

## 2 TIMOTHY 3:1-9

### DIFFICULT TIMES

“Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.”<sup>1</sup>

**Y**ou may be certain that difficult days lie ahead. When the Apostle wrote, “Understand this,” he was stressing that which was definite. Timothy, and thus all Christians, needs to learn that challenging times are coming. It is the responsibility of the pastor to warn of what is coming; and those who hear are responsible to heed that warning. Paul doesn’t merely sound out some vague warning, he is quite specific about the future of the Faith.

In order to have a thorough grasp of Paul’s prophecy concerning the last days, we will benefit from review of other instance of similar warnings from the Word. In an earlier missive, Paul wrote, “The Spirit expressly says that in later times some will depart from the faith by devoting themselves to deceitful spirits and teachings of demons, through the insincerity of liars whose consciences are seared” [1 TIMOTHY 4:1, 2]. Paul clearly warns that the last days will be marked by demonic assault against the Faith and infiltration of the faithful by evil people. In this latter letter, the Apostle will focus on the individuals controlled by the demonic powers.

The insinuation of evil into the worship of the Living God is not a new phenomenon; intrusion by wicked people has continued as long as mankind has worshipped the Living God. God, through Jeremiah, exposed this evil before the House of David fell in the last days of the Judean Kingdom. Speaking for God, Jeremiah said, “The prophets are prophesying lies in my name. I did not send them, nor did I command them or speak to them. They are prophesying to you a lying vision, worthless divination, and the deceit of their own minds” [JEREMIAH 14:14].

In a later chapter, God again exposed the evil of the religious leaders,

“In the prophets of Jerusalem  
I have seen a horrible thing:  
they commit adultery and walk in lies;  
they strengthen the hands of evildoers,  
so that no one turns from his evil;  
all of them have become like Sodom to me,  
and its inhabitants like Gomorrah.”

[JEREMIAH 23:14]

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<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from **The Holy Bible: English Standard Version**. Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers, 2001. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

God exposed what was happening when He said, “Thus says the LORD of hosts: ‘Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you, filling you with vain hopes. They speak visions of their own minds, not from the mouth of the LORD. They say continually to those who despise the word of the LORD, “It shall be well with you”; and to everyone who stubbornly follows his own heart, they say, “No disaster shall come upon you”’” [JEREMIAH 23:16, 17].

As difficult as the last days are prophesied to be, perhaps the most distressing aspect of these difficult times is the knowledge that the difficulty arises from within the congregations. It is lamentable that wickedness will be associated with the assemblies of the Lord. Perhaps you recall the Apostle’s warning to the elders from this Ephesian congregation when he met them at Miletus. At that time Paul cautioned, “Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock that the Holy Spirit has appointed you to as overseers, to shepherd the church of God, which He purchased with His own blood. I know that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. And men will rise up from your own number with deviant doctrines to lure the disciples into following them” [ACTS 20:29, 30 HCSB].

One further passage will assist in understanding the difficult times that would come. Near the end of His ministry on earth, Jesus taught the disciples, “Many false prophets will arise and lead many astray. And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold.” Then He warned, “False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect” [MATTHEW 24:11, 12, 24].

Difficult times, appearing to grow in severity and in intensity as the age moves toward a cataclysmic conclusion, are prophesied throughout the Word. What is sometimes forgotten is that we are *now* living in the last days. The Letter to Hebrew Christians begins by identifying the time in which we live. “Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He created the world” [HEBREWS 1:1, 2a].

In his sermon at Pentecost, Peter cited the Prophet Joel as he spoke of the last days. “Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel:

“‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares,  
that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,  
and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy,  
and your young men shall see visions,  
and your old men shall dream dreams;  
even on my male servants and female servants  
in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.  
And I will show wonders in the heavens above  
and signs on the earth below,  
blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke;  
the sun shall be turned to darkness  
and the moon to blood,  
before the day of the Lord comes, the great and magnificent day.  
And it shall come to pass  
that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.’”  
[ACTS 2:14-21]

To emphasise this point, note John's statement in his first letter when he writes, "Children, it is the last hour, and as you have heard that antichrist is coming, so now many antichrists have come. Therefore we know that it is the last hour" [1 JOHN 2:18]. What we see in these passages is that "the Last Days" are the indefinite time between Jesus' first and second coming. We are living in the Last Days. We cannot say how long these last days will continue; but we may be confident that the last days are now. The next event on God's timetable is the rapture of God's people from this fallen world, an event that precedes the Great Tribulation when God pours out judgement on the earth for a period of seven years. Because we are in the last days, it is vital that we recognise what life will be during the last days. I don't mean that we need to look for some activities that are otherwise unknown; rather, I want the people of God to understand their place among the churches during these last days and ensure that they are instructed how to live in light of what is taking place.

