**“Knowing when to call it” – 2 Timothy 3:1-9**

**Intro**

If you look around nowadays, it’s fairly easy to see that we are living in a very different day and time then when we grew up. Now I know I picked on the under 25s a bit last week, but it’s worth pointing out that if you are in your mid-20s or younger, you may not actually notice much of a difference between your growing up years and today. But for my parents generation – who grew up with “Leave it to Beaver” and “Roy Rogers” – and even for my own generation – who grew up with “Happy Days” and “The Cosby show” – the differences between the problems being addressed, as well as generally held ideas about what is acceptable and appropriate even, compared with what we see today, are really quite stark. (Ask Dr. Frank about the days when all of this side of Vancouver had one police officer!) One way to describe this would be to call it the progressive death of Christendom. And, for our purposes this morning, we’ll define that as just a generalized knowledge of Christianity and a generalized desire to live life according to Christian principles, even if you weren’t, yourself, a Christian.

Now, as a preacher, one of the things I do is exegete texts, or draw the meaning out of texts. And in this setting, that usually means exegeting the bible. But that’s not all I seek to draw the meaning out of. I want us to take a minute and watch a short clip of a widely popular song from today, and do some exegesis together. I want you to watch with me, see if you can’t hear a summary, a modern-day manifesto really, of how our culture views life in our present day. **(watch video).**

If you don’t know, this is a song from a widely popular band today called Imagine Dragons. But, as you listen to the lyrics and think about what we just read in our passage this morning,/ don’t you see a strong connection? Don’t you see both the lyrics of this song and the description Paul gives in our passage, describing people who are not only infected/diseased with sin/radiation, but who also fully embrace it? Who are unapologetically running after that evil; even defining themselves by it? This is absolutely the world we live in.

But here are two terrifying things to consider: 1. Paul is saying that this was also the world he and Timothy were living in/ 2000 years ago. 2. //At no point has Paul changed his metaphor, and stopped talking about the church or the people inside it. ////

If you watch medical dramas on TV or in films, you’ve seen the scene in the ER where there’s a person on the operating table who’s died – heart and brain activity monitors have flat-lined – and yet there is this doctor who is still trying to treat the patient; pounding away on the their chest, calling for the defibrillator to be charged again and adrenaline to be administered to the patient. And finally another doctor steps in and says what everyone else in the room already knows, “That’s it – take your hands off. I’m calling it. Time of death …” and the exhausted, heartbroken doctor pulls the sheet over the person’s face. Have you seen this before?

In our passage this morning, Paul is going to continue talking with Timothy about this “gangrene” in the church - this fast spreading disease of false teaching that is in danger of spreading to the whole body. But now/ he’s going to say, there’s also going to come a point in time where – instead of treating any longer - you need to take your hands off; to stop treating the disease; a point when it becomes clear that there is no life in the patient; and to call it, and make the heartbreaking decision to amputate.

**And the difficulty for Timothy and his church then, as well as for us today, is that we find it incredibly difficult/heartbreaking to know when and where that point *is*/ that we should stop treating /and call it.** And so what Paul is going to show us in this passage, is a description of what that time/place will look like. And basically he’s gonna say it’s both when it becomes clear that there is no life in the person (and by that I mean spiritual life) and when the person in the church looks and acts unapologetically like the sinful world around them.

So what we’re going to see from our passage this morning is this: **In order to protect the life and health of the whole body, we must *see the true nature of the diseased part,* and *see the effects on the rest of the body.*** (And b/c Liam told me last week that I *did* need to improve on my preaching b/c last week’s sermon only had 2 points) **finally we’ll talk about what this looks like here at DHBC.**

So turn back with me in your bibles to 2 Timothy 3 and let’s do this.

So the first thing we’re going to look at from our passage is:

1. **To protect the life and health of the body we must: *See the true nature of the diseased part* – vs. 1-5, 8.**

We saw last week, that Paul is very concerned about the life/health of the church and the people inside, *even those* who are deceived and diseased – that’s why he took the time to teach Timothy (and us) about how to treat those diseased parts in the hope that they might repent and come to a knowledge of the truth.

But now – and I don’t know why – I can just feel the weight in Paul’s words here; almost like he stopped writing for a moment, and just let out this deep \***sigh**\* before he continues. The tone of Paul’s writing absolutely seems to shift here anyways.

