**How To Study the Bible**

**Pastoral Epistles**

**2 Timothy 3:10-17**

**How would you describe the bible to someone who had never read it?**

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**Are Christians called to be different than the world? In what way?**

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*Every* Christian is called to be different from the world. ‘Don’t let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould’ (Rom. 12:2, jbp). Certainly the pressures upon us to conform are colossal, not only from the direct challenge to traditional beliefs and morals, but also—and more—from the insidious, pervasive atmosphere of secularism which even seeps into the church. Many give in, often without realizing what they are doing. But again and again the word of God addresses us, calling us not to be moved. We are not to be like a ‘reed shaken with the wind’, feebly bowing down before it from whatever direction it may blow. Rather, like a rock in a mountain torrent, we are to stand firm.[[1]](#footnote-2)

**Why does Paul talk about himself this way? (10-11) Compare what he says in other texts (2 Cor 11:23-30; Phil 4:11-13; Phil 1:12) Look these texts up, read and discuss each?**

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Why, however, does Paul give us in verses 10 and 11 this catalogue of his virtues and sufferings? Is it not more than a little immodest, even conceited, that the apostle should put himself forward like this? Perhaps it is understandable that he should mention his ‘teaching’, but why go on to blow his own trumpet about his faith and love, his purpose and conduct, his sufferings and his endurance? Is it not rather unseemly that he should boast like this?

No, Paul is not boasting. He has reasons quite other than exhibitionism for drawing attention to himself. He mentions his teaching first, and then goes on to supply two objective evidences of the genuineness of his teaching, namely the life he lived and the sufferings he endured. Indeed, these are good (though not infallible) general tests of a person’s sincerity, and even of the truth or falsehood of his system. Is he so convinced of his position that he both practises what he preaches and is prepared to suffer for it? Have his beliefs made him a better man, even in the face of opposition? Paul could answer both questions affirmatively. The false teachers lived lives of self-indulgence, and it would be quite out of character to expect them to be willing to suffer for their views; they were altogether too soft and easygoing for that. The apostle Paul, however, lived a consistent life of righteousness, self-control, faith and love, and remained steadfast to his principles through many and grievous persecutions.

Look at his behaviour first. Timothy had observed and tried to imitate Paul’s ‘conduct’ (*agōgē*, his whole demeanour and way of life), his ‘aim in life’ (the spiritual ambitions which motivated him and made life meaningful for him), his ‘faith’ (which perhaps here includes his fidelity), his ‘patience’ (*makrothymia*, tolerance or long-suffering towards aggravating people), his ‘love’ (towards both God and man, as opposed to the false teachers’ love for self, money and pleasure) and his ‘steadfastness’ (*hypomonē*, the patient endurance of trying circumstances, in distinction to *makrothymia*, the patient endurance of trying people). Indeed, since *hypomonē* (‘steadfastness’) is regularly in the New Testament the child of our Christian ‘hope’, our expectation of the Lord’s return and the glory to follow, we may detect within this list yet another example of Paul’s favourite triad of graces ‘faith, hope and love.’

The reference to ‘steadfastness’ or ‘endurance’ naturally leads on to the ‘persecutions’ and the ‘sufferings’ which Paul had had to endure. In particular, he mentions the three Galatian cities Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, because Timothy was a citizen of Lystra and had possibly himself witnessed the occasion when the apostle had been stoned by a hostile mob, dragged out of the city and left in the gutter for dead, though from this and all other persecutions so far the Lord had rescued him. Perhaps Paul’s courage under persecution had even played a part in Timothy’s conversion, much as Stephen’s bravery in martyrdom had done in Paul’s. At all events, Timothy had ‘followed’ Paul’s persecutions, first watching them, and then discovering that he must himself share in them, for he could not be committed to Paul’s teaching and conduct without becoming involved in his sufferings also.[[2]](#footnote-3)

