

Facing Times Of Stress: Lovers Of Self

Lovers of Self

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Few people of any kind of religious background doubt that we are at the end of an age. The Christians, Muslims, Eastern religions, and the New Age religions—virtually every religion (including the Evolutionists and the Globalists)—all have some form of prophetic teaching that predicts the end of the present world system. There is a plethora of scenarios on how the end plays out.

In the context of Hebrews 1:1-2, we are told that "the last days" is a period of time that actually began with the life and ministry of Christ on this earth. However, the New Testament elsewhere indicates that "the last days" refers principally, but not exclusively, to the state of the church before the coming of Christ.

These are to be 'perilous times,' 'difficult to deal with,' 'times of great stress.' People believe in the 'doctrines of demons.' This world has become a demonic junkyard. We are in those days now!

Self-love is the dominant characteristic of the last days. This self-love produces a greedy, covetous and arrogant attitude that we see prevalent in society today. True affection has almost disappeared; unnatural affection prevails. We live in a reckless age, whether you look at the speed of travel, or the waste of money, or the carelessness of human lives. This society is a self-destructive culture of death, and Satan is smiling all of the way.

Sin is the most stressful of all things! And, we are surrounded by it. A major factor in facing these times of stress is in dealing with, and resisting and overcoming, the human proclivity toward 'lovers of self' in a totally narcissistic society. This society does affect us as members of God's church. Thankfully we have God's strength to be able to resist that. Nevertheless it has its effect on us, and our families.

The apostle Paul was warring with the influence of this type of society in his day; and as he lay in his prison cell, he was still preoccupied with the future of the church and the gospel message. When he wrote chapter three of his second letter to the young pastor, Timothy, his mind was dwelling on the evil of the times. He was concerned especially about Timothy's diffidence—his reticence.

Timothy seemed so weak compared to the strong opposition from the world and the

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false teachers. It seemed so uncharacteristic that a man with a seemingly weak personality or disposition would be called during such a negative situation to contend for the truth.

So Paul vividly described the condition of society and its influence on the church, and against this background he calls on Timothy to rise above his normally subdued temperament—to continue faithful to the truth he has learned.

II Timothy 3:1-2 But know this, that in the last days perilous times [or, times of stress] will come: For men will be lovers of themselves...

Paul introduces this chapter with an emphatic command to 'know this'—to 'understand this.'

The existence of opposition to God's truth was obvious. Paul had been arrested, chained and imprisoned because of his own loyalty to it. Almost everyone in Asia Minor had rejected him, as Timothy was well aware.

Earlier in his letter, Paul urged Timothy not to be ashamed of the gospel, but to take his share of suffering as Christ's good soldier; and he reminded him that he had to persevere with Christ if he hoped one day to reign with Him. Paul warned him that behind the 'word-battles,' 'godless chatter,' and 'stupid and senseless controversies' spread by false teachers, there prowls the evil Satan himself.

So why does Paul enjoin Timothy 'to know,' and to 'understand' what he already knows? Timothy grew up in the church, and he knew that there were problems.

It seems he wanted Timothy to understand that opposition to the truth is not a passing situation, but a permanent characteristic of the age. It may be that he was concerned that Timothy was, and would be, over-optimistic; hoping that if he lay low for a while, the storm of opposition would pass.

Whatever Timothy thought, or hoped, Paul was not going to let him rest. And just as Timothy was to 'know' and 'understand' this danger, we should be very clear about the same dangers and troubles today that will weigh us down if we do not stand firm in the truth of God.

Next Paul tells him, "in the last days perilous times will come."

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So Paul refers to 'the last days.' It may seem natural to apply this term to the present, or days immediately preceding the end when Christ returns. But biblical usage does not allow us to use this term 'last days' exclusively to the time just before Christ's return, because it is sometimes used for the last days of a contemporary period. Here is an example:

The letter to the Hebrews begins with an assertion that the God who had spoken to the fathers through the prophets had 'in these last days' spoken to us through His Son.

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

There Paul is speaking to himself, as well as to the members of the church at that time, and also to us today.