And he says this: look at Vs. 1 with me **(READ vs. 1).**  So Paul is saying to Timothy here, ‘Yes, do everything I told you about treating the disease in the church and not destroying the host/diseased person, in the hope that they will repent and see the truth. “***But mark this***”/know this: there’s also going to be a time when – understanding that no one is ever beyond the reach of God Himself – you’re gonna need to take your hands off and stop trying to treat the disease; where it’s going to become clear that there is no life in this person.’

Almost like in a police academy, recruits being told that they have all these other tools at their disposal to restrain a criminal: hand-cuffs, pepper spray, baton, Tazer // but that there will also come a point, where they will need to draw their sidearm and – for the protection of everyone else around – take the life of another human being. It’s never the first tool you reach for //but there will come a time when you will need to use it.

The circumstances are different here, yes, but there’s absolutely that same level of gravity and weight to Paul’s words.

I want to point out here, quickly, that these “last days” Paul refers to here are not some future, way off period, but a present reality for Timothy, then, and for us today; so remove all the images of “Left Behind” films from your mind when you read that. Heb. 1:2 tells us these “last days” began with the coming of Jesus, the Messiah, and then continue forward from that point.

Then, Paul goes into this description of what these people in the church who are beyond further treatment will look like. Look at vs. 2-5 now. **(READ vs. 2-5).** No we could talk a lot about each of these descriptions, and this is not even an exhaustive list. But what I want us to focus on – and what most commentators point out as well – is this: Paul’s first description here of people who are “lovers of themselves” is actually the foundation for/fountainhead from which all these other descriptions flow. When God is not (or ceases to be) the focus of our love and worship, and our *self* takes that place instead, every other description Paul gives in this list is the inevitable result.

And then, almost like a parenthesis, Paul closes out this devastating description in vs. 5, look at it with me. He says these people will have, “*a form of godliness but deny its power.”*

* So he says these people will have the form of/appearance of godliness; this is really the terrifying and insidious nature of what he’s describing here. He says, on the surface, these people are going to look, to some degree, like the really godly/holy people in the church!
* But then, look at vs. 5 again, he adds this, *“but denying it’s power.”* Now there’s a lot we could say here as well, but for the sake of time let me just ask you: what is the “power” of the gospel? **It is the power to *change* things;** to bring things to life that were dead; to make blind people see; to transform hearts of stone into hearts of flesh//the power of the gospel is regenerative. And so Paul is saying that, even though these people can talk a good game, the reason they are still dead and diseased inside is because they have not been changed by the power of the gospel; they are still in their sins and – look down at the end of vs. 9 with me – Paul says, sooner or later, it’s plain as day for everyone to see. The hypocrisy of these pretenders eventually catches up with them.
* Look as well at vs. 8. Paul writes **(READ vs. 8).** So Paul compares these same people to these guys Jannes and Jambres. The bible doesn’t mention these guys anywhere but here, but extra-biblical sources, as well as Jewish tradition, tell us that these were the names of the magicians in Egypt that Pharaoh called on to copy the signs of Moses. And if you remember, they tried to do all the signs God had given Moses to do and, up to a point, they succeeded. And yet, eventually, it became clear to everyone – including Pharaoh – that Moses was legit and these magicians were fakes. And Paul says that just like those magicians were opposed to the truth that Moses was presenting, so these people in the church are also opposed to the truth of the gospel, both in their own lives (which is why he says they are “rejected as far as the faith is concerned”) as well as in the lives of those around them.

And this is why Paul gives the only command in our passage this morning in the second half of vs. 5. Look at it with me. He writes **(READ vs. 5b).**

And all the commentators agree that what Paul means by this is not simply, ‘don’t chat with these guys after the service’, or ‘don’t have these guys as Face Book friends’, but to remove them from the church. He is referring to the last, and most heartbreaking form of treatment, where a member of the body is amputated. In similar circumstances in the church at Corinth – when the behaviour of some of the members there began to look exactly like (in fact worse than) the sinful world outside, Paul says in 1 Cor. 5:4-5,

“*When you are assembled in the Name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of the Lord Jesus is present (*another reference to the true, transforming power of God) *hand this man over to Satan …”* which means, to expel him from the community of the church.

What is essential to see here, however, is that - even this most extreme form of treatment - is meant to be loving and restorative. For Paul says immediately after this, [do this]“*so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord.”* Paul says, even in this most extreme act, there is still hope for this person. But, for the good of the whole body, treatment can no longer be administered within the church.

