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FOREWORD

The following lessons deal with Paul's statement in 2 Timothy 3:1 that "in the last days perilous times will come." The writer was not undertaking to enumerate sins which would become prevalent just before the second coming of Christ. He was warning Timothy and all of us of the wickedness that would exist throughout the whole dispensation in which Christians live. It is my conviction that "the last days" include the age in which we now live - the gospel age. (See Acts: 2:16,17 and Heb. 1:1,2.)

Where the King James Version has "perilous times," the American Standard has "grievous times." The most literal idea is that of the New American Standard, "difficult times." The conditions mentioned by the apostle (2Tim.: 3:1-6) make it very difficult for Christians to remain faithful to Christ; but if we recognize that these things are detrimental to our spiritual good, we can fortify ourselves against them.

These are indeed difficult times for the child of God. Young people have grave difficulties in securing an education, finding marriage partners, and in their social relationships generally. Parents face numerous difficulties in the rearing of their children. That a sort of "social revolution" has been occurring for some time now is undeniable. That it poses serious difficulties for people who strive to go to heaven should be obvious to all.

In this series we shall consider some of the conditions in society which pose such threats to Christians as to demand some response. We shall look at these in the light of New Testament teaching and seek to provide some BIBLE SOLUTIONS for those who are facing "difficult times."

Barney L. Keith

LESSON I

THE REVOLT AGAINST GOD

Nothing is more fundamental than a correct view of, and attitude toward God. Relief in the existence of Jehovah, and a firm conviction that He has spoken to mankind with authority which must be respected, will make all the difference in the world in one's attitude toward other people and toward himself. The Christian cannot help being concerned about the widespread revolt against God.

I. GOD IS BEING REMOVED FROM SOCIETY'S VIEW ON ALL FRONTS. Our children are growing up in a Godless world, and many are being destroyed.

A. In religious matters God is either being denied or disobeyed.

1. There is now even a "Church of Satan" with several branches over the United States.
2. Astrology and occult movements are increasing.

B. In educational circles God is given little or no respect.

1. Everything is explained on a naturalistic basis and the bias is strong against the very idea of the supernatural. (The influence of John Dewey and others.)
2. In biology, history, sociology, literature, psychology, geology (and nearly every area of study) the texts and professors are slanted against faith in the God of the Bible. The effects of all of this are cumulative.

C. In the political area, particularly with Communism, there is no room for God. With all of the turmoil, conflict and confusion stirred up in recent years, only the Devil himself is being served - certainly not God.

D. In social life the same lack of concern for God is evidenced by the materialism of the day - money possessions, THINGS, status, etc., have become gods to many (even to some who claim still to believe in God).

II. THIS REJECTION OF GOD HAS ALWAYS BEEN FOLLOWED BY THE DEPRAVITY OF SOCIETY.

A. Paul vividly depicts the process of decay in Romans 1:18-32.

B. This cycle of events has occurred in various ages. It can be seen among the ancient Gentiles, the Greeks, the Romans, and even in modern times. It may very well be that the same sequence is unfolding in our own country today.

C. When men lose faith in God and His word, there is no absolute standard to determine what "ought" to be or "ought not" to be. No true moral standard can possibly exist for the atheist or the infidel. If so, what can it be?

LESSON II - "DIFFICULT TIMES"

Barney Keith

A CORRUPT VIEW OF THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF MAN

Introduction:

As was pointed out in the preceding lesson, there has been a general move to repudiate the God of the Bible. Scepticism and outright atheism are not uncommon. When men reject the idea of a God who exercised His creative power to bring all things into existence, including man himself, they must form some alternative explanation for the origin and nature of man. Theism and atheism lead in different directions. Atheism makes of man something quite unlike what the word of God says he is. The theories of evolution present a perverted view of the nature of man. Our young people are being brainwashed in many places.

