



2 Timothy - Chapter Three

III. 2 Timothy 2:14-3:9 - Dealing with False Teachers (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Three

Paul starts with a graphic and disturbing account of just how depraved and degenerate mankind will become during the church age. Although people have always had the capacity to do real harm and damage to themselves and others, there will be a marked decline in community relationships, with a parallel increase of those who are selfish and self-centred, seeking to gain wealth and power for themselves at any cost. Paul cites the case of two Egyptian magicians who tried to oppose the power of God that was being displayed through Moses in Pharaoh's court, to show there is only ever going to be one winner - God!

Paul then turns to command Timothy to hold firm against such people as these, referring to the sound teaching that Timothy had received since his childhood and especially that from Paul himself. Paul reminded Timothy of his own experiences and the qualities he had displayed to remain faithful to his calling from God, yet clearly acknowledging that it was always God that was there to help him in all his hardship, saving him on numerous occasions from the life threatening situations he had frequently faced.

III.b. 2 Timothy 3:1-9 - Godlessness in the Last Days

This section opens by signalling a contrast from the previous paragraph. Although Paul hopes that some false teachers will repent, he does not want to give an unrealistic picture of the situation. While God may grant repentance to some, it is also clear that opposition to the faith will continue.

¹ You must understand this, that in the last days distressing times will come.

2 Timothy 3:1

You must understand this is a clear imperative, showing that what Paul is saying

is certain and that it is something that will definitely occur, probably in multiple instances, a fact that history has borne out.

Paul's reference to the last days, the Greek phrase *eschatais hēmerais*, puts the present evil situation in solemn eschatological, or end times, perspective. It is indicated by: <<*In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams*>> (Acts 2:17), that the last days began with the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost; refer also to comments made on 1 Timothy 4:1. Thus Paul's prediction distressing times that will occur in the last days is already beginning to be fulfilled, even in their present situation.

² For people will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy,
³ inhuman, implacable, slanderers, profligates, brutes, haters of good,
⁴ treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, ⁵ holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power. Avoid them!

2 Timothy 3:2-5

This list of vices vividly describes the negative impact of those who were opposing Paul and Timothy. The list begins and ends with references to misplaced love – i.e. people who are lovers of themselves, lovers of money (v.2), and lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God (v.4).

The first one, lovers of themselves, primarily refers to being lovers of their carnal selves, whereas believers should care more for their spiritual self and wellbeing.

Being lovers of money refers to wealth for the sake of wealth and being prepared to do almost anything to attain wealth and the status it so often provides, no matter what the cost may be to others. Paul had written of this to Timothy before: <<*For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains*>> (1 Timothy 6:10).

Paul uses a common technique, emphasising an item in a list by placing it either first or last and expanding upon it more than the other items in the list. While Paul and Timothy's opponents have the outward form of godliness, they do not have its real essence.

Disobedient to their parents is the only personal characteristic listed that directly opposes God's Law: <<*Honour your father and your mother, as the Lord your God commanded you, so that your days may be long and that it may go well with you in the land that the Lord your God is giving you*>> (Deuteronomy 5:16), although lovers of money could be considered to be covetousness: <<*You shall not covet your neighbour's house; you shall not covet your neighbour's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbour*>> (Exodus 20:17). All of them are clearly traits that are opposed to the spirit of the teachings of Christ.

Godliness, Greek *eusebeia*, means genuine piety, including holiness, reverence, faith, love and devotion to God.

The people referenced in vv.1-9 claim to know God, i.e. holding to the outward form of godliness but denying its power, but their lives are devoid of the work of the Spirit, which would have resulted in holiness, perseverance, and effectiveness in advancing God's Kingdom. Instead, they choose to be lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God.

Power means the present, effective working of God in and through believers' lives, something that was announced beforehand by Jesus: <<***But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judæa and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth***>> (Acts 1:8). This powerful new work of the Holy Spirit after Pentecost brought several beneficial results: more effectiveness in witness and ministry, effective proclamation of the Gospel, power for victory over sin, power for victory over Satan and demonic forces, and a wide distribution of gifts for ministry.

