

“Difficult times will come”

2 Tim 3:1 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. (2) For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

In the previous study, we recognized that one of the chief reasons for Paul writing 1 and 2 Timothy, having the awareness that Paul is about to be executed, is to exhort the young evangelist Timothy to continue in the faith, as he must carry on preaching the true gospel and teaching the true doctrines that accompany it. Paul is aware of the false teachers at Ephesus and the need for Timothy refute them and to continue preaching, teaching and instructing in the Word of God to the congregation. Paul told him to ***“Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort; be unfailing in patience and teaching.”***

So Paul not only has Timothy’s welfare in mind when writing 2 Timothy, but it is Paul’s dying wish that the doctrines of the gospel be defended and promoted as the firm foundation for the church at Ephesus. Indeed, Paul’s dying wish is that the gospel would continue to advance throughout the world after he is gone. Timothy must carry on the battle as a good soldier without Paul beside him.

Now it is not merely about Timothy continuing in his faithful work as a ministry of Jesus Christ, but he must do so in light of the times that they are in.

The final three verses of chapter 2 reads:

2 Tim 2:24 The Lord’s bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, (25) with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition, if perhaps God may grant them repentance leading to the knowledge of the truth, (26) and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will.

This leads to chapter 3. In order to exhort Timothy to persist in preaching the unadulterated Word of God, Paul reminds him why these false teachings and speculations have risen in the church. Thus Paul writes in 2 Tim 3:1, ***“But realize this, that is the last days difficult times will come.”*** The opening words, ***“But realize***

this,” indicates that we should see a connection between what preceded (2 Tim 2:24-26) and what Paul now has to say in chapter 3. Having commissioned Timothy to teach with patience and to bring people out of doctrinal error to salvation, Timothy must realize why his preaching and teaching may not always gain favorable responses. Here, Timothy must realize that opposition to the truth of God’s Word is always intense. The present imperative tells you to keep this realization in front of you. So this is what he wants Timothy to do.

- **“Last days”**

By “last days,” Paul is not speaking about the last days of the church age, nor is the expression intended to mean “the whole church age” as being “the last days” either. Rather, it is to be understood as the “last days,” of Israel’s dispensation under the old covenant.

Now the rabbis taught that Israel was living in what they called “the present age.” But when the Messiah appears, He would bring them into “the age to come.” Therefore, with the appearance of Jesus the Messiah, it indicated that the present age must be drawing to a close, and that the age to come had already commenced under Christ.

Now it is Moses who calls the closing out of the era of Israel under the covenant as “the latter days” (Deut 31:29). The “Song of Moses” concerns Israel’s “latter days,” which would culminate in their apostasy and future judgment (Deut 32), when God would finally remove them in judgment for all of their violations of the covenant, and then commence a new era with a remnant people and with the Gentiles. Again, Moses called this final period of Israel’s history, “the latter days” (Deut 31:29).

- **“Difficult times”**

It was also believed that the Messianic age would be ushered in by a time of “tribulation,” or what was called, “the birth pangs of the Messiah.” Not only did the “birth pangs” or “tribulation” bring the present age to a close, but at the same time, it also would usher in the new age of His reign; in other words, the gospel era. With the appearance of Christ, the NT writers knew that they must be in the “last days” concerning the present age. The book of Hebrews is written from this position.

- **Apostasy**

Not only did Moses refer to it in his song, but also from the writings of other prophets, the rabbis understood that this time of tribulation was also be a time of apostasy. Thus Paul mentions that “difficult times will come. “Difficult times,” “stressful times,” or “evil times” will come. This will be a time of moral decadence. Thus, Timothy must stay true to the word during these last days of difficult times.

- **Characteristics of the last days**

Verses 2-4 next describe the *personality characteristics* that will flourish in the last days. Note what the first one is.

2 Tim 3:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, (3) unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, (5) holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these.

Paul lists eighteen characteristics of the last days, in which “lovers of self” heads the list. **2 Tim 4:2 “For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money ...”** It is no accident that “*lovers of self*” heads the list, because it is the chief trait from which the other characteristics are derived. This was explained in our study of Galatians, but it is worth mentioning again. For example, Gal 5:22-23 reads:

Gal 5:22 But the fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, (23) gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law.

