

9/15/24 - 2 Tim. 3:1-5 - "Calling a Spade, a Spade"

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[0:00] Today's reading is from 2 Timothy 3, verses 1-5, but for context, we'll be starting from chapter 2, verses 23 onwards.

Have nothing to do with foolish, ignorant controversies. You know that they breed quarrels. And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome, but kind to everyone, able to teach patiently, enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness.

God may perhaps grant them repentance, leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil after being captured by him to do his will.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-esteem.

Self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power, avoid such people.

[1:16] That is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. I got to hand it to this praise team. They came together this week.

Praise the Lord. I just ask everyone, just as a side note, to keep Kimberly in prayer. She's dealing with a pinched nerve right now.

And just mobility is an issue. And so I just said, hey, let's remove all responsibilities so she can just sit home, rest.

She's on muscle relaxers and things like that. So if you get a weird text from Kimberly, I don't know. It might be the muscle relaxer. It might be Kimberly. You don't know. But she has been serving so faithfully.

She's here when she's sick. She's here when she's well. And so praise the Lord for Kimberly. And so a time of rest. Maybe it's what the Lord just wanted for her. And so in this time, thank you, Mary Jane and Dan for stepping up within the past three days.

[2:28] And so you got the church singing this morning. Amen. And so praise the Lord. And so we go into this passage today.

We're continuing in the series in 2 Timothy. And last week we were challenged by the charge of gentleness, of handling ourselves gently in the midst and in the face of opposition.

Talking to humanity here. We struggle with that, don't we? And Paul calls for gentleness. And while he calls for gentleness, though he does call for gentleness, there are times when we find that the truth of Scripture is not so gentle.

Kind of sharp. It offends. However, we must present those corrections to opponents always in a spirit of gentleness.

And that's what we saw last week. And today, we enter a passage where truth doesn't seem so gentle.

[3:46] It nearly falls into the preconceived notion that the church is a bunch of hypocrites and judgmental. Today's text has a laundry list of attributes of false teachers.

How about that? How about that? It falls right into those preconceived notions. And these attributes affect everything from the behavior of false teachers, whether it's behavior seen, observed by actual evidence, or unseen behind the scenes.

And we might ask, is this being judgmental? Paul, are you on your muscle relaxers? Well, that's the point.

Christians must be aware of being judgmental. But Christians must be more aware of how to judge rightly.

There is a difference between being judgmental or judging rightly. Especially for Timothy. Especially for Timothy. Young pastor in Ephesus.

[5 : 00] Paul, in his other letters, has addressed the importance of judging rightly. We saw that in, or we see this in 1 Corinthians chapter 5.

Where he gets into this messed up church, messed up situation, says, don't judge outsiders, essentially. But those within the church we're supposed to judge rightly.

And this is certainly what Paul's motive is for Timothy today. To return to Ephesus equipped to judge rightly those within.

Right? But do we know how to judge rightly? Have we grown sort of tolerant rather than tough upon those who deviate from sound doctrine?

Who deviate from the truth of scripture and just give them some allowance and leniency that a broken clock is always right twice a day?

[6 : 03] Is that what he's telling Timothy to do with Hymenaeus and these guys in the church? And so upon this sort of way that we get tolerance and we see the best of people, rather than just call it for what it is, I think that we will be challenged today.

The sermon titled, Is Calling a Spade a Spade? And that's an idiom that means to speak directly and truthfully about something.

Don't give excuses. And even if it's unpleasant, even if it's impolite or even coarse. And so what we'll see developed by the end of our time, and we'll keep tilling that soil all the way through, is that God's word is our tool of right judgment.

God's word is our tool of right judgment. I'm going to break this into three sections. And I thought it was the most helpful way, but I think there's kind of like two sections that we could have broken into.

But in order for us to follow and really reinforce what Paul's getting at, I believe three would be helpful. So let's pray as we go into this and wrestle with this.

[7 : 21] And I invite you to pray with me. Father, thank you for giving us the tool to judge rightly so that we are equipped to know you, to know the God who has revealed himself, not through dreams and all these uncertainties, but through the written word.

