

# Faithful Ministry in a Degenerate World

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Well, let's grab our Bibles and let's go back to 2 Timothy and we start chapter 3 this morning. We've entitled this exposition "Beautifying the Bride" because, in effect, again, Paul is writing from prison this time to his understudy, Timothy, whom he's left in charge of the local church at Ephesus and he is actually, in a sense, pastoring the church through Timothy, telling Timothy how it should be structured, how it should be organized, how it must function, correcting this error, correcting that error, and giving a lot of cautions and a lot of warnings to Timothy about the things that are not allowed in God's church and the type of things that must be gotten out of God's church if it gets into God's church.

We've seen a lot of that already and that spirit continues as we look at 2 Timothy 3:1-5 and I've entitled this exegesis "Faithful Ministry in a Degenerate World." Faithful ministry in a degenerate world. Now since Adam and Eve sinned in the garden of Eden, this has been a degenerate world. Degenerate obviously means to decline; to have fallen beneath what is acceptable; instead of holy, unholy; instead of righteous, unrighteous; degenerating and continuing on down away from the standard of God and the, the values and the ethics of God and his word. And so it's always been a degenerate culture but some seasons seem to be much much worse than others. Our country is in a fast decline into degeneracy. We are way down the slippery slope from where we were as a country just a few decades ago and that's the culture Paul and Timothy are in. Uh, for example the, uh, one of the, the temples of the pagan, uh, worships, worshipers of the day was a temple where you worshiped God by relations with temple prostitutes, uh, gross and vulgar immoralities was just overwhelmingly prominent in cities like ancient Ephesus and in ancient Corinth. And so they're just covered with, uh, degeneracy but here's something Paul says to Timothy about being faithful in your ministry in a degenerate world.

Verse 1, chapter 3, 2 Timothy,

1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. 2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, 4 treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of

God, 5 holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

I. Seasons and cycles of wicked degeneracy. First of all, he says, "Now, Timothy, in the last days difficult times will come." The, the phrase "last days" is the idea of, of a time or seasons of time or an era. Now basically we would say the last days are from the time that the church age began and the New Testament era until Christ returns. Matter of fact, there's no other major event on God's calendar but Christ's return, that's why we're in the last days. I guess you could say we're in the last of the last days. But the word "times" can have the idea of a cycle or a cyclical occurrence and I think that's what we see in church history, we see it all through the biblical record. Uh, Israel would, uh, have something of a renewal or revival and then she would fall away, and then she would have a renewal and then she would fall away, and we see this in other parts of the world throughout history.

So there's going to be these seasons and cycles of increased societal degeneration and then some renewal, it never gets back where it ought to be, but some renewal happens and then a degeneration again. Who knows, we may be in the last degenerate period before Christ comes. Then again, God may do something we haven't seen. I love reading about the first Great Awakening in the mid part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century when Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley charged through Europe and the, the American Colonies preaching to these dead, unsaved, unreborn church members that they must repent and they must be born again, and the Baptist churches flourished out of that, and Methodism started out of that, and, and God did a great work and hundreds of thousands, if not millions, came to Christ. There was just a renewal of morality and purity. They talk about whole towns and cities where the taverns closed down, house of prostitution disappeared. Wouldn't you like to see something like that in this degenerate age? But overall during these last days, it's a degenerate world we find ourselves in and there are seasons and times, like in Paul and Timothy's day, when it was at one of its lowest ebbs.

So Paul writes and says it's going to be like this. Matter of fact, Paul's writings is full of this warning. Let me just glean through several quickly. 1 Timothy 4:1-3, "But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons." I'll just move on from there, move on to Romans 1:28-29, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper," that's our age, brothers and sisters, "being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips." And unfortunately and the reason why Paul's writing to Timothy so clear about this is this degenerate wickedness is constantly trying to find its way into God's church, and Satan's very conniving, he's very subtle and he's very clever about trying to bring it. He, he brings it into the church often cloaked under the veils of compassion and equality and care and lovingkindness but, brothers and sisters, nobody outta be, have more of those traits than God's church but we're to have those traits defined by truth not by human sentimentalities, to be careful about letting this stuff creep in.

