

A warning and disclaimer: these texts from God's Word do not mince words. They are a tough assessment of a world at odds with God. We live in dainty times and don't like strong and clear descriptions. We prefer euphemisms and pleasantries. But the world of the New Testament, to include Jesus Himself, spoke boldly, plainly, and without "political correctness." Do not expect these passages to speak with the softness of modern times. They are a tough assessment of what is really going on.

That said, these texts do not mean that everyone who opposes Church teaching has all of these qualities. Texts like these speak to the collective qualities of the fallen world governed by a fallen angel. Further, since we all have fallen natures, we ought not assume a mere "us vs. them" scenario. For we who strive to come out of the world and not be of it, do this imperfectly and in stages.

Therefore take texts like these as a sober description of a fallen world governed by a fallen angel, addressed to believers with fallen natures, who need to be reminded of this, summoned to courage, and to love that speaks the truth lovingly.

Let's begin first with texts that describe the situation:

1. *Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age, according to the will of our God and Father (Gal 1:3-5).* The age then (and now) is described simply as an "evil age," for this world is at odds with God and what He teaches. This has been more or less obvious over the centuries, but Jesus Himself warns that the most consistent experience of His followers will be persecution and hatred from "the world" (cf John 15).
2. *And you were once dead in the trespasses and sins in which you walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind (Eph 2:1-3).* Thus the unrepentant are described as following the prince of this world (Satan), being in disobedience, living in the passions of the flesh, and destined for wrath. These are tragic truths for many unless they repent, and for us if we turn away from the faith.
3. *And even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, in whose case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving so that they might not see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. For we do not preach ourselves but Christ Jesus as Lord, and ourselves as your bond-servants for Jesus' sake (2 Cor 4:3-5).* Here, too, the confused of this age are described as being blinded and deceived by the "god" of this age and time. This is a prophetic description of the world in which we live. Do not excessively admire the wisdom or thoughts of this age. Science has accomplished much, but knowledge is not on par with wisdom, and wisdom is what this world lacks. Knowledge without wisdom is like a car without a key, or life without a known purpose.
4. *For the time that is past suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. With respect to this they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery, and they malign you; but they will give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1 Peter 4:3-5).* Sound familiar? Adultery, premarital sex, cohabitation, promiscuity, homosexual acts, and the acceptance and even celebration of all these disordered actions. Add to this our modern struggles with addiction and all forms of excess. And let anyone, like the Church, say that there should be limits and then just listen to the outraged cry: "Intolerant, bigoted, homophobic, uptight, hateful!" Yes, many are astonished that we do not simply join in their celebration of all of illicit sexual unions, debauchery, and greed. But see what the text says: we do not owe them assent; it is the unrepentant disobedient who will have to render an account to Him who will be their Judge.

5. *But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh* (Jude 1:17-23). In other words, do not be dismayed. These are unpleasant times, but not unexpected. For our part, we must not be fascinated, enamored, or discouraged. Simply and clearly draw back from this confusion and see it for what it is: ungodly, confused, worldly, and devoid of the Spirit. Have nothing to do with it.
6. *But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith, paying attention to deceitful spirits and doctrines of demons, by means of the hypocrisy of liars seared in their own conscience as with a branding iron, ...* (1 Tim 4:1-2) Notice again: lies, deceits, fallen, demonic notions, and seared consciences.
7. *But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of great trouble. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not loving good, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power ... so these men also oppose the truth, men corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith ... But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus* (2 Tim 3:1-8; 14-15). Yikes! All too familiar. And let's be clear that there are more problems today than just sex. Greed, consumerism, excess, the arrogance of our science, the thought that we know better than the ancients, the demand for comfort, and the insistence on flattering our arrogant egos are all common problems in the world. We who would believe and seek to come out of this world must examine our lives and repent of drives and actions like these.
8. *The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment, and especially those who indulge in the lust and defiling passion and despise authority. Bold and willful, they do not tremble as they blaspheme ... blaspheming about matters of which they are ignorant ... reveling in their deceptions ... They have eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin. They entice unsteady souls. They have hearts trained in greed. Accursed children! Forsaking the right way, they have gone astray ... For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved. For, speaking loud boasts of folly, they entice by sensual passions of the flesh those who are barely escaping from those who live in error. They promise them freedom, but they themselves are slaves of corruption. For whatever overcomes a person, to that he is enslaved* (2 Peter various verses). Yes, the hatred of the truth, the blaspheming, and the contempt for sacred doctrine are nothing new. But they are now more arrogantly on display than ever before, and the capacity to deceive multitudes is as never before.

