

2 Timothy 3

2 Timothy 3 bears a closer look as the Savior's return comes closer and closer because Paul may be sharing not only a description of the time of Christ's coming but what we need to do to be prepared. As the parable goes, make sure we have the wicks in our lamps trimmed and plenty of oil so when He arrives we are ready to receive Him.

We live in a time of multiple conflicting voices which represent major rips in the fabric of society. Whatever your personal view, social media has that shade of gray in support of it. Influential persons can even through artificial intelligence be given to say and do things they never really said or did. We are most susceptible to being deceived, misinformed, and even gaslit.

Western civilization is no longer based on the virtues of community and neighborhood. It is every man for himself. As a consequence social order is disintegrating; the moral glue that held families and communities together is dissolving. Ideas thought once unconscionable are becoming mainstream. If it can be sold for a buck, it is considered worth the sale regardless of its lack of ethical value.

But the worse part in all of this is a blatant disregard for the Scripture, itself. The message of Scripture, as every Christian knows, is about grace and therefore about giving not taking, about others and not "me."

The Word of God is being re-interpreted in support of the very lifestyles it actually condemns. Theology is being rewritten—not in the name of honest scholarly research, but—in an effort to discredit the real truth, water it down and wash it away! We might ask: did the Bible mention any of this, of what is trending in today's civilized societies?

Well, Paul saw it coming in 2 Timothy 3 where he used the word "perilous" or "hard times." The only way to define this word is by the context itself characterized by, first and foremost, a selfish interest [lovers of self] which Richard Trench called "ministering to their own ease" with no regard for another's need. This is represented, secondly, by an inordinate interest in wealth—not for the sake of spending it but merely to accumulate it [covetous, lit.: lovers of

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money]. Already we can see the flow of the apostle's thoughts since greed is an aspect of selfishness.

Paul then called them braggarts; but of what is their boast? They are arrogantly blustering, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" [Revelation 3:17]. Now we are not talking about all the rich, nor are we quantifying the term, riches." Paul is, I believe, describing the self-reliant elite, who also use their wealth and influence to oppress the poor. Scripture on many occasions warns us about them [Jeremiah 5:27; Zechariah 11:5]. Micah says of them they are "full of violence, ... have spoken lies, and their tongue is deceitful" [Micah 6:12]. There is a clear progression of the apostle's thoughts here. A desire of the selfish is to be wealthy and this gives them a sense of superiority, of a self reliance which eventually says, "I don't need God anymore for support."

Agur's Prayer in Proverbs 30:8-9: "Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain."

Paul testified to the Philippians: "... in respect of want: ... I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content." [Philippians 4:11].

A favorite verse to learn is Hebrews 13:5. The ESV reads, "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

What they publicly acclaim they privately believe. [This is the word proud, i.e. proud thoughts and a proud heart] —but it is all sophistry and self-serving. They are now self-deceived. And how many poor mistakenly envy them! They scrape together a few coins to purchase a lottery ticket in the hopes of being rich, too; but this is also deception. It is not having money that is so wrong, but when money has us, we serve it rather than God—that's the danger!

This leads inevitably to [blasphemy], slandering God's message as disreputable and foolish. God has become a veritable joke and a

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curse word to many in our generation. They even now have a saying to indicate someone getting serious about something. They call it a “come to Jesus moment.” Pardon my language but they have prostituted God’s Word. If they know any Bible, they begin to pick and choose verses in support of their way of thinking. The Bible no longer challenges them when that was precisely God’s reason for giving us His Word: “to convict of sin, righteousness and judgment” [John 16:8-10].

If they would have no regard for God’s Word, why have any toward parents! [disobedient to parents]. The Latin word suggests “swollen up with pride” and pride is a trait already noted. Is it possible—unknown to Paul, of course—that this speaks of our time, a generation raised in a technical age in which science has made God of little value to them. They are now convinced that logic has taken the place of authority figures.

Is it possible such disrespect for parents is a symptom of a disregard for God and His Word? Honoring one’s parents is a vital part of that Biblical truth!

They are [ungrateful] something that most might think of minor interest but the word Paul uses suggests to me “never satisfied; never pleased and never open to accepting gifts or help from others.” There is no thanksgiving in their hearts nor thanks on their lips.

Paul admonishes us “in every thing by prayer and supplication *with thanksgiving* let your requests be made known unto God.” [Philippians 4:6]. A lack of thanksgiving indicates a spirit of self-reliance and an inability to allow another to help. When things happen they don’t like, they are in danger of becoming bitter, envious, resentful. Thanksgiving recognizes the contributions of others to our own well-being. The spirit of self-reliance, on the other hand, becomes a spirit of entitlement without gratitude. Self-reliant is self-centered.

