

Evil and the Christian Response

2 Timothy 3:10-15

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn to HCC on 9/11/2011

Introduction

- ❖ There are only a few events, within living memory, where an entire society can remember, with striking detail, *where* we were and *what* we were doing *when* we heard the news.
 - Some here can remember exactly what they were doing when they heard President Kennedy had been shot. Some can remember where they were when they heard the Space Shuttle Challenger exploded upon lift off. Some of us even had the disturbing experience of watching it broadcasted on live television.
 - And everyone here, with the exception of younger children, can probably tell, with specific detail, where you were and what you were doing when you heard about the terror attacks on 9/11.

- ❖ I had been working here at HCC for just shy of 2 weeks as the youth intern. I was driving to church listening to the radio. I remember the exact street and the exact light I was stopped at when the radio host interrupted to announce a plane had crashed into one of the Twin Towers.
 - I pulled into church, went straight to the office where someone had set up a TV, and as a staff we stood horrified as we watched the events unfold before our eyes. I was glued to the Internet for the rest of the day, trying to understand what just happened.

- ❖ And now, looking back 10 years later, what we concluded then we would still affirm today. 9/11 was a stark reminder that evil is real AND it can manifest itself in our world with such atrocity and devastation. Now when people come face to face with this reality, they respond in different ways.
 - Some respond with fear. Some with hatred and prejudice. Others with courage and compassion. Some are driven to greater unbelief in God. Others are driven to greater faith in God. *How did you respond that September morning, ten years ago?*

- ❖ This morning I want to pose this question: ***When we are confronted with evil and evil people in this world, how should Christians respond?***
 - Now I'm not thinking in terms of how to answer theological questions ("Where was God? How could He let this happen?"). There is a time and place for that, but I'm thinking in terms of a response, not with explanations in particular, but with the way we live our lives in general.
 - I want to suggest that the Christian response to evil is to model a different kind of life -- an alternative lifestyle, if you will. The world ought to look upon the Church and see a distinct, different way of thinking and living.

Context

- ❖ Let me start by setting this morning's text in its context. We've been walking through this second letter of the Apostle Paul to Timothy, a pastor in Ephesus. And from the start, he has been warning Timothy of attacks against the faith and the faithful.
 - In the first nine verses of chapter 3, Paul speaks of living in 'the last days', which is simply a reference to this present age that we're currently living in. And Paul warns that these days will be filled with difficult, evil times.

- ❖ There will be a general decline in morality as explained in vv2-5. People will be lovers of self rather than lovers of God, following their self-inclinations and pleasures. And such people will not be found just among the irreligious but also among the religious.
 - V5 says they will have the appearance of godliness, meaning they look to be godly, religious people, but their religion is empty. They have a veneer of God-centeredness but underneath lies a radical self-centeredness. And because it's so easy to put on religion, these false teachers had infiltrated Timothy's church and were now doing harm to his flock spreading their false teaching.

- ❖ Now at the end of v5, Paul suggests one response to evil and evil people. He says to avoid such people. In context, it means for church leaders like Timothy to avoid quarreling with false teachers in ear shot of the congregation, to avoid giving them any inroad to influence your people with false teaching. In such cases, just avoid them.
 - But I hope you don't get the impression that the Christian response to evil and evil people is to simply withdraw into our Christian enclaves, to just turn a blind eye, to circle the wagons and just hold out until Christ returns.

- ❖ Edmund Burke once said, "*All that is necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.*" When Paul says "*avoid such people*", he's not advocating we do nothing because if you read on in today's text, clearly Timothy is being called to do something. He is called 1) to be different and yet 2) to stay the same. Let's consider these two responses.