For example, in 2 Timothy 4:3 he says, "For the time will come when they," he's talking about the professing church now, "For they will not endure sound doctrine," sound Bible preaching and teaching, they won't want that, "but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires." Wanting to have their ears tickled literally means they want the latest fad. "Preacher, don't get up there and just preach the word, what's the latest cool thing churches are doing today? What's the latest trend in culture that we can bring in and maybe entice more people in the world to come into God's church?" Well, we're not about enticing, uh, people to come into God's church. We're about winning people to Christ and then them coming into God's church. Enticing people in the flesh, flesh doesn't do anything as far as changing one's heart or changing their eternal destiny.

In Jeremiah and other places, the Old Testament prophets warned about this stuff that came into Israel. It shows the wickedness that took root there. In Jeremiah 23:14, "Also among the prophets of Jerusalem," those are God's people, "I have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; And they strengthen the hands of evildoers, So that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, And her inhabitants like Gomorrah." The prophet says we've come to a day in, in, in the, the Old Testament covenant relationship of God with Israel that Israel, God's people, actually had church leaders that would not confront people about sin but confirmed them and even applaud them in sin so that no one ever repented and got right with God. I can take you to many profession Christian congregations that that's basically what's happening in those congregations today. Nobody wants to come to church and feel convicted. Nobody wants to come to church and be a repentor and that's because so many of them don't know Christ. Once you know Christ, you want God's help and God's church and God's preacher to help you be a repentor and draw back near to the Lord. My brothers and sisters, the church is to be an oasis of sanity in a degenerate world.

Paul warned this very church, the church at Ephesus, as he met with the elders of this very church that Timothy is now pastoring and he said this in Acts 20:29-30, ""I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and from among your own selves men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them." So Paul was well-aware already in his ministry of planting these churches and appointing elders and appointing men like Timothy to oversee them that there's gonna be a battle on their hands to keep these savage wolves out of the church.

2 Peter 2:1-2 Peter warns, "But false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you," in the professing, uh, uh, body of Christendom, you might say, not necessarily in every single church but they'll try every single church, "who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. Many will follow their sensuality," notice that word sensuality, it's the idea of lasciviousness, giving over to wanton, uh, indulgence, in especially sexual immoralities, "and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned."

2 Timothy 3:13, again Paul says, "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." The degeneracy of the culture and the continual effort of Satan and his minions to bring it into God's church.

Well, he says not only in the last days will you have cycles of this, he amplifies this a little bit and he says difficult times will come. Difficult is the idea of perilous or grievous times. Actually in one of the gospels this word that's translated "difficult" in verse 1 of our text is translated "violence," violent times will come. The early Greek writer Plutarch used this very term to describe an ugly infected sore on one's body. He said that's the kind of the way this wickedness in the degenerative culture looks, like an ugly infected sore. Jamieson, Fausset-Brown in their excellent brief commentary said this, this is, describes a day with, with heathendom that has beast-like propensities. That's a very accurate way to put it. Heathendom where men and women and people in the world act like crude and brute beasts in their morals and in their conduct in the culture and one to another.

So the pastor of a New Testament church and those faithful church members will encounter wave after wave of degenerative wickedness creeping in and even arising from within the church, and for those who love Christ and those who love the truth and to those who love his church, the last days is no time for idle relaxation and for churches to be mildly biblical in what they're about as God's people. Well, the seasons and cycles of degenerative wickedness.

Now II, note the polluted stream from which wickedness flows. The polluted stream from which wickedness flows. He says there in verse 2, "For men will be lovers of self." I'm convinced based on the context and the overall balance of biblical truth that first phrase is first because it's the root of all the others. Lovers of self. This is the poisonous spring from which all other evils flow. These evils flow naturally from the unredeemed and unregenerate heart, that one that does not know Christ, the heart that is slavishly bound to the love of self and all the pleasures that center in self. Our natural hearts are warped and perverse. Our glorious good and gracious God made us to love him and to find our pleasures in him, but instead in our fallen condition we love only ourselves and we honor and, and, and, and look to our depraved hearts and only the restraining powers of God holds the unsaved man from the deepest depths of wickedness.

You might say, "I've known people who were not Christians and I've known people who are not, uh, uh, uh, converted or committed to Christ and they were decent moral human beings." Yes, that's the goodness of God and his restraining power. But you remove God's restraining power and see what happens to a culture and that's what's happening in our country. God's saying, "As your judgment I'm pulling back My restraint. I'm going to let you go in your lust and see where that gets you." And even when an unsaved man is held back some by God's restraint, nevertheless he cannot be improved by himself and he will cycle further downward in degeneracy the longer he lives and this is all because the root of his being is corrupt, the stream of his life is sin-polluted, the anchor of his life is not a good anchor, it's the broken anchor of self-love and self-worship.

