

2Timothy 24-11-10a

Good morning, welcome to Sunday morning here at Grace & Truth Bible Church. It is November 10, 2024. It's the birthday of the United States Marine Corps and those of us who have had the privilege of being associated with that fine organization are in a celebratory mood.

Not that our happiness depends on our outward circumstances, but it doesn't hurt. We are going to continue this morning our study in 2 Timothy. We have come to this third chapter and I like these portions of scripture that are very clear on what the purpose is and it begins with, but know this.

We have some things that we need to know. It's going to tell us what we need to know. It's going to be useful, helpful, applicable to know, especially in the day in which we live.

So let's ask God's blessing on our fellowship and study and we will dive in. Father, how grateful we are for the country we live in, the protections and blessings that you have provided. We thank you for our freedom.

We thank you that because we have a relatively stable form of government, we are able to lead peaceable and quiet lives and we owe it to your grace to give us the opportunity to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank you for him. We thank you for his example, his teaching, his gift to us of the word of truth that transfers status and standing in your sight to us.

We have a share in his sonship, in his heirship, in his priesthood, in his being chosen to be at the center of fulfillment of your plan and we are privileged to represent him on this earth which is our greatest affiliation, our greatest connection to one another and to you. We pray that as we look at this portion of your word this morning that the Holy Spirit will minister it to our hearts, help us to understand it, to remember it and to be aware of its application in the moment that we need it, in that time when we are challenged to overcome our own fallen nature and our self-interest and remember who we are and why we are here in Christ. We pray it in his name.

Amen. Let's read our passage, 2 Timothy chapter 3. But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness. Does it strike you at all after that description, after those three full verses of uns and nots and negative traits, they have a form of godliness? Godly people, they look godly, they have an appearance of godliness and all of these things are rife and characterizing the group.

It's sobering to say the least. Having a form of godliness but denying its power. There is

power in genuine godliness, where there is weakness, where there is shortfall, where we have problems maintaining our commitments, that's a lack of power.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me, there is power in the word of God, there is power in the Holy Spirit. These are gifts from the Lord Jesus Christ in the name of His own Heavenly Father for us. And if we lack power, why would that be? Is it just unavailable or have we denied it? We could have a form of godliness and deny its power.

That is as scary and sobering to me as the preceding descriptions. From such people turn away. From such people turn away.

Think about that. But we're going to work through this not so much by taking each individual word and exploring it. We've actually done that in the past.

What I would like to do is pick up where we left off last Sunday, looking at the categories, the areas where these pertain. And you will remember, and I hope you've done this with your trusty, you know I have a Navy pencil, I have a Marine Corps pencil, this is my trusty Marine Corps pencil for obvious reasons. It goes with my tie.

But if you will notice in verse 2, you should by now have circled lovers of themselves and lovers of money. If you look at verse 4, how does it close? Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. So you circle lovers of pleasure and lovers of God.

This is the encapsulation. This is where these problems begin and end. What do we love? It's well known, even Dr. Phil knows that you can say a thing, we can tell ourselves what we love, but it is our actions, it's where we invest our time, it's what occupies our thinking on an ongoing, frequent, regular basis.

When we're young and we fall in love or think we have fallen in love, there is the infatuation that brings the person to mind all the time. Get up in the morning, if you think you're going to see them that day, it affects how you dress, it affects your grooming, it affects your plan for the day and how you're going to spend the time, and it recurs your mind over and over again. Why? Because you're in love and when you're in love, you think about the object of that affection all the time and it has an effect on what you do.

