

Title: Power of Godliness
Text: 2 Tim 3: 1-9
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2 Timothy 3: 1: This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

We have been in the “the last days” since Christ came the first time—Hebrews 1:2 “Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son...” Here is why times will be perilous.

2 Timothy 3: 2: For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3: Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4: Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; V5: Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof, from such turn away.

You might say, “Since Adam plunged every man into spiritual death, hasn’t this always been the description of sinners?”

Proposition: The thing that makes these days perilous is that men do these things having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. What is the power of godliness?

I. BUT IN THESE LAST DAYS THEY DO SO HAVING “A FORM OF GODLINESS”—V5: Having a form of godliness,

What is Godliness?

Godliness is the worship and course of life resulting from the fear of the Lord in the heart, from inward reverence for God. Godliness involves the whole course of life resulting from holiness of heart, the result of true, spiritual religion within. A form is only without. True godliness flows from within.

True godliness is spiritual yet it is in a body—so godliness does have a form, which is necessary and useful. To have the outward as a result of the inward is true godliness. But to have the outward without the inward is to be dwelling in spiritual death.

All Have a Form of Godliness

In our day, almost everyone has a form of godliness. Most attend church services somewhere. They all outwardly appear sincere, speak of “fearing the Lord”, they speak of the necessity of “godliness.” Outwardly they appear righteous before men, baptized, do good works.

In our day, there is even a great host who claim to believe the doctrine of grace. The Lord Jesus Christ said,

Matthew 24:24: For there shall arise false Christs, and false prophets, and shall shew great signs and wonders; insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect. 25 Behold, I have told you before.

It means they are so subtle it is not easy to discern that their doctrine is a lie. Papacy is obvious heresy to anyone with spiritual discernment. Those who preach universal atonement are easy to recognize to anyone with spiritual discernment. Those who preach that dead sinners have a free will—are easy to recognize to anyone with spiritual discernment, as easy to detect as Mormonism, Pentecostalism, or any other form of idolatry.

But there have arisen many that appear to be preaching the doctrine of grace, when in great subtlety, they are really preaching universal atonement, freewill, works religion—these are those Christ meant when he said, “if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect.”

All of these have a “form of godliness.” But notice, it is not these definitions of godliness that they deny. Nor is it godliness itself that they deny. Those with a form of godliness put great emphasis on what they consider to be godliness. It is the “outward form” that they consider to be godliness so they greatly promote the outward and highly esteem it. But notice, it is the POWER of godliness that they deny, “but denying the power thereof.”

II. WHAT IS THE POWER OF GODLINESS? (Turn to 2 Peter 1)

The Triune God in Christ is the Power

2 Peter 1: 2: Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,
3: According as HIS DIVINE POWER hath GIVEN UNTO US ALL THINGS that pertain unto LIFE and GODLINESS, through the knowledge OF HIM that hath CALLED us to glory [spiritual life] and virtue: [godliness]
4: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

God in Jesus our Lord, by his divine power, gives his child all things that pertain to spiritual life and true godliness. By our first birth, we were dead in trespasses and in sins. By his divine power, God gives us spiritual life. Likewise, by his divine power he gives us all things that pertain to godliness—creating us in the image of God. He cleanses us within and gives us a new heart.

Ezekiel 36:25: Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. 26: A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh.

He teaches us the mystery of godliness which is the gospel.

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness: God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

He teaches us that Christ came in the flesh to save his elect. Christ had our sins laid on him and bore our stripes and he healed us thereby. So through the knowledge of Christ—he gives us faith, hope and love—the principle parts of godliness.

Thus by his divine power he effectually calls us to glory [spiritual life] and virtue [godliness]. And with godliness he gives us exceeding great and precious promises—

1 Tim 4: 8: “godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.”

All of which are yea and amen in Christ Jesus. So he makes us partakers of the divine nature. It is by the divine power of God alone that we escape the corruptions that are in this world through lust.

So you see it is the triune God, in Jesus our Lord, who is the Power of godliness. Everything relating to godliness is from Christ: given to us out of his fullness, of which he is the Author and Finisher. So it is God our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ that those deny who has a mere “form of godliness.”

The Power to Nourish Us in Godliness is the Gospel

Also, it is through the preaching of Christ crucified that God maintains our inward godliness, nourishing our inward man by his power.

1 Timothy 4: 6: If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up...

Nourishment is within. True godliness is within. A form is without. We are nourished in godliness within. How?