I. WHAT THE BIBLE TEACHES ABOUT THE ORIGIN AND NATURE OF MAN.

A. Man is the product of Deity, the "offspring" of God (Gen. 1, 2; Acts 17:26-28).

B. Man is like the animals in certain respects.

1. Both have physical composition from "the dust of the ground: (Eccl. 3:19, 20; Gen. 2:7).
2. Both man and animals are "living souls" (Gen 2:7; 1:30).
 - a. The "life" in the beasts, etc. (Gen. 1:30) is the word for "a living soul."
3. Both have "the breath of life" in them (Gen 2:7; 7:15, 21-23).
4. The bodies of both will return to the dust (Eccl. 3:19, 20).

C. But man is distinctly UNIQUE and is set apart from the animals.

1. God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness....and God created man in His own image; in the image of God created He him: male and female created He them" (Gen. 1:26, 27).
2. This is NOT said concerning the animals. Man is, therefore, NOT just a more highly developed animal--he is made in the image of the Creator.

D. Paul affirms that God made man and also sustains him (Acts 17:26-28).

E. As the creation of God, man is to seek God and to worship Him (Acts 17:27).

F. Man is a responsible, accountable creature who will face judgment before God's Son (Acts 17:30, 31).

G. The whole duty of man is summed up in Eccl. 12:13: "FEAR GOD AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS"!

II. WHAT EVOLUTION TEACHES CONCERNING MAN.

A. Man was not miraculously created, but gradually evolved and developed from some simple, primitive organism. All forms of life now seen, it is claimed, have thus evolved, both plants and animals.

B. Contrary to the misleading statements of many "amateur" evolutionists, the theory DOES claim that man indeed has come from monkey or ape ancestors. (The leading authorities rebuke some of the lesser lights among them for trying to conceal from the public this concept...Quotations from George Gaylord Simpson, N. G. Muller, etc.)

III. THERE IS GREAT NEED FOR CHRISTIANS TO BE ARMED WITH REASONS FOR BELIEVING IN GOD.

- A. Unless we can instill in the minds of our young people a real faith, based on solid evidence, we will continue to see many turn from God to atheism or scepticism. (Think of some valid reasons for believing in God.)
- B. We must stress to our young people also the DIFFICULTIES and the WEAKNESSES of atheism.
 1. The impossibility of proving that God does not exist.
 2. The lack of any satisfactory explanation of the origin of life.
 3. Attributing all of the order seen in nature and man to pure chance. (Consider the marvels of the eye, ear, heart; the process of photosynthesis, etc.)
 4. Atheism makes man a mere machine without responsibility for his conduct. (If atheism is true, how does one explain man's ability to will, his power of choice, his judgmental decisions about moral questions?)*
 5. What has atheism done to make the world better? What motivation can it offer? What incentives to serve the good of humanity? What hope, cheer or comfort does it provide when man needs such?

IV. GOD IS TO BE THE CENTER OF OUR LIVES, THE OBJECT OF OUR FAITH AND LOVE.

- A. Consider such passages as Mt. 22:37; 6:33; Ecc. 12:13; 1 Jn. 5:3; etc.
- B. Despite such teaching there is much idolatry even among those who claim to be Christians. Read 2 Tim. 3:1-6 and note the various things people "in the last days" will LOVE: money, self, pleasure, evil.
- C. Especially in our day are people involved in material things, with little time left for God, the Bible, the church, or service to the Lord. As our children see our absorption in materialism, are they learning from us the importance of God in our lives? We may be able to give them every material convenience and luxury money can buy and see them LOST. They need more than THINGS.

CONCLUSION:

The attitude one has toward God lies at the root of all of his actions. If God is FIRST, all else will be in order. If He is rushed into the background of our lives, other things will fill the gap - career, sex, good times, wealth, etc.

"If Jehovah be God, follow Him; if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Every person must make the choice. This choice has to be reaffirmed day after day as we decide whom we shall serve. We need the same attitude Joshua had so that we can say, "WE WILL SERVE JEHOVAH" (Joshua 24:15)

LESSON III "DIFFICULT TIMES"

Barney Keith

THE SEX REVOLUTION - - ASSAULT ON MORALS

Introduction:

1. That a "revolution" in morals exists no one can doubt. A "new" morality has evolved which amounts to sexual anarchy, unbridled lasciviousness.
2. The demand for a new morality comes from many sources - scientists, sociologists, theologians and young intellectuals.
3. The danger to our whole social structure (especially to the family) is extremely great. Christians should be deeply concerned.

