

CHAPTER 3

I. The apostle forewarns Timothy what the last days would be, with the reasons thereof (v. 1-9).

II. Prescribes various remedies against them (v. 10 to the end), particularly his own example (“But thou hast fully known my doctrine,” etc.) and the knowledge of the holy scriptures, which are able to make us wise unto salvation, and will be the best antidote against the corruptions of the times we live in. In this chapter Paul tells Timothy how bad others would be, and therefore how good he should be; and this use we should make of the badness of others, thereby to engage us to hold our own integrity so much the firmer.

2 TIMOTHY 3:1-9

MARKS OF PERILOUS TIMES

Timothy must not think it strange if there were in the church bad men; for the net of the gospel was to enclose both good fish and bad, ~~424~~ Matthew 22:47, 48. Jesus Christ had foretold (Matthew 24) that there would come seducers, and therefore we must not be offended at it, nor think the worse of religion or the church for it. Even in gold ore there will be dross, and a great deal of chaff among the wheat when it lies on the floor.

I. Timothy must know that in the *last days* (v. 1), in gospel times, there would *come perilous times*. Though gospel times were times of reformation in many respects, let him know that even in gospel times there would be perilous times; not so much on account of persecution from without as on account of corruptions within. These would be difficult times, wherein it would be difficult for a man to keep a good conscience. He does not say, “Perilous times shall come, for both Jews and Gentiles shall be combined to root out Christianity;” but “perilous times shall come, for such as have *the form of godliness* (v. 5) shall be corrupt and wicked, and do a great deal of damage to the church.” Two traitors within the garrison may do more hurt to it than two thousand besiegers without. Perilous times shall come, for men shall be wicked. Note,

1. Sin makes the times perilous. When there is a general corruption of manners, and of the tempers of men, this makes the times dangerous to live in; for it is hard to keep our integrity in the midst of general corruption.

2. The coming of perilous times is an evidence of the truth of scripture-predictions; if the event in this respect did not answer to the prophecy, we might be tempted to question the divinity of the Bible.

3. We are all concerned to know this, to believe and consider it, that we may not be surprised when we see the times perilous: *This know also.*

II. Paul tells Timothy what would be the occasion of making these times perilous, or what shall be the marks and signs whereby these times may be known, v. 2, etc.

1. Self-love will make the times perilous. Who is there who does not love himself? But this is meant of an irregular sinful self-love. Men love their carnal selves better than their spiritual selves. Men love to gratify their own lusts, and make provision for them, more than to please God and do their duty. Instead of Christian charity, which takes care for the good of others, they will mind themselves only, and prefer their own gratification before the church's edification.

2. Covetousness. Observe, Self-love brings in a long train of sins and mischiefs. When men are lovers of themselves, no good can be expected from them, as all good may be expected from those who love God with all their hearts. When covetousness generally prevails, when every man is for what he can get and for keeping what he has, this makes men dangerous to one another, and obliges every man to stand on his guard against his neighbour.

3. Pride and vain-glory. The times are perilous when men, being proud of themselves, are *boasters and blasphemers*, boasters before men whom they despise and look upon with scorn, and blasphemers of God and of his name. When men do not fear God they will not regard man, and so *vice versf.*

4. When children are disobedient to their parents, and break through the obligations which they lie under to them both in duty and gratitude, and frequently in interest, having their dependence upon them and their expectation from them, they make the times perilous; for what wickedness

will those stick at who will be abusive to their own parents and rebel against them?

5. Unthankfulness and unholiness make the times perilous, and these two commonly go together. What is the reason that men are unholy and without the fear of God, but that they are unthankful for the mercies of God? Ingratitude and impiety go together; for call a man ungrateful, and you can call him by no worse name. Unthankful, and impure, defiled with fleshly lusts, which is an instance of great ingratitude to that God who has provided so well for the support of the body; we abuse his gifts, if we make them the food and fuel of our lusts.


6. The times are perilous when men will not be held by the bonds either of nature or common honesty, when they are *without natural affection*, and *truce-breakers*, v. 3. There is a natural affection due to all. Wherever there is the human nature, there should be humanity towards those of the same nature, but especially between relations. Times are perilous when children are disobedient to their parents (v. 2) and when parents are without natural affection to their children, v. 3. See what a corruption of nature sin is, how it deprives men even of that which nature has implanted in them for the support of their own kind; for the natural affection of parents to their children is that which contributes very much to the keeping up of mankind upon the earth. And those who will not be bound by natural affection, no marvel that they will not be bound by the most solemn leagues and covenants. *They are truce-breakers*, that make no conscience of the engagements they have laid themselves under.

7. The times are perilous when men are *false accusers* one of another, *diaboli* — *devils* one to another, having no regard to the good name of others, or to the religious obligations of an oath, but thinking themselves at liberty to say and do what they please, ¹²⁴ Psalm 12:4.

