The Second Epistle to Timothy

Part 3

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[00:00:00] Good evening. Thank you for coming. We begin with Hymn 278, 278. It's the expression of a desire, a good desire.

Saviour, we long to follow Thee. It assumes there are others who are like-minded with whom we wish to follow the Lord. Saviour, we long to follow Thee, daily Thy cross to bear, and count all else, whate'er it be, unworthy of our care. 278. [00:01:15] Saviour, we long to follow Thee, daily Thy cross to bear, and count all else, whate'er it be, unworthy of our care. We honor now, O Lord of Thy, the virtues of Thy law, and make Thy grace and love divine, the psalms and hymns of hope.

[00:02:05] Thy Spirit to the present still.

O come, O come, O come, O come, O come, to Bethlehem.

O come, O come, O come, O come, to Bethlehem.

[00:03:03] O come, O come, O come, O come, to Bethlehem.

O teach us, Lord, the path to know.

O praise the life within.

O come, O come, O come, O come, to Bethlehem.

[00:04:21] Without natural affection, truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof, from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers' lusts, ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. [00:05:11] Now as Janes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth. Men of corrupt minds reprobate concerning the faith. But they shall proceed no further, for their folly shall be manifested unto all men as theirs also was. But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering,

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charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra, what persecutions I endured. [00:06:03] But out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them, and that from a child thou hast known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. For all Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works. [00:07:19] 2 Timothy chapter 3 outlines the kind of character that God is looking for. in the days immediately before the coming of the Lord, and it should therefore commend itself to our study.

[00:08:03] I remember suggesting a Bible reading once, looking at three or four examples of Scriptures where the presence or the absence of a little three-letter word made all the difference. And we were going happily, seeing that where the little word thee is used, something specific is being referred to, and if the little word thee is absent in those translations which make any attempt at literal accuracy, that where the little word thee is missing, it's not so much a specific instance, but the overall character of the thing. Young men were present, seemed to be going along with anything, until someone dropped a bomb. [00:09:10] He said, this is, of course, the inarthorous construction. He may well have been right. Soon as he said that, I could see the shutters come down on the young brother's eyes. And with one accord after the meeting, he said, we were getting on fine, until we were told that you need to know some of the niceties of English and Greek grammar to understand the Bible. Now, of course, I've been very careful to say, well, whether the little word thee is in, or whether the little word thee is absent, makes all the difference. I tried to learn from that lesson, so I hope no one switches off because the word's been mentioned. [00:10:04] But there's no doubt, in verse one, we get a good example. It doesn't look much on the surface, but if you examine your literal translations, you'll see that this know also that in thee last days, at best, the thee is in brackets, but most editors say, well, really, it shouldn't be there. It should be, this know also that in last days, perilous times shall come. The teaching being that it's not so much any specific item, incident, or circumstance, it's the whole character of the thing that makes all the difference. There is a kind of behaviour, a kind of moral fibre, a kind of character, which will be particularly in demand of necessity in last day's conditions. [00:11:15] It's for this reason, probably, that as long as brethren are kind and know what you're saying, it's probably true to say, if there's one chapter rather than another, that outlines what Scripture means by presenting Philadelphian character, it's 2 Timothy chapter 3. Now, being well taught, you will recoil and say, we would never claim to be Philadelphia. Oh, but you will have learned also that while you do not claim to be Philadelphia, which would make you demonstrably Laodicean, what is true is that it is right to aim, not claim, it's right to aim to exhibit Philadelphian character. [00:12:16] Now, if you want to put this together with Revelation 2 and 3, that progressive history of the responsible church on earth, you feel free to do so. And when you come to Philadelphia, if you want an outline of what Philadelphia or character appropriate to Philadelphia, you'll find it in 2 Timothy 3. In any event, it's about Christian character that the Lord is looking for. Now, we'll move slowly through. [00:13:20] of the kind of behaviour and the kind of character that made it necessary for the Son of God to come into the world and die at Calvary. Compare this list in verses 2, 3 and 4.