So, the early church was living in a type of the last days; and we also are living in the last days. Jesus Christ, God's Son, ushered the last days in. What follows in II Timothy 3, is a description of the present, not just the future. These things that we are going to read in II Timothy, are for us today, and are very important for us.

In a sense, to the church, Paul depicts the whole period elapsing between the first and second coming of Christ. Under the last days he includes the universal condition of the church.

It is plain to see this from the fact that what Paul gives Timothy here is not predictions about some future age that he will not himself live to see, but instructions relating to his present ministry, including the command to avoid certain people.

Similarly, the backsliders and the scoffers who belong to '*the last days*' or the '*latter times*' and are referred to in I Timothy 4:1, II Peter 3:3, and Jude 18, are regarded as already active when Paul, Peter and Jude were writing.

Timothy was already living in '*the last days*' to which Paul is referring. And so are we. They may get worse in the future, but even now the times are bad and dangerous. 'Times of stress' are certainly not unique to our time. The church has had to deal with such times off and on, and the gates of hell have never prevailed against the church, because God has given us strength, and He always has as long as His church has

existed.

In these last days, Paul adds, there will come 'times of stress;' or 'times of difficulty;' or 'perilous times;' or, 'terrible times;' depending which translation you read.

What Timothy is to understand about the last days is not that they are uniformly and continuously evil, but that they will include—as the Amplified Version has—'perilous times of great stress and trouble.' Church history confirms that this has been so.

Regarding, these periods Paul labels 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 or menacing. These times of stress are very serious times for us to deal with as we are beginning to realize more and more.

The Greek word 'chalepos' 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 demonic possessions who were as savage and untamed as wild beasts, and whom Matthew describes as '*so fierce [chalepos] that no one could pass that way* (Matthew 8:28).

This gives us an idea of the kind of seasons that 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 understand that it is men who are responsible for the menacing time periods that the church has to bear. These are evil men that are under Satan's influence and deception, men whose nature is perverted to say the least.

These are people whose behavior is self-centered and immoral, whose mind is hostile toward God and His law (Romans 8:7), and who spread evil, heresy and dead religion in the church. This is also speaking of those who have crept in unawares into the church.

In summary, Paul tells us that we are living in the last days; that these days will include periods of danger and stress; that they will be the result of the activities of bad men; that we are to understand this; that we are to be very clear about it, and that we are to be prepared.

The rest of this first paragraph of II Timothy 3 is devoted to a thorough portrayal of these

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self-loving people. Specifically, Paul delineates their moral conduct (verses 2-4), their religious observance (verse 5) and their proselytizing zeal (verses 6-9).

II Timothy 3:2-9 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! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

There are those that are in the church teaching heresies, but it says that they will progress no further.

In verses 2-4, Paul uses no fewer than nineteen expressions that describe the wicked people who are responsible for the 'times of stress.' For our purposes today it might be a little too tedious to analyze the portrait too minutely and to define each term separately.

But notice right away the first and last phrases used. The first says that they are '*lovers of themselves*,' '*lovers of self*' [Greek *philautoi*] and the last (in verse 4) that they are not, as they should be, '*lovers of God*.'

Interestingly, four of the nineteen expressions are compounded with 'love' [Greek *phil?*] within the original Greek terms, 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*,' and '*lovers of pleasure*.'

In between these four words come fifteen other expressions that are almost entirely descriptive of the breakdown of people's relations with each other.

The first three expressions elaborate on the meaning of self-love. People who love themselves more than anyone else become: 'proud,' 'arrogant' and 'abusive.'

The first word "boasters" also means 'braggarts' or 'swashbucklers,' and the second

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word "proud" also means 'haughty' or 'disdainful,' which naturally leads to the third word "blasphemers" which also means 'slandering,' because inevitably those who have an exaggerated opinion of themselves look down with contempt upon others and speak evil of them.

The next five expressions can be grouped together because they seem to refer to family life, and especially to the attitude that some young people adopt towards parents. The Greek words are all negative in form and begin with the prefix a-, like our English words beginning with un- or dis-, as if to emphasize the dreadful absence of good qualities.

