

What We Believe

November 26, 2023

Lesson Summary

Main Passages

2 Timothy 3:13-17

Session Outline

1. Enemies of the Truth (2 Timothy 3:13-15)
2. Confident in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16)
3. Thoroughly Equipped (2 Timothy 3:17)

Theological Theme

The Bible is God's Word and is foundational to our faith. It is inerrant and powerfully at work in our lives as we seek to know and obey it.



Leader Guide

What We Believe

Introduction

A study in July of 2022 shows that fewer Americans say they believe the Bible is the literal Word of God. This is an all-time low and considerably different than the high points in 1980 and 1984 when it was about twice as much. This is the first time that the percentage of Americans who view the Bible as not divinely inspired significantly outweighs the percentage of those who view the Bible as the literal Word of God.

While there is no definitive reason these numbers have declined, several factors point to overall religiosity decreasing among American adults. People who identify as evangelical or born again are much more likely to view the Bible as literally true even though the actual percentage in this group is below half.¹ These kinds of numbers reflect our society at large today. Christians are to be people of the Word who know it, believe it, and live it.

- ❓ What evidence do you see that our country has moved away from believing the Bible is literal and true?
- ❓ How does our belief that the Bible is the inerrant word of God affect/shape the church?

Session Summary

What you believe about the Bible has a huge impact on your life. It is important to stand firm on the Scriptures so that your faith has a strong foundation. The Bible is God's Word for us and every word of it is God breathed and inspired. We must be committed to knowing it, believing it, and living by it.

In our world, which aggressively promotes anti-Christian values, we can find direction and instruction in Scripture to guide the ways we respond and react. Each Christ follower has the responsibility to prioritize God's Word so that we honor and receive it the way Paul exhorted Timothy to. When we treat Scripture appropriately, we position ourselves to make a difference in this world as God calls us.

1. Enemies of the Truth (2 Timothy 3:13-15)

Paul wrote to his protegee Timothy amid an anti-Christian society, not unlike ours today. His words of warning, instruction, and encouragement are still applicable, and we do well to give them serious consideration. To live the abundant life Jesus described (John 10:10), we must believe and be empowered by the Word of God.

Paul warned Timothy that evil people and imposters would grow increasingly worse in his day. "Evil people" refers to those who are obviously and openly enemies of Jesus. This type of people does not hide their ungodliness but instead revel in sin and attack things of the Lord. Christians are targets for evil people and should be prepared to face attacks based on the differences between living a godly life and celebrating a sinful lifestyle.



What are some ways people in our society are deceived by sin?

Paul also referenced imposters. These are different than "evil people" because their influence is more subtle. Imposters tend to appear good and are often not viewed as dangerous. However, Christians should beware because imposters are deceptively dangerous and are a destructive force among God's people. Imposters may cause more havoc to believers because they can come across as similar or on the same side as Christians. Often imposters have deceived themselves. Allowing just a little deception or lie into your life invites the enemy to set up camp and take ground that should be dedicated to following Christ.



Why is the deception of imposters particularly dangerous for the church?

Paul warned Timothy of what to watch out for, and he gave a plan to protect the church from these enemies. To prepare for attacks against our faith we must continually abide in the Scriptures.

Remembering those who taught you and the wisdom you've received is related to being strengthened by Scripture. When you can trust the source, you place more confidence in the message or instruction. Paul reminded Timothy who taught him the things he stood on. The Scriptures were part of his inheritance from childhood. Timothy's life is a reminder of the value of training people in the Scriptures from an early age. It is vital to give children a foundation of Scripture so that they will grow and mature spiritually as they grow and mature physically.

All Scripture

All Scripture refers to the OT, but by implication to the writings of the NT as well (1Tm 5:18; 2Pt 3:15–16).



Application: Who poured into your life as a spiritual mentor? Who might you care for in this way?

2. Confident in Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16)

One of the best ways to guard against deception is to know God's Word, to know who wrote it, and to live it out. Paul reminded Timothy that all Scripture is God-breathed. Many have written and developed things that can feel inspired, but Paul stressed that Scripture is different because God gave it directly. Every word of Scripture is divinely inspired, and that sets it apart.

God's Word is also profitable in multiple ways. Teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness are all things we receive from Scripture. This impacts our readiness to stand against deception. Once you know, understand, and believe the truth, you will be less likely to fall for deception.

The Bible is truth and teaches us what we need to know about God as well as giving us insight and truth about mankind, the world, and everything else. Worldly wisdom aggressively promotes lies and false teachings about both God and man. Therefore, we need to be focused on truth and why it matters. When you aren't sure who or what to believe, it is profitable to recognize that Scripture alone is infallible and inerrant.



