

Counsel for the Last Days

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[0:00] The days and the times in which we live. And verse 1 it says, But of the times and the seasons, brethren,!

Note there the last days.

The days and seasons. The day of the Lord. Well, maybe this day of the Lord could be next year. Could it be?

We know it's 2010, the year of our Lord. Isn't it? The year of our Lord. Could it be the day of our Lord comes in the year of our Lord, 2010? I'm not prophesying that this morning.

But it could be, couldn't it? Brother, sister, we should be prepared that it could be. That it could be. And days of darkness. Days of darkness are here. As we see, while some say peace and safety or security and claim some peace to the world.

[1:38] These are days of birth pains. Of travail upon a woman with child. And they shall not escape. Some are going to miss the boat.

In days of darkness, brothers and sisters, we're called to be children of light. Of light. In days of darkness. That's what we're meant to be.

It goes on. Verse 4. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness. That that day should overtake you as a thief.

Ye are all the children of light. And the children of the day. We are not of the light. Sorry, we are not of the night.

Nor of darkness. We do not belong to the night, it says there. We do not belong to the darkness. It's interesting there, isn't it? They shall say peace and safety, but sudden destruction shall come upon them.

[2:37] But ye, brethren, are not in darkness. They shall not escape. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness. You're in the light. You're in the day. Verse 6.

Therefore, let us, let us not sleep, as do others. But let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep in the night, and they that be drunken, are drunken in the night.

But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and foreign helmet, the hope of salvation.

For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us.

That whether we wake or sleep, in other words, whether we pass away in earthly death, or we're alive when he should come, we should live together with him.

[3:45] It's telling us there, let us not sleep. Let us watch and be sober. It's saying there the sense of the text, let us not go on drowsing and sleeping.

Let us keep on our guard. Let us be watchful. Let us be constantly on the alert, is the sense of it here. And let us be sober. Let us be self-controlled.

Let us keep our senses. These are days not for darkness and drunkenness like the world, but days of light, of truth, of soberness.

To be awake, to be alert, to be armed. Paul writes, these are the days. This is the response that we should have as children of the day, as children of the light, to put on that breastplate of faith and love.

And for in helmet, the hope of salvation. For God hath not appointed us to wrath. What a blessing. That we, as he's addressing the brethren, us, we, we're not appointed to wrath.

[4:56] Isn't that a blessing? But to obtain salvation. And yet, wrath is real. Wrath. God's anger and hatred and venom and ferocity and terror against sin.

God's judgment is real. And it's relevant. It's tangible. We can tremble at it and be conscious of it today.

But it is not for us. Thank God. By his virtue, by his salvation, we're free to live forever with him. And verse 11, it goes on. Wherefore, comfort yourselves together and edify one another.

Build up one another, he says. He says, be encouraging. He says, be building one another up.

Even as also you do. Verse 12. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake.

And be at peace among yourselves. He says, maintain peace. And the next section, looking at in three ways, in three sections here.

[6:12] Firstly, our conduct concerning people. Verse 14. Our conduct concerning people. He writes, now we exhort you, brethren. Warn them that are unruly.

Comfort the feeble-minded. Support the weak. Be patient toward all men. That pretty much covers everybody, doesn't it?

And verse 15. See that none render evil for evil unto any man. But ever follow that which is good. Both among yourselves and to all men.

It's telling us how we should conduct ourselves concerning people. Concerning our fellow man. Our conduct. Concerning people. He says, warn those who are unruly.

The disorderly. Those out of line is the sense of it. Those rebellious. He says to warn them. There's a place to warn. Brother, sister. There's people you know that you are to warn.

[7:18] He says, comfort. The feeble-minded. Some are faint-hearted. They're feeble-minded. They need your comfort.

They need your care. There's some that need your support. The weak. Uphold the infirm. Uphold those that are weak. And be patient toward all men.

Now notice their wives. Be patient toward all men. Of course, we, your husbands, we don't have to be patient with our wives because they're such blessed creatures.

And we don't have to be persevering towards them. But because they're such angels. And such blessings. But it says, be patient toward all men. Of course, it's meaning women too.

There's some women that you need a lot of patience with. Not my wife, of course. She's such a blessing. And verse 15. See that none render evil. For evil unto any man.

[8:19] It says, don't render evil to any man. It says elsewhere, speak evil of no man. We should not have an evil bone in our body towards another.

Not to render evil to another. Not to speak evil of another. As it says elsewhere. But ever follow that which is good. Ever follow it. He says, keep on pursuing this.

Keep on striving. Keep on chasing this. That you follow that which is good. Follow that which is good.

Both among yourselves and to all men. Elsewhere, Paul writes, overcome evil with good.

Overcome evil with good. When someone's evil to you, overcome it with good.

