

The New Gospel of Today

L. R. Shelton, Jr.

The new gospel of today that has come in allows a man to go on leading the same old Christless and godless life, while he professes to be a Christian. In spite of the sinful life he is living, in spite of the wicked state of his heart, he retains a certain shell or outward form of religion. He may still go to church, may still say his prayers, may still read his Bible, may still attend communion, may still teach his Sunday School class, may still preach in his pulpit—but there is no real, vital reality about it at all, because Christ is not there. There has been *no vital change* worked in his heart by the Holy Spirit!

You see, this false gospel denies the power of the grace of God to break the power of sin in the sinner's life in salvation and also to keep the redeemed soul walking in a pathway of righteousness and true holiness. So not knowing this power, the professing carnal Christian gives himself over to the lust of the flesh under the guise of "liberty," and goes on producing the *same old fruits of the flesh* that he did before he made a decision or profession. His profession of being a Christian is nothing but a thin veneer, a thin clothing of Christianity, there is not vital, life-giving power that sets the sinner free to follow Christ in a life of self-denial and holiness.

"Faith without works is *dead*" (James 2:26). Our Lord told the church at Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art *dead*" (Rev 3:1). Yes, the carnal Christian is still spiritually dead, and even though his preacher will surely preach him into heaven when he dies, he will surely be in hell! These are those described in 2 Timothy 3:5: "Having a *form of godliness*, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away." And they that teach this false gospel know nothing about the power of our Almighty God to save, break the power of sin, and set the captive soul free to walk in newness of life in Christ, which is a life of holiness. That's why their converts bring forth the fruits listed in the preceding verses of 2 Timothy 3: "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away."

First, by way of contrast, we see the *fruit* which the true Gospel produces in the heart of God's child, when we behold the likeness of Christ. The power of the gospel works in the life of the repenting, believing sinner, setting him free from the power and tyranny of sin, and producing in him the reign of righteousness, so the saved soul can then walk in newness of life by the indwelling Holy Spirit. Yes, God's child is changed into the likeness of Christ, as the Holy Spirit produces the changed life of holiness, separating the saved soul from a life of sin and setting him apart for the holy use of God. All of this is done by the power of the Holy Spirit, which is called progressive sanctification (2 Cor 3:17,18). And now the fruit of the Spirit is produced in the saved soul, described in Galatians 5:22 as "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Also by His divine power there are given to every child of God "exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust" (2 Peter 1:3). And we are each one kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation till we are taken home to be with our blessed Lord for ever and ever (1 Peter 1:4).

So you see, by His Gospel all we need for time and eternity is given us in Christ, and faith lays hold on the unbroken Word of God and daily overcomes sin, Satan, and the world—"Nay, in all these things we are *more than conquerors* through him that loved us" (Rom 8:37). These are the fruits produced by the true Gospel in the heart of God's children!

Now let us consider the fruits of those who have been deceived by the false gospel of carnal Christianity as they are described in 2 Timothy 3. First, we will see that their behavior is all wrong; *second*, that their *opinion* is all wrong; and *third*, that their *affection* is all wrong. In verse 1 we are told, "This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come." Then verses 2-4 give a description of the fruitage of this false gospel of carnal Christianity. How do we know this? Because in verse 5 comes the astounding words that all of those spoken of in

the preceding verses have "*a form of godliness,*" but that they *deny the power* thereof, and we are instructed, "from such turn away."

Yes, it seems strange to speak of such a thing as piety or godliness in connection with the sort of persons described in these verses; but we find indeed that the Holy Spirit has been speaking of those who have their names upon some church roll. They have a "form of godliness," but they are pagans masquerading as Christians! So we see that their *behavior is all wrong*, for the Word says they are *blasphemers*, that is, abusive and foul mouthed in their speech and conversation. Is this not a true description of these days in which we live? Do we not hear loose language abound in so many places among those who claim to be saved? Yes, everywhere we turn today there is lying, swearing, and filthy language spoken even by so-called Christians! This fact reveals the true state of many hearts? Yes it does, for "out of the abundance of the heart, the mouth speaketh"! (Matt 12:34). In salvation, the Holy Spirit cleanses your heart, thus delivering you from being a foul-mouthed individual.

