Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Danger in the Church, Part 2
Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:2-4
Code: 55-13

Well let's open our Bibles, this morning, to 2 Timothy chapter 3. In 2 Timothy chapter 3 we come again to verses 1 through 9. We're only this morning going to go through verse 4, but that's better than we did last Sunday when we covered basically verse 1. And we're going to move our way through this list in verses 2 through 4, list of sins that have tremendous tremendous implications in the life of the church.

Now what I told you last week I reiterate to you again. This is a passage that speaks about the danger the church faces. Verse 1 says, "Realize this that in the last days," we saw last week that means the time between the first and second coming of Christ, the time in which we are now living, the church age, "Dangerous or perilous or difficult times will come." That is a prophecy, that fits into the category of a prophecy. That is an inspired prediction and it is true, dangerous times face the church.

The word "times" is the word "seasons" or epochs. And the picture here is the idea that during the period of the church age there will be seasons when the church is under great danger in perilous perilous condition. This is primarily due to the encroachment on the church of false teachers and false doctrine. Verse 13 says, "Evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." Evil men, impostors who come into the church rising from within become a tremendous danger to the church. False teachers and their product, false doctrine, and their converts, false Christians, are inevitable in the life of the church and exceedingly dangerous. We look at the church today and we know we're in dangerous times. The church as we speak of it in the largest sense, Christianity or Christendom, is mixed up with all kinds of things. It is literally filled with false teachers propagating false doctrine being believed by false converts or false Christians. The church is filled with men and women who deny Scripture in their theology, who deny Scripture in their living. The church tolerates that false teaching, tolerates that ungodly living. Even in some cases justifies it quite as it did in Ephesus where Timothy was when he received this letter from Paul. Only today it's far worse than it was then because evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse and worse as you come closer to the coming of Christ.

We are 2,000 years nearer the coming of our Lord than the church at Ephesus and we then have to suffer the accumulation of deceit and false teaching through all of those centuries that is now encroaching upon the church today. And I told you last week that I think the church is in a tremendous time of decadence, the professing church has within it a growing apostasy and this is of great, great danger to the church. The reason is because of what men have become, verse 2, "For

men will be..." he says. The problem is people, people who have become in the church literally the agents of Satan. In 1 Timothy chapter 4 you remember verse 1, the Spirit explicitly says that in the latter times and other similar prophecy, some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons by means of the hypocrisy of liars. So there will come hypocritical liars into the church who will deceive people and sell them on the doctrines of demons rather than the doctrines of God. That's exactly what we're experiencing today. Hypocritical liars masquerading as truth teachers, pastors, Christian leaders are coming into the church and they are teaching the lies of Satan. They are coming as the agents of seducing spirits, espousing doctrines of demons. This is within the church.

Now the description of this particular danger here is a description that I believe we have to see as with reference to the church. The danger here is to the church because these are the kind of people who are not only in society but will encroach upon and infiltrate the church. They're very much like cancer in the body. They're cells in rebellion...that's exactly what cancer cells are. In fact, the most traumatizing condition in the human body occurs when cells become disloyal to the whole of the human body, when they in their disloyalty defy inhibition. They multiply without any checks on growth, the spread rapidly throughout the body, they choke out the normal cells. White cells who are supposed to be armed against those invaders won't fight against the body's own cells so the cancerous cells flourish. Sometimes the white cells even rebel and that becomes leukemia. Internal rebellion, the most devastating thing that can happen to the human body, is also the most devastating thing that can happen to the church.

Jesus speaking about the attacks from the outside said, "The gates of hell will not prevail against the church." He was unthreatened among sinners and criminals. But what moved on His heart was not the threat from the outside but the spiritual disloyalty that would come from within. Beware...He said...of false teachers. And here we find the same thing with Paul. Paul knows that persecution refines the church but internal rebellion is a danger to the church. It sucks its power. It debilitates its strength. It weakens it. And, friends, we live in a society today where we do not experience the external persecution that strengthens the church but we are experiencing the internal rebellion that weakens the church. We have cancer in the church, cells are running amuck, out of control, uninhibited. And the body is not even warring against them. It's almost as if the duty that is ours has been shirked and these people have been allowed to run rampant. There is danger to the church.

Now what is the nature of this danger? What are the characteristics of these dangerous people? The first thing, and we'll give you four before our series is through, the first one is listed there in verse 2, "For men will be self-lovers...self- lovers." Now all the rest of the sins that flow out of that in verse 2, 3 and 4 are simply reflections of that pervasive sin. Self-love is the basic issue here. So first of all, we will say that the impostors and evil men who are a danger to the church are those who love themselves, self-lovers. And I want to speak to that, if briefly, adding to what I said last Lord's day.

