

Here in 2 Timothy chapter 3, we're looking at this first section, the perilous times that can come in later days, not only literally in the progress of human history, but also in our own lives. All of us in the sound of my hearing—the sound of my hearing, the sound of my voice—you're hearing my voice. All of those of you hearing my voice at present have been believers a while. And all of us are subject to the sort of unconscious creep of taking things for granted or forgetting to pay attention to the basics.

And what does it really boil down to when you look at this passage and you say, “All right, that was fun to look at in the Scripture, but I've got work to do. I have tasks to accomplish. I have responsibilities to fulfill.”

What difference does this make for me? And the bottom line is, we are constantly under the observation of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. The circumstances of our life, whether it is our health, our relationships, our jobs, the tasks and responsibilities, and whatever it is that faces us in a day, has been put here, not because God needs somebody to do them. They have been put here for us to navigate. These are the story problems at the end of the instructional chapter in almost any textbook.

When you think back to grade school, junior high, there is material that is given. These are truths of mathematics or truths of physics or truths of geometry or whatever it might be. And then, at the end of the chapter, there were often story problems.

This is your classic: one train leaves Chicago and the other one leaves Boise, Idaho, and they're traveling at such and such a rate. And you have a rate-time-distance problem that is set as a story. How long will it take for these two trains to meet? Hopefully not on the same track. And where will they meet? How far will each train have traveled?

And our lives are like those story problems. God isn't just interested in people getting the laundry folded or getting a job accomplished or having conversation take place or the next meal is on the table and the dishes are washed or the vacuuming is done in the house. What is God's reason for creating us? His reason for putting us on the surface of planet in this time and in this place.

It isn't because He needs an ant colony with all of the ants running around, picking up this and carrying it back to the storehouse. We are here specifically to make use of what we learn. Every conversation, every interaction with another human being, every application of our time, our talent, our skill, our effort, is supposed to be an implementation of what we have learned.

So, understanding this, being people of prayer and people of faith and people of hope, people endeavoring to express and reflect love, we view our life differently. Church is going to end here shortly, and we'll sign off and we'll set our Bible to the side, and we're going to go about the day.

Maybe get a midday meal, maybe try to accomplish a few things that need doing in the afternoon, maybe take a nap. But there will be waking time spent between now and this evening when we retire. What do we do with that time? Any godless, pagan, atheistic, agnostic unbeliever can spend time doing stuff.

It is only we who can redeem the time and invest it in eternity by doing what we do as unto the Lord. We saw it in Revelation chapter 2. The Lord Jesus said, “You are doing these works, and I commend you for that, but they're not the first works. They're not expressions of love. They're not characterized by that love that you understood, recognized, and responded to at first.”

That love, love for God, doing what we do heartily as unto the Lord and not unto men, that's love. That is a return of gratitude and appreciation for God's grace in saving us, dedicating our time, dedicating our efforts to God, to God's Son, the Lord Jesus, and to God's people, the body of Christ, our fellow believers.

Looking outward at what we do as an expression of love to God and love for one another transforms the very same works. You can fold a blanket and put it on the end of the bed, but you do it with an attitude of respectfulness toward God. “I appreciate that I've got a blanket to fold and I've got a bed to lay it on. I appreciate that there may be others in the household who won't have to do it for me.”

We can think our way into approval at the judgment seat if we change the way our mind works about our investment of time and our expression of labor. Why we do what we do is transformative, and that's the message

of the Lord Jesus to Ephesus through John in Revelation chapter 2. It is the message of the Lord Jesus to Ephesus through Paul to Timothy in our passage.

So I am not nearly so worried about the dangerous, menacing, perilous times that will come in the latter days of human history. I may or may not see and experience those days, but this passage wasn't locked up in an envelope to be opened at a few years before the rapture. It has been here for every single group of believers beginning with the congregation in Ephesus 2,000 years ago, and we are to look at this and we are to apply it.

