

## Keeping On At The End Of The Age – 2 Timothy 3:1-9

We're in the middle of our **Keep On** series from the book of 2 Timothy

This is the 9<sup>th</sup> message in our study and if you've just joined us, I'd encourage you to pick up the previous messages, either online or at Books and Things  
I think you'd find it beneficial for your understanding as we "keep on" . . .  
And helpful as you apply this to your life

- But for today, we're going to pick up where we left off – turn with me to **2 Tim 3:1-9** (**Intro**) V1 – *in the last days there will come times of difficulty*  
Question is – when is that?  
B/c the answer determines how, and how directly this applies to our lives  
The answer is – right now; We are in the last days

Not b/c I claim to be clairvoyant or something . . .  
Or have a "feeling" – there's plenty of that these days . . .  
But rather, we're in the last days b/c the Bible says so

**Heb 1:1-2** – *Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has he has spoken to us by his Son*  
Implying that the *last days* started with the coming of Christ

And Peter confirmed that we're in them with his explanation of the HS's coming at Pentecost, shortly after Christ ascended to heaven  
That's found in **Acts 2:17** – *In the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh*

The HS had just fallen on the people in a visible, miraculous way, and they were like, "What's going on?"  
And Peter's like, "We're in the last days, just like God foretold thru the prophet Joel"  
And until Christ returns, that's still the case  
Meaning this applies to us, just as much as it did to the church in Ephesus, and maybe even more, since we're closer to Christ's return than they were

- So having established that, he starts with the word "but" – *But understand this* (1)  
Meaning that despite your kindness toward others from the last part of ch 2 . . .  
And despite your patient endurance of evil, and your gentle correction of opponents . . .  
There will *still* be times of difficulty – b/c it's the last days; you can expect it

And that's the first principle to remember in order to keep on at the end of the age . . .

### **Expect hard times (v1)**

We've talked about it before in our study of 2 Timothy in terms of personal suffering, but here he refers to it generally as *times of difficulty*

Things like – Impostors; Wars; Famines; Earthquakes; Persecution . . .  
Apostasy (renouncing of faith); Betrayal; Hatred . . .  
False prophets who lead people astray; Lawlessness; And love that grows cold  
Sound familiar? (Mt 24)

And when you add martyrdom, death, plagues, and economic upheaval to the mix – you get hard times

The worst of which will be *days of vengeance* Jesus said, where *there will be great distress upon the earth* (Lk 21:22-23); Expect it

- That doesn't mean that all is lost, or that we have no reason for hope or joy; Not at all  
God is in control, Christ is coming back, and it's all going to come to a screeching halt  
Which is why we can and should have a quiet confidence and firm conviction that all is well, even when it's not

But when you combine this verse with the rest of Scripture, it does mean that we can *expect hard times*, and more of them as time grows short  
Especially when you take into account the sinfulness of *people* – which is Paul's focus in v2-5  
Willful, rebellious, sin-filled people who cause hardship for all

And the bottom line is stated about as succinctly as you can get in v5, where Paul says – *Avoid such people*

If you're going to keep on in times like these . . .  
If you're going to live in a God-honoring manner . . .  
If you're going to persevere in a Christ-like way, you must . . .

### **Avoid bad people (2-5)**

People who are neither red apples – ripe for the gospel . . .  
Nor green apples – closed to the gospel . . .  
But rotten apples – who are sinful through and through

They're hearts have become so hardened by the deceit of sin . . .  
And they've become so enamored with all that's wrong . . .  
That they're rotten to the core, and happy about it

That's the kind of people Paul describes in this laundry list  
Not those who are sinful and miserable; Or sinful and searching; Or sinful/struggling  
But those who are sinful and lovin' it

- And I want to highlight a few of these, including people he describes as *lovers of self*  
Avoid lovers of self; People who are self-centered, self-exalting, self-focused, & self-ish  
People who live by the motto, "It's all about me"

And no wonder

From the time a kid can crawl, we promote the ideas of self-esteem, self-worth, and self-image as stand-alone, fundamental truths to be embraced and pursued  
And they're not

Apart from being made in the image of God – there's nothing about us to be esteemed  
Apart from being created by him, there's nothing special about us – we're just a glob of molecules

Our self-esteem starts with God

Apart from being made in his image, there's nothing good to look at in the mirror  
Apart from his work of creativity and beauty, there's nothing lovely about us

Most people struggle with self-esteem b/c they're mired in sin, or don't see themselves as *God* sees them – made in his image and designed for his glory  
And yet we promote it as a stand-alone truth, and then wonder why so many people are lovers of themselves

