

## 2 Timothy 3:1-9

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/2tim/2tim-3/2-timothy-31-9/>

*Paul warns Timothy of the way men will behave in the last days before Christ's return. Men will love themselves only, seek money, elevate themselves, exploit other people, hate goodness while pretending to be religious. Timothy ought to avoid men like this. These men will be like the two magicians who opposed Moses, with some brief displays of power that will ultimately be shown as nothing in comparison to God's power. In the end everyone will see that these men wasted their lives.*

Paul now turns to a discussion of what Timothy can expect in the future. Paul is in prison, awaiting execution for his faith. He has exhorted Timothy to look upon his chains without being ashamed, and without fear. Paul wants Timothy to have the courage to follow in Paul's footsteps, and live without fear of man, or of what man can do to him. He wants Timothy to be a faithful witness for Christ, and follow the example of Christ, who did not fear rejection, loss, or death. However, as bad as things are now, Paul says that they are going to get worse.

Speaking of the future, Paul says *But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come*. It is likely that Paul considered themselves to be living in *the last days*. Or at least on the verge of being in the *last days*. The *last days* would be the days just prior to Jesus's return to earth. We know this was a primary topic of teaching by Paul through his letters to the Thessalonians. Paul was not able to teach for long in Thessalonica before persecution pushed him out of the city. But during his short stay there, perhaps a few weeks or months, we know he spoke of Jesus's imminent return. This is because in his letters to the Thessalonians, written shortly after his visit, he addresses a number of questions regarding the topic. The Thessalonians were so expecting the return of Christ to take them up into the air that they came to be concerned about what would happen to those who died prior to Jesus's return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

In 1 Thessalonians Paul spoke of the "day of the Lord" coming like a "thief in the night." Thieves break into houses unexpectedly. Paul's point to the Thessalonians is to be ready, be prepared to receive Jesus at any time. In our present day, even though it has been about 2000 years since the time of Paul's writings, it is still appropriate for us to consider Jesus's return to be imminent. Peter addressed the issue of people saying Jesus was slow to return. To this, Peter said:

"...with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day. The Lord is not slow about His promise, as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance."

(2 Peter 3:8b-9)

God is paradoxical from our perspective as finite humans, and one paradox is that God is both within time as well as outside of time. In the modern era we have learned that time varies with a change in gravitational gradient. So even within what we know, it is possible for time to be a day

in one place in the universe, and thousands, millions, or billions of years elsewhere in the universe. From God's perspective, all times are the same, although God is always in the moment.

Jesus' return was imminent during Paul's day, and it still is imminent now. Paul and Timothy were in the *last days*, and we are in the *last days*. The *last days* will be like a woman in labor, going through birth pangs. The closer and more severe the contractions, the closer the delivery (Romans 8:18-24).

There have been *difficult times* in the days of Paul and Timothy, and there are still *difficult times* today. But the cycles will keep getting more intense, and each cycle will be more severe. In each cycle of ungodliness, *men will* increasingly exhibit the following characteristics, they will *be*:

- *lovers of self*,
  - This phrase translates a single Greek word “philautos” from “phileo” which is affection and “autos” which is self.
  - Being self-seeking is actually self-destructive. Romans 2 tells us that those who are self-seeking will get wrath as a reward (Romans 2:8).
  - The true way to gain our lives is to lose them for the sake of Christ.
- *lovers of money*,
  - In 1 Timothy, Paul noted that the love of money is a root of all sorts of evil (1 Timothy 6:10).
  - Those who love money cannot also love God, for no one can have two masters (Luke 16:13). That means that those who love money are actually its slave.
- *boastful*,
  - This word can be translated “empty pretender.”
  - The world's way will increasingly be the way of presenting a managed image of self, rather than being authentic.
- *arrogant*,
  - This word means carrying an air of superiority to others, even with contempt for others.
  - The world will increasingly wane in care for others.
- *revilers*,
  - This translates the Greek word “blasphemos” from which we get our English word “blasphemous.” This means to adamantly assert things that are untrue.
  - Men will become increasingly adamant that lies are true.
- *disobedient to parents*,
  - The attitude of the adults in the culture, who are self-focused and do not respect the authority of God, manifests itself in the children as disrespect for their parents.
  - These other attitudes that encompass the culture of the world are like spoiled children who think they know everything, think they should be able to do whatever they want and take whatever they see, and still have everything work out for them.
- *Ungrateful*
  - There is no reason to be thankful for receiving things to which you are entitled. The attitude of the world will increasingly be one of entitlement, which is a natural consequence of self-focus.

