

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Look at 2 Timothy: 2 Timothy 3:1-17 - Last Days and their Perils

Ninety years ago last April the Titanic sank with such dreadful loss of life. That magnificent liner had set off in such high hopes on her maiden voyage to cross the Atlantic. There had never been a ship like her. With her sealed watertight compartments she was supposedly unsinkable. Instead, she came to grief as a huge iceberg tore a gaping hole in her side.

If only there had been some warning that she was sailing into perilous waters! If only there had been a look-out who might have seen those icebergs earlier and warned the captain! But there was no warning and more than 1,000 people perished.

2 Timothy 3 is Paul's warning to his son in the faith, Timothy, of the spiritual perils which lay ahead. As we have seen in 2 Timothy 1 and 2 Timothy 2, this letter is Paul's last letter before his martyrdom. In it, he pours out his love and care for his young son in the faith. Paul wants to prepare Timothy, as much as possible, for the time when Timothy would no longer have him to turn to. To be forewarned is to be forearmed!

### Paul's solemn warning to Timothy of the perils to be expected in the last days

Paul's warning to Timothy ought to have an even greater urgency and importance for us today, more than 19 centuries on in the history of the Church. We'll read 2 Timothy 3:1-5: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: for men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away!"

This is no mere cry of "Wolf!", but represents the deep concern of Paul as, with the spiritual insight given of God, he saw what lay ahead. It was no exaggeration on Paul's part to write of 'perilous times'. He foresaw the very real spiritual perils ahead.

It is said that if a frog is dropped into a pan of boiling water, it will immediately jump out and save its life. If that same frog is put into a pan of cold water and that pan is steadily warmed up, then the frog will stay in the water until it is overcome by the heat. It is then too late to jump out and the poor frog perishes!

There is a very real danger in this comfortable 21st century that we, as Christians, fail to realise the changes which for many years have been gradually taking place around us. In particular, the increasing disregard for the word of God which characterises much of life today is an attitude into which we can all too readily slip. 2 Timothy 3 is Paul's wake up call to Christians everywhere before it is too late. "Last days" is an expression which occurs 8 times in the King James Bible (Genesis 49:1, Isaiah 2:2, Micah 4:1, Acts 2:17, 2 Timothy 3:1, Hebrews 1:2, James 5:3, 2 Peter 3:3). Generally, it seems to refer to that time just before the coming of the Lord Jesus for His Church. As the Lord Jesus left His disciples to go to the cross, He promised them, "And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" (John 14:3). That hope of the Lord's imminent return has been the Christian's hope in every generation since then. At times, it has burned more brightly in the hearts of believers than at other times. Every generation of believers, then, has been able to live in the sense that they may well be living in the last days.

S Trevor Francis (1834-1925) beautifully expresses that hope as follows:

*"I can almost hear His footfall  
On the threshold of the door,  
And my heart, my heart is longing  
To be with Him evermore."*

If Paul could warn Timothy of the perils of the last days which threatened him, how much more do we need to heed Paul's warning! Certainly, as we look down the list of the characteristics of those last days, it is difficult to escape the conclusion that we are indeed living in those last days. Let's consider just a few of them.

### **“Men will be lovers of themselves”**

More than ever, today's attitude seems to be, “It makes me feel good, so it must be all right”. Questions of right and wrong, or what the Bible has to say about the matter, are ignored.

### **“Lovers of money”**

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul had already warned, “For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil” (1 Timothy 6:10). Many today find themselves caught up in a relentless pursuit of money to buy more and more things. That pursuit is actively encouraged by the media with aggressive advertising.

### **“Boasters, proud”**

We're more important than Jesus Christ was the proud boast of the Beatles in the 1960s. Although the Beatles still enjoy some measure of popularity, others in the pop world have taken their place. But the Lord Jesus remains “the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13:8).

### **“Disobedient to parents”**

The problem of teenage crime, so prevalent today, is, in large part, due to failure in parental discipline. This lack of respect for parents leads to a general lack of respect for all authority.

We do not need here to go through the entire list but read it at your leisure. It makes for sorry reading. Lower down the list we come to the telling words: “...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). This is clearly seen in the fact that, whereas Sunday was once given up to going to church, it is now largely devoted to amusement and pleasure.

Our present day certainly shows all the characteristics of the last days, these perilous times. Paul is not exaggerating when he describes them as ‘perilous times’ (2 Timothy 3:1). The Christian is in real spiritual peril of being affected by these attitudes so prevalent in the world. Little wonder, then, that Paul writes, “From such people turn away” (2 Timothy 3:5). Don't let these attitudes infiltrate your Christian life! Until He comes, the Lord leaves us here to “shine as lights in the world” (Philippians 2:15), but He wants us to keep ourselves “unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).

### **Opposition to God is not new**

In 2 Timothy 3:8-9, Paul reminds Timothy that opposition to the truth of God is not new. He instances the opposition of Pharaoh's magicians to Moses when Moses challenged Pharaoh to let God's people go (see Exodus 7:11-13, 22; 8:7; 9:11). Incidentally, it is only here that we learn the names of those magicians. But all such opposition must eventually fail!

### **The remedy**

2 Timothy 3:1-9, then, present Paul's solemn warning to Timothy of the perils to be expected in the last days.

### **Paul's remedy for these perilous times**

In 2 Timothy 3:10-17, we have Paul's remedy for these perilous times. So Paul writes, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra - what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution” (2 Timothy 3:10-12). I love that little word “but”. So often, in Scripture, it's like turning a corner from shadow into sunshine. Listen to Paul's words to the Ephesians: “You ... were by nature children of wrath, just as the others. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us...” (Ephesians 2:3-4). Occasionally, however, that word ‘but’ turns us, as it were, from sunshine to shadow. Here, we turn from the darkness of behaviour in the last days to the lovely example of Paul's life.

