

## **Persecution and the Power of the Word** **(2 Timothy 3:10-17)**

Everywhere Paul took the gospel he encountered severe opposition. What is there about the good news of Jesus Christ that seems like such bad news to so many people? Resistance to Jesus and His love reveals an inner spiritual battle. The way of Jesus collides with the way of the world. The world embraces its own self-aggrandizing priorities which by very nature stand in opposition to the acknowledgement of sin, the need for repentance, and the admission that life is only available through someone else—Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who follow Jesus will encounter resistance and even persecution. But God sustains His persecuted people and provides spiritual stamina through His Word. When we're strong in the scriptures we'll be steadfast in the face of opposition.

**While persecution is inevitable,  
the Lord will deliver His people (3:10-13).**

The Christian life is not a life of ease and luxury—it was never intended to be. Jesus warned that those who follow Him must take up their crosses (Matthew 16:24) and suffer persecution (John 15:20). Persecution, to some degree, is inevitable. But God is always at our side.

***When facing persecution, we'll benefit from observing the example of others (3:10-11).***

Paul had experienced all kinds of persecution and at the moment that he wrote this letter he was anticipating martyrdom. He wanted his younger protégé, Timothy, to know that God sustains His persecuted people. Those who are persecuted can take great comfort in the stories of others who have seen God's sustaining strength in the midst of such heartless circumstances. Timothy, as Paul points out, had been a close follower who had paid close attention to Paul's life. Timothy knew all about Paul's teaching, the way in which he conducted his life, his purpose, his faith in God, his longsuffering in the midst of difficult situations, his love for God and others, his patient endurance, the ways in which he'd been persecuted, and the sufferings he'd endured for the sake of Jesus Christ. Paul's life was an open book to Timothy. Timothy learned much from Paul's example.

Paul specifically reminded Timothy about the persecutions and sufferings he'd endured in Timothy's home region in Asia Minor—the neighboring cities of Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. Paul had been driven out of Antioch (Acts 13:50) and fled Iconium under threat of death (Acts 14:5-6). At Lystra, Timothy's hometown, Paul had actually been dragged outside the city, stoned, and left for dead (Acts 14:19-20). Timothy would have been aware of these events, and may have even witnessed Paul's stoning. He knew very well that Paul had endured all kinds of

severe persecutions for the sake of the gospel. But Paul confidently declared to Timothy, “The Lord delivered me from all of them.” God gives strength to His persecuted people. He delivers (a word that encompasses the idea of rescue) those who are persecuted, although that deliverance may be deliverance through death. Nonetheless, persecution in its various forms should never deter Christians from standing up for and proclaiming Jesus Christ.

***When facing persecution, we’ll benefit from knowing that persecution is normal (3:12-13).***

Lest Paul’s experience be written off as that of an extreme Christian fanatic, Paul reminds us that “everyone who desires to live a devout life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.” Persecution is normal, something to be expected by those who live truly devoted lives for Jesus Christ. Granted, persecution takes on more severe forms in certain places at certain times. Such severe persecution reminds us that the way of Jesus Christ is diametrically opposed to the way of the world. But even less severe forms of persecution—rejection, ridicule, isolation, denied rights and opportunities—carry a painful sting. Persecution simply isn’t going to go away until Jesus returns. Paul could warn Timothy that evil people and “imposters” (a term that can carry the meaning of cheaters, charlatans, or magicians) will continue to advance in their deceptive ways. They deceive others while they themselves are deceived. Their deception will get worse and worse. Using the same verb for “advance” in verse 9, Paul had already indicated that, although these false teachers will advance in their deception, that advance will ultimately come to a halt. Truth will triumph over error. Christians will face persecution. Persecution and deception will increase. But God is still in control and He will deliver His people.

**The written Word of God has the power  
to challenge and change our lives (3:14-17).**

God delivers His people in times of persecution, and He strengthens His people through the gift of His written Word. The Bible is the authoritative truth of God. It reveals the mind and will of God. As such, the Bible challenges our minds and changes our hearts.

***God’s Word is trustworthy, deserving our abiding commitment (3:14).***

In contrast to false teachers, Timothy needed to stay focused on the truth. “You,” Paul stated emphatically to Timothy, “You abide in what you’ve learned.” Timothy had been taught the truth of God’s Word from very special teachers—his mother and grandmother (2 Timothy 1:5), as well as Paul. Because Timothy knew the source of his instruction he therefore was “assured” of its truthfulness. Paul instructed Timothy to “continue” or “abide” in these truths. He was not to abandon these teachings but was to allow the truth to continue to rest deeply in his

mind and heart. We need to take time to abide in God's Word because God's Word is trustworthy.

***God's Word is holy, giving us insight about salvation (3:15).***

Not only did Timothy know from whom he'd learned God's truth, he also knew the content of God's Word—the “holy letters”—from the time he was a child. Timothy's earliest instruction centered on the Old Testament. Paul referred to the Scriptures here as “holy,” or set apart and sacred. He also referred to them as the holy “letters,” an unusual phrase not found anywhere else in the Bible but used by other Jewish writers to describe the Old Testament. The fact that Paul used the word “letters” implies the precision and depth of inspiration. The very letters of God's Word are sacred and authoritative. It's the holy Word of God that's able to make us “wise unto salvation.” We gain spiritual insight, especially about salvation by faith in Jesus Christ, through the Word of God. The Old Testament pointed forward to the redeeming work of God's Messiah and the New Testament, which became a part of the sacred letters, reveals and explains the redemptive work of Jesus Christ. Our understanding of salvation must come from the Bible rather than personal opinion, and that salvation is based on faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

***God's Word is inspired, providing us with authoritative direction for living (3:16).***

Second Timothy 3:16 is a foundational verse supporting the inspiration and authority of God's Word. “All Scripture is God-breathed.” While some translations allow for a distinction between God-breathed writings and writings that weren't inspired (“every inspired Scripture”), the best way to interpret this verse is to apply the process of inspiration to the whole of Scripture (“all Scripture is inspired”). Inspiration, the idea that the Bible is God-breathed, moves far beyond the idea of mere inspirational human thoughts. Inspiration, when applied to the Bible, means that God Himself breathed the truths of Scripture so that they're powerful and authoritative. Second Peter 1:21 describes the way in which God breathed out the Scriptures—the Holy Spirit carried along the human authors to write the truth of God. Because the Bible is divinely inspired it's “profitable” or “beneficial” in a number of ways. The Bible is profitable for teaching (expressing and explaining God's truth), for rebuking (confronting sin and refuting error), for correcting (restoring to an upright position or condition), and training in righteousness (rearing as a child toward moral alignment with God's holy character). The God-breathed Bible is authoritative in our lives, providing both positive reinforcement and corrective discipline for living life God's way.

***God's Word is transformational, equipping us for every good work (3:17).***

When properly applied, God's Word has transforming power in our lives. The result of inspiration is that God's people are equipped to live for God. Paul combines two words that come from the same root for equipping or completing what is necessary for spiritual success. The Bible helps us to be "equipped" by "fully equipping" us for every good work. In other words, we lack nothing when it comes to living for and serving God because the Bible is sufficient for our needs. In Ephesians 4:11-12 Paul indicates that God has given spiritual leaders to equip God's people for works of service. In 2 Timothy 3:17 we read that God has given His holy Word to equip God's people for every good work. Spiritual leaders who rightly handle the Word of truth (2 Timothy 2:15) provide the church with a powerful source of spiritual transformation. The Bible challenges our minds and changes our hearts. When we're strong in the scriptures we'll be steadfast in the face of opposition and effective in serving our Lord Jesus Christ.