So look again at our passage, men will be, and of all of the things, if Paul in his prophetic vision is looking ahead, say to our day, and you look at the political strife and division, you look at the hate, the vilification, the bitterness, the crime, the self-interested, greedy, abusive, oppressive behavior, what's the very first thing you would choose? If you were going to make a list right now, we've got some problems in society, so I challenge you right now, if you think about everything that's been going on, everything you're aware of, and you're going to make a list of what's wrong with society, what would you put first? I would start with ungodliness, wouldn't you? I mean, wouldn't

godliness be the... Why doesn't Paul start with ungodliness? This is my question. He's an apostle. He's on the list of godly men, right? So why doesn't he start with ungodliness? Men will be ungodly, and here's all of the sub-categories of ungodliness, but that's not what he says, is it? What does he start with? The problem, the root, the source, the definition of our lack of relationship with God, lack of a walk with God is what? It's what we love.

We have our love aimed in wrong directions. It's not unlike having our faith aimed in wrong directions. Everybody has faith.

There's people that have faith in their political party. They have faith in a candidate. They have faith in a philosophy.

They have faith in a set of priorities. They have faith in humanity. If you want to talk about misplaced faith, faith in the basic goodness of man, that is doomed to disappointment.

So men will be lovers of themselves. Lovers of themselves. And I think, well, those rascals out there loving themselves, how dare they? That's just awful.

I want to look at this list for us to examine ourselves, because many of these are not so much does it exist, but to what degree. What is the summary of the law? When Jesus was in discussion with a scholar of the law, what did he say? What is the first and greatest commandment? The first and greatest commandment. You want to talk about godliness, what's the first commandment? What is the substance of it? What is the area of it? Love the Lord your God.

What is the second great commandment? Love your neighbor. I do not find in the first commandment, and I do not find the second which is like unto it, a reference to loving myself. There has been a lot of a pushback on that idea in psychology and in especially the modern and postmodern day, where it's important to pay attention to yourself.

You've got to care for yourself. You've got to forgive yourself. You've got to give yourself space.

And Whitney Houston, may she rest in peace, sang a song. I don't remember anything about the song, except in the chorus somewhere it says, the greatest love of all is to love yourself. And I thought, you're a Christian lady, how can you sing that song? Christian ladies that sing bear watching.

You've got to watch out. Debbie Boone, it can't be wrong if it feels so right, and so on. I could name others, but I digress.

Men will be lovers of themselves. This leads the list. This is the biggest danger.

And there's a sense in which many of the others are expressions of this first thing. What is the direction of our love? So I can't fix what men love. We can't change the direction of society.

We can't win America back for God. We can't shift the tide of public opinion as individuals. We are here to shine as lights.

We are here to represent the Lord Jesus Christ, who out of love, greater love hath no man than to lay down his life for his friend. Greater love hath no man. The Lord Jesus is the expression of God's love for us.

It is sacrificial. It is beneficial. And because we cannot fix what is wrong in society, I can't fix what is wrong with the person sitting next to me.

I can't fix what is wrong with anyone near or far, only myself. So when we see this and it says men will be, and we think, oh no, what are we going to do? What we can do is look at this list and make sure that we are as far from this description individually, me, myself, and I as possible. So I want to go down this list and pray the Psalm 51 prayer.

Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Try me and see if there be any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean.

Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow. I am the one person in the world that I can make sure by God's grace and through God's power doesn't fit this description. I can't do it for anyone else.

I can be an influence on others to move away from these attributes and move toward God and toward godliness. How do I do that? Not by talking, not by persuading, not by preaching, not by looking with downcast eyes across my upturned nose. It is by being an example.

The best witness, the best testimony, the best influence we can have is to stop trying to be a witness and a testimony and an influence and become what God can make us in his grace through his power. So there is a sense in which anytime we vertently or inadvertently sink into some of these characteristics and attributes, perilous times have come. This is a formal description of the latter days, but it is always perilous to let any of these make inroads in our heart and in our soul.

So men will be lovers of themselves. So I can stop right there and start examining myself to see if I am in the faith, to see if I am maintaining my hope, my motivation, my self-encouragement, looking at the promises of God, looking at the character of God, the faithfulness of God, the love of God as it has been expressed to me both recently and across my life and ensure that my love is aimed at my Heavenly Father, at his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, at my fellow believers first and foremost, the one and others. Am I expressing love? Love has a description.

