

“Follow the Example of Suffering by the Word: Two Encouragements to Stand in An Evil Day”

Geist Community Church

2021-05-16

2 Timothy 3:11-16

Kevin McClure

Our Lord says in Luke 6:22 “Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! He also says in John 15:18 “If the world hates you, know that it has hated me before it hated you.

Friends, year by year the public opposition to God’s Word and His people is growing in our context. The Sexual Revolution is being weaponized against Christian bakers and photographers in order to put them out of business. A man in the UK was recently arrested for preaching on Romans 1. If you speak out about the sin of homosexuality and transgenderism, then you are liable to be fired from your job, or censored from your social media, or slandered by your peers. What type of world will we and our children live in ten or twenty years from now? And why should they or you or anyone hold on to an old book if it brings such opposition? Why not swim with the tide of culture and get with the program and turn our backs on God’s Word? Our answer to this question comes in two reasons that we will look at in the two points of our passage today.

I invite you to turn with me to 2 Timothy 3:10-17. It’s on Page 996 if you use one of the seatback bibles. Children and students, I have a job for you: I want you to see if you can pick out the one word that Paul emphasizes three times in this passage. Lets read the text.

2Tim. 3:10 You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, 11 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. 12 Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, 13 while evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. 14 But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it 15 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. 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work. [Pray]

We have two points today:

1. The Footsteps of the Saints

2. The Nature of God’s Word

1. The Footsteps of the Saints

Now Paul has spent the past nine verses in chapter 3 describing these very spiritual but very ungodly—verse 5 says that they have “the appearance of godliness, but [they] deny[] its power.” But Timothy is not like that, and verse 10 tells us one of the reasons why: because he has *followed* Paul. Paul lists nine attributes that Timothy has followed him in, many of which are the exact opposite of verses 1-9.

Here is one of the great passages on Christian discipleship in the Bible. Notice how these attributes that Timothy has followed imply a personal knowledge of Paul. Timothy saw Paul’s Teaching: What he taught

about the whole counsel of God He saw his Conduct: how he lived with a consistency of integrity and uprightness He saw his Aim in life: how Paul lived for the glory of God He saw his Faith: How he trusted in Christ for his salvation and also for strength in weakness He saw his Patience: how he loved difficult people over the long haul He saw his Love: How Paul loved God and loved people He saw his Steadfastness: How Paul Persevered through so many persecutions and sufferings.

Friends, many of you already know Paul's secret of discipleship. Discipleship is basically following Jesus, and inviting others around you to follow him like you do. But it requires an intentionality to open up your life to others and to invite them in. I think in a church like ours that highly values the right teaching/preaching of the word that we can be tempted to view discipleship primarily through the lens of teaching. Discipleship is not less than that, but it is so much more.

Take this list and put your name in there in front of these nine characteristics. Can you call people to follow your Teaching, Conduct, Aim in life, Faith, Patience, Love, Steadfastness, Persecutions, and Sufferings? If there's any area of your life that is not worthy of imitation, this is an area for you to pray that God would grow you in. And on the other side of the coin, if you are a Christian who wants to grow in Jesus, Find the person you want to be like, and spend time with them. Get meals with them. Watch them. Ask them questions. You will learn how to follow Jesus better as you follow in their footsteps.

But of all these aspects of discipleship, there's one that Paul focuses on more than all the others. Do you see it? It's persecution. We know this is Paul's great focus because he mentions it three times in [verse 11-12](#). Paul is alluding in [verse 11](#) to events that happened in [Acts 13-14](#) at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra. Now we know from [Acts 16:1](#) that Lystra was Timothy's hometown. And it's in this very same city that Paul preached the gospel in [Acts 14](#). And it's also in this very city, [Acts 14:19](#) tells us, where a religious mob picked up rocks to hurl at Paul with the hope of murdering him. And so they did. And when Paul was so bloodied and bruised and unconscious that they concluded he was dead, they dragged his body outside the city and left it there to rot in the open. But God gave Paul a resurrection of sorts.¹ He wasn't dead. And as Paul reflects on how he endured these persecutions in [2 Tim 3:11](#), he says, "yet from them all the Lord rescued me." Paul is alluding here to [Psalm . 34:19](#) "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers [—or rescues—]him out of them all." (The word for deliver and rescue is the same in the Greek.)

