



Times of stress

(2 Timothy chapter 3)

The Lord Jesus Himself and the apostles warned about the spiritual deception and apostasy that would be a conspicuous feature in the professing Christian Church in the last days. Paul not only described the conditions that existed in the Church in Timothy's time but also the conditions that exist today in the Church.

His main emphasis was not on the world but on those who professed a form of godliness but whose lifestyles denied God's power to change them down on the inside. These people Paul described were not primarily people in the world but people in the Church.

The context of what he said applies specifically to the last days. While apostasy and spiritual deception has always marked the Church it will be a conspicuous feature of the last days.

When you look at the state of the professing Christian Church today especially in the west and the rapid rise of Islam it is abundantly clear that we are seeing the sun set on the traditional form of Christianity as we have known it. The spiritual seduction, deception and apostasy we see today will culminate in the appearance of the Antichrist himself.
(2 Thessalonians 2:3-4)

How does this passage of scripture describe those who have a form of godliness but deny its power to change them?

Now lets look at 2 Timothy chapter three beginning at verse one.

1. People will profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly.

(Vs 1-5) "But mark this: There will be terrible times (times of stress) in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God-having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with them."

Now the King James version says that in the last days there will be "perilous times" but the Greek says "times of stress." Today in our world stress is the number one feature of our contemporary western culture. The kind of stress the Bible speaks about here is directly generated by the lifestyles people live today. When you look at this list of people described here it begins with "lovers of themselves and lovers of money" and ends with "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." This accurately describes the society in which we are living today in the world as well as the spiritual condition of the professing Christian Church in the West.

The startling thing in these scriptures is that it is not talking about the unbelievers in the world but professing

Christians in the Church. They have a form of godliness but will not allow themselves to be changed inwardly.

Now corruption is irreversible. Refrigeration will slow down the process of corruption but not stop it. For example if you put a piece of fruit in the fridge it will last much longer than in the open air but it will eventually rot and decay.

Many churches are like refrigerators. People are not really changed inwardly by the Holy Spirit. The process of corruption may be slower but it is still irreversible. The only answer is the New Creation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) (John 1:12-13 3:3) (Galatians 6:15) (Romans 8:7-9 10:9-13,17)

Many in the Church seek for blessings, particularly spiritual gifts, power, healing and prosperity but very few hunger and thirst after righteousness. Soon we will all have to make one of three choices. *Firstly*, we can choose the 'Babylon' of false religion with its ecumenism, Charismania, Hyper faith and interfaith associations. Jeremiah calls them "*The Circle of the Merrymakers.*" (Jeremiah 15:17) *Secondly*, we can completely backslide into the 'Egypt' of this world. *Thirdly*, we can remain faithful to the Lord Jesus Christ and to His Word, the Bible.

Multitudes in the Church are sitting on the fence between the kingdom of this world and the Kingdom of God but God is going to 'electrify' the fence and everyone will have to jump one way or the other.

Many Christians are not really committed to Jesus and all out for Him but they are not really at home in the world either and there is no real sense of urgency in them to fulfil the great commission. They attend Church meetings and Bible studies and profess to believe

but they are really living their lives just like the pagans do in the world. They have developed a false sense of spiritual security but don't realize their true spiritual condition before God. They live in a kind of 'neutral zone' between two worlds where spiritual perceptions are not really clear but rather grey and obscure.

However, the Bible does not teach this category of spiritual living. We are either hot for the Lord Jesus and for the establishment of his Kingdom on this earth or we are cold. The Lord Jesus himself said, "*He that is not with me is against me and he who does not gather with me scatters*"

In the book of Revelation Jesus speaks to the lukewarm Church of Laodicea and says that He will spew it out of his mouth if it does not repent. Either we are progressing in our spiritual lives or backsliding because there is no middle course. In fact the Bible says that we are not to even associate with these kinds of people in the Church! That seems hard but its God's Word not mine!

Either we belong to a 'Philadelphian' kind of Church or a 'Laodicean' kind of church or to be more precise either we are either a Philadelphian type of Christian or a Laodicean type of Christian. We cannot be both at the same time! So then those who have a form of godliness will not allow the Holy Spirit of God to change them down on the inside.

2. Those who profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly entice the unstable by appealing to their carnal and fleshly appetites.

(Vs 6) "*They are the kind that worm their way into homes and gain control over weak-willed women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires.*"

There is a lot of preaching and worship leading these days that actually appeal to the carnal and fleshly appetites of people. Sometimes worship has become so professional that it has become the worship of worship itself. It has become entertainment for Christians. Christian musicians and singers are treated like Pop stars. The majority of the hyped up worship in the modern Church these days appeals to the carnal appetites and desires of the flesh.

