

2 Timothy 3:5

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof:
from such turn away.

Analysis

Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. Paul reaches the frightening climax: these vice-ridden people aren't obvious pagans but professing Christians. "Having a form of godliness" (echontes morphōsin eusebeias, ἔχοντες μὀρφωσιν εὐσεβείας). Morphōsis (μὀρφωσις) means outward form, appearance, semblance—external shape without internal reality. Eusebeia (εὐσέβεια) means godliness, piety, true religion. They maintain religious appearance: attend church, use Christian vocabulary, participate in rituals. But it's mere form, empty shell.

The devastating indictment: "but denying the power thereof" (tēn de dynamin autēs ērnēmenoi, τὴν δὲ δύναμιν αὐτῆς ἡρνημένοι). Perfect participle indicates completed action with ongoing result—they have denied and continue denying the power. Dynamis (δύναμις) means power, ability—the transforming power of the gospel that produces genuine holiness. They claim Christianity but reject its power to change hearts, break sin's dominion, and produce Christlike character. Their lives contradict their profession.

Paul's command: "from such turn away" (kai toutous apotrepeu, καὶ τούτους ἀποτρέπου). Present imperative demands ongoing action—keep turning away, continually avoid. Don't fellowship with, don't follow, don't support false professors whose lives contradict their profession. This requires discernment: distinguishing genuine but struggling believers from hypocrites who exhibit the vice list while

claiming Christianity. The difference: true believers, though battling sin, don't exhibit this comprehensive vice catalog or reject the gospel's transforming power.

Historical Context

The early church struggled with false professors who joined for social benefits, business connections, or family pressure without genuine conversion. Nominal Christianity became common as the faith spread. Some maintained religious externals—baptism, Lord's Supper, church attendance—while living pagans. This hypocrisy damaged the church's witness and confused genuine seekers. Paul demands that Timothy and the church distinguish between struggling saints (who battle sin but pursue holiness) and hypocrites (who maintain religious form while denying transforming power). Church discipline was necessary to maintain purity.

Related Passages

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

Study Questions

1. Do you maintain a 'form of godliness' while denying its power to transform—professing faith without pursuing holiness?
2. How can you cultivate genuine, heart-level godliness rather than merely maintaining external religious activities?
3. From which professing Christians exhibiting the vice list while denying gospel power do you need to 'turn away' to protect your spiritual health?

Interlinear Text

ἔχοντες	μόρφωσιν	εὐσεβείας	τὴν	δὲ	δύναμιν	αὐτῆς
Having	a form	of godliness	G3588	but	the power	thereof
G2192	G3446	G2150		G1161	G1411	G846
ἡρνημένοι·	καὶ	τούτους	ἀποτρέπου			
denying	from	such	turn away			
G720	G2532	G5128	G665			

Additional Cross-References

Isaiah 29:13 (Parallel theme): Wherefore the Lord said, Forasmuch as this people draw near me with their mouth, and with their lips do honour me, but have removed their heart far from me, and their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men:

Titus 1:16 (References God): They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

1 Timothy 5:8 (Parallel theme): But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.

Matthew 7:15 (Parallel theme): Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves.

Titus 3:10 (Parallel theme): A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject;

2 Timothy 2:16 (References God): But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

2 Timothy 2:23 (Parallel theme): But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

Ephesians 4:14 (Parallel theme): That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive;

1 Timothy 6:5 (References God): Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.

2 Thessalonians 3:6 (Parallel theme): Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.

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