



Tim Pauley
PO Box 58403, Charleston, WV 25358
304.767.8430
tim.pauley@capitolcom.org

Difficult Times Will Come 2 Timothy 3:1-17

Why do we seek to have Bible studies in our state capitol? It is for this reason: ***“All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work”***. It is our desire that every man and woman of God in the capitol, whether legislator, elected official, staffer, or lobbyist, would be equipped for the good work God has for them do in the capitol. Paul wrote this wonderful description of God’s Word as he encouraged a young pastor, Timothy, to remain faithful to the work for which God had called him even during difficult days. Paul’s challenge to Timothy is a reminder to us of how we can remain faithful in the challenging times in which we live.

2 Timothy is Paul’s final words to Timothy, his son in the faith and a young pastor and Christian leader he sent to Ephesus to care for and lead the churches there. Timothy was certainly facing difficult times as he sought to lead the believers in a pagan city. As we read Paul’s first letter to Timothy we find that he may have been struggling with the difficult task Paul had assigned him. Paul challenged him to ***“fight the good fight”*** (1:18, 6:12) and not to let anyone ***“look down on his youthfulness”*** (4:12). In 2 Timothy he challenges him to suffer hardship as a ***“good soldier of Christ Jesus”*** (2:3). In chapter 3 Paul warns Timothy of the difficult days to come and how he might stand and serve in such challenging times. (I once again encourage you to read 2 Timothy 3 as we continue this study.)

The Warning of Difficult Times to Come

In chapter 3:1 Paul writes:

But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come.

Paul warns Timothy of something he needs to know and keep in mind – that ***“difficult times will come”***. The term ***“last days”*** refers to the period from Christ’s ministry here on earth until He comes again. Paul was referring to Timothy’s own day but also in a prophetic sense to our day as well. He describes the difficulties as ***“difficult times”***. The word means dangerous, hard to deal with, savage, or stressful. While Paul could be speaking of trials and tragedies which are part of each of our lives, he is primarily warning Timothy of the spiritual challenges and difficulties he would face. These ***“difficult times”*** come to those who faithfully seek to live for Christ.

Paul gives a vivid description of the characteristics of individuals and society that will bring about great challenges. Notice the 18-fold portrait:

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|-------------------------------|---|
| Lovers of themselves | Unforgiving |
| Lovers of money | Slanderers |
| Boasters | Without self-control |
| Proud | Brutal |
| Blasphemers | Despisers of good |
| Disobedient to parents | Traitors |
| Unthankful | Headstrong |
| Unholy | Haughty |
| Unloving | Lovers of pleasure rather than God |

These describe the attitudes and actions of those who do not follow Christ and reject the truths of the Word of God. We might spend a great deal of time examining each of these descriptions, but we should just consider if this is not an accurate description of our day and age? Paul completes his description by stating that such people ***“...have a form of godliness but deny its power”***. (vs. 5) In other words, they may be religious, but they have not experienced the changing truth of the gospel in their lives.

Paul goes on in his warning to Timothy:

10 Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 11 persecutions, and sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! 12 Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

Paul lets Timothy know that one who stands for Christ and His Word will certainly face persecution.

Finally, Paul warns Timothy,

But evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. (vs. 13)

The Source of Difficult Times

As we read Paul’s warning to Timothy, we should consider the source of the difficult times to come so that we are well prepared to face them. Believers will be challenged from

the outside by those who openly reject Christ and from the inside by those who claim to be Christians but seek to deceive through false teaching.

Those Who Openly Reject Christ

In Timothy's day this came in the form of great persecution from the Roman government and others who rejected the gospel message. Paul reminds Timothy how he had witnessed the persecutions endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. We can read of the tremendous persecution Paul himself faced throughout his ministry in 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. Tradition tells us Paul ultimately gave his life, beheaded at the hand of Nero, Emperor of Rome. There are countries today where believers are extremely persecuted; imprisoned, tortured, even put to death for openly following Christ or sharing the gospel message. Perhaps we do not (yet) face such extreme persecution in America, but there will come difficulties for those who faithfully seek to live for Christ.

Those Who are Deceivers and False Teachers

The greatest peril may not come from the persecution by unbelievers on the "outside". The greatest danger comes from "inside"; from those who claim to be Christians and proclaim God's Word but preach a false gospel and teach things contrary to the scripture. Paul warns of the **"impostors...deceiving and being deceived"** (vs. 13). Paul spends a great deal of time dealing with the danger of false teachers. In Acts 20 Paul calls together the elders from the church in Ephesus to meet with them one final time to give them some counsel on leading the church. (It is significant this is the same church to which Paul will send Timothy a short time later.) He warns the leaders **"...that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves."** (Acts 20:29-30) Interestingly, Paul's answer to them for this danger is again the Word of God: **"I commend you to God and to the word of His grace..."** (vs. 32) In many other places Paul warns believers to be on guard against those who would teach false doctrine. Recall Paul's warning to Timothy how this danger would grow worse and worse. Today the combination of a profound lack of Bible knowledge and a proliferation of errant teaching through TV "ministries", the internet, books, and other avenues, many are left wide open to any "spiritual" teaching that comes along. Many certainly fit Paul's description of those who are **"always learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth"**. (2 Timothy 3:7)

Paul warns Timothy (and us) that difficult times will come; that all who desire to live godly will be persecuted, and that evil men and imposters will go from bad to worse. This certainly leads us to the question; how do we respond in middle of such difficult times?

How Do We Respond in Difficult Times?

Focusing on Paul's warning of the difficult days to come could be discouraging. However, we remember that Paul warns Timothy so that he might respond correctly to the

difficult times he would face. This is a challenge to us as to how we should respond in our own difficult days.

Following Godly Examples

Paul wrote, **"But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance..."** Timothy stood in stark contrast to those who rejected God and His Word. Timothy faithfully followed Paul's teaching and his example of godly living and faithfulness in ministry. We would do well to identify godly people who are committed to the Word of God and seek to learn from them as Timothy learned from Paul. We should study the Word of God and learn from examples of Bible characters who stood for God. We can learn much from Christian historical figures, many who suffered or gave their lives in standing for the Word and preaching the gospel.

Continuing in the Word of God

In our study last week, we considered Paul's challenge to Timothy to "continue in the things which you have learned". Paul goes on to challenge Timothy to **"...Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction."** (4:2). It is knowing the truth is what will best protect us from the error and deceit we might face. This is again in great contrast to those who have rejected the scripture, the very ones who bring about the perilous times true believers will face.

Belonging to a Good Local Church

Paul's letter is a "pastoral letter", written to a young pastor challenging him how he should lead the church and preach the Word of God. As believers not in "the ministry" the challenge for us is to make sure we are part of local church with this kind of leadership and commitment to the Bible. Perhaps this will help us appreciate our churches and its leaders (By the way, October is Pastor Appreciation Month). Being part of such a local church is what will best prepare us for the difficult times to come.

"The Word supplies us with an unerring chart by which to steer through the dangerous sea of life. If we sincerely and diligently follow, it will deliver us from disastrous rocks and submerged reefs — and direct us safely to the heavenly harbor. That Word has all the instructions we need for every problem, and every trouble we may be called upon to face. That Word has been given to us "that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." 2 Timothy 3:17. How thankful we should be, that God has favored us with such a Word!" A.W. Pink

CAPITOL BIBLE STUDY

Thursday, October 25

12:00 McManus Conference Room

(# M252 Located near House Minority Offices)