

# THE PASTORAL EPISTLES



## Hold Fast the Word: 2 Timothy 3

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*A Scriptorium Study from The Fellowship of Ailbe*

**The Fellowship of Ailbe**

The Pastoral Epistles: Hold Fast the Word: 2 Timothy 3  
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## 2 Timothy 3: Introduction

Timothy must understand that hard times are coming. He must prepare himself and his congregation to stand firm in the Word of God, come what may.

That is his heritage, and it will be his legacy. The Word is our strength, and we must never let go of it.

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## 1 Lovers of Themselves

*Pray Psalm 2.1-3.*

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.1-5.*

*Preparation.*

1. When are “the last days” (cf. Acts 2.14-17)?
2. Look at what is first on the list in verse 2. Why do people act the way Paul says they will in the last days?

*Meditate.*

People have always loved themselves above everything else. But in our day, we have waded into a morass of narcissism in which all that seems to matter is that people get whatever they want. Every person wants what’s right in his or her own mind, regardless of how that might impact others.

Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, saw this coming. He warned Timothy because, as is apparent in verse 5, even people who seem to have faith in Jesus and at least some “form of godliness” can be, at bottom, mere lovers of themselves.

Self-love must not be the defining love of our souls. Love for God comes first, because in loving Him we learn what real love is like, and how we should want others to love us. This, then, equips us to love others with the love of God, just as we should want them to love us. All Christian teaching and preaching must work toward these ends (1 Tim. 1.5), because if Christians don’t model true love to our narcissistic world, the swamp of narcissism will swallow and drown us all.

Paul’s list of disagreeable traits is not meant to be exhaustive, but illustrative of where out-of-control self-love leads. We see all these characteristics present and increasing in our day – just as Paul did in his – because we are living in the last days, which began with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2.14-17). Paul warns Timothy about this because, as shepherd over the Lord’s flock, he must be careful to identify the presence of any of these markers in the people of his church, and work diligently to overcome them.

Self-love is like a virus. Unchecked and uncorrected, it will infect all our thoughts, affections, values, and priorities; and we’ll think it’s just the most natural thing to do or say or seek or have just about whatever we want. And we’ll expect our church, rather than to equip us for serving others, to serve our every whim and need. And when that happens, we have entered “perilous times” indeed.

*Reflect.*

1. Meditate on Isaiah 2.1-8. In “the last days” such as Paul described, what should the Church be like?
2. Why is out-of-control self-love so poisonous? How can we tell when the love we rightly have for ourselves is beginning to become misguided?

3. What should believers do if they notice any of these indicators in themselves? In their fellow believers?

*There isn't anyone, after all, who doesn't love himself. But we have to look for the right sort of love and avoid the wrong sort. You see, anyone who loves himself by leaving God out of his life and leaves God out of his life by loving himself, doesn't even remain in himself but goes away from himself. Augustine (354-430), Sermons 330.3*

*Teach me to love You better, Lord, so that I might love my neighbors well, especially today as I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.1-6.*

How might you encounter the anger of unbelievers today? Are you prepared for it? How will you respond? Take all these matters to the Lord in prayer.

*Sing Psalm 2.1-6*

**Psalm 2.1-6** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!

Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.

His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

## 2 Corruption in the House

*Pray Psalm 2.11, 12.*

Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish *in* the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.6-9.*

*Reflect.*

1. Are learning and knowing the truth the same thing? Explain.
2. Who resists the truth of God? How can we recognize such people?

*Meditate.*

These verses continue the description of people who have “a form of godliness” but are “denying its power”, whom Paul mentioned in v. 5. In the last days, Paul says to Timothy, expect to find wolves in sheep’s clothing.

These are people whose intentions in becoming part of the believing community are wholly self-interested. They are lovers of self and pleasure rather than lovers of God (vv. 2, 4), and so they will look for a church where they can parade their much learning, impress a few gullible people, and spread their corruption around.