Keep your finger here and turn back to 1 Corinthians. You know this well. This is another one of those passages that ought to be at our mental fingertips.

1 Corinthians chapter 13. You say, oh, I know what's in there. Well, let's just read it.

Though I speak with the tongues of men and angels, I can be so glib, I can be so erudite, I can be so expressive, I can write in my blog, I can communicate wonderfully well with words, I can speak with the tongue of men and angels. Let me just pause right there. If you read what is put out on various social media platforms, there is a virtue signaling and a claim to virtue for people who are so very judgmental, looking at people, and I don't even know them or know them well.

There are some in my distant ring of acquaintance. Many are just complete strangers, but they are quoted, they are retweeted or re-exed or whatever they do now. And there is sort of a self-important opining about things.

And well, if you didn't vote the way I voted, if you don't think the way I think, if you don't prioritize what I prioritize, there is just something wrong with you. And these people are expressive. They have a command of the language and they make people feel bad about themselves or they try to.

And this is one of the influences, one of the factors in the recent election that has been cited by almost all sides is that making people feel bad about themselves on your own is a good way to alienate them and turn them off. Who does conviction of sin? Not us. Who points out error and shortcoming and the need for repentance and cleansing and acclaim on God's grace and power? Whose job is that? Not mine.

Not yours. And people who want to convict each other of some sort of failure, shortfall, blindness, short-sightedness, myopia, self-interestedness, or any other sin. And as we go down through this list in 2 Timothy 3, don't start thinking, I know somebody that, boy, you want to talk about putting their picture in the dictionary next to this term.

That is a fatal mistake. This list is not for us to examine others or even examine society in general. It is to be warned and to expunge and expel any hint of these things in ourselves.

We're the only ones we can change. And talking about the woes of society and the shortcomings and the flaws and the misdirected energies of others is a waste of time. It's not our job.

How do people come to a realization? How do you and I come to a realization that we're on the wrong track? It is the Holy Spirit using the Word of God in our souls. Not fellow believers convicting me without a trial, assuming my motives, impugning my priorities, or anything else. The only way change happens in the human soul is the Holy Spirit working with the Word of God.

We are transformed by the renewing of our minds. And that's Holy Spirit work. That's Word of God work.

It is a waste of time. Oh, I have such a argument. I'll persuade someone to see things differently.

Sorry, no. Think about the Pharisees the day after Lazarus was raised from the dead. There is nothing more persuasive than a man four days dead walking out of his tomb and coming back to life at the Word of the Son of God.

And if people decide, well, we've got to kill the both of them, that's their response. Do you think there's a persuasive argument? Do you think Mary or Martha or Lazarus himself could say, look, let me just tell you, this guy's the real deal. It is a heart issue and the heart is only addressed by the Holy Spirit and the Word of God.

So if we do have loved ones or acquaintances or co-workers or others in our periphery and we care about them, we want the best for them, we would love to see them enjoy blessings of fellowship and communion with God and with believers. If our heart bleeds for them losing their way and suffering in life from bad choices, the lack of God's power in their life, inability to enjoy peace and joy and the other fruits of the Spirit, and we grieve for them. In many cases, they can be loved ones or people that we care about.

You can't talk them into a different mode of living. Perilous times come when people are first and foremost self-interested, lovers of self. We have no human ability to break that spell.

We can pray that God will break it, that God, through the presence and power of His Holy Spirit, through His Word, which can be evident in an unspoken way in our lives, women can win their husbands without a word because they're living the truth. They're representing the truth. When Jesus said, I am the truth, He didn't say, I speak the truth.

Do you ever wonder about that? I am the way, I speak the truth, and I am the life. I am the truth. His behavior, His attitudes, His actions, everything He did was true and truth.

We are now His body on this earth and our lives, often without saying a word, can be expressions of truth, quiet faith, persistent hope, indomitable love and joy and peace and patience. Many times, speak louder than words. So, look at 1 Corinthians.