The first two expressions are "*disobedient to their parents*," who scripture says children are to honor and— at least during their minority—obey, and the word "unthankful" meaning 'ungrateful,' devoid of even a basic appreciation.

The next word is translated "unholy" (Greek anosioi), whose antonyms are: 'devout' or 'pious' towards God. But like the similar word—meaning 'reverent'—it sometimes means 'loving respect.'

The next word is translated "unloving," also meaning 'utterly lacking in normal affections,' or 'heartless.'

The last word of this group of five is "unforgiving," also meaning 'implacable' or 'irreconcilable.' It describes a situation in which 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 characterized by: obedience, gratitude, respect, affection and reasonableness. In 'times of stress' all five are lacking, or totally absent.

The remaining seven words of the list are obviously wider in scope than just the family. The first is "slanderers" (Greek diaboloi, literally meaning 'devils'), translated 'backbiters' and 'scandalmongers' elsewhere. They are guilty of the sin of speaking evil against others, especially behind their back.

They are also "without self-control" meaning 'wasteful and immoral' or 'ungovernable.' The next word is "brutal" meaning 'fierce' or 'untamed.' The next word is "despisers of good" meaning 'haters of good' or 'strangers to all goodness.'

The next expression about these people in the last days is that they are "traitors" also meaning 'treacherous' (this was used in Luke 6:16, of the traitor Judas). The next word

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is "headstrong" also meaning 'reckless' (entirely thoughtless in word and action); next, "haughty" meaning 'swollen with conceit' or 'puffed up' (implying: self-important, opinionated). Thus we are back to the basic evil with which the hideous list began, and that is "pride."

And all this unsocial, anti-social behavior—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-centeredness—it is the consequence of a narcissistic lifestyle and mentality!

The self-centered woman/the self-centered man is like the porcupine when it rolls itself up in a ball, presents only sharp spines to those outside its ball, keeping at the same time all the soft and warm fur for itself inside its zone.

If a person is proud, arrogant and haughty, of course he will never sacrifice himself to serve others. God's order, as plainly declared in His immutable law, is that we love Him first, with all our heart, body, mind and strength, our neighbor next, and our self last.

If we reverse the order of the first and third, putting self first and God last, our neighbor in the middle is bound to suffer. We see how critical that it is that we put self in the right location, and God in His right location, always first.

So the root of the trouble in 'times of stress' is that people are 'utterly self-centered,' 'lovers of self.'

Only the inspired written word of God offers a radical solution to this problem—because only God promises a new creation and new birth, which involves being totally transformed. It requires a total reorientation in mind and conduct that makes us fundamentally God-centered instead of self-centered.

Then, when God is first and self is last—we love humankind as God does, and we seek to give and serve like Him, and like our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and our Father.

II Timothy 3:5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!

It may be that there has never been such a time as today when people such as these, who lack the common decencies of civilized society let alone of God's law, are often also religious. Nevertheless, in the history of humankind, religion and morality have

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been more often divorced than married.

Scripture bears an unwavering testimony to this fact. Prophets of ancient Israel and Judah warned of this very thing as well:

Amos 2:8 They lie down by every altar on clothes taken in pledge, And drink the wine of the condemned in the house of their god.

In other words, in the 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. And, they took advantage of those who had been fined unjustly.

Isaiah deplored the same thing in Judah. God inspired him to confront the people with their false religion and immorality.

Isaiah 1:12-17 When you come to appear before Me, Who has required this from your hand, To trample My courts? Bring no more futile sacrifices; Incense is an abomination to Me. The New Moons, the Sabbaths, and the calling of assemblies—I cannot endure iniquity and the sacred meeting. Your New Moons and your appointed feasts My soul hates; They are a trouble to Me, I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands, I will hide My eyes from you; Even though you make many prayers, I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood. "Wash yourselves, make yourselves clean; Put away the evil of your doings from before My eyes. Cease to do evil, Learn to do good; Seek justice, Rebuke the oppressor; Defend the fatherless, Plead for the widow.