Now Satan will always work on the women in the Church because this is what he did with Eve in the Garden of Eden. While God has given spiritual gifts to men and women without partiality He still has a Biblical order for men and women in ministry. Women are more susceptible to deception than men; however, it needs also to be said that they can be more sensitive to the voice of God.

In a marriage where the couple is walking in the power of the Holy Spirit the woman will often hear from the Lord before the man does. He may be out working hard but his wife is at home where it is quiet and able to read the Bible, pray and listen to good Bible teaching.

Many in the Church today if they are brutally honest with themselves only follow Jesus for the material benefits they can acquire in this world. Many preachers today are talking about prosperity and money and big building projects as if wealth is automatically a sign of God's blessing. This was exactly the case in the time of Jeremiah before the judgment by the Babylonians. The prophets were prophesying falsely and the people loved it this way. (*Jeremiah 5:30-31*)

Paul the Apostle tells us about these kinds of people when he says, "*For, as I have often told you before and now say again even with tears, many live as enemies*

of the cross of Christ. Their destiny is destruction, their god is their stomach, and their glory is in their shame. Their mind is on earthly things" (*Philippians 3:18-19*). These people he describes were once Christians.

Many professing Christians today want Jesus and the blessings He brings but they are enemies of the cross of Christ. Their Jesus is not the real Jesus of the Bible. They refuse to take up their cross daily and follow Him. They are too much at home in this world. Paul continues to say, "*But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a saviour from there, the Lord Jesus Christ"* (*Philippians 3:20*).

If we are not eagerly waiting for Jesus' return then God is going to arrange things so that we will desperately yearn for His return. Remember that we are heading for the 'Time of Jacob's Trouble' and the reign of the Antichrist. Remember Lot's wife. She perished because she clung to the things of this world.

3. Those who profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly have religious knowledge but they are never able to discover the real truth for themselves.

(Vs 7)"Always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth."

These false teachers claim to have spiritual knowledge and insight. However, appealing their teaching is to the carnal mind and flesh it is never the truth. Satan is too clever to tell an outright lie so he takes a Biblical truth and makes it the foundation for doctrine. There is only one foundation upon which all Biblical truth should be based and that is the work of the cross and the resurrection. (*1 Corinthians 3:11*)

What false teachers preach may contain elements of truth or even a Biblical truth itself but it is in fact not the whole truth. Satan is very clever. He always mixes truth with error. It is like a rat-trap. You have the cheese but that is only the enticement. The reality is that when the rat takes the cheese it brings about its own destruction.

Likewise arsenic is a deadly poison but when it is mixed little by little over a period of time with delicious food it accumulates in the body eventually bringing about death. The process takes time but in the end it is deadly. All false doctrine is taught and inspired by demons. This will characterize the last days. (1 Timothy 4: 1)

There have always been false prophets and teachers around but in the last days they will multiply. (2 Peter 2:1-3) False teachers and prophets are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth because God gives them over to deception like he did to the false prophets who led King Ahab astray. (1 Kings 22:20-23)

4. Those who profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly are influenced by witchcraft but eventually they will be exposed for what they are.

(Vs 8-9) "Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these men oppose the truth-men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone."

Jannes and Jambres were the magicians in Egypt that counterfeited the miracles of Moses. They did this by occult power. However, there came a point where they could not counterfeit all of them and Moses won the day. So it will

be the same in the last days. The final spiritual conflict will not be primarily in the area of doctrine but in the area of power. Like Moses and Aaron the Christians will prevail over the forces of Satan. The false teachers and prophets in the Church in the last days will be exposed, defeated and overcome by the faithful remnant. (Exodus 7: 1-19) (Revelation 12:11)

5. Those who profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly will persecute the Godly.

(Vs 12) "In fact everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted."

Persecution never starts from the secular powers. It always begins within the professing Christian Church. Jesus Himself said that this had happened to the prophets throughout Israel's history and would happen to the Church especially in the last days. (Matthew 23:29-39, 24:9-13)

Just as the House of Saul persecuted the House of David so the false teachers and false brethren will persecute the faithful remnant in the last days. This is already happening. Many of our leaders are compromising with the Church of Rome. Some leading evangelical leaders recently signed a contract with the Church of Rome not to try and convert Roman Catholics. This is just like Hezekiah showing the treasures of the temple to the King of Babylon. (2 Kings 20:12-13) In an edition of the Christian newspaper New Life there were statements by Billy Graham and other evangelical leaders praising Pope John Paul II despite his support for the persecution of Bible believing Christians in third world Roman Catholic countries.

