



Gospel Difficulty - Part 1

Summary and Goal

False teachers will be present in the church, and Paul provided a vivid description of what they look like (2 Tim. 3:1-5a). He wanted Timothy to be aware and informed so he could protect himself and his people.

Main Passages

2 Timothy 3:1-9

Session Outline

1. Detailed Description and Clear Instruction (2 Tim. 3:1-5)
2. Tactical Advances (2 Tim. 3:6-8)
3. Folly Revealed (2 Tim. 3:9)

Theological Theme

The exclusivity of Christ and His gospel is implied in Paul's special emphasis on refuting false teaching. If truth isn't absolute, then why would it matter? Further, the critical and central role of the pastor continually comes to the fore in this letter, and in this passage especially.

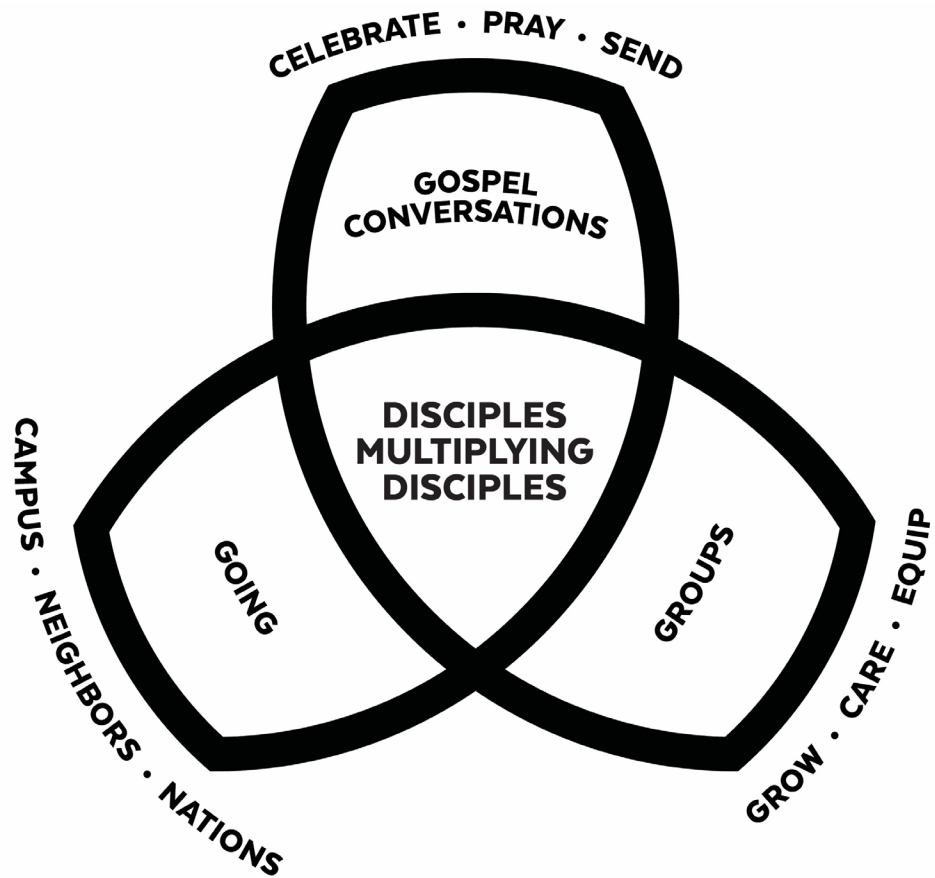
Christ Connection

Christ is the Good Shepherd who redeemed Timothy and in whom Timothy must find his strength to carry out the mission (John 15:5). The truth of Christ is the heart of the message, which Timothy was to defend.

Missional Application

The long-term labor of establishing a congregation in the truth, protecting them from false teaching, raising up leaders, and installing pastors to oversee the congregation is a crucial aspect of getting the gospel to the world and a critical piece of the puzzle of the advancement of the Kingdom.