Always be striving. Always be pursuing that which is good. That which is going to benefit. That's our conduct. Number one concerning people. Secondly, next section is our conduct concerning God.

[9:18] Verse 16. Our conduct concerning God. And this talks about the will of God. The will of God. We should take that seriously, shouldn't we? Shouldn't we care about what God's will is for us?

Shouldn't we care what God's will is for our lives? Do we care about the will of God? Then we should care about these scriptures here. From verse 16. He writes, rejoice. Rejoice evermore.

In other words, always be rejoicing. Always be rejoicing. Shouldn't that be our spirit? Shouldn't that be our heart? Shouldn't that be our mindset?

Always be rejoicing. Rejoice evermore. 17. Pray without ceasing. Pray without ceasing. It's got the sense of that prayer.

Let it be unbroken. Let it be a prayer that's unbroken. Let it be an ongoing prayer. A life of prayer. A persevering prayer. Praying always. It says elsewhere.

[10:17] Praying continuously. Praying unceasingly. Praying perseveringly. Unbroken prayer. Do you pray? It's God's will that you should. That we

must.

Verse 18. In everything, give thanks. In everything, give thanks. Be giving thanks, he says. Whatever. Whatever betides, give thanks.

Make it a habit. Make it a constancy. This is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks.

For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you. He writes further, verse 19. Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying.

Verse 19. Quench not the Spirit. We believe in the Holy Spirit. We believe in the Holy Spirit. Stop stifling and suppressing the Holy Spirit.

[11:13] That's what he's saying there. Stop extinguishing the fire of the Spirit. We want the fire to blaze, don't we? We want to be on fire as a church. We want to be ablaze, consumed with God, with his love, with his message, with his truth, with spiritual life.

We want to be ablaze and flowing with God. We want to be on fire and alive with the Spirit of God. That's the conduct concerning God. That's the counsel that Paul writes concerning God. Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything, give thanks. For this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

Quench not the Spirit. Despise not prophesying. Thirdly, our conduct concerning self. Our conduct concerning self. We've seen the conduct, the counsel concerning the people.

The conduct, the counsel concerning God. And lastly, the conduct or the counsel concerning self.

Verse 21. Prove all things. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good.

[12:23] It's got the intention of scrutinize everything. Carefully examine. Carefully test and put to the test things around you. Put everything to the test.

Everything. And be constantly holding fast or clinging to that which is good. Cling to that which is good. Hold it fast to you. Hold it fast to you.

And then verse 22. Abstain or reject. Abstain from all appearance of evil. Even that which has the look of evil. That which has the perception of evil.

That which others could think is evil. Even though it's nothing of that. Don't even have an inch. Incy-wincy bit. Of evil.

Of that which others could perceive as evil. So that's that conduct concerning self. And he goes on.

Verse 23. And the very God of peace. Sanctify you. Make you holy. Consecrate you.

[13:19] Consecrate every part of you. To his worship. To his service. It goes on. Sanctify you holy. And I pray God. Your whole spirit and soul and body. Be preserved.

Blameless. Be preserved. Blameless. Be kept guarded. Blameless. Unto the coming. Of our Lord Jesus Christ. There's the context again. This chapter. The context is the day of the Lord.

It's the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. This is how we should live. This is how we should be. This is how we should live. Verse 24. Faithful is he that calleth you.

Who also will do it. God is faithful. He will do it. Brethren. Pray for us. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss. I charge you by the Lord. That this epistle be read.

Unto all the holy brethren. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Be with you all. Amen. What a blessing. Paul closes these remarks with the grace. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ.

[14:17] Be with you. Amen. Friends. Just to visit back that section about your conduct. My conduct. We're on the threshold of a new year.

Shouldn't we care about the will of God concerning us? Shouldn't we care about his will? It's the brink of a new year. It's the threshold of a new year. And we aspire, some aspire to New Year's resolutions and commitments.

So making commitments, so-called. Commitment. It's a glib word, isn't it? It's a throwaway line. I'm going to make a commitment to Christ. Yeah, sure.

Commitment. It's a word we just use so glibly and carelessly and thoughtlessly. And yet, we're living in the impending day of the Lord. The day of the Lord.

I've got some news lately, and I'll just read some extracts of the days that we're living in. Brothers and sisters, we should be on our guard. We should be on the alert.

[15:14] We should be awake. Global governance. Global management of the planet. Global management of the planet. That's the phraseology that we're hearing a lot of these days with the so-called man-made global warming.

And where is this government located? Someone writes here. And can you vote it out of power? No. Are we heading for a new system of control of the world system by unelected bodies in the EU, the European Union, the UN, the United Nations, the IMF, the International Monetary Fund, and the IPCC, Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change?

Maybe it's a whole lot more than just the world's getting a little bit warmer, something. But maybe it's more about who's going to run the planet in the future.

And Gordon Brown has called for the European Union to become a global warming policeman.

