

Kingdoms in Conflict

The UnHoly Tension between the kingdoms of the world and the Kingdom of God.

We live in interesting times. Here at home, the hype and hysteria of BREXIT and beyond is overshadowed by two leadership contests and the long-awaited publication of Sir John Chilcot's inquiry into the Iraq war.

Away from home, Lionel Messi is in prison for tax evasion; Oscar Pistorius has been give a six year prison term; suicide bombers kills foreigners in Bangladesh, in Iraq, and for the first time in the Holy City of Medina near the Prophet's tomb. News like this may be far removed and not engage us emotionally, but makes us uncomfortable. If it happened any closer, we might have reason to be alarmed.

If the above does not affect your emotions, there is Wimbledon, football, cricket, the Olympics, to test your emotion-management skills.

There seems to exist side-by-side, two parallel worlds, one fuelled by fear, hate, intolerance and violence, and another world trying desperately to be the complete opposite, hoping that any good done, would cancel all the bad.

Sitting in a single room, under house arrest in Rome, Paul would have thought the same. Emperor Nero had gone mad; he hated Christians and blamed them for everything wrong. He had them dipped in tar and burned on a stake, as night lighting for his orgy-filled parties! Roman armies and administrators were increasingly intolerant of Jewish religious leaders and watched the rise of Jewish nationalism. Paul writes to Timothy wondering, were these the signs of "last days" (3:1), the end times?

Two things concerned Paul: the church, and its leaders.

- Was the church showing signs of more people hearing, accepting and celebrating the good news, that Jesus **was** God's promised Messiah?
- Equally important to Paul, were Church leaders strong in their own faith, and were they faithful in teaching the Word of God, without influence from false teachers?

Although under house arrest, Paul had the privilege of regular visitors who brought news of the growing strength of opposition to God's Word. Paul was concerned for Timothy; did he have the inner strength to face this challenge.

The list of "vices" at the start of the chapter tells us of Paul's view of the seriousness of the challenge from false teachers. It is not a universal list of vices and wrongs, rather his understanding of what was going on in Ephesus, and no different from life in Rome.

Paul says to Timothy, *There will come times of difficulty, which is the direct result of people who love themselves, love money and love pleasure, rather than being lovers of God.*

Paul knows from personal experience, God's character is defined by His love. Our relationship with God begins with God's love for us (*cf*: John 3:16), and how we live in response to God's love for us.

Paul knows, those who do not live in response to God's love for them, become *lovers of themselves (narcissists), lovers of money, and lovers of pleasure*; to **love one's self** is to do everything and say anything which

people will adore and pay compliments, and for which the person takes all the credit: *I did it my way!*¹ (cf: our culture of hero worship).

There is nothing wrong with money and wealth, and God does not wish anyone to live on the edge of poverty, but the **love of money** is to hoard it for personal use, when needs around us are apparent, evident and clearly visible, and we do nothing to meet it.

And to **love pleasure** is to indulge our-selves with anything which provides thrill and enjoyment, and turn a blind eye to the emotional and spiritual need of people, those who are hurting and need a friend, a companion who will listen and care for them, help them through a difficult time. The Apostle John expresses this trilogy as the "lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the boastful pride of life"².

Paul warns Timothy, *Many among those who are lovers of the self, lovers of money and lovers of pleasure, give the appearance of godliness, but there is no evidence of God's power at work in their lives.*

So, how do we guard ourselves from slipping into the pitfall of not loving God who first loved us?

Only one way, says Paul. Occupy yourself by soaking in the Word of God, because all Scripture is God breathed. As God breathed His Spirit into us and we came to life, so God breathed life into His Word and His Word has life! **ALL** Scripture, emphasises Paul, has the breath of God, and therefore, the life of God.

ALL Scripture, therefore is beneficial, is valuable, is illuminating and fruitful when used teaching, reproof (*disapproval*), correction, and for

¹ Frank Sinatra's song

² 1John 2:16

training (*instruction and education*) in righteousness, in living right before God.

When Scripture is used in this way Paul says to Timothy, *You the man of God will be complete and equipped for every good work, to which God has called you, work form which you will not be side-tracked.*

This is our challenge: first, to know the Word of God has life, because the life-giving breath of God, makes it relevant to us. Second, to trust the Word of God and soak ourselves in it, absorb as much as we can, learn it, discuss it, learn more from it, that it may teach us and give us discernment not to be drawn into frivolous and irreverent chatter.

We underestimate the beneficial power of the Word of God. Like good and proper medicine, we will only know its potency and effectiveness when we try it.

Paul knows it; he encourages Timothy not to give up on the daily recommended dosage, and he advises us to get in the habit of taking it seriously. **AMEN.**