

The Books of 1 and 2 Timothy

Lesson 11: The Last Days and the Power of Scripture -- 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Picture an old man writing by lamplight in a cold cell, knowing his time is almost up, and the very first thing he wants his young friend to understand is that the days ahead are going to be hard. "Understand this," Paul says, "that in the last days there will come times of difficulty" (v. 1). He is not trying to frighten Timothy. He is trying to prepare him, the way a father pulls his son aside before sending him out into a storm and says, plainly, here is what you will face, and here is what will hold. There is something steadying about a person who refuses to pretend the road is easy.

Then Paul lets loose one of the most unsettling lists in all of his letters. Lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, without self-control, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (vv. 2-4). Read it slowly and it sounds less like ancient Ephesus and more like the evening news, or worse, like a mirror held up to our own hearts on a bad day. And the sting at the center of it is this: these are not godless people standing outside the church. They have "the appearance of godliness," Paul says, "but denying its power" (v. 5). Religion with the engine taken out.

So where does a young preacher turn when the culture is rotting and the counterfeits are convincing? Paul points him backward and downward, to bedrock. "Continue in what you have learned" (v. 14). Remember the faith you saw lived out from childhood. Remember the sacred writings you have known since you were a boy, the Scriptures that are "able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (v. 15). When everything else is shifting, Paul does not hand Timothy a new technique. He hands him the old, tested, God-breathed word.

And that brings us to the mountain peak of this chapter, one of the grandest statements about the Bible found anywhere: "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" (vv. 16-17). Stop and feel the wonder of it. The words you read in your Bible are the breath of God. They are enough. They are sufficient to make you whole and to fit you for everything God asks of you. As we walk through these seventeen verses, let us ask the Lord to give us not just respect for His word but hunger for it, and the courage to stand on it when the times are hard.

Group Discussion: Paul says people will hold "the appearance of godliness" while "denying its power" (v. 5). What does it look like when religion keeps the outward forms but loses its real power, and why is that kind of counterfeit so much more dangerous to a church than open unbelief?

Personal Reflection: Paul reminds Timothy that he has known the Scriptures since childhood and urges him to "continue" in them (vv. 14-15). When the days feel difficult and the voices

around you grow loud, where do you actually turn first? What would it take for the God-breathed word to become your true bedrock?

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Study Questions

1. Paul tells Timothy to expect “times of difficulty” in “the last days” and then describes people who are “lovers of self” and “lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God,” holding “the appearance of godliness, but denying its power” (vv. 1-5). What does this passage teach about what “the last days” means and about the kind of moral and spiritual danger the church must be ready to face?
2. Paul warns Timothy to “avoid such people” (v. 5), those who keep a religious shell while denying the power of true godliness. Where do you sense the pull in your own life toward outward religious appearance without inward reality, and what would it mean to let God restore the power and not just the form?
3. Paul compares the deceivers to “Jannes and Jambres” who “opposed Moses” but whose “folly will be plain to all” (vv. 8-9). What does this comparison teach us about how false teachers operate, the limits God places on their success, and how truth ultimately exposes counterfeits?
4. Paul says plainly, “All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (v. 12). How does that promise sit with you, and where have you been tempted to soften your discipleship to avoid the cost of standing with Christ?
5. Paul holds up his own life as an example: his “teaching,” “conduct,” “aim in life,” “faith,” “patience,” “love,” “steadfastness,” and “persecutions,” from which “the Lord rescued me” (vv. 10-11). What does this show about how the truth is meant to be passed down, not just in words but in a life that can be followed?
6. Paul urges Timothy to “continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed,” remembering from whom he learned it (v. 14). Who are the people God has used to ground you in the faith, and how can you both honor what they handed you and pass it on to someone else?
7. Paul reminds Timothy that from childhood he has known “the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (v. 15). What does it mean that the Scriptures make us “wise for salvation,” and how does this guard us against thinking salvation comes through cleverness, novelty, or human wisdom?
8. Paul says evil people and impostors “will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived” (v. 13). When you look honestly at your own heart, where are you most easily deceived, and what habits keep you anchored to the truth instead of drifting?
9. Paul rises to his climax: “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” (vv. 16-17). What does this passage teach about where Scripture comes from and what it is able to do, and how does the inspiration and

sufficiency of the completed word answer modern claims of new revelation, continuing prophecy, or sign gifts?

10. Look back across this whole chapter, from the hard times of the last days to the God-breathed word that equips us for every good work. Name one specific way Jesus is using this passage to form you, and one concrete step you will take this week to let Scripture do its work in you.

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: 2 Peter 1:20-21, Scripture carried along by the Holy Spirit; Psalm 19:7-11, the perfect law of the Lord reviving the soul; Hebrews 4:12, the living and active word of God; Acts 2:16-17, Peter declares that the last days have come; John 17:17, sanctified by the truth of God's word.