

Twisted Religion

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon emphasizes the importance of staying true to Scripture and avoiding twisted religion, which is characterized by a focus on human opinion and tradition rather than Scripture.

Duration: 30:42

Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1

Topics: "Religion"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the concept of 'Twisted Religion' and its prevalence in today's society. He emphasizes the importance of following Jesus according to his word and condemns those who engage in pleasure-seeking and materialistic behavior. The preacher warns against false teachings and urges listeners to adhere to the whole counsel of God, rather than cherry-picking verses to suit their desires. He concludes by affirming that there is only one way to salvation, through Jesus Christ, and highlights the signs of true worship in contrast to twisted religion.

Transcript

I started nine, 10 weeks ago this series on vital truth. This one is the hardest one of all to preach, but it's needed, and it's called twisted religion. Twisted religion.

I prayed before the service and late last night and early this morning here that God would give me the grace to say this in the right way, but it's something we all need to know. It's a vital truth. So let's look in our passage, the first one we wanna just focus on is 2 Timothy, the third chapter.

Let me just say to introduce it, these people have identified today with our church, which is part of the big church. This is a local church where we meet together, but then there's the church of Jesus Christ, universal and also invisible because no one can see all the Christians at one time. They're all over the place.

This church, the church of Jesus Christ is made up of who? Not members who get a card, but it's made up of everyone who's born again and now becomes not only a part of the church, but the church is likened in the New Testament to the body of Christ. Everyone say the body of Christ. In other words, he is the head spiritually and we are connected to him.

We are the body. What does the body do? It carries out the direction of the head. The head gives the direction, the body carries it out.

My brain tells me, let's walk over to the other side of the pulpit and I walk over that way. My body obeys that. Now, if I was crippled, sick, comatose or whatever, I couldn't obey that dictate of my mind.

Now, you have to understand as a vital truth that because we are connected to Christ spiritually and we are the only ones who can carry out his purposes on the earth, he's not using angels, he's using his body, just like you use your body when you wanna carry out some function. We are thus under the attack of Satan. Jesus talked about a real Satan, a real devil.

We're involved in spiritual warfare and why are we under attack? Because he is anti-Christ and that includes his body. He's not only anti the head, he's anti the body. He cannot hurt Jesus.

Jesus is in heaven but he can attack the body to weaken it, to distract it, to hurt it in some way. So when you become a Christian, you come under special attack individually and you can't throw up your hands and say, whoa, what's happening with this? Because this is it. Because I am representing as the body of Christ one of the members and I'm gonna be a target of the enemy.

But there's many ways that Satan attacks the body, the church, and every one of us should be concerned as a vital truth about the condition of Christ's body. Not just our local assembly that we encourage each other but the body across the country and across the world. Those are our brothers and sisters.

You know that guy who just was running away and then helped the man and paid for his medical expenses? You and I are gonna spend eternity with him. How many believe that? Say amen. That's our brother.

We might not meet here. So Satan has many attacks. Some are from the outside like persecution but other attacks are more insidious because they come from within.

They bring the concept of a twisted religion. It's religion and it's called Christianity and folks are going to church. But it is totally departed from the Christianity that Jesus gave.

This was forewarned by the way by Jesus and by the apostles. Let's look at one instance. Second Timothy, the third chapter.

But mark this. There will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, without natural affection, even for their own family.

Unforgiving, that word means you can never make a peace treaty with them. They're going to keep at you no matter what. Slandering, vilifying and talking negative about people who aren't present.

Without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited. What's crazy about this thing to our minds is you would say, oh, that's the world out there. No, what makes this so terrible is what's coming.

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Having a form of godliness, seemingly religious, one translation has. Having a form of being committed to God.

Having a form of godliness but denying its power or one translation, strangers to its power. It goes through the outward form and charade but the power of God and his word and the spirit are unknown to them, although they're religious. And then the indictment is so bad that Paul gives instructions to Timothy, have nothing to do with such people.

Don't fellowship with them because you could get contaminated. You can witness to them, try to talk to them but have otherwise nothing to do with such people. Remember, I'm not making this stuff up.