You remember last week that I said to you there is a psychological trend today that wants to blame all people's relational problems on a lack of self-love, a lack of self- esteem, a lack of self-image. There is this psychiatric theory or psychological theory that says the basic problem that everybody has is they think too little of themselves. They're all like Groucho Marx who one time said, "I would never join any club that would receive me as a member." Now you can understand that kind of mentality. That's what psychologists say man's problem is, we're all depreciating ourselves.

In the 1950's when rather neo-orthodox theologian by the name of Reinhold Nebor(??) asserted the biblical fact that original sin is self-love, pride and pretension. Psychologist Karl Rogers reacted against that and said, no, people's problems are because...and I quote from Rogers..."They despise themselves, regard themselves as worthless and unlovable," end quote.

In other words, the theologian said the problem is pride and self-love. And the psychologist said the problem is a lack of self-love and a lack of pride. Now which of those two views did the church buy? The core of committed biblical churches have stuck with the true theology, the peripheral ones have bought into the Rogers theory. And 30 years later in society we are infested with the false idea that has penetrated the church and the idea is that I don't love myself enough and I've got to love myself more and esteem myself more and think more highly of myself and lift myself up and push myself and promote myself.

Now you say, "Well why has that become so popular?" Well think about it. It's obvious why it's popular because it denies pride, it denies self-love, it denies pretension, it denies my sinfulness. It denies the singular mark of my fallenness, my pride. And it eliminates that which most characterizes me as unacceptable to God. Now I am more than willing to say...my problem is I'm too humble. That eliminates all the sin out of it. That makes me a victim. It's very convenient to ignore the reality that my heart is filled with wicked pride and self-love and happily will I accept the idea that I am a victim of people and circumstances who have pushed me down so low that I don't even have enough self-love to be spiritual.

What a lying twist on the truth. Sure it's popular. Of course the world will buy that philosophy. They will buy the philosophy of loving oneself because they're already into that. It calls for no change. It accepts their sin, their fallenness, their pride.

It's interesting that even the psychological community is coming to grips with the fact that the idea that man has all of his problems related to his failure to love himself is really a lie. Recently a new book came out under the auspices of the Christian College Coalition, the title of the book is Psychology Through the Eyes of Faith, it's written by David Meyers and Malcolm Jeeves(?). They have a chapter in that book called "A new look at pride." It's very interesting. The intent of the chapter is they collect all of the recent psychological data from the secular world to see if it affirms that man's basic problem

is he doesn't love himself enough. And what they discovered was that that's not his problem at all. The data will not support that. They are discovering rather in all the psychological testing which is just a way to get into the heart of man and find out what he's thinking, there is a pervasive pride, there is a dominant self-love, just the opposite of what they thought. That man is basically self-serving, self-loving, self-justifying and he is so overwhelmed with that bias that it controls almost everything he thinks and everything he does.

For example, and I'll quote generally out of their book, "Time and time again experimenters have found that people readily accept credit when told they have succeeded, yet they attribute failure to external factors such as bad luck or the problems inherent impossibility." In other words, when taking a test, if they are successful they take the credit. If they fail, they blame something else. Typical...typical of you, typical of me, typical of our fallenness. They write, "These self-serving attributions have been observed not only in the laboratory situations but also with athletes after victory or defeat, students after high or low exam grades, drivers after accidents and married people among whom conflict often derives from deceiving oneself as contributing more and benefiting less than is fair in the relationship?"

Self researcher Anthony Greenwald(?) writes, "People experience life through a self-centered filter." The problem is not they don't love themselves enough, the problem is they love themselves too much, they're not even realistic about themselves. In virtually any area that is both subjective and socially desirable, most people see themselves as better than average. When tested, most business people see themselves as more ethical than the average business person. Most community residents see themselves as less prejudice than their neighbors. Most people see themselves as more intelligent and healthier than most other people.

When the college board asked high-school seniors to compare themselves with others their own ages, 60 percent reported themselves better than average in athletic ability, only six percent below average. In leadership ability, 70 percent rated themselves above average, two percent below average. In their ability to get along with others, relationships, zero percent of the 829 thousand students who responded rated themselves below average while 60 percent saw themselves in the top ten percent and 25 percent put themselves in the top one percent.

If Elizabeth Barrett Browning were still writing, she would perhaps rhapsodize, "How do I love ME, let ME count the ways."

At the University of Waterloo, Michael Ross has repeatedly found that people will distort their past in ego-supportive ways. In one experiment he exposed some people to a message about the desirability about frequent tooth brushing. Shortly afterwards in a supposedly different experiment, these students recalled brushing their teeth more often during the proceeding two weeks than did an equivalent sample of people who hadn't heard the message about tooth brushing.