And so we hold for us today your word. We thank you for that. Help us to be spoken to by your words today.

We praise in Jesus name. Amen. Amen. You guys with me? Amen. Amen. All right. So the first section that I think will be helpful for us to see is verse one.

The difficult last days. The difficult last days. Paul says, but understand this. I want you to feel that transition where he's going from one thing to the other.

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. So Paul begins to contrast that word, but is a contrasting word.

[8 : 45] And so he's contrasting what? Well, last week. The idea of hopefulness that some people who are in error, that we're addressing gently, might come to their senses and the knowledge of truth.

But that's not for everyone. But understand this. Understand this.

That is to what follows that passage last week is something imperative for us to hear.

Understand this. Understand this. I want you guys to get this. He says that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. And this poses many questions for us today.

What days is Paul referring to? Is it just the days back then? Is it the days now? Or is it some days to come? The last days?

[9 : 47] And the answer to all of those questions is yes. All of the above. It's D. You'll get a right answer. These last days began at Pentecost.

It was prophesied by the Apostle Peter in his first sermon at Pentecost. And it will continue until Christ's second coming. We've been in the last days.

These last days and difficult times have been essentially in effect for 2,000 years, church. But more pertinent question that we should be asking, not what days is he referring to, but what is Paul identifying as being difficult in these last days?

What's the difficulty in these last days? Some translations say terrible. What's terrible in these last days? In other words, where does the difficulty lie?

Who can we assign the difficulty to? Or what is the difficulty? And the answer is only in a contextual observation from hopefulness with our opponents from last week to those ensnared by the devil and what Paul contrasts now today with a hopeless situation regarding false teachers.

[11:08] The sad reality that in the last days, as the Apostle Peter stood up and he said that in the last days, the time where God would pour His Spirit on all humanity, that this time of pouring out His Spirit and the Word escaping the walls of Jerusalem into all the region and remote parts of the world, even reaching Youngstown, Ohio, who would have thought that?

That this spread would intensify the devil's engagement to try to thwart the redemptive plan of God on this earth.

The devil would say, All right, now it's time to get serious. These are the last days. Satan knows what that means. And what's the problem with the last days then?

People. People in these last days. Sinful people. Corrupt people. Puppets. Literally, of Satan. All leading God's people astray.

Now Paul expounds upon this hopeless situation. And we see this in the second section. I just read for you the qualifications of a pastor and elder.

[12:33] Well, Paul lays out qualifications of a false teacher. Isn't that interesting? Compared to what we saw in 1 Timothy chapter 3, we received this list that we just read of what an elder is, what deacons are.

And here we get literally the complete opposite, an antonym. 19 qualifications of hopelessness. It says in verse 2, For people, the difficulty there, people will be lovers of self, lovers of money. Proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God.

And that's just 19 of them. We'll hold off on the last one in the last section. And if we were to attempt to organize and just look at this extensive list of 18, but fully 19, descriptions of false teachers, we might end up maybe with three categories, which oddly enough, Mark Driscoll arrived at that.

Mark Driscoll, if you know anything that happened at Mars Hill, and regarding his character, fits the bill in a lot of these things. And he even observed these three categories of narcissism, of hedonism, and of materialism.

[14:20] Of narcissism, of being contrasted with an elder's role of humility. Or hedonism, a pursuit of pleasure, being contrasted with having integrity. Or materialism, as contrasted in the role of elders, to be generous.

And while these three categories do ring true, I'm not about to run with Mark Driscoll's thoughts. But I believe that it goes even further than where he took it.

And I think, I could speculate, may have made all the difference in his life, and his ministry at Mars Hill. I believe that an even more profound, hopeless situation is observed in relation to not these three categories, but the vertical and the horizontal nature of the Christian life, and the vertical and horizontal nature of this list.

I would call these two categories of distortion. And so vertically, scouring this list, we observe a blatant rejection of God vertically.

Narcissism, blatant rejection of God vertically. We see hedonism, love of pleasure, blatant rejection of God vertically. And materialism, again, where are treasures stored?

