

PERILOUS TIMES AT HAND

"This know also, that in the last days
perilous times shall come." --[2 Tim. 3:1](#) .

REALIZING that we are now living in the very times referred to by the Apostle, some may inquire, How can this be? Are not these times, in comparison with times past, especially favorable to the prosperity of the Church? Time was when fire and sword and guillotine and rack were systematically employed to exterminate the true saints of God, when the Word of God was a book prohibited, and when the prison and the dungeon rewarded the faithful searching of the Scriptures. And is there not also more Truth due and understood now than formerly, as well as full liberty (if a man is pleased to exercise it) to believe and teach, either in private or in public, whatever he believes to be Truth?

Yes, such are the favorable conditions of our day. Never, in all the history of the Church, has there been a day of such privilege and blessing--such increase of knowledge and general intelligence, such facilities for the general diffusion of knowledge and such breadth of individual liberty--of conscience, of speech and of action--as today. The spirit of liberty is abroad in the earth, and though the wily enemies that once fettered and handcuffed and imprisoned it still live, and would fain imprison it as before, they regretfully realize that the soaring eagle is on the wing and may never be pinioned again. But hand in hand with all these advantages, strange to say, comes the Church's greatest peril. True, there is little peril to physical life, or earthly property; but these, to the true saints, are of minor importance, for they count not their earthly life dear unto them if by any means they may attain the divine nature and glory to which they are called.

The peril of these times is to the spiritual nature of the saints and to their valuable inheritance in the exceeding great and precious promises of God, which are all yea and amen in Christ Jesus. Subtle influences are now at work seeking to dwarf and extinguish the spiritual life and to rob the saints of their glorious hope, to sap stealthily the very foundations of Christianity, and thus effectually to overthrow the whole superstructure of the Christian faith in the minds of many, causing them thus to stumble and lose their glorious inheritance as joint-heirs with Christ.

The present besetments, being of this subtle character, are the more calculated to delude and ensnare, so that if one allows himself to be for a moment off his guard, the agencies of the Adversary will gain an advantage and use it to entrap the unwary one. And God will permit such snares because only those who are loyal and faithful, and therefore ever watchful, are counted *worthy to escape* their strong delusion. "Watch ye, therefore, and pray always, that ye may be accounted worthy to escape all these things that shall come to pass, and to stand before the Son of man." --[Matt. 21:36](#).

MANNER OF APPROACH OF THESE TIMES

The Apostle forewarns the Church, not only of the certainty of such perils, and of their character, but also of their manner of approach. On one occasion he said, "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. (Such were the great and destructive papal powers.) Also of *your own selves* shall men arise, speaking perverse things to draw away disciples after them." ([Acts 20:29,30](#).) Some of these Paul and the early Church encountered in their day.

Paul was often in peril among false brethren who, concerning the faith, had made shipwreck, and who greatly withstood his words--his efforts to build up the [R4728 : page 390] Church in the most holy faith. ([2 Cor.](#)

11:26; 1 Tim. 1:19; 2 Tim. 4:14-17.) And he shows that from such false brethren, brethren who have erred from the Truth and become teachers of false doctrine, will come the Church's greatest peril in these last times. (2 Tim. 2:16-18; 3:5.) And in order that we might recognize and beware of them, he very minutely described them, though the clear significance of the warning is somewhat beclouded by a faulty translation, which reads as follows:--

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,* truce-breakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good; traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the Truth."

The description as here translated, the reader will observe, is incongruous; for men of such villainous character could have no form of godliness. Read the description again and consider, How could a proud, covetous, boastful blasphemer, a truce-breaker, a false accuser, incontinent and fierce, a despiser of those that are good, a heady, high-minded, pleasure-loving traitor, have any form of godliness whatever, or deceive any one in this respect? Such a fierce character and bold blasphemer could not possibly palm himself off as a child of God; nor would he attempt it. The fact is that our translators did not fully comprehend the Apostle's language, and in rendering it into English they put the heaviest possible construction upon the Greek words, and thus the picture of these persons is overdrawn. Thus, for instance, the Greek word here rendered "blasphemers" (V. 3) is *blasphemos*, which signifies *one speaking injuriously, or an evil-speaker*.

Now, judging merely by the word, regardless of the context, we would not know whether in this instance the evil-speaking is carried to the extent of revilings or not; but as it stands related to the context--in view of the after statement that these have a form of godliness (V. 5), though lacking its real power--we must conclude that those milder or more subtle forms of evil-speaking, which would be consistent with hypocritical forms of godliness, are referred to, and therefore that our English word *blaspheme*, though it means evil-speaking, is too strong a term by which here to translate the Greek word *blasphemos*; for the full and generally understood significance of the English word *blaspheme* is--"To speak of the Supreme Being in terms of impious irreverence, to revile or speak reproachfully of God, Christ, or the holy Spirit--to speak wickedly of, to utter abuse or calumny against, to speak reproachfully of."--*Webster*.

