

Here comes trouble.

But know this: Hard times will come in the last days. ²For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, proud, demeaning, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³unloving, irreconcilable, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, without love for what is good, ⁴traitors, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵holding to the form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid these people.

⁶For among them are those who worm their way into households and deceive gullible women overwhelmed by sins and led astray by a variety of passions, ⁷always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁸Just as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth. **They are men who are corrupt in mind and worthless in regard to the faith.** ⁹But they will not make further progress, for their foolishness will be clear to all, as was the foolishness of Jannes and Jambres. 2 Timothy 3:1-9

Background:

We need a 30,000 foot view of Paul's words before we get into the Spiritual Principal that Paul is passing on to us....

1. We are living in the last days.
 - a. When is the "last days"? - We're in it! It is the time after Christ's resurrection & ascension into heaven & before his return to Earth. It's been going on for 2,000 years.

2. The last days will include seasons of peril & stress.
 - a. The 1st & 2nd century church experienced it dramatically.
 - b. There was a season that some of you grew up in here in America where our Christian values were the social-norm. Not anymore...

3. These seasons of stress are the results of the activities of sinful men.

a. V. 2-5

b. Who are Jannes & Jambres? “Tradition says that the magicians were Jannes and Jambres, two men mentioned by Paul (2 Tim. 3:8). These men opposed Moses *by imitating what he did*. When Aaron’s rod turned into a serpent, the magicians cast down their rods and they turned into serpents. Moses turned the water into blood, and the magicians followed with the same miracle. When Moses brought up all the frogs, the magicians duplicated the miracle. But when it came to the miracle of the lice, the magicians could not imitate it (Ex. 8:16–19).” (Wiersbe)

i. “Satan is an imitator; what God does, Satan counterfeits. The religious leaders in the last days will have a counterfeit faith, and their purpose is to promote a lie and resist the truth of God’s Word. They deny the authority of the Bible and substitute human wisdom and philosophy. In their attempt to be “modern,” they deny the reality of sin and people’s need for salvation. “Reprobate” is the word Paul used to describe them. This means “tested and found counterfeit.” (Wiersbe)

c. *“For among them are those who worm their way into households and deceive gullible women overwhelmed by sins and led astray by a variety of passions, ⁷always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth.”*v. 6-7

i. This is not to malign women but to show the treachery of false teachers!

d. *“Just as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so these also resist the truth. **They are men who are corrupt in mind and worthless in regard to the faith.**”* (v. 8)

i. These false teachers are teaching & living one way. A way that is completely counter to the Truth. Counter to the Gospel.

1. We will address this next week as Paul speaks of how to respond to this in verse 10.

a. But for this week...What’s our take away?

4. We shouldn't be surprised & we are to be prepared for these seasons.
 - a. V. 5 "Avoid these people."

Be Prepared for Trouble.

- Be prepared for corrupt morals
- Be prepared for corrupt "teachers."

The Military taught us a thing called "Situational Awareness."

- Don't sit on the aisle in an airplane.
 - Terrorist tend to take hostages off the aisle seats
- Don't let your bushes get to high or thick in front of your home.

Us as Christians need to have "Situational Awareness."

- Realize that we are IN a spiritual situation!
 - The world is corrupt
 - There is a Spiritual Warfare raging around us for the hearts & souls of this world.

"A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance." John 10:10

There are going to be false teachers that are actively trying to deceive us! They could be on TBN. They could be in our churches or even in our pews.

- "Paul stated that these people he has just described would consider themselves religious! "Having a form of godliness" (2 Tim. 3:5) suggests an outward appearance of religion, not true Christian faith; for they have never experienced the power of God in their lives. Form without force. Religion without reality." (Wiersbe)
 - They could go to church, know Christian doctrine, use Christian clichés, and even follow a Christian communities traditions.

- They might LOOK good but their inner attitudes...Their lack of love, lack of generosity, lack of care & concern... Makes their outer appearance meaningless.

Be Prepared for Trouble.

I wrote to you in a letter not to associate with sexually immoral people. ¹⁰ I did not mean the immoral people of this world or the greedy and swindlers or idolaters; otherwise you would have to leave the world. ¹¹ But actually, I wrote^[a] you not to associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister and is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or verbally abusive, a drunkard or a swindler. Do not even eat with such a person. 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 (CSB)

Invitation:

The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. (Wiersbe)

Lord's Supper

Turn Away from the False (2 Tim. 3:1–9)

“From such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5b). A faithful believer should have nothing to do with the people Paul described in this section. It is important to note that these people operate *under the guise of religion*: “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5). They are “religious” but rebellious! Paul discussed three facts about these people.

Their characteristics (vv. 2–5). At least eighteen different characteristics are listed here, and Paul probably could have listed more. There is an emphasis on *love*: “lovers of their own selves,” lovers of money (“covetous”), “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God.” The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. God commands us to love Him supremely, and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:34–40); but if we love ourselves supremely, we will not love God or our neighbors.

In this universe there is God, and there are people and things. We should worship God, love people, and use things. But if we start worshiping ourselves, we will ignore God and start loving things and using people. This is the formula for a miserable life; yet it characterizes many people today. The worldwide craving for *things* is just one evidence that people’s hearts have turned away from God.

Of course, if someone loves and worships himself, the result will be *pride*. “Ye shall be as gods” was Satan’s offer to Eve (Gen. 3:5), and the result was that people “changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshiped and served the creature more than [rather than] the Creator” (Rom. 1:25). Man became his own god! The creature is now the creator! “Boasters, proud [arrogant], blasphemers [given to contemptuous and bitter words]” (2 Tim. 3:2).

“Disobedient to parents” suggests that this apostasy reaches into the family. Children are “unthankful” and do not appreciate what their parents have done for them. They are “unholy” in their attitude toward their parents. “Honor thy father and thy mother” is not widely taught or respected.

The phrase “without natural affection” is the translation of one word that describes “family love.” The family is under attack these days, and, as go its families, so goes the nation.

In place of the natural love that God has put into men and women and families, today we have a good deal of *unnatural* love which God has condemned (see Rom. 1:18–27; 1 Cor. 6:9–10). It is confusion, and God will judge it (Rom. 1:28–32).

Not only in homes, but out in society and the business world, the characteristics of these perilous times may be seen. “Trucebreakers” (2 Tim. 3:3) describes people who will not try to agree. They are unyielding and irreconcilable and must have their own way.

In order to defend their position, they become “slanderers” [“false accusers,” κΙΥ] and try to tear down the reputations of others. Unfortunately, some of this activity goes on even among professed Christians. “Christian leaders” accuse one another in the pages of their publications.

“Incontinent” means “without self-control.” The motto of our society today is “Do your own thing and enjoy it!” Sad to say, some of the children born to these people do not always enjoy it because they are deformed or handicapped as the result of drugs, alcohol, or venereal diseases.

This lack of self-control reveals itself in a number of ways. “Fierce” means “untamed, brutal.” When these people cannot have their way, they become much like savage beasts. Instead of honoring what is good, they despise what is good and honor what is evil. In society today the standards of right and wrong have been twisted, if not destroyed. “Woe unto them that call evil good and good evil,” cried Isaiah the prophet (Isa. 5:20).

“Traitors” (2 Tim. 3:4) describes people who betray others and cannot be trusted. Neither friendship nor partnership makes any difference to them; they lie and break their promises whenever doing so helps them get their own way.

“Heady” means “reckless, rash, acting without careful thought.” Paul did not condemn honest adventure, but foolish endeavor.

“High-minded” does not describe a person with lofty thoughts. Rather, it means a person who is “puffed up” with his importance. “Conceited” is a good synonym.

“Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” does not suggest that we must choose between pleasure and God; for when we live for God, we enjoy the greatest pleasures (Ps. 16:11). The choice is between *loving* pleasure or loving God. If we love God, we will also enjoy fullness of life here and forever; but the pleasures of sin can only last for a brief time (Heb. 11:25). No one can deny that we live in a pleasure-mad world; but these pleasures too often are just shallow entertainment and escape; they are not enrichment and true enjoyment.

Paul stated that these people he has just described would consider themselves religious! “Having a form of godliness” (2 Tim. 3:5) suggests an outward appearance of religion, not true Christian faith; for they have never experienced the power of God in their lives. Form without force. Religion without reality.

Their converts (vv. 6–7). The fact that Paul described “silly [‘weak-willed,’ κΙΥ] women” does not suggest that all women are like this, or that men are not vulnerable to the wiles of false teachers. In Paul’s day, women were especially susceptible to this kind of experience since they had a low status in society. Whether men or women, people who fall for this false religious system have the same characteristics.

They are *burdened with guilt* and looking for some escape from bondage and fear. They find themselves unable to control their various desires (“divers lusts,” κΙΥ). The emphasis here may be on sexual problems. Finally, they are always searching for truth, trying this approach and that; yet they are never able to be satisfied. This kind of person is fair game for the cultists and the religious racketeers.

These false religious leaders take advantage of the problems people have, and promise them quick and easy solutions. They “worm their way in” and soon control people’s lives. It is not long before these leaders grab their followers’ loyalty, money, and service. And their “converts” are

worse off than they were before. They still have their problems, but they have been duped into thinking that all is well.

And, remember: All of this underhanded activity is done in the name of religion! No wonder Paul told Timothy, “From such turn away.”

Their religious leaders (vv. 8–9). Read Exodus 7–9 for the record of the contest between Moses and the Egyptian magicians. Tradition says that the magicians were Jannes and Jambres, two men mentioned by Paul (2 Tim. 3:8). These men opposed Moses *by imitating what he did*. When Aaron’s rod turned into a serpent, the magicians cast down their rods and they turned into serpents. Moses turned the water into blood, and the magicians followed with the same miracle. When Moses brought up all the frogs, the magicians duplicated the miracle. But when it came to the miracle of the lice, the magicians could not imitate it (Ex. 8:16–19).

Satan is an imitator; what God does, Satan counterfeits. The religious leaders in the last days will have a counterfeit faith, and their purpose is to promote a lie and resist the truth of God’s Word. They deny the authority of the Bible and substitute human wisdom and philosophy. In their attempt to be “modern,” they deny the reality of sin and people’s need for salvation. “Reprobate” is the word Paul used to describe them. This means “tested and found counterfeit.”

Jannes and Jambres were finally exposed and made fools of by the judgments of God. This will also happen to the leaders of false religions in the last days. When God’s judgments fall, the true character of these counterfeits will be revealed to everyone.¹

1. Facing Times of Stress (verses 1, 2a)

Why does Paul introduce this chapter with such an emphatic command to Timothy to ‘understand this’? After all, the existence of active opposition to the gospel was evident. Paul himself had been arrested, chained and imprisoned because of his own loyalty to it (1:11, 12; 2:9). Everybody in Asia had repudiated him, as Timothy was well aware (1:15). And earlier in the letter the apostle has urged his young friend not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to take his share of suffering as Christ’s good soldier; has reminded him that he must endure with Christ if he hopes one day to reign with him; and has warned him that behind the ‘word-battles’, ‘godless chatter’ and ‘stupid and senseless controversies’ spread by false teachers there lurks the evil figure of the devil himself (1:8; 2:3, 11–12, 14, 16, 23, 26). So why does the apostle enjoin Timothy to understand what he already knows? Surely because he wants to emphasize that opposition to the truth is not a passing situation, but a permanent characteristic of the age. Perhaps he fears that Timothy will be over-optimistic, hoping that if he lies low for a while, the storm will pass. But

¹ Wiersbe, W. W. (1996). [*The Bible exposition commentary*](#) (Vol. 2, pp. 249–251). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Paul gives him no such hope. We too should 'understand this', and be quite clear about the perils and troubles which will beset us if we stand firm in the truth of the gospel.

