

“The Priority of Biblical Teaching” (part 2)

2 Timothy 3:10-17

I am very grateful to be back this morning. Thank you for praying for both me and Quentin as we were in Southeast Asia. We had a wonderful trip. We taught in a seminary setting, spending our time teaching pastors and church leaders...

I want to return to our series on what a disciple-making church really looks like. There are several core convictions that shape the church in the New Testament. If we are going to be a church that makes disciples, then these same convictions must grip our hearts and determine the way that we do ministry.

The first conviction that we considered is corporate prayer. We value prayer as a church, and everything that we do must be bathed in prayer. Without prayer, the church will be powerless and stagnant in its mission of making disciples. We believe in praying together as a church because without the Holy Spirit's power, we cannot accomplish God's mission. That is the main principle that we came away with. This must be in our DNA as a church.

The second conviction involves biblical preaching and teaching. In Acts 2:42, the Bible says that the early church devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching. It is a statement that implies an objective body of doctrine that the believers carefully followed. They gave themselves to doctrinal instruction. A couple of weeks ago, we took a look at what Paul wrote to Timothy in his second letter. I want to return to that passage for the remainder of our time this morning.

Taken together, there are some 32 different references to doctrine or teaching in the pastoral epistles. Paul was very specific in his instructions to the leaders of the church. They were to teach sound doctrine so that those they lead would be well grounded in the faith. Three things to point out from chapter 3:

1. The DIFFICULTY that is characteristic of the age (3:1-9)

Paul wanted Timothy to understand that his calling would not be easy. He was to be a guardian of truth in a world that has lost its way. The church in Ephesus was under a constant threat of being infiltrated with false teachers whose teaching would be contrary to the body of doctrine that had been handed down from the Spirit to the apostle Paul.

The apostolic body of doctrine that he had received from Paul, he was to pass on to some faithful men who could teach others also. To do this would mean that he share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ. He was to put the church in constant remembrance of the truth.

2 Timothy 2:15—“Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who has no need to be ashamed, rightly handling the word of truth.”

Such a task demanded that he flee youthful passions and the sins of the flesh. He must pursue righteousness, faith, love, and peace. He must not become sidetracked with foolish controversies that would get both him as well as the church off in a ditch.

2 Timothy 2:24-26—“And the Lord’s servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses...”

Timothy’s calling was to the truth. He was set apart for the truth, he was instructed in the truth, he was to teach truth.

This calling would not be easy because he was to faithfully live it out in a corrupt culture that is in opposition to God's truth. Paul's words to Timothy in chapter 3 call attention to this as he mentions some 19 characteristics that will be true of people in the last days:

- People will be depraved in what they do
- People will be deceived in what they believe
- People will be disguised in what they are
- People will be dangerous in what they teach

2. The DILIGENCE that is required of the church (3:10-15)

“You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, may 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. 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. 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 or salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.”

Notice how verse 10 begins—“You, however...” It is almost as if Paul is saying to young Timothy, “Perilous times will come when false teachers will abound and will behave in this way that I’ve just described. But you, Timothy, you must be different because you are different.” He uses the verb ‘followed’ to describe just how different Timothy was. The verb is in the aorist tense, which refers to an

action at a specific point of time in the past. Unlike false teachers who were not grounded in the truth, Paul tells Timothy that he was different because he had been well established in the faith.

An example

Though Timothy would face difficulty as a gospel minister living in increasingly perilous times, he could be personally encouraged by Paul's own example. Unlike the false teachers being describe earlier in the chapter, the apostle Paul had nothing to hide. His motives were pure. His example was worth emulating.

1 Corinthians 11:1 — “**Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ.**” (word is ‘mimetes’ or mimic)

Is that something you can call on others to do? Paul's manner of life backed up what he preached. He was a servant, not a celebrity. You will notice in verses 10-11 that Paul is drawing out lessons from his own life for the benefit of his younger disciple. What did Timothy see when he lived up close and personal with the apostle?