If they cannot thank a parent, they will not thank God. The King James Bible calls them [unholy] meaning they are not dedicated or devoted to Him. A favorite narrative of mine is Genesis 5:24 “Enoch walked with God.” Enoch’s name mean “dedicated” or “devoted.”

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One who cannot praise and thank God for His goodness to them, is not capable of being devoted to Him, either. They are no Enoch. But they are self-centered. Life is all about them and them only. They seek their own happiness, their own way through life. Perhaps, we might not realize the gift we have in our heart every time it swells with a desire to thank our Lord for His goodness. A grateful heart is a gatekeeper warding off bitterness and hate. It is the soul's song sung in the night [Job 35:10].

In keeping with this social theme in verse 3: there will come a generation that is so self-centered that they will not want children, having lost any interest in family [without natural affection]. We are obviously not profiling an entire generation but still we see the seedlings of this plant.

With no honor for God or parent it is a short way to no honor at all. They cannot keep their word, honor pledges, or alliances [truce breakers] because selfishness is not a unifying idea. A truce breaker is someone who proves to be among other traits: implacable, irreconcilable, and unforgiving—once an enemy always an enemy—refusing to make peace.

They become diabolical [false accusers]. Paul's word means slanderer. To think that someone who is irreconcilable, who is unforgiving, that they would seek to ruin another's reputation—this—is not a stretch. It is in keeping with who they are. They have disowned family and laughed at God and have no interest in appeasement. This is another example of what is more about 'me' and less about 'us.' Such persons tend to be undisciplined—Paul's next word which in the King James Bible is "incontinent" meaning uncontrollable and unrestrained. Paul prophesied that they are a generation without discipline. Paul called them [fierce], wild. We don't need to be social-psychologists to see the digression in the apostle's language. They started down this road the day they decided that life was all about them and them alone!

For the believer, there is the Fruit of the Spirit temperance and meekness, gentleness, and long-suffering. We need to live these virtues the more so—the more we seem challenged not to.

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They despise the “good” Paul concludes or as Isaiah explained it, “[they] call evil good, and good evil” [Isaiah 5:20]. We must not be naive. As times become more and more perilous, a systemic evil is reforming society, redefining morality, and reinventing language as Isaiah wrote, calling evil good and good evil. Everything we valued as social beings, from family, to friendships, from morality to ethics, from affection to love, is morphing into something unrecognizable, foreign, alien—what Paul called dangerous, savage.

Now in verse 4 we come to the ultimate end, Dante’s Inferno, Jesus’ Gehenna, a place without hope, without love. A place where betrayals are culturally commonplace [traitors], reckless behavior [heady] is the norm. Plato noted that this differs in no way from madness. It is reckless actions not done in consideration of others. They are [high-minded] puffed up or inflated with pride. From this comes “envy, strife, railings, suspicion” [1 Timothy 6:4].

At last Paul points out something I can understand: They seek [pleasure]. That’s what it really is all about! Paul might have simplified this description by calling such persons selfish seekers of pleasure, which is what drugs and casual sex is all about.

Loving pleasure rather than God—says it all. For believers, this is carnality which is adversarial to the Spirit of God within [Romans 8:4-5; Galatians 5:16]. “For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other,” [Galatians 5:17] NIV.

Here in verse 5 Paul surprised me, calling them “religious” [having a form of godliness] and, yet, in verse 2 they are “unholy.” [2 Timothy 3:2, 5] If words matter—and they ought to—these are genuinely pious individuals but, clearly, *not* toward God. Consequently, their piety is powerless to benefit them. Perhaps, that momentary gathering in the temple or the church soothes a disturbed conscience back to sleep. Perhaps, piety is toward “another” god, the god of self or an indisputable dedication to a cause religiously defended at all costs. Paul talked to the believers at Romans about those “who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator” [Romans 1:25]. Perhaps, no one can rightly be called non-religious.

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Paul has been profiling a systemic apostasy that like a malignancy is destroying the body politic from the inside. The enemy is within. They are waging war against a conscience God gave them to lead them. It is mutiny. It is an ethos based on self instead of God, pleasure instead of virtue. It is a society that uses law for personal gain and logic to justify immorality. And to confirm all of this, one simply needs to pick up the Old Testament, the Jewish prophets, and read on.

But now Paul seemed to get off subject in verse 6. Those who are in power in this world have been supposedly recruiting *women* to carry the signs. Could Paul be on a tangent here like preachers who are prone to get off subject when one idea brings another to mind that doesn't exactly fit the topic or text. If that be true, we can jump to verse 10 and set verse 6-9 aside for another discussion. The question is: are the men in verse 6 the persons we have been talking about in the previous verses? If they are then these verses [6-9] are no tangent.

