



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

“HOLDING TO A FORM OF GODLINESS” - 2 TIMOTHY 3:5

WYOMING

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In studying 2 Timothy 3, we are reminded that Paul exhorted Timothy to abide by sound doctrine and make every effort in doing so, because in the last days, difficult times will come, grievous seasons where peddlers of sinister falsehoods make their appearance. Such individuals are characterized by the love of self, living for their own pleasures instead of having a love for God. They have an unwillingness to restrain their own evil desires, yet put on a religious front all the while they deny God's power! These religious fakes are the people Paul warns Timothy about in the church and the warning is meant for all who live in the last days... which are our days as well.

I. “HOLDING TO A FORM OF GODLINESS...” 2 TIMOTHY 3:5

(1)“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.(2) Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unboly, (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; and avoid such men as these.” 2 Timothy 3:1-5

What is most shocking about Paul’s warning is that he describes these phony religious people as actually being in the church. How do we know this? Because Paul says that they hold to a “*form of godliness*” in 2 Timothy 3:5. It’s hard to comprehend these evil, sinful people will infiltrate the church and fool many. How can this be? Let’s see what Paul says.

A. “HOLDING TO A FORM OF GODLINESS”-2 TIMOTHY 3:5A

Even in Jesus day, He denounced the religious leaders for their hypocrisy. (John 2:16, Mark 12:38-40) Charlatans and false teachers have always been a problem. It is these which hold to a “*form of godliness*”. They might look like sheep, they might “baa” like sheep but really they are wolves in sheep’s clothing. (2 Peter 2)

“**form**” Greek “**morphis**” refers to the outward shape and appearance, like a silhouette, an undefined outline or shadow of something.

In Matthew 23:25 Jesus refers to the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees who are lovers of self. They are only concerned about the outward form but are religious fakes who masquerade as Christians. John 8:44 shows that while they claim to be believers, they really are servants of Satan and merely propagate his lies. So “*having a form of godliness*” is only an outline of a real and genuine relationship with Jesus Christ. There’s no real substance to these religious people who have the appearance of form without any substance.

Referring to these phony believers, the great evangelical leader J.C. Ryle wrote this over 100 years ago: “*Look in another direction of those hundreds of people whose whole religion seems to consist in high talk and high profession. They know the theory of the gospel intellectually and profess to delight in evangelical doctrine. They can say much about the “soundness” of their own views and the “darkness” of all who disagree with them, but they never get any further. When you examine their inner lives, you find they know nothing of practical godliness. They are neither truthful, nor charitable, nor humble, nor honest, nor kind tempered, nor gentle, nor unselfish, nor honorable. What shall we say of these people? They are Christians no doubt, in name and yet there is neither substance nor fruit in their Christianity. There is but one thing to be said-they are formal Christians. Their religion is an empty form.*”²

Titus 1:16 refers to these imposters of the true faith as those who “*profess to know God but by their deeds they deny Him.*” They might have the external practices which can fool, but they are morally corrupt as we have seen and their religion is a show. Satan is so very clever. Possibly the most dangerous attacks against God’s people come from within the church by means of false teachers/preachers, those who pretend to speak for God. There is plenty of that in our day. They use religious jargon but their “*form of godliness*” is fake, bogus and they are absolute phonies having a form without substance. They are a Christian in name without life or deeds that follow Scripture. They have the externals of religion, in fact they are experts at externals.³

Tragically though it is possible to engage in outward rituals of worship yet know nothing of a true relationship with Jesus Christ. This outward form of Christianity can make them all the more dangerous. They appear so godly, so religious. But in reality they are merely form without substance, dangerous because they lead so many astray. Dangerous because immature believers will think because of their positions, that they have true faith...but don’t. Paul describes these as “*holding to a form of godliness*” but he doesn’t stop there.

B. “ALTHOUGH THEY HAVE DENIED ITS POWER”- 2 TIMOTHY 3:5B

What have these fake religious people denied? Paul says it is the very power of the gospel. Tragically everything about them is just an empty form or shadow with no substance because they deny the true gospel, the true Christ and the true Word. They have no true love for God or His Word or His people, only a love for themselves. They are very persuasive but have a worthless message that keeps hearers

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"HOLDING TO A FORM OF GODLINESS" - 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-5

"But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God: holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these."

far from the true gospel and that's the danger.⁴ The television, radio and bookstore are filled with their false messages and fake lifestyles.