This is the psalm that was read this morning, and it is one of the psalms that speaks of a righteous sufferer. It ultimately is used to describe Jesus on the Cross in [John 19:36](#); the verse right afterward speaks of none of his bones being broken. So Paul is using a psalm that speaks about the suffering of Jesus in order to help understand his own life. Paul is setting expectations here. The Christian life is a Christ-following life: it's a life of suffering before glory. As Christians, we follow our savior in a life of persecution and opposition, and our great reward comes at the end of life. But in some cases, God chooses to preserve his people through physical persecution, as Paul speaks of. In Paul's case it is a physical rescue. Jesus had sovereign purposes for sparing Paul's life. So when the rocks were flying through the air, Jesus sovereignly ordained their path such that none would strike a fatal blow. When Paul was shipwrecked three times at sea, Jesus ordained that he would not drown. Paul is following his savior in suffering, and it's a path that Timothy is following Paul in.

¹ Throughout the book of Acts many events in Paul's life mirror that of Christ: They set their face to go to Jerusalem, are welcomed, go to the temple, are opposed by Sadducees, slapped by a high priest, both have four quasi trials, both are delivered, both have resurrection appearances, and so forth. The instance in [Acts 14:19](#) is no different: both Paul and Jesus are unjustly executed at the instigation of Jews, and both are brought outside the city, and both are raised (same Greek verb in [Luke 24:46](#) & [Acts 14:20](#)).

Can you imagine what the effect watching and hearing about this suffering had on young Timothy? It's easy to endure the slander of false teachers when you remember that your mentor endured their stones. It's easy to walk a path of persecution when you see the footsteps of your discipler going past yours all the way to glory. And in fact, right past the narrow gate is this hard path of suffering and opposition that every Christian must walk on the way to heaven. Look with me at verse 12, "Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted," Parents, this is the verse to put on your son or daughter's graduation coffee mug gift! If you are a Christian, you must have this expectation for your life, or else you may fall away when you are repeatedly and publicly shamed for identifying with this Rabbi from Nazareth. The footsteps of Jesus go ahead of you in this path of suffering. Jesus said in John 15 basically, "if they hate you, know that that hated me first." This is part of God's wonderful plan for your life!

But why do so many people persecute Christians specifically? I'll let you in on a little secret from John 3:20. "everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his works should be exposed" If you are a Christian who walks in integrity and uprightness, your lifestyle is convicting and uncomfortable stench to those who walk in darkness, and this conviction will either result in opposition or repentance. Why does a fraternity or sorority put so much pressure on the Christian who is living a celibate lifestyle until marriage? Why is someone defcon level five offended if you don't use their preferred pronouns? Why do boyfriends who are taking their girlfriends to the abortion clinic sometimes pull a gun on you when you protest their murder? This doesn't happen at football games.

It's because God has given these people a conscience and the witness of creation and deep down they know that what they are doing angers a holy God. But they love it. And Romans 1 tells us that when people pursue sin without brakes, that God will give them exactly what they want. This is why in verse 13 in our passage that evil people and imposters will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.² And your godly presence is a reminder that what they do is wrong. And so they will mock you and label you and de-platform you and even fire you, and deceive other people about you. We read in verse 13 that these people are deceiving others; what's even more tragic is that they themselves are deceived. They have believed Satan's lie, and they are now evangelists for their prison. As an aside, this is why at the end of 2 Timothy 2 the Lord's servant is called to correct his opponents with gentleness: because those whom you correct are captives to be pitied, and not the great enemy themselves.

Now in verse 14 Paul again encourages Timothy to persevere in what he has learned, and he gives him two motivations: because he knows from whom he learned it, and because he has known the scriptures since childhood.³

Aren't these strange motivations? Why is knowing whom Timothy learned the scripture from an encouragement for him to continue? Because he has seen the life and the outcomes of those who have taught him. Paul is likely referring to himself and also to Timothy's godly mother Lois and his grandmother Eunice. The logic of this passage shows us that our most important decisions in life are not 100% purely mental. Rather, under the sovereignty of God, our decisions have hundreds of influences, whether mental, relational, sociological, cultural, or otherwise. And one of the Christian's motivations for continued perseverance is the faithfulness of those saints who have gone before us. When you are crawling on the ground of Christian obedience because you cannot stand, seeing the petite outline of your grandmother's footsteps ahead of you on the path helps you to get back up and keep going. You know her, and the fact that she has faithfully walked this road before you strengthens your faith! The beautiful

² There is a conceptual parallel with this verse and 2 Pet. 2:17-22. Is it the case that people are getting worse as a whole (as in, all of society), or that people are getting worse as individuals? This passage seems to be primarily focused on individual false teachers (who "deceive" others), but the cumulative effect is a larger societal decline.

³ The same Greek root for "know" (οἶδα) is used in both instances, even though some English translations obscure this by translating two different English glosses for the same Greek word.

outcome of our Christian forbearers is just one additional testimony that the Spirit uses to confirm in our minds in the truth of the gospel.

the Second reason why Timothy ought continue in what he has learned and firmly believed is because he has been taught the sacred writings—this would be the Old Testament—from a young age. Oh parents and grandparents! The greatest legacy you can give your children is not a comfortable lifestyle or extra-curricular opportunities or even a paid college education, but a regular instruction in God’s word. A Godly mother and grandmother have taught Timothy God’s book, and Timothy firmly believed it. This becomes one more motivator to continue in what he has known to be true for all of these years.

And notice what is true about these scriptures: they are able to make timothy wise for salvation. Isn’t this a strange way to describe the path to salvation? How does wisdom relate to salvation? Here’s how it works: a regular interaction with God’s word grows you in wisdom by giving you a right view of yourself and a right view of God. To say it another way, you cannot grow in wisdom without also growing in humility. And this humility is necessary for a person to be saved. You see the gospel message assaults human pride, and only those who have the humility of wisdom can receive it. The gospel tells us that all our lives we have walked in a prison darkness—doing, saying, and thinking things that we know are wrong. And whether we do these actions willfully or because we have been deceived, the sum total of our sinful actions break God’s law and merit an eternal punishment in hell under God’s anger. God is especially angry and severe with those who actively deceive and encourage others in wrongdoing.

But the good news is that God has smuggled a book into the dark prison, so that those who read it would have their eyes open to the horror of darkness, and so that they might be set free through Jesus. You see, Jesus, the perfect son of God, experienced the wrath of God for sin on the cross so that you might not have to. And his death and resurrection caused a jailbreak so that blind sinners might receive their sight and come to their senses and walk out of their prison and into God’s marvelous light. Friend, The gospel tells you that God is fundamentally marked by love. And though your sins separate you from your Maker and though they make you vile before him, in love God has made a way for all of your sins and shame and darkness to be washed away through your faith in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus.

Friend, God is calling you to come out of the darkness and into his marvelous light. Your humble wisdom will most clearly be seen by you bowing your knee to king Jesus and humbling giving yourself to him by faith and then followings his footsteps in the path of suffering that leads to glory. But in order to walk this path to the end, you will need to know something about these sacred writings.

What are these sacred writing? Here’s where we turn to our second point.

2. The Nature of God’s Word

A. The Inspiration of Scripture

Look with me at verses 16–17. “2Tim. 3:16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.” Friends, verse 16 is one of the most important verses in understanding the nature of the Bible. We’ll look at the second half to start off. The Scriptures are useful for teaching, reproof, correction, and for training in righteousness. Notice how these four phrases describe progression, growth, and even an opposition. On the one hand you have teaching and training: Scripture causes a growth and a maturing in righteousness. But on the other hand scripture also reproofs and corrects. If you are rightly engaging with scripture, you will not stay the same. To put it another way,

if you are never uncomfortable or challenged by God's Word, then its because you're not actually engaging with it.

Scripture changes people—you will be hardened or softened, but you will not stay the same. And the reason for this is because of what we find in the first part of verse 16. All scripture is breathed out by God. That is to say, as human authors wrote, God superintended their words such that His very words are what was written. 2 Pet. 1:21 tells us that "...men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit." These human authors retained their own personalities and writing style, But the Holy Spirit moved them to write exactly what they wrote, such their words were the very word of God.

This is called the Inspiration of Scripture, and it is the basis for another big word: the inerrancy of scripture. The inerrancy or Scripture means that Scripture in the original manuscripts does not affirm any thing that is contrary to fact.⁴ Why do we trust the scriptures are without error? Because we trust in the character of God. The God who can never lie is the one who wrote every single word by means of human authors. There is not one error, falsehood, or flaw in this holy book. Because there is not one of those in God. And the character of God is another factor. Our view of the trustworthiness of scripture is based on the trustworthiness of a loving God. A loving God would not throw us out to sea with ship that has holes in the hull. If we are surrounded by a wide and thirsty desert, our God would not cause a spring to arise in that is mixed with arsenic. As it becomes increasingly costly to follow the scriptures, we can cling to it knowing that it is true. But this raises the question, how do we know what books comprise the scriptures?

