

“THE CHECKLIST”

2 Timothy 3:1-16: READ

Our concerns about the "last days" tend to be very personal. They usually arise, not because we are actually suffering, but because we dread suffering. Concerns focus not so much on the destructiveness of evil around us, but whether or not evil will affect our way of living. Such narrow concerns sometimes reveal our blindness to evil.

In our text, Paul gives Timothy (and us) a dose of reality about the times in which we live. He warns us that “in the last days difficult times will come” (3:1). When Paul says “*the last days*,” he is referring to the period of time between Christ’s ascension and His second coming.

So the idea is that during the church age ... there will be various times, some more intense than others ... where the world will face difficult times, and the church will face intense, sometimes savage, opposition. Paul here describes in detail the kind of evil people who instigate such opposition. It should not surprise us, then, to see the moral degeneration of society around us. Paul warned us that it would happen, as did Jesus (cp. Matthew 24). **Let’s look at Paul’s Checklist:**

- **For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money.** These first two characteristics of society in the "last days" provide the basis for society's downfall. When people misdirect their love -- toward themselves and material pleasures -- there can be no love left to direct toward others. Then moral corruption naturally results, as noted in the following characteristics.
- **Boastful, arrogant.** A heart full of pride manifests itself in outward boastfulness. Such characteristics reveal a person's inflated self-importance and necessarily leads them to looking down on others.
- **Blasphemous.** Abusive people speak disrespectfully to others, including God. Not only are these people guilty of an overinflated sense of their own importance, they also verbally abuse people around them.
- **Disobedient to their parents.** The extent of moral degeneration can be seen in the rejection of the most intimate human ties. Parents are not spared from abuse. This behavior willfully breaks the fifth commandment to honor one's father and mother (Exodus 20:12). When parents are not respected and honored,



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disobedience naturally results, and the breakdown of the family easily follows. Paul understood that when families fall apart, "*terrible times*" (3:1) follow.

- **Unthankful.** People are in a sad state when they cannot appreciate anything, express thankfulness, or give gratitude for small or large blessings or favors. In Rom 1:21, Paul noted that ingratitude was second only to dishonoring God as a just cause for God's judgment on humanity.
- **Unholy.** People who set aside God in order to live only to please themselves can only go one direction -- toward wickedness. They instinctively resist anyone or any ideas ... that would force them to measure themselves by God's standards!
- **Unloving.** Because these people love only themselves and their money (possessions), as Paul noted in verse 2, they are unloving toward everyone and everything else.
- **Unforgiving.** Unforgiving people cannot allow for other people's mistakes or weaknesses. They are unyielding, unrelenting, and often are filled with extreme bitterness and anger over their own hurts. They simply refuse to forgive, even if presented with the opportunity. Eventually, they become unable to forgive, even when they might acknowledge the need to do so.
- **Slanderous.** This in Greek is *diabolo*, which contains the root word for "devil." Here it is used as an adjective -- such people are quick to spread falsehoods. Slanderers enjoy spreading gossip and malicious reports about others. Destroying another's good reputation gives them perverse pleasure.
- **Without self-control.** These people cannot restrain their actions, their feelings, or their words. The NRSV translates this as "profligates" -- people who are thoroughly and shamelessly immoral. Their character is completely debased.
- **Brutal.** The opposite is tame or civilized. Brutal people are like untamed animals, or "uncivilized" people. They are insensitive and crude, even savage and cruel.
- **Haters of good.** These people are so evil that they actually hate (despise) anything good.
- **Treacherous.** Treacherous people are traitors -- ready and willing to betray anyone. In some cases, betrayal of another might enhance a person's standing or enrich him or her; at other times, the betrayal could be a vengeful act. Combined with slander (3:3), truth goes by the wayside.

- **Reckless.** This characteristic can also be translated "headstrong" (NKJV) and "rash" (NIV). Such people act foolishly and carelessly, completely unconcerned about the consequences for themselves or others. The word headstrong includes their determination to have their own way, regardless of advice to the contrary.
- **Conceited.** Such people have a puffed up opinion of themselves. People with this trait have an exaggerated opinion of their importance, intelligence, wit, appearance, etc. The idea differs from "lovers of self" in verse 2, for that trait can at least be concealed, while the very nature of conceit involves being noticed by others.
- **Lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.** The list ends, as it began, with those whose love has become so misdirected that they can only think of their own desires. Those who fail to acknowledge God eventually aren't able to love God!
- **Having a form of godliness but denying its power.** Often these evil characteristics appear in a context of respectability. Religion is not gone; in fact, these character qualities are frequently exhibited by people known for their "religiousness." However, as Paul wrote, they practice a form of godliness -- that is ... using godliness as a cloak of respectability while denying God's power over their lives.

The *"form"* or appearance of godliness includes ... going to church, knowing Christian doctrine, using Christian clichés, and following a community's Christian traditions. Such practices can make a person outwardly look good, but if the inner attitudes of belief, love, and worship are lacking, the public appearance is hollow, meaningless!

It's easy to read this list and think, *"You know, I once knew someone who fit this description, they were scandalous!"* But I think that Paul wanted Timothy and us to do some personal soul-searching as we read this list and ask, "Lord, is it I? Could I be drifting into holding to a form of godliness, but be denying its power to transform my heart?" **Paul's message to us is ... We must knowingly avoid empty religion and those who propagate it!**