Next, Paul refers to 'the last days'. It may seem natural to apply this term to a future epoch, to the days immediately preceding the end when Christ returns. But biblical usage will not allow us to do this. For it is the conviction of the New Testament authors that the new age (promised in the Old Testament) arrived with Jesus Christ, and that therefore with his coming the old age had begun to pass away and the last days had dawned. Thus Peter on the Day of Pentecost quoted Joel's prophecy that 'in the last days' God would pour out his Spirit upon all flesh, and declared that this prophecy had now been fulfilled. 'This is what was spoken by the prophet Joel,' he said. In other words, 'the last days' to which the prophecy referred had come (Acts 2:14–17). Similarly, the Letter to the Hebrews begins with an assertion that the God who had spoken of old to the fathers through the prophets had 'in these last days' spoken to us through his Son (1:1, 2). This being so, we are living in the last days. They were ushered in by Jesus Christ, God's Son.

What follows in 2 Timothy 3, therefore, is a description of the present, not the future. Paul depicts the whole period elapsing between the first and second comings of Christ. 'Under *the last days* he includes the universal condition of the Christian Church.' This not only follows from the way in which the expression 'the last days' is used in the New Testament. It is also plain from the fact that what Paul gives Timothy here is not predictions about some future epoch which he will not himself live to see, but instructions relating to his present ministry, including (for example) the command to 'avoid' certain people (5). Timothy is already living in 'the last days' to which Paul is referring. And so are we. They may get worse in the future (13), but even now the times are bad and perilous.

In these last days, Paul adds, 'there will come times of stress'. What Timothy is to understand about the last days is not that they are uniformly, continuously evil, but that they will include 'perilous seasons' (AV). Church history confirms that this has been so. As the vessel of the Christian church put out to sea, it was not to expect a smooth untroubled passage; it has been buffeted by storms and tempests and even hurricanes.

These seasons Paul denotes as 'times of stress'. The Greek adjective *chalepos* means basically 'hard' or 'difficult', and implies either 'hard to bear' (for example, in the case of physical or mental pain) or 'hard to deal with, violent, dangerous' (AG), 'menacing'.¹ The word was used in classical Greek both of dangerous wild animals and of the raging sea. Its only other New Testament occurrence is in the story of the two Gadarene demoniacs who were as savage and untamed as wild beasts and whom Matthew describes as 'so fierce (*chalepos*) that no one could pass that way' (Mt. 8:28). This gives us an idea of the kind of seasons which the church must expect in the last days. They will be both painful and perilous, hard to endure and hard to cope with.

Paul goes on immediately to tell us why this is so: *For men will be* ... It is important to grasp that it is *men* who are responsible for the menacing seasons which the church has to bear, fallen men, evil men, men whose nature is perverted, whose behaviour is self-centred and godless, whose mind is hostile to God and his law (*cf.* Rom. 8:7), and who spread evil, heresy and dead religion in the church.

Before we study in detail Paul's characterization of these men, we need to absorb his words of introduction. First, we are living in the last days, he says; Christ brought them with him when he came. Secondly, these days will include seasons of peril and stress. Thirdly, they will be the

result of the activities of bad men. Fourthly, we are to understand this, to be quite clear about it, and so to be prepared.

2. The Evil Men are Described (verses 2–9)

The rest of this first paragraph of chapter 3 is devoted to a thorough portrayal of these men. In particular, Paul delineates their moral conduct (2–4), their religious observance (5) and their proselytizing zeal (6–9).

a. Their moral conduct (verses 2–4)

In these three verses the apostle employs no fewer than nineteen expressions by which to describe the wicked men who are responsible for the ‘times of stress’. It might perhaps be a little tedious to analyse the portrait too minutely and to define each term separately. But notice at once the first and the last phrases used. The first says that they are ‘lovers of self’ (*philautoi*) and the last (4) that they are not, as they should be, ‘lovers of God’ (*philotheoi*). Indeed four of the nineteen expressions are compounded with ‘love’ (*phil-*), suggesting that what is fundamentally wrong with these people is that their love is misdirected. Instead of being first and foremost ‘lovers of God’, they are ‘lovers of self’, ‘lovers of money’ (NEB: ‘men will love nothing but money and self’) and ‘lovers of pleasure’ (4).

In between these four come fifteen other expressions, which are almost entirely descriptive of the breakdown of men’s relations with each other.

The first three enlarge on the meaning of self-love. People who love themselves best become ‘proud’, ‘arrogant’ and ‘abusive’. The first word means ‘braggarts’ or ‘swashbucklers’ (*alazones*), and the second ‘haughty’ or ‘disdainful’ (*hyperēphanoi*) which leads naturally to the third ‘slandering’ (*blasphēmoi*), because inevitably those who have an exaggerated opinion of themselves look down with contempt upon others and speak evil of them.

The next five words may conveniently be grouped together. For they seem to refer to family life, and especially to the attitude which some young people adopt towards their parents. The Greek words are all negative in form and begin with the prefix *a-*, like our English words beginning un- or dis-, as if to stress the tragic absence of qualities which nature alone would lead one to expect. The first two are ‘disobedient to their parents’, whom Scripture says children are to honour and—at least during their minority—obey, and ‘ungrateful’, devoid of even an elementary appreciation. The next word is translated ‘unholy’ (*anosioi*), for *hosios* normally means ‘devout’ or ‘pious’ towards God. But like the similar adjective *eusebēs* (‘reverent’) it was sometimes used in classical Greek of filial respect. The context suggests that this may be the allusion here. ‘Inhuman’ (*astorgoi*) is rendered by JBP ‘utterly lacking in ... normal human affections’ and by RSV in Romans 1:31 ‘heartless’, because it is part of the natural, created order that parents and children should love each other. The last word of this group of five is ‘implacable’ (*aspondoi*) and is translated by AG ‘irreconcilable’. It describes a situation in which people (maybe the reference is still primarily to young people) are so much in revolt that they are not even willing to come to the conference table to negotiate. In an ideal society the relationship of children to their parents should be marked by obedience, gratitude, respect, affection and reasonableness. In ‘times of stress’ all five are lacking.

The remaining seven words of the catalogue are obviously wider than the family. The first is 'slanderers' (*diaboloï*, literally 'devils'), translated 'backbiters' by E. K. Simpson and 'scandal mongers' in NEB. They are guilty of the sin of speaking evil against others, especially behind their back. They are also 'profligates' (*akrateis*), 'ungovernable' (Simpson) or lacking in self-control, 'fierce' (*anēmeroi*) or 'untamed' (AG), and 'haters of good' (*aphilagathoi*) or 'strangers to all goodness' (NEB). Finally, they are 'treacherous' (a word used in Luke 6:16 of the traitor Judas), 'reckless' (entirely thoughtless in word and deed) and 'swollen with conceit' or 'puffed up' (connoting 'self-importance, bumptiousness'). Thus we are back to the basic evil with which the hideous list began, namely pride.

And all this unsocial, anti-social behaviour—this disobedient, ungrateful, disrespectful, inhuman attitude to parents, together with this absence of restraint, loyalty, prudence and humility—is the inevitable consequence of a godless self-centredness. Archbishop Trench, commenting on the meaning of *philautos*, 'selfish', mentions an unnamed Puritan divine who 'likenes the selfish man to the hedgehog which, rolling itself up in a ball, presents only sharp spines to those without, keeping at the same time all the soft and warm wool for itself within'. If a man is 'proud', 'arrogant' and 'swollen with conceit', of course he will never sacrifice himself to serve others. God's order, as plainly declared in his moral law, is that we love him first (with all our heart, soul, mind and strength), our neighbour next and our self last. If we reverse the order of the first and third, putting self first and God last, our neighbour in the middle is bound to suffer.

So the root of the trouble in 'times of stress' is that men are 'utterly self-centred' (JBP), 'lovers of self' (*philautoi*), 'an Aristotelian term ... for inordinate self-love'.

Only the gospel offers a radical solution to this problem. For only the gospel promises a new birth or new creation, which involves being turned inside out, from self to unself, a real reorientation of mind and conduct, and which makes us fundamentally God-centred instead of self-centred. Then, when God is first and self is last, we love the world God loves and seek to give and serve like him.

b. Their religious observance (verse 5)

It may be a shock to discover that people such as these, who lack the common decencies of civilized society let alone of God's law, can also be religious. But it is true. In the history of mankind, although this is a shameful thing to confess, religion and morality have been more often divorced than married. Certainly Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to this fact. The great ethical prophets of the 7th and 8th centuries BC fulminated against Israel and Judah on this score. Amos was the first, exposing the anomaly that in the reign of Jeroboam II there was a boom in religion and in injustice simultaneously. Israelite worshippers 'lay themselves down beside every altar upon garments taken in pledge', he cried; 'and in the house of their God they drink the wine of those who have been fined (sc. unjustly)' (Am. 2:8). In other words, in the very performance of their religious duties they were making use of garments and wine to which they had no moral right. Their immorality had actually invaded their religious observance.

Isaiah deplored the same thing in Judah. Through him God addressed his people thus:

'Your new moons and your appointed feasts

my soul hates;
they have become a burden to me,
I am weary of bearing them.
When you spread forth your hands,
I will hide my eyes from you;
even though you make many prayers,
I will not listen;
your hands are full of blood.
Wash yourselves; make yourselves clean;
remove the evil of your doings
from before my eyes;
cease to do evil,
learn to do good;
seek justice,
correct oppression;
defend the fatherless,
plead for the widow' (Is. 1:14–17).

The Lord Jesus had to utter a very similar complaint against the Pharisees, the ultra-religious people of his day: 'you cleanse the outside of the cup and of the plate, but inside they are full of extortion and rapacity' (Mt. 23:25). That is, they were meticulous in ensuring the ceremonial purity of their vessels, while what they ate and drank from their clean vessels had been acquired by unclean greed and dishonesty.

Still the same malady was rife among the people Paul is describing. They preserved the outward 'form of religion' but were 'denying the power of it' (5). They evidently attended the worship services of the church. They sang the hymns, said the 'amen' to the prayers and put their money in the offering-plate. They looked and sounded egregiously pious. But it was *form* without *power*, outward show without inward reality, religion without morals, faith without works.

