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A PATHWAY FOR GODLY LIVING

2 Timothy 3:10-17

*(6 of 8 in a series through 2 Timothy)*

In the 1980s there arose a group of fifty so-called biblical scholars that formed a group called “the Jesus seminar.” They were actually the furthest thing from biblical scholars. They didn’t believe the Bible was God’s inerrant, inspired, and holy Word. In fact, they thought that instead of submitting themselves to the Bible, they should stand in judgment over it. And that’s exactly what they did. Their entire project was to cast judgment on the validity of the Bible as God’s Word.

The way they carried out their judgment over Scripture is that they would read a passage in the gospels or some isolated teaching from Jesus specifically, and they’d vote on whether or not they think this really happened or Jesus really said it. For example, when they read the passage where Jesus multiplied fish and bread and fed the 5,000, they voted (of course) that this really didn’t happen. Nor would they have affirmed the validity of verses like John 8:58 where Jesus declared, “Before Abraham was, I am.” Now, they were fine with Jesus saying things like, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (Matt 22:39). But, in their minds, he could not have made any declaration that made it look like he was God the Son, demanded exclusive worship from his followers, or performed any miracle. And, as anyone could have foreseen at the beginning of this project, the Jesus that was left after they dismissed much of his life and teaching ended up being a Jesus that looked a lot like them. He said the things they would have said and did the things they would have done. As many have noted, “God created us in his image, and we have graciously returned the favor.”

I haven’t been able to determine for certain what the Jesus seminar’s judgment was on Matthew 10:16, but it’s always struck me as one of the more amazing declarations that Jesus ever made. In the beginning of that verse, Jesus says, “Behold, I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” That’s the picture Jesus painted for his followers. Now, there’s a reason no sports team chooses a sheep as their mascot. They’re not predators; they’re prey. There are no nature shows in which you follow the sheep going out on a hunt. Nature shows that involve sheep conclude with the wolf carrying the sheep’s bleeding, dead body in its mouth.

And yet, as Jesus tells his followers that he is sending them into the world, this is the imagery he uses. He tells them, “I am sending you out as sheep in the midst of wolves.” And lest we think that we may be misunderstanding what Jesus meant by that imagery and that perhaps he’s stressing some keen strength of sheep that enable them to thrive in the midst of enemy-occupied territory, he quickly shatters our optimistic thinking by noting that we’ll be flogged, dragged before kings, delivered over to death by our own family members, and maligned. In other words, the painful image that first comes to your mind when Jesus says that he sends us out as sheep in the midst of wolves is the right one. It’s the one you’re supposed to think of.

And this raises a crucial question for us, namely, how do we then live? What do we do as Christians knowing that as Jesus sends us out into the world, this is the imagery he's chosen to represent what we're walking into? Thankfully, 2 Timothy 3:10-17 aids us in answering this question because Paul writes to Timothy, giving him insight concerning how to walk faithfully in a world that is opposed to what he believes, teaches, and does. What do we learn, then, from Paul's insights and instructions given to Timothy in this text? I want to note four exhortations that I think we can extract from this text as we seek to walk faithfully in this world. First, follow godly models.

### **Follow godly models**

The last place we left off, Paul had been describing to Timothy the nature of a specific group of unbelievers who will seek to worm their way into the lives of believers in order to lead them astray from what is true. He'd put them in the same category as Jannes and Jambres, the Egyptian magicians that challenged Moses and Aaron. Therefore, as Paul begins to describe to Timothy what he is like and needs to continue in, he notes a great difference between his young protégé and these false teachers. He writes, "You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me" (vv. 10-11).

Notice what Paul is saying here. He doesn't just say to Timothy, "But you've taught and lived much differently than these faithless false teachers." He's certainly affirming that. But he says that Timothy has taught and lived much differently than these false teachers *precisely because* Timothy has followed Paul's model. Timothy has simply taught what he saw and heard Paul teach. He's made his aim of life what he knew was Paul's aim of life. He's imitated Paul's faith, patience, love, and steadfastness. He's even tried to handle persecutions and sufferings the way he saw Paul handle them. This means that Timothy is living a faithful Christian life in the midst of this evil age in great measure because he chose to follow the godly example he had in Paul.

This should be instructive for us as well. Living the Christian life doesn't have to be about every new generation recreating the wheel. Take the faithful scriptural teaching you've heard from others and pass it on. And look at people who have lived faithfully in their homes, workplace, church, and the world, and follow their examples. Watch how men lovingly speak to their wives and wives respectfully speak to their husbands, and let it be a model to you. Find people who have faithfully endured hardship, sufferings, and persecutions, and seek to learn from their example. We've noted before that faithful discipleship demands that things are both taught and caught.

This is one of the reasons that though we have some settings, for example, where the youth-aged, college-aged, or more senior members get together with their specific age groups, most of what we do is inter-generational. We want younger people sitting and listening and observing the generations above them to see and hear how they are faithfully living out obedience to Christ so that they might follow their examples. So take advantage of these opportunities. And if

you're older, ensure that you're staying plugged in with opportunities like small group gatherings so that you're sharing the example of your life for others. Follow godly models. Second, recognize the situation in which we live.

