



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

"BUT REALIZE THIS..." - 2 TIMOTHY 3:1

COLORADO

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Wow, can you believe we are starting another new year? And what will this year hold for each of us? Surely it will be a mixture of joys, challenges, encouragements and yes even hardships. But in spite of what comes our way...may God be glorified in us and through us. And as we continue with our study in 2 Timothy may you be reminded of the unshakable truths of God given in His Word that will bring light to our path on this journey of life, and offer stability, hope and direction as we seek to live our lives set a part for God and His glory.

In thinking back through the first two chapters of 2 Timothy, may I remind you of realities from which Paul lived his life and served God? The motivation for his life, his ministry always focused on Jesus Christ and the preeminence of Christ was the driving force behind his life and work. He understood the importance of keeping this truth in the forefront of life and work. It would enable Timothy and each of us to endure through hardships of every kind. Paul has reminded us that we must be single-minded in our devotion to Christ like a soldier who only wants to please his commander, disciplined as an athlete and labor like a hard working farmer. Live like this and you will have what's needed to be strong in grace guarding the treasure, disciplined through challenges, diligent throughout hardships and invested in lives for eternity's sake!

Just as Paul invites Timothy to be courageous, so too all believers are called to such action as we take the gospel to the world. As we remember Jesus Christ: the Son of God risen from the dead and the Son of Man descendant of David, may we have the same unshakable confidence in Him and willingness to suffer for His sake. Only by these truths of the gospel message can people be saved and reconciled to God. The power of the gospel cannot be restrained by opposition or censure. Nothing can ever keep the Word of God from going forth and accomplishing what God intends. And the Christian can be certain that after the effort of this life there comes the joy of heaven; and the greater the struggle, the greater the joy.² There is no sacrifice, mockery, alienation, rejection, desertion, imprisonment or even death too high a price to pay to put everything on the line for Christ. The importance and the rewards of a faithful life and ministry, not to mention the honor and glory of the Lord we trust and serve, far outweigh any personal sacrifice our trust and service may require.³ May this be our passion and pursuit as we live each day we are given in this New Year!

I. "BUT REALIZE THIS..." 2 TIMOTHY 3:1

2 Timothy 3:1- "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come."

Paul was facing imminent death and was prepared to suffer and die as a witness for Jesus Christ and the gospel. So everything we read in this epistle should be seen not merely as ink on a page but rather as Paul's lifeblood. He is prepared to offer the pledge of his death for all he writes. The circumstances of Paul's near execution for the gospel add special weight to these instructions given. Paul's desire

was to strengthen Timothy and all believers in our faith and our faithfulness in sharing the gospel.⁴

A. "BUT REALIZE THIS" - 2 TIMOTHY 3:1A

Paul concluded 2 Timothy 2 by reminding how to gently deal with sin and with those who have been held "captive to do his will". Now in chapter 3, Paul wants Timothy to understand that the evil and wickedness all believers face is something that will not go away or eventually get better. These terrible times will continue and escalate for every true believer in Jesus Christ. We must understand that opposition to God and His truth will persist and get worse as time progresses. There is a moral decline at every level. And there is only One Who can make a difference, only One Whom we can turn to and that is Jesus Christ. Only Jesus Christ can have an impact on our family, our friends, our nation and our world. Only God's Word can have the eternal impact needed in these days not just for our life but all lives. And so Paul begins 2 Timothy 3 with these words, "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come."

"But realize this" indicates a change of direction in Paul's writing as he transitions to a serious warning. "Realize this" is in the Greek present tense and carries the idea of constantly and continually, mark this, be aware and alert of this, be all the more diligent with this warning. Paul warns Timothy to prepare for struggle in these days because they will require a special faithfulness, constant alertness, diligence and wisdom. Remember that Paul is writing to what is taking place in the church, the professing church. That's the context of Paul's letter. There will be apostasy, moral decay and a tolerance for sin and this will escalate. Paul writes in 2 Timothy 4:3 that the time will come when men will not endure sound doctrine, rather wanting their ears to be tickled. Paul is referring to the church and those who call themselves believers. And Paul is addressing Timothy as pastor and his responsibility as a guardian of God's people. The apostasy of these times must be guarded against not just in the world but in the church. Prepare for struggle Timothy. These were Timothy's days. And you know what? These are our days as well.

B. "THAT IN THE LAST DAYS"-2 TIMOTHY 3:1B

What are "the last days" to which Paul refers? It refers to the days beginning with Jesus ascension to heaven and ends with His return. (1 John 2:18, Acts 2:16-17, Hebrews 1:2) Obviously it does not refer to a short period of time for there has already been almost 2000 years since Christ's ascension. It refers to this age, the period of time between Christ's first advent to His second return. This means that we are living in the "last days" as well. Paul isn't talking about

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“BUT REALIZE THIS...” 2 TIMOTHY 3:1

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

something in the distant future, but rather present times that Timothy and all believers will face in the course of life and ministry until Jesus Christ returns.