This is in the Bible, right? Later on in that chapter, same chapter, Paul says, you however, Timothy, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance, persecutions, sufferings. That's not something too many American pastors or evangelists would boast in. What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra? The persecutions I endured, yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. That's a basic truth. While evildoers and impostors, not just evildoers but impostors, who are the impostors? The people pretending to be ministers, the people pretending to be Christians.

Impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. So notice the mixture here. It's not just the preachers, it's what they produce in the church.

Like priests, like people. Whatever the leadership is like and whatever the doctrine is, that's what you're gonna get in the pew. So evildoers and impostors are gonna go from bad to even worse.

While Christians go from glory to glory, the impostors and the deceivers go from bad to worse. But you, as for you, continue in what you have learned and become convinced of because you know from whom you learned it and how from infancy, Timothy, you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture, all of the Bible is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, that means saying sharp words, correcting and training in righteousness so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Now that's a lot to chew on, but it's a vital truth. The truth is that because we're the body of Christ, we're gonna be attacked. And notice this attack.

We just brought in members into this local church. What is a local church? Well, wait a minute, what's a Christian? Well, wait a minute, who is Christ? When I said to them that you've all testified that you've received salvation, what's salvation? What are any of these things mean? The only way to know what any of those things mean is not to be talking to your friends, but to go to Scripture, the Holy Word of God. In the Bible, God gives us everything we need to know about spiritual living, everything we need to know.

There's nothing outside the Bible that we need to grow in God, nothing. And the Word of God is God-breathed, it's authoritative, and it gives us the only proper definition of the things that we're talking about. Salvation, what's the future? Is Christ gonna return? Your opinion is meaningless.

My opinion is more meaningless. What people on your job say is meaningless. What the culture says is meaningless.

What the preachers say is meaningless. What the Pope says is meaningless. The only authority that we have as Christians is the Word of God.

Can we all put our hands together and affirm that and say amen to that? What's right, what's wrong? How would you know that? No, you shouldn't do that, who says? No, you should do that, who says? The only answer to these questions and a million others is what does the Word of God say? The all-sufficiency of Scripture is a theological doctrine that's very important for Christians. The Bible alone is sufficient as a rule of our conduct and our faith. 500 years ago, this was the break off from the Roman Catholic system that Martin Luther, the German reformer, faced.

He faced a situation where at that time the Roman Catholic Church was preaching, as it does today, that there are two kinds of authority. One is the Bible, but along with the Bible and really more important than the Bible are the teachings of the popes, the encyclicals, church tradition, so that if you said to a Catholic back then, or really Mariology hadn't come into fashion yet back then, but if you said to someone, well, wait a minute, you're praying to Mary, where is that in the Bible? Oh, no, no, it's not in the Bible, but Pope such and such said in such and such a year that Mary will, if you talk to her, she'll put in a good word with her son Jesus and then that will help you. So some people under that illusion pray more to Mary than they do to God.

I don't know why I would want to talk to Mary. How many are happy we can go right to God and talk to him? Luther was then condemned and they wanted to kill him and they chased him all around, but Luther's main point was not only that are we justified by faith only and not by works, which the church was teaching, but the other just as important truth was this. Solo scriptura, only scripture.

And when they condemned him and condemned him and said, deny that you wrote those, condemn what you wrote when you criticize the church. He said, I will not condemn anything. I cannot violate my conscience.

I only can go by the word of God. I cannot go by what a Pope says. I can't go by what a council says.

I can't go by what Pastor Cimbala says. I can't go by what anybody says. My conscience is bound.

I have to be loyal to the precious word of God. Where the word of God corrects me, I stand corrected. Where the word of God does not correct me, you could get a team of horses.

I will not deny anything unless scripture corrects me. That was the battle of the Reformation, to go from tradition and other voices and authorities to only one, that book, that book, only this book. Genesis through Revelation.

Inspired by God, God breathed, and our only rule of faith. This is how we know this living, vibrant word of God corrects us, trains us, encourages us. How many have ever read the word of God in a time of stress and just those words and promises have lifted you up and created faith? Wave your hand at me if the word of God has ever helped you that way, okay.

We know about salvation through the word of God. How do I know I'm saved? I know what I should tell people to become a Christian. How do I know that? Should I start asking people around? What do you think I should tell this woman? She's ready to die, she has cancer, it's terminal, and what should I tell her? I don't know, my opinion is this.

