

Group Study Outline

LAUNCH QUESTION

What did you imagine life would be like when you first decided to follow Jesus?
Has it met your expectations?

READ 2 Timothy 3:10-13

In what ways is Timothy different from the people mentioned in v1-9?
Why do you think Christians will always face persecution?
What aspects of 'living a godly life in Christ Jesus' might lead to opposition today?
Have you ever experienced opposition for following Jesus? What form did it take?
How might we be tempted to respond to opposition?
How should we respond?

READ 2 Timothy 3:14-17

How does Timothy contrast with the people mentioned in v13?
What are we taught about scripture here?
How do these verses help us answer someone who says:

- The bible was written so long ago, it doesn't have any relevance today?
- The bible was written by lots of different people with different opinions, it doesn't have a single message?
- I like Jesus teaching, but I don't like the Old Testament?
- There are parts of the bible that I really struggle to understand or accept?
- If the church is going to reach young people/ families/ single people/ working class people etc. then we need less time looking at the bible and more time playing games/ socialising/ discussing contemporary issues/ in pubs etc.

If these things are true of the bible, what implications does that have for the place of the bible in your life?

PRAY

Pray for Christians around the world who are experiencing serious persecution at the moment.
(See <http://www.releaseinternational.org/pray/> for resources)
Pray for any in the group who are facing opposition for being a Christian.
Pray that we won't shy away from living godly lives, even if that invites opposition.
Thank God for his word. Pray that we will value it, trust it and obey it.

2 Timothy 3:10-17



'2 Timothy' at a glance

The apostle Paul is in prison and facing execution for preaching the gospel. Many Christians have refused to side with him, ashamed of his imprisonment and suffering. His mentee Timothy is trying to continue gospel ministry in the midst of desertions and false teaching. Paul writes to encourage him not to be ashamed of the gospel, to persevere in following Jesus, and to pass the gospel baton on.

Where this passage fits in...

Paul has just warned Timothy of the terrible times there will be in the last days, with people 'having the appearance of godliness but denying its power'. Now he reminds Timothy that he is not like them because he has followed Paul's own example. He encourages Timothy to continue in this.

Theme Sentence

Timothy should continue to follow Paul's example, including persecutions, being equipped by scripture.

Application

- Following Jesus will lead to opposition from others. If we find this in our lives, it's a good sign. (and if we don't, we need to consider why...)
- We need to continue in what we have believed, because it is based on the God-breathed scripture, which shows us how to be saved and equips us for every good work.

Commentary

- 10-13 'But you' – Timothy is contrasted with the false believers and teachers of verses 1-9. He is different from them in that he has followed Paul's teaching, as opposed to false teaching, Paul's conduct, as opposed to the bad behavior of verses 2-5, and Paul's persecutions and sufferings. One of the things the false teachers are saying is that the resurrection has already happened (2:18). This probably involves the idea that we enjoy the benefits of the resurrection in this life, i.e. following Jesus will make life better. If so, Paul's sufferings form a sharp contrast to this teaching. Also note the contrast between the 'lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God' (v3) and Paul who suffers for Christ.
- 11 Antioch, Iconium and Lystra are three cities that Paul appears to have visited on each of his three missionary journeys. But it's the first journey that is the most eventful, and that appears to be what Paul is referring to here (Acts 14). Paul faced persecution in each of the three cities, being driven from one to the next, until in Lystra he was stoned and left for dead (though surviving, obviously!). Paul's message to the Christians in these cities when he returned (14:22 – 'continue in the faith...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God') is very similar to his words to Timothy in this passage, indicating this was the pattern of life he taught both at the beginning and at the end of his ministry. Although these events took place before Paul met Timothy, Timothy was from the city of Lystra, so would probably have been familiar with them.
- Note that the persecution Paul faced in these three cities was not official, organized, government sponsored opposition. It was unofficial, informal persecution stirred up by people who heard Paul preach. And note these people were not pagans who had no idea what Paul was talking about, but Jews who believed the same OT scriptures as Paul. It's not an exact parallel, but suggests that informal religious opposition from those that call themselves 'Christian' may be as fierce as persecution from non Christian governments.
- 12 Paul's experience, whilst extreme is not unique. All Christians will face opposition to the faith. The fact that Paul has always taught this, and indeed Jesus taught it (John 15:18ff) suggests we should not be surprised by opposition, but rather should expect it. Christianity will always fit with the culture in some ways, but clash in others, and those clashes will inevitably lead to persecution.
- 13 Meanwhile, as Christians are persecuted, evil men go from bad to worse. This is part of understanding that there will be difficult times in the last days (v1).
- 14-17 'As for you'. Again Timothy is contrasted with the false teachers (evil men in the previous verse). Whilst they go from bad to worse, he is to continue in what he has learned and believed.

One of the reasons he is to continue is because he knows those from whom he learned it. This could refer to Paul (2:2) or his mother and grandmother (1:5). Either way his confidence in them gives him confidence in the message. The conduct of the teachers matters as well as their teaching, both for showing up those teaching the truth and those teaching falsehood.

- 15 But it seems this teaching has been based on the sacred writings, which Timothy has learned from childhood. Paul is referring here to the Old Testament Scriptures (since the New Testament was still in the process of being written). However a number of places show that the New Testament is also scripture. Paul understood his message to be the very word of God (1 Thess 2:13). He appears to quote Luke's gospel and refer to it as scripture (1 Tim 5:18). Peter refers to Paul's letters as scripture (2 Peter 3:16). Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would lead the apostles into all truth, so their words carry authority (John 16:12-15). Interestingly though, it is primarily the Old Testament that Paul has in mind when he says it is 'able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus'. The Old Testament is about Jesus and how we can be saved through faith in him.
- 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God, literally, 'God-breathed'. Every chapter, verse and sentence should be considered as his very words. This doesn't deny that human authors played their part, shaping it according to their own cultures and styles. But ultimately God is the author of the bible. This means it is authoritative, we cannot ignore it, reject it, or sit in judgment over it. To reject God's word is to reject God. It also means it is trustworthy, since God is trustworthy. He does not lie or make mistakes, and so his word cannot contain anything untrue.
- Scripture is profitable for teaching, telling us who God is, what he has done for us and what he demands from us. It is profitable for rebuking and correcting, telling us when we are wrong in our beliefs and actions, and showing us the right way to believe and behave. It is profitable for training us, helping us grow in our understanding and in godliness.
- 17 'Man of God' means messenger of God, a common expression in the bible for prophets, used in this passage for those that preach the gospel. But the principle that the bible equips for every good work surely applies to any Christian seeking to live for God.