

2 Timothy 3:1-9 – “Characteristics of the Last Days”

Summary Statement:

In our passage we see a clear depiction of the progressing character of the ungodly in the last days. Paul points out that many will profess to follow God but will clearly deny Him by their character. We who are desiring godliness must mark and avoid such people.

Outline:

The Character of the Last Days – 3:1-5

The Counterfeit of the Last Days – 3:6-7

The Conclusion of the Last Days – 3:8-9

1. The Character of the Last Days – 3:1-5

3:1 - *But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come:*

Paul has been explaining to Timothy that within God's house, there are going to be vessels of honor and vessels of dishonor. These two are going to be functioning right alongside each other. There will be those who will want to engage in worthless disputes only to stir up strife.

- Timothy may have been wondering, how long am I going to have to put up with this kind of nonsense? When will the church finally function in peace?
- And here in chapter 3 Paul gives Timothy a bit of a reality check. Things aren't necessarily going to get any better. In fact, Paul says ***know this***... In other words, realize that ungodliness is going to be a real distinguishing mark of the last days.

Paul gives us 19 characteristics between vv. 1-5 of the people which mark the last days.

Now before looking at these characteristics, it's important to identify what we mean by the ***last days***. We often immediately think of the last days as the moment just before Christ returns. We get the imagery of Revelation type stuff – chaos and wars, etc. But the last days ultimately consists of that time from Jesus' ascension to heaven (40 days after His resurrection) to His Second Coming. It encompasses what we refer to as the Church Age.

- We're living in a day where we are awaiting the return of the Lord.
Depending on where you land in your eschatology, that will either be at the

rapture of the church, or at His Second Coming, when He returns to this world to usher in His kingdom.

- We're living in a time where nothing needs to be fulfilled for the Lord to come again. Now that's only true if you believe in the rapture, which is one reason why I do – it gives us an imminent return of Jesus. If there's no rapture, then we're ultimately waiting for an antichrist to appear, for a more defined global system of government, religion and economics. This is what Revelation points out.
- But I'm living life as though Jesus could come at any moment. We're in the last days!

Now I believe that when we see those terms: last days, or latter times, they need to be defined by the context they are used in. Sometimes Old Testament prophets spoke of a time that would reference specifically the tribulation period or the millennial kingdom.

But here Paul is referencing the time they are in – the Church age – and the moral decline that will be evident and will sadly progress worse and worse as we get closer to the return of Christ.

Now this all flies in the face of another eschatological position that some in Christianity hold – Kingdom Now Theology, or Dominionism. This is the teaching that the Church is going to Christianize the world. That Christians will take control of the various spheres of influence in the world and the world will basically usher in the kingdom age on their own. And then Jesus just needs to show up and inherit what the church has established.

- But throughout Scripture this is not the picture that is painted. We see repeated references to the progressive ungodliness and moral degeneracy that will be commonplace in the last days.
- Jesus' kingdom parables paint the picture of corruption taking place even within the church. That is why we need to stand guard, this is why there is a call to faithfulness often in these letters, because many will be unfaithful and move away from the truth to follow their own selfish desires.
- This is what becomes a common theme through this list of 19 characteristics of the ungodly in the last days.

It will be **perilous times**. These days will be difficult. It will be difficult to stand for Christ; it will be difficult to be faithful because you're going against the current of

culture. You're going to stand out. People will hate you because you're living different than them and reminding them of their own sin and folly.

- What do people want today? Acceptance. Tolerance. They want people to not only accept their sin but to endorse their sin and celebrate it. If you're going to live godly lives, don't expect everything to be easy in this world. Brace for perilous times.
- The Greek word as defined by the Greek-English Lexicon of the N.T. says: "pertaining to that which causes trouble and hardship, with an implication of violence—'troublous, distressful, violent.'" ¹
- This word is used only one other time in the N.T. – **Matthew 8:28**, "*When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly fierce, so that no one could pass that way.*"

I don't say that to scare you, I say this to freak you out 😬.