B. How do we know what is scripture?

By Jesus's day, there's very little debate on the books that comprise the Old Testament. Jews himself recognized the authoritative nature of the law, the prophets, and the writings which comprise 39 books in our English Bibles. The Old Testament books were established, and in the centuries between Malachi and Jesus the Jews themselves affirmed that there were no more prophets.⁵ When Jesus and the Pharisees clashed, it wasn't over what scriptures they used, it was over the interpretation of these scriptures. Now the Greek word used here in 2 Tim 3:16 for Scripture is *graphe*, and it is a technical term that occurs fifty times in the New Testament.⁶ In every single one of these occurrences, it's referring to the authoritative Old Testament. What's amazing is that even in the first century the word that was reserved for God's authoritative and true scriptures was also used to refer to the New Testament.

Turn with me to 1 Tim 5:17-18 and 2 Peter 3:16, and we'll look at these briefly. 1Tim. 5:17 ¶ Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. 1Tim. 5:18 For *the Scripture* says, "You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain," [Deut 25:4] and, "*The laborer deserves his wages.*" [Luke 10:7]. The first quotation is from Deuteronomy 25:4, but the second quotation is from Luke 10:7—which is being held up to the very same level of authority as the Old Testament scriptures!

Look now at 2 Pet 3:16, "There are some things in them that are hard to understand, which the ignorant and unstable twist to their own destruction, as they do *the other Scriptures.*" People are twisting Paul's

⁴ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 90.

⁵ See Josephus, *Against Apion*, 1. 3, and see 1 Maccabees 4:46.

⁶ Some cite the occurrence of this word as occurring 51x in the Greek New Testament, but this is due to the inclusion of the word *graphe* in Mark 15:28, which the best manuscripts omit. The fifty instances are as follows: Matt. 21:42; 22:29; 26:54, 56; Mark 12:10, 24; 14:49; Luke 4:21; 24:27, 32, 45; John 2:22; 5:39; 7:38, 42; 10:35; 13:18; 17:12; 19:24, 28, 36-37; 20:9; Acts 1:16; 8:32, 35; 17:2, 11; 18:24, 28; Rom. 1:2; 4:3; 9:17; 10:11; 11:2; 15:4; 16:26; 1 Cor. 15:3-4; Gal. 3:8, 22; 4:30; 1 Tim. 5:18; 2 Tim. 3:16; James 2:8, 23; 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:6; 2 Pet. 1:20; 3:16.

writings just like they do the other scriptures (Old Testament). What is Peter saying, he is saying that Paul's writings have the same authority and in fact are in the same category as the authoritative Old Testament scriptures!

Now put yourself in the first century. The only bible you've known for all your life has been the Old Testament. How in the world did these New Testament writings come to be recognized as part of the canon of Scripture? In a nutshell, it all comes down to Jesus. God sent his son into the world, and Jesus spoke with an authority like no other. In Matt. 7:29 [the crowds were astonished at his teaching] for he was teaching them as one who had authority, and not as their scribes. Jesus then gave this authority to the apostles as his representatives, including Paul Acts 1:8 But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." The twelve apostles were Jesus's witnesses on earth, and when they wrote, the Holy Spirit brought to their mind all that Jesus said to them, just as he said in John 14:26. And the apostle Paul was also made an apostle and commissioned with the authority of Jesus. After Saul's conversion, Jesus instructed Ananias Acts 9:15 to go out and meet Paul, and Jesus said to Ananias: "[...] "Go, for [Paul] is a chosen instrument of mine to carry my name before the Gentiles and kings and the children of Israel.

So in Paul's letters, he wrote with the authority of Jesus, and a few times he speaks of this authority. We read in 1Th. 2:13, "And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the *word of God*, which is at work in you believers." We also hear Paul say in 1 Cor. 14:37 "If anyone thinks that he is a prophet, or spiritual, *he should acknowledge that the things I am writing to you are a command of the Lord.*

Friends, this is one of the reasons why we are not merely "red-letter Christians." Some Bibles put the words of Jesus in red, and there are some people who call themselves "red-letter Christians" who only want to stress the words of Jesus in the Bible to the exclusion of the rest. But the red letters give their authority to the black letters! The great commission of Jesus to teach all that Jesus has commanded includes everything else the apostles commanded on Jesus's behalf.

In fact, all of the 27 books of the New Testament are there because of some connection to the apostles. The gospel of Matthew was written by the apostle Matthew.

The gospel of Mark was written by Mark, and although he was not an apostle, an early church father named Papias wrote this about him: "Mark having become the interpreter of Peter, wrote down accurately whatsoever he remembered."⁷ This is one of the reasons why so many details about Peter are mentioned in Mark.