In other words, the point is we fabricate the past to make ourselves look better. I mean, you know that. When you tell those old tales, men, about your exploits, every time you tell it gets better and better to the point where you don't tell it when your wife is around because she pulls you back to reality...with her editorializing. We...we build ourselves up even in the past, to say nothing of the present. Anthony Greenwald again surmised that human nature is governed by a totalitarian ego that continually revises the past in order to preserve a positive self evaluation. Researches who study human thinking have often observed that people over estimate the accuracy of their beliefs and judgments. As Baruk(?) Fishov(?) and others have demonstrated, we often do not expect something to happen until it does at which point we over estimate our ability to have predicted it. They call it the "I knew it all along" phenomenon.

People also fail to recognize their vulnerability to error because they think so highly of themselves. They don't want to think they can make a mistake. Margaret Matlin(?) and David Stang(?) again in psychological research, have amassed evidence pointing to a powerful Pollyanna principle, that people more readily perceive, remember and communicate pleasant than unpleasant information. Positive thinking predominates over negative thinking.

At Rudgers University, Neal Winestein(?) also has discerned a consistent tendency toward unrealistic optimism about future life events. Most students perceive themselves as far more likely than their classmates to experience positive events, such as getting a good job, drawing a good salary and owning a house. And is far less likely to experience negative events such as getting divorced, having cancer, and being fired. Under certain conditions, most people have been observed to act in rather inconsiderate, compliant or even cruel ways. When other people are told about these conditions and asked to predict how they would act, nearly all will insist that their own behavior would be virtuous.

Now the sum of all this, according to Meyers and Jeeves, "The most common error in people's self-images is not unrealistically low self-esteem, but rather self-serving pride...not an inferiority complex but a superiority complex," end quote.

The problem with people is they think too highly of themselves. They love themselves too much. That's a sin. And it's out of the sewer pipe of self-love that all the filth flows that is listed in verses 2, 3 and 4. Even self-depreciation, even putting oneself down is a mechanism to get someone to compliment you...to build you up. You see, the heart of man is deceitful and the heart of man is deceitful enough to deny its own ugly, self-loving, self-serving pride when given the opportunity.

You say, "But, John, what about in the Bible it says we're to love ourselves?" It never says that in the Bible. There's no command in Scripture to love yourself. You say, "What about love your neighbor as yourself." That tells us to love our neighbor, not our self. Well what about husbands, love your wives even as your own bodies? That says love your wife. You say, "But it says as yourself." Yes, it doesn't

command us to love ourselves, it assumes we do. Did you get the difference? It makes that assumption. Why? Because that is reflective of our fallenness. That's an assumption, not a command. And I daresay, if we weren't fallen, the Lord wouldn't have to make the command or the parallel. So self-love is a sin. The Bible constantly warns on the other hand against pride and self-love and calls self-love a sin. The Bible doesn't teach us to love ourselves, it assumes that that is a part of our fallenness and we need to give to others what we so readily give to ourselves by way of attention and concern. The pervasive deadly sin that grips the human soul is pride and self-love, and out of that sewer pipe flows all the rest of the things that he gives us here.

Samuel Johnson preaching in the eighteenth century said, "He that over values himself will under value others. And he that under values others will oppose them." That's right. The problem with relationships isn't that I don't love myself enough, the thing that destroys all relationships is I love myself too much. And if I'm more valuable than you, then I'm going to have to fight against you to get what I want and therefore I'm in opposition to you and we can't have a relationship on that basis.

Now what flows from this? Let's look back at verse 2 and we're going to consider this list this morning. "For men will be lovers of self...one word, philautos, and then a second word, philarguros...silver lovers, money lovers." Love of self, my dear friends, leads to covetousness. You love yourself, you want to indulge yourself. You love yourself, you want to feed your desires. You are a silver lover. That's materialism...self- consumption. It's the same word used in 1 Timothy 6:10, "For love of silver is the root of all kinds of evil, or the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil." There it appears in a noun form.

Now what you have then, what you have then is this mentality that says "I am consumed with my own self love," and therefore the next thing is, "I must indulge myself." And that means I'm going to love money, I'm going to covet.

This could readily be seen as a problem in the Ephesian church since Ephesus was a prosperous city, it was a city of wealth, it was a city of materialistic blessings. It was even called "the treasure house of the ancient world" by some writers. It was called "The Vanity Fair" of Asia Minor. And because of the rampant materialism in Ephesus it had encroached upon the church and the church was in grave danger from it. That's why Paul wrote about it in the first epistle to Timothy, chapter 6. And here again in the second epistle to Timothy, chapter 3. And may I hasten to say, false teachers are always money lovers? First Timothy 6:4 characterizes them as such. Titus 1:11 characterizes them as such. Second Peter 2:2 and 3 characterizes them as such. Why? Because they are consumed with the love of self.

