

Surviving Perilous Times

2 Timothy 3:1-17

Introduction

In His Word God tells us to stand firm in difficult times.

In verse 10 Paul tells Timothy, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:10-15 NKJV)

How can we stand firm in difficult times?

In 2 Timothy 3:1-9, Paul warned Timothy of the “terrible” times that would happen throughout church history. He says, “But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having a form of godliness but denying its power. And from such people turn away! For of this sort are those who creep into households and make captives of gullible women loaded down with sins, led away by various lusts, always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. Now as Jannes and Jambres resisted Moses, so do these also resist the truth: men of corrupt minds, disapproved concerning the faith; but they will progress no further, for their folly will be manifest to all, as theirs also was.” (2 Timothy 3:1-9 NKJV)

Timothy was to be different from those with an empty religion. He was called to “continue” being faithful, even while others went from “bad to worse” (v. 13). In this text, we will examine some principles about standing firm in difficult times—not only do these apply to difficult seasons in the church but ultimately bad times in our lives.

I. Remember the Faithful

The first thing Paul instructs us to do is remember the faithful. He says, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.” (2 Timothy 3:10-11 NKJV)

After sharing with Timothy about the ungodly people and the false teachers in the church (v. 1-9), Paul encourages Timothy with his example. There were some dark times and even evil people in the church, but Paul was faithful, and his faithfulness encouraged Timothy.

When Elijah was depressed and no longer wanted to live, he cried out to God, "I'm the only one left!" But God reminded him that he had preserved a remnant that would not bow down to Baal (1 Kings 19).

God does the same today. Satan often tempts us to feel alone and hopeless, but we are not because God has faithfully preserved his saints, even in these dark times. We need to recognize this to stand firm.

1 Peter 5:8-9, "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world." (1 Peter 5:8-9 NKJV)

We must resist and stand firm against Satan's attacks since we have a family of believers around the world enduring suffering as well.

It's true many churchgoers possess only a form of Christianity and practice no reality of it in their lives. But there are many other believers who follow God faithfully. And if we are going to stand in terrible times, we must remember them.

In Hebrews 12:1, the author says this to persecuted Hebrew Christians: "Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares *us*, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us." (Hebrews 12:1 NKJV)

The "therefore" refers to chapter 11, which describes many faith heroes—Abraham, Noah, Moses, David, and others. Remembering these witnesses helps us overcome sin and endure the race before us. "Endurance" means to bear up under a heavy weight. When we feel like giving up during terrible times, we need to remember the godly examples of those who have already endured.

We must remember how God allowed Joseph to suffer betrayal from his family, slavery, and prison before God exalted him to second in command over Egypt. We must remember how God allowed Job to suffer various tragedies, but God's ultimate purpose was to bless him. The Bible contains many examples of those who persevered during hard times. We need to remember these faithful examples if we are going to persevere during hard times. It also reminds us to look at the faithful around us.

Their example will help us to persevere and endure when we must face hardships.

Like Timothy, we need to intimately “know” other faithful believers so we can draw strength from them. Who are the faithful around you that you can watch during the storms of life?

II. We Must Follow the Faithful

2 Timothy 3:10 says, “But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all, the Lord delivered me.” (2 Timothy 3:10-11 NKJV)

Verse 14 says, “But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*” (2 Timothy 3:14 NKJV)

Not only do we need to remember the faithful who successfully stood in faith during difficult seasons, but we must follow and imitate them. Timothy wasn’t just aware of Paul’s example; other teachers also imparted truth into Timothy’s life—enabling him to stand.

Timothy continued in what he had learned because he knew “who” he learned it from. This is true for us as well. If we are going to stand in terrible times, we need to follow the godly examples of the faithful. Philippians 3:17, Paul said: “Brethren, join in following my example, and note those who so walk, as you have us for a pattern.” (Philippians 3:17 NKJV)

In 1 Corinthians 11:1, he said: “Imitate me, just as I also *imitate* Christ.” (1 Corinthians 11:1 NKJV)

We must keep our eyes on godly people and imitate them if we are going to stand in difficult times. To stand during difficult times, we must walk closely with the faithful and follow their footsteps as Timothy did Paul’s. Proverbs 13:20 says, “He who walks with wise *men* will be wise, But the companion of fools will be destroyed.” (Proverbs 13:20 NKJV)

Through their examples and teaching, we must allow them to invest in our lives. What are the characteristics of the faithful as demonstrated through Paul’s characteristics?

1. The faithful live transparent lives.

Paul lived a life of transparency and invited others to watch. This wasn’t because Paul was perfect; he wasn’t, but he was pursuing God’s perfect will, and we need examples like that. We are far from perfect, but when we follow a perfect God, He can use even our imperfections to encourage others who are also imperfect.

2. The faithful teach God’s Word.

Paul points out that Timothy knew his “teaching” (v. 10). Paul’s goal was to teach “the whole purpose of God” (Acts 20:27). He didn’t avoid difficult questions, try to soften their tone, or change them so they wouldn’t offend the church or culture. Paul preached the Word of God whether it was popular or unpopular. He warns Timothy that in the last days, “the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, *because* they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn *their* ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” (2 Timothy 4:3-4 NKJV)

Godly models challenge us with God’s Word. They encourage us with it when we are down, and they affirm us with it when we are doing right. Are you studying God’s Word, and can you teach it to others?