Now the word “fruit” is in the singular. Unlike our English, in the Greek this word may be written as either singular or a plural form. One may think that since there are nine different characteristics listed here, that the plural would be used instead. But the significance of the singular points to the fact that the chief characteristic is the one that is mentioned first, “love.” It is the primary fruit from which all the other qualities in the list are derived. That love is intended to be the primary fruit may be demonstrated by comparing Gal 5:22-23 with 1 Cor 13:4-7.

Notice, for example, that Galatians reads, “**But the fruit [singular] of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness...**” Thus, we find for example, that “patience” and “kindness” are listed as separate from “love.”

But compare this with 1 Corinthians 13:4 says. **1 Corinthians 13:4 Love is patient, love is kind...**” Instead of listing patience and kindness as a completely separate quality from love, 1 Corinthians places these as behaviors descriptive of love. They help to describe what love is. So also in Galatians, where Paul uses the singular form for “fruit,” he is implicating that “love,” being listed first, is the essential fruit, and it is that which empowers the rest. So even though Galatians looks like a list of separate qualities, “love” truly is the central fruit, and the rest are not to be regarded as autonomous from love.

So also here, as Paul begins his list of traits that describes the last days, “lovers of self,” begins the list because, in Paul’s view, it either is regarded as the central motive behind all of the others, or at least it is the most significant trait behind the degenerate culture.

Definition of “self-love”

This expression, “**Lovers of self,**” comes from a Greek compound word derived from *philia* and *autos*, “love-self,” and is only used here in the NT. The word then meant precisely what psychologists mean by “self-love” today. It means one should have a fond affection for self, to love one’s self, to have self-respect. And as is the case today, where psychology places self-love as a very valuable trait for a healthy self-image, so also the Greeks saw it as an indisputable attribute for one’s self-image and necessary for good character development. Eugene Stock writes:

In Greek thought of an earlier age, *philautia* had a good sense, expressive of the self-respect which a good man has for himself. But... once the sense of sin is truly felt, self-respect becomes an inadequate basis for a moral theory.

Indeed, Paul sees it as an inadequate basis for a moral theory. And he not only puts this on the list of that which characterizes a degenerate culture, but puts it first on the list, as though it is the most influential trait that leads to cultural breakdown.

That Paul would write this is striking, since to the Greek mind, *philautos* was regarded as a valuable “virtue” that an individual should acquire, along with its sister, “pride.” In Greek culture “self-love” and “pride” were regarded as positive influential qualities in the development of personality. Also, in contrast to biblical teaching, “humility” was to be regarded as a vice to be shunned. The Greek term for “humility” (from *tapeinos*), means, “lowly, insignificant, weak, poor.” As the Greeks saw it, who would want to go around being humble. Epictetus said that one “forgets his dignity and self-worth when he is not aware of his relationship to Zeus”; and that “a humble man” is “an animal lower than a fox.”

So the biblical teaching of “humility” also contradicted the Greek view of human development. Yet Jesus comes along, as does Paul, and teaches that “humility” is a virtue and “pride” is the vice, and that self-love is the way of the carnal man.

The reason for such a discrepancy between the way the Greek culture thought of man and that of the Christian is due to the Christian’s perception of the greatness and glory of God and God’s own definition of man. God is glorious and eternal and holy in all respects; and in comparison, we are found to be utterly sinful and produce works that are as “filthy rags” before His Holy character. When I have the right perception of Him then I have the right perspective of me.

Jesus gave this parable:

Luke 18: “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. (11) The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. (12) ‘I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.’ (13) “But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ (14) “I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Who had the high self-esteem? Who had the low self-esteem? Which one did God justify?

So, the teaching of the New Testament butted heads with the Greek understanding of the day. Paul says in Acts 20:19 that he ***“serves the Lord with all humility.”*** In Romans 7:24, he writes, ***“wretched man that I am, [not a “good” man, but a “wretched” man] who will deliver me from this bondage of sin.”*** In 1 Tim 1:15, he calls himself ***“the chief of sinners.”*** The church at Laodicia also needed to see itself as ***“wretched”*** (Rev 3:17). When one sees himself as God does, then he can no longer base his acceptance before God on any notion of self-worth. ***“God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”*** Humility stands in contrast to self-pride.

And what did Jesus have to say concerning “self-love”? Is it really a necessary human trait that the psychologist tells us it is? In what was, perhaps, Jesus’ final teaching, before partaking of the “last supper” with his disciples, He offers this fundamental principle to His followers who wish to belong to the kingdom of God.

