

Introduction to 2 Timothy Chapter 3

Perilous Times: The Character of the Last Days, the Pattern of Persecution, and the Sufficiency of Scripture

Second Timothy chapter 3 is one of the most searingly diagnostic passages in the New Testament. It opens with a catalogue of vices that reads, to the contemporary reader, less like a prophecy about a distant future and more like a description of a recognizable present — the self-love, the money-love, the boasting, the arrogance, the ingratitude, the unholy, the unloving, the slanderous, the uncontrolled, the brutal, the treacherous, the reckless, the puffed up, the pleasure-loving rather than God-loving. Paul is not describing people outside the church. He is describing people who have a form of godliness while denying its power — people who have the appearance of the religious life without the reality of the transformed character that the gospel produces.

The chapter moves from the catalogue of the last-days character to two concrete exhibits of what that character looks like in practice: the false teachers who creep into households and capture weak women, and the opponents of Moses whom Paul uses as the Old Testament type of the people who oppose the truth in every generation. Both exhibits are illustrations of the same principle: the appearance of religion without the reality of transformation is not a recent innovation. It has been the pattern of the opposition to truth in every age, and it will be the pattern in the last days.

The pastoral pivot of the chapter comes in verse 10, where Paul turns from the description of the false teachers and their pattern to the description of Timothy's own formation: you, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. The contrast is between the person who has the form of godliness without the power and the person who has been formed in the full reality of the gospel — in teaching and in life, in faith and in patience, in love and in steadfastness. Timothy's formation has been comprehensive and personal. And it has included persecution and suffering, which Paul names not as anomalies but as the normal experience of everyone who desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus.

The chapter closes with one of the most important statements about the nature and sufficiency of Scripture in the entire New Testament: All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. The Scripture is the provision for the perilous times. It is the resource that equips the minister for everything the last days demand. And the final instruction of the chapter is the most obvious and the most necessary: continue in the things you have learned and been assured of. The perilous times are no reason to abandon the Scripture. They are every reason to hold it more firmly.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We come to 2 Timothy chapter 3 as people who recognize the world it describes. The perilous times Paul announces as coming are the times we inhabit — not because every feature of the catalogue is new, but because the combination of religious appearance without moral reality, the form of godliness without its power, is as present and as dangerous in our own moment as it was in Paul's. We need the discernment the chapter offers: the ability to recognize the pattern, to name it accurately, and to respond to it with the full resource that the chapter's closing section provides.

Lord, form in us the character that stands in contrast to the catalogue of the last days. Where self-love is the water in which the culture swims, form in us the love of God that displaces self as the center. Where the form of godliness without the power is the default of the religious landscape, form in us the reality of the transformed character that the gospel produces when it is genuinely received and genuinely obeyed. Let us be the exhibit of what the power of godliness actually looks like — the contrast that makes the counterfeit visible by comparison.

And equip us from the Scripture that this chapter describes as the provision for the perilous times. Let the word of God that is profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness be the formation of our minds and our characters and our practices. Let us continue in the things we have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom we have learned them — and let the sacred writings that have been able to make us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus be the resource we draw on most deeply in the times that most demand it.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

2 Timothy 3:1–9

The Perilous Times: The Catalogue of Last-Days Character and the Pattern of the False Teacher

- (1) This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.*
- (2) For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy,*
- (3) Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good,*
- (4) Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;*
- (5) Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.*

*(6) For of this sort are they which creep into houses,
and lead captive silly women laden with sins,
led away with divers lusts,
(7) Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.
(8) Now as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses,
so do these also resist the truth:
men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.
(9) But they shall proceed no further:
for their folly shall be manifest unto all men,
as theirs also was.*

The Context

The opening words — this know also — carry the weight of a solemn forewarning. Paul is not sharing theological speculation. He is giving Timothy the diagnostic equipment he will need to recognize what is coming and what is already present. The last days in Paul's usage is not primarily a reference to an end-time period still future to us. It is the description of the entire period between the first and second comings of Christ — the age in which the church lives and ministers. The perilous times are therefore not a future crisis to be prepared for. They are the present conditions to be navigated.

The catalogue of verses 2–4 is one of the most comprehensive inventories of fallen human character in the New Testament. Nineteen vices are listed, and they fall into a discernible pattern: they are the vices of self-orientation — lovers of self, lovers of money, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — and of the relational destruction that self-orientation produces. The person who is oriented toward self rather than God becomes, inevitably, the person who is unthankful, unholy, unloving, uncontrolled, brutal, treacherous. The root is the orientation. The catalogue is the fruit.