Truly, I want people who are followers of Jesus to not be surprised when they see less than ideal conditions and less than ideal treatment of you from the world. This is what Paul is doing for Timothy.

- Many people have turned to Jesus only to give up or walk away when their illusions of what being a follower of Jesus is about didn't come to pass. We're not signing up to live in perpetual bliss. We're signing up because He alone offers forgiveness of sins, reconciliation with our Heavenly Father, and the promise of everlasting life with Him. That's worth living through perilous times – which will seem like a brief moment compared to eternity.

So let's get to this wonderful list of what will characterize these last days.

3:2-4 - *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,*

The first characteristic really sums up all the rest that follow.

And just for clarification, these are not just traits of men, but traits of men and women who desire to serve themselves rather than God.

¹ Louw, J. P., & Nida, E. A. (1996). In *Greek-English lexicon of the New Testament: based on semantic domains* (electronic ed. of the 2nd edition., Vol. 1, p. 244). United Bible Societies.

- "...if a person is driven by self-love at the outset, then all the other sins follow quite naturally. For when self is on the throne of the personality, then love for God and other people is of little consequence. Thus the list describes not only the breakdown in morals, but also the breakdown in human relationships within the family (parents and children), and in anti-social behaviour (lacking self-control, brutal, haters of the good). In addition, the godless society is materialistic, and governed by the senses in hot pursuit of pleasure and prosperity (lovers of money and lovers of pleasure)."

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(1) **lovers of themselves** – [Gk=*philautoi*]. These are people who are self-centered and what we would call today, narcissistic. It's interesting how this has become a very common description I hear people giving of others these days.

"*They're such a narcissist.*" Usually I hear it from narcissists who are saying everyone else is a narcissist.

- Being lovers of self runs completely contrary to what we've been called to in Christ.
- **2 Corinthians 5:15**, *"and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again."*
- As a follower of Jesus we've laid our lives down to self. This is what Jesus said in **Luke 9:23**, *"Then He said to them all, 'If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.'"* Our call is to deny self – to die to self.
- When we fall prey to loving ourselves, we stop at nothing to attempt to fulfill the unquenchable appetites of the flesh. Anything that gets in the way of our own affections must be dismissed. So of course, God is cast aside and the idol of "I" is erected in His place.
- Yet, Jesus doesn't call us to lay our lives down so that we can live a miserable life. He calls us to do so because it's the only way to live a blessed life – a happy and content life. Being so consumed with self is the life of misery. Jesus is only looking to spare you from that.

(2) **lovers of money** – [Gk=*philargyroi*]. Now I confess, I love money. Money just doesn't love me a whole lot. Now again, it's not wrong to have money and to like having money. But if it becomes our love, or our idol, we'll have problems.

² Williams, P. (2007). *Opening up 2 Timothy* (pp. 67–68). Day One Publications.

Paul addressed this in 1 Timothy 6:9–10, when he said that many who desire to be rich fall into many temptations. It can pull you away from the better things God has for you. Money isn't evil, but the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. It exposes what it is we're truly living for.

(3) **boasters** – If people are filled with self-love and a love for things, it's a natural progression to be boastful and prideful. Boasting means that you are attempting to elevate yourself higher than you ought.

- The Greek word for **boasters** is *alazōn*, which comes from the word *ale*, meaning to wander about. It became used to refer to a quack doctor. A man who travelled around proclaiming to have the right fix, but never delivered. It was empty talk. That's what a boaster is like. They want to puff themselves up, but it's just a lot of hot air.

(4) **proud** – this is closely related to boasting. Again, it's holding an exaggerated view of yourself. Boasting is speaking pridefully. Proud is acting pridefully. Pride leads to boasting, and the more you boast the more you believe your own false press report to your pride.

- Pride is talked about a lot in Scripture. It's what led to Satan's fall. It's at the root of much of our sin. These are outward displays of self-love.