[15:40] In heaven. It's a blatant disregard and a distortion vertically. These are all vertical issues. And what you place in your life in place of that vertical relationship with God is what?

An idol. Idolatry. And so think horizontally with this list. What happens when, when we naturally, when love for God is replaced by idols?

What happens? Well, all sorts of trouble follows. It's like planting a, planting a bulb in the ground. What's going to happen? It's going to spring forth. It can't do anything but spring forth a shoot.

Right? And so we see this natural horizontal trouble to follow. So the horizontal corruption follows and it occurs in what this passage says.

Abuse. Horizontal. Slanders. Horizontal. Disobedient to parents. Horizontal. Unholy. Horizontal. Heartless. Horizontal. Brutal. And ungrateful.

[16:42] All horizontal issues. And so looking upon these two categories of distortion. Are you with me today? Okay. I want to make sure I'm not being unclear.

Looking upon these two categories of distortion, we should see something so profound that rocks our world. We should think about God's unveiled message to humanity at Mount Sinai. Just as we read at the beginning of the service, the Ten Commandments. As summarized in what? Two great commandments from Jesus Christ.

Which, guess what? Have vertical emphasis and what? Horizontal emphasis. This is huge, church. Recall Jesus' words in Matthew, Mark, and Luke on that vertical and that horizontal.

He says, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment.

[17 : 52] Vertical. Verse 39 continues. And a second is like it. Horizontal. You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

On these two commandments, these two categories depend all the law and the prophets. This entire book hangs in the balance of those two categories.

Man. I'm getting excited today. But you want to know the saddest reality. If that's true, if we can observe this vertical distortion and this horizontal corruption in false teachers, these people are vessels of dishonorable use to literally undo everything Christ came to do.

It's not child's play. It's not a broken clock right twice a day. Actually, that's the problem. They neither love God and they don't love people.

See, false teachers distort the gospel to the extreme extent of undoing the very work of God. Now, think about Timothy. Think about Paul. Think about the reality and the historicity of this text.

[19 : 15] Paul is writing to Timothy to take with him a tool. A tool to be reminded of after Paul is long dead and gone, martyred for his faith, that Timothy would have a tool to remember, to judge rightly.

And now some of you might say, well, Brent, this is judgmental. How can you look at somebody like this and do that?

Well, if judgmentalness is in this convo, we must remember who the author of these imperatives are. Was it Paul on his muscle relaxers, all mad and up in arms about those false teachers?

No. Scripture is inspired. It is the word of God who put these descriptions on a page for Timothy, for Ephesus, and for Steel Valley Church today.

This is a call to pay attention. Continue to be gentle. Don't forget last week. Continue to be gentle. But don't play games when Satan gains favor through dishonorable vessels.

[20 : 35] It's every Christian's duty to judge rightly, each and every one of us, myself included, based upon the metric of Scripture alone.

There's not much leniency or tolerance of that. And so let's look at the third section, which I have titled, Don't Be Fooled and Flee. It says in verse 5, in the last description, having the appearance of godliness but denying its power.

It says avoid such people. And so this is difficult. Why? Well, going back to the first section, because of the but, the contrasting, the hopefulness that somebody ensnared by the devil would come to their senses.

But understand this, this is difficult, because these guys, or girls, these people, are very good at pretending to be holy.

They got the personality that you just can't deny, and you say, Brent, are you sure? From the outside, they are impressionable, and it's all a show.

[21 : 53] And guess what? These teachers might actually be unaware of it, because they fail to look in the mirror. This is supremely dangerous, because these leaders appear to be Christians, but actually are just in it for themselves.

Now, I want you to think that if you don't think that the devil won't allow the gospel to be preached through the lips of a false teacher, in order that at the end of the day, their claws might be more impressably dug into the minds of hearers to ultimately lead them astray from God.

I think that's a compromise that Satan is willing to play in the life of Christians. Think about it. I don't think that we know our opponent very well, Satan.

that 80% or 90% that somebody might say is an amen, and we hoot and holler, jumping from our seat, but that 10% to 20% where we are like, we got a problem.