True religion combines form and power. It is not external form without power. Nor, on the other hand, does it emphasize moral power in such a way as to despise or dispense with proper external forms. It combines them. It fosters a worship which is essentially 'spiritual', arising from the heart, but which expresses itself through public, corporate services, and which also issues in moral behaviour. Otherwise, it is not only valueless; it is actually an abomination to the Lord.

No wonder Paul adds: 'avoid such people'. Not that he was to avoid all contact with sinners, for Jesus himself had been 'the friend of publicans and sinners', and if Timothy were to shun association with them he would have to go right out of the world (*cf.* 1 Cor. 5:9–12). Paul means rather that within the church, for he has been giving a description of 'a kind of heathen Christianity', Timothy was to have nothing to do with what might be called 'religious sinners'. Indeed, one could go further. Anybody whom the Book of Common Prayer terms 'an open and notorious evil liver' should be disciplined, and, if he remains unrepentant, excommunicated (*cf.* 1 Cor. 5:5, 13).

c. Their proselytizing zeal (verses 6–9)

It is indeed astonishing that the kind of people the apostle has been describing, filled with godless self-love and malice, should not only profess religion, but include some who actively propagate it. Yet such was the case.

It seems probable that their proselytizing zeal is portrayed as a military operation. The verb translated 'capture' (*aichmalōtizō*) properly means to take prisoner in war, although AG add that 'the figure may fade' so that the word comes to signify 'carry away = mislead, deceive'. At all events, their method was not direct and open, but furtive, secretive, cunning. They were sneaks. Using no doubt the back door rather than the front, these tradesmen of heresy would insinuate themselves into private homes or 'households'. Choosing a time when the menfolk were out (presumably at work), they concentrated their attention on 'weak women'. This expedient, comments Bishop Ellicott, was 'as old as the fall of man', for the serpent first deceived Eve. It was also employed by the Gnostics, and has been the regular ploy of religious commercial travellers right up to and including the Jehovah's Witnesses of our own day.

The women chosen as victims Paul refers to by the word *gynaikaria*, 'little women', a term of contempt for women who were idle, silly and weak. Their weakness was double. First, they were morally weak, 'burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses'. Their sins were to them both a burden and a tyrant, and the false teachers, worming their way into their home, played upon their feelings of guilt and of infirmity. Secondly, they were intellectually weak, unstable, credulous, gullible. They were the kind of women who would 'listen to anybody', while at the same time they could 'never arrive at a knowledge of the truth'. Constitutionally incapable of reaching any settled convictions, they were like little boats tossed hither and thither by a storm (*cf.* Eph. 4:14). In such a state of mental confusion, people will listen to any teacher, however specious. 'It was no love of truth that impelled them to learn,' however, 'but only a morbid love of novelty.' Such women, weak in character and intellect, are an easy prey for door-to-door religious salesmen.

As an example of spurious teachers Paul now mentions 'Jannes and Jambres', the names (according to Jewish tradition) of the two chief magicians in Pharaoh's court. They are not named in the Old Testament text, although one of the Targums inserts their names in Exodus 7:11 which reads: 'Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerers; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same (*sc.* miracles) by their secret arts.'

The implication of what Paul writes here is extremely important, although it does not lie on the surface. He draws a historical parallel between Jannes and Jambres who had opposed Moses centuries previously and 'these men' (the false teachers of his own day) who also oppose the truth. Jannes and Jambres were magicians; the false teachers also were 'impostors' and 'deceivers' (13). Perhaps they too went in for magic of some kind, for when the Ephesians who had 'practised magic arts' were converted, they had brought their books and publicly burned them (Acts 19:18, 19). What is remarkable about this analogy, however, is not just that the Asian false teachers are likened to the Egyptian magicians but that Paul is thereby likening himself to Moses! For Moses was the greatest figure of the Old Testament. No prophet arose like him in Israel, we are told, either in his knowledge of God ('whom the Lord knew face to face') or in the signs and wonders he did to authenticate the revelation of God (Dt. 34:10, 11). 'See,' the Lord had said to him, 'I make you as God to Pharaoh ... You shall speak all that I command you' (Ex. 7:1, 2). So for forty years Moses spoke God's word and gave God's law to the people.

But now Paul dares to equate himself with Moses. For as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so the Asian false teachers were opposing the truth. What truth? Why, the truth taught by Paul and entrusted by Paul to Timothy (1:14), the apostolic faith, the sacred deposit, which Timothy was to guard and to transmit. Thus the apostle Paul, naturally and without any apparent hesitation, puts himself on a level with Moses as one who also taught God's truth. Moses taught the law; Paul preached the gospel. But whether it was law or gospel, the teaching of Moses the prophet or Paul the apostle, it was God's truth which men were opposing and rejecting.

So Paul rejects them as men who were 'corrupt' in their 'mind', despite their claim to *gnōsis* (knowledge), and 'counterfeit' (*adokimoi*, 'tried and found wanting') as to their 'faith'. Moreover he is confident that such men 'will not get very far'. They may themselves 'go on from bad to worse' (13). Their false teaching may also temporarily spread and 'eat its way like gangrene' (2:17). But its success will be limited and transient. How could Paul be so sure? Because 'their folly will be plain to all, as was (or 'came to be' *egeneto*, an aorist) that of those two men', Jannes and Jambres.

We sometimes get distressed in our day—rightly and understandably—by the false teachers who oppose the truth and trouble the church, especially by the sly and slippery methods of backdoor religious traders. But we need have no fear, even if a few weak people may be taken in, even if falsehood becomes fashionable. For there is something patently spurious about heresy, and something self-evidently true about the truth. Error may spread and be popular for a time. But it 'will not get very far'. In the end it is bound to be exposed, and the truth is sure to be vindicated. This is a clear lesson of church history. Numerous heresies have arisen, and some have seemed likely to triumph. But today they are largely of antiquarian interest. God has preserved his truth in the church.

Having reached the end of the first paragraph of chapter 3, it should now be plain to us what these dangerous seasons are which occur spasmodically in 'the last days' in which we live, and how they arise. It is because in that part of God's field (the world) in which God has sown wheat, the devil has also sown weeds. Changing the image, the devil has his 'fifth column', his secret agents, actually inside the church. As the Church of England's *Article XXVI* puts it: 'in the visible Church the evil (is) ever mingled with the good, and sometimes the evil have chief authority in the Ministration of the Word and Sacraments ...' Yes, inside the church, within the visible society of professing believers, there are men of immoral character and conduct, of purely external religiosity, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith. They are lovers of self, money and pleasure rather than lovers of God and their fellows. They retain the form of religion but deny its power. They oppose the truth and seek to win the weak to their pernicious errors. Morally, religiously and intellectually they are perverse. It is a remarkably apt portrayal of the so-called 'permissive society', which genially tolerates every conceivable deviation from Christian standards of righteousness and truth, and whose ethos has crept into the church.

But Timothy is not to catch this infection, nor be carried away by this flood-tide, but to stand out boldly against the prevailing fashion.²

² Stott, J. R. W. (1973). [*Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy*](#) (pp. 81–92). Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

CHAPTER 2 ENDED optimistically: The Lord's servant is to instruct opponents patiently, with the hope that God will graciously rescue them from Satan's grasp. But chapter 3 presents another, less optimistic reality, introduced with the mild adversative *de* ("but") and the command "mark this."

Terrible Times (3:1–5)

THE VERB "MARK" is the simple word "know," but in this context it serves as a jolting reminder to Timothy of a reality with which he must come to grips: "Terrible times" are coming. The adjective translated "terrible" can, in various contexts, mean violent (Matt. 8:28), fierce, or hard to deal with. "There will be" would normally describe a coming state of affairs, but it becomes clear in verse 5 that the future is now. Some have argued that a later pseudonymous author attributed this to Paul, using the future tense to make it appear as if Paul had correctly predicted what would take place. However, Paul could certainly draw on writings and sayings that spoke of future dangers and cast this in futuristic language, although he knew—and will soon make clear—that these things are already taking place.

The expression "last days" originated in the Old Testament (see Isa. 2:2). Note how Peter, quoting Joel 2:28 in his speech at Pentecost (or Luke, quoting Peter in Acts 2:17), recasts the prophet's "and afterward" as "in the last days." The section that follows (Joel 2:28–32; Acts 2:19–20) describes events both at the beginning of the church age and those that must take place "before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord" (Acts 2:20). Isaiah too follows his reference in Isaiah 2:2 to the "last days" with a description of a "day" that the Lord Almighty has "in store" (2:12). Such terminology occurs also in the Minor Prophets (e.g., Zeph. 1:14–18), in Jesus' teachings (Matt. 24:29), and in 2 Peter 3:10. The battle of Armageddon will take place on "the great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:14, 16).

While some chronological prophetic detailing is possible, the *day/days* terminology in Scripture seems flexible, directing attention to major events that characterize different phases of history. Unlike the present passage, 1 Timothy 4:1–3 (which describes "later times") has to do with doctrinal defection rather than with the moral depravity described here in 2 Timothy 3. All teaching about the last days is consistent with the idea of the present age as evil (Gal. 1:4) and with Paul's exhortation to make "the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil" (Eph. 5:16).

The reasons why the last days are so terrible are cited in verses 2–9, introduced by the word *gar* ("for," omitted in NIV). The list in verses 2–5 calls to mind the vice catalogues found in Greco-Roman literature. Sometimes, as in the present passage, the perpetrators are listed rather than the evil deeds. Hanson vividly refers to those in this chapter as "vicious characters."⁵ The descriptions in verses 2–4 have sometimes been grouped according to their verbal similarities in Greek. For example, the two words translated "lovers of themselves" and "lovers of money" begin with the Greek prefix *phil* (related to love). The last three Greek words in verse 2 and all those in verse 3 (except "slandering") begin with the so-called *alpha privative* (the use of an initial Greek alpha, which transforms a positive into a negative [similar to the English "un"]). The first two words in verse 4 begin with *pro*; more significantly, the two nouns

in the last phrase of verse 4 have the same *phil* prefix as in verse 2 (“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”), which, it might be said, summarize the whole section.

This drawing together of the first and last pairs of words by means of identical prefixes also brings “lovers of money” into contrast with “lovers of God,” calling to mind Colossians 3:5, “greed ... is idolatry” (cf. also 1 Tim. 6:10). “Boastful, proud” (2 Tim. 3:2) are two words that overlap semantically and can be translated “arrogant pride” (cf. Rom. 1:30). The word translated “abusive” (“blasphemers” in KJV and NKJV) is usually understood now as having a broad sense. It certainly can include “scoffing at God” (NLT) but its inclusion with other vices (as in Mark 7:22; Eph. 4:31; Col. 3:8) demonstrates that it can refer to the defamation of other human beings also. A bad attitude to parents (2 Tim. 3:2) is seen in the extreme in 1 Timothy 1:9 and is disallowed among the children of elders in Titus 1:6 (see also Rom. 1:30).