That's what he calls it. And there's some 700 new bureaucracies that are going to handle the enormous amounts of money that the world's going to pay in tax for this global warming.

This is the intention, ultimately. This writer goes on. What was agreed at Copenhagen will be followed by successive treaties which will gradually transfer more power to the bureaucracies once they are in place.

[16:52] He writes, The big question raised by all of this is whether global warming is a real catastrophe waiting to happen or a scare story being used by the global elite to bring in their desired global government.

And in the Bible it says, From the point of view of Bible prophecy, there are significant passages which do point to environmental disasters for the seven-year period of the Great Tribulation, which will precede the second coming of Christ to the earth.

On the issue of global government, the Bible says, That in the last days there will arise a world leader who will be given authority over, quote, Every tribe, tongue and nation.

Revelation 13.7 Last days, brothers and sisters. Another recent news story is this from the 21st of October 2009.

As many as 1,000 clergy may leave the Anglican Church and join the Roman Catholic Church, according to an article in the Times. Yep, they want to join the fold of Rome.

[18:04] And the Queen, who is the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, is said to be appalled at developments in the Church, as is Prince Charles. She is said to have an affinity with the Pope, who is expecting to stay at Buckingham Palace when he makes only the second visit to England since Henry VIII broke with Rome and established the Church of England 500 years ago.

The government of the UK wants to reform the rules, the laws, banning Catholics from succeeding to the throne. And since the monarch is always the Supreme Governor of the Church of England, this would seriously affect the very nature of the Church.

John Paul II, the previous Pope, defined ecumenism as seeking Christian unity, ultimately in the one holy Catholic and apostolic Church.

In other words, the aim of ecumenism, from the Catholic point of view, is that the non-Catholic Churches accept the supremacy of the Catholic Church, the primacy of the Pope and Catholic doctrine.

There's much more you could say. You can have a read of this later. But, brothers and sisters, the days we live, these are the end times. These are the last days. The last days. This is the present context.

[19:27] These are not days when we should have drowsiness and darkness and drunkenness. These are days we should be children of the light, children of the day.

We're living in an age where many are astray from the Bible, where being politically correct is more important than being truthful. Where the idols of pleasure and entertainment are universally worshipped.

As Paul Washer has said, over the epitaph of this generation, it will say, entertained to death.

Entertained to death, where amusement and pleasure and fun is our preoccupation in the Church scene too.

Days that call for soberness. Days of soberness. Days of wrath, which we'll be spared from, yet we should be mindful of.

Our world needs warning. Just to dwell on these next two verses here. Verse 21. Prove all things. Prove all things. Just to hone in on these couple of instructions for days of darkness.

[20:32] These are instructions for now, for today. He says, verse 21. Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. It's a good time for us to reflect.

As we know, New Year, we reflect, we remember and we think ahead. We wonder, what commitment will I make? What resolution will I make? Not that making resolutions is necessarily a good idea.

But having a self-examination is a good idea. Proving ourselves is a good idea because it's God's idea. We should examine ourselves whether we are in the faith, as he writes elsewhere.

Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. Brethren, it's time to prove, to test. It's time to be sold out. It's not time for us to play church.

It's not time for us to pretend that we're where we should be. It's time for us to get right, to get right. Hell is still hot.

[21:31] And heaven is still sweet. But ye, brethren, but ye, brethren, we're not in the dark. We're not in the drowsiness and the deadness and the drunkenness.

We're meant to be sober. And friends, when we read these current events that I've just referred to and like things that are constant of late, there's a spirit of the age that's at work.

There's a prince of the power of the air who's at work in all his darkness and all his demons. And all religion is hell-bound. All religion is hell-bound.

It's hell-bound.

We don't want religion today. It's going to do us no good. We need to prove. We need to test. We need to examine. We need to find what is God's truth. Find out what God wants for us.

[22:51] Discern is the sense of it. Prove. Search your heart today. Search your heart. In repentance for sin. In seeking the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

And prove all things. Is it good? There's many things going on about the church scene that you question. And we should question. Is it good?

Is it good? Is it good that there's extra-biblical manifestations? Is that a good thing? Is that a biblical thing? Is that going to benefit? Or is it not good?

Extra-biblical revelations. Extra-biblical doctrines. It is good to hold that which is good. Hold it fast. Hold fast the Word. Get into the Word. Search the Scriptures. Be saturated with it. It's been said of John Bunyan. He was so saturated with God's Word.

[23:48] Someone said that if you cut him with a knife, he would bleed the Bible. Wouldn't it be good to be so saturated with the Spirit of God, with His Word? So hold it fast. So hold fast the Word.

Hold fast the Gospel. Hold it fast. Declare it. Present it where you can. Hold fast the faith. And verse 22. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Now, in the schools today, they use this phrase. Zero tolerance. We could use a bit of that. I know there's a bit of that in the Sunday school too. Zero tolerance.

