

Face Off

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[0 : 00] Well, if we could, this evening with the Lord's help and the Lord's enabling, if we could turn back to that portion of Scripture that we read. 2 Timothy chapter 3.

2 Timothy chapter 3. And if we read again at verse 10. I want us to consider from verse 5 onwards, but if we read again at verse 10.

Where Paul writes, While evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

And so on. Believe it or not, I love watching ice hockey. There's not much of it on the TV nowadays, except when the Winter Olympics are on.

But I love watching ice hockey because it's amazing to see the speed and the skill and the strength that's required to be an ice hockey player. Of course, I can't skate to save myself, but I enjoy watching others do it.

[1 : 35] Especially when two opposing players, you have two opposing players and they have what's called a face-off. So in ice hockey, you have a face-off where the two players are facing one another.

They're leaning forward, right down, almost face-to-face with their helmets are almost touching. And they're waiting for the referee to throw in the puck to get the game started.

It's a face-off. But in order to win a face-off, it not only requires the strength of your arms, it also requires the strength of your entire body.

Where they need to be wholeheartedly committed in order to win the face-off. And you know, as we come to this section in 2 Timothy, that's the image I have in my mind with Timothy.

Not that Timothy was playing ice hockey, but that Paul was saying to Timothy, he was saying to Timothy, in the last days, you're going to have a face-off. You're going to come face-to-face with problematic people.

[2 : 37] Problematic people that you're going to come across. And what it will require is wholehearted commitment from you. Because these problematic people, they will be lovers of self, as we read, rather than lovers of God.

What's worse, Timothy, is that they will have an outward appearance of godliness. But they will deny the very power of the gospel. And Paul's advice to Timothy, the end of verse 5, Avoid such people.

Avoid such people. Timothy, in the last days, you're going to have a face-off with opposition. And a face-off with obstacles. So there are two headings this evening.

A face-off with opposition and obstacles. So first of all, a face-off with opposition. Opposition, he says in verse 6, For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

Just as Janes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also opposed the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.

[4 : 01] Now, you remember that last Wednesday we began chapter 3 by looking at the first few verses of chapter 3, where Paul gives to us in verses 1 to 5, he gives this solemn and scary statement about the last days.

He says in verse 1, Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. And he explains what those times of difficulty are. He says, Avoid such people.

So Paul gave us that solemn and scary statement about the last days. And as we said last week, we're already living in the last days. We've been living in the last days for the past 2,000 years.

Because the last days are the period between the cross of Jesus Christ and the second coming of Jesus Christ. And as Paul reminded and reaffirmed to Timothy, he said there in the opening verses, that in the last days there will be difficult days, there will be dangerous days, and there will be dark days for the church.

Because during that time, worldliness and ungodliness will creep in. But more than that, there will be those who fail to remain faithful to Jesus and remain focused upon Jesus.

[5 : 43] Because they will be led astray, he says, by dishonesty and deception and even the depravity of their own sin and the sin of false teachers. Timothy, understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty.

There will be times of difficulty. And as we said last week, that word difficulty at the end of verse 1, it sets the tone for the whole chapter.

It sets the tone for the whole chapter because it not only expresses that there will be days of difficult days and dangerous days and dark days in the last days, but that word difficulty, it also explains that the last days will be volatile.

They will be violent. They will be fierce and ferocious days. They will be hard and hostile days. They will be aggressive and antagonistic days towards the gospel.

Paul is saying to us that in the last days, the devil will be powerful. He will be present. And he will be prevalent, not only within our community, but also within the church.

[6 : 55] And that's why Paul is seeking to make Timothy. He wants to alert and make Timothy aware of what's coming. He wants to let him know what is going to happen when he goes.

Because Paul knows that Timothy, Timothy, as we've seen, he must fan into flame his God-given gift as a pastor and preacher of the gospel. He's not to be ashamed of the gospel message or the ministry of the gospel.

He's to guard the gospel. He's to glory in the gospel. He's to pass on this gospel baton to the next generation because this gospel, as we know in our own experience, it is the power of God unto salvation to those who believe.

