

2 Timothy 3:10-17

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In contrast to the evil way men will behave in the last days, Paul points to himself as an example for Timothy to follow. Timothy spent years being mentored by Paul on missionary journeys. He knows of the many ways Paul suffered for Jesus, because all who walk with Jesus will be persecuted, yet the Lord rescues us and sustains us. Timothy does not need to look only at Paul for an example to imitate; he has known the scriptures since he was a boy. The scriptures are God's word, given from the highest authority, and they can teach, correct, and equip all people to become who God made us to be.

Paul appears to shift topics, using the transition *Now*. Paul says *Now you followed my teaching, conduct, purpose, faith, patience, love, perseverance, 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!*

In this list, Paul sets forth characteristics that Timothy would have observed in Paul while they ministered together on their journeys. It seems that this is somewhat of a list of opposites to the list of self-serving characteristics in verses 2-5 that would increasingly typify worldly culture in the last days:

- *Teaching*
 - This word can be translated “doctrine” and refers to consistent teaching of what is true and right
 - This contrasts with the list of worldly characteristics, and is the opposite to those who are always learning but never coming to the knowledge of the truth (3:7)
 - Paul has consistently taught what is true, in the face of overwhelming
- *Conduct*
 - This could also be translated “leadership.” Paul has maintained his focus on serving the mission of serving others by sharing with them the eternal truths of the gospel, and the real path to discover their true self-interest.
 - This would be a counter to all the self-serving characteristics of the world, listed in 3:2-5. True leadership is always mission-focused.
- *Purpose*
 - Paul has remained mission-focused, intent on serving Christ by spreading the truth of His word, in spite of
 - Paul has endured great suffering because he is serving a mission rather than his own appetites.
 - This again is the opposite of the appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics of 3:2-5.
- *Faith*
 - Paul's faith has not wavered that his true self-interest is best served by following the example of Jesus, who suffered and died in obedience to His Father (2:5-10).

- This is the opposite of all the appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics of 3:2-5.
- *Patience*
 - This can also be translated perseverance or endurance.
 - In spite of resistance, in spite of *persecutions*, in spite of difficulties and pain, Paul has continued to serve the Gentiles in obedience to Christ, even in the face of their rejection.
 - In doing this, Paul is following the example of Christ. This is the opposite of all the appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics of 3:2-5.
- *Love*
 - This is the Greek word “agape” which is making choices based on good values to serve a true mission. In Paul’s case, the mission is to serve others by leading them into the truth of God’s word, which is a light to lead us from darkness and self-destruction, and into the light of our true self-interest, which comes through the obedience of faith.
 - Paul has not served self, but the mission of God. This is the opposite of all the appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics of 3:2-5.
- *Perseverance*
 - This word can also be translated “patience.” So it seems that by including this word, in addition to the word translated “patience,” Paul is emphasizing enduring to the finish line of life.
 - This fits with the emphasis of this letter. As Paul stated in 2:12, we only gain the greatest reward of life, to reign with Christ, if we endure in living faithfully.
 - It is difficult to endure and persevere in godly living, while opposing the culture of the world, as Paul described in his list of appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics of 3:2-5. But we must choose one or the other.
- *Persecutions*
 - The reason endurance is needed, is that if you oppose the world, and its appetite-serving, self-absorbed worldly characteristics (3:2-5), there will be a terrible price to pay. We will find at the judgment seat of Christ that we have wasted our time on earth, and squandered the rewards of our inheritance.

Paul emphasizes overtly the reality of *persecutions*, saying *Indeed, all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will be persecuted*. Even the *desire* to follow God, just trying to living godly brings persecution from the world. The world is in darkness, and hates the light. Self-serving people do not want to hear truth, and strike out against it. The world rejects all who will not serve its ways. Many times that rejection also involves loss.

Paul provides some examples of the persecutions he has endured, noting in particular the persecutions that *happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium and at Lystra*. He might have noted these due to the particularly vicious nature of those persecutions. At *Lystra*, Paul was stoned, and thought to be dead (Acts 14:19). He in fact might have been dead, and raised back to life. In any event, his recovery was a miracle. It could have been at this time that Paul saw the heavenly vision of which he was not allowed to speak (2 Corinthians 12:2). This verse speaks of this event that occurred in Lystra.

“But Jews came [to Lystra] from Antioch and Iconium, and having won over the crowds, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. But while the disciples stood around him, he got up and entered the city.”
(Acts 14:19-20)

The cities of *Antioch*, *Iconium* and *Lystra* were cities where Paul and Barnabas ministered on Paul’s first missionary journey (Acts 13:13-14). Timothy was from Galatia, and joined Paul on his second missionary journey (Acts 16:1-3), so he would not have seen this in person. But he still knew these things that had *happened* to Paul. These were all *persecutions* that Paul *endured*. He never wavered. Furthermore, *out of them all the Lord rescued* him.

