

<b>SCRIPTURE FOCUS</b>	<b>2 TIMOTHY 3:1-4:8</b>	<b>DATE</b>	<b>08.04.19</b>
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<b>LESSON SUMMARY</b>	In the difficulty of the last days, Christians can look to positive examples of faithfulness and scripture for guidance in living out God's call on their lives.		

*all scripture from NIV unless otherwise noted*

## ENCOUNTER THE TEXT

**3:1 But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. 2 People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, 3 without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, 4 treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God—5 having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people.**

Chapter 3 begins with a general description of the last days that is then applied to Timothy's present situation. Importantly, Paul is not referring to a future last days. Rather, he is speaking of the time period between Christ's resurrection and return. Thus, Timothy and we ourselves live in the last days. In these end times, various types of immorality will prosper. If this is true, neither Timothy nor we should be surprised by the depravity that we sometimes encounter in the world.

V 5 brings an interesting twist into the depravity that precedes it. These lovers of self and money have a form of godliness but deny its power. Vv 6-9 show that Paul is speaking specifically of the false teachers who have infiltrated the Ephesian community. This in mind, v 5 refers specifically to professing Christians who deny the power of the gospel for moral transformation. Because this description is grouped in the more general description of the last days it is also appropriate to apply it to "spiritual" or "religious" people who use their spirituality as a smoke screen for love of self and money.

Unsurprisingly, Paul directs Timothy to have nothing to do with these kinds of people. Of course, Timothy would witness to such folks if the opportunity presented itself, but Paul tells Timothy not to run in this crowd.

**6 They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, 7 always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. 8 Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. 9 But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone.**

While vv 1-5 spoke in the future tense, Paul now employs the present tense to speak of the false teachers. Grouping these folks with the vices of vv 1-5, Paul says that they worm their way into households and gain followers among

“gullible” women whose guilt and desires make them especially prone to their false teachings. Importantly, this is a description of the particular situation in Ephesus rather than a blanket condemnation of women. Coming from a pastoral perspective, NT Wright describes his own experience of just this phenomenon:

*Paul then turns to a much more particular problem. Some of the people he’s describing are active in propagating their own views. One of the ways they do this is by preying on the vulnerable. I’ve seen it happen; I’ve watched people with particular agendas, and a strong belief in the rightness of their cause, approach people who can’t say no to them and persuade them to go to a meeting with them, to listen to their ideas, to join their club. There are many people—the ones Paul seems to have known were women, but many men come into this category too—whose moral or immoral past and whose muddled present makes them easy targets for such predators. They are always hoping that the next new thing they learn will finally sort their lives out; but it never happens, for the good reason that all they really want is the stimulus of novel ideas, not the solid, restful satisfaction of learning the truth and reordering their lives by it.*

In the end, Paul compares the false teachers to “Jannes and Jambres,” who according to Jewish and Christian tradition were the magicians Moses squared off against in the earlier chapters of Exodus. This is a stark comparison, for the magicians stood in direct opposition to Moses, the man of God. Thus, the false teachers “oppose the truth,” are men of depraved minds, and are rejected when it comes to the faith. Ultimately, they will be shown for what they are.

**3:10 You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, 11 persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. 12 In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, 15 and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

Having presented the unpraiseworthy lifestyles of the false teachers, Paul now holds himself up as an example for Timothy. Of course, Timothy is not unaware of his mentor’s life and teaching, and Paul therefore simply recalls Timothy’s experience of their relationship rather than going into detail on any one characteristic of Paul’s life and ministry. All of this leads to the assertion that “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” (v 12) As was the case in chapter 1, Paul is offering Timothy a clear-eyed view into the real-life difficulties of discipleship. Rather than making life easier, those who follow Christ will at times find that their faith complicates their lives. And on top of these to-be-expected persecutions, “evil doers and impostors will go from bad to worse.” (v 13) In spite of these realities, Paul’s call to Timothy is crystal clear: continue in the truth that he learned from Paul and that he has become personally convinced of. (v 14)

In the midst of Paul’s exhortation, he offers an important explanation of scripture. When approached correctly, scripture makes a person wise for salvation (receiving and being transformed by God’s grace). It does so through teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness. Note here that scripture is a transformative, God-breathed force when it is applied to a person’s life. This truth stands in stark contrast to the false teachers who handle scripture and the gospel poorly by engaging in silly arguments over words. Proper handling of scripture aligns the believers’ life with God and prepares them for the good works God will set before them. Note how v 17 echoes 2:21’s

theme of being ready for good work. The earlier passage speaks of how cleansing oneself from dishonorable things makes a person ready for good work. Here in chapter 3, proper handling of the scripture equips the same person for every good work. The Christian life therefore entails turning from dishonorable things and turning to a new and better way of life as we are shaped by the scriptures.

***4:1 In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: 2 Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. 3 For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 4 They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths. 5 But you, keep your head in all situations, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, discharge all the duties of your ministry.***

V 1 of this section lets Timothy know that Paul's next charge is being made on the most serious of grounds. Think here of people swearing on their mother's grave and the like. In terms of faith, you can't get more serious than being in the presence of God and Christ and speaking under the hope of Jesus' return. In this most serious of ways, Paul charges Timothy to (1) preach the word, (2) always be ready to do so, regardless of situation, and (3) do so particularly by correcting, rebuking, and encouraging. His will do so in the midst of false teaching and Christians going astray. Timothy, however, should remain faithful in this by making good decisions, not giving up in hard times, and sharing the gospel. In doing these things, he will be faithful to the duties of his ministry.