And Paul has emphasized and re-emphasized the power of the gospel to Timothy. He's done it again and again throughout his letters. Because, as he explains here, in the last days, in the last days there will be people in the church.

And this is what we need to note. It's people in the church, he's saying, who are lovers of self rather than lovers of God. And verse 5, it's a terrifying verse.

[8 : 07] They will have an outward appearance of godliness, but they will deny the grace of God and they will deny the power of the gospel.

They will have a face and a form and a figure of godliness, but they will doubt, dispute, disregard and deny the power of the gospel.

Timothy, avoid such people. And, you know, we don't have to go far. We don't have to go far to know what Paul is actually talking about.

Because within our own nation today, there are many men and women who are ministers in parish churches who have a face and a form and a figure of godliness where they look like a minister because they wear a clerical collar, they put on clerical vestments, they wear clerical garb and they give a clerical performance.

They have a form, as Paul says, a form of godliness, an appearance of godliness. But that appearance is short-lived because when they open their mouth, they open their mouth and what comes out of their mouth is doubt and dispute and disregard and even a denial of the grace of God and the power of the gospel.

[9 : 44] They doubt the authority of scripture. They dispute the resurrection of Jesus Christ. They disregard the holiness of God and they deny the virgin birth of our saviour.

They doubt, dispute, disregard and deny the grace of God and the power of the gospel. And you all know that what I'm saying is a reality in our nation today.

We see it on the news. We see it on our TV. We see men dressed like ministers but yet they have a form of godliness and deny its power.

I remember being in a Church of Scotland parish church outside Glasgow many years ago. It was when I went to get, to do my test for becoming a Sparky. And I was staying with a woman in a B&B; and I went to church with her.

And it was a parish church outside Glasgow. And the minister, he looked like a minister. But his sermon wasn't a sermon at all. It was a 10-minute talk that didn't mention Jesus once.

[10:51] And you know, that's one of the reasons why, and I'll say it, that's one of the reasons why practically all the ministers in our denomination have ditched their clerical collar. because they want to detach and disassociate themselves from liberal ministers.

They want to detach and disassociate themselves from a national church that doubts and disputes and disregards and denies the authority of Scripture.

And I get their point. I see where they're coming from. Because I'm not really dogmatic about the dog collar. I do think it's very helpful. In fact, I find it very beneficial when I go into a house or a hospital or a care home.

I've never had to introduce myself to anyone or explain who I am because they know straight away who I am and what I do. Just like the nurses who are there or the paramedics that you see in hospital or the police or the fire brigade.

They're all dressed in their uniform. And this is what I view it as. This is my uniform. And it's a universally recognized uniform of a minister of the gospel. And I'm sure maybe I've told you this before.

[12:05] I'll never forget the first home that I went to visit in Barvis. I'll never forget it. So when I became the minister here in Barvis in 2014, I was only 26.

I was so young then, didn't have grey hair. I was just out of college. I just started wearing my clerical collar and I wasn't even sure that I was going to keep it. I wasn't really convinced that I should keep it.

That was until I went on my first visit, my first pastoral visit here in Lower Barvis. I went to the door and I knocked on the door and the woman opened the door and she took one look at me.

Some of you might know who it was. And she said to me, well, I don't know who you are, but I know what you are. And if you weren't wearing that collar, I wouldn't let you in.

And you know, that was it for me. I've worn a collar ever since and I don't intend taking it off. But you know, the issue isn't actually the clerical collar, as many people have an issue with it.

[13:04] But the issue isn't the uniform. The issue isn't the uniform that gives the form of godliness. The issue is the function. It's not the form that's a problem.

It's the function of godliness. The issue is the Christian character, conduct and conversation of those wearing the clerical collar. The issue is the message they preach and proclaim.

Because there are many ministers in our nation and it's so sad to say, and I say it with something in the pit of my stomach as I say it, as a minister of the gospel.

There are many ministers in our nation where they look the part, but they are liberal in their theology. They don't preach the glory of Jesus and the whole counsel of God and the beauty of the cross as the only way of salvation.

There are many ministers who look gracious and they look godly, but they deny the grace of God. They deny the glory of the gospel. And Paul clearly and Paul categorically is saying to this young minister, Timothy, he's saying, avoid such people.

