

The Church in Perilous Times

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2 Timothy 3:1–5 (NKJV) *“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!”*

Acts 4:18–31 (NKJV) *“So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹ But Peter and John answered and said to them, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard’... ²³ And being let go, they went to their own companions and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: ‘Lord, You are God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said: “Why did the nations rage, and the people plot vain things? ²⁶ The kings of the earth took their stand, and the rulers were gathered together against the LORD and against His Christ.” ²⁷ For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.’ ³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.”*

We are living in perilous times. Times are changing. Challenges are rising. Corruption is spreading. Choices are before us. Complacency is not an option. Courage is required.

This fallen world system is under the controlling influence of the wicked one: *“We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one.”* ¹ The “wicked one” is a reference to the Devil or Satan. He is the mastermind behind the evil and lawlessness rising on the stage of human history.

Satan is called the “god of this age”. He is the adversary who stands in opposition to God and the gospel of Jesus Christ: *“But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, ⁴ whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”* ² His strategy is to blind the minds of the entire human race so that they are unable to perceive the light of the gospel which can set them free from his deception and control. Consider the words of John the apostle: *“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.”* ³ Satan has deceived the whole world, the world that has rejected Christ.

How does Satan deceive? He does so through lying words, lying actions, lying prophets, lying religions, and lying signs, wonders, and miracles. Satan then uses deceived people as pawns to spread his lies. Satan forms strongholds of deception in systems of education, government, media, entertainment, and business to intimidate, dominate, and eliminate those who expose his lies with God’s truth.

The church is in Satan’s crosshairs. Jesus said He will build His church and that the gates of hell would not prevail against it. (Matthew 16:18). The church is a direct threat to Satan’s prison house of deception. The church is “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). The church that is faithful to Christ and His gospel is Satan’s worst nightmare.

Satan hates the church for several practical reasons. First, it belongs to Christ. Second, the church declares and defends the absolute inspiration and authority of Scripture. Third, the church declares the God of the Bible to be the only true and living God. Fourth, the church openly declares the exclusivity of Jesus Christ, i.e. that He is the only Son of God and the only way to heaven. Fifth, the church preaches and teaches the reality of God’s moral law. Sixth, the church preaches that all are sinners in need of a Savior. Seventh, the church warns sinners of the

¹ 1 John 5:19 (NKJV)

² 2 Corinthians 4:3–4 (NKJV)

³ Revelation 12:9 (NKJV)

judgment and wrath to come. Eighth, the church preaches and teaches the truth of God's word that can set them free from Satan's deception and control.

Peter and John, two of Christ's apostles, were commanded by the Jewish Sanhedrin not to speak or teach in the name of Jesus. Thus, we see that these Jewish leaders were under the influence and control of Satan's deception. Satan had infiltrated these Jewish minds with a substitute religious mindset that opposed the Person, Work, and teaching of Jesus Christ. We see this happening in our own society as the name of Jesus, the message of the gospel, and the truth of Scripture are being banned. Threats, bans, and lawsuits are being launched against those who dare to maintain their allegiance to Christ and His kingdom.

How did the church respond under such threats? First, they responded with prayer. They looked to God for His sovereign help and intervention. Prayer is the church's secret weapon that links the vulnerability and mission of the church to God's sovereignty.

Second, the church refused to be silenced. Silence would be disobedience to Christ. Jesus had commanded them to preach the gospel and to teach disciples. They understood that the only hope of delivering men and women from Satan's blinding deception was to preach the gospel. The apostle Paul said, *"For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek."*⁴ Interestingly, the church did not pray for protection but rather for boldness to speak God's word.

Third, the church prayed for signs and wonders to be done in the name of Jesus Christ. In other words, they prayed that God would confirm His word in supernatural ways that would convince others of the living reality of Jesus Christ and the truth of His gospel. In the same way, we must pray that God will confirm His word through miraculous signs and wonders that testify to the reality of Christ and the truth of His word: *"And they went out and preached everywhere, the Lord working with them and confirming the word through the accompanying signs. Amen."*⁵ When they prayed, the disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God in boldness.

Fourth, the church responded to Satan's threats through the witness of their lives and community. They demonstrated by their words, motives, and behavior that they were different from others. That difference was rooted in their mutual relationship with Jesus Christ. They not only preached the gospel, they also demonstrated the change that the gospel brings. Paul said: *"Do all things without complaining and disputing,¹⁵ that you may become blameless and harmless, children of God without fault in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world,"*⁶ The church is to be salt in a decaying world. It is to be light in a dark world. It is to be generous in a greedy world. It is to be loving in a hateful world. It is to be merciful in an unmerciful world. It is to be thankful in an unthankful world. It is to be moral in an immoral world. It is to be lawful in a lawless world. It is to be peaceful in a violent world. It is to be sacrificial in a selfish world. It is to reflect the excellencies of Christ through words, attitudes, and behaviors: *"But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;"*⁷ Jesus said, *"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven."*⁸

The church is living in perilous times. Yet the church is positioned in the earth for such a time as this. Let us not cower in fear. Instead, let us follow the response and example of the church in the book of Acts. Let's commit ourselves to prayer, to proclaiming the gospel with boldness, to depending upon God's power, and to showing tangible expressions of God's love and grace to one another. Through these means, Satan's deception over the minds of non-believers can be broken and his kingdom uprooted and replaced by God's kingdom.

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⁴ Romans 1:16 (NKJV)

⁵ Mark 16:20 (NKJV)

⁶ Philippians 2:14–15 (NKJV)

⁷ 1 Peter 2:9 (NKJV)

⁸ Matthew 5:16 (NKJV)