Isaiah's point is that the people assumed that merely by offering sacrifices at the altar they would be made ceremonially clean before God. They thought their mere presence was enough to make their worship acceptable to God. Even multiple sacrifices are meaningless and therefore do not please God when the "worshiper" does not bring his life into conformity with God's standards. Over the years in the church we have seen those that do not live righteously during the week, but put on righteousness on the Sabbath day.

They come before God, and they feel that they have met their obligation to God, and that they are clean. But, the right attitude is not there and their works of faith are not.

God called the worshipping at their observances evil, because they were carried out hypocritically, with sinful hearts. So those gatherings, rather than pleasing God, were an obnoxious burden to Him.

In addition, the people's numerous prayers were ineffective because of their guilt. The words '*spread out your hands*' represented asking for help. But those hands were full of blood. By treating the needy unfairly, the people were like a murderer spreading out his bloodstained hands to God in prayer.

This spiritual condition made Judah's religious services absurd. Obviously God would never listen to and answer such hypocritical prayers. Inward righteousness must accompany outward good works for that service to mean anything to God. Faith must be accompanied by works. Isaiah is speaking there to what we would consider to be worldly Christians, those who considered themselves religious, but what I am talking about is the same thing but adding to that these influences do influence us in God's church. We have to be aware of them, and we have to be cautious.

Jesus Christ had to confront the ultra-religious Pharisees with a very similar complaint. He pointed out to His disciples that the Pharisees say one thing and do not do it or, do another.

Matthew 23:1-6 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. "Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. "For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. "But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and enlarge the borders of their garments. "They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues.

We can actually transfer this description to our political leaders today. The Pharisees made law after law after law, adding to God's law. They made God's law such a burden that the people were weighed so heavily under that burden that they could barely function, and they were miserable in their lives. We have the same thing happening today with our politicians and governments, and they are making law after law after law. So we are seeing the same exact attitude in the world, in our leadership, that Jesus and the disciples were dealing with with the Pharisees.

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Matthew 11-15, 23-28 "But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. "And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you shut up the kingdom of heaven against men; for you neither go in yourselves, nor do you allow those who are entering to go in. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you devour widows' houses, and for a pretense make long prayers. Therefore you will receive greater condemnation. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell as yourselves. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cumin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. "Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel! "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence. "Blind Pharisee, first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also. "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness. "Even so you also outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.

The Pharisees were meticulous in ensuring the ceremonial purity of their material cups, dishes and utensils, while what they ate and drank from their clean dishes had been acquired by unclean greed and dishonesty.

But even sadder was the fact that they appeared righteous on the outside, but in reality, they were hypocrites, whose hearts and minds were completely corrupt with hateful thoughts of murder, extortion, cheating and stealing. They were self-indulgent and thought that they were above the law.

Still the same trouble was prevalent among the people Paul describes in II Timothy 3:5, *"having a form of godliness but denying its power...."*

They evidently attended the worship services of the church. They sang the hymns, said 'amen' to the prayers and gave their offerings. They looked and sounded moral and religious. But it was form without power, outward show without inward reality, and religion without morals. It was 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, or works. That means that it is not such as the mainstream Christian churches do, here they preach morality, but they do not require that a person do that in their lives physically in their bodies. I believe that the Gnostics of Paul's time also believed the same thing. They believed that what you did in your body could be sinful, but you are not sinning in your mind. What a perverse way of thinking. Of course we know that you cannot separate the two.

No wonder Paul adds at the end of verse 5—"*...And from such people turn away!*" We are told to 'avoid such people.' Not that we are to avoid all contact with sinners. Jesus Himself had been 'the friend of publicans and sinners,' and if Timothy had shunned association with them he would have had to go right out of the world.

Paul explains this principle to the Corinthian members who had allowed flagrant sin into their midst.

I Corinthians 5:9-12 I wrote to you in my epistle not to keep company with sexually immoral people. Yet I certainly did not mean with the sexually immoral people of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or idolaters, since then you would need to go out of the world. But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner—not even to eat with such a person. For what have I to do with judging those also who are outside? Do you not judge those who are inside?

The apostle Paul was correcting the Corinthian congregation because they did not handle this situation on their own and remove that flagrant sinner from their midst.

