



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

“MEN WILL BE LOVERS OF SELF” - 2 TIMOTHY 3:2A

COLORADO

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As we began our study of 2 Timothy 3 last week, you will remember in the first verse that Paul warns Timothy to prepare for struggle in these last days because they will require a special faithfulness, constant alertness, diligence and wisdom. The “last days” refers to this age, the period of time between Christ’s first advent until His second return which means that we are living in the “last days” as well. Paul isn’t talking about something in the distant future, but rather present times that Timothy and all believers will face in the course of life and ministry until Jesus Christ returns. We must also keep in mind that Paul is writing to what is taking place in the church, the professing church. That’s the context of Paul’s letter. There will be apostasy, moral decay and a tolerance for sin and this will escalate even in the church. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:3 that the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, rather wanting their ears to be tickled. This refers to those who call themselves believers. During the period of Christ’s first coming and His second coming, there will be difficult and dangerous times not just in the world, but in the church.

These days are characterized by men substituting their truths for God’s truth and thus God Himself.¹ The list Paul gives us here in 2 Timothy 3:2-5 along with 1 Timothy 1:9-10 describes believers while Romans 1:29-31 describes the pagan society. And these times will be unparalleled periods of difficulty and danger. As time progresses, we draw nearer to the second coming of Christ and these terrible times will increase in number and intensity.² And we must know for certain that these days “will come”. These are the days Paul refers to here in 2 Timothy 3:1. The apostasy of these times must be guarded against not just in the world but in the church. These were Timothy’s days. These are our days as well. Paul will describe the characteristics of these “difficult times” in the following verses and it’s important for us to be aware and on guard. This warning by Paul must be taken seriously by all believes in Jesus Christ.

I. “MEN WILL BE LOVERS OF SELF...” 2 TIMOTHY 3:2A

“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. Men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unboly, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God...” 2 Timothy 3:1-4

Paul warns that “the last days” are full of pride, deceit, deception and heresy with imposters and false teaching in the church reflecting the rejection of God and His Word. Paul has warned repeatedly about false prophets and savage wolves that will come into the church. (Acts 20:29-30) Christ Himself warned of false teachers who would come and deceive. (Matthew 7:15, Matthew 24:11-13, 24) Paul later warns in 2 Timothy that evil men and imposters would proceed from

bad to worse. (2 Timothy 3:13) The enemies of God and His people will continue to thrive until the Lord’s return and the alliance of false teaching and ungodly living will continue to grow until the Lord’s return.³ Could this list Paul gives us really describe those who profess Christ? Indeed these are “terrible times”.

A. “MEN WILL BE...” - 2 TIMOTHY 3:2A

It is important to remember that Paul isn’t accusing the outside enemies of the church here. He isn’t referring to those who openly oppose Jesus Christ but rather those people who belong to the family of God and want to be known as part of the church. So “men” does not refer to mankind in general but those “holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power”. (2 Timothy 3:5) It is these who pose a grave threat to the body of Christ and will continue until our Lord’s return. They are shameless in excusing even their worst sins, hiding falsely under God’s name. They manage to keep the appearance of being godly just like the Pharisees in Jesus day who enjoyed a reputation for outstanding holiness and keeping of the law as though they were blameless. Hypocrites deceive people by wearing masks of godliness.⁴ Their sins and the characteristics that follow are clearly spelled out by Paul in his warning. Keep in mind that it is important to recognize these people quickly and make sure that none of these sins are in your life as well. Paul warns, men “will be” sinful and deceitful in the church. Be on guard, watch constantly with vigilance and be prepared to deal with these imposters.

B. “MEN WILL BE LOVERS OF SELF,”-2 TIMOTHY 3:2B

The first characteristic Paul reveals can be seen as the foundation for all other sin. It is a pride of self-love from which all other sin flows. The danger which Paul refers to regarding these “difficult times” will not be from war, famine or any other disaster, but rather from the wickedness of depraved people in the church; this errant leadership was very apparent in Timothy’s day and in his church at Ephesus. It is this false teaching and sinful living that continue to be rampant in our churches today.⁵

The essence of Christianity is not the enthronement of self, but rather removing of self from the throne of our life. But here, Paul refers to the love of self wrongly replacing the love of God.

“lovers” Greek “phileo” the verb form meaning to have a gratification for.

“self” Greek “autos” pronoun referring to self.