[14:15] Literally, he's saying, turn away from such people. Don't entertain them. Separate yourself from such people. But there's more because Paul, it's very hard hitting what he's saying here.

Paul mentions that in the last days there will be some clergy who abuse their position and they will not only abuse their position, they'll abuse their power by abusing people.

There will be some clergy who abuse their position and power by abusing people. We see that in verse 6. He says, for among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

You know, the Bible is solemn. It doesn't hide anything from us. It presents everything. And what Paul is doing here, he's alerting and he's making Timothy aware of the fact that in the last days there will be scandals within the church.

There will be scandals within the church and again, we don't have to look far to see it because in the past number of years there have been lots of scandals, sexual scandals that were concealed and covered up for decades.

[15 : 40] But they've now been revealed. They've been reported to have taken place within the Roman Catholic Church. And these scandals with women and also with children, they were carried out by people in positions, positions within the church who were in positions of trust.

They had a form of godliness but they denied its power. But you know, let's not highlight the speck in someone else's eye without first taking the log out of our own eye.

because over the years as a denomination we have had our own share of scandals whether alcoholism, adultery, abuse and of course the danger is when leaders in the church abuse their position and power by abusing people.

And we might ask, well how does this happen? How does this happen? And the answer is simple.

The answer is subtle. The answer is sin. Sin is real and it affects all of us.

We're all sinners, we're all susceptible to falling to sin. But you know, as we consider what Paul is saying here to Timothy and he's saying it so boldly but as we listen to what Paul is saying here you know, we should have Paul's words, this is what was preaching to me in a way before I'm preaching this to you.

[17 : 09] Paul's words should be ringing in our ears let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. Let anyone who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall.

Because as we said when worldliness and ungodliness creeps into the church we fail to remain faithful to Jesus and remain focused upon Jesus. And that's when clergy have this form of godliness but deny its power.

That's when power and positions of trust are abused to the point that clergy don't represent god anymore. They actually replace god.

When power and positions of trust are abused clergy don't represent god anymore. They replace god.

And I say that because this is what Paul is talking about here when he mentions these two men.

These two men who opposed Moses. These men Janus and Jambres.

[18 : 15] Look at verse 8 he says just as Janus and Jambres opposed Moses so these men also opposed the truth men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith but they will not get very far for their folly will be plain to all as was that of those two men.

As you know Moses we're studying Exodus on Sunday morning. Moses he's a man of God and Moses was you could say a representative of God.

He was he was God's servant. And he was someone who represented God in Pharaoh's palace when he went in to stand before Pharaoh to ask for the people to be let go.

Moses was someone who represented God in Pharaoh's palace but Janus and Jambres were magicians who sought to replace God in Pharaoh's palace.

Now if you were to read through the whole Bible if you were to read through the book of Exodus you would never find Janus and Jambres mentioned anywhere in Scripture except here in 2 Timothy chapter 3 which immediately raises the question it should raise the question how did Paul know that the names of Pharaoh's what the names of Pharaoh's magicians were how did he know that they were called Janus and Jambres because it's not mentioned in the Old Testament and the answer is the Talmud the Talmud I don't know if you've ever read the Talmud I've never read it but the Talmud is the Hebrew word meaning learning or instruction the Talmud it's like it's what the Jews would use to read alongside the Old Testament they view it as a commentary a Jewish commentary on the Old Testament history laws customs and culture the Talmud consists of a collection of Jewish traditions called the Gemara and also oral teachings called the

[20 : 16] Mishnah and you can find that in the Talmud if you want to read it for yourself but unlike the Bible which is the inspired infallible and inerrant word of God the Talmud is just the teachings and traditions of men it's not inspired but nevertheless according to the teaching and tradition of the Talmud Janus and Jambres are mentioned there and they're mentioned as the magicians who sought to replace God in Pharaoh's palace because you remember in the Exodus story when Moses and Aaron they go into Pharaoh and they demand to Pharaoh that he releases the Israelites from slavery and bondage in Egypt thus saith the Lord let my people go but Pharaoh as you know he denied their request he claims that they weren't representatives of the Lord at all he asks who is the Lord that I will bow down and worship him but in order to prove their position in order to prove that Moses and Aaron are representatives of the Lord you remember how Aaron throws his staff on the ground and it becomes a serpent but Pharaoh he quickly counters the argument by calling in his two magicians he calls in

