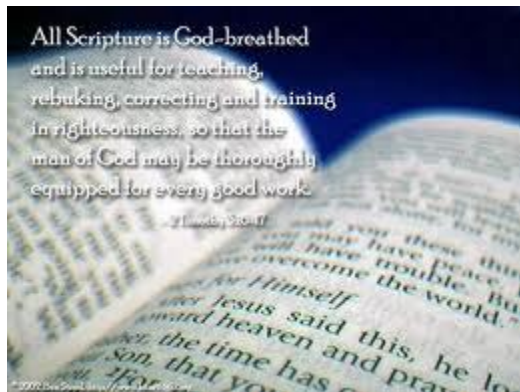


Sunday Evening Service 30th June 2013 - Kenneth Gray, 2 Timothy 3 “Don’t be afraid when darkness comes”



Kenneth mentioned that he had recently been reading about the working conditions and benefits enjoyed by Google’s 30,000+ employees. The average wage is currently around \$74,000 and the company’s website presents a very appealing list of additional benefits that ensure Google has little difficulty in recruiting new workers.

How this contrasts with the message Paul is sending to Timothy telling him what to expect if he is to spend his life as a worker for Jesus!

“People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents,

ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.”

In verses 1-5 Paul warns Timothy to watch out for people - people inside the church - who have ‘a form of godliness’ but who are not really godly at all because they have not allowed the gospel to change them. One such sign of ungodliness that Kenneth has often seen during his ministry has been people’s unforgiving natures. Another has been people’s relish for gossip - the all-pervasiveness of gossip is sometimes what puts people off becoming involved with a church. Too often gossip and rumour, despite being ill founded, can become accepted as truth and we spread lies unwittingly because we have been corrupted by the desire to pass on what we’ve been told ‘in confidence’.

Paul describes such ungodly people as ‘brutal’ - completely lacking in love in what they say and how they deal with others. The worst thing is that such ungodliness exists inside the church as well as outside it. When we try to let the Holy Spirit move in our lives such ungodly folk undermine us.

Paul is counselling Timothy about his ministry, a ‘work in progress’, and sadly his message is equally applicable to the modern church 2 thousand years on. So many people achieve a ‘form of godliness’ but their lives are not transformed by faith. Kenneth’s hosts during his recent visit to the USA revealed that they too had been nominally Christian with a ‘form of godliness’ for many many years before they truly saw the light and allowed the Spirit to transform them.

Evangelical churches can be just as ungodly as any other church. People are turned off by the church because it is not living as it should live - one body that is healthy and holy as God intended.

Paul warns Timothy to be on his guard against people who are too easily converted. Ungodly people do not always display those bad characteristics. They know how to turn on the charm to your face then suddenly their inner nastiness reveals itself. It reminded Kenneth of his experiences as an auditor. He was often warmly welcomed by employers when he arrived to audit the company accounts, being treated with charm and courtesy. Then he would observe those same employers next minute speaking abusively to their employees. Similarly, recent child abuse revelations about a whole range of celebrities and TV personalities have shown how those idolised by society can be really evil underneath. Sadly the church environment has not proved to be immune from such shameful deceit and sinfulness.

Paul is determined to make Timothy aware of these dangers of ungodliness and to help him recognise and deal with them when they emerge. In verse 7 he warns against those who are *“always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth”*. Some folk are so addicted to acquiring fresh information, chasing every new theory or idea that they continuously postpone acknowledging the Truth. This addiction is really a lack of humility masquerading as a virtue. But Paul assures Timothy in verse 9 that time will tell on such

people because godlessness does not build anything lasting. *“But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.”*

It is easy to be influenced by and dragged down by the ungodliness of others. But sometimes when you confront the ungodly, when you look it square in the face, it turns away in shame. We must all be on guard against being sucked into sin and compromising God's standards but we must also be prepared for the consequences of standing up for the Truth.

Kenneth recalled the persecution experienced by John Wycliffe and Jan Hus, the pre-Reformation reformers. Their translations of the Bible into the language of the populace derived from a desire to let every ordinary person read the Truth for him/herself in an era when the church was corruptly hiding it. The leaders of the mediaeval church burned Hus at the stake and burned the translations of the Bible.

The Bible is our source of guidance and direction for living our lives. Yet we spend less of our time reading it than we do watching TV, eating, shopping etc. Many of us behave as if we've done it all - we've committed ourselves to Jesus when we joined the church and we don't need to do more.

Timothy knew, first-hand, what Paul's experiences had been. Paul's way of living, his teaching, his purpose are what Paul urges Timothy to follow.

For us the question is: What is our purpose and our way of living? Is it just like everyone else's? Paul endured much suffering as a worker for the Lord but he encourages Timothy saying *“Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them”* In verse 12 he states: *“In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted”* - persecution goes with the territory in Paul's day. In our day too it is becoming more evident as our society increasingly calls 'good' what is bad and 'bad' what is good. For example in the USA gay marriage is now enshrined as a right in the constitution. Fifty years ago in our western world being a Christian did not result in persecution. The same is no longer true.

Paul concludes this passage with a reminder that *“All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”*

The trouble is many in the church know what the Bible says but think they know better. They consider themselves 'more enlightened' and are the very people against whom Paul was warning Timothy in verses 1-9. We can all be guilty of this folly from time to time when Bible teaching gets in the way of what we want to do.

Jesus Himself knew it is not possible to 'know better' than the Bible - how then can we have the temerity to 'correct' its teaching?