If I speak with the tongue of men and angels, but I do not represent love, I don't have love, I have become a clashing zildjian symbol. I'm just a big round flat piece of brass that somebody's banging on. I'm a sounding brass or a clanging cymbal.

It's just noise. Verse two, and though I have prophecy and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, we can begin to believe this about ourselves because we have all been beneficiaries of wonderful teaching. I love the men in the past that have done diligent

work and have shared it and I've benefited from it and I have been given understanding into things that were mysterious and hard to fathom.

Knowledge, have all faith so that I can remove mountains. Now, this is a scary one. Jesus said, if you have faith as a grain of mustard seed, you can move mountains.

By the way, it is always an interesting question how much Paul knew about the teaching of the Lord Jesus since he was not one of the disciples who accompanied him. Where do you think Paul got this particular phrase? Though I have all faith so as to move mountains. Where did that come from? He didn't make that up.

He didn't happen to coincide. He knew the teaching of the Lord Jesus. Where did he get it? Who is his traveling companion for months and months on board ship and walking down roads and traveling across the Roman Empire? Who is his traveling companion? Luke.

Luke has interviewed, Luke has manuscripts, Luke has firsthand accounts of the words of the Lord Jesus. And once Paul meets him on the Damascus Road and later on is traveling with did sit under his teaching and especially with Luke, you know what an animated conversation. Wouldn't you like to know Greek and be able to sit in on conversations between Luke and Paul? Luke says, well, you know, I'm putting together this account for Theophilus.

Luke writes both his first and second book for Theophilus. Theophilus, the one who loves God. I'm not sure Theophilus was an individual, could have been, might be a happy arrangement when God uses names of actual people to represent truths for us.

But it just means when he says in Acts, the former account have I written, oh, great Theophilus, oh, great one who loves God, not himself. It's not for myself. It's not for money and so on.

So could have prophecy, understand mysteries and knowledge. I could go to a really great church and I could believe what I learned there. I can have faith that will shift to the landscape as Jesus said.

But if I have not love, I am nothing. Knowing the word of God and believing it, even to the point of moving mountains without love is nothing. We are nothing.

This is why when we use a memory aid for the Christian virtues, we understand that faith is a means, hope is a motivation, but love is the measure. That's based on this passage. Faith by itself, if it doesn't work itself out in love, if it doesn't work through love, it's useless.

Being a theologian is not enough. Being able to explain Romans chapter 9 in great detail is not enough. If it doesn't work itself out in love, Paul says, I'm nothing.

Paul probably had a better grasp of New Testament truth than anyone in history short of the Lord Jesus himself. And he says, I am nothing. Notice he puts this in the first person.

He doesn't say if you have faith and move mountains and you don't have love, you're nothing. That would have been a different tone, wouldn't it? Paul uses himself. It's a way to slip it under the defenses that we want to put up.

Hey, wait a minute. What do you mean I am nothing? I thought faith is the victory that overcomes the world. This is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith.

I've got faith. Why are you picking on me? But he uses the first person and it is so helpful. If I have prophecy, which he does, and understand mysteries, he's the steward of the mysteries.

Remember when we went through Paul's stewardship of the mysteries? This is true. He is a steward of the mystery. And he said, I'm the apostle Paul for crying out loud.

I've got prophetic gifts. I understand mysteries. I've got faith that sustains me in the Philippian jail, that sustains me in the shipwreck on the sea, that sustains me when I'm getting 40 stripes minus one, three different times.

When I am stoned and left for dead in Lystra, when I endure hardships, when I am persecuted, when there are riots over me in Ephesus, I'm a man of faith. He says, if I don't have love, I'm nothing. Wow.

So how important is love? Why do you think he leads off in the third chapter of second Timothy with love problems? It's the key. That's the measure. We can examine ourselves and see if we are in the faith, but to really know if we're in the faith, we've got to look at our love.

