

What Must the Church Realize?

2 Timothy 3:1–5



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

Writing from a dungeon cell and knowing death was near, Paul was passing the baton of ministry to Timothy, his younger protégé. From his years battling enemies of Christ and His church, the wise apostle knew the necessity of being prepared. Timothy’s survival and the church’s effectiveness depended on it.

Paul’s first words of 2 Timothy 3 sounded the alarm:

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. (2 Timothy 3:1)

The phrase, “You should know this,” communicates urgency, as if Paul were poking Timothy (and us) in the sternum with his finger, insisting we pay attention. What will the world be like in the last days—the days in which we now live leading up to Christ’s return? Paul cast a grim picture in the verses to follow.



Observation: Depravity on Display

Observation, the first step of *Searching the Scriptures*, involves looking carefully at the words of Scripture like a detective might examine clues through a magnifying glass. With what small but important word did Paul begin 2 Timothy 3:2? What connection does this word imply between the “difficult times” in verse 1 and the list that follows in 3:2–5?

According to Paul, the source of the difficulties in the world is *sinful people*. When seeds of depravity take root in people’s hearts, their evil influence spreads like noxious weeds, even invading the church.



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Paul detailed nineteen sins that characterize the people he had in mind. The chart below groups the sins into four columns and includes Paul's own words, transliterated from the Greek. Try pronouncing the Greek words to get the feel of the repetition of sound which Paul used to enhance the impact.

| 2 Timothy 3:2a | 2 Timothy 3:2b-3a | 2 Timothy 3:3b-4a | 2 Timothy 3:4b-5a |
|--|---|---|---|
| People will love only themselves (<i>philautoi</i>) | disobedient to parents (<i>apeitheis</i>) | they will slander others (<i>diaboloï</i>) | be reckless (<i>propeteis</i>) |
| and [love] their money (<i>philarguroi</i>) | and ungrateful (<i>acharistoi</i>) | and have no self-control (<i>akrateis</i>) | be puffed up with pride (<i>tetuphōmenoi</i>) |
| They will be boastful (<i>alazones</i>) | They will consider nothing sacred (<i>anosioi</i>) | They will be cruel (<i>anēmeroï</i>) | and love pleasure (<i>philhēdonoi</i>) |
| and proud (<i>huperēphanoi</i>) | They will be unloving (<i>astorgoi</i>) | and hate what is good (<i>aphilagathoi</i>) | rather than [love] God (<i>philotheoi</i>) |
| scoffing at God (<i>blasphēmoi</i>) | and unforgiving (<i>aspondoi</i>) | They will betray their friends (<i>prodotai</i>) | They will act religious (<i>morphōsin eusebeias</i>) |



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Write down your initial observations of this list. What repeated words do you see, and where did Paul place them in the list?

Which of these sins describe a person's heart—something that is a part of his or her nature?

Which of these sins are directed toward God?

Which of these sins are directed toward other people?



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Paul did not list the sins in random order. What do you notice about the sequence?

What is surprising—even shocking—about the last sin in the list?

The church can be a dangerous place, and those who are most dangerous are those we might think are pious. They will not look like the old caricature of the devil, and we tend not to think of them that way. But Paul reminded us of their existence. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Meaning of the List

In the interpretation section, we draw meaning from our observations. What deep truths did Paul intend his readers to understand? Let's dig beneath the surface and uncover vital principles from Paul's list of vices.

The Core Problem of Misplaced Affection

Paul began with misplaced affection, the root of all sin. Since the beginning of time, the devil's strategy has been to lure people away from God into the sanctuary of self where people "love only themselves and their money" (2 Timothy 3:2) and "love pleasure rather than God" (3:4).



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Write a principle based on Paul’s warning about the root sin of loving self rather than God.

This is the narcissistic individual at his or her worst. This is a self-lover who is a money-lover and, along with that, a pleasure-lover. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Disintegration of Character

Paul characterized those who worship at the shrine of self as “boastful and proud, scoffing at God” and “puffed up with pride” (2 Timothy 3:2, 4).

What principle can you draw from how loving self rather than God impacts a person’s character?