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



DxD This Week

Break Things Up

For discussion of this lesson we encourage you to break your group up by gender. Smaller groups can sit together in the same room or move to a separate room with a co-leader. This will facilitate a deeper level of discussion as well as help participants move toward a DxD Group*.

(*DxD group is a group consisting of 2-10 people that grows, cares, and equips with an apprentice, and a focus on gospel conversation, accountability, and serving.)

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Session Plan

Gospel Difficulty - Part 1

For the Leader

If meeting by Zoom: Look up the Palatine Hill event and show photos via screen share.

Introduction/Ice Breaker

- ? When have you or someone you know faced opposition because of belief in Jesus? How did you (or the person you know) respond?
- ? What are some reasons for opposition to the Christian faith and persecution in the world today?

The idea that Paul tried to convey may be summarized along the lines of: “Timothy, be faithful now because it’s only going to get worse!” Paul wasn’t interested in coddling Timothy. He knew that Timothy needed to know the truth and be encouraged to stay faithful to the mission. The work was already difficult, and Paul knew that it would likely get worse. The pagan world was not sympathetic to Christ and His gospel. Those who followed Christ would suffer. Timothy had to bear up under this suffering for the sake of the flock.

1. Detailed Description and Clear Instruction (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

The difficulties that Timothy faced, and that Paul warned he would have to face in the future, had to do with people. He didn’t warn him of sicknesses or financial struggles. Timothy’s main challenge came in the form of people who would counteract the message that he was meant to preserve and propagate.

- ? Why do you think the threat of false teachers was such a serious issue? What was the fundamental problem that they created?
- ? How did Paul describe the false teachers? Do you see any themes? Which characteristics jump out at you? How might this provide warning for false teachers we encounter today?
- ? Application: How can you discern between false teachers and faithful teachers? What helps has God given to help us be aware and able to avoid falling into the trap of a deceiver?

2. Tactical Advances (2 Tim. 3:6-8)

Next, Paul gave specific examples of how these false teachers can inflict damage. He spelled out some of their strategies to advance their agendas. Doubtless, Paul had seen this happen before. He didn't invent some scenario that he imagined could come to pass. Rather, in all likelihood he had seen these very things take place.

- ❓ What issue did Paul describe in detail? What are some patterns today that might lead people in the church to succumb to false teaching?
- ❓ Application: How might others in the early church have helped defend the women spoken of in these verses from these dangers? How might this weakness be avoided today? What responsibility does the church have to one another in these matters?

3. Folly Revealed (2 Tim. 3:9)

Paul compared the false teachers to Jannes and Jambres. These were the names given to the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7. The names aren't biblical, but are found in early extrabiblical Jewish writings. These characters became important symbols of opposition to the truth of God, and they would have been well-known to Paul and Timothy. All of this must have felt a bit overwhelming to Timothy. He already faced difficulty, and then Paul told him that things were only going to get worse.

- ❓ What did Paul say at the end of this passage that would bring Timothy comfort?
- ❓ How might this bring us encouragement today when it feels as if false teaching threatens to overtake the church, despite efforts to continually teach the truth?
- ❓ Application: In what ways does God's sovereignty give us peace and rest? Where do you currently feel like you are striving in your own power but need God's power? How are you encouraged by the truth in this verse today?

Conclusion

- ❓ What are some ways you might have unconsciously let false teaching have influence over your life? How are you encouraged to return to truth from today's study?
- ❓ How does a commitment to speaking the truth with one another and sharing the gospel with others help in this effort?

❓ For Further Discussion

What can we as a group and as a church do to point one other to the truth and to defend against false teaching in our midst?



Expanded Session Content

Gospel Difficulty - Part 1

Introduction/Ice Breaker

During an excavation at Palatine Hill in Rome in 1857, an archeologist discovered a bit of graffiti carved into plaster. It showed two figures. On the left was a man in a posture of prayer and worship. On the right, rising above him, was a second man hung on a cross. Strangely, the man on the cross had the head of a donkey. Near the drawing was a string of Greek letters that mocked the praying man, “Alexamenos worships his god.” Historians date this graffiti to around AD 200, making it the earliest surviving representation of Christ on the cross.

It is fitting that the earliest depiction of Jesus on the cross would be a carving that blasphemed Him and mocked His faithful follower Alexamenos. Though Alexamenos may have felt alone during that time of persecution, he was among many Christians across the Roman Empire who suffered persecution (many unto death) during the first 200 years of Christianity.

Timothy and the Christians in Ephesus faced their own unique attacks. Deceivers sought to mislead followers of Christ and take advantage of the situation. They resisted the truth and brought great distress and trouble to Timothy. You may be facing your own sorts of suffering and persecution for your faith. Let’s consider how Paul’s counsel to Timothy might apply to our contexts today.

For the Leader

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- ❓ When have you or someone you know faced opposition because of belief in Jesus? How did you (or the person you know) respond?
- ❓ What are some reasons for opposition to the Christian faith and persecution in the world today?


Session Summary

Paul wrote to Timothy, “But now this: Hard times will come in the last days!” But connects this passage to his immediate previous exhortation to Timothy, which was the challenge to be an approved workman by rightly dividing the Scriptures and faithfully shepherding the flock under his care (2:14-26).

The idea that Paul tried to convey may be summarized along the lines of: “Timothy, be faithful now because it’s only going to get worse!” Paul wasn’t interested in coddling Timothy. He knew that Timothy needed to know the truth and be encouraged to stay faithful to the mission. The work was already difficult, and Paul knew that it would likely get worse. The pagan world was not sympathetic to Christ and His gospel. Those who followed Christ would suffer. Timothy had to bear up under this suffering for the sake of the flock.


1. Detailed Description and Clear Instruction (2 Tim. 3:1-5)

The difficulties that Timothy faced, and that Paul warned he would have to face in the future, had to do with people. He didn’t warn him of sicknesses or financial struggles. Timothy’s main challenge came in the form of people who would counteract the message that he was meant to preserve and propagate.

 Why do you think the threat of false teachers was such a serious issue? What was the fundamental problem that they created?

What both Paul and Timothy knew was that nothing could be more damaging to a flock of believers than a deceiver who would lead them away from the pure gospel. This was also the issue facing the Galatians and why Paul wrote to them, “But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, a curse be on him!” (Gal. 1:8). If the gospel of Jesus Christ was lost, then all was lost.

We should be careful not to veer off into a point of view that makes God weak and unable to accomplish His purposes apart from the efforts of people. He does indeed accomplish the good work that He begins in believers (Phil. 1:6), but He does this good work in the context of the local church shepherded by faithful pastors who will protect the sheep from wolves and lead them to the green pastures of God’s pure Word.

 How did Paul describe the false teachers? Do you see any themes? Which characteristics jump out at you? How might this provide warning for false teachers we encounter today?

Paul’s lengthy list painted a disturbing picture of a person who was antithetical to the person who is in Christ and walking by the Spirit. Paul began and ended his list with two contrasting descriptions that give a tidy summary of this sort of person. He said they are “lovers of self” and not “lovers of God.” The essential quality of a false teacher, then and now, is that the throne of their heart is not occupied by God, but themselves.

The difficulty is that these people hold to a “form of godliness” but they deny its power. This means that they could easily deceive an onlooker because they appear to be of God, but in reality, their spirituality is bankrupt, void of power.

At the end of verse 5, we find the second command Paul gave Timothy in this passage. The first was located in the introductory verse (v. 1) where Paul said, “know.” He told Timothy to be aware of the danger that lay ahead. In the second command, Paul told him how to deal with it.

George Bernard Shaw once famously said: “I learned long ago never to wrestle with a pig. You get dirty, and besides, the pig likes it.” The idea is applicable here. Timothy’s fundamental job was to protect the flock, not to argue with false teachers. He certainly did that when necessary, but he wasn’t to go looking for a fight because he already had plenty to do without engaging in theological conflict. The problem with going toe to toe with false teachers is that, like wrestling with pigs, there will be some collateral damage. It may be necessary for the long-term good, but avoiding those sorts of people altogether would be the best route if possible. This is what Paul advised Timothy to do.

At this point, one might misunderstand that Timothy would be neglecting his responsibility and possibly even showing cowardice in avoiding interactions with false teachers. Yet, it takes great meekness, humility, and faith to turn away from false teachers and focus exclusively on shepherding the sheep. Again, it is necessary to engage them when they enter the fold and begin to inflict damage. It is not necessary, however, for a shepherd to venture into the forest to contend with wolves. It is for the good of the sheep when pastors are able to practice self-control, and turn their attention from a fight with a false teacher to the needs of their sheep.



Application: How can you discern between false teachers and faithful teachers? What helps has God given to help us be aware and able to avoid falling into the trap of a deceiver?

2. Tactical Advances (2 Tim. 3:6-8)

Next, Paul gave specific examples of how these false teachers can inflict damage. He spelled out some of their strategies to advance their agendas. Doubtless, Paul had seen this happen before. He didn’t invent some scenario that he imagined could come to pass. Rather, in all likelihood he had seen these very things take place.

Persons burdened with sins are everywhere. They include outright opponents of the Gospel. Sadly, among them are individuals who have managed to damage congregations from the inside. In Timothy’s day,

these people—false teachers—worked by getting into households that would give them a hearing.

- What issue did Paul describe in detail? What are some patterns today that might lead people in the church to succumb to false teaching?

He said that some of these false teachers “worm their way into households and deceive gullible women overwhelmed by sins and led astray by a variety of passions.” It is not a small thing that Paul pointed out this particular strategy. He must have seen it multiple times and understood it to be one of the most successful tactics of false teachers. In other words, this appears to have been a point of weakness that the enemy exploited during the growth of the church in early Christianity.

This same problem may have been behind Paul’s teaching to Titus, “In the same way, older women are to be reverent in behavior, not slanderers, not slaves to excessive drinking. They are to teach what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands and to love their children, to be self-controlled, pure, workers at home, kind, and in submission to their husbands, so that God’s word will not be slandered” (Titus 2:3-5).

- Application: How might others in the early church have helped defend the women spoken of in these verses from these dangers? How might this weakness be avoided today? What responsibility does the church have to one another in these matters?

Not everyone who is interested in religion is interested in the truth of Scripture. Some resist the truth and manipulate others for their own gain. We must know the truth, and must share the truth with those who will listen.


3. Folly Revealed (2 Tim. 3:9)

Paul compared the false teachers to Jannes and Jambres. These were the names given to the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7. The names aren’t biblical, but are found in early extrabiblical Jewish writings. These characters became important symbols of opposition to the truth of God, and they would have been well-known to Paul and Timothy. All of this must have felt a bit overwhelming to Timothy. He already faced difficulty, and then Paul told him that things were only going to get worse.

- What did Paul say at the end of this passage that would bring Timothy comfort?

Corrupt in Mind and Worthless


Paul asserted two additional statements in v. 8 about the false teachers. First, he saw them as possessing “depraved minds” (“Their minds are distorted,” Phillips). That avenue through which the truth could reach the will had ceased to function. This led to Paul’s second statement, the evaluation of their faith content as worthless or rejected. The term for “rejected” is used in the New Testament to describe someone whose actions or abilities prove the person unfit for spiritual usefulness (see “disqualified” in 1 Cor 9:27). It is an apt term to use in reference to false teachers whose empty professions were only a caricature of the true faith.

-  How might this bring us encouragement today when it feels as if false teaching threatens to overtake the church, despite efforts to continually teach the truth?

Assigning the names Jannes and Jambres to the false teachers would have brought two primary ideas to Timothy's mind. The first is the fact that those men had great power and influence. They served, after all, in the court of Pharaoh, the most powerful man on earth at the time. The second idea should have quickly followed. These great magicians were impotent before the power of God. Their appearance of power dissipated in the presence of real, divine power.

Paul contented the same would be true of the deceivers who caused Timothy trouble: "Their foolishness will be clear to all, as was the foolishness of Jannes and Jambres." Paul wanted Timothy to take necessary and wise action in response to the false teachers, but he also wanted him to trust the Lord. Those deceivers would not thwart God's sovereign hand and plan any more than Jannes and Jambres were able to stop the exodus.

Timothy had to learn to labor vigorously, but he did so with his heart resting in the power of the Lord. The efforts of the false teachers would ultimately fail, and the work of the Lord would prevail. Timothy had the distinct privilege to be used of God to accomplish that plan in the lives of His redeemed people in the church of Ephesus. Paul wanted Timothy to labor with all his might, joyfully, to that end. Paul knew that Timothy (and all Christians) served a God "who works out everything in agreement with the purpose of his will" (Eph. 1:11).

-  Application: In what ways does God's sovereignty give us peace and rest? Where do you currently feel like you are striving in your own power but need God's power? How are you encouraged by the truth in this verse today?

Conclusion

Following this passage, Paul pointed Timothy to the excellence of the Scriptures and encouraged him to highly esteem those writings. Timothy was going to need the firm foundation of God's Word if he was going to stay faithful to the task. God's will for Timothy as the pastor of Ephesus was that he would protect the gospel message from corruption and protect the sheep from wolves. Paul gave Timothy a clear and detailed description of those false prophets and their activities. Timothy had already experienced their work to some degree, but it was going to get worse according to Paul.

We need to take seriously the Scriptures' warning to be alert for any who express hostility against Christ and His Church. We should carefully check out what we hear being taught with what the Scriptures say and teach. We ought to emulate Christians who show they consistently live by the Scriptures' guidance. We can be confident in the Scriptures as our guide, leading us to salvation and equipping us to live for the Lord.

Discuss these three questions in your subgroups separated by gender:

- ① What are some ways you might have unconsciously let false teaching have influence over your life? How are you encouraged to return to truth from today's study?
- ② What can we as a group and as a church do to point one other to the truth and to defend against false teaching in our midst?
- ③ How does a commitment to speaking the truth with one another and sharing the gospel with others help in this effort?

Further Application/Prayer

Where do you currently feel like you are striving in your own power but need God's power? In groups of three, pray for one other. Conclude your prayer time with a leader guided prayer time for our pastor and ministers. As you consider the difficulty and importance of their work, ask God to give them wisdom, grace, and strength. Pray that they would depend upon Christ and draw power from Him alone. Pray also for your fellow church members. Ask God to strengthen the church with His Word. Pray that any deceivers who have infiltrated the flock will be revealed and that their folly will be clearly seen.

Additional Resources

- *The Letters to Timothy and Titus* by Robert W. Yarbrough
- *Letters to Timothy and Titus* by Philip H. Towner
- *2 Timothy* by John MacArthur

For Next Week

Session Title

- Gospel Difficulty - Part 2

Main Passages

- 2 Timothy 3:10-17

Session Outline

1. Praise (2 Timothy 3:10-11)
2. Assurance (2 Timothy 3:12-13)
3. Reminder (2 Timothy 3:14-17)

Memorize

You should know this, Timothy, that in the last days there will be very difficult times. ² For people will love only themselves and their money.
- 2 Timothy 3:1-2a

Daily Readings

- Monday - 2 Timothy 3:1-9
- Tuesday - John 14:6
- Wednesday - 1 Timothy 4:1
- Thursday - Jude 1:3-4
- Friday - 2 Peter 2:1-3
- Saturday - 1 Thessalonians 5:21

Historical Context of 2 Timothy

Purpose

In 1 Timothy Paul directed Timothy to actively oppose false teaching. He also gave instruction on the type of behavior that should characterize those in the church. The letter to Titus shows a similar purpose, albeit briefer in scope. As Paul addressed the character of church members, he presented it in light of the work of Christ. The message in 2 Timothy, Paul's final letter, is quite different. It is much more personal, a letter from one friend to another. Paul was preparing Timothy to carry on the work of ministry after he was gone.

