

Gut Check: Are You Ready? – Various Scriptures

2 Tim 3:1-5; Great to be back; Preached at HBC-Rockford, York Region, Barrie; And in the middle, we squeezed in a wedding; And what a joy it was
And what a blessing to find like-minded believers halfway across the continent, with the same passion for Jesus and the same love for his Word
We came away with full hearts for sure

But we also came away thankful for the love we share, and the *faithfulness* we see in you, and work of ministry, and giving, and growth right here
God has given us quite an opportunity to make disciples and change lives, and it shows

➤ I'm also thankful for those who are joining our church as *members* this weekend
One of whom is out of town, and sent an email to me this week that I want to read
It's a bummer that we will not be able to make it on the Sunday we are being recognized and prayed for, but on behalf of my wife, we are very blessed to call a place like Harvest home. God brought my wife and I together at Harvest during a night of worship in the Spring of 2012 when I had just moved to the Quad Cities. Although membership for us at Harvest won't be much of a change from the day to day, we will now make it known that this church is a priority, and that we commit to protect, honor, and support it. In the fallen world we live in today, we pledge to stand together, to honor God, and support his creation and will. So we send all our love. May God bless this weekend for all those who are members, those who will be members, and those who come to seek God's teaching through Harvest Bible Chapel. Love how God is adding to our number that way

➤ That said (**Intro**), we left off last month in the middles of a series called Gut Check – assessing various attitudes of our heart
We started with 2 messages on “Are You Loving?” And then moved to “Are You Thankful?” and “Are You Grieved?” Which brings us to *Are You Ready?*

And I'd like to start by reading 2 Tim 3:1-5

The Apostle Paul is writing, and after saying that some people will escape from the snare of the devil through those who patiently instruct them, he says in v1 . . .
[1] But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. [2] For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, [3] heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, [4] treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, [5] having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

Does that not describe our culture? It does; Not only b/c we're in the last days by virtue of the fact that we're living on this side of the cross, but b/c people like that are increasing

There's no getting around it . . .

We live in a culture that's increasingly sinful and godless (2 Tim 3:1-5)

You see it in homes, you see it in churches, you see it at work, and you see it on the news
Abusive, heartless, brutal, and not loving good

The latest example of which is the abortion industry, and the heinous practice of not only ripping babies apart in the womb, but selling their body parts for profit
Have you seen the videos recently? Their sickening

You can find them on Justin Taylor's blog at **TheGospelCoalition.org**; And every other thing there is to know about abortion, on *Abort73.com*
And I'd encourage you to watch them, b/c the things going on in the abortion industry are the *epitome* of sinful and godless

And if you've had an abortion, this is not a commentary on you; God forgives; God redeems; God restores; God renews; And God loves
So much, that he died so you wouldn't have to carry the guilt of that to the grave
And having repented of it, you can rest secure*****

➤ This isn't a commentary on you, but it is a commentary on the abortion industry; And the practices they perpetuate; And the women on whom they prey
And the cavalier callousness with which they do their work; And the barbaric, illegal practice of *selling* the babies, in whole or in part God help us, for profit

This is a commentary on them; This is a commentary on those who advocate such things
This is a commentary on those who try to whitewash it with smooth speech and innocuous terminology – like “women's health,” and “fetus,” and “specimen”
And this is a commentary on those in our government who support it, and allow it, and fund it
It's wrong, it's wicked, it's evil, it's disturbing, and it's unbecoming of a culture that's supposedly enlightened and advanced

➤ And please don't minimize it by telling me that the research done with the babies' parts, helps us find cures and make medical advances that improve our lives
Short of a direct act of God, when has it ever been right to snuff out the life of one group, in order to extend the life of another?
When has it ever been right to intentionally *take* the life of one person, in order to *better* the life of another? Maybe to save it, yes; But better it?
That reeks of Nazi Germany and the experiments they did on the Jews

And yet we continue to give Planned Parenthood, the largest provider of abortions in this country – \$540M a year, to do it; Our tax dollars at work
And the argument that the money doesn't go for abortions is about as lame as it gets
That would be like me giving you \$2000 a month, and saying that you can use it for anything except your mortgage payment
Hello; Does that not free up \$2000 that you *can* use for your mortgage payment?

The whole abortion industry is a whitewashed tomb, that's black as can be under the surface; And just *one* example of the increasingly sinful and godless culture . . .
In which we live; There's no getting around it

2nd, there's no getting around the fact that . . .

