



2 Timothy

RBS
2 Timothy 3:1-17

Lesson 3: The Sufficiency of Scripture

“All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Doctrinal Focus: Scripture is entirely sufficient to equip God’s servant for life and ministry.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17.

One of the defining marks of genuine Christian ministry, we have seen, is Christ-like gentleness. But the turbulence of the present age will stretch the patience of God’s servant to its limit and severely test his gentleness. Nevertheless, the apostolic example, the Lord’s power, and the sufficiency of Scripture furnish God’s servant with all that is needed for faithful life and ministry.

Verses 1-9

Paul does not paper over the difficulties that lie ahead. *“But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty”* (2 Timothy 3:1). *“Last days”* refers to the period between the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost and Christ’s coming again in glory at the end of the age (cf. Joel 2:28-29, Acts 2:17-18, Hebrews 1:1-2). With the second coming of Christ the grand history of redemption, which includes the Savior’s incarnation, death, resurrection, and ascension, ends.

The sordidness of the present age is graphically depicted in verses 2-4. Paul catalogues eighteen sins: *“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.”*

The list begins and ends with misdirected and perverted love. Love of God and man are the fruits

of genuine biblical religion (Mark 12:28-31). But life in the present age is defaced by love directed toward self, money, and pleasure—the love of God is conspicuous by its absence. Truly, what the heart loves reveals the character of a man.

Those who are *“disobedient to their parents”* ravage the very homes in which the love of God should be nourished and love of man modeled. In these troubled times, the home becomes the focal point of the false teachers’ attacks, and family life is robbed of its godliness and goodness.

Where godly self-control is absent, human relationships are disfigured by abuse, brutality, slander, treachery, and recklessness, fueled by the pride and conceit raging in the human heart and mind.

Taken as a whole, Paul shows Timothy the appalling condition from which believers have been delivered by the redemptive work of Christ and the environment in which God’s servant must labor until Christ’s return.

The list is painful to read because the wickedness that threatens the church comes not just from external attack. Frequently, destructive forces emerge from within its membership. Seeking to obtain a foothold in the church are those *“having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power”* (2 Timothy 3:5a). The false teachers mimic many of the outward patterns of religious

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life but are strangers to the sanctifying influence of biblical faith. Timothy must guard the gospel and God's church by avoiding such people (2 Timothy 3:5b). Avoidance is not merely a passive tactic, but requires the active excommunication of false teachers and unrepentant believers from the church (1 Timothy 1:18-20; cf. 1 Corinthians 5:1-13).

The false teachers' assault on the home is particularly pernicious. Paul vividly portrays their malicious work, describing them as those who "*creep into households and capture weak women*" (2 Timothy 3:6a). The women they would capture are already in grave peril. Sinful behaviors that marked their lives prior to their Christian faith persist, for they are "*burdened with sins and led astray by various passions*" (2 Timothy 3:6b). An incomplete repentance leaves these women spiritually compromised, intellectually wavering, unsettled in their convictions, "*always learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth*" (2 Timothy 3:7). Their instability provides fertile ground upon which the false teachers sow their heresy.

After reading verses 6-7, modern readers should not conclude that Paul has a low view of women's moral, spiritual, and intellectual capabilities—nothing could be further from the truth. Godly women are found among Paul's prized fellow servants in gospel work (Romans 16:1, Acts 18:18). Paul's words here demonstrate his pastoral devotion to the flock by identifying homes susceptible to the false teachers. He does not describe all Christian women, but certain women whose domestic circumstances and spiritual immaturity make them vulnerable to religious wolves. Bereft of strong spiritual leadership and protection, widows and wives with unbelieving husbands, along with their children, were in grave spiritual danger. Timothy and the Ephesian elders must give special care to the perils these homes face, a pastoral concern Paul addresses in his other Pastoral Letters (1 Timothy 5:11-16, Titus 2:3-5).

Verse 8 likens the false teachers to Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses. Mentioned nowhere else in the canonical Scriptures, these are the names Jewish tradition identifies as leaders of the magicians who contended with Moses in Pharaoh's court. Like Jannes and Jambres, the false teachers

are "*corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith*." The word translated "disqualified" is the opposite of "*approved*" in 2 Timothy 2:15. Timothy is a workman approved by God; God rejects the false teachers. The false teachers did not prevail in Egypt and will not prevail in Ephesus (2 Timothy 3:9). First Timothy 6:5 exposes their motivation: "*depraved in mind and deprived of the truth*" they imagine "*that godliness is a means of gain*."

A pagan people and worldview incompatible with biblical faith surrounded Moses. Yet, by God's power he triumphed. And Timothy will also triumph as he perseveres in the truth of the gospel.

Verses 10-17

Awareness of the reality of persecution is vital to long-term effectiveness in ministry. Christian leaders who fail to take account of intense hostility to the gospel set themselves up for heart-wrenching disappointment. Timothy must squarely face the fact of persecution.

Paul's second letter—indeed his life—is drawing to its conclusion. In verses 10-11 Paul reminds Timothy of the doctrine, virtues, and personal experiences they share, all of which shaped a manner of life and ministry that Timothy must continue after Paul dies.

