

Evil Men, Silly Women, and the Man of God

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The one passage of Scripture which deals in direct fashion with the last days of the church's sojourn on earth is 2 Timothy 3: 1 - 4: 5. Elsewhere we get predictions concerning "the latter times" (1 Tim. 4: 1), and also as to what shall happen after the church is removed, in such a Scripture as 2 Thessalonians 2. The former of these two passages, however, deals with a time a little before, and the latter passage with a time just after, "the last days" of 2 Timothy 3: 1.

We believe that these "last days" are now upon us, and consequently the Scripture we have indicated has a most urgent voice to us. Hence our calling attention to it in these pages. We ask that the passage be carefully read.

The apostle, we notice, fixes his prophetic gaze upon the sphere of religious profession in the last days, and not upon the condition of the world as such. The sphere where Christ's name is owned, and the Christian religion is professed, is before him, and within it he discerns three classes.

1. "Evil men" (verse 13).
2. "Silly women" (verse 6).
3. "The man of God" (verse 17).

We have placed "evil men" first in order because their features are fully described in the opening verses of the chapter, though the actual words do not occur until verse 13 is reached. The "evil men and seducers" who are to "wax worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived" are those who resist the truth after the fashion of Jannes and Jambres (verse 8), they lead captive the "silly women" (verse 6), and they are "of this sort" — i.e., they are the stamp of person described so fully in verses 2-5. Those terrible verses give us a picture of the general state of the professors of Christianity in the last days, as is clear from verse 5. which shows that all the evils of verses 2, 3, and 4 are covered with a cloak, "a form of godliness," though of course the power of godliness is totally wanting — is rather denied.

In order that the import of these verses may more fully dawn upon us, we quote the rendering given in the New Translation: — "Men shall be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, evil speakers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, profane, without natural affection, implacable, slanderers, of unsubdued passions, savage, having no love for what is good, traitors, headlong, of vain pretensions, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; having a form of piety, but denying the power of it: and from these turn away."

Several features of this dreadful picture are very significant. "*Self*" stands first. "God" comes last, and even then He is only mentioned in order to be excluded. Does not this tell its own tale? The roots of this go back as far as to the garden of Eden. The sin of Adam was virtually this, that he set up self as his object and excluded God by throwing off allegiance to Him.

After "self" comes "money." Those who are lovers of self are always lovers of money, since money is the well-nigh universal medium of exchange whereby all material things that minister to self are procured.

Following again are fifteen descriptions, most of which, if not all, are various manifestations of the self-assertive spirit, for instance: —

"Boastful" — glorying in the supposed prowess of *self*.

"Arrogant" — filled with an overweening sense of the importance of *self*.

"Evil speakers" — ready to decry others that *self* may be the more effectually elevated.

"Disobedient to parents" — *self*-assertion at a very early age.

"Ungrateful" — *self* treated as of such importance that all services are taken for granted and treated as unworthy of recognition.

"Profane" — *self* rising up in its fancied might and belittling God, — and so we might continue to the end of the list.

Last on the list comes "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." If *self* is the great object, and money is prized as that which enables *self* to be gratified, pleasure in its many forms is that which gratifies, and it is loved accordingly.

In a word the whole picture presented to us is one of fierce, aggressive, unabashed *self*-assertion to a point where God is entirely excluded, though the outward form of piety is still retained for appearance sake.

The extraordinary way in which the description fits the present age is quite apparent. A great word in educational, and other similar circles, just at present is *self-expression*! Education, we are told, consists in drawing out of the young that which is in them; they must be taught to express themselves. Indeed, the *right* of each individual to this *self-expression* is insisted upon. Educational ideas, now hopelessly out of date, might recognize there was latent in the child as much needing repression as that needing expression, if not more. Modern theories, denying the fall of man, also deny, or at least ignore, the ugly facts of fallen human nature, and hence repression is ruled out, and expression is all the rage.

In 2 Timothy 3: 2-5 we have, then, just human nature pretty fully expressed with a cloak of hypocrisy superimposed.

But though the description given covers in a general way the religious professors of the last days, out of the general mass there proceeds a special class of deceivers. "Of this sort are they which creep into houses and lead captive silly women" (verse 6). "Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth; men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith" (verse 8). "But evil men and seducers [or, juggling impostors] shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived" (verse 13). These three verses put together give us a full portrait of the character of the "evil men."

