

## Are These The Last Days? (Part 2)

by **Richard T. Ritenbaugh**

***Forerunner*, "Prophecy Watch," December 1996**

As complex and anxious as our lives are, the first four seals (Matthew 24:4-7; Revelation 6:1-8) can seem somewhat impersonal as signs of the end. Wars, famines, disease and death may happen to other people in other places, but often they do not hit very close to home. These signs are often just intellectual knowledge, not experiential. We believe them because we know they happen, not because we have ever actually encountered them. We have our own problems that often seem to dwarf the world's state of affairs.

Maybe we can get a better sense of how deep we are into the last days if we examine something closer—something we are either part of or closely associated with because of children or grandchildren. This "something" is Generation X, also called the Baby Busters, the Boomerang Generation, the 13th Generation, the MTV Generation and the New Lost Generation.

### **Attitudes of Generation X**

Just as the signs of Matthew 24 give us indications of the last days, so do the attitudes listed by Paul in II Timothy 3:1-5:

But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

He says, "Know this!" because it is important in identifying the signs of the times. When he finishes with his litany, he writes, "Have nothing to do with such attitudes!"

Unfortunately, we can see these attitudes in today's youth. This article does not intend to ridicule but to analyze them. Nor does it intend to paint everyone between 15 and 35 with the same brush. The people under scrutiny are in the world. Most young people in God's church—hopefully—do not fit the general type, but it may be surprising to learn how many of this world's attitudes have rubbed off on us and our families.

According to the authors of the book, *13th Gen: Abort, Retry, Ignore, Fail?*, everyone born between 1961-1981 belongs to the 13th Generation, the thirteenth since the birth of the eldest of America's Founding Fathers (e.g., Benjamin Franklin). The authors, Neil Howe and Bill Strauss, admit that their findings are generalities. Not every person fits the mold of a 13er, as they call members of this generation, but 13ers typically follow certain trends, attitudes and ways of thinking.

Sadly, II Timothy 3 lists many of them. Here are some examples of how these attitudes appear in society today:

### **Lovers of Themselves**

This attitude heads the list because it is the root cause of all the others. We could also use the terms "selfish," "self-centered" and "self-absorbed." These are the young people of "Beverly Hills, 90210," "The Cosby Show," and "The Simpsons." Their selfishness has many different facets:

**Clothing:** the grunge look, the 70's-retro look, the designer-GQ-Mademoiselle look.

**Body Sculpting:** steroids for bulking up and anorexia/bulimia for slimming down.

**Body Accessories:** rings in the ears, nose, navel, nipples, tongue, lips, eyebrows and other places; tattooing.

**A Soaring Suicide Rate:** Suicide is a totally self-centered act. Tragically, 10% of adolescent boys and 18% of adolescent girls admit they have attempted suicide, and one million of them succeeded. In the 13er movie *Heathers* a teacher says, "Whether to kill yourself or not is one of the most important decisions a teenager can make."

### Lovers of Money

David Leavitt, a 13er writing in *Esquire*, reasons, "It's okay to be selfish, as long as you're up front about it. . . . We trust ourselves, and money. Period." Their greed has put many of them into debt. Two 13ers, Anne Gowen and Sean Piccoli, write about their contemporaries in a *Washington Times* article, "A Generation Lost in Time":

They are little Drexel Burnhams, little S&Ls: free-spending in the '80s, when they got their first taste of plastic; broke now. . . . Their parents are like ATMs, hit up regularly to pay for plane tickets and help tame credit-card debt.

### Boasters, Proud

Daniel Smith-Rowsey, a 13er, brags in *Newsweek*:

We're street smart, David Letterman clever, whizzes at Nintendo. We can name more beers than Presidents. Pop culture is, to us, more attractive than education.

In fact, the authors of *13th Gen* say that 13ers proudly think of themselves as the "clean up" generation, out to right the wrongs and clean up the messes of their elders. "We're not trying to change things. We're trying to fix things. We are the generation that is going to renovate America. We are going to be its carpenters and janitors," says 21-year-old Anne McCord of Portland, Oregon.

### Blasphemers

Modern Bible translations render this word as "railers," "defamers," "abusive," "contemptuous," and "given to bitter words." Who do 13ers rail against, defame and abuse? Baby Boomers, who, they say, ruined everything for them. One 13er vents:

Drugs, crime, sexual diseases and family stress is all stuff you [Baby Boomers] blame us for, when you are the ones that raised them all to an art form. You blame young folks for having no concept of the higher ideals in life, when you're the ones who trashed most of them. . . . Your gnatlike attention span has produced a culture of ideas that is far junkier than any video game we could ever waste an hour playing.

### Disobedient to Parents

Some translations read, "disrespectful to parents." Growing up, this generation faced the highest divorce and abortion rates ever in America. They were the latchkey kids whom the television baby-sat. Their parents indulged them with expensive clothes, cars, stereos and games because they felt guilty for spending so little time with them. As a result, most 13ers have no respect for parents, and many feel they know more and are more mature.

### **Unthankful**

13ers appreciate neither what their parents have provided for them nor the tried-and-true methods for prosperity that have a long and successful history. Howe and Strauss write:

Twenty years ago, the biggest fights between adolescents and their parents were over global "values" involving politics, war, and religion. Today, surveys show their biggest quarrels are over "how they spend their money" and "what they do with their leisure time." . . . 13ers collectively lack that strong attachment to the familial, educational, and economic institutions that once helped move older generations from here to there on the ladder of adult success.

### **Unholy**

Other translations have, "without piety," "irreverent," "having no religion," "irreligious," "wicked." Pollster George H. Gallup reports, "Religion ranks behind friends, home, school, music, and TV as factors teens believe are having the greatest influence on their generation."