The most devastating phrase in the catalogue is verse 5: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. The people being described are not secular materialists who have abandoned the appearance of religion. They are people who maintain the form — the outward shape of religious practice, the language of devotion, the participation in the community of faith — while denying the power that genuine godliness produces: the transformed character, the genuine love, the actual obedience to God rather than the performance of obedience before people. The form without the power is the most dangerous counterfeit because it is the hardest to distinguish from the genuine article.

The concrete exhibit of verses 6–7 is the false teacher who preys on the spiritually vulnerable — described here as women burdened with sins and swayed by various desires, ever learning and never able to arrive at a knowledge of the truth. The ever learning and never arriving is the description of the person who is perpetually engaged in spiritual consumption — seeking new teachers, new experiences, new content — without the formation that genuine truth produces.

The false teacher feeds this appetite rather than addressing it, offering the stimulation of religious novelty without the demand of genuine transformation.

The reference to Jannes and Jambres — the traditional names of the Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses in Exodus 7–8 — is Paul’s establishment of the typological principle: the opposition to truth by people of corrupt minds and counterfeit religion is not a new phenomenon. It has been the pattern since the beginning of the redemptive story. And the outcome is the same: their folly will be evident to all, as the magicians’ folly became evident when their imitation reached the limit of its power. The false teachers will not prevail. The pattern of their failure is written in the Old Testament for those with eyes to see it.

Plain American English

But mark this — there will be terrible times in the last days. People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God — having a form of godliness but rejecting its power. Have nothing to do with such people. They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible people who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so these men oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. But they will not get very far because, as happened with those two men, their foolishness will be clear to everyone.

Key Observations

“In the last days perilous times shall come”: This signifies **The Perilous Times Are Not a Future Crisis Still Approaching but the Characteristic Conditions of the Entire Age Between the First and Second Comings of Christ.**

The eschatological framing of the chapter — in the last days — is not primarily a prediction about a distant future event. In Paul’s usage, the last days describes the age inaugurated by the first coming of Christ and continuing until His return — the age in which the church currently lives. The perilous times are therefore the characteristic conditions of the present age: the age in which the gospel is proclaimed into a world that is simultaneously shaped by the fall and informed by the presence of the Spirit. The warning is not wait for things to get worse. It is recognize what the age is like and navigate it accordingly. The dangerous times are now.

“Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away”: This signifies **The Form of Godliness Without the Power Is the Most Dangerous Counterfeit Because It Is the Most Difficult to Distinguish from the Genuine Article.**

The vice catalogue of verses 2–4 describes people whose behavior is visibly destructive. But verse 5 introduces the most dangerous category: people whose behavior is not visibly destructive because they maintain the form of godliness. The form is real: the religious language, the

participation in the community, the performance of devotion. What is absent is the power: the genuine transformation of character that the gospel produces when it is truly received and truly obeyed. The form without the power is dangerous because it passes the visible tests of religious authenticity while failing the actual test: the changed life. The instruction — from such turn away — is the most direct possible command in the passage. Do not engage. Do not be influenced. Turn.

“Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth”: This signifies **The Perpetual Spiritual Consumer Who Accumulates Religious Experience Without Arriving at Transforming Truth Is the Specific Vulnerability That the False Teacher Exploits.**

The description of the ever-learning and never-arriving is one of the most diagnostically precise descriptions of a specific spiritual condition that recurs in every generation. The person who is perpetually engaged in spiritual seeking — moving from teacher to teacher, experience to experience, community to community — without the formation that genuine arrival at the knowledge of the truth produces is the person whose spiritual hunger has become a vulnerability rather than a virtue. The hunger for truth is good. But the perpetual seeking that never submits to the demands of the truth being sought is the condition that the false teacher exploits: offering the stimulation of religious novelty without the demand of genuine transformation. The arrival at the knowledge of the truth requires the willingness to be changed by what is known.

