

## 2 Timothy 3:1-9

I want to start with an aside. I hate to do that because I know I'm taking away from the main point, but I think it's important.

Paul talks here in verses 6-7 about false teachers working their way into the homes of women. To our ears, that implies sexual impropriety, which may have been the case, but probably not. In Greek society of the first century, women had almost no place in public life. The home may have been the only place where false teachers could gain access to them.

Why were these women the targets of false teachers? Because they were uneducated. In Hebrew society, women were educated because they needed to know God's Law. Greek women were not. It's easier to deceive someone who lacks knowledge of the truth.

In 1 Timothy, Paul reminds him that women should be taught in the Church. But he also says, "I would not let women teach or have authority." That is the most prominent of the "clobber verses" used by people who think that women should not have leadership roles in the Church. But it illustrates the risk of reading one verse of Scripture, with no context, and then concluding, "That's the end of the matter!"

We need to read each verse of Scripture in the light of the whole of Scripture. In general, it seems that Paul had no issue with women in leadership. In Romans 16, Paul refers to numerous women as church leaders. When Paul was in Corinth, he worked with a woman named Priscilla.

So I think it's better to see this as an issue in Ephesus, where Timothy was working. The Greek women of this church were uneducated, and some of them had been taken in by false teaching. The answer was to train these women in the true faith, not put them into leadership. Generally speaking, it's a bad idea to put people who have been taken in by false teaching into leadership.

Now, getting back to the main point: Selfishness, "the love of only oneself." That is the heart of what a godless society looks like. If there is no God, or if you just pay no attention to him, then often everything begins and ends with me.

The modern term that we use for "excessive love of self" is narcissism. Judging by how often I see social media posts about narcissism, it seems to be a problem in our world. Which I don't think should come as a surprise. But narcissism is just a fancy psychological word for a very, very old idea: The idolatry of self. "I am my own god. I don't need God, because I am my own god."

If you want a good biblical example, I don't think they get any better than the first king of ancient Israel, King Saul. You can read his story in 1 Samuel, if you need a refresher on it. But the gist of the story is that when God chooses Saul to be king, he really seems like a good fit. He was tall, strong, and handsome. He was humble. He didn't want to be king. He tried to hide from the prophet Samuel to get out of the job. Some people opposed him, but rather than having them put to death or some unpleasantness like that, he was gracious to them.

But it didn't last. It seems that being king went to his head. Before long he is rejecting God's authority and disobeying God's commands. Maybe the best indication things have gone astray is that after he disobeys God, he goes to Carmel to build a monument to ... himself! That sounds like narcissism, the idolatry of self.

The rest of these vices all flow out of "love only for oneself." Pride, arrogance, boasting: If your god is yourself, then you probably think you're pretty great. Disobedience, no self-control: "The rules don't apply to me." Cruel, slanderous, unforgiving: "How dare someone oppose ME or wrong ME?!" Ungrateful: If there is no God, then to whom do you give thanks?

I don't think it's hard for us to see these things happening in the world around us. The real concern is when we see them in the Church, people "acting religious but without the power that could make one godly," an external form of religion with no inward transformation. Such behavior in the Church brings harm to the cause of Christ and hurts our witness. The world says, "Enthroned yourself," but Christ calls us to "Deny ourselves."

The good news is that someday the truth will be seen. Paul talks here about Jannes and Jambres. Those are not names you'll find in the Bible; they come from Hebrew tradition. They were the court magicians of Pharaoh, who opposed Moses. We're told that Moses did miracles, and for a time, Pharaoh's magicians were able to replicate those miracles. But then they could not.

Truth wins out in the end. Every time. And the truth is that no matter how strongly one might believe "It's all about me," in the end, God is still God.