Before I initiate an exposition of the verses, I need to stress one further matter. When Paul writes, "Understand this," he uses the present, active imperative of the verb usually translated "to know." In other words, the preacher is responsible to keep this message in the forefront of his teaching to the people of God. Knowing the times in which we live and knowing how we are to respond to the challenges of the times is crucial to healthy Christian growth.

**SOCIETY'S FOCUS IN THE "LAST DAYS"** — "Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power."<sup>2</sup>

What a stunning catalogue of dismal characteristics marking mankind in the last days! The list Paul provides encompasses all mankind. This is evident when he writes "People will be," or more literally, "Men will be." Mankind is obviously in view! Perhaps one could argue that these characteristics mark all of us to greater or lesser degree; and that would be true! However, what I find especially daunting is the understanding that Paul provides this catalog as indicative of what would be witnessed among the churches identified as belonging to the Master! Society as a whole will be identified in ever-greater measure by the dreadful characteristics listed and simultaneously the churches will reflect the society in which they are located.

Paul teaches that the exaltation of the self will reach its zenith in the last days. Note the particular negatives named in this apostolic catalogue of sinful behaviour and attitudes. The first behaviour named is that "people will be *self-lovers* (lit.)." Self-love will mark mankind in the last days. This is not merely an issue of taking care of oneself—it is selfishness in the extreme.<sup>3</sup> To be a self-lover implies excessive love of oneself; in modern parlance, it is to be self-centred.<sup>4</sup> In classical Greek, the concept of a self-lover would have been abhorrent because it meant that the "self-lover" was unwilling to sacrifice for the welfare of others.

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<sup>2</sup> This portion of the message, especially the description of evil characteristics, has drawn heavily on John F. MacArthur Jr., **2 Timothy, MacArthur New Testament Commentary** (Chicago: Moody Press, 1995), 106–116. Other references are provided as they were used.

<sup>3</sup> See Richard Chenevix Trench, **Synonyms of the New Testament** (Macmillan and Co., London, 1880) 351–353

<sup>4</sup> James Swanson, **Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Greek (New Testament)** (Logos Research Systems, Inc., Oak Harbor, WA 1997)

The great danger to any individuals who seek to follow the Saviour is the knowledge that “self-lovers” cannot embrace the words of Jesus spoken in **MARK 8:35**. Jesus said, “Whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the Gospel’s will save it.” The Master expects that just as He sacrificed Himself for those who would believe, so those who do believe must love Him and the Gospel supremely. This is the import of His challenge, “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple” [**LUKE 14:26**].

The root word for love in this instance is not the familiar *agapáō*; it is *philéō*. Some may imagine that the type of love is in question; however, it is elevation of the object loved to a position greater than the Living God that is evil. Love of self is elevated above love for God. I have had church members attempt to argue that we cannot love God or others rightly unless we first love ourselves. However, such a concept turns the teaching of the Word of God on its head! In this distorted view, the source of evil becomes the source of all good. Consequently, self-love and its multiple derivatives—self-esteem, self-worth, self-fulfilment and positive self-image—have been imported into church life from the prevailing view within contemporary society.

Set against this destructive invasion of the precincts of the Faith are the words of the Master, “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 first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself” [**MATTHEW 22:37-39**]. In the modern context, the words “as yourself” are transformed from an assumption of self-love that is natural to sinful mankind to become the “great and first commandment!”

Note the sinful characteristics and attitudes that follow self-love—*money lovers* (lit.), proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” Each of these dreadful characteristics flow naturally from the exaltation of self to the highest position within the individual’s life.

We see the biblical language before us; perhaps we can have a better understanding through transforming the concepts into contemporary forms. *Money lovers* is not necessarily to be understood as greedy, though it assuredly could hold that meaning; “money lovers” is best understood as materialism. It is not labouring to secure sufficient funds to provide food, shelter, clothing and transportation—it speaks quite plainly of the acquisition of things for the sake of acquiring more things. It should not be too difficult to imagine that if we have placed self at the centre of life that we expect God to provide not only the necessities as He promised, but we expect what can only be classed as luxuries, as well!