“Ungrateful” and “unholy” (v. 2) may not seem to belong together until we realize that prior to the vice list in Romans 1:29–31 (referred to above), Paul had written, “for although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him” (v. 21). To withhold thanks from God is a refusal to acknowledge that he exists or, at the least, to refuse to acknowledge that our life and all we have come from him. The NIV “without love” fails to bring out the specific kind of love that is missing: that which normally exists between family members (such as between parents and children). The NRSV’s “inhuman” may be too strong. This missing element of love is expressed in Ellicott’s use of a quaint but accurate definition, “destitute of love towards those for whom nature herself claims it.”

The meaning of the word “unforgiving” (v. 3) is helped by reference to its etymology. It conveys the attitude of a person who does not respond to a proposal for a truce; such a person refuses to be reconciled or placated. The Greek word for “slandering” is translated by the NIV as “malicious talkers” in 1 Timothy 3:11. “Without self-control,” when used in a vice list like this, refers not to relatively harmless matters such as diet, but to matters of moral failure. “Brutal” is a good translation for the next word, which means also “untamed” or “savage.” “Not lovers of the good” (occurring only here in Greek literature) can, in a vice list, be interpreted more forcibly as “haters of good” (NRSV). “Treachery” conveys the idea of betrayal. “Rash” describes the attitude of a crowd out of control (cf. Acts 19:36). On “conceited” see 1 Timothy 3:6 and comments.

The amazing thing is that these people, consumed by their own vices, have “a form of godliness.” This does not necessarily mean that they are in the church, but the fact that Paul counsels Timothy to “have nothing to do with them” may indicate that they are. Note how Paul makes it clear in 1 Corinthians 5:9–11 that believers are not to dissociate themselves from immoral people in the world, but from those in the church. The word for godliness (*eusebeia*) was commonly used to mean piety or religion. It appears frequently in the Pastoral Letters as a word for Christian piety (see 1 Tim. 2:2; 3:16; 4:7–8; 6:3, 5–6, 11; Titus 1:1). Whatever their “form of godliness” is, these people deny its power and thus reject the true God.

Victimization of Women and Others (3:6–9)

VERSES 6–9 CONTINUE the warning against the evil people so graphically described in verses 2–4. Since these evil hypocrites have a “form of godliness,” they are able to seduce some people into believing their heresies. Those described in verse 6 are women, specifically described as

gynaikaria—a diminutive, demeaning form of the word for woman. Since “little” may fail to convey the disparaging pathos of the word, translators have tended to expand its connotation with words such as “weak-willed” (NIV), “silly” (NRSV), “gullible” (NKJV), and “vulnerable” (NLT).

It is important exegetically to understand this word as a particular class of women and not as a description of women in general, any more than the words in verses 2–4 describe men in general. These women may have been recent converts, possibly from lives of religious perversion or prostitution. Kelly forsakes objectivity when he says “it remains a fact that women, with their more intuitive and receptive approach, are in all ages particularly susceptible to proselytism, bad as well as good.” Lock’s comment is more appropriate here: “They have become *caricatures* of true womanhood.” The fact that some women are being deceived by evil, hypocritical false teachers may help to explain why Paul earlier restricted women as he did (1 Tim. 2:11–15). It is reasonable to suppose that this was also taking place in churches beyond Ephesus, requiring a blanket restriction on his part.

Paul’s main point in verses 6–7 is not to malign women but to show the treachery of the false teachers. One of the ways in which these people carried on their skullduggery is underhandedly to “worm their way into homes” and victimize women. What these men do when they get into the homes is to “gain control over” the kind of women who will respond to them. This verb means literally “to take captive,” but is, of course, not used in a literal sense here. If the word “captive” (NRSV) were a little stronger—it usually conveys the idea of charming someone—it would be a clever choice.

The women who are taken advantage of in this way are “loaded down with sins.” The same verb occurs in 4:3 about accumulating teachers and, with the prefix *epi*, appears in the postapostolic Epistle of Barnabas 4:6, in the phrase “compounding your sins.” As Knight points out, this verb is in the perfect tense, indicating a condition they are in as a result of past sins, while the next verb (“are swayed”; lit., “are led”) is a *present* participle. While the word for “desires” is not in itself negative, it generally has a negative sense in the New Testament. These women are sadly “always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth” (v. 7). The point is that they are susceptible to further encounters of this nature and, ironically, cannot even gain the awareness of truth that Timothy’s opponents might have through repentance.

Verse 8 contains another description of the false teachers, this time by reference to “Jannes and Jambres,” two figures known from extrabiblical literature. These are the names Jewish tradition gave to the Egyptian magicians who tried to imitate the signs performed before Pharaoh by Moses and Aaron (Ex. 7:11; 9:11). What they had in common with the false teachers at Ephesus was that they also stood against the truth, had “depraved minds,” and were rejected “as far as the faith is concerned” (cf. also Titus 1:16, where “unfit” is the same word translated “rejected” in the NIV here). Lock calls the reference to Jannes and Jambres an “*ad hominem* illustration,” remarking that the false teachers are “fond of their Jewish myths and genealogies: well, the nearest analogy to themselves to be found there is that of magicians whose folly was exposed.” The “just as ... so also” construction makes the comparison clear.

This section with its dismal pictures concludes with some encouragement to Timothy. These heretics “will not get very far” (v. 9). Paul is being somewhat sarcastic here, as the heretics’ only advance is toward ungodliness. Once more the comparison is made clear by the words “as in the case of those men.” In a situation where the very nature of false teaching was that it fooled

some people, such as the “weak-willed women,” it would have been a great encouragement to Timothy to know that “their folly will be clear to everyone.”³

Bridging Context

A DEGENERATING SOCIETY. An article containing a sobering description of contemporary youth made the rounds several years ago. It portrayed the disobedience of young people toward their parents, their failure to observe traditional norms of politeness, and so on. It was a bleak picture, and the reader was compelled to join in this lament over the direction of today’s youth culture. It was only at the end of the article that one learned the author was an ancient Greek philosopher. Probably many generations have felt that it was their particular fate to live during a period when society (and not only the youth culture!) was rapidly degenerating. Verses 1–5 can compete for one of the most pessimistic descriptions in print. No doubt the files of many preachers contain clippings illustrative of the various categories of degeneracy in this paragraph.

It is easy in a Bible commentary, which is read mainly by people with high spiritual aspirations, to moralize piously about the evil world “out there.” But while trying to avoid banal moralization, some comment is necessary. We cannot bridge contexts without identifying trends. It is not only the first-century heretics or our contemporary narcissistic culture that have lovingly stared at their own reflection. “Lovers of themselves” have strutted through many cultures and many levels of society. “Bad as I wanna be” and “having it my way” are now acceptable as public declarations, but they are not new. Even though we may evaluate self-esteem as a valid and healthy Christian attitude, we can easily find perversions in any religion or philosophy.

Greed and arrogance. Nor do we need to look far to find “lovers of money.” Having ministered in wealthy communities in both eastern and central United States, I know that rich people can be either generous or greedy. The possession of wealth itself does not determine this. The same can be said for people below the poverty line. One of the most wealthy families I knew was not only generous but *sacrificially* generous. But the literature of any age or country has its stock figures of sheer greed.

Arrogance—whether fed by wealth or poverty or neither—takes many forms. In this passage “boastful,” “proud,” “abusive,” “ungrateful,” “unforgiving,” “brutal,” and “conceited” are some of its faces. Anyone who goes to the altar for worship without proper reconciliation with others, or who acts out the equivalence of a Corinthian Christian using the Lord’s Supper as a means of partying with friends, shows that he or she is an arrogant lover of self rather than a lover of God and one’s neighbor. We would probably not find partying at the Lord’s Supper in most cultures, but there are other ways to disregard the rights of disadvantaged people. No

³ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#) (pp. 268–273). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

doubt from first-century slaves to medieval serfs and to contemporary minorities there have been many ways in which this has been done, both subtle and openly outrageous.

It may come as a surprise that occasionally missionaries have in effect enslaved defenseless people, but it is, sadly, no longer a surprise that some ministers abuse women in their churches. The people in this passage have “depraved minds” and are not true lovers of God; they are opponents of the faith and people of “folly.” Whenever such attitudes erupt in the church there should be discernment and discipline. The church must purify itself. Verses 10–17 will provide a contrast in the pure life of the Lord’s servants, such as Paul and Timothy.

The experience of the women described in verses 6–7 was not unique in Ephesus. During the first centuries of our era the Roman empire was crisscrossed by itinerant merchants, entertainers, philosophers, cult leaders, and others seeking to propagate or to peddle their wares and ideas. Some of the methods of the wandering preachers were aboveboard. However, others had motives that were mercenary or worse. The actions of greedy itinerant preachers, from whom Paul sought to disassociate himself, provide a useful background to the actions of the false teachers described in this chapter. The vulnerability of some women in the Ephesian church may have a bearing on Paul’s restriction of women’s ministry in 1 Timothy 2:12.

A form of godliness. The amazing thing about 3:1–9 is not that people are boastful, proud, and conceited or that they are unforgiving or without self-control, but that these words can describe people who have “a form of godliness but [are] denying its power.” Paul is not describing pagans engaged in crime or biological warfare but false teachers penetrating the Christian church. Non-Christians often level the charge that the church is full of hypocrites. Actually that charge is mild compared to the insidious character of these protean false teachers. They could adopt a “form of godliness,” but in their “depraved minds” they were preying on vulnerable women. Unlike Paul (1 Thess. 2:5) they used a mask of piety to cover up greed.

There seemed to be two ways of looking at such people. They are clearly hypocritical with their “form of godliness,” so to some degree they may for a while be undetectable. At the same time their rebellion is often overt, as has been the case as far back as Jannes and Jambres. Paul says that “their folly will be clear to everyone.” It will therefore take some discernment on the part of believers to detect these opponents of the gospel even before their cover is blown.⁴

Contemporary Significance

SOCIAL DEGENERATION. WE have already cited some contemporary examples of social degeneration. If it were not that Paul has tied all this with the “last days,” we could easily assume that he is referring to terrible people who were a threat to the church at Ephesus and leave it there. However, assuming that the downward spiral will not reverse itself, the final “last” days will become increasingly intense in their horror, right on to the end of history.

⁴ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [1 and 2 Timothy, Titus](#) (pp. 273–275). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

It was probably the story of the death of Kitty Genovese in New York City several decades ago that woke people up to the extent that self-love and disregard for others had come to characterize modern urban dwellers. The story, disseminated widely, is that one night this woman was attacked in the street right in front of an apartment building. Residents in the surrounding buildings heard her screams for help, could see the savagery from their windows, but did nothing to come to her aid. She died a horrible death.

Our quest for the contemporary significance of this passage in 2 Timothy is not difficult, once we recognize that every murderer and every disinterested, dispassionate observer like those in that New York scene contribute to the “last days.” Supporting evidence from the media is hardly necessary to prove the point that contemporary society is in bad shape. It could be asked, of course, whether Western culture at the turn of the millennium is demonstrably worse than, say, the calculated frightfulness of Tiglath-Pileser III in Old Testament times or than the times of the worst Roman emperors. We could proceed through history, pausing to look at such horrors as medieval torture chambers, the gulags of Siberia, and ethnic cleansing in Bosnia Herzogovena. Along the way we could take note of the days of Al Capone, Bugs Moran, Lucky Luciano, and other gangsters with their disregard for innocent life. But then would have to acknowledge as well the sad victims of abuse in its various forms in our own day: the terrors of street gangs, drive-by shootings, and the tragic results of road rage on the highways. And according to the Bible’s descriptions of “the last days,” the darkest hours of social degeneration may be yet ahead.

