

A call to continue

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[0 : 00] Our reading today is from 2 Timothy 3, verses 10-17. Reading from the NIV.

You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

What kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra? The persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them.

In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evildoers and imposters will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

But, as for you, continue in what you have learned and have become convinced of, because you know those from whom you learned it, and how from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

[1 : 16] All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Amen. Okay, so 2 Timothy chapter 3 from verse 10. If you've got a Bible to hand, it would be great if you're able to have that open.

And, as ever, things will appear on screen as well to help you along. Those of you who know me at least a little bit, well, I'm sure have realised by now that I'm a bit of a gadget man, or whatever you want to call it, that I like the latest and greatest technology when I can get my hands on it.

My shed contains not only a lawnmower, but also a selection of LED lights to make pink walls and things like that. Kind of having grown up tinkering with things and a degree in electronic engineering, I still like to think that I'm keeping up with technology, and I like playing with whatever Apple's latest device is.

I'm far more excited than I should be that it's WWDC starting tomorrow, and we'll find out what Apple's next plans are. There's definitely part of me, also, that's been quite enjoying playing with different bits of tech stuff, kind of making all this live streaming and what have you work.

[2 : 40] And if I had a bit more disposable income, then I'm pretty sure more tech stuff would be on the list of where some of that would go. Now, mostly, this is a fairly harmless thing to enjoy, provided at least that Joe's there to restrain my inclination to hand over my credit card details.

But there was a particular time a few years back when this inclination did cause me major problems. I was in the middle of writing several essays, and Apple released a software update for the computer, and I liked the sound of a few of the new features, and it was a free update, and I needed a break from my writing.

So I clicked on the upgrade button, and so began the three days of frustration, as the upgraded computer first completely refused to start up, and then when I fixed that, discovered that the program that I was using to write the essays was no longer able to talk to the printer.

It's pretty rare, but sometimes upgrading your computer, even a Mac, can cause it to have problems, and certainly was a pretty foolish thing to do with deadlines looming.

That's why I waited till my holiday a couple of weeks ago to do the more recent upgrade. Now, in most areas of life, the new and the novel is morally neutral, if you like.

[4 : 01] Certainly that's true of every computer operating system I've ever come across. One is not more evil or more virtuous than the other. It's usually harmless.

But the same thing is not true of new things in the Christian life. And when we look at our passage today, one of the things that we see is the danger of the novel, the risk of turning to something new and exciting that then lures us away from the safe and traditional and known.

Now, don't mishear me. Even in the church, sometimes new is good. The church rapidly embraced the printing press as a means of putting God's word into people's hands.

And today we're all embracing this online streaming as the best available way to gather for worship. Sometimes new is good. Sometimes technology is helpful.

Sometimes it is good to go with a new thing. But in terms of our understanding of what God has said, then all too often when somebody tells you that they have a fresh understanding of a passage, well, you should be quite deeply suspicious.

[5 : 09] And as Paul here continues to address Timothy, which the NIV heading here calls the final charge, he points out here two things that are kind of established and known.

And he encourages Timothy to continue in them. Paul points to his own life and he says, follow me. And he points to the scriptures and he says, follow them.

For you and for me, we could equate those instructions to follow godly examples and follow God's word. The passage that Kevin read, the passage we're looking at, it divides into two sections, each of which begins with a comparison.

But you. The desire for a smooth English translation means the first one in verse 10. You're probably reading something like, you however. And then the second one in verse 14 will say, but as for you.

But the Greek words that are being translated there are the same. But you. So two comparisons. And in each section, Paul's telling Timothy how Timothy should behave in contrast to how the false teachers were behaving.

[6 : 18] Those false teachers that were infecting the church that we've been looking at in the past weeks. So in the first part of this passage, Paul points out to Timothy his reassuring past and encourages him to follow his own godly example.

The verb here that the NIV is translating, know, here in verse 10, there's a little bit more force behind it, perhaps, than we might instinctively think when we talk about knowing.

We could also talk about following. Timothy has followed Paul's teaching. Now, knowledge is absolutely part of that. Probably the central part of it.

This certainly isn't just that they kind of traveled together for a time. But it is also more than knowledge. It kind of implies a wholehearted acceptance, a response in Timothy's life to what he knows of Paul's teaching and so on.

Knowing and understanding is, of course, important. But knowledge is not enough on its own. It has to translate into action. And therefore, Paul reminds Timothy that he's followed his teaching that stands here in kind of primary place at the head of the list.

[7 : 32] It's what Paul has told him. It's the apostolic gospel. This is what is of key importance. But that isn't all. He continues with, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecution, sufferings.