So also the word *apeithes* rendered "disobedient," signifies *not persuaded*; and the expression "disobedient to parents" would consequently signify *not of the same persuasion, or not of the same mind as were the parents*. The word *anosios*, rendered "unholy," which signifies *unkind, or unholy*, would likewise, in view of the context, be better rendered by the milder English term, *unkind*. The word *aspondos* rendered "truce-breakers" (V. 3), signifies *irreconcilable or implacable--i.e., stubborn or constant in enmity*. The word *akrates*, rendered "incontinent," signifies more properly, *without strength, or without self-control*. Though this thought is also in the English word "incontinent," a coarser meaning generally attaches to the word. The word *anemeros*, rendered "fierce," signifies *not mild, savage*. That is, it may be a great or a small lack of mildness, amounting in some cases to savage bitterness. But, again, the fierce or savage idea is not compatible with any pretensions to godliness, as intimated in *verse 5*. The word *aphilagathos*, rendered "despisers of those that are good," would thus be better rendered *not friendly to the good*.

Thus revised, the Apostle's language reads as follows: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves (selfish), covetous, boasters, proud, evil-speakers, not of the same mind as were their forefathers (i.e., devisers of new doctrines), unthankful, unkind, irreconcilable, false accusers, without self-control, not mild, not friendly to those that are good--traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God (i.e., preferring their own will or pleasure to the will or pleasure of God); having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof; ever learning, and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth."

"MEN OF YOUR OWN SELVES SHALL ARISE SPEAKING

PERVERSE THINGS"

It should be observed also that the word *men*, in *verse 2*, is emphatic in the Greek text, as shown in the *Emphatic Diaglott*, thus indicating that a particular class of men is here referred to, which, according to the description, can be none other than those mentioned in [Acts 20:29,30](#), viz., men "*of your own selves* (men of your own company, men whom you have hitherto regarded as members of the Body of Christ, and who still claim to be such), who shall arise speaking perverse things (perverting the Truth).

But why, you ask, should any one who had once received the Truth desire to pervert it? The Apostle answers that their object is) to draw away disciples after them." And for this purpose, of leading away disciples after them, they keep up the form of godliness, although they deny its power--the only power by means of which any of the fallen race can be reckoned godly or righteous in God's sight, viz., the power of the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth us from all sin, as long as we appreciate and accept this salvation through faith in his blood.

Well may we inquire, as we realize that we are living in the last days here referred to, Is there such a class of enemies to the Truth and to the Church actually in existence today? Truly, the voice of prophecy has never set up a false alarm, or foretold an uncertain event. The perilous times have come and the foretold perils are all about us. Side by side in the same communities with the humble, faithful, consecrated saints--in the same little assemblings together of those who have escaped from the bondage of Babylon, in the same households, and often at the same table of the Lord, there has also been developing a class who are "lovers of their own selves (selfish), covetous (of honors and distinction and the praise of men--ambitious), boasters (as though the credit of the Truth now due and received were in some way due to them, and as though they had a right therefore to alter and amend it at their pleasure), proud" (of that knowledge which should be received with only humility and thankfulness, and which can be retained only under these conditions).

Because the light of the newly unfolding Truth has dawned upon their pathway, they, in common with the faithful saints, no longer are of the same mind as were their parents; but the goodness of God thus manifested to them, instead of cultivating in them a spirit of thankfulness

*The Sinaitic, the oldest and most reliable MS., omits the words, "*without natural affection*," they being no part of the original text. [R4728 : page 391] and co-operation, which is its design, seems to arouse a spirit of pride and ambition, which does not long hesitate to make merchandise of the Truth for ambitious ends, however trivial and foolish those ends may be. And in pursuance of the ambitious policy, by degrees they become "evil-speakers (against the doctrine of Christ and those who believe and teach it), unkind, unfriendly to those that are good (who hold fast the Truth in righteousness), and false accusers" (of such). As they proceed in this way they seem to lose all former strength of Christian character. They become irreconcilable to the Truth, so that neither Scripture, nor reason, nor the example of the faithful, has power to restore them. Loving their own wills more than the will of God, they grow more and more proud and boastful of their attainments-- high-minded and heady. Not submitting themselves to the Head of the Body, Christ Jesus, they are ambitious to head new factions themselves, and thus they turn traitors to the Truth.