Luke & Acts was written by Luke, and although he was not an apostle he travelled with the Apostle Paul.

The gospel of John was written by John the apostle

Romans, 1 2 Corinthians, Galatians.... All the way to Philemon were all written by the apostle Paul.

We don't know who wrote Hebrews, but the author is affiliated with the apostolic group in that he mentions Timothy at the end of the letter, and the letter is so Christocentric that it accords with the apostolic writings.

James and Jude were half-brothers of Jesus who were associated with the apostles in Jerusalem.

⁷ See Eusebius' *Ecclesiastical History* 3:39.

1 & 2 Peter were written by the apostle Peter.

Finally, 1 & 2 & 3 John and revelation were written by the apostle John.

Altogether, the 39 books of the Old Testament and the 27 books of the New Testament comprise 66 books of the Bible. And in his sovereignty God put a warning at the end of Revelation that anybody who adds to the words of Scripture will have curses added to them. This applies in the book to Revelation, but canonically to the entire Bible. There are no more apostles today, and thus the canon of Scripture has closed.

Both Islam and Mormonism claim that an angel dictated to their leader additional revelation in the Quran and the Book of Mormon, But God's word itself warns us against this type of counterfeit. Gal. 1:8 But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach to you a gospel contrary to the one we preached to you, let him be accursed. Roman Catholicism adds a few extra books into their canon, but this was not done until 1545 at the Council of Trent, and they did it in order to add books that supported their view of purgatory. Many in the early church even rejected the books that Roman Catholics sought to add. So we've established what books are in the Bible. But how do we communicate to others the authority of God's word?

C. The Self-Attestation of Scripture

Well, we could speak of the fulfilled prophecies, and the internal consistency over centuries of time and dozens of writers, we could speak of the correlations with historical events to minute details and we could cite how it has changed human history and changed billions of lives, but ultimately, the Bible is its own standard. It is self-authenticating. The beauty and wisdom and truthfulness of the Word authenticates itself by the witness of the Holy Spirit.

But a person might object to us saying we believe that the Bible is true because of the Bible: isn't this a circular argument? Wayne Grudem gives a very helpful insight here. He points out that any claim to absolute authority has an element of circularity involved. So if someone only believes what their five senses tell them, then what authority do they have to trust their five senses? Same with the scientific method and with logic. On what basis do you affirm those concepts as the foundation for everything else. If you are not a Christian today, I would ask you: what is your ultimate authority for what you do and believe? Is it the changing culture—which is an ever moving target? Is it your own desires? I would offer to you that the best authority you could have is that of God's Word. Listen to what Grudem says:

“How then does a Christian, or anyone else, choose among the various claims for absolute authorities? Ultimately the truthfulness of the Bible will commend itself as being far more persuasive than other religious books (such as the Book of Mormon or the Qur'an), or than any other intellectual constructions of the human mind (such as logic, human reason, sense experience, scientific methodology, etc.). It will be more persuasive because in the actual experience of life, all of these other candidates for ultimate authority are seen to be inconsistent or to have shortcomings that disqualify them, while the Bible will be seen to be fully in accord with all that we know about the world around us, about ourselves, and about God. The Bible will commend itself as being persuasive in this way, that is, if we are thinking rightly about the nature of reality, our perception of it and of ourselves, and our perception of God.”⁸

⁸ Wayne A. Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1994), 79.

Friends, we as a church have staked our lives on God's Word. All our eggs are in this basket, all of our oars are in this ship and there are no life-vests or prenuptial agreement. This is why we regulate what we do as a church based on the word of God. This is why every Sunday we sing God's Word, we pray God's Word, we read God's Word, and we hear God's Word preached. It's because this is our life.

And as we see at the end of 2 Timothy 3:17, it's the word of God that equips the man of God for every good work. This is referring first and foremost to Timothy as a preacher of God's word, but note the implication is true for every Christian. Do you want your life to be marked by good works? Then give yourself to God's word. The more of His Word that you read and heed, the more good works that you will do.

Friends, the word of God is true, and it is powerful. You can trust it, and you can stand on it. When all the cultural winds have ceased to blow, and when all of the mockers and scoffers have been laid to rest, and when the world ceases its raging against Jesus, it's then that the word of God will remain unshaken over the arc of human history. And if you have held on to the word of God, then you will receive blessing. You will find glory on the end of that road of suffering, and one day in the eternal bliss of the new heavens and new earth, you will hear your savior say: Well done, good an faithful servant.

Lets pray.