

Times of Stress

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2 Timothy 2:11-3:9

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The Last Days

Christianity is an anti-utopian faith. Prior to Christ's return in glory to judge the living and the dead there will be no perfect society. All men are fallen and, therefore, the societies that we create are tainted by sin. Hence, history contains ups and downs. There are times of spiritual renewal and cultural advance as well times of apostasy and cultural decay. History is not static. Israel in Jesus' day was going to face *a period of judgment* because of their failure to honor Jesus as God's Son.

33 Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell? 34 Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, 35 that on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. 36 Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. (Mt 23:33-36)

Jesus announced that all Judea would be ravaged by the Romans. It took 40 years for His prediction to reach its fulfillment. During that period relations between Romans, Jews, and Christians steadily deteriorated. This reached a fever pitch in the 60s as *the _____* of the Jewish era came nearer. It was *a perilous time*.

Times of Stress

So what characterizes *perilous times*? In Romans 1, Paul outlines the trajectory of societal decay. Sin is like cancer. When it goes untreated, it metastasizes. So Paul outlines various stages of societal decay. It begins with *idolatry and ingratitude* (1:18-23); a failure to repent results in rampant *sexual licentiousness* (1:24-25); *sexual licentiousness* further degenerates into *unnatural homosexual lusts and actions* (1:26-27); and unrepentant *homosexual lust* degenerates into widespread *cultural decay* (1:28-32). In our text today, Paul provides a similar laundry list:

1 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: 2 For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3 unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, 4 traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, 5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! 6 For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, 7 always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. 8 Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; 9 but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was. (2 Tim 3:1-9)

As a culture comes increasingly under judgment, as it enters "*the last days*" of its existence, it faces "*perilous times*" (1), times of _____. These *perilous times* witness cultural disintegration.

Keeping Your Head (2 Timothy 2:11-13) - Four Theological Foundations

So how do we navigate such *perilous times*, such *times of stress*? Paul provides Timothy with *four theological foundations* (2:11-13) and *four practical principles* (2:14-3:9) for navigating perilous times.

11a *This is a faithful saying:*

11b *For if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him.*

12a *If we endure, We shall also reign with Him.*

12b *If we deny Him, He also will deny us.*

13 *If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*

Notice that Paul lays out *four theological foundations* that help guide us in *perilous times*.

- *In perilous times, remember that Christ died and rose again for your _____.* (11a)
- *In perilous times, remember that ultimate _____ belongs to Christ and His people.* (12a)
- *In perilous times, beware the danger of _____.* (12b)
- *In perilous times, _____ on God's faithfulness not your own.* (13)

What these principles reveal is both *the simplicity of the Gospel* and *the complexity of church history*. On the one hand, *the Gospel is _____*. Trust in Jesus, rely on His mercy and grace, and you are assured of eternal salvation and victory over all the plots and schemes of Satan and his offspring. On the other hand, *church history is _____*, especially in *perilous times*. Some endure, some deny Jesus, some are faithless - and we have to be able to distinguish these things.

Dealing with Times of Stress (2 Timothy 2:14-3:9) - Four Practical Principles

A. Don't strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers (2:14-19)

14 Remind them of these things, charging them before the Lord not to strive about words to no profit, to the ruin of the hearers. 15 Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth. 16 But shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness. 17 And their message will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, 18 who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that the resurrection is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. 19 Nevertheless the solid foundation of God stands, having this seal: "The Lord knows those who are His," and, "Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."

B. Be a vessel of honor in the Lord's house (2:20-22)

20 But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay, some for honor and some for dishonor. 21 Therefore if anyone cleanses himself from the latter, he will be a vessel for honor, sanctified and useful for the Master, prepared for every good work. 22 Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

C. In humility, correct those who are in opposition to the truth (2:23-26)

23 But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. 24 And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, 25 in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, 26 and that they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.

D. Turn away from those who resist the truth (3:1-9)

Conclusion