John 12:23 “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. [The tense indicates He will continue to be glorified from this point on] (24) **Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.”**

Jesus is about to be crucified. The general meaning of verse 24 within the context is that the death of Christ will bring much fruit; that is, He is to die on the cross for sins, and by His death great works for God will be achieved in bringing many into the kingdom. “Fruit” here is essentially the results that will be achieved from being obedient to the Father’s will. Here the will of the Father will be carried out in Jesus’ death, so that people from all ethnic groups will be able to enter into His kingdom. So we notice here that before the Son is to be glorified and before He is able to produce the desired fruit expressed here, He must die. Like a seed, he must die first.

Jesus then takes this principle that a seed must die first, and applies it to the human psyche.

John 12:25 “He who loves [*phileo*, “has a fondness”] his life [*psuche*, “soul”] loses it [‘his soul], and he who hates his life [soul] in this world will keep it [‘keep his soul’] to life [*zoe*] eternal. (26) “If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

Verse 24 has a dual application. On the one hand, it was applied to Jesus’ death from verse 23. But in verse 25, He applies it a disciple’s love for his soul. We too must die to this world if we are to bear fruit and possess life eternal. Jesus comes along and says that, “*anyone who loves [philia] his own life [psuche, or “psyche”] will lose it* (Jn 12:25); that is, anyone who fondly thinks of psyche (soul) will lose his soul. Jesus regarded that affection for self was like a seed that had to die in the ground if the person really wanted to produce fruit to eternal life (Jn 12:24).

The Greek world nurtured pride and self-esteem, and their culture was characterized by excessive indulgence. Where do you think the doctrine of self-loving is taking us?

Psuche is translated, “life,” here, but there are other Greek words in the New Testament that are also translated “life” (*zoe* and *bio*). However, *psuche* is usually translated “soul” and refers to one’s being or person, having reference to his mental or psychological existence (in fact, 7 times it is translated “mind”); it is your *being* in terms of thoughts, will and emotion. From *psuche* we get the expression,

‘psychology’: *Psuche* = “soul” and *logia* = “words”; thus, ‘words of the soul’ or ‘teaching of the soul.’ Whoever esteems his soul is the one who is going to find his soul destroyed (*apoluo*). Whoever hates his soul **“in the sphere of this world,”** is the one who will keep it for life (*zoe*, “power of life”) eternal. According to Jesus, to pursue self-esteem leads to destruction. Here, Jesus says, we are to “hate” our *psuche*. He does not mean that we are to go about hating ourselves, but is using the expression comparatively to emphasize how much a person is not to esteem his soul in this worldly existence.

There is a need to elaborate on Christ’s particular challenge here because of the influence that psychology and self-esteem have had on our culture, for the one who feels he needs to esteem himself, he must buy into a world’s system to do so. A man who loves his soul is a man who has attached himself to worldly motives and desires.

The solution that Christ gives for loving in a biblical way is not by man gaining a sense of self-love or self-esteem or self-confidence or self-worth, but that he comes to a position of a self-death or self-denial. Like a seed that falls to the ground, he must die. There are many places in Scripture where one may go to demonstrate this point (Gal 2:20; Matt 10:38-39; Luke 14:27-28; Rom 6:3-7; 8:13; 2 Cor 5:14ff; Col 3:5; 2 Tim 3:12; etc.).

Luke 9:23 And He was saying to them all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me. (24) For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake, he is the one who will save it."

The challenge to self-denial or self-death is given by every gospel writer, as well as thoroughly enforced in the epistles; and when Christ gave this challenge, it was given to the audience at large. Paul also writes:

Romans 6:3-7 Or do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus have been baptized into His death? Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead... we too might walk in newness of life. For if we have become united with *Him* in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be *in the likeness* of His resurrection, knowing this, that our old self was crucified with *Him*, in order that our body of sin might be done away with.

When you were baptized, you, through your baptism, were to have declared a self-death. You died to the world. You have turned your allegiance away from the world's system to Christ. And Paul says in 1 Cor 15:31, **“I die daily.”** It is a decision we must make everyday. Indeed, it is necessary to make this commitment all the time; otherwise we allow the flesh with its self-centered focus to gain the upper hand. The point is, death to self is the position that every believer knows he must take, and there is a spiritual battle to maintain this manner of living every day (see also 2 Cor 4:10-11).