**App**

Now, the same danger we saw in last week’s passage, with the religious and the non-religious person mis-understanding what Paul is saying, is present here we well; in fact, probably even more so.

**The religious person** is going to read this and immediately want to go rooting through the shed for their torches and pitch-forks, and start looking through the church directory.

And **the non-religious person** is going to read this/ and dismiss Christianity as barbaric and un-loving.

And also - just like last week – they’re both still wrong.

B/c Paul has ordered this instruction to Timothy very intentionally. He’s spent all that time talking about gentle, patient instruction of these same people, long before he ever gets here, for the precise reason that this is the very last, most heartbreaking step in the process. This is not where Timothy, or we, are to begin. Policemen don’t draw their side arm and shoot at people jay-walking; doctors don’t see a tiny mole on your leg and schedule surgery to remove your leg. There’s a process to how things are dealt with and force/treatment is escalated only as the circumstances require it.

Beyond that, Paul is not talking about people displaying sinful behaviour at times (remember, we are all sinners in need of a Saviour) or even those who have had significant moral failings. He’s dealing with a persistent, willful, and unapologetic pursuit of sin that is both robbing this person of blood flow - to the point where they have no life in themselves - as well as now spreading to other parts of the body. Nowhere else in life would anyone call this kind of protective action “barbaric” and “unloving.”

Would we allow a cancerous tumor to remain in a person’s body and call it barbaric to remove it? Would you call it un-loving to restrict a convicted serial-rapist from coaching a girl’s soccer team? Would we allow evil robots that looked like Daniel and Henrik Sedin – who were fighting other Canuck players and scoring goals for the other team – to remain on the Canucks team, however much they wanted to?

No, the point for Timothy then, and for us today, is that we need to discern between the two extremes of:

1. Jumping to amputation at the first sign of disease
2. Never being willing to act decisively when action is required, and masking that under the banner of “being loving.”

Things like this are *alway*s complex, and never to be handled lightly, and w/o much prayer, discernment and tears.

So that’s “seeing the true nature of the diseased part” which is essential for understanding how Paul relates this instruction to the life/health of the whole body.

But Paul doesn’t just want us to accurately see what the diseased part looks like. He also want us to see the effects of allowing this diseased part– which is now beyond treatment – to remain un-dealt with. And so next I want us to see:

1. **To protect the life and health of the body we must: see the effects on the rest of the body – vs. 6-7.**

In the middle of all this description of the diseased part of the body, Paul includes an example, as well, of the effects this disease/gangrene is having on the rest of the body/the church. Look at vs. 6 and 7 now. Paul writes, **(READ vs. 6-7).**

Now I know we’re not going to make it one more step here this morning until I deal with this “weak-willed women” part of vs. 6. And believe me, I know there are a lot of women who could either body press me, manage a multi-billion dollar company through an economic downturn, or be a single-mom managing a home and kids and two jobs, while making it look effortless and say, “How’s that for a ‘weak-willed woman bro?!’ Huh?”

But I think if we look again at what Paul lists here as the circumstances behind the weakened will of these women, we’ll see that this is merely an example that would have been familiar to Timothy and his church, but which could be applicable to anyone; male or female. Look at what those circumstances are in vs. 6-7: he says their wills are weakened b/c they are “*loaded down with sins [*and, consequently*], swayed by all kinds of evil desires* [which leaves them in a state of] *always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.”* Do you see anything in there that could only be applicable to women? B/c I sure don’t.

One of the keys to understanding this progression is in noticing that Paul doesn’t say that, exclusively anyways, they are loaded down with *their own* sins. These sins would, and likely do, include sins committed against them. And we can easily imagine the long-term, damaging effects of sins committed against people from sexual, to physical, to emotional abuse. Do you know how almost impossible it feels for people (with a sinful nature themselves) who have been sinned against in those ways as well as many others, to not then act out of the abuse that’s been committed against them? What’s the point of purity anymore when it’s been sullied? What’s the point of gentleness when you’ve tasted the power of violence? What’s the point of honesty when you’ve felt the force of manipulation?

And so, what Paul is describing here is a situation where people – living under this weight and burden – are succumbing to their own evil desires and are in a place where they are desperate; just *desperate* for anything they think will give them hope/relief.