“As Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith”: This signifies **The Typological Principle Establishes That the Opposition of Counterfeit Religion to Genuine Truth Is a Pattern Written Throughout the Redemptive Story and That the Pattern of Failure Is Also Established.**

The naming of Jannes and Jambres is the appeal to the typological imagination that Paul expects his readers to exercise. The Egyptian magicians who imitated the signs of Moses were not powerless — they produced genuine counterfeits of the first two plagues. But their imitation reached the limit of its power, and their folly became evident to all. The false teachers of the last days follow the same pattern: genuine enough imitation of the real to be dangerous, but ultimately limited by the corruption of their minds and the rejection of their faith. The outcome is already written in the type: their folly will be evident to all. The typological pattern is both a warning and a comfort — a warning about the genuine danger of the imitation, and a comfort that the imitation has a predetermined limit.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Develop the Diagnostic Capacity to Recognize the Form of Godliness Without the Power in Its Contemporary Expressions: The form of godliness without the power is not easily recognizable by its surface features. It uses the right language, participates in the right communities, performs the right religious activities. The diagnostic test is not the form but the fruit: the transformed character, the genuine love of God rather than love of self, the actual obedience to the demands of the gospel rather than the performance of obedience before an audience. Develop the ability to ask the question beneath the surface: is the power present? Is the character being formed? Is the love of God displacing the love of self? The form is easy to

produce. The power requires the genuine surrender that the form without the power has refused to make.

2. Recognize the Ever-Learning Pattern as a Spiritual Danger Rather Than a Spiritual Virtue: The contemporary church's celebration of spiritual curiosity and openness has, in some of its expressions, produced the ever-learning and never-arriving condition that verse 7 describes. The accumulation of theological content, spiritual experiences, and religious community memberships without the formation that genuine arrival at the knowledge of the truth produces is not spiritual maturity. It is spiritual consumption. The correction is not to stop learning but to submit to the demands of what is being learned: to allow the truth that is being encountered to actually form the character, change the habits, redirect the loves, and reshape the life. Learning that does not transform is the condition the false teacher exploits.

3. Take Comfort from the Typological Pattern That the Folly of the Counterfeit Has a Predetermined Limit: The reference to Jannes and Jambres is the pastoral provision for the anxiety that the apparent success of the false teacher can produce. The magicians produced genuine imitations. They were convincing for a time. But their folly became evident to all when the imitation reached the limit of its power. The false teachers of every generation follow the same pattern. Their apparent success is real but limited. Their folly will become evident. The typological pattern is written in the Old Testament as the standing assurance that the counterfeits are not ultimate. Hold onto this comfort when the apparent success of the false teacher is most discouraging.

How This Relates to Today

The catalogue of verses 2–4 functions as a mirror for the contemporary church rather than a window onto a distant future. Each item in the list — self-love, money-love, boasting, arrogance, disobedience to parents, ingratitude, the unholy, the unloving, the uncontrolled, the brutal, the pleasure-loving — is recognizable in the cultural landscape that contemporary believers inhabit. The question the catalogue poses is not whether these vices exist in the world around us — they obviously do — but whether they have also infiltrated the church in the form of the godliness without the power that verse 5 describes. The church that looks like the world in its character while maintaining the form of religious practice is the specific target of Paul's warning.

The ever-learning and never-arriving condition of verse 7 is also one of the most precisely applicable diagnoses for a specific pathology of contemporary evangelical culture: the perpetual consumer of theological content who attends conferences, listens to podcasts, reads books, and participates in online theological communities without the personal formation that genuine engagement with the truth of the gospel demands. The content is real. The accumulation is genuine. But the arrival — the willingness to be changed, to submit, to obey, to allow the truth being consumed to form the character — is perpetually deferred. The false teacher thrives in this environment because he offers more content without the demand of transformation.

Key Lesson: **The perilous times of the last days are not a distant future crisis but the present conditions of the age in which the church ministers — characterized above all by the form of godliness without the power that genuine transformation produces — and the specific vulnerability it exploits is the perpetual seeker who is ever learning and never arriving at the*

*knowledge of the truth; but the typological pattern of Jannes and Jambres assures us that the folly of the counterfeit has a predetermined limit, and the pattern of its failure is already written in the story of Moses.**

2 Timothy 3:10–13

The Contrast: Paul's Life as the Exhibit of Formed Character and the Inevitability of Persecution

(10) But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, steadfastness,

(11) Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra;

what persecutions I endured:

but out of them all the Lord delivered me.

(12) Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.

(13) But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.

The Context

The you, however of verse 10 is the sharpest pivot in the chapter. After the extended description of the false teachers and their character, Paul turns to Timothy with the most personal and most direct possible contrast: but you — you have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. The contrast is between the person who has the form of godliness without the power and the person who has been formed in the full reality of the gospel. And the exhibit of that formation is not a theological argument or a list of virtues to be pursued. It is a person: Paul himself, whose teaching and life Timothy has personally witnessed and personally followed.