1 Timothy 4: 6:...in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

We are nourished within “in the words of faith”—the gospel. Of good doctrine—in the declaration of God’s mighty works:

- Election,
- Predestination,
- Accomplished redemption,
- Effectual regeneration,
- Preservation by his mighty hand.
- We are taught to walk in faith, taught to forgive, be gracious, to love one another—as God for Christ’s sake has forgiven you.

By words of faith and good doctrine God himself—by the same divine power--nourishes our inward man. When a sinner experiences his Power, our worship stops being form, and we trust in his Power! As we hear of his power he exercises his power to grow us in faith, hope and love—in godliness. Next he will tell us what the opposite of this nourishment is.

1 Timothy 4: 7: But refuse profane and old wives’ fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

Rather than exercising yourself in profane and old wives fables, exercise thyself unto godliness—by words of faith and good doctrine as opposed to profane fables.

1 Timothy 4: 8: For bodily exercise profiteth little: [and for a little while]

Profane fables will teach you that godliness is in bodily exercise. They teach mortification is by bodily abstinence. Those who practice bodily exercise teach you that by neglecting the body you become more holy. But if we abstained from this world to the point that we became a hermit, locked away from society, that would never stop your sin.

Colossians 2: 23: Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

If what you are hearing is not giving God all the glory and planting you at the feet of Christ, which is where you will be in the eternal life to come—then it is not profitable for this life either.

1 Timothy 4: 8:...but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

True inward godliness which is of God’s power is profitable for our present life and the life to come.

Psalms 84:11: For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.

So the power of godliness is God himself, Christ Jesus our Prophet, Priest and King. And the power of godliness by which we are nourished up in godliness is the gospel of Christ and him crucified. This is the Power that men deny.

III. HOW DO MEN DENY THE POWER OF GODLINESS?—BY THEIR WORKS.

Titus 1: 16: They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

Most apply Paul's words to Titus to immoral sins—and there is that application. But for those with a form of godliness, the works whereby they deny God are in our text in the descriptions given of them. The things listed here are their works toward three persons: toward self, toward God and toward others.

Lovers of Their Own Selves

This is toward their self. Verse 2 says they are “lovers of their own selves.” This is because of their form of godliness. They do not esteem others better than themselves because they are not the chief of sinners. True godliness sees self as he is.

Job 42: 5: I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. 6: Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.

Covetous

This is especially toward God. They are covetous of the glory that belongs to God. Their covetousness is to have the glory for creating their form of godliness themselves. It is a covetousness to have the glory for making others take up a form of godliness rather than God getting all the glory for doing it.

Galatians 6: 12: As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ. 13: For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.

True godliness has this heart,

Galatians 6: 14: But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world. 15: For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth any thing, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature. 16: And as many as walk according to this rule, peace *be* on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.

Boasters, Proud, Blasphemers

They boast and are proud of their form of godliness,

2 Thessalonians 2:4: Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

If they teach election then they say God foresaw good in them. When they speak of Christ's redemption they say they made Christ's blood effectual by their faith. If they speak of regeneration it is that they took the first step and they let God do the rest. They speak a lot of “Big I” and little of God. And by attributing their form to themselves, therefore in all their words and works they blaspheme God.

True godliness says,

Psalm 115:1: Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory, for thy mercy, and for thy truth's sake.

Disobedient to Parents

Here we have an example of how they treat others. In verse 2, “parents” stands for parents, as well as anyone in power and authority. Those whose godliness came by their own power hate for their power to be threatened. They hate those in authority because they “will not have this man [Christ] reign over them.” (Lu 19: 14)

True godliness is “subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God.” (Rom 13: 1) We have been touched by that power and we know that Power is Christ our Head.

Unthankful

They are unthankful toward God because they are self-made men, unthankful toward their ministers—why should they thank anyone but themselves? Their “thank you” sounds like this “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican.” (Lu 18: 11)

True godliness “Gives thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;...which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light:” (Eph 5: 20; Col 1: 12)

Unholy

They think their form of godliness is holiness but they have never been sanctified by God: not by divine election, not by blood redemption, not by divine regeneration—they are unholy, yet calling their form of godliness holiness.

True godliness—those truly holy—cease looking at their own holiness and look to Christ our Sanctification. Believers see nothing about self as holy—“in my flesh dwells no good thing—o wretched man that I am”—because Christ has been made unto us Sanctification. Therefore, we glory only in the Lord. (1 Cor 1: 30-31)

Without Natural Affection

It means they do not even show affection to those they naturally should show affection. Remember the Pharisee's would call their material things “Corban”—meaning a gift reserved for God. By that they would excuse themselves from taking care of their parents—those they naturally should love and care for. They do the same toward their unprofessing husbands or wives, siblings or children—considering themselves holier than everyone around them—because of their form of godliness.