The apostles likely understood power in the context of Jesus' announcement to include both the power to preach the Gospel effectively and also the power, through the Holy Spirit, to work miracles confirming the message.

The same word, Greek *dynamis*, is used on at least eight occasions in the Book of Acts to refer to enabling power to work miracles in connection with Gospel proclamation.

In: <<***for God did not give us a spirit of cowardice, but rather a spirit of power and of love and of self-discipline***>> (2 Timothy 1:7), Paul linked power to the presence of the Holy Spirit, and this power enabled perseverance through suffering: <<***Do not be ashamed, then, of the testimony about our Lord or of me his prisoner, but join with me in suffering for the gospel, relying on the power of God***>> (2 Timothy 1:8), and faithful defence of the Gospel: <<***Guard the good treasure entrusted to you, with the help of the Holy Spirit living in us***>> (2 Timothy 1:14).

What should stand out above all of these characteristics are the two great commandments that were confirmed by Jesus: <<***Just then a lawyer stood up to test Jesus. 'Teacher,' he said, 'what must I do to inherit eternal life?' He said to him, 'What is written in the law? What do you read there?' He answered, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbour as yourself.'***>> And he said to him, '***You have given the right answer; do this, and you will live***'>> (Luke 10:25-28). It is recorded of the Sanhedrin: <<***Then they said, 'What further testimony do we need? We have heard it ourselves from his own lips!'***>> (Luke 22:71), which was intended in a very different context, but is clearly both prophetic and instructive.

Avoid them! This is the only command in vv.1-9. This avoidance most likely involves excommunication. Although there may appear to be a contradiction between this and the exhortation: <<***And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and***>>

come to know the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been held captive by him to do his will>> (2 Timothy 2:24-26), where the point is to seek the repentance of such people. In v.5, however, Paul envisions those who remain obstinate and states clearly that there comes a time when such people must be excluded from Christian fellowship. That is a tough call for leaders but is necessary for the greater good, which was the viewpoint of the high priest Caiaphas in his prophecy over Jesus: <<*You do not understand that it is better for you to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed*>> (John 11:50).

There has always been and will always be a mixture of good and bad people in the world, irrespective of their faith or belief. However, what Paul is warning of is that as time passes in this, the last age, the distinction between the two will widen. Those who represent the bad are diametrically opposed to the teachings of Christ and therefore the will of God. These are the people that Paul is calling for Timothy and all other disciples to oppose. There remain a lot of good people who disciples should still try to attract to the faith, indeed it is not for the church to discriminate between good and bad, although good discernment is always needed. The church is called to stand firm on its message, continue to proclaim the Gospel and live their own lives according to its teaching, which should naturally open up opportunities for them to reach out into their communities.

⁶ For among them are those who make their way into households and captivate silly women, overwhelmed by their sins and swayed by all kinds of desires, ⁷ who are always being instructed and can never arrive at a knowledge of the truth.

2 Timothy 3:6-7

For among them refers to a sub-group of the false teachers who make their way into households and captivate silly women. Such men were not professing their faith in the light but were doing so in secretive darkness: <<*For all who do evil hate the light and do not come to the light, so that their deeds may not be exposed*>> (John 3:20). Since women had little opportunity for education in those days, spent most of their time in the home, and were taught to respect the authority of men, they made an easy target for these false teachers. They would have known that some of these women would have had all kinds of natural desires, including a wish to have a wider role in society. The false teachers would have become a catalyst for the breakdown in the traditional family hub of community, something that Jesus had said his own teaching would do, although for the right reasons, for it would divide those that would come to God and those who would choose to go their own way in life: <<*For I have come to set a man against his father, and a daughter against her mother, and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law*>> (Matthew 10:35). It is the family of God that is the true hub of society, albeit a far from perfect community.