Terrible as such things are (and “brutal” in verse 3 serves as a good contemporary description of them), the common thread through all of this is selfishness. “People will be lovers of themselves,” and the expressions of that—pride, ungratefulness, lack of love for others, ingratitude, and sensuous pleasure—are descriptive of contemporary moral malaise.

Victims of abuse. The abuse of women is another example of our social malaise and of the relevance of our passage. It is true that there have been societies in many ages of history where women were abused in one way or another. One would hope that with an increased sensitivity to the position and self-respect of women in our day, there would be less abuse. While the specifics of the first century (e.g., temple prostitutes) are a thing of the past, male aggressiveness and sinful passions drive some men to abuse their wives and daughters (sometimes under the guise of “male headship”). Further, as is now widely realized, access to the Internet can yield vivid and sordid sexual information. The so-called “vice catalogs” in the New Testament can perform a salutary service as checklists for Christians to avoid today.

It is possible for pastors, day-care employees, youth leaders, and others in contemporary churches to play on the weaknesses of people who depend on them for religious guidance, even if not to the horrific extent of the objects of Paul’s condemnation in this passage. We do not have the same circumstance of wandering preachers (although evangelists do travel, as do entertainers, sports figures, and business people, and such people have been known to prey on women). Yet in today’s society privacy is easily gained, and the very people who come to a minister for help may develop an attraction for, and dependence on, the helpful pastor. Reciprocally, pastors can feel attraction to and sympathy for a seeker; such situations can lead to problems.

More than that, unscrupulous clergy can exploit people both sexually and in other less obvious ways rather than care for the very persons whose needs lead them to the church for

help. If such individuals then leave the church, they may well tell others how the “church” or “Christians” prostituted them, and the reputation of God, which the Pastoral Letters are seeking to uphold, is sullied.

The evils described in this passage are relatively easy to identify. It is possible, however, for Christians to become so occupied with such evils outside the church that they are oblivious to the vulnerability of people to sinful “operators” within the church. Those who do home schooling or send their children to Christian schools and Sunday schools and who encourage their young people to attend church youth groups may have a false sense of security. Sex maniacs can invade youth groups, just as financial predators can have neat haircuts and run for church office. The greed of a naive Christian can give opportunity to such a crook, and a natural hunger for sex can make young people vulnerable to a leader they trust.⁵

An Explanation of the Future (3:1–9)

“The last days” is a period of time that actually began with the life and ministry of Christ on earth (Heb. 1:1–2). However, the NT indicates that “the last days” refers particularly to the state of the church before the coming of Christ. These shall be “perilous” times, that is, “difficult, hard to deal with.” This is the same word used in Matt. 8:28 to describe the Gadarene demoniac. Because people will believe the “doctrines of demons” (1 Tim. 4:1ff), this world will become a “demonic graveyard” just as in Gadara. We are in those days now!

Self-love will be the hallmark of the last days. This self-love will lead to a grasping attitude and a boastful spirit. “Boasters” really means “swaggerers.” True affection will almost disappear; unnatural affection will prevail. “Incontinent” means “intemperate”; “fierce” means “savage,” and savage conduct is certainly evident today. “Heady” means “reckless”; and we surely live in a reckless age, whether you look at the speed of travel, the waste of money, or the carelessness of human lives.

Verses 5–8 indicate that there will be plenty of religion in the last days, but it will be a mere imitation, a form of godliness without the life-changing power of God. The departing from the faith that Paul predicted in 2 Thes. 2 is upon us today, yet there is still plenty of religion! The Bible continues to be a national best-seller, yet the crime rate increases and problems multiply. True Christians are in the minority. These false teachers of Paul’s day preyed especially upon women who were loaded with sins and led astray by their lusts, women who were “ever learning” but who never really came to an understanding of the truth.

Paul compared the apostate teachers to the Egyptian magicians Jannes and Jambres, who opposed Moses by imitating what he did (Ex. 7:11ff). Satan is an imitator, and his imitation gospel and church will spread in the last days. But just as Moses overcame these imitators by the power

⁵ Liefeld, W. L. (1999). [*1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*](#) (pp. 275–276). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House.

of God coming in great judgment, so Christ will ultimately overcome these latter-day deceivers. “From such turn away!” warns Paul (v. 5). Timothy was not to get involved with Christ-denying deceivers, even if it meant being branded as a “crank.”⁶

DIFFICULT TIMES

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (3:1)

In the intervening 2,000 years, the apostle’s divinely revealed prediction of **difficult times** has come true as heresies have become progressively more characteristic of nominal Christianity. In this passage he gives the most serious possible command to avoid, expose, and oppose spiritual impostors in the church.

Throughout church history the full counsel of God has been unpalatable to many who have claimed the name of Christ. In his book *Damned Through the Church* (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1970), John Warwick Montgomery discusses the **difficult times** as he offers a list of what he calls “the damnable epochs of church history.” He identifies and discusses seven specific movements or theological orientations—from the sacramentalism of the Middle Ages (Also called the Dark Ages) to the subjectivism that is so rampant in our own day—that are clearly unbiblical, ungodly, and destructive of the body of Christ. As the title of the book implies, these false gospels are damning to their adherents.

In each of those **difficult times**, men’s ideas were substituted for God’s truth and therefore for God Himself. Under sacramentalism, the church replaced God; under rationalism, reason was god; under orthodoxism, god was sterile, impersonal orthodoxy; under politicism, god was the state; under ecumenism, god was uncritical fellowship and cooperation among nominal Christians; under experientialism, god became personal experience; and under subjectivism, which still reigns in much of Christendom, self has become god.

It would be appropriate to add to Montgomery’s list the current emphases on mysticism, which seeks to determine truth about God by intuition and feeling, and on pragmatism, which attempts to determine what is true by what produces desired effects. These movements do not come and go but come to stay, so that as the years go on, the church accumulates them, and the battles continue.

Besides our present text, the only other prediction Paul made to Timothy is found in the first letter, in which he gives a similar warning: “The Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron” (1 Tim. 4:1–2).

That problem was not new to God’s people. Jeremiah wrote, “The Lord said to me, ‘The prophets are prophesying falsehood in My name. I have neither sent them nor commanded them nor spoken to them; they are prophesying to you a false vision, divination, futility and the deception of their own minds’ ” (Jer. 14:14). Later he relates that “among the prophets of

⁶ Wiersbe, W. W. (1992). [*Wiersbe’s expository outlines on the New Testament*](#) (pp. 648–649). Wheaton, IL: Victor Books.

Jerusalem I [the Lord] have seen a horrible thing: The committing of adultery and walking in falsehood; and they strengthen the hands of evildoers, so that no one has turned back from his wickedness. All of them have become to Me like Sodom, and her inhabitants like Gomorrah” (Jer. 23:14). The prophet then warned, “Thus says the Lord of hosts, ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who are prophesying to you. They are leading you into futility; they speak a vision of their own imagination, not from the mouth of the Lord’ ” (v. 16).

The most serious and lamentable aspect of such rejection of God and His Word is that the danger comes from *within* the church. As noted several times, near the end of his third missionary journey Paul sent for the Ephesian elders to meet with him at Miletus. Pouring out his heart to them, he warned, “I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in *among you*, not sparing the flock; and from *among your own selves* men will arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after them” (Acts 20:29–30, emphasis added).

Although our Lord assures us, “I will build My church; and the gates of Hades shall not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18), He did not promise that His people would be free from spiritual danger and harm. Much to the contrary. Near the beginning of His ministry, in the Sermon on the Mount, He warned, “Beware of the false prophets, who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inwardly are ravenous wolves” (Matt. 7:15). In the guise of spiritual shepherds and prophets, who were noted for wearing wool garments, they devour and destroy the very ones they profess to lead and protect. Zechariah spoke of such men as those who “put on a hairy robe in order to deceive” (Zech. 13:4). Earlier in His revelation to that prophet, the Lord declared, “For behold, I am going to raise up a shepherd in the land who will not care for the perishing, seek the scattered, heal the broken, or sustain the one standing, but will devour the flesh of the fat sheep and tear off their hoofs. Woe to the worthless shepherd who leaves the flock! A sword will be on his arm and on his right eye! His arm will be totally withered, and his right eye will be blind” (11:16–17).

Near the end of His ministry, Jesus expanded the warning cited above from Matthew 7. “Many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many,” He said. “And because lawlessness is increased, most people’s love will grow cold.... For false Christs and false prophets will arise and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect” (Matt. 24:11–12, 24).

Similar warnings are given in the epistles. Peter warned that “false prophets also arose among the people, just as there will also be false teachers among you, who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift destruction upon themselves. And many will follow their sensuality, and because of them the way of the truth will be maligned” (2 Peter 2:1–2). John warned, “Children, it is the last hour; and just as you heard that antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour. They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, in order that it might be shown that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:18–19). Jude warned that “certain persons have crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

Those warnings were about the contemporary as well as the future condition of the church. The dangers that plagued the New Testament church would continue and become worse

throughout the church age, as “evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (2 Tim. 3:13).

The twin dangers are the closely related evils of ungodly teaching and ungodly living, of false doctrine and sinful lifestyle. As Jesus pointed out in the quotation above from Matthew 24:11, as “false prophets will arise,... lawlessness is increased,” and as Jeremiah predicted, “the committing of adultery and walking in falsehood” are companion evils (Jer. 23:14). Those enemies of God and of God’s people originated at the Fall and will continue to thrive until the Lord returns and takes back the world for Himself. In the meanwhile, the alliance of false teaching and ungodly living will continue to afflict the church.

The conjunction **but** indicates a change of direction, from the admonition to be a godly “vessel for honor,” one characterized by kindness, patience, and gentleness (2:21–25), to the admonition to be a responsible and fearless guardian of God’s people, protecting them from false doctrine and immoral living.

Realize this translates a Greek present tense, which, as often noted before, carries the ideas of constancy and continuity. As long as Timothy was given breath and energy to serve the Lord and the Lord’s people, he was to heed Paul’s warning.

In Scripture, the phrase **last days** can have several meanings. In his prophecies about “the latter days,” Daniel referred to the entire sweep of history from the time of King Nebuchadnezzar of ancient Babylon to the time when “the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which will never be destroyed” (See Dan. 2:28–45). In Isaiah’s prophecy, the phrase refers to the time just prior to and including Christ’s second coming, when “the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills; and all the nations will stream to it” (Isa. 2:2; cf. Micah 4:1).

The writer of Hebrews declared that “God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in *these last days* has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world” (Heb. 1:1–2, emphasis added; cf. James 5:3). It seems clear that these **last days**, which began with the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ, are the ones about which Paul is speaking here. Explaining the miraculous descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, Peter made clear that “this is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel: ‘And it shall be in *the last days*,’ God says, ‘That I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind’ ” (Acts 2:16–17; cf. Joel 2:28, emphasis added). The Messiah, Jesus Christ, initiated these last days, the continuation of which was attested by the descent of His Holy Spirit at Pentecost and the birth of the church.