*Pride* and *arrogance* are intimately related. Pride grows out of self-love; and pride inevitably leads to arrogance. “Proud” translates a word that is often translated “boastful.” The pride in view is closely related to false teaching. Paul has previously stated that the proud person “is puffed up with conceit and understands nothing.” Earlier, we saw that arising from this pride are the sins of “envy, dissension, slander [and] evil suspicions” [**1 TIMOTHY 6:4**].

The word translated “arrogant” speaks quite literally of “placing above”; thus, the arrogant person holds a sense of superiority. An example of such arrogance is witnessed in some Jewish leaders, whom Doctor Luke describes as “trust[ing] in themselves that they were righteous” and as “treat[ing] others with contempt” [**LUKE 18:9**]. You will no doubt remember that Jesus, confronting the arrogant people who surrounded Him, told a parable of a Pharisee and a tax collector who both went up to the Temple to pray [see **LUKE 18:11-14**]. That is arrogance!

The *abusive* are described by the Greek term *blasphemos*. Those who are contemptuous of others will grow abusive in their speech about others. When people are dismissive of fellow Christians, putting them down and speaking ill of them, they fall into the category of those who are abusive. According to Jesus, the tongue always follows the heart. “From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness” [MARK 7:21, 22].

Paul next names the evil of children who are *disobedient to their parents*. It seems apparent that we have trained a generation of children, and are continuing to train generations that are following, in the art of self-love. Even among the churches, training in self-love has replaced the supreme love for Christ and for others that is expected in the Word. This ensures that an attitude of disobedience toward parents must predominate in these generations. Children are trained to think more highly of themselves than of others; thus, the natural, wicked self-love is reinforced and justified by society, undermining the family, the church and even the society that promoted this particular evil.

*Ungrateful* should be self-explanatory. Why be grateful for others when the self is at the centre of one’s being? When one has been taught that she deserves everything good, there is no need for gratitude. The precious snowflakes that require safe spaces and demand trigger warnings before hearing anything unpleasant are exposing their lack of gratitude; and that ingratitude must be seen for the evil it is!

*Unholy (anósios)* carries the idea of gross indecency. The word was used of an individual who refused to bury a dead body or who committed incest.<sup>5</sup> The individual in view gives no thought to decency, to propriety or personal reputation.

*Heartless* negates a verb used for family, social or patriotic love. The heartless person does not care about patriotism, is unmoved by the disintegration of family or the downward trend of society as the standards are progressively lowered. The heartless individual justifies one-tenth of one percent of the population making ninety percent uncomfortable in order to use whatever bathroom they wish. The heartless person justifies compelling Christians to bake a cake against their religious convictions or to provide medical services that contradict their consciences.

*Unappeasable* individuals refuse to change, even when having their own way damages others. As far as these individuals are concerned, there is no compromise, no reconciliation—their egotism is so great that nothing matters except having their way.

*Slanderous* people are diabolical people (the literal meaning of the Greek). Whether promoting their own interests, expressing jealousy or hatred or venting their anger, these wicked individuals make a point of harming others. They take a perverse pride in damaging reputations and destroying lives.

The one *without self-control* has renounced inhibitions and shame; this person does not care what people think about him or what he does.

*Brutal* speaks of savagery. Like wild beasts that attack enemies and tear them to pieces, self-love that is unchecked leads to a loss of sensitivity, malice and eventually brutality.

When Paul speaks of those identified as *not loving good*, he describes individuals who sink to an animal level. However, unlike animals, though they know good from evil, they choose to ignore what they know to be true. Isaiah describes precisely such people when he writes,

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<sup>5</sup> Hermann Cremer, trans. William Urwick, *Biblico-Theological Lexicon of New Testament Greek* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1895), 464; Johannes P. Louw and Eugene Albert Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament: Based on Semantic Domains* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1996), 538

“Woe to those who call evil good and good evil,  
who put darkness for light  
and light for darkness,  
who put bitter for sweet  
and sweet for bitter!”

[ISAIAH 5:20]

*Treacherous* speaks of people that turn even against family and close friends. The sort of treachery in view is described by Jesus when He warned disciples, “Brother will deliver brother over to death, and the father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death, and you will be hated by all for my name’s sake” [MATTHEW 10:21, 22a].

