

Staying God's Person. 2 Timothy 3:10-17

A Challenging world

Paul has been straight with Timothy about what he will face as he responds to Paul's call to guard and transmit the gospel, the message about the crucified and risen Jesus being Lord of all, the message that brings life and immortality to those who believe.

He hasn't pitched the job in terms of Timothy's personal growth, an opportunity to work with a great team, to realise his potential for leadership.

In this chapter we have already heard him talking about hard times in the last days when people would love themselves, money, pleasure – instead of God

False brethren who would have the appearance of being followers of Jesus – but none of the Spirit empowered reality

False teachers peddling their speculations for profit

And persecution

And this is on top of what he has said in chapter 2 about the distraction of empty talkers, those preoccupied with the unimportant and marginal

And the need to work hard, to live the disciplined life of the athlete, to endure the hardships of the soldier intent on pleasing his commander.

You wouldn't get Paul to write your advertisement for a new pastor, would you.

And on top of all this Timothy knows that he will soon lose his friend and mentor Paul

That Paul is writing to prepare him to continue the work in his absence.

In these last days, with Paul absent, what does Paul say will keep Timothy faithful to the task entrusted to him, of being unashamed of the gospel, of guarding its truth, and passing it on to the others who would in turn teach and preserve the message of Jesus

Stop him from being carried away by popular error, overwhelmed by opposition, giving up in the face of suffering?

In answering that question we will also find out what will keep us unashamed of the gospel of Jesus, faithful to its truth, and committed to making disciples

Stop us from being carried away by popular error, overwhelmed by opposition, giving up in the face of suffering

For our times are Timothy's times

We live in the last days, in a culture characterised by love of self, of money, or pleasure, rather than love of God

A world where people profess Christianity but deny its power, where people teach falsehood for profit, a world where there is a cost to being a Christian

And we live in a world where the apostles are long gone.

The place to which Paul directs Timothy for continuing help, guidance and renewal in his absence

Is the place where we too can find the encouragement, help and direction we need to live faithfully and fruitfully as followers of Jesus in our times.

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, [from whom you learnt]

Paul says that for Timothy and us the answer to going on in the gospel year after year, going on after Paul has gone, is staying put

Remain

The word translated 'continue' has the basic meaning of 'remain', abide. Just as a tree planted by water grows and remains fruitful by staying rooted where it is, in the face of all the challenges he faces Timothy will keep growing and being fruitful by staying put in the truth he has already learned

Timothy is not a newcomer to the faith. He has been working with Paul for at least fifteen years by now.

He has had time to test what he has heard – to test it intellectually, and to test it practically.

He has lived the Christian life, relied on the promises, he knows its truth.

This is what he has to stick with.

More, he has seen that same truth confirmed in the lives of those from he learnt the faith.

But who are they?

Paul - certainly, but also his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois who have taught him the scriptures from childhood. [1:5]

And what has Timothy learnt from them that will be the source of continuing faithfulness and fruitfulness for Timothy and us?

Paul, and God, for this is God's word, points Timothy and us to two areas of Timothy's learning

First – what he has learnt from Paul about Christian ministry and life vv. 10-13

And Secondly v. 15, what he has learnt from all three about the sacred scriptures and their fulfilment in the Lord Jesus.

What Timothy has learnt from Paul

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁰ But you have followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, and endurance, ¹¹ along with the persecutions and sufferings that came to me in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra. What persecutions I endured—and yet the Lord rescued me from them all. ¹² In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived.

In contrast to the false teachers and pseudo believers of vv. 5-9 Timothy knows and is committed to Paul's pattern of teaching, life and ministry.

You have followed – that is not 'follow' as you might follow a footy team, a spectator with an emotional investment in your teams ups and downs

The sense of follow is understood and committed yourself to, the following of a player who understands and puts into practice the coach's instruction.

Timothy has made his own Paul's teaching, his conduct, and his purpose

Paul can in these few words summarise his whole life and ministry because Timothy was so intimately familiar with Paul's ministry

He knew Paul's teaching – Timothy is listed as a co-author of Paul's second letter to the Corinthians [2 Cor. 1:1], and his letters to the Philippians, Colossians and Thessalonians. In many contexts he had been entrusted with explaining, defending and applying that teaching.

And Timothy had had ample opportunity over years to examine closely Paul's conduct. Paul could say that Timothy had served with him like a son with a father in the gospel [Phil. 2:22]. He had seen Paul become all things to all

people to by all means save some, Paul putting the interests of others ahead of his own, acting transparently in the collection and handling of money, working with his hands so as to not burden those whom he was teaching, his modelling that it was more blessed to give than to receive

And he knew Paul's purpose, that Paul lived to please the Lord Jesus, that, in Paul's words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20:24, he 'considered my life no value to myself. My purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.'

Acts 20: 24 But I consider my life of no value to myself; my purpose is to finish my course and the ministry I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the gospel of God's grace.

Timothy was committed to a ministry that was the very opposite of the self seeking and grasping for money that characterised the false teachers

And Timothy was also committed to the godly character Paul modelled

To the same Faith – a life of trusting God shown in faithfulness to God

Patience – in dealing with others, especially believers

Love – that first fruit of the Spirit, seen over and over again in Paul's service of believers, his giving himself, expending himself, suffering for their benefit [e.g. 1 thess. 1-2, 2 Cor. 12-13]

The faith and patience and love Paul has already called for from Timothy [2:22, 24]

And he knew Paul's Endurance, his steadfastness under trial

Timothy knew that in a genuine servant of Jesus there could be no separation of doctrine from godly living

All this Timothy was committed to.

This is what he had learnt and must continue in.

But there is more

Paul explicitly mentions his persecution and suffering

In fact highlights what happened to him at the beginning of his missionary journeys in Asia Minor in the cities of Antioch, Iconium, Lystra [Acts 13:50, 14:3, 5; 14:18.]

This is the area Timothy came from [Acts 16:1]. He knew the concerted opposition Paul had faced – how he had been driven out from Antioch, that they had tried to stone him in Iconium, and that his opponents had stoned him and left him for dead in Lystra.

Paul highlights this persecution and suffering Timothy knew to remind him that

Opposition to and suffering for the gospel were there from the beginning.

not an anomaly, not exceptional

And that persevering through this opposition, as Timothy had seen, was the prelude to and condition of great fruitfulness, the fruitful ministry Paul had known and Timothy had shared in in Asia and Greece

And he also highlights the persecution to encourage him

From them all the Lord rescued me

The Lord who had called Paul to ministry did not keep Paul from trial, but He delivered him out of it

The Lord can be relied, and even at the end Paul was confident the Lord would still rescue him, rescue him eternally

2 Tim. 4: ¹⁸ The Lord will rescue me from every evil work and will bring me safely into his heavenly kingdom. To him be the glory forever and ever! Amen.

Timothy and we can serve the Lord Jesus knowing from Paul's example that no opposition will stop our Lord from achieving His saving purpose.

And we need that encouragement for believers should expect persecution.

¹² In fact, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ Evil people and impostors will become worse, deceiving and being deceived.

If we are going to persevere in following Jesus, in teaching His word – we should expect persecution. [John 15:18-20, Matt. 10:16-22, 24-25, Matt. 24:9-11]

It's intensity may vary - from mocking and exclusion to active opposition to imprisonment – from time to time and place to place, but we should expect it and not to be shaken by it

Timothy will be equipped to persevere faithful and fruitful by remaining in what he has learnt from Paul

His life and teaching, His ministry, His godly character, his endurance in suffering

A ministry and example still available to us to encourage our own faithfulness and fruitfulness – through God's word, Paul's letters and the book of Acts

And it is to this word Paul points Timothy to in preparation for his departure

What Timothy has learnt from the Scriptures through Paul and others

2 Timothy 3: ¹⁴ But as for you, continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. You know those who taught you, ¹⁵ and you know that from infancy you have known the sacred Scriptures, which are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

By sacred Scriptures Paul is referring to our Old Testament, the Bible of first century Jews.

Timothy has had those like his mother Eunice and grandmother Lois who had taught him the scriptures in his childhood.

And these Scriptures themselves are a more abiding teacher – present before Paul, and continuing after Paul, and pointed to by Paul as '*able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Jesus*'.

Teaching from the Old Testament was a staple of Paul's ministry. In Thessalonica, for example, it says he reasoned in the synagogue from the Scriptures [Acts 17:2-3] '*explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Christ to suffer and rise from the dead.*'

Acts 17: As usual, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days reasoned with them from the Scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and rise from the dead: "This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah."

But Paul is not just directing Timothy to the Old Testament on its own

'It is the sacred scriptures that are able to give you wisdom for salvation through faith in Jesus'.