Misdirected self-love then indulges itself on self- gratification. And we are in a dangerous time in America in the church of Jesus Christ because the church is in to self-love and if it's in to self-love it's in to self-indulgence. And what you've got encroaching on the church today is a bevy of psychologists

saying we have to love ourselves more and esteem ourselves more. And coming right on their heels, a lot of prosperity preachers who are saying, "Jesus wants you healthy, Jesus wants you wealthy, Jesus wants you rich," because the two are inseparable. And one will give birth to the other and one will feed on the other. And you look at the church today and you see the encroachment of a self-love psychology and the encroachment of a prosperity gospel and they're in the same partnership right here in this verse, only in the church today they're being sold as if they were the things that are desirable, here they are called sin and danger to the church. Big difference. That's how deceived the church is and that's why we're in danger.

And then he moves on and gives another pair of sins that go together. The first one is boastful, this is the outward pride that springs from self-love. If you love yourself, you're going to boast about yourself, you're going to shoot off your mouth about yourself. You're going to talk about yourself. The word alazon means a bragger, a bragger. A bragger is someone, Plato said, who claims to greatness which he does not possess. He speaks about himself in terms that are not related to truth or reality. He brags and boasts about his accomplishments, overstating the truth to the degree that it has no truth for the simple purpose of impressing other people with his greatness. These are the people who parade around as if they were the heroes, the know-it-alls who deceive people into thinking they are wise. They love to see their name in print. They love to see their face on television. They're pretenders whose pretensions are most important to them...the most important thing on their agenda is to promote themselves. They lack self-effacing humility. They are boasters. They are proud.

Again, characteristic of false teachers, as 1 Timothy 1:7 and 6:4 reiterates. You listen to them preach and they will always be the heroes of their own stories. Every story they tell will be about them. They will exaggerate their own ability, they will exaggerate their own achievements, they will exaggerate their own accomplishments, they will exaggerate their own value. They will feel indispensable to everything going on in the world and try to make you believe that they are the claim to greatness that they do not possess. But if you're building your whole approach to life on self-love, you will covet and you will boast.

The companion to that boastful sin is the sin of being arrogant. That is to be proud in heart. This is to the inside what boastfulness is to the outside. This is a heart that is involved in self-exaltation. The idea being that everything I do I am motivated to do by the desire for self-exaltation. I want to exalt myself. That's what moves me. That's what shapes my decisions. That's what making me act, the evil motive of self- exaltation.

The result of this is contempt for everybody else. In the pursuit of self-exaltation, anyone who gets in my is worthy only of my contempt. William Barclay gives us a good picture of the distinction between these two terms. He says, "The braggart is a swaggering creature who shouts his claims to the four winds of heaven and tries to boast and bluster his way into power and eminence. No one can possibly mistake him or fail to see him. But the sin of the man who is arrogant in this sense is in his

heart. He might even seem to be humble, he might even seem to be quiet and inoffensive, but in his secret heart there is this contempt for everyone else. He nourishes an all-consuming, all- pervading pride. In his heart there is a little altar where he bows down before himself and in his eyes there is something which looks at all men with a silent contempt. The best illustration is the Pharisee who said, `I thank Thee that I am not as other men, even as this Publican,' whom he distained and treated with contempt in his self-exaltation."

You look at the church and look at the bragging boasting people you see, the parading people across the media who believe that everything revolves around their little world and who are the hero of all their own stories. And look more deeply into the heart of those who are contemptuous toward others because the only thing on their list of motivation is how can this accrued to my benefit. We're moving fast, I think, to almost a pre- reformation, proud and dead Christendom. When Christianity will be a parade of the noble and the elite and the proud and the arrogant and the worldly and the materialistic and the indulgence will reign supreme rather than the truth of God. And maybe they'll have to be another Reformation.

You ask yourself, "Where are the humble? And where are the meek? And where are the lowly who speak only of Christ and never of themselves?" And you look a long time before you find them.

And then he moves to another sin in verse 2, "Revilers," blasphemeo, we get the word blaspheme from it. Those who are abusive in speech. It means to slander someone, to be abusive in speech, to hurl abuse at people, to injure others with your tongue. Blasphemers, revilers, abusive...see this is what happens to self-lovers. You love yourself, you love the money that feeds your self desire. You love yourself, you boast on the outside and you're arrogant on the inside. You love yourself and you treat everybody else with contempt and that ultimately ends up in verbal abuse. Pride begets contempt and contempt begets a wicked tongue. These self-lovers will attack and they will hurt and they will injure and they will devastate with contempt. They have no care for others. Their agenda is to love themselves. Their tongues will lash out with venom toward other people.

