

## 2 Timothy: 3:1-9 Is your religious routine empty, is it missing God's power?

God warns that in the last days men (and women) will be utterly sinful; they will be self-centered and godless in every way imaginable. If they happen to have an interest in God, it will be a veneer of godliness, meaning that they want to talk about God and use Him but in actuality they will deny His power. As we look at the world around us, it sure seems like we're already in the last days. People behave this way now; they see God this way now. How is a Christian to respond to all this?

**3:1**, God warns Timothy that the last days will be perilous because men will be completely wicked, 3:2-5. By last days God's referring to the time period right before Jesus' Second Coming. The world will be this wicked right before Jesus comes back. But "last days" also refers to Timothy's day and ours. That is, Timothy faced these wicked people then, which is why God tells him to avoid them, 3:5. So last days refers to the time period between Jesus' First Coming and His Second Coming.

**3:2-4**, just how bad will men (and women) behave in the last days? They will be utterly selfish, in love with wealth, proud, arrogant, demeaning, disobedient, ungrateful, godless, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, degenerate, savage, haters of good, betrayers, reckless, conceited, and devoted to pleasure instead of God. This is what Timothy is facing now in Ephesus and it reveals that nothing much has changed since the five years that Paul wrote 1 Timothy (Paul wrote 1 Timothy about five years prior to 2 Timothy). Thus what Timothy faced five years ago—unruly, wicked leaders who led the people astray with erroneous and false interpretations of God's Word, which led to a myriad of problems among the men, women, young, and old (1 Timothy 1:3-7, 19-20; 2:1-15; 4:1-3, 7; 5:1-16; 17-25; 6:1-10; 17-21)—is still a problem.

This is why Paul said what he said in 2 Timothy. That is, Timothy appears to be wavering from confronting these wicked men, from fulfilling the job God gave him, which is why Paul urges him to rekindle what God gave him, 1:6-7. Timothy must take the Lord's promise of life, the Gospel and way living it that Paul taught him, and proclaim it boldly. After all, God will give him the power to do it, regardless of the fears confronting him, 1:8-14. Timothy must not be like everyone who's turned their backs on God; he must be like Onesiphorus whom the Lord will reward for his faithfulness and endurance, 1:15-18. He must pass down the Gospel and way of living it to men who will teach succeeding generations, 2:2. He must shun those opposing and perverting God's Word, who love to fight over it; instead, he must correctly handle God's Word, 2:14-18. And if he has opportunity, he must use God's Truth to correct those who've been taken captive by the Devil to do his will, 2:23-26.

**3:5-7**, but there's a problem: though Timothy will be able to rescue some of those who've taken Satan's side in opposing the Gospel, he will not be able to turn others around. These men will reject God's Truth. Why? Because they are men of the last days, thoroughly wicked and uninterested in God except to use Him for their own gain, 3:6. They appear godly, they even preach God, but in reality it's a pretense, in reality, they completely reject God's power and ability to transform. They're not interested in transforming their lives or the lives of those they lead. Instead they use the Gospel to take advantage of the gullible, like women who are so loaded down with sins and lusts that they fall prey to these wicked men. They're looking for relief from any and every new teaching that these wicked men bring; they're always learning the latest doctrinal fad but are never able to come to the knowledge of God's Truth. In the end, the problem of those who are taken in by the lies is not a failure to study; it's a moral problem. They recognize their sinfulness and are looking for refuge from their guilt and shame but instead of turning to God's Truth, they turn to the latest knowledge taught by these wicked men. The only thing Timothy can do with wicked men, who take advantage of such people, is avoid them.

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**3:8-9**, these wicked men resist the Truth the way Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses. When God sent Moses to confront Pharaoh to let His people go, there were sorcerers and magicians who opposed him. But Scripture never gives their names. So where did these two names come from? There are many things that Rabbinic tradition says about God and His people and what happened to them. Some of these things are fanciful and unsubstantiated. But other things that Rabbinic tradition asserts are confirmed by Scripture and this is one of them. That is, God confirms that two of Pharaoh's sorcerers who opposed Moses were indeed Jannes and Jambres.

And when we look at the confrontation between Moses and Pharaoh's sorcerers, we see that what Paul said of them in 2 Timothy 3:8-9 is true. That is, Paul says that the wicked men, the men of the last days, who are opposing Timothy in Ephesus will not last because their folly will be manifest to all just as Jannes' and Jambres' folly was revealed to all when they opposed Moses. For example, in Exodus 7:8-13, Aaron's rod turns into a serpent and Pharaoh's sorcerers are able to duplicate this miracle. However, Aaron's rod/serpent swallows their's up. In Exodus 8:16-19, Moses and Aaron bring the plague of lice. However, Pharaoh's magicians can't duplicate it and in fact say to Pharaoh, "This is the finger of God." In Exodus 9:8-12, Moses brings the plague of boils and not only are the sorcerers unable to duplicate this plague, they walk away from Moses defeated and covered with boils. Thus, just like Pharaoh's sorcerers were unable to progress no further, the wicked men opposing Timothy will likewise progress no further. God will uncover them as men who are of "corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith."

Our religious routine must not be like that of the men of the last days, empty and devoid of God's power. Such men and godly-sounding advice promise absolution from our sins, from the guilt and shame we feel. But in reality they deliver nothing. Instead of drawing us closer to God and His power to transform our lives, it's a mere veneer of godliness. We must cling to God's Truth and live by it. This will protect us from falling prey to the latest spiritual fad.