The specificity of verse 11 is pastorally significant: Antioch, Iconium, Lystra. These are not generic references to suffering. They are the specific cities of the first missionary journey, the specific locations where Paul was stoned, driven out, and left for dead. Timothy was from Lystra. He knew these events not from report but from personal witness and personal memory. Paul is not invoking suffering in the abstract. He is invoking the suffering that Timothy personally saw, that happened in his own hometown, that formed the context in which Timothy first encountered the gospel. The persecutions are real, specific, and personally known.

The statement of verse 12 is one of the most counter-cultural assertions in the New Testament in the context of a prosperity-oriented religious culture: all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. Not may be. Not might be, if circumstances are unfavorable. Will be. The persecution is not the exception for the particularly courageous or the particularly exposed.

It is the normal experience of everyone who genuinely desires to live the godly life in the present age, in a world that is organized around the loves that the catalogue of verses 2–4 describes. The godly life is the one that is most in conflict with the world as it is.

The contrast of verse 13 deepens the urgency: evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. The trajectory of the false teacher is not stabilization but deterioration. They do not reach a plateau of comfortable error. They go further in. And they are simultaneously the deceivers and the deceived — they are not coolly calculated manipulators who know what they are doing. They are themselves captive to the deception they are propagating. The one who deceives others is also the one who has been deceived. The corruption of the mind that verse 8 identified runs in both directions.

Plain American English

But you have closely followed my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, my faith, my patience, my love, my endurance — as well as the persecutions and sufferings I went through in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. You know the kinds of things that happened to me, and you know that the Lord rescued me from all of it. In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. But evil people and impostors will keep going from bad to worse, deceiving others and being deceived themselves.

Key Observations

“But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, steadfastness”: This signifies **The Formation Paul Points to Is Not a Curriculum but a Person — the Comprehensive Knowledge of a Life Fully Lived in the Reality of the Gospel.**

The list of nine things Timothy has followed — teaching, conduct, aim, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, and then persecutions and sufferings — is not a curriculum that can be replicated by content delivery. It is the description of a comprehensive personal knowledge of a life that has been fully lived in the reality of the gospel. Timothy has not only heard Paul’s doctrine. He has seen Paul’s conduct. He has observed Paul’s aim in life — the purpose that has organized the whole of his ministry. He has witnessed Paul’s faith, patience, love, and steadfastness in the specific circumstances where each of these was most tested. The formation is comprehensive and personal. This is what discipleship actually is: the comprehensive personal knowledge of a life fully formed by the gospel, followed closely enough to be imitated.

“But out of them all the Lord delivered me”: This signifies **The Deliverance Is Not the Absence of Persecution but the Faithfulness of the God Who Sustains Through Every Form of It.**

The statement that the Lord delivered Paul out of all his persecutions must be read carefully in the context of the letter in which it appears. Paul is in prison, awaiting execution. The deliverance he is describing is not the avoidance of all suffering — the circumstances of the letter make that reading impossible. The deliverance is the faithfulness of God through the

suffering: the preservation of Paul's faith, the continuity of his ministry, the unchained word that has gone forth despite the chains that bind its herald. The Lord delivered him from Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra — and the deliverances did not prevent the imprisonment, but they did establish the pattern of divine faithfulness that is the ground of Paul's confidence even now.

“All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution”: This signifies **The Persecution of the Godly Life Is Not the Exception for the Heroically Faithful but the Normal Experience of Everyone Who Genuinely Desires to Live the Life That Is Most in Conflict with the World as It Is.**

The universality of verse 12 — all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted — is the most direct available refutation of the prosperity gospel's implicit promise that faithful Christian living produces comfort, approval, and success in the present age. The godly life is the life that is most in tension with the world organized around the loves of verses 2–4. The person whose loves have been redirected from self and pleasure and money toward God and others will find that the world in which self and pleasure and money are the organizing loves is not hospitable to the redirection. The hostility is not the sign of failure. It is the sign of the genuine desire to live the godly life.

“Evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived”: This signifies **The Trajectory of the False Teacher Is Deterioration, Not Stabilization — and the Deception Runs in Both Directions: They Deceive Others Precisely Because They Have Themselves Been Deceived.**

The going from bad to worse of verse 13 is the pastoral warning against any expectation that the false teacher will reach a comfortable plateau of stable error from which they can be engaged on equal terms. The false teacher is on a trajectory, not a plateau. The corruption of the mind that verse 8 identified is progressive. And the description of the false teacher as both deceiving and being deceived is the most important diagnostic observation in the verse: they are not detached manipulators who coolly know what they are doing. They are captives of the deception they propagate. They believe what they teach, even as what they teach is false. The engagement with them requires the recognition that their error is not a performance but a condition — which means the response to them must be the meek instruction of chapter 2, not the combative refutation that treats them as calculating opponents.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Pursue the Comprehensive, Personal Formation That Paul Points to Rather Than the Content Accumulation That Substitutes for It: The nine things Timothy has followed — teaching, conduct, aim, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, persecutions, sufferings — are not transferable through content delivery. They require personal proximity to a person whose life is fully lived in the reality of the gospel. The contemporary church's tendency to substitute content consumption for personal formation — to produce believers who know a great deal about the gospel without having closely followed a person whose life exhibits it — produces exactly the ever-learning and never-arriving condition that verse 7 warned against. Identify the person whose life exhibits the comprehensive reality of the gospel. Follow closely. The formation happens in the following.

2. Expect Persecution as the Normal Experience of the Godly Life and Prepare for It Rather Than Being Surprised by It:

The universality of verse 12 is the most important pastoral preparation available for the believer who is navigating the hostility of a world organized around the loves that the catalogue of verses 2–4 describes. The persecution is not a sign that something has gone wrong. It is the sign that the godly life is genuinely in conflict with the world as it is — which is the inevitable consequence of the redirection of loves from self and pleasure toward God and neighbor. Prepare for it by grounding the expectation in the theology of the chapter: the Lord delivered Paul from Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. He will deliver from the persecutions of the present age. The deliverance does not prevent the suffering. It sustains through it.

3. Engage the False Teacher with the Awareness That They Are Deceived as Well as Deceiving — and That the Response Is Meek Instruction, Not Combative Refutation:

The deceiving and being deceived of verse 13 is the foundation for the pastoral approach to the false teacher that chapter 2 prescribed: meek instruction in the hope that God will grant them repentance. The false teacher is not a cool manipulator who knows what they are doing and can be argued out of it by sufficient counterevidence. They are captive to their own deception. The engagement with them that might lead to their freedom is the gentle, patient, meek instruction that treats them as the captive who needs to be freed rather than the enemy who needs to be defeated.

How This Relates to Today

The statement that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted is one of the most counter-cultural claims the church can make in a contemporary Western context where the narrative of the Christian life has been shaped, for several generations, by the implicit promise that authentic faith produces comfort, health, success, and social approval. The persecution that verse 12 describes as universal and inevitable is not the catastrophic suffering of the martyr — though it can include that. It is the ordinary, daily experience of the friction between the redirected loves of the godly life and the world organized around the unredirected loves that the catalogue describes. Every genuine believer experiences this friction. The question is not whether it will come but whether the expectation has been formed by verse 12 or by the prosperity narrative that contradicts it.

The comprehensive formation that Paul points to in verses 10–11 is also one of the most needed correctives to the contemporary church’s discipleship deficit. The nine things Timothy has followed are not a curriculum. They are a life. The church that has reduced discipleship to content consumption — however excellent the content — has missed the model of verse 10: you have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness. The following is personal, comprehensive, and sustained over time. It requires the presence of people whose lives exhibit the reality of the gospel, and the sustained proximity to those lives that makes the following possible.

Key Lesson: **The contrast between the false teacher and the genuinely formed minister is not primarily a contrast of doctrine but of life — the comprehensive personal formation that Timothy has received from Paul, including the suffering that is the inevitable accompaniment of the godly life in the present age; and the persecution that verse 12 declares universal is not the sign that*

*something has gone wrong but the normal friction between the redirected loves of the godly life and the world organized around the loves that the catalogue of verses 2–4 describes.**

2 Timothy 3:14–17

The Sufficient Scripture: Continue in What You Have Learned, and the Word That Equips for Every Good Work

*(14) But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned
and hast been assured of,*

knowing of whom thou hast learned them;

*(15) And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures,
which are able to make thee wise unto salvation
through faith which is in Christ Jesus.*

*(16) All scripture is given by inspiration of God,
and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof,
for correction, for instruction in righteousness:*

*(17) That the man of God may be perfect,
thoroughly furnished unto all good works.*

The Context

The but continue of verse 14 is the pastoral pivot from the description of the false teachers and their trajectory to the instruction for the person who is not on that trajectory. The false teachers go from bad to worse. Timothy is to continue — to persist in, to remain in — the things he has learned and been assured of. The contrast is between the progressive deterioration of verse 13 and the steadfast continuation of verse 14. And the ground for the continuation is specified: knowing from whom you have learned them. The from whom is both Paul — the person whose comprehensive formation Timothy has personally followed — and, underlying Paul’s transmission, the God who gave the Scripture that Paul has been handling and teaching.

