

Ethel sat beside her dying husband's bed. “

Ethel,” said Ray, “You’ve always been by my side. When we were poor newlyweds, you were there. When I broke my leg, you were there. When I lost my job in ’72, you were there. When the fire destroyed our house in ’87, you were there. Do you remember when I was in the car wreck? You were there. No matter what difficulty came our way, you were always there.”

Ray looked up at his wife with tears in his eyes, “You know something, Ethel? ... [P A U S E] ... You’re bad luck!” ... [P A U S E] ...

Being around certain people is bad for you.

One author that I read this week said we have two kinds of relationships: **balcony people** and **basement people**. ... Balcony people lift us up — cheering us on and calling forth our best. ... Basement people (on the other hand) drag us down. ... They infect us with a negative attitude... discouraging us and leading us down the low road.

That’s why Scripture is so clear that we are to guard our close associations... and (LISTEN!)... our passage today will tell us that it will be **ALL THE MORE important** during the last days. ... The description that we are about to see (I think) should convince any of us... that Christ is about to return. This isn’t the last **hour**... We are living in the very last **seconds**. ... We will also see how we are to make the most of the time that we have remaining.

(Now) because we should make the most of the time... let me ask: What will be the main problem in the days leading up to our Lord’s return...? Will it be a lawless society...? Immorality...? Horrible crime...? Bad government that gets worse and worse...? Aggressive world dictators...?

Gender confusion...? Continued loss of free speech (and other freedoms that we once took for granted)...? The desecration of our nation's constitution...? An extreme cancel culture...?

As bad as those things **are**... none of them... are what our passage today points to... as the main problem. The answer to what it is... is probably going to surprise you. (It did **ME**... when I noticed it... in the plain sight of Scripture.) ... We will get there in a few moments. ... [P A U S E] ...

We have been in Paul's second letter to Timothy... where Paul has been helping Timothy deal with the false teachers (who have over-run and now dominate the church at Ephesus.) ... Chuck Swindoll comments with the start of chapter three (which we begin today) by saying:

“Paul’s letter takes an abrupt, dramatic turn with the words, “But realize this.” What follows is an autopsy of human depravity...”

Dr. Swindoll builds the case that Paul suddenly (almost out of nowhere) turns to the topic of “the last days.” ... (Now) I never thought that I would **ever** disagree with Chuck Swindoll... but I'm afraid that I have to (here.) We **DO SEE** an “autopsy of human depravity”... (starting in verse 2... just as Swindoll graphically calls it)... but this is not really such an “abrupt and dramatic turn.” ... I think Paul is still helping Timothy to deal with the false teachers in his church. “*Timothy, you should not at all be surprised by your hardship! Com'on – Expect it!*”

1 Tim 3:1

“*But realize this*” is written in such a way that it means: “*keep realizing this – never let your guard down about this...*” “*Do not ever expect ministry will get easier, Timothy! It won't!*” ... So this does **not** seem (to me) to be such

an abrupt and dramatic turn. “As you deal with your false teachers (Timothy) keep realizing that things will never get easier... Prepare yourself for continued difficulty...” ... If Timothy had expected the time between the resurrection of Christ and His return in power ... to be marked by the steady retreat of evil... then he was about to be disappointed. No. Just the opposite. Things will DIGRESS. (They will grow more difficult.)

The Greek term $\chi \alpha \lambda \epsilon \pi \omicron \zeta$ (translated “difficult”)... is used only one other time in the New Testament. It was used to describe the two demonized men living among the tombs near Gadara (in Matt. 8:28). They were empowered by evil. They broke the chains that bound them and terrorized the region with their “extreme violence.” ... To say that they were “difficult” is an understatement! ... (“Difficult” would be a bad translation there... and is probably not-so-good right here either.) This term ($\chi \alpha \lambda \epsilon \pi \omicron \zeta$) means “wild,” “vicious,” “dangerous,” or “menacing.” ... Outside its use in the Bible... this word was used to describe wild animals or a raging sea.

Paul want to communicate that “violent... fierce ... wild... very grievous times are ahead!” These are painful... difficult... and dangerous times which will test the faith of believers and make the believer long for the Rapture.

Many people take the phrase... “the last days” of verse 1... to refer to the time just before Christ’s return. But are we to understand **that** is what Paul meant here? About half the commentators that I read this week don’t think so. (You see) the Biblical usage of that phrase (“the last days”) clearly refers to the whole period of time **between** the first coming of our Lord and

His second coming. In other words... for **more than 2,000 years** we have been living in the last days.

(Let me show you how we get that understanding...) ... In Acts 2... we read that on the Day of Pentecost... Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel... in which the prophet said that *“in the last days”* God would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh (Acts 2:17). ... **That** (Peter announced) was beginning to be fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost (almost 2,000 years ago.)

Then... the first words of the book of Hebrews are: *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many ways, in these last days has spoke to us in His Son,”* (Heb 1:1-2a).

So... from these passages... we understand that *“the last days”* is a period which has now grown to more than 2,000 years’ duration. Once we understand that... we can (now) see that the Apostle Paul is saying: that within this rather LONG period of time... there will come repetitive cycles of distress. ... Wait! What? **Repetitive cycles**...?

Yes. The word *“times”* (κ τ α ρ ο ζ) in the phrase *“difficult **times**”* refers to “seasons of times”... “periods”... “eras”. ... In other words... (LISTEN!)... there will be troublesome seasons and then it will let up for a while... followed by another season of severe difficulty. ... This will characterize the 2,000 + year-long *“Last Days”*.

OK... so Pastor... are you telling us that Paul is **not** about to list off some definite markers of what the world will be like just BEFORE Christ returns...? *“You seem to be telling us that there will be cycles of vicious seasons (not that these bad behaviors just come at the very end)... Yes (!) **HOWEVER** ... (and this is a HUGE *“however”*)! ... Paul (also) says... a*

couple of verses later... (Verse 13 to be exact)... these perilous times will ***intensify*** and become ***closer together***. The intervening times of relative calm will be less frequent and less peaceful.

2 Timothy 3:13 (ESV)

¹³ *while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.*

So... these ***are*** (indeed) marks that Christ is about to return. The viciousness wildness and danger will intensify! It will go from bad to worse!

Paul ***then*** describes the “wild”... “vicious”... “dangerous” days ahead – ***by its people!*** ... Do you remember the question that I asked earlier: What is the main problem in the last days? ... Is it all the ***bad things*** that we see in society...? ... No. ... The problem Paul notes here is “***people!***”!

But I have yet another surprise for you. The one that I am saving... is the one that surprised ***me*** when I saw it. (I am going to make you ***wait*** for it... until AFTER we first read Paul’s description of the people – who are the problem in the days leading up to Christ’s return.

2 Tim 3:2-4

At least eighteen different characteristics are listed here... and Paul probably could have listed ***more***. ... Putting this in contemporary terms... Paul notes three inappropriate (or misguided) loves: **narcissism** (love of self)... **materialism** (love of money)... and **hedonism** (love of pleasure). ... Narcissism... materialism... and hedonism are going to greatly increase **JUST BEFORE** Jesus returns.

These excesses lead people **not** to love what is good. The heart of every problem is a problem in the heart. God commands us to love **Him** supremely... and our neighbors as ourselves (Matt. 22:34–40); but if we love ourselves supremely... we will not love God *or* our neighbors.

Paul points to misdirected loves... but not just that. The other characteristics are all matters of corrupt relationships. ... So we have **1. misdirected loves** ... and **2. corrupted relationships**. (In short... people of the last days will have a lot less love for God... and people.)

I will have more to say about what Swindoll called an “*autopsy of human depravity*”... but first we need to consider something very important – that a lot of people miss... or pass too quickly over. ... OK... so what is the big surprise that I keep mentioning...? It is found in the very next verse.

2 Tim 3:5

In other words... Paul says that the primary cause of these repetitive cycles of stress and danger is the **hypocritical lives of Christians** who outwardly look pious... religious... committed and devoted... but are actually unchanged inside... and have no power to overcome evil in their lives. Hypocritical Christianity! — **that** is the bottom line to these vicious seasons.

If we want to use these verses to see if we are living in the last days... we need to look inside the church... and **if** we see these behaviors intensify - **THERE**... we will know. The catalogue of evil (found in these verses I just read)... is not **society's** ills. ... All this is happening and multiplying within the church!

