

# Signs Of The Times II

Valley Center Seventh-day Adventist Church  
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I'm an heir. The piece of paper I hold in my hand right now is proof of that. Actually, what I hold is a copy from an original, but I'm prepared to accept it as valid. It's called a Will, or Testament. When an attorney files a will for probate, they are called "testamentary" papers. Before my mom died, she put down in writing who was to benefit from her estate at death, and my name is written there. She was under no obligation to include me. She had every right to leave her estate to anyone she wished.

Before she passed away, she could have changed it. But once she died, the terms of her will became unchangeable, and those terms name me as an heir of her estate. Because of this, I stand to inherit property or its cash value, which I did not earn. It was my mom's wish (her "will") that I be awarded this as a gift.

The only thing that would prevent me from receiving the benefits of her will would be my decision. I could deny that it is true. I could refuse to accept the gift. That would be my choice, and not her wish. When the estate is settled, I could tear up the check. That would be pretty foolish. I would only be hurting myself. I haven't heard of many people doing such a thing.

I hold in my hands another will. It's also not the "original," but a copy. But I'm persuaded to put my faith in it. The Bible is called the Old and New Testament, a word which embodies the same concepts as a will or testament does today. I know it would sound strange, but you could call the Bible the Old and New Will. Thursday night in His prayer, Jesus expressed His wish that we be with Him in heaven. He said emphatically, "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that

they may behold My glory which You have given Me." John 17:24. The King James Version says, "Father, I will that they also...be with Me."

It was His will that we be with Him. When Jesus died, His will became unchangeable. It was His wish, His "will" that I be an heir. The benefit that His "estate" offers, eternal life, is given to me. It is a gift, which I did no more to earn than I did the property contained in my mom's will. The only thing that prevents me from inheriting this gift is my own choice. I can deny that it's true; I can disown the benefits. But I'd only be hurting myself. Why would I, or anyone do that?

It is through Christ alone that we can receive this wonderful estate. That's because God originally created mankind with certain powers and capabilities. In Edenic perfection, he had authority over the animal kingdom **and** over himself. As long as mankind obeyed God's holy requirements, this estate was theirs to enjoy. But man sinned, and lost the "first dominion." The estate was forfeited through disobedience. But Jesus won it back, by His righteous life and meritorious death, and He offers to each one of us the restored dominion. He has made us heirs through His sacrifice!

In His will, or testament, Christ gave us much valuable information on how His estate will come to final and complete reality, upon His return in glory to this earth. He told us, as we studied last week, that before "deliverance" there would be "travail," just as when a woman gives birth. Today we will take a look at what one of His servants said regarding the times before Jesus' return.

Wrote the Apostle Paul, "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves; lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of

God, having a form of godliness but denying its power." II Timothy 3:1-5.

We need to back up a minute to better understand this. It's not that these characteristics have been absent from the human experience before the "last days." The truth is that the weeds of wicked behavior sprung up soon after the sowing of sin. The heart of man became degenerate and hard, and without the subduing ennobling influence of God's Holy Spirit, the heart of mankind will fall further and further into the chasm of sin. Man may flatter himself that he is quite good, incapable of committing heinous and revolting acts, but that's not the case. Without the restraining power of God's Spirit, man is left to the despotism and tyranny of Satan. And the devil will work his destructive intent through his slaves. It's only the presence of the Holy Spirit that prevents this.

God told the world through Noah, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever." Genesis 6:3. In His great mercy, God has given us the "earnest" or "down payment" of His will in the gift of His Spirit, but because He has endowed mankind with the freedom to choose, man may reject this Gift and be abandoned to the enemy. Someone will occupy the hidden citadel of man's heart, for he is unable to rule himself. Jesus told a parable once about a man who swept his house clean and evicted an evil spirit, but when that spirit returned and found the house empty, what happened? He brought with him seven spirits more wicked than himself and they occupied the "house." An "empty" house doesn't exist. There's no such thing as an unoccupied throne. One or the other; either God's Spirit or the devil's will rule the heart of man.

When man receives the strengthening power of God's Spirit, the graces of His character are implanted in his life. Paul described the fruit of the Spirit: "love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control." Galatians 5:22, 23.

What we've read in his second letter to Timothy is descriptive of the human heart devoid of God's Spirit. Right now,

God's Spirit is still ministering to human hearts, still "striving" with the world, although we see evidence of His withdrawal.

Last week we noted conditions in the physical world as they fulfilled signs of Christ's coming. Earthquakes, famines, floods and hurricanes are signals of the end, as the planet "waxes old like a garment." Like an old shirt, its fabric is being pulled apart by the stresses of age. We're saddened by the report of a horrific typhoon which struck Myanmar last weekend, leaving 22,000 dead.