And sad to say, beloved, that is true in the church of Jesus Christ today, that there are those people who feel that in their own self-promotion they gain their position by destroying everybody they can around them. And their tongue lashes out abusively against others in slander that is not related, of course, to truth or compassion. But that's the sin of a self- lover. Contempt for others leads to an abusive tongue. It's such a tragic thing but that just goes on continuously as people use their tongues to abuse those who are around them...get this...for the single purpose of self-promotion because they're indulging in self-love. Dangerous to the church.

And then he adds, "Disobedient to parents...disobedient to parents." Another aspect of our sinful culture that has marked degeneration of the church is this one. Now as I said yester...last week rather, all of these are characteristic of our culture. The issue here is that they encroach upon the

church. We have a generation of young people and children who are disobedient to their parents. There's no question about that. We also have that in the church. It's the sin of a society's demise, by the way. If there's any one sin that I could point to in America that spells the end of our nation as we know it, it is a rebellious generation of children. That wipes out the unit of solidarity in the nation which is the family. The family is the basic point of society's preservation. And a disintegrated family explodes the whole society.

I was interviewed last week for that television program that they were here shooting. A man from New York interviewed me and we were just talking about the issues in America. He said to me that the greatest issue facing America today in the hearts of the people is the breakdown of the family. He's coming at it from a strictly secular viewpoint but he's right. The disintegration at that point destroys authority, it destroys unity, it destroys values, meaning, morals, ethics. When the family goes, everything goes. And disobedient children are a great danger to the church, a great danger. Parents, you can't tolerate that with your children. In the Old Testament, you remember don't you that a disobedient child could pay with his life. Children, you cannot offer to your parents anything but obedience and still please God. Disobedient children are a danger to the church. And young people and children, you need to respond to the direction of your parents under God. Parents, you need to create an environment where that does not frustrate children but calls them to a responsibility that will bring them to the knowledge of God.

It is an expression of self-love, by the way, that marks this kind of rebellion. When children are taught by society that the whole of life is to love yourself, then what do they care about their parents? I mean, that's inevitable. You buy the self-love lie, the sewer pipe is open and the rest of it is coming through to you. It's all going to come. You can't maintain the obedience and submission of your children if they are going to be allowed to believe that love of self is the dominant need and expression of the human heart.

He again lists the word "ungrateful" and moves to a whole new area but related...thankless. Does this flow out of self- love? Sure, self-love says I am what I am because I made it. Self-love says I got there by myself, who's to thank? Self-love is ungrateful for that reason and secondly, self-love is ungrateful because it never has enough. So when it is it ever going to stop and say I'm grateful? What am I going to be grateful for, I never have had enough yet? I haven't reached the point of thankfulness because I haven't reached the point of satisfaction. Self-love says I did it myself and self-love says I haven't got it all yet and self-love is sharper than a serpent's tooth, as Shakespeare put it...because of ingratitude.

Proud, self-loving people flaunt their self-sufficiency. They flaunt their achievements. They're thankless. Consumptive greed knows no satisfaction so it never says thanks. And our society, beloved, you know it, is absolutely selfish and it all flows out of the lie that the deepest problem of the human heart is the lack of self-love. And so we give a premium to self-love and the result is an

ungrateful society...ungrateful people...thankless people. Absent is the lovely grace of gratitude.

Then he uses the word "unholy." Its meaning is interesting, anosios. It's not so much anomos which is outward lawlessness. It's not so much violating the written law. The word was most often used of violating the very essence of common decency. You could even translate it indecent. You could translate it irreverent, disrespect for what is sacred in the sense that to the Greek anosios was to, for example, bury a dead body which was just common decency. Anosios was to have an incestuous relationship with your sister or with your mother or your father. It was something that just flaunted common decency, not being lawless or unholy in the sense of what is revealed by God in Scripture but what is just common, human decency. It's an indecency...that's perhaps the best way to understand it, the one who is indecent. One who is so driven by passion that decency is of no consideration, one who seeks to gratify lust and evil desire and who flaunts common respect in the process. One who is decadent, who is so decadent that he is...to use an old word...base...base...or even a new word, gross. A person who flaunts what society deems as simple decency.

We're in danger of that kind of mentality. The PTL scandal was anosios, it was flaunting decency. It was wickedness without restraint, violating the essence of what was right. Dominated by passion, people seek to gratify their own lusts and flaunt everything in that fulfillment.

In verse 3 he uses the word "unloving," astorgos, it basically has to do with natural affection. It's not love in the sense of agapao which is the love of will, choosing to love. It's not love in the sense of phileo which is a warm affection, even including a kiss. It's the love that is natural to the family. It is a natural movement of the soul like gravity, or some other force of our nature to love the people that are a part of our family. It's to love someone who is bound up with us in relationships. It's a quiet and abiding feeling within us that we are closely bound up with and take satisfaction in the relationships of our family...so says Benjamin B. Warfield in an old Princeton theological review in 1918. It's family love.