In John’s first epistle, he warned his readers in the early church that “it is the last hour,” which, in this context, is the equivalent of **the last days**. “And just as you heard that antichrist is coming,” he continued, “even now many antichrists have arisen; from this we know that it is the last hour” (1 John 2:18). We are still living in the messianic time between Christ’s first and second comings, all of which may properly be called **the last days**.

In those **days**, Paul says, **difficult times will come**. *Chelepos* (**difficult**) carries the ideas of perilous or grievous, as some English versions translate the word. In Matthew 8:28, referring to the Gadarene demoniacs, it is translated “violent” (NASB). The famous Greek writer Plutarch used the term to describe an ugly, infected, and dangerous wound.

Times does not translate *chronos*, which, as one would guess, indicates chronological time, but rather *kairos*, which refers to periods of time, to seasons, epochs, or eras. The plural **times**

may indicate the epochs of varying degrees of danger and difficulty the church would experience throughout its history. As Paul makes clear a few verses later, these perilous **times** will become more and more frequent and intense, whereas the intervening periods of relative tranquillity will become less frequent and peaceful, as the return of Christ nears.

LOVERS OF SELF

For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; (3:2–4)

Paul's description of these seasons of danger is specific. In this context, **men** does not refer to mankind in general or to the unsaved world but to members, especially leaders, in Christ's church, **men** who not only claim the name of Christ but claim to be His ministers, His prophets, pastors, teachers, and evangelists. These **men** are apostate leaders in apostate churches. As Paul will shortly point out, they hold "a form of godliness, [but] have denied its power" (v. 5) and they pose an immeasurable threat to the spiritual health, safety, and power of the entire body of Christ. In these three verses, Paul lists eighteen characteristics of ungodly, apostate **men**, and doubtless women, who have corrupted and will continue to corrupt the church of Christ until He returns.

The first characteristic is that these **men will be lovers of self**. The pride of self-love is the pervasive deadly sin that grips the human soul and is the foundation sin of all the others. It might be called the sewer out of which the rest of these ugly sins are discharged.

Lovers of self translates the single Greek word *philautos*, a compound of the verb *phileō* (To have great affection for) and the pronoun *autos* (Self). *Phileō* is not a wrong kind of loving, and the verb is frequently used positively in the New Testament. In John 16:27, it is used both of the Father's love for believers and of the believer's love for the Son. It is used of Jesus' love for John (John 20:2) and is used once even of the Father's love for the Son (John 5:20). In the present passage, it is not the *kind* of love that is evil but the wrongly elevated *object* of that love, namely **self**. Whenever love for **self** is raised, love for God and the things of God is lowered. For that reason, misdirected love always engenders vice. It was first from Lucifer's and then from Adam's and Eve's love of themselves over the Lord—and from the similar self-love of their descendants—that every other sin has issued.

It is for that reason that the most frightening development within the contemporary church is the wide acceptance and enthusiastic proclamation of self-love, not only as being allowable but as being the basic virtue. Turning God's truth completely on its head, the source of all evil is touted as the source of all good. And on the other hand, the lack of self-love and its many derivatives—such as self-esteem, self-worth, self-fulfillment, and positive self-image—have been imported almost unchanged into the church from antibiblical secular psychology.

It is widely claimed that a person cannot love God and other people rightly unless and until he loves himself rightly, completely reversing what both the Old and New Testaments teach. As already noted above, Jesus said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with

all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matt. 22:37–39). Instead of taking the words “as yourself” as an assumption of self-love that is natural to sinful man, many interpreters not only take these words as a command but as the *first and greatest command!*

Throughout church history, many Christians, both true and nominal, have been guilty of perverted self-love. Self-love always has been associated with worldliness, but heretofore it was never taught as a doctrinal tenet in the church, even in its most corrupt periods. It was universally acknowledged to be the sin it is. Even most neoorthodox theologians have recognized self-love, or pride, as the root sin of all others. But psychologists Carl Rogers, Erich Fromm, and many others strongly denounced that God-centered view and boldly claimed that *lack of self-love and self-esteem is the root problem of man*. That false and damnable twist has permeated the church to an alarming degree.

In *The City of God*, Augustine wrote, “Two cities have been founded by two loves, the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God. The heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self. The former, in a word, glorifies itself, the latter the Lord.” In his great theological work *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* the Swiss Reformer John Calvin said, “For so blindly do we all rush in the direction of self-love that everyone thinks he has good reason for exalting himself. There is no other remedy than to pluck up by the roots that most noxious pest, self-love.”

The concept of self-love as a positive characteristic did not find its way into the church until the late twentieth century, and, lamentably, it has spread quickly to broad portions of evangelicalism. Contrary to the unambiguous teaching of Scripture and contrary to its clearly destructive consequences, the heresy of self-love continues to find acceptance among those who claim Christ.

The roots of the modern infatuation with self-love can be traced to the humanism of the nineteenth century, especially in the development of evolutionism. If man is seen as the product of impersonal chance, God is ruled out, making the elevation of self perfectly acceptable. Because there is no basis for right and wrong, the individual’s natural bent to self-centeredness is reinforced, and he finds consummate justification for being his own god who does his own will. Each man is captain of his own ship and master of his own fate and cannot allow his self-will to be hindered or he does harm to his well-being.

The philosophy and theology of existentialism have also contributed to selfism. Although some existentialists genuinely believe there is a God and even that Jesus Christ is His Son and the Savior of the world, they reject the authority of Scripture except in a mystical way and claim that God is too far removed from man to be clearly understood, much less be personally known. Man is thrust back on himself to make of God and of life what he can. Consequently, and regardless of any protests to the contrary, man becomes in effect his own interpreter of God. Because no outside absolutes are recognized, personal beliefs and personal actions must be based solely on what seems best at the moment. Rather than unconditional submission to God, there is unconditional submission to self.

Fortunately some psychologists and psychiatrists are contesting the premise that man’s basic problem is low self-esteem. In a book written under the auspices of the Christian College Coalition, called *Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith*, David Meyers and Malcolm Jeeves give abundant evidence against that myth. In a chapter titled “A New Look at Pride,” they write,

Time and again, experimenters have found that people readily accept credit when told they have succeeded (Attributing the success to their ability and effort), yet they attribute failure to external factors such as bad luck or the problem's inherent "impossibility." These self-serving attributions have been observed not only in laboratory situations, but also with athletes (After victory or defeat), students (After high or low exam grades), drivers (After accidents), and married people (Among whom conflict often derives from perceiving oneself as contributing more and benefiting less than is fair). Self-concepts researcher Anthony Greenwald summarizes, "People experience life through a self-centered filter." ...

In virtually any area that is both subjective and socially desirable, most people see themselves as better than average. Most business people see themselves as more ethical than the average business person. Most community residents see themselves as less prejudiced than their neighbors. Most people see themselves as more intelligent and as healthier than most other people. ([New York: Harper, 1987], 130)

Later in the book the authors maintain that "the most common error in people's self-images is not unrealistically low self-esteem but rather self-serving pride; not an inferiority complex but a superiority complex." Even self-depreciation, putting yourself down, is but a thinly disguised attempt to get others to build you up.

The eighteenth century preacher Samuel Johnson said, "He that overvalues himself will undervalue others. And he that undervalues others will oppose them." self-love alienates men from God and from each other. self-love is the supreme enemy of godliness and of genuine friendship and fellowship.

What a contrast self-seeking love is to the self-giving love that God requires. "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit," Paul adjures, "but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others" (Phil. 2:3-4). Just as the second great commandment assumes self-love, so Paul's admonition assumes that people naturally "look out for [their] own interests." As always, the Lord Himself is our perfect example. "Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus," the apostle continues, "who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross" (vv. 5-8). If the heavenly Lord had that attitude in His incarnation, how much more ought we to humble ourselves, empty ourselves, and become unselfishly submissive to God to the point of death.

A concomitant of being lovers of self is being **lovers of money**, a term which represents materialism, the craving for earthly possessions of whatever sort. It is being covetous, as the Greek word is here rendered in the King James Version.

Paul is not speaking of the rightful earning and use of **money** to feed, clothe, and otherwise provide necessities for ourselves and our families. "If anyone will not work," the apostle said in another letter, "neither let him eat" (2 Thess. 3:10). But as he explains in the first letter to Timothy, "If we have food and covering, with these we shall be content" (1 Tim. 6:8). Those who are *not* content with those essentials and want "to get rich fall into temptation and a snare and many foolish and harmful desires which plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil, and some by longing for it have wandered away from the

faith, and pierced themselves with many a pang” (vv. 9–10). Because Ephesus was a wealthy city, it is likely that Paul had in mind specific members of the church there who had “wandered away from the faith” because of their love of money.

Because false teaching always leads to wrong living, it is not surprising that many false teachers, such as those who promote the so called health and wealth gospel, “suppose that godliness is a means of gain” (1 Tim. 6:5). It is the inordinate desire for **money** and for the things money represents that has made this perverted gospel so popular in the church today. It follows logically that a Christian who thinks first of himself has no problem in expecting God to provide not only necessities but luxuries, to believe that because he is a child of the King he should live like a prince. “Godliness *actually is* a means of great gain,” Paul goes on to say, but only “when accompanied by contentment” (v. 6, emphasis added).

Such false teachers “must be silenced,” Paul declares, “because they are upsetting whole families, teaching things they should not teach, for the sake of sordid gain” (Titus 1:11). They are consumed with self, which inevitably leads to greed, “and in their greed they will exploit you with false words” (2 Peter 2:3). It is a cycle of sin. Greed leads to false teaching, and false teaching leads to further greed. The false gospels of self-love and prosperity go hand in hand; they promote each other and feed on each other.

Being **boastful** is the outward manifestation of self-love. **Boastful** translates *alazōn*, a noun meaning “braggart,” which Plato defined as a person who claims greatness that he does not possess. **Boastful** persons brag about their accomplishments, overstating the truth to the degree that it has no basis in reality. They are know-it-alls who try to deceive people into thinking they are brilliant. They love to see their names in print and their faces on television. They exaggerate their abilities, their accomplishments, their talents, their reputations, and their value to society and to the church. They are always the heroes of their own stories.

Like self-love and love of money, being **boastful** is closely related to false teaching. Boasters want “to be teachers of the Law, even though they do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertions” (1 Tim. 1:7). The boastful person “is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words,” and out of those sins arise such companion sins as “envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions” (6:4).

A person who is boastful is invariably **arrogant**. Those who are characterized by these twin evils are perpetually self-exalting and determined to have their own way. *Huperēphanos* (**arrogant**) has the literal meaning of placing above, hence the idea of superiority.