13ers make up a large portion of those who are fleeing churches and taking up witchcraft, New Age religions or becoming totally secular. A professor at Cal-Berkeley says, "TV is their collective dream machine, their temple." An ethics report reads: "An unprecedented proportion of today's youth lack commitment to core moral values like honesty, personal responsibility, respect for others and civic duty."

This is the generation most heavily influenced by the baby boom idea that "God is dead." They *do* believe in sound bites, rap lyrics, and advertising slogans that become their mottoes: "Just do it." "Do the Dew." "Life is short. Play hard." "All the sugar, twice the caffeine." "Life is a sport. Drink it up." "Image is everything." "Why ask why?"

### **Unloving**

Other translations read, "callous," "inhuman," "without natural affection," "hard-hearted." This is the generation of inner-city gangs, Neo-Nazis, carjackings, and Lyle and Eric Menendez. They were raised on Dirty Harry, Rambo and the Terminator. Syndicated columnist William Raspberry writes:

Their casual acceptance of violence, the attitude (often reinforced by their parents) that any means is okay to get what you want, and the fatalism that kills their hope of the future is turning them into a generation of animals.

Quotations and statistics can easily be found to support the ten other attitudes Paul lists in II Timothy 3. For now, it will suffice to read what 13ers say about themselves:

- » We are clueless yet wizened, too unopinionated to voice concern, purposefully enigmatic and indecisive.
- » Mine is a generation perfectly willing to admit its contemptible qualities.
- » We are an impatient, quick and dirty generation.
- » Our generation is probably the worst since the Protestant Reformation. It's barbaric.
- » It's only wrong if you get caught.

## What Do We Do?

Are we living in the last days? Are the attitudes of the present generation consistent with what Paul describes in II Timothy 3? Very much so! When we make a sober assessment of the times, we find that it is dangerous and evil out there!

- » Gangs, drugs and murder are everywhere. There is no place to hide! Even small towns far from urban centers—like Mena, Arkansas, which authorities discovered to be a major drug port of entry—can be centers of drug and gang activity.
- » People seldom dare to be Good Samaritans anymore for fear of being robbed, assaulted or even killed for their efforts.
- » Americans abort millions of babies every year.
- » Racism is flaring up all over the U.S.
- » Stalkings, drive-by shootings, carjackings, and home invasions have become commonplace.

What do we do? We cannot fight it either physically or politically. God forbids that because it is not our world. We can recognize it for what it is—a sign of the times—and do what God says we must do.

John 5:1-15 tells the story of Jesus healing a man who had been infirm 38 years. Notice what He tells the man after He heals him: "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worst thing come upon you" (verse 14). Spiritually, He says to us: "See, I've called you out of this evil world and healed you. You must now stop sinning—repent of your wicked ways—lest you return to the world and end up worse than when you started!"

What is this "worse thing" that could come upon us? In II Peter 2:19-22; 3:1-7, Peter lays out a sequence of events that shows striking similarity to what has happened in the greater church of God in recent years. The "worse thing" is the Lake of Fire! Have we forgotten that?

But before that, another time of fiery trial will come upon those who fail to prove to God whose side they are on: the Great Tribulation! Jesus says in Revelation 3:10 this "hour of trial" comes "upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth."

The ultimate trial facing us in this age is just before us! Have we built the kind of character that will endure the fiery trials of the Tribulation (I Corinthians 3:12-17)? If not, we need to get building! And we should be trying to build with gold, silver and precious stones!

Notice how Christ counsels the church just before His return:

**Ephesus:** Repent and get back to what you learned and did at the beginning (Revelation 2:5).

**Smyrna:** Do not fear suffering, imprisonment, persecution. Be faithful to death. Endure to the end (2:10)!

**Pergamos:** Repent, or else you will face the sword (2:16)!

**Thyatira:** Repent, repent, repent! Or else you will go into tribulation (2:20-24)!

**Sardis:** Remember what you were taught. Hold fast and repent! Watch for signs of His coming (Revelation 3:3)!

**Philadelphia:** Hold fast! Maintain your current standing (3:11)!

**Laodicea:** Buy refined and tested character, holiness and righteousness, and God's Spirit to see the truth and obediently do it. REPENT (3:18-19)!

His counsel is clear! Jesus Christ is coming back **SOON**. We have no time to waste! It is crunch time, the gun lap, the last hurrah! Besides, we never know when God will allow us to die—maybe tomorrow! If we should die soon, would He account us worthy to stand before Him when He returns (Luke 21:36)?

### **Turn to God!**

The prophet Joel writes of Christ's army when He returns, and he describes the terrible fate of God's enemies. Joel's reaction to his vision is alarming. He immediately implores us to repent (Joel 2:12-17)! Call a fast! Weep and mourn! Turn to God with all your heart!

Peter also brings us up short when he writes, "If the righteous one is *scarcely saved*, where will the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (I Peter 4:18). He tells us in his next epistle what we should do:

Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness? . . . Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless. . . . You therefore, beloved, since you know these things beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked; but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (II Peter 3:11, 14, 17-18)

We truly have been blessed to "know these things beforehand," and it is our spiritual duty to put Peter's advice into practice! It is no time to rest, or even to feel spiritually comfortable. Paul warns, "Therefore, since a promise remains of entering His rest, let us fear lest any of you seem to have come short of it" (Hebrews 4:1).

Rest comes after work. We must now commit ourselves, as Christ did, to "work the works of Him who [called us] while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work" (John 9:4). Only then will we enter His rest for all eternity!