What are some lies the world teaches about God or humans?

Due to sin and the brokenness of the world, we all need correction. Wrong thinking or attitudes can easily slip into your life. Some sins seem like they aren't really a big deal, making it easy to justify our behavior, but the truth is we all need to recognize when we are making wrong choices. How we respond to reproof or correction is important. When we refuse to acknowledge our wrongdoing, we become arrogant and prideful. God's Word is the standard that reflects the truth we need to recognize where we fall short and see how to move toward God's standard for our lives.

- ❓ How has Scripture shown you where you need to make a change recently? How did you respond? Why are these moments important in our lives?

Most of us appreciate when someone points out an issue and offers a solution more than if they only point out the issue. That is what the Word of God does by revealing where we go wrong but also teaching us how to live in righteousness. Righteousness is all about right living in line with God's perfect design for the world. The phrase "training in righteousness" reminds us that this is a process. Training is about deliberate effort over time to experience a desired result. None of us read the Bible one time and automatically start living exactly the way it describes. This process takes time and intentionality based on the Word of God and empowered by the Holy Spirit. We can be confident in the Bible because we know it is true and because we see the way it works in our lives.

- ❓ Application: How do you need to respond to the Word of God for further training in righteousness?

3. Thoroughly Equipped (2 Timothy 3:17)

The end goal of receiving God's Word correctly is for every believer to be complete and equipped for the life God has for them. Scripture is for every part of your life. People tend to segment their lives and invite God to work in some areas while seeking to keep control over other areas. For you to be complete and equipped for the work God has for you, you can't hold back.

- ❓ How have you been guilty of compartmentalizing your life to retain control over certain areas? Why is this detrimental?

When you allow Scripture to permeate your life, it produces the results you need, whether you know you need them or not. The goal is to know and obey the Word for the sake of bringing God glory. Think about how different your life would be if you were truly submitted to the Scriptures completely. Instead of feeling like you are missing out or that you are not prepared to make a difference in this world, the Bible says you can be complete and equipped for the life God has for you. Your responsibility is to know the Word and apply it to your life. God does the rest.



How is God using Scripture to equip you for His purposes right now?

Nothing is left to chance or misinterpretation. Paul's emphasis on being complete and equipped reminds us that God's plans are bigger and more eternal in significance than ours. When we surrender our plans to God's, He can do far greater things with our lives than we could ever imagine. We no longer need to keep struggling under our own power to accomplish things that don't matter in the long run. When we allow the Word of God to do its work in us, we will be empowered in far greater ways than we could ever have imagined.

When we go to God's Word and let God speak to us, we are changed. We continue in the process of being transformed into the image of Christ. As we grow and mature, we see more victory over sin and darkness. The work of the Holy Spirit in us is always for our good and for His glory. Paul clearly stated that as we get this right, we will be equipped and ready for whatever God brings before us. Instead of wasting time, we can be focused on the good works God has for us. How encouraging it is to know and trust the Lord and rest in confidence that He has our every need and situation under control and is equipping us for His works every day, by His Word.



Application: How do you need to trust and obey God's Word in a specific situation you are facing right now? How will you respond?

Conclusion

It is important that we have strong convictions about the Word of God. The Bible is the inspired Word from the Lord to teach and equip us for life and godliness. Scripture also convicts and corrects us when we are off base or in sin. When we face challenges from outside or from within, we can look to Scripture for answers and strength.

When we know the Word and listen to what God says to us, then we will live differently. Scripture is our foundation as we seek to imitate Christ and reach the lost world with the gospel.

- ❓ How might you have been deceived, directly or indirectly, about the Word of God? How have you been challenged or encouraged by today's passage?
- ❓ How is Scripture teaching, rebuking, correcting, or training you currently?
- ❓ How will you commit to knowing God's Word more fully so you can be equipped and empowered to do the good works God has for you? How might this better prepare you for gospel conversations in the future?

Prayer of Response

Thank the Lord for giving us His Word. Praise Him for the ways you have been changed by Scripture and commit to giving it the priority it deserves in your life.

Memory Verse

All Scripture is inspired by God, and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

- 2 Timothy 3:16-17

Additional Resources

- *Creature of the Word* by Matt Chandler, Eric Geiger, and Josh Patterson
- *Be Faithful* by Warren Wiersbe
- *The Message of 2 Timothy* by John Stott

Disciples Multiplying Disciples



Historical Context of 2 Timothy

Purpose

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 3:13-17

3:13. Paul typically discussed issues by placing arguments in opposition, creating a clarifying tension. The fate of godly men and women is persecution the fate of evil men and impostors was ongoing corruption as they go from bad to worse. But the deceptions to which these people were prey, and the deceiving teachings which they promoted, explain why followers of Christ face continual persecution. Godliness elicits a strong reaction from unbelievers. The reaction becomes all the more intense and violent when Christians live out their godliness because it convicts others of their sin.

