

Life Together

Part 5: Cling to Scripture

TEXT: 2 TIMOTHY 3:10-4:8 (ESV)



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In this series, we've explored the paradox of Christian community—we're called to live together as One Body, yet we're all sinful people and will probably offend or wound one another if we're together for any significant period of time. So how can we live life together in a way where the church is & stays healthy? We've focused on the call to pursue peace with one another, learning to look for the Gospel in all we do together, opposing what tears us down, contending for what builds us up. Today, we focus on the foundation beneath us—the Word of God!

2 Timothy 3:10-4:8

¹⁰You, however, have followed my teaching, my conduct, my aim in life, my faith, my patience, my love, my steadfastness, ¹¹my persecutions and sufferings that happened to me at Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra—which persecutions I endured; yet from them all the Lord rescued me. ¹²Indeed, all who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³while evil people and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived. ¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you've been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, ¹⁷that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work. ^{4:1}I charge you in the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who is to judge the living and the dead, and by his appearing and his kingdom: ²preach the word; be ready in season and out of season; reprove, rebuke, and exhort, with complete patience and teaching. ³For 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, ⁴and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths. ⁵As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry. ⁶For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I've kept the faith. ⁸Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.

Itchy Ears & Alluring Myths

Remember Paul is writing from prison, and he's about to be beheaded. Paul knows the persecution of the church will not

end with him. He also knows his son in the faith is prone to timidity. Paul is certain that whatever he himself has endured for the Gospel, Timothy will face as well. But in this text, Paul isn't so much concerned about the external legislations of governments as he is the internal rebellion of the human heart.

Americans live in an era of great liberty when it comes to preaching the Gospel. As long as we have our freedom, we should do all we can to influence our government to uphold what is good, honorable and dignifying to all people, as image bearers of God. (So for example, if you are eligible to vote, you should know the issues and candidates on the ballot and cast your vote.) Whether or not our liberties will be taken in our lifetimes is up for debate. One thing we are certain of, though, is Paul's warnings about the coming assault on the Gospel and Timothy's call to preach it are already here among us in force. Paul's model for Timothy concerning government forbidding the preaching of Christ is clear: do it anyway and suffer the consequences. Governments will do what they will do.

Paul's charge to Timothy here isn't to avoid prison. It's to avoid becoming an "imposter" ^(3:13)—a man called to preach Christ, but instead preaching something else to tickle the ears of his hearers. Knowing what goes on in the hearts of people everywhere (even in Timothy) Paul's appeal is for Timothy—as one who knows the truth, who was raised in the Scriptures, who was mentored by Paul himself—to cling to Scripture and to preach the Word. Still, see how little changes over time.

Paul writes, a "time is coming when, having itching ears, people will accumulate teachers to suit their own passions, and will turn away from listening to the truth and wander off into myths." ^(4:3-4) This isn't hard to imagine if you've paid any attention to Christianity in America. The human heart wants to rewrite the Gospel because the Gospel opposes the proud, exposing our desperate need for a Savior. We stop listening to truth so that our hearts might be instructed, and instead listen only for things which suit our tastes and stroke our egos. Everything else, we turn away. This leads to many places which have a directly negative impact on the unity and health of the local church. Here are just a few.

- **UNIVERSALISM**—Some want Christianity to be one path to God among many, directly opposing Jesus' own testimony that no one comes to the Father but through Him. ^(Jn 14:6) Universalism leaves our salvation up to us. But when we embrace universalism, our creed must be morally & doctrinally relative too, meaning what we believe doesn't originate with God, but with us. Then do you know what we've created? A myth. The truth is we're saved by grace through faith in Christ alone. Universalism is a man-made myth no church can unite around because there is no unifying core—only opinions.
- **THE PROSPERITY GOSPEL**—I suspect we all embrace this false Gospel to some degree. When you hear "prosperity gospel," please don't mistakenly believe the promise behind this is money. It's not. It's control. We want our diligence and decency to pay out. We can embrace this false Gospel whether we have money or not by wanting the Christian faith to be about having control of our lives—which is the reason people want money in the first place. You may revile prosperity preachers you see on TV, but what about what you preach to yourself—how if only you could achieve _____, you'd be happy because you'd be in control.

When this is what we believe, we'll never confront one another in love, though we should. And we won't know how to truly encourage one another in tragedy because tragedy doesn't fit into a system where God pays His people in cash for their positive attitudes and good deeds. We become like Job's friends, wondering how he messed up to deserve such a blow. We're only unified when things go well, leaving no room for Paul's promise that Christians will be persecuted. ^(3:12) God never promised you control, but if you want it bad enough, you will accumulate teachers to suit that passion.