Here then were many descriptions of what is only too familiar today. Sadly, though, it has returned on our watch and we need to take responsibility for the situation. We, as the Lord's witnesses, are supposed to be prophets to this world. If things have declined—and they have—it happened on our watch! As a Church, we have not been as clear as we should be; we have made compromises and been intimidated into silence. Parents, too, have been largely passive. And we have collectively and too easily tolerated contraception, promiscuity, cohabitation, divorce, single motherhood (absent fatherhood), and all sorts of confusion about life, marriage, and family.

What then are we to do? Here, too, Scripture speaks to witnessing to a dubious, resistant, and rebellious age. Consider some of these quotes:

1. *For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not come to know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe (1 Cor 1:19-21).* Preach with confidence, and when ridiculed, remember that the Wisdom of God is unfathomable to the world, but the thoughts of this age are foolishness to God. Do not be impressed or fearful at the foolishness that parades as enlightenment and tolerance. It will neither last nor emerge victorious. God and His wisdom will out!
2. *Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory (1 Cor 2:6-7).* Notice that the rulers of this world are passing away but the word of the Lord remains forever. Do not lose heart!
3. *Look carefully then how you walk, not as unwise but as wise, making the best use of the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the will of the Lord is (Eph 5:15-17).* Stay in conformity with God's will no matter how much the world scoffs.
4. *Walk in wisdom toward outsiders, making the best use of the time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person (Col 4:5-6).* Be gracious but clear. Give answers to doubters, with kindness but also with clarity! Do not hide; do not fail to answer.
5. *Sanctify Christ as Lord in your hearts, always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence; and keep a good conscience so that in the thing in which you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ will be put to shame (1 Peter 3:15-16).* Never, never, never defile the faith by bad conduct or inconsistency. And permit the joy of the Gospel to permeate your life such that people will notice and ask you for the reason. Not everyone in this world is so jaded that he will not respond to joy and the message of the truth.
6. *Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but wanting to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside (2 Tim 4:2-4).* Never give up. Preach and teach even if people scoff, walk out, write the bishop, or threaten. Preach, preach, preach, even if your own children scoff or manifest confusion and error. Many today will resist and quote "authorities" to seek to refute you. Just keep preaching. Stay anchored in the Scriptures and the Catechism. Read the Fathers and do not succumb to trendy revisions of the Word of God.

Well, let this be advice for difficult days. In times like these we need a Savior. And, thankfully, the Lord Jesus is still here. He himself was scoffed at, ridiculed, called a threat, and finally crucified outside the city gates. Let us be willing to go out and die with Him if necessary, out of love for this confused culture and the many who have been deceived.



In Times Like These – A Scriptural Guide for Troubled and Confused Times

Msgr. Charles Pope • June 29, 2015 •

There's an old hymn that says, "In times like these, you need a Savior, in times like these, you need an anchor. Be very sure, be very sure, Your anchor holds and grips the Solid Rock."

And indeed, there are very few faithful Catholics who are not astonished and dismayed at the rapidity of decline into confusion (sexual and otherwise) of a culture we once described as Judeo-Christian. Whatever our sectarian differences of the past (and honestly they were significant and embarrassingly many), there was at least a basic agreement on the fundamentals of biblical morality and the authority of the Word of God. Most of this is gone—and it has gone quickly.

The Supreme Court's decision on Friday was unfortunate but not surprising. Yet still the rapidity of what even five years ago would have appeared unlikely, bewilders and feels like whiplash. Make no mistake, in my words to follow I am not singling out people with a same-sex attraction. No, the situation is much broader than that. Those of us left holding to tradition and to some sense that maybe God and 5,000 years of recorded history should be respected in any number of areas, have suddenly become "outdated," "hopelessly out-of-touch," and even worse, "hateful, bigoted, homophobic, and just plain mean!" And all this because we have not snapped-to with the "new morality."

Yes, in times like these ...

The early Church certainly experienced a similar struggle. As the Gospel left the relatively sane but religiously hostile world of Judaism, it encountered the pagan world, not religiously hostile but morally confused by corrupting sexual practices and entertainment marked by violence and destruction to the human person. Sound familiar?

There is one difference, noted by C.S. Lewis in his *Latin Letters* (1948-53). The difference is that ancient Greece and Europe were a virgin awaiting her husband. The modern West is an angry divorcée. And this makes our task even more difficult as we seek to re-propose the Gospel to a cynical world that responds, "Been there, done that, and filed the annulment papers."

Nevertheless, we have much to learn from the early Church, which experienced similar decadence and confusion. Perhaps a survey of some texts that both describe the situation and offer advice may be helpful. With that in mind, permit these quotes, which both describe an all-too-familiar scene and also offer advice about what to do in the midst of confusion and storm.