- *unholy,*
  - The world's culture will be a reverse image of the things of God. It will honor things that are shameful and shame things that are honorable.
- *unloving,*
  - The world's culture might have an image of caring for others, but in reality will not care for other people. It will have indifference for the welfare of others. People will be objects to exploit.
- *irreconcilable,*
  - This is the idea of being disagreeable.
  - People will not join things that are mission-focused, they will not work together as a team. They will only focus on themselves and their own appetites.
- *malicious gossips,*
  - This phrase translates the Greek word "diablos" which is usually translated "devil." It means false-accuser.
  - "Devil" is actually a job description rather than a proper name. Lucifer's chosen occupation is to be a false-accuser.
  - The basic purpose of false accusation is to demean others, and promote self (which was Satan's original sin (Isaiah 14:13)).
- *without self-control,*
  - This is the Greek word "akrates," where the "a" means "not."
  - The word "kratos" is usually translated "power." It often applies to the initiative and discipline required to begin and complete a mighty deed.
  - The idea seems to be that the world will increasingly be full of entitled people without initiative or willingness to work hard to accomplish anything.
- *brutal,*
  - This can be translated as "fierce" or "savage." While men will not be interested in working hard to create things of mutual benefit, and will not be interested in working hard to accomplish difficult jobs, they will be willing to exert substantial energy in being vicious toward others, tearing them down and exploiting them.
- *haters of good,*
  - The world's culture will not only honor what is wicked. It will also hate anyone and anything that is good. It will shame and resist truth, while honoring and elevating lies.
- *treacherous,*
  - This word is also translated "traitorous." A form of this word is used to describe Judas, who betrayed Jesus (Luke 6:16).
  - It could include pretending to join with others in a shared mission (like Judas), while really only being there to promote themselves.
- *reckless,*
  - The arrogance and self-focus of men will cause them to do things that are destructive to themselves and others without thought for the future.
- *conceited,*
  - People will become so self-focused, and self-referencing that they will always think they are right, and better than others.
- *lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,*

- In this and the last entry in this list, we find that the general, deteriorating culture appears to also work its way into the church.
- Paul's overriding message to Timothy has been to embrace the suffering of Jesus while courageously advancing the truth, in spite of rejection, loss, and even death from the world. The world's culture will begin to erode this gospel truth. It will not see suffering for Christ as being in our best interest.
- The spirit of the last days will exchange suffering for the truth of the gospel, and instead will manifest itself in people who have become *lovers of pleasure*.
- The root translated *pleasure* comes from "hedon" from which we get our word "hedonistic." According to James 4:1, this is a source of conflict among believers, from our own
  - *holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power;*
    - There will be a *form of godliness* that is portrayed as an illusion of religious legitimacy. But it will have no *power*, because it will be self-centered, rather than being of the power of God to serve others in love.
    - The culture of the world will seep into the church, although people will retain the external trappings of religiosity.

At the time of Paul and Timothy there were already people like this, because Paul tells Timothy to *Avoid such men as these*. So it has always been the case that this attitude has been in the world, and has adversely influenced the church. But we can expect that as time passes, things will progress in cycles with increasing intensity, until the final days of this age, when the anti-Christ arises. And we can expect that the culture of the world will continue to influence those within the church. That is the reason Paul's teaching of 2 Timothy is applicable to every believer.

Within the church there will be an external *form of godliness*, but without the *power* of the Holy Spirit living through people. There could also be a *form of godliness* represented by the world system, that is separate from the truth of God. Paul will soon tell us that the antidote for the rot of the world's culture is to ingest the truth of the Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16).

We now find that a subset consisting of *such men*, who exhibit this self-focused, pleasure-seeking lifestyle, are those who could potentially be influencing or among the church in Ephesus where Timothy ministers. The strategy for *such men as these* is to *avoid* them. That might include keeping them out of the church leadership, in order to protect those within the flock, and trying to minimize people's exposure to them.