They are first and foremost active energetic agents of the powers of darkness. They are seducers, and in effect, deceiving, yet are they themselves deceived. They maintain a certain outward Christian profession and yet are thoroughly dominated and deceived by the spiritual forces of evil that they serve. Their minds are corrupted, hence their methods are crooked. They *creep* into houses to do their nefarious work instead of walking in erect by the front door. Judged by "the faith" they are reprobate or "found worthless," and as to "the truth" they resist it.

This last point seems to be their characteristic feature. They *resist the truth*, as the two Egyptian magicians once withstood Moses. *Truth* is the great standard by which everything is judged. *Truth* is the great object of the assaults of the adversary whom these evil men serve, though perhaps they are not so directly and palpably under his influence as were the Egyptian magicians of old.

It is worthy of note that nothing immoral or outwardly abominable is alleged against these men, as for instance is alleged against those of whom Jude writes. The evil that marks them is of a more

refined and subtle sort — evil in the region of soul and spirit rather than the body.

Men "of this sort" are much in evidence to-day. Self makes up their little world. Truth they hate and resist, and souls they corrupt and capture. We need not mention various names under which they work. They adopt a variety of banners, and have differing party cries, but essentially they are one. May we all be fully warned against them!

The victims of the deceiving teachings of these evil men, who are thus led captive by them, are designated "silly women." The term "women" is used, we judge, with a moral significance, i.e., it describes a class of person, and not exactly the female sex as such. The Old Testament provides us with a similar passage in Proverbs 2: 10-22. There we find warnings against "the evil man" (verse 12) and also "the strange woman" (verse 16). That there is a simple and literal meaning there is obvious. It is equally clear that the two expressions personify evil in its two main features; violence on the one hand, and corruption on the other. So, here; though it is true that in the main self-assertiveness, and boasting and active propagation of seducing deceits characterizes men rather than women, and a certain foolish shallowness and inability to reach settled convictions characterizes women rather than men, yet plenty of exceptions to the general rule may be found. Hence, we judge, just as "evil men" in the passage before us indicates a class in which occasionally women may be found, so "silly women" indicates another class in which not a few men may be found.

The characteristic feature of the "silly women" is that they are "ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (verse 7). Always inquiring, always open to receive novelties, and yet never reaching a settled state of conviction about anything. "What is truth?" is their perpetual cry. The reason of this singular inability to reach definite knowledge is exposed for us in the words "laden with sins, led away with divers lusts." When the life is laden with sins, and various and conflicting desires and passions make a battle-ground of the heart, no divinely-reached conviction is possible.

Here is another proof of what has often been asserted, viz., that the origin of all mental and intellectual trouble, all scepticism, and uncertainty and indecision, is much more frequently found in the heart than in the mind. The difficulty is far more of a moral than of an intellectual nature. And, oh! with what frequency are the "silly women" to be met with to-day. How many learned professors are bending their energies to produce just this type! Our forefathers were men of rugged beliefs and sharp convictions, whether right or wrong, and lusty blows they gave and received in the conflict engendered. Today all such loud vulgarity is condemned and eschewed and the fashionable thing is to inquire continually and be sure of nothing, so as the better to indulge one's various lusts conveniently, and become a "silly woman" indeed!

The present age is unquestionably marked by shallowness. The river of human thought and energy has so broadened out that depth has necessarily been sacrificed. Shallowness — foolish shallowness — in the things of God is greatly to be dreaded. May the Lord in His goodness deliver both writer and reader from every taint of it.

Towards the end of our chapter a third class comes to light. There are "all that will live [or, desire to live] godly in Christ Jesus" (verse 12). The "evil men" are lovers of pleasures. The "silly women" are led by their various lusts. But in contrast these, far from living lives of self-gratification, "shall suffer persecution." The tide of the world is dead against them. Out of this class springs "the man of God" who is contemplated by the apostle in verse 17.

Not all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus attain to that remarkable title. In Old Testament times God had many saints and witnesses; a few only are called men of God; so in the New Testament. A "man of God" is a man raised up to stand for God when the mass of that which is professedly His is

marked by decay and declension and even apostasy.

In this passage the "man of God" particularly before the mind of the apostle was Timothy himself, and we shall do well to notice the things that marked him.