The **arrogant** are best illustrated in the New Testament by the Jewish religious leaders mentioned by Jesus “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (Luke 18:9). He proceeded to tell them the well known parable of the Pharisee and the tax-gatherer, or publican, who went to pray in the temple:

The Pharisee stood and was praying thus to himself, “God, I thank Thee that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax-gatherer. I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.” But the tax-gatherer, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself shall be humbled, but he who humbles himself shall be exalted. (vv. 11–14)

Quoting from Proverbs 3:34, both James and Peter declare that “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5; cf. Ps. 138:6).

William Barclay gives a helpful comparison of boastful and arrogant:

The braggart is a swaggering creature, who shouts his claims to the four winds of heaven, and tries to boast and bluster his way into power and eminence. No one can possibly mistake him or fail to see him. But the sin of the man who is *arrogant*, in this sense, is in his heart. He might even seem to be humble; he might even seem to be quiet and inoffensive; but in his secret heart there is this contempt for everyone else. He nourishes an all-consuming, all-pervading pride. In his heart there is a little altar where he bows down before himself, and in his eyes there is something which looks at all men with a silent contempt. (*The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon* [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1957], 214)

The boastful and the **arrogant** are much more alike than different. It is a rare instance when a person who is one is not also the other. Even in the modern church it becomes harder and harder to find those who are meek and humble and equally difficult to avoid those who are proud and conceited.

Revilers translates *blasphēmos*, from which we get “blasphemous,” and carries the basic idea of being abusive and slanderous. It is inevitable that a person who is contemptuous of others will eventually revile them. When you elevate yourself, you automatically lower and denigrate others. Inner disdain will eventually find expression in outward slander, because the tongue always follows the heart. “For from within, out of the heart of men,” Jesus made clear, “proceed the evil thoughts, fornications, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting and wickedness, as well as deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness” (Mark 7:21–22).

Disobedient to parents is the next evil in Paul’s list and is self-explanatory. The disobedience of children to parents in our day has become endemic, and the cause is not hard to find. Not only are children born with a bent to self-will and disobedience, but the disappearance of mothers into the work force and the spiritual failure of fathers is exacerbated by the prevailing philosophy of self-love that is promoted in modern society, including many classrooms and churches, making being **disobedient to parents** all but compulsory. Children who will rebel against their parents will have no qualms about rebelling against anyone else. It should be no surprise that a generation whose natural, sinful self-love has been reinforced and justified by society is now undermining the family, the church, and the permissive society that has misguided it.

Like the previous sin, **ungrateful** is self-explanatory. The person who elevates self above all others will feel he deserves everything good he receives and therefore feels no need of gratitude for it. Although he may not put it into words, the **ungrateful** person despises the very idea of grace, which denotes goodness received that is undeserved. This is a particularly noxious sin to God, whose wrath is revealed against sinners for being unthankful (cf. Rom. 1:18, 21).

Unholy translates *anosias*, which carries the idea not so much of irreligion as of gross indecency. It was used of a person who refused to bury a dead body or who committed incest. The unholy person is driven by self-love to gratify his lusts and passions of whatever sort, as fully as possible with no thought to propriety, decency, or personal reputation.

Unloving translates *astorgos*, a negative adjective form of the verb *storgē*, which commonly was used of family, social, and patriotic love. The noted theologian Benjamin Warfield described it as “that quiet and abiding feeling within us, which, resting on an object as near to us, recognizes that we are closely bound up with it and takes satisfaction in its recognition.” It is not natural for people to love God or the things and people of God, but it *is* natural for them to love their own families. To be *astorgos* is therefore to be “without natural affection” (KJV). Just as the self-loving person is without common decency, he also is without common affection. He cares nothing for the welfare of those who should be dearest to him. His only interest in them is for what he believes they can do for him. To be **unloving** is to be heartless.

Unloving behavior is reported daily in newspapers and broadcasts. Husbands and wives abusing one another, parents and children abusing one another—often to the point of murder—are so common that they make headlines only if they are particularly brutal or sensational. Tragically, the evangelical church has its share of the **unloving** and heartless.

The **irreconcilable** are those who refuse to change, no matter how desperate even their own situation becomes, much less the situations of those they should care about. They are determined to have their own way regardless of the consequences, even to the point of knowingly destroying their own lives and the lives of their families. They do not forgive and do not want to be forgiven. They are implacable, beyond reasoning, and inevitably self-destructive. As far as they are concerned, there is no compromise, no reconciliation, no court of appeal. Their self-love is so extreme and their egoism so massive that absolutely nothing matters except doing as they please.

Gossip is often thought of as being relatively harmless, but at best it is unkind, harmful, and ungodly. **Malicious** gossip is a sin of an even more evil and destructive sort. Whereas the irreconcilable person tends to disregard and neglect others, **malicious gossips** make a point of harming others. Whether to promote their own interests, to express jealousy or hatred, or simply to vent their anger, they take perverse pleasure in damaging reputations and destroying lives.

Malicious gossips translates *diabolos*, which, even to the person unacquainted with Greek, suggests the severity of this evil, with our English derivative “diabolical.” *Diabolos* means “accuser” and is used thirty-four times in the New Testament as a title for Satan. Engulfed and blinded by self-love, **malicious gossips** do the very work of Satan.

Akratēs (“without self-control”) denotes incontinence, in this context that of a moral and spiritual kind. When Jesus excoriated the hypocritical scribes and Pharisees, He told them they cleaned “the outside of the cup and of the dish, but inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence [*akratēs*]” (Matt. 23:25).

Without self-control describes the person who has jettisoned inhibitions and shame, who does not care about what people think or about what happens to them because of what he does. Like a driverless car, he careens haphazardly and crashes into whatever gets in his way. The lover of self eventually loses control of his own life and becomes a slave to his passions and ambitions.

Brutal refers to savagery, like that of wild beasts, whose nature it is to attack enemies and tear them in pieces. self-love that is not checked makes a person insensitive, malicious, and eventually brutal.

Next in their downward spiral, self-lovers become **haters of good**, hating what should be loved and loving what should be hated. They sink to what amounts to an animal level; but unlike animals, they know what is good yet choose to despise and oppose it. “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil,” the Lord warned the wicked; “who substitute darkness for light and light for darkness; who substitute bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter” (Isa. 5:20). **Haters of good** remain under God’s judgment.

Lovers of self eventually become **treacherous**, turning against even their own families and friends. Treachery comes naturally to a person who loves money, who is boastful and arrogant, ungrateful and un-holy, unloving and irreconcilable, a malicious slanderer who has lost self-control, and who is brutal and hates what is good.

Jesus warned the Twelve that “brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father his child; and children will rise up against parents, and cause them to be put to death. And you will be hated by all on account of My name” (Matt. 10:21–22; cf. 24:9–10). Whenever the church has suffered persecution, true believers have been betrayed into the hands of the oppressors, often by members of their own families who value safety and prosperity above devotion and fidelity. Feigned love and friendship become means of treachery. That is also the time when genuine loyalty proves itself, often at a high price.

The **reckless** person is careless, negligent, and rash. This characteristic is not as serious as most of the others and often is manifested unconsciously. The self-centered person is so preoccupied with his own interests that he simply does not notice people and things around him that are not related to those egotistic concerns.

It goes without saying that the self-lover is **conceited**, having a much higher view of himself than is justified. *Tuphōo* (**conceited**) has the root meaning of being enveloped in smoke, or beclouded, so that what is outside one’s circumscribed world of self cannot be seen.

Paul advised Timothy in his first letter that an elder, or overseer, should “not [be] a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil” (1 Tim. 3:6). Later in the same letter the apostle states that conceit is a sure mark of a false teacher, again certifying the inescapable connection between wrong doctrine and wrong living. A false teacher who “advocates a different doctrine, and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness,... is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions” (1 Tim. 6:3–4).

The final sinful characteristic of dangerous false teachers given in this extensive but not exhaustive list is their being **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God**. **Lovers of pleasure** translates the single Greek word *philēdonos*, a compound of *philos* (Loving) and *hēdonē* (**pleasure**), from which we get “hedonist” and “hedonism.” Along with all his other sins, the false teacher is a self-loving, pleasure-mad hedonist.

It should be noted that **pleasure**, especially in this context, is not limited to the desire for comfort, fine food, sexual satisfaction, and other indulgences normally associated with hedonism. As already mentioned, a self-centered person also derives perverse pleasure from such things as malicious gossip, brutality, and treachery. His satisfaction comes, in part, from the pain and misery he sadistically inflicts on others, including parents and supposed friends.

This depraved **pleasure** is not loved *more than* God, but **rather than... God**. In other words, the true God has no place at all in the thinking and living of a false teacher or of anyone who is

self-centered. Jesus told Nicodemus, “And this is the judgment, that the light is come into the world, and men loved the darkness *rather than* the light; for their deeds were evil” (John 3:19, emphasis added).

Those who love **pleasure rather than... God** cannot possibly obey either the first or the second great commandments. They cannot truly love God or their neighbors, and have no genuine desire to do so. Jesus made clear that a person can have only one god, and for the self-lover, self is god. Satan has never had a shortage of false gods with which to tempt man, and by far the most useful to his cause is the god of self. Lucifer fell from his exalted and magnificent state in heaven because he became his own god, and since that time he has endeavored to entice fallen mankind into the same form of idolatry.

CHARLATANS OF RELIGION

holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; and avoid such men as these. (3:5)

Leaders in the church who foster false systems of belief and corrupt standards of living not only are lovers of self but also are charlatans of religion.

Form comes from translates *morphsis*, which refers to outward shape and appearance, such as that of a silhouette, which is an undetailed outline or shadow of something. Like the unbelieving scribes and Pharisees, lovers of self are concerned only about the outward **form**, about “the outside of the cup and of the dish,” while “inside they are full of robbery and self-indulgence” (Matt. 23:25). They are religious fakes, phony religionists who masquerade as Christian leaders. They claim to be servants of God and teachers of His Word, but they are really servants of Satan and purveyors of his lies. Again like the scribes and Pharisees who opposed Jesus, they “are of [their] father the devil, and [they] want to do the desires of [their] father. He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature; for he is a liar, and the father of lies” (John 8:44).

That false teachers hold **to a form of godliness**, that is, an outline of Christianity without substance, makes them all the more dangerous, because immature members in the church will accept their paganized Christianity as the true faith. Like most of the other vile traits Paul has just mentioned, this one was not new among God’s people but was regularly recurrent in ancient Israel. Ezekiel warned against such impostors, who “do the lustful desires expressed by their mouth, and [whose] heart goes after their gain” (Ezek. 33:31). Paul warned Titus that such men “profess to know God, but by their deeds they deny Him, being detestable and disobedient, and worthless for any good deed” (Titus 1:16).

Satan is deceptive and subtle. He never tells the truth about anything, although he frequently tries to use a partial truth or a truth out of context to his advantage, as when he quoted Scripture to Jesus during the wilderness temptations (Matt. 4:6). And Satan’s most dangerous attacks against God’s people come from within the church by means of false preachers and teachers who pretend to speak for God.