I. THE POLLUTION OF MORALS IN THE UNITED STATES IS WIDESPREAD.

- A. Salacious, pornographic literature is published and sold by the tons.
- B. Promiscuity and illegitimate births have increased alarmingly.
- C. Even homosexuality is now being justified under the "new morality."
(Someone has come up with the idea of a CHURCH for homosexuals.)
- D. Lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, indecent exposure, crimes of passion, rebellion against rules and laws -- all of these point to the widespread trouble this country is in, with no relief in sight at the moment.
- E. The internal decay of American society parallels that of ancient Rome in various ways.

II. THE "NEW MORALITY" STRIKES AT THE VERY FOUNDATION OF BIBLICAL ETHICS AND ADVOCATES A NEW SET OF GUIDELINES.

- A. In this system of values the ultimate criterion of right and wrong is NOT divinely-given law (the Bible), but the individual's own personal, subjective decision. "Love" is exalted above "law." The catch phrase "situation ethics" has become a cardinal point in the doctrine of the "new morality."
- B. The "new morality" is actually just a new sophisticated term for the lasciviousness, fornication, adultery, and sodomy which are so clearly denounced and forbidden in the word of God.

III. THE "NEW MORALITY" IS BUT A SYMPTOM OF THE REAL DISEASE - INFIDELITY, LOSS OF FAITH IN THE OBJECTIVE STANDARDS FOUND IN THE BIBLE.

- A. Human reason has been enthroned as god, resulting in scepticism, infidelity, and atheism. (Ethical systems today are based on physical considerations only, and this can only breed moral recklessness.
- B. Modernism and liberalism have stripped the Bible of authority (including, of course, its ethical and moral teachings) with a resulting general rebellion against such authority.
- C. The patent fruit of unbelief is lasciviousness and general "filth" (Study Rom.1:19-28).
 1. Liberal theology has deleted God's wrath against evildoers and has dissolved God's laws into NOTHINGNESS. The only "standard" that liberalism sets forth is vague, intangible, subjective, utilitarian, relative, variable, situational -- NO STANDARD OF MORALITY AT ALL.
 2. Modern culture follows pretty much the pattern seen in Romans 1.

C. Some very fine works have been published in recent years by men of science to refute the claims of evolution. Parents should purchase some of these and become familiar with the chief arguments and their answers. Be concerned about what your children are being taught in their biology texts (and others).

D. It will help your children to know:

1. That evolution is NOT a PROVED FACT, but is a THEORY which, in the very nature of things, cannot possibly be proved.
2. That the number of reputable anti-evolution spokesmen is multiplying in the scientific community itself. Many scientists are now openly opposing the theory.
3. That more and more literature is becoming available which champions the Bible view of man's origin and nature.
4. That some states are now FORBIDDING science teachers to teach evolution as THE explanation of the world in which we live, and requiring that opportunity be given for the creationist viewpoint to be set forth.

III. IF THE BIBLE IS THE INSPIRED WORD OF GOD, THE CHRISTIAN CANNOT BELIEVE THE DOCTRINE OF EVOLUTION.

- A. It is absolutely contrary to the teaching of Scripture.
- B. It either repudiates God altogether (atheistic evolution) or it perverts the Bible concept of God's creative work in making man.
- C. It downgrades man who, according to the Bible, is made in the very image of God.
- D. It "animalizes" man and makes him an irresponsible, helpless product of blind chance.

CONCLUSION:

David said, "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psa. 139:14). There are too many things about the wonderful creature called man that cannot be explained by the evolutionist. Accepting the view of man set forth in the Bible should result in responsible, useful, worthwhile and reverent people. There is nothing in evolution that could make men this way.

- D. Our need is what it has always been -- respect for God and His word, acceptance of the Bible as the infallible, inerrant standard of behavior. We need the faith to take God at His word (Acts 27:25), and faith to ACT in obeying Him (Jas. 2:14-26).