In Matthew 22:37 Jesus said the greatest commandment is "to love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." No man can do this. No man even desires to do this. Men on their own do not wake up in the morning and say, "Oh, my God, how wonderful You are! And all the moments of my night and all the moments of my day are to love You and honor You because You're worthy of such devotion!" No man naturally does that. We're right the opposite and why is this? Because our core nature instead of flying the banner of the love of God flying in our hearts is the banner of the love of self and the worship of self, and what a twisted logic this is because the love of self is the sure way to destroy yourself. Only the love of God as our primary motive and desire can bring life and health and peace to ourselves. Only the new birth, genuine Christian conversion, can take us from the state of being centered on and enslaved to the love of self, to being centered on and enslaved to the love of God. Those that are not converted are left to themselves, they're left to the love of self and the worship of self. This is their normal path and this is their inevitable downfall.

Now these wicked traits that we're gonna see laid out in front of us as we continue in a moment, all of these described in the chapter is the inevitable fruit that comes from the love and worship of self. In today's world we have such wicked traits being manifested before us. We have those who reject the Creator's design for men and women, that abounds in our culture, divorce abounds in our culture, adultery abounds in our culture, fornication abounds in our culture, unnatural sexual lust abounds in our culture, the brazen rejection of one's created gender, that abounds in our culture. We glory in victor, victim-hood and the manipulation of so-called oppression, especially by politicians, to gain wealth and power, that kind of thing abounds in our culture. Criminal activity abounds in our culture. Hatred abounds in our culture. Abortion, the killing of the unborn abounds in our culture. And we could go on and on. These are the fruits of self-love and self-worship.

It was Satan's love of himself that fueled his rebellion. It was Adam and Eve's love of self that led to their rebellion and their descendants are born with this same sin disease unless they are rescued by Christ. John MacArthur points out how these things creep into the church, this self-love and all the wicked characteristics of self-love. He says it's come in and been welcomed into the church through modern psychology; that's where we got the terms self-esteem and self-worth and self-sufficient and positive self-image. All have come into the church almost unchanged from modern psychology. By the way, how in the world are you gonna have a health, healthy self-image and preach the truth of the doctrine of sin? You don't need self-image you need a Christ-image. You should say, "Christ is in me. Christ is my righteousness. Christ is my life and I have a wonderful image of Him. Well, no hope for me naturally." That's the Christian truth.

So this stuff is clever. It comes in through, "Oh, we're helping people. We're, we're, we're, we're healing the hurting." Well, temporarily maybe, permanently you're not, not with things that are outside of biblical truth. The phrase self-love has become the mantra of this modern age and, again, self-love always runs parallel with self-worship, they always go together. And today especially among the radical left of our day, we hear the phrase that, "Well, this is my truth. This is my truth." They caustically reject that truth is

objective, it comes from God, it's outside of them, it doesn't come from within them. Jesus said in John 14:6, "But I am the way, the truth, and the life."

So we see this terrible plot, this horrible condition of the world and you wonder in a million years why would God so love the world. Well, it's not because the world's lovely, it's because God is wonderful. He's bigger than we are. He's greater than we are. He's love is deeper than our love and more glorious than our love. He could love even the most unlovely, that includes you and that includes me.

III. Let's unpack this and I'll go through it rather quickly. I call this a dissection of a degenerate season. He's saying, "Timothy, this is the way this world is and it's just gonna get more worse. Worse and worse, Timothy. Men will be lovers of self." Then he goes on to the first one there, lovers of money, and I think lovers of money comes second because it's a primary tool of the worship of self and the love of self. Now let's be reminded again, having money is not the same as loving money. The love of money is not the same as having even a lot of money, even the abject poor can commit the sin of loving money, they just want somebody else's because they don't have their own. So it's a heart condition.