Next they are described as *disobedient to parents*. We have never lived in a day when such a sin is so widespread. Yes, this is evident world-wide. Children and young people have no regard for the fifth commandment which reads: "Honour thy father and thy mother"; or its counterpart in Ephesians 6:1-3 which reads, "Children, *obey* your parents in the Lord: for this is right. Honour thy father and mother; (which is the first commandment with promise;) that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth." Yet even though they stand out in rebellion against their parents, children and young people who have made a decision for Christ are told that they are saved, just because they have made a *decision*. Let me warn you right here: no such a child or young person is saved, but is indeed lost; because when God saves a soul, He *breaks the power of sin* and *spirit of rebellion* in that heart and life! And God does not save children any different than He saves the middle-aged or the elderly—it must be by the power of His Holy Spirit. They must be awakened to their lost condition, because Christ came to seek that which was lost. So I must warn you and tell you the truth in love: Every child and young person whom God has ever saved has been given the spirit of obedience.

Then we see in our text that these converts of the false gospel of carnal Christianity are "*unthankful*." This age is characterized by unthankfulness; and that among those who claim to be saved. The majority of so-called Christians today are oblivious of any goodness of God or man, and take everything for granted; they have no use for God while things go well, but only use Him as Someone to blame when things go wrong. This is a sin that marks our day. Why among so-called Christians? Because they have denied the power of God in salvation to break the power of sin. They have preached and heard a gospel that allows them to sin; but they have not heard the gracious Gospel of Christ which teaches deliverance from the bondage of sin and death.

Thanksgiving is a fruit of the Spirit and surely should be exercised daily and hourly by the people of God; we have so much to be thankful for! Our lives are filled with one deliverance after another, and one providential leading after another, which should give rise to prayers of thanksgiving to our living God! We are commanded: "In every thing give thanks: for *this is the will of God* in Christ Jesus concerning you" (1 Thess 5:18). "Let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips *giving thanks* to His name" (Heb 13:15). So unthankfulness is a fruit of the flesh which characterizes the carnal man.

Another word given here describing the fruit of those adhering to this false doctrine of carnal Christianity is the word unholy, which means *irreverent*. Surely this is one of the most prevailing features of these last days. Irreverence for the Bible, Christ, God, and all that is holy. These are all made the butt of many jokes, and some so-called Christians laugh the heartiest of them all. Why? Because they have no sense of sin, and no love for God, His Christ and His Word; all they have is a "form of godliness." They have flatly denied the power of God in His Gospel to save, keep and deliver from sin. But if there is one word which characterizes a child of God, it is the word "saint"—a holy one, a person who is being made in the image and likeness of Christ. This is the reason God saves us—to make us holy, saintly, like Christ (Eph 1:4; Rom 8:29; 2 Cor 3:17,18).

The next word used to describe the fruit of these carnal Christians is *trucebreakers*. This word means *relentless*—those who are going to gain their end, becoming utterly careless of their word or their pledge. They

will press on *their* way, no matter what it costs, saying that the end justifies the means. And where do you go today to find a man whose word is his bond? My dear man, my dear woman: How have you treated those vows which you took at the marriage altar? Have you been a trucebreaker, breaking the marriage vows by being unfaithful to your husband or your wife? The sin of adultery is rampant today, and this is the breaking of the marriage vows; so if you are guilty of this sin, you are marked before God as a trucebreaker!

Then the next expression used to describe the fruit of these carnal Christians is *false accusers*. This means backbiting, unkindness, gossiping, never attempting to find out whether the thing be true or false. Or it could be expressed as scandal-mongering—starting a scandal on someone so as to benefit your own end. But my friend, be sure your sin will find you out! God hates a gossip, declaring He will punish those that stir up strife among the brethren (Prov 6:16-19; Phil2:3). Yet those who teach this false gospel of carnal Christianity say that it is just your flesh doing this: "So don't be alarmed about it—did you not make a decision?" They say: "Surely you are saved, and all will be well by and by. Sure you might miss some millennial or eternal reward, but that does not really matter, does it?" But God says of such a gospel, and of such people: "*from such turn away.*"

Again, we see from 2 Timothy 3:3 that these false professors are *incontinent*, which means *without self control*. So anything goes—liquor, wine, beer, sex or pleasure—"If I want to do it, let me do it; I'm saved and under grace;" or, "Just let me get it off my chest; let me blow MY top, or spit out venom; let me tell them off, it's O.K., I have liberty." Yes, liberty to go to hell! Oh my friend, the liberty which God gives in the true Gospel is a liberty to *walk in holiness*; and the opposite fruit of these incontinent carnal Christians is the fruit of the Spirit called "temperance." This is self control, and walking in meekness and kindness.