The *reckless* individual is one who is careless, negligent, rash. This evil is almost unconscious, arising from one who is so preoccupied with her own interests that she does not notice people or things unrelated to her egotistic concerns.

People who are *swollen with conceit* have a more exalted view of their person than is justified by reality. The word Paul chose literally means “to wrap in smoke.”<sup>6</sup> Hence, the word means to obscure as though wrapped in fog or wreathed in smoke. In contemporary parlance, we might say the individual was blowing smoke about himself or his accomplishments.

Finally, Paul speaks of the evil characteristics of the last days as people identified as *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God*. The word translated by the phrase “lovers of pleasure” is derived from the word that is used to create the English word “hedonist” or “hedonism.” I must make one observation of the censure Paul pronounces. It is not that this individual loves pleasure more than he loves God—he loves pleasure *rather* than God!

What is especially tragic is that these evils are not only brought into the Faith, but they are presented as desirable characteristics to be sought out by the people of God. This is demonstrated as the ultimate condition of the last days when Paul identifies the denizens of the last days as “having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.” Increasingly, the churches will be led by and then filled with individuals who are religious fakes, ecclesiastical frauds masquerading as Christian leaders. Outwardly, Christianity will perform the familiar rites and rituals, but there will be no power either in the acts or in the worshippers. The Faith will be populated with people who “profess to know God, [while denying] Him by their works.” Thus, they will be exposed as “detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work” [TITUS 1:16].

This entire catalogue of grievous evils—and make no mistake, these evils are evil—grows out of overweening, ubiquitous self-love brought into the life of the churches. Every facet of society in the last days is rooted in and grows out of self-love. If you review each of the evils listed in the dark catalogue Paul provides, you are driven to the conclusion that it provides a valid description of the society in which we live and serve.

Should someone question whether we are in fact living in the last days, we need but review our culture to convince ourselves that these are indeed the last days. We are trained from childhood to take care of number one. Then, unconsciously, we bring that distorted evil into the life of the Body of Christ. This is the reason we must push back against the night that always attempts to insinuate itself into the light. We are well advised to take to heart the admonition, “Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil” [EPHESIANS 5:15, 16].

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<sup>6</sup> Timothy Friberg, Barbara Friberg and Neva F. Miller, *Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament*, Baker’s Greek New Testament Library (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000), 386

**THE RESPONSE REQUIRED OF CHRISTIANS IN THE “LAST DAYS”** — “Avoid such people. For among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith. But they will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men.”

There must be no dialogue with evil. When the Apostle writes, “Avoid such people,” he employs a verb that is middle voice and present tense, indicating that we must make ourselves turn away and continually avoid errant people. It does not matter how attractive error may appear or how sincere those advocating the error may be, we must not yield even for a moment. We must turn away from error and continue to turn away at all times. The naïveté of those who insist that Christians must understand error in order to avoid said error has always startled me. Understanding the truth is a far more effective way of avoiding error. We preachers are not to teach what purveyors of error teach; we are to preach the Word, delivering the truth of God. Christians that know God’s will are equipped to avoid error. Christians who are untaught or who have been insufficiently instructed in righteousness are susceptible to succumbing to error.

There are at least three guidelines for judging whether a teacher is sent from God.<sup>7</sup> ***Measure the creed of the preacher.*** Ask what specific doctrines the individual holds dear, what ideas he advances. Does the individual use the totality of Scripture as foundation for his beliefs? Or does he, as is common among most cults and many fringe sects among the faithful, appeal to “proof texts” to build his theology and to foster unbiblical ideas? If the individual’s doctrine position fails to match up to the Word of God, nothing else that he says is worth your attention. If he belittles doctrine, run as fast as you are able to run to get away from the error. It is obvious that such an individual does not honourably represent God and his teaching is false.

A second guideline is to ***examine the preacher’s personal character***; examine how the man’s character is reflected in his lifestyle. This is nothing less than application of the standards presented for assessing the fitness of an elder that Paul presents in **1 TIMOTHY 3:1-7**. If churches applied this standard, much of the harm caused by false teachers would be avoided. However, vetting is outsourced to denominational leaders who are more concerned for perpetuating the denomination than they are with advancing the Kingdom of God. By that, I mean that too often denominational leaders conflate the Kingdom of God and their particular denomination. Christians are responsible to ensure that their leaders hold godly doctrine and live a godly life. Ungodly living betrays a godless heart! Godly belief always produces godly living.