We live in a culture that's increasingly hostile toward believers (John 17:14)

Which is completely the opposite of how it was, but not surprising

B/c Jesus said in **John 17:14** – *I have given them your word, and the world has hated them because they are not of the world, just as I am not of the world.*

Speaking to God the Father in his prayer right before he was arrested and crucified,
Jesus said in no uncertain terms that those who follow him, are going to be hated
And we are; Increasingly so; B/c . . .

A. We're strangers and aliens – we're not *of* this world as Jesus said
And people usually don't *like*, those who aren't like them

B. People don't like those who oppose them or disagree with them
And we certainly oppose those who advocate sinful practices; And disagree with those
who live a godless lifestyle

C. People don't like to feel guilty
Which happens, when we conduct ourselves in a godly manner; It's *convicting* to those
who don't
As is the presence of God we bring to the table, and the floodlight of righteousness that
comes with him
To those living in sin, this little light of mine is a spotlight; And they feel the heat
And the more they feel, the more hostile they get; Even though we love them and want
to see them saved; That's why our culture's *hostile* toward us; And it's increasing***

➤ Like the Tweet last year, from New York Times writer Josh Barro, who said that people
who hold orthodox Christian views on marriage, do not deserve to be treated civilly
And lest you think that's an isolated perspective from a crackpot, consider the
conclusion of a sociology professor who wrote a book about all this (George Yancey)
He said – “My research suggests a certain willingness of Americans to dehumanize
conservative Christians.” It's out there

If you hold a biblical view on sexuality, abortion, marriage, morals, parenting, or
anything else that's contrary to the prevailing winds of culture – you're a problem
And your ability to express those views, and live by them, and advocate that others do
the same – is being confined more and more to the inside of churches
Say what you want here, but outside these walls, either shut up or conform; And if you
don't, you're at risk of losing your job, your grade, or your position
It's happening; Even to people in our church; Right now; Right here

Which means we can no longer sit back as Christians and go with the flow – depending on
the *cultural* tides to preserve our freedom and all that is good; We can't
We're going to have to *fight* for the things we believe; We're going to have to *struggle*
for the life that's best; Or as the Bible says it – *contend* for the *faith*

And that's the 3rd thought I want to commend to you; And really the core of the message
Now more than ever, we need to contend for the faith (Jude 3-4)
Jude 3-4 – Beloved [that's you and I, those who are called, those who are saved, as he says
in v1], *although I was very eager to write to you about our common salvation, I found it
necessary to write appealing to you to contend for the faith that was once for all
delivered to the saints. [4] For certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago
were designated for this condemnation* [the punishment for sin that he goes on to talk
about], *ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our
only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ.*

It happened then, and it's happening now; People are twisting and perverting God's design
for life, his *grace* – and trampling on the *faith* we've been given
Referring to the truth of who Jesus is, what he's done, and how we should live
It's under attack; And we *have* to do something

Gone are the days when we can just sit back, go with the flow, and ride the wave
Or hide in the shadows while the battle rages; Or take the selfish route and leave the
issues to the *next* generation – when it's even worse

This is *our* watch; And the time is now
To fight for what's right, oppose what's wrong, strive for the best, and support others
who do the same; We *have* to contend

Which means at *least* 5 things; And this is where the rubber meets the road

1. Make yourself known

Stand up; Like that old hymn says – *Stand up, stand up for Jesus, ye soldiers of the cross;*
Lift high his royal banner, we must not suffer loss
You may not know *everything* about a particular issue and what God's Word says about
it, but you do know something; And you need to say it
Set your fear aside, and speak up; Repent of your complacency if necessary, and make
your views known

It's something I've battled with ever since I became a pastor
Out of a fear of man and possible backlash, I've struggled to take a stand sometimes
And I made a commitment to the Lord a while back, that I'm done with that; I'm over it
Love for my neighbor, my family, my church, the Lord, and the truth – demands it

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was killed by the Nazi's for speaking
against their genocide of Jews; And he said this . . .
“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil: God will not hold us guiltless. Not to speak is to
speak. Not to act is to act.” Contend for the faith, and make yourself known*****

2. Trust the Bible

There's nothing like facing opposition that causes you to doubt the truth, is there?
Nothing like a question you can't answer, or an argument you can't counter, to make
you second guess the Bible
“Maybe this book *doesn't* have all the answers; Maybe it *doesn't* have a lock on the
truth”; It happens, doesn't it?