Notice first that he was an example through what he did:

- **Teaching**—this refers to the gospel message that he had faithfully proclaimed; word for doctrine
- **Conduct**—the guiding principles of his life that were demonstrated through his own personal behavior; this refers to Paul's total manner of lifestyle
- **Aim in life**—the purpose that he lived for was to show undivided loyalty and devotion to Jesus Christ; ‘prothesis’

- **Faith**—confidence in God despite opposition; he was unswerving in his purpose because of his faith in Christ
- **Patience**—refers to forbearance toward people and circumstances
- **Love**—what led him to offer his own life
- **Steadfastness**—an attitude of perseverance that kept him from discouragement under trying circumstances

In a world that had lost its way, Paul devoted himself to preaching and teaching the truth. He exposed the false ideas of his day, contending with the pagan world, urging his hearers to examine God’s Word and believe the gospel of Christ. Here at the close of chapter 3, it is as if he is saying to young Timothy, “In a world that is collapsing and falling apart, you need to remember the truth that you heard from me and saw illustrated in my life.”

We live in a world that is literally crumbling under the weight of false ideas that lead to social chaos. And the only hope for our world is the truth that God has revealed in His Word. That’s why we need to hear it over and over again, immerse ourselves in it, that we may obey it.

Paul was an example in what he did. Notice he was also an example through what he faced:

- **Persecutions**—what he faced from others who opposed his message
- **Sufferings**—pain that was the result of persecutions

If you want just a small taste of what Paul faced in his own ministry, read 1 Corinthians 11...

Both actively and passively, both in what he did and through what he had faced, Paul was an example that Timothy could follow.

An expectation

“Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.”

In a world that is corrupted by sin, God’s servants can expect persecution and suffering. Even though this is true, it must not keep us from being committed to God’s truth.

Paul knew how to stand firm in times of pressure. He understood that the secret of his strength was the presence of God. The Lord was with him, working through all the events of his life, providing him with the strength he needed so that he could accomplish the mission he had received from the Lord. We need this same level of awareness in our lives as well.

Psalm 34:19—“Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all.”

Sometimes the Lord delivers His servants from death, while at other times He delivers His servants through death. But at all times, the Lord delivers His servants!

Paul wants Timothy to know that evil will only grow in its intensity. This means suffering for those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus. So what is he to do?

An exhortation

He says, “Timothy, you must continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.” He uses a very important word here to emphasize Timothy’s responsibility.

Timothy was to ‘continue’ in what he had learned and had become convinced of. Verse 15 says that from childhood, literally ‘infancy,’ he had been acquainted with the sacred writings. Now, there is only one way for someone to be acquainted with something from infancy. Timothy had to have someone who introduced him to the truth.

2 Timothy 1:5—“I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.”

The word ‘continue’ there in verse 14 means to abide by. It is the same word used in John 15 where Jesus referred to Himself as the vine and His followers as the branches.

John 15:5—“I am the vine; you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.”

It is the same word that Jesus uses earlier in John:

John 8:31-32—“If you abide in my word, you are truly my disciples, and you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.”

As the people of God, we must be diligent in our approach to the Word of God. We are to ‘continue’ in what we know to be true, even in the midst of a culture that finds much of our faith to be reprehensible. Biblical Christianity is counter

cultural. We will face the pressure to conform to cultural dictates, yet just like Timothy, we must ‘continue’ in what we’ve been taught in Scripture.

3. The DYNAMIC that is true of the Scriptures (3:16-17)

“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.”

Timothy was to continue in what he had learned and had firmly believed, in the holy Scriptures that made him wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ.

When Paul refers to ‘all Scripture,’ he is referring to both the Old Testament scriptures as well as the writings of the apostles in the New Testament. What he is writing to Timothy here is authoritative scripture. These two verses are among the most important in the entire Bible as they reveal important truth about the nature of God’s revealed Word to us.

What you believe about the Bible influences everything you believe and affects every decision that you make in life. That’s why we are to saturate our minds with the truth of God’s Word. Right thinking in a fallen world demands this.

John Wesley—*“I am a creature of a day, passing through life as an arrow through the air. I am a spirit come from God, and returning to God: just hovering over the great gulf; till, a few moments hence, I am no more seen; I drop into an unchangeable eternity! I want to know one thing: the way to heaven; how to land safe on that happy shore. God himself has condescended to teach the way; for this very end He came from heaven. He hath written it down in a book. O give me that book! At any price, give me the book of God!”*

Scripture is the very words of God, revealing to us the mind of God, pointing us to faith in the Son of God.