Proverbs 10:22 says, "It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it." Proverbs 10:4 says, "Poor is he who works with a negligent hand, But the hand of the diligent makes rich." Proverbs 28:20 reminds us, "A faithful man will abound with blessings, But he who makes haste to be rich will not go unpunished." Making haste is the idea that you forget God in your quest to make money, you forget ethics and morality and, and consort to fraud and deceit and unethical ways. That will be punished by God. You see, the love of money is when there's an absence of the love of God and the presence of the love of self so that you vi, readily rather violate Scripture to gain money and then to keep the money you gain and all of this, again, is out a heart, out of a heart that does not love and treasure God but loves and treasures self.

The love of money is when our primary motive is not how can God be served by my wealth but how can I serve myself by my wealth. In fact, the whole socialist, communist movement is centered on the love of money and you might amplify that out to, uh, covetousness. If you remove the sin of the love of money and the sin of covetousness, you remove the, the, the systems of socialism and communism from your culture and, of course, that's never gonna happen.

Now the rich, the Bible says, in the church are commanded to be generous and joyous in helping the less fortunate but they're not condemned for having more money than others. Throughout the ages God has had very wealthy servants and God has had very poor servants and many servants in between, but in our world today the love of money abounds and far too often the love of money is too prominent in God's church.

Secondly, he says boastful. That's the next trait here, boastful. Boastful has the idea of being an empty pretender. Isn't this a case of all non-lovers of God, they're empty pretenders? Oh, they boast of wisdom but they know not God and only God has wisdom.

They boast of power but they have no strength before God from whom they originated and to whom they will give an account one day. They boast of attractiveness yet what beauty they have will fade and be gone. They boast of achievement but it's like Paul said, "My achievements are nothing more than dung. I am what I am by the grace of God," Paul said. They boast of righteousness and God says all their righteousness is filthy rags, it's all empty, it's all false, it all fails. They're boastful, they're empty pretenders and in one of the ways that's so obvious and these traits definitely overlap and interleave but the arrogance behind their boasting, "We feel so deeply of our narrative and our viewpoint, you must agree." It's just boastful. Boastful. These are not gospel-humbled people. They, they try to come into the church wearing a thin veneer of Christianity but not the real thing.

Closely related again, he continues on, the next trait, arrogant. These are arrogant. It means arrogant in thought and conduct. They put themselves above others. Uh, in counseling with some of our churches in our fellowship, we, uh, had a brother who had a, a young lady in the church and she became very committed to the social justice movement and very committed to what's called the woke movement, or even the woke religion is what I think it is in many ways. And, uh, and by the way, the church and me personally and us all adamantly oppose any real racism or injustice or evil that's anywhere committed at any time, period, but when a movement comes out of the world based on the wisdom of the world, it always has terrible flaws in it. And what happened, they wanted to bring the secularist, unregenerate, world's wisdom on these things and then bring it into the church. Well, there was a young lady in one of our churches out there who came in and she was beginning to demand the senior pastor and the elders, "You must follow this new movement. The church must change everything and become woke and to get on the social justice, uh, bandwagon." And the pastor said, "Look, we agree with you on some of these issues. Where there's observable provable injustice or oppression, we condemn it, but we're not going to follow this whole line of thinking because a lot of it is centered in ungodly viewpoints and ungodly philosophies." But she insisted, "No, you're, you're not as spiritual or godly as I am if you don't change the church." Now she didn't say that but that's what she meant and eventually she became so forceful that she and her family had to be removed from the church. And at the root of it, what is it? It's arrogance. Arrogance, "I have a new..." You mean, after 2,000 years of, of church history, we've got 21 year old girls that are finding truth we all missed? Now don't misunderstand what I'm saying. You listen to my sermons over the last 41 years and you find a time when in the slightest way I've given the tiniest encouragement to any real injustice or, or prejudice or evil against anyone, anywhere, anytime.

It's wicked, it's not of God but now these movements are a type of justice and compassion that has the warped wisdom of the world and not the true wisdom of God's word. I'll give you one quick example of that. The Bible says if you don't work, you don't eat. Now that's a figure of speech, it doesn't apply to every single case. I'm not gonna let a suffering person whoever they are who's sick and can't work, and even if they were a sluggard in their life, we'd still love them and help them, amen? Show mercy as much as we can but generally those who are able to work ought to work. We have a spirit in our age that's based on non-wisdom and not wisdom. They call it compassion, it's not compassion, it's

beneath the dignity of mankind to hand out to a person who's able-bodied and well able to take care of themselves. You're hurting them, not helping them.