### **Recognize the reality of the situation in which we live**

We've noted this a few times in our study through 2 Timothy, but that's because Paul repeats this point throughout. We need to recognize the situation and reality in which we live. At the end of his description of his life that Timothy was modeling his own life after, Paul mentions his persecutions and sufferings that happened in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and then adds, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived" (vv. 12-13).

Now, I think we could make an interpretive mistake here considering Paul's statement in verse 12 following the description of his own suffering and persecutions in verse 11. Here's what I mean. If you look in the book of Acts to see what persecutions Paul is referring to in these three towns, you'll find that it's quite brutal. In Acts 13-14, we read of Paul having a crowd yell at him and drive him out of Antioch so that he and Barnabas ended up going to Iconium. In Iconium a group decided that they'd try to stone them, but Paul and Barnabas got news of it and escaped, fleeing to Lystra. Then, at Lystra a group succeeded in stoning Paul, afterward dragging him out of the city and supposing that they had succeeded in killing him. Paul of course reminds us that they didn't actually kill him, as the Lord rescued him and spared his life, but nonetheless, the persecution was brutal.

Here then is the interpretive mistake we could make. Right after referencing that brutal persecution, Paul tells us that all who desire to live a godly life will be persecuted. Therefore, we might think that he means that everyone who desires to live a godly life will be persecuted *to the same degree that Paul was*. Perhaps you've thought that yourself and wondered, "What's wrong with me? Maybe I'm not living a godly life." Or maybe you thought Paul was exaggerating when he wrote this.

But I think it's better to recognize that persecution comes in many forms. Indeed, it can take the form of unbelievers chasing you out of a city, stoning you, and even killing you. But remember how Jesus spoke of persecution, saying in Matthew 5:10-11, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil things against you falsely on my account."

Do you see how Jesus speaks there? He's talking about his followers being persecuted, and he mentions us being "reviled" and having all kinds of evil things falsely spoken against us. That doesn't feel quite on par with being stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead. But, according to Jesus, there is a broad spectrum of things that fall under the heading of "persecution." And this is what we need to understand when Paul says that all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted. If you're not being physically assaulted for your

faith, it doesn't mean you're failing at living a godly life. And yet we need to understand that if we set out to believe and proclaim what Jesus teaches and live according to his commands, we will invite persecution (in some form) in our world.

The reason why this is the case is because, as Paul notes, evil people in our world will go from bad to worse. They'll seek to deceive others while they themselves are deceived. In other words, those who are trying to lead believers to go astray from following Jesus in what we believe and do won't necessarily think they're trying to deceive us because they themselves are deceived and may even think they're doing a good thing. But this is why if we hold our ground and stay true to Christ, we'll endure persecution. And Paul wants us to recognize that. We need to recognize the reality of the situation in which we live. This then leads to a third reality. We need to persevere in the faith.

### **Persevere in the faith**

After noting the certainty of persecution that was coming Timothy's way (as well as all who pursue godly living), Paul writes, "But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" (vv. 14-15). The key word here in Paul's exhortation is to "continue." He's telling Timothy to remain exactly where he is and not to be moved. In other words, he's telling Timothy to persevere.

Now, this makes sense as an exhortation in light of what Paul just said. I mean, think about the logic so far. Paul has said, "Timothy, you've followed my example, and that includes following my example of facing suffering and persecution. And be assured, this will continue in your life if indeed you keep pursuing godly living." You might anticipate Paul saying, "Therefore, feel free to back off a bit, take a break from trying to live a godly life, and pace yourself." But that's not what he says. He says, "So continue in it. Keep at it. Persevere in it." The Christian life isn't about trying to go a short, brief stretch where we pursue the Lord. It's about a lifetime of obedience. We fight the good fight. We run the race (think, marathon). We keep the faith.

And Paul reminds Timothy why he should continue in the godly life he's living. First, he should remember from whom he learned of Christ and his commands. This includes, of course, his grandmother, mother, and Paul himself. These aren't individuals who were untrustworthy but have proven themselves faithful and committed to the end. Paul will ultimately be martyred because he's so confident that what he's taught is true.

But the other reason Timothy should endure in obedience to Christ and his commands is because what he's believing and doing are in response to what he's been taught in Scripture. That's what Paul means by "the sacred writings." It's not just that Timothy's grandmother, mother, and Paul taught Timothy some good life lessons that they picked up along the way. What they've taught him is the Scripture, which the Lord gave us to make us wise to salvation as we place our faith in Christ.

Paul is eager to show that the gospel he's preached is simply the fulfillment of what the Old Testament taught. Jesus isn't something other than the words of God written in the Old Testament. He's everything those words pointed to. And, therefore, salvation is found only in him.

And so we should hear the same exhortation from Paul. Keep at it. Persevere in following Jesus. Does it bring about ridicule, attack, and possibly even physical harm and death? Yes, it does. But it's true. Those who have held to the faith before us and passed it down to us are models of faithfulness. Read Hebrews 11 again. There's a reason prior believers endured. What they believed and obeyed were the sacred writings which were able to make them wise to salvation and us as well.