The twisted truth of the Gospel that was portrayed to these women by the false teachers no doubt played to all kinds of desires that would sway the women into their way of thinking, thus making them easy prey to become their disciples. After

all, Jesus had many female disciples drawn to the real truth he had spoken. These women may have known of that or were then told about it by the false teachers, and perhaps envisioned that this was the way they should serve God.

Women, overwhelmed by their sins. Due to their guilt from the past, which they had no way of repenting of, these women were particularly susceptible to both the asceticism, promoting artificial self-denial: <<*They forbid marriage and demand abstinence from foods, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by those who believe and know the truth*>> (1 Timothy 4:3), and the antinomianism, teaching that **all kinds of desires** are actually acceptable (vv.2-4), set forth by the false teachers, who were men such as: <<*those who say, ‘With our tongues we will prevail; our lips are our own – who is our master?’>> (Psalm 12:4).*

Always being instructed, never arrive at a knowledge of the truth. Even those who regularly attend a good teaching church and hear the Gospel being explained in ways that most would understand, some people just seem to be blind to the truth. Jesus had alluded to this in a conversation with some Pharisees: <<*Jesus said, ‘I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind’>> (John 9:39).*

⁸ As Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these people, of corrupt mind and counterfeit faith, also oppose the truth.

2 Timothy 3:8

Jannes and Jambres are the names given in early extra-biblical Jewish writings to the Egyptian magicians who **opposed Moses**, and in doing so opposed God as well: <<*The Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘When Pharaoh says to you, “Perform a wonder”, then you shall say to Aaron, “Take your staff and throw it down before Pharaoh, and it will become a snake.”’ So Moses and Aaron went to Pharaoh and did as the Lord had commanded; Aaron threw down his staff before Pharaoh and his officials, and it became a snake. Then Pharaoh summoned the wise men and the sorcerer’s; and they also, the magicians of Egypt, did the same by their secret arts. Each one threw down his staff, and they became snakes; but Aaron’s staff swallowed up theirs. Still Pharaoh’s heart was hardened, and he would not listen to them, as the Lord had said>> (Exodus 7:8-13). In these writings, these men became key symbols of opposition to God’s truth. Although their names do not appear in the OT itself, they would be familiar to Timothy and other Jews; identifying the opponents with these archetypal enemies of God’s truth would have significant rhetorical power.*

Of corrupt mind. Once again false teaching is cast in terms of deficient thinking, as was commented on in 2 Timothy 2:26. This is why divine aid is so necessary for coming to the knowledge of truth that is lacking in those who **oppose the truth**.

Counterfeit faith. In spite of their claims, these people do not have saving faith, since they oppose the Gospel, both in their teaching and in their living: <<*They profess to know God, but they deny him by their actions. They are detestable, disobedient, unfit for any good work>> (Titus 1:16).*

⁹ But they will not make much progress, because, as in the case of those two men, their folly will become plain to everyone.

2 Timothy 3:9

They will not make much progress is another note of encouragement similar to: <<*But God's firm foundation stands, bearing this inscription: 'The Lord knows those who are his', and, 'Let everyone who calls on the name of the Lord turn away from wickedness'*>> (2 Timothy 2:19). In spite of the current success of the false teachers, they will and must ultimately fail: <<*For who can resist his will?*>> (Romans 9:19b).

The case of those two men refers back to Jannes and Jambres in v.8.

Their folly will become plain to everyone, as is always the case for those who try to oppose the will of God.

IV. 2 Timothy 3:10-4:8 - Paul's Charge to Timothy

Having focused almost exclusively on the false teachers in vv.1-9, Paul addresses Timothy directly as to how he must resist these opponents, while remaining totally faithful to the Gospel.

IV.a. 2 Timothy 3:10-17 - Call to hold fast to Scripture and Paul's example

This section opens with a clear, strong contrast: 'now you have observed my teaching'. The false teachers live and teach one way (vv.1-9), but Paul provides a totally different model for Timothy. The repetition of 'my' in vv.10-11, places clear emphasis on Paul as the model for faithful living and ministry, in contrast to that proposed by the opponents. While Paul is not yet perfected, he is confident enough in his Christian walk to ask Timothy to imitate him. Several years earlier he had made the same suggestion to the church in Philippi: <<*Brothers and sisters, join in imitating me, and observe those who live according to the example you have in us*>> (Philippians 3:17).