The next trait is revilers. It comes from the Greek word blasphemos or blasphemous. It's the idea of abusive slander. It means if you confront this person, if you reprove this person, or if you just disagree with this person, you're gonna get a, abusive slander back in return. They don't listen to anyone. They will not listen to the truth. All they want to is to fire back at you and bully to win their way. This reminds me of the cancel culture of our present age when some deem some of us unworthy to even be heard, gotta shut you down, gotta cancel you out. And if you don't walk to their narrative and, and agree with their values and their viewpoints, why they don't consider you worthy to have a business. They'll try to shut your business down. That's the spirit of a reviler. They will maliciously slander you and try to ruin you. Now that's not just in the world but sometimes that comes into the church, at least the professing church. Paul says it ought not to be this way.

Well, the next one he says is disobedience to parents. Now the children's rights movement, uh, took hold some years ago and over and against the parental responsibility, uh, I wouldn't call it movement but foundation God's laid down. We even have the FBI sicced on parents because parents are going to school board meetings and, and demanding certain things not be taught to their children. And by the way, parents have every right to do that, but we have this spirit, this, this system in our degenerative age of, "No, children know what's best for them. Their parents don't know." A young person's rebellion against authority is applauded and, and is defended. And we have a, a bill in the state of Florida by Ron Desantis, a man I have a good bit of respect for, who says, "We're not going to allow our teachers to teach sexuality of any kind to kindergartners through third graders." Who in heaven's name would have a problem with that? I'm that child's parent. I can teach that to them and my church will teach that to them and the state has no business doing it. Disobedience to parents. It's, it's all under that heading. Children, and, and these, these evil, they know children are vulnerable and they know they can get to them and lead them on the wrong path quickly and want to teach children about homosexuality and transgenderism at the smallest ages and against parents' wishes. There was conversion therapy law passed, an anti-conversion therapy law passed in Canada and if you read the law it looks like you could very easily be interpreted that in the church if we repent, preach repent, sinners to repent and reform their lives, we can be guilty of convert, conversion therapy and be violating the law in Canada.

Well, disobedience to parents. The next one is ungrateful. This is quite self-explanatory. These are those who feel that they are owed everything from everyone, being so consumed with self-love and self-worship they have no debt of gratitude to God or to anyone else. They've built an altar in their hearts and they bow down to it, that is, to themselves. This is the first cousin to much of the victim-hood we see in our culture today.

And then he says unholy, fallen deep into self-love and self-worship they reject all restraint and indulge in gross immoralities. This word is used in the Bible of those who



commit incest. They deify themselves and glory in their own perverse lusts and have no shame and no semblance of decency. We are a people today in our country that have ignored these unholy things and then accepted these unholy things and now we are glorifying unholy things: divorce, adultery, fornication, homosexuality. We take children to see drag queen performances. We teach children to accept these immoral lifestyles that are promoted. We glory in the killing of unborn children. It may be legal but it is not holy. It's unholy. Unholy and God forbid God's church give an open arm to any of these unholy things. Do we struggle? Yes, we do. Do we sin? Yes, we do. But we will not stand up and lack the resolve to condemn it and call it what it is and command our own hearts to humble ourselves and repent of the unholiness that may rise up in our own hearts. God help the church to be a guard against and an oasis of sanity in this world of insanity.

Unloving is the next one. This is, this word is the idea of the natural love a person feels for others that they ought to naturally love, like members of your family or those in the same cause with you. There's an affinity, an affection that's just naturally there. But what Paul is saying is some go so far in self-love and self-worship that they even lose the love they should have for those that they should naturally love. They just become brazen and selfish and they see those in their family and those around them as only people to be used for their own selfish gain. What could be more unloving, what could be more unnatural than a woman killing her unborn child? That's a brazen hardness against the one that ought to have the most compassion, love and care, a mother's heart for her own child. We have an unloving world, that's because we have an unholy world.