Will Robinson. the Bible is full of examples of religious showmen, those who have the appearance of godliness, but are actually ungodly.

[23 : 18] You can go to Isaiah chapter 1, and through the prophet Isaiah, God scolded the people of Judah for their hypocrisy. They had religious rituals, but neglected to do good and act justly, at which point God says to them, I will not listen.

Your hands are covered in blood, Isaiah 1, 15. We go to James, contrast to empty worship in James chapter 1. James writes that the pure and undefiled religion, what pure and undefiled religion is, and in God's sight involves caring for those in need, pouring out, not pouring in to their ministry, like widows and orphans pouring out in their affliction.

Matthew 23, let's just go to the supreme example. You might not believe me up to this point, but Jesus himself, Jesus reserves his most intense words for those religious leaders that appeared to be good with God.

He tells them, on the outside, he says, quote, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. In that sermon, Jesus calls the scribes and the Pharisees hypocrites, rightfully so, because they're unrepentant.

He calls them hypocrites seven times in that sermon. He calls them blind five times, and once he calls them fools and brood of vipers, snakes.

[24 : 50] And what a warning we have for us today, that we can attend church our entire life, we can be baptized, we can join in church membership, we can serve in all the ministries, we can even sleep on the altar, but if we do not have Christ and a transformed heart, we do not possess a spiritual life.

It's not by our efforts. In Christ alone is where our sin that separated us is referred to in past tense. That at the cross of Jesus Christ, and the blood that was poured out for us, reconciles us to God. Christ cures our sinful infection, Jesus Christ came to reconcile us, through his death on the cross, vertically. And it also brings peace among relationships and with others.

This gospel offers the solution to the radical problem caused by sin. And we know that setting our rules, behavior modification, the 10 steps to being a new you by 2022, I don't know, maybe that does exist, that sounds like a good book title.

Whatever you want to follow, rules, behavior modification, or even the law itself are just not enough. They are instituted to manage sin, to convict us of sin, but they cannot transform a heart.

[26 : 13] Only the gospel can do that. Amen? It's the only hope in a hopeless situation as we can observe all around us in these last days full of imposters.

sinners. We cry from the depths of our hearts with the psalmist in Psalm 73, who do I have in heaven but you? And I desire nothing on earth but you.

Godliness begins with adoration for God. Godlessness begins with disposal of God. Maybe you're not a Christian here today and something about this reality of how God has made things right through Christ that you realize that you've been pretty much faking it.

That even your family's duped that you're a Christian. Well, I'm going to encourage you to not try to fake it because you will not make it. This is not a career that you lie in a resume.

God knows your heart. He knows a heart that is fully surrendered to him. He knows you. So what do you do to have assurance? Repent and turn towards the one true and living God.

[27 : 35] Have faith in Jesus Christ alone. What's the promise? You will be forgiven for your past. You will be forgiven today and you will be forgiven for the sins that will continue to maul you in your life tomorrow.

it is sure that in the end you will have an advocate for you at death and that is Jesus Christ. So church in our last days we have a duty to test.

We have a duty to defend. We have a duty to wake up. But there is something that we have today that Timothy didn't have in Ephesus.

They didn't have podcasts. They didn't have the radio. They didn't have all these books in the Christian bookshelf at Barnes and Noble.

They didn't have these books on display racks at Hobby Lobby that you would assume are well it's a Christian environment.

[28 : 49] They got to be good. Okay. Well let's hear some quotes from the last days for a minute. It was once said last week that all religions are a path to reach God.

God. They are like different languages sorry. Different idioms to get there to God. But God is a God for everyone.

And since God is God for everyone we are all children of God. There is only one God in our religions our languages and paths to reach God.

Some are Sikha. Some are Muslim. Some are Hindu. Some are Christian. But they are all different paths to God.

It was said last week from Pope Francis. It was also once said in 2016. I'm going to tell you something folks. I didn't stop sinning until I finally got it through my thick head that I wasn't a sinner anymore.