Just tell her to live a good life, okay. Try to live a good life. How about you, what do you feel? Oh, what I would tell her is if she gets better, go to church or read the Bible every day.

I know, but what does God say I should tell her? I can't go by everybody's opinion. I'll be tracking people all over the world. Now, one of the principles about the all-sufficiency of Scripture is this, which is found in many places.

In fact, the last thought in the Bible is the same as Deuteronomy 4, verse two. Look at it. It says, do not add to what I command you, God speaking, and do not subtract from it, but keep the commands of the Lord your God that I give you.

The last thought in Revelation is anyone who adds to the words of this prophecy, not just Revelation probably, but we can apply it to all of Scripture. Nobody can add, nobody can add, nobody can add, and nobody can subtract. Who are you and I to add to what God says? If God says this is all I need, how many believe that it's all I need? If I add to it, I'm challenging God.

Now, God has certain things that he expresses as the moral ruler of the universe, as the ruler of the universe, as the holy God, our creator who we're gonna have to answer to in the end. Who am I to take anything away? Who am I? How can I take something away from what God says? Who's your aunt or your uncle or your friend on the job? What does it matter what their opinion is? You gotta settle this in your heart if you're gonna be a Christian. Our only source of authority is the word of God.

Oh no, but I feel I had a dream. All right, fine. Tell me your dream, but I'm gonna match it up with the word of God.

And if it doesn't line up with the word of God, you had that dream from another source. It wasn't from God. Everything's judged.

This sermon has to be judged. Listen to me. Every speaker who ever stands here never believe anything they say unless they back it up with scripture.

Never believe any televangelist, anyone who teaches. You gotta ask, is that the whole word of God? Is that a balanced truth from God's word? Is that true? Now, what do cults do? They add to the word of God. People like, as I mentioned, the Roman Catholic Church adds tradition and all of that.

Christian science, they have the Bible in some way, but then the teachings of Mary Baker Eddy. So they'll go more to that than they will the Bible. The Mormons, they say they believe in the Bible, but they believe in the Book of Mormon more than they do the Bible.

And where the Bible contradicts what they're doing, they throw it out and say, yes, but Joseph Smith had this revelation and that's what we are, we're Mormons. So you have to decide today. You're gonna go only by the Bible or you're gonna start checking around with everybody.

I'm telling you as a vital truth, you grieve the Holy Spirit when you let anybody add to what he gave us. Some people say, I don't go by the word, I go by the spirit. No, you don't.

The spirit inspired that word. How would he work with us and help us and lead us if we're not listening to what he wrote? The Holy Spirit inspired the word of God. Then there are people, more to the point here before I close, who take away from God's word.

They go to a kind of false doctrine where they deny everything. Very few do that. The imposters wouldn't.

The evil seducers wouldn't. They'll quote some of the Bible, but then they'll deny other parts of the Bible. Or they'll take a verse out of context and make it the whole truth and not give you the whole counsel of God.

What most of them were doing then, doing now, telling people what they wanna hear rather than what they need to hear. And because if you want popularity and many times money or if you wanna be accepted, it's much easier. If you held this microphone and did what I do, it's much easier to tell people what they wanna hear than what they need to hear as it's found in the word of God.

Don't you think I wanna be accepted by you? Don't you think I have feelings? Don't you think it's harder for me to preach this kind of sermon than I know the plans that I have for you? The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. People who take away from the scriptures are under a curse, the Bible says, because they've tampered with what God said. Who in the world are you and me to tamper with what God said? Oh, Pastor Simbala, that's an old-fashioned, no, it's not old-fashioned, it's either true or false.

If it's true, we can't move from what God said. Let me say amen. If what I'm saying is false, then make up your own religion and we're really wasting our time here because everybody can form their own Christianity.

So recently I got an email from a minister who's out of the ministry and he was sharing with me that he'd gone through a divorce. He had passed it for 20-some years, went to seminary. But now he had come out of the closet and proclaimed his new lifestyle and was writing me saying I enjoy your webcast.

I guess he's watching it. So I wanna know, what do you feel about what I'm doing and what do you feel about me now living this lifestyle? What do you feel about me going in the ministry? Can God use me in this lifestyle? So what struck me, of course, I wanted to call him. I couldn't solve this or help him with an email.

