

## How to Prepare For The Last Days

### 2 Timothy 3:1-13

The study of the end times, or last things, is called eschatology. It comes from the Greek word *eschaton* (“last”) and *logos* (“word/teaching about”), so eschatology is the study of the end times. When this issue is raised all sorts of questions come to mind with respect to personalities and particular events, such as who is the anti-Christ? Who is the false prophet? Is the rapture pre-tribulational, mid-tribulational, post-tribulational, or pre-wrath rapture? Exactly what is going on with the seal judgments in Revelation 6? What about the trumpet judgment in Rev 8-9 and the bowl judgments in Revelation 16? Who is the great whore of Babylon in Rev 17-18? What about this man of lawlessness in 2 Thessalonians 2? These and many more questions could be asked and they are all good questions. The questions we are going to answer tonight are not concerning personalities or particular event. Rather, the questions concern the moral condition of the world as we move towards the end times.

What is going to happen in terms of personal ethics, behavior and morality as we move toward the end of the age? In this context, we will get a running start into our passage. Chapter 3 begins with a contrast by saying (“but know this”). It not a contrast in that it is like this and then it is going to be like something else. Rather, it is as if Paul says, “Here is what God hopes will happen and here is how God intends to work in terms of repentance for those who come to their senses and embrace the truth.” The fact of the matter is that things are going to get worse and worse and worse before they get better. When are they going to get better? The answer is when Jesus comes again.

Look at 2 Timothy 2:22-26 to give us a running start into our passage tonight.

<sup>22</sup> Flee also youthful lusts; but pursue righteousness, faith, love, peace with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. <sup>23</sup> But avoid foolish and ignorant disputes, knowing that they generate strife. <sup>24</sup> And a servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, <sup>25</sup> in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, <sup>26</sup> and *that* they may come to their senses *and escape* the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to *do* his will.

Now look at 2 Timothy 3:1-13 with me:

<sup>1</sup> But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: <sup>2</sup> For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup> unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, <sup>4</sup> traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, <sup>5</sup> having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! <sup>6</sup> 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, <sup>7</sup> always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. <sup>8</sup> Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; <sup>9</sup> but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.

<sup>10</sup> But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, <sup>11</sup> persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.

<sup>12</sup> Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. <sup>13</sup> But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.

In this life and this particular period of time, we should be working for that which is good, that which is righteous. We should be pursuing with a red hot passion the souls of lost men and women with the gospel of Jesus Christ. Indeed, the Bible promises in Revelation that as we move toward the end of the age that there is going to be a great turning of people to faith in Christ, a number so great that John says that he could not count all of them” (Rev. 7:9). Yet as this great turning of men and women to faith in Christ is occurring, the world *is* going to be getting worst and worst and worst. Indeed, Paul, John, Peter and all of Scripture bear witness that as we move toward the last day things are not going to get better, but rather things are going to get worse. The question is, “What do you and I do?” How can you and I prepare well for those times as they are more quickly than ever approaching the age in which we live?

There are three things that Paul tells us to do to prepare for the these times in 2 Timothy 3:1-13.

**I. Know the times.**

**3:1-4**

Be aware of the times in which we now live. “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come” (3:1) Dangerous times, very difficult times will comes. What does he mean by the “last days?” Actually, we live in the last days. In my judgment, we are living in the latter part of the last days. John calls it the “last hour” (1 Jn 2:18). What I think we would say today is we are in the final minutes of the last hour. In light of 2 Timothy 3, we are the final days of the last days. The point is that we have been in the last days since the Christ event. Since Jesus came, died, raised from the dead, and ascended into heaven we have been in the “last days.” It is a very

strong statement that contrasts the previous age and the age to come with the age in which we live. We are looking for a new age, a new day, a new kingdom. But since we have this period of time between his first and second coming, how do we describe that biblically? The Bible says it is the last hour or last days. Paul, I think would say these things have always been present in some measure during this particular time between his first and second coming. However, as we move closer toward the end of the last days, you can expect the circumstances to intensify and you can expect these to become more acute than ever before.

What will these times look like? Paul lists no less than nineteen different descriptions of what these days are going to look like as we move toward the end of time. I make five observations for you in 2 Timothy 3:1-4.

1. They will love the wrong things. 3:1-2, 4

First, they will love the wrong things. This particular opening paragraph (3:1-4) begins and ends on the subject of love. Four times in this opening paragraph Paul emphasizes the wrong affection, the wrong love during the end times. He says they will be lovers of themselves, idolaters. They will deify man and they will idolize themselves. It is basically Romans 1 writ large over the world. Secondly, they will be lovers of money. In other words, they will be consumed by the material. It will be their god as well. They will worship themselves and the things they can accumulate for themselves. Welcome to the United States in 2009. It is certainly a very apt description of the gods of twenty-first century. Then Paul says at the end of verse 4, the bottom line is this, “they are lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” They love pleasure, their lust; they love money, their gold; and they love themselves. Paul says as we move toward the end of the age, people will love the wrong things.

