

ENDURING

2 Timothy 3:10-17, 4:1-8

The second letter of Paul to Timothy was written at a time when Paul was approaching his death and he wanted to be sure Timothy appreciated the need for growth and was looking to the right sources for inspiration. The advice Paul gave to Timothy who was the pastor of the church at Ephesus is, in many ways, applicable to us in our walk and ministry in Christ. Paul's advice focused on three facets: (1) Follow the example of Godly people. (2) Stay with the basic principles. (3) Do what you do diligently and faithfully.

Paul saw that perilous and difficult times were very close to happening to Christians in what he described as the last days. The reference to the "last days" was intended to include the time in which Paul and Timothy lived as evidenced by the advice that Paul gave to Timothy to avoid people whose lives were devoid of any morality. When people reject the Word of God as a foundational and fundamental guide for living, then the result is a life that is driven by selfish interests that cater to materialism and promotion of their own achievements with little or no regard for anyone else. Whether it was in ancient Rome or the boroughs of New York and the suburbs of Washington, we can see that many live for the pleasure of the moment, have no regard for the values of the past, and have no appreciation for the hard work and sacrifice of those who have dedicated themselves to making the world a better place.

Such people and conditions as described by Paul were present when he wrote this letter which was about 60 A.D. The intensity of the persecution of Christians by Nero would start in 64 A.D. and would continue until his death some three and a half years after it was initiated. Additionally, Paul was very concerned that people who had the morality and mind set of a lost world would infiltrate and influence the church. Ironically, some of the greatest abuses of Christians were likely during the reign of terror of the Papacy from the sixth through the eighteenth century. This was truly a case of having a form of godliness but denying the power of the gospel to change lives.

Persecution Coming – 3:10-13

¹⁰ Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, *and* sufferings, such as happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium *and* at Lystra; what persecutions I endured, and out of them all the Lord rescued me! ¹² Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will proceed *from bad* to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 2 Timothy 3:10-13 (NASB95)

It is one thing to read about characteristics for successful living and we can profit from such learning. However, when we read such things we have a tendency to think these are lofty ideals and we may one day progress toward them; however, we do not really see ourselves operating in that manner. On the other hand, when we encounter a real live example of someone who embodies and practices all the right things, then we are inspired to do likewise because we realize these are not just ideals but are really achievable. Paul served as an impressive example for Timothy and because Paul was faithful to his calling from God, he could say to others "Follow my example." All of us should strive to live our lives in such a way so we could advise others to follow our example because we have done "the right thing."

Our goals in life, the lifestyle we practice and the principles by which we operate must be aligned with each other in a consistent way or our lives will be filled with conflict. A secular example may help us see what this statement means. If a person had a goal in life to become wealthy, then his lifestyle would need to be adjusted so he did not spend everything he had on entertainment and vacations. The principle by which he would need to live would be one that

acknowledged the value of diligence and hard work rather than just “getting by.” Alignment is also needed in the totality of our lives. We cannot compartmentalize our lives into the religious and the secular or the spiritual and the physical and ignore the influence of one on the other. Timothy had a good example in Paul’s goals (purpose), his lifestyle (manner of life) and his principles (doctrine). There are a number of values characteristic of people who are really successful in life. Among these are faithfulness, tolerance for hardship, genuine love, and the endurance to follow through until the job is done. We tend to associate these with the religious and spiritual part of life, but these characteristics and values are the very ones that are important in **all** of life. We need to be fully committed to what we are doing. We can expect difficulties and roadblocks; however, we must keep our perspective correct regarding the value and worth of people, and have the fortitude to complete a job that is underway.

Paul could point to many examples of the problems he encountered as he was faithful to his call to take the gospel to the Gentiles. Some of these difficulties occurred in Timothy’s hometown of Lystra and it is probable that Timothy saw how Paul handled such situations. Such knowledge of how to handle adversity is useful to all Christians because, if we are faithful to God’s calling, then we **will** encounter opposition from the world. As Paul pointed out to Timothy, evil people are in the world who have different agendas than doing the work of the Lord and the opposition is to the principles of the Kingdom of God will grow and become more intense. While there have been times of revival and repentance, the general trend is exactly what we have been witnessing over the past several decades in our own nation – those with evil agendas are more and more emboldened and are openly rebellious against God even to the point of maliciously attacking those who are openly aligned with the principles of the Kingdom of God.

