

Persecution and False Teaching will Continue, but God is in Control

2 Timothy 3:10-15

2 Timothy 3:10-15: *“But you have carefully followed my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, love, perseverance, ¹¹ persecutions, afflictions, which happened to me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra—what persecutions I endured. And out of them all the Lord delivered me.¹² Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution. ¹³ But evil men and impostors will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴ But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”*

Background Notes

When the Epistle of 2 Timothy was written, Timothy was in Ephesus. Paul had left Timothy in Ephesus to help pastor the young church there, and to guard and protect it from false teaching. Paul wrote this letter from prison in Rome. In 2 Timothy 3:10-15, Paul contrasted his life and teaching with that of the false teachers who were already circulating around the Roman Empire. He listed nine characteristics of his own ministry (v10-11) in contrast to that of the false teachers (v6-9).

The apostle Paul challenged Timothy to continue to follow his true teaching as well as his example - even though following it would involve persecution. In verse 11 he mentioned the persecutions that he had endured in Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra (Acts 13-14). Acts 14:19-20 describes the near-fatal event when Paul was in Lystra: *“Then Jews from Antioch and Iconium came there; and having persuaded the multitudes, they stoned Paul and dragged him out of the city, supposing him to be dead. However, when the disciples gathered around him, he rose up and went into the city. And the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.”*

Many of the persecutions that Paul went through for the sake of Christ are not recorded in the book of Acts. However, in 2 Corinthians 11 Paul briefly listed some of them. He didn't write this list of trials to brag about how much he had suffered for the Lord, but to contrast himself to the prosperous lifestyle of the false teachers. He said that he *“was in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequently, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was a drift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers, danger from my own countrymen, danger from the Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, in danger from false brother; in weariness and toil, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure – and besides the other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my deep concern for all the churches.”*

Whenever you think God is allowing you to suffer more than you deserve, or more than your share, read 2 Corinthians 11:23-28. I think you'll go away convicted!

Hebrews 11:23 is a little-known Scripture that mentions Timothy. It shows that he did indeed follow Paul's example and challenge. Hebrews 13:23: "*Know that our brother Timothy has been set free, with whom I shall see you if he comes shortly.*" This verse doesn't appear to fit in chronologically anywhere in the book of Acts, and Hebrews was written shortly after 2 Timothy, so it seems that Timothy's imprisonment came after Paul wrote 2 Timothy. We can't be sure of this dating, but my point here is that Timothy did take up Paul's challenge. He was willing to follow Paul's example – to step out, face persecution and even endure imprisonment for the sake of Christ.

Doctrinal Points

1. The Bible does not teach a "prosperity gospel"!

The idea behind the teachings of the "prosperity gospel" is that the faithful Christian should be – and will be - prosperous and healthy, with no problems or persecutions. Their teaching goes like this: "After all, you're a child of a King, so you should live like a king! If you're a poor brother, if you're a sick sister, it's because you don't have enough faith. God expects you to be healthy and wealthy! You can have anything you want through the power of prayer and your faith!"

I wonder what the apostle Paul would have said about the prosperity gospel? Well, we don't have to wonder. We know what he would have said - it's right here! Not only did he give us his experiences of persecution, but he said, "*...and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution*" (v12). Acts 14:22 says "*...through many tribulations we must enter the kingdom of God.*" And in John 16:33 the Lord said, "*In the world you will have tribulation.*" The Bible does not teach a prosperity gospel!

But suppose someone who believes in the prosperity gospel says to you, "Well, that teaching was for the early Church - for the early Christians who were undergoing Roman persecution. That teaching is not for us today." Well, they're wrong! ***It is for us!*** Remember the ***context***. This whole section is a prediction of conditions for believers in the "last days" – and the last days include the entire Church Age. So it's not just a teaching for "early Church" times. And conditions do not get better and better - they get worse and worse.

Verse 12: "*...all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution.*" Notice several things that verse 12 ***does not*** say:

- Verse 12 does ***not*** say that *every* Christian will suffer persecution. You can be a Christian and not be persecuted. You can be a secret Christian. You can have a hidden faith. But verse 12 says that ***all who desire to live a godly life*** will suffer persecution.

