**Lesson 5 - 2 Timothy 3-4**

**3:1-5. In the last days there will come times of stress**. The last days, strictly speaking, means the time immediately prior to the second coming of our Lord; but because it has not been revealed to us exactly when that will be (cf. Mt 24:3ff), the “last days” can be taken to mean the entire period between the Incarnation (cf. Heb 1:2) and our Lord’s coming in glory: these are the times when the vices mentioned will afflict mankind.

As many as eighteen types of sin are listed here. Elsewhere in the Pastoral Letters (cf. 1 Tim 1:9–10; 6:4–5; Tit 3:3; 2 Tim 3:2–5) the vices mentioned have to do mainly with doctrinal aberrations; but here they are more the result of selfishness and are more serious because they strike at the basis of the moral order.

The morality of human acts is measured in terms of their conformity to the eternal law of God, that is, the moral order established by the Creator to guide us to our individual goal and to the universal goal of Creation, the glory of God. When man allows himself to be dictated to by his passions and fails to respect the order desired by God, he does grave harm to himself and to society, because he opens the door to every type of moral disorder. The last vice named by the Apostle is especially dangerous to the Church: it is that of people who project themselves as being godly and concerned about others but who are empty on the inside, devoid of grace and of love for God.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**3:5. Holding the form/make a pretense but denying the power**. As one listens to the list of vice-ridden people, one might say they are godless. But no, the problem is that they *look* godly—which suggests that they have either wormed their way into the Church or, having become Christians, have strayed off into heresy by adulterating the faith. In any case they upset the community. The word “religion” here is the same *eusebeia* that we have often met before. It refers to the true faith. How do they **deny its power**? This could mean that their very conduct contradicts or nullifies the power they pretend to have. It could also mean that their teaching has no power in it; as today some of the New Age movements promote a gnostic self-development theosophy or nature religion that does not require transformation but canonizes self-satisfaction.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Going Deeper – Was it Then or is it Now**

Tertullian’s comments about his times (late second century) could easily fit ours: “Evil is ever on the increase, a sign of the final times. Innocent babies are now not even allowed to be born, so corrupted are the moral standards. Nor are children properly trained, so neglected is concern for them.… In fact, modesty … has in our time become an obsolete subject.” And Caesarius of Arles (around AD 500) complains that there is no longer any fear of the general judgment or of hell. (**Ibid.** Montague p. 117)

**3:8. Jannes and Jambres.** Egyptian magicians who opposed Moses and Aaron (Exodus 7:11). They are not named in the OT but are identified as such in Jewish tradition (e.g., in the Dead Sea Scrolls, CD 5, 18–19, and in an apocryphal work titled Jannes and Jambres). (**Ibid.** Hahn CBD p. 399)

**3:10. Now you have observed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life.** In strong contrast to the false teachers, Timothy has been a disciple of Paul from the time of his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1–5). He has **followed** Paul, not only as a companion of his journeys but as a child follows a father. The intensive form of the Greek word for “follow,” meaning literally “to walk at one’s side,” here suggests imitation, understanding, following instructions, as well as firsthand knowledge of the person. The list of nine elements of this “following” contrast with the list of vice-ridden persons in 2 Tim 3:2–5. **Teaching** heads the list, probably to contrast with the noxious influence of the false teachers. (**Ibid.** Montague p. 183)

**Going Deeper – Discipleship in Ancient times**

In ancient times, particularly biblical times, the disciple learned more by imitation than by instruction. That is why living with the master or the rabbi was the best way to learn his **way of life**—his life of prayer, his toil at the ministry, his manner of dealing with setbacks, his way of relating to persons of all kinds, both within and outside the community. This would include his **purpose**, that is, his vision of the mission given him by the Lord and his practical objectives and methods for carrying it out, for example, the policy of going first to the Jews and then to Gentiles or of not invading the arena of other apostles’ ministry (Rom 15:20). These objectives were inspired by Paul’s **faith** in Jesus Christ, a faith tested repeatedly by trials in which he held firm and “steadfast.” And Paul carried out his mission with a **love** that, according to his own teaching, *endures* all things (1 Cor 13:7). (**Ibid.**)

**3:12. All who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted**. Paul projects his own experience onto a universal screen. Those who take their Christian commitment seriously **will be persecuted**. By the time of the writing of this letter Christians took for granted that persecution would be their lot, for most of them had experienced it, and the words of **Christ Jesus** had rung true. He had promised persecution to his disciples (Mark 4:17; 10:30) and declared blessed those who endure it for righteousness’ sake (Matt 5:10) or for his sake (5:11), since authentic discipleship is a prophetic vocation. If Paul warned his communities in his early ministry that they could expect persecution (1 Thess 3:4), he now recalls this from a lifetime of experience marked by the cross. (**Ibid**. p. 184)