Be Equipped for Right-Living – 3:14-17

¹⁴ You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned *them*,¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; ¹⁷ so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work. 2 Timothy 3:14-17 (NASB95)

Everywhere we turn, we can find some new philosophy of life someone is promoting. The obvious books and magazine articles on such subjects and the more subtle messages from TV programs and novels advocate a variety of philosophies. With the advent of the popularity of social media, we have witnessed an exponential growth in blogs, tweets, memes and articles that promote ideas – some good and some very questionable. As Paul advised Timothy, we too should continue in the teachings of the word of God, because we know these to be correct. It is in the word of God we find our only salvation in Christ Jesus. Though there are many today who question the validity and truth of the Bible, we will find every word is true. We ignore its teachings to our own peril and we faithfully follow its teachings to our benefit. The Bible is truly God’s blueprint for us to build our lives on the foundation of Jesus Christ so we can be equipped to live successfully.

How important is it that we know the source of the advice that we choose to follow? Paul reminded Timothy that he should continue in what he had learned and become convinced of. So much of what we “learn” may not turn out to be true because our experiences in the trials of life do not match up with what we had been taught and, consequently, we are not convinced or persuaded that the information that we had been taught was really true. One of the things that we continually hear today is that if we can just provide people with healthy food, medical care and

an education that they will become better people and all mankind will become better off because of this. You would think it should help, but we do not see a lot of evidence that confirms that teaching. Providing people with free food does not insure that they will be healthy. In fact, the more people are provided with free food, the more obese they become and the less healthy they are. Free medical care can lead to people being less responsible in taking preventive measure to be healthy, and better education without a moral foundation just leads to smarter criminals.

Timothy had been taught by people who loved him (his mother and grandmother as well as the apostle Paul) and they based their teachings on the infallible word of God. The wisdom of the word is able to lead us to salvation since the message originated from the Savior. The results of giving heed to the word of God are that we can learn the truth or godly precepts, we can see evidence where these truths are proven to be correct, we can discover ways to correct errors that have been made, and find guidance as to the direction our lives should take so that we are becoming more like the Savior. If we live in such a manner then we will be ready for whatever comes our way in life and be able to be useful to God who wants to work through us to accomplish the work of the kingdom of God.

Preach His Word – 4:1-4

¹ I solemnly charge *you* in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by His appearing and His kingdom: ² preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. ³ For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, ⁴ and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths. 2 Timothy 4:1-4 (NASB95)

As a pastor, Timothy had certain expectations he was to fulfill in carrying out a successful ministry. Each of us has a ministry or calling in Christ – there are things we are charged to do in general and because we have been individually gifted with spiritual gifts, there are specific ministries we have. We are expected to carry out our calling and ministry with the help of God through the power of the Holy Spirit working in our lives. Not only are we expected to do this, we will be held accountable for it. Even though we don't like to talk about it, Judgement Day is coming.

Timothy's call was to preach the word. Our call is certainly to share the word with others about the love of Jesus. Timothy's call was to reprove, rebuke and encourage. We certainly should have concern enough for others to warn them when we see them going in the wrong direction in life. If you saw someone driving toward a bridge that had been washed out by a flash flood, you could not avoid your responsibility to shout a warning to them to turn back. How can we be any less responsible when we see someone heading for an eternity in hell and not shout a warning (reprove and rebuke)?

We are certainly seeing a trend in our world of people turning away from the truth of God's word and rejecting God from our society. This trend makes it more incumbent on us to proclaim the truth at every opportunity. Just as Paul advised Timothy to make full proof of his ministry, likewise there should not be *any* doubt in anyone's mind we are Christians.

