A Form of Godliness

(by Mark Moseley)

***“But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God”*** (**2 Timothy 3:1-4**).

It's easy to pick up a newspaper or turn on the television and think, *"We must be nearing the end."*  Senseless killings abound.  Children are committing atrocious acts.  The quickest path to fame, fortune and celebrity seems to require nothing more than a willingness to publicly debase oneself.  And that is getting more and more difficult because our morals are so degraded that very little shocks us anymore.

It's not hard to find a large segment of society that is self-absorbed and excessively self-indulgent.  There seems to be little true appreciation for how good that we have it.  If there is thanksgiving, it is nothing more than a proud relief that says, *"I am thankful I'm not like that wretch."*  Rather than gratitude there is a sense that people somehow feel cheated because they have yet to receive what they deserve.

In this “ME first” society people are willing to do nearly anything in order to achieve self-satisfaction.  There are no holds barred.  There is no conduct too outrageous, too cruel, and too evil to be avoided.

But before we go into a tirade about how awful the world has become; before we begin ranting about evil that surrounds us in a godless, immoral world; before we pat ourselves on our religious backs and declare how glad we are to have avoided the godless world around us – keep reading:  ***“holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; avoid such men as these”*** (**verse 5**).

These are RELIGIOUS men! Understand me.  Sincere people who trust in Christ and are struggling to break free of the world will sometimes be shocked and disappointed at their own capacity for sin and wickedness.  They are not in Paul's mind here.  Paul is describing those who hold to a "form" of godliness – but have none of the substance.  They are poisonous roots in God's garden. Notice Paul's instruction – AVOID SUCH MEN AS THESE.  Why?  Because they will not only use and abuse us – they will entice and corrupt us.  They will rob us of our own substance if we let them.

Be careful of "Christians" who gossip and backbite.  Be careful of those who encourage you to make reckless and questionable moral choices.  Watch out for those who are only interested in things that are "fun."  Take heed of those who are conceited and want to draw you into an "elite" clique.  Look out for the one who is determined to get rich and are pre-occupied with status.  Look out for those who encourage others to disregard the will of their parents and talk disdainfully of those who have responsibility for our spiritual well-being.

Today, after watching some pretty shocking things on the news, I read this to be reminded.  Of course people without God revel in ungodliness and are consumed by wickedness.  Why should I be surprised to find that as the world moves away from God it becomes darker and darker? That is tragic.  Yet, as long as Christians serve the Lord from the heart there will be light in the world.  It is when we who are to be lights in the world become darkness, that times will truly be difficult.

Today's Prayer:  *"Father, let not my trust in You be merely in word – but also in deed and power.  I don't want to be hollow, Lord.  I don't want to be a shell of Your likeness.  Let Your light shine from within me into the world."*

Life is Too Short to be a Slave?

(by Edwin Crozier)

I met an interesting fellow at the coffee shop the other day. I had been intently studying while he was focused on his computer at the next table. He started to get his things together, ready to go. He stood up to leave, but then started talking to me.

*“Has anyone close to you ever died?”* he asked.

*“Yes,”* I replied. *“How about you?”*

*“Yes,”* he said. *“It changes things, doesn’t it?”*

*“Yes, it does. Who was it for you?”* I wanted to know.

*“My brother.”*

I wanted to push this conversation further. *“How did it change you?”*

*“It caused me to realize that life is too short to be a slave to anyone or anything.”* His face was intent. It seemed that tears might come at any moment. Earnestness exuded from his very stance and look.

He talked for a few more minutes about time clocks, reviews, money, and rat races. He explained that the important things were integrity, honesty, and courage. Before I could push on this sensitive topic anymore, he thanked me for listening, turned without awaiting my response, and walked out the door. I never even got his name.

But I thought a lot about what he said, especially since what I had been so intently studying when he started the conversation was Romans, which begins:

***“Paul, a servant [bondslave] of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle, set apart for the gospel of God…”*** (**Romans 1:1**, ESV)

Keep in mind what Paul is striving to accomplish in these opening sentences and paragraphs. He is writing to a congregation he didn’t establish, to Christians he didn’t know and didn’t convert. He had to begin with the *ethos* of  ancient rhetoric; that is, he needed to begin by establishing his credibility. Why should these Roman Christians listen to what he wrote about anything?

When the ancients would take up this part of their rhetoric, they would talk about their exploits, their expertise, their experiences. They would mention battles they had won, victories they had achieved, commissions they had fulfilled. How did Paul begin?

*“Listen to me, I’m a slave of Christ Jesus.”*

We can understand the declaration of apostleship that comes next, but slavery? They should listen because he is a slave?

Absolutely. Why?

Because a slave of the Imperial Ruler of All the Universe has more authority than a freed man in this world.

On the one hand I agree with my new acquaintance whom I hope to meet again. Life is too short to be a slave to time clocks, annual reviews, paychecks, houses, cars, gizmos, gadgets, rat races, politics, passions, pleasures. Life is definitely too short to be enslaved to alcohol, drugs, sex, food, gambling, pornography, money, etc.

On the other hand, I disagree. Life is too short to ***not*** be a slave of Jesus Christ.

The fact is we are all slaves of something or someone (cf. **Romans 6:19-23**). Whose slave will you be today?