2. They will think the wrong way. 3:2

Secondly, they will think in the wrong way. They will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, and proud. They will think the wrong way in that they will have a self-evaluation that is faulty, thinking more of themselves than they ought. In actuality, they will think they are something when they are nothing. They will think that, in and of themselves, they are the end of all things. They will think that, in and of themselves, they have inherit value and worth. They forget the fact that any worth and value they have is the result of being made in the image of God, the very one that men will deny, reject, oppose, ridicule, and run away from in the last days.

3. They will speak the wrong words. 3:2-3

They love the wrong things, they think the wrong way but thirdly they will speak the wrong words. He says in verse 2 that they will be boasters, blasphemers, and slanderers. Boasters in that they will be braggers, puffed up with who they are, who they think they are and therefore compelled to tell everyone who they think they are. “Blasphemers” has the idea of ridicule or speaking ill of others. “Slanderers” indicates that at the very heart of their deception is lying. They will misrepresent people; they will not speak of things correctly as they truly are. Sometimes evangelical Christians do not put their best foot forward in this area. We should never expect to get an accurate, balanced and true depiction of Christianity by the secular media.

I have a friend who is an atheist. Several years ago when I was in Dallas, Texas, he came to live in our community. After going to our college, going on a mission trip, attending the Southern Baptist Convention and a Pastor’s Conference, he wrote a book called *A Skeptic Revisits Christianity*. He actually wrote a pretty positive book. He was quite fair in his analysis and assessment of who we are, what we think, what we believe and how live. As a result of this

his publisher nearly canned the book. In fact, he had to fight very hard to even get the book published. They gave him absolutely no PR. Why? It was because they wanted a more critical portrayal of Christians. He actually tried to write a fair and balanced book about Christians both criticizing what we did not do well and praising what we did well. However, the publishers wanted nothing good. They wanted a hatchet job. As we move toward the end of the age, we should expect people to slander and misrepresent us.

4. They will act with the wrong passions. 3:3

They love the wrongs things, think the wrong things, speak the wrong words, and they act with wrong passions. They will be disobedient to parents, unthankful, and unholy. In verse 3, it very clearly states that they are unloving, unforgiving, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, head strong, haughty. These are very violent words in the context of how these people are going to act. It is very interesting that the phrases “disobedient to parents” and “unthankful” are side by side. I think the idea of being unthankful is a general concept, but I think Paul may have had this in mind: Not only will they be disobedient when they are young; they will also be unthankful toward their parents as they get older. This is why more and more adults see aging parents as they see children—a burden and not a blessing, a hindrance and not a help.

If you were at Southeastern Seminary yesterday, we heard the message of a ninety-five year old saint of God by the name of M.O. Owens. He still has incredibly dexterity and an incredible mind. In fact, in the three days, this ninety-five year old man played fifty-four holes of golf. As he was talking, he said that we are living in a day were there is a movement to say that people like me have an obligation to die. He said there will be a time in the near future that those who are not capable of making such a decision will have the government step in and make it for

them. I think he is right. They will be disobedient to parents when they are young and unthankful toward them as they grow older.

Unholy. No fear of God. No desire to live for him. Unloving. Any affections they have are turn back in on themselves and not on anyone else. Unforgiving, the word could be translated, “irreconcilable.” They are so many way this could be applied, but I think in terms of marriage, where the idea of reconciliation is almost a byword as we see the divorce culture continue to percolate. The destruction, the fallout, the bodies strung everywhere become more evident with each passing year. Without self-control. Why are they without self-control? Because they are controlled by their passions. Brutal because they are controlled by their passions, as a result, they become nothing more than an animal. They have the same kind of disposition of a dog or a cat. They are run by their brutal nature. Despisers of good, that which is grounded in the very character and nature of God. Not only do they reject good, they despise and ridicule it. Traitors. There is no one they need to be faithful to but themselves. Whatever they need to do to get ahead, climb the ladder, to promote their own self-interests, then that is what they will do, even if it means betraying a friend, mate, or family member. They do what is in their best interest. Sometimes in life you will meet people like that, sometimes in the church. If you pay close attention, they will never hurt you because you can always count on them doing what is in their best interest. I have some acquaintances like this. They never blind side me. Some say that is very cynical, but I’ve seen a lot of sinners. In fact, I look at one every day in the mirror. I don’t even trust him; in fact, I trust myself the least. I have had others that I can count on them to do what is in their best interests. The Bible says that there will be a cardinal characteristics of those who are alive as we move toward the end of the age. Head-strong. My way or the highway.