The reference to the holy scriptures from childhood in verse 15 connects the chapter back to 2 Timothy 1:5 and the faith that dwelt first in Lois and Eunice. The sacred writings that Timothy has known from childhood are the writings that his grandmother and mother taught him — the Old Testament Scriptures that were the formation of every Jewish household in which genuine faith was practiced. These writings, Paul says, are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. The wisdom the Scriptures produce is not general wisdom. It is the specific wisdom that leads to salvation — and the path of that wisdom runs through faith in Christ Jesus. The Old Testament Scriptures are the preparation for the gospel, not the substitute for it.

The statement of verse 16 — all Scripture is given by inspiration of God — is one of the most important theological claims in the entire New Testament. The word translated inspiration is

theopneustos — God-breathed. The Scripture is not the product of human religious insight that God has subsequently endorsed. It is the product of the divine breath — the same word used in Genesis 2:7 for the breath that gave life to the human being formed from the dust. The Scripture is alive because God breathed it into being, and it carries the authority and the power of the One whose breath produced it.

The four-fold profitability of verse 16 — for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness — is the description of the full range of the Scripture’s work in the life of the believer and the community. Teaching: the positive instruction in the truth. Reproof: the confrontation of what is false and destructive. Correction: the restoration of what has been displaced or distorted. Training in righteousness: the long-term formation of the character that the godly life requires. All four are necessary. The Scripture that is used only for teaching without reproof produces a community that knows the truth without being challenged by it. The Scripture that is used only for reproof without training produces a community that is confronted with what is wrong without being formed in what is right.

Plain American English

But as for you — continue in what you have learned and have been firmly convinced of, because you know who it was that taught you. You’ve known the sacred scriptures since you were a small child — and they have the power to make you wise for the salvation that comes through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is breathed out by God, and it is useful for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, and for training in righteousness, so that the person who belongs to God may be complete and fully equipped for every good work.

Key Observations

“Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them”: This signifies **The Continuation Is Grounded Not Only in the Content of What Has Been Learned but in the Character of the Person Through Whom It Was Transmitted.**

The knowing of whom you have learned them is the personal dimension of the theological continuity Paul is calling for. The things Timothy has learned are not free-floating theological propositions whose validity is independent of the person who transmitted them. They are the content of a life fully lived in the reality of the gospel, transmitted by a person whose conduct, aim, faith, patience, love, steadfastness, persecutions, and sufferings Timothy has personally followed. The ground for the continuation is therefore both the content — the sound words, the gospel pattern — and the person who exhibited it: the apostle in chains who is writing this letter, and behind him the God who breathed the Scripture that Paul has been teaching. The from whom is both personal and divine.

“From a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus”: This signifies **The Sacred Scriptures Known from Childhood Are the Generational Gift That Lois and Eunice Transmitted —**

and Their Wisdom-Producing Power Is Directed Specifically Toward the Salvation That Comes Through Faith in Christ Jesus.

The connection between verse 15 and 2 Timothy 1:5 — the grandmother Lois and the mother Eunice who transmitted the genuine faith that now dwells in Timothy — establishes that the sacred writings Timothy has known from childhood are the Scriptures that his grandmother and mother taught him. The generational transmission of verse 1:5 is the generational transmission of the Scriptures that verse 3:15 celebrates. And the wisdom those Scriptures produce is the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus — not the general wisdom of the morally educated person, but the specific wisdom that recognizes in Jesus Christ the fulfillment of everything the Old Testament Scriptures were pointing toward. The Old Testament is the preparation. The faith in Christ Jesus is the arrival.

“All scripture is given by inspiration of God”: This signifies **The God-Breathed Nature of Scripture Is the Foundation of Its Authority, Its Power, and Its Profitability for the Full Range of Tasks That the Ministry of the Word Requires.**

The theopneustos of verse 16 — God-breathed — is the most fundamental claim that can be made about the nature of Scripture, and everything that follows in the verse depends on it. The Scripture is profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training because it is God-breathed: because the authority behind it is the authority of the God who breathed it, and the power within it is the power of the same breath. The teaching that is grounded in Scripture is not the opinion of the teacher — however expert the teacher may be. It is the communication of the mind of the One whose breath produced the text. The reproof that is grounded in Scripture is not the judgment of the community — however wise the community may be. It is the correction of the God who knows what is true and what is not. The God-breathed nature of Scripture is the source of everything the Scripture can accomplish.

“Profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works”: This signifies **The Four-Fold Profitability of Scripture Is the Complete Provision for the Full Range of the Ministry of the Word — and the Goal Is the Complete Equipment of the Person of God for Every Form of Good Work.**

The four dimensions of scriptural profitability are not four options from which the minister chooses according to preference. They are the four quadrants of a complete ministry of the word. Teaching establishes the truth that forms the community. Reproof confronts the error and the sin that deform it. Correction restores what has been displaced or distorted. Training in righteousness forms the long-term character that the holy life requires. The community that receives all four — formed in the truth, confronted with the error, restored when it has wandered, trained over time in righteousness — is the community that is moving toward the complete equipment that verse 17 describes: the person of God who is complete, fully equipped for every good work. The completeness of the equipment corresponds to the completeness of the Scripture’s profitability.

What This Means for Us Today

1. Ground the Continuation in Both the Content and the Person Through Whom It Was

Received: The knowing of whom you have learned them is the pastoral wisdom that grounds the continuation in the relationship as well as the content. The person who continues in the received truth only on the basis of its propositional content is more vulnerable to the pressure of the false teacher — who also has propositional content — than the person who continues on the basis of both the content and the character of the person who transmitted it. The network of relationships through which the genuine faith has been received is itself a resource for the continuation: the grandmother who taught the Scriptures, the mother who modeled the faith, the apostle whose life exhibited the full reality of the gospel. Know from whom you have learned. Let the character of the teacher be part of the ground of the continuation.

2. Receive the Sacred Scriptures as the Wisdom-Producing Provision for the Salvation That Comes Through Faith in Christ Jesus — Not as a General Religious Resource but as the Specific Preparation for the Gospel:

The wisdom the Scriptures produce is not generic moral improvement. It is the specific wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus — the wisdom that recognizes in Jesus the fulfillment of the entire redemptive story that the Old Testament tells. The contemporary church's tendency to treat the Scriptures as a general resource for life improvement — a collection of wisdom literature from which principles for living can be extracted — misses the specific directedness of the wisdom they produce. The Scriptures are pointing somewhere: toward the salvation that comes through faith in Christ Jesus. Read them as the preparation for the arrival.

3. Deploy All Four Dimensions of Scriptural Profitability in the Ministry of the Word Rather Than Defaulting to the One or Two That Come Most Naturally:

Every minister of the word has a default mode: the teacher who defaults to teaching without reproof, the prophet who defaults to reproof without training, the pastor who defaults to correction without doctrine. The four-fold profitability of verse 16 is the corrective to the default mode: all four are necessary for the complete equipment of the person of God. The community that receives only teaching without reproof will drift into comfortable error. The community that receives only reproof without training will become discouraged and brittle. The community that receives all four in their proper proportion will be the community that is moving toward the complete equipment that verse 17 describes.