Inspiration

What Paul says is true of Scripture cannot be said about anything else that has been written—Scripture is inspired by God. When we refer to the inspiration of Scripture, we mean something totally different than to say that an author was inspired to write something, or a painter was inspired to paint something. To say that God's Word is inspired is to say that it is literally 'breathed out' by the Holy Spirit. It has a supernatural dynamic.

Authority

Notice that Paul tells Timothy that Scripture is inspired and it is useful or profitable. The authoritative purpose of Scripture is fourfold:

- **Teaching**—what's right

The word here is 'didaskalia' and refers to a crucial element in the believer's growth toward maturity. As a Christian, you are in need of sound teaching from God's Word if you are to grow as Christ's disciple.

Colossians 1:28-29—“Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.”

- **Reproof**—what's not right

The idea behind this word is that of the Holy Spirit using the Word of God to reveal the truth of sin in our lives. Scripture is authoritative in the way that it reveals to us what is right as well as what is not right.

- **Correction**—how to get right

The word means ‘restoration’ or ‘reformation.’ Whereas reproof reveals our sinfulness, correction shows us how to straighten out what we’ve been getting wrong.

- **Training in righteousness**—how to stay right

The word here is based on the idea of guiding a child to adulthood. Parents have the responsibility of bringing their children to a place of maturity. Pointing out what is wrong is certainly a part of the process, but it doesn’t stop there. It would be like trying to drive by looking in the rearview mirror. Used here, the idea is that Scripture trains us to align our behavior so that it matches our new and righteous identity in Jesus Christ. It doesn’t give us righteousness; rather, it points us to the righteousness that is only found through faith in Christ. (illus. of Pharisees)

John 5:39—“You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about Me.”

In addition to Scripture’s inspiration and authority, notice also that Paul mentions:

Sufficiency

Scripture is inspired, it is authoritative, and it is sufficient for life and ministry in both the world and the church. It is sufficient in this way—*“that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.”*

“Equipped” — *a passive participle and strongly suggests this equipping is by divine activity*

In an increasingly post-Christian culture, it will become more difficult for us to faithfully live out our witness for Christ. But no matter what the temperature of the culture around us may be, we must be diligent to ‘continue’ in what we know to be true. In Scripture, we have what we need in order to do what we must do as the church.

In what way would the man of God be equipped? Look at the first few verses of chapter 4. Paul says, “Timothy, you have everything you need to do what you've been called to do in the inspired, authoritative, sufficient Word of God. So preach it! Be ready in season and out of season.” The verb ‘be ready’ carries the idea of standing over something, such as a guard who stands over a city or something he has been entrusted to protect. It required careful diligence.

To be ready in season and out of season means that Timothy was ready to preach the Word at all times. He was to be ready to preach the Word when it was in style and when it was out of style, when it was convenient and when it was inconvenient, when it was early and when it was late, when the crowds were large and when the crowds were few.

4:2—“Preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching.”

To ‘reprove’ means to convince or persuade someone of that which is true. It conveys the idea of replacing incorrect ideas with correct ideas, a false way of thinking with a true way of thinking.

The word 'rebuke' is similar, but it takes things a step further. The intended result of reproof is to bring about conviction in a person's heart. The goal of rebuking a person is humility that leads to repentance.

The word 'exhort' means to come alongside of someone else to provide help and instruction. One of the names of the Holy Spirit comes from this verb (parakaleo).

The phrase 'with complete patience and teaching' applies to all five commands. Timothy was to be patient and full of grace as he gave himself to the task of preaching and teaching. His work would not be easy, especially when you consider what Paul says he could anticipate.

4:3-4—“For the time is coming when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths.”

“Endure” — *to be patient with*

Paul is using somewhat of a play on words here. Timothy must be patient in his ministry of preaching and teaching because the time would come when people would not be patient with the truth. The idea is that people will find the truth to be offensive, hard to endure, and they will refuse to listen to it. Their natural disposition is set against the truth. So what will they do?