It makes me think of the woman in Luke 8 who had suffered under the hemorrhage of blood for 12 years; who had spent all she had on doctors who could not cure her and who had endured the reproach and discrimination of society around her, which would have only added to her suffering. A woman *desperate* to find *anything* that would cure her and remove her disgrace. The difference in that story being, that she finally sought that healing from the One who could truly give it to her.

And so Paul says, because of this – look at the end of vs. 7 – they are *“always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth,”* or some of your translations will say “never able to come to a knowledge of/arrive at the truth.”

And, in the end, doesn’t that describe all of humanity? Sin sick and weighed down and yet desperately looking to things and to people and to stuff to find the hope/healing we can only find in Jesus?

But what’s most disturbing about this picture, is that Paul says that these diseased parts/people in the church are knowingly victimizing these other vulnerable people. Look again at vs. 6. Paul says **(READ vs. 6a).** Some of your translations will say that they “creep into homes” or Eugene Peterson paraphrases this in the Message as they “smooth-talk” their way in. The point is there is an intentionality to this action. And they weasel their way into these homes and into these lives to “gain control” – look again at vs. 6. “Gain control” carries with it the idea of achieving a psychological dominance over these people. and they gain that control/dominance by offering false hope for these vulnerable people; not content to be diseased and void of life themselves, they purposely seek to destroy others around them! //// You still think it’s barbaric and un-loving to get rid of these guys?

In fact, this has to be such a sad realization for Paul as well b/c, if you remember, back Acts 20, before Paul leaves for Jerusalem where he is arrested, Paul warns the church leaders there of this exact type of situation. He says, *“Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He bought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number me will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them.”*

**App**

But, as we look at all this this morning,// I want to take a minute to address the people in here who read this/hear me talk about what Paul describes as people “weighed down by sins”, and who are desperate to know freedom from that – and so you feel that like a punch in the stomach, b/c that’s exactly where you are right now.

And, first of all, if you don’t know Jesus here this morning, let me tell you this: forget what you think you know/or have been told about Christianity. Christianity **does not** offer you a list of things to do to be right with God so you can know healing/freedom from that baggage you carry around everywhere – that’s just religion. What Christianity is offering you is the **one thing,** that Jesus did **for you,** that changes everything. That’s the simplest way I can put it. Come find, in Him, the only healing/freedom that there is to be found. I’d love to talk with you more about that after the service if that’s you.

And, secondly, if you are a Christian here today. Maybe you believe, that - in Jesus – your sins have been totally paid for and covered, and yet, you also are still weighed down with the baggage of not being able to forgive yourself. That’s a complex issue, I know, and, what I say may not be applicable to you even – but maybe it is. One possible cause is that you are still growing in your faith and simply have not yet made the logical, and theological, connection between Christ’s complete forgiveness of your sin how to live out of that forgiveness. Tim Keller, speaking to this problem, mentions two other possible causes to an inability to forgive yourself (and again, I know this isn’t going to fit every case):

1. “**You know, but you don’t know**” And what he means by that is that you have an intellectual knowledge of biblical truth (forgiveness for sins in Christ) up here [head] but it is not a truth that you know and have experienced here [heart]. It’s the difference between reading about romantic love in a book, and actually being in love yourself. In other words he’s saying, it’s worth considering that you may know a lot of stuff about Christianity but you may not yet be a Christian. That doesn’t mean we’ll never have moments of doubt and still struggle with this sometimes. But an over-ridding sense that you are not truly forgiven may mean you have not yet actually experienced forgiveness to begin with.
2. The other possible cause Keller mentions to a pervasive feeling of guilt, and the idea that – even though you believe God has forgiven your sins, you can’t forgive yourself – is that you simply **haven’t been forgiven yet by your “real god” yet.** Which, at the end of the day, is *you*!

Now again, I am describing an ongoing, pervasive feeling of guilt for sin that you say God has forgiven you for, **not** the occasional feelings, that we all have, of residual guilt for sins we’ve committed. And I am most *certainly* **not** talking here about feelings of guilt/shame over sins that have been committed against you – that’s a totally separate issue.

But one of the best solutions I know for the guilt and shame that come from our sin, is to hear and believe for the first time, or to be reminded again and again, of what the bible says about the complete and comprehensive forgiveness for person who’s been made alive in Jesus. To feed our souls and quiet the voices of guilt and shame with verses like Heb. 10:14 “*By His one sacrifice He has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified.”* Or Psalm 103:12 *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”* And there are hundreds more as well.