Hating one's *psyche* is so strongly put forward by Jesus that He makes it a requirement for salvation: ***“The one who loves his soul will lose it and the one who hates his soul keeps it to eternal life.”***

The roots of self-esteem and unconditional love

The father of unconditional love from a psychological standpoint is Eric Fromm. Fromm was an atheist who argued against Christianity. He resurrected the old Greek philosophy that man “*is the measure of all things.*” Since there is no God and man is the measure of all, then love cannot come from God, but must be drawn from within oneself. He taught that one must love himself, accept himself, and esteem himself to reach his highest potential. While he recognized that man has an innate sense of separation, he rejected God’s plan for reconciliation. He wrote:

Man—of all ages and cultures—is confronted with the solution of one and the same question: the question of how to overcome separateness, how to achieve union, how to transcend one’s own individual life and find *at-onement* [italics added].

By this little wordplay, he rejected the work of atonement on the cross for the solution to man’s separation and spoke of *at-onement* which must be self-produced. It is found within man himself, through unconditional self-love, which he believed would enable individuals to love the whole world. Thus, the source of love is within the self. This was the *necessary beginning* for Fromm. What a contrast to 1 John 4:7ff.

1 John 4:7 Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. (8) The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. (9) By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. (10) In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. (11) Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another... (16) We have come to know and have believed the love which God has for us. God is love, and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him. (17) By this, love is perfected with us, so that we may have confidence in the day of judgment; because as He is, so also are we in this world.

It was Fromm who first used Matthew 22:39, “**You are to love your neighbor as yourself,**” with its twisted interpretation that we are commanded to first love ourselves. According to Fromm, if man is the center of all, then he has intrinsic worth and innate goodness. Therefore, even love must start from self.

Why then do people have problems? Well psychologists contend that one main reason people experience emotional and behavioral problems is because they have not received “unconditional love” from their parents. Thus, unconditional love is touted as a love that makes no demands for performance, good behavior, or the like. According to Fromm, God was even wrong in rejecting Cain’s offering.

Fromm developed the same fallacious reasoning that many Christians use today in thinking that the only alternative to self-love is self-hatred. However, the biblical alternative to self-love is to love God and others. The Scriptures rightly assume that man innately loves himself.

Eph 5:29 for no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ also *does* the church,

Fromm’s notions about God represented the kind of theology that is at the root of the self-love, self-acceptance and self-esteem teachings that are prevalent in the church. But the “self-love” theory cannot be separated from its rotten source; nor do the Scriptures support it.

The contemporary Church

Despite sordid roots, self-esteem has become a sacred cow in the church. Those who have criticized the teaching are ignored or sometimes criticized themselves. For example, Charles Swindoll writes:

Frankly, I think we as evangelicals have done more damage than good with “worm theology.” I’m getting weary of being told (and having people encourage me to emphasize) how wrong and filthy and unrighteous and godless we are.

Even though this is exactly what the Bible does portray out man, this type of response is not surprising. In his book, *Growing Wise in Family living*, he writes:

A child must develop a good, strong self-esteem! Nothing can substitute for it. It is never automatic. The secret rests with parents who are committed to doing everything possible to make it happen.

Later, he calls everyone to “come to terms with this plaguing problem.”

To list all the preachers who repeat this kind of hype would be like compiling “Who’s Who.” And those who have challenged such humanistic views are dubbed

“witch hunters, narrow-minded, even as dangerous to society. Now we are accused of worm theology. Who cares if the worm has dug up the truth! And there is little attempt on the part of the “self-love” theologians to answer the biblical criticism.

Definition of “self-love”

Self-love means that a person has a positive attitude about or feels good about himself. Dorothy Briggs writes:

What is self-esteem? It is how a person feels about himself. It is his over-all judgment of himself-how much he likes his particular person.

Bruce Narramore describes self-love this way:

Most of us have mixed feelings about ourselves. We fluctuate between periods of relative contentment and times of self-dissatisfaction. Sometimes we like ourselves; sometimes we don't. When we feel right about ourselves, we are happy, confident, relaxed, and alert. When we don't, we become pressured, anxious, irritable, or “down.”

The term “self-love” is often used interchangeably with other terms such as “self-esteem,” “self-worth,” “positive self-image,” and “self-regard.” There are also descriptive phrases that are used, such as “feeling good about yourself,” “liking yourself,” “being fond of yourself,” etc.