They claim, too, to be very earnest students of the Word of God; and so they are, but they never come to a knowledge of the Truth. They are after something new, some new and peculiar "find" in the mine of God that will attract the wondering gaze of many curious disciples. But, alas for their purposes! There are no such real curiosities in the blessed Word of God; but the zeal of these ambitious ones is equal to the emergency, and one after another the actual truths are beclouded, distorted and perverted to this ignoble end and presented as newly-found truths. And the unwary receive them as such, not recognizing at first that they are subversive of the entire system of Divine Truth. Thus their faith in the truths already learned is unwittingly undermined;

they are caught in the snare of the Enemy; and as they continue to give ear to these seductive influences they become more and more entangled, until, having lost their anchorage, they find themselves adrift on a vast sea of unbelief, floating they know not whither. Like their leaders, they may retain the form of godliness, but have lost its power.

THEIR POLICIES SHALL BE VERY SEDUCTIVE

But there is another feature of the description of these false teachers, whose ambitions place so many perils in the pathway of the saints, which should not be overlooked. *Verses 6 and 8* describe, or rather illustrate, the *manner* in which the influence of such teachers will be brought to bear upon the Church. Their opposition is not expressed in bold, defiant terms, and emphasized and enforced with vehemency. As here intimated, their policy is crafty, deceitful, sly, under pretensions of godliness, love of truth and zeal for the truth. Their influence will be exerted somewhat after the *manner* of a vile class mentioned in *verse 6*, who "creep into houses and lead captive silly women, laden with sin, and led away by various inordinate desires." Not that such will be the actual immoral character of these teachers, but that their policy will be similarly seductive.

Their actual course is more particularly described in *verse 8* thus: "Now *as* Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, *so* do these also resist the Truth--men of corrupt minds (corrupted or turned aside from the Truth), reprobate concerning the faith." Thus we are shown that the opposition to the Truth will be manifested in a subtle, deceptive course similar to that of those opposers of Moses. They opposed Moses by doing something similar to what he did, thus confusing the people. God had given Moses power to do certain miracles in order to prove to Israel that Moses was his Divinely empowered agent. And Satan forthwith empowered his agents to duplicate those miracles, which they did to some extent, not perfectly, thus endeavoring to confuse the minds of the people and to unsettle their confidence in Moses and his leading and teaching.

Just so it is today. The studied effort of false teachers --false brethren developing in the very midst of the Church--is to offset the Truth by plausible forms of error, to unsettle confidence both in the Truth and in all teachers of the Truth, thus to lead away disciples after them and their theories. And in consequence of the allurements of these false teachers, and of the unfaithfulness of many to the love and service of the Truth which they have received, a class in the midst of the Church will give much encouragement to the ambitions of these false brethren; "for," says the Apostle ([2 Tim. 4:3,4](#)), "the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but after their own desires (desires for something new) shall they gather to themselves teachers, having itching ears (for new and strange things); and they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

Nor will this class be only a small minority; for, in order that the faithful may not be discouraged when brought face to face with these things, they are forewarned ([Psa. 91:7](#)) that, before this conflict ends, a thousand shall fall at their side and ten thousand at their right hand. Thus, realizing that God foreknew it all and that the accomplishment of his glorious purposes is not in the least endangered thereby, they may still have confidence and joy in view of the glorious consummation of his Plan, and of their promised position in it.

"FROM SUCH TURN AWAY"

But how shall the faithful believers act towards these false brethren in their midst? Shall they take them by the hand, as formerly, and bid them God-speed? Shall they recognize them as brethren in Christ? Are they owned of God as sons? Shall we indeed walk with them and be guiltless? What does the Apostle say we shall do? He says, "From such *turn away*." (*V. 5.*) "Be not ye partakers with them; for ye were formerly darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord; walk as children of light...and have *no fellowship* with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them." ([Eph. 5:6-11.](#)) And the Apostle John (*2 John 11*) emphasizes Paul's counsel, saying, "If there come any unto you and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house,

neither bid him God-speed; for he that biddeth him God-speed is partaker of his evil deeds."

Such "evil men," says Paul (*V. 13*), "shall wax worse and worse (more and more bold and aggressive, as they receive encouragement from that rapidly increasing class who will no longer endure sound doctrine), deceiving (others) and being deceived" (themselves--becoming more firmly entrenched in the snares of their own weaving, so as to make it impossible to extricate them). But, nevertheless, the time is coming when they shall proceed no further; for their folly shall be manifested unto all men, as was the folly of Jannes and Jambres, who could not forever withstand the teachings of Moses, the servant of God.--*V. 9*.