Paul says they “creep” into “households”, probably intending “households” as a reference to house churches, which were common in these early days of the faith. “Creep” translates the Greek, ἐνδύω – *enduno* – which means to enter secretly and with ulterior motives. Their motives are purely self-serving. They may know a lot of Scripture and doctrine, but it’s all just head knowledge. They seek to entice women who are “gullible” and “loaded down with sins”. The suggestion here is that they might exploit them for personal satisfaction, whether as admiring followers and conduits of corrupt teaching, or for sexual sin.

But such people do not have the truth, and never will have it, so long as their motives are as Paul describes them here (v. 7). Instead, they are like the court magicians who resisted Moses. Soon enough “the magic” will show itself to be a façade, and they will be exposed as self-seeking, worldly frauds. But how many people will be misled and hurt before that happens? Paul warns Timothy to keep a close watch out for such men, and to have nothing to do with them (v. 5). Good advice for all of us.

*Reflect.*

1. How can you tell when someone is just parading their knowledge to impress others? How should you respond?
2. Why are people “of corrupt minds” “disapproved concerning the faith”? Is there any hope for such people?
3. What should church leaders – like Timothy – do to help ensure that people of corrupt minds and merely selfish interests don’t find a home in the local church?

*Hold Fast the Word: 2 Timothy 3*

*The sins of the wicked come about in three ways. Either they are bound up with sacrileges or vices or crimes. For they commit sacrilege when they do not believe rightly concerning God and depart from the true faith either because of fear of temporal misfortunes or desire for temporal advantages or by blindness or perversity of heart alone. They sin by vice when unrestrained or obscene in themselves; they live in a shameful fashion. Then they sin by crimes when they cruelly harm others, either by damages or some kind of oppression. Fulgentius of Ruspe (467-532) Letter to Scarila 10.37*

*O Lord, let there be no corruption, and no mere self-interest in me! Guard me from these today as I go forth to...*

*Pray Psalm 2.10-12.*

What opportunities for serving the Lord are ahead of you today? Commit them to Jesus, and go forth trusting in Him to use you for His glory.

*Sing Psalm 2.9-12*

**Psalm 2.9-12** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*).

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

### 3 Great Expectations

*Pray Psalm 2.11.*

Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.10-12.*

*Reflect.*

1. How is Paul using the word “followed” in verse 10?
2. How is he using the word “delivered” in verse 11?

*Meditate.*

In 1 Corinthians 11.1, Paul commands his readers to imitate him, just as he imitated Christ. In our text for today, Paul commends Timothy because, apparently, he did just that. Notice the many areas of Paul’s life and teaching mentioned here. First, Timothy conformed himself to Paul’s teaching. He didn’t just listen to Paul; he did what Paul taught.

Everything else follows from that. From Paul’s teaching, Timothy set his purpose in life and his faith. He was fixed on Jesus and he would not turn back. Like Paul, Timothy knew longsuffering and love, but also perseverance, persecutions, and afflictions. He may have shared in some of these with Paul. He surely had troubles of his own as well.

Paul was sustained through all these things by the Lord Jesus. His suffering was real, as was Timothy’s. But Jesus delivered them, sustaining them through their trials and bringing them through to greater growth and ministry.

All of which raises the question: What do *we* expect from our experience of faith? If we listen to and follow Jesus and Paul, we should expect to love well, serve faithfully, persevere in obedience, and suffer various trials and afflictions. It is given to all who trust in Jesus, not only to believe in Him, but to suffer for His Name (v. 12; cf. Phil. 1.29).

So we shouldn’t try to dodge or avoid it. Just be faithful. Live for Jesus. Proclaim Jesus to the world. And let the Lord handle the responses (cf. Acts 17.32-34). Like Paul and Timothy, we need to have great expectations about our discipleship, and those will include everything that happened to the apostles, and to our Lord Himself.

*Reflect.*

1. What are some ways believers in our day might expect to suffer for the Lord?
2. How can we prepare for persecutions and afflictions, so that we endure through them and know the deliverance of the Lord?
3. How can believers help one another to carefully follow Paul’s teaching and example?

*Here he calls afflictions and sorrows “persecutions.” Anyone who pursues the course of virtue should not expect to avoid grief, tribulation and temptations. John Chrysostom (344-407), Homilies on 2 Timothy 8*



*Strengthen me, Lord, for whatever may come today, so that I will be...*

*Pray Psalm 2.10-12.*

What do you fear as you think about serving the Lord? Fear the Lord instead, and love Him, and He will give you the courage you need..

