

# The Reality of the Last Days

## Introduction

### a. objectives

1. subject – Paul warns Timothy of the massive self-love that will dominate the church in the last days
2. aim – to cause us to understand our role in the church as self-sacrificial under the Lordship of Christ
3. passage – 2 Timothy 3:1-9

### b. outline

1. The Concept of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:1)
2. The Reality of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:2-8)
3. The Hope of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:9)

### c. opening

1. the **depressing nature** of these verses
  - a. we will deal with this pericope in a single sermon because it is *one of the most depressing pericopes of Scripture* one might encounter in the Bible (**top 10?**)
    1. I won't be able to say everything that *could* be said, but I will say everything that *needs* to be!
  - b. in contrast to **Matthew 16**
    1. Jesus asks his disciples who *others* say he is – they answer with various possibilities
    2. Jesus asks his disciples who *they* think he is – Peter answers with his great confession “*you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God*”
    3. Jesus then states a great truth – that this confession (given to Peter by God) is the “*rock*” upon which the church will be built, and that “*the gates of hell will not prevail against it*”
    4. that phrase implies that the church will be a great power, overcoming every barrier that Satan and his forces will erect to keep people from the kingdom of Christ (**i.e.** gates = barrier)
    5. but, that phrase *does not imply* that the church *itself* will be a perfect instrument – it will accomplish a great task *in spite* of its imperfections and weaknesses
  - c. someone once said that a preacher looks out each Sunday and he sees *two distinct* churches:
    1. the first is the **theoretical** church: justified people, sanctified by the Spirit, holy, mortifying any last vestiges of sin in themselves, and transformed into the image of Jesus Christ
    2. the other is the **real** church: a messy organization of sinners, some progressing in holiness, concerned more about the things of the Lord than their happiness; others more concerned about themselves and their worldly lives, still wallowing in their sin, difficult to reach
    3. **the goal:** to move that *real* church bit-by-bit towards the vision of the *theoretical*, to *patiently* teach and encourage and exhort each member of the body until that vision of Christ is achieved
2. the **stark nature** of these verses
  - a. in the first two chapters, Paul has encouraged Timothy to take the great legacy of faith that he has received and *transfer it* to the next generation, through men who are trustworthy
  - b. Paul has exhorted Timothy to pursue a life of righteousness, faith, love and peace, and to preach the gospel in such a way that even those “*captured by [the devil]*” (**2:26**) will escape in repentance
  - c. **now:** chapters 3 and 4 are a **reality check** – Timothy must be *honest* about his view of the church
    1. both chapters are an **expansion** of **1 Timothy 4:1-5**
    2. in his first letter, Paul warned Timothy that some would apostatize from the faith – but he was less concerned about it given that he believed there was *so much more time left to him*
    3. in this letter, Paul gives a *much greater warning* about apostasy in the church – because the time is short for him, and he doesn't want Timothy to take up the mantle of leadership without a *thorough* recognition of what he *truly* will be facing (now, in a concise and powerful way)

## I. The Concept of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:1)

### Content

#### a. the concept of the last days

1. “*last days*” = the adjective *eschatos*; from which we get our word **eschatology** – the study of the “end times” or (more accurately) how and when the fullness of God's plans are *consummated* upon the earth as Christ returns to fulfill the purposes of God in all things
  - a. the *immediate* reaction is to link this phrase to the *end times* – the “still future” church

- b. but, eschatology has *both* an “already” and “not yet” sense – *already*, in that Christ has come to make perfect atonement and is now seated at the right hand of God; *not yet*, in that Christ has yet to fully bring in his elect and destroy all of his enemies in establishing his kingdom
- c. to assume this phrase is *only* about the “end of the world” is an error – it is *likely* that Paul is using this phrase similarly to how Peter used it at Pentecost (**Acts 2:17 cf. Joel 2:28**)  
*“And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams ...”*
  - 1. Peter justifies the *glossolalia* of the disciples as a fulfillment of this prophecy *which occurs in the “last days”* – that the “last days” has now begun, **the Church Age has dawned**
  - 2. Paul is (**clearly**) using this phrase in the same way – in the church, *down through time, starting even now* (*i.e.* this passage *portends* Timothy *dealing with it* starting in **v. 10**)
- 2. “*times of difficulty*” = turbulent times that are hard to survive *which he now describes in detail ...*
  - a. **IMO**: Paul has been *fully disabused* of his belief that Christ would return in his lifetime – that the Church Age would last only a few years and that he would not have to face *death* – the realities that he had *personally* experienced in the churches would continue on *for the rest of the age*
  - b. **Paul recognizes that the church is not and would not be a perfect, harmonious organism**