Haughty has the concept of being prideful, arrogant and condescending. Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. This leads to the final wrong problem.

5. They live by the wrong priorities. 3:4

They live by the wrong priorities. Whereas they ought to love God, they love pleasure. Whereas they out to love God, they love themselves. Therefore, the Bible says take notice as we move towards the end of the age; this will be the characteristics of the times in which we will find ourselves.

## **II. Turn from the troublemakers. 3:5-9**

Secondly, the Bible says we must turn from the troublemakers. Why should we turn from them? Paul gives us five reasons. In verse 5 Paul says, “They have a form of godliness, but deny its power. Therefore, from such people turn away.” The phrase turn away is an imperative. It is also in the present tense. The imperative indicates it is a word of command. He is not asking you to do this, he is telling you to turn away. It is in the present tense which means it is to be the habit of your life to turn away from troublemakers. One commentator suggests that it has the idea of turning yourself away in horror because of the danger you find in these people. What is wrong with them?

1. They are spiritually impotent. 3:5

They are spiritually impotent. “They have a form of godliness.” In other words, at least on the outside these teachers have an appearance of godliness, but deny its power. Notice the shift here. In verse 1-4 he has given us nineteen general characteristics, counting the opening of verse five, of what life will be like as we move toward the end of the age. However, in particular, the false teachers he is most concerned about have a form of godliness but deny its power. In other words, there is a veneer, or façade in which they claim to speak for God, in which they



claim to be religious. We do this in our day and time. If you take a survey of most Americans and you ask them: 1) Are you spiritual? 2) Are you interested in spiritual things? You'll get an overwhelming yes. This is not necessarily a good thing. What types of spiritual things are they interested in? What kind of spiritual teaching do they follow and embrace? Paul says there is going to be at the end of the age a type of teaching that has a form of godliness but does not have the power of God. It does not have Christ. It does not have the gospel. It does not have the presence of the Holy Spirit. Keep this in mind: No Jesus, no power. No gospel, no power. No Holy Spirit, no power. End of discussion. There is nothing more to be said. E. Stanley Jones, the great missionary to India, was once asked by Hindu, "What does Christianity offer that I don't already have?" He one answer, "Jesus." We have Jesus and that is the only thing we have. By the way, that is the only thing we need. When we are confronted with the sirens of the modern age, we need to ask, "What do they think about Jesus?" and "Do they truly understand the gospel?"

In recent days, you may have seen on [www.pray4gcr.com/what-is-gcr/](http://www.pray4gcr.com/what-is-gcr/) a document I was invited to assist Dr. Johnny Hunt, president of the Southern Baptist Convention, in crafting. It already has more than a thousand signatures in less than three days. One of the things that document emphasizes is the fact that the church is always in danger of losing the gospel. My fear is even in a group like this that is faithful to come on a Wednesday night; it is possible that you have lost the gospel—that you misunderstand the gospel. The gospel is always in danger of being eclipsed by religion. Instead of the gospel being something God did for us in Jesus, it becomes something we do to earn God's approval. That last statement, "something we do to earn God's approval," is not only not the gospel but it is a heresy that will lead you straight to hell. The gospel is always about what God did for us in Christ that we could not do for ourselves. The gospel is always a message of grace and mercy. That gospel is that Jesus lived a sinless life,

made a perfect atoning sacrifice for sin, was buried, raised again for our justification, sanctification, and glorification, and if you will put your faith and trust in him, he will save you. That is the gospel.

Therefore, I serve not because I have to but because I want to serve him. I am not accepted because I obey, but I obey because I am accepted. It makes all the differences in the world which one comes first. Some of us are so foolishly deceived and thinking that we can check off reading our bible, praying, and giving will get us rightly related to the gospel. This is the false gospel. I guarantee you the Pharisees could check off every list and they were lost because they thought they could earn a right standing before God. Again, I say it all the time: I have the greatest fear that our churches are filled with people who have never been born-again. People who think they are doing good, therefore, God will have to accept them. Such a theology will only land you in that horrible place called hell. You cannot do good. You are not good. You are a depraved wicked sinner apart from the amazing grace of God. That is why we sing, “Amazing grace, how sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me, I once was lost but now I’m found, was blind, but now I see.” Did you create sight for yourself? I don’t think so. God gave your blind eyes the ability to see through his amazing grace, his wonderful gospel.