In the first place, he had fully known Paul's doctrine and manner of life. He was thoroughly acquainted, that is, with the full truth of Christianity, and with the proper experimental effect of that truth as seen in the life of Paul, the pattern saint (see 1 Tim. 1: 16).

Secondly, he knew from a child the Holy Scriptures given by inspiration of God. Here he had the unfolding of God's ways in deliverance and government, with every conceivable warning of the tendencies and workings of the fallen human heart. Thus he was to be made wise unto salvation from every pitfall which Satan would set for his feet, or the feet of saints generally. Scripture, too, is capable of so many different uses that it thoroughly furnishes the man of God unto all good works. Here we have the positive equipment of the man of God. 2 Tim. 2: 21 has shown us his necessary equipment of a negative character. As a result of that he will be "prepared unto every good work," just as here he is "thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

Lastly, he preaches "the word" (2 Tim. 4: 2). Fortified by the truth himself, made wise unto salvation from the raging tide of evil, and thoroughly furnished, he wields the word of truth for the deliverance of others. Truth may fall in the street to all appearance, for the populace may "turn away their ears from the truth," and "turn to fables," still the more earnestly and insistently he preaches the Word.

All this particularly characterizes the man of God. It characterizes also, though, doubtless, in lesser measure, all who will live godly in Christ Jesus. We are painfully conscious how far we come from being entitled to such a designation as "man of God." We may even be aware that we could hardly lay claim to the title "the godly in Christ Jesus," still how gracious is our God! How condescending to our littleness and feebleness in these last days! He even speaks of those who "*desire to live godly in Christ Jesus.*" Cannot we thankfully place ourselves here?

As we conclude our survey of the passage, let us notice how upon God's side all seems to hinge on the *truth*; and how on our side all hinges on what we *love*.

Whatever the "evil men" may be in themselves, the great object of the devil in raising them up is that they may "*resist the TRUTH.*" Whether they work in open opposition, or in the more dangerous form of imitation, this is the object.

If it be a question of the careless multitude that will be embraced within the capacious circle of a corrupted and worldly Christianity, they "*turn away their ears from the TRUTH.*" They are glad enough to have teachers, but wish them to pander to their own lusts.

The "silly women" are of an inquiring turn of mind, and therefore at first sight, promise better things. They, however, are marked, as we have seen, by being "*never able to come to a knowledge of the TRUTH.*"

As for the "man of God," that which above all else characterizes him is that he is thoroughly saturated with Scripture, which is to us the *fountainhead of TRUTH*. The word "truth" does not occur in the verses concerning the man of God. We do get, however, "my doctrine," "the Holy Scriptures," "all Scripture," "the word," and "sound doctrine," which is only another way of saying "THE TRUTH."

In the last days, as in all other days, the truth is of all importance. If that be lost *all* is lost indeed.

On our side we are coloured and controlled by what we love.

The evil men are "lovers" as we have seen. "Lovers of their own selves, lovers of money, . . . lovers of pleasures rather than lovers of God." Their career of evil is controlled by this.

So, too, the "silly women." They are controlled and led away by their various lusts, — or unlawful loves. Demas, of whom we read in 2 Tim. 4: 10, seems to be a pretty fair example of such. Unstable was he, and ultimately controlled by the fact that he "loved this present world."

On the other hand, the man of God is what the evil man is not — a lover of God, and, consequently, he loves Christ's appearing. In this he is not alone. Just as there are others who at least desire to live godly in Christ Jesus, so in anticipating "that day," he says, "not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing" (2 Tim. 4: 8).

And now let us seriously ask ourselves — do we love Christ's appearing? If, indeed, we are Christ's we do most certainly love His coming into the air which will mean the rapture and translation of His saints. His appearing will mean the testing hour has come. The heavens and the earth will be shaken. All religious profession will be put to the test. "Evil men" and "silly women" will equally be tested and judged. The present world which ensnared Demas of old, and has so sorely tempted saints from that day to this, will be exposed in all its hollowness and sham. The truth will be gloriously vindicated, and those who are of the truth, and have held to the Word, living godly in Christ Jesus, according to it, and proclaiming it, will be rewarded with a crown of righteousness. It will be a moment when light, divine light, will be shed on all things.

How does the thought of it affect us? Do we welcome it? Is His glorious appearing as dear to us as is His coming into the air and the rapture of the saints?

Let us brace ourselves afresh for the path of faithful walk and witness while we wait for that Day. May God Himself help us so to do.