***6 For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time for my departure is near. 7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. 8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.***

Here we find that Paul offering this charge to Timothy in view of Paul's own death. As Paul comes to the end of his own ministry, he passes the torch to his younger mentee. For Paul's part, he is able to speak of his own life and ministry in a remarkable way. He has "fought the good fight," "finished the race," and "kept the faith." Note here the similarities to Paul's previous advice to Timothy in 2:3-7. There, Paul encouraged Timothy to be a focused soldier, a rule-abiding athlete, and a hard-working farmer. Here, Paul applies two of those images to himself. He has successfully served as Christ's soldier and finished the race that was set before him. In all of this, we see that Paul believes himself to have successfully lived the very kind of life that he is charging Timothy to pursue. In light of this, Paul expects to be rewarded along with the rest of the Lord's faithful.

## TEACH THE TEXT

In the second half of 2 Tim 2, Paul gave Timothy instructions for dealing with a specific messy situation. Here in chapter 3, Paul turns to speak more generally of faithfulness in the mess of the "last days." As noted in the "Encounter the Text" section, the "last days" refers to the time between Christ's resurrection and return. Thus, the time period that Paul speaks of is the time period in which we ourselves live. As he describes the mess of the last days, Paul offers Timothy an example, a resource, and a charge for faithful living. For teaching, moving through each of these

elements of the text will be helpful.

## **The Last Days**

Paul's depiction of the last days is bleak as he makes the following predictions:

3:2-5

- People will love themselves inordinately
- People will love money
- People will be:
  - o Boastful
  - o Proud
  - o Abusive
  - o Disobedient to parents
  - o Ungrateful
  - o Unholy
  - o Without love
  - o Unforgiving
  - o Slanderous
  - o Without self-control
  - o Brutal
  - o Not lovers of the good
  - o Treacherous
  - o Rash
  - o Conceited
  - o Lovers of pleasure instead of God
  - o Have a form of godliness but deny its power

3:12

- Christ-followers will be persecuted

3:13

- Evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse

4:3

- People will not put up with sound doctrine
- People will gather around false teachers

Needless to say, this is not a pretty picture. Moreover, it isn't hard to see these types of things playing out in our culture today. At the same time, we need to be careful not to paint all non-Christian society in such a poor light. While the image of God is marred in humanity, it has not been erased. This being the case, we can expect to see good in society as well. And we should also note that many of these descriptors can unfortunately be found in the church today. Indeed, that was the thrust of Paul's discussion in the beginning of chapter 3.

## **An Example**

Against the bleak picture of the last days, Paul upholds his own example of faithfulness (3:10), which included:

- Purpose
- Faith
- Patience
- Love
- Endurance

These positive traits are presented to Timothy and to believers today as elements of the faithful life. Though not directly related to this passage, 4:6-8 tells us that living this way leads to ending well.

## **A Resource**

The resource that Paul holds out to Timothy is scripture (3:14-17). For Timothy, this resource is two-fold. First, it applies to his own spiritual walk. Second, it applies to his teaching ministry. While not all Christians are teachers, we can all identify with the need to conform our own lives to scripture. Paul says that the scriptures are able to make us wise for salvation. They do so by teaching us, rebuking us, correcting us, and training us in righteousness. If we will apply this God-breathed resource properly, it will lead us to faithful living in the mess of the last days.

## **A Charge**

Paul's charge to Timothy (4:1-2) is directly related to Timothy's unique calling. As a church leader, Timothy is to preach the word regardless of convenience. Doing so will require him to use scripture in the ways already described in 3:16 (correct, rebuke, encourage). Along with this specific charge, Paul also calls Timothy more generally to "keep your head in all situations" and "endure hardship" before returning to the specifics of Timothy's ministry (evangelism). If Timothy will do these things, he will be able, like Paul, to eventually say that he has fought the good fight and finished the race.

## **Bringing It Together**

It shouldn't be hard to convince students that culture in the US is moving further and further away from agreement with the faith. As teachers, we can present to them positive examples of faithfulness (Paul's or more contemporary folks), point them to proper use of scripture, and charge them to live out their personal callings, both generally and specifically.

## **QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION**

### **3:1-5**

1. What are the "last days"?

2. How does Paul describe the last days?
3. Does this picture jive with your experience?
4. What about goodness in society? Is everything bad?

**3:10-13**

1. Is it proud for Paul to hold himself out as a positive example?
2. What are the specific characteristics that Paul points out about himself?
  - a. Why do you think he mentions these specifically?
3. Can you think of any positive examples of faithfulness in your own life?

**3:14-17**

1. Why is scripture an important resource for Timothy in the last days?
2. What does it mean that scripture is God-breathed?
3. According to this passage, how should we approach scripture?

**4:1-6**

1. Paul charges Timothy to attend to his unique calling. How does this charge apply to those of us who aren't ministers?

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1. Is it proud for Paul to hold himself out as a positive example?