**3:16. All Scripture is inspired by God**. Jesus had frequently used the Scriptures for **teaching**, not only from memory but, on one occasion at least, by publicly reading from them (Luke 4:16–21). In the apostolic Church, teaching was a charism of the Holy Spirit (Rom 12:7; 1 Cor 12:29). In Eph 4:11 it is closely associated with the office of pastor and obviously was a ministry of the apostle himself (1 Cor 4:17). But teaching should be based on the Scriptures (Acts 8:35; 17:2–3), for they have an unparalleled authority (John 10:35) and a power to instruct, strengthen, and encourage and thus fire hope (Rom 15:4). Their authority makes them an apt instrument for refuting the claims of opponents. Since nonbelievers would not accept the authority of the Scriptures as a basis of argumentation, this **refutation** must envisage the Jewish opponents of the new faith, who met Paul and his companions in nearly every city.

For those open to **correction** (Sir 21:6), the Scriptures are also useful to bring them back to the right path. In profane Greek, the word is used for the rebuilding of a city, the restoration of a sanctuary, the correction of an error, and in many places in Philo it is used for moral reform. There is a close parallel in Stoic philosopher Epictetus, who, in discussing the prayerful attitude with which one should approach religious rites, says: “The Mysteries … were established by men of ancient times for the purpose of *training* and *reform* of life.” The word *epanorthōsis* means **correction**, and its twin, *paideia*, means **training in righteousness**.

We have, then, in this lineup the four practical values of Scripture: (1) teaching, the more general and inclusive term, (2) the authority to dispel opponents, (3) the power to bring about conversion, and (4) the ongoing spiritual formation of the Christian. The history of the Church amply demonstrates how effectively the Scriptures have been used for all four functions. (**Ibid.** pp. 186-187)

**Going Deeper – Yes, You Can trust the Scriptures**

A doctrinal elaboration of Paul’s words to Timothy is given in Dei Verbum of the Second Vatican Council:

Those divinely revealed realities which are contained and presented in Sacred Scripture have been committed to writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. For holy mother Church, relying on the belief of the Apostles (see John 20:31; 2 Tim 3:16; 2 Pet 1:19–20; 3:15–16), holds that the books of both the Old and New Testaments in their entirety, with all their parts, are sacred and canonical because, written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, they have God as their author and have been handed on as such to the Church herself. In composing the sacred books, God chose men and while employed by Him they made use of their powers and abilities so that with Him acting in them and through them, they, as true authors, consigned to writing everything and only those things which He wanted.

Therefore, since everything asserted by the inspired authors or sacred writers must be held to be asserted by the Holy Spirit, it follows that the books of Scripture must be acknowledged as teaching solidly, faithfully and without error that truth which God wanted put into sacred writings for the sake of salvation. Therefore “all Scripture is divinely inspired and has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, for reformation of manners and discipline in right living, so that the man who belongs to God may be efficient and equipped for good work of every kind” (2 Tim 3:6–7, Greek text). (Dei Verbum 11)

Since Paul is speaking mainly about the Old Testament here, it is worth also quoting what Vatican II says about that: “These books, though they also contain some things which are incomplete and temporary, nevertheless show us true divine pedagogy [teaching]. These same books, then, give expression to a lively sense of God, contain a store of sublime teachings about God, sound wisdom about human life, and a wonderful treasury of prayers, and in them the mystery of our salvation is present in a hidden way. Christians should receive them with reverence” (Dei Verbum 15). (**Ibid**. p. 186)

**4:2. Preach the word, be urgent in season and out of season**. “Preach the word”: that is, the message of the Gospel, which includes all the truths to be believed, the commandments to be kept and the sacraments and other supernatural resources to be availed of. In the life of the Church the ministry of the word has special importance; it is the channel God has established whereby man can partake of the Gospel. (**Ibid.** Scepter p. 121)

**4.3. When the people will not endure sound teaching**. This spiritual and doctrinal preparation of leaders is all the more important because of the difficult times that lie ahead. People will not listen to sound teaching but will run to one teacher after another looking for what will satisfy their vain and insatiable curiosity. Had Paul lived today, he might have called them channel surfers of philosophy. Other translations stick to the more literal metaphor Paul uses: these people have “**itching ears.”** Just as scratching an itch often makes it worse, Paul here depicts these passion-driven novelty seekers as always wanting to hear or to teach something new but never being satisfied. (**Ibid**. Montague p. 192)

**4:6. For I am already on the point of being sacrificed**. Although we begin a new section here, it is tightly connected with the preceding one, as the initial **for** indicates. Why is Paul’s charge to Timothy so urgent? Because Paul’s death is imminent, and his disciple will have to go it on his own from now on. “**I**” contrasts with “you” of the preceding verse. How does Paul view his death? Not with foreboding or terror but with a realism inspired by faith. He knows that because of his faith in Jesus Christ he is in chains. Now, because of that same faith, he awaits the sword. That is why he can describe his imminent death as **a libation**. (**Ibid**. p. 194)