Describing self-love's importance

Dorothy Briggs makes this claim in her book, *Your Child's self-esteem*:

Today, enough evidence has accumulated to give you just such a formula: if your child has high self-esteem, he has it made. Mounting research shows that the fully functioning child (or adult) is different from the person who flounders through life. Self-esteem is the mainspring that slates every child for success or failure as a human being.

Those who advocate the “self-love” theory begin with the assertion that large segments of society are suffering from a low self-image or lack of self-love. Often it is pointed out as a special problem among Christians because of its stress on the sinfulness within man. Such teachings bring about a deficiency within the person and own view of himself. Therefore, he suffers from anxiety, fear, feelings of rejection, and a host of other psychological disorders.

In the same vein, these symptoms are the crux to our social problems, whether it be failure at work or failure in marriage or some other interpersonal relationship resulting in evil acts of crime. For example, James Dobson writes:

The matter of personal worth is not only the concern of those who lack it. In a real sense, the health of an entire society depends on the ease with which the individual members gain personal acceptance. Thus, whenever the keys to self-esteem are seemingly out of reach for a large percentage of the people, as in 20th century America, then widespread “mental illness,” neuroticism, hatred, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and social disorder will certainly occur.

Not only is low self-image viewed as the plague of the individual and society, but the converse is also accepted to be true. A healthy self-image is the source of an abundance of blessing, the foundation for personal well-being and happiness, and a well-adjusted life. Another Christian author writes, “The act of self-acceptance is the root of all things.” I have even read in Christian self-love literature that a person needs to love himself before he can love God.

The claim that self-love is biblical

There is another aspect of self-love that adds to its acceptance. It is said to be biblical. Loving yourself is the Christian thing to do. Norman Vincent Peale, who was an all-time best-selling Christian author, portrayed Christianity as an “adventure of self-discovery” that helps believers to “become aware of their innate goodness.” Swindoll writes:

I could write paragraph after paragraph about the importance of a personal sense of esteem, telling one story after another...but there are already numerous books that do that. What turns my crank is to see what the Bible has to say about the subject. If God’s Book promotes it—and indeed it does—then we know it is a pursuit well worth our time and effort.

And then he cites one passage to support his claim (Eph 5:25-29). Even in this passage, it has to be assumed as teaching self-esteem. A whole chapter entitled, “Affirmation, Enhancing Esteem,” 17 pages long, and one passage where, the best that can be said is that “self-love” may be implied. I thought the Bible was loaded with it! Where are all the passages.

Paul Brownbach mentions a student that went to a highly respected seminary. A professor told the student that if the Apostles Paul had the advantage of contemporary Christian insights on self-love, he might have been better adjusted. At least the professor knew that Paul didn't teach it in his writings.

What the Bible teaches

There are two basic Greek words used in the NT: *agape* and its derivatives, and *philo*s and its derivatives. The question needs to be asked: to which New Testament word for "love" does "self-feelings" or "self-esteem" or "self-love" apply? The answer is *philo*s.

Love of affection

Philia refers to a natural human affection, fondness or likeness. Godet defines it as "to cherish, love in the sense of personal attachment." Westcott as "the feeling of natural love." Lenski agrees, "*philia* expresses the love of mere personal affection or liking. It is a natural, uncalculated enjoyment of another person.

For some examples, we find that the Greek Old Testament translated Abraham, "the friend of God," by the Greek word *philia*. Or James 4:4, "Friendship with the world is enmity with God." To give you an idea that the root meaning is that of fondness or affection, one may observe that the verb is sometimes translated "kiss" as when Judas kissed Jesus. The word relates more to the idea of "fondness, affection, or feeling." However, this type of love is neither volitional nor based on calculation.

Love of Sacrifice

As to the meaning of *agape*, Ethelbert Stauffer observed that there are two basic elements of *agape*: will and action. Here you may note such examples in the Old Testament (LXX) of God's love for Israel (Deut 7:13), or of Israel's love for God and for the neighbor (Deut 6:5; Lev 19:18); because it is not from impulse that you love your neighbor, but from the will.

This meaning carried over into the New Testament. As Jesus saw it, love is a matter of will and action. "**Love [agapao] your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you**" (Matt 5:44). We don't naturally love our enemies. Therefore, *agapao* is the appropriate word.

So one will notice in the New Testament that *agape* is frequently used as a command, but *philia* never is. A command directed toward our will and action is appropriate, but a command to have warm feelings toward another is contrary to our capacity. This is particularly true when the command is to love strangers or enemies. With *agape* the stress does not lay with your emotions, but your will. So as W. E. Vine has written concerning *agape*,

Christian love, whether exercised toward the brethren, or toward men generally is not an impulse from the feelings, it does not always run with the natural inclinations, nor does it spend itself only upon those for whom some affinity is discovered.

