

A Call for Conviction (2 Timothy 3:1-17)

“When a man is filled with the Word of God you cannot keep him still. If a man has got the Word, he must speak or die.” ~ D. L. Moody

I. The Call (3:1-17)

A. Overview

Paul continues contrasting his own ministry with that of the false teachers in order to encourage Timothy to persevere in the truth and in godliness. Once again the Pauline model serves as a call to endure, even in the midst of suffering.

B. A Prophetic Perspective (3:1-9)

1. A Description of the Evil Generation (vv. 1-5)

vv. 1-5 - This list of 18 vices strings together a list of numerous sins to describe the level of depravity of the future generation. As noted by one commentator: “The list does not intend to lay each sin mentioned at the feet of the false teachers in Ephesus (i.e., it is not a reliable guide to specifics of their behavior). But the picture it paints suggests that Paul regarded the false teachers as actual deviants from the norms established by his gospel, whose deviance endangered their faith and the faith of their followers” (Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 553).

Throughout Scripture the eschaton is marked with an unprecedented and unbridled reign of evil (cf. Mk 13; 2 Thess 2:3; 3:3; Jude 17-19; Rev 13:11-18).

Note that the list of descriptors is bracketed by two kinds of love — self-love and lovers of pleasure. A presence of self-centeredness overshadows the list (cf. Marshall, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 772).

The separation from such individuals seems to contradict Paul’s redemptive approach in 2:23. However, “tough love,” even excommunication, may need to take place for redemption to be even an option (cf. 1 Cor 5). The separation seen here is clearly a reference to a removal from the community.

2. A Reason for Avoiding this Evil Generation (vv. 6-9)

Paul devotes the next several verses to detail why such evil individuals are to be avoided (vv. 6-9). Much of what Paul pens reflects his words in 2:16-19.

vv. 6-7 - “infiltrate” - The term could be translated “who worm their way into” (cf. 1 Tim 5:13). Their tactics are subtle and destructive. We must be careful not to assume that Paul is espousing a low view of women. First, it was typical of other movements in the first-century to single out women to spread their message (cf. Josephus, *Ant.* 18.65-86). Second, Paul is careful to specify a particular group of women—gullible women living in sin and swayed with new and novel teachings (also, cf. 1 Tim 2:11;

5:3ff.). Third, just like these women, Paul has singled out particular men who have created havoc in the church. And fourth, elsewhere, Paul clearly values and utilizes women for the advancement of the Gospel.

vv. 8-9 - Appealing to Jewish tradition, Paul cites two magicians of Pharaoh's court who opposed Moses (e.g., CD 5:17-19; *Tg. Ps.-J.* on Exod 1:15; 7:11). As noted by one commentator: "They came to represent Moses' archenemies, who would counter his displays of divine power with various tricks of their own, and by their association with various stories . . . they acquired symbolic status as opponents of the truth" (Towner, *The Letters*, 564).

Note how Paul describes Jannes, Jambres, and those who follow in their steps: (1) they oppose godly leaders and their message, (2) they are unable to discern truth, (3) they are unfit for faith, (4) they are increasing in their depravity, and (4) they possess a transparent foolishness!

C. A Pauline Perspective (3:10-17)

vv. 10-11 - Contrasted with the false teachers, Paul's life and ministry serves as a model for godliness (1 Tim 4:6). This list of nine items addresses both the theoretical and the practical. The focal point of this list is upon Paul's perseverance in the midst of persecutions and sufferings—a major theme throughout this epistle.

Paul mentions three locations that Timothy would have been very familiar with (Acts 16:1-2):

- Antioch - This was Pisidian Antioch where the Jews forced Paul and Barnabas to leave (Acts 13:14-52).
- Iconium - At this city there was a threat of a stoning so Paul and company fled (Acts 14:1-5).
- Lystra - Paul actually suffered a stoning and was dragged out of this city and left for dead (Acts 14:6-19).

vv. 12-13 - Paul contrasts those who seek to live godly lives with those who embrace evil.

vv. 14-15 - Timothy's past training and present relationship with the truth calls for perseverance.

"holy writings" - The adjective is seldom used of the canonical OT writings. However, it is clear that Paul is speaking of writings of the Jewish religion—writings separate from secular works.

The purpose for continuing in these writings is that they grant wisdom and the ability to lead one to salvation. Also, note that Paul highlights the goal of these OT writings, which is Christ (cf. 1 Tim 1:14).

v. 16 - Often translated "all Scripture," the Greek adjective "all" speaks of "every [text] of Scripture" or "everything of Scripture." In turn, this "everything of Scripture" is inspired by God (To translate this phrase "all inspired Scripture is also useful" fails to account for the grammatical construction, the distributive way in which Scripture is envisaged, and the logical conclusion from the immediate context (cf. Towner, 588; Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible*).

"God-breathed" - This unique term does not speak of divine dictation but divine oversight (cf. 2 Pet 1:21).

In four prepositional phrases, Paul identifies the value and authority of Scripture. Note that the first two phrases address doctrine, while the last two phrases give attention to duty.

v. 17 - The ultimate goals of Scripture are for the building up of the saints, and ultimately, for God's glory. Note that the Scriptures are applicable/useful for all believers, not just for leaders in the Church. Also, observe that the Scriptures provide the means for accomplishing the task set before each believer (cf. Eph 2:10).

II. Intersect

While the vice list of 3:2-5 is reserved for a future generation, these descriptors serve as a warning to us who live in this present age. Living in a comfortable, materialistic, and self-centered culture, we can easily be lured by these vices. We need to ensure that our lives reflect one governed by the work of the Holy Spirit. Select one of the areas below which has been a struggle for you in your walk with the Lord. Commit the corresponding verse to memory this week. Also, explore one specific and measurable way you will address this area in the next seven days.

lovers of themselves - Mark 12:31: "The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

lovers of money - 2 Corinthians 9:7: "Each of you must give as you have made up your mind, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver."

boastful - Psalm 34:2: "My soul makes its boast in the LORD; let the humble hear and be glad."

arrogant - Psalm 149:4: "For the LORD takes pleasure in his people; he adorns the humble with victory."

ungrateful - Colossians 3:16: "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; teach and admonish one another in all wisdom; and with gratitude in your hearts sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to God."

unholy - 1 Peter 1:16 - "for it is written, 'You shall be holy, for I am holy.'"

unloving - 1 John 3:11 - "For this is the message you have heard from the beginning, that we should love one another."

without self-control - Titus 2:6 - "Likewise, urge the younger men to be self-controlled."

treacherous - Proverbs 3:3: "Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart."

loving pleasure rather than loving God - Matthew 6:33: "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well."

"The Bible is authoritative, for it is the Word of God; it is intelligible, for it is the word of man. Because it is the word of man in every part and element, it comes home to our hearts. Because it is the word of God in every part and element, it is our constant law and guide."

~ B. B. Warfield