We are to recognize that there are menacing, perilous, legion of demon-attacking times in our own lives, and it will rob us of reward. It will rob us of the approval of the Lord Jesus at the judgment if we don't wake up and recognize that doing good things is not enough. Expressing faith and hope and love is the transformative power of God.

So as we look at this description, we want to not so much look at society and say, "Well, I see these things happening." It is a peril to me. It is a menace and a danger to me.

For any of these things to creep into my heart, my operation, my conversation, my relationships, I've got to be super careful, be vigilant, be prayerful, have my mind set on things above, not things on the earth. This is something we can do, and we think, "Well, only if there's a great big decision—I'm going to marry someone, I'm going to move to a new community, I'm going to take a different job—I'll go to God and make sure these big things are done." This is what most of believers miss.

It is the small things. It's the conversation that I have with someone this afternoon. It's the chores that I perform. It is the small tasks, to dedicate those small things and do them in love for God, in appreciation that I have the ability. I am alive. I'm awake. I'm aware. There are things I am able to do, and it is all by God's grace.

What do you have that you did not receive? Scripture says we have been given so many wonderful things, and to be appreciative and to be content with such things as we have and to dedicate those in stewardship and faithfulness to our Father in heaven, to reflect the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the benefit of fellow believers and anyone else in the periphery—this is the task.

That's why love is at the center of this section of 2 Timothy 3:1 through 9. That's why it is the heart of the message to the same people in Ephesus, perhaps a generation later, in Revelation chapter 2. And it is certainly a message for us.

So what are these descriptions? This perilous, menacing time we saw in Matthew 8:28. But this has been true in a sense in every generation in between the Testaments. Remember the apocryphal books after the Old Testament canon is complete with the writing of Malachi. And then there's three or four hundred years of divine silence between the end of the writing prophets of the Old Testament and the coming of the Lord Jesus.

There is just silence. In that time, people wrote non-inspired works that are in some cases known as the Apocrypha or the Pseudepigrapha. One of those books is the Testament of Issachar. Remember, one of the sons of Jacob was Issachar, one of the tribes in Israel.

In the Testament of Issachar, written before our New Testament, listen to this description: "Know you, therefore, my children, that in the last times your sons will forsake singleness and will cleave to insatiable desire. And leaving guilelessness, they will draw near to malice, and forsaking the commandments of the Lord, they will cleave unto Belial. Leaving husbandry, leaving farming, they will follow after their own wicked devices, and they will be dispersed among the Gentiles and will serve their enemies."

Another one of those books is Baruch. And in Second Baruch—we remember Baruch was Jeremiah's scribe and annotator and factotum—in Second Baruch, we get a more vivid picture. "Honor will be turned to shame. Strength will be humiliated into contempt. Probity will be destroyed. Intelligence will be destroyed. Beauty will become ugliness. Envy will rise in those who had not thought aught of themselves. Passion will seize him that is peaceful. Many shall be stirred up in anger to injure others. And they will rouse up armies in order to shed blood. And in the end, they will perish together with them."

So when Paul wrote this to Timothy, there was already a tradition of expectation that perilous times would come. The Jewish view of the world was that you're in the present and God's grace and provision are available, but there is going to be the rise of evil, and God is going to have to come and conquer that evil and expunge it,

much as the Israelites had to expel the Canaanites from the land of promise so that they could dwell and enjoy the milk and honey of God's promise.

So they recognized that this was a paradigm for larger things. And it is the same with us. The more faithful and obedient we are, the more we will be subject to attack from the outside and the dangers of becoming lazy or inattentive on the inside. Love is the driving measure.

So the self-centeredness here, love of self—we talk about something that is automatic, and autos is the word that is used for self. And so philo autos, or philautos, is love of self, prioritizing self-love. And then the second one is lovers of money. We've talked about this, the material goods.