Irreconcilable is the next trait. It means without libation because in the ancient world when two parties came together, were reconciled and formed a covenant, they poured out a libation to celebrate and seal the unity of the covenant. But without libation it means, "I refuse to be reconciled. I refuse to get along. I refuse to compromise. It's my way or the highway. We have our narrative and our viewpoint and that's it, period." They refuse to humble themselves for the good of others. They just will not reconcile. Now let me say to you, brothers and sisters, that such a spirit is the exact opposite of Christian love. Christian love says, "Okay, I'll deny myself to have unity with my brother." You see, there's no such things as two genuine Christians being irreconcilable. It's impossible. Two people who've been crucified with Christ, two people who've died to self can always learn to get along but he says in this day there'll be a spirit of harsh, hard division and a refusal to be reconciled. And I, I'm telling you, it's, I have a lot of brothers and sisters and friends who have darker skin than I've got and I'm telling you, I love them and feel a oneness with them a lot more than I do a lot of people that have the same color skin as I've got. But all this movement and all this work and all this notion to pit one color of skin against another color of skin, it's evil, it's an irreconcilable spirit. It certainly should not have a trace of it in the church.

Malicious gossips is the next trait. These are those who make it a point to harm another person out of jealousy or hatred or whatever else. They somehow have a perverse pleasure in hurting others. This word comes from the same word that's, uh, used 34 times

in the New Testament to define Satan or refer to Satan. He, he's, he's the malicious one out to hurt and to harm.

The next trait is without self-control, denotes incontinence, can't control. They throw off all self-restraint. They have no embarrassment and just want to indulge themselves in whatever lust comes across their depraved heart and depraved mind. These are those who'd engage in all sorts of criminal activities. No self-restraint. All sorts of immoralities. No self-restraint. We've watched video after video on our televisions of these mobs crashing into stores in California, just having big sacks and just piling the goods in their sacks and just more or less walking out the door. Some of them fill up cars and they don't run, they just walk out the door because they know they won't be prosecuted. No self-control. And our government applauds it and enables it. They glory in their liberty and in their freedoms but they commit gross immoralities and they're not free and they don't have liberty, they're bound and they're slaves to sin.

The next trait is brutality. It has the idea of savagery. It means to attack and devour at will. This is where self-love and self-worship gets one if it's left unchecked. Again, is not abortion a brutality? Is it not savagery? Is that not the spirit of our age?

And then haters of good is the next trait. These are completely warped mindsets. These are those that revile and attack that which is decent, upright and good and they glory in that which is bad and evil. Romans 12:9 says we are supposed to abhor evil and cling to what is good, and Isaiah 5:20 warns, "Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Those who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; Those who substitute bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter!" What an age we have when God's word says that the haters of good. There's a spirit of it in our world today that hates anything that's good. You go out in almost any public arena, now we may still have some, uh, vestiges of Christian consensus here in the Bible belt, I don't know but in most arenas in the culture today bring up that you believe in biblical morality, you won't get another word out. The, the revilers will shut you down right there because they hate what's good. They hate it.

Now what's behind all this? I'm getting away from my notes now, that's when it gets good. Why do they hate it? Because God gave them a conscience. The law of God, the Bible says, is written in their hearts and they're convicted enough and they need the government and the schools and the teachers and if possible the churches to commend and, and condone their wickedness so their conscience will not bother them so bad. Help me dull it. Our job is to love them. How do we love them? Give them the truth in love, that will expose the evil and get them to Christ, Christ, the one who can cleanse them and forgive them. You know what this world needs? Peace and love. Your sin will not get you there. Are you hearing me? Your sin, your indulgence, your rebellion, will not get you to peace. That's why you go for more sin and more sin and more sin and more sin because you're looking for something that's not there. Only Christ. If we love them, we don't affirm them in the thing that's going to destroy them, we call them from it to Christ who's the lover of sinners like me and you and you and me.

Back to my notes. Treacherous. Treacherous is the next trait. It is the idea of a traitor, people who just turn on those they ought to be defending. And I throughout this message, of course, have talked about the culture and the church, culture again right now. In our country today there are those who have thrived under the freedoms of this country. They have thrived under the liberties this country affords. They've been blessed by free market capitalism. No country in the world has more people come from nothing to something financially than they have in America, and though they've thrived under that, these people are treacherous in their spirit toward our country. They want to, to destroy it. They hate our country, "Let's tear it down." Now listen to me: America needs repentance, America needs reformation, but we need to turn back to our founding principles. I'm not a scholar on Martin Luther King, Jr. and I, I don't agree with his biblical theology. He had gone liberal in some areas. But I do think if you study Martin Luther King's speeches and writings, he will say the founding documents of this country are wonderful and good, we just need to live them out, we just need to live up to them, where I'd say, amen! That's true. We don't need to destroy them, we need to get back to them. But a treacherous spirit says, "No, let's destroy everything. Let's just take it all apart and let's start over with something brand new." And of course, what's brand new? It's a socialism-communist system. And by the way and I want you to listen to what I'm saying. Now you listen real clear what I'm about to say. I am for communism. Do you hear me? I am for communism if Jesus Christ is leading it and he will one day. But anyone with less virtue and moral integrity and ethical uprightness than Christ is not qualified to rule others in that absolute sense. I'll take freedom until you can get Jesus running everything and he'll come and run it when he's good and ready when it's time.