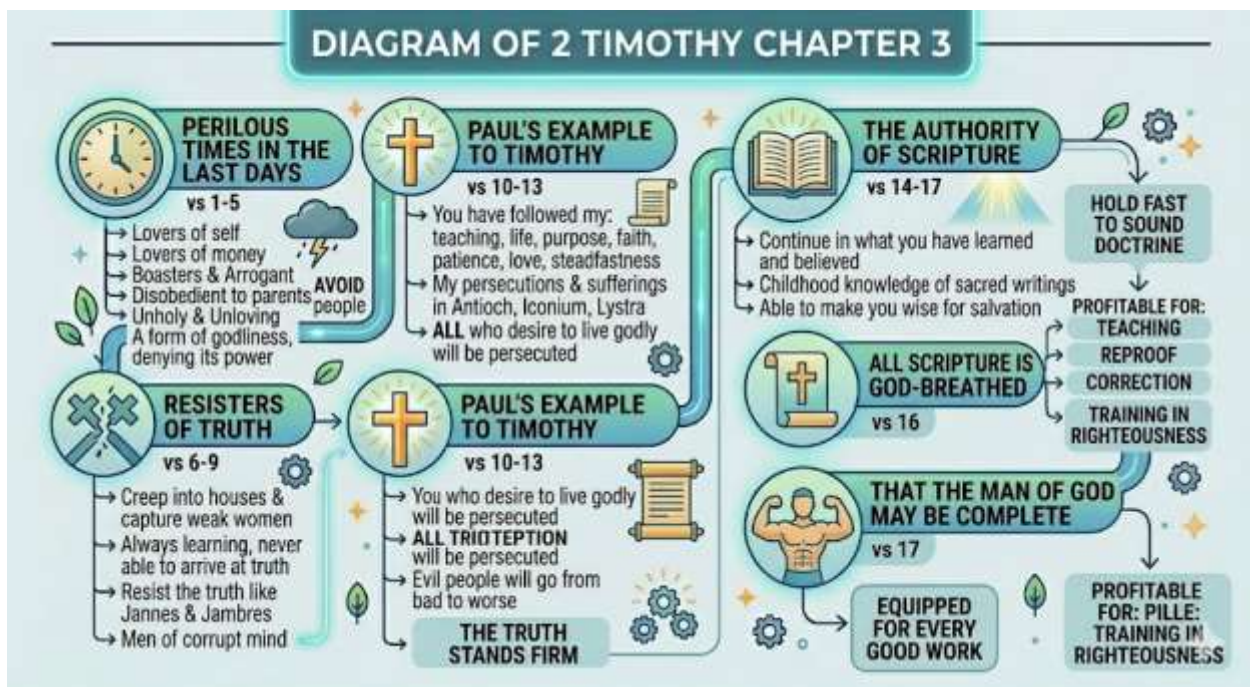
How This Relates to Today

The claim that all Scripture is God-breathed is one of the most contested and most important claims the contemporary church must hold with clarity and confidence. The erosion of confidence in the authority of Scripture — whether through the academic skepticism that questions its historical reliability, the cultural accommodation that treats its moral claims as relative to their historical context, or the experiential prioritization that places personal spiritual experience above the authority of the text — is precisely the undermining of the resource that this chapter names as the provision for the perilous times. The perilous times are not the occasion for a reduced confidence in Scripture. They are the occasion for a deeper reliance on it.

The goal of verse 17 — the complete person of God, thoroughly equipped for every good work — is also one of the most needed correctives to the contemporary church's tendency to measure

the adequacy of its members by their theological knowledge rather than by the completeness of their equipment for good works. The Scripture is not given to produce theologically informed spectators. It is given to produce people who are completely equipped for every good work — who can teach, rebuke, correct, and train because they have themselves been taught, rebuked, corrected, and trained by the God-breathed word that does all four. The measure of scriptural formation is not what the person knows. It is what the person does with what they know.

Key Lesson: **The continuation in the things learned and been assured of is grounded in the character of the people through whom they were received and in the God-breathed nature of the Scripture they transmitted — the sacred writings that are able to make wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus and that are profitable for the complete range of the ministry of the word: teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness, so that the person of God may be completely equipped for every good work that the perilous times demand.**



Closing Prayer

Heavenly Father,

We close 2 Timothy chapter 3 having been diagnosed, warned, formed, and equipped. We have been diagnosed by the catalogue of the last-days character — the form of godliness without the power, the self-love and pleasure-love and money-love that characterize the perilous times we inhabit. We have been warned by the exhibit of the false teachers who creep into households and by Jannes and Jambres whose folly became evident to all. We have been formed by the portrait of Paul whose teaching and conduct and aim and faith and patience and love and steadfastness Timothy has personally followed. And we have been equipped by the most important theological

claim in the chapter: all Scripture is God-breathed, and it is profitable for everything the perilous times demand.

Lord, give us the discernment to recognize the form of godliness without the power in its contemporary expressions — in the culture around us and, more urgently, in ourselves. Let the mirror of the catalogue show us not only the world but our own hearts, and let the recognition produce the flight and the pursuit that chapter 2 described: fleeing the youthful desires and pursuing righteousness, faith, love, and peace with those who call on the Lord from a pure heart.

Equip us from the God-breathed Scripture for the full range of what the ministry of the word requires: teaching, reproof, correction, training in righteousness. Let us not default to the one or two dimensions that come most naturally while neglecting the others. Let the complete profitability of the Scripture produce the complete equipment of the person of God — thoroughly furnished for every good work, prepared for the perilous times not by retreat from them but by the formation that the God-breathed word produces.

And give us the grace to continue — in the things we have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom we have learned them. In the perilous times, the continuation is the most radical act available. Continue in the Scripture. Continue in the gospel. Continue in the community of those who call on the Lord from a pure heart. The false teachers go from bad to worse. The person of God continues. Let us be the people who continue.

In Jesus' name, Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria
Glory to God Alone