



2 TIMOTHY 3:10-17

# Continue in What You've Learned & Believed

3<sup>RD</sup> SUNDAY DURING LENT – MARCH 19, 2017 (AM)

## INTRODUCTION

*Oh, that's not true! That's just not possible!* This was the response of my wife's Muslim friend when she heard from 1Jo.2 that 1 ... *if anyone (sins), we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.* There's just no room in her worldview for a *God-Man* Who absorbs the wrath of God's judgment against the sins of *all* who believe. At this point she doesn't believe that's possible. And she has no qualms hearing the Word of *God* and responding: *That's not true!*

Now, it's not necessarily a surprise to hear this sort of objection from a professing Muslim. But it wouldn't it be strange for Jean, because of it, to try to find some other line of argument besides *Scripture* to defend the sufficiency of Jesus' sacrifice offered on the cross to cover the sins even of a Muslim, if (s)he receives Him in repentance and faith? Her friend's lack of trust in *Scripture* doesn't negate it as the authoritative Source of our knowledge of *Christ*.

Timothy is hearing instruction from Paul along these lines in our passage today. Just because some have diverted from *Scripture* and are teaching *different doctrine* (1Ti.1:3; 6:3) doesn't mean he should move away from *Scripture* and seek a different way to expose and (*correct*) their errors. Rather, Timothy should 14 ... *continue in what (he has) learned and... firmly believed, knowing from whom (he) learned it.* This is the lone command in today's text. But it's accompanied by two contrastive addresses, two *but you* (10, 14) statements that reveal two lessons: 1) a reminder that *opposition is unavoidable in the Christian life* (10-13), and 2) this charge to *continue in what (he's) learned (14-17), to keep to the teaching (he's) received (v.14) over against all corruption of it (cf. 1:13-14; 2:15)* (Knight 438). Let's listen in on Timothy's two lessons.

## OPPOSITION IS UNAVOIDABLE IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE – 10-13

Paul opens this section with his first *(but) you*: 10 *You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness.* He's contrasting himself to *Jannes and Jambres* (9) and the false teachers in Ephesus who *oppose the truth* and are *corrupted in mind and disqualified regarding the faith* (8). Paul is not like them. And Timothy knows it. He's *followed (Paul's) teaching and (example)* across the board, his virtues (10) and 11 *(the) persecutions and sufferings that happened to (him) at Antioch, at Iconium, and at Lystra.* Timothy is from *Lystra* (Act.16:1). He joined Paul's team early on in his second missionary journey (Act.16:3), but almost certainly he also knew what happened to him there in *Lystra* on his first journey, probably no more than three or four years earlier.

The Jews in *Antioch* had grown *jealous* of the *crowds* Barnabas and Paul were drawing (Act.13:45), so they not only incited *persecution* against them *and drove them out of their district* (Act.13:50), but they followed them to these other nearby cities. Act.14:5 *When an attempt was made in Antioch by both Gentiles and Jews, with their rulers, to mistreat (the apostles) and to stone them, 6 (Paul and his team) learned of it and fled to Lystra and Derbe....* Now, *Lystra* was one of the locations of a temple of *Zeus* (Act.14:13). Barnabas and Paul were mistaken for *gods* there because Paul healed a lame man (Act.14:8-10). Act.14:11 *And when the crowds saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in Lycaonian, "The gods have come down to us in the likeness of men! 12 Barnabas they called Zeus, and Paul, Hermes, because he was the chief speaker—the lead god would never speak for himself. He'd have a lesser god do that on his behalf.*

As Barnabas and Paul were trying to straighten all this out, Jews from *Antioch* and *Iconium* showed up and *persuaded the crowds* to turn against them. Paul was *stoned, dragged out of the city, and left for dead* (Act.14:19). 20 *But when the disciples gathered about him, he rose up and entered the city, and on the next day he went on with Barnabas to Derbe.* He spent the night there in *Lystra!* These are no cowards!

Well, all this took place in Timothy's hometown. So, even though he wasn't on Paul's team at the time, almost certainly he knew about it. And, as Paul says here (10), Timothy had *followed* him. And by *followed*, Paul doesn't necessary mean that Timothy imitated or obeyed his teaching, though that is surely true. He means Timothy has *followed his teaching and (example)* like we (*follow*) a developing news story. He's kept up with it. He knows the ins and outs of it, all the way from the big picture down to the nitty-gritty details.

He's *traced it out* (Guthrie 178)—this is the same word Luke used in the prologue of his gospel (Luk.1:3) to say that he *followed all things closely for some time* in order to research and write his gospel account.