If the Lord rescued Paul from being stoned, and from a prison in Philippi, then He could certainly rescue Paul from a Roman prison. The Lord rescued Paul from prison in Philippi with a great earthquake (Acts 16:25-26). God could do it again. But as Paul will soon note, in this instance Paul’s life is being offered to God through becoming a martyr. Paul’s rescue will be final this time. Paul will be delivered from this body of death, and brought into the presence of Jesus. He will be delivered from the struggle against the flesh, and receive a crown of righteousness (2 Timothy 4:8). The Lord will rescue Paul a different way this time, by rescuing him from the trials of this life, to a great reward in heaven.

Paul states that in the cycles of history, the *evil men and impostors will proceed from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived*. Things will get progressively worse, until the man of sin appears, and the abomination of desolation occurs, as was spoken of in Daniel, at the end of this age (Matthew 24:15; 2 Thessalonians 2:1-4). The word translated *impostors* could also be translated as “seducers” or “deceivers.” This likely refers back to the list of characteristics of men in verses 1-5 of chapter 3, the behaviors of men who are *evil* and *impostors*. Those who have a “form of godliness” but without the power of the Spirit. They are self-oriented exploiters. Some will be wolves among the flock, which is the church of God.

This will be. But Paul admonishes Timothy to focus on controlling the things he has been given to steward, rather than trying to control things outside his power to choose. People will be bad, that is their choice. We cannot control them through worry. If we try to control them through manipulation, we will be on a path to become like them. Rather, Paul desires Timothy instead to *continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them*. Timothy can’t keep evil men from making evil choices. He can’t keep deceivers from being duplicitous. But he can make a daily choice to *continue in the things* that he has *learned* from Paul.

Timothy was *convinced* by Paul’s teaching. But he still lives in the world. And the world constantly presses upon each person still living in the world to bow to its ways. So it takes an ongoing effort to *continue* walking with a perspective that is true, serving a God-focused mission. Part of Timothy’s confidence in continuing *in the things* he has *learned*, is that he knows *from whom he has learned them*—namely Paul. The Bible teaches us not to judge others, with a notable exception: we are to judge the fruits of teachers, and if their lives don’t line up with what they teach, then we are not to listen to them. Paul is bold here, telling Timothy “You saw firsthand that I do what I say, so you can have confidence that what I say is true.” This

shows the importance of holding teachers accountable by only following those whose lives are good examples to follow.

But it is not only Paul's teaching that Timothy is to follow. Paul's teaching is trustworthy. But Timothy has *from childhood...known the sacred writings which are able to give [him] the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus*. Paul's teaching is sound. But that is because Paul's teaching comes from the Bible. Timothy has an even greater authority than Paul to rely upon: the scriptures.

Timothy has learned the scriptures *from childhood*. Although his father was Greek, Timothy's mother and grandmother were Jewish, and taught him the Bible (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5). This is likely a reason Paul was eager to take Timothy with him on their missionary journey. He was well-versed in the scriptures, and cross-cultural, having both a Jewish as well as Gentile heritage.

We can trust the Bible; all of it. This is because:

All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; so that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

The fact that *all scripture is inspired by God* means that every single bit of the Bible is God's word, and has benefit to us. Paul and Timothy's training would have been in the Old Testament scriptures. But the Old Testament's message is the same as the New. They both tell the story of humanity, and God's redemption through His Son (Matthew 26:56; Luke 24:44-45). Much of the New Testament is a commentary on the Old. 1 Corinthians 10:11 tells us that the events of the Old Testament were written down for us to learn from, so we can learn from the mistakes of others, rather than having to make the same mistakes ourselves.

God gave us His scripture with the intent for it to be *profitable* for us. It is *profitable for teaching* us how to live life effectively. How to get the most out of life. The world is full of deception. God's word equips us to avoid the deception, and know what is actually true. But in order for God's word to be *profitable* for us, it is necessary for us to accept its *teaching*. And the *teaching* of the Bible is for *reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness*.

The Bible's purpose is to help us change. To shed what is untrue and unhelpful, and replace it with what is true, and helpful. Accordingly the scriptures won't really be *profitable* for us unless we go to the Bible hoping to learn what is true, rather than trying to justify what we want to be true. The *teaching* of the Bible is for the purpose of:

- *Reproof* – the root of this word is “to prove what is true.” The Bible is a source that tells us what is true and what is not. If we come to the scripture looking for verses to support what we already think, we are not allowing it to be *profitable* to our lives.
- *Correction* – this can also be translated “doctrine” or “teaching.” All these words indicate that we need to find out what we should be doing, and change from what we are currently doing. Again, for the Bible to be fully *profitable* to us, we should come to it as a “life coach” expecting to discover a better way to live.