I heard this just recently, a historian said this and it just kinda took me back and he was talking about, like me, with all of our errors and failures and there's stuff that sickens all of us in our country, there are injustices, there are prejudices, there's junk out there that we outta always fight against but he said, and I want you to hear this because it was so powerful when it hit me, he said name another country in the world from any time in history that recently had a two-term President whose very ancestors could have been the slaves of the first President. Do you hear what I said? He said name any other country that showed that kind of progress that just had a two-term President, Barack Obama, whose ancestors may or could have been the slaves of our President George Washington because he had slaves. How could that be? Because those men even though they did not live up to it, wrote founding documents that taught the equality of all men before God. We need to live up to it, not destroy it. We don't need to be traitors about it, we need to be reformers of what we have but there are many who don't want to help us live up to our Constitution, they want to destroy everything and start over.

But now back to the main point of Paul's argument here, this kind of spirit comes into the church if we're not careful, if we're not diligent. Jesus himself said in Matthew 10:21-22, "Brother will betray brother to death," what's that? That's in the church, "and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents and cause them to be put to death. You will be hated by all because of My name, but it is the one who has endured to the end who will be saved." Now I, I don't know, humanly speaking, of a greater love than a love for parents for their child but if one of my children stands up and say, "I denounce Christ.

I'm turning to a life of sin and wickedness." I have nothing to do with it. I'll say, "I love you," and with tears in my eyes, "I'll love you all my days but you and I are not in union with your renouncement of my Savior." And if that's not where you are, you're not a Christian or you're, you're a weak one at best. Now listen, the Bible gives us clear instructions. If you have a lost spouse, you're to go to the ends of the earth and back to stay with that lost spouse and try to win them to Christ, but if they decide they must abandon you because you love Christ, then you're to say, "Then you must go. I don't want you to go but I will not denounce Christ for even my family."

Well, we come to our...wait a minute, let me make sure if I got my notes right here. Have you not surmised there's a lot of notes here. Uh, reckless is the next trait. It means to be without caution, to be headstrong, to be so consumed in self-love that you disregard any care and concerns for others because all you care about is pursuing your indulgences. You know, we, we have a, a younger generation, I'd say 18 to even 40 now that they don't care much about getting married, they sort of, they don't want to have children and, by the way, there's a lot of people that want to have children don't want to be parents, amen? Church, we have children and we're gonna be parents. But there's, there's a, there's a group in that 18 to 40 year age bracket, they're just hedonist. "We want to indulge in every worldly pleasure we can possibly find." And many of them, in effect, say, "And it's the government's job to facilitate this or we're being discriminated against." It, it's just reckless self-indulgence.

Conceited. The word conceited is the idea of being veiled in smoke. They've got fog in their heads. They can't think clearly because they think there's something the facts don't bear out. They're puffed up. Where the word puffed up comes from, they're in a fog. And these kind of spirits and attitudes can get in the church and cause great harm.

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, um, is the next trait. In Luke 16:13 it tells us "no one can serve two masters, he'll either hate the one or love the other or else be just as devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon." You cannot love pleasure first and primarily and love God. Now when you have a, an inner love of self and a worship of self, all you know and all you see is worldly pleasure. Now a Christian can enjoy the common grace given in earthly blessings but he does not love or worship those earthly blessings. Matter of fact, when he enjoys those earthly blessings he worships God and thanks God for ever getting those or having those.

Well, that's a dissection of those traits. Now real quickly. IV. And I'm circling the field about to land, all right? The rigorous requirement to guard the church. We begin in verse 4 where he says these are those who are "holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power." And he's talking about these, these, folks with many of these traits and many of these characteristics will, will try to come into the church under the form of godliness, form means outer shell only. They just have the outer shell. Godliness means piety. Only the outer shell of godliness or piety but they do not have the substance. Titus 1:16, "They profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed." Perfect balance to what he's

talking about here when he says they only have the form of godliness. They, they're a sham and they're a, a knock-off. They're not the real thing.

