

Remain Faithful

Scripture Text: 2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12-17. **Devotional Reading:** 1 John 5:1-5.

Background Scripture: 2 Timothy 3:1-4:8.

TIME: About A.D. 64 **PLACE:** from Rome

2 Timothy 3:1-5, 12-17, 4:1-5

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.

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.

2 Timothy 4:1-5

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.

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each student should be able to:

- Produce a profile of the wicked people described in today's text.
- Explain how faithfulness in teaching the Bible provides an antidote to wickedness.
- Plan to share the Word of God with someone who needs to hear it.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In his great hymn "Am I a Soldier of the Cross?" Isaac Watts asked these rhetorical questions: "Are there no foes for me to face? Must I not stem the flood? / Is this vile world a friend to grace, To help me on to God?" One glance at a news-paper will show us that the world is full of evil men. We should expect no applause or assistance from a godless world as we seek to live for the Lord.

We need to be mindful of the evil around us not only to stay on our guard but also to enhance our appreciation of what God has done to save us from a life of vanity and decadence.

One of the reasons Paul's instructions to Timothy emphasized man's sinfulness was to inspire him to remain faithful to God's Word and to the ministry to which he had been called. There simply was no other way worth

pursuing.

There was no guarantee that Timothy would always have a receptive audience for his teaching, but he could count on the goodness of God and the steadfastness of His truth to guide him. This is our source of confidence as well.

Characteristics of Evil People (2 Timothy 3:1-5,12,13)

Paul had just told Timothy to patiently teach people in the hope that some might come to repentance (2:24-26). Timothy was not to be naive, however (the phrase "this know also" could be rendered "but know this"). He needed to know that people would often be very hardened to the truth and not receptive to change.

The reference to the last days calls to mind the time right before Jesus comes back to earth (John 6:39; 2 Pet. 3:3). Indeed, the sinfulness of man will be very pronounced as the second advent nears, but it seems clear that the "last days" can also be understood in a very broad sense to refer to the entire period between the advents of Christ (Heb. 1:2; 1 Pet. 1:20; 1 John 2:18). We must remember that these verses are in the context of Paul's instructions to Timothy. The warning was not just for some future time but applied to Timothy's day as well (2 Tim. 3:13,14).

Paul warned that Timothy faced the prospect of dangerous times. This no doubt included spiritual snares as well as the possibility of physical harm.

1. How is the term "last days" (2 Tim. 3:1) to be understood?

These verses give a frightening description of the extent of human depravity. Topping the list of man's evil traits, and in many ways lying at the foundation of all of them, is his tendency to love himself at the expense of all others. We cannot help loving ourselves, and indeed God intends for us to seek our best good in a loving relationship with Him. The problem comes as we place ourselves instead of God on the throne, and the result is great disorder and sin.

As we make ourselves our heart's idol, we are never satisfied. We relentlessly seek money and all that it can get for us. Coupled with this money-loving ("covetous") spirit is the desire to be thought great. We cannot keep quiet about our supposed preeminence, and we act in a haughty way toward others. We will not tolerate that anyone else might be considered as great as we are, so we become scornful and derisive (the meaning of "blasphemers" here), tearing down others so that we ourselves will seem more exalted.

Another mark of man's sinfulness in the last days will be his refusal to abide by divinely ordained parental authority. Gratitude, to parents or to anyone else, is certainly out of the question for anyone inordinately in love with himself. Obviously, he deserves everything he receives!

The next two characteristics in Paul's list highlight the derangement introduced by sin. The corrupt men are described as "unholy," meaning they lack all respect for sacred things. Furthermore, they are incapable of loving even those whom it is part of God's natural order to love, as with a parent's love for a child and vice versa (v. 3).

The list goes on to detail the ways in which man's sinful depravity affects his relations with others. Sinful men are unable to maintain peaceful relations with each other (v. 4). They stubbornly nurse their grudges ("truce-breakers"). Fueling this tendency is their love of inventing ways to slander one another.

The depraved of the last days lack self-control ("incontinent"). As a result they are "butal," or aggressive. The end result is that they hate good men and all that they represent.

The term "treacherous" (v. 4) shows how untrustworthy these wicked men are. They are steadfastly loyal only

to their own selfish interests. In addition, they are "heady," or headstrong. They cannot be dissuaded from recklessly pursuing whatever sinful pursuit they are drawn to. They do this because they are conceited ("high minded"), filled with a sense of their own merit and wisdom. They also do it because nothing, not even God, outweighs their love of pleasure.

2. What characteristic lies at the foundation of man's sinfulness (vs. 2-4)?

The evil men Paul was describing would not be as dangerous if they did not so often hide their sinfulness behind a cloak of religiosity. To appear religious can offer advantages of prestige and power. Sometimes wicked men will even infiltrate the church and try to use this to meet their crooked ends.

