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# 1.

LIVING  
IN  
THE  
LAST DAYS



**Commonly** when the Bible speaks about the 'last days', it refers to the entire period between Christ's first coming and his second. Similarly, the expressions 'last hour' and 'last day' usually refer to the entire period. Thus, when the apostle John

writes his first letter he says, 'Dear children, this is the last hour; and as you have heard that the antichrist is coming, even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know it is the last hour' (1 John 2:18).

The idea is that the coming of Christ is so world transforming, now that the kingdom has already dawned, that the old world is petering out; it is coming to an end. We are now, already, in the last days.

When the apostle Paul refers to these last days in the passage from 2 Timothy, he is not telling Timothy to write down something that will be only for some future generation. The context shows that Paul is giving instruction that tells Timothy what to do now, in his own time: 'But mark this: there will be terrible times in the last days' (3:1).

More than just 'difficult' times; the word Paul uses, here rendered 'terrible', suggests violence or wild conduct. It's the term that is used, for example, of the Gadarene demoniac. There will be uncontrollable times, wild times, in these last days.

So what will be the characteristics of the ungodly that warrant such a label? In verses 2–5 Paul lists eighteen individual items and then adds a clause to give a nineteenth trait. The first four in the list depict selfishness. People ‘will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, and ‘proud’. According to the Lord Jesus, the first commandment is to love God with heart, soul, mind and strength. The second is to love our neighbours as ourselves. By contrast, these people are characterised first and foremost by loving themselves.

The reason the commandment to love God is first – that is, first in importance – is because it’s the one that we always break when we break any other. Whatever we do that is wicked demonstrates that we do not truly love God. The antithesis of loving God is worse than not loving God: it is loving something else supremely, most commonly ourselves or things that we covet. We become idolators: we do not love God supremely. Wallowing in self-love, it is easy to be boastful and arrogant.

The next two terms suggest socially destructive behaviour. We become 'abusive', whether in word or deed; 'disobedience to parents' characterises our conduct. Such behaviour to parents is not the only disobedience we manifest, of course, but it reflects a certain kind of rebellion of heart that is fundamentally against God himself. It is true, of course, that authority, even parental authority, can be abused and abusive, but then it is no response to be suspicious of all authority, for some authority is ordained by God. Disobedience to parents becomes a kind of benchmark: where there is disobedience to parents there is almost always a disobedience to all structure, a sort of in-your-face anarchy that is no less an anarchy against God.

Then, in Paul's listing, there are four 'un' words, that is, words that mark literally the absence of something: ungrateful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving. This list shows that sometimes sins manifest themselves in the absence of good, of virtue. What is missing is gratitude, holiness, love, and forgiveness.