For over 600 years the Roman Catholic Church systematically persecuted Jews and Bible believing Christians during the Inquisition. John foretold this in Revelation. He was not only referring to Imperial Rome but also to Papal Rome. (*Revelation 17:1-6,9,18*) Once more right at the end of this present age Rome as part of the Super Church will persecute Jews and born again Christians along with the Secular global government. It will be a case of the Bride of Satan persecuting the Bride of Christ.

This pattern is repeated in the Bible again and again going all the way back to Cain and Abel. Abel knew that the only way he could approach God was through a blood sacrifice and this made him acceptable to God. However, Cain offered up to God the work of his own hands, i.e., he approached God on the basis of his own works. When the Lord rejected his offering he went out and killed his brother. (*1 John 3:12*) This was the first manifestation of a false brother persecuting a true brother. False Christians will always persecute the true Christians just as the people of Israel persecuted the prophets and those who would not compromise their faith in God's Word.

When the Antichrist comes to power there will be the greatest apostasy the world has ever seen. Multitudes of professing Christians will not only deny their faith but also betray their fellow Christians. John the Apostle alludes to this when he says, "*Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth*" (*Revelation 12:3-4*).

The red dragon is the bloody persecution of the Church by Satan through the Antichrist. The seven heads, ten horns and seven crowns are the one world gov-

ernment and the one world religious system carrying out the persecution. The stars are professing Christians.

In a very short span of time one third of the professing Christian Church will fall away. (*2 Thessalonians 2:3*) This is why we must walk very closely with Jesus through prayer and obedience to His Word and by staying under the protection of His blood. If we learn to persevere in trials and temptations now with the strength and enabling power of the Holy Spirit then we will be able to stand when persecution comes. As the 'birth pangs' of war, disease, famines, earthquakes and spiritual deception escalate in intensity and frequency the Lord will do a mighty 'caesarean section' and remove the Church just as the bowls of His wrath are poured out on the earth's inhabitants.

6. Those who profess godliness but deny its power to change them inwardly will continue to deceive themselves and those who listen to them.

(*Vs 13*) "*While evil men and impostors (enchanters) will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*"

This was the precise case in the time of Jeremiah before Jerusalem fell under the judgment of God. Jeremiah tells us what it was like, "*A horrible and shocking thing has happened in the land. The prophets prophesy lies, the priests rule by their own authority, and my people love it this way. But what will you do in the end?*" (*Jeremiah 5:30-31*) "*From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. They dress the wound of my people as though it were not serious. 'Peace, peace,' they say, when there is no peace. Are they ashamed of their loathsome conduct? No, they have no shame at all; they do not even know how to blush. So they will fall among the fallen; they will be brought down when I punish them,' says the*

Lord" (Jeremiah 6:13-15).

There have always been false prophets and teachers around and those who listen to them but in the last days they will increase and multiply. (Matthew 24:24) (1 Timothy 4:1) (2 Timothy 4:3-4) (2 Peter 2:1-3) (Jude 17-19)

7. The only safeguard today against spiritual deception is the Word of God.

(Vs 16-17) "All scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Today in the Church, there is a growing emphasis on experiential theology and a decline in sound Biblical doctrine. The name of the Church Laodicea literally means "People's opinions." This is the character of the Church of the last days. The Church at Laodicea was lukewarm, self-centred, materialistic and rich just like the Church today especially in the developed western nations.

Right now the countries experiencing revival are the Roman Catholic ones in South America, Italy, and many other third world countries that never experienced the reformation. However, the countries that experienced the reformation for over 500 years such as Germany, Switzerland, Holland and England are in Spiritual decline.

More than ever before we need to repent of our materialism and lukewarmness and do what God says to do, "Break up your unploughed ground; for it is time to

seek the Lord, until He comes and showers righteousness on you" (Hosea 10:12b). God can send revival to the Western Church but He may have to use persecution to bring it about.

He may permit the devil to persecute the Western Church to purify it and to mobilize it in evangelism. This is what happened to the first century believers in the book of Acts. Even though the Church was not in a backslidden state it had become comfortable to a great degree but with the death of Stephen and the persecution that followed the Church was scattered but became active in evangelism. (Acts 8:4)

We need the Gifts of the Spirit as well as the Word of God if we are to avoid spiritual deception and know God's power in winning the lost and sanctifying the saints!

When Paul was leaving the Elders in Ephesus he said to them,

"Keep watch over yourselves and all the flock of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers. Be shepherds of the church of God, which He brought with His own blood. I know that after I leave, savage wolves will come in among you and will not spare the flock. Even from your own number men will arise and distort the truth in order to draw away disciples after them. So be on your guard! Remember that for three years I never stopped warning each of you night and day with tears. Now I commit you to God and to the word of His grace, which can build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified" (Acts 20:28-32).

BLOW THE TRUMPET IN ZION

" For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ "

