

### The Moral and Spiritual Conditions of the Last Days

#### 2 Timothy 3:1-9

2 Timothy 3:1-9: *“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.”*

#### Background Notes

Verse 1 says that perilous times - times of distress or difficult times - will come in the “last days.” When are these “last days”? Are they yet to come, or are we living in them now?

The “last days” began with the first coming of Christ, and they continue until the second coming of Christ. Turn to Hebrews 1:1-2: *“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things.”* “These last days” (v2) began with the coming of Christ - and we’re living in them now.

The last days had already started when Paul was writing to Timothy, because after describing some of these predicted conditions, Paul said to Timothy, *“From such people, turn away”* (v5). Paul used the present tense, showing that the conditions of the last days already existed.

As time moves on toward the return of the Lord, the moral and spiritual conditions of the last days will get worse and worse. Look at verse 13: *“But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”*

In fact, declining conditions constituted one of the primary reasons why Paul wrote this last epistle to Timothy. Already the Roman persecution of Christians had begun. Already false teaching and apostasy was creeping into the early Church. So Paul wrote this final letter to Timothy to encourage him to be steadfast and faithful, even though severe persecutions were coming upon the Church, and some within the church were beginning to fall away.

In verse 8 Paul mentioned Jannes and Jambres. Who were these men? Jannes and Jambres were two of the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses during the time of the Exodus. Their names were not given in the book of Exodus, but Paul knew their names from reliable Jewish tradition.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The last days are characterized by ungodly behavior.

In verses 2-4 there is a list of eighteen vices that will characterize people of the last days. These vices will increasingly characterize society in general; sadly, these vices will even characterize people who call themselves Christians. By the way, the Greek word that is translated “men” (v2) does not mean men in contrast to women. It’s the word for “mankind” or all “people.”

I’m going to read this list again two more times. The first time I read it, I want you to think of our society in general, or people that you know. *“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”* Do you know anybody that fits the description like that, or at least part of it? I’m sure you’ll agree that we’re in the last days.

Now I’ll read the list again and this time, I want you to think of *yourself!* How does your life compare with the items on this list? Are you characterized by any of these vices or character flaws? *“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”* Convicting, isn’t it?

Notice how the list begins and ends. Verse 2, *“For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money”* and verse 4, *“lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.”* **Love of self, love of money, and love of pleasure!** All these things take priority over love of God - not only for non-Christians, but for many Christians as well. All of the characteristics in this list could be summarized by the words **selfishness, pride, and lack of self-control.** The last days are characterized by ungodly behavior.

### 2. The last days are characterized by a form of godliness.

Verse 5: *“Having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!”* This description of the last days indicates that many people will be “religious” and have some kind of value system, but they will deny the power for

achieving true godliness. The power for achieving godliness is the Word of God and the gospel of Christ. Romans 1:16, *“...the gospel of Christ... is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes.”*

There are plenty of churches all around us today, but many of them are not preaching the gospel or teaching the Bible. And most people in our society today have some kind of code of ethics, but it's a self-created code of ethics of their own choosing. It is not based on the moral absolutes of Scripture.

Some time ago I talked with the father of a teenage girl. This man was a nominal Christian – he went to church. His daughter was coming to our home Bible study. She had become a true believer, and her father liked the changes that he was seeing in her life and lifestyle - but he didn't like the fact that the positive changes had come about through true Christian faith and a Bible study! I asked him, “What's your basis for wanting your daughter to be a nice girl, and not do drugs or have sex before marriage?” He said “Because that's the way it should be. It's not right to have sex before marriage.” So I asked him “Who says so?” and he said that society looks down on girls who are not virgins when they get married. I replied that maybe that was the way society used to think, but society is changing – so shouldn't he change too? Finally, he threw up his hands and had to agree that it was the right thing to do because the Bible said so!

The last days are characterized by a form of godliness but the power is denied.

### **3. The last days are characterized by false teachers.**

Paul was thinking of the false teachers in verses 6-9. When verse 6 speaks about “gullible or weak women” – this comment was not meant to imply that women are gullible and men are not. And the idea is not that immoral men were breaking into houses and raping women, or that immoral men were making love with immoral women. No, the idea here is a description of the *tactics* of false teachers.

The methods of false teachers are not open and above-board. Their methods are subtle, secretive, cunning and sneaky. They try to capture the women with their false teaching, because they know that this is generally a way to reach their husbands. That's the way it was in the Garden of Eden. Satan approached Eve - and thus he was able to get Adam as well.

Why do false teachers use this tactic? Generally speaking, women are more sensitive to their guilt and moral failures than men are. Therefore they're more vulnerable and open to false teaching that offers relief from guilt and a new way of life. Many women, searching for teaching that will bring peace to their souls, are willing to “jump on the bandwagon” of false teachers. However, while they are always learning, they are never able to come to the knowledge of the truth (v7). I hope that brief description clears up a verse that may at first seem to be confusing.

Jannes and Jambres are mentioned in verse 8. This verse indicates that false teachers will imitate the true teachers, just as the Egyptian magicians imitated Moses. Just as these magicians were able to do some of the miracles through occult powers, so the false teachers of the last days will be able to do miracles. Don't be surprised if false teachers today can perform signs and wonders that look like the powers from God – but the power is not from God at all (Matthew 7:22-23).

There is a promise in verse 9: *“They will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.”* God limits the false teachers. They can only go as far as God permits - and no further. Just as Jannes and Jambres could do certain miracles but could not bring about life, so the false teachers cannot lead people to the new and abundant life that is found in Christ alone.

And it's not long before their folly and false doctrines become evident. Even the world recognizes that they are phonies. Look at Rev. Moon of the Unification Church, for example. Look at the flamboyant “healers” and “miracle-workers” on TV. Look at the Jehovah Witnesses - the door-to-door false-doctrine-pushers. God only allows them limited success before even non-Christians see through their tactics. Remember, the last days are characterized by false teachers.

## **Practical Application**

### **Don't go to a church where the Word of God and the gospel of Christ are watered down!**

In verse 5, Paul told Timothy to turn away from people who have “a form of godliness but deny its power.” This is not just Paul's letter to Timothy – it's God's message to us today. Turn away from people who have a form of godliness but deny the power! The power to bring about **true godliness** is found only in the Word of God and the gospel of Christ.

This doesn't mean that we should avoid these people to the point where we don't witness to them, or work with them in business, or interact with them as neighbors, etc. No! Here the apostle is discussing Christian fellowship. You can't have true Christian fellowship with them - because they are not true believers. They deny the power!

Don't go to a church where the Word of God and the gospel of Jesus Christ are watered down. When you're selecting a church, look for one that preaches the pure gospel and puts an emphasis on teaching the whole Word of God.

Be very careful, thoughtful and prayerful in selecting the church to attend. Don't go to a church where the Word of God and the gospel of Christ are watered down!