Author

As stated in the opening of each letter, these letters were written by Paul (1Tm 1:1; 2Tm 1:1; Ti 1:1). However, many scholars today assume that Paul did not write them. This opinion is based on the differences from his other letters in vocabulary and style, alleged differences in theology, and uncertainties about where these letters fit chronologically in the life of the apostle. But the differences in style and vocabulary are not troublesome when one considers that authors often use different vocabulary when addressing different groups and situations. Rather than addressing churches in these letters, Paul was writing to coworkers who were in unique ministry settings. Hence we would expect different vocabulary. Also, the traditional view of the historical situation in which Paul wrote these letters is reasonable and defensible. Therefore, in spite of significant opposition by some scholars, there is a solid basis for accepting the Pastoral Epistles as Pauline.

Setting

Paul most likely wrote these letters after the time covered in the book of Acts. Acts closes with Paul in prison. Traditionally it has been believed that Paul was released from this imprisonment, then continued his work around the Mediterranean, perhaps even reaching Spain (Rm 15:22-29). During this time, he visited Crete and other places. First Timothy and Titus were written during this period of further mission work. Timothy had been left in Ephesus to handle some problems with false teaching there (1Tm 1:3-4). Titus had been left in Crete after the initial work to set up the church there (Ti 1:5). Eventually Paul was imprisoned again, and this led to his execution. During this final imprisonment, Paul wrote 2 Timothy to request another visit from Timothy and to give final exhortations as he anticipated his martyrdom.

Special Features

First Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus have been referred to as the "Pastoral Epistles" since the eighteenth century. It is reasonable to consider these letters together since they have striking similarities in style, vocabulary, and setting. These letters stand apart from the other Pauline letters because they were the only ones written to Paul's gospel coworkers. The Pastoral Epistles deal with church structure issues and, unlike Paul's other letters, were addressed to men serving in pastoral roles rather than to churches. But we must also recognize these are separate letters with their own distinctives. They were not written primarily to describe church structure or pastoral ministry (contrary to popular opinion), but to teach Christian living in response to the gospel.

Extended Commentary

2 Timothy 3:1-9

3:1. Paul declared, Mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. The “last days” is not some future event to which we look. It is now. Jesus Christ initiated this epoch, and it will continue uninterrupted until his return. Paul defined this expansive time period as “terrible.” God’s extravagant grace also characterizes this era, establishing salvation and the church. But these days unleash Satan’s wild attempts to destroy and undermine God’s redemptive intentions.

In giving us this information, Paul desired that believers maintain a readiness of spirit and life. The battle will rage. What each believer must decide is whether he will prepare for the promised difficulties or give in to personal safety and comfort.

3:2-5. The terribleness of the last days results from the continual decay of man’s spiritual nature. As people neglect the spiritual dimension of life, they turn in upon themselves to find meaning and consolation in the face of life’s absurdity. Paul penned a list of characteristics of false teachers and all those who turn from truth.

In 2 Corinthians 5:15, Paul wrote: “Those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.” In this era, people refuse the love of God, choosing instead to be lovers of themselves.

This sentence offers the key to unlocking the rest of Paul’s list of vices. When we fall in love with ourselves, our own appetites consume our souls. We become our own lover, pandering to that solitary “i” which must, of necessity, dismiss all threats and counterclaims to our affections. Everything from thoughts to possessions must be lavished upon the one we love—ourselves.

This leads quite naturally to becoming lovers of money. Paul dealt with this rather extensively in 1 Timothy 6. Loving money and all it buys opens the soul to Satan’s traps, ensnaring the person in desires which cannot be met and enslaving him to a continual lusting for more money, possessions, or power.