Be Different

- ❖ **In response to evil and evil people, Christians are called to be different.** I get this from vv10 and 14. Notice how v10 starts with "*You, however*" and v14 with "*But as for you*". Both verses actually begin with the same phrase "*su de*", which literally means "but you".
 - Notice also how for both instances, the preceding verses describe the character and actions of evil people in Paul's day. So by writing the words "but you", he is calling Timothy to live in stark contrast to these people, to paint *their* evil and *his* godliness in bold relief.

- ❖ Now in v10, Paul is looking back and commending Timothy for how he has responded to evil, for how he has been living differently. And as Paul goes on to explain, this difference (this stark contrast) is a direct result of who you follow.
 - As I said before, people in these last days are lovers of self who follow their self-inclinations and pleasures, and according to Scripture, that is exactly what plummets a society into greater evil.

- ❖ In the book of Judges, we see the nation of Israel spiraling deeper and deeper into greater sin and moral evil. And what was the author's explanation? Judges 21:25 - because "*in those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes*". Everyone followed their own selfish inclinations.

- ❖ Now according to the wisdom of this world, doing whatever is right in your own eyes seems like good advice. But according to the Bible, doing whatever is right in your own eyes is never a good thing. The Bible recognizes that we are too sinful, too self-destructive, too evil to do what is truly right if we're only doing what is 'right' in our own eyes.
 - Instead, the Bible teaches that what we need is a Good King to follow. In those days there was no king and that was the problem.

- ❖ Well in this regard, compared to those who were simply following their own evil hearts, Timothy was different. He followed a Good King. Read vv10-11, "*You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings.*" Ok wait, is Paul suggesting he is the Good King to follow? Is he commending Timothy for imitating him?
 - Yes, he is commending Timothy for imitating him, but no, Paul is not suggesting that he is the Good King. There is no doubt Paul believes Christ Jesus is the Good King. But in Paul's mind, for Timothy to imitate him is to ultimately imitate Christ.

- ❖ He says something similar in 1 Corinthians 11:1. There he commands the Corinthians believers to "*be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*" So clearly Paul has no qualms with telling people to imitate him *because* the standard of imitation is not merely *his* teaching, *his* conduct, *his* aim in life, etc. The standard is ultimately Jesus' teaching, Jesus' conduct, Jesus' aim in life, which Paul himself is trying to imitate.

- ❖ Friends, imitation is the key to discipleship. But unfortunately, too many Christians feel either inadequate or uncomfortable to tell others to follow them. They feel like making disciples is something only a select few are qualified to do.
 - But you don't have to be perfect before you can model the Perfect One to others. The only condition required, before you can call others to follow you, is this: *Can you genuinely say you are trying, by God's grace, to imitate Christ?* So long as you are imitating Christ, be it imperfectly, it is your privilege (your responsibility!) to call others to imitate you, to make disciples out of them.

- ❖ So in vv10-11, Paul lists nine things that Timothy has followed (has imitated), nine ways in which he has lived in contrast to evil and evil people of his day. We can boil them down into four categories: his convictions, his conduct, his virtues and his endurance.
 - As we consider each, remember these are ways in which Christians are called to be different as a purposeful response to evil in this world.

- ❖ **First, Christians are to be different in our convictions.** When Paul mentions 'my teaching' that's a reference to the sound doctrine he taught Timothy. In chapter 1:13 he calls it "*the pattern of sound words that you have heard from me*". He's talking about core doctrines that center on the good news of salvation by grace, through faith, in Christ alone. The Gospel. That's the good deposit he entrusted to Timothy, which Timothy has followed.

- ❖ Friends, you have to understand that by following the same Gospel teaching, your convictions will be in direct opposition to that of this world. I don't think it's an overgeneralization to describe all other competing worldviews and religions as teaching some form of salvation by works.
 - That is, what you do or don't do becomes the ultimate basis by which you're considered "good" and treated good by fellow man in this life and by whoever or whatever evaluates you upon death (whether it be a personal god or a cosmic force like karma).