Further, these deluded souls are described as "*fierce*." This means *savage*, especially in the tongue, inflicting wounds that break hearts, blast hopes, and ruin lives. But how can any soul claim to be saved, who lashes out against his mother or sister or pastor with vengeance because they've crossed his path, indulging in the fierceness of his tongue? If this is your heart and tongue, you're not saved! You've been deceived by the false gospel of carnal Christianity! You know nothing of Christ and His love, because this love has never been shed abroad in your heart by the Holy Spirit. You need to be born again; you need a new heart and a new nature.

When God saves you, He breaks the power of sin in your life. He gives you a new heart to love Him and your neighbors. He gives you His divine nature so you may worship Him in Spirit and in truth. He gives you the mind of Christ, so you will follow after righteousness and true holiness. He gives you His Spirit to indwell you, to fill and to overflow you, and to work God's glorious and gracious salvation in you by His mighty power! You have new desires, new hopes, new ambitions, yes, a new life. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor5:17). For as Titus 3:3 tells us: "We...were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared," we left the old life and now walk in newness of life in Christ Jesus! Now by His grace, we yield our members as instruments of righteousness unto God. Why? Because He has redeemed us by His wondrous love, by His blood and power; He has delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of His dear Son, setting us free to follow Christ in the liberty of the Gospel of grace. Now we have a new song, and praise unto our God, who has taken us from the miry clay of sin, giving us a hatred for sin, self, the world and Satan, and has set us upon the Rock, Christ Jesus!

Be not deceived by the god of this world into believing that you can have heaven when you yet stay chained to your sins and your hateful way! Your only hope, you who are caught in this false gospel, is to honestly face your true condition and lay down your arms of rebellion in repentance, turning to Christ by faith, and pleading with Him for mercy for your never-dying soul, based upon His redemptive work for you.

Another of these fruits of carnal Christianity in 2 Timothy 3 is—"traitors." This means that the unsaved religious professor is really treacherous, undependable, and has no real conviction of the truth; therefore he denies the truth of saving grace. This word describes those who have no sense of loyalty to Christ, to His cause, His true Gospel, or to His church (His true people). Their loyalty is only to themselves, to "number one."

The next expression is the word "*heady*," which means headstrong, reckless—taking the "bit in one's teeth" or taking the "reins in his hands." Here again we see the result of the false gospel of carnal Christianity that says a person like this is saved! He takes the bits in his teeth and becomes entirely heedless of what is right, or of the rights of others or the consequences of what he does. His way at any cost is what matters. And how many heady, headstrong individuals there are today in religion, who never take God into an account of their lives! Their wills have never been broken and they have never taken the blame for their condition before God; therefore they know nothing about Christ and His salvation.

What a distressing picture 2 Timothy 3 shows, as it reveals the fruitage that is so wide spread today, which is caused by this false gospel of carnal Christianity promulgated from so many pulpits! They say: "Just as long as you have made a decision, just so long as you have walked the aisle and gave the preacher your hand, or have joined the church—or even if you have held up your hand to be prayed for or said the sinner's prayer—now all is well and you are sure of heaven, no matter what kind of life you live along the way. And the power of sin is not broken, so you give vent to the old nature because you can't help yourself! Oh what false foundations poor souls stand upon, not knowing that Christ has never been laid in their hearts as the chief cornerstone, and the power of God has never worked in their hearts.

But these 10 words and expressions are not all that are given here to describe the unsaved carnal Christian. There are more, and we would describe them as: *their opinions are all wrong*. Yes, since their behavior is all wrong, then their opinions are wrong. First, their opinion of *themselves*, 2 Timothy 3:2 says, they are *boasters*—boasting of what they do and what they are. The Word describes them as being conceited, swell-headed, self-applauding, self-flattering, and vain glorious. All of this the world loves and applauds, but it is just the opposite of the Christ-like spirit which is humble, contrite, self-emptying, and which looks upon others as being better than oneself.