But the people in the church here who are a danger are unloving. What does that mean? They don't even have natural affection. They are heartless to people who are a part of the intimate circle of their life. It's talking about a heartlessness at the most natural level of love. It is not natural for me to love all of you. It is not natural for me to love God. It is not natural for me to love the unlovely. But it is natural for me to love my family. That's part of the residual image of God within me. It's not part of my fallenness, it's part of the residual image of God that I carry, that I bear.

But when men go bad, they go bad at the deepest level and they don't even love those that are naturally lovable and to be loved, the family. And so what do you have in our society? Women abusing their children, men abusing their children, battering their children, beating up their children, burning their children with an iron, drowning their children in a toilet or a bathtub. The utter absence of natural love...why? Because they are consumed with self-love and self-love crowds everybody out, it

doesn't matter who they are. And if that kid keeps screaming when I'm trying to watch the soap opera, I'm going to drown that kid because it's me that matters...that's the legacy of self-love. That's more of the stuff coming down the sewer pipe. Heartlessness.

And then you have husbands that beat up their wives where the natural bond of intimate affection between a man and a woman should secure against that. We have women who come into this office to talk to the pastors of Grace Church to tell us about their husbands who attend church here who beat them. That's not a common thing but that happens...heartlessness, heinous sins of people consumed with loving themselves. And if you get in their way, you have no place. That's why there's such alienation between parents and children, between husbands and wives, between children and parents, in families even...extended families. That's a danger to the church because we are now inheriting in the church this kind of mentality, this kind of attitude. And if we keep propagating self-love, we're going to keep getting people who really want to do away with anybody who stands in the way of their fulfillment.

The next word he uses is "irreconcilable," a synonym for that would be implacable. That means a person who doesn't respond to an appeal. No matter what you say to them they're unmovable, they will not change, they will not alter. This is what I said, this is what I mean, I don't care what you say, I'll never be any different, I'll never change, I'm not interested in it. This is a person who is bitter, a person who is so full of hate that he never wants to make things right. It is even used to refer to a truce breaker. It doesn't matter what agreements he's made, what vows, what promises, he will disregard them for his own personal desires. You cannot go to him and appeal for harmony. You cannot go to her and appeal for resolution. There is conflict that is inevitable and ongoing because they are implacable, they are irreconcilable. They cannot be made to agree, to give in, to compromise, to adjust, to think another person's thoughts, to give themselves away on behalf of someone else, they just won't do it.

Why? Because they love themselves. And the supreme expression of self-love is that I will do what I will do and there is no court of appeal. I will think what I will think and there is no court of appeal. This is so self-centered, so hard that literally the person is cut off from every other relationship. You want to know why we have problems with relationships? It isn't because we think too little of ourselves, it's because we think too much of ourselves. In fact, sometimes we think so much of ourselves that we are irreconcilable and implacable and we are hard-hearted and we are separated from everybody in every relationship by that kind of mentality.

Ultimately that alienates us from all relationships, since all relationships by definition are one person serving the needs of another one. And by the way, the word irreconcilable knows nothing of forgiveness and cares nothing about forgiveness. It's massive egoism.

Out of self-love also flows another sin, malicious gossips...malicious gossips, diabolos, slanderers, it's the word for the devil. And every time you maliciously gossip, you take on the character of the devil. I think of that in my own life and have for a number of years that when you slander someone else or abuse them, you are really acting in a Satanic fashion, you are taking on the character of your former father...not God. For Satan is a slanderer, he speaks evil against all who represent God in Christ. He is malicious, he attacks with venom. And that's one of the sins that comes out of self-love, self-love is malicious toward anyone who stands in its way as it pursues its satisfaction. Its evil heart's desire compels it down the path and if you're in the way you're going to be destroyed.

Malicious gossip also is a reflection of self-love because it enables someone to push himself up by virtue of pushing everyone him down. And so people who are deeply in love with themselves will destroy everybody around them in order to push themselves up. To appear better than they are in their own eyes and in the eyes of others they make everyone else look worse.

Again, this comes into the church. Malicious, slanderous, diabolical gossip spawned out of hearts that are controlled by self-love. People speaking evil against other people, gossiping wickedly against them. This is of great danger in the church. And believe me, the world in which we live is into this. I mean, the attacks are unbelievable in our world. I'd hate to be out there. I mean, the attacks are unbelievable. It seems like everyone is fair game and everything wicked that can be said about anyone ought to be said and put on the front page of some paper. Malicious sort of self-justification acts of condemning other people and that mentality can get into the church. And instead of being loving and gracious and kind and tender hearted and forgiving, we become as malicious as the world around us.