8. When men have no government of themselves and their own appetites: not of their own appetites, for they are *incontinent*; not of their own passions, for they are *fierce*; when they have no rule over their own spirits, and therefore are like a city that is broken down, and has no walls; they are soon fired, upon the least provocation.

9. When that which is good and ought to be honoured is generally despised and looked upon with contempt. It is the pride of persecutors that

they look with contempt upon good people, though they are more excellent than their neighbours.

10. When men are generally treacherous, wilful, and haughty, the times are perilous (v. 4) — when men are *traitors, heady, high-minded*. Our Saviour has foretold that the brother shall betray the brother to death and the father the child ( Matthew 10:21), and those are the worst sort of traitors: those who delivered up their Bibles to persecutors were called *traditores*, for they betrayed the trust committed to them. When men are petulant and puffed up, behaving scornfully to all about them, and when this temper generally prevails, then the times are perilous.

11. When men are generally *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. When there are more epicures than true Christians, then the times are bad indeed. God is to be loved above all. That is a carnal mind, and is full of enmity against him, which prefers any thing before him, especially such a sordid thing as carnal pleasure is.

12. When, notwithstanding all this, they *have the form of godliness* (v. 5), are called by the Christian name, baptized into the Christian faith, and make a show of religion; but, how plausible soever their form of godliness is, they deny the power of it. When they take upon them the form which should and would bring along with it the power thereof, they will put asunder what God hath joined together: they will assume the form of godliness, to take away their reproach; but they will not submit to the power of it, to take away their sin. Observe here,

- (1.) Men may be very bad and wicked under a profession of religion; they may be lovers of themselves, etc., yet have a form of godliness.
- (2.) A form of godliness is a very different thing from the power of it; men may have the one and be wholly destitute of the other; yea, they deny it, at least practically in their lives.
- (3.) From such good Christians must withdraw themselves.

III. Here Paul warns Timothy to take heed of certain seducers, not only that he might not be drawn away by them himself, but that he might arm those who were under his charge against their seduction.

1. He shows how industrious they were to make proselytes (v. 6): they applied themselves to particular persons, visited them in their houses, not

daring to appear openly; for those that do evil hate the light, ⁴⁰⁰John 3:20. They were not forced into houses, as good Christians often were by persecution; but they of choice crept into houses, to insinuate themselves into the affections and good opinion of people, and so to draw them over to their party. And see what sort of people those were that they gained, and made proselytes of; they were such as were weak, *silly women*; and such as were wicked, *laden with sins, and led away with divers lusts*. A foolish head and a filthy heart make persons, especially women, an easy prey to seducers.

2. He shows how far they were from coming to the knowledge of the truth, though they pretended to be *ever learning*, v. 7. In one sense we must all be ever learning, that is, growing in knowledge, following on to know the Lord, pressing forward; but these were sceptics, giddy and unstable, who were forward to imbibe every new notion, under pretence of advancement in knowledge, but never came to a right understanding of the truth as it is in Jesus.

3. He foretels the certain stop that should be put to their progress (v. 8, 9), comparing them to the Egyptian magicians who withstood Moses, and who are here named, *Jannes and Jambres*; though the names are not to be met with in the story of the Old Testament, yet they are found in some old Jewish writers. When Moses came with a divine command to fetch Israel out of Egypt, these magicians opposed him. Thus those heretics *resisted the truth* and like them were men *of corrupt minds*, men who had their understandings perverted, biassed and prejudiced against the truth, and *reprobate concerning the faith*, or very far from being true Christians; *but they shall proceed no further*, or not much further, as some read it. Observe,

(1.) Seducers seek for corners, and love obscurity; for they are afraid to appear in public, and therefore creep into houses. Further, They attack those who are the least able to defend themselves, silly and wicked women.

(2.) Seducers in all ages are much alike. Their characters are the same — namely, *Men of corrupt minds*, etc.; their conduct is much the same — they resist the truth, as Jannes and Jambres withstood Moses; and they will be alike in their disappointment.

(3.) Those who resist the truth are guilty of folly, yea, of egregious folly; for *magna est veritas, et praevalabit* — *Great is the truth, and shall prevail.*

(4.) Though the spirit of error may be let loose for a time, God has it in a chain. Satan can deceive the nations and the churches no further and no longer than God will permit him: *Their folly shall be manifest*, it shall appear that they are imposters, and every man shall abandon them.

~~END~~ 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

EXCELLENCE OF THE SCRIPTURES

Here the apostle, to confirm Timothy in that way wherein he walked,

I. Sets before him his own example, which Timothy had been an eye-witness of, having long attended Paul (v. 10): *Thou hast fully known my doctrine.* The more fully we know the doctrine of Christ and the apostles, the more closely we shall cleave to it; the reason why many sit loose to it is because they do not fully know it. Christ's apostles had no enemies but those who did not know them, or not know them fully; those who knew them best loved and honoured them the most. Now what is it that Timothy had so fully known in Paul?