***The converts brought to faith under a leader*** express his fitness for leadership. This is especially true when assessing the most ardent followers of a particular leader. If the followers are committed to him without regard to what is taught, that is indicative of a serious problem. If those who come into the Faith through his ministry are committed to Christ, appreciating the teaching presented by the particular servant that God has appointed, he fits the criterion of a true servant of the Master. Again, examine the lifestyle of those who follow the preacher in question. If their lives reflect biblical standards, it is likely that they leader is a true leader appointed by God. If, however, their lives fail to reflect biblical standards, the leader himself should be examined more closely. A godly leader will not claim to be satisfied with ungodly converts. Leaders who honour Christ, who hold to Scripture and reflect the love of God will product followers who love Christ, hold to Scripture and endeavour to reveal the love of God.

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<sup>7</sup> MacArthur, op. cit., 117–118

The Apostle then describes a favourite tactic of the false teachers who perpetuate the errors that insinuate themselves into the churches. Ladies, steel yourselves. Let this serve as a trigger warning. Paul writes of the false teachers in these last days, “Among them are those who creep into households and capture weak women, burdened with sins and led astray by various passions, always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” The false teachers who increasingly plague the churches are those of whom Jude also wrote when he warned, “Certain people have crept in unnoticed who long ago were designated for this condemnation, ungodly people, who pervert the grace of our God into sensuality and deny our only Master and Lord, Jesus Christ” [JUDE 4].

A favourite target of false teachers is identified as “weak women who are overwhelmed with sins and led along by various passions.”<sup>8</sup> Then, the Apostle says of these deluded women, “Such women are always seeking instruction, yet never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.”<sup>9</sup> This grows out of the innate sensitivity to sin inherent in women and the tendency to be led by feelings rather than reason. In saying this, I am not condemning all women as somehow inane or incapable of thinking logically; I am simply reflecting a tendency that is observed often enough to be characteristic of women.

In particular, the women Paul considers especially vulnerable are untaught, whether they are untaught because those who should teach—husbands, but especially elders who have equivocated on the truth—fail to do so or through being refractory to the truth. Though such individuals often see themselves as “strong,” they are in fact weak—emotionally and spiritually. The women in view are weak in truth and weak in virtue. Consequently, they feel the heavy weight of their sin, being conscious of the guilt it brings. “Just as wrong doctrine leads to wrong living, so can their wrong living easily lead to embracing wrong doctrine.”<sup>10</sup>

What is tragic about the women in question is a tendency to flit from teacher to teacher, each new teacher purporting to present greater truth. Ignorant of Scripture and powerless to turn from their own sinful inclination, these ecclesiastical butterflies lack discernment and are left defenceless against errant teaching. The participle translated “always learning” is a verb referring to learning through instruction.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, they are driven to a constant, futile search for the truth. Thus, they are “always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth.” The goal of these frustrated women is “knowledge of the truth”; they can never arrive. The adverb “never” is intensified in order to emphasise the futility of their search. They accumulate facts and theories, but are unable to arrive at the full embrace of knowledge.

We will benefit from some needed insight at this point. “Knowledge of the truth” in that original tongue speaks of “deep understanding,” of “comprehension,” of “discernment.”<sup>12</sup> We know that God desires that each of His people have “knowledge of the truth.” Jesus prayed for His own, “Sanctify them in truth; Your Word is truth” [JOHN 17:17]. Paul has already taught that God “desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth” [1 TIMOTHY 2:4]. Elders are to correct those opposed to the teaching of the Word with gentleness, trusting that “God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth” [2 TIMOTHY 2:25].

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<sup>8</sup> Biblical Studies Press, **The NET Bible First Edition** (Biblical Studies Press, 2005)

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> MacArthur, op. cit., 118

<sup>11</sup> William Arndt et al., **A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature : A Translation and Adaption of the Fourth Revised and Augmented Edition of Walter Bauer's Griechisch-Deutsches Worterbuch Zu Den Schrift En Des Neuen Testaments Und Der Ubrigen Urchristlichen Literatur** (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, IL 1979), 490

<sup>12</sup> Arndt et al., op. cit., 291; see also Trench, op. cit., 285-6



It is possible that the false teachers that were even then beguiling people within the congregation in Ephesus were performing signs and wonders. Scholars suggest that Jannes and Jambres were among the Egyptian magicians. If this is accurate, then the false teachers may well have been performing starting signs that deceived some within the assembly. This fits with what is said of the conditions in the last days. I've already referred to Jesus' warning, "False christs and false prophets will arise and perform great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect" [MATTHEW 24:24]. Add to this Paul's prophecy concerning the last days delivered to the Thessalonian saints. "The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing" [2 THESSALONIANS 2:9, 10a]. Miracles absent the truth of the Word are dangerous.