**Going Deeper – What is a Libation**

In ancient sacrificial rites such as we find in the Old Testament, a sacred liquid, sometimes oil (Gen 28:18; 35:14; Mic 6:7), wine (called the “blood of the grape” in Sir 50:15), or water was poured out in sacrifice or consecration. David, hiding from the Philistines, longed for water from his hometown of Bethlehem that was in Philistine hands. Some of his men risked their lives to fetch some of that water, but when they brought it to him, he poured it out on the ground as a sacrifice to the Lord (2 Sam 23:16–17). The idea behind the libation, like that of other sacrifices, is that the liquid is a gift of God and pouring it out is a way of returning at least a portion of it to God. In the Old Testament the animal sacrifices obviously involved the pouring out of blood, which was sometimes also sprinkled upon the altar (Exodus 24:6) (**Ibid**. p. 195)

**4:7. I have fought the good fight/competed well.** “Fight” (Greek *agōn*) in the Hellenistic world could refer to any contest. It included the combat that took place in a public arena. In the literature of Judaism produced around the first century, the suffering of Jewish martyrs under Greek persecution is compared to the contests of athletes, which is all the more apt because the suffering and execution of the martyrs often took place in the same arena as the athletic contests: “While being tortured he said: ‘O contest befitting holiness, in which so many of us brothers have been summoned to an arena of sufferings for religion, and in which we have not been defeated!’ ” (4 Macc 11:20 NRSV). Already early in his ministry Paul spoke of his work for the gospel not simply as a duty but as an *agōn*, a passionate struggle. After his suffering in Philippi, Paul courageously preached the gospel to the Thessalonians “with much struggle” (1 Thess 2:2). We can apply this ‘struggle’ metaphor to struggle against all the obstacles in his career, both external and internal (“external conflicts, internal fears”; 2 Cor 7:5). Now he looks back with the grateful joy of the victor who awaits the “crown” (2 Tim 4:8).

**4:16. At my first defense no one took my part; all deserted me**. Paul was left without anyone to speak in his behalf. No doubt by this time, association with Paul could have brought arrest, and the danger of a connection made any associate of Paul a candidate for execution. Paul experiences what Jesus experienced in the garden: “They all left him and fled” (Mark 14:50). But like Jesus, who asked the Father to forgive his enemies (Luke 23:34), and like Stephen, whose death Paul had witnessed (Acts 7:58–60), the apostle prays, “May it not be charged against them!”

St Paul points to the contrast between the way men treat him and the way God does. Because of the hazards involved in staying with Paul or defending him, some of his friends, even some of his closest friends, have deserted him; whereas God stays by his side.

St Josemaria Escrivá comments, “You seek the company of friends who, with their conversation and affection, with their friendship, make the exile of this world more bearable for you. There is nothing wrong with that, although friends sometimes let you down. But how is it you don’t frequent daily with greater intensity the company, the conversation, of the great Friend, who never lets you down?” (*The Way*, 88). (Ibid Scepter p. 124)

**4:17. But the Lord stood by me and gave me strength.** The absence of testimony in Paul’s favor may have made his situation more critical, but there was one who **stood by** his side. **The Lord**, who had promised to be with his disciples, supplying them with wisdom for their defense at trials (Luke 21:15; see also 12:11–12), kept his promise in Paul’s case. Like a defense lawyer, the Lord stood at Paul’s side, giving him the strength not only to defend himself but to use the occasion to proclaim the gospel.

We may infer that his defense was something like that recorded by Luke when Paul was brought before Felix and Agrippa (Acts 24:10–21; 26:2–23), that is, a report of the basic facts about Jesus Christ, including his resurrection from the dead—in short, the *kērygma*. But in this case, Paul sees he was able to proclaim the message fully. A successful end to his mission. It is not just the end of his preaching career; it is the crowning of it, for Christ had called Paul to proclaim the good news before Gentiles and kings (9:15; 1 Tim 3:16). (**Ibid.** Montague pp. 205 - 206)

1. [*Saint Paul’s Letters to the Thessalonians, and Pastoral Letters*](https://ref.ly/logosres/navarrentstandard73th?ref=Bible.2Ti3.1-5&off=7&ctx=m+doing+harm%0a3%3a1%E2%80%935.+~%E2%80%9CThe+last+days%E2%80%9D%3a+str) (p. 117). (2005). Four Courts Press; Scepter Publishing. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Montague, G. T. (2008). [*First and Second Timothy, Titus*](https://ref.ly/logosres/cathcomm75ti?ref=BibleNAB.2Ti3.5&off=78&ctx=d+to+the+preceding.+~As+one+listens+to+th) (P. S. Williamson & M. Healy, Eds.; p. 180). Baker Academic. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)