- ❖ Friends, that is not in line with Christian convictions. The sound words that Paul preached (that Christians follow) is the Gospel of grace. And this gospel teaches that for God to treat me according to my best effort would be bad news. That's because his standard of evaluation is himself. We are to be holy as he is holy. If God were to hold me to that, then I'm undone!
 - But the good news of the Gospel is that God sent his Son to live the life I should have lived and to die the death that I deserved. So that, by renouncing my works and trusting Jesus and his works, God will accept me and treat me as good as he does his own Beloved Son. That is amazing grace!

- ❖ So unlike the convictions of this world, the emphasis is not on my worth, my performance, my best effort. The emphasis is on the worth and performance and effort of another, a Savior who is not myself.
 - Now it's important to distinguish these contrasting convictions because they're going to translate into contrasting behavior, which leads to our next point.

- ❖ **Second, Christians are to be different in our conduct.** Paul mentions how Timothy followed his 'conduct' (lit. his way of life) and also his 'aim in life'. Now there is a vital connection between your convictions and both your way of life and aim in life.

- ❖ I recently heard a Buddhist monk speak at a funeral. His message of comfort and hope was that the deceased had done enough good in life and for society to merit entrance to a better existence in the next life (as he put it). In other words, if you do enough good deeds to outweigh the bad, you're considered "good" and treated good in the next life. Again the emphasis is on your best effort and the hope that your best effort is enough.
 - Now I want you to really think about how this kind of worldview would shape your conduct (the way you treat others) and your aim in life (what motivates you).

- ❖ If you really believe your only hope of salvation is for the good you've done to outweigh the bad on some scale of cosmic justice, then there is no way you can know, right now, if you've done enough. You might feel like you're at peace with God or karma, but for all you know he could be fuming mad at you right now because your scale still tilts towards the bad.
 - So without any assurance of salvation, without any way of knowing how much good there is left to do to atone for the bad, your life will always be clouded by a nagging sense of guilt and fear.

- I'm sure you'll be motivated to be a good person who does good things, but for what purpose? What aim? I suppose it would be to appease your god or to balance your karma.

- ❖ Furthermore, imagine if someone was to deeply hurt and offend me, and suppose he never acknowledges his offense or tries to make amends. Now if I really believe a person can live a good enough life to such an extent that God or karma will overlook the bad, then I have to accept the fact that his offense against me just might be one of the bad deeds that gets overlooked!
 - I have to accept the fact that you can't always count on justice being served in the end. There is a good chance that this person (who was mean to me) can be nice enough to others for the rest of his life, that he can go to his grave in peace never having to acknowledge his offense against me or be held accountable for it.
 - If that is truly my worldview, then I wouldn't be surprised if I tended to be a vengeful or bitter person.

- ❖ But if you really believe in the Gospel of grace, if you knew your good deeds could never atone for the bad AND instead you trust that Jesus has atoned for your sins on the cross, then your aim in life would be to please God out of gratitude, not to appease him out of fear.
 - And if you believe God to be holy and loving, then you can leave justice in his hands. You can finally let go of your bitterness, knowing that every offense ever perpetrated will be punished in one of two ways. Either on the cross in the death of Christ OR on the offender who goes to the grave rejecting God's grace.

- ❖ Friends, let us respond to evil and evil people by offering them an alternative way to think about God and to think about themselves. Let's show them another way to relate to God and to relate to others. There will come a time and place when you'll have to explain how God can be both powerful and good and yet evil still exists. But everyday you can respond by thinking and living differently.

- ❖ **Third, Christians are to be different in our virtues.** Paul mentions how Timothy followed his faith, patience, love and steadfastness. In contrast to the faithless who have turned away from Paul (1:15), Timothy remained faithful. In contrast to those deserting the Gospel because the persecution that accompanied it was just too much, Timothy has followed in Paul's patience and steadfastness.
 - The word 'patience' is usually used in reference to long-suffering towards aggravating people, and 'steadfastness' usually refers to aggravating circumstances. Now those words lead to our next point.