We learn from Acts 16:1-3 that, when Paul came to Lystra, he took Timothy, a native of that city, to join Silas and himself. Timothy was thus with Paul for most of his second missionary journey (Acts 15:36-18:22) and for Paul's third missionary journey (Acts 19:1-21:14). He had plenty of opportunity to see Paul at work in his service for the Master.

He saw him in good days and in bad. He could see what made the apostle tick. So Paul might well write, "You have carefully followed..." (2 Timothy 3:10)

What was it that Timothy carefully followed? First in the list comes 'my doctrine'. Paul's Christian life was not based on his own ideas but on what he had "received from the Lord" (1 Corinthians 11:23). Much of that teaching we still have with us in Paul's epistles. But closely allied with that doctrine was "my ... manner of life". What Paul preached, he also practiced! What an important lesson that was for Timothy, and also for us today! It has been well said that "what you practise shouts so loud that others can't hear what you say". But Timothy had also been an eyewitness of Paul's "persecutions, afflictions". Not long after joining Paul and Silas, Timothy had gone with them to Philippi and seen them beaten and thrown into prison (Acts 16:12-40).

Listen to Paul's moving description of his service for the Master: "From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of water, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness" (2 Corinthians 11:24-27). The details of much of that are not recorded in the Acts of the Apostles, but Timothy must have witnessed a large part of it.

But, triumphantly, Paul can add, "Out of them all the Lord delivered me" (2 Timothy 3:11). The servant of the Lord is not sheltered from trouble but he has the assurance that the Lord will deliver him or her out of it. So Paul forewarns Timothy, and us today, "All who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution" (2 Timothy 3:12). That persecution is still evident in those lands that are opposed to the Christian Gospel. Here in this country, following Christ may not result in physical persecution but it often results in ridicule.

### **Timothy's resource - The Holy Scriptures**

Timothy's resource for the last days would lie in the Holy Scriptures. So Paul writes: "But as for you, continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:14-17).

Timothy had had the inestimable benefit of a godly upbringing in which the Holy Scriptures played a large part (2 Timothy 3:15). For young Timothy, those Holy Scriptures would be largely our Old Testament since much of the New Testament was not then written. We have the great blessing of a complete Bible. Timothy's security then, and ours today, lies in our obedient trust in those same Holy Scriptures, "The impregnable rock of Holy Scripture", as WE Gladstone put it.

Those Holy Scriptures are, indeed, able to "make [us] wise unto salvation". Paul uses the word 'salvation' in its widest possible aspect. It covers salvation from the penalty of our sins: "For by grace you have been saved through faith..." (Ephesians 2:8). But it also covers the fact that we are to know God's saving and preserving power in our lives now: "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God" (1 Corinthians 1:18) - salvation from the power of sin.

Finally, it covers that wonderful time when the Lord Jesus comes from heaven for His Church when we shall be changed to be like Him: "Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation" (Hebrews 9:28) - salvation from the very presence of sin. Hallelujah! What a Saviour!

"... search the scriptures; for in them you think you have eternal life: and they are they which testify of Me", the Lord Jesus told the Jews (John 5:39). Of the Bereans we are told, "These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so" (Acts 17:11).

We cannot over emphasise the importance of 2 Timothy 3:16-17 in a day when so many spiritual perils threaten the Christian. We'll read the verses again: "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work". It is interesting how often 3:16 marks an important statement in Scripture though, of course, the chapter and verse divisions were not part of that original inspiration of Scripture (see Malachi 3:16, Luke 3:16, John 3:16, 1 Corinthians 3:16, Ephesians 3:16, Colossians 3:16, 2 Thessalonians 3:16, 1 Timothy 3:16, 2 Timothy 3:16, 1 John 3:16, Revelation 3:16, besides others).

The opening statement is literally, "All Scripture is God-breathed...". The words you are hearing now might be said to be "me-breathed". They are conditioned by the interaction of my vocal chords with air expelled from my lungs. My friends recognise its peculiar characteristics! In the same way, your words are 'you-breathed'. They sound different to mine though the same air is being expelled from our lungs. So God used some 35-40 different writers over a period of about 1,600 years, not obliterating their human personalities but bringing through them His living word, the Holy Scriptures, to man.

Why has He given us His word? 2 Timothy 3:17 says, "That the man of God may be complete". "The man of God" is an expression often used in the Old Testament where it signifies one who was ready to stand for God in an evil day (see **Moses** - Deuteronomy 33:1, Joshua 14:6, 1 Chronicles 23:14, 2 Chronicles 30:16, Ezra 3:2; **Samuel** - 1 Sam 9:6; **Shemiah** - 1 Kings 12:22, 2 Chronicles 11:12, **Elijah** - 1 Kings 17:18, 24; **Elisha** - 2 Kings 5:8; **David** - Nehemiah 12:24, 36, 2 Chronicles 8:14, **Hanan** - Jeremiah 35:4). It is only used twice in the New Testament, 2 Timothy 3:17, and in 1 Timothy 6:11. In both cases, the word used is not limited to males, but covers males and females.

For all of us, women and men alike, the resource for Christian living in the last days, in perilous times, here and now, is to be found in the Bible, in Holy Scripture. "That the man of God may be complete..." (2 Timothy 3:17). Every resource to live a life pleasing to God will be found in its pages. Read it! Meditate on it! Treasure it! Obey it!

We close with some words of the well known hymn:

*Lord, Thy word abideth,  
And our footsteps guideth;  
Who its truth believeth  
Light and joy receiveth.*

*Oh, that we discerning  
Its most holy learning,  
Lord, may love and fear Thee,  
Evermore be near Thee!*

*Henry W Baker (1821-1877)*

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