So I called him and we got to talking and I said, listen, sir, you passed it for 20 years? Yeah, you went to seminary. Okay, I didn't, but I was shocked by your letter. Why are you interested in what I think about anything? What's that got to do with it? Who am I? I'm a little ant, I'm a little worm.

What's it matter what I think? No, but I respect you. I said, we're talking now about what's right and what's wrong. You don't find that by talking to Pastor Cymbala.

Good grief. You gotta go to the word of God. But listen, but that's accepted today because people are making judgment about lifestyles, about what's right or by what's wrong.

Not from the Bible, but by contemporary society. What's popular? What people are accepting? Well, that's like saying go to Germany in 1935 and you get a town, let's say that's 98% thinks Jews are vermin and should be destroyed. Does that make that right? Or how about to go to Mississippi in 1858 when the slavery question was being battled with three years before the Civil War began and saying, so what do you all feel here in Mississippi about slaves? Should we keep it or get rid of it? I wouldn't care if 100% said keep it.

It's wrong, it's an evil. Since when does what people think determine what's right and wrong? Ah, some of you saying amen, but some of you looking at me because that's the way possibly some of you form your opinions. Not by the word of God, but what are you gonna do when you see God? What are you gonna do when you see God? Unless you don't believe in God, what are you gonna do when God says, who gave

you the right to change what I said? Who gave you the right to take away and add? Passages like this, there's many, but let's look at one.

This answers all kinds of questions, look. Or do you not know, Paul writes, that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God. Do not be deceived.

Neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who have sex with men, nor thieves, nor the greedy, nor drunkards, no slant, notice where slanderers are listed along with. Nor swindlers, all the con artists, none of them will inherit the kingdom of God. But that is what some of you were, but you were washed.

You were sanctified, you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the spirit of our God. So brothers and sisters, my point here is, please don't let my life be useless. When you hear anything, when any question comes to your mind think one thing and one thing only, does God's word speak to this? And whatever God says is true, and let every other man be a liar.

Can we all say amen to that? When someone asks you, well what's your opinion? I don't have an opinion. I got an opinion about how to make mac and cheese. But after that, I have no opinions.

How in the world does your opinion or my opinion have any validity when God has spoken? Ah, but you see, that's twisted religion. We're the center, not God. What we think, what we saw growing up in the Caribbean or Poland or Puerto Rico or Brooklyn or Nigeria or any place else, that's what's important, our experience.

That's what my religion is. I decide which verses I pick. I like that one about he'll prosper me and bless me.

I like that one. That one about no sex outside of marriage. No, I just talked to a student at a Christian college who said, listen, wake up pastor.

All the people I talk to, they're at their school say, you would get married without living with the girl first? Why would you do that? What if it won't work? So you live with her, you have sex with her, like your man and wife. Then if it works out, you get married. This is in the school.

He said, I don't know one person who would just get married, married. Well, I don't care who's changed that. Marriage is still very precious to God.

And to live with someone who's not your spouse, to have sex with them is wrong before God, as the other things that are mentioned. To have racial prejudice is wrong before God. I know so many people who have a thing about racial prejudice, and rightly so.

It's a horrific thing. But these other things, well, I don't know about that. That's simple, that's kind of really old school.

Well, how do you and I pick and choose which commands we want? How many are getting what I'm saying? Say amen. Listen, and do you think this is easy for me to say? What do you think? I'm not that bright, but what do you think? I'm that slow that I don't know that this is tweaking some of you. Don't you think I know that? But at the end of my life, when I see God, what am I gonna tell, when he says to me, did you tell people the truth? What am I gonna say? No, I wanted to be popular.

I wanted to sell some more books or whatever we're doing. No, you gotta tell the truth. You know what, if I didn't tell you this, you know what it's a sign? I don't care about you.

You can go to hell, I don't care. You can go to hell, I don't care. Because I'm not gonna tell you the truth.

You can live any old way you want. Make up your own religion. Is that what you wanna hear? Well, you won't hear it here.

And you won't hear them singing it. Come on, there's only one way to salvation through our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Notice the signs of this religion.

But notice it has worship. It might even have lights and smoke and mirrors and people with emotion in it. It might have preachers who are sincere and great communicators.