- ❖ **Fourth, Christians are to be different in our endurance,** particularly in the face of persecution and suffering. Let's read **v11**, "*my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.*"

- ❖ If you recall, on Paul's first missionary journey, he travelled through the Roman province of Galatia and visited three cities where he introduced the Gospel, Antioch, Iconium and Lystra. And in the book of Acts, chapters 13-14, we read that in all three cities he faced severe persecution (persecution in Antioch, 13:50-51; in Iconium, 14:4-6; in Lystra, 14:19).
 - In Acts 14:19, while Paul was in Lystra, it says he was stoned and dragged out of the city, with everyone supposing he was dead. And in Acts 16:1, we learn that Timothy was a citizen of Lystra, so he very well was an eyewitness of Paul's stoning. That is why Paul can say Timothy followed his persecutions and sufferings.

- ❖ Now I think it's important to note that all three examples of persecution that Paul mentioned came early on in his gospel ministry. That was to remind Timothy that persecution and suffering is not just a passing trend but a permanent characteristics of the Christian life in these last days.
 - And in case the point was lost on us, Paul says it explicitly in vv12-13. *“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*

- ❖ Now when Paul says all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted, some people think he's talking about a sub-group of Christians -- those who are really serious about living a godly life. “Those guys will be persecuted, but there's a good chance a normal Christian like me will avoid such things.”
 - But Paul is not created a new class of Christians. Those who “desire a godly life” is a reference to real Christians who are being contrasted with false teachers who only have the appearance of godliness.

- ❖ So that means every Christian can expect persecution (perhaps not the threat of arrest or death but it could come in the form of slander or social pressure), but then what does that imply if I'm not experiencing any? Well there are two possible explanations. Perhaps you've escaped persecution because you've withdrawn from society. You are in Christ but not really in the world. You're safe and comfortable in your holy huddle, but at the same time, you have no real influence to advance the Gospel or the common good.
 - Or perhaps you've escaped persecution because you've assimilated with society. You're comfortably in the world, but you're not living in Christ. So likewise, you have no real influence to advance the Gospel or the common good.

- ❖ But if you're committed to being both in Christ and in the world, then there is no escaping persecution. It is inevitable. So instead of withdrawing or assimilating, you endure.
 - The Christian response is to be neither friends with this world nor strangers to it. Instead, we are called to live *in* the world, but in such a way as to demonstrate that we are not *of* this world.
 - As a Christian, my response is to be different, to make it clear through the way I live my life that I am of another world, a citizen of another kingdom. And I make that clear by following its King.

Stay the Same

- ❖ **So respond to evil and evil people by being different, but at the same time, we see Paul calling us to stay the same.** Look at vv14-15, *“But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”*
 - In v13, Paul just said evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. So in contrast to those who ‘go on’ (who regress in their teaching and their morality), Timothy is to ‘continue’ (to abide) in what he has learned and firmly believed.
 - So one way Timothy can be radically different than these false teachers is by staying the same in his core beliefs as they continue to change theirs.
- ❖ And he gives Timothy two reasons why he should continue in his core beliefs. First, because he knows from whom he learned it. He knows who taught him these convictions. That would include his grandmother Lois, his mother Eunice and of course the Apostle Paul.
 - Paul most likely led Timothy to Christ, which explains why he calls him a child in the faith (1:2). Paul laid hands on Timothy at his ordination (1:6). And Paul was appointed by Christ himself to be a preacher, apostle and teacher of the Gospel (1:11). So Timothy was confident in Paul and his authority as a teacher, which gives him every reason to continue in what he learned from Paul
- ❖ The second reason to continue in his core beliefs is because Timothy knows the source of Paul’s teaching (his source material), which of course is the scriptures. In v15 he calls it ‘the sacred writings’. He’s referring to the Old Testament, the scriptures that Timothy was taught from childhood.
 - Paul is saying that you can trust my teaching, you can continue in it, because you know it is in line with the Word of God. Now I’m going to save the last part of v15 (about the scriptures being able to make you wise for salvation) for next week along with vv16-17.
- ❖ The point is that Timothy is being called to be different from these false teachers who were changing their beliefs, advancing new doctrines, and trying to change the beliefs of others. In stark contrast, he is to continue in what he has learned and firmly believed. No changing, no advancing, no progressing. Just staying the same.
- ❖ Friends, learning and believing sound doctrine is one thing. Continuing in it even in the face of persecution is another. We have to realize that as long as we’re in these last days, we’re going to face constant pressure to change our convictions, to modernize our beliefs.
 - Staying the same in your convictions, continuing in the same beliefs you were taught as a child, is viewed as ignorant or anti-intellectual.