1. The doctrine that he preached. Paul kept back nothing from his hearers, but declared to them the whole counsel of God (~~ACTS~~ Acts 20:27), so that if it were not their own fault they might fully know it. Timothy had a great advantage in being trained up under such a tutor, and being apprised of the doctrine he preached.

2. He had fully known his conversation: *Thou hast fully know my doctrine, and manner of life;* his manner of life was of a piece with his doctrine, and did not contradict it. He did not pull down by his living what he built up by his preaching. Those ministers are likely to do good, and leave lasting fruits of their labours, whose manner of life agrees with their doctrine; as, on the contrary, those cannot expect to profit the people at all that preach well and live ill.

3. Timothy fully knew what was the great thing that Paul had in view, both in his preaching and in his conversation: “Thou hast known *my purpose*,

what I drive at, how far it is from any worldly, carnal, secular design, and how sincerely I aim at the glory of God and the good of the souls of men.”

4. Timothy fully knew Paul's good character, which he might gather from his doctrine, manner of life, and purpose; for he gave proofs of his *faith* (that is, of his integrity and fidelity, or his faith in Christ, his faith concerning another world, by which Paul lived), his *long-suffering* towards the churches to which he preached and over which he presided, his *charity* towards all men, and his *patience*. These were graces that Paul was eminent for, and Timothy knew it.

5. He knew that he had suffered ill for doing well (v. 11): “Thou hast fully known the *persecutions and afflictions that came unto me*” (he mentions those only which happened to him while Timothy was with him, *at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra*); “and therefore let it be no surprise to thee if thou suffer hard things, it is no more than I have endured before.” **6.** He knew what care God had taken of him: *Notwithstanding out of them all the Lord delivered me*; as he never failed his cause, so his God never failed him. Thou hast fully known my *afflictions*. When we know the afflictions of good people but in part, they are a temptation to us to decline that cause which they suffer for; when we know only the hardships they undergo for Christ, we may be ready to say, “We will renounce that cause that is likely to cost us so dear in the owning of it;” but when we *fully* know the afflictions, not only how they suffer, but how they are supported and comforted under their sufferings, then, instead of being discouraged, we shall be animated by them, especially considering that we are told before that we must count upon such things (v. 12): *All that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*: not always alike; at that time those who professed the faith of Christ were more exposed to persecution than at other times; but at all times, more or less, those who will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution. They must expect to be despised, and that their religion will stand in the way of their preferment; those who will live godly must expect it, especially those who will live godly *in Christ Jesus*, that is, according to the strict rules of the Christian religion, those who will wear the livery and bear the name of the crucified Redeemer. All who will show their religion in their conversation, who will not only be godly, but live godly, let them expect persecution, especially when they are resolute in it. Observe,

(1.) The apostle's life was very exemplary for three things: for his *doctrine*, which was according to the will of God; for his *life*, which was agreeable to his doctrine; and for his *persecutions and sufferings*.

(2.) Though his life was a life of great usefulness, yet it was a life of great sufferings; and none, I believe, came nearer to their great Master for eminent services and great sufferings than Paul: he suffered almost in every place; the Holy Ghost witnessed that bonds and afflictions did abide him, ^{<402>}Acts 20:23. Here he mentions his persecutions and afflictions at *Antioch*, at *Iconium*, at *Lystra*, besides what he suffered elsewhere.

(3.) The apostle mentions the Lord's delivering him out of them all, for Timothy's and our encouragement under sufferings.

(4.) We have the practice and treatment of true Christians: they live godly in Jesus Christ — this is their practice; and they shall suffer persecution — this is the usage they must expect in this world.

II. He warns Timothy of the fatal end of seducers, as a reason why he should stick closely to the truth as it is in Jesus: *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse*, etc., v. 13. Observe, As good men, by the grace of God, grow better and better, so bad men, through the subtlety of Satan and the power of their own corruptions, grow worse and worse. The way of sin is down-hill; for such proceed from bad to worse, *deceiving and being deceived*. Those who deceive others do but deceive themselves; those who draw others into error run themselves into more and more mistakes, and they will find it so at last, to their cost.

III. He directs him to keep close to a good education, and particularly to what he had learned out of the holy scriptures (v. 14, 15): *Continue thou in the things which thou hast learned*. Note, It is not enough to learn that which is good, but we must continue in it, and persevere in it unto the end. Then are we Christ's disciples indeed, ^{<403>}John 8:31. We should not be any more *children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive*, ^{<404>}Ephesians 4:14. *Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines; for it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace*, ^{<509>}Hebrews 13:9. And for this reason we should continue in the things we have learned from the holy scriptures; not that we ought to continue in any errors and mistakes which we may have been led into, in the time of our childhood and youth (for these, upon an impartial enquiry

and full conviction, we should forsake); but this makes nothing against our continuing in those things which the holy scriptures plainly assert, and which he that runs may read. If Timothy would adhere to the truth as he had been taught it, this would arm him against the snares and insinuations of seducers. Observe, Timothy must *continue in the things which he had learned and had been assured of*.