Paul is directing Timothy to continue in the teaching of The Old Testament read in the light of its fulfilment in the gospel of our Lord Jesus

The Old Testament points us to faith in Jesus. But when we read it with faith in Jesus, as completed in the gospel, it does more

As you read the Old Testament through the lens of faith in Jesus it teaches you what it means to be saved through faith in Jesus – gives substance to that salvation by telling us both what God promises His people and how we are to

live as His people. And it teaches you the significance of the person and work of Jesus, helps you see Him as the One in whom God's saving purposes reach their climax, the prophet, priest and King foreshadowed in Israel's history.

'*wisdom for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.*' tells us these verses are speaking of the Old Testament as always associated with the Gospel. Its good effect in the lives of believers is never divorced from the gospel – and what is said of the one here embraces, is true of, the other.

This reading of the Scripture through faith in Jesus, as pointing to Him and fulfilled in Him – starts with Jesus

John 5:39, 46, Luke 24:25-27, 44-47

Jesus who said to the Pharisees

John 5: 39 You pore over the Scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them, and yet they testify about me. 46 For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me.

The risen Jesus who opened up the minds of His followers to the Scripture teaching

Luke 24: 44 He told them, "These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you—that everything written about me in the Law of Moses, the Prophets, and the Psalms must be fulfilled." 45 Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. 46 He also said to them, "This is what is written: The Messiah will suffer and rise from the dead the third day, 47 and repentance for forgiveness of sins will be proclaimed in his name to all the nations, beginning at Jerusalem.

Throughout Paul's letters he shows us how the Old Testament helps us to understand the salvation brought by Jesus. If you want one example look at Galatians 3 where Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 – Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness – to show that salvation is by faith in Jesus, not works of the law

Timothy has learnt and firmly believed that this is the way to read the Old Testament, with Jesus as the fulfilment of its promise

And Timothy is to continue in what he has learnt from the Scriptures about Jesus, the Scriptures that he has known, and whose truth he has confirmed, throughout his life.

Paul will depart, but this teacher stays with him

And this teacher will continue to equip him and all believers to persevere faithfully, continue to teach him how to follow Jesus in all the situations he will encounter, for

The Scripture's ability to make us wise for salvation is not accidental. It is the expression of God's purpose for His Word, a purpose which continues

The Continuing ministry of the Scriptures

2 Timothy 3: 16 All Scripture is inspired by God and is profitable for teaching, for rebuking, for correcting, for training in righteousness, 17 so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. CSB

[2 Timothy 3: 16 All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, 17 so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. NIV

2 Timothy 3: 16 All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work. NRSV

2 Timothy 3: 16 Every scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, NET Bible

2 Timothy 3:16: All inspired Scripture has its use for teaching the truth and refuting error, or for reformation of manners and discipline in right living REB [attributive, suggesting that there is some Scripture that is not inspired, and the test is whether we find it useful]

Paul tells Timothy and us that by God's action the Scripture will be our abiding instructor

Important verses, and they take a bit of unpacking

Scripture is the Old Testament, a known body of written books. This word translated Scripture occurs about 50 times in the New Testament, and in every other instance, in the singular or plural, it refers to our Old Testament.

But we should not confine what is said here about God's Word to the Old Testament for as verse 15 tells us, Paul is thinking of the Old Testament as fulfilled in the gospel, of achieving its purpose only in association with the gospel.

The gospel word, the writings of the apostles, share the character and origin of the word they fulfill. They are given by the Spirit so what is said here applies equally to our Old and New Testaments

We see that in the NT itself where parts of our NT were early thought of as Scripture [e.g. 1 Tim. 5:18, 2 Peter 3:15-16] and Paul's letters functioned in Christian gatherings as Scripture, read with the Old Testament.

All Scripture

You will come across varying translations of the beginning of verse 16.

The majority – CSB, NRSV, NIV, ESV – will read 'all scripture' – that is, what Paul says about the Scripture is said about Scripture in its entirety.

Others like the NETranslation translate

2 Timothy 3:¹⁶ Every scripture is inspired by God

This is saying basically the same thing, but emphasising that every part of the Scripture is inspired by God, that nothing in Scripture is not inspired.

But some – the NEB and its descendant the REB – translate –

2 Timothy 3:16: All inspired Scripture has its use for teaching ...

This is potentially misleading in that it could suggest that there are in Paul's mind some Scripture that is not inspired, and Paul is giving us a test to know which Scripture is inspired and which is not. That which we find useful we can know to be inspired, but if it is not useful – then it won't be inspired Scripture.

