Danger in the Church, Part 1
2 Timothy 3:1-2
55-12

We have a wonderful wonderful pattern of Bible study here at Grace Church. We go through book after book after book just the way God wrote them, that's the way we take them. We assume you can't improve on God's method. And since the Lord gave us a Bible, we want to study it. Since He gave it to us book by book, we want to study it book by book. Since He said that we are primarily those who have inherited the blessings of the new covenant, we spend the bulk of our time in the New Testament. And He said that the Old Testament account was for examples to us who believe. And we go back to the Old Testament to see examples of those great truths taught in the New Testament.

At this point in time we're studying 2 Timothy, Paul's second epistle to his son in the faith, Timothy. Now the wonderful thing about going expositorially through Scripture is that you know exactly where you're going to go and you're taking God's Word as He gives it. The difficulty is you've got to deal with what comes next, and sometimes it may be a little bit poignant and directed at you, but that's how it is. And I don't know, I'm kind of getting the feeling now after 1 Timothy and 2 Timothy that all of these things have been directed at me and the leadership of the church because Timothy is a church leader and Paul is writing to him to help him get things straightened out.

One man wrote me a gracious letter this week and said, "We've been being exhorted week after week after week and I'd like to suggest that it's time for a little comfort. Couldn't you divert yourself and give us a little comfort once in a while?" And I feel the same way. I just want to tell that gentleman that I agree, I'd like to be comforted to but I've got two more chapters of the Lord's exhortation here that I've got to deal with just like you. And it's all in His good time and all in His holy purpose.

I was sent a tape cassette album last week that pronounced the fact...and it had my name on the cover, it was by a preacher here in Los Angeles who was preaching against me...and he said, "The heresy of MacArthur is expository preaching. He has perverted preaching into what he calls verse-by-verse Bible exposition." Well I've heard it all now, I mean, that is...that's just unbelievable. But anyway, we'll carry right on with our exposition in spite of this man's opinion...since this is God's precious Word. And we rejoice to be able to study it.

Now I say all that in a sense because I want you to know that this is a very difficult passage we come to from the standpoint that it's not very comforting. In fact, it's a passage of more warning as is rather typical in these epistles. In fact, if I were to title this, and I did, it's "Danger in the church," not danger to the church, but danger in the church. While our Lord Jesus said, "I will build My church and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it," He didn't say it would be easy. And He didn't say the process of growing in the church would be without conflict. In fact, Jesus made it clear that the church age itself would be plagued with difficulty, primarily and there are many areas of difficulty, but

the primary concern of our Lord and the Apostles and even Paul here is the encroachment on the church of false teaching, false doctrine and its consequent...ungodliness.

False doctrine and ungodly living are twins, they go together and they are the greatest enemy of the church. The church will always be, has always been, plagued by false teachers, false apostles, false pastors, false preachers and false Christians. Those who name the name of Christ say they represent God but in fact represent Satan. They create confusion in the church. They create disorder in the church. And they keep the church in a battle situation all the time.

Jesus Himself writing in Matthew 24 predicted that there would come false Christians, false prophets and false Christs even. Peter predicted false prophets and false teachers who would lead people astray and be very successful at it. John warned of many antichrists who were already at work in the church in his epistle. Jude warned about evil, wicked, lascivious men who would come and cause us to have to contend for the faith, once for all delivered to the saints. And the beloved Apostle Paul fought false teachers everywhere he went. No sooner would he found a church then false teachers would invade it, whether they were the Judaizing legalists from Jerusalem, or the pagan religionists from out of the Greek culture, they would go in and try to pull away the unstable people, bring chaos and confusion, get evil men in high places and disrupt the church. So Paul in that rather generic message in Acts 20 says that he expects in the church that perverse men will rise from within your midst and wolves will come in from the outside and the intent of both will be to disrupt the church. And you must be committed to the Word, he says, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance.

The church is always under attack. Jesus in Matthew 7 put it very straightforward in His Sermon on the Mount as He drew that sermon to a conclusion, warning the people about those who would come along pretending to be shepherds. He said, "Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing but inwardly are ravenous wolves." It doesn't mean that they are wolves dressed like sheep, sheep's clothing is wool. They were men in wool cloaks because the wool garment was the garment of a prophet. In fact, Zechariah 13:4 says that they wear a rough garment to deceive. John the Baptist wore that kind of a rough garment which was consistent with the prophetic office.