- Verse 12 does not say that persecution will happen all the time. Persecution usually comes in waves – although in some situations it may be continuous and life-long.
- Verse 12 does not say that we should pray for persecution. In fact, 1 Timothy 2:2 says that we are to ask to be able to *“lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and reverence.”* We shouldn’t try to get ourselves persecuted - but some form of persecution will come to us if we’re seeking to lead a godly life in Christ Jesus.
- Verse 12 does not say that all persecutions will be physical. Standing up for Christ and for biblical standards in the workplace may cost you a job promotion - that’s persecution. Standing up for Christ and the Bible in the secular classroom may result in a lower grade - that’s persecution. Persecution can come in more than just physical forms.

So the Bible does **not** teach a prosperity gospel. In fact, in the context about persecution that is sure to come, the indication is that anyone who preaches a form of the prosperity gospel is a false teacher! Look at verse 13: *“But evil men and imposters will grow worse and worse, deceiving and being deceived.”* The prosperity gospel preachers are not only deceiving people, they’re deceived themselves. The Bible does not teach a prosperity gospel!

2. The Bible is God’s S.O.P. for man’s salvation.

Verse 15: *“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* The Bible is God’s S.O.P. for man’s salvation. S.O.P. means “Standard Operating Procedure.” For any job or mission, the S.O.P. gives you all the requirements for that job or mission. The S.O.P. does not do the job or accomplish the mission for you, but it tells you how to do it, and how to do it right.

Notice - the Scriptures did not save Timothy. His faith in the Lord Jesus Christ alone saved him. But the Scriptures taught him everything he needed to know about salvation. The “sacred writings” made him “wise for salvation.” Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, had taught him the Scriptures from his childhood.

How many of us had godly parents who taught us the Scriptures from the moment we could read or hear? We should be very thankful for that! The Scriptures did not save us, but they made us “wise for salvation.” Romans 10:17 says, *“Faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the word of God.”* The Bible is God’s S.O.P. for mankind’s salvation.

Practical Application

1. Can we say, “Follow my example?”

When asked a question like that, most of us would have to say, “Do as I say, not do as I do.” Well, the apostle Paul was able to say, “Not only do as I say, but also do as I do!” He commended Timothy for following his teaching **and** for

following his example! In verse 14 Paul said, *“But you must continue in the things which you have learned and been assured of, knowing from whom you have learned them.”* Paul was primarily referring to his teaching and his example, and Timothy had learned both from Paul’s teaching and his example. Paul had nothing to hide. He practiced what he preached!

Can we say, “Follow my example?” Younger Christians are watching. I know a young Christian man whose life was completely messed up because he followed the bad example of an older Christian man who practiced the prosperity gospel. The older man didn’t preach the prosperity gospel - but he lived it. As a result, the younger Christian got tripped up. His desire for financial and material success caused him to stumble in his life of faith. It led to a lot of bad fallout, including the breakup of his marriage. To this day, that older Christian does not realize he was the problem - that he was a very bad example. What about us? Can we say, “Follow my example?”

2. Let’s not forget our Christian heritage!

When Paul wrote to Timothy, he knew that he would not live much longer on this earth. In fact, Paul may have been martyred for his faith within a few weeks of when this letter was written. He not only wanted Timothy to continue on as a steadfast Christian - Paul wanted Timothy to remember his roots.

Verse 14: *“...knowing from whom you have learned them.”* Remember, Timothy, how I lived what I preached. And verse 15: *“From childhood you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.”* Timothy was to remember that as a child he learned the Scriptures from his godly mother and his godly grandmother. Timothy - ***remember your heritage!***

We, too, should remember our Christian heritage. If you had faithful Sunday school teachers or youth group leaders, have you ever written to thank them for being faithful, for teaching you, and for being a faithful example? Let’s not forget our Christian heritage!

Those of you who had godly parents, or still have godly parents, have you ever thanked them for teaching you the Scriptures, and a biblical worldview, and Christian values? A few years ago I wrote my Dad a letter that “officially” thanked him for teaching me and for being a good example. I’m so glad I did this before he died.

Besides our godly parents and Sunday school teachers, multitudes of faithful believers down through the centuries have suffered greatly - even martyrdom - so that we could know freedom in Christ, and so that we could hold the Word of God in our hands. Let’s be very thankful for those believers on whose shoulders we stand today!

Let’s not forget our Christian heritage!