

Paul had a close relationship to Timothy. He had also already expressed in this letter deep confidence in Timothy. Therefore, it may be surprising to read his command to Timothy to continue in the truth. But this chapter explains Paul's reasons for that command and it points to things that will encourage him to do so.

I. Reasons for the challenge to continue in the truth (3:1–13)

1. The coming apostasy (3:1–9, 13)

"Apostasy", a falling away from the truth, will happen in the last days, i.e., in the times when God sends the Messiah. They have begun with the first coming of Jesus. Timothy and we are in the last days.

a. Paul is probably describing the situation within the church or professing Christianity, although the description fits the pagan world as well.

1) People will have a "form of godliness" (v. 5), i.e., they will attempt to appear like Christians, but will deny its power, i.e., the gospel (Romans 1:17). Cf. Matthew 7:22–23.

2) These people are like Pharaoh's magicians who posed as divine representations, offering counterfeit miracles to oppose Moses (v. 8).

3) Paul calls them impostor (v. 13) who deceive, i.e., present themselves as Christians but are not. Hence, they are able to win the confidence of vulnerable women (v. 6).

Sadly, the description fits the conditions we find in churches today.

b. The actions of these people who had left the truth also oppose the truth by demanding what they want instead of the truth and by direct opposition (v. 8). They are heading in a bad direction, only getting worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived (v. 13).

2. Persecution (3:10–12)

a. Paul had been persecuted. Timothy had witnessed some of that in his home area of Iconium and Lystra where Paul had been stoned and left for dead (Acts 14; 16:1–2).

b. Paul also gave Timothy the sober warning, "Everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted." Cf. John 16:33; 1 John 3:13; Acts 14:22.

Persecution and apostasy could frighten and discourage. Therefore, Paul challenged Timothy to continue in the truth.

II. Encouragements to help continue in the truth (3:10–17)

1. The example of Paul's life (3:10–11)

Timothy had first hand knowledge of Paul's response to persecution and suffering. Paul's life revealed that the grace of God is sufficient to stand in persecution and suffering. It also communicated the value which Paul placed on the message.

2. The sufficiency of Scripture (3:14–17)

The sufficiency of Scripture for all which we need is a strong encouragement to continue in the truth.

a. Timothy had learned the sufficiency of Scripture in childhood (vv 14–15), probably from his mother and grandmother, who taught him the "sacred writings" or more literally, the "sacred ABCs." He had learned the fundamental truths of Scripture from an early age.

b. The Scriptures are as well inherently sufficient (vv 16–17). They are God-breathed and profitable, sufficient to equip for every good work.

1) "Inspired" (NIV) is literally "God-breathed" and refers to the writings and in this verse not to the process of the writing. Just as God created the heavens by "the breath of his mouth" (Psalm 33:6), He brought into existence writings to say exactly what He wanted them to say. (The process is explained in 2 Peter 1:21.)

2) The God-breathed Scripture fully equips the man of God for "every good work," i.e., to stand firm in persecution and suffering, to guard the truth, to entrust it to other, to live godly, etc.

Paul encouraged Timothy to continue in the truth by pointing to the positive examples in his life and the very nature of the Scriptures themselves.

Paul described terrible times: defection from the truth within the church and persecution from all sides. "But as for you, continue in the truth."

Don't be part of the problem, resisting the truth, deceiving or being deceived. Remember that we are in the last days. God's truth is a most valuable possession. It reveals Christ, declares the Good News, equips us to stand. Continue in the truth!