G. Abbott-Smith also observed:

[It is the] spiritual affection which follows the direction of the will, and which, therefore, unlike that feeling which is instinctive and unreasoned, can be commanded as a duty.

Love of self

Which of these words corresponds to the love we find in the “self-love” theory? It should be clear that it is *philia* with its emphasis on affection, liking, attachment, a feeling of natural love, cherishing, and so on. The focus is on feelings and emotion.

This is the major “pot-hole” in the system, which claims that the Scriptures teach that you must love yourself. The verses used to support that idea, namely, “love your neighbor as yourself,” does not contain the word *philia*, but *agapoo*, the word that does not mean to “esteem yourself.” *Agapoo* must be used when a command is given, because it is a decision that is to be made and carried out. Yet even in those passages, there is no command to love yourself. We will deal with that problem at a later date.

But for now the love, which is defined by the psychologist, corresponds to the Greek word, *philia*. What do the scriptures teach about *philia* love towards oneself? 2 Tim 3:1-4 directly refers to this style of self-love. It is noteworthy that in chapter 2, Paul encourages Timothy to continue to “accurately handle the word of truth” in the face of some false teachers who were offering to the church “speculations” that were contrary to the Scripture. Timothy must hold his ground and correct them.

This leads to chapter 3. In order to exhort Timothy to persist in preaching the unadulterated Word of God, Paul reminds him why these false teachings and speculations have arose in the church.

2 Tim 3:1 But know this first of all, that in the last days difficult times will come.

You must realize that opposition to the truth of God’s Word is always intense. The present imperative tells you to keep this realization in front of you.

Verses 2-4 describe the *personality characteristics* that will flourish in the last days. Note what the first one is. **“For men will be lovers of the self.”** “Lovers of self” aptly heads the list because it is the root from which the other characteristics listed are derived. It was a Greek style of writing to sometimes put at the top of the list the principle quality of which the others are derived. The characteristics which follow are empowered by it (for example, compare Gal 5:22-23 with 1 Cor 13).

2 Tim 4:2 For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, [from *stergos*, “without natural affection,” maternal and paternal care] irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, (4) treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure [*philedonoi*, from *philia*, and *hedonoi* of which we derive our word, “hedonism”] rather than lovers of God [*philotheoi*, pleasure being a substitute for God].

As head of the list, “lovers of self” is, from the Greek, a compound word derived from *philia* and *autos*, “love-self.” This is the only place the word is used in the New Testament. But in the Greek world, it was a socially accepted and indisputable attribute. Eugene Stock writes:

In Greek thought of an earlier age *philautia* had a good sense, expressive of the self-respect which a good man has for himself. But... once the sense of sin is truly felt, self-respect becomes an inadequate basis for a moral theory.

Isn’t this surprising! In Greek philosophy, pride was regarded as a virtue and humility a vice. Christ comes along and teaches that “humility” is the virtue and pride is the vice. The Greek philosophers said that “self-esteem” is a necessary trait. Jesus comes along and says that, “anyone who loves [*philia*] his own life [*psuche*] will loose it (Jn 12:25); that is, anyone who has a fond affection for himself will loose his soul. Jesus regarded that affection for self was like a seed

that had to die in the ground if the person really wanted life (Jn 12:24). The Greek world nurtured pride and self-esteem, and their culture was characterized by excessive indulgence. Where do you think the doctrine of self-loving is taking us?

- **Abraham Maslow**

One contemporary psychologist who built a significant database for his conclusions was Abraham Maslow. Maslow, one of the founding fathers of humanistic psychology, saw self-esteem as one of the stages in his hierarchy of needs. He thought that a high self-esteem would give rise to better behavior. In the 1950's his writings demonstrated his affinity to this belief. But Maslow did something that many psychologists don't do; he documented his research. As time went by the data accumulated. He began to see that his theory of self-actualization was not working as expected. In his book *Toward a Psychology of Being* (1968), he wrote:

Though, in principle, self-actualization is easy, in practice it rarely happens (by my criteria, certainly in less than 1% of the adult population).