Neither of these words are wrong or sinful. Here, Paul is not referring to the kind of love that is wrong, **but** rather wrongly

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elevating the object of that love which is ourselves. Paul is referring to one who is utterly self-centered with a self-love that leads to all sorts of sin. Whenever a love for self is raised, a love for God and others will be lowered. It began with Satan and then Adam and Eve and a love for themselves over God. Thus all sin flows from this. Paul begins his list with “men will be lovers of self” and closes with 2 Timothy 3:4, “rather than lovers of God.” (Matthew 22:37-39) Our Lord’s greatest command to love God has been turned upside down. When the focus is shifted to the individual, this self-love leads to any means of materialism to gratify self. Remember, Paul’s list is one of imposters and false teachers in the church. This inspired list is a tragic picture.⁶

There is a tremendous concern in Christianity today regarding self-esteem...*loving yourself*. There is a wide acceptance of self-love and it is even considered a virtue. This is so subtle. It has been said in the church that you cannot rightly love God without rightly loving yourself. But Jesus said in Matthew 22:37-39 that the greatest commandment is to love God. In the church we have self-esteem, self-worth, self-fulfillment and positive self-image proclaimed as good and right. But that’s not what Jesus said. Jesus knew there is an assumption of self-love; that mankind loves themselves and it is natural to do so. Self-love has always been understood in the church as sin...until now. Psychology has denounced this God centered view and boldly claims that a lack of self-love and self-esteem is the root of man’s problem. The church has bought into this thinking. An elevation of self-love and a lack of love for God has permeated the church and that’s the real problem. We must have the right view of ourselves. We have been amazingly created in the image of God and loved dearly by Him, thus giving us worth and purpose in life. It is His creative work and love graced to us which gives all life value. In contrast to God, we are by nature sinful. Our worth and value comes from God. Paul refers here to a love that elevates self above God which leads to a focus on the individual and a moral breakdown. If man is a product of impersonal chance through evolution, with God completely out of the equation, then elevating self is perfectly natural and acceptable. There is no basis for right and wrong, for God has been removed from the equation. Our natural bent toward self-centeredness is only reinforced. In this world where man has become his own interpreter of God, Scripture is no longer considered authoritative and rejected as God’s Word, there are no absolutes with everyone doing what is right in his own eyes. (Judges 21:25) And what results is tolerance for everything except Jesus Christ.⁷

The great Reformer who lived from 1509-1564, John Calvin said this nearly 500 years ago, “*So blindly do we rush in the direction of self-love that everyone thinks he has good reason for exalting himself. There is no other remedy*

then to pluck up by the roots that most noxious pest, self-love.” Could it be that our real problem isn’t a low self-esteem, but rather a self-serving pride? Could it be that having a self-love is the supreme enemy of godliness? Samuel Johnson, an 18th century preacher said this in his day, “*He that values himself will undervalue others and be that undervalues others will oppose them. Self-love alienates men and others from God.*”⁸ But what’s the contrast to this kind of self-seeking love that must not characterize our life as a true believer? Well, it’s not what the world would say.

C. “DO NOTHING FROM SELFISHNESS”- PHILIPPIANS 2:3-4

Philippians 2:3-4, “Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself. Do not look out for your own personal interests but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...”

Rather than a focus on ourselves, we must have the attitude of Jesus Christ 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 bondservant...and humbled Himself by become obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross.*” (Philippians 2:6-8) This is the kind of love we are called to. Christ’s love was unselfish love for us. In contrast to the world, we are to be like Jesus Christ.

And what about you? Where are you? Paul said in our days that difficult times will come. They will come from within the church. They will come from those claiming to love God but really they will be lovers of themselves. We must evaluate our lives to make sure that none of these characteristics are present in our lives. Do you have the attitude of Christ towards yourself...towards others? Are you willing to humble yourself and unselfishly commit your life to Christ and then to others?

¹MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.104.

²Williams, Peter, *Opening Up 2 Timothy*. One Day Publications: Ryelands Road, Leominster, New Zealand, 2007. Pg. 66.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.105-106.

⁴Calvin, John, 1509-1564. *The Crossway Classic Commentaries; 1 & 2 Timothy*, Titus. Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 1998. Pg.148.

⁵Calvin, John, 1509-1564. *The Crossway Classic Commentaries; 1 & 2 Timothy*, Titus. Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 1998. Pg.148.

⁶MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.108.

⁷MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.109.

⁸MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.109-111.