Timothy has "*followed*" Paul's "*teaching*" and virtues, of which six are listed: "*my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness*" (2 Timothy 3:10). Without Paul's teaching and the virtues that adorned his life there can be no genuine Christian ministry, either for Timothy or those who serve today's church.

But Timothy has also followed Paul's "*persecutions*" and "*sufferings*" (2 Timothy 3:11). A native of Lystra, Timothy's earliest acquaintance with Paul likely began during Paul and Barnabas's first missionary journey. By the time of Paul's second journey, Timothy's reputation as a mature believer led to an invitation to join Paul's team. He was with Paul during his imprisonment in Philippi (Acts 16:16-40) and hostile reception in Thessalonica (Acts 17:1-9). He was an eyewitness of Paul's persecution and deliverance (2 Timothy 3:11). In addition, if he were not a witness to, he was at least aware of Paul's earlier sufferings in

his hometown (Acts 14:19-20) and surrounding region (Acts 13:45-50, 14:2-6).

Persecution is not peculiar to Paul; it is one element of the normal Christian life, for "*all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*" (2 Timothy 3:12). The grace of the gospel produces a visible change in the life of the believer, one that separates him from the ordinary character and conversation of the world, thereby prompting its derision and opposition. Persecution is an inevitable consequence of pursuing the gospel life and ministry in an age when "*evil people and impostors,*" like the false teachers, deceive others even as they themselves are deceived (2 Timothy 3:13).

Preparing the church to withstand persecution is the duty of every Christian leader. Wise leaders take to heart the solemn warnings of the Lord Jesus and his apostles (John 15:20, Acts 14:22, 1 Peter 4:12-14).

Timothy is obligated to remain faithful to the gospel he has believed (2 Timothy 2:14). In stark contrast to the "*evil people and impostors*" in verse 13, Timothy knows well the character of those who taught him, among them Lois and Eunice (2 Timothy 1:5) and perhaps also Paul (the "*by whom*" of verse 14 is a Greek plural). From these faithful teachers Timothy has been introduced to "*the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus*" (2 Timothy 3:15).

The "*sacred writings*" are the books of the Old Testament. Together they testify to the person and saving work of the coming Christ, and to the necessity of faith in him for salvation, a view of the Old Testament and its promised Redeemer/Messiah that Jesus and Paul shared (John 5:39, and Luke 24:25-27, 44-47; cf. 1 Corinthians 10:1-5 and Romans 15:3-4).

Verse 16 identifies the source of Scripture and Scripture's role in the life of the church. God is the source of Scripture. "*All Scripture is breathed out by God.*" Because Scripture is a product of God's creative breath, it serves a unique, fourfold role in the life of the church. It is profitable "*for teaching*" (correct doctrine), "*for reproof*" (admonishing the erring), "*for correction*" (restoring the erring to a godly life), and "*for training in righteousness*" (the disciplined and godly manner of life consistent with the gospel).

"*All Scripture*" includes the entirety of the Old Testament, and may also include other New Testament writings available to the church in Paul's day, including Paul's own letters. These, along with the Old Testament writings, were received as Scripture (1 Timothy 5:18, 2 Peter 3:15-16).

Every leader in God's church should have full confidence in the sufficiency of Scripture. With it, the "*man of God,*" a worker approved and cleansed, is "*complete, equipped for every good work*" as he gathers, nourishes and protects the church of God (2 Timothy 2:15, 21).

Although "*man of God*" could refer to all believers, it likely refers to Timothy and the other leaders at Ephesus. If the leaders of God's church trust the all-sufficient Scripture, then those under their leadership will too. The end result is a congregation and its elders "*complete, equipped for every good work.*"

The present age is dangerous and followers of Christ are in perpetual danger. Assaults on the church come from many directions, and, sadly, even from within. The Lord's servant must not lose his nerve. The Scripture furnishes him and his congregation with everything necessary for faithful life and ministry.

Suggested Commentary

The Message of 2 Timothy by John Stott (The Bible Speaks Today Series)



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Questions for Discussion

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17.

1. In chapter 4 of 2 Timothy, how does Paul prepare Timothy for the challenges and persecutions that accompany Christian ministry? Can you identify other passages in the New Testament that prepare believers to suffer for the gospel?
2. In verse 1, what does Paul mean by “in the last days”? What sins characterize this period? How do these sins display themselves in your community? How does the reality of the second coming motivate you to live during this troubled time?
3. Identify the threat false teachers presented to the church at Ephesus. What are the false teachings prevalent today in the Christian community? What steps has your church taken to protect itself?
4. What does Paul mean when he warns of false teachers “*having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power*” (2 Timothy 3:5a)? Why do Christians and churches today need to heed Paul’s warning?
5. What strategy did the false teachers take to invade homes? How can you and your congregation protect its homes from false teachers?
6. Who were Jannes and Jambres? How were they like the false teachers of Paul and Timothy’s day? What motivates false teachers? How do you evaluate your own intentions and motivations?
7. Read verses 10-11. What are the doctrines, virtues, and personal experiences Paul and Timothy share? How did these experiences shape Timothy’s understanding of ministry?

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