So here come these who are wolves dressed up like prophets in wool garments and they come to deceive. They come to tear and shred and destroy. They're dressed like shepherds but they're wolves. That's the way it is. Jesus said it would be that way and that's exactly the way it is.

Now as Paul writes to Timothy, he wants to warn him about this and he's already warned him on a couple of occasions in these epistles. And now he warns him in a more general way by saying the whole church age will be characterized by this kind of conflict. We shouldn't be surprised by that. We shouldn't be vulnerable to that. Our eyes should be wide opened because we have passages like the one before us. Let's read it. You follow along as I begin in verse 1.

"But realize this, that in the last days dangerous times will come, for men will be self-lovers, money lovers, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self- control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, holding to a form of godliness although they have denied its power and avoid such men as these. For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. And just as Jannes and Jambres

opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind rejected as regards the faith, but they will not make further progress for their folly will be obvious to all as also that of those two came to be."

Now this, as I said, is a warning passage to God's ministers. It is a warning to stay away from spiritual imposters. You will notice verse 13 adds another dimension, "But evil men and imposters will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Here he is talking about the religious charlatans, imposters and frauds that invade the church. This is, by the way, one of the two prophetic passages in these epistles. The first one is in 1 Timothy chapter 4 and it also predicts the coming of infiltrating apostates and false teachers who will attempt to destroy the church, and this one does the very same as that first prophetic word.

It is important that Timothy be alerted to the fact that he is to expect this kind of warfare. And, beloved, if you think for any moment that there will ever be a time when the church can sit back and relax because the battle is finally won, you're wrong. Not until the Lord Jesus takes us to be with Himself will we get out of the war. Furthermore, it isn't going to get easier, it's going to get worse, Verse 13 says, "Evil men will proceed from bad to worse and imposters will proceed from bad to worse." It continues to accumulate and escalate as we progress toward the Second Coming of Christ. And Paul wants Timothy to understand that. He wants Timothy to know that what he's experiencing with the false teachers and false Christians in the church at Ephesus is something that will be common to the rest of the church's history. This is not an abnormal situation, I hate to think of it but this is a normal one...the church at war, the church in conflict.

Now remember that Paul has just encouraged Timothy to be a vessel to honor back in verse 20 of chapter 2. He said the church is like a large house with vessels that are honorable and dishonorable and I want you, Timothy, and all those who stand in the name of Christ to preach and do His work to be honorable vessels. And so he gave him some principles for being an honorable vessel down through verse 26. But he never told him it would be easy. Being an honorable vessel will be very difficult because there will be an ever ever ever continuing battle and warfare. Timothy had already begun to experience the resistance in Ephesus with the false teachers and the ungodly people who had followed their line. He needed to understand that this was to be expected and we need to understand the very same.

In Timothy's case these false teachers had arisen in the church and I think that's the context in which you have to see this passage. I don't think he's describing the world here, I think he's describing the character of the apostate church, the defecting church. I think these sins named from verse 2 on are characteristic of the world, but I think the issue here is that what should be characteristic of only the world has become characteristic of the church. The leaders in the church are reflective of the evils of the world, for they themselves are false. And I believe this is a picture of the church and the danger that is in the church from these who falsely represent God.

Difficult times or dangerous times are coming to the church. In verse 5 he says these people hold to a form of godliness. That tells me he must be referring to the church. He must be referring to people who pass themselves off as though they represented God. And it says in verse 6 they enter into households and captivate weak women who are weighed down with sins led on by various impulses who are always learning or hankering after religious truth but never come to the knowledge of the truth. So they again are religious teachers who purport to give answers to guilty, anxiety-ridden women who are indulged in sin and looking for a way out. They are supposedly religious gurus who

can solve problems. They are called in verse 13 imposters which says again that they are masquerading, they are pretending to be preachers and teachers who speak for God when in fact they don't.

So I believe that what we have here is a picture of the battle in the church. The church will experience this kind of personage throughout all of its history, as we shall see. And as I said, while the sins that are listed here are certainly true of the age of man and the world outside the church, what makes this such an insidious issue is that they have become issues within the church. And they pose a severe danger to the church's health, safety and power.