The "signs of the times" that Paul is addressing in our passage today are of a different category. They aren't focusing on those things that demonstrate the aging of the earth. Instead, they are concentrating on the destructive behaviors that are symptomatic of a society which has turned her back on the only source of assistance to resist evil.

Let's take a closer look at what Paul tells us. "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come." Our word "eschatology," the "study of last day events," comes from the word translated "last." This is not something that is debatable. This is not something that might be. Paul says, "Know this". You can be certain of this: perilous times **will** come.

The word translated "perilous" means "violent, hard, severe, dangerous, fierce, savage, stressful and wicked." It's only used one other time in the Bible, but you'll get a very good picture of what it conveys by how it's used. It's the same word we find in Matthew 8:28. "When He had come to the other side, to the country of the Gergesenes, there met Him two demon-possessed men, coming out of the tombs, exceedingly *fierce*." That's not an attractive picture. It's the picture of men under the control of evil spirits. Paul uses the same word to describe the condition of mankind at the end of the age.

One school of theology taught some time ago that mankind was getting better and better. Moral worth was on the climb.

Eventually a pure and holy society would be elevated to live in harmony. I haven't heard too much from that line of thinking lately. The blinders have come off. The stark reality is too grim to deny. The moral worth of mankind hasn't increased. It's getting worse. The "head of gold" has degenerated into "feet of clay." Those who still might teach that earth's inhabitants are, on their own, making headway up the river of righteousness are in denial of Scripture as well as the plain facts evident for all to see. The truth is the opposite. God's Spirit is being pushed away, and another spirit is taking over.

Notice that the first application that Paul makes of this frightening development has to do with "love." In Galatians 5, we noted that the "fruit of the Spirit is love." Here we see that the fruit of the other spirit is also "love," but what a difference! The word that Paul uses comes from the root "phil", not the "agape" of I Corinthians 13 or Galatians 5. He couldn't use "agape" in this passage, because that "love" comes only from God, and these are the characteristics of those who have pushed God away.

But it is significant that the very first term in the list is a word which we translate as "love." It's the love of self. Just as the agape love in Galatians 5 is the fountain of all the features of Christian character, so the love of self is the root of all evil. The love of self was the virus in Satan which erupted into a planet of misery. After the Fall, man is born thinking only of self, but through the glorious provisions of the Gospel, an avenue is created whereby he, through the Spirit, can be changed. His heart can be made new, with a different center of operation. We are privileged to grow from the immaturity of a life centered in "my will" to a life centered in "His will." The converted Christian will not "seek his own," but will find his or her pleasure in honoring God and bringing blessing to others.

Not so, the one who has grieved away God's Spirit. That person will never grow out of the babyhood of selfishness. Forever the diapers of infantile behavior will be required. This

characteristic will grow stronger and stronger as God's benevolent Spirit is pushed away.

Paul goes on to say that men will be "lovers of money." This, and the previous term, appears as one word in the original. The literal meaning is "lover of silver," as Paul used a compound word including "*phil*" and "*argurion*". Peter said to the paralytic, "Silver and gold have I none." It's the word used in I Timothy 6:10 where Paul writes, "the love of money is the root of all evil." Quite often the word is translated "covetous," another trait of self-love. Self-seeking will be on the rise as we approach the end.

Paul goes on to describe other aspects of the characteristics marking society in the end. Men, he says, will be "boasters," a word which means "empty, braggart talk, insolent self-assurance." It used to be that modesty was considered attractive, but it doesn't seem so now. It's in fashion to boast. You hear a lot about "I" and "me" in the language of the world. "It's all about me" is a popular philosophy. To boast is a verbal outgrowth of the elevation of self, which is contrary to Christian principles. Self-denial, self-sacrifice, self-abnegation are the watermarks of Christ-likeness. **Self is to die** in the spiritual curriculum. Boasting, or expressing confidence in ones self, is out of harmony with the attitude of heaven.

It's interesting that the lexicon uses the word "empty" as part of the definition. That's truly accurate, because without God, we have nothing; we are nothing. All such self-proclamation will be seen as being without substance, without content when the curtain is pulled back.

The word "proud" means "haughty, arrogant, and disdainful." The word is a compound term, composed of *hyper* ("above," as in *hypertension*) and *phaino* "to bring forth light, or cause to shine." (Our word "*phenomenon*" comes from this root.) The lexicon gives the meaning, "showing ones self above others; conspicuous above others; pre-eminent." These are all traits of fallen Lucifer,

aren't they! He had been the "one who carried the light," but then it became his mission to turn the light on himself.

The word has the connotation of putting the spotlight on yourself, and turning the rheostat to its highest level. It is far removed from the graces of humility and modesty. When Saul was first crowned, in shyness he "hid among the baggage." Later, he became proud and haughty and demanded that glory be given to him. He was hopeful that the Philistines be defeated so that "he could be avenged of *his* enemies." The spotlight was on self. In contrast, David declared the battle "to be the Lord's."