False teachers often lead this. And you may not see it so much in a congregation like this but if you look at the church in the big picture across America, there is malicious talk going across this country...malicious talk, trying to destroy the character of people in God's service, attacks that are rampant. I hear about them all the time. People write me letters of blasting this person and that person and blasting me and there are some who feel that they gain their own place in the sun by obliterating everybody else. If they can blot out all the stars in God's sky, maybe they'll be the only one left and everyone will notice them.

Further he says, "without self-control...without self- control." It's an adjective used only here, akrates. It really means that they just don't have an inhibitions. They're just slaves to passion, unrestrained lust. The noun form of this word appears in Matthew 23:25 and 1 Corinthians 7:5, it has to do with an uninhibited desire. I mean, when they get power in their eyes, they just blow over everybody in the path. They get their goal, they can't check their ambition. They can't check their compulsion. They can't check their passion. They're just driving. The danger to the church, men of passion controlled by that passion, that desire that lust, men and women who are compelled without control to accomplish their goals.

Then he adds the word "brutal" in verse 3. That word basically means savage like a wild beast that's used to speak of a wild beast that rips and tears and violently destroys. Ruthless might be another way to translate it, merciless, without sensitivity or sympathy. Put those three words together, malicious gossips without control who are brutal. You have people who feel that the deepest expression of their self-love must be made known and so they maliciously attack, they attack other people without control and without restraint, fulfilling their own desires and they do it brutality. Savage, ruthless, merciless, no sensitivity, no sympathy...beloved, this is the world around us. There's no question about it. And I see it like never before encroaching upon the church with people ripping and tearing and shredding others for their own expression of self- love and pride. And then when we come along and try to justify self-love, what a terrible disservice.

Then he mentions "haters of good...haters of good." Imagine, no love for anything that's beneficial to others. They are sunk to the animal level yet remain sufficiently human to at least recognize what is good so they can hate it. They're brutal-like beasts but at least they're smart enough as men to know what's good so they can hate it. Unbelievable that people would get to the place where they actually hate what is good, where they hate what is righteous, where they attack what is righteous.

You know, I see in the church today an attack on righteousness. I see an attack on goodness. "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil," says Isaiah 5:20. And if you're teaching the truth and preaching the truth and trying to live godly, you'll be attacked...you'll be attacked. If you're teaching some false teaching and living a dissolute life, you seem to be able to flourish in some quarters. There is an attack mentality that hates good and it's a result of self-love. Obviously if you're led by self-love, you're going to hate the good things, you're going to love what that self-love pursues and that will be what is evil.

Then further, look at the word "treacherous." In verse 4 and we'll go by these just briefly, treacherous. The word basically means ready to betray. It's a word that speaks about a traitor literally. It draws attention to the idea of disloyalty, disloyalty. We all agree when we serve the Lord that the most wonderful relational attribute in a person is loyalty. Isn't it wonderful when you have someone who is loyal to you? Someone doesn't believe the evil gossip? Someone who doesn't believe when people say things about you that aren't true? Someone who stands by you in your failures? Someone who is there to hold you up and pray for you and undergird you and strengthen you and love you and forgive you and has loyalty? That's such a beautiful marvelous grace. But the danger to the church is people who are treacherous. They're treacherous. They get close to you in order to stick the knife in you, they want to destroy you. They want to come and talk to you and feign friendship and then they want to take that information which they have gleaned from you and use it to destroy you. They want to cut and cut at the very heart.

This...it's interesting to read church history and read about the people who betrayed the Christians, who feigned loyalty to Christ in a persecuting environment. And when they feigned their loyalty to Christ and the persecution broke out, the ones who weren't genuinely believers began to turn in the true believers to be persecuted and executed. That's a place where this word fits...betrayal, disloyalty, a traitor. Easy for them to deliver others if they can gain something for themselves, that's self-love again. Protect myself at all costs even if it means the end of you. Treacherous people. Listen, the church is full of those treacherous people. They're not genuine. They're not sincere. They're not real. And they'll betray.

Then he uses the word "reckless." These people are aggressive. The word "reckless" has that idea. It literally means head strong or falling forward actually. It's the idea of moving with your headfast, disregarding anything and everything around you. It's used only here and in Acts 19:36 where it's the idea of rash behavior...just...you're just going so fast you're like a bowling ball hitting the ten pin, everything flies in every direction. You just move recklessly, stopping at nothing in the pursuit of fulfillment of self-loving desire, swept on by self-love. People flying out of the way everywhere you go...just making room for you to blast down the alley, nobody get in your way.