So, you could walk away from Christ. You could quit believing his teaching, stop obeying his commands, and probably have many more in the world applaud what you're doing. But know this, if you do so, you're abandoning the only path given for salvation, which is through faith in the crucified and risen Christ alone. That's what the Scripture says. And because this life is so brief in comparison to eternity, don't walk away. Don't give in. Continue in what you have learned and firmly believed. And finally commit yourself to Scripture.

### **Commit yourself to Scripture**

Just as mentioning his persecutions earlier in this text led Paul to launch into the reality that persecution awaits everyone who desires to live a godly life, so mentioning the sacred writings leads Paul to finish this section speaking of the glorious benefits of God's Word. Paul writes in verses 16-17, "All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work." My exhortation in light of what those two verses say is that we all must commit ourselves to Scripture. But why? Let me try to highlight a few things that Paul says here, and I think the answer to that will become clear.

First, Scripture is God's very words. Paul says that Scripture is "breathed out by God." Some older translations use the word "inspired" to translate this term, and that's why we refer to the inspiration of Scripture. We'll sometimes in our services speak of the holy, inspired, and inerrant Word of God. Well, this right here is what we're referring to when we say that Scripture is "inspired." But the way the ESV translates it "breathed out" is a better translation and is less confusing in light of how we use the term "inspired" sometimes. We say something "inspired" me when it just energized.

For example, I had a friend when I was in college who decided to watch all four Rocky movies that had come out at that time in a single day. And after he was halfway through the third one, he jumped up and said, "I can't take it anymore. I've got to do something." And he ran outside in the middle of winter for a long run. The movies inspired him. But that's not what 2 Timothy 3:16

is saying. It's saying precisely what the ESV says. The words found in our Bibles are the very words of God. They were breathed out by him as if he were audibly proclaiming them.

Now, most Scripture didn't come about because an audible voice from heaven dictated these words. Rather, as Peter says, "Men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit" (2 Pet 1:21). The Spirit moved men and fashioned their desires so that the very words the biblical authors desired to write ended up being the very words God wanted them to write, and so we rightly say that these are the words of God. We can affirm B. B. Warfield's declaration: "To say, 'the Bible says' is to say, 'God says.'"

Moreover, lest we think that Paul thought his own words (and the rest of the writings of the NT) were somehow less than God's authoritative words, we should recognize that Paul repeatedly declares that his writings carry infallible authority. Even in this text, Paul commends Timothy for following Paul's teaching.

Paul and the other apostles knew that Jesus had promised when the Spirit came, he would lead them into all truth (Jn 14:25-26; 15:26-27; 16:12-14). And that very truth is what they saw themselves proclaiming in their writings. In fact, Paul is so clear in his mind about this that he commends the Thessalonians for accepting the word Paul had preached to them "not as the of men but as what is really is, the word of God" (1 Thess 2:13). And when he gave instructions to the Corinthians, he proclaimed that all of them needed to recognize that "the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord" (1 Cor 14:37). And, though I could say more, I'll refer to you our Sunday school class on the doctrine of Scripture. But suffice it to say, as Paul writes about the fact that the Bible is God's Words, he saw his own writings and those of the other NT writers as no less authoritative which is why the early church recognized the NT writings as God's self-attesting Word as well.

So, first we must commit ourselves to the Scripture because it is the very word (and words) of God. But also, it's profitable for us. Paul tells us that it's profitable for teaching, reproof, correction, and training in righteousness. The idea seems to be that the Scripture is profitable for helping us know what to believe and how to live. The ideas of teaching and reproof represent a positive and negative for teaching us what to believe. The Scripture positively teaches us what to believe as we read and accept it. And it corrects our false beliefs by reproofing us.

But it's also helpful in the same ways in regard to our conduct. Again, noting it negatively and positively, Paul tells us that it corrects us and trains us. That is, it exposes our sinful practices and corrects us, calling us to repent of them. And, as we obey its commands, it trains us to live righteous lives, so that we might be equipped for every good work the Lord puts before us.

Therefore, the Bible is not some small, peripheral thing in the Christian's life. It is God's very Word that he has given to show us what to believe and how to live. So commit your life to believing and obeying this book and never sway from it. This is most key for us as a church. We might say, "Well, is it more key than . . ." but whatever we finish that statement with is something

we know because we read it in God's Word. So commit your life to God's Word. It brings us salvation, teaches us everything we need to believe, and shows us how to live righteous lives.

How do we live faithfully in a world where we've been sent out as sheep in the midst of wolves? We follow godly models. Recognize the reality of the situation in which we live, acknowledging that we will endure persecution. There's simply no other way. But, in spite of that, continue in the faith. Persevere in obedience to Jesus. And commit to God's Word. It alone has the words of eternal life, telling us of Christ's glorious life, death, and resurrection for us. Let's thank him for that redeeming work for us now as we come to the table. Amen.