Then Paul proceeds to call attention to the ground of Timothy's confidence in himself as a faithful teacher of Divine Truth, saying, "But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, long-suffering, charity, patience, persecutions, afflictions which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra; what persecutions I endured; but out of them all the Lord delivered me."--*Vs. 10,11*.

Such are always the marks of a true teacher. His [**R4728 : page 392**] doctrine will be that which the most thorough investigation of the Scriptures most clearly proves and establishes beyond all peradventure. His manner of life will be consistent both with his faith and with his consecration to the Lord. His purpose will be the building up of the Church in the most holy faith. His faith will be positive and clear--not mere guesswork, but knowledge based upon the sure Word of God, with whom is no variableness nor shadow of turning. And his great love for the Church will be manifest, as was Paul's, and as was Moses' love for Israel, by long-suffering, patience and meek endurance of persecution, both from an opposing world and from false brethren arising in the midst of God's people. And in such persecutions no true teacher will be lacking; for "all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution." (*V. 12*.) Such has been the experience of every true teacher that God has ever raised up to deliver and guide his people. Witness Noah, Moses, Paul and Luther.

But, Beloved, our advice to you in these perilous times, when error is taking on its most baneful and deceitful forms, and when it is finding its most active agents amongst false brethren and sisters in your very midst, and when fidelity to Truth, therefore, occasions the severing of some of the tenderest social ties you have ever known, even among those with whom you once held sweet converse as you walked together to the house of God--yes, in these times let us again urge the counsel of Paul-- "Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them"; for it is written ([John 6:45](#)), "They shall be all taught of God." Whoever the human agent may be that God has made use of to bring you to a knowledge of the truth, he was simply an index finger to help you trace it for yourself on the sacred page; and in humility and faithfulness he made no greater claim than this, assuring you that the holy Scriptures to which he ever and continually pointed are indeed "able to make you wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus"; and that "all Scripture, given by inspiration of God, is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

THE PRECIOUS TRUTH IS GOD'S MESSAGE

Therefore, dearly beloved, what you have learned concerning God's glorious Plan of the Ages, and concerning your privileged place in that Plan, as heirs of God and joint-heirs with Jesus Christ, his Son, and concerning the conditions upon which you hold this precious promise and may finally realize it, and concerning that great foundation doctrine of our redemption from sin and death through the precious blood of "the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all," upon which fact rests the whole superstructure of the wondrous and glorious Plan, *hold fast* these things, knowing of whom you have learned them. This precious Truth is God's message to you, not man's. No such high and glorious hope could ever have entered the mind of mortal man had not God revealed it by his Spirit, as he has done through faith in his Word, in his own due time. It is all in that Word. Search and see for yourselves; and be not faithless but believing. It comes not to you on the miserable authority of vain imagination, or dreams, or doubtful visions, but on the

authority of God's most holy and authentic Word. True, it is almost too good to believe, but is it not just like our God? Does it not gloriously illustrate the breadth of his mighty mind, the scope of his marvelous wisdom and power, and the depth of his love and grace?

Continue, therefore, in the things which thou hast learned, and hast been assured of (having proved them yourselves from the Scriptures), and be not of them who turn away their ears from the Truth and are turned unto fables. And observing those who have a form of godliness, but who, nevertheless, by their false teachings deny the power thereof, "*from such turn away,*" and "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them."

We cannot serve two masters; we cannot espouse the cause of Truth and the cause of error as well; nor can we retain the friendship of God and of the advocates of error also. Who is on the Lord's side? Let them rally around the Lord's standard. All told, they will be only a "little flock." Like Gideon's band, the company now gathered by the proclamation of the harvest-message of Truth must be tested and sifted until only the loyal, faithful, true-hearted, brave and valiant soldiers of the cross remain; and to these, though their numbers be small, will the laurels of victory belong when Truth and righteousness finally prevail. Let no man boast of numbers now when the highest interests of the elect of God are all bound up with the faithful few, to whom it will be the Father's good pleasure to give the Kingdom.

"Count me the swords that have come."
"Lord, thousands on thousands are ready."
"Lo, these are too many, and with them are some
Whose hearts and whose hands are not steady.
He whose soul does not burn,
Let him take up his tent and return."

"Count me the swords that remain."
"Lord, hundreds on hundreds are daring."
"These yet are too many for me to attain
To the victory I am preparing.
Lead them down to the brink
Of the waters of Marah to drink."

"Lord, those who remain are but few,
And the hosts of the foe are appalling,
And what can a handful such as we do?"
"When ye hear from beyond my voice calling
Sound the trump! Hold the light!
Great Midian will melt in your sight."

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