- ❖ Listen to what John Stott says about Paul's command to continue in our core beliefs. *"This kind of summons is not infrequently heard in the pages of the New Testament. It is specially relevant whenever innovators arise in the church, 'radicals' who claim to be progressive and who repudiate everything which savours of the traditional. It has perhaps never been more needed than today when men boast of inventing a 'new Christianity' with a 'new theology' and a 'new morality', all of which betoken a 'new reformation'. To be sure, the church of every generation must seek to translate the faith into the contemporary idiom, to relate the unchanging word to the changing world. But a translation is a rendering of the same message into another language; it is not a fresh composition. Yet this is what some modern radicals are doing, setting forth concepts of God and of Christ which Jesus and his apostles would not have recognized as their own."*
- ❖ I see this happening especially in the wake of catastrophic events like 9/11. People are confronted with real evil, and their immediate reaction is to modify their view of God to explain how such evil can co-exist in this world.
 - Either God is good BUT not all-powerful (and therefore he cannot stop every evil act perpetrated by evil men) OR he is all-powerful BUT not all-good (and therefore could care less to stop every evil act). It's one or the other. They can't imagine how God could be simultaneously both.
 - Some in recent years have even questioned God's omniscience and ability to know the future. Perhaps the future is logically unknowable (even for God), and therefore he could not have predicted a 9/11 much less have stopped it.
- ❖ Friends, I urge you to continue in what you have learned and firmly believed from the beginning. Don't get tossed around by every new wind of doctrine. Be different from everyone else by staying the same in your core beliefs. Let me ask you:
- ❖ 1) Do you know who taught them to you? Like Timothy, do you have a discipler who is building into you and building up your doctrine? Perhaps it's someone who teaches you directly (i.e., a parent, a small group leader, a friend, a pastor). Perhaps it's someone who teaches you indirectly (i.e., an author you read, a preacher you listen to, a teacher from church history).
 - If you know them to be faithful to God and consistent in what they teach -- that is, their conduct is consistent with their expressed convictions -- then you can be confident to continue in what you have learned from them.
- ❖ 2) Do you know their source material? That is, do you know your Bible? Are you intentionally and systematically reading through the Scriptures? Do you understand its divine origin and purpose? I encourage you to return next week as we dig further into that question in the next few verses.
- ❖ Friends, be different in your convictions compared to the unbelieving world. Be centered on the Gospel of grace, the Gospel of Jesus Christ. But then once you're there, stay the same. Don't move. Just continue in what you've learned and firmly believed. That is your Christian response to evil and evil people in these last days.

**The Second Letter to Timothy:
Evil and the Christian Response
2 Timothy 3:10-15**

Sermon Abstract:

In these last days, evil and evil people will go on from bad to worse. In response, the godly in Christ are called to be different and yet stay the same.

Introduction

How should Christians respond to evil and evil people in these last days?

1. Be different

a. In your convictions.

b. In your conduct.

c. In your virtues.

d. In your endurance.

2. Stay the same

a. In your core beliefs because you know who taught them to you.

b. In your core beliefs because you know their source material.