Religious effort, though, is to no avail without the presence of a nature regenerated and then empowered by the Holy Spirit. It is a fearful thing to learn of the truth but then live contrary to it and deny the Lord's provisions and claims. Timothy was to have no dealings with those who lived this way. He was not to recognize them as being legitimate Christians.

2. Why do evil men often decide to hide their sinfulness under a cloak of religiosity (v. 5)?

From the section of Scripture we have just discussed (vs. 1-5) and from the verses that follow (vs. 6-11), it is evident that Timothy needed to prepare for spiritual conflict and hardship. If there was any doubt, verse 12 certainly disposed of it!

It is generally accepted truth that a Christian who is living a zealous life for the Lord will meet injustice and opposition from the world (Matt. 5:11,12; 10:22-25). As John 3:19 indicates, fallen men turn away from Christ because they love spiritual darkness and their evil deeds more than they love the light. They do not want the light of the gospel to ex-pose their sin and make them uncomfortable (Rom. 8:5-7).

We should not expect that this state of things is going to change. In fact, it is going to get worse (2 Tim. 3:13). Those who are evil will progress in their wickedness.

Again, Paul had in mind especially the apostates who are within the churches. They are "seducers," that is, impostors, and they are very clever and resolute in their efforts to lure people from the faith (Acts 20:29,30). They have been taken in by Satan's deceit (2 Cor. 4:4), and they seek to bring down with them as many of the sheep as they can.

3. If a man lives for Christ, what can he expect from the world (vs. 12,13)?

Ability of Scripture to Conquer Evil (2 Timothy 3:14-4:5)

Even while others might be lured away from the truth, it was essential for Timothy to remain steadfast. He had learned the truth and become convinced ("assured") of it. His own mother and grandmother had taught him about Christ (1:5). The Old Testament stresses the importance of teaching God's Word to children (see Deuteronomy 4:9). The Old Testament Scriptures that Timothy had learned helped prepare him for later faith in Jesus (John 5:39). The Apostle Paul himself had mentored him (2:2). They certainly would carry more weight with Timothy than any false teachers could.

What a blessed heritage Timothy had! He had long known and experienced the excellencies of God and His Word. How foolish it would have been for him to turn away from it! The Scriptures are indeed holy, for they come from God. They tell us what we need to know to be saved from the penalty and bondage of sin. And despite what any false teachers might say, that salvation comes only through faith in Christ, who is the central focus of Scripture (Luke 24:25-27).

4. From whom had Timothy learned about the great truths of the faith (2 Timothy 3:14,15)?

Parents and teachers need to "walk the talk," as the saying goes. Example is such a strong teacher! But the issue goes beyond that. Parents and teachers need to express a vital, personal concern for the one being taught. It needs to be clear that they have the child or student's best interest at heart. Then, when a false teacher comes along, the student will have that extra protection in evaluating the teacher's message. "I don't really know this new person, but I know what those who love me have taught-and this is different.

Those who love me would not have lied to me-so this new person must be the one who is lying!"

5. What does it matter "of whom" someone has learned the truth of the gospel? What challenge is implied here for parents and teachers?

Purpose of the Word (vs. 16,17)

Second Timothy 3:16 is justly cherished as a strong statement in support of biblical authority and inerrancy. The verse declares that Scripture, and not part of it but all of it, is God-breathed. It is more than the mere thoughts of man; it represents a revelation from God. God is the author and source. Second Peter 1:21 tells us a bit about how this inspiration took place. We can take comfort in the fact that "the Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35).

As such, it is the reliable source on Christian teaching and is a divinely empowered instrument for guiding people in their spiritual walk.

As unpleasant as it might sometimes be, the Bible's guidance includes clear warnings about what constitutes departures from right doctrine or practice. It would not be loving to let someone go astray without voicing strong words of alarm and sometimes even rebuke. The rebukes and corrections that come to a believer through the Word are part of the sanctifying work of the Spirit.

6. What does verse 16 teach us about the authority of Scripture?

When Paul says that the purpose of Scripture is to make us perfect, he does not suggest we can become flawless in this life. The idea, rather, is to be "complete" or "fully equipped." This is what it means to be thoroughly furnished for all good works. It means that we will be given all we need to be mature Christians and to meet the demands of God.

7. In what way will Scripture make us "thoroughly equipped" (v. 17)?

This will be a good opportunity to hear how different ones among your learners conduct their quiet times and daily devotions. What devotional books can they recommend? When do they read? Is morning better, or evening? Do they read through the Bible in a year? If so, what plan do they follow?