And then he adds "conceited." The root for that is from the word "smoke." People who are blowing smoke, to put it in the vernacular, who are puffed up, perhaps the idea, inflated with their own sense of self-importance, full of smoke, unable to see reality, all those kind of thoughts could wrap around this word. It's used in 1 Timothy 3:6 and 6:4. It has the idea of someone whose head is engulfed in smoke so he can't see reality. He's in his own little world, he's created his own little environment where he blows smoke in his own eyes and his own face, in a fog, consumed with himself. It came to mean to be conceited, to preoccupy yourself with your little world, and we're right back to self-love, aren't we? Right back to self-love, conceited, developed ingrown eyeballs. All you see is yourself. And when you get to the point where that has happened, then all this other garbage is going to come along.

He sort of wraps this section up with the last statement in verse 4, "lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God." That's an appropriate climax, by the way, to the list of vices flowing out of the sewer of self-love. Lovers of self are lovers of money. Lovers of money are lovers of pleasure. Lovers of pleasure do not love God. And that's where we are in our world, self, money, pleasure.

We love self. We love money. We love pleasure. We don't love God. It's not "more than" as the Authorized says it, it's "rather than" as the Greek text indicates. The emphasis is not that there is some love for God, exceeded by love for pleasure, but rather there is no love for God, only love for pleasure. And she that lives in pleasure is dead while she lives, Paul said. The whole life is lived in pursuit of self-love, self- aggrandizement, self-pleasure. This is hedonism.

The word is philedonos, phileo love, hedonism. Love and hedonism brought together, love of pleasure...that's the characteristic of those who are a danger to the church. We have to watch out for self-lovers in the church. They are a grave grave peril.

How do you know them? They love money. They brag out of their arrogant hearts. They slander others. They resist authority. They have no gratitude. They have little affection for those who are in the circle of intimacy in their own life and family. They're obstinate, bitter truce breakers, eager to slander others if they can gain from it. They're out-of-control slaves to their passions who hate what is noble and will betray anyone for gain, and who pursue their vices with an abandon and an inflated sense of self-importance and they love pleasure rather than loving God. You have to watch for such dangerous people.

You can turn this whole thing around with the last phrase, "rather than love for God." They are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. May I say to you that if you're a lover of God, you're not going to be a lover of self? You're not going to be a lover of money. You're not going to be a lover of all the rest of this stuff. Because if you truly love God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength, you're going to be consumed with Him. You're going to have that deep deep desire to know and commune with God. The insulation against the danger then is that we should love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind and strength. And Jesus said that's the first commandment. And what flows out of it is the second, which is like it, you will love your neighbor as...what?...as yourself. So you'll conquer self-love. You'll conquer self-love by loving God and out of that loving your neighbor you'll conquer self-love.

There's much more to say, much more, about the danger to the church. We'll have to wait till next Lord's day for that. Let's bow in prayer.

Father, You know our hearts and You know that though we draw things black and white as we preach this morning out of this text that there are in our hearts battles with loving self, loving money, boastfulness, arrogance, all these things. Sometimes our lips speak maliciously. Sometimes we are reckless in the pursuit of the fulfillment of our passion. Sometimes we lose sight of people around us. We treat them with contempt as we try to fulfill our own goals. Lord, we know the church is in danger from this just because of what is in the fallen human heart. But, O God, how dangerous it is when the church accepts this, when the church allows for a self-love that is pervasive or when it allows for people to come in as leaders and teachers whose lives are characterized by this and this becomes then a tolerable thing. I'm sure even in some cases a desirable way of life. How frightening.

We can sense the danger of the church because we sense the encroachment in our own lives and our own hearts of this thinking, this worldly philosophy. Lord, help us to step away from this, to be set apart. Help us to be lovers of God, not lovers of pleasure. Help us to be just the antithesis of all of this, to be humble and meek, to speak well of people, to be obedient to parents, to be filled with

gratitude, to be holy and reverent and decent, to be full of love for the people in our intimate family, to be easy to be entreated, to be one who speaks kindly, under self-control, tender, loving what is good, loyal and faithful, gracious in spirit so that we may not just have a form of godliness on the outside but that we may genuinely be righteous on the inside. And help us to recognize what's happening around us, Lord, and protect Your church. And we know it's not the people on the outside that cause the problem, it's the people on the inside who have caught the disease on the outside. It's the cancer inside, it's the internal rebellion of the cells that are within the body that pose the dire threat. Save us, Lord, from all these wicked things and preserve Your church faithful, pure until Jesus comes that as Paul said she might be presented to You as a chaste virgin. And help us to be on guard and let that watch begin at our own life. We ask this in order that our Savior might be honored, we pray in His name. Amen.

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