In admonishing Timothy, in II Timothy 3, Paul described a kind of heathen mainstream Christianity; he means that within the church Timothy was to have nothing to do with what might be called 'religious sinners' that is flagrant sinners, and false teachers.

I Corinthians 5:5, 13 ...deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. But those who are outside God judges. Therefore "put away from yourselves the evil person."

I am not emphasizing here that we should be throwing people out of the church left and right or anything of that sort. We have to realize how important it is for each and every one of us not to be guilty of flagrant sin, where we are committing sins overtly and openly, and that it is a very serious infraction of God's law, and those people are not even to be kept in the congregation.

What we see there, in those descriptions of that type of individual in I Corinthians 5, is a person that has a love of self that controls them.

II Timothy 3:6-7 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

It is astonishing, in one sense, that the kind of people Paul has been describing, filled with godless self-love and malice, would not only profess religion, but include some who actively propagate it. Yet this was the case during Paul's time in the first century, and it has been true for almost two thousand years.

It seems that their proselytizing zeal is portrayed as a military operation. It means that they planned it, scheduled it and moved to carry it out. The Greek verb translated 'capture' means to take prisoner in war, although in time the word softened to signify carry away, that is, mislead or deceive.

These religion proselytizers use an indirect approach. They are not direct and open, but cautious, secretive, and cunning. They are sneaks. They use the back door rather than the front, these tradesmen of heresy insinuate themselves into private homes or households.

They choose a time when the men of the house are out (presumably at work); they concentrate their attention on 'weak women.' The women labeled as victims by Paul, refers to the term, 'little women,' a term of contempt for women who were idle, silly and weak.

Their weakness was doubly bad. First, they were morally weak. They were burdened with sins and swayed by various impulses. Their sins were to them both a load and an oppressor, and the false teachers, worming their way into their home, played on their feelings of guilt and illness.

Secondly, they were intellectually weak. They were unstable and gullible. They were the kind of women who would listen to anybody, while at the same time they could 'never arrive at knowledge of the truth.'

The analogy of the little boats tossed to and fro by a storm forms a picture of people who are incapable of reaching any settled convictions. In such a state of mental confusion, people will listen to any teacher, however false, as long as it titillates their senses.

They are driven to learn only by morbid love of new things rather than a love of truth. These women are weak in character and intellect, and are an easy prey for door-to-door religious salesmen. I am not just speaking about people in the church, but speaking in general. That is why the televangelists can get such a large following with these types of people. Jim Baker was very prevalent in this area.

II Timothy 3:8-9 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

As an example of false teachers, Paul mentions 'Jannes and Jambres.' According to Jewish tradition, these are the names of the two chief magicians in Pharaoh's court. They are not named in the Old Testament text.

The implication of what Paul writes here is extremely important, although it does not necessarily show up on the surface. He draws a historical parallel between Jannes and Jambres who had opposed Moses centuries previously; these false teachers of his own day also opposed the truth.

Jannes and Jambres were magicians; the false teachers also were imposters and deceivers. It may be that these false teachers also were involved with magic of some kind, because when the Ephesians who had practiced magical arts were converted, they had brought their books on magic and publicly burned them. Obviously it was a problem in the Greek world at that time.

Acts 19:18-19 And many who had believed came confessing and telling their deeds. Also, many of those who had practiced magic brought their books together and burned them in the sight of all. And they counted up the

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value of them, and it totaled fifty thousand pieces of silver.

I do not think a piece of silver is one ounce, but it is a lot of money, and a lot of books. They must have really been into magic in that Greek world.

Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so the false teachers were opposing the truth. Both Moses and Paul taught God's truth. Both Jannes and Jambres and the false teachers opposed and rejected the truth.

So Paul rejects them as men who were corrupt in their mind. Despite their claim to knowledge, they were counterfeits. False teachers will not get very far. They will always go on from bad to worse. Their false teaching may also temporarily spread and eat its way like gangrene. But its success will be limited and transient. We certainly see that in the breakup of the Worldwide Church of God, and all of the splinter groups that have broken off, and the false teachers that have come from it. They are transient and they have taken advantage of people, especially these women that I spoke of earlier.

