

Series	Gamma 17 – Study 14 (Gospel Stewardship)
Reference	2 Tim 3:1-17
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Speaker	Dr Peter Ng

Welcome back to Gamma 17. We are continuing the last stretch of our journey to the pastoral epistles. We are going to be doing the last two chapters of second letter of Paul to Timothy. Today, we are doing chapter 3, study 14.

2-Timothy 3:1 But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. 2 For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,

Now what Paul is doing is taking Timothy through what is expected in his time, which is also our time, because last days described the time from the cross right up to today, it will be difficult. It was difficult for Timothy in Ephesus as it is difficult today because people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud and arrogant and abusive. I just came across this poverty during time of pandemic. In the middle of the crisis and poverty because of the pandemic, there was an auction for this blue spaceship that goes all the way up by Jeff Bezos into the space and someone actually won an auction to join Jeff Bezos going into the space with an \$28 million winning bid, 28 million US dollars for 10 minutes in space. While the rest of the world is starving this gentleman pays \$28 million dollars for 10 minute ride. This is what our world is coming to.

We live in a society enthralled by selfishness and expressive individualism not so much different from the Greek mythology of narcissism, looking at its own reflection in the pool. We are taking selfies and looking at ourselves all the time. So freedom today is saying true to yourself. Fulfilment is through the definition and articulation of one's own identity and that is important, it is me versus us. Whereas before in the past we used to be more co-operative but now it's basically me. That's why most bands don't even stay together.

The biblical trajectory in life is supposed to be **God, Us** and then **Me**, but for us, we are doing it the other way around. We are doing **Me, Us** and then **God** in a reverse trajectory. The pragmatic view of religion in our society relegates our faith to the private sphere of personal values. So faith doesn't take centre stage in our society anymore, it is actually squeezed into one corner. Science now takes centre stage. It's an arbiter of public truth and facts, and even that is being challenged in the COVID pandemic. Private values, meaning, identity, they are all private. There is no relationship to truth because faith is now private. Someone writes,

The challenge here is that many Christians now see their faith only in terms of its effect on their lives, not its overall truthfulness. Christianity's moral demands are applicable only if they bring the kind of happiness we've already decided must be the goal of our lives.

So the goal of our lives, if it is happiness and whatever brings happiness is necessarily true and whatever doesn't, is not true. So therefore different from Genesis chapter 1, when God saw it was good God doesn't determine what is good anymore, we determine what is good and what is good is defined as what makes me happy and what makes it rewarding for me. This is the times in which we live. So therefore people are

2 Timothy 3:3 heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, 4 treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,

And this is the direction in which the society is moving because it is moving towards self as the number one in your own universe. Christian morality on the other hand is seen as old fashioned, extreme or even dangerous and we are being marginalized. Now there's a rise in our society of fake Christians,

4...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people.

This epitomizes the struggle in the church itself, where we have got people who actually love self, basically love pleasure rather than lovers of God. So there is a natural correspondence. You've got the power of godliness will then show itself in a form of godliness. Now you have got a situation where you have got a form of godliness but actually without its underlying power.

What is the understanding of power?

Power needs to be interpreted in the light of purpose.

2 Tim 1:8 Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony about our Lord, nor of me his prisoner, but share in suffering for the gospel by the power of God, 9 who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us in Christ Jesus before the ages began,

So what is the power?

The power here is actually a power to withstand suffering, sharing in the suffering for the gospel. Power is defined by its purpose. Power in the world is misinterpreted. Whether you're Napoleon Bonaparte or some conquering hero in the medieval ages, power is used to subjugate people. Power is misinterpreted today. Power is then translated to political power and where people rise up, they support their particularly leaders. The real nature of power seen in the cross of Jesus Christ because the real danger, the real enemy in life is Satan and the real disaster in life is sin and the power of eternal death. So therefore real power is to overturn the ultimate destination of people into eternal death. Now look at, for example, Genesis chapter 4 and chapter 5. Chapter 4 looks at the lineage of Cain, Enoch, Irad, Mehujael and it describes you go back to chapter four, all the nasty things that they do, violence amid a lot of cultural advances by a lot of violence.

In chapter 5, you look at Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalel, all of them are singularly distinguished by their long life, which is God's blessing. And the last, the person most stands out is Enoch and here is Enoch,

Genesis 5:21 When Enoch had lived 65 years, he fathered Methuselah. 22 Enoch walked with God after he fathered Methuselah 300 years and had other sons and daughters. 23 Thus all the days of Enoch were 365 years. 24 Enoch walked with God, and he was not, for God took him.

So therefore Enoch never saw death. Enoch lived such a life that he pleased God, so that when he was 365 years, God took him, which means took him to heaven and he was spared the agony of death. Hebrews chapter 11 talks about him,

Hebrews 11:5 By faith Enoch was taken up so that he should not see death, and he was not found, because God had taken him. Now before he was taken he was commended as having pleased God.