Such individuals are "corrupted in mind." Moreover, because they have rejected the Faith, they are themselves rejected (*adókimos* Greek). Paul was concerned that should he deviate from pursuing the Master with his whole heart he would be disqualified as a useable instrument in the service of the Lord [see 1 CORINTHIANS 9:27]. In this instance, these individuals are disqualified from salvation because they not only refuse to obey the Gospel, but they turn others aside who would otherwise hear the message of life. Just so, Paul counselled the Christians in Corinth, "Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves. Or do you not realize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you?—unless indeed you fail to meet the test" (*adókimos* is translated "fail to meet the test") [2 CORINTHIANS 13:5]!

**DANGERS OF ACCOMMODATING SOCIETY IN THE "LAST DAYS"** — "They will not get very far, for their folly will be plain to all, as was that of those two men." The law of unintended consequences is frequently cited by speakers. The proposition goes back at least to the days of John Locke.<sup>13</sup> Economists and social scientists in particular have recognised the law; politicians have largely ignored it. Unintended consequences may result in benefits that could not be foreseen; but the more likely scenario appears to be in drawbacks or positively perverse results.

Contemporary governments seek to advance a new moral code; "transgenderism" as a civil right is part of that new code. "Transgender" is used to mean that one is whatever sex he/she/it feels is right regardless of biology. People are now reacting to legislation enacted by some states. The legislation usually states that an individual must use the restroom, dressing rooms and/or restrooms in public accommodations that correspond to the sex listed on his or her birth certificate. In the USA, the current administration has taken umbrage at such legislation, threatening to withhold federal education funding if the states do not yield to governmental fiat.

As these political shenanigans are carried out, a famous "transgender" calling herself Caitlyn is reportedly pondering again becoming Bruce. One must wonder, if "she" reverts to Bruce, would she become "he" again. In fact, one has to ask, "Was 'she' ever really 'he?'" The rationale for the change of pronoun is based on the alleged reality of the individual's self-identification, in which case "he" had always really been "she." The narrative is that this poor, confused individual was always Caitlyn, though her parents mistakenly named her Bruce because they failed to take into account her gender.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> "Unintended consequences," Wikipedia, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended\\_consequences](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Unintended_consequences), accessed 14 May 2016

<sup>14</sup> An excellent discussion of the problems arising when society accepts gender dysphoria as normal in an article published this past Friday. See Michael Brown, "If Caitlyn Jenner Reverts to Bruce...", Townhall, May 13, 2016, <http://townhall.com/columnists/michaelbrown/2016/05/13/if-caitlyn-jenner-reverts-to-bruce-n2162479>, accessed 13 May 2016

You can understand how the attempt by SJWs to accommodate what is clearly a psychological problem by compelling 99.7% of the population to pretend that the emotional dysphoria is normal leads to unforeseen difficulties. Physically disfiguring the body and saying that gender is fluid leads to numerous unintended consequences.

I am currently reading for a second time a book written by a favourite author.<sup>15</sup> He documents the decline in birthrates throughout Europe as well as here in Canada, and the subsequent influx of immigrants to continue paying for the social programmes enacted by these same nations. A disproportionate number of the new immigrants are from Middle Eastern countries. Steyn then documents the stress arising when Islamic ideas are imposed on society as governments, and even churches, twist themselves into knots in a misguided attempt to accommodate Islam as the moral equivalent of the Christian Faith.

It seems never to occur to political leaders that the ideals on which our nations are founded and which we take for granted—charity as a duty, tolerance of different ideas, freedom of speech, religious liberty, freedom of association—grew out of the shared faith of Christians. Moreover, politicians seem genuinely mystified that Islam does not—indeed cannot—tolerate such ideals. Thus, the tensions that have plunged the western world into religious conflict arise out of our perverted distaste for children despite the continued need to grow the economy with new workers who will pay their taxes to pay for the entitlements we have come to expect.