Janice and Jambres who do the same they both throw their staff on the ground and their staffs become serpents but you remember that Aaron's staff swallowed up their staffs Aaron's staff swallowed up their staff Janice and Jambres sought to replace God in Pharaoh's palace but Moses and Aaron proved their position they proved that they represented God in Pharaoh's palace they proved that they were the genuine article despite what these men looked like and that's what Paul is reminding and reaffirming to Timothy here he's saying just as Janice and Jambres opposed Moses so these men these men who have a form of godliness but deny its power so these men also oppose the truth they are men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith but they will not get very far their folly will be plain to all to everyone as was that of those two men

Janice and Jambres Paul was saying to Timothy Timothy when I go when I go you are going to have face-offs with Pharaohs you're going to come face-to-face with with men like Janice and Jambres and they're going to have a face and a form and a figure of graciousness and godliness they're going to have all the garb of looking like a minister of the gospel but they will doubt and dispute and disregard and deny the grace of God and the power of the gospel therefore Timothy I want you to know this because Timothy you need to stand firm you need to stay focused and you need to stay faithful and that's our message in a world where there are so many voices even within the church we're being told to stand firm stay focused and stay faithful to Jesus because in the last days

Timothy you're going to have a face-off with opposition and then a face-off with obstacles a face-off with obstacles that's what we see secondly and look at verse 10 he says you however have followed my teaching my conduct my aim in life my faith my patience my love my steadfastness my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch and Iconium and at Lystra which persecutions I endured yet from them all the Lord rescued me indeed all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted so before Paul moves on to emphasize and to explain to Timothy the importance of the inspiration and the infallibility and the inerrancy of scripture which he'll do at the end of the chapter and we'll consider that next time before he does that Paul asserts and affirms to Timothy that in the last days he will have a face-off with obstacles he will come face to face with obstacles because as he said there in verse 12 all who desire to live a godly life in Christ

Jesus will be persecuted all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted now as you know this isn't the first time that Paul has mentioned persecution throughout his many New Testament letters Paul highlights that he's suffering for the sake of the gospel and even throughout this farewell letter Paul is reminded and reaffirmed to Timothy time and time and time again that he's suffering for the sake of the gospel and that if Timothy saying to Timothy if you remain focused on Jesus and remain faithful to Jesus then you too will suffer for the sake of the gospel we saw that in chapter 2 Paul exhorted and encouraged Timothy he said to him share share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus so Paul he doesn't hide the fact that he's suffering for the sake of the gospel and that others will suffer too because for Paul the subject of suffering it's not written in the small print or as a footnote it's out front it's written in bold and underlined he puts asterisks around it he says

[26 : 07] Timothy Jesus suffered I'm suffering you're going to suffer too so expect it expect it because every disciple of Jesus Christ will experience and encounter persecution in some form or another we might not have the martyr's death but we will most likely encounter resentment or rejection or ridicule because of the gospel of Jesus Christ that's what Jesus said if anyone denies me if anyone will come after me let him deny himself take up his cross and follow me so Timothy the path of salvation is a path of suffering the path of salvation is a path of suffering but as Jesus said remember what Jesus said blessed are those blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven however