## II. The Reality of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:2-8)

### Content

#### a. the characteristics of the last days (vv. 2-5)

- 1. “*people*” = generally speaking, people *in the church*; specifically speaking, those in positions of *influence in the body* (*i.e.* the “*false teachers*” warned about in **chap. 2** and **1 Timothy**)
  - a. Paul is *undoubtedly* speaking about people *in the church*, not reprobate men *outside* the church
    - 1. this cannot be an indictment of those over whom Timothy has no authority (*i.e.* the reprobate)
  - b. so, Paul might be referring to those who use their influence in *official* ways to teach what is false
  - c. but, Paul is *probably* using a generic term here because this is true of *many more* in the church
    - 1. **clarification: you do not have to be an “official” teacher to have influence – it is possible to influence people just by having conversations with them in the hallway**
- 2. the list has many similarities to the list of **Romans 1:29-30** – meaning: it is a list of characteristics that are “common to fallen man” to be mortified by the true Christian **but which become very prominent in those who are immature in the faith or are apostate from the faith (note v. 9)**
- 3. the “chief characteristic” of this list: love of self, the desire for self-satisfaction
  - a. Paul uses the *rhetorical device* of *starting* and *ending* a list with a similar characteristic – used to emphasize a *single point* (which is why I am **not going to exegete** each element of the list)
  - b. *i.e.* “*lovers of self, lovers of money*” (**v. 2**) vs. “*lovers of pleasure, rather than lovers of God*” (**v. 5**)
    - 1. all of the items “in between” are simply expressions of this self-love – putting the *temporal* needs of self before all else, in every way that that *selfishness* can be achieved
      - a. *e.g.* “*disobedient to their parents*” – the *childish* sense of demanding what one wants
  - c. the **pandemic** of the church: the belief that one’s *emotional needs* are more important than one’s *spiritual needs* – that the church exists for *happiness* rather than for *holiness* – the substitution in the church of those things that will “meet needs” for those that bring spiritual growth
    - 1. *i.e.* why Paul insists that a Christocentric catechism is so important – it helps the student, in learning of this Christ, what he must **mortify** in himself in order to serve that Christ
- 4. “*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*” = having an *outward* (*i.e.* false) sense of Christian piety, but preventing the Spirit from actually changing one *inwardly*
  - a. *e.g.* the *false piety* of the “worship experience” – outwardly demonstrating a religious zeal that “meets the need” of religiosity, but has no substance actually able to transform one in holiness
- 5. “*avoid them*” = either a) excommunicate them or b) avoid being entangled with their perspective
  - a. the *only imperative in the pericope*: watch out for these kind of people!

#### b. the examples of the last days (vv. 6-8)

- 1. those who “*creep into households ...*” = as similar to **1 Timothy 4:11-13** – people who “use” the weak in the church to build *factions*, using the *immature* to build positions of influence
  - a. the weak: “*always learning and never able to arrive ...*” – having a constant stream of teaching, but remaining in a spiritually weak and immature place (*e.g.* **Hebrews 5:12-6:2**)
  - b. **IOW**: the **door-to-door salesman** with a “pitch” that the spiritually immature cannot resist – the message that the church can “make you happy” if you just follow these easy and exciting steps
- 2. those who “*oppose the truth*” = as similar to **2 Timothy 2:17-18** – those who actively oppose the *right* way for the church to operate; who *purposely* try to turn the focus from the *primary* to the *secondary*

- a. **e.g.** “Jannes and Jambres” = the *traditional* names assigned to the magicians of **Exodus 7:11**
  1. they opposed Moses in the sight of Pharaoh in order to convince him that Moses’ message from God could be ignored – what was right (obedience) overridden by *personal desire*
  - b. “*corrupted in mind*” – actually *believing* that self-love and pleasure *is the purpose of the church*
  - c. “*disqualified regarding the faith*” – teetering on the edge of apostasy in their pursuit of self-love
3. **although the church stands upon the confession of Jesus as the Christ, and will succeed in the world to accomplish its goal, we must remain aware that not everyone in the church agrees with that goal, and there will be many who will attempt to steer it in a different direction**

### III. The Hope of the Last Days (2 Timothy 3:9)

#### Content

##### a. the folly of opposers

1. “*their folly will be plain to all*” = just like Jannes and Jambres, *eventually* the futility (folly) of those who pursue the wrong ends will become plain – not necessarily *immediately*, but *over time*
2. **i.e.** the church of Jesus Christ has survived for 2,000 years through every *imaginable* form of heresy and fad and division that has threatened its existence, because (eventually) these things are revealed *by the Spirit*, and the *truly elect* see them for what they really are
3. **IOW:** the Spirit of God *tolerates* these things in his church because he sees the true church (**i.e.** his own) within the “noise” of all of this secondary stuff
4. **therefore, although it is depressing to see so many people “wander off” from the true purpose of the church, we must never forget that Christ will (eventually) have before him the perfect church of those sanctified by the Spirit into true holiness – the church will be perfect one day!**