The thing about false teachers is that their folly will always eventually be plain to all, as came to be that of those two men, Jannes and Jambres.

We sometimes get distressed—rightly or understandably—by the false teachers who oppose the truth and trouble the church, especially by the underhanded and deceitful methods of backdoor religion traders. But we do not have to fear them, even if a few weak people may be taken in, even though lies have become fashionable today.

There is always something counterfeit about heresy and something self-evidently true about the truth. Error may spread and be popular for a while; but it will not get very far. In the end, it is bound to be exposed, and the truth is sure to be vindicated. Whether it is in education, politics, or whatever it may be, the truth eventually comes out.

This is a clear lesson of church history. Many heresies have arisen and some have seemed likely to succeed. But they will fail eventually. God has preserved His truth.

So, one of the lessons of handling times of stress is to avoid false teachers. There are many out there. I know that some who have been in the Church of the Great God have been enticed by some of those who have websites that promote false teachings. We have to be very careful because there are false teachers out there, and we are told to avoid them.

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This brings us to the end of the first paragraph of II Timothy 3, and it should be clear to us what these dangerous seasons are that 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) that God has sown wheat; Satan has his 'fifth column,' his conspirators, actually inside the church.

Within the church, within the visible society of professing believers, there are people 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 fellow brothers and sisters in Christ.

They retain the form of religion, but deny its power. They oppose the truth and seek to win the weak to their malicious errors.

Morally, religiously and intellectually they are perverse. It is a significant portrayal of the so-called 'permissive society,' that amiably tolerates every conceivable deviation from Christian standards of righteousness and truth, and whose pop culture and philosophy have crept into the church.

But Paul warns Timothy not to catch this infection, nor be carried away by this flood tide, but to stand out boldly against the prevailing direction of society. Keep in mind that many of those splinter groups that broke off from Worldwide Church of God are part of this society, and not part of God's church, and you can tell that by the doctrines that they are promoting.

In stark contrast to the contemporary decline in morals, empty show of religion, and spread of false teaching, Paul tells Timothy that he is called to be different, and if necessary to stand alone.

II Timothy 3:10-15 But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

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Every Christian is called to be different from the world. Paul told the Christians in Rome, 'Do not let the society around you squeeze you into its own mould.'

Romans 12:2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.

One of the ways of not succumbing to stress is to make sure that your religious teacher is firm in the truth, and has a good track record of teaching God's truth. We are so very thankful to be here, and to have that instruction, and the truth of God strictly and straight from scripture.

Certainly we are under great stress from the pressures put on us by the world. These pressures to conform are colossal, not only from direct challenge to traditional beliefs and morals, but also in a greater way from the insidious, pervasive atmosphere of secularism that even seeps into the church.

Many give in, often without realizing what they are doing. But again and again the word of God addresses us, calling us not to be moved. We are not to be like a reed shaken with the wind, feebly bowing down before it from whatever direction it may blow.

Instead, we are to be like a rock in a rushing mountain stream—immovable. We are to stand firm.

So, in other words, what Paul is telling Timothy is: 'But as for you Timothy, in spite of all the current false teaching, what you have been closely following is my doctrine and my way of life as I have received it from the inspired written word of God and His inspiration, together with my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions and sufferings... Wicked men and charlatans, deceiving others and themselves deceived, will still make their strange progress from bad to worse. But as for you, you are not to progress in any direction, least of all away from or beyond my teaching because you would be degenerating rather than growing. On the contrary, you are to stand firm, to continue in what you learned and have believed, because you know from whom you learned it...'

That was just a general paraphrase of what Paul is insisting on convincing Timothy of.

Paul first reminds Timothy what he has been doing so far. In II Timothy 3:10, he told Timothy '*you have observed*' or '*followed my teaching.*' Then, in verse 14, he

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encourages him *'to continue in what you have learned'*.