However, Maslow did not blame the results on his own self-theory system. Instead, he blamed the Bible and biology. Yet his own research was working against him. In the book, *Psychology's Sanction for Selfishness*, Dr. Michael and Lisa Wallach wrote:

Maslow and Rogers certainly want people to be caring and helpful to one another to pursue common goals, to try to deal with the problems of their communities and broader groups. But what they advocate seems designed rather to prevent this than to bring it about... If we are always to be determined by what is within rather than outside ourselves, if we are always first and foremost to seek our own growth and actualization, this inevitably seems to push toward concern for the self at the expense of others.

Dr. William R. Coulson, a former colleague of Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow says that in his later years, Maslow did not agree with much of what he had theorized previously. Unfortunately Maslow didn't make the corrections loud enough for people to hear. His theories were already accepted as a system and pope were running with it. And one of the most dangerous places where it was being used was on children. Coulson writes:

In truth [Maslow] finally believed children *mustn't* be brought under the self-actualization umbrella. Their purchasing power was something new in

history; couple it with parents who were falling for the new permissiveness and that made for great danger. Humanistic psychology was actually helping to make children vulnerable to exploitation. Giving direction was being left to family outsiders.

In one place, using the example of a marriage in which the wife had the dominance, Maslow observed:

She is more confident in her behavior, gets what she wants more often than does the husband, feels superior to him, generally feels herself to be stronger than he is, and respects herself more than she does him.

In the end Maslow found that satisfying the so-called self-esteem needs did not produce what he thought it would. He concludes:

...the high scorers in my test of dominance-feeling or self-esteem were more apt to come late to appointments with the experimenter, to be less respectful, more casual, more forward, more condescending, less tense, anxious, and worried... The stronger [high self-esteem] woman is much more apt to be pagan, permissive, and accepting in all sexual realms. She is less apt to be a virgin ...more apt to have had sexual relations with more than one man.

Paul wrote that difficult times would come because of the prevailing sin of “loving self.” But notice what Paul attaches to these men who are lovers of self in verse 5: **“holding a form of godliness [semblance or an appearance of godliness] although they have denied its power.”** That is, it will operate under the pretense of a way to godliness although they have denied the actual power of godliness. Self-love is not to be applauded. It is of vital concern that the church steers far from it.

2 Tim 3:5 ...avoid such men as these. (6) For among them are those who enter into households [via TV, radio, books and magazines] and captivate weak women [not every woman, not the wise or godly woman] weighed down with sins [women who are easily persuaded largely because they are guilt-ridden by sin; they have not rightly dealt with their sins and so are easily captivated by another teaching], led on by various impulses [epithumia, that is, various desires, but not godly desires], always learning [they take it all in” and are well informed ladies], and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth [i.e., the knowledge that can truly free them].

Perhaps they are looking for the easy way out of a guilt-complex, but they fail to see the deliverance that is available in Jesus Christ. Timothy is reminded that, for him, since childhood he has learned the sacred writings (v. 15) **“which is able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”** The Scripture gives wisdom. Then Paul continues:

2 Tim 3:16 All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; (17) so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Peter wrote this concerning the power granted to us through Jesus Christ:

2 Peter 1:3 seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence.

If one has Christ, then what more does he need? Why must he see a need to go after other forms of teaching to satisfy and deal with his soul? Many Christians who struggle with emotional problems do so because they want to hang on to the self-life. They desire to maintain the road to self-esteem rather than self-denial and are trusting in the teachings of man rather than the truth of God’s unadulterated Word. The road to spiritual maturity and emotional stability is self-denial, not the exaltation of self. God said, **“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways” (Isa 55:8)**. Faith in Christ and His Word has been replaced by by attempts in the flesh, by a reasoning that comes from man, not from God. The church today finds itself holding hands with a psychology that ultimately dislodges the power of Christ for transforming the human soul. Victory comes by faith in Jesus Christ and *all* that He said.

Conclusion

Self-denial leads to a life lived by faith that empowers the believer to live by the Spirit (Gal 2:20). For Jesus, it is an important step to true discipleship (Luke 9:23). For the Christian, the righteous man is to live by faith (Rom 1:16), and we are commanded throughout the New Testament to encourage and strengthen each other’s faith, in which we stand, and we are to pursue faith and love for God and others. But nowhere are we commanded to pursue or to build one another’s “self-esteem.” Self-denial helps us to get the focus off of ourselves, away from self-exaltation or self-pity, and to focus on loving God and others. This is clearly God’s method.