3. The faithful practice what they preach.

Many are orthodox in their doctrine but unorthodox with their life—they don’t practice what they preach. Hypocrisy only serves to push people away from God. Timothy was keenly aware of how Paul used his time, recreation, work life, devotion, prayer life, and ministry. It was all open before Timothy, and it matched Paul’s teaching. We must model these types of people to stand in terrible times. Do you practice what you preach?

4. The faithful focus on knowing God and pleasing him.

In Philippians 3:8, Paul said he ‘counted everything a loss’ to know Christ. That was his primary goal in life. Even his ministry was driven by this unflinching goal of knowing Christ and pleasing him by completing Christ’s mission. Philippians 3:12-14 says, “Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” (Philippians 3:12-14 NKJV)

The faithful are not driven by money or the applause of men but by knowing and pleasing God. Is your goal to know Christ and please him?

5. The faithful demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit.

Paul lists several prominent aspects of the Fruit of the Spirit in his life (v. 10): faith, patience, love, and endurance. These were divine characteristics that were born out of his relationship with God (cf. Gal 5:22-23). Paul’s ministry opened the door for criticism, mocking, poverty, and many other hardships, including imprisonment; however, Paul endured them all.

Paul was a man of character worth modeling. We need to model those filled with the Fruit of the Spirit who demonstrate it through their lives. Is the Fruit of the Spirit evident in your own life?

6. The faithful willingly accept suffering for Christ.

In verse 11, Paul adds various sufferings he endured, “persecutions, afflictions,

which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of *them* all the Lord delivered me.” (2 Timothy 3:11 NKJV)

In those specific cases, God didn't keep Paul from those persecutions. Instead, God gave him grace to endure them, and it's often similar for us. God knows what we can bear and what we can't. He also knows what trials we need to experience to know and glorify him more. Trials are part of the Lord's sanctifying process, and we must humbly accept them (cf. Rom 5:3-4).

Those who are godly examples have typically been through various trials that God used to build them up and help them to know Christ more. Paul willingly accepted these trials without being angry at God or others. How do you respond when you go through trials? Do they draw you closer to God or away from him?

If we hope to stand in terrible times, we must remember the faithful and walk close beside them to imitate them. Which characteristics of the faithful stand out to you most and why? What godly examples have made the most impact on your life?

III. We Must Expect Persecution

In verse 12, Paul says, “Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. (2 Timothy 3:12-13 NKJV)

What types of suffering will godly believers experience? Paul not only shares his experience of persecution but warns Timothy that everyone living a godly life will experience them (v. 12).

These persecutions come from outside or inside the church. 2 Corinthians is essentially a defense of Paul's apostleship to a church he founded. Jesus was criticized (and killed) by the religious establishment of his day. There will always be people in the church without true faith who oppose the truth (2 Tim 3:5-9).

Not only will there be persecution from without and from within, but also spiritual warfare. Job's trials were attacks from Satan, which came simply because he was righteous (Job 1:8-9, 2:3-4). Paul said, “All who want to live godly lives in Christ Jesus will be persecuted” (v. 12).

Why will believers be persecuted, and what causes this animosity? John 3:19-20 says, “**And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil. For everyone practicing evil hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.**” (John 3:19-20 NKJV)

The reason for this persecution is simple. A godly life exposes the wickedness of others. People do not like to be exposed. Instead of repenting and turning to Christ, they seek to destroy the one who has exposed their sinfulness. If you want to be

exempt from persecution, you have to renounce Christ. Timothy needed to hear this, and we need to hear it as well. If we are going to stand in this evil age, we should expect persecution.

CONCLUSION

The Faithful Continue in God's Word In 2 Timothy 3: 14, Paul calls Timothy to "continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*, and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. (2 Timothy 3:14-15 NKJV)

Timothy needed to make his home in Scripture to stand firm. As a side application, Parents should read the Bible to their children from birth. They may not be able to fully grasp it yet, but that doesn't mean they shouldn't hear it. Right after birth, parents should begin to saturate their infants with Scripture. Throughout early childhood, children are like sponges. Then, they can most easily pick up languages and memorize things; it becomes more challenging as they get older. Therefore, Christian parents should saturate those early years by reading God's Word and helping them memorize it.

Paul said Timothy needed to continue in what he had learned from infancy if he was going to stand firm in terrible times, and this is true for us as well. God's Word is the primary way to make us holy, encourage us when we are down, and protect us. It makes us wise for salvation and trains us for every good work (2 Tim 3:15-17).

How can we continue in God's Word? We must believe it. Paul said Timothy had become convinced of it (v. 14). We must read it daily.

We must meditate on it throughout the day (Ps 1:2-3).

We must memorize it to recall it when tempted or discouraged (Ps 119:11).

We must obey it, even when we don't feel like it (John 14:15).

We must teach it and hide it in our hearts (Matt 28:19-20).

We can't endure difficult times unless we continue in God's Word.

Are you building on the rock of God's Word? Any other foundation won't last. How can we stand firm in difficult times, especially those within the church (cf. 2 Tim 3:1-9)?

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