Ephesus was an enormously successful and prosperous place of commerce. There were roads that intersected there. It was one of the most prosperous areas in all of Asia Minor. It was at the mouth of the River Cayster. Trade routes came through there. The Euphrates Valley—you would come through Colossae and Laodicea to get to Ephesus. And these communities garnered wealth and prosperity from this commerce.

And so these people understood what it was to be enticed and lured by prosperity. There is money to be had. And the description you have in Revelation chapter 18, verses 12 and 13, of the prosperity of Babylon has been true down through the ages. It was true of Ephesus.

Remember, in 18:12 and 13 of Revelation, it says there was cargo of gold and silver and jewels, pearls, fine linen, purple, silk, and scarlet, all kinds of scented wood, all articles of ivory, all articles of costly wood, bronze, iron, marble, cinnamon, spice, incense, myrrh, frankincense, wine, olive oil, choice flour and wheat, cattle and sheep, horses and chariots, slaves, and the souls of men, the lives of men.

You hear about the porosity of our southern as well as our northern border. And one of the things that it promotes, and you think, “How is this even possible in the modern day?” The human trafficking. That's true of our country and the countries that surround us and the nefarious people who are now trafficking in children and women who are used for all kinds of abusive purposes.

It is taking place now. We're blind. We're inured. We don't think about it. We're not exposed to it. But you find out from the accounts of people involved in the control of immigration and control of our borders, this is one of the biggest problems. Drugs and human trafficking have been rife, especially with the lax policies of the last few years.

And that is the description in Revelation 18:12 and 13. That is the description in the latter days. And it's hard to believe. But to measure by economic levels, to measure by prosperity or material goods, possessions, is always a mistake.

The next word here, when it says “boasters,” the boasters word is fascinating. This is the word alazōn. And it comes from a word, alē, which—it's kind of like in French. French allé means “to go.” Well, this goes all the way back to the Greek. Alē, A-L-E, means to wander about, to move about.

And the alazōn originally were wandering quacks. They were snake oil salesmen. The guy in The Wizard of Oz that has his little trailer and he's got the crystal ball. And here's an elixir, Carter's Little Liver Pills, and these other remedies that were a mixture of kerosene and sugar water and whatnot.

And we still have it in the modern day. Anytime you see the little warning, “The FDA has not evaluated these statements,” for eat these beet juice or eat these pills or get this ground-up vegetables and fruits in these pills and so on. Are they actually effective?

All of the shelves near the pharmacy, it's deceptive because you go to the pharmacy at any big store and the actual pharmaceuticals that have been tested and approved and have an effect, the antibiotics and the different treatments, they're behind that window. And you've got to have a doctor's prescription to get them. But right on in front, there are rows and rows and rows of St. John's wort and other things.

And are they effective or are they not? Well, who knows? In many cases, they've not been scientifically tested. And even if they say this ingredient has been shown to have an effect, okay, but under what conditions? Have you combined it with something that makes it unavailable to the human body, and you're going to take a

thousand milligrams of vitamin C, but it's going to pass right out again because it was combined with something that doesn't let it get released into your system?

If it gets released into your system, is it going to go where it needs to go to do what it needs to do? And in many cases, people are spending all kinds of money, not just on pharmaceuticals. And that's a problem. Big Pharma is a problem unto itself, but also all of these other remedies and anecdotal information. Much of it is just outright quackery.

And the Greeks had a word for this, and it was *alazōn*. That's the word that is used here for boasters, because these people had no qualifications at all. And they traveled around with medicines and spells and attempts at exorcism of demons and so on. And they said, "Well, these are remedies. This will fix you up." And they advertised and made claims about these alleged medicines.

This profession is centuries old, millennia old. People have been doing this forever. It preys on the hopes and expectations of people who aren't well-informed and takes advantage of their ignorance and pulls the wool over their eyes. That's an *alazōn*. That is this boaster. It is someone who takes advantage of the ignorance of others.