Now let's look at verse 1. The first word is helpful to understand, it's the word "but" and it turns the corner on a thought. He has just been saying to Timothy, if you want to be a vessel unto honor that requires gentleness, that requires meekness at the end of chapter 2, that requires kindness, that requires patience, all of those seem to be kind of soft and a little bit on the gentle side in terms of identifying the nature and character of one who ministers for Christ. You're to be kind and tender and patient and thoughtful and all of that. But...he says...realize this, that you are in great danger. So there's a hard side, too. On the one side there is a gentleness and a meekness and a patience and a tenderness. But on the other side there is a strength and a power and a resoluteness. You can be gentle but don't relax. You can be meek but don't get fooled, don't get lulled. Realize this, present tense, continually be knowing this, present tense again, continuous action...Timothy, you right now keep this in your mind. And this indicates to me that whatever he's talking about he wants Timothy to know because Timothy is experiencing it even then. Some people have wanted to say that the prophecy here relates to a time just prior to the Second Coming of Christ. Not so. It relates to that time but it also relates to Timothy and that's why Paul is saying it. So it sweeps from Timothy to the Second Coming. And we'll see the indication of that in the phrase "in the last days."

So he says, "But realize this, that in the last days." Now what are the last days? How are we to perceive the last days? Some say as I mentioned a moment ago that means the Second Coming, a time just prior to the Second Coming. It could mean that. It could mean anything. That phrase "in the last days" is used in the Old Testament for several different things. For example, in Genesis 49:1 it is used to refer to the events that are to come in the life of Jacob's sons and the tribes of Israel. So that the last days there has to do with a time in history in the near future at which time the people who are hearing the prediction are alive. The last days then would be just a few years hence.

On the other hand, in Daniel 2 the last days is used in verse 28 to refer to the entire sweep of history from Babylonian supremacy to the Messiah's Kingdom, everything from the Babylonian ascendancy where they had, you remember, the head of gold, the greatest kingdom of the world, clear till the coming of Christ to destroy the final form of man's kingdom made of iron and clay mixed, that whole sweep of history is called the last days.

What you conclude then is that in the phrase "the last days" you have to establish its meaning by virtue of its context. What is the passage talking about because the phrase in and of itself is not necessarily identifiable? The last days of what?

In Isaiah 2:2 it is used and it becomes clear that this means the Messiah's Kingdom. It will come about in the last days the mountain of the house of the Lord will be established as the chief of the mountains, will be raised above the hills and all the nations will stream to it and many people will come and say, Let us go to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob that He may

teach us concerning His ways that we may walk in His paths. That's a Messianic Kingdom prophecy. So the last days of Isaiah 2:2 has to do yet with the future of Messiah's time. So that phrase in the Old Testament could refer to a few years later, it could refer to the whole sweep of Gentile human history, or it could refer to a time when Messiah sets up His Kingdom. Again, the context has to dictate that.

Now when you come into the New Testament, these last days can be pinpointed fairly well. For example, you find in Acts 2, you remember on the day of Pentecost that Peter stood up to preach. And just after the Holy Spirit had descended and the people had spoken in languages and declared the wonderful works of God and this marvelous miraculous sign had indicated the coming of the Holy Spirit, Peter said, "This is what was spoken of through the prophet Joel." And what did Joel say? "It shall be in the last days that I will pour forth My Spirit." So Joel said in the last days the Spirit will be poured forth. On the day of Pentecost when the first pouring of the Spirit came, that began those last days. So the last days began with Pentecost for sure.

In Hebrews, let me take you to a further Scripture. Chapter 1, "God after He spoke long ago to the fathers and the prophets in many portions and in many ways." In other words, God speaking in the Old Testament. "In these last days has spoken to us in His Son." In other words, the writer of Hebrews says the last days began when God began to speak through His Son. So now we know the last days didn't begin at Pentecost, we can back up the last days began when the Son began to speak on earth. When the Son came He initiated the last days.

In John's epistle, 1 John 2:18, "Children...John says...it is the last time." So what does the last days mean? It means the time from the first coming of Christ to the establishing of His eternal glory. This whole period, this whole age is the last days up until He establishes His glorious Kingdom. We're living in a long dispensation that is properly called "the last days." The last days were the Messianic days, the days when the Messiah came and He has already come and initiated those last days.