Selfish people are typically boastful and proud. In stubbornly holding to the view that they are the center of the universe, such people have an exaggerated view of themselves. They actually believe in their own superiority. With this delusion, bragging falls naturally from their lips and pride wraps them in a haughty demeanor. These are the props which support their fantasy.

Pride can then lead to abusive speech and behavior. In order for arrogance to survive, it must view others as lesser individuals, as unworthy or unfit. This degraded view dehumanizes others, stripping away all respect and allowing the proud to slash with words or hurt by actions. When someone fails to see another person as wholly human, it becomes easy to destroy them. This is the antithesis of Christian teaching. Christ left us an example of servanthood, submission, and sacrifice (Phil. 2:6-11). Paul wrote: “Consider others better than yourselves” (Phil. 2:3).

Children disobedient to their parents also characterize the last days. In the Jewish mind, this equaled rebellion. Rebellion against authority always implies revolt against God. The stability of the

home and society, and even the church, rested upon the harmonious functioning of family members. Disobedience represented a destructive force in all three spheres, and it struck at the heart of God's authority over mankind.

The next few words— ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving— need little analysis except to highlight that these terms describe people totally given to selfishness. Unthankful people refuse to acknowledge their need or appreciation of anyone but themselves. Such persons are unloving. They see no need to offer the grace of forgiveness to others.

Slandering refers to an unbridled tongue, a mouth that spreads rumors, gossip, or lies to the harm of others. The ungodly, who proliferate during the last days, also evidence a lack of self-discipline or self-control. They are brutal, or savage. They degenerate to wildness and are not lovers of the good. These people possess an appetite for evil, for all that opposes good. As such, they are treacherous, or traitorous, lacking in faithfulness. The ungodly are rash, thoughtless in their actions and speech.

Paul closed his list much as he began it, calling such people conceited. Pride surrounds all these sins and vices. He then concluded with the statement: lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God. Those who elevate themselves above others will eventually elevate themselves above God. Their own appetites and desires become their passion.

Paul's words pile up into a negative portrait. Yet we need only look around us, or within our own hearts, to discover the seeds of selfishness. These phrases describe the unbelieving world as well as those within the church. The last days in which we live feature a mixed church, with wheat and weeds growing together.

Paul summarizes these days: having a form of godliness but denying its power. The essence of ungodliness comes from within, and then it comes out in behavior. Those who profess God, who claim spiritual or religious knowledge, do not necessarily possess a relationship with God or his righteousness. True spirituality issues from right thinking in concert with God's power within the spirit of a person which transforms outward behavior. True Christianity cannot be hidden, nor is it a private religion without public effect. This was the erroneous view of the false teachers of Paul's day. This theory still finds acceptance in modern thinking.

In these last days in which we live, there exists a decreasing belief in the Holy Spirit's regenerating power for forgiveness and eternal life. People go through the motions of religion, refusing to depend upon Christ. Self-focus then supersedes everything else, and the spiral of immorality sweeps people into its vortex.

3:6. Paul had kept the false teachers in mind, even in his general description of ungodliness. In this verse, he returned more specifically to these teachers.

The false teachers carried out a "standard operating procedure"—they would worm their way into homes and gain control. This description implies sneaking or creeping into homes. These false teachers would hold home Bible studies, perhaps, or lead discussion groups with the intent of gaining control over the household.

They found greatest success in the homes of weak-willed women. I do not believe Paul targeted women as inherently weak-willed or prone to deception. Instead, he recognized and pointed out a pattern he observed. Women offered easier access into homes, and those women whom the false teachers could most easily exploit were vulnerable: loaded down with sins and . . . swayed by all kinds of evil desires.

This suggests that these women, perhaps the teachers as well, possessed a history of sin which remained unconfessed. Loaded down with a past they could not relinquish, or which they refused to conclude through confession, they became easy prey to faddish doctrines. Not only did their past remain unresolved; it left them susceptible to sins in the present. The weight of guilt reduces a person's ability to make proper decisions. It also leaves the conscience scarred so that temptations overcome the will more easily.