2. They are morally inadequate.

3:6

There is all sort of false teaching out there that has a form of godliness but denies its power. The Bible says to turn away from such people. They are morally inadequate. For of this sort are those, there are those who creep into households and they make captives of gullible (“silly”) women who are loaded down with sins led away by various lusts. It seems that Paul has a particular group of women in mind. Evidently, these were women who came out of a less than

wholesome lifestyle because it says that they are “loaded down with sins.” I think the implication is that though they have come out of a sinful lifestyle and perhaps God has forgiven them, they have not forgiven themselves. So their sins still acts as a hindrance to their conscience. Their sins still follow them and trail them. Some of you her tonight have the same issues. God has forgiven you completely of all your sins, but you have not forgiven yourself for your sin. You drag that guilt around with you like a massive albatross. In essence, you are calling God a liar, saying I know you forgave at least some of my sins but you have not forgiven all of my sins. Therefore, you try to earn the rest of God’s forgiveness. That is a miserable way to live. It is a tragic way to live. Because they were loaded down with sins and because they were still be led by their passions, Paul says they are gullible. They are gullible women, just as if were a description of gullible men. They are susceptible to the false teachers because they have not rightly understand the gospel deals with their sin problem from beginning to end. He says to these false teachers who sneak in who take captive these women, “they are always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.” Always learning what? Lies. In other words, this may be the sin of the scholars. A bunch of “Ph.D’s,” if you want to use that language, running around claiming to know something, but in actuality they know nothing. The Bible says that we have precedent for this. They were two men names Jannes and Jambres who resisted Moses. These men are not recorded in the book of Exodus. However, we know that in extra-biblical writings that some of the magicians who represented Pharoah who came against Moses were named Jannes and Jambres. This was a common tradition passed down that most of the Jewish people that Paul was writing to would have known. Paul is not endorsing all extra-biblical writings, but he saying that at least in this instance they were correct. There magicians of Pharoah resisted Moses and so do these also resist the truth. They are men of corrupt minds.

This is a fascinating argument he is making here. We are talking about the end times in chapter 3, but he goes back to the Exodus. Things are going to get worse as we move to the end, but false teachers have always been around. Those who oppose God's truth have always been around. Those who stand in opposition to God have always been around. They always will be until the new heaven and the New Jerusalem. If you look to the back, you see false teacher. If you look forward, you see false teacher. If you look around today, you see false teachers. How are they characterized in whatever age you find them? They resist the truth and are men of corrupt minds. By the way, Paul uses a perfect tense verb which speaks of a settled state in terms of their corrupt thinking. Therefore, this is the most tragic statement of all to me; they are disapproved concerning the faith. They are disqualified concerning the faith. In other words, these men are lost. They are lost. They are not saved. They are not regenerated. They have not been born again.

3. They are theologically ignorant. 3:7

They are disapproved concerning the faith. They are spiritual impotent, they are morally inadequate, and they are theologically ignorant.

4. They are personally insubordinate. 3:8

He says they are also personally insubordinate men of corrupt minds and disapproved concerning the faith.

5. They are ultimately inexcusable. 3:9

Perhaps the most telling statement is that ultimately they are inexcusable. They will progress no further for their folly and error will be manifest to all. The "theirs" probably refers to Jannes and Jambres. As they were exposed for the false teacher they were, these will also be exposed for the false teachers they are. When you spot a trouble making false teacher, you need

to turn and run as fast as you can. So, know the times, turn from the trouble makers and finally follow the truth.

### **III. Follow the Truth**

**3:10-12**

This is perhaps the key to number two. Follow the truth. The “but you” in verse 10 makes a strong contrast between false teachers and the apostle Paul. Paul begins by telling us how to follow the truth. He lists no less than nine characteristics of his example. Furthermore, the word “my” is fronted for emphasis in the Greek text. Paul is telling Timothy, “But you, in contrast Timothy, have carefully followed, not the teachings of a Jannes and Jambres, not the teachings of these with corrupt minds, not the teachings of these who are leading those ladies away in lust, not those who are leading those people away in a form of godliness that has no power, no in contrast, you carefully follow 1) my doctrine, 2) my manner of life, 3) my purpose, 4) my faith, 5) my longsuffering, 6) my love, 7) my perseverance, 8) my persecutions and 9) my afflictions.” Paul say here is an example worth following. Here is a life worth emulating. If you think about, some of these are not such a big deal. Some of these are rather interesting.