Worse yet, some people even teach self-love in church circles  
They read Jesus' command to *love your neighbor as yourself*, and think – “there it is, we should love ourselves; it's a virtue”  
When instead, we should be seeing his reference to self-love as something natural to *sinful* man . . .  
And used as an illustration of how our love for *others* should look  
Otherwise, it's one great big contradiction with our passage at hand, where it's a bad thing to be a lover of yourself

- In any case, we should avoid those who do so, as well as those who are *lovers of money, proud, arrogant, and abusive*  
You don't have to stick around people like that

Nor should you hang out with those who are *disobedient to their parents*  
Which is rampant these days often b/c parents abdicate their responsibility to correct and punish such disobedience  
If you're a parent, you don't have the luxury to just throw up your hands and say, “oh well, we're in the last days and kids will be kids”

Not at all; It's your responsibility to correct and punish them, last days or not  
Not for childish behavior or accidents; But for willful, rebellious, disobedience  
And the more battles you win when they're young, the less wars you'll fight when they're old – and the better off they'll be

But the main application here I think, is for kids and students to avoid *other* kids and students who are disobedient to their parents, and *ungrateful*; avoid them

- And avoid those who are *unholy, heartless and unappeasable* – never satisfied  
As well as those who are *slandorous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, and reckless*  
Describing those who are a danger to themselves and a danger to be around  
And don't forget those who are *swollen with conceit*

And finally, avoid those who are *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God* – which is quite the stinging commentary on *our* culture, don't you think?  
As well as those *having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power* – a sad commentary on many churches as well

If you're going to keep on for the Lord in these last days, you need to avoid such people  
Don't associate with them; Don't cater to them; Don't be around them

Pray for them, yes; Be ready to reach out to them when you see a softness or opp, yes  
But don't orient your entire life around rotten apples who are closed to the things of God, and probably even antagonistic toward them

- Now, having said all that, I want to address **3 Issues regarding this command**  
The first of which, is the . . .

### 1. Reasons for it

Why does God tell us to do such a thing – to avoid bad people?

And I think there are two answers, the first of which is . . .

#### A. *God wants to protect us*

Wicked, hard-hearted people are hazardous to your health – if not literally, certainly emotionally

Not only that, but bad company corrupts good character (1 Cor 15:33)

#### B. *Time is short*

For every minute you spend on those who are sin-filled and rotten, you lose a minute to spend on those who are open and soft

There's an opp cost to everything you do, including kingdom things

And with time so short, both in life and in these last days, we must do everything we can to make the most of it, including avoiding bad people

### 2. Apparent contradictions

IOW if you read discerningly (and you should), you might think there's a discrepancy or a contradiction between this command to avoid bad people, and Jesus' command to love our enemies

Doesn't that seem like a contradiction?

And how do we reconcile this with Paul's previous admonition in chapter 2 to patiently endure evil, and correct our opponents with gentleness (24-25)?  
How do those things square? Or do they?

\*I think the answer goes something like this:

Though we are to avoid bad people, we are not to hate them

To do so would place ourselves in their camp, filled with the same sin we see in them

Rather, we're to keep a soft heart of love toward them, while being careful to avoid them

And yes, we are to patiently *endure* evil, but we don't have to cozy up to it

And when it comes to gently *correcting* your opponents, that doesn't mean you have to be their best friends

It means responding in a Christ-like manner to their opposition, and letting God take care of the rest

\*There seems to come a time when it's no longer beneficial to spend time pursuing bad people

A point at which your association with them taints your *own* heart and testimony, and maybe even the testimony of your church . . .

There seems to be a point at which you begin to *waste* precious kingdom time, instead of making the *most* of it

And you know it's close, when the person you're wondering about is so consumed by one or more of these qualities, that it's the defining mark of their life  
When that happens – it's time to avoid them

### 3. Don't be one of them yourself

As important as it is to avoid bad people, perhaps more important is that you don't become one yourself

And there are 4 kinds of people in this list that I think we are particularly susceptible to becoming

#### \*The first is a *lover of money* (2)

If you hoard all you can get; Or you're stingy with your giving

Or you live in fear of losing what you have; Or you're consumed with getting more . . .

You're a lover of money – it's a huge temptation, even for believers

And the only way to prevent such an insidious love, is to give it away

To hold loosely to all that you have; To tithe regularly to your local church

And to invest in *kingdom* things

#### \*Second, don't be *unappeasable* (3)

Always discontent with something; Never completely satisfied with anything

I don't know why, but church-world *breeds* this kind of person

Don't go there; Don't be that way

#### \*Third, guard yourself against becoming a *lover of pleasure instead of a lover of God* (4)

This is perhaps our biggest risk in such an affluent society

Where our expendable income and extra time tempt us to pursue *pleasure* as our god

When you put the pursuit of ease, the pursuit of vacation, the pursuit of recreation *ahead* of your pursuit of God . . .