Steady your hearts with the truth of God’s promises to us in Jesus.

Finally well quickly answer the question:

**3. What does this look like at DHBC?**

Now, most churches that believe the bible to be God’s written word to us, follow – at least in principle – the Matt. 18 pattern for dealing with un-confessed sin in the church. Let’s go there quickly and see the pattern Jesus says we should follow – it’s on pg. 695 in your pew bibles **(READ Matt. 18:15-17) – talk through 4 stages.** Two things to quickly note here:

1. Jesus is referring here to professing Christians here, lit. “if your brother sins against you ..” In fact, in 1 Cor. 5 when Paul is talking about removing a person from the congregation, he adds this helpful clarification: he says, “*I have written you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people* [the issue he was dealing with specifically in this church] *– not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy or swindlers or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother* [so, someone who is professing to be a Christian] *but is sexually immoral or greedy,* etc. etc.” So these are professing Christians Jesus is also talking about here, living unapologetically like the world.
2. This process is also intended to be worked out amoung those who are members of a church – this is why the last two stages are addressed to churches.

And so, with all that in mind, this is why – here at DHBC – we have written up a church covenant which is copied into the back of your hymnals, and why we also say it together once a month; to remind us again what we have committed ourselves to in being members here. We’ll do that again today after we take the Lord’s Supper. One part of what we commit to here as members of this family – along with loving one another and serving this body and this community - is to carry out that Matt. 18 principle and to hold one another accountable. Along with other things, it’s a commitment we make that understands that we need each other to live this Christian life well. and also, that we get that it’s not ok for someone who is professing to be a Christian, to live in a way that unapologetically resembles the world, and is infecting others in the church, and nobody is allowed to call them out on that – we’re agreeing that’s not ok for others or for ourselves. And so this church covenant is one of the ways we work to protect this family of believers from the kind of people Paul is describing in our passage this morning.

**Conclusion**

If we have those in the church whose lives and actions unapologetically resemble the world around us, and who are preying on the vulnerable people in our church, Paul says this is not some sort of “progressive” Christian understanding to celebrate, but something to be both mourned and, also, dealt with decisively; both for the good of that person as well as for the body of believers with whom they dwell.

But if all this sounds overly harsh or authoritarian to you, remember that this decisive act is meant to be restorative, not punitive. It’s done with the hope of bringing this person back into the fellowship of the church This is not God’s people saying, “Uh oh! You broke God’s laws so you need to pay for that now!” This is God’s people saying, “We love you too much, and we also love Jesus too much, to let you continue living in this way that is ruining your life and the lives of those around you.” In fact, in 2 Cor. 2 – I think, referring to his command in1 Corinthians, to remove that man from the church – Paul says that, once he’s been removed, the church is to “*forgive and comfort*” that man so that he will not be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. He says, “*I urge you to reaffirm your love for him*.” And Paul says to do that “*in order that Satan might not outwit us – for we are not unaware of his schemes.”* Satan’s focused effort is always against the church, and, what we said last week is also true here, even in these extreme circumstances, he is still the ultimate enemy we are fighting against.

B/c, if we’re honest, we have to admit, we’re not “better/smarter people” than these people who are now beyond further treatment that Paul describes in our passage this morning; we’re not! We all still experience the temptation at times to live in those ways ourselves, *particularly* in the way he says is the root cause of all those other things, viz. the **love of self**. There’s nobody in here that isn’t tempted by – and at times even gives into the temptation – the love of self. I know I am.

And it is *only* the grace of God alone that sustains us from pursuing and being destroyed by the exact same lifeless ways. Always remember, the greatest strength He offers us in withstanding that temptation is found in Jesus – who Hebrews calls our sympathetic high Priest. Who took on flesh and lived amoung us – all w/o sinning. And who actually lived in the exact opposite way of what Paul describes in our passage – look quickly at vs. 2-5.

Jesus:

Who didn’t love Himself, but gave up Himself for us.

Who didn’t love money, up gave up the riches of heaven to rescue us.

Who was not proud and boastful, but humble and lowly.

Who was perfectly obedient to His Father.

Who was perfectly holy and filled with love.

And who didn’t just practice and form of godliness but was – the Scriptures tell us – the very form and nature of God Himself.

And so we seek to live differently from the world, not out of begrudging submission, but out of grateful obedience and joy for all He has given to make us His.