How self-sacrificial am I? How enduring is my patience? Do I love as I have been loved by the Lord Jesus? Is my care for others as great as his care for me? Verse three, though I bestow all my goods to feed others, though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. You can sacrifice for other reasons. There are secular charities that don't do what they do to the glory of God.

They aren't representing Christian faith or Christian love or Christian hope. They're just, here's somebody that's hungry. I'm going to give them a meal.

And we think, well, but that has to be good in any context. That's intrinsically good to feed a hungry person. The Bible says, no, it's not.

You can give what you have to feed the poor. And if you have not love, which is the love of God, which reflects the glory of God, the beauty of God, the Son of God, feeding the poor is not intrinsically good. That's a biblical truth, poorly understood.

Look at verse four, love suffers long. Love is long suffering. Someone else is causing me to suffer.

This isn't a circumstance. This isn't an affliction. It's not a physical hardship.

It's not the weather. It's not the economy. This is people causing me suffering, either by lack of action or by their action, insensitivity, what they say, what they do, how they treat me, how they avoid me, love, which depends on the person loving, not the merits of the object.

Isn't it interesting? You think about faith and think about love. Where is the merit? Where is the value in faith? The merit of faith is in the object, right? When we put our trust and faith in God and in the Lord Jesus, where's the merit? Is it meritorious for me to place my faith in Christ? The object has the merit. In love, it's the reverse.

In love, it is the lover that has the merit, regardless of the merits of the object. Faith, its value depends on what you're putting your faith in. Love depends on the qualities and the virtues of the person doing the loving.

This is why the love of God is so great. Wonderful song, the love of God. If every stalk on earth were a quill and every ocean was ink and you try to write the love of God, you couldn't finish writing because the merit of love is in the subject.

The merit of faith is in the object. So, love suffers long and is kind. Love does not return evil for evil.

Love returns good for evil. It suffers and is kind. Love does not envy.

Love does not parade itself. Love is not puffed up, does not behave rudely, does not seek its own. You can't get much closer to a direct contrast here in verse 5 of 1 Corinthians 13.

In the latter days, perilous times will come. Men will be lovers of themselves. Genuine love does not seek its own, is not provoked.

And if I were to expand that a little bit, I would say does not allow itself to be provoked. When we are loving, we won't let ourselves be provoked into anger, into impatience, into unkindness, into judgment, into vilification and insult. Does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil.

Thinks no evil. Doesn't say recognizes no evil, identifies no evil, avoids no evil. To avoid evil, we have to know where it is.

We have to recognize it. We have to understand it. But thinks no evil.

It does not allow its own thinking to become evil. And there's the difference. It is

important to identify, recognize, avoid evil.

And the way we avoid it is we don't think it. We don't let it creep into our thinking. There's enough evil in the world without it penetrating our thoughts.

Thinks no evil. Does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth. Doesn't build its happiness on someone else's unhappiness.

Doesn't celebrate karma. You did something bad, now something bad has happened to you. You raised yourself by your own bootstraps and now you have fallen.

Does not rejoice in iniquity. Rejoices in the truth. Bears all things.

Believes all things. Hopes all things. Endures all things.

This is a case where we understand that you believe all things that should be believed. You don't believe lies. How many times have we been told by the Lord Jesus and by the Apostle Paul, let no one deceive you.

Be not deceived. So you can't just believe any old thing. Well, just tell me a story, I'll believe it.

What does it mean to believe all things? Believe all the things that we're supposed to believe. We are to bear all things that we're supposed to bear. There are some things that you don't bear.

An abusive spouse, especially physically abusive, you don't bear with, well, I've got to bear with all things. And so I'm being, you know, abused and having to go to the urgent care and worried about my children being injured and so on. Somebody comes home in an alcoholic fit and is being abusive.

This is not saying bear with that. Bear with the things we know we are supposed to bear with. We are to believe all the things that we have been given by God to believe, not just some of them.

I'm going to believe some of the promises, but not all of them. I'm going to believe all of the promises. I'm going to bear up under all of the things that God allows through the wall of fire for my benefit and his glory.