Now let's go back to our thought in 2 Timothy. When he says here, "Realize this that in the last days" he's talking about the sweep of this long period between the first and second coming of Christ. This age of the church, in these last days, already set in motion by the arrival of the Lord Jesus Christ on earth, what are we to expect? Here it is, "Dangerous times will come." Or literally, enistemi, set in...dangerous times will set in. The word chaleposis dangerous, the word for "time" here is not chronological time, there's a word for that, chronos, it's kairos, it means seasons, epochs, particular times. And the best way to understand that is that in the period of the church age in which we live, very dangerous seasons will set in.

Now the idea of the word "seasons" is that there will be seasons of greater danger and lesser danger, almost a pulsing effect. The word for "danger" or "difficulty" here means a threat, a menace. It is used, for example, in Matthew 8, I think it's verse 28, where it talks about those two demon-possessed people that came out of the tombs. And it says they were violent, that's the same word. Violent seasons will assault the church. All through the church age there will be violent assaults against the church. That's the context here. That's the age in which we live.

Plutarch secular Greek writes, uses the same word to refer to an ugly wound, having to do with someone being assaulted and wounded severely. The church is going to be cut up, it's going to be wounded, it's going to be gashed and hacked. It's going to receive blows, painful, hard, menacing, dangerous, difficult seasons are coming against the church. And as we get closer to the coming of

Christ they're going to get worse because of verse 13. It says they will proceed from bad to worse.

So cumulatively they become worse. They come, they go but each new wave is worse than the wave before. We live in danger. I want you to understand that, beloved. As we get closer and closer to the coming of Christ, and that happens every second, obviously, we cannot expect that the things in the church are going to get better and better, they're going to get more violent and more difficult all the time. And I'm telling you, I'm seeing that. I'm seeing that in my own personal life and in the life of this church. There was a time, I look back 20 years ago when it seemed like everything was sort of a honeymoon and hearts and flowers and all of that. And we were carrying on and God was blessing and we were growing and nobody seemed to care. And as the years have gone on, the battles just accumulate, they just keep accumulating. And every new wave seems more difficult and more devastating than the one before. And not just in our local church but at the level of the church worldwide. There seems to be today a greater apostasy than every before, a greater tolerance for things that displease God, greater confusion, more religious phonies and charlatans, more false Christians, more apostasy of every sort.

The church faces hard times, seasons of great danger, painful difficulty. There will be a general encroaching decadence, an escalating apostasy. It's never going to change. I hear people say, "You know, Grace Church isn't perfect." Right, right, we know that. And you want to know something else? I believe with all my heart that in the days ahead it might become less perfect. Why? Because the escalation of the violence against the things of God coming from the kingdom of darkness.

The battles are going on all over the place, sometimes I don't even know what front to fight on. We live in a time when it's not going to get any easier. People have said to me recently, "You know, Grace Church isn't perfect and Grace Church has got problems." That's right, Grace Church has got problems because Grace Church has people. And people have problems because people are sinful. And Satan is powerful and the waves of attack just come and come and come and come and sometimes, honestly, you're so busy fighting on one front you can't fight on another front and the enemy gets you over there. And I'm experiencing that personally right now. I cannot fight on all the fronts where battles are going on, I can't get there. There's just no way. So you've got to choose the front you're going to fight on and figure you might get shot from the rear. That's just how it is in the church, it's just one constant battleground and it goes on and on and on. Now I don't want to discourage some of you young men who feel called to the ministry, but I want you to know what reality is. If you can't...if you can't face the battle then you better not join the army, you better not get into the situation if you're looking for perfection. It's just a warfare. But if you're committed to the victory and to being on the victory side, it's a challenging and exhilarating warfare and victory is glorious.

These seasons come and go but every time they come there's an ever-increasing wickedness. Ultimately it's going to culminate in the Antichrist himself as Paul writes in 2 Thessalonians chapter 2, he is going to come and he's going to be the absolute epitome of deceivers. This one is going to come who is called the man of lawlessness, the son of destruction who opposes and exalts himself above every so-called God or object of worship, who takes his seat in the temple of God, displaying himself as being God and he's going to deceive people and he's going to do all kinds of wonders and signs, false wonders it says, and signs and with the deception of wickedness he's going to cause people great harm. That's going to be the epitome, but we just keep escalating.

And by the way, the Antichrist is going to rise from within organized religion. He's going to be from

the dominion of Christendom. The false...the false christs, the false apostles, false prophets and all of them are going to rise within the framework of the quote/unquote "church."