You see this in politics. There were descriptions of this back in Plato and Aristotle. Aristotle said an *alazōn* was someone who claims good things that he does not really possess. "I can fix it. I will make it better." The man who pretends to creditable qualities that he does not possess or possesses in a lesser degree than he makes out.

Xenophon, author of the Peloponnesian Wars, has another book and is talking about how Cyrus, the Persian king, defined the *alazōn*. "The name *alazōn* seems to apply to those who pretend that they are richer than they are or braver than they are, those who promise to do what they cannot do, and when it is evident that they do this only for the sake of getting something or making some gain for themselves." Cyrus the Persian. How old is that?

Xenophon, I think that was in the Peloponnesian Wars. In the *Memorabilia*, another one of his books, he tells how Socrates condemned such imposters. Socrates said they were to be found in every walk of life, but they were worst of all in politics. Here's a quote from Socrates: "Much the greatest rogue of all is the man who has gulled his city into the belief that he is fit to be in charge of it."

Notice that word: he has gulled them into it. He's fooled them into it. He's deceived and beguiled them into it. That's where we get the word gullible, which is the word we have down in verse 6, making captives of gullible women. You are able to gull them. You're able to convince and persuade them of something that is completely false and unhelpful.

The world is full of such people to this day. They are braggarts. They make claims that they cannot possibly fulfill. They are know-it-alls, and their cleverness is not in their accomplishments. Their cleverness is in how they can gull people into believing them. That's their talent. That's their skill.

Politicians who claim that they or their party has a program that will bring in the utopia. They alone are born to lead. People who crowd the pages of advertisements with claims to give beauty, knowledge, health. People in the church who have an ostentatious goodness. "We will plug into society and make it better." So that is the boaster.

The next one is the proud. Proud here is *hyperēphanos*. You know what *hyperēphanos* is? That's hyper. If you hyperventilate, there's too much breathing. If you're hyperactive, there's too much activity. Well, this is *hyperēphanos*.

*Ephanos* comes from the word that we get epiphany from, to reveal. And so this is TMI. This is too much information. This is putting yourself above what the facts will support. You say more about yourself than is really true. You put on a shine. You put on the self-promotion that isn't justified.

So this again, there are Greek references to this. It literally means to show yourself above. You're going to project yourself above. Theophrastus had a contempt for everyone except himself. Theophrastus says the *hyperēphanos* is a man who basically has contempt. It's well concealed. He's guilty of the sin of the high heart or sin of the high hand. He's the man whom God resists.

It is repeatedly said in Scripture that God receives the humble, but resists the proud. You remember this in James 4:6, and it's repeated in 1 Peter 5:5. God resists the proud. The word proud there is this word *hyperēphanos*, those who project themselves above others. It's an appearance. It's not a substance.

And that, of course, is a quote from back in Proverbs 3:34. There is a difference between the braggart and the proud. The braggart is a swaggering individual, blusters his way in under false pretenses, sells you something that doesn't work. You can pretty well spot them. People say, "You know, he's a snake oil salesman." But the arrogant in the heart is more difficult to spot.

In many cases, there is a hypocrisy. There is a facade of humility. Man looks on the outward appearance, and the Lord looks on the heart. So these two descriptions, one is the obvious person trying to put it over on others, but the proud is more subtle, more artful, exercised with more intelligence, and is thus more deceptive.

And in many cases, more persuasive. You can spot somebody making a claim that they can't possibly prove, but you can't always spot someone who, while they have an appearance of godliness, they are actually lovers of self. And they are actually looking down on you. They're underestimating you. They're manipulating you or seeking to. And they have an all-consuming, all-pervading pride. And the altar at which they worship is dedicated to themselves.

So what is the result of these two things? If you are either outwardly trying to big-deal people or inwardly, that is the motivation for how you treat people and what you do, the result of this is blasphemy. And you notice that the third one after lovers of self and lovers of money, you have boasters, proud, and then blasphemers.