I will bear with whatever comes. I will believe everything I'm supposed to believe. I will hope in all of the things that God has made promises about that are hopeful.

I'm not going to hope for pie in the sky by and by. I'm not going to hope for fantasies. I'm not going to hope for figments of someone's imagination.

Those would be included in all things if you didn't understand the context. Paul doesn't

lead with this, does he? This is in the middle of a context. And all of the things we are supposed to endure, we endure.

All of the things we are supposed to believe, we believe. All of the things we are supposed to hope for in Christ, in God, we hope for all of them without omission. And whatever it is that we are supposed to endure, whatever God has placed in our path to challenge us, you have need of patience so that after you have suffered a while, you will inherit the promise.

We will endure the way the Lord Jesus endured. All things, whatever comes, love never fails. Prophecies will fail.

Tongues will cease. Knowledge will vanish away. We know in part.

We prophesy in part. When that which is perfect has come, that which is in part will be done away. When I was a child, I spoke as a child, understood as a child, I thought as a child.

When I became a man, I put away childish things. What is the purpose of this? He's talking about love, and he says love never fails, and love is never going to disappear. Think about the eternal future.

It is the fulfillment of prophecy. Is there going to be prophecy in the kingdom of the Father where God is going to describe a future reality that has not yet come, and we will enter into it by faith? We will assume its truth and wait for it by faith? Prophecy will no longer be necessary. There won't be a need because right now we have partial knowledge.

We are not in glory. We have not been resurrected and entered into the realms where angels dwell, the presence of God himself. So in this fallen, corrupt, and ephemeral world, prophecy is necessary.

Prophecies will eventually be obsolete. Tongues were obsoleted within the 1st century. They were necessary at a time when there wasn't written scripture.

The epistles, the gospels, had not yet been written and circulated, and so to get information to believers in a timely manner, the Holy Spirit would bring it to the group via prophecy, via tongues, and the interpretation of tongues, and so on. And it authenticated it the way we don't need authentication because our Bible is authentic, and we know it is. So tongues will cease.

Whether there is knowledge, it will vanish away. Not knowledge in the standard sense. This is the gift of knowledge.

When Agabus comes and wraps bindings around his ankles and his wrists and tells Paul,

you're heading into bondage and chains if you keep heading for Jerusalem, that was knowledge. There was knowledge that guided the early church when they didn't have a Bible, and they didn't have the scriptures. That gift of knowledge, that impartation of knowledge, such as Daniel.

Daniel was not only a prophet, but he had knowledge of the symbolism of dreams, as Joseph did. But this will cease. There won't be any need because right now we know in part and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is complete is come, people have said, well, this is the scripture. We are still incomplete. When that which is complete comes, that is going to be the kingdom of the Son and the kingdom of the Father.

When we are in our resurrected state, we will be complete. Our salvation will be accomplished and full. Right now we are saved in part, if you think about it.

I've still got a fallen nature. I'm still suffering the slings and arrows of the world, the flesh, and the devil. We have a part salvation in the way that we have partial knowledge.

We have partial understanding. We push against resistance. When that which is complete is come, that which is in part will be done away.

And then Paul says, now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Notice when that which is complete has come, we will see face to face. When is that? That's the rapture.

That's the second coming. That is when we are with Christ. So when that which is partial is not just talking about the first century in Christianity, and that which is complete is not just talking about the scriptures, although it's a wonderful thing.

When that which is complete is come, we see face to face. That's the future. That's the resurrection.

Now I know in part, but then I shall know just as I also am known. So now abide faith, hope, and love, these three. But the greatest of these is love.

The worst thing we can lose, the top of the list in Second Timothy 3 is misdirecting our love, aiming it at ourselves instead of at God, at one another, at our neighbors, and at even our enemies. The quality of love depends on the quality of the one doing the loving, and that's us. To be a lover of self, that's a closed loop system that is perilous.

Well, we'll pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll continue looking at this list in Second Timothy 3 with the key being, what do you love?