- **PERSONAL SUPERIORITY**—Some of us want our display of faith to show us as superior to our fellow Christians—as though we're of a better type of Christian. When this is our position, what our itchy ears listen for from Scripture are proof-texts which demonstrate *how* we're superior. We might even call ourselves something other than "Christian" to emphasize this point. I love what Abraham Piper said about this; "*Self-applying the term "Jesus follower" for accuracy or lexical variety is good. Doing it to distance yourself from other Christians is cowardly.*"

Paul warns that a person shouldn't "*think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members don't all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.*" ^(Rom 12:3-5) When we insist we're not like "other Christians"—meaning we're not as sinful, duplicitous, near-sighted, proud, insensitive or legalistic as most others, we need to see we're being all of these at once. *(Added irony: for those of us most needing to hear this, we probably didn't because we presumed this was for someone else.)*

As for You, Preach the Word

We have no shortage of imposter gospels and false teachers. So upon what shall we stand? See Paul's expression again—"as for you, continue in what you've learned." Paul knows a lot is coming Timothy's way that will shake him to the core. Where will Timothy stand when the soldiers with the spears in their hands show up asking if he's a follower of The Way? Or when Philetus tries to persuade Timothy's dearest friends in the faith that he's just a scared kid who couldn't possibly know what in the world he's talking about? Or when he can count more reason to fear man than to trust Christ? Where will Timothy stand? Where?

And you, where will you stand when the world calls you a narrow-minded bigot for believing in only one way to God—through Christ alone? Where will you stand when your account runs dry and you wonder if God is mocking you? Where will you stand when your child or spouse sins greatly and publicly? Or when you do? Paul tells us where to stand, and in so doing tells us the *only* place we can stand with certainty. As for you, cling to Scripture. All other ground is sinking sand.

2 Timothy 3:16-17 is stunning! Do you see what Paul says about Scripture. First, it is the breath of God. These words—all of them—came from His mouth. Second, in this book is all we need for teaching us what we don't know, reproving us when we act like we know better, correcting us when we think we know but don't & training us in righteousness, that we might be competent, equipped for every good work. What equips the church to live the Christian life well? The Word of God. As a pastor, I cannot equip you to follow Christ if I am not faithfully teaching His word. My call is to preach the Word. ^(4:2, 5) In His Word, God has given us all we need for all He has called us to do and be. Our call as a church is to cling to Scripture.

Parents in the Faith

I want to close by focusing on the role of the parent's faith as illustrated in this text. I say this not only because today is Father's Day, but also because one of the greatest ways families and individuals contend for the health of the church over time is by striving to live for the glory of Christ consistently in the home. In fact, when Paul talks about the qualifications for leadership in the church, he says leaders need to manage their own homes well, "*for if someone doesn't know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church?*" ^(1 Tim 3:5)

If there is a father in the home, the responsibility of leading the family in the faith falls to him. And the way we do this is by yielding to the authority of God's Word as our "family constitution." Unfortunately, Timothy's father did not do this. Acts 16:1 tells us Timothy was "*the son of a Jewish woman who was a believer, but his father was a Greek.*" Timothy's training in righteousness came from his mom. His father wasn't on board.

But believing fathers drop this ball too. Dads, I'm not the perfect picture of leading my family in the faith. I struggle with consistency. I have an amazingly gracious wife who, I know, would love to see me do better at this. Our families don't need us to write Bible curriculum, they just need us to study the book—personally and with our families. If you can't read—get the audio for yourself, and listen together as a family, or have your wife read if she's a better reader. If you will do that, you are leading your family, even if you're not the one reading.

Parents, there is power in studying Scripture in the home. How do we know this? Look at how Paul talks about Timothy's spiritual heritage. Paul knows what Timothy has learned and believes—the sacred scriptures he was taught from childhood. ^(3:14-15) Timothy was exposed to Scripture at an early age and it took root in his heart. But look at what else Paul says: he knows Timothy has God's Word buried in his heart because he knows "from whom" Timothy learned it! ^(3:14) Who's that? Timothy's grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice. ^(2 Tim 1:5)

What an honor the Breather of Scripture has paid to these two women—naming them for instilling sacred truth in Timothy's young heart that when he grew older, he'd be equipped to preach that word, ready in season and out! You might say, "Some Father's Day encouragement that is!" since Timothy's father failed here. Listen, the gloriously redeeming point is not that if mothers and grandmothers will do what dad neglects to do, they'll get a special mention from God. The point is that when Godly parents—moms *and* dads and grandparents—sow the seeds of faith in their children's hearts, God blesses that.

When Eunice told her boy about the Passover and how God's Son Jesus died once for all as the Passover Lamb who takes away our sins, did she know he'd would come to be a pastor in Ephesus one day? No! But that wasn't *why* she taught him. She wanted him to know his Savior. And God was pleased to use her words over Timothy to imbed His words *into* Timothy.

Dad's, I believe God would have done this through Timothy's father, had he believed. Be the voice of God in your children's ears, knowing as you read Scripture to them, God speaks to their hearts in ways you can't always see. God has given His people His written revelation of Himself—"breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be competent, equipped for every good work." ^(3:16-17) As people and as a church, this is where we stand—on the Word of God! Cling to it.