IV. BIBLE MORALITY STANDS IN SHARP CONTRAST WITH THE "NEW MORALITY."

- A. The Christian's behavior is determined by the will of God, not by human wisdom or the prevailing practices.
1. Note the REASON given for morality: 1 Th.4:1-3,7,8; Eph. 5:3-10.
 2. What "others" are doing is not always good (1 Cor.15:33).
 3. The Bible requires chastity of both the married and the unmarried (1 Cor. 7:2,5).
 4. The Christian is motivated to conduct himself properly by recognizing that he is ever before God and is accountable to Him (1 Cor.10:31; 2 Cor. 5:9,10).
- B. The Bible uses PLAIN SPEECH for immoral behavior -- there is no pleasing or euphemistic way to talk about such sins.
1. Pre-marital and extra-marital sex episodes are labelled "fornication" and "adultery" by the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 5:1; 7:2, 5; etc.).
 2. There is no scriptural way for "sex outside of marriage" to be justified. In view of this Christians should:
 - a. Seek out decent and clean associations (1 Cor. 15:33).
 - b. Avoid occasions which provoke lasciviousness: dancing, indecent dress, pornographic literature, the close intimacies of "petting," etc. (See Eph. 5:3, 7-12).
- C. Adherence to the Bible standard of morality is positively required, with the only alternative being condemnation (1 Cor.6:9,10; Gal. 5:19-21; Eph.5:5). God knew what was good for man, and revealed it in His word.
- D. While men justify immorality, the closing scenes of the Bible picture the fornicators, etc as being outside of heaven. (Rev. 22:15).

CONCLUSION:

1. Every great civilization of the past has decayed morally before its final collapse. Sexual anarchy and socio-political revolution have gone hand-in-hand.
2. Young Christians especially need to be convinced that chastity and purity are worth the price as they approach marriage.
3. Let the Christian utterly reject the hedonistic and specious "Eat, drink and be merry" philosophy which is rooted in human wisdom. Let us rather seek to be guided by that wisdom which is from above (Jas. 3:15-16) so as to live "soberly, righteously and godly in this present age" (Titus 2:12).
4. The Christian is to glorify God in his BODY, and abstaining from all immorality is one way of glorifying Him (1 Cor. 6:13b, 18-20).

Barney Keith

SELF-DESTRUCTION THROUGH DRUG ABUSE

Introduction:

1. The problem of drugs abuse is REAL and MENACING; the statistics are FRIGHTENING AND STAGGERING. (David Lawrence called the present crisis "The Worst Sickness in American History" in an article in U.S. News and World Report.)
2. The President reported that in seven years juvenile arrests involving the use of drugs rose by almost 800 per cent (Message to Congress, July 14, 1969).
3. Samples of newspaper articles, magazines, etc. pointing up the wide-spread problem. (on campuses, in military bases, "rock festivals," etc.)
4. The Akron, Ohio Beacon Journal, in an article by Helen Carringer, reported: "The nation's drug problem is growing so rapidly that one teen-ager dies each day from the use of drugs." (Copied from "Southeast Sower.")
5. It is a mistake to think that nobody in the churches of Christ have been affected. Numerous examples.
6. We shall examine some reasons why Christians cannot indulge in "drugging" and be pleasing to God. (We are not discussing the taking of medication prescribed for certain ills or diseases.)

WHY CAN A CHRISTIAN NOT ENGAGE IN DRUG ABUSE

I. IT IS AN ILLEGAL ACTIVITY.

- A. If there were no other wrong involved, this would be sufficient to keep a real Christian from the evil of drug abuse.
- B. No Christian can violate the law of the land without disobeying God (Rom. 13:1-7)
- C. Penalties may vary from state to state, but the drug traffic is against the law.

II. DRUG ABUSE IS HARMFUL TO THE HEALTH (Either physical ly or mentally).

- A. Some quotations from those in position to know.
- B. The Christian cannot knowingly and deliberately abuse his body, for it is the temple of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19, 20).

III. DRUG ABUSE IS FORBIDDEN IN SCRIPTURE.

- A. In Gal. 5:19-21 Paul lists the works of the flesh which will keep one out of heaven. Verse 20 mentions "witchcraft" (KJF) or "sorcery" (ASV). It is clear from the lexicons that the word thus translated means MORE than just sorcery.