The reason for this instruction to *avoid* these men is that *among them are those who* engage in a number of exploitative practices that prey on the weak. Given the description that came before, and the description that follows, it would seem that these *men* that Paul wants Timothy to *avoid* are those who speak and act in such a way as to appear to have a *form of godliness*, when in reality their true goal is to exploit others to satisfy their own lusts. Paul gives several examples of how they exploit others:

- These exploitative men *enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses.*
  - Their goal is to prey on vulnerable *women*.

- They *captivate* them, making them a servant to fulfill their sexual appetites.
- They have no interest in helping these women who are *weighed down by sins*, and *led on by various impulses*. They only have interest in exploiting them.
- These men are *always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*.
  - It appears that in order to advance their *form of godliness* they are learning all sorts of religious things. However, they are *never able to come to the knowledge of the truth*.
  - This likely means they are full of religious words and deeds, but these are just a façade. Their true interest is in advancing themselves, and fulfilling their own appetites.

Paul says that these men are like *Jannes and Jambres*, men who *opposed Moses*. These names do not appear anywhere else in the Bible. From inference and extra-biblical tradition they refer to two magicians who opposed Moses when Moses confronted Pharaoh in Exodus chapter 7:11-12. These magicians were able to cause their staffs to turn into serpents, emulating Aaron's miracle. However, Aaron's serpents swallowed their serpents. *Jannes and Jambres* had a form of power, but not the power of God. In the same way that these magicians opposed God with false substitutes, *so these men also oppose the truth*.

The *these men* being spoken of are those who have a "form of godliness" but without the power of the Spirit. They are worldly *men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith*. But their "form of godliness," and habit of "always learning" apparently provides them religious legitimacy among the less discerning. As a leader in the church, it is Timothy's job to confront these people with the truth, when they cannot be avoided, just as Moses confronted *Jannes and Jambres*.

The phrase *rejected in regard to the faith* could mean either of two things. It could mean they do not truly believe in Christ. However, this is unlikely. The Bible occasionally tells us the heart of another person, but that is rare. God told us the heart of Abraham, when he believed God (Genesis 15:6). But unless God revealed the heart of these men to Paul, he would not know their status before God in terms of whether or not they are His child. Being born again is a matter of grace, apart from deeds.

The phrase *rejected in regard to the faith* probably means that they will be *rejected* from gaining the rewards of the *faith*. They will be denied rewards due to their disobedience. As Paul stated in chapter 2, "If we deny Him, He also will deny us" speaking of the reward of reigning with Christ (2 Timothy 2:12b). God is the judge, not Paul. But in this case their disobedience is so apparent that Paul is able to judge their works as being *rejected*.

No person born into God's family is ever rejected by God. As Paul also said in chapter 2, just after saying we will be denied rewards for unfaithfulness, "If we are faithless, He remains faithful, for He cannot deny Himself" (2 Timothy 2:13). Nothing can separate one born into God's family from His love (Romans 8:39). But self-seeking works done for earthly rewards will be *rejected*; they will be burned in the forge of Christ's judgement (1 Corinthians 3:15).

Paul expresses confidence that these *depraved* men *will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also*. Their *folly* in following the world's ways was already apparent to Paul. Apparent enough that Paul pronounced their deeds as "rejected in regard to the faith." The application seems to be that if Timothy will continue to teach what is true, opposing what is false, no matter the cost, in time the *folly* of those who resist what is true *will be obvious to all*.

However, there is a time delay. Which is why Paul has admonished Timothy to persist diligently in continuing to preach and live what is true, "accurately handling the word of truth" and "with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition" (2 Timothy 2:15, 2 Timothy 2:25).

### **Biblical Text**

**3 But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, <sup>4</sup> treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power; Avoid such men as these. <sup>6</sup> For among them are those who enter into households and captivate weak women weighed down with sins, led on by various impulses, <sup>7</sup> always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men also oppose the truth, men of depraved mind, rejected in regard to the faith. <sup>9</sup> But they will not make further progress; for their folly will be obvious to all, just as Jannes's and Jambres's folly was also.**