He kind of piles up and up and up these examples of what Timothy has seen and received and understood and what it is that Timothy is to press on in.

As he always is. Paul here in these verses is profoundly realistic in how he talks about the realities of the Christian life, talking in terms of suffering and persecution.

And Paul doesn't just point to his own experience in this area as part of what Timothy has understood and has followed. Paul also says very bluntly in verse 12 that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.

To put that another way, the only way to avoid persecution is to abandon God. If you want to live a godly life, you will be persecuted. The only way to avoid it is to stop trying to live a godly life.

[8 : 44] Now to many of us, this idea of persecution, it perhaps seems far off and remote because we typically don't experience the same kind of persecution that Paul did.

But if we're honest, well we can point to various instances of persecution in our own lives and in our society and that shouldn't surprise us. That's what Paul says will happen.

But of course that level of persecution is nothing compared to what some Christians are enduring even today. Because being persecuted for being a believer in Jesus is not a distant memory from thousands of years ago, is it?

This very day, this Sunday, Christians are meeting in fear of their lives. In recent weeks, churches in China have been prevented from holding online services and at least 48 churches have been closed by state authorities in the last month.

Muslim militants murdered nine people, including women and children, in a Christian village in Nigeria. And elsewhere in the same country, armed gunmen ambushed a pastor and his wife as they worked on their farm at an opened fire, killing the man and his wife and orphaning their eight children, aged from one to 19.

[10 : 04] I could go on and on and on. Folks, persecution is real today. We should be prepared for it and we should be praying for those who suffer greatly in these circumstances.

That said, at the point that Paul is making here, it's perhaps not primarily that Timothy needs to be ready for persecution, so much as actually that Paul's persecution functions as a grounding for Timothy's faith.

Now, perhaps that seems an odd thing to ground your faith on, but I think the idea here is, why would somebody be willing to suffer persecution for something that they did not genuinely believe?

See, the willingness of Paul and of the other early believers, their willingness to suffer all kinds of persecution, to suffer even to the point of death, this is surely a compelling argument that they really did believe what they were saying.

It is a fairly convincing argument for the validity of the gospel claims, because it is conceivable that a group of men would agree to claim that somebody had come back from the dead, to claim that for the sake of the fame and the influence they might thereby accrue.

[11 : 25] That is conceivable. But surely for those same people to be willing to die for that claim, surely that would be ludicrous if they did not believe what they were saying.

Well, that stands in contrast, doesn't it, to the evildoers and the impostors of verse 13 who go about deceiving. Paul contrasts these impostors against Timothy and against himself.

They will be persecuted. The evildoers will deceive. So here Paul points to his own life as evidence of the validity of what Timothy has believed.

And given the whole tone of this letter that is focused on charging Timothy to pass on what he has received to guard the treasure by distributing it.

Given that tone of the overall letter, surely it is fair to say that Paul expects Timothy to then be able to say similar things to the believers in his church. What Paul says to Timothy, Timothy should be able to say to others who will say it to others, to others, to others, to others.

[12 : 33] And that therefore should be passed on all the way down to us, shouldn't it? This becomes then a charge for any mature believer in the church that we should be able to say, you know how I lived.

You know about my teaching and my way of life and my purpose and so on and so on. You can look at my life and know the truth of Christianity.

This is a charge for mature believers in churches today. So the question is, will you be able to say to people, when, like Paul, you believe your time on earth is drawing to a close, will you be able to say, you know about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, persecutions, sufferings.

will you be able to say to people that they know these things? Maybe you might say that of your teaching, that people know what you have said, but do you let people get close enough that they could say they know your way of life?

A few years back, when I was learning to drive, several times as I got into the car as a passenger, people would say to me, do as I say, not as I do.

[13 : 58] I suspect we're going to be having a few people saying that in the coming weeks now that the DVLA is open again and our older teenagers are applying for their provisional licenses. So it's easy for us to see our shortcomings when we know that somebody's going to be watching and we rightly want to guard people against those same mistakes.

Do as I say, not as I do. Now saying that, saying do as I say, not as I do, that might be something that we can get away with when somebody's learning to drive.

But to be saying that is certainly not acceptable in the Christian life. We can't allow that kind of disconnect between our words and our actions.

We can't kid ourselves along that people will listen to what we say and not see what we do. We have to admit that people will naturally copy how we live.

And I think all too often we are scared to let people get close. Scared because we know what they'll see. We know that they'll see the imperfections.

[15 : 09] They'll see the things that we would rather not have to admit to. They'll see me be irritable with my wife and exasperated with my children. And they'll see me be lazy and greedy and prideful and envious.

And you're right. You're right to be worried that people will see these things. Because if you let people in enough that you could say to them follow me then they will see those things.

And that's precisely the point. The idea is not that you let people supposedly come in but show them a facade. What we need is not immaculate perfection.

What we need to see is a sinner saved by grace. We see somebody who is loved by God despite those failings.

We see somebody who regularly apologises for falling short. So my question to all of you and my question to myself is will you say to people watch me?

[16 : 23] Follow me? Come and I'll show you how to read the Bible on your own. Come for dinner and I'll show you how to have family worship. Come and stay for a couple of days and see what it means to be devoted in prayer.

Come and watch me have coffee with a non-Christian friend and see what it means to gently lead somebody step by step baby steps into the world of the gospel. Come and see what it is to be a Christian husband and Christian father.

Look at me. Watch me. Come and see what it looks like. Come and see a sinner saved by grace. Come and see a life transformed by the gospel with all of the remaining messiness and pain and difficulties.

Come and see. Now this is of course a profound challenge to those of us who are parents who will have people who will definitely be able to say in years ahead that they do know how we lived for good or for ill.

But it's also a challenge to all believers isn't it? A challenge that we should be inviting one another to have that kind of a relationship. So when a young Christian moves into the area or when in God's grace we see people turning from their former ways to follow him the question is will you draw that person in so that they can learn what it is to be a follower of Christ what it is to be a disciple.

[17 : 56] Of course the opposite of that should also be true that we should all of us be seeking out those whom we can watch because for all of us whatever our level of maturity there will still be those who have more experience and wisdom at least in particular areas of the Christian life even if not overall.

And for all who are believers there are also areas where we have experience to offer and to share. We can both be watchers and those who are watched at the same time.

Paul is keen here for Timothy and for others to imitate him. Why? Well ultimately because he knows he is imitating Christ. Timothy is called to continue in this way of life that he's observed and started out upon.

So the Corinthian church Paul wrote be imitators of me as I am of Christ and apparently I didn't make that slide sorry. So that's our first point follow godly examples.

then secondly follow god's word. We come here to verse 14 and that second emphatic but you again Timothy here is being contrasted against the false teachers.

[19 : 12] Those false teachers will go from bad to worse they'll continue in their downward spiral and Timothy likewise is to continue but of course in a positive manner rather than a negative one.

Timothy doesn't need something new or novel Timothy doesn't need at the latest operating system on his computer with its promises of more productivity and more efficiency and more enjoyment and he doesn't need the latest trend in church growth strategies.

All he needs is to continue to continue in what he's learnt and what he's become convinced of and we too continue in what we have heard.

We continue to follow god's word. So Paul here is offering reassurance that Timothy can safely remain where he's begun that he can stay grounded in scripture.

Timothy is reassured about the source of his knowledge that he knows where it has come from where he has received it from when he says those from whom you learned it.

[20 : 15] Paul surely includes himself in that but he also continues on into how Timothy has known the scriptures since his infancy. So Timothy's information comes not only from Paul but also from his mother and his grandmother too.

Now our culture on the whole is obsessed with the new isn't it? But for Timothy in the world that he lived in the idea of being established of having a pedigree was much to be preferred and Paul assures Timothy that that is exactly what he has.

Isn't this something that we should belong as parents to be able to say to our own children or all of us to be able to say to the children of Covenant Church and to other children who we know to be able to say as they grow from infancy you have known the holy scriptures.

What a blessing that is. And Paul continues his reassurance in the following verses here in terms of the power and sufficiency of the scriptures.

Verse 16 here is perhaps one of the best known verses in the Bible in the circles that I grew up in at least and rightly so. Fundamentally the scriptures God's word it is able to make you wise for salvation.

- [21 : 37] This section of verse 15 we've got to not lose sight of this because the examples of verse 16 follow on from that. the positive work of teaching, the negative work of rebuking, these are with respect to and they follow on from being made wise for salvation.

It's not in an abstract ethereal sense that scripture is useful to teach and to rebuke. It's not as a mere historical text with interesting anecdotes and little bits of data about life amongst well frankly a largely insignificant group of people in the ancient Near East.

Now that's not what we need to be taught about is it? No the purpose of scripture is first and foremost to make you wise. This is what it teaches. It teaches wisdom.

And it is incorrect understandings of salvation that need to be rebuked. And the same is true of the correcting and training in righteousness. But again we have kind of the negative and the positive aspects.

to change incorrect behaviour and to encourage good deeds. Here the practical dimensions of life as well as the more intellectual understanding of the first two points.

- [22 : 58] And again these are in the context of being wise for salvation. There's great danger actually in trying to correct and to train in behavioural terms without the foundation of salvation by the grace of God.

God. Verse 17 the closing words here on the screen provides further explanation of what's in view. Telling us that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Every good work. See there's nothing that is expected of us that the scriptures do not equip us for. And there's a danger that we look at these verses and they're so familiar to many of us.

We look at them and think well yes of course I know that of course scripture is inspired by God. Of course scripture is sufficient. Fine fine fine fine fine. Now just tell me what I should do.

But the question is do you, do I, act in practice as if this is true? Do we recognize that it's his word that we should follow?

- [24 : 15] Or are we always off looking for the latest gimmick and the newest trick to bring people into church? Folks do you actually think that scripture alone can make people wise for salvation?

Do you think it in practice as well as in theory? Is that going to be the driving force of our evangelistic strategy both individually and as a church?

Is it going to be sitting down with the word of God that is the means by which we bring people to Christ? Do we believe that the Bible has the answers to the questions that our friends are asking?

Or are we going to go and depend on courses and programs and good coffee and comfy seats and an accommodating message and an impressive band and downplay the difficult bits of doctrine until a little bit later when people are ready for them?

Now folks don't mishear me. I'm not saying I don't think that we should have good coffee. I like good coffee. I want us as a church to be welcoming and therefore to serve a nice cup of tea and a good cup of coffee.

- [25 : 26] And I'm not saying that we shouldn't use the helpful courses that have been written provided that what they're doing is pushing us into God's word. But what I am saying is we can't treat these things as the be all and end all.

We can't expect anything else to do the work that only God's word can actually do because it is the scriptures that are able to make you wise for salvation, not anything else.

So would you do something for me? If you've got one there with you, will you please pick up your Bibles and hold them in your hands? Folks, do you really believe that as you do this, you are equipped for every good work?

Because you are holding God's word and therefore you are equipped. If you have a smartphone, do you realise that with a Bible app on your phone, you have everything you need to make somebody wise for salvation in your pocket every single day?

See, the scriptures aren't useful just for a bare minimum. It's not a launching board, but rather the scriptures give us everything that we require for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness.

[26 : 46] And that means that whatever stage you are at, there is nothing more productive you could be doing than reading God's word. And because I believe that that is true, because we believe that as a church, here are two very practical outworkings of that.

Firstly, we believe that having access to a Bible is vital. And therefore, if you do not have a Bible at home, or if the only Bible that you've got is falling apart, or if it's ancient and you can't understand half the words, folks, we would be absolutely delighted to give you a Bible, absolutely free of charge and with no strings attached.

just get in touch with me, my details are all there on the Facebook page. We would love to send you a Bible, because we believe having God's word is vital. Secondly, if you'd like somebody to read the Bible with you, perhaps especially if you're diving into it for the first time, but more broadly too, if you want some help to understand what you're reading, if you want somebody to be able to chew over it with you, not so much that you need somebody to teach you, but that it's helpful to bounce ideas to and fro and to increase understanding together, if that's something you would appreciate, well again, I would be delighted to do that with you, either to do it myself or hook you up with somebody else who can do it with you.

Again, just get in touch. We probably can't do it over a cup of coffee just yet, but we can start on Zoom and see how far we get. Maybe the days of coffee meetings will come again.

And then, well if you've been reading the Bible for decades, I hope that this has been your experience of God teaching and moulding you through his inspired word.

[28 : 39] And to you, I would say, you who have been doing this for years, I say to you and to me that I urge you in the most emphatic possible terms, to make the word of God, the foundation, the cornerstone, the linchpin, the bread and butter, whatever metaphor it is you want to use, to make the scriptures the be-all and end-all of your own growth in discipleship, of how you help your fellow Christians and of how you speak to your friends who don't yet know him.

Folks, there is no need for something new. We need only continue in what we have learned. So please, follow godly examples and follow God's word.

Let's pray. Father God, thank you that you have given us the scriptures that are able to make us wise for salvation.

Thank you that we have your word plainly before us. Thank you for the privilege that it is readily accessible to us in the language that we have known since infancy.

Thank you that many of us can say that we have known what you are saying to us since our infant days. Thank you that none of us need something new and novel.

[30 : 06] We need not follow the latest fads and trends, but rather need only be devoted to what you have said, to what you have given us. Please keep us dependent not only in word, but in practice as well.

Keep us dependent upon your word, and upon that alone. Amen.