*Sing Psalm 2.9-12*

**Psalm 2.9-12** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*).

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.

Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!

Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

## **4 Think It Can't Get Worse? Think Again.**

*Pray Psalm 2.1-6*

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”  
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The Lord shall hold them in derision.  
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,  
And distress them in His deep displeasure:  
“Yet I have set My King  
On My holy hill of Zion.”

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.13.*

*Reflect.*

1. Why should we expect evil to “grow worse and worse”?
2. What will that look like? How should we look upon people who are “being deceived”?

*Meditate.*

Paul had already described a fairly grim scenario for the last days (vv. 1-9). This had been the cause of his being afflicted and persecuted, and of advising all believers that they should expect the same (vv. 10-12).

And Paul says it's going to get worse. The weeds which the devil sows into the field of the world will proliferate, grow strong, and threaten the good seed of the Kingdom (Matt. 13.24-30, 36-43). Evil men will get worse. Impostors – those who pretend faith but are really wolves in sheep's clothing – will grow worse and worse. Those who lie and deceive will increase, and, consequently, those who are deceived will increase as well.

It's just what we might expect from a world of rebellious sinners, where every person only wants to do what is right in their own eyes. There will always be tares in the field. There will always be people to mock the Gospel and mock us, to spin wild lies about life and morality, and to convince many to believe their lies. We must neither be surprised nor chagrined by this. But just make sure we're ready.

Follow Paul and Jesus; hold fast to sound doctrine; maintain your testimony; look for opportunities to love. Do that, and Jesus will take care of you, come what may.

*Reflect.*

1. What are some examples of deceiving teaching in our day? How does this hurt people?
2. How can we know that we ourselves are not “impostors” when it comes to faith in Jesus?
3. How does God view the rebellious people of the world (Ps. 2.1-6)? How should that encourage and guide us in dealing with the evil of our day?

*Hold Fast the Word: 2 Timothy 3*

*Make progress, make progress in well-doing, for, according to the apostle, there are certain people who go from bad to worse. If you are progressing, you are advancing. Progress in well-doing, progress in good faith, progress in good deeds. Keep singing. Keep advancing. Do not wander. Do not return. Do not remain stationary. Augustine (354-430), Sermons 256*

*Help me to persevere today, Lord, no matter what I have to confront. Grant me grace so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.1-6.*

Pray for those who are hostile to God and the Gospel. Pray that they may come to their senses and find the truth that is in Jesus. Be prepared to bear witness to the Lord today.

*Sing Psalm 2.1-6*

**Psalm 2.1-6** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?

Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!

Throw off His Law, reject His Word; no more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath at all who embark on this cursed path.

His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

## 5 Continue in the Word

*Pray Psalm 2.7-9.*

“I will declare the decree:  
The LORD has said to Me,  
‘You *are* My Son,  
Today I have begotten You.  
Ask of Me, and I will give You  
The nations *for* Your inheritance,  
And the ends of the earth *for* Your possession.  
You shall break them with a rod of iron;  
You shall dash them to pieces like a potter’s vessel.”

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.14, 15.*

*Reflect.*

1. What does Paul mean by “continue”?
2. What does the phrase, “wise for salvation”, mean?

*Meditate.*

Paul has been painting a picture of a world changing for the worse. The temptation is to resist change for a while, then to go with it. This is as true for Christians as for anyone else. When Christians “go with the flow” of culture and morality, they drift from the Word, usually either by ignoring or downplaying parts of it, and rationalizing their wayward interpretations of others.

The result is always bad. The only way to keep from such drifting is to continue in the Word of God and the sound teaching of the apostles and prophets (v. 14). We continue in these by learning and relearning them, seeking new and more personal applications of the Word to our daily lives, encouraging our fellow believers in the truth of Scripture, and standing firm on the Word in the face of deniers and detractors.