C. “DIFFICULT TIMES”- 2 TIMOTHY 3:1C

Why the serious warning from Paul about these “*last days*”? Because it is these days between Christ’s first and second coming that “*difficult times will come*”.

“*difficult*” Greek “**chelepos**” speaks of perilous times, terrible times, times of terror, threatening, menace and danger, grievous and violent and dangerous. It is used to describe the savage nature of 2 demon possessed men in Matthew 8:28.

“*times*” Greek “**epochs**” refers to periods of time rather than calendar time. It is plural possible referring to varying degrees of danger and difficulty, more and more frequently and intense as Christ’s return draws near.

Many thought there would be peace from trouble as a Christian and many still teach that today. Yet Paul warns all believers that there will not be any such state during this age, the last days. The church will have to deal with every kind of wickedness and so Paul issues this serious warning to Timothy and all believers. During the period of Christ’s first coming and His second coming, there will be difficult and dangerous times not just in the world, but in the church.

These days are characterized by man substituting their truths for God’s truth and thus God Himself.⁵ The list Paul gives us here in 2 Timothy 3:2-5 along with 1 Timothy 1:9-10 describes believers while Romans 1:29-31 describes the pagan society. And these times will be unparalleled periods of difficulty and danger. It doesn’t mean that all the days will be evil but there will be periods or seasons of evil where believers are hard pressed by the enemies of the gospel and would suffer persecution from increasing wickedness in the world. As time progresses we draw nearer to the second coming of Christ and these terrible times will increase in number and intensity.⁶ These are the days Paul refers to here in 2 Timothy 3:1. These are our days.

D. “WILL COME”- 2 TIMOTHY 3:1D

Paul wants us to know with certainty that these “*difficult times will come*.” It’s not that they may come...*they will come!* Our Christian life will not get easier. We live in a fallen world and distress will come. Wicked men will arise even from professing Christians as Paul will make clear in the following verses. Christians are being exposed to even greater hostility. The world will not welcome us with open arms because the world is hostile to God. In fact Paul warns that dangerous, savage periods of times will increase in frequency and severity as the return of Christ approaches. Attacks will come against the true church of Jesus Christ with increasing persecution and

difficulty. It is a rebellion against God with heresy, apostasy, self-will and moral decadence trying to engulf the church of Jesus Christ, corrupting and weakening the church, the body of Christ. And so Paul begins this chapter with serious warnings for the church, for all believers to aware and on guard and alert.⁷ Because these difficult times will come, we have the responsibility to expose and confront heresy and spiritual imposters in the church.

In fact, Paul gives his most serious commands with imperatives to avoid, expose, defend and be on the alert for imposters and the heresy creeping into the church in 2 Timothy 3:1-9. Then Paul urges Timothy to be strong and faithful in defending the faith and the gospel in 2 Timothy 3:10-14 knowing full well what this will bring as he awaits his own execution. But finally. Paul reminds Timothy of the rich resource he has in the Word of God which is the power of God to save sinners and sanctify believers. Believers must be rooted in and built upon the eternal foundation of God’s truth. The peril to be faced by all believers are real and difficult but are no match for God’s living and life changing Word.

One final word of encouragement. These days will not be forever. There will be a final showdown with the forces of evil. There will come the final consummation when evil meets God in a head on collision and the final triumph of God comes. We don’t have to worry about the outcome of these days.⁸ No for Christ is returning!

But until then, how shall we live? Peter wrote these words in 2 Peter 3:11-1: “(11) *Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, (12) looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning and the elements will melt with intense heat. (17) You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard lest, being carried away by the error of unprincipled men, you fall from your own steadfastness, (18) but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. To Him be the glory, both now and to the day of eternity. Amen.*”

¹Hughes, R. Kent and Chapell, Bryan, *1 and 2 Timothy and Titus; To Guard the Deposit*. Crossway Books: Wheaton, Illinois, 2000. Pg. 197.

²Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.183.

³MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.54-55.

⁴Calvin, John, 1509-1564. *The Crossway Classic Commentaries; 1 & 2 Timothy, Titus*. Crossway: Wheaton, Illinois, 1998. Pg.113.

⁵MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.104.

⁶Williams, Peter, *Opening Up 2 Timothy*. One Day Publications: Ryelands Road, Leominster, New Zealand, 2007. Pg. 66.

⁷MacArthur, John, *MacArthur Commentary on 2 Timothy*. Moody Press: Chicago, 1998. Pg.104.

⁸Barclay, William, *The Letters to Timothy, Titus, and Philemon*. Westminster John Knox Press: Louisville, Kentucky, 1956, revised 1975 and 2003. Pg.205.