**What are your thoughts about this phrase, “everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”?**

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In verse 12 Paul makes it clear that his experience was not unique. He sought to live ‘a godly life in Christ Jesus’, loving and serving God rather than himself, and he suffered for it. Timothy had found the same thing. For all Christian people who ‘in Christ Jesus’ (*i.e*. through union with him) ‘desire to live a godly life … will be persecuted’, and indeed are bound to suffer persecution. The godly arouse the antagonism of the worldly. It has always been so. It was so for Christ, and he said it would be for us: ‘If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you. Remember the word that I said to you, “A servant is not greater than his master.” If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you’ (Jn. 15:18–20; *cf*. 16:33). It is important to notice the situation in which Christ here told his followers to expect persecution. He envisaged that they would be both in the world (living among godless people) and at the same time ‘not of the world’ (living a godly life in Christ). Those who are in Christ but not in the world are not persecuted, because they do not come into contact and therefore into collision with their potential persecutors. Those who are in the world but not in Christ are also not persecuted, because the world sees nothing in them to persecute. The former escape persecution by withdrawal from the world, the latter by assimilation to it. It is only for those who are both in the world and in Christ simultaneously that persecution becomes inevitable. As Calvin comments, ‘it is in vain to try to detach Christ from his cross, and it is only natural that the world should hate Christ even in his members’.2

This inevitability of persecution is further explained in verse 13 by the continued activities of false teachers. Paul is quite outspoken about them. He dubs them ‘evil men’ and ‘impostors’. The latter word (*goēs*) means a ‘sorcerer, juggler’ and so in early Christian literature a ‘swindler, cheat’ (ag). The apostle does not credit them with sincerity; they are ‘charlatans’ (neb). Such men ‘will go on from bad to worse’. The verb for ‘go on’ (*prokoptō*) properly means to ‘go forward, progress’, but here Paul uses it ironically, since the only advance they make is backwards, not forwards, ‘from bad to worse’. He appears to be referring not to their success as teachers, for he has said that ‘they will not get very far’ (9), but to their own personal deterioration, both intellectual and moral. They are ‘deceivers and deceived’. Alfred Plummer explains it well: ‘they begin by being seducers and end in being dupes, and the dupes (very often) of their own deceptions; for deceit commonly leads to self-deceit’.[[3]](#footnote-4)

**What is Paul’s truth claim about the “Holy Scriptures”?**

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What we have before us is one of the most often quoted and important statements about Scripture in Scripture. Paul said that “all Scripture is inspired by God.” There have been attempts to read the Greek grammar as “all inspired Scripture” or “every inspired Scripture,” thus limiting the scope of what is said, but these are not convincing. It is much more likely that the adjective “inspired” is a predicate of “Scripture,” as in the NLT and with many interpreters (see note on 3:16). The point of 3:16–17 is to elaborate on the end of 3:15 by explaining what Scripture’s efficacy consists in (i.e., inspiration) and, especially, the ways in which it makes us wise unto salvation.

In terms of strict historical concerns, Paul was speaking of the text of what we know as the Old Testament, since there was no “New Testament canon” at the time he said this. To be sure, some think that at least some of the New Testament may already have been intended here by Paul himself (cf. Knight 1992:448, referring to 1 Tim 5:18 [Luke 10:7]; 2 Pet 3:15–16; and other passages). Whether or not he had specific New Testament writings in mind, when Paul spoke of Scripture and its usefulness, it was always a matter of Scripture as read in relation to the Good News of Jesus Christ (see comments below on 4:2). Moreover, from the vantage point of broader theological understandings, his statement applies in principle to all canonical Scripture, including for us the New Testament.

The key word is the term translated “inspired by God.” This translates the adjective *theopneustos* [2315, 2535], which appears here for the first time in Greek literature (BDAG 449–450; Quinn and Wacker 2000:749–750); it may have been coined by Paul. Parallel language was used by Philo (e.g., *On the Decalogue* 35; *On the Confusion of Tongues* 44) and Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.37). To say that Scripture is inspired is to say that its words are God-breathed (a more literal translation); it is God’s own personal speech breathed out by God (cf. Heb 4:12–13; 2 Pet 1:20–21; also Num 24:2; Hos 9:7). This does not negate the active involvement of human authors, but it does affirm that God is fully responsible for Scripture, and it is therefore as true, reliable, authoritative, permanent, and powerful as is God himself. Its message is coherent and consistent, and it is such in its witness to Jesus Christ (Luke 24:25–27, 44; John 5:39–40; Acts 3:24; 1 Cor 15:3–4). If it were not so, it could not bring salvation nor inspire faith. Because it is so, it must not be abused after the fashion of the false teachers but properly taught. It should also be said that inspiration results in the fact that Scripture is not just like all other human literature. It is human literature, and that is important to remember when it comes to thinking about the principles of interpretation (hermeneutics). But it is more than human literature, and this also has implications for interpretation.