Sunday Evening Service 23rd June 2013 - Kenneth Gray, 2 Timothy 2:14-26 “Seeking the best all the time”



Kenneth commended Timothy as a book all preachers should study as it reveals a lot about good preaching. Having recently attended a preachers' conference in America he observed that conferences can be enlightening when the Bible is the focus of the teaching and we must never forget that everything we know about God comes from what the Bible tells us.

Some people, even people within the church, urge us not to trust the Bible. They recommend a 'pick & mix' approach to the Scriptures where we select only those parts we like and reject those we dislike or find too

uncomfortable and challenging. This is a dangerous approach which leads its adherents to form their own religion rather than embrace Christianity.

When Paul was writing this letter there was no Bible available and he was frequently preaching to people who knew nothing about Jesus. So how did he get the message across? He did it by repetition. He kept on reminding them about the Gospel message. Those of us who are parents or grandparents can relate to this technique. Experience has taught us that children need instructions to be repeated numerous times if there is to be any chance that they'll remember to pick up their gym kit or their lunch money or whatever.

Ministers do well to reiterate the soul-saving message over and over so that their congregations can manage, over time, to take it in. A worshipper, disappointed to hear him deliver a sermon for a second time, asked Spurgeon if he felt this was a legitimate practice for ministers. Spurgeon replied that if a sermon were not worth preaching a second time then it was not worth preaching once! We do forget so quickly. We do need to be re-told 'the old, old story' as the popular old hymn suggests.

The warning in verse 14 *'Warn them before God against quarrelling about words; it is of no value, and only ruins those who listen'* could have been written for the benefit of modern theological colleges. The practice these days is to present the Scriptures to theology students then encourage them to argue against it. Timothy is often used for exegesis but is hardly recognisable once it has been picked over and distorted in such interpretive exercises. The same thing occurs in many churches across the world where preachers are so concerned to display their intellectual gymnastics that they finish by undermining their people's faith.

An example of the results of *'quarrelling about words'* that is familiar to us can be found in the work of influential Scottish theologian William Barclay. He started arguing about words and lost sight of what the Bible was saying. In his endeavours to 'simplify' the Gospel, the Gospel message was lost. Any 'stripped down' version of the Gospel message fails to challenge or convert people.

In verse 15 Paul advises: *'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.'* For Kenneth this is a reminder that the Bible is a 'working class' book. The vast majority of early converts were working class people - fishermen, farmers, shepherds - and even Jesus himself worked as a carpenter. The modern church has become a largely middle class institution.

It is interesting to compare the craftsmanship, say, of modern builders with the skills of those who, for example, built our own church building. The dovetailing on the floor joists underneath our chancel are a thing of beauty even though they were never meant to be seen and say a lot about the sense of pride and dedication of those carpenters who constructed them. In contrast, it is not uncommon in newly built houses today to find sloppy, make-do finishing when you open a cupboard door.

We are each called to be workers for Jesus Christ. How then do we carry out our duties? Do we apply our best efforts and deploy our highest skills in working for the Lord or are we content to offer Him substandard work?

Kenneth commented that it is an awesome responsibility to stand in the pulpit and preach - that's why he resisted the ministry as long as God would let him.

In verse 16 Paul says *'Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly.'* Many preachers whose sermons are one joke or funny story after another would do well to heed this. Such sermons may be popular but they do not save people. The hard meat of the Gospel requires effort in the consumption. Humour can sometimes create the conditions for people to receive the Gospel message but it doesn't of itself change hearts and, inappropriately applied, can lead to ungodliness.

There is a lot of 'godless chatter' around these days. Millions of books are sold every year advocating 'sure-fire' methods of achieving revival. One such is the 'Prayer of Jabez' series of books. The very liberally minded Presbyterian Church of America has also recently banned books on the Second Coming as being too 'dangerous'. The merits or spuriousness of any books can only be assessed in relation to their

closeness to the teaching of the Scriptures.

Verse 19 contains the antidote for all the godless chatter and wrong teaching that people are being given nowadays *'Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness."*

Kenneth recalled occasions when his builder father would show him houses in various stages of erection. When he would remark that nothing much seemed to be happening his father would explain that work was being done on the foundations and that this was the most important stage to get right. Recalling this Kenneth observed that nowadays we seem to be more concerned with 'finishings' than we are with 'robust foundations'.

In verse 20 Paul states: *'In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use.'* Many of us remember granny's display cabinet that displayed the best china that was always felt to be too good to use in case it got broken. God calls us to be like the more robust and useful everyday clay crockery that serves a good and necessary purpose.

In some churches it can be relatively easy to find people willing to be leaders - Committee Convenors, Heads of Working Parties etc. But sometimes it's harder to recruit those workers who will not receive enhanced status or public recognition for their efforts. His recent trip to the USA showed Kenneth that there are many big preachers who demand a big stage. Here in Bridge of Weir the church should be getting out among ordinary people working one-to-one alongside them so that we can be *'useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work'*.

The passage ends with a very challenging word from Paul: *'And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful'*.

This is a big ask - it's relatively easy to be kind to nice folk who are kind to us but it's much harder to be kind to those we consider 'undeserving'. People who get under our skin should be 'opposed gently' says Paul. Pastor Richard Wurmbbrand spoke of the arrest in his youth of Nicolae Ceausescu. Ceausescu was arrested by Romanian Christian authorities for his pro-Communist sympathies and he was brutally tortured whilst in prison. Wurmbbrand wondered what might have transpired if those 'Christians' had dealt more compassionately with the young man who later became the notorious Romanian Communist leader.

It is often easy to humiliate people and get the upper hand in disagreements. This was not the way of Jesus nor should it be our way in the church. All that we do should help people escape from the trap of the Devil and we must always remember to remain under the judgment of the Word when we engage with people.