Has the time come when people will not endure sound doctrine? We can find evidence that this is the case in many groups who call themselves Christian. There are many groups that are still insistence on following the error that we have to do something to earn our salvation, it may be that you have to be baptized to be saved, or that you have to witness to people by going from house to house, or that you have to adhere to certain rules and regulations. Even in many of our churches that are seemingly sound, we have messages that contain many errors that cling to Old Testament mentality. A recent example is that of promoting the idea that we are to offer

our best to God. This is exactly what the sacrificial system of the Mosaic Law required. The first fruits of the flocks, herds, and crops were to be offered as sacrifices. Nowhere in the New Covenant are we asked to give only our **best**. The New Covenant involves total commitment to give our **all**. To purchase the pearl of great price, the person gave up all he had to acquire it. The Cross calls for our very lives in order to walk in the “way” that Jesus walked. Jesus gave His disciples a new commandment that they love one another even as He loved them – complete and total sacrifice. To call for anything less is to set the bar too low and leave the choice of what is best up to our own selfish interests.

Finish Well – 4:5-8

⁵ But you, be sober in all things, endure hardship, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶ For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷ I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith; ⁸ in the future there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day; and not only to me, but also to all who have loved His appearing. 2 Timothy 4:5-8 (NASB95)

Paul concluded his charge to Timothy with four additional areas on which he should focus. The first was to be level-headed (sober) and take a measured approach to situations that would come up in his ministry. The best way to handle problems is to first of all avoid panic and not do something just out of a knee-jerk reaction. It is also important to realize that many of the things we encounter are difficult and create what we refer to as hardships. We should always hope for the best but we also need to be prepared for the opposite alternative and expect the worst. Life is more manageable if we are prepared for hardships that we may encounter. These two approaches of being level-headed and prepared are the basis from which we are able to actually carry out the work we are called to do such as being an evangelist as was the case with Timothy. Sometimes the difference in being able to accomplish anything or just go from one crisis to the next is a commitment to be sober minded and prepared for difficulties.

One of the drives for Paul’s placing a lot of emphasis and importance on this charge to Timothy was the realization that he (Paul) was running out of time and if the work was going to continue that Timothy needed to get ready to take on more of a leadership role in Paul’s absence. Paul had come to the point in his life and ministry that he realized an urgency to get things ready and pass the mantle of leadership on to someone else. The someone else was going to be Timothy.

Paul could look back on the incidences of his life and realize that the outcome of it was that the gospel message was proclaimed in the highest courts in the world and that was part of his calling which had now been fulfilled. He also realized that the Lord was with him and had delivered him from a possible death sentence at that time. God still had important work for Paul to do even though he was in prison. We need to cultivate a mindset that recognizes the importance of continuing on with the mission and calling on our lives in spite of the difficult circumstances in which we may find ourselves. We must not allow our circumstances to divert us from what God has called us to do.

Paul stated in verse eight that the remaining thing was to receive the crown of righteousness that was already in store for him. Many commentaries assert that the crown would be given on the day the Lord will come in judgment. John Gill thought that the context could mean either at Paul’s death or at Judgment Day. The crown of righteousness may be the same as the crown of life mentioned in Revelations 2:10 or the crown of glory that we find in 1 Peter 5:4.

We should find it encouraging that crowns are laid up and waiting for all who “have loved the appearing of Christ.” The past tense renderings of this phrase in the NASB and NKJV

agree with A. T. Robertson's "New Testament Word Picture" and is the same wording in the Greek that Paul used in 2 Timothy 1:10 which speaks of the salvation that we enjoy that was revealed "by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ." Of course, the 1:10 passage is a clear reference to the Incarnation of God in Jesus or His first appearing. There does not appear to be anything in the wording of the 4:8 passage that would necessarily point to the second coming of Christ. However, the preconception that this means the second coming is so strong that some translations use extra words such as "those who look forward to his appearing" which would tend to reinforce the thinking that Paul was referring to the second epiphany rather than the Incarnation.

Faithfully enduring during difficult times is a theme that the early church needed to hear because of the coming persecution they would experience. We can look to their example and see that remaining faithful is not just an idealized or theoretical possibility, but that it is possible through the indwelling presence and power of the Holy Spirit in our lives.