When Paul says "*they have denied its power*", the power that is denied is that which energizes, saves, changes a life. That is the power that is missing...the power of the gospel of Jesus Christ to save as Romans 1:16 makes clear. And these charlatans ultimately deny this, even though they claim to be Christians. At the very core of true religion, true faith, they deny its power. (Titus 1:16) Apart from the gospel, people are just practicing a dead religion. People can go to church their whole life, be a church member, they could even have their bedroom in the church but if they do not have Christ, they do not have spiritual life. They are religious showmen which Isaiah 1:14-17 refers to. But, James 1:27 speaks of a religion that is pure and undefiled and stands in contrast to these hypocrites.⁵

Without the reality of the presence and power of God, religion is an empty formality. And empty religion makes for empty souls of which we have more than enough of in many churches today. These people emerge in the church during every age and are active in promoting falsehood and error under the pretense of being the true gospel, the true message of the church. But it is merely a form with no substance.⁶ It may well be that the greatest handicap to Christianity is not the most notorious sinner, but the sleek devotee of a faultless orthodoxy and dignified convention, who is horrified when it is suggested that real religion is a dynamic power which changes an individual's personal life...without all the pomp and circumstances.⁷

C. "AVOID SUCH MEN AS THESE." - 2 TIMOTHY 3:5C

Because these people have denied the true gospel which is the only power to save, then Paul says to "*avoid such men as these.*" He has given us a sobering critique of their life in 2 Timothy 3:2-4 and concludes there is but one solution to deal with these people.

"avoid" Greek "**apotreo**" present tense verb which carries the idea to make yourself turn away, continuously turn away from. Apply this rigorously with continuous action, keep avoiding continuously.

Paul gives an imperative, a standing order regarding these imposters, these who teach falsely and live falsely. No matter how convincing or how sincere these imposters may be, we are to make ourselves avoid these men. We are to avoid and keep on avoiding. We are to reject them and their ungodly ideas. We must be able to recognize it as a counterfeit and understand that it is a worthless and deceptive life that is a counterfeit if it does not match God's Word.⁸ It's interesting the contrast between dealing with those caught in sin from the previous verses in 2 Timothy 2:25-26 and those who are false

imposters of Christianity. Keep in mind how our Lord dealt with the scribes and Pharisees compared to the sinners. The same advice given by Paul is consistent with our Lord's example.

This is a devastating indictment on these men. Paul first gave a searing summation of their life in 2 Timothy 3:1-4 revealing how self-love had dominated and suffocated the most sacred relationships between God's people. And we must remember that just as it was possible to be a member or teacher in the church at Ephesus in Timothy's day, so it is possible to be lost and deceived in today's church. Unregenerate evangelicals are a growing reality in pastors and congregations. It's easy to have a form of godliness, use the right language and yet "*deny its power*" by the quality of our lives. Paul says have nothing to do with these false leaders who contradict the gospel. This is Paul's advice regarding them. These were existing evils in Paul's day. From the beginning, the church has endured hypocrisy and imposters and this is not to be taken lightly.⁹

We must avoid practicing a religion without godliness and a faith without works as James 2 makes clear. To those who have played the imposter, the hypocrite in the church there is nothing but rebuke in Scripture. (Matthew 23:28) Jesus reserves His most intense words for them. This must stand as a serious warning for all engaged in mere religious activity. Jesus was merciful to those whose lives were a mess and admitted their need for Him but only rebuke for hypocrites and imposters.¹⁰

¹Hendriksen, William. *Exposition of The Pastoral Epistles*. Baker Book House: Grand Rapids, MI, 1957. Pg. 304.

²Hughes, R. Kent and Chapell, Bryan, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; To Guard the Deposit*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2000. Pg. 224.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.118.

⁴MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.118.

⁵Platt, David; Akin, Daniel L.; Merida, Tony, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, Tennessee, 2013. Pg. 187.

⁶Williams, Peter, *Opening Up 2 Timothy*. One Day Publications: Ryelands Road, Leominster, New Zealand, 2007. Pg. 69-70.

⁷Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.215.

⁸MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.118.

⁹Hughes, R. Kent and Chapell, Bryan, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; To Guard the Deposit*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2000. Pg. 223-225.

¹⁰Platt, David; Akin, Daniel L.; Merida, Tony, *Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary: Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus*. B&H Publishing Group: Nashville, Tennessee, 2013. Pg. 188.