"Pharmakeia" - according to Thayer's Lexicon, means (a) the use or the administering of drugs; (b) poisoning; (c) sorcery, magical arts....

According to Souter's Lexicon, the word means "the practice of drugging... sorcery, witchcraft."

Harper's Lexicon states that the terms means "the employment of drugs for any purpose; sorcery, magic, enchantment." (All emphasis by BLK)

While it is true that the word can mean sorcery, it is not right to leave out of its meaning that which is the FIRST definition each time - the use of drugs. It is not difficult to see why drugging would be included in the works of the FLESH for that is the very source of motivation for the practice.

IV. DRUG ABUSE IS WRONG BECAUSE IT MAKES IT IMPOSSIBLE FOR THE PERSON TO DO WHAT HE MUST DO TO GO TO HEAVEN - THAT IS, IT KEEPS HIS MIND FROM PROPER FUNCTION.

- A. The teaching of Christ and the practice of that teaching demands the exercise of a clear mind and a dedicated heart. (Both in obeying the gospel and in growing spittitually the mind, the intellect, is involved.)
- B. SOBER Thinking is involved in serving Christ. Hence, whatever may affect the mind to prevent reasonable, sane, sober action is WRONG. To take into the body that which distorts reality, confuses the mind, or removes one's inhibitions against wrong-doing, or leads to erratic, irrational behavior is S-I-N.
- C. Some passages which show the importance of the mind or heart in serving God: 1 Pet.1:13; Ph.2:5; Ph. 4:7,8; 2 Tim.1:7; Mat.22:37; Rom12:2.

V. THE USE OF DRUGS GENERALLY BRINGS ONE INTO ASSOCIATION WITH EVIL COMPANIONS.

- A. This would have to be true since the people who traffic in drugs are NOT noted for their piety, spirituality or holiness of life. One who has become dependent on drugs, "hooked" or addicted, will resort to anything to satisfy his "need" for drugs. The exposure to what has become known as the drug subculture can do the person no good.
- B. The word of God warns us against "evil companionships" (1 Cor. 15:33).

CONCLUSION:

Various things may contribute to the drug problem, but surely much of the fault lies in the home. With very little parental supervision many young people are "on their own." No authority or discipline is exercised, no concern is manifested about who the child's companions are, where the child is spending his time, how late he stays out at night, etc. FAMILY LIFE is disintegrating in many instances. Parents who are Christians must assume the responsibilities God places on them. We cannot leave our children to the streets to be reared and expect them to remain free of society's ills.

(Some of the same things said about drugs could also be said about the alcohol problem which has been partially obscured with all the concern about drugs. It would be rather difficult for a child whose parents drink their beer or whiskey to see what is so wrong with marijuana, speed, acid, etc. And it would be rater difficult for such a parent to try to correct and punish his child for drug use.)

LESSON V "DIFFICULT TIMES"

Barney Keith

A SOLUTION FOR THOSE WHO FACE "DIFFICULT TIMES"

Introduction:

1. It is not surprising that the Christian faces all sorts of difficulties in trying to serve God. Since the "whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19), we should expect hardships, temptations and even persecutions. Early Christians were faced with these (1 Pet. 4:12-19).
2. We can be sure that God does not demand the impossible of us when He requires faithfulness and perseverance on our part, but provides us with the means of overcoming difficult times (1 Cor. 10:13).
3. In this final lesson we shall consider a few of the FUNDAMENTAL things which will carry the Christian through whatever times may come to him. Without these NO person can endure to the end and be saved. These are things we must really work on, but if we are willing to pay the price, the reward is certain.

WHAT CAN ONE DO ABOUT "DIFFICULT TIMES"?