Those faithful souls who endeavour to follow the Christ, obeying His Word, find themselves in growing conflict with governments. New moral codes are foisted on society and the faithful are counselled to be silent. Increasingly, we read of Christians compelled to provide services against their consciences. The slaughter to the unborn has become as the birth control of choice and the faithful are expected to tolerate this evil in silence. Now, in the United States, Christians are compelled to purchase a product that violates their consciences (insurance that provides abortion benefits and birth control products that are actually abortifacients). As society becomes more intolerant of the Faith, even the advocates of the new morality, like Pandora, are intimidated as they are confronted by the evils they have unleashed on society.

These matters just introduced admittedly lie in the socio-cultural realm; however, they do have a major impact on Christians. If the faithful accommodate the strange new twisted families of this brave new world, we will cease to proclaim the truth of God even as we consign ourselves to irrelevance. If we do not accommodate the new moral code, we will be compelled to face the wrath of the state. Candidly, throughout history, the churches have never been the friend of the state. When the churches embrace the state as a means of advancing the cause of Christ, the Faith was dimmed and relegated to the realm of religious prostitution. When the Faith has stood firm with the Risen Lord, though the churches were persecuted, they moved forward in power.

The folly of error is soon exposed; and whether people actually speak of that foolishness or whether they remain silent, even the pagans know that the errant position is sheer folly. As many churches have imbibed deeply of ecclesiastical error, becoming indistinguishable from the world, the membership supported them by fleeing from them in droves. Men, especially, attend these religious exercises cleverly disguised as empty pews. God's people recognise error because it is not the real thing. Emptied of truth, only fools or people sentimental for the past who refuse to jettison the error now presented continue to support such errant religious exercises through their presence. Stately facilities that once hosted faithful preachers of the Word are now emptied of the saints. Like Israel when the Ark of the Covenant had been captured by the Philistines, saints breathe out "Ichabod" with their dying breath [cf. **1 SAMUEL 4:19-22**].

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<sup>15</sup> Mark Steyn, **America Alone: The End of the World As We Know It** (Regnery Publishing, Inc., Washington, DC 2001)

We are living in challenging times; the Faith of Christ the Lord is needed more than ever. Though there are many religious organisations, most of which call themselves churches, few are proclaiming the Gospel of Christ. Does that sound harsh? What are the standards for uniting with a congregation? Are those standards applied? What is actually expected of those who wish to unite? Do they actually have to believe anything? Or is it sufficient, as one church leader once insisted, simply “to pray the prayer?” The message that is presented in modern churches seems more often offered as a suggestion than a call to life through faith in the Risen Son of God. Does the congregation which you attend present life in the Beloved Son? Or is it simply another religious organisation presenting seven steps to living at your full potential?

The churches today have unprecedented opportunity to spread the Gospel throughout the world. At the same time, churches in this day face times of unparalleled danger. Heresy, apostasy, the exaltation of self-will, toleration of moral decadence saps the strength of contemporary churches. Just as cancer cells growing unchecked destroy the body that hosts them, so errant teachers and church members tolerant of evil multiply, choking the life out of the churches and reducing the Faith to irrelevance. Naïve and careless church leaders fail to act because they are unable to define corruption hidden in the guise of orthodoxy. Such churches and church leaders are in rebellion against the Lord Christ.

Paul urged the Christians in Salonica “not to be quickly shaken in mind or alarmed, either by a spirit or a spoken word, or a letter seeming to be from us, to the effect that the day of the Lord has come.” He continued by writing, “Let no one deceive you in any way. For that day will not come, unless the rebellion comes first, and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the son of destruction, who opposes and exalts himself against every so-called god or object of worship, so that he takes his seat in the temple of God, proclaiming himself to be God. Do you not remember that when I was still with you I told you these things” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:2-5]?

If the situation was urgent in that day, and it was, how much more urgent is the situation today as we near the end of the age? The Apostle warned that “The coming of the lawless one is by the activity of Satan with all power and false signs and wonders, and with all wicked deception for those who are perishing” [2 THESSALONIANS 2:9, 10a]. In short, before the antichrist is revealed, there shall be a great apostasy. Perhaps that is already taking place today. Therefore, it is time for the people of God to take note and heed the call of the Saviour. “When these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near” [LUKE 21:28]. Even so, come quickly, Lord Jesus. Amen.