This is a transliteration. And you think, "Well, blasphemy, that's what taking the Lord's name in vain. So they're—that's what they're doing." Blasphemy is thought in English to be insulting God. The root of this word, blasphemy or blasphememe, is to insult.

And so if you say or do things that are insulting to God—His name, His reputation, His Word, His Son—we say that's blasphemy, but it's basically treating someone in an insulting way. And it is true not only of God, but also of people. Pride always results in this.

If you have a superiority complex, if you think that somebody is messed up and you've got it figured out and they don't, sooner or later, that attitude will reflect itself in insult. You will either insult them behaviorally or you will insult them verbally. So this is accompanied by disregard.

If you have a low opinion of people or you have a low opinion of God, He's not where He should be in our estimation. It is going to give rise to disregard. "I know better than God." This is people who decide they were born in the wrong body. They weren't given what they should have been given at birth, when God is the one who determines our parents, our physical configuration, our heredity, even our environment in the early years. God is sovereign.

This is the proper application of God's sovereignty. And to rail against circumstances or to rail against something physical or something mental or our lot in life or why—you know, shall the thing formed say to Him that formed it, "Why have you made me thus?" Well, this is insulting. It is blasphemous to question why God made us the way He made us, put us where He put us, and has blessed us with both strengths and challenges in our life.

To think that we've got a better plan than God is blasphemy. It's insulting. You really think you know better than God, when He sees the end from the beginning? He can see things we can't possibly know or understand. He has purposes that transcend our own. His ways are higher than our ways. His thoughts are higher than our thoughts.

And to have the hubris and the self-esteem to think, "God shouldn't have done it this way. He should have done it my way," that's what blasphemy means. It's much more than some sort of verbal mistake.

Jewish rabbis placed the sin of insult high in the list of sins. The insult that comes from anger is bad but forgivable because it's delivered in the heat of the moment and someone will regret and apologize. But the cold insult that comes from arrogant pride is an ugly and unforgivable thing.

What was the sin that caused Satan to fall and a third of the angels with him? It is this pride, this ongoing blasphemous attitude toward God.

The next description here is disobedient to parents. This was prized in the ancient world, fidelity and duty to parents. In the ancient Near East, even in the Persian and the Greek and the Roman worlds, the connection and the duty to parents was in existence and was prized even when other aspects of morality went by the wayside. It was just understood that it was intrinsically good to respect your parents and to care for them.

The earliest Greek laws, when the Greek empire first began to rise under Alexander, the oldest of their laws took rights away from the man who struck his parents. You could be imprisoned and expelled for abusing your parents. To strike a father in Roman law was on the same par as murder. In Jewish law, honor for father and mother comes high in the list of the Ten Commandments.

One of the signs of a decadent civilization is when youth loses respect for age and fails to recognize the debt and the duty it owes to those who gave it life and built its world and laid the foundations and created an environment. In our day, this is an egregious fault in our culture.

Parallel to this is thankless. And this is very close to graceless. The word here is charis. That's our word for grace. Remember, charisma is that attractive quality that draws others. Well, this is charis with the alpha privative. It's graceless.

We talk about saying the blessing before a meal. And my dad used to say, "Let's return thanks, express gratitude, thankfulness." And so this is thankless, graceless. And all of us only have what we have because we have received it in some way. We didn't create the world. We didn't create our circumstances. We weren't in charge.

And to be characterized by ingratitude and thanklessness is concomitant. It is another facet of this complex of self-love and lack of love for others. And it is blind. Thanklessness is an expression of blindness. You don't even recognize that you owe a debt of gratitude.

Shakespeare puts these words into the mouth of King Lear: "How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child. It is honorable to pay one's debts, to recognize what we owe to others, to be people of gratitude first to God and then to others. It is one of the facets of genuine love for God.