(LISTEN!) The New Testament everywhere seeks to convince us that the church is the most important body of people in the world. (You see) **God**

builds society around what happens in the church. The **church** is in control of history. “*You are the salt of the earth,*” Jesus said (Matt 5:13). If the salt loses its savor, becomes saltless, without flavor, the whole world will go to pot. “*You are the light of the world,*” He said in Matt 5:14. If the light dims, the whole world will sink into darkness. That is what the Scriptures tell us. Immorality in the world is caused by insincerity in Christians. ... Darkness among the nations... is an outgrowth of ignorance and darkness - in the church. ... [P A U S E] ...

Alright... now we are ready to consider this “*autopsy of human depravity*” and ask ourselves if we see that it has intensified – in today’s church. (I think you already know what my vote will be...) Some of these I will comment on... and leave alone the ones that *need* no further comment.

Lovers of self—All people are given to selfishness, but this describes a deeper level of self-love to which we would assign the term “narcissism.” Self-lovers see everything in the world only as it affects them. They skew their perception of every event to bolster their own sense of superiority, significance, or safety. They seek the comfort and promotion of self above all else.

Lovers of money—“Materialist” is the modern term. Materialists seek wealth and possessions as a means of power, control, security, personal worth, and even love. There’s nothing wrong with wealth. It’s the love of wealth we must avoid.

Boastful—The Greek term *alazōn* describes the ancient version of a con artist, a vagabond who moves from town to town, making big promises, raking in money, and then disappearing overnight. They seek glory for

themselves without providing anything of worth to those around them.
Health and wealth gospel comes to my mind here.

Arrogant

Revilers—The Greek word is *blasphēmos*, from which we get the English term “blasphemer.” To blaspheme is to curse or slander someone, verbally treating them with contempt. While we now reserve the term for those who revile God, blasphemy is any manner of speech that disregards or disrespects the value of another.

Disobedient to parents— Does anyone doubt there is a greater problem here, than ever before? There seems to be a total breakdown of the family and rebellion against parental authority - *even in solid Christian homes.*

The need to be a two-income family is greater than it used to be. Moms are no longer around. This no doubt has contributed to the lack of respect toward parents. But there are also a number of other factors. Teenagers are treated today as though they are **supposed** to rebel. If they don't, it is thought by many, that there must be something wrong with them. Teens feel the pressure from their peers. They may not want to be rebellious, but if they don't then they look like freaks to their friends. Rebellion is cool. Only a nerd doesn't show disrespect to their parents.

Ungrateful—These people walk around with a spirit of entitlement. “*This is MY RIGHT!*”

Unholy

Unloving

Irreconcilable—This person cannot admit wrongdoing, refuses to forgive offenses, and remains at odds with everyone.

Malicious gossips— Is gossip ever a problem in the church...?

Without self-control—The apostle alludes to the dedication of an athlete in training for competition, watching his diet, and avoiding anything that might dull his competitive edge. Those without self-control cannot remain ethically upright, for morality requires a denial of self.

Brutal

Haters of good— This person finds greater comfort from a corrupt world.

Treacherous—This same term is used by Luke (Luke 6:16) to describe Judas as a “traitor.” In most contexts, the term carries the idea of betraying the well-being of another for personal gain. This is someone who turns away from a friend when he or she most needs help.

Reckless—The literal meaning of the Greek word is “falling forward,” presumably without the ability to stop. In English, we would say someone is “rushing headlong” into trouble. This person is rash and headstrong, easily provoked and therefore susceptible to harming others without thinking.

Conceited—The Greek expression means “wrapped in smoke,” or “head-in-the-clouds,” picturing someone whose lofty view of himself or herself towers above everything else, someone deluded by his or her own sense of importance.

Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—A “pleasure-lover” adopts a hedonistic lifestyle, elevating the desires of the moment above all else,

even God. (You know) Convenience is King among God's people today. *"I will only volunteer if it is not too inconvenient..."*

Only having a form of godliness

J. C. Ryle, the great evangelical leader of 100 years ago, wrote:

Look in another direction at those hundreds of people whose whole religion seems to consist in talk and high profession. They know the theory of the gospel intellectually and profess to delight in evangelical doctrine. They can say much about the "soundness" of their own views, and the "darkness" of all who disagree with them, but they never get any further! When you examine their inner lives, you find that they know nothing of practical godliness. They are neither truthful, nor charitable, nor humble, nor honest, nor kind-tempered, nor gentle, nor unselfish, nor honorable. What shall we say of these people? They are Christians, no doubt, in name and yet there is neither substance nor fruit in their Christianity. There is but one thing to be said—they are formal Christians. Their religion is an empty form.

... [P A U S E] ...

