

“Religion Without Power”
2 Timothy 3:5
(Preached at Trinity August 21, 2022)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. In these verses Paul is describing great perilous times that would come upon the church. There are several truths important to this passage:
 - A. These are dangers within the church – not without. Paul is talking about counterfeit Christianity – Ungodliness among professing believers.
 - B. These dangers will exist the entire age of the church.
 - C. These dangerous conditions will grow worse and worse.
2. Too often we emphasize persecution from without as being the greatest danger to the church. This has never been the case.
 - A. Persecution is to always be expected by God's people. We should always be prepared to face opposition as we stand upon God's truth.
1 Peter 4:12 NAU - "Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal among you, which comes upon you for your testing, as though some strange thing were happening to you;"
 - B. Jesus said regarding persecution that those who face it are blessed.
Matthew 5:11-12 NAU - "Blessed are you when *people* insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me.
¹² "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you."
 - C. Peter described persecution as a trial more precious than gold.
1 Peter 1:6-7 NAU - "In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, ⁷ so that the proof of your faith, *being* more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ;"
3. Our greatest danger is from unbelievers within the church who pretend to follow Christ. In **Verse 5** Paul summarizes these counterfeit Christians that bring great peril to the church of Christ.
"holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these."

I. "holding to a form of godliness"

μόρφωσις – carries the idea of a mere semblance or outward form

A. These counterfeit Christians have all the outward appearance as being true, but it is just a veneer.

1. Like cheap furniture – looks like wood but is only plastic, or a thin layer of wood over particle board.

You have to watch for words like, wood grain, wood tone, veneer
They are cheap imitations.

2. These counterfeit Christians come to church, they may tithe, they can sometimes act quite pious, but they have evil hearts.

3. They can sometimes be quite strict in the areas of the law that they prefer or in performing particular rituals.

B. They are outward professors only – They give only lip service.

Isaiah 29:13 NAU - "Then the Lord said, "Because this people draw near with their words And honor Me with their lip service, But they remove their hearts far from Me, And their reverence for Me consists of tradition learned *by rote*,"

Titus 1:16-2:1 NAU - "They profess to know God, but by *their* deeds they deny *Him*, being detestable and disobedient and worthless for any good deed. "

1. Religion without holiness is empty vanity

James 1:26 NAU - "If anyone thinks himself to be religious, and yet does not bridle his tongue but deceives his *own* heart, this man's religion is worthless."

2. It is only a form of godliness – a cheap imitation

From the conclusion of Part 1 of Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (concerning *Ignorance*, who trusted in the feelings of his heart)

"When he was come up to the Gate, he looked up to the writing that was above, and then began to knock, supposing that Entrance should have been quickly administered to him: but he was asked by the men that looked over to top of the Gate, Whence come you? And what would you have? He answered, I have eat and drank in the presence of the King, and he has taught in our streets. Then they asked him for his Certificate, that they might go in and shew it to the King; so he fumbled in his bosom for one, and found none. They said they, Have you none? But the man answered never a word. So they told the King, but He would not come down to see him, but commanded the shining ones that conducted *Christian and Hopeful* to the city to go out and take Ignorance and bind him hand and foot, and have him away. Then they took him up, and carried him through the air to the door that I saw in the side of the Hill, and put him in there.

Then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of Destruction."¹

¹ Bunyan, John, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2009), pages 188-189.

- C. The Bible refers to these counterfeits as hypocrites
1 Timothy 4:1-2 NAU - "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, ² by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron,"
 ὑπόκρισις – the acting of a stage player - an actor who dresses up and memorizes his lines to play the part of someone he is not – convincing.
 It is also interesting that it is made up of two Greek words
 ὑπό - under κρίσις - judgment, damnation
1. A religious hypocrite is one who performs an outward religion without an inward conversion. He is only dressed up in a Christian costume – But he is not genuine. And he is already under judgement.
 2. We can see this demonstrated with Ananias and Sapphira – Acts 5:1-11
 - a. They made an outward show desiring others to see their spirituality
 - b. Their love for money brought them to conspire in hypocrisy.
 - c. They lied to God.
- II. "although they have denied its power"
- A. They lack the reality of salvation through the sacrifice of Christ.
 It is Religion without a Redeemer.
1 Corinthians 1:18 NAU - "For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God."
1 Corinthians 2:5 NAU - "so that your faith would not rest on the wisdom of men, but on the power of God."
Romans 1:16 NAU - "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek."
1 Thessalonians 1:5 NAU - "for our gospel did not come to you in word only, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction; just as you know what kind of men we proved to be among you for your sake."
- B. We are saved by the power of God – HIM ALONE!
1. It is not us plus His power – It is Him and Him alone – His Work, His
 2. It is false to teach that God has done all that He can and we must now do the rest.
 3. Our testimony must always be, "I am what I am by the grace of God"
- C. The counterfeit Christian denies the power of the gospel by proudly relying upon his own merit, good intentions.
1. He has a form of godliness and confuses it for the genuine.
 2. He is like *Ignorance* in *Pilgrim's Progress* who stands at the gate without a Certificate – the reality of saving faith in Jesus Christ.