Isaiah 65:5: Which say, Stand by thyself, come not near to me; for I am holier than thou. These *are* a smoke in my nose, a fire that burneth all the day.

True godliness makes a sinner love more because Christ commands it and what he commands he creates in our hearts!

Trucebreakers

This could apply toward God and men. They call themselves “promise-keepers” but they have not kept the covenant of works by which they desire to come to God—“they are debtors to keep the whole law of God.” (Gal 5: 2-3) And they always justify themselves for breaking their word because the Word of God means nothing to them.

True godliness knows the value of an everlasting covenant ordered in all things and sure—it makes a man keep his word.

False Accusers

Self-righteousness always makes men like Satan, “accusers of the brethren.” They are always uncovering the faults of others to make their own form of godliness appear more godly—always looking for someone to discipline.

Proverbs 10:12: Hatred stirreth up strifes: but love [true godliness] covereth all sins.

Incontinent

They pretend to be temperate, full of self-control—yet their whole form is one big unlawful, greedy, orgy of vain self-righteous religion--giving themselves up to all lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness. Also, when no one is looking, men with a form of godliness will usually over-indulge in what they claim to control.

True godliness does not confide in self but in our new Master to keep us by his power.

Romans 6: 14: For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Fierce, Despisers of Those That Are Good

Let one of God’s saints declare the truth to a man with a form of godliness and when their self-made form of godliness is threatened they become fierce, despisers of those that really are godly by the grace of God.

Proverbs 9:8: Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee.

Traitors

They may sit a long while under the sound of the gospel but as soon as their false refuge is threatened they will turn on everyone around them--just like Judas betrayed Christ with a kiss.

By God’s power he makes a man “a faithful dog.” “Lord to whom shall we go!” (Jn 6: 68)

Heady

It means rash and bold. Their preachers are bold to craft their words to try to make converts, to glory in men for making them take their form—for getting them to be baptized, to join the church, to take the Lord’s table or not,...on and on.

Listen to true godliness,

1 Corinthians 1: 17: For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect. 18: For THE PREACHING OF THE CROSS is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved IT IS THE POWER OF GOD...

It is not the act of preaching alone or our attendance to hear preaching that is the power of God. Many have that “form” who do not have the power. The preaching of the cross IS the POWER OF GOD.

2 Corinthians 4: 7: But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

They craft their words, they adopt other methods, worldly music and so on—**2 Tim 3: 6: For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins,... 8: Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.**

Jannes and Jambres were Pharaoh's magicians—they saw what Moses did by the power of God—and they imitated it in form by the power of their flesh and slight of hand. Thus they deny God's power to save through the simple declaration of the truth of Christ.

True godliness says,

1 Corinthians 2: 4: And my speech and my preaching *was* not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power: 5: That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

Highminded

They are puffed up and swelled up, speaking great swelling words of vanity because of their confidence in their form of godliness—they say, “When did we NOT do these things.” (Mt 25: 44)

True godliness says, “Lord, when DID we do these things.” (Mt 25: 37-39)

Lovers of Pleasures More Than Lovers of God

The pleasures they love are all these things they do and say to keep up the outward form—it is their form they love, not God.

1 Corinthians 1: 23: But WE PREACH CHRIST CRUCIFIED, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; 24: But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, CHRIST THE POWER OF GOD, and the wisdom of God.

Application:

First, we are told here, in verse 5, “from such turn away....(verse 9) But they shall proceed no further: for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as [Jannes and Jambres] also was.” Those with a form of godliness only desire to rob you and glory in what they made you do. Godliness watches for your souls as those that must give account.

Secondly, understand, this is why I preach Christ and him crucified in every message. I declare God is just because Christ bore the sin and bruises his people deserved. And God is the Justifier because God was in Christ because the gospel of the cross is the method whereby God speaks in power. So I wait on God to teach you. I don't chase after you when you cut and run—God's hand is bigger than mine.

Thirdly, know that a form of godliness will do you no good. If your religion is without spiritual life, what good is it? Spurgeon said, “Can you warm yourself by a painted fire?” Is there no comfort in your religion? You can't get it from brother or father—second hand religion is no good. Ask God to create in you a clean heart and right spirit. May we ask God to come in power and put away all pretenses and make us worship God in spirit and in truth.

Amen!