we've looked at this morning. How we love the image of God is a direct reflection on how we love God.

How we protect the vulnerable is therefore so important because it reflects on how much we value and love God. It is a gospel issue and we must do everything we can to ensure that protection. We're there to be shepherds of one another. It's actually why false teaching and evil really matters because the protection of the vulnerable is paramount. The protection of the vulnerable is paramount.

[28 : 45] The reality is that we will all have been weak at some point and we will all be vulnerable at some point and we need to know that this church is a safe place and we need to know that the reason it's a safe place is because we are directed by the compassion and love of Jesus Christ with Him as our shepherd to show us in our spiritual weakness what we can do to protect what He does to protect us and guard us and we still need Him every day and out of receiving that from Him we long to demonstrate and show that to others and for that to be the place or the experience people have when they come in here.

this church should be the surface place there is. It's a refuge for the broken. A refuge for the broken. Those who've suffered and not just suffered from the abuse of church leaders spiritual leaders but those who've suffered in any aspect of it.

and I'm aware that as we bring this difficult subject up if any of us in the past have gone through anything like that from any individual what we need to know is that the place that we're coming is a safe place but more than that we need to know that in the middle of it all in the middle of that pain and suffering Jesus Christ is there for you.

He's with you side by side. And that the real thing that we want to hold on to the real thing that we want to hold on to is that at the end when we look towards eternity the place of eternity Jesus Christ says says in Revelation 22 he says there is a river that runs from the city of our God there is a river that runs from the city of our God and there is the tree of life and he says that the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

[31 : 17] That is what he says eternity is for and he says eternity is for his glory but out of the city of God where Jesus Christ is sat on the throne flowing out from him is this river of life it's the same water that he offered the woman at the well.

It's the river of life and the tree that is blossoming out of the life that we will eat from the leaves are for the healing of the nations. It's why when we reach the heavenly places Jesus promises that every tear will be wiped away and all pain and suffering will be destroyed and vanquished.

It's the way that he is explaining that actually actually that is a it's a picture of what will happen. Because of the holiness of God everything that is sinful when it comes into the holiness of God will be obliterated.

Sometimes when we hear those truths about him wiping away every tear we think that we're still going to hold on to that until he does that. But the real truth is that God's holiness his character his love and compassion in the kingdom is so different to our experience in here that it won't even be a fleeting memory.

his holiness is so powerful that anything that is from the curse will be obliterated by his holiness so that his healing will be complete and total and so expansive that any abuse or thought of abuse will be gone and wiped away and be no more and we will be like him.

[33 : 02] we have a wonderful God who shepherds who loves who cares and who leads us to that heavenly place that we live for and we want to experience that today and we want this community to experience that through us where he will shepherd and protect his people through us and so we need to be on our guard and we pray almighty God we thank you that you love us and we thank you that you have or you have the perfect character that you are the most weak that you are the individual who matters so much more than the institution we saw that in the way that you loved your people but you were able to talk against the institution of Judaism in your time at the temple we love the fact that the temple was replaced by you that you condemned those who were in spiritual authority but abused people under them you've taught us how to love people and the reason we know is because you loved us and we've been on the receiving end of that

I pray that you would shepherd each one of us you would protect us and I pray that this church would be a safe place for the broken I pray that you would make it that I pray that people would encounter Jesus and I pray that you'd give us discernment I pray that you'd help us I pray that you'd keep us from messages of Satan I pray that you'd protect your people and so we thank you Lord

that you're sovereign over your church and I thank you that you know those who are yours you know those who belong to you and so we ask that you would strengthen us uphold us be with us and equip us bless us we pray bless us for all this in Jesus' name Amen Amen