(5) **blasphemers** – Following right along with these other descriptive attitudes is blasphemy. This is about slandering others. For boasting and pride to have its way, it's very natural to cut down others. When you have a view of superiority over another, it becomes very easy to hurt them with words or actions. This sort of harsh or abusive talk not only hurts the individual but is an insult to God who made man in His image.

(6) **disobedient to parents** – Can it get much worse than what we see today in society. “After the Duke of Windsor visited America he was asked what impressed him most about our country. He answered, “It was the way American parents obeyed their children.”” (Sandy Adams)

What an indictment, but it's true. To see the way kids act around their parents these days is quite tragic, and even more tragic when you see the parents do nothing to curtail the behaviour of their kids.

(7) **unthankful** – There are some people who are just chronic complainers. They're no fun to be around. As Christians we should be the most thankful people.

1 Thessalonians 5:18, reminds us: *"in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you."*

We become quite unthankful when we are living for self and feel entitled to more and more, or we have a covetous attitude.

- In 1960 the average house size was just under 1300 sq. ft. Today the average house size in North America is about 2300 sq ft. We keep wanting bigger and better which leads to discontentment, unhappiness, and being ungrateful.
- No sooner do you get a new phone, and then the latest model comes out. And you're like, *great, now I'm stuck with this dumb model for the next 2 years*. While you were super excited when you got it 2 months ago.
- The pursuit of more can blind us from what is really important. Which leads into our next item on the list.

(8) **unholy** – Our goal is not to be happy with what this world can provide, our goal is to be holy for the Lord. Holiness will lead to true happiness. But many in the last days will have no desire to live set apart for the Lord, but rather they will live to please themselves. It's a life void of God and purely secular.

(9) **unloving** – This is the Greek word *astorgoi*. Remember, in the Greek language there were a few different Greek words for love. One of which was *storge*, which spoke of a familial love. A natural affection. But in these last days people will be hardened toward the people that they should be able to love the easiest.

- It's sad to see today how many family relationships become broken over menial things. The next one plays into this as well.

(10) **unforgiving** – This speaks of a lack of desire to be reconciled to people. You want to keep people at bay and hold grudges. It ultimately hurts you most.

(11) **slanderers** – This is the word *diabolos* in the Greek. Same word used for the devil. This word is used 38 times in the N.T. 35 of which is translated 'devil', 3 of which is translated 'slanderer'. This is what the devil does – he's the accuser of the brethren (Rev 12:10). He falsely accuses those seeking to live for God.

If you're out there spreading gossip about another or speaking in a way that harms others – you're doing the devil's work.

(12) **without self-control** – This is a fruit of the Spirit. But when people are not walking in the Spirit, all restraint is thrown out the window.

(13) **brutal** – This means wild; untameable. Usually said in reference to a wild beast. But it's quite a fitting description of many today.

(14) **despisers of good** – They have no regard for the public good. They will be offended when you stand for what is good.

(15) **traitors** – these are people who are untrustworthy.

(16) **headstrong** – this means reckless or acting without careful thought.

(17) **haughty** – they are puffed up with self; swollen with conceit.

(18) **lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God** – This is what it really comes down to. These are people who have a greater love for the things that please them, than they do for God.

- Sometimes people replace the love for God with a love for pleasure because they have a view that these are two diametrically opposed options. Yet, I would like to say that the amount you enjoy life, and pleasure in life, is directly related to the amount you are living for God. Our joy is increased as we live for God's glory and purpose.
- Is God first in your life? Are you putting Him above everything else?
- Now don't get me wrong, we can find pleasure in the things of this world, but we're to do it in a way where we are maintaining our love of God.
- When you are truly loving God and putting Him first, you will find greater pleasure in life, because you're living it the way it was intended to be lived: to know God, to be known by God, and to make God known. This is what we are created for. Live it out, and you will find great joy in that.

Now Paul goes on to say that these aren't just the characteristics we'll see from those who are atheists, occultists, or the common criminal; these are traits we'll see from those who will consider themselves to be religious...