Doing so will make us wise for salvation. That is, standing firm in the Word will allow us to grow in our great salvation and to become wise for righteous living in a world of ever-increasing unrighteousness. Salvation is not just a gift bringing forgiveness and the hope of heaven. It is a gift bringing new life, a completely transformed way of living, that stands firm against contrary winds of doctrine and resists the shifting *spiritus mundi* with the unchanging Spirit and Word of God.

They truly have faith in Christ Jesus who continue in His Word and grow in His salvation (v. 15).

Look to the apostles and prophets (v. 14) – how they lived, what they sacrificed, their boldness and holiness, their faithfulness, even unto death. Let their example confirm their teaching; and so continue in the things you have learned, since learning Christ first began to be your calling in life. This is the way to wisdom and salvation.

*Reflect.*

1. What signs do you see that some Christians today are drifting with the moral and cultural winds of our secular age?
2. How can you fortify yourself against such false teaching?

3. Growing in salvation means growing in wisdom. Why?

*Read the divine Scriptures constantly. Never, indeed, let the sacred volume be out of your hand. Learn what you have to teach... Do not let your deeds belie your words.* Jerome (347-420), *Letters* 52.7

*Keep me in Your Word today, Lord, and help me to resist false teaching, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.7-10.*

Renew your commitment to seek the Kingdom and righteousness of God today as you go forth into your Personal Mission Field as a witness for Christ.

*Sing Psalm 2.7-10.*

**Psalm 2.7-10** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
From heav'n He sent us His only Son, Who has for us salvation won!

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.  
Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

## 6 Why Scripture?

*Pray Psalm 2.10-12.*

Now therefore, be wise, O kings;  
Be instructed, you judges of the earth.  
Serve the LORD with fear,  
And rejoice with trembling.  
Kiss the Son, lest He be angry,  
And you perish *in* the way,  
When His wrath is kindled but a little.  
Blessed *are* all those who put their trust in Him.

*Read and meditate on 2 Timothy 3.16, 17.*

*Reflect.*

1. What kind of profit does Scripture provide?
2. What does Scripture do for those who make good use of it?

*Meditate.*

Paul succinctly addresses the questions of Scripture's origins, benefits, and intended uses. What is the Bible for? While Paul is speaking primarily of the Old Testament Scriptures here, what he says stands for all the Bible as well.

The Bible comes to us by way of divine inspiration. God "breathed" His Word to various human authors, employing their circumstances and personalities to communicate His grace and truth. While every book of the Bible addresses a particular situation and time, we would expect anything inspired by God to be timeless in its truths and applications.

The Bible is *profitable*. That is, if we invest in it, giving it the time and careful attention such a divine book deserves, it yields benefits of various kinds. By the Scriptures we learn sound doctrine. Scripture is a mirror in which we see areas of needed correction in our lives and times. It reveals the path of righteousness, and shows us how to walk in it.

The purpose of Scripture is to make us complete, that is, to help us grow into the image of Christ (2 Cor. 3.12-18; Col. 1.27-29). We'll know we're becoming more complete in Christ as we do the good works for which the Scriptures equip us. This is why we have been saved (Eph. 2.8-10). Only God can define those works which are truly good, and His Word is the place to go for learning them.

The Scriptures are thus a reliable place to stand as times change and things go from bad to worse. We show our love for God, and for the Lord Jesus Christ, when we diligently apply ourselves to His Word, reading, meditating, studying, learning, and obeying Scripture for every aspect of our lives.

*Reflect.*

1. Why is it important to know that Scriptures is divinely inspired?
2. How would you counsel a new believer to use Scripture most profitably?
3. How would you explain what it means to be complete in Christ to an unbelieving friend?

*Hold Fast the Word: 2 Timothy 3*

*To search the sacred Scripture is very good and most profitable for the soul. For, "like a tree which is planted near the running waters," so does the soul watered by sacred Scripture also grow hearty and bear fruit in due season. This is the orthodox faith. It is adorned with its evergreen leaves, with actions pleasing to God. John of Damascus (650-750), *The Orthodox Faith* 4.17*

*Let Your Word take deep root in me, Lord, so that I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.10-12.*

Pray for yourself, for all God's people, and for people everywhere, that we might be instructed in the Word of God for every good work.