¹⁰ Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹ my persecutions, and my suffering the things that happened to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured! Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

2 Timothy 3:10-11

Now you have observed my teaching. Paul reminds Timothy that he has firsthand experience of Paul's Gospel proclamation and indeed has shared sufficient of his life to know his true character, a life of dedicated service to God and one that is clearly worthy of emulation by any disciple, even if it is only to have a similar attitude and quality of faith, hope and trust in God. Paul knew that he had proclaimed the whole truth in the Gospel, as he confirmed in his farewell address to the Ephesian leaders in Miletus: <<*Therefore I declare to you this day that I am not responsible for the blood of any of you, for I did not shrink from*

declaring to you the whole purpose of God>> (Acts 20:26-27).

One of the reasons that made Paul into such an iconic teacher of the Gospel is the fact that he actually lived what he taught. That is a lesson for all church leaders to learn and emulate if they are to avoid accusations of hypocrisy. They cannot say one thing to their congregations on a Sunday and then live their own lives in a different way.

Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra are cities Paul visited on his first missionary journey, as recorded in Acts Chapters 13-14, prior to Timothy joining him during his second journey. Lystra was Timothy's hometown: <<*Paul went on also to Derbe and to Lystra, where there was a disciple named Timothy, the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer; but his father was a Greek. He was well spoken of by the believers in Lystra and Iconium*>> (Acts 16:1-2), therefore, he was probably aware of what happened to Paul on this first journey, for it would have been talked of openly. Thus Timothy would have known from his earliest awareness of Paul that suffering had been a central part of Paul's work, and that, by joining him in the work, he would be laying himself open to similar suffering.

Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them does not mean that God kept Paul from experiencing any harm in these instances, for in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead: <<*But Jews came there from Antioch and Iconium and won over the crowds. Then they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing that he was dead. But when the disciples surrounded him, he got up and went into the city. The next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe*>> (Acts 14:19-20), and it is possible that Timothy even witnessed this. What Paul is probably referring to is both the fact that the Lord preserved him from death in order that he could continue preaching, and continue in the Lord's work, something central in Paul's heart, which would keep him faithful even in suffering.

Paul had known from the day of his calling that he would suffer. The Lord's appearance to him on the Damascus Road had blinded him, although that only lasted three days, during which time he would contemplate his experience and await further instruction: <<*I asked, "What am I to do, Lord?" The Lord said to me, "Get up and go to Damascus; there you will be told everything that has been assigned to you to do"*>> (Acts 22:10). The Lord then appeared to Ananias with an instruction: <<*But the Lord said to him, 'Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name'*>> (Acts 9:15-16). And Paul did suffer: <<*For you put up with it when someone makes slaves of you, or preys upon you, or takes advantage of you, or puts on airs, or gives you a slap in the face. To my shame, I must say, we were too weak for that! But whatever anyone dares to boast of – I am speaking as a fool – I also dare to boast of that. Are they Hebrews? So am I. Are they Israelites? So am I. Are they descendants of Abraham? So am I. Are they ministers of Christ? I am talking like a madman – I am a better one: with far greater labours, far more imprisonments, with countless floggings, and often near death. Five times I have received from the Jews the forty lashes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I received a stoning. Three times I was shipwrecked; for a night and a day I was adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from*