Be sure to give attention to heart issues here as well as the form of Bible study. How do they prepare themselves to hear "rebuke" and "correction" from the Bible? How do they make sure they apply what they read and learn? Does someone hold them accountable? Allow some good examples to be reported to encourage those who may not have a good daily devotional plan.

8. If the Bible is all that verses 16 and 17 say it is, then we ought to spend considerable time in studying it! What are some ways you can realize these benefits from the Bible? What specifically do you do to know and understand its message?

Proclaiming the Truth (2 Timothy 4:1-5)

In light of the importance of God's Word, Paul gave Timothy strict orders. He was "laying a mandate upon Timothy which must be obeyed" (D. Edmond Heibert). The solemnity of the orders are emphasized as he noted that they were being given in the sight of God the Father and God the Son.

To add even more weight to his charge, Paul reminded Timothy that the Lord is He who will judge the world when He comes and makes His kingdom fully manifest. How important it was for Timothy to be able to give a good account before Christ the Judge and King. It was equally important that his flock be able to do the same.

In the light of all this, therefore, Paul charged Timothy to herald forth God's truth to the people. The task was so important that he was to be "instant," or prepared, to do this on every possible occasion, even when the circumstances seemed threatening and the audience unreceptive.

The message was too important and the stakes were too high to soft pedal this message. Part of Timothy's faithful preaching would include causing people to see their sinfulness and then strongly rebuking them for it. He was not to stop there, though. His message was also to offer encouragement to grow in godliness.

9. How did Paul emphasize the magnitude of the responsibility facing Timothy (4:1,2)?

Timothy needed to take every opportunity to proclaim the truth, because forces of evil were at work and were threatening to harden the hearts of men (1 Tim. 3:13). As man's heart becomes more and more corrupted, he becomes increasingly allergic to the goodness of God's truth. Instead, he turns in every direction and grasps at false fulfillments. These false answers rest upon the satisfaction of sinful desires rather than fellowship with God.

This warning to Timothy is ours as well: some people will be interested only in what they want to hear, not what they need to hear (1 Tim. 4:3). That's what it means to have itching ears.

Paul also discusses the problem of fables in 1 Timothy 4:7 and Titus 1:14. During the time between the Old and New Testaments, Jewish writers had created a great many fanciful tales. Greek myths went back even farther than that.

10. Where does man look for truth as he becomes increasingly corrupt (1 Tim. 4:3,4)?

We need to keep open minds and open Bibles when someone is teaching. The noble Bereans set the example for us when they compared what was taught with the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). If we disagree, we need to determine whether the issue is one of faith or one of expediency. Matters of expediency leave room for liberty of opinion.

If we disagree on issues of faith (doctrine), we need to discuss it with the teacher in private. Perhaps we misunderstood. Give the teacher an opportunity to explain and clear up the confusion. Or maybe we can explain to the teacher "the way of God more perfectly," as Aquila and Priscilla did for Apollos (Acts 18:26).

11. Suppose a preacher or teacher expresses some views that you do not like. How do you know whether it is he who is wrong, or if it is you who are guilty of what Paul describes here? What should you do if you disagree with your teacher?

Amid all the conflicts he might face, Timothy needed to maintain a calm and sober spirit, keeping his head even if all around him seemed to be losing theirs. He was to keep to his course, and he needed to do that even while he suffered hardships.

Paul wanted Timothy never to lose sight of his mission of proclaiming the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. There was nothing more important than the gospel message. Timothy had been given the great honor of being a minister of God's truth, so Paul finished this section of his letter by exhorting him to be faithful in every aspect of his work. -Stephen H. Barnhart

12. What mission was Timothy never to lose sight of (4:5)?

CONCLUSION

A Lifelong Learning Experience

Educators extol the virtue of lifelong learning. They rightly remind us that we can never know everything, that there is always more to learn, and that we need to continue to grow. The same can be said of Bible study. Even if you began studying as a child, you can always learn more of God's will from that greatest of all books.

No less an intellect than U.S. President John Quincy Adams (1767-1848) spoke of his love for, and study of, the Bible. He made it his practice for many years to read through the Bible once a year. His plan was to read four or five chapters every morning immediately after waking up. He gave a full hour to this study and described it as "the most suitable manner of beginning the day." He went on to say that with "reference to revelation, to history, or to morality, it is an invaluable and inexhaustible mine of knowledge and virtue."

Following the example of Adams, let us commit to reading and studying the Bible every day. A good way to do this is to use a "one-year Bible" that is conveniently divided into three hundred sixty-five daily readings. Find a Bible reading plan and put it to work today!

PRAYER

Dear Father, I desire to know Your Word, share Your Word, and order my life by Your Word. May that commitment bear fruit in my life and my church. In Jesus' name, amen.

THOUGHT TO REMEMBER

"Sin will keep you from this Book, or this Book will keep you from sin."

—Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899)