And without faith it is impossible to please God. So basically the issue is pleasing God. Now, if you look

back in 2 Timothy chapter 3 verses 4 and 5, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, which is basically pleasing self rather than pleasing God. That is the difference between fake Christians that have an appearance of godliness but denying his power. And it starts way back in the 1950s when you got the prosperity gospel issue that comes up, which is so prevalent in the church today starting off with Oral Roberts required, who actually speaks of the miracle of having faith. If you've got faith, you could do anything. You need healing, you to do these three things, 1, 2, 3, 4, and then you can actually manipulate God to do what you want him to do.

And what about Joel Austin and his church in Florida, five keys to go beyond your barriers and live an extraordinary life. The focus is actually your life now. There are a couple of features that we need to recognize in this problem of a kind of prosperity gospel that actually infects the church, which is a reflection of lovers of self rather than lovers of God and there are four features:

Number one, Jesus purchased all the benefits of salvation for this life now. Joel Osteen says, your best life now, but if the truth of the matter is if your best life is now what happens later on is a disaster. This is what he says. Now Isaiah 53, he justify this,

5 But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.

John 10:10 the thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came to that they may have life and have it abundantly.

The interpretation here of the healing is not a healing that occurs only in the future, but it is here and now. The abundant life that they have is here and now, it is not for the future. So when you actually limit this interpretation within the four corners of this world then it becomes a kind of here now kind of prosperity religion.

Now, the second feature is that we have received in Abraham the blessings now. They take this from Galatians chapter 3 verse 14.

So that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham comes to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promise Spirit through faith.

And so they looked at all the blessings that God has given to Abraham in Genesis 12. They say look Galatian says, in Christ the blessing of Abraham comes to us to all of us Gentiles. We are Chinese. We're Gentiles don't we get this blessing, but if you actually look very carefully in the passage before and after,

Gal 3:11 Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for "The righteous shall live by faith."

So he is talking about justification. The righteous shall live by faith.

12 But the law is not of faith, rather "The one who does them shall live by them." 13 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree"— 14 so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

So therefore he is actually talking about salvation. The blessing of Abraham is actually salvation, that aspect of it which is actually spiritual salvation resurrection later on. No one is justified by the law but

justified by faith and we receive the blessing of Abraham. So therefore here is again a misinterpretation if you don't read the passage properly.

The third feature of prosperity gospel is that we give in order to get

2 Cor 9:6 The point is that whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows bountifully will also reap bountifully.

So you give in order to get. Sounds very effective isn't it, until you read other verses within the same passage.

2 Cor 9:10 He who supplies seed to the sower and bread for food will supply and multiply your seed for sowing and increase the harvest of your righteousness

Which means if God gives you more money you got to give it away and increase the harvest of your righteousness. The whole focus is that you actually train up to be generous and give whatever he gives you back so that you increase your harvest of righteous. And so this is actually a blatant tearing a passage out of his particular context.

Lastly, is a name it and claim it kind of thing. So it is your faith, through your faith if you name it you can claim it, you can get it. This is the idea that actually distorts this idea of faith. Faith is asking and praying to God within the confines of his will is effective but if you actually name it, just because you want it and claim it you are actually making God your servant and basically manipulating him to give you whatever you want, which is not going to happen.

John 15:7 If you abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. 8 By this my father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

So this is where they base it from ask whatever you wish, but you forget if you look, if you abide in me, which means if you are in Christ, you understand his will and what he wants and whatever you actually ask, whatever you wish if that for whatever you ask for glorifies God and in that doing you actually bear much fruit, spiritual fruit and in godliness then that will be actually granted.

So again, a careful reading of word will easily debunk proponents of prosperity gospel.

John 15:10 If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and a bite in his love.

So therefore there is a provisor, you can't just name it and claim it. You've got to be able to keep that naming and claiming within the confines of God's command.

So four features Jesus purchased all the benefits of salvation for this life now. We would receive Abraham's blessings now, we give in order to get, name it and claim it. These features of what is happening to the Christian Church today are actually features of lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Our default mode is actually to use God not to serve God, is counter-intuitive. You look all around. I had a driver who was in the Hindu faith last time. Whenever he got into trouble and had difficulties financially or otherwise, the first thing he will do come Thaipusam he will carry all sorts of skewers through his body and that was in order to manipulate the gods to give him a break as it were. What

about many of our relatives whenever they got in trouble they need God for something they go to temple. They lift up a stick to look for some respite. No wonder that famous socialist Karl Marx says,

Religion is the opium of the people

See having the appearance of godliness but denying its power, avoid such people. So you actually have an appearance of godliness, but you actually do not have its power. Power is not for miracles. The power is the obedience that conforms to the demands of the gospel. The power is to be like Enoch to be able to please God with a life transforming faith. Power is miscast to signs and wonders or miracles. I remember reading about the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship, there are 300 incidents of dental miracles. Miracles where God put gold fillings in your teeth. The picture of one of the gold fillings, basically to bless his people and they actually base it on Psalm 81 verse 10.

