

Last Days (3.1-9)

- Not a phrase concerning some pre-apocalyptic time of global chaos and unrest.
- This phrase is about the time after Jesus' death and resurrection, awaiting his return—so the last 2,000 years.
- N.T. Wright has spoken of history as a five-act play: Creation, Fall, Israel, Church...
- The “...” is where we are, the last days.
- Remember Jesus' return is always depicted as a good thing (Rev. 21 & 22).

The False Teaching (3.1-9)

- The language of this passage is dark and desperate because the situation in Ephesus is so bad.
- There are some taking advantage of the weak, spreading false teaching, and demonstrating poor moral character.
- These are the problems *inside* the church, spreading like gangrene.

Idolatry Language (3.1-9)

- In verses 2, 5, and 8, Paul uses very particular language to elevate the problem from poor character to misplaced worship—AKA idolatry.
- Worship begins with trust, follows with love and culminates in service. Whatever we trust in, love and serve is what we worship.
- Idolatry is putting our trust in anything other than God.
- Consider a toddler who doesn't trust and love their good parent. They soon end up hurting themselves and destroying their environment—it's the same with all of us.
- The list here is all about the things opposite to God's character, the result of living the lie of idolatry and worshipping Greed, Self, and Power.

What Idolatry Produces (3.1-9)

- Take a look at that list again: boastful, proud, disobedient, ungrateful, unloving and unforgiving, slanderous, lacking self-control, cruel and hateful toward what is good, prone to betrayal, reckless, puffed up with pride, only concerned with one's own pleasure and hypocritical.
- This is obviously not Jesus' character.
- They were taking advantage of “weak women”—we don't totally know what this means as we only have one half of the conversation.
- Paul likens these people to the magicians in Egypt (Exod. 7), just like in that struggle only one God is standing at the end.

Who or What Do You Worship? (3.1-9)

- Sin isn't just bad behavior. It's misplaced worship.
- So when we find ourselves “missing the mark,” our first questions should be: “What am I worshipping instead of God?”
- Paul is confident that Jesus is the only true “image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15), and that in God we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17).

A Personal Example (3.10-13)

- Paul contrasts the false teachers with his own personal example.
- He notes that following Jesus in a world that worships nongods will create pushback—nobody likes being dethroned.
- He reminds Timothy of Lystra, where they probably met (Acts 16).
- He doesn't draw Timothy to an idea, but to his personal example.
- God has always chosen to work in the world through people—Abraham, David, the people of Israel, ultimately Jesus, Paul and Timothy, and now through us.
- It's in our hands to be this example.

In Our Hands (3.14-15)

- Again, Paul reminds Timothy to remember who he has learned from.
- This is the real heart of the letter: we don't just learn things, we strive to embody them.
- Paul points to the bigger story Timothy, and all of us, are a part of. The story found in Scripture.
- Timothy is to remember who he learned from, the story he is a part of, and strive to reflect that story with his own story.
- "Receive the salvation that comes by trusting in Jesus Christ"—it's almost a question. When the rubber hits the road, who do you trust? Who do you love? Who do you serve?

Discussion Questions

- How does this understanding of the "last days" change the way you see things? Does it?
- Have you had an experience where you realized some of your bad behavior was a result of an idolatry? What happened next?
- What are some of your idols? Greed, Self, Power, etc? What character do they produce?
- What examples do you have that help you to remember how to live rightly?
- How does renewing our understanding of embodying faith in Jesus benefit our daily thinking?