1. Pursue the right examples.

3:10-11

1) My doctrine or teaching – no big deal. 2) My manner of life – sometimes Paul’s manner of life led him to some rather precarious situations. I will bring these up in the latter part of verse 11. 3) My purpose – Paul’s purpose was “for me to live is Christ and to die is gain” (Phil 1:21). Paul had a laser focus in terms of his own personal life. 4) My faith – In good times and bad times, Paul kept his faith in the Lord no matter what. 5) My longsuffering – In other words, Paul always hung in there. He reported every single day to King Jesus. The longer I live the more I admire those who are longsuffering, those who always hang in there. I am not impressed with loud mouth, shooting star Christians. I can guarantee you, God is not either. I am not impressed

with people who end up on a platform. I am far more impressed with those quiet, consistent saints who show up day after day in faithful service to Jesus because they love Him. I don't say this with any false humility, but I suspect that when I get to heaven I will be way in the back with some big shot preachers who hopefully will be there, but I'm not sure about all of them. Up around the throne will be some of the unknown saints that no one down here ever paid any attention to, but in heaven God was watching. He was so pleased that they will have a choice seat down front. 6) My love – Paul loves the lost and pursued the Gentiles with an abandonment. 7) My perseverance. 8) My persecutions – If this is what God has for you. 9) My affliction – These things happened to Paul at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra.

Many Bible teachers agree the afflictions that Paul is referring to occurred in Acts 13-14. This was his first missionary journey. You will read of his ministry at Antioch, his ministry at Iconium, and his ministry at Lystra. Two things are interesting about his ministry at Lystra: 1) They stoned him and left him for dead. 2) It is almost certain that Timothy was from Lystra (Acts 16:1-2). A number of commentators said they would not be surprised if Timothy actually witnessed the stoning of Paul. Just like Paul witnessed the stoning of Stephen. God uses the stoning of Stephen to bring Paul to Christ. Is it possible that God used the stoning of Paul to bring Timothy to Christ? We do know that by the end of chapter 16 that Timothy is now traveling with Paul. It may be simply Paul's way of reminding him what he had witnessed with his own eyes. What persecutions I endured, yet out of them all the Lord delivered me. Did the Lord deliver him in the sense of sparing his life? Yes. Did the Lord deliver him in the sense that he suffered no harm? No. I would say getting stoned and left for dead is a bad day. That is just my opinion. I would count that as a bad day. Paul says, "the Lord delivered me." He raised me back up. In my judgment, he was still a little stoned, pun intended, because he walks back in to

the place they had run him out of town. If I had been stoned and God miraculously raised me up, I am headed somewhere else. That is just me. But Paul goes back.

2. Anticipate persecution. 3:12

In the midst of all that that Lord delivered Paul from, he give to Timothy a non-negotiable spiritual truth we all need to embrace: All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. If you live a godly life, you will suffer persecution. Let me make a quick statement. If you suffer persecution, please ask the question, “Is it because I am living godly or is it brought on by myself?” A lot of you in seminary, I get to hear some of your horror stories of serving in local churches. They treat you badly and are unkind you, perhaps you are even run off, sometimes there are some religious clubs out there that should not be called churches. But there are also some ministers that bring the suffering on themselves. They have a persecution complex, when the fact is they need to be persecuted because they are rude, mean, arrogant, condescending, in some ways like the false teachers described in this passage. When you are persecuted, it is a good thing to ask, “Is this happening because I am loving Jesus by doing the right thing in the right way at the right time or is happening to me because I am not a nice person to be around?” Paul says all who live godly will suffer persecution.

3. Expect evil to grow. 3:13

In contrast, evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. Not only do they lie to others, but they eventually lie to themselves. I am not surprised that that think they are really serving the Lord, when in actuality they are serving the evil one. How could they ever discern the difference? Jesus, the Gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Jesus, the Gospel, the ministry of the Holy Spirit who brings power to the word of God.

## **Conclusion**

This passage has not been an easy one, but a needed one. False teaching will get worse, people will become more evil, and things will continue to worsen until Jesus comes again. Does that mean we need to be pessimistic? No. Does that mean we need to be defeatist? No. Does that mean that we need to throw in the towel? No. It means we preach the gospel faithfully until Jesus comes again. We put our hope not in government, but the gospel. We put our hope in the resurrected King, not a representative, senator, governor, president or any human person. They are all sinners like us destined to fail and make mistakes. King Jesus never does. Therefore, we will draw close to Him, honor Him, serve Him, love Him, and proclaim His gospel faithfully that men and women might reach the end of themselves and reach out to Him in faith to the One who will never forsake us or let us go. That is a gospel worth preaching. That is the gospel that will save. May we be faithful to it as we move through and prepare ourselves for these last days.