Those who neglect the truth of God become enmeshed in a confusing web of deception. Their consciences and reasoning capabilities suffer damage through sin, and they become incapable of extricating themselves from Satan's delusions. Only God's truth possesses the power to free such persons.

3:14–15. Each of us is susceptible to this dangerous trap of deception unless we obey Scripture vigilantly. Following Christ is more than a one-time decision or an occasional church service or kind act. True Christianity involves continual dependence and obedience to Christ the king. Paul told Timothy to continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of. Our faith is proved by its endurance.

Two elements are necessary for faithful living. First, we must possess knowledge of the truth. Truth enlightens a person about what is right and wrong, what constitutes purpose and happiness. We cannot trust or love which we do not know. The second element is conviction or belief. We express our belief system in the daily decisions we make and the behaviors in which we engage. No one acts contrary to belief (though we may act contrary to our professions of belief).

Paul also wanted Timothy to consider those from whom you learned [truth], and how from infancy you have known the holy Scriptures. Once again he had Timothy's mother and grandmother in mind (see 2 Tim. 1:5). Timothy was schooled in the Old Testament writings and had learned the need for forgiveness, the provision of God, and the necessity of faith. He had also been discipled by Paul, learning Christ and the church. In each case, Timothy had not only been given knowledge; he had been witness to godly lives.

These people served as examples to Timothy about the truth of God, the need for endurance, and the reward of faithfulness. Each person had staked his or her life on the revelation of the Scriptures which, according to Paul, are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

3:16. The power of the Bible to affect change and demand obedience resides in the fact that all Scripture is God-breathed. The Bible originates with God. Claims of origins carry great significance because authority lives in the Creator. This is why people invest such Herculean efforts in trying to disprove God as the earth's Creator and in questioning the authenticity of the Bible. Admitting to God's authorship is an acceptance of his authority over every aspect of life. By stating that Scriptures are God breathed, Paul established the Bible's claim as God's authoritative Word over all people.

The Scriptures were written by men “as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit” (2 Pet. 1:21). The picture is that of a sailboat being moved along by the wind. Indeed, men wrote the Bible, but the words and substance of what they wrote came from God. This makes the Bible useful. Paul listed four main uses of Scripture, all of which intertwine with one another.

Teaching involves instruction. Since Timothy was feeling the attacks of false teachers, Paul encouraged the young pastor to continue in teaching correct doctrine and correct living. The Scriptures must be known so people will grasp their need of salvation and so the confessing community will adhere to its instructions on proper Christian conduct.

Rebuking and correcting are the disciplinary authority of Scripture. Because the Bible is God’s Word and because it reveals truth, it exercises authority over those who deviate from its standard. “Rebuking” points out sin and confronts disobedience. “Correcting” recognizes that a person has strayed from the truth. Graciously, lovingly, yet firmly, we should try to guide the errant individual back into obedience.

Many times the Old Testament relates Israel’s disobedience to God, how the people suffered God’s chastisement for their rebellion, and how God corrected their sinful habits. The New Testament continues with stories and instructions, warnings regarding disobedience, disciplinary actions for those who fail to heed God’s revelation, and teachings on proper conduct.

Training in righteousness is the counterpoint to correction. The Scriptures give us positive guidance for maturing in faith and acceptable conduct.

3:17. The goal of all this instruction, discipline, and training is not to keep us busy. God intends that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. We study the Bible, we rely upon God’s Spirit, his revelation, and the community of the faithful to keep us on track—obedient and maturing in faith. Continuing in this commitment will enable us to do whatever God calls us to do. Timothy could withstand the attacks of false teachers, the abandonment of professing believers, and the persecution that surrounded him because God had equipped him for the task. God never calls us to do something without first enabling us through his Spirit and the power of his truth to accomplish the task.

We neglect the Scriptures at our own peril. Through them we gain the ability to serve God and others. The Scriptures not only point the way; through the mysterious union of God’s Word and faith, they give us the ability to serve.²

References

1. Frank Newport, “Fewer in U.S. Now See Bible as Literal Word of God,” Gallup.com, May 31, 2023, <https://news.gallup.com/poll/394262/fewer-bible-literal-word-god.aspx#:~:text=In%202022%2C%2049%25%20of%20Americans,God%20to%20be%20taken%20literally.>
2. Knute Larson, *I & II Thessalonians, I & II Timothy, Titus, Philemon*, vol. 9, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 2000), 305–307.