So there's always a battle. It never goes away. If it isn't one thing it's another thing. If it isn't somebody attacking you from the outside, it's somebody on the inside bickering or complaining or trying to protect their little turf or trying to destroy unity or whatever it might be. Or else you're fighting over issues that you can't resolve. And so there's just a constant thorn in your side and you get distracted to things that you ought to just give to God and walk away. There's always something to keep the battle hot. But with all the fronts and all the battles, the bottom line, people, and this is the thing which I'm committed to, the bottom line is to protect the truth of God and the purity of His church. We may not be able to accommodate everybody with everything the way they would like it, but we will uphold the Word of God and we will call for the purity of godliness. That's the bottom line. You've got to guard the truth and you've got to guard the integrity of the church, its character.

But we are in a battle and a battle that will escalate. And it's going to get worse and worse and we're interested in people who are going to say, "I know I'm in a war so I expect a battle, but I'm wanting to stand." They're going to be people, I think, in the future at our church that are going to leave, going to leave the church because they're going to say it's a little too intense there, there's a little too much commitment to things. I'd like to get in a little more relaxed environment. I'm kind of in to the social thing, I don't want to get so hot and heavy. MacArthur's always got some heat on. And he's always under attack from something. And I don't need that. I don't want to fight his battle, I just as soon avoid it if I could.

And they'll drift off into a quieter place, and there are quieter places. I think that will happen in the future. I think some people will say, "Well, you know, Grace Church doesn't have all the social things it once had and that's maybe because as the battle gets hotter, more of our energies are going to be spent on the front and less on the R&R end." But that's maybe the way the Lord would have it. I don't know all the future holds, but I just know the battle is going to get worse. And I'm ready. I don't shirk from that, in fact I kind of get excited about it, to be honest with you, because the worse the battle the greater the victory, I guess. And we want to see the kingdom of darkness defeated. So it's difficult, dangerous times.

Verse 1 says, "Dangerous times will set in." And I believe, beloved, we're in one of these waves right now, one of these kairostimes, one of the epochs of danger to the church. Why? Verse 2, "It's because of what men will be, for men will be." Stop there for a minute. The problem is it's because of people. It's because of what men will be. The word men is anthropos, that's the word from which we get anthropology, it's a generic word. What men generically here, used in a generic sense. It's because of what people are. We have certain people who are the problem here. There are people who will be...and then he gives you a list of the worst things you could imagine, the worst. That's the problem. The problem in the church, the battle that we fight is not because we don't have good ideas or good facilities or good programs, it's because we have a lot of bad people who are endeavoring to attack the church, not just our church but the church of Christ around the world.

Now who are these people we ought to look out for? He says you've got to avoid these people, the end of verse 5, "Avoid such people as these." Now what are their characteristics? Four points he makes to establish the character of the people who are dangerous to the church, four points. Here are the people to avoid, they are dangerous to the church. They must be spoken against, they must be identified...very very important. These four points and then as we go down through verse 9 we'll

see them unfold. Now this morning we're just going to barely get started because of the need to give you an introduction. But these four general points will give us the characteristics we need to look for.

Let's just start with the first one, okay? The first point of identification in verse 2, "For men will be self-lovers." That's one word in the Greek, philautosfrom two words, phileowhich means to have affection for, literally sometimes translated to kiss, and the pronoun, themselves. People who kiss themselves, people who are in love with themselves, self-lovers. Now that's the pipe, may I say, that's the sewer pipe out of which all the rest of the garbage flows. All the garbage comes out of that...lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. What an ugly ugly list. And it all flows down the pipe of self-love....all of it. It all drips out of that pipe. It's the sewer of self-love that spews out all that filth.

Now misdirected love always releases vice...always...always. If you love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, you're okay. Anything less than that and you're going to demonstrate vice and wickedness. Once a person decides that the focal point of life is himself and he becomes a philautos, a self-lover, he has just made the decision that will destroy his entire world. Because as soon as you decide to love yourself, you've just destroyed the possibility of a meaningful relationship to God, Christ or anybody else. Because your agenda is you. And that will violate every relationship that you endeavor to make.