Verse 5 says and they have denied its power, form of godliness although they have denied its power. It means they've renounced the need and have no desire for God's saving Son and God's saving power. They do not know and do not want to know the regenerating, uh, sanctifying work of the Spirit of God. At one level or another in various varieties, they live out the wicked traits we've described above and have no desire to repent. Why do they have no desire to repent? Why do people keep living in such corrupt immoralities? They have no ability to repent. They have no power to stop and so they're enslaved and so they want to justify it because only if Christ comes in and changes them do they begin to have the power to walk out of that wickedness. They've deceived themselves like Satan and they've deceived others when they try to come into the church like Satan does. The Bible says he clothes himself in the form of an angel of light yet in reality he's the imp of darkness. Well, they put on this form of godliness but it's but a lie. Their teaching and their lifestyles are inconsistent with one who's been changed by the power of God.

And here's where we see that rigorous requirement to guard the church. In verse 5 he continues on and says, "Avoid such men as these." That phrase "Avoid such men as these" is, is an imperative. It, it's a command. It implies that some of these are gonna get into the church and too often pastors today try to pacify these power-mongers that sneak in and they try to, to honor these men and tolerate these men and women, by the way, but that, in itself, is a sin on the part of the pastor. Why? Because Paul says avoid them. Avoid them. Verse 5, it's a present middle imperative which means the subject acts on itself. "You, Timothy, you make sure you keep this out of the church." That's what he's saying. "Timothy, grab yourself by the nape of the neck and get about the work of guarding God's church. Rigorous. You have a rigorous requirement to stand against this stuff taking root in the church."

Do we have these spirits in the church? Brothers and sisters, you've got many of these spirits in your heart right now but they don't dominate you. They're not the true you. They're a part of your old unredeemed humanity that you repent of and try to push behind and walk on in God's truth. What Paul is saying, "This better not take root, Timothy. Don't let it get established. You grab yourself and you cause yourself, you make yourself keep this out of the church." Do you know why? It's not fun, it's not easy, and as a personal testimony after 41 years, it's tiring. Sometimes the elders deal with many things you know nothing of but we keep it from getting a root started in the church. So sometimes we have to grab ourselves by the napes of the neck and say this has gotta be dealt with.

I saw a coach down here, Coach Statem is the vice-chairman of our elder body and it's been many many years ago now and I, I took my July break two weeks' vacation, two weeks of study break and I came back in and there had been two people in our church that we had been dealing with for, I think coach would say years just struggling and loving them and counseling them and they'd just keep pushing into their sin and keep not

raising our admonitions and our help and just living in open rebellion. And boy, it was just on my heart, I knew it had to be dealt with and I came back in from my July break and coach said, "Hey, pastor, while you were gone we removed those two people from church membership so you wouldn't have to fool with it." Do you know how rare that is? I thought, "Praise God, that's a blessing."

Avoid these people, Paul says. This requires having a sound biblical policy for membership and a sound biblical policy for removal from membership. John MacArthur gave this test for these false teachers who have many of these traits in their life and, by the way, these don't come out all at once, you've gotta be around them a while and this stuff starts popping out of their lives and you begin to think, "Now that's not the conduct, those are not the character traits of a man of God or a woman of God." MacArthur gives these three tests: test their creed, what's their doctrinal statement, what's their doctrinal position; test their character, does, does any of these things start coming out without a humble repentance? It might come out of us but we ought to be humbly repentant, amen? But the false teacher, he kinda defends himself and excuses himself. Check his character, check or check his creed rather, check his character, then check his converts, long-term key word there, key phrase, long-term what do those who follow him look like because that will pretty well expose false teachers.

Well, these are part of the things we must be about to have a faithful ministry in a degenerate world. Can I just thank you for these years of standing with us as we strive imperfectly, yes, but strive to build a church that's based on these truths because you've done that as a church and I praise God for you. Now child of God, are some of these traits too prominent in your heart and in your, your life? Then let's deal with it this morning. Let's be a repenter, not a reviler, not an excuser of our heart and our conduct.

Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build My church and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it." It's not always easy work but we do win. We do win.