Well, you could say certainly 2 and 3. You can compare that with the behavioural pattern of the brute pagans given in the first chapter of Romans.

[00:14:04] You would also get towards that list some of the characteristics of the cultured Greeks that

you get in Romans, end of Romans 1, beginning of Romans 2. And you will certainly get things here that are very akin to the outline given of the condition of the Jewish nation, having a form of godliness and so on, denying the power thereof. We are fortunate in Western Europe in that, certainly for those of us who are older, we've lived most of our lives in a country basking in the aftermath, if I can use the term, [00:15:11] of three or four centuries where, even if the Bible wasn't read, it was respected. And those who framed the laws of the land, well, all the lands in Western Europe, I suppose, were those who made the laws, framed the laws, took account of the norms of behaviour according to God as expressed in the Bible. And for three or four hundred years, this had a secondary effect. Whether or not the souls were saved, it had the effect of placing a limiting factor on the behaviour of the nations. Certainly, in the last fifty years, we've been able to see the result of a movement which started over a hundred years, I suppose, culminating in throwing the Bible overboard out of the home, out of the school, out of religion.

[00:16:29] Out of religious societies. It's not surprising then that the conduct of the general population will slide back to what it was before God's written word was published and spread throughout the nations. And so we get a count here. Things will revert to primitive, pagan conditions. Things that not so many years ago, we would have been done quietly, surreptitiously, behind a curtain, indoors, with the blinds drawn, [00:17:19] for shame's sake, are not only tolerated now, but openly encouraged. We are certainly in last day conditions.

Nothing new. We come to the point where Paul speaks of Janez and Jambres. Tell me afterwards how to pronounce it. I'll be glad to learn.

[00:18:03] Babies are named now, not so much from family tradition, but because we like the name. I won't go into that. But in the Bible, names were not only personal, they were characteristic.

Whether they were the names actually given them by their parents or whether it's the names they came to be known by when their characters developed is not for me to say. Often God gave insight as to how that person would live their lives by saying to the parent, you name him so and so. And in 2nd Timothy, we see a clear trend. In the first chapter, Phygelus, Hermogenes. Second chapter, Hymenaeus, Phyletus. Chapter three, Janez and Jambres.

[00:19:20] Now, if you take Pains, easily checked up, you'll find that there's a trend, a moral trend, a moral degeneration. First chapter, Phygelus, Hermogenes, Fugitive and Luca, root meanings of words.

A suggestion of movement away from the truth and the reason why the movement was attractive for what was in it for the people. When we come to chapter two, Hymenaeus, marriage, Phyletus, amiable.

[00:20:16] There were things they didn't like in chapter one, they wanted to move away from them. In chapter two, there are things they are drawn towards. And then in chapter three, Janez and Jambres, seducing and rebellious. Now, this is no flight of fancy. You can check the meanings of the words, but it's in the text. Notice in chapter one, verse 15, in the same verse where it talks about these men, it says, all they which are in Asia be turned away from me. [00:21:07] Chapter two, verse 18, speaking of the two men who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection has passed already.

Chapter three. These men resist the truth. Now, there's a moral downward spiral there. In the first

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chapter, it says there are people who turn away from the truth.

In chapter two, there are those who go to the next step. Having turned away from the truth, they accept something that is not the truth. And then in chapter three, you get two men who go a stage further and they positively resist the truth. [00:22:08] You see, that trend is inevitable. It's, I was going to say progressive, but that's a positive word. It's retrogressive, I suppose. If you say, oh, it's best to affirm the truth. But if people aren't well instructed, haven't thought it through, very honest people, they wouldn't admit to something they haven't gone through themselves. But as long as they don't say it's wrong, well, I'm quite happy as long as they don't make a fuss about it. But Second Timothy chapters one, two and three say, if you start on the slippery slope down, you don't stop halfway. [00:23:04] If you turn away or don't accept what is the truth, you're exposing yourself to accept something that is not the truth. And whether you foresee it or not, you will finish in the invidious position of resisting the truth. This is why I forbore from speaking of Phygelus and Hymenides last night. They're best considered as a sequence. The pair in chapter one, the pair in chapter two, and the pair in chapter three. Now we'll move on again. Verse nine, he says, they shall proceed no further. God will set a limit. God gives us the opportunity to act on his behalf in discerning what is right and what is wrong in the light of revealed Scripture.