- *Training in righteousness* – The word translated *righteousness* is the Greek word “dikaiosune.” It means all parts working in harmony toward a common mission, like a well-functioning body. The Bible trains us how to serve a mission, and live and work in harmony with others.

We should approach the Bible asking “What perspectives do I have that need *correction*?” “What behaviors am I practicing that need *reproof*?” What *training* do I need, so I can learn to live in *righteousness*?

In 2 Timothy 2:22 the word translated *righteousness* (“dikaiosune”) was contrasted with “youthful lusts” as its opposite. Youthful lust is “all about me, and what I want.” *Righteousness* is all about serving a mission through contributing our gifts. In 2 Timothy 4:8, Paul will tell us that there is a “crown of righteousness” laid up for him in heaven, as there will be for any believer who loves His appearing. In other words, if we live in such a way that we hope our Master shows up and sees us being faithful, then we will also receive the reward of this crown.

The word “dikaiosune” (*righteousness*) appears in the book of Romans thirty six times, because a major purpose of Romans is to answer the question “What is ‘dikaiosune’ and how is it gained?” Paul’s answer is twofold: a) we get “dikaiosune” in the sight of God given to us as a free gift, on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ, apart from our deeds, and b) we gain the experience and reward of “dikaiosune” by faithful obedience to Christ through the walking in the power of the Spirit. Paul explains that the experience of “dikaiosune” looks like a body, with each member doing what it does best to serve whatever the head instructs the body to do (Romans 12). There is only one Head of the Body of Christ, and that is Jesus Himself (1 Corinthians 12:12).

We are all born physically with a tendency toward selfishness, and have to learn to share and get along with others. When we are born again spiritually, we are given the indwelling Spirit of God, a supernatural power to allow us to go beyond cooperation, and learn to walk in love, the love of choosing to walk in truth to benefit others. This takes an immense amount of change. It requires *training*. It requires *reproof*. The word *reproof* carries with it the idea of being convicted, and convinced of things unseen. The word of God is like a personal trainer, helping us improve, like an elite athlete training for the Olympics in order to win the prize of life (2 Timothy 2:5).

The *training* we need is to learn to live in *righteousness*. To live as a member of the Body, employing our gifts in obedience to the Head, which is Christ. Serving the other members, following the Head. Allowing the wind of the Spirit of God to stir up the embers of the fire of our zeal to be who He created us to become (see 2 Timothy 1:6). The purpose is *that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work*. The goal is not just to be born. The goal is to grow up, and *be adequate, equipped for every good work*. The goal of the Christian life is to accomplish great things in the service of Christ.

We are born into being a child of God simply by having sufficient faith to look on Jesus, hoping to be delivered from spiritual death from the poison of sin (John 3:14-15). That comes by faith, works plays no part (Ephesians 2:8-9). Just as with physical birth, where the choices and works of the baby plays no part in his or her birth.

But once the little human baby is born, who they become, and what they gain in life will be enormously shaped by the choices they make. Their life will be defined by their actions. The same is true with our spiritual life. *All Scripture* is a means to gain the knowledge to be *equipped* to know how to do *every good work* God desires us to do. God made each person for a reason. Each person has a gifting, and a stewardship of those gifts. God has prepared works for each person, specially for them to perform (Ephesians 2:10). God has given *all scripture* to provide training in how to become all God made us to be.

Timothy has Paul's example, and all the teaching he gained from Paul. But even more importantly Timothy has *all the Scripture*. He can read *all scripture* and receive the *training*, the *reproof*, and the *correction* needed to do *every good work* for which he was appointed. In 2 Timothy 2:15, Paul exhorted Timothy to be "accurately handling the word of truth," which is to exhort Timothy to teach the Bible correctly. Here, Paul exhorts Timothy to also ensure that he is applying the Bible to his own life. Timothy does not want to become like one of those men who holds "to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power" (2 Timothy 3:5).

And Paul does not want Timothy to be one who teaches, but himself is "always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth" (2 Timothy 3:7) because he didn't accept the Word of God in the *Scriptures* as *reproof, correction and training*. Even though Timothy has been a great ministry partner, he needs to continue to grow in *training in righteousness*; as humans we are either growing or deteriorating. We are either gaining in fitness, or our muscles atrophy. Solomon was the wisest man on earth, and ended his life in sin, not following his own advice. As Paul stated in 2 Timothy 2:12, it is only if we endure in serving God with the *good work* God has appointed for us that we receive the immense reward of sharing Christ's reign with Him, which is the ultimate fulfillment of all we were created to do (Psalm 8).

Biblical Text

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. 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.