Paul's concern wasn't so much about Timothy's persecution because that was inevitable Paul's concern is about Timothy's practice Paul's concern was Timothy's character his conduct his conversation as a Christian Paul's concern was that in comparison to the other pastors and preachers who have a form of godliness but deny its power Paul's concern was that as a pastor and as a preacher of the gospel Timothy would be consistent he would be consistent in his Christian character conduct and conversation and he would do so by practicing what he preached he would do it by practicing what he preached and he would do it not in an arrogant way but he would follow in the footsteps of Paul because Paul sets before him well his role and his responsibility as an

apostle Paul is saying to

Timothy there in verse 10 and 11 he's saying imitate me imitate me he's saying like a tradesman to his apprentice and that's what Paul was to Timothy Paul was a tradesman Timothy was the apprentice and Paul was saying to Timothy you've watched me you've watched me all these years you've watched me in my teaching my conduct my aim in life my faith my patience my love my steadfastness my persecutions my sufferings you've watched me you've seen it all in my life Timothy therefore imitate me as I seek to imitate Jesus imitate me as I seek to imitate Jesus Paul you know he's speaking with integrity here and he's saying to Timothy Timothy there are no secrets or skeletons in my life so imitate me as I seek to imitate Jesus that's a bold statement there are no secrets or skeletons in my life so imitate me as I seek to imitate

Jesus a modern equivalent would be Timothy you can read through my phone and you can have my laptop I have nothing to hide from you you can see my life for who I am and what I am because everything of who I am and what I am is an open book before God imitate me as I seek to imitate Jesus and you know that statement to Timothy to ministers of the gospel it should not only be through of ministers of the gospel it should also be through of all the people of God where we are to imitate Jesus we're to imitate the example set out in scripture by Paul and the apostles we're to imitate them as we seek to imitate Jesus this means that as Paul is saying to Timothy and to us there should be no secrets and no skeletons in our life now that is challenging there should be no secrets and no skeletons in our life my friend

Paul is saying to Timothy understand this in the last days you will come face to face with opposition you'll come face to face with obstacles you'll have a face off with opposition and obstacles and what will surprise you most is that it will be from clergy clergy who have a face a form and a figure of godliness and yet they doubt dispute disregard and deny the grace of God and the power of the gospel but you Timothy you Timothy I want you to remain focused I want you to remain faithful to Jesus right to the end and that's the message for us tonight remain focused remain faithful to Jesus right to the end well may the lord bless these thoughts to us let us pray oh lord our gracious god we give thanks to thee for thy word and lord we look at it and we come to it and we realize how far short we come but we give thanks to thee for also the warnings that scripture gives that it gives not only good news to us but it reminds us that there are dangers there are things that will distract and divert our attention and lord we pray that we would remain faithful and we would remain focused upon [32 : 08] Jesus and upon him alone oh lord we live in a world where there are so many voices there are so many men and women in pulpits today who are graceless and godless and lord we look at the dark day that we live in and it is a day that Paul spoke about it is a day that Paul warned us about and help us then we pray as thy people as thy people who have been born again of the spirit of god help us to stay focused to stay faithful to the end to keep looking to Jesus to keep him as the one who is the fairest among ten thousand and altogether lovely that we would have him in the forefront of our mind and that we would do as Jesus commands us that we would listen to his voice because as Jesus says my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me and I give to them eternal life and they will never perish neither shall they be plucked out of my hand oh lord keep us we pray for we know that we cannot keep ourselves do us good than we ask go before us cleanse us and do us good for

Jesus sake amen we are going to bring our service to a conclusion by singing the words of psalm 27 psalm 27 it's in the Scottish Psalter page 236 psalm 27 we're singing from the beginning down to the end of the double verse marked 4 psalm 27 it's just it's same again it's somebody psalm it's Mary Martin's favorite psalm by the way so remember Mary Martin we miss seeing her here she used to always sit there wherever he is tonight used to always sit there so this is Mary Martin's favorite psalm I think her favorite verse was verse 14 we're singing verses 1 to 4 the Lord's my light and saving health who shall make me dismayed my life strength is the Lord of whom then shall I be afraid when as mine enemies and foes most wicked persons all to eat my flesh against me rose they stumbled and did fall we'll sing down to the end of the double verse marked 4 to God's praise the Lord's my light unsaving health who shall make me dismayed my life strength is the Lord of whom then shall I be afraid when as mine enemies enforce most wicked persons all to eat my flesh against me rose they stumbled and did fall against me though one host and come my heart yet fear less is though war against me rise

I will be confident in this thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain that all days of my life life I may within God's house remain that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire and that

I in his holy place will reverently inquire the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ the Holy Spirit be with you all now and forevermore Amen