As a consequence of inspiration, Scripture is “useful.” This is the primary point in this context. Taken together, the following four functions insist that Scripture, so far from lending itself to the abuses to which the false teachers have subjected it, gives rise through faith in Christ to the wholesome teaching and the correction of what is wrong, whether in heart, mind, or conscience. (1) Scripture is useful in instructing people as to what is the truth. It refers to instruction in the gospel of Jesus Christ which is “according to the Scriptures” (cf. 1 Cor 15:3–4; Luke 24:25–27). (2) Scripture is also useful “to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. (3–4) It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right” (3:16). The fourfold usefulness of Scripture, grounded in its character as inspired, has a particular end in view: “God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work” (3:17). The same or a similar phrase as “to do every good work” is used in 2:21; 1 Timothy 5:10; Titus 1:16; and 3:1. Here and in those passages we see characteristic concerns of the letters to Timothy and Titus—namely, the disastrous effects of the false teaching on the moral fabric of these churches, the importance of the public witness of the faith, and, ultimately, the realization of God’s intention in salvation itself (1:9; cf. Titus 2:11–15).

The upshot for Timothy and for us will follow (4:1–2): “Preach the word of God.” Of course! But how many churches are there today where the Scriptures are in truth the warp and woof of what is said from the pulpit, let alone the substance of daily conversation between believers? It is ironic, though understandable, that modern critics of Scripture have done so much to question the authority of this letter, denying that Paul wrote it, thus leading to its being marginalized and widely ignored. It is ironic because with this letter, of course, goes this powerful statement on Scripture as a whole! But it is even more ironic that within confessing churches, although they would affirm 3:16 in principle, only superficial attention is given to the actual contents of Scripture as fulfilled in Christ. This is a trend that must be reversed if we are to claim faithfulness to Paul’s teaching and to the God whose speech this is.[[4]](#footnote-5)

**What is yours?**

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**Agree or disagree/ discuss:**

The Bible applies to all men and women in every culture, in every age, in every walk of life.

It is God’s supernatural manual that alone reveals the mind and ways of God so that humankind may know and experience His blessings.

The Bible is God’s written record of His works through the ages. It provides substantial evidence of His nature, plan, and purposes so that we can confidently place our faith in Him.

Because of the Bible, we are not left to archaeological, historical, or theological guesswork. We can know, for “it is written.”

Because the Bible is inspired (God-breathed) it is life’s final and ultimate authority.

The Bible is the “last word” on issues pertaining to God and His ways. No individual, institution, or organization can supersede the authority of Scripture.

Through the ministry of the Holy Spirit, the Bible enlightens each individual to recognize personal sin, the need for salvation, and the best possible life course. Without the Bible informing and illumining us, we would be hopelessly unable to know and follow the true and living God.

The Bible is also profitable and nourishing. It provides us with an advantage in every department of life—family, business, and social relationships.

As we meditate and consider its truth, our spirits and souls find nourishment; we become established and enriched in every experience of life by living according to God’s perspective.

The Bible is the book for everyone. It is revelation, inspiration, and communication of the Person and plan of the eternal, living, and powerful God.

1. John R. W. Stott, [*Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus76ti2?ref=Bible.2Ti3.10-15&off=438&ctx=ary+to+stand+alone.%0a~Every+Christian+is+c), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
2. John R. W. Stott, [*Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus76ti2?ref=Bible.2Ti3.10-13&off=3020&ctx=%2c+my+conduct%2c+etc.%E2%80%99%0a~Why%2c+however%2c+does+P), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 94–96. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
3. John R. W. Stott, [*Guard the Gospel the Message of 2 Timothy*](https://ref.ly/logosres/bstus76ti2?ref=Bible.2Ti3.10-13&off=6324&ctx=ufferings+also.%EF%BB%BF1%EF%BB%BF%EF%BB%BF%0a~In+verse+12+Paul+mak), The Bible Speaks Today (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 96–97. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
4. Jon C. Laansma, [“Commentary on 2 Timothy,”](https://ref.ly/logosres/cstonecm75ti?ref=Bible.2Ti3.10-17&off=20738&ctx=sitive+affirmation.+~What+we+have+before+) in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary: 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, Titus, and Hebrews*, vol. 17 (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2009), 197–198. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)