
Sermon Notes

October 3, 2021

First Congregational Church of Pomfret

Danger, Watch Out! 2 Timothy 3:1-9

A Downward Trend

- ❖ Shifting values and changes in standards of public morality and decency surface in nearly every era
- ❖ The Apostle Paul concerns himself not with declines in society, but with declines in the church
 - Paul's words in 2 Timothy 3 are directed at those inside the church, not those who stand apart from Christ
 - sobering words about the dangers that threaten the purity and the mission of the church Jesus is building

Appearance vs. Reality

- ❖ A perennial threat faced by the church is the temptation to fixate on externals
 - measuring godliness on the basis of outward appearance
 - head knowledge minus heart connection
 - ignoring the need for inner renewal and transformation
- ❖ *You MUST be born again* (John 3:5) and experience inward transformation before behavior can be modified

- ❖ Attempting a plan of behavior modification without the life changing, life-giving power of God's Spirit, leads to futility, frustration, legalism and many other traps
 - the problem of the Pharisees
 - letter of the law rather than the spirit of the law
 - form without substance
 - the problem of false teachers in the early church
 - salvation = Jesus + circumcision, customs, celebrations, dietary laws, sacrifices, etc....
 - throughout her history, the church has repeatedly lapsed into focusing on external forms and symbols rather than the realities those things represent
 - William Wilberforce: *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System Contrasted With Real Christianity*, written in 1797
 - examines how a "cultural form" of Christianity carries only a thin, surface level veneer of a Christ-centered life
 - calls people to embrace real Christianity rather than being conformed to external patterns of behavior that do nothing to change the inner person
- ❖ Within the professing church of our day, great confusion reigns because of those who have the appearance of godliness but deny its power
 - the wholesale rejection of Biblical truth
 - misguided attempts to be contemporary, relevant and positive
 - "ear tickling"

Lovers of Self

- ❖ Self-love has always been the crux of the problem
 - love of God replaced by love of self
 - v. 4, *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*
- ❖ Paul gives a list of 18 traits that describes what happens when people concentrate on themselves
 - when the love of God is replaced with love of self, all sorts of vices inevitably follow
 - Paul's list reflects the Holy Spirit's description of spiritual reality
 - a "sampler" of how our lives will run amok if we fall into the self-focused trap that is so characteristic of much that passes itself off as Christianity in our day
 - lacking godly humility, those overtaken by these vices seek to draw attention to themselves as if they are the center of the universe
- ❖ R. Kent Hughes: "Unregenerate evangelicals are a growing reality in both clergy and congregations. It is easy to acquire a 'form of godliness,' to subscribe to all the right subcultural expressions and customs and yet be 'denying its power' by the quality of our lives."
- ❖ *Avoid such people...* have nothing to do with them!

Underhanded Methods

- ❖ Preying on the weak-willed and weak-minded
- ❖ Trapping those who are overburdened with guilt

- ❖ Targeting those who are spiritually "hungry" and who habitually "dabble" in whatever is "new" in the realm of spiritual experience
 - religious cults and secret societies
 - in our culture, seeking is good... finding is bad!
- ❖ Always learning and learning and learning but never coming to know Christ
- ❖ Taking a page from the play book of Jannes and Jambres
 - just as the false magicians opposed Moses and Aaron, so the false teachers in Ephesus oppose the truth
 - although their religious trappings may look the same on the outside, they are *corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith*
- ❖ HOPE: God's Word and God's way **WILL** prevail
 - ultimately, the power of God, the truth of God's Word, and the message of the gospel will be victorious
 - *Greater is He that is in us than he that is in the world*

Personal Application

1. Are there ways in which you tend to focus on the "externals" of behavior without having first experienced the power and transformation of the Holy Spirit within yourself?
2. As you look at Paul's long list of vices in this passage, identify what areas are you most susceptible to becoming a "lover of self" or a "seeker of pleasure".
3. How easily might you be "taken in" by any of the underhanded methods used by false teachers? What will you do to protect yourself from falling into that trap?