So verses 10-13 describe Timothy's past loyalty to Paul, and verses 14-17 urge him to remain loyal in the future. Summed up, Paul told Timothy: 'You have followed me faithfully up till now; so then continue to do so.' We understand that even though Timothy was firm in the faith, Paul still felt it was necessary to warn Timothy and remind him of these things, even though he knew that Timothy knew them deep down. Almost anyone can be deceived if they are not close to God.

Timothy's relationship to Paul is explained in terms of a certain 'following' of Paul. The Greek verb used for "following" can be used literally of following a person as he goes somewhere and of walking in his footsteps.

But it is usually not used that way in the New Testament. Its figurative use can refer either to an intellectual following, much the same as our saying to a person who is explaining something to us 'I follow you,' or to a real commitment of mind and life as when we say of somebody 'he is a follower of Christ.'

In other words, the two meanings are: 'to follow with the mind, understand, make one's own' and 'to follow faithfully, follow as a rule,' as a way of life.

In Luke 1:3, Luke uses the verb more or less in the former sense, when he tells Theophilus of his painstaking historical investigation. He has 'followed all things closely for some time past.'

But Paul seems to use the verb "followed" in the other and more committed sense in his letters to Timothy. In the first letter he urged Timothy to nourish himself on *'the good doctrine which you have followed,'* or *'embraced.'*

Paul is reminding Timothy not simply that he has 'fully known or observed' his doctrine and conduct, as if he were merely an impartial student or a detached observer, but that he has become a dedicated disciple of Paul's. We have to be careful because I have seen quite a few people, over the years, and you probably have too, who have taken and followed a minister in this first way and never really dedicated himself or been loyal to him. So we have had people who have even referred to our pastor, John Ritenbaugh, as just one of their teachers. Right away you can see the error in that. He is more than our teacher, he is our pastor, and it is very important to have that loyalty in him, as well as the other ministers, as long as the truth of God's word is being preached.

No doubt Timothy had begun by trying hard to understand the meaning of Paul's

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instruction. But over time he made it his own; he believed it, absorbed it, and lived by it. Probably he began by watching Paul's manner of life, but then he went on to imitate it.

It was because Paul knew himself as an apostle that followed Christ; he did not hesitate to invite others to follow himself. Remember he wrote, 'Be imitators of me as I am of Christ, or, as I follow Christ.' So it is important that we choose leaders to follow who we know, without a doubt, are following Christ and the apostles.

In a sense, Paul even made himself the standard by which truth could be distinguished from falsehood. In Philippians 3:17, he tells us, "Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern." The "us" being the apostles and the patriarchs.

So, in both belief and practice, in teaching and conduct, Timothy became and remained Paul's faithful follower. He had 'followed' step-by-step as Paul followed Christ.

The contrast with the first paragraph of this third chapter of II Timothy, is obvious. The men described there were following their own inclinations—they were lovers of self, money and pleasure—and their pathetic converts had been carried away by their own impulses.

Timothy, on the other hand, followed a different standard, namely the teaching and the example of Christ's apostle Paul. So Paul goes on to list the characteristics of his life, in contrast to that of the self-lovers whom he has characterized in verses 2-5.

The emphatic words are the personal pronouns and possessive adjectives. They bring out the contrast very clearly. Paul said, '*For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money,*' ...They will be and do this or that. "*But as for you, Timothy, you have followed me, my teaching, my conduct...*"

Why, however, does Paul give us this list of his virtues and sufferings? At first glance it may seem somewhat immodest, or even conceited that Paul would set himself as a good example like this, and seem to toot his own horn. But we know Paul from his writings—that he was not like this at all.

It is understandable that he would mention his teaching, but why go on to blow his own horn about his faith and love, his purpose and conduct, and his sufferings and his endurance?

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Paul has his reasons for this. He mentions his teaching first, and then goes on to provide two objective evidences of the genuineness of his teaching. They are the life that he lived, and the sufferings that he endured. He used those as evidences that he was a man that could be followed.

These are good (though not perfect) general tests of a person's sincerity, and even of the truth or falsehood of his system of beliefs. Paul is so convinced of his position that he both practices what he preaches and is prepared to suffer for it. His beliefs have made him a better man, even in the face of opposition.