They're like bullying or harassment or whatever it is or whatever it could be. We need a zero tolerance policy. Not to be tolerant, but to be zero tolerant.

You know, there's a lot of talk about tolerance and inclusivity and all that sort of stuff. But God does not tolerate sin, does He? God does not tolerate that which is sin. He condemns it.

[24:48] His wrath is against it. And at New Year, we could think, shouldn't I have a zero tolerance policy towards sin? To abstain from it. To not have a bar of it.

Shouldn't I have a desire for God to change me from the inside out? From the spiritual level. To be radically changed. To seek God afresh and anew. To seek Him afresh.

To seek His face. To seek Him to radically change us. To know Him. To depend on Him. And to evaluate our life. He says, prove all things. He says, search yourselves.

Examine yourselves. Are you in the faith? Evaluate your life from God's point of view today. Not about some New Year's resolution. But taking a look at yourself through the mirror of God's Word. How do I measure up? And ask Him for revival. And we're prayerfully seeking God. We're calling it our revival camp. Not that we're going to have a Toronto blessing or something.

[25:49] But we're going to have God's blessing. Heaven's blessing. And we can have revival at the personal level. At the personal level. At the corporate level. That God will bless us with new life.

A new vision. New vigour. New energy. And fervour for our Saviour. To exalt and glorify Him. To magnify Him. To stand for the great biblical doctrines of the faith. And proclaim them. And friends, just to close. Reassess today. Reassess today. Prove that which is good. Is your life measuring up? Prove that which is good.

Abstain from that which is evil. Even the appearance of it. Even the perception of it. Reassess today. How is your loyalty to the Word of God?

Are you loyal to this book? To its truth? Are you obedient to it? Are you sensitive to the Holy Spirit? Are you devoted to the Lord and His truth?

[26:45] Devoted enough to follow Christ whatever. Whatever. I know I saw a gripping video clip of Christians in India. And from where our brethren have come from.

And showing persecution. Pastors getting hit on the back with big sticks. And bleeding in their faces. And driven out of schools and churches.

And men, women and children. Our brothers and sisters in India. And this is happening brothers and sisters. Because they love Christ. They love the truth. They love His Word.

They love the Scriptures. They love the Saviour. And this is what is happening to our brethren. Our brothers and sisters. Today. Now. Following Christ means a cost.

What's the cost for you? Might mean you might lose a few hours of sleeping on a Sunday morning. Or you might inconvenience yourself by having to put something in the plates.

[27:44] Or it might be that you're having to juggle your commitments around finding time to maybe open the pages of the Bible for a few moments. Brothers and sisters.

You've got nothing. You've got nothing to complain about. You have got no cost. It's pretty much cost free for you. You Western Christians here this morning.

There's no cost there. Scarcely a cost. There's no scars for you. Scarcely. Count the cost of Christ. Of His crucifixion. Of His blood.

Of His dying. Of His bleeding. Of His beckoning. Of His calling. Of His commissioning of you. To declare His truth to the world about you. You've got nothing to complain about today.

And yet we should be guarded. We should be alert. Just to quote Washer again. We should discipline ourselves to the purpose of godliness.

[28:45] Young men. Discipline yourself to prayer. Discipline yourself to the systematic reading of scripture. From Genesis to Revelation. Over and over and over and over again.

Discipline yourself in your speech. Discipline yourself in when you go to bed and when you rise up. This is a war. Discipline yourself. Paul says exercise yourself unto godliness doesn't he?

It's an exercise. It's a discipline. It's a commitment like an athlete would want to strengthen and reinvigorate and test and pull and strain and grow those muscles, that energy, that vigor, that life for that race.

Are you in the race today? Prove all things. Hold fast that which is good. Abstain from all appearance of evil. There's a holy terror that awaits the lost.

There's a terror. There's a real terror of the Lord. A wrath against sin. But thank God he's paid for it. It's fully paid.

[29:55] We've got entry. We've got access today. People today, let's appreciate that. Let us not sleep. Let us be sober. Remember, the wrath of God is against you if you're outside of Christ this morning.

The wrath of God is against you. He's calling for you like he called for Adam in the garden. Adam, where are you? You can't hide from him today.

You can't hide from his wrath. But as a believer, you're covered. You're shielded. You're sheltered. You're protected. The penalty's been paid.

Trust him today. Let us pray. Heavenly Father, we love and praise your name.

Thank you, Lord, for this new year ahead, for decisions we make, for choices we choose. Help us, Lord, to prove that which is good. Help us to abstain from all appearance of evil.

[31:03] Guide us, Lord, that we might know what is evil, even the perception of it, even that which has the look of it. Lord, forgive us for when we fail and miss that. Help us to prove all things and hold fast that which is good.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Let us close. Let us close.