[00:24:11] But rest, be rest assured that if we don't do what we should be doing to preserve the truth and act upon it, God will set the limit himself eventually. But it will be to the sorrow, the mutual sorrow who had the opportunity to take their place in the ranks of those who stand for the truth. Verse 10, as always, Paul says, I'm not asking you to do anything I'm not prepared to do myself. Very good thing about Paul. He doesn't, he's not the kind of delegator that gives all the nasty jobs out and keeps the nice one for himself. [00:25:03] Whatever has to be done, he's been through it, he's done it. And he says, look, my life is transparent. You know what I teach. You know how I behave. You know my honest endeavour that the way I behave is consistent with what I say I believe. It's not for you and me to tell each other what to believe. We owe it to the Lord what we really believe. But we do owe it to the Lord and to each other to act faithfully in line with what we say we believe. And not only when there is a common consensus, we owe it to the Lord and ourselves and each other to face up to it like Paul and be able to say, now, look, you've known me for a long time, Timothy. It's near the end of my journey on earth. [00:26:06] I'm going to be with the Lord soon if he doesn't come to take me. And you know full well that as long as you've known me, I've taught the truth and I've lived it. And it's not merely words to me. And he develops that more. And again, if you want an outline of Christian character, you have it given in chapter, in verse 10. Doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, love, patience and so on.

Perhaps I should mention in verse nine, the comment, they shall proceed no further for their folly shall be manifest unto all men as theirs also was.

[00:27:11] How good are you at interpreting your own hieroglyphics? I'm not very good. A brilliant thought occurs to me in a meeting. I get my pen out. I scribble a little note in the margin, which is full of treasure for me. I know why I've put it there. Until later, like tonight. And I look at it and I say, now, whatever did I enjoy on that occasion? When you go home, write it out longhand. Put it on a floppy, whatever. But you'll remember it better. My mnemonic here at this verse, verse nine, it is S-T-S-R-T-S. Now, what does that mean to you?

[00:28:05] I can remember this one. How about this as a proposition? The sins of teachers are the teachers of sins. It's right, you know.

I used to engage in a rather doubtful activity. And I began to get a conscience about it. But then, while I was half persuaded, I saw a mature, experienced, very nice, elderly Christian gentleman engaged in the sort of activity that I was beginning to get a conscience about. Clutching at straws, I thought, if it's all right for him, it's all right for me. It excused my conscience. [00:29:13] We are all examples to each other. Let us make sure we are good examples and not bad examples in what we do and the way that we do it. This is why a particularly high standard of behaviour is necessary in those who take responsibility in local assembly life. I'm speaking of the elders and the deacons. Read them through the first epistle. You haven't got to go far, very far back. And if you wonder why elders and deacons have to be particularly whiter than white in their behaviour, it's because the majority of their leadership is leading by example. [00:30:14] And what they have to say, if they need to say anything, will carry more weight when the way they behave is consistent with what they teach or recommend. Well, Janez and Jambres, leaders of their day, the magicians that withstood Moses, God will have the last word. He will demonstrate their folly. And indeed, at the time, judgment, summary judgment fell upon them. And again, as we saw in chapter two, if you commit yourself to live in a way that's well pleasing to the Lord, don't by any means expect an easy life. Paul says, you know me, I meant well, I did well, I spoke well, I was consistent all the way through. And yet persecutions, afflictions were my portion. Oh yes, he refers to it here. Go comb through the book of Acts and you'll see what he suffered. [00:31:22] If you're in any doubt, read the catalogue in Second Corinthians chapter 11 of the things that he suffered for the name of Jesus. And he says, not only me, says, yes, I experienced the Lord's delivering hand. And he says, now, this is a universal principle. All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. It's not just a statement of things that happen. To me, it's a statement of a commitment in character. [00:32:05] All that will, all that set themselves, all who have this burdening desire to be faithful to the Lord, the Lord will give you the kind of experience that will purify your character. And that apart from anything you do, that in character, you'll be well pleasing to the Lord. So he says, don't expect an easy time, but at least there will be this overriding matter that you'll be well pleasing to the Lord. And he says, keep going. When I was younger, or about the age of the youngest here, where I lived, there was a group of about 70 apparently keen young brothers and sisters.