I am the Lord your God who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, open your mouth wide and I will fill it.

So what it means is gold fillings. That's not true because if you look in verse 16,

He would feed you with the finest of wheat and with honey from the rock I will satisfy you.

You see a quick reading of the Bible will show you in verse 16 that open your mouth fill is actually feeding you rather than putting gold. I mean what use is gold fillings in your mouth if you think about it.

If you look in Matthew chapter seven, many have these signs and wonders

22 On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' 23 And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

So it is not the intensity, magnitude or spectrum of their gifts that are important. It is whether they walk in a manner like Enoch to please God. So Jesus rejects them because they are workers of lawlessness, which is another way of saying they are sinners. They have no regard for the holiness, which is the calling to which God calls us.

2 Timothy 1:9 Who saved us and called us to a holy calling, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace,

His purpose is to call us to be his sons so we reflect God in his entirety. It is a holy calling.

2 Tim 3:10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me.

This in the life of the apostle Paul is a form of godliness with true power and the power is not to defeat your enemies with a sword but the power comes in the ability to suffer and to persist and hang on with the truth. You see, this power of misunderstanding of power is so common even in the world today. If you look, there are a couple of organizations where pastors and leaders are calling names apostles. Why? Because apostles are associated power, apostolic round table. The future of the church. The International Coalition of Apostolic Leadership, Apostle Peter Wagner basically who writes in missiology writes, Apostles of the City. Cities have to look to special leaders to be able to lead revival in this areas.

This is looking at triumphalism. It is not looking for the power to suffer. Real power is like Paul,

2 Tim 3:10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—

That is the real credential or godliness within these true apostles. Os Guinness says these words,

We grow through copying deeds, not just listening to words, through examples as well as precepts, through habit and not just insight and information. Calling therefore creates an ethic of aspiration, not just obligation.

So he is saying that we grow by being mentored, following other Christians, looking at their deeds, more than listening to their words is for looking at the examples, not just insight information but through habit. Now the true power of Christ in our lives is a cruciform power.

2 Tim 3:12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

This is a warning. If you want to be an apostle like those International Coalition of Apostles, their singular call or credential should be persecution because all who desire to live godly lives will be persecuted.

13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

It is simply because we live in an age and the age is characterized by people getting worse and worse and worse. So the solution is that we have to continue in the word, no matter how difficult it gets in church and how muddied the waters get and how people have tried to watered down the faith, Paul says to Timothy,

14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

So basically he is asking him to continue in the word that he has got such rich tradition because taught by his grandmother and mother and now continue which is basically grounded by Paul in.

Because this is our world. Our world is a world of fake news. A lot of things are fake around it. People can fake spiritual gifts. You can ask the charismatic speakers, miraculous. It's not all these things. It's not even be a momentary spiritual experience of being slain in the spirit, or it is not even prophetic class. I remember going to a church once where everyone was got so excited about going prophetic classes and you know what in the prophetic classes they do. They get you to put hands on you and then they tell you, ah, Kevin in a couple of years' time, you're going to marry the most beautiful girl in the world. You're going to have this, you will be a lawyer, you will be this and that. And everyone is really fantastic. They are all very happy. You know why? Because the prophecies are always positive. I have never seen a prophetic class when you go and tell you, Kevin you are going to get cancer in three days' time. You are going to get a stroke when you are 50. All those things happen, don't they, to most people, but the prophetic classes never bring this out. It actually is a way which people love themselves. And if they've got the Bible, they don't read it, but they want to go for prophetic classes and what difference is that from going to a Feng Shui guy who tells you your future? Why do they do that? Because of the lovers of self, not lovers of God.

16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

That is the only one constant we need to have, not some funny fellow coming to you laying the hand and tell you all the good stuff you want to hear in disguise of being prophecy. Are we going to buy that? See in this life where everything is fake when the trials and tribulations come everything will be knocked down. During World War II, November 23, 1943 over Berlin they bombed it and everything was flattened. It was almost miraculous that in this area that has been flattened one building remain intact. It was a Kaiser Wilhelm Church. It stood despite all the battering and smashing and the flames, it stood tall and unbroken, and that is a form of godliness, which is undergird by the power of godliness and the power of godliness comes from the word of God where we use it to teach, to correct each other, for reproof and for training in righteousness, not the word of God that is torn apart or picked apart or our favourite verses but the whole word of God that comes and instructs us and corrects us.

The challenge to us today, are we kind of Christians that are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God that we only pray when we need things from God or we only come to God when we want him to do something for us or are we willing to really seriously come under the authority of the word of God and have that word of God teach us, reprove us, correct us, however painful it may be and train us in righteousness. Is this happening in your group? Is this happening in your life, in your life group, in your family? This is the only thing that will keep us strong and faithful in the Lord. May God add a blessing to your group as you study and share.