Now let me tell you something. That we expect in the world. We expect the world's attitude to be one of loving itself. What is frightening to me is that that has become a reality in the church. It is not only a reality, it is tolerated. It is not only tolerated unbelievably, it is advocated. Are you ready for that? In the new self-esteem, self-fulfillment, self-image, self-love theology. Here we are, very up-to-date. And we live in a time when psychologists, at least a great bulk of them in psychological theory, believe that the explanation for almost every interpersonal problem is low self-esteem. You hear that all the time. Your problem is you don't think well enough of yourself, you've got to climb up and think of yourself as somebody. You've got to be...you've got to be good to yourself, indulge yourself, you've got to love yourself. We have now elevated self-love to the heights. It has become the priority of everyone's life.

May I tell you that I did a little look at church history to see if I could find any advocacy of self-love in the history of the church and I found none....none at all. It didn't even exist until about the 1960's when the church started to buy into secular psychology and secular psychology says the cure for everything is to love yourself. And the church began to buy into that prioritization in the late 60's and through the 70's and now we're there hook, line and sinker. Since in our society, see, self-love is the solution to everything. Love yourself. Do it, go for it, grab it, buy it, make it, it's yours, take it, you're the big one, you're who matters.

You understand what that's doing to our society? You understand why we have conflict in our society at every level? Because people who are consumed with self-love cannot make meaningful relationships. It's impossible. Because the only agenda is me and the only agenda is you and therefore you're not interested in me and I'm not interested in you. And when you get a society of people consumed with self-love, you get chaos...chaos, absolute chaos. And we now believe in our culture that self-denial is a terrible thing. Self-humbling, a horrible thing. You have to have self-love and self-esteem. You know what that translates to in most cases? Selfishness.

Now I'm not saying as Christians that we're not to be thankful for what we are in Christ. We are to be thankful for what we are in Christ. Praise God for what He's made us. But I want you to know, what I am in Christ is Christ, not me. Right? What I am in Christ is Christ in me, not me. What I am apart from Christ is me and I don't love that. I don't love that. And as soon as I start to love my own indulgence and focus on my own life, I've just cut myself off from every meaningful relationship and crated chaos at every level. Now I live for myself, my own agenda, my own goals, my own plans, my own achievements, my own success, my own enterprises. You get in my way, you get stepped on. I've got my own turf, I'm going to protect it. I've got my own goals, my own plans and that just devastates relationships. And that's what life is is relationships.

So what you have basically in the advocacy of self-love is the advocacy of selfishness. And everybody pursuing selfishness destroys everybody in their wake. As I said, this has no place in historic Christian theology. I went all the way back to St. Augustine in the city of God and he said this, "Two cities have been founded by two loves, the earthly by the love of self, even to the contempt of God. The heavenly by the love of God, even to the contempt of self." And he said, "The former in a word glorifies itself, the latter the Lord."

Obviously he made a very clear statement there. He said you either love self or you love God. And if you love self you have contempt for God. And if you love God you have contempt for yourself.

John Calvin writing in the Institutes of Christian Religion, of course the classic treatment of theology says, "For so blindly do we all rush in the direction of self-love that everyone thinks he has good reason for exalting himself. There is no other remedy than to pluck up by the roots that most noxious pest, self-love." Now that's how the church felt about self-love. The wave of self-love has come before. I think it's greater now than it's ever been. It isn't that self-love has never been around, it is, dear friends, that the church has never before advocated it. That's the issue. We don't want to sing "Amazing Grace that saved such a worm as I." When did anybody ever write a song like that currently? Or how about, "My sinful self, my only shame. My glory all the cross?" There's no command in the Bible to love yourself. There's only an assumption that you're going to care for your own interests. There's no command to love yourself, there's no command to esteem yourself but a lot of commands to humble yourself.

The church has always seen it as a sin. It was the sin that cursed the whole world. It was Eve's own self-love that brought down the entire human race into sin. And when the serpent came and tempted Eve, he said, "You shall be as God." And she was so in love with herself that she couldn't stand the way she was, she wanted to be other than what she was, superior to what she was, she wanted to be like God because in her mind she was so very important. And it was her love of self that sent the entire human race careening into sin. And so the church has recognized self-love as a noxious weed to be rooted out until now, and now the church promotes self-esteem, self-love, self-affection, self-fulfillment. It abounds.