This is not the most likely translation of the Greek [attributive versus predicative], and it goes against the flow of the passage. Paul is assuring Timothy of the ongoing usefulness of something known and defined – the Scriptures, not giving a test to discern Scripture.

So Paul is speaking of all Scripture and Scripture in every part – it is all 'inspired'.

God breathed

By 'inspired' Paul is affirming something about this written word. 'Inspired by God' is the traditional English translation and it does communicate that the Scriptures originate with God, they come from His initiative.

But the NIV has a more literal translation of a word that it looks like Paul coined – theopneustos. It translates this as 'God Breathed' and this is a better translation. 'By the word inspired you could think that Paul is saying something about the work of God in the human authors. But Paul is saying something about the product, the written Scriptures themselves.

These, he says, come from God, are breathed out by Him – with not a word about the process. You can find a little more on that in 2 Peter 1:20-21 but here Paul is saying that all the Scripture comes from God. It is His word, given by Him to us.

Profitable

And as God's word it will fulfill His purpose in the lives of His people. They will be profitable, and continue to be profitable, useful, in equipping Jesus' people for the service of Jesus as they do the work they are given to do – teaching, rebuking, correcting and training

Let's think of that work

The Scriptures will teach us sound doctrine. Here we can learn the truth of God, of the Lord Jesus, of ourselves, of the future. Here we can find light in our darkness, be equipped to discern truth from error. And here we will learn of the life God wants for His people, learn how to love, learn what righteousness is. And they will do that with unique authority, for they come from God. Coming from God they will be the test of every claim about God and what pleases Him.

Having a unique authority, they can also rebuke us, confront our errors in life and doctrine, and call us to repent, to change our minds to conform to the truth God has revealed, to change our behaviour so that we turn away from sin to do what pleases God.

They will correct us – they will improve our efforts, straighten out what is veering off course, improve what we are already doing so it conforms more closely to what God teaches us in His word

And they will train us in righteousness – through encouragement and exhortation keep us going in cultivating godly behaviour

They are our God given coach to help us persevere and grow in persevering.

Like, say, a swimming coach, they explain what needs to be done

They come down on our laziness and bad habits

They watch us in the water and correct our breathing or the way we are bringing our arms through

And they keep us going – up and down the pool again and again until we perfect what they have taught us

The outcome

And the outcome in the lives of God's people as they continue to read the Scriptures?

¹⁷ so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work

The person of God might be complete – the sense is proficient, capable, able to meet all demands

Equipped – thoroughly equipped – for what God calls us to do

For every good work

The works Eph 2 God has prepared us for

Ephesians 2:10, Titus 2:14, Titus 3:8, Matt. 5:16

Ephesians 2:¹⁰ For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared ahead of time for us to do

Titus 2:¹⁴ He gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and to cleanse for himself a people for his own possession, eager to do good works.

Matthew 5:¹⁶ In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven.

The works Titus 2 that Jesus expects His people to be eager to do, devoted to doing

The works Matt. 5 that bring glory to our heavenly Father

We are not told here what those good works may be for us, but we are assured that through the work of Scripture we will be prepared for them, whatever they may be.

Scripture's preparation is comprehensive – every good work

There is nothing that God wants us to do that the Scriptures do not equip us for as they do their work in our lives.

The Scripture is our sufficient instructor – it can do all that needs to be done to equip us for a life pleasing to God, to know the truth of God.

And we can be confident as we give ourselves to their instruction that they will do their work in our lives, for they are the word of God, and God has promised that His word will never fail of its purpose

Isaiah 55:10-11

*Isaiah 55: ¹⁰For just as rain and snow fall from heaven
and do not return there
without saturating the earth
and making it germinate and sprout,
and providing seed to sow
and food to eat,
¹¹so my word that comes from my mouth
will not return to me empty,
but it will accomplish what I please
and will prosper in what I send it to do.”*

That is why we must diligently and humbly study it, and discipline ourselves to distinguish the words of Scripture from all other words, to distinguish the Word of God from all human words

I want to emphasise that sufficiency – the Scriptures, uniquely from God, are all we need to live a life pleasing to God, and nothing can be demanded of God's people to be believed or done which is not taught in Scripture

This conviction of the sufficiency of Scripture is a source of a great divide

Some, like the Roman Catholic church, teach Scripture plus the teaching of the church is needed. They elevate the teaching of the church, of people, to be equal to the Word of God. Their human traditions, whether about Mary or the Mass or the Pope, displace the word of God, something Jesus condemns in Mark 7:5-13.