You've become a lover of pleasure instead of a lover of God

When sports take precedent over church on a *consistent* basis – you've crossed the line

When week in and week out, month in and month out, year in and year out – you're there instead of here . . .

The apple of your soul is rotting, I don't care how shiny your exterior is

And if you're not sure if that's you, consider this – you love most, what you pursue most

And if you pursue pleasure, including sports, to the exclusion of God – you've become the very person you should avoid

That doesn't mean that recreation, or sports, or vacations are wrong – they're not

They're given to us by God, along with all good things . . .

And in their proper place and frequency, they contribute to a healthy, productive life

But when the *pleasure* becomes your love, instead of the giver *of* it – there's a problem

Don't do that – avoid the sin, as well as the people who embrace it

#### \*And fourth, don't be a fake

Someone who has *the appearance of godliness, but denies its power*

Someone who has the *appearance* of being saved, but isn't

Someone who's religious before *man*, but not righteous before *God*

Someone who's busy doing all the right things, but in their own strength

Someone who's more concerned about appearances, than substance

Don't be like that

Better that you admit your unbelief and start all over . . .

Than continue living a lie that leads nowhere good

• If you're going to keep on at the end of the age . . .

Expect hard times; Avoid bad people, and third . . .

### Beware of false teachers (v6-9)

That's the kind of people Paul describes for us in v6-9

They're a subset of those he just described in v2-5, saying . . . (v6-8)

False teachers abounded in Timothy's day, and they abound in ours

From the worst of TV evangelists who milk people for money, and promise things they can't deliver . . .

To well-meaning pastors who bless pets, and tickle people's ears

False teachers abound

They prey on the *weak* and immature – including those are who are down/out, or naïve

They're *corrupted* in their thinking (8) – where everything wrong is considered right, and their view of reality is completely clouded

And some of them are *disqualified regarding the faith* (8b)– i.e. they're not saved, b/c they oppose and reject the truth

If we're going to keep on for the Lord at the end of the age, we must beware of false teachers, and know a *Jannes* or a *Jambres* when we see one (8)

Two guys whose names you won't find in the OT . . .

But are cited in later Jewish writings as the magicians in Pharaoh's court, who opposed Moses when he asked for the release of the Hebrew people from Egypt

*Jannes* means – he who seduces; *Jambres* means – he who makes rebellion

Tradition holds that they infiltrated the escaping Israelites by pretending to worship God, so they could subvert the effort . . .

Only to be found at the foot of Mt Sinai, and killed for it

All of which makes them infamous examples of what happens to those who pretend to be someone they're not, for the purpose of opposing the truth or preying on the weak

• The question is – how do you identify one, let alone avoid them?

The answer first of all, is . . .

1. Beware of smooth talk

That's the whole idea of creeping into households (6) – they capture your allegiance and win your trust with a deceptive nature and a glitzy setting . . .

And then hold out their hand

2. Fortify your weaknesses

Especially if you lack discernment like the weak women of Ephesus

That's what Paul means by *weak* (6) – lacking in discernment; easily taken

If that's you, fortify your weakness by realizing it, setting aside your pride, and getting wise counsel from those who *do* have a good measure of discernment

Unfortunately that's easier said than done, b/c . . .

Most people *think* they're discerning, and don't want to admit it if they're not

### 3. Turn from your sin

If you're *burdened with sins* (6); If you harbor un-confessed wrongs in your life . . .

Or if you're easily led astray by various passions and desires . . .

You're susceptible to all kinds of falsehoods, especially those that come with the smooth talk of false teachers who tickle your ears

Unfortunately, churches, and radio, and TV are filled with people in that category . . .

To the shame of both the pastors/evangelists for speaking such pleasant platitudes . . .

And the *people* for listening to them

Turn from your sin, and tolerate platitudes no longer

### 4. Seek truth

Be a discerning listener and sit under someone who teaches the Bible, and from whom you can learn

Otherwise, you'll be forever learning useless information, from man-made religions, that in no way leads to a *knowledge of the truth* (7)

That is, to salvation or spiritual maturity

At best you'll continue to suck on a biblical milk bottle, *unskilled in the word of righteousness* (Heb 5:13)

Seek truth, and apply it; Put it into practice and internalize it

As opposed to always learning just for the sake of it

It's one of the best defenses against false teachers and the things they say

- And finally, don't be discouraged by their success – *they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all* (9)

Rest assured that time reveals all truth

Whether on this side of eternity, or the other – you can count on it

Their progress, though great in some cases, is capped; it's limited

*They will not get very far*

And there will come a day when their foolishness will be exposed

In the meantime – beware; watch; and pray (**summary slide**)

Expecting hard times and avoiding bad people