And then after this comes unholy. The last one in verse 2 is unholy. And this is the Greek word, anosios. It doesn't mean that they're breaking the law. It means they're unethical and immoral. They don't have the moral fiber, the ethical understanding, a basic sense of right and wrong.

This in another place is what Paul describes as having their conscience seared with a hot iron. No conscience, blatantly self-interested, thoughtless and thankless toward others, and insensible to the immorality, the intrinsic wrongness of their attitude and their behavior. They offend the unwritten laws, the expectations that just a normal human conscience would have.

I remember when I was a kid, went to a new school in grade school. And one of the first days, I went out on the playground. It didn't have much of a playground. It's a rural school. And in those days there was just grass and a field on the other side of a fence. And there were frogs that would occasionally get into the area where elementary school children were released to expend their energy.

And a couple of guys that were in my class picked up these frogs and then threw them against the brick wall of the house and smashed them to death and were laughing and thought it was funny. That's this word. Insensible to basic, what people like to call human decency, but it is the divine spark of the knowledge of what is right and what is wrong.

And to override that and to suppress that truth in unrighteousness, that is this unholy. You are base and depraved and uninterested in the most basic kinds of right and wrong. That's the unholy.

Well, that gets us halfway through this list. And it is one thing to look around and see its expression in and among others, especially now that we have so much media and so much access to things near and far. But the reason this is written in Scripture is for our instruction, to look within ourselves and ask God to reveal to us the hidden things of the heart.

Am I insensitive in ways I'm not aware of? Am I blasphemous and insulting in ways that I've become callous to and indifferent to my own interactions and attitudes with and toward others? This is remedial for ourselves.

Even a good airplane gets a pre-flight check. Mechanics and especially the pilot will walk all the way around it. The assumption is it's a good airplane, but you don't just assume it's good like we do with our cars and hop in and head for the road with procedure with an organized and thorough and comprehensive view to make sure there is nothing wrong.

Rather than assuming that our airplane is good for flight, we should do a pre-flight check in the morning as we're doing our ablutions and getting ready for the day. We can do a pre-flight check. We can pray the Psalm 51 prayers: "Search me, O God, and know my heart. Try me. See if there is any wicked way in me. Purge me with hyssop. Make me clean. Wash me so that I can be whiter than snow. Help me to see my hidden faults."

Psalm 51 ought to be on the regular memorized list of Scripture. This is the attitude we need to avoid being these people without knowing it. How tragic to look in society and say, "Look at those unthankful, unholy, disobedient, immoral, snake oil salesmen, arrogant, proud, boasting people," and we ourselves are doing the same thing. How tragic. How scary.

Don't worry about other people. We can't change them. We can be a witness without a word by becoming the opposite of this list, by cultivating the characteristics of 1 Corinthians 13, by remembering any place we have departed from love and going back and doing the first works. That's the key.

If we remember who we are and why we're here, we will be a witness and a testimony, a presence of the body of the Lord Jesus to all of those around us. We will be a blessing and not a curse. We will be supportive and not dangerous and menacing to those in our area of contact. It's up to us.

We can change our minds. We can examine ourselves to see if we are in the faith. We can be transformed by the renewing of our minds as we present ourselves a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This set of verses isn't for them. It's for us.

"Purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean. Wash me and I shall be whiter than snow."

Father, thank You for the warning, the encouragement to self-examination that we find in the pages of Your Word. Thank You that we can not only see the danger, but You have given us the solution. You've given us the power. You have enabled us to become that which is pleasing in Your sight, productive in Your plan, reflective of the glory of the Lord Jesus.

And we pray that as we do think about these descriptions, as we do search our hearts with the aid and the illumination of the Holy Spirit and the truth of Your Word, that we can truly be those who represent the Lord Jesus in this life. We can be overcomers who are blessed with the privileges that are promised to those who pursue right relationship with You, love for You and love for others. We pray it in Jesus' name. Amen.