You say, "What is it a result of?" Well, it's a result, of course, of sin and fallenness and Satan but just specifically I believe it's partly a result of a society that's bought in to the evolutionary lie. Our culture believes that man is a piece of protoplasm waiting to become manure hoping he can move to a higher level in the next pile. Our society believes there's no God, there's no God at all, this is just what happened. You know, one day there was nothing and then nothing became something and here we go. And all of that evolutionary thing means that ultimately man is at the peak of evolution, he's got no accountability to a deity, there's no real God involved. Man is just the final movement of

the evolutionary process. He's the ultimate beast, so why not celebrate your bestiality. Right? You're a beast, do what a beast wants to do. Call your own shots. Mark your own course. Chart your own destiny. Do what you want. It's the evolutionary that's cursed this world because it's cut man off from accountability to God, it's cut him off from having to bow the knee before a greater power and it's made him think he was God and he can love himself ultimately because who else is there to love? That's the legacy of evolution. It's not just as simple as a wrong view of creation, my friend, evolution has cursed our entire society with a viewpoint that says man is just the result of a random process and has every right to be as beastly as he wants to be since he's the highest beast on the totem pole. At least for now.

The second thing I believe has contributed to this is existential philosophy. Existential philosophy came in in the sixties and seventies and really reeked havoc in our thinking. And it says "live for the moment." Existentialism says, "Fulfillment is in the now, grab it now, do it, baby, this is it, get your gusto, go for it, it's right now." Live for the moment. Exhilarate yourself in the moment. No thought for the future. No concern about the past. Just indulge yourself in the moment and squeeze as much fulfillment out as you can. That's existential philosophy. There's no destiny, that's also tied to evolution. There's no destiny, there's no God, there's no where to go, this is it, man. All you've got is now, so milk it, grab it, run with it, exploit it. And whoever else you need to exploit to get your fulfillment. So you take evolutionary theory, you add to it existential philosophy and you get selfishness.

You could throw a third thing in and that's a pervasive humanistic mentality which says, "Man is all there is." Man is ultimate. And if man is ultimate and I'm man then I'm ultimate. Humanism says I'm God. The only God there is is me. The only moment I have is now. And I'm going to do what I'm going to do.

I would expect William James to believe that. I would expect Erich(?) Fromme(?) to believe that. I would expect Mazlo(?) to believe that. I would expect Karl(?) Rogers(?) to say "All advocate self-love, unconditional acceptance of ourselves leads to true fulfillment." I expect that from Karl Rogers. I don't expect that out of the pulpit and I don't expect that from someone who reads the Bible. That's what's frightening. That's what's so dangerous in the church because if you get a church of people who all love themselves, you've just alienated everybody from everybody. People come to me sometimes and say, "How we going to get fellowship in the church? How we going to have better fellowship?" And I realize it's not as simple as having a potluck dinner, folks. I wish it was, but it isn't. We are living in a society that is selling people on the idea that they matter supremely. And how do you get them to wind their way out of that? That kind of thinking? To give their life up for somebody else?

Somebody says, "Well, you know, people aren't compassionate. I want people to be more compassionate. How can we stimulate compassion?" I don't know, I wish I knew how to stimulate compassion. But I'll tell you, it's hard when people are only compassionate about themselves. It's a pervasive thing. And we've all been affected to one degree or another in this "me" generation. Dangerous to the church, dangerous. We're living in a dangerous season when self-love is not only tolerated, it's preached...it's preached, it's advocated. I mean, try writing a book on humility and see how many you sell. Maybe two or three. Nobody would buy a book on humility. You'd have to put it in a fake cover that says, "How to have maximum sex," and then they'd buy it. I mean, it's a society where everyone wants to indulge themselves to the limit and then people ask why there's a breakdown in meaningful relationships.

And what flows out of this sewer of self-love? Love of money, boastfulness, arrogance, reviling, disobedience to parents. I mean, why obey your parents? You're more important than they are. Ungrateful. Sure, what are you going to thank anybody for? You're so self-centered and independent and resourceful, you don't owe anybody to anything any way, they owe you. And it just goes on and on. Unloving, irreconcilable, people are implacable, malicious gossips or slanderers, no self- control, brutal, they hate what's good, treacherous. All that flows out of the sewer pipe of self-love. And we'll go in to those next time.

I don't want to leave you with a depressing kind of a situation, I'd like to help you turn it around a little bit. That's as far as we can go. Now, folks, I want you to know that there are about 19 of these and I'm going to do more than one a week. This is just...this is the first one, next time I promise you I'll do more. In fact, I'll probably go through all of them, down to verse 5 at least.