Especially when an issue strikes close to home
Like when your son says they're gay; “Maybe the Bible's off on that; Maybe we're just
reading it wrong”
Or when your daughter moves in with her longtime boyfriend; “Maybe it is okay”
Or your unmarried co-worker gets an abortion; “Does God really say?”
Or your sister files for divorce b/c she's in a miserable marriage
Those sorts of situations tend to make us *doubt* the Bible, and question its truth, and
look for ways around it

But the fact remains – it's God's Word, and he knows best; On social and moral issues,
just like salvation issues
And if you're going to contend for what it says, you have to trust it

3. Solidify your convictions

If you're not *sure* what you think, or you don't *know* what the Bible says – get up to speed
Talk to somebody who *does* know; Study the Scriptures yourself; Read up on the issue

B/c if your *convictions* aren't solid, you'll never be the pillar and buttress of truth that God calls you to be, as part of the church

Get grounded; And if you need to, start with your *own* faith; Solidify *that*; B/c you'll never contend for something you don't really believe
It's one of the reasons we offer so many opportunities to be disciplined; So you can solidify your convictions, and not only live your faith out, but contend for it

4. Understand the times

When God was preparing David to take over the kingdom from Saul, it says in 1 Chron 12:32, that he added the men of *Issachar* to David's camp; Men . . .
Who had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do

If you're going to stand for what's right, you have to know what's wrong; You have to know what's going on; You have to stay current; You have to read between the lines
You have to recognize the warning signs; You have to discern the core issues; You have to ferret out the nuances; You have to smell the battle
And by all means, you have to stop *insulating* yourself from the issues, and start *exposing* yourself to them

➤ I gave you some websites to that end a few weeks back, and here's a few more . . .
AFA.net – The American Family Association; Their mission is to provide practical ways to contend for the faith
Another is **TheFamilyLeader.com** – based right here in IA; Focused on the impact that the various issues have on *us*

We live in an unprecedented age, where every single one of us can understand the times; 5 minutes a day to peruse the headlines and read an occasional article
And if we fail to do so, the faith we hold dear will be shuttered and confined*****

5. Expect to suffer

Financially, socially, relationally, emotionally, spiritually, and maybe even physically
B/c anytime you swim against the cultural current, and anytime you stand for what's right in the face of what's wrong – you *will* suffer
Whether it's the scorn of your friends in class; Or the lack of promotions at work; Or the negative publicity of those you oppose; Or the scrutiny of government
Suffering is part of contending; Especially so for believers, who are contending for the *faith*, and calling sin, sin

➤ Philippians 1:27-30; After Paul says to the church in Philippi that it's better if he joins them and continues with them, he says in v27 . . .
[27] *Only let your manner of life be worthy of the gospel of Christ, so that whether I come and see you or am absent, I may hear of you that you are standing firm in one spirit, with one mind striving side by side for the faith of the gospel, [28] and not frightened in anything by your opponents. This is a clear sign to them of their destruction [referring to our firmness, and unity, and lack of fear], but of your salvation, and that from God. [29] For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should not only believe in him but also suffer for his sake, [30] engaged in the same conflict that you saw I had and now hear that I still have.*
Which was contending for the faith

Part of living a life worthy of the gospel, worthy of the great truths by which we were saved – is contending for them, and suffering for it
It's part and parcel of our salvation, our life in Christ; Especially in the last days

And I don't think we'll ever contend the way we should, until we're *ready* to suffer
Until we're ready to sacrifice our lifestyle, and belongings, and bank account, and well-being, and even friendships sometimes
To the extent that we put those things first, we'll never contend for the faith (**Summ**)

➤ So how about it? Are you ready?
Or have you become so *numb* to what's wrong, you don't care? Or so *calloused*, you turn a blind eye? Or so self-absorbed, you don't even see a *need* to contend?

I hope not (**Summary**); B/c the battle rages, and we need to fight; Not with the weapons of *this* world – but the sword of the Spirit, the shield of faith, and the love of God
Starting in our homes and churches, and then our schools, legislatures, courts, and workplaces
Otherwise, the way of life we know and the cultural blessings we enjoy, will go by the wayside – and the light of Jesus, put under a bushel

Prayer – Lord, bolster our love, our passion, our strength, and our courage; And find us ready to contend for the faith; We love you, and worship you, and commit ourselves to your cause
And ask that you would use our tithes and offerings now, to that end