Just before Jesus returns there will be an intensified season of seeing these hypocritical behaviors inside the church. But Paul is not finished. There is another mark that Paul gives about these "wild"... "vicious"... and "dangerous" days. ... False teachers will abound who will prey on the church's susceptible members. In Paul's day they physically came into the homes. Today... cults still do... but they also have television and the internet to come inside and take advantage. Boy(!) Has this ever been on the rise in recent years.

2 Tim 3:6-8

Paul says these zealous false teachers went after “*weak women burdened down with sins, led astray by a variety of passions, always learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth*” (vv. 6–7). Paul is not using this as a description of **all** women... but rather those who are immature... childish... naïve... weak... and especially those burdened down with sins.

Because of their unclean consciences... they were open to hear anything... even the messages of these false teachers. The false teachers preyed on their intellectual weaknesses... their moral weaknesses... and their gullible nature. These women would listen to anybody... but they were never able to come to “a knowledge of the truth.”

These false religious leaders take advantage of the problems people have... and promise them quick and easy solutions. They “*worm their way in*” and soon control people’s lives. It is not long before these leaders grab their followers’ loyalty, money, and service. And their “converts” are worse off than they were before. They still have their problems... but they have been duped into thinking that all is well.

Be VERY CAREFUL if you use the internet to find Biblical information. Know the organization or the author who is behind particular web sites that you draw from.. This past year I have delt (on multiple occasions) with some very BAD THEOLOGY that vulnerable lady from our church had picked up from the internet. ... Finally I asked for the web site she was reading. It was Mormon!

Mormons and other false teachers love to offer their understandings with Scripture sprinkled on it. They will use very familiar Christian terms that you heard in Sunday School as a child... but with a subtle / sinister twist.

They are very much like Jannes and Jambres (the Egyptian sorcerers who opposed Moses before Pharaoh.)

Jannes and Jambres are not mentioned by name in the Bible. (Jewish tradition has given them these names.) ... When Aaron threw down his rod and it became a snake... they cast down their rods... which also became snakes. ... These sorcerers opposed Moses like the false teachers who were opposing Paul and Timothy (and those who proclaim God's true Word today.)

The sorcerers opposed the truth of Moses' message. The magicians' rods looked just like Aaron's. And by analogy, today the same language of the gospel is used by false teachers, but with different meanings. Their commands may sound like God's commands. Their religious paraphernalia may look the same — the same clothing... the same Bible... the same creeds. ... They may use the same meter in their prayers... just like authentic prayers. ... But they enslave people. They remain "men of depraved minds... who... as far as the faith is concerned... are rejected"

... [P A U S E] ...

Paul closes his thought in this section with an encouraging word to Timothy: "*But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.*"

2 Tim 3:9

Evil has a limited shelf life. Deceivers will proliferate... and their influence will expand. Falsehood may devastate some churches and persecute many genuine believers. Evil men may consume many lives with their hatred. But... ultimately... evil comes to nothing. Divine truth always prevails. In the

end - God wins! ... This had to be an encouraging word to Timothy as he looked at the apparent success of the false teachers.

(You know)... like Timothy... we must rest in God's promises and courageously keep teaching His truth... in spite of opposition and false religious systems. In the end - God wins! ... **[P A U S E]** ...

Are we living in the last days before Christ's return...? I believe that we are. I believe it because of what I see **not** in society as a whole. We have always had godless societies. I believe it because of what I see happening in the church today. It is as Paul told Timothy it would be just before Christ's return.

If I am right...then the words of Ephesians 5:15-16 have never been more appropriate for us to apply.

Ephesians 5:15-16 (ESV)

¹⁵ *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise,*

¹⁶ *making the best use of the time, because the days are evil.*

Are you making the most of your time...or do you fit the mold of what Paul told Timothy normal Christianity would look like near the end...? My friend, we are encouraged to reject the norm of Christianity for these last days. Stop pretending that you are alright as you look around and see that you look like the norm of what Christianity has become.

Make the most of the time. No one else may be using their spiritual gift to the fullest. But they are not your standard. Everyone else may be getting away with gossip - but that is not to be you... even if it looks acceptable to most people in the church. Boasting, arrogance, loving pleasure to the point of ignoring commitment to God-everyone else may be doing it-but

God's eyes are looking to and fro roaming the church worldwide, looking for those who will redeem the time.

What does He see when His eyes look to you...?