But let me turn the table, if I can, and have you turn to Philippians chapter 2 cause I don't want to leave you with that kind of depressing thing. In Philippians chapter 2 verse 3, can I just give you this from Paul from the Holy Spirit as an exhortation to your own heart? "Do nothing from selfishness." Did you get that? Could you just underline that? That's pretty simple, straight-forward, basic, not complicated. "Do nothing." You say, "What was that again?" "Do nothing from selfishness."

Ask yourself every time you do something, is this selfish? Is this for me? Is this selfish? I'm telling you, you might be...you might be paralyzed at the start of the day and never take a step in any direction. You know? You might never ever be able to leave your room. I mean, you go to the closet and you say, "All right, now what should I wear? Am I thinking of myself? Boy!"

I mean, if you lived your life that way and ask yourself that question, you might be totally paralyzed. You see how deeply entrenched we get into that? "Do nothing from selfishness, or empty conceit." Ask yourself this, am I doing this to promote myself? Am I doing this for myself? To promote myself? "But with humility of mind let each one of you regard one another as more important than himself."

Can you go through your...just one day at a time, maybe start with one day, maybe start today and do nothing for yourself today and everything you do today do for somebody else? Might begin a little pattern change in your life. And verse 4, "Do not merely look out for your own personal interest, but for the interests of others." It's not wrong to look out for your own personal interests...the assumption here is you're going to do that, you need to do that, you've got to live and sleep and eat. But not just yours but others also. Be humble, regard others as more important than yourself and while you're looking out for your own normal personal interests, be sure you're looking out for everybody else's too.

Now notice verse 5, "Have this attitude in yourselves." Let me tell you something, folks, you don't need another program. We don't need a program to stimulate compassion. We don't need a program to stimulate fellowship. We need an attitude to do that. We need an attitude of mind to do that. That's an attitude. The church...the church cannot take all of its resources and put them into some kind of a program, we don't have those resources. We've got to give ourselves to the battle, but what we want to do is cultivate the attitude in every heart. What attitude? The attitude which Christ had. And what was the attitude of Christ? It was an attitude of one who didn't think what He had was so important, He wouldn't give it up for somebody else, because that's what Jesus did. He existed in the form of

God, that is in the full glory of His eternal presence in the trinity but He didn't regard being equal with God in that way something to hang on to. He emptied Himself, took the form of a bondservant because God wanted Him too and made Himself in the likeness of man, being found in appearance as a man, humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross. Jesus came down and died in subservience to the will of the Father because He looked on the Father's will and saw that as the most important thing. He was willing to give up what He had for the sake of the one He loved.

Don't do anything from selfishness. Don't do anything out of conceit. Be humble in mind. Think more of others than you do of yourself. Take tremendous interest in other people's lives. And maintain an attitude like the attitude of Christ who having something willingly gave it up for someone else in order to show Himself a servant.

Boy, we're in a war, we're in a battle, the church is in danger of great violence. The church is suffering deep wounds right now. The enemy is winning on many many fronts because the church is not only tolerating self-love, it's advocating self- love as if it was biblical. And all the garbage that comes out of it.

The second one is money love and coming right out of the self-love psychology is the prosperity gospel...right out of it. If you believe in the self-love philosophy, then you're going to believe in the prosperity gospel because if you're the most important person and self-esteem is the greatest issue, then whatever feeds you is what you're after and that's going to lead you to indulge yourself in anything and everything you can get your hands on. And the flow, you'll see next week, how the flow comes.

So we've got to stop it at the start. And that's at the matter of self-love and come to the point where we have an attitude like Christ did as described here in Philippians chapter 2. Well, let's bow together in prayer.

Lord, You know each of our hearts and You know that there are areas in all of our lives, in my life and all of our lives where we have selfishness and exercise our own egos and our own empty conceit and we demonstrate the love of self. Forgive us, Lord, for that. And help us not to catch this terrible, terrible contagion that's spreading through our society and into the church where everybody is just bent on fulfilling their own pleasure, feeding their own ego, self-fulfillment. Lord, please protect the church. Help us to have the mind of Christ, humble, condescending, gracious, submissive. That same attitude that He had cultivate in our hearts that we might look on the things of others not on our own things that we might esteem others better than ourselves, that we might never do anything out of selfishness or conceit. And we pray, Father, that You will use us even this day somehow in an unselfish way to be Christlike to someone. That's our prayer and we pray in His name. Amen.

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