To begin with, he says that they will surround themselves with people who will only tell them what their sinful hearts already want to hear. They will reject those who preach the Bible as it was written and who take its words at face value. In

their place, they will accumulate teachers for themselves who downplay sin, who sugarcoat their words, and give people the ‘boost’ they need for the week ahead.

Next, they will turn away from listening to the truth and will wander off into myths.

What are myths?

“Myths” — *false narratives that people turn to in order to rationalize certain behaviors*

There are a number of these floating around today:

- the myth of moral relativism
- the myth of secular humanism
- the myth of raw materialism

As a pastor, I don’t want us to be a church that merely claims to believe the truth of the Bible. Talk is cheap. Instead, I long for us to be a church that lives and obeys the truth. I don’t want to put a question mark where God puts a period. That’s why I am of the deep conviction that my primary responsibility whenever I enter this pulpit is expository preaching and teaching. The kind that gets to the meaning of the text and seeks to bring it to bear on the lives of God’s people in a practical, applicable way. The reason is that this is the way that we as believers are thoroughly equipped for every good work.

Why must we make preaching and teaching the Bible a big deal at Green Street? Not because it is an end itself, but because it is a means to an end. *Because we believe that it is the means by which lives are transformed as people meet the living Christ in the pages of His written Word.* Your greatest need is to be transformed.

Romans 12:2—“Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect.”

Within the pages of Scripture, God has revealed what Paul refers to as His “secret wisdom” (see 1 Cor. 2:7-10). This is why it is so important that we understand the Bible. If we go to God’s Word and seek His wisdom for our lives, found only in a relationship with Christ, then our lives and thinking will be radically changed. Whenever the truth revealed in the Bible has been introduced to society, it always leads to changed lives.

An illustration of this can be seen in the story of mutiny aboard the H.M.S. Bounty in April of 1789. That historical incident has been the subject of a novel as well as a couple of movies, “Mutiny on the Bounty.” A group of British sailors, led by first mate Fletcher Christian, mutinied and seized control of a ship used by the Royal Navy to transport breadfruit plants from islands in the South Pacific. The mutineers cast the captain and eighteen other men adrift in a small boat, and then sailed to Pitcairn Island. They sank the Bounty in the bay and then started building a community on the island. Fletcher Christian was the leader of the community, and they treated the island natives as servants. They made a crude distillery and began brewing whiskey. Very soon, the mutineers were drinking all the time, fighting, and murdering each other.

One of the men, Alexander Smith, found a Bible in a trunk he had salvaged before the Bounty was sunk. As he began to read it, he gave his life to Christ and his life was transformed. He then taught the Scriptures to others on the island, and the entire society on Pitcairn Island was changed. To this day, Christianity in the South Pacific can trace its roots to his influence. That is the transforming

power of the Word of God. It has happened over and over again throughout the centuries of time. The gospel of Jesus Christ changes lives!

To be a church that makes disciples demands that we prioritize biblical teaching. The living Word of God goes to work in our lives as we listen to it proclaimed, as we study it, memorize it, and obey it.

While the Scriptures are indeed powerful, they are not magical. I think that sometimes we're guilty of treating the Bible like some kind of good luck charm. This book consists of paper, ink, and the cover that binds it together. Your Bible will not change your life by sitting on your coffee table or the backseat of your car. You must read it, study it, meditate on it, and carefully listen to it preached in order for its truths to permeate your life.

What might this look like in a practical way in our lives? It means that we prioritize the opportunities for instruction in the Word—we regularly take in the Word through reading, we constantly hear the Word as it is proclaimed, and we faithfully obey the Word in our lives.

*Holy words long preserved
for our walk in this world,
They resound with God's own heart
O, let the ancient words impart.*

*Words of life, words of hope
give us strength, help us cope
In this world, where e'er we roam,
ancient words will guide us home.*

Ancient words ever true,

*Changing me, changing you.
We have come with open hearts,
O, let the ancient words impart.*

*Holy words of our faith
handed down to this age,
Came to us through sacrifice
O, heed the precious words of Christ!*