

PRESENT TRUTH

A Teaching Letter of Lifestream Teaching Ministries

For this reason I will not be negligent to remind you always of these things, though you know and are established in the present truth. (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV)

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For the Love of Self

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Introduction

I am old enough now that things that didn't bother me in times past now become irritating. My wife and family have told me for several years that I am just getting old and crotchety. While some of that may be true, I believe that some of the issue is the condition of our cultural environment and the state of knowledge of the things of God. Things seem to be getting worse and doing it quicker that they used to.

The Warning

Paul in his letter to Timothy warned him of the problems associated with the cultural environment of the day and this warning is even more relevant to our day.

2 Timothy 3:1-5 NASB But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

Notice that the list of 18 moral issues or conditions begins with “lovers of self” and “lovers of money” and ends with “lovers of pleasure”. You could sum this up as self centeredness or self love or selfishness or soulishness. Regardless of which word is used, the focus is upon myself, my desires, what I want, me, me, me.

This is the nature of the people of the last days; that is, the generations prior to Jesus' return. The difficult times [*the original word means fierce, terrible, violent*] are caused by the people who have made selfishness the cultural norm.

Paul said this would happen. It is unavoidable because the Scriptures say it will happen. We can pray all we want to for it not to happen but it is already ordained to occur. All we can do is let

the Lord prepare us for it.

The Problem

Now, we should expect selfishness to be a mark of the atheist or the unbeliever. It should not be surprising to us that the cultural environment of the world would be one of self interest. What should surprise us is the fact that Paul was not speaking of the world but of those who profess Christ. Those who portray the characteristics Paul listed are also the ones “who hold to a form of Godliness but have denied its power”. I don't think that Paul would use the word “Godliness” except in the context of the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. He was not speaking to unbelievers but to those who name the name of Christ.

“Holding to a form” I think is pretty clear. They had a facade, an outward appearance of “godliness”. We understand that because we have a clear example in the Scriptures of it with the Pharisees. But, what does it mean when Paul says, “having denied its power”? I think that this is the crucial issue.

The Power

The power that Paul is speaking of is the power of the Holy Spirit to change us into the likeness of the Son.

Romans 8:29 NASB For those whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that He would be the firstborn among many brethren;

From the moment that we know the Lord, the Holy Spirit begins to work in us to change us into the image of the Son. The *event* of the new birth begins the *process* of change in us. However, the process involves our willingness to be changed. The Word begins to cut deep into the thoughts and intents of the heart, discerning what is soul and what is spirit [*Heb. 4:12*]. The process begins with denying self. Jesus spoke of this in three phases.

Luke 9:23 NASB And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.

If we are to follow Jesus we must 1) deny ourselves, 2) take up our cross daily, and 3) then, follow Him. It begins with denying ourselves, which we cannot do without the power of the Holy Spirit. The moment that we “deny the power” of the Spirit we remain unchanged in our hearts and minds. We cease to be conformed to His image. Instead we remain self centered, soulish.

The Reason

Why does this happen? As I said at the beginning of this, I have lived long enough now to look at things with a different perspective. I saw the Jesus people movement as it faded away. I saw the beginnings of the Charismatic Movement and its evolution into hype and excess. I have seen several movements since then. God moves and after a time, it deteriorates into a self centered, what's in it for me group. Why?

Because of mixture. What starts as an objective scriptural move of God full of His power and grace becomes a subjective seeking after spiritual experiences. This comes from soulishness,

from the desire to please our self. And the fullness of the outworking of our self is the list of 18 moral conditions listed by Paul for Timothy's understanding. We can't mix self desires, ambitions, and pleasures with the will and purpose of the Lord. It won't work. The Lord tells us that we are not compatible with Him and He doesn't change. If we deny the power that changes us we will never be compatible with Him.

The sad thing is the church has stopped teaching this. So, we have an end time people who are lovers of self, lovers of money, etc. It doesn't matter whether it is the church building on the corner or the living room church down the street, until we can deny our selves and take up our cross and follow Him, we will be a mixture of desire and purpose that is ineffective in the ways of the Lord.

The Way it Works

Mixture always causes confusion and then division. Some of what is provided is good and some is bad. Some is truth and some is error. This means that there are two ways that people can respond.

1. Some will focus on the error and reject the truth;
2. Some will focus on the truth and accept the error.

The end result of either of these responses is confusion and eventually division. People become more and more aggressively committed to one or the other of the alternatives. Eventually, division occurs. This happens because of mixture. We cannot afford to tolerate mixture.

What's the answer? Truth! The pure, undiluted truth of God's word. Jesus was the Word made flesh. To be conformed to His image requires that the Word must be made flesh in us also. Our self desires prevent the Word from becoming flesh in us. We must deny self or we will deny the power of God to change us.

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