1. It is a great happiness to know the certainty of the things wherein we have been instructed (~~and~~ Luke 1:4); not only to know what the truths are, but to know that they are of undoubted certainty. What we have learned we must labour to be more and more assured of, that, being grounded in the truth, we may be guarded against error, for certainty in religion is of great importance and advantage: *Knowing,*

(1.) “That thou hast had good teachers. Consider of *whom thou hast learned them*; not of evil men and seducers, but good men, who had themselves experienced the power of the truths they taught thee, and been ready to suffer for them, and thereby would give the fullest evidence of their belief of these truths.”

(2.) “Knowing especially the firm foundation upon which thou hast built, namely, that of the scripture (v. 15): *That from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures.*”

2. Those who would acquaint themselves with the things of God, and be assured of them, must know the holy scriptures, for these are the summary of divine revelation.

3. It is a great happiness to know the holy scriptures from our childhood; and children should betimes get the knowledge of the scriptures. The age of children is the learning age; and those who would get true learning must get it out of the scriptures.

4. The scriptures we are to know are the holy scriptures; they come from the holy God, were delivered by holy men, contain holy precepts, treat of holy things, and were designed to make us holy and to lead us in the way of holiness to happiness; being called the *holy scriptures*, they are by this distinguished from profane writings of all sorts, and from those that only treat morality, and common justice and honesty, but do not meddle with holiness. If we would know the holy scriptures, we must read and search

them daily, as the noble Bereans did, ^{<4471>}Acts 17:11. They must not lie by us neglected, and seldom or never looked into. Now here observe,

(1.) What is the excellency of the scripture. It is *given by inspiration of God* (v. 16), and therefore is his word. It is a divine revelation, which we may depend upon as infallibly true. The same Spirit that breathed reason into us breathes revelation among us: *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men spoke as they were moved or carried forth by the Holy Ghost,* ^{<612>}2 Peter 1:21. The prophets and apostles did not speak from themselves, but what they received of the Lord that they delivered unto us. That the scripture was given by inspiration of God appears from the majesty of its style, — from the truth, purity, and sublimity, of the doctrines contained in it, — from the harmony of its several parts, — from its power and efficacy on the minds of multitudes that converse with it, — from the accomplishment of many prophecies relating to things beyond all human foresight, — and from the uncontrollable miracles that were wrought in proof of its divine original: *God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will,* ^{<3114>}Hebrews 2:4.

(2.) What use it will be of to us.

[1.] *It is able to make us wise to salvation;* that is, it is a sure guide in our way to eternal life. Note, Those are wise indeed who are wise to salvation. The scriptures are able to make us truly wise, wise for our souls and another world. “To make thee wise to salvation *through faith.*” Observe, The scriptures will make us wise to salvation, if they be mixed with faith, and not otherwise, ^{<3042>}Hebrews 4:2. For, if we do not believe their truth and goodness, they will do us no good.

[2.] *It is profitable to us for all the purposes of the Christian life, for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.* It answers all the ends of divine revelation. It instructs us in that which is true, reproves us for that which is amiss, directs us in that which is good. It is of use to all, for we all need to be instructed, corrected, and reprov'd: it is of special use to ministers, who are to give instruction, correction, and reproof; and whence can they fetch it better than from the scripture?

[3.] *That the man of God may be perfect,* v. 17. The Christian, the minister, is the man of God. That which finishes a man of God in this

world is the scripture. By it we are *thoroughly furnished for every good work*. There is that in the scripture which suits every case. Whatever duty we have to do, whatever service is required from us, we may find enough in the scriptures to furnish us for it.

(3.) On the whole we here see,

[1.] That the scripture has various uses, and answers divers ends and purposes: *It is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction* of all errors in judgment and practice, and *for instruction in righteousness*.

[2.] The scripture is a perfect rule of faith and practice, and was designed for the man of God, the minister as well as the Christian who is devoted to God, for it is *profitable for doctrine*, etc.

[3.] If we consult the scripture, which was given by inspiration of God, and follow its directions, we shall be made men of God, *perfect, and thoroughly furnished to every good work*.

[4.] There is no occasion for the writings of the philosopher, nor for rabbinical fables, nor popish legends, nor unwritten traditions, to make us perfect men of God, since the scripture answers all these ends and purposes. O that we may love our Bibles more, and keep closer to them than ever! and then shall we find the benefit and advantage designed thereby, and shall at last attain the happiness therein promised and assured to us.