[00:33:16] Did everything together, tract bands, open air preaching, going either inland to the country or down to the sea and the beaches and going to every opportunity for fellowship and ministry, everything going fine. I've lost touch with many. No doubt, some may well be serving the Lord as best they can in their present circumstances. I don't know. Oh, but for everyone like that, there must be dozens who just stopped bothering, made their way in the world, affluence has taken its toll, married nice people, men or women who were nice, cultured.

[00:34:22] Friendly, respectable, but no spiritual interest. And out of that 70, sad to say, I could only point to about a dozen now that I'm aware of that are in any way strongly committed to what they believe. Paul must have had this fear for Timothy. He says, but continue thou. We've had it before in the book. Here it is again. Unless you pursue your Christian service and character as an individual, you'll never enjoy it in company with other peoples. [00:35:11] I don't mean be a loner. If you are true to the Lord and follow him diligently, you will find others with whom you have so much in common. But unless initially you are prepared to do this as an individual in personal exercise before the Lord, you won't get very far. If you're relying upon the social gang to carry you along, it won't take you very far in your souls. Now, if you're going to do that, you'll need help. You'll need resources. And so in verse, well, verse 14 is important. Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and has been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them. [00:36:07] Makes a difference, you know. If you get help from someone you trust, someone you've observed over the years and got help from in

many ways, you know how consistent and reliable they are. It encourages you to go on because you don't want to let them down. But of course, most of all, personal commitment to the Lord. Paul says, I know you've had a good start, like most of us, I suppose. From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures. Again, a topic in itself which there isn't time to develop in the whole. Able, the capacity of the Scriptures, able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. [00:37:05] The Lord came into the world, lived here faithful to God. His faithfulness took him into death, even the death of the cross. God raised him by his glory, exalted him a prince and a saviour. And the one who's gone through it before is there to encourage us when we try to be faithful to him while we wait for him to come. We have the Scriptures. Again, a nice point. All Scripture given by inspiration of God. Worthy of an address in itself. The things that are unique in their class because they were brought into being by the operation of the breathing of God. [00:38:01] Man is different to all the creatures because he received life by God breathing into his nostrils and man became a living soul. There will be a day when Israel will not only be a name but in reality a unique nation because they will be born in a day. Ezekiel 37 tells us when the breath of God coming upon them, the power of the Holy Spirit will bring them into being as a renewed nation. There are other examples. Look for them. But here the Scriptures different to all other writings that have ever been written because they've been brought into being by the breathing of God. [00:39:01] Peter talks about men born along by a power greater than themselves bringing the revelation of God to light by writing down in principle and in detail in word as well as concept God's message for men. And he speaks of this. He uses this adjectively I suppose. All God breathed Scripture. Doesn't mean some is and some isn't. It's giving the character of the Scripture. Again, this chapter is all about character. It tells you what's right. Doctrine tells you where you're not right. Free proof. It tells you how to get right. Correction. And it tells you how to continue in the way that is right. Instruction in righteousness. [00:40:02] That's the man of God. How many? If you haven't thought about it, let me give an introduction. Very often in the Bible times are difficult. Nothing new.

The trend is opposition to God. Those who try to be true to God despised, opposed. And then you see come to light an individual who is prepared to stand for God in an evil day.