[29 : 58] And the religious world thinks that's heresy. And they want to hang you for it. But the Bible says that I'm righteous. And I can't be righteous and be a sinner at the same time.

All I have ever taught is to say was I'm a poor miserable sinner. I am not poor.

I am not miserable. I am not a sinner. That is a lie from the pit of hell. That is what I was. And if I still am, then Jesus died in vain.

It was once said by Joyce Meyer in 2016. It was once said in 2021 when God said to Moses, I am, that my name is I am, he was trying to get to see him.

You see that you are as I am, Moses. And in fact, we are. I am. And he concludes his message saying, I am God almighty.

[31 : 08] Another moment, this teacher said, following Jesus doesn't change you into something else, but it reveals who you've been all along. All quotes, no amen to that.

All quotes from Stephen Furtick in 2021. False teaching, brother. It was also once quoted, you can look it up on a website today, that we believe that as part of Christ's work of salvation, it is the Father's will for brothers to become whole, healthy, and successful in all areas of life.

And it also says Jesus didn't reach his full potential, but we can. On a website right now on Mike Todd's page.

And last one, it was once taught, or it's being taught today, started, really took root in 2020. It's a teaching that goes, teaches you to go internally and rely on mystical warnings, feelings, and prompts.

Sounds like Eastern mysticism, doesn't it? But what it's actually teaching is the insufficiency of Scripture, and the sufficiency of ourselves to obey our personal feelings, found on a bookshelf near you by Beth Moore, followed by many others, Tony Evans, Tony Evans' daughter, Priscilla Shearer, Francis Chan, Bill Johnson, and many of these churches, what they do and what they have done is they have created really good sounding music groups.

[32 : 52] And what better way to infiltrate churches around the world than through good sounding music, but a corrupt and toxic church. What do we have with, or what do we do with these impressionable teachers invading our lives through conferences, through books, through music?

Look at verse 5. Avoid them. Avoid them. that's it. There's not much justification there for us, church.

No tolerance. Don't believe me? Or maybe you agree. Well, any one of those I listed today, and there's more.

I could be here until tomorrow with the list. Go ahead and try to have a civil conversation with any of those names that I listed and tell them that they're incorrect in this.

Gently. Confronting them with God's word. And let me know how that goes for you. For the numerous other people that are much more of a bigger name than Brent at Steel Valley Church on the corner of Wick and McGuffey who have tried to call them to repentance and it just turns into their claws.

[34 : 08] What I've created for you on our website, and it's at that link down there, if you go to notes, you will see a link with a more extensive list, and I actually don't agree with every name on the list, but to help you in that discernment in these last days.

I want to equip you, just as Paul equipped Timothy in the last days, of those attributes. I want to actually open your mind up to this ridiculous aspect in our last days today.

Thinking about this, we have a 10 to 20 percent sort of like they say something wrong in that 10 to 20 percent, but that 80 to 90 percent is like right, right?

You're amening. Well, Jim Challies says something great, and I was trying to paraphrase, but I figured I'd just quote him. He says, Satan's greatest ambassadors are not pimps, not politicians, not power brokers, but pastors.

His priests do not peddle a different religion, unless you're Pope Francis, obviously, but they preach a deadly perversion of the true one.

[35 : 20] His troops do not make a full-out frontal assault, but work as agents sneaking into the opposing army. Satan's tactics are studied, they're clever, they're predictable, they're effective.

Therefore, we must always remain vigilant. As Jesus said himself, beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves.

You will recognize them by their fruits. Matthew 7, 15. Thinking about installing an elder, this is a call to the elders.

This is a call to Timothy to stand firm. God instituted the office of elder to protect and maintain the doctrinal purity of the church, which Satan is constantly threatening.

But also, we must pay careful attention to anything that influences our spiritual lives and be discerning ourselves. No matter how many elders you have here serving you, caring for you, we can't micromanage your conscience.

[36 : 32] That's the Holy Spirit's job. And the Holy Spirit has inspired this Word to help in that endeavor. See, God's Word is our tool of right judgment.

And so we call a spade a spade until the Lord returns. Amen. Let's pray.