bandits, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers and sisters; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, hungry and thirsty, often without food, cold and naked. And, besides other things, I am under daily pressure because of my anxiety for all the churches. Who is weak, and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble, and I am not indignant?>> (2 Corinthians 11:20-29). Since this account was written in the mid-50's AD it does not include a beating by a mob in Jerusalem, being attacked in the Sanhedrin, Roman imprisonment in Jerusalem, Cæsarea and Rome twice, and being shipwrecked on the island of Malta! Yet Paul still had faith in God to say: <<The Lord will rescue me from every evil attack and save me for his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory for ever and ever. Amen>> (2 Timothy 4:18). Paul always knew that further suffering was ahead of him: <<And now, as a captive to the Spirit, I am on my way to Jerusalem, not knowing what will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies to me in every city that imprisonment and persecutions are waiting for me. But I do not count my life of any value to myself, if only I may finish my course and the ministry that I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the good news of God's grace>> (Acts 20:22-24), and later while in Cæsarea on his way to Jerusalem: <<While we were staying there for several days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judæa. He came to us and took Paul's belt, bound his own feet and hands with it, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, "This is the way the Jews in Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and will hand him over to the Gentiles."' When we heard this, we and the people there urged him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, 'What are you doing, weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not only to be bound but even to die in Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.' Since he would not be persuaded, we remained silent except to say, 'The Lord's will be done'>> (Acts 21:10-14), for his mindset was always: <<For to me, living is Christ and dying is gain>> (Philippians 1:21), a mark of rock solid faith, hope and trust.

¹² Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

2 Timothy 3:12

All who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus must abide in the Word of God: <<Then Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him, 'If you continue in my word, you are truly my disciples; and you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free'>> (John 8:31-32). The warnings against following false teaching are there for those who do abide in the Word: <<We must no longer be children, tossed to and fro and blown about by every wind of doctrine, by people's trickery, by their craftiness in deceitful scheming>> (Ephesians 4:14), and: <<Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings; for it is well for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by regulations about food, which have not benefited those who observe them>> (Hebrews 13:9). It was the sole purpose of Luke's Gospel to portray the certainty of the truth: <<Since many have undertaken to set down an orderly account of the events that have been fulfilled among us, just as they were handed on to us by those who from the beginning were eyewitnesses and servants of the word, I too decided, after

investigating everything carefully from the very first, to write an orderly account for you, most excellent Theophilus, so that you may know the truth concerning the things about which you have been instructed>> (Luke 1:1-4).

The Berean Jews wanted to live a godly life and so when they heard the Gospel they neither dismissed it outright, nor accepted it without questioning, but looked further into it for themselves. Something to be emulated by believers and unbelievers especially, for all should refer to God's Word as it contains the truth, something the Berean Jews were well aware of: <<*These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so*>> (Acts 17:11).

Will be persecuted. Suffering is an expected element of Christian living: <<*'If the world hates you, be aware that it hated me before it hated you. If you belonged to the world, the world would love you as its own. Because you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world – therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, "Servants are not greater than their master." If they persecuted me, they will persecute you; if they kept my word, they will keep yours also. But they will do all these things to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me'*>> (John 15:18-21), <<*I have said this to you, so that in me you may have peace. In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!*>> (John 16:33), <<*In fact, when we were with you, we told you beforehand that we were to suffer persecution; so it turned out, as you know*>> (1 Thessalonians 3:4), and: <<*Share in suffering like a good soldier of Christ Jesus*>> (2 Timothy 2:3). The actual persecution may be less when there has been more Christian influence on the laws and cultural values of a society, but the unbelieving world will always remain deeply hostile to the Gospel, and toward those that choose to live by it.

¹³ But wicked people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived.

2 Timothy 3:13

Wicked people and impostors. It is not clear why Paul separated these two groups. It is probably because he saw the first group as being deliberately deceptive to achieve their own ends, whereas the impostors may actually believe in what they are proclaiming, although the end result would be the same for those who would be taken in by either group.

The false teachers will progress from bad to worse: <<*Avoid profane chatter, for it will lead people into more and more impiety*>> (2 Timothy 2:16). Those doing the deceiving are themselves deceived, perhaps the saddest fact of all for, unless the deception becomes known to them, they live beyond the bounds of hope.

Despite all the advances made in science, medicine and technology, as well as a dramatic increase in material wealth for ordinary people in some parts of the world, overall it appears that morality is in sharp decline just as is indicated in the words of Jesus, Paul and others from that period, spoken and written

nearly two thousand years ago. Some people believe this means the time for Christ to come again is imminent, although it seems that mankind has the capacity to decline much further yet. All the church can do is to keep living by the Gospel and ensure the truth is passed on faithfully to the next generation.

¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it,

2 Timothy 3:14

But as for you. Paul again contrasts Timothy to the false teachers, showing that he is called to be different, as are all who have accepted Christ, for that is what you have learned and firmly believed. Once the Gospel truth is accepted in a person's heart there is no need to look elsewhere.

From whom you learned it. This could refer to Paul but may also refer back to Timothy's mother and grandmother: <<*I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that lived first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, lives in you*>> (2 Timothy 1:5), especially since v.15 mentions the teaching he received in childhood and the Greek translated from whom is plural.

¹⁵ and how from childhood you have known the sacred writings that are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

2 Timothy 3:15

From childhood you have known the sacred writings. Timothy was a Jew and therefore would have been taught the Law of Moses from a very young age and then the rest of Scripture. It is not known how old he was when his mother and grandmother came to faith. If they had heard the Gospel from Diaspora Jews who had been in Jerusalem at Pentecost, when the Spirit was given, then he could have been taught the Gospel too from a young age! What he would have learned from the sacred writings is that the Messiah would come to bring salvation to those who would believe in him; and that is exactly what had happened in his mother's generation, so it was very real and fresh for Timothy and his generation.

That God had the foresight to give the information about Jesus so long before it happened made it easy for so many to accept it. Yet for even more it seems, they still did not want to accept the truth. Two thousand years later, the experience of disciples might be very different but the evidence for Jesus being the Messiah seems to be even stronger, yet it seems that even fewer people, in the affluent countries at least, even want to believe. This is why Jesus and men like Paul issued the warnings against having the world as a god.

Instruct you for salvation. Scripture can lead to the 'knowledge of the truth' as seen in: <<*This is right and is acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, who desires everyone to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth*>> (1 Timothy 2:3-4), <<*And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kindly to everyone, an apt teacher, patient, correcting opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant that they will repent and come to know the truth, and that they may escape from the snare of the devil, having been*>>

held captive by him to do his will>> (2 Timothy 2:24-26). It has the power to bring its readers to faith: <<*In fulfilment of his own purpose he gave us birth by the word of truth, so that we would become a kind of first fruits of his creatures*>> (James 1:18), and: <<*You have been born anew, not of perishable but of imperishable seed, through the living and enduring word of God*>> (1 Peter 1:23). This is in direct contrast to the false teaching which, as stated throughout the letter, leads only to useless disputes and ungodliness.

¹⁶ All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness,

2 Timothy 3:16

All Scripture would refer first to the OT but by implication also to at least some NT writings, which by this time were already being considered as Scripture. This can be seen in: <<*for the scripture says, 'You shall not muzzle an ox while it is treading out the grain', and, 'The labourer deserves to be paid'*>> (1 Timothy 5:18), where the second phrase is a quote directly from Luke 10:7, a document Paul would have been very familiar with at the time of writing. Peter provides a similar indication: <<*So also our beloved brother Paul wrote to you according to the wisdom given to him, speaking of this as he does in all his letters. There are some things in them hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do the other scriptures*>> (2 Peter 3:15b-16), which shows awareness of some kind of collection of Paul's letters, with the number unspecified here, but which Peter and others accepted as having the same authority as the OT Scriptures.

Inspired by God translates a Greek word *theopneustos* that does not occur in any other Greek text, biblical or otherwise, prior to this letter. Some therefore suggest that Paul coined this term from words meaning 'God' and 'breathed', which is certainly possible, and many translations use terms to reflect this such as 'All Scripture is breathed out by God' (ESV), and 'All Scripture is God-breathed' (NIV). It is the inspiration of God that moves people, for: <<*It was declared at first through the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God added his testimony by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will*>> (Hebrews 2:3b-4).