I. THE CHRISTIAN WILL WORK ON HIS HEART, FOR OUT OF IT ARE THE ISSUES OF LIFE (Prov. 4:23).

- A. What we all need in the church is real purpose of heart in cleaving to the Lord (Acts 11:23).
- B. Real enjoyment of the kingdom of God is possible only to the "pure in heart" (Matt. 5:8).
- C. Since the heart is where one's treasure is (Mt. 6:21), we must be sure that the PROPER treasures are the ones we seek (Col. 3:1, 2; Mt. 6:33; Matt. 22:37).
- D. If the heart is set on right things, great strength belongs to that one - strength to do right and strength to resist wrong.
- E. Let us strive for sincerity and real earnestness as members of the church.

II. THE CHRISTIAN WILL NURTURE HIS FAITH, FOR IT IS ONLY "BY FAITH" THAT HE CAN PLEASE GOD.

- A. The whole "walk" of the child of God is "by faith, not by sight" (2 Cor. 5:7). Hence, whatever he can do to maintain his faith should concern him.
- B. The word of truth is the source of faith, so one must "give diligence" to be approved before God by abiding in that truth (2 Tim. 2:14-18).
- C. A growing KNOWLEDGE of the inspired scriptures becomes an increasing strength to the Christian, for his every need is met by the all-sufficient book (2 Tim. 3:16,17).
- D. We need also to impart this kind of faith to our children (2 Tim. 3:14; 1:5). (What steps can parents take to instill such faith in their children?)
- E. We can never be strong by refusing to study the Bible at home, refusing to attend the Bible classes provided by the congregation, or refraining from talking about it to others.

III. THE CHRISTIAN WILL PROTECT HIS CONSCIENCE, FOR IN THIS WAY HE CAN AVOID MAKING SHIPWRECK OF HIS FAITH (1 Tim. 1:18-20).

- A. Every Christian needs to strive to maintain a "good conscience" (1 Tim. 1:5) or a "pure conscience" (2 Tim. 1:3). His conscience will help him by its warnings, as long as it remains sensitive.
- B. "Conscience" is from a word which literally means "joint knowledge, knowledge along with."
 - 1. Presupposes knowledge of some standard of right and wrong. (We must understand, of course, that there is only one TRUE standard of right and wrong - the word of God. Not all people recognize this.)
 - 2. Presupposes the knowledge one has of his actual conduct
Conscience is brought into play when one compares what he knows he is actually doing with what he knows is the will of God. Conscience will either approve or disapprove one's actions (Rom. 2:14, 15).
- C. In order to have a good conscience, then, one must study to know what the true standard teaches (John 17:17; Psa. 119:101, 104, 105) and be careful to bring his life into conformity with the truth.
- D. There is great danger in overriding the cry of one's conscience. A person may become "seared;" or so hardened in sin as not even to care. This is a certain guarantee that he will make shipwreck of the faith.
- E. We surely cannot grow in our ability to overcome difficult times unless we keep our consciences sensitive to our sins, and are thus made willing to repent and correct our lives.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN WILL MAINTAIN COMPLETE TRUST AND CONFIDENCE IN CHRIST, FOR BY THIS HE CAN DO ALL THINGS HE NEEDS TO DO (Ph. 4:13).

- A. Note some passages which point to the necessity of remembering Christ. 2 Tim. 2:8; 1:12; 4:17, 18; Heb. 12:1, 2; 1 Cor. 11:24-30.
- B. The promise of victory over sin and Satan is for those who submit themselves to Christ. The Revelation depicts Jesus as the conquering Lord and assures the faithful Christians that they will share in this victory, if they but continue in faith. (Rev. 4:9, 10; 7:14-17; 12:10-12; 15:2).
- C. The Christian's faithful labor will not be in vain (1 Cor. 15:58) if he will not shrink back, but will believe "unto the saving of the soul" (Heb. 10:35-39).

CONCLUSION:

The Lord did not tell us that there would be no difficulties in our way in serving Him. Rather, he admonished us to "count the cost" and to realize the value of being His disciples. In reality, the true Christian is the only person who is equipped to endure ANY AND ALL of the difficult times in this life, for he is the only one who can look with the eye of faith to what is yet to come. While the unbeliever is filled with fears, frustrations, and doubts, the child of God can be courageous, serene and completely confident. In these "last days" let us cultivate the things which will give us victory over the evils we have studied about. May we all realize that "in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).