3:5 - (19) *having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!*

Paul is addressing people who are appearing to be followers of God, but have not truly been born again. You see, when we surrender our lives to Jesus and allow Him to be our Lord and Saviour, He does a work of transformation.

But the people Paul is pointing out are trying to live a reformed life without truly being regenerated by God. And all it did was expose them as phonies.

- The Gospel of Jesus Christ is so wonderful because it provides the power we need to salvation. **Romans 1:16**, *"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."*

So these are people who are not genuine believers. They show no fruit and they have no ability to bear that fruit because they're not tapped into the source of power that provides it.

In fact, many of these people were using religion as a disguise to take advantage of others. Paul says that we need to identify these people and have nothing to do with them. Don't embrace them as brothers and sisters and give them an open door to continue their deception. We must turn away from them.

Paul seems to have these false teachers in mind (as he may with the list of characteristics of those in the last days).

- It goes to show that Paul saw himself in the last days. These were people that Timothy was to avoid presently. These are things I believe that will increase in intensity, and Paul will say as much in vs. 13 (*"but evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse..."*).

But here's what these evil men were doing...

2. The Counterfeit of the Last Days – 3:6-7

3:6-7 - *For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, ⁷ always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.*

They would creep into households and target the women who were typically less educated in this day than the men were. It's not to say that Paul thought women

were inherently more gullible, but this was the pattern he was observing in the way these false teachers were gaining access into people's lives.

These were women who did not understand yet the power of the gospel. They were still loaded down with sins of their past and were being carried about with various lusts.

They would seek after new teachings and philosophies. Always learning, but they were being kept from the simple truth of God's Word and the gospel.

- It's a mark of what we see today. The information highway keeps expanding. We are never short on opportunity to learn but if it's void of God's truth, we'll never come to a proper knowledge.

3. The Conclusion of the Last Days – 3:8-9

3:8-9 - *Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; ⁹ but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.*

Now some people may have begun to think at this time that there's just no hope. These people are just going to take over and lead many into worldwide rebellion and error. But Paul brings up two men who were in a similar situation, Jannes and Jambres, two men who resisted Moses. Now who were these people? They're not mentioned in the O.T. but they are widely believed to be two chief magicians who were in Pharaoh's court as Moses came asking for Pharaoh to free his people from Egypt. This was also passed down in Jewish tradition.

Paul says that the people he mentioned in the first few verses are people who are of corrupt minds and disapproved concerning the faith, just as Jannes and Jambres were. But just as Jannes and Jambres were found out for what they truly were, these people will be also.

Their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was. When Moses came before Pharaoh, he threw his rod down and it turned to a serpent. The magicians (most likely Jannes and Jambres) came in and also threw their rods down and they turned to serpents as well. When Moses had the water turn to blood, the magicians were also able to replicate that. When Moses had frogs come in and cover the land, the magicians did likewise. However when Moses had the third plague of lice released, the magicians were unable to copy it and said, this is the

finger of God (apparently they weren't 'licensed' for that 😊). Their folly was manifest in that they were not able to do the things of God by their own abilities.

- Though we may see things in this world becoming more godless, God will be sure to let it only go so far.
- "Error may spread and be popular for a time. But it 'will not get very far'. In the end it is bound to be exposed, and the truth is sure to be vindicated." ³

People that want to follow after Satan and self **will progress no further**. They will reach a point where they will either be stopped, or they will come to the end of themselves realizing they are empty and lost.

- **Matthew 16:26**, *"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"*

Points to Ponder:

1. Who sits on the throne of my heart? Is it the idol of "I", or is it Jesus?
2. Does my Christianity have a form – or does it have power? Am I merely practising Christianity or am I allowing Jesus to truly transform me?
3. Am I surprised by perilous times or prepared for them? Am I hoping for ease, or trusting in a Saviour who is sufficient through it all?

³ Stott, J. R. W. (1973). *Guard the Gospel the message of 2 Timothy* (p. 91). InterVarsity Press.