*Sing Psalm 2.9-12*

**Psalm 2.9-12** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High*).

To Christ the Lord be given all who humbly embrace Him and on Him call.

Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!

Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

## 7 Bad, Worse, Good

*Pray Psalm 2.1-6*

Why do the nations rage,  
And the people plot a vain thing?  
The kings of the earth set themselves,  
And the rulers take counsel together,  
Against the LORD and against His Anointed, *saying*,  
“Let us break Their bonds in pieces  
And cast away Their cords from us.”  
He who sits in the heavens shall laugh;  
The Lord shall hold them in derision.  
Then He shall speak to them in His wrath,  
And distress them in His deep displeasure:  
“Yet I have set My King  
On My holy hill of Zion.”

*Review 2 Timothy 3.*

*Reflect.*

1. How does this chapter speak to conditions in our day?
2. How does it counsel us to rise above those conditions?

*Meditate.*

This short chapter goes from bad to worse to good. Things will get bad in the last days, Paul explained. The tares will multiply and grow strong throughout the Lord's field.

And then things will get worse.

The reason for this is that people reject the truth of God. In trying to be gods unto themselves, they will always be slaves to base passions, even though some of them may profess to believe in the Lord.

This is not how Timothy learned the faith, however. He must hold fast to the things he has learned and the examples that were set for him by family and Paul. He must not allow himself to be caught in the slipstream of unbelief, lest he drift from the faith he learned as a child. And he must expect that, as he does stand firm in the Gospel, people will not always welcome his word. Persecution at various levels awaits all who believe in the Lord.

But if we hold fast to the Scriptures, and invest time and effort in learning them, we will gain the benefits God has prepared for us there. We will become increasingly complete in Christ, and will overcome the evil of our day with an array of good works that are the fruit of Scripture, sown into our souls.

*Reflect.*

1. Paul says that we must not be overcome by evil, but must overcome evil with good (Rom. 12.21). How should a Christian prepare each day to do good work in an evil world?
2. How important is it that we have good examples to follow in the life of faith? Why?
3. What can Christians do to help one another remain rooted and grounded in Scripture?



*The Scriptures are holy, they are truthful, they are blameless... So we have no grounds at all for blaming Scripture if we happen to deviate in any way, because we haven't understood it. When we do understand it, we are right. But when we are wrong because we haven't understood it, we leave it in the right. When we have gone wrong, we don't make out Scripture to be wrong, but it continues to stand up straight and right, so that we may return to it for correction. Augustine (354-430), Sermons 23.3*

*Thank You, Lord, for Your reliable and trustworthy Word! Help me to make good use of Your Word each day as I...*

*Pray Psalm 2.*

As you pray, think of the situation in our day – people denying God, rebelling against His Word, and seeking to throw off the restraints of His Law. Pray that God will firm up His people in His Word, and will use us to proclaim the message of Jesus and call the world to repentance and faith.

*Sing Psalm 2.*

**Psalm 2** (*Agincourt: O Love, How Deep, How Broad, How High!*)

Why do the nations vainly rage, conspiring together from age to age?  
Earth's kings and all of their counselors stand against the Lord and His Right Hand:

“Now let us cast His yoke below, His Kingdom authority overthrow!  
Throw off His Law, reject His Word; No more be governed by this Lord!”

The Lord in heaven laughs in wrath At all who embark on this cursed path.  
His angry Word to them is plain: “Yet shall My King in Zion reign!”

Proclaim the message far and wide, that God has exalted the Crucified!  
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Be wise, be warned: His judgment comes to break the prideful, sinful ones.

Rejoice with fear in Jesus' grace, and worship before His exalted face!  
Beware His anger and judgment grim: How blessed are all who rest in Him!

*Questions for reflection or discussion*

1. Why should we expect “perilous times” in these last days?
2. How can you tell when someone falsely professes faith in Jesus?
3. What kinds of persecution should Christians expect? Why?
4. Why are the Scriptures so important to our faith in Jesus? How can we make the best use of them?
5. What’s the most important lesson you’ve learned from 2 Timothy 3? How are you putting that lesson to work in your Personal Mission Field?

*For prayer:*

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Thank you.