The deception of such false leaders is seen in their denying the true, gracious, life-giving **power** of the true gospel. Although it is presented in many persuasive ways, theirs is an empty, worthless, damning message that keeps its adherents out of the kingdom. Ungodly leaders have no love for God and no love for His Word or for His people, only love for themselves.

True believers are given a standing order to **avoid such men as these** and reject the false doctrines they teach and the false standards they live by. And because the verb *apotreō* (Avoid) is here in the middle voice, the idea is to *make yourself* turn away. Regardless of how convincing a false idea may appear or how sincere a false teacher may seem to be, we are to take ourselves by the scruff of the neck, as it were, and make ourselves **avoid such men as these**. We should **avoid** and keep on avoiding **such men**, whenever, wherever, and however they may confront us. Whether their heresy is sacramentalism, rationalism, ecumenism, subjectivism, experientialism, mysticism, pragmatism, or any of countless others, both they and their ungodly ideas are to be rejected. As with counterfeit money, it is not necessary to understand every false detail of a teaching but only necessary to recognize that it does not match the real thing, namely, God's Word. Whether a counterfeit is a well done fraud or a shoddy fake, it is equally worthless.

There are three guidelines for judging whether a teacher or preacher is from God. The first thing to measure is his creed, the specific beliefs and ideas he propounds. Is Scripture, the whole of Scripture, the basis for everything he believes and does, or does he use certain Bible passages selectively to bolster unbiblical ideas? If his creed does not measure up to Scripture, or if he belittles the importance of doctrine, nothing else about him matters, because he obviously does not speak for God and has not been sent by Him.

The second guideline to examine is personal character and its reflection in his lifestyle. Even if a person's professed doctrine is orthodox, ungodly living betrays a godless heart. Godly belief always produces godly living.

A third measure of a godly leader is his converts, his most ardent followers. If his devotees are weak, confused, or unconcerned about doctrine, and if their living does not reflect biblical standards, the leader himself almost certainly is not godly, because godly leaders will not claim or be satisfied with ungodly converts. Christ honoring, Scripture-loving teachers and preachers will produce Christ-honoring, Scripture loving converts. Religious charlatans, on the other hand, will produce converts in their own image.

CAPTORS OF THE WEAK

For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. (3:6–7)

A third identifying mark of false teachers is their capturing of the weak. This particular characteristic does not apply to all false teachers but is found **among them**. *Endunō* (**enter**) carries the idea of stealth and therefore of creeping in undetected. Like all ungodly leaders who come from within the church, these men go under false colors. Jude wrote of "certain persons [who had] crept in unnoticed, those who were long beforehand marked out for this

condemnation, ungodly persons who turn the grace of our God into licentiousness and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” (Jude 4).

A favorite target of these particular false teachers is **weak women [who] are weighed down with sins, [and are] led on by various impulses**. Because they are deep into **sins** and ungodly **impulses** that have **weighed [them] down** emotionally and spiritually, the weak women Paul describes here are especially vulnerable to being religiously seduced by false teachers. They are weak in truth and weak in virtue, and they feel the heavy weight of their sin and the guilt it brings. And just as wrong doctrine leads to wrong living, so can their wrong living easily lead to embracing wrong doctrine. Just as Eve was the first target, as the weaker sex (1 Peter 3:7), so Satan continues to target women as his initial captives. Cults not only are often spawned by women, but women are the most numerous and devout adherents.

Often moving from one false teacher or group to another, such women are **always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth**. If they have been reared in the church, they are especially susceptible to ideas that purport to be Christian. But their ignorance of Scripture and their sinful living make them utterly undiscerning and defenseless against unbiblical and ungodly precepts. They are continually learning about everything except **the knowledge of the truth**. Because legalism deals only in outward performance, it is very attractive. Many such women, and men as well, are glad to find a way that promises to make them right with God simply by adhering to certain outward forms and conforming to certain behavioral standards.

Epignōsis (**knowledge**) refers to deep understanding, comprehension, and discernment, not merely awareness of factual truths. It is the **knowledge of the truth** that God wants all of His children to have and for which our Lord interceded on our behalf: “Sanctify them in the truth; Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). In fact, God “desires *all men* to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” (1 Tim. 2:4, emphasis added; cf. 2 Tim. 2:25; 2 Peter 3:9). Reflecting that divine love, Paul sought the salvation even of those who were “in opposition” to the gospel, hoping that, “perhaps God [would] grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth” (2 Tim. 2:25).

OPPOSERS OF THE TRUTH

And just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected as regards the faith. But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, as also that of those two came to be. (3:8–9)

Although **Jannes and Jambres** are not mentioned in Exodus or anywhere else in the Old Testament, they may have been among the magicians in the pharaoh’s court who duplicated many of the miracles the Lord performed through Moses. Because **Jannes** perhaps means “he who seduces” and **Jambres** “he who makes rebellion,” those may have been symbolic names given to these men at a later time. Jewish tradition holds that they pretended to convert to Judaism in order to subvert Moses’ divine assignment to liberate Israel from Egypt, that they led in making and worshiping the golden calf while Moses was on Mt. Sinai receiving the Law from God, and that they were slaughtered by the Levites along with the other idolaters (See Ex.

32). That possibility is consistent with Paul's warning about false leaders who corrupt the church from within. **Just as** those two men **opposed Moses** in his teaching and leading ancient Israel, so **these men** in Ephesus **also opposed the truth** of the gospel.

If **Jannes and Jambres** were indeed among the Egyptian magicians, Paul may be warning that, similarly, **these men** in the early church also might perform magical feats. They may have been like the "false Christs and false prophets [who] will arise" in the last days, "and will show great signs and wonders, so as to mislead, if possible, even the elect" (Matt. 24:24; cf. 2 Thess. 2:9).

Those false teachers were **men of depraved mind**. The Greek word behind **depraved mind** is a perfect passive participle, indicating an established, continuous, and unalterable condition. It was of such reprobates that Paul declared, "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper,... and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them" (Rom. 1:28, 32).

Because they had rejected the faith, they were themselves **rejected** by God **as regards the faith**. *Adokimos* (Rejected) was used of metals that did not pass the test of purity and were discarded. The word also was used of counterfeits of various sorts. The fact that the men were rejected as regards the faith makes clear that Paul was speaking of individuals within the church who claimed to be Christians but were not.

The apostle admonished members of the church in Corinth, "Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you—unless indeed you fail the test [*adokimos*]?" (2 Cor. 13:5; cf. vv. 6–7). Paul used the word in his previous letter to that church, expressing fear that "possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified [*adokimos*]" (1 Cor. 9:27). He was not, of course, speaking of being disqualified from salvation, as were the men who were **rejected as regards the faith**, but of being disqualified as a usable instrument, a vessel of honor, of the Lord in ministry.

Paul assured Timothy that, despite the great turmoil and damage they cause the church, such men **will not make further progress**. In other words, they can seriously harm the church and can prevent many unsaved from becoming saved; but they cannot rob His redeemed people of salvation. Jesus Himself assures us that "the gates of Hades shall not overpower" His church (Matt. 16:18), and that "all that the Father gives Me shall come to Me, and the one who comes to Me I will certainly not cast out" (John 6:37). Until the Lord returns, "false Christs and false prophets will arise, and will show signs and wonders, in order, if possible, to lead the elect astray" (Mark 13:22). But they **will not make further progress** in their evil schemes.

Many times throughout history, the church has been so fiercely persecuted that believers have feared not only for their own lives but for the very existence of the church. But God has a boundary that pro-scribes the work of Satan, not only in the church but in the world. He is on a divine tether that he can neither break nor lengthen.

Sooner or later the **folly** of false teachers and preachers becomes obvious to all of God's people, **as also** did the folly of **those two**, Jannes and Jambres, in ancient Israel. While these "evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (v. 13),

their plunge into the depth of sin and error, which deceives them and other ungodly men, ceases to deceive the people of God, who see the error clearly.

This passage holds several lessons, explicit or implicit, for believers today. First, we must realize that the church is in spiritual warfare, a warfare that will intensify as Christ's second coming draws nearer. Second, we must be doctrinally discerning, testing every message that claims to be Christian against God's Word, as did the God-fearing Jews of Berea, who "received the word with great eagerness," but carefully examined "the Scriptures daily, to see whether these things" that Paul and Silas preached "were so" (Acts 17:11).

Third, we must be pure and holy, vessels of honor for the Lord to use. Christ's own righteousness is our protection against false teachers, false doctrine, and ungodly living. Fourth, we must be patient, a difficult task for many Christians today who want instant answers to their questions and immediate resolution of their problems. We know the ultimate outcome is certain, that victory already belongs to Christ and His church, but the actual time of victory may be further away than we would like to think. In the meanwhile, our responsibility is to remain faithful (See 1 Cor. 4:2).

The church today faces times of unparalleled difficulty and danger. As extraordinary opportunities for spreading the gospel increase with rapidity after the breakup of much of the former Communist world, attacks on that church are also increasing with great speed. Heresy, apostasy, self-will, and their accompanying moral decadence are engulfing the evangelical church. Like cancer cells that rebel against the body, these evils are in rebellion against God by corrupting and weakening the church, the body of Christ. Also like cancer cells, the evils multiply rapidly and choke out and destroy normal cells. Much like white cells in the blood, which will not attack cancerous cells because they are identified with the body, many naive and careless church leaders take no action against corruption in the church simply because the corruption hides behind the guise of orthodoxy. Simply put, much of the church is in rebellion against the Lord.

In the days ahead, the escalation of violence against the kingdom of God by the kingdom of darkness will intensify. As in any warfare, there will be times of relative calm, but God's Word assures us of ever-increasing wickedness, which will culminate in the appearance of Antichrist, the ultimate deceiver and enemy of God except for Satan himself. Like the wolves that would come into the flock at Ephesus from within and try to destroy it (Acts 20:29–30), Antichrist, along with other false christs, false apostles, and false prophets, will come from within Christendom.

Before the Antichrist appears, Paul informs us, the great apostasy will come first, which, by definition, is a falling away, or defection, from God and His truth. At the peak of his power, Antichrist, "the man of lawlessness,... the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself above every so called god or object of worship, [will take] his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God,... the one whose coming is in accord with the activity of Satan, with all power and signs and false wonders" (2 Thess. 2:2–5, 9). We know that his defeat is certain, because "the Lord will slay [him] with the breath of His mouth and bring [him] to an end by the appearance of His coming" (v. 8). But before that final defeat is accomplished—before and during the great apostasy and before the Lord takes His own to Himself at the Rapture—the church will continue to experience expanded assaults from the adversary.

Even now, the attacks against God Himself and against His truth and His righteousness come from so many sides and in so many forms that it is hard for His people to know which front to defend. Discerning Christians are hard put to know which falsehood to refute or moral compromise to oppose. No believer, no matter how gifted and willing, is able to fight on all fronts. But we are not called to win God's battles single-handedly and are presumptuous and foolish to try. He does, however, expect us to yield to Him all that we are and have and to be willing to be used wherever and in whatever way He leads.⁷

⁷ MacArthur, J. F., Jr. (1995). [2 Timothy](#) (pp. 103–122). Chicago: Moody Press.