These individuals bluster their way through life, unconcerned if others notice their pride on display. They are arrogant. Abusive. Spend time with a self-lover who is a money-lover, boastful, and arrogant, and abuse will follow. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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The Breakdown of Families

When the inner cesspool of sin overflows, those closest to the person are the first to be poisoned. What sins cause family relationships to break down, according to 2 Timothy 3:2–3?

Write down a principle about sin's impact on families.

The first circle to be impacted by the self-lover who becomes a money-lover, boastful and arrogant, is the family. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll

The Fracturing of Communities

As Paul's list continued, depravity's destructive path widened to whole communities. Imagine workplaces, neighborhoods, and nations in which people "slander others and have no self-control," in which people are "cruel and hate what is good," and in which people "betray their friends" and are "reckless"—irresponsible, thoughtless, unrestrained, and violent (2 Timothy 3:3–4). In other words, imagine our world!



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Summing up Paul’s list so far, what truth or truths was Paul communicating about “the very difficult times” in the last days (2 Timothy 3:1)?

The Warning for Churches

Paul concluded by bringing depravity to our church’s doorstep. These sinful people “will act religious, but they will reject the power that could make them godly” (2 Timothy 3:5). What warning was Paul giving Timothy and all church leaders to come?

What final command did Paul give at the end of 3:5? What principle was he communicating about dealing with difficult people who can destroy a church?

Paul’s problem wasn’t with the lost person but with religious phonies who take advantage of their position. They are to be avoided! They do a church no good. They are scorpions in your sleeping bag. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



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Correlation: Leaders Who Understood Their Times

In the correlation phase, we compare other verses that can shed light on our primary passage. Looking back into the Old Testament, we find a helpful model for today's church from a group of ancient leaders. The writer of the Chronicles described these leaders in *1 Chronicles 12:32*. Write what they did and how their actions can guide us.

The writer of Chronicles tells us two things about the sons of Issachar. The first was their discernment, they “knew their times.” Second was their decisiveness, “they knew what Israel should do.” One was awareness, the other was responsibility. —Pastor Chuck Swindoll



Application: What Must We Realize?

We've focused on awareness of the dangers of depravity in our world and how unchecked sin can damage our souls, our families, and our churches. What new truth did you realize from Paul's warnings in 2 Timothy 3:1–5?



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Following Paul's lead, what warning can you offer those you love regarding the dangers of our times? With whom can you share this warning?

The spiritual storms on the horizon in Paul's day have struck. The battering winds of depravity are shaking our families and our churches. How can we stand strong against the torrent? Once we realize the dangers, what should we do? Paul will guide us in the next *Searching the Scriptures* study by teaching us how the church should react to our treacherous times. Stay tuned to Paul's next broadcast!



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, I'm grateful for Your presence and the simple truth of Your love for all Your children. Guard me from the temptation of loving myself over You and serving my interests and desires rather than Yours. Keep me safe in Your sanctuary worshipping You alone. Hold my heart in Your hands, and guide me through the storm into the safe harbor of my eternal home. In Jesus' name, amen.



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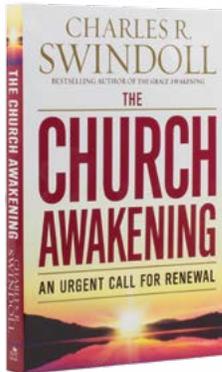
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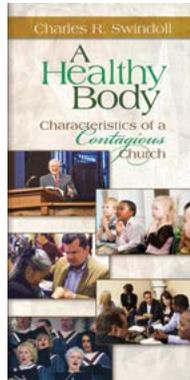
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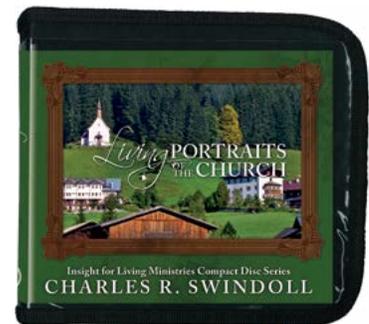
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