The term stresses the divine origin and thus the authority of Scripture. Paul does not point to the human authors of Scripture as inspired people but says that the written words themselves, Scripture, Greek *graphē*, which usually means writing, and in the NT always refers to biblical writings, are the words spoken, i.e. breathed out, by God. Peter writes in a similar fashion: <<*First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one's own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God*>> (2 Peter 1:20-21).

Whereas it seems that Paul's and Timothy's opponents stressed certain aspects or portions of Scripture, e.g. genealogies: <<*I urge you, as I did when I was on my way to Macedonia, to remain in Ephesus so that you may instruct certain people not to teach any different doctrine, and not to occupy themselves with myths and endless genealogies that promote speculations rather than the*

divine training that is known by faith>> (1 Timothy 1:3-4), and: <<*But avoid stupid controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless*>> (Titus 3:9), Paul stresses the authoritativeness of all Scripture. The divine origin of Scripture is the reason for its power to convert (v.15), and its usefulness in training. Because Scripture comes from God himself, all of it is profitable in a range of ways, ultimately leading to righteousness.

Scripture, the very Word of God, is of utmost importance for several reasons:

1. It reveals the nature and character of God.
2. It reveals sin for what it really is and does, in all its destructive force and just how abhorrent it is in the sight of God.
3. It teaches how God views his creation and, in particular, his love for all of mankind.
4. It provides a manual for right living, showing what God wants and does not want from his people.
5. Above all, it reveals God's only plan for human salvation in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah of God, who took the place of sinful mankind and offered himself as a living sacrifice to God the Father as atonement for all sins: past, present and future.

That the Word is useful for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness means it can be useful to teachers like Timothy, who need to take such actions with individuals or whole congregations, and is equally of use for individuals, who recognise they need to take such actions in their own lives.

¹⁷ so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 3:17

So that, in the sense of 'in order that', refers back to the preceding verse, and indicates the purpose of Scripture for the believer.

Everyone who belongs to God is also translated man of God. Both the OT background of this phrase, refer to comments made on 1 Timothy 6:11-12, and the context, show that Paul is thinking specifically of Timothy as his delegate and a leader over the church. While this verse applies generally to all believers, Paul's specific focus here is the preparation of Timothy to continue in his task when Paul is no longer present.

May be proficient. God is not looking for perfect people. He wants people to acknowledge him in all his glory and accept Christ Jesus as their Lord and Saviour, living out their lives in fulfilment of God's will for them. Everyone should have a good grasp and understanding of the Word of God in order to achieve this aim.

Equipped for every good work. In a broad sense this includes everything that God calls a believer to do. But, in a specific sense, this also supports the doctrine of the sufficiency of Scripture. That is, the idea that the truth contained in Scripture is sufficient in all matters pertaining to doctrine and moral behaviour. Although there are no commands outside the Bible that apply to all of God's people, this

does not exclude individual guidance by the Holy Spirit on how to apply the universal commands of Scripture in particular situations. This can be seen in: <<*Live by the Spirit, I say, and do not gratify the desires of the flesh. For what the flesh desires is opposed to the Spirit, and what the Spirit desires is opposed to the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law*>> (Galatians 5:16-18), where ‘live by the Spirit’ implies both direction and empowerment. That is, making decisions and choices according to the Holy Spirit’s guidance, and acting with the spiritual power that the Spirit supplies. In Scripture, to be ‘led by the Spirit’ clearly represents the pattern of conduct of all of one’s life. In this phrase, the verb implies an active, personal involvement by the Holy Spirit in guiding Christians, and the present tense indicates His commitment as an ongoing activity.

The Word of God is a living Word that is suitable for all people, in all generations and in all situations. Its primary purpose is to reveal God to his people, showing them what they need to do in order to come into an everlasting relationship with him.

Matthew Henry wrote on this subject that: ‘There is no occasion for the writings of the philosopher, nor for rabbinical fables, nor popish legends, nor unwritten traditions, to make us perfect men of God, since the scripture answers all these ends and purposes. O that we may love our Bibles more, and keep closer to them than ever! and then shall we find the benefit and advantage designed thereby, and shall at last attain the happiness therein promised and assured to us’.