On the other hand, the false teachers lived lives of self-indulgence, and it would be out of character to expect them to be willing to suffer for their views; they were altogether too soft and easy-going for that.

When the Worldwide Church of God began going into apostasy in the 1970's and 80's, as the false teachers there became more openly active, one of the excuses they used for changing doctrine was to make it easier on the brethren because (they said) the members should not have to suffer. They said, "God would not want us to suffer!" To a person who is weak in the faith, or not even converted, that sounds like a good way to go, and they got many, many followers by doing that.

On the surface that sounds noble and loving; however, it is not scriptural. The Bible teaches us that we must suffer because Christ suffered, and we are one with Christ as members of God's church. Here is a quick sampling of scriptures:

Acts 5:40-41 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name.

Acts 9:15-16 But the Lord said to him, "Go, for he is a chosen vessel of Mine to bear My name before Gentiles, kings, and the children of Israel. "For I will show him how many things he must suffer for My name's sake."

Romans 8:16-17 The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.

Philippians 1:29 For to you it has been granted on behalf of Christ, not only

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to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake,

I Thessalonians 3:2-4 ...and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know.

That tribulation is referring to trials; it is not talking about the great tribulation.

There are many more scriptures that express this fact that members of God's church will suffer affliction, trials and persecution.

II Timothy 3:12-14 Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them,

The apostle Paul lived a consistent life of righteousness, self-control, faith, hope, and love. And he remained dedicated to God's principles through many severe persecutions.

Timothy had observed and tried to imitate Paul's 'conduct' (his way of life). He tried to imitate his 'aim in life' (the spiritual ambitions that motivated him and made life meaningful for him). He tried to imitate his 'faith.'

He tried to imitate his 'patience' (tolerance or longsuffering towards aggravating people). He tried to imitate his 'love' (towards both God and man, as opposed to the false teachers' love for self, money and pleasure).

He tried to imitate his 'steadfastness' (the patient endurance of trying circumstances). He tried to imitate his 'hope' (the expectation of Christ's return and the glory to follow).

Probably Paul's courage under persecution had played a part in Timothy's conversion, much as Stephen's bravery in martyrdom had done in Paul's. At all events, Timothy had 'followed' Paul's persecutions, first watching them, and then discovering that he must share in them, because he could not be committed to Paul's teaching and conduct

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without becoming involved in his suffering also.

In verse 12, Paul makes it clear that his experience was not unique. He tried to live a godly life in Christ Jesus, loving and serving God rather than himself, and he suffered for it. Timothy had found the same thing.

All true Christians who 'in Christ Jesus desire to live a godly life ... will be persecuted,' and are bound to suffer persecution. The godly person arouses the antagonism of the worldly. It has always been so. It was so for Christ, and He said it would be for us:

John 15:18-20 "If the world hates you, you know that it hated Me before it hated you. "If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. "Remember the word that I said to you, 'A servant is not greater than his master.' If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you. If they kept My word, they will keep yours also.

It is important to notice the situation in which Christ told his followers to expect persecution. He envisioned that they would be both in the world (living among godless people), and at the same time *'not of the world'* (living a godly life in Christ).

Those who are in Christ, but not in the world, are not persecuted, because they do not come into contact, and therefore into collision with their potential persecutors. Those who are in the world, but not in Christ, are also not persecuted because the world sees nothing in them to persecute.

The former escape persecution by withdrawal from the world, and the latter by assimilation to it. It is only for those who are both in the world and in Christ simultaneously that persecution becomes inevitable.

Because persecution is inevitable for the truly righteous, the people of God are exhorted to respond positively. Negative reactions such as fear, compromise, cursing, desertion, retaliation, or apostasy deny the true Christian the witness God expects from us.

Instead, we are to commit ourselves to God, we are to rejoice because of the great gift of salvation and accompanying reward awaiting us. We are to demonstrate patience and perseverance, and we are to pray for those who inflict persecution upon us.

In facing these times of stress we have to deal with, resist and overcome our human

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proclivity toward being 'lovers of self.' We have to replace self-centered "love" with God-centered love.

We must, first and foremost, be 'lovers of God'!