But you'll know a tree by its fruit. Listen to the fruit of the twisted religion. Having a form of religion, but strangers to its power, they will be, Paul says, it's gonna be so hard in those days.

Because when someone's out and out against you, you can deal with that. But when people are having church and they're against you, against the Word of God, that's harder to deal with. Why are you so critical? Who are you to judge? Notice we're all captive to the Word of God.

None of us should be making up, this is what I believe it should be, this is what God says. I belong to Christ, I have to go by what He says. We can't make up our own religion on the fly.

Notice, they'll be lovers of themselves. Life is one big selfie. They'll worship God, seemingly.

They'll go to church, but really the center of everything is my feelings, what I like, what I think. Look at me, or whatever. The center of their life is not others, not gonna serve others.

They don't mind little preaching, little whatever the doctrine is, but not about others, it's about me. And if you bump up against me, I don't care even if you quote the Bible, you bump up against me, I have no use for you. That's not loving and that's not kind.

Like we're gonna have soon safe zones in the church, you know, like they have on college campuses now. You go there and nobody can say anything you disagree with, because that's very threatening. How dare you think differently than moi, than me? What are you, I lost your mind.

You dare to think differently than me? You dare to challenge something I hold? That will be the twisted religion fruit. Not lovers of God, lovers of self. Self, self, self, selfishness, what I like, when I want it, where I want it.

They'll be lovers of money, materialism. They'll care more about things and gadgets than they will about God and what he's doing in the earth. Prayer will be foreign to them because they're interested in things, not invisible things, physical things.

They want the riches of money that you can spend here. They'll have no heart for the riches that lasts for all eternity that you can store up for in heaven. Just think of the riches of that guy that went back and got his attacker out of a hole.

Just think of the riches he has. He might not have two nickels to rub together, but trust me, he's rich. How many say amen, he's rich.

But this stuff, money, it comes and goes, and God gives it sometimes to the wickedest people in the world. So it's not a sign of God's favor. We just thank God for it if he gives it to us.

But never look down on anyone who's poor. They might be 10 times the Christian you are. Are you with me on that? That's what the Bible teaches.

God has chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith. Lovers of themselves, lovers of money, and then finally at the very end, here's what you do when you put those two together. They'll be lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.

They'll go to church, having a form of religion. They will not deny the existence of God. They might even in some way worship God.

But after that little hour is over or so, their life is characterized by pleasure seeking, pleasure mad, pleasure crazy, self-loving, money hungry, materialistic minded folks who are part of a very difficult day that Paul says will come. So I wanna just tell you, I trust that the Spirit have borne witness to the word that I spoke to you because it is from the Bible. And if it's not to your liking, I leave you with God.

I leave you with God. You work that out with God. I can read to you what the verses say and nobody can refute what I read.

I want you to know on behalf of the leadership of this church that we have decided to follow Jesus all the way. How many are with me? We wanna follow him all the way according to his word. If there's anybody here involved in a situation which the word of God just condemned, I plead with you, listen, God loves you.

I love you. But you don't love someone by not telling them the truth. Run to Jesus.

He will help you. Not only forgive you, he will give you the strength to overcome. I don't care what the trap is.

A slanderous mouth, racial prejudice, some uncleanness in your life, God will give you the power. He is able to keep us from falling. He is able to keep you from falling and me from falling.

Just beware of people who say there is no falling. There's nothing wrong. You decide what's wrong.

Your friends and you and your family decide what's wrong. Please listen to me. Don't go that way.

There is a way that seems right to a person, but the end is destruction. Not for us, we're gonna serve the Lord. Let's just pray.

Jesus, Holy Spirit, apply your word to our hearts. Make us holy like you, clean and pure. Save us from twisted religion, perilous times, difficult days, having a form of religion, but not knowing its power to change lives.

That's what we do not want to happen to this church, to me, to any of the people listening. Let God be true. Every man is a liar.

Anyone who contradicts God's word. Help us, Lord, now to spend more time in your word. How will we know all these things I'm talking about unless we know your word inside out? Save us from wasting time with things that don't matter to the point that we have so little or no time to meditate on your word.

Help us to hide your word in our heart that we might not sin against you. I thank you for my brothers and sisters. I pray that everyone will receive the intent of my message, my heart, but more importantly, forget me, Lord, make them to see that your word is true.

Your word is true. We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

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