The word "blasphemy," which is a transliteration of the Greek word, means "to injure the reputation of, revile, defame or slander," and includes all abusive language. Our words are important. They carry weight. Of every idle word, said Jesus, we shall give account. When we speak evil of our neighbor, we blaspheme. When we use His name in a way that does not express homage, we blaspheme. When we live in a way that contradicts our claim as Christian, we slander God, and injure His reputation.

Paul said that disobedience to parents would be an indicator of the last days. The word he uses comes from the root "to disbelieve," and begins a string of five words expressed in the negative. Never before in history have we seen the systematic dismantling of the family unit as today. The pendulum as swung, from instances of child abuse, which are indefensible, to an over-protective mentality that makes it a crime to spank in some localities. The Biblical wisdom "spare the rod and spoil the child" has been debunked in favor of more modern psychological insight. The media constantly portray the parent as the goofus and the child as the one of superior intelligence. A concept such as being obedient to your parent sounds foreign in today's liberal culture.

Ingratitude, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers and without self-control Paul mentions. The word "slander" is from the

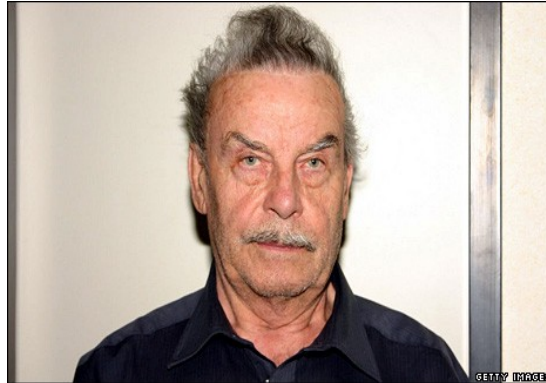
Greek *diabolos*, from which we get “diabolical” and “devil,” whose purpose has been to smudge God’s reputation.

Lack of self-control will characterize last-day living. Indulgence of appetite is encouraged. Self-restraint and temperance are archaic. Temperance is defined as the abstinence of all things harmful, and the judicious use of that which is good. Bill Bramanti of South Chicago Heights, Illinois enjoys Pabst Blue Ribbon beer, and so ordered his coffin to be made like a can of Pabst. Last Saturday, he filled the coffin with ice and Pabst and threw a party for friends.



Paul continues: “brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.” The word translated “brutal” means “untamed, fierce, wild, and savage.” In Mark’s description of the demoniac, he says, “neither could anyone *tame* him.” Mark 5:4. The inclusion of this term in Paul’s list underscores the truth that without the presence of God’s Spirit in man’s heart, he is reduced to the level of the brute beast. Nebuchadnezzar found out that by rejecting God’s influence, he went from being a king to a cow, and ate hay along with the cattle. What we’ve heard about the conduct of Josef Fritzl of Amstetten, Austria seems to fit in with Paul’s portrayal of life at the end. The 73-year old retired electrician imprisoned and

raped his daughter Elisabeth for 24 years, fathering seven children by her, keeping her in a windowless cell sealed by an electronic keyless-entry system. One of the children died in infancy, and was tossed into a furnace.



Pleasure-seeking has become the rage. For many, the substance of life consists in searching out the next thrill, no matter what the cost. The truth is that happiness cannot be obtained when it is searched for as an independent commodity. It doesn't work that way. True happiness is the byproduct of service to God and to others. The search for pleasure as a thing of itself will always prove futile.

It used to be that you'd see buses carrying children to church on weekends. The buses still run, but now they're filled with adults going to another kind of temple, where their "offerings" are deposited. How is it that the craving to get "something for nothing," the addiction for gambling, has taken over so strongly? Society used to recognize gambling as a vice; now it is hailed as a savior. What happened? Going to church has been replaced by every form of amusement and distraction.

"Having a form of godliness, but denying its power." The society of the last days, states Paul, would be characterized by many who claim to be God-fearing, but know little of His life-changing power in their experience. When the power of the Gospel takes hold of a man or woman, they are changed. They are transformed. They are not the same anymore. Their goals, aspirations, are now under the guidance of God. They are not

living for this world and its pleasures anymore. They have caught sight of the heavenly vision, and now everything is different.

There are many who today say they are Christian, but their life is a denial of their profession. True Christianity will always evidence itself in conversion, brought about only by the power of God. To say, "I am a believer," but refuse to allow His Spirit authority to transform my life, is to deny Him the opportunity to put on display the greatest miracle of all, the restoration of character.