Paul observed that there is a certain type of woman that is most likely to be led astray in all this: "For of this sort are they [persons we have been discussing above?] which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts" [2 Timothy 3:6]. Some women become easy prey to false teachers. Paul says the men described in verses 2-5 worm their way into homes and insinuate themselves into the lives of these women who perhaps are vulnerable because of neglect. They seem easily lead by all kinds of evil desires. I must admit some ignorance as to what this is describing. Most modern women would detest being called victims or vulnerable and easily deceived. It is up to them to evaluate Paul's words, but I wouldn't pass it off as Ephesian or Ionic or Spartan Greek culture as if it has no relevance in our day. We are living in the end times! [verse 1]

Historically women have been more religious than men, but this might be changing. Nonetheless, corrupt leaders might find women more open to their charms and emotional appeals than men. In one church I pastored, I learned later by a woman that it was a group of older women who didn't like me and had the pulpit vacated in a congregational meeting called for that purpose. This is not surprising

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since traditionally women have been more demonstrative than men. How are we to understand 1 Timothy 2:12 “I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence.” Perhaps, everything Paul is saying to Timothy has more to do with the church at Ephesus where Timothy is pastor than in general about Christianity. I have my view but that’s another topic.

What seems more apropos to our time than to Paul’s is the part women play in an evolving society. In our time they are more likely to play major roles in government as well as being outspoken on issues. Virile men are being culturally denigrated in the Western world as abusive and some universities have limited the enrollment of white men. We are not profiling here the modern woman—much less the Christian woman. But we are suggesting that there is an applicable interpretation of these verses that overlays what we perceive to be true in our day.

Is it possible that the role of men and women in society in a Biblical sense is no longer the norm! Some might say of Paul that he is misogynous but perhaps he is only recalling God’s original design in the Garden when Eve was created Adam’s support in a spirit of absolute oneness.

These are educated women [2 Timothy 3:7] “Ever learning,” refers to these women. But what is not lived is not learned. They are “never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” What is, at least, implied here is that there is an honest desire to find meaning in life, perhaps, happiness. A modern course in “gender studies” as much as suggests this. Paul is not accusing these women of manipulating circumstances to perfect by craft some devious scheme. They don’t want to see themselves as victims but because they trust men who are abusing the privilege of their attention, they are in a sense victimized. A.I. tells us that “In the Fall of 2022, female students made up 57.9% of all postsecondary enrollment in the United States.”

Paul came up with what to our ears is a strange analogy: he saw the men who taught and used these women like the Egyptian magicians, Jannes and Jambres [2 Timothy 3:8] who pushed back against Moses’ request for the Israelites to leave Egypt. [They resisted the truth.]

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The magicians used trickery and magic—the “wow” effect, which is reproducible now, I surmise, through higher education by simply appealing to student pride, “I’m an Ivy-leaguer!!”

Generations of a cherished morality and ethics are now being discredited based on untried theories and bizarre ideas that are only accepted because of who proposed them—teachers of “corrupt minds.” Meanwhile, disowning the lessons of the past, a new generation builds their tower of Babel.

In verses 2 through 5 we find 20 different traits profiling this type of person who appeals to these women for support. Like these magicians, those who support a modernistic view seek to discredit Christ and God’s Word. In Paul’s words they are “reprobate concerning the faith.” The New Living Translation bluntly identifies this as a “counterfeit faith.”

The adversarial relation between modernism and Christianity is real [resist]. Paul couldn’t have known that evolutionary theory would attempt to discredit the Creator; that the word “sin” would cease to have any cultural significance or that the Savior’s resurrection would be discredited by the historical-critical method of interpreting Scripture. Paul simply wants us to outright disapprove what we know is not of God! He then assures us that God will expose all this as He did the Egyptian magicians.

It is reasonable to think that Paul was observing all this in some way in his day but it is equally clear that these verse are relevant in our day, as well. Paul spoke of these things being true “in the last days” which must apply more so now than then, since secondly he prophesied that things would get worse [2 Timothy 3:13].

Paul turns his thoughts now toward us [2 Timothy 3:10-17] beginning with a personal testimony of the price a believer must pay in defense of their faith. Persecution is a given [2 Timothy 3:12]. It is unavoidable for those who live a godly life. How could we imagine any meeting of the heart or mind with a culture that has utterly forsaken the God, whom our soul pants after! “Be not conformed to this world...” [Romans 12:2].