3. He is like the man who goes to the wedding without the proper garment **Matthew 22:9-14 NAU** - "Go therefore to the main highways, and as many as you find *there*, invite to the wedding feast.' ¹⁰ "Those slaves went out into the streets and gathered together all they found, both evil and good; and the wedding hall was filled with dinner guests. ¹¹ "But when the king came in to look over the dinner guests, he saw a man there who was not dressed in wedding clothes, ¹² and he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without wedding clothes?' And the man was speechless. ¹³ "Then the king said to the servants, 'Bind him hand and foot, and throw him into the outer darkness; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' ¹⁴ "For many are called, but few *are* chosen."

III. The counterfeit Christian lacks the graces of the Christian life

- A. He lacks the power of the indwelling Spirit. What is this power?
 1. It is the power necessary to produce holiness.
 - a. This one continues in sin because he can't help but sin – he is a servant of sin.
 - b. The Holy Spirit must renew us and grant us faith and repentance – the counterfeit Christian knows nothing of this.
 2. It is the power necessary for understanding the truth
 - a. The Holy Spirit enables us to understand on a spiritual level.
 - b. This is why it is so dangerous to the church for a counterfeit Christian to become a teacher.
 3. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we have a desire for spiritual things – Loving those things that the Holy Spirit loves. The counterfeit Christian does not have this capacity.
 - a. He cannot control his carnal lusts.
 - b. He will show little interest in Bible study.
 - c. Worship will be boring – he will daydream through preaching.
 4. It is by the power of the Holy Spirit that we have hope in every trial. **Romans 15:13 NAU** - "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."
 - a. You won't see this living hope in a pretender.
 - b. The genuine believer will not become disappointed with his life in Christ. He will not lose his joy when life turns to affliction.
 - c. This cannot be artificially created – when they die they face nothing but the fear of standing before a holy God.
- B. The counterfeit Christian lacks access to God in prayer. **1 John 5:13-14 NAU** - "These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. ¹⁴ This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us."
 1. No one has access to the Father but through Christ - **John 14:6**
 2. It is perilous to a church to add members who have not access to God.

- C. The Counterfeit Christian lacks confidence in testimony –
1. You cannot witness what you have not seen or experienced.
 2. This is why the counterfeit is not mighty in testifying of Christ.
 3. Christians are witnesses to the living Christ – the counterfeit Christian has nothing to testify.
- D. The Counterfeit Christian lacks the power to persevere.
1. Our power to persevere lies in the power of God in us
 2. He keeps us and preserves us.
1 Peter 1:3-5 NAU - "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to *obtain* an inheritance *which is* imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are protected by the power of God through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time."
- IV. Paul ends with a solemn word: "Avoid such men as these"
- 2 Thessalonians 3:14 NAU** - "If anyone does not obey our instruction in this letter, take special note of that person and do not associate with him, so that he will be put to shame."
- A. Paul has been telling us of the great danger that would come upon the church due to the presence of these counterfeit Christians.
1. They dishonor God and bring His displeasure upon the church.
 2. They are a constant source of temptation for the saints because they are unspiritual - The unholy always try to lower the standard.
 3. They hinder the church's worship.
 4. They harm the church's witness.
- What are we to do?
- B. Paul is telling us that we must withdraw ourselves from them.
1. Doesn't that mean that we have to withdraw from almost everyone?
 No – only the ungodly people pretending to be Christians.
1 Corinthians 5:9-11 NAU - "I wrote you in my letter not to associate with immoral people; ¹⁰ I *did* not at all *mean* with the immoral people of this world, or with the covetous and swindlers, or with idolaters, for then you would have to go out of the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote to you not to associate with any so-called brother if he is an immoral person, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or a swindler-- not even to eat with such a one."
 2. We must be careful in how we receive members.
 3. We must exercise church discipline upon gross offenders.
 4. We must contain them. What does this mean?
 In spite of our caution and care in how we receive people into our membership, an unbeliever may have joined our church. We must not allow them into the leadership of our church. They must not be considered as deacons, as teachers.

5. And we must pray for one another, that the power of God might work mightily in us all.

Ephesians 3:14-19 NAU - "For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, ¹⁵ from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, ¹⁶ that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; *and* that you, being rooted and grounded in love, ¹⁸ may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God."