Who says even if there's nobody else, even if I'm going to swim against the tide, if that's what God wants me to do, I'm prepared to do it. [00:41:10] Of course, if I'm standing alone, I've got to examine myself very carefully. Am I alone because the trend is against God and I'm the only one to prepare to do what's right at whatever personal sacrifice? Or am I on my own because I'm an awkward individual who rubs everybody up the wrong way? If I don't consider that, certainly a lot of other people will. So the man of God has to be very sure that what he's doing has the right motive in mind. It's done in the right way at the right time and that the character that he demonstrates is that he's on earth to please God. [00:42:03] Now, if any of us, even in a mild way, imagine for a moment that we've committed ourselves once and for all to live in a way that pleases God, totally committed to the Lord, we'll be given ample opportunity to demonstrate it. God takes us at our word, do you know? Make no loose commitments before God because he will give us the kind of experience that if we say, if nobody else, Peter did, didn't he? Lord, if everybody else deserts you, not me! He was tested on his own ministry as we all are. And if I say, I'm so convinced that this is the right thing to do that if nobody supports me, I'm still going to stand my ground. Well, so be it. Before we get through the end of the tunnel, the Lord will give us the opportunity to demonstrate the reality of that commitment. [00:43:15] And the term that God uses about such an individual is man of God. Count them. I'd be interested how many you find. So far, I've found 12 in the Old Testament. Everyone doesn't agree. That doesn't matter. In every case, it's an individual, usually the person's name, not always. But in every case, whoever it is, has to come to the crisis point of saying, if no one supports me, I'm still so totally

committed to what God wants me to do that I don't, I'm not worried about the shame, the disgrace. [00:44:07] Or the embarrassment of standing alone. You remember one of them, Elijah, the man of God, he actually said that, Lord, there's nobody left. There's just me. It wasn't true. But before he was relieved, delivered, he had to get to the point where if it was necessary, he was prepared to be alone. Now, this is the concept of the term man of God. Sometimes the little word the is there, sometimes it isn't. We can talk afterwards how many there are in the New Testament. John 9, in an oblique way, the man who was born blind, said of the Lord, if he were not a man of God, surely he couldn't do this. He couldn't perform such miracles. [00:45:02] Paul says to Timothy in the first epistle, thou, everybody else does that, but you, thou man of God, you're different, act different. But here it's general, that the man of God, anyone who takes the position of being prepared to stand for God when everybody else seems to be against God. Always in the individual. I've never found in Scripture the term woman of God. Are there not women prepared to stand for God in an evil day? Of course there are. All I can conclude in the light of what the Scripture says is that in the examples given in Scripture, they are usually formal occasions about official public matters. [00:46:05] And as we've learned from Scripture, when that kind of responsibility is mentioned, it's the male of the species that is expected to take that responsibility. There is ample opportunity for women, godly women as well as godly men, to exhibit this kind of character and act in this way. What is the result? If you're going to stand for God when things are difficult, you need the end of the chapter as well. The Scriptures are geared to this end, that anyone who's prepared to stand for God, even alone, that he will be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every kind of good work. [00:47:01] Immense possibilities. And begins in this way. Read your Bible, pray every day, and you'll grow. And the kind of committed Christian character that's necessary in the dark days before the Lord's coming are these features which are outlined in this lovely chapter, 2 Timothy chapter 3. Let us close by singing hymn 462. [00:48:02] O gracious God, our Father, we thank Thee for Thy Word. To every sense of pleasure, the Spirit of Christ the Lord.

We thank Thee for Thy Spirit that moves those men of old, who in the Holy Grail of Thy truth and love unfold.

For that same one we thank Thee, the earnest and the still, who comes to Thy own children, Thy kind and will reveal.

[00:49:22] As none but Thee would do if Thy truth could impart, so none but Those He teacheth will sing it in the heart.

Who may remember'st, Father, Thy gracious work, please be, that we may by Thy Spirit the truth in love receive.

[00:50:15] For we would thus be good to serve our faithful Lord, and in this day of comfort cling to His name and Word.