Reading this list from II Timothy is like scanning the newspapers of today. But here's a question: Does God need the world to get worse before He comes back? I don't believe so! Remember, it's only an eleven day journey from Sinai to Canaan, but because of unbelief, that period stretched several decades. Paul wrote, "The earnest expectation of the creation waits for the revealing of" ....what? how do you think that verse ends? "Creation waits for the revealing of the Son of God"? That would be a true statement, and there are passages in the Bible to support that notion, but that's not what *this* text says. It says, "Creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God." That's what God is waiting for: the demonstration of His grace in the hearts and lives of those who have accepted Him.

What is the message of God's Word today? It is that we have been made heirs in Christ. We are named in His will, and if we don't refuse Him, He will operate in our lives to restore us into His likeness today, and will someday give to use the gift of immortality.

Because of sin, we desperately need His Spirit to be in us, because without His help, we will degenerate into something little more than an animal. All the characteristics of Satan will be bred in us. Things we didn't think ourselves capable of doing, he will inspire and lead us into.

Pray today for God's Spirit to revitalize us! Pray for His Spirit to bring new life to our beings! Pray that soon Jesus will come!

### "On The Down Grade"

"Even the most confirmed optimist, were he entirely candid, would be forced to admit that the standard of personal virtue and public morality in these times, if not actually waning, is really making little progress toward a higher plane. No one can view the daily movements of civil society in this land at the present time without becoming profoundly impressed with the thought that there is a great moral leakage going on somewhere amidst the complicated organism of individual, State, and national life.

"This deficiency is not particularly discernable in any one direction or country more than another, but it consists principally in the gradual and general lowering of moral tone and sensitiveness to shame in public thought and private activities. Many things are passed by now or merely winked at, which ought to excite pronounced abhorrence and indignant comment. There seems too little of a restraining sense of honor among the people. Too many are inclined to do that which is right in their own eyes, and no notice is taken of such variations in conduct unless they happen to conflict with the civil law or with the private interests of other parties.

"Even the absence of personal virtue is not generally considered a crime, if the person himself in other respects is a useful citizen, and especially if he has considerable wealth and influence. Thus, in rebounding from the excessive strictness of Puritan decorum and morals, we are fast going over to the opposite side of Parisian looseness and reckless license.

"This, however, is only the negative side of the matter. On the positive side there is obviously a very marked increase of all

kinds of crime. Murders, robberies, embezzlements...lying cheating, housebreaking, fighting and drinking are now as common and regular as the succession of day and night. Every paper is full of such occurrences from week to week the year around. There seems to be no break or let-up in the hideous procession of criminal events, but, on the contrary, they are apparently growing more numerous and sanguinary in character. The apology of increased publicity which is sometimes offered as an explanation or a reason of this rampant criminality will not always hold good. Every one with two eyes and a medium share of common sense knows as well as he knows anything that the spirit of lawlessness is ruling among the people in all civil and social spheres today with more potent auxiliaries and to a great extent than formerly, and that many of the prevailing habits, customs, and practices of men and women are growing morally worse instead of better as the world becomes older and larger. To try to smooth over this ugly fact, or explain it away in self-justification, is cowardly and uncandid. In business life, methods of adulteration and fraud are openly resorted to and justified without the least appearance of shame or compunction of conscience. In politics, deception and perjury are as common as elections, and every one knows it. Why, then, pretend to deny it? What good can every be accomplished by indulging in shallow and commendatory excuses, when the loathsome cancer of criminal infection is eating steadily inward towards the center and seat of personal and national life?

“How has this state of things come about? Chiefly from two causes. The first is through the rapid and abnormal growth of selfish, money-making greediness....Money is all that is thought of or cared for by the masses, and in the hot pursuit of this supreme object many better things are allowed to go by the board or take care of themselves as best they can. In a very emphatic sense this raging love of money is one of the principal roots of all our social and civil defections and evils.

“But another cause, equally potent and prolific, is the growing laxness of moral and religious education at home and in

the church. The sense of active and personal obligation to God seems to be slowly dying out of the public mind. Every man is too much becoming a law unto himself. Some of the churches are little more than fine religious club-houses, with private germs of admission and an annual fee. They do a certain amount of good among their own members, but exert almost no power of the outside sinful world. Ministers meet their limited congregations weekly, hammer out a smooth essay on doctrine, make a few appointments, and then, one and all, and go home for a season of rest. If any unbeliever publicly attacks their creed, they will throw after him a huge bundle of deluding statistics and then retire with a feeling of victorious complacency within their own exclusive circles. But where is the moral power which is designed to make men lead better lives and abhor wickedness in thought and in conduct? Where is the public restraint against the commission of sin and iniquity?

“When the morals of the church have fallen so low, and the state of society has become so corrupt, as to call forth such a scathing rebuke in a secular daily, it would seem high time for the churches to set about remedying the evil.” Editorial from *The Oregonian* (a secular newspaper), April 27, 1884.