3:7. These women were mirror images of the false teachers they followed. They masked the disarray of their inner spirit through religious practices, especially Scripture studies. They were probably familiar with the Old Testament and could discuss the intricate doctrinal strategies of their teachers. But because their souls had not been cleansed of sin, they were blind to the truth. It is also possible that they did not want to discover truth but sought in Christianity a salve for their bruised lives. Despite the hours they invested in studying, they were always learning but never able to acknowledge the truth.

3:8. Paul compared the false teachers to Jannes and Jambres who opposed Moses. These men do not appear in the Old Testament records, but they remained familiar names in Jewish tradition as sorcerers who opposed God's authority through Moses in Egypt.

So also these men oppose the truth. This phrase summarizes Paul's indictment against the false teachers: they contended with God's truth as given through Paul. This exposed the false teachers' depraved minds. These people were incapable of comprehending God's truth because their minds were irrational and devoted to lies. Consequently, they could not acknowledge God's truth. So, Paul declared, as far as the faith is concerned, [they] are rejected. A good workman is approved by God through adherence to correct doctrine and the evidences of a holy life (2 Tim. 2:15,21). Conversely, these false teachers were unacceptable because they opposed the apostolic teachings, and their lives reflected a progressive degeneration.

3:9. Just as Pharaoh's court enchanters succeeded against Moses only to a point, so the false teachers would flourish for a limited time. Eventually, however, the false cannot match the truth. Truth exists, not as an option, but as testimony to what actually is. The counterfeit exists by delusion and cannot withstand reality's judgment.

Timothy probably felt that truth was losing to the spread of false doctrines and philosophies as well as to the brutality of persecution. But Paul affirmed that these apparent successes were temporary: they will not get very far (cf. Ps. 73). When people peddling bogus philosophies or theologies encounter the truth of God and his power, their folly will be clear to everyone. Lies and deceptions must crumble, dissolving to dust. Among the ruins of these elaborate but false beliefs are the men who devised them, exposed in their foolishness. ¹

References

1. Larson, Knute, and Max E. Anders. *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*. Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2000.

Author Bio

Knute Larson (I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon)

Knute Larson coaches pastors and churches, majoring on leadership, pulpit, making changes, and daily grace — drawing on 43 years as a pastor and eight as a pastoral coach.

Max Anders (I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon)

Dr. Max Anders is the author of over 25 books, including the bestselling *30 Days to Understanding the Bible*, and is the creator and general editor of the 32-volume *Holman Bible Commentary* series. He has taught on the college and seminary level and is a veteran pastor. Max provides resources and discipleship strategies at www.maxanders.com to help people grow spiritually.

Robert W. Yarbrough (The Letters to Timothy and Titus)

Robert W. Yarbrough (PhD, University of Aberdeen) is professor of New Testament at Covenant Theological Seminary in St. Louis, Missouri. He has authored, coauthored, or translated several books, including the groundbreaking textbook *Encountering the New Testament*. He is also coeditor of the *Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament* series.

Philip Towner (Letters to Timothy and Titus)

Philip H. Towner (Ph.D.) is dean of the Nida Institute for Biblical Scholarship of the American Bible Society based in New York City. He is also Research Professor of New Testament at Ewangelikalna Szkoła Teologiczna in Wrocław, Poland, and the author of several books.

John MacArthur (2 Timothy)

John MacArthur has served as pastor-teacher of Grace Community Church in Sun Valley, California, since 1969. His ministry of expository preaching is unparalleled in its breadth and influence. In more than five decades of ministry from the same pulpit, he has preached verse by verse through the entire New Testament and several key sections of the Old Testament. He is Chancellor of the Master's University and Seminary, and can be heard daily on the *Grace to You* radio broadcast (carried on hundreds of radio stations worldwide). He has authored numerous bestselling books, including *Twelve Ordinary Men* and *One Perfect Life*.