



Even though I still have to think to make sure that I don't write "2018" at the top of my sermon notes, 2019 is officially upon us. There's really nothing that makes January 1, 2019 any different from December 31, 2018, it's still a time that many of us use to take stock and consider the year ahead.

Of course, pondering the future is an activity as old as mankind, and we certainly see it in the Scriptures. For instance, in 2 Timothy 3, Paul tells Timothy what the future will hold for him and what he should do about it. Because the wisdom of God is timeless, these same things apply to us today. Let's consider Paul's words, then, to learn how we can find God in the new year.

In this text, Paul first warns against **WORLDLINESS IN THE CHURCH**. Look here at 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Much of this text is taken up with a horrendous catalogue of sins, but of it all, the part that most concerns me is v. 5. There, Paul notes that the people who will practice these things have the appearance of godliness but have forsaken its power. In other words, all of these awful sins will be committed by people who outwardly look like Christians!

Brethren, this is the future that the devil wants for every one of us, and we can rest assured that he will spend 2019 working as hard as he can to make sure that this is where we end up. He wants us to be people who show up for church on Sunday morning but have lives that are every bit as rotten and corrupt as the people around

us. One Christian like that does more harm to the cause of Christ than a hundred atheists!

This year, before we gossip, before we look at porn, before we nurture hatred in our hearts, let's remember the devil's goal. Let's resolve that whatever else happens, we're not going to let him put us in this category. We can't control the choices that the world makes, but we can and must control ourselves.

Next, Paul predicts **WORLDLINESS IN CHURCH LEADERS**. Let's keep going in 2 Timothy 3:6-9. There are two main problems that the apostle identifies in this text, and the first has a very modern ring to it. It is the problem of leaders in the church using their position to sexually abuse and exploit others.

All of us are familiar with the child-molestation scandals that have rocked the Catholic Church for decades. However, in recent years, similar problems with the abuse of girls and women have emerged among some evangelical churches. Those things are bad enough, but it's even worse when churches cover up sexual misconduct by their leaders.

That must never happen here. I hope and pray that this never becomes an issue, but if it does, all credible accusations of criminal sexual activity by church leaders here must be reported to the authorities. In that event, we can't worry about the damage reporting it will do to the reputation of the church. It would be far better for this congregation to close its doors forever than to be engaged in sheltering evil.

As Paul observes, part of the problem is that those who prey on the weak and vulnerable will also end up abandoning the truth. You can't let Satan have that much real estate in your heart and remain useful for preaching Christ or serving Christ or shepherding others in Christ. Leaders, we have a job to do. Let's pursue godliness so we can do it.

In contrast to this, Paul urges Timothy to **FOLLOW HIM**. He explains what this means in 2 Timothy 3:10-13. He first of all notes that Timothy has been doing this, but that what Timothy has seen from Paul doesn't necessarily inspire confidence. Yes, Paul's life has shown faith, patience, love, and steadfastness, but the result of this for Paul has been persecution and suffering. Not much of a recommendation!

However, as Paul notes, this is to be expected. Persecution is for everybody who is trying to live godly in Christ Jesus. In fact, as other parts of the Scriptures observe, pushback from others is an important sign that we're on the right track.

This certainly can be about people giving us grief because of our faith in Christ, but I think the applications are broader than that. We can't expect doing the right thing to result in earthly blessing. Let's say that Brother Joe Bob has a rotten marriage. He decides that he wants to make his marriage better, so he dedicates himself to

loving his wife, Emma Sue, as Christ loved the church. However, his better behavior does not guarantee her better behavior. She may well continue being a hag.

Nonetheless, doing the right thing, even to the point of suffering, does guarantee that God will be with us as He was with Paul, and that's what truly matters. The wicked can go on fooling themselves right on into destruction, but only the righteous will please their Creator.

All right. If we want a bright future, we have to continue to follow God, but how do we do that? Paul tells Timothy and us both to look to THE SACRED WRITINGS. Let's finish up our reading with 2 Timothy 3:14-17. In this text, there are two things that we must appreciate. The first is the extent of what Paul is talking about. Notice that Paul tells Timothy that these are the sacred writings that he has known from childhood. That can't be the New Testament. It has to be the Old Testament.

Sometimes, I'll hear Christians grump and complain about studying the Old Testament. "Why bother with this stuff?" they grumble. "Everything we need is in the New Testament anyway!" Well, Paul tells us otherwise. Timothy needed, and we need, the Old Testament to make us wise for salvation too.

Second, let's pay attention to Paul's words about all Scripture, which of course includes both testaments. He tells us that the Scriptures are both inspired and adequate. They come from God, and in them, we have everything we need to know to equip us to serve Him. If it isn't in the Bible, we don't need it.

However, if we don't know the word and incorporate it into our hearts and our lives, it won't do us any good. Last week, Shawn urged us to make sure that we read our Bibles every day. Let me echo his words. Let me make you a promise.

Even though every chapter in this year's reading is in the Old Testament, if you will dedicate yourself to doing every reading, by the end of this year, it will change your life. If it doesn't, I will give you your money back! Seriously, though, the word of God is powerful and active. It is certain to transform us if only we will let it.

Matt Bassford