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This all sounds uncommonly harsh for a saint like Paul to delineate but it is because he is close to God that he sees the danger. Paul admonished us to disassociate from all of this [2 Timothy 3:5]. Then he closes out the chapter urging us to stay in the Word!!

It is rather easy to see this prophecy playing out on the streets of our world. We may be tempted to embellish this description with details not envisioned by Paul, but it would serve no purpose nor add any importance. I know I have been so inclined to talk about gender affirmation and dysphoria, things I haven't discover yet mentioned in the Bible. I think I recall Francis Schaeffer talking about "freedom within limits" meaning if the Bible doesn't say it's wrong, you decide for yourself. But I am now inclined to think that—to use a legal idea—the lesser offense is included, which means to me that Paul's description here blankets all sin.

Paul took a few steps back to blur unnecessary details less they demand undo emphasis. It is enough to say that a selfish, greedy, proud world cannot long survive no matter how lofty sounding their rhetoric. A wealthy world that has forsaken and forgotten their Creator is enjoying a temporary high. To show us this Paul had to take us outside and walk the streets with eyes wide open.

Now he admonishes, urges, beseeches, us to

"continue ... in the things which [we] have learned and have been assured of, knowing of whom we have learned *them*;" [2 Timothy 3:14]. Young's translation is best "And thou -- be remaining in the things which thou didst learn and wast entrusted with, having known from whom thou didst learn them." I prefer the word "entrusted" rather than "assured" because it gives a clearer sense. We are stewards of God's Word and must never disrespect that honored calling!

In Psalm 93:5 we read of the Lord, "Thy testimonies are very sure..." A translation of the Latin of verse 14 reads, "But you, remain in the things you have learned and that have been entrusted to you, knowing from whom you learned [them]."

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Paul ends this chapter reminding Timothy of his childhood having been raised by a saintly mother and grandmother [2 Timothy 3:15]. He then reminds Timothy of the value of the Word that it has been provided for us under inspiration by God to equip us for such a time as this—perilous times [2 Timothy 3:16-17].

It is paramount that believers keep their minds and hearts on the Word of God: reading it, studying it, meditating on it, discussing it, fellowshiping around it united in living it. This is no option nor something we can neglect and plan later to repent over.

It is probably here I remind the church that what Paul shares with Timothy, our Lord through this text shares with us all. The days of allegiances to buildings and rituals at the expense of the simple message of the Cross have to be over. We need to renew our first love.

Here's where I get preachy! I began this study talking about the many voices out there that we hear—and some of them actually listen to—that are counterfeits of Biblical truth. They are deceptive by design—if not man's, Satan's! And the only way to tell the real from the fake is to know the real!

Engage in discussions with other believers in an honest prayerful hunger for God's truth and the Spirit will keep your minds and hearts safe from the times we live in. But if you or I distance ourselves from fellowship around God's Word, we will be like a wounded animal that has left the safety of the herd or flock and the wolf or lion sees that!

2 Timothy 3:16 ought to be cherished because it is more than a doctrinal statement. It is the sum of the Spirit's work in us which excels in Christian fellowship.

From time to time, some of us are being encouraged, some convicted, some taught new truth, and some are being restored. We are on the strait and narrow. Some are simply walking the path, learning as they go [doctrine]; some have stopped along the way and need to be urged to keep going [reproof] and others have left the path and need to be directed back [correction]; some have just started out

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and need to be assured it is the right way [instruction in righteousness]. Each week the Spirit might have a different ministry to us: taught one week, corrected the next.

Sometimes we may need general teaching [doctrine]; some of us at times need to have a separate and private conversation with the Holy Spirit [conviction]. Some who have lost their way need to find the path again [correction]. And there are young believers who are learning the path, how it winds, or where the hills are, etc.

I believe The Spirit does His best work when we gather together to discuss and learn Scripture—each contributing thoughts and testimonies; in this way, I find this chapter exceptionally meaningful. Everything about it screams out to me that we need each other: “... the same Spirit is active in all [of us], distributing to each person as he wills.” [1 Corinthians 12:11].

“Let us hold fast the profession of *our* faith without wavering; (for he *is* faithful that promised; And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some *is*; but exhorting *one another*: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.” [Hebrews 10:23-25]

Prayer: Father, we are grateful for your truth. Thankful that you at times convict or correct us by your Spirit when You see we need that. Like David, we pray, “Show us Your ways, O LORD; teach us Your paths.” Keep us on the strait and narrow. Hid us in that secret place the Psalmist spoke of. Give us that continued awareness of Your presence that arrests all fear and doubt and keeps our faith in You strong. In Jesus Name we pray, Amen.