So, Timothy knew of Paul's *persecutions* and suffering for the gospel, 11 ... *yet he also knew that from them all the Lord had rescued (Paul)*. He knew *God* had not left Paul alone in his suffering, but had delivered him out of each of them. And the list was long. Paul summarized it in 2Co.11., as he compared himself to the *false apostles* (2Co.11:13). He knew 2Co.11:23 ... *far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. 24 Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. 25 Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; 26 on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; 27 in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure, now imprisoned in chains* (2:9). 11 ... *Yet from them all the Lord rescued me.*

So, Paul issued this reminder to Timothy, backed up by the *teaching of Jesus Himself* (cf. Joh.15:20), that suffering is the rule for believers, not the exception. 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.* The implication seems to be that times will get worse as the *last days* (3:1) progress. *Opposition* is clearly on the rise. And so, this sort of *opposition is unavoidable in the Christian life.*

## CONTINUE IN WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED AND BELIEVED – 14-17

14 *But as for you, Paul writes, but you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed.* Don't swerve from the path. Don't look for an alternate route. As Peter wrote to his flock: 1Pe.4 12 ... *do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. 13 But rejoice, insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.* As we've seen even right here in 2Ti., payoff will follow these *persecutions* (cf. 2:3-6). There's a *promise of life through this suffering and death.*

So, Paul says to Timothy: 14 ... *continue on in what you have learned and 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 may you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.* Timothy has been rooted in this

*teaching since childhood* (1:5). It didn't begin accumulating when he got to know Paul (cf.10). He's seen the power of the gospel himself. He's witnessed the power of God's Word. He knows first-hand that *16 all Scripture is breathed out by God*—that it communicates God's truth and bears His authority—and that it is, therefore, *profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that (every) man (and woman) of God may be complete (mature, competent), equipped for every good work* that God has prepared for them (Eph.2:10). Timothy knows that. He knows there's no merit in moving away from the Word of *God* in the work he's called to do there in Ephesus. And Paul is now setting the stage to reinforce that truth in the central charge of this letter (4:2), as we'll see next week in 4:1-8.

## CONCLUSION

But right now, this morning, we just need to appreciate the level of confidence Paul wants Timothy, and all his readers, to feel in the authority and (*profitability*) of *Scripture*. And we need to *continue in* that confidence even though our allegiance to *Scripture* brings *persecutions* (12). But it did the same for the OT prophets. It surely did for *Jesus*. It did for the Apostle Paul, and now for Timothy. It will for *all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus* (12). The more we hold forth *Scripture* and our *firmly-held (beliefs)* in public dialogues and decisions, the more *opposition* we'll feel.

And we don't like *opposition*. On the whole, we'd rather be well-liked, or even just left alone, rather than held up as objects of scorn and ridicule by a society that's (*going*) *on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived* (13). We'd rather not have to put our beliefs on the line and risk hearing: *Oh, that's not true! That's just not possible!* Or worse. But, our only alternative is to forsake *Scripture*, to turn our backs on the gospel, or just to be quiet about both.

But that's not our calling. Woven into the very fabric of *Scripture* and of our *firmly-held (beliefs)* is the charge from *God* to proclaim them, and live the truth of them publicly, and call others to (*believe*) them. Anything short of that is just the sort of behavior Paul is calling Timothy to lay aside, to forsake in favor of (*fulfilling*) *his ministry* (4:5), of (*continuing*) *in what (he's) learned and firmly believed* (14).

So, how are you doing at this—at (*continuing*) *in what you have learned and firmly believed* (14) even when it brings *opposition*; at affirming the truth of God's *breathed out Scripture* even when it's being ridiculed right in front of you; at proclaiming the truth, in love, even when it brings charges of naïveté and bigotry?

Our confidence in God's Word and the gospel, our *(continuing) in what (we) have learned and firmly believed* (14), is never what it should be. Never! Our faith fails. Our confidence wavers. Our proclamation is muted. Our obedience wanders. But our calling remains. Our *great commission* from Jesus stands. It remained Paul's commission in that Roman prison. It was equally Timothy's *commission* in the Ephesus church. And it's ours, here and now, today. But we need to remember that when that *commission* was given, first, it was delivered by One who said Mat.28:18 ... *All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me*. We can trust this charge! But second, this One also affirmed that 20 ... *I am with you always, to the end of the age*. And this is the only way our commission will be achieved. There is no strength in our human will to obey this command, or press on in it, on our own. Unless the Savior of the world is with us, we are lost. Unless He speaks through us, we are mute. It is *through faith in Christ Jesus* alone that we can keep the charge Paul has given here.

And the good news today is that He is indeed with us!