Then they have wrong opinions because they are *proud*. The word "haughty" is fitting here, for it describes those who look upon others who are humble as beneath their consideration, even beneath their notice. Let us remember that the Holy Spirit is not describing the world here, but those who have embraced Christianity and say they are saved, but who by word and deed deny the power of the true Gospel to save them. What an awful state to be in. These poor, deceived souls are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" that they are helpless, lost, guilty sinners before God. They are ever reading books, tracts, and pamphlets about the Christian or "Spirit-filled life"; and they are ever reading about how to overcome depression, worry and anger, and how to get along with people; but nothing ever works in their lives because they have never come to the knowledge of the truth that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble (2 Peter 5:5). They do not know that they stand guilty before God as helpless, hell-deserving sinners. They are for ever going here and there, searching out this truth, looking into that group, trying such and such a method, hearing this or that preacher, and learning all that is new in prophecy, but are never able to come to the knowledge that all their trouble stems from a heart and will that is hard, unbroken and stubborn! They are building their house upon sinking sand and know nothing about Christ the Chief Cornerstone, being laid in their hearts. They have never been regenerated by the power of the Holy Spirit; they have never been born again into the family of God. Oh what an awful thing, my friend, to have it said of you that you are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"!

Next, their opinions are all wrong because they are described as *highminded*; they are eaten up with self esteem, bloated with self importance. Their lives, like the Pharisee in Luke 18, is "I, I, I, I, I"! Yes, five times in two verses the Pharisee declared the high opinion he had of himself. His whole life was centered around self, and not around Christ. just so are the lives of those who are deceived by the false gospel of carnal Christianity. Their lives are self-centered and not Christ-centered. Everything they do or say is calculated to bring attention to *self*.

Then the opinion of these deceived souls about others is expressed as: "*despisers of those that are good*." They are against, even despise, those who live godly in Christ Jesus, who take seriously and desire to put into practice the things spoken of in Philippians 4:8, "Brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest,

whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, if there be any praise, think on these things." Yes, it is strange but true: those who live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. And from whom?—from *religious professors* who have never been saved, but have only a form of godliness. Do you know why? Because the life of a godly man or woman condemns the ungodly, the mere sight of them becomes a rebuke to their ungodliness. Sinfulness cannot abide such saintliness. This hatred of the good is born within them, and can only be removed by the new birth.

But those who are born of God are just the opposite, for one of the marks of the true child of God is *love*—love for the brethren. "We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14). Again, "Beloved, let us love one another: for *love is of God*; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God" (1 John 4:7).

Have you been given a new heart whereby you are enabled to love God and your neighbor? Or are you caught up in this false gospel of carnal Christianity that allows you to go on producing these fruits of the flesh in the name of religion? Surely the Holy Spirit has given us a mirror in which to look from 2 Timothy 3, and my prayer for you who are deceived by this false gospel, has been that as you look, you will see your picture, and by the grace of God will hear God's Word, "*from such turn away*"; and that *you will turn* to God in repentance.

If you see yourself to have been deceived, ask God to illuminate your understanding so you will know yourself to be a guilty sinner before Him? Then, as He illuminates your heart with the light of the *glorious Gospel of Christ*, you will be humiliated before God as you see yourself as God has seen you all the while. Then all boastings will be gone, and you will begin to cry that God will clothe you in the righteousness of Christ. Also, as the Holy Spirit works in you to show you your heart in illumination, and to bring you to *humiliation* before Him, He will give you a detestation for yourself and sin. Not only will He give you a hatred for sin, but a longing to be freed from its power and tyranny. And then, praise His name, by His power He will bring in *transformation*, as the heart turns by faith to embrace the blessed Lord Jesus Christ in all of His work of redemption. Yes, by the power of the blood of Christ your life will then be transformed, and will show it in true repentance.

Repentance is to leave
The sins we loved before,
And show that we in earnest grieve,
By doing so no more.

May the Holy Spirit work God's gracious and glorious salvation in you by His almighty power, giving you new desires, new hopes, new ambitions, and a new life! (2 Cor 5:17).

Taken from *The True Gospel of Christ versus the False Gospel of Carnal Christianity*.