Others say you need Scripture plus prophecy to live a really fruitful life and create a dependency on charismatic leadership and elevate the doubtful and transient over the sure and eternal.

But it says the Scriptures will prepare us for 'every good work'

While we have to understand the word and help each other to do so, the Scripture is uniquely God's word and does not need supplementing by human words to do its work.

As the Anglican reformers said – and you can find something similar in the WCF 1:VI

Article 6: Of the Sufficiency of the holy Scriptures for salvation

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an Article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation.

What is promised of the God-breathed word is not promised of other words, and its authority is unique, which is why we must keep God's word distinct from, unconfused with, human words – even the commentary in our study bibles.

Keeping on as the Equipped person of God

In a world full of challenges to both Timothy and our persevering in faithfulness of life and teaching, in persevering in unashamedly sharing the gospel

How can we keep on, not carried away by popular error, overwhelmed by opposition, withdrawing in resigned defeat, giving up in the face of suffering?

Like Timothy, it will be by staying in what we have learnt and firmly believed

The teaching and example of Paul, preserved for us in the New Testament

The teaching of the Old Testament Scriptures as they are fulfilled in the gospel of our Lord Jesus

The teaching of the Scriptures, Old and New Testaments, we are assured will always be useful to prepare us for every challenge and opportunity that we will encounter in our following and service of Jesus,

The Scriptures that are God breathed

We have those Scriptures, have them in our tongue, have the extraordinary privilege of a Word from God that we can understand, that will give us salvation, that can equip us for every challenge we will face in the Christian life

But of course the Scriptures will only do us good as we attend to them

As we read them

As we listen to them taught

As we meditate on them

So if you want life

If you want to be a faithful servant of Jesus

A child of God who knows and lives to please Her or his heavenly Father by doing the good works that honour Him

Be a student of Scripture

Give yourself to their study, individually and together

Read them Humbly – Isaiah 66:1-2 –

Isaiah 66: This is what the LORD says:

*Heaven is my throne,
and earth is my footstool.*

*Where could you possibly build a house for me?
And where would my resting place be?*

*² My hand made all these things,
and so they all came into being.*

This is the LORD's declaration.

*I will look favorably on this kind of person:
one who is humble, submissive in spirit,
and trembles at my word.*

The Scriptures are the word of the living God, not a word for you to judge but the word that will either judge you or give you life at the last day

When you are handling them you are handling something that is holy, that belongs to God, and which He will vindicate

We should never stop trembling when we read or hear the Scriptures

Read them Expectantly – come expecting that work, looking to be taught, rebuked, corrected, trained

Read them Diligently – not as an afterthought, but passionately and persistently

Get a way of reading that works for you- a regular time of day, a regular pattern of reading, whether that is reading whole books through

Or using devotions

Or following the bible in a year

Or a combination of ways

Never tire or reading and listening to them

Read them Thoughtfully and in community

Thoughtfully – as a good reader, for God’s word comes to us in human words, asking the questions you ask of anything you read – Who, what, when where why

ponder what you read. Don’t dismiss it if you don’t understand it the first time. Come back to it, consult Christian friends, teachers – present and past

Read it as it is – written in another time and place, written in another language and translated – but doing God’s work today

Because they are Written for us

Romans 15:4, 1 Corinthians 10:11

Romans 15: 4 For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures.

1 Corinthians 10: 11 These things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our instruction, on whom the ends of the ages have come.

Read the Scriptures Thankfully, as the Psalmist says, as a lamp to our feet and a light to our path [Ps. 119:105], and light in darkness is so good – it is safety and certainty on our way

Read it knowing that the one who delights in God’s word, who meditates on it day and night, is blessed by God

Read it and Teach it where you may

Timothy didn’t just learn the Scriptures from Paul

Others, ordinary believers like his mother and grandmother, taught him the scriptures

We can also teach, and should – in our homes to our family, Sunday School, Youth Group, reading it with each other

Teach it so that others may be made wise for salvation through faith in Jesus

But more, pray that as you are equipped and changed by the Word you will, by God’s grace – be a Model for other believers so that one day you can commend the truth